

War

As a child, during the war, I would spend nights and days in a shelter beneath the building my family and I inhabited.

I would emerge from these endless ongoing battles to discover a landscape invaded by the soot and dazed by destruction.

During the lull, in a slow epiphany, I remember how violently I had been struck not only by the disaster, but also by the changing of the seasons, the weather, and the landscape that persisted and the jasmine that continued to blossom.

The sun continued to shine, the rain continued to pour, and the wind continued to blow

The cycle of nature, the mountains around... everything seemed totally out of context. They followed their own destiny, their own temporality outside our history—outside our contemporaneity.

There was something disruptive, asynchronous. It was nearly cinematic.

In 1991, when I was 15, the demarcation lines that had been crisscrossing the country into mosaics for 20 years, had just been removed, and we could suddenly move around the country / landscape. However, the Syrian army barricades were scattered over the country, and terrified us. Traces of war and destruction were everywhere. Confronting this desolation, however, was a sense of marvel at the discovery of new landscapes and a new territory that had been forbidden for years.

That is how I started taking photographs, by discovering this other dimension of territory, or, more precisely, by devouring it. I wanted to photograph everything, in an attempt to thwart any possibility from escaping.

The meaning of what I was doing was, of course, foreign to me.

Come to think of it, this is how I've have photographing the mountains these past years.

The constant threat of a new war with Israel looming over Lebanon, internal tensions, the ecological disasters, the war in Syria, the destruction of sites like Palmyra, the atrocities in Iraq... Of all these terrible threats, it was image of refugees wandering *en masse* through the region that struck me the most.

I thought of my grandparents who had fled Diyarbakir in Turkey, around 1920, like hundreds of thousands of other inhabitants, and of their lost lives of which they weren't been able to keep one image, one color, one stone.

I have no idea of the world they came from.

"Art preserves and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved.

It preserves and is preserved in itself (...)" . Deleuze

The risk that the landscape might become inaccessible again urges me to go out into the terrain. My impulse is both romantic and aggressive, amorous and combative.

I look at this landscape again and again, driven by a desire to reconquer the land and to work it. I am driven by desire but also by a process of grieving.

Above all, there is something that concerns my freedom.

Unconsciously, I chose a camera better suited for documentary photography than a slow observation of the landscape. I saved my images on memory cards, dozens of times, out of fear of losing any. Losing a single image would have been a disaster.

Everything is important, everything is interlaced. The strata upon strata upon strata upon strata communicate silently outside our timezone.

Even though I am not on a quest for "beauty", everything ends up being beautiful, because in nature, everything exists without hierarchy.

Jean-Christophe Bailly, author of so many beautiful essays on photography, once said:
"Photography endlessly presents the present that was. Its own presence is nothing more than this discreet trace that records as we might withdraw. Endlessly, the photograph says: "there is": there is in me what was before me, which I've taken, while leaving it."

Here everything is poetic. Here everything is political.
Every point is strategic for one reason or another.
Everything is meaningful; as much to me as to others.
What for me is a lookout onto the landscape is for another a look out onto enemy territory, onto danger...

I wonder if my images/landscapes are both, and, at the same time, images/landscapes of peace, and images/landscapes of war.

To experience the mountain is to rediscover something as powerful as innocence and freedom, without striving to eroticize and explore, without celebrating identity or nationality.
To fetishize territory, to saturate it... to keep its textures, colors and surface, as I would have discovered the skin of another person, or even my own. Every curve, layer, and twig. Every color of every stone. Every nook.
I want to possess them, to carry them with me. Perhaps it is they that possess me.

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