

Under the Shadow of the Idea

By Youssef Abdelke
April 2008

He is a photographer who comes from another place. Neither traditional subjects tempt him, nor do familiar aesthetics mean anything to him. He rides his thoughts - ideas to take untraveled roads, to his own place.

Completely ignoring his university education, Ammar Al-Beik fell for photography during his work at Hayek Studio, a studio specialized in camera repair,(1992-2000). Working for almost a decade, Ammar got to know this fascinating world. He learned all about the famous and less famous brands; each box, its features, its capabilities and materials, as well as its weaknesses; He also got to know all types of lenses, their purity and the function of each one of them.

Meanwhile, he was shooting more and more photos, learning how to control the light, the structure and the aesthetics of motion. He exhibited his works in several places. But at a moment of free choice, he decided to leave his “profession” and move to cinema in 1997. Like most self-made artists he had nothing but his talent. Thus, he started shooting short and long films using his own resources without any funding from any institution or protection from production companies, but more importantly without any considerations or conditions imposed by any party. He had a truly independent cinema.

Ammar Al-Beik’s films turned a lot of heads abroad. Some of it even won important awards. His first film *Light Harvest* won the “Liege Mayor Reward” at the International Film Festival in Belgium in 2000 while his other film *When I Color My Fish* won the Jury Award at the Brisbane International Film Festival in Australia in 2002. The first to be surprised with these successes was Ammar himself. It never occurred to him that his individual work would be presented abroad, compete and even win. Some of those who saw his film *When I Color My Fish*, for example, were taken not only by the critical spirit of the film, but also by the elaboration of the scenes, dynamism of synthesis and the sense of humor in the film that was making fun of the contest in which it’s protagonists aim to participate!

But Ammar didn’t turn his back at photography. He continued to take photos while working in cinema. He has been attracted by digital cameras since 2002. Therefore, he took hundreds of photos around the same topic only to get at the end one single blurred photo. After the long years he spent to produce a perfect photo in terms of light, structure and clarity, Ammar tries now to capture the aesthetics of blurriness with the aim of

obtaining an unusual photo driven from the personal sensitivity of the eye of its photographer.

The current set of photographs is different from his earlier works showcased in his first three exhibitions in 1996 and 1999. It's not because of his use of color or big cuts, but rather the themes of his photos and the intellectual messages they bear.

Contrary to the usual path taken by artists who load their works with ideas and then gradually release them in favor of vision, hints, sensitivity of surface and the tenderness of the relationship between the two color degrees, so that the picture, statue or painting says less... but the less captures the sentiments, (here I am saying contrary to the usual), Ammar Al-Beik, is like a modern Don Quixote that carries his stick and hurries towards ideas. Therefore, we will see today photos of the woman between the past and the present, the enslaved and victimized woman, as well as photos of artists immersed in their own realms, and ideas stripped of consumption in addition to symbolic blackness that besieges light, etc.

These photos aren't simple. They aren't one of those photos taken by a photographer while crossing two streets, then after developing the film, chooses to print one of them. Ammar Al-Beik's photos are complex ones that require a lot of contemplation, design, and re-designing in many ways, as if he is making a film in each photo. In that sense, Ammar's work is not that of a professional photographer who is sure of the results. It is something else more subtle. His photos reflect the anxiety that takes over the artist when accomplishing a work that represents their being and the heart of their message to others.

In this exhibition there is no one photo, one shot. Each photo is more than one shot; two, ten, or fifty. Thus, the area is divided in length and width into parts. Sometimes, the parts are separated by horizontal and vertical wide black strips that remind us of Mondrian's summary of the structure of a painting. In some parts of the artwork, photos are repeated over and over again; sometimes in a bigger size and sometimes smaller and even smaller. What Ammar wants through his playing is to reach an idea, and to reinforce it through insistence, like repeating the name of God in a circle of prayers. Does insistence here communicate the idea? Or does it get the person saying it, i.e. the photographer to his visual passion?

Anyway, this is some of Ammar's works. Each photo requires special attention, contemplation, and a special dialogue that it triggers yet it doesn't allow this dialogue to overwhelm it.

Stand in front of Ammar Al-Beik's photos and domesticate yourselves to his worrisome questions for they are more entertaining than the certain answers you know.