

Being and Not Seeing

A Note on Mohammad Ghazali's photographs



Tehran Inclined to the Right is the title of a collection of photographs by Mohammad Ghazali that have been photographed in the quick and easy Polaroid style. The Polaroid films used by him however were outdated and as one would say, expired. This very fact has caused the colors to be incorrect and in some cases for the forms to be distorted. And in most of the photographs, a part of the image is missing and left unexposed. What have been captured in the photographs are parts of street and it might not even matter which city or street they are, but as the title of the series implies, they are the streets of Tehran. In fact, these photographs that evoke a vintage feel as they were captured on expired film don't provide a premeditated description or precise analysis of anything. Furthermore, these are street photographs, documentary and incidental. And this has reduced the photographer's amount of proficiency, authority and control over the final image and more so resembles the kind of neutral, impartial and unbiased look that documentary photography claims to contain. Capturing an image on expired Polaroid film is very much similar to photography without a visor. In this method, not only color and light but also the composition is not the photographer's absolute intention. It's as though, the photographer has only chosen the location which in this case is the subject of the photographs: the street.

Street is one of the most important public spaces within a city. In public spaces such as street, bazaar, university, gym and such, an individual encounters other individuals and occasionally starts a relationship that he himself has not chosen. But the street might be the most important of these spaces because people's encountering on the street is different from an alley that is a more local and familiar space and neighborhoods exist therein. And street is still very different from institutions such as university in which the person has the ability to choose to some extent. Street is a place of passage, it's a way; from home to a place and from there homeward. At home-a private space-one can freely do as he pleases whereas on the street, he has to follow the social rules. On the one hand, private space, namely home, is the place where personal memories are made and on the other hand, public space, especially street, is where collective memory is formed. In Ghazali's photographs, the nostalgic residue of Polaroid has fallen in line with the collective memory of the street. His assessment of such memories in form of damaged photos that haven't saved the entire subject to show-and even what they show is indistinct-place the viewer in a position to face absence of something that used to be, something that existed but no longer does, and us, who ourselves were on the streets one day are now viewing these images and we might want to but are unable to see anything.

In the end, the fact of the matter is that Polaroid is nostalgic and nostalgia is reminiscence and memory always belongs to the past and the past is trancelike. And street is the place of passing and whatever is in passing passes by and what has passed by will never exist again.

Zarvan Rouhbakhshan
Spring 2013