

Where I end and you begin: experiencing the Mountain

By Nayla Tamraz

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Landscape as a fragment of a “country” is primarily a “view.” That of a territory of which we enumerate the physical properties. View of a space which, beyond the perceptions through which it reaches us, refers to the inner territory of emotion. Then, it becomes a story, where collective myths and small personal mythologies mix and cross, as well as the artistic and the poetic imagination with which it enters into dialogue. The motif of the mountain can be read as a site of childhood fascination as well as a topos that gives coherence to the superimposed territories of history, experience, and reverie. As a metonymy using a part to describe a whole, the landscape of Nadim Asfar crystallizes hopes and expectations.

Merleau-Ponty had taught us that the perception is “buried under sediments of subsequent knowledge” and must be conquered “by a work comparable to that of the archaeologist”¹. It is this work that is carried out by the artist, digging into the layers of this sensitive relationship to the world, to bring out the image. It is this singular moment he’s attempting to freeze, where, emerged from the territories of subjectivity, the image imposes its presence on the world. It becomes the place where the latter manifests itself and where the encountered experience gives itself to be contemplated, here the artist calls it the “experience of the mountain”.

This confrontation in which the experience is restored leads to knowledge, that of the eye, that of the territory as well, acquired by a documentation, as yet another attempt to tame the living, and that finally, tries to substitute the political boundaries battered by the war with the troubled territorialities of the you and the I, the subject and the world in which it is inscribed, those where I end and the other begins. Moving away the territory from politics, towards areas of freedom where it switches to poetry: this is the subject of this long topographic exploration where the imagining of frontiers gives way to the porosity of moments and becomes a voyage. This expedition through the visible is that of an eye opened to the beauty of soil, light, elements and matter. It is also a voyage looking for the origins of the names of mountains and valleys: Jabal Moussa, Jabal Serghol, Jabal el-Sheikh, Jabal Sannine, Jabal Muneitra, Jabal Makmel, Wadi Al-Jamajem, Wadi Nahr Ibrahim, Wadi Qozhaya, Wadi Qannoubine and other linguistic reveries that feed what amounts to a geographical fantasy. This is where the eye trains both visually and mentally. On this fragile point, it stands and the image offers itself, precious, like a little patch of yellow wall.

In *The prisoner*, Marcel Proust recounts the experience of an encounter, the one the writer Bergotte had with *The View of Delft* by the Flemish painter Johannes Vermeer: “a little patch of yellow wall (which he didn’t remember) was so well painted, it was, if one looked only at it, as a precious work of Chinese art, with a beauty that was sufficient in itself (...) he noticed for the first time small figures in

blue, that the sand was pink, and finally the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. “

Precious declivity of the lines and the point where they break, precious irradiance of tiny touches of color, light, texture: the photographic purpose has the preciousness of an illumination. Delicacy that distills violence to introduce itself into the world. A miniature inviting for the whole.

“I own better the world when I am capable of miniaturizing it. But in doing so, one must understand that in the miniature, values are condensed and enriched. (...) We must go beyond logic to live what is great in the small”². The landscape is where this connection to the miniature is lived and experienced.

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1. M. Merleau-Ponty, « Lettre à Martial Guérault » in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 4, 1962, pp. 401-409, reprise dans *Parcours II*, 40
2. Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, Paris, les Presses universitaires de France, 3ème édition, 1961, p. 177