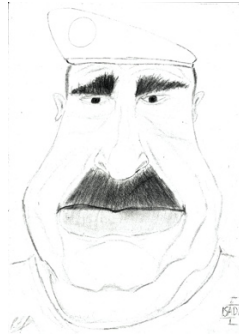


LIAR
Luxembourg Institute for Artistic Research
NYC



PASHA RAFIY

Corners

Curated by Sofia Eliza Bouratsis

41 Orchard Street, New York, NY

Th - Su, 11 - 6

www.liar-nyc.com

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CORNERS

Intimate variations of the interior¹

"This being the case, if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace".²

In these conditions therefore – discovering an exhibition by way of a computer, making use of a process that becomes a private viewing – could potentially lead to an atypical relationship with the works³ and open up a singular interior space between the images and oneself, much like the solitary reader who, upon entering a bubble, is occasionally carried away by dreams.⁴

Corners is an exhibition consisting of six photographs. These are photographs of indoor and private outdoor spaces.⁵ They are all *photographs of corners*. Why corners? Maybe because there are angles from which we cannot escape,

¹ Expression inspired by Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Paris, PUF, 1951. This text cites the English translation in the digital version of the 1994 edition published by Beacon Press, Boston, MA, based on the 1964 The Orion Press Inc edition translated by Maria Jolas.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ No opening hours for the exhibition space, no limit in time to see this exhibition, no social posture to adopt and no viewers viewing us view. It is possible to cheat and download these images and in sense to 'have' them, or to not even grant them ten minutes of time, it is equally possible to watch them every day, as a meditation exercise ...

⁴ Manguel, Alberto, *History of reading*, New York: Viking, 1996.

⁵ Over the past ten years, Pasha Rafiy has realised (amongst others) a series of photographic portraits from the fields of politics, art, architecture, philosophy, etc. In the works chosen for *Corners*, empty of human presence, the built environment becomes an expression of a longing for a bygone time, whilst also serving as a projection for a future yet to come. In this sense, the exhibition resonates with the current situation in which confinement, reduced activity, social distancing, empty public spaces and closed institutions form everyday reality.

maybe because there is nothing better than curling up in a corner to read, meditate, warm up... perhaps because, simultaneously, the corner marks a limit and forms the implicit sign of an arrow: moving forward.

Taken from this series, which also consists of 'exterior corners', only those which refer to an interior have been selected. It is a way of establishing a kind of self-referentiality between proposing an exhibition online, while realising that this experience will most likely be experienced by the public from an intimate and familiar place – each individual's home – and proposing, by way of this exhibition, the possibility of discovering other interior spaces, other intimacies.

It is additionally from this perspective that Pasha Rafiy's work refers to Gaston Bachelard's proposition in *The Poetics of Space* where the philosopher demonstrates that inhabited space is a subjective and lived-in space which contains the qualities of refuge and of protection where the human being will not think so much as dream.

The photographs' titles merely provide general information: the geographical location and the year they were taken. Even so, from the way Pasha Rafiy presents them to us, these spaces exude a certain familiarity – without us necessarily ever having entered these spaces: a high tower in Tokyo, a Parisian courtyard, the impressive reception room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, an empty swimming pool in Tehran, the house of Richard Neutra in Los Angeles, or the Rafiy family vacation home in Urmia, Iran. The photographs' laconic captions therefore situate them and, simultaneously, strangely amplify their meaning. This is a characteristic of Pasha Rafiy's work: faces and bodies (when present), places, spaces and context, atmosphere, and architecture are all transcended by the *uncanny familiarity*⁶ aroused via his gaze, by the subtle, intimate recognition of familiar sensations that it evokes. It is as if, in contact with his work, interior images were added to the discovered one. This contact is indeed reminiscent of meeting a person, when the boundaries are uncertain and where a sharing takes place, a feeling of déjà vu, or rather déjà-felt (the vague remembrance of an encounter without remembering it precisely). From this perspective, Pasha Rafiy's work is indeed located at a position both familiar and strange where the difference between the already known and the unknown tends to vanish, a shift which is simultaneously foreign and familiar.⁷

This aesthetic identification can be explained in part by technique: Pasha Rafiy has developed his photographic practice over more than ten years, yet he continues to work with his Contax 645, the same low contrast film, natural light, without a tripod, and without ever editing his photographs. He additionally always shoots his photographs at – nearly – the same distance from his subject. This, in a way, constitutes his signature. Even so, something else characterises his work: a delicate and discreet feeling of intimacy.

“For it is not until his eyes have left the page that recollections of my room can become a threshold of oneirism for him.”⁸

This discreet, unexpected and deep intimacy – which stands out in Rafiy's work whether he photographs people or places – is therefore presented to us through his non-intrusive gaze, which nonetheless reveals and reveals itself by sharing his view of the world. He realises an abstraction which becomes a kind of dialectic between the inside and the outside or, in other words an aesthetic experience of the intermediate,⁹ the space between one and the other, between the public and the private, between body and space. This subjective experience becomes the 'transsubjectivity of the image'. As Magali Uhl underlines in a theoretical perspective that associates “knowledge of images with subjectivity”, what is conveyed is indeed “something which positions the intimate together with a familiar and fluctuating experience of exchange and sharing”.¹⁰

By looking more closely and for longer than a sober first glance, the organisation of spaces (of bodies) and therefore, of images, suddenly becomes more expressive of a singular gaze that enters into a relationship between architectures, sometimes playful, often critical, always particularly sensitive to human nature. In Parisian photography for example, where in an interior courtyard typical of buildings in the French capital's centre, an enormous motorcycle is nonchalantly

⁶ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

⁷ An intimate, but also domestic image, our home, which is not always necessarily *known* to us, even if it remains near. An image as well of the daily, however ordinary, banal and repetitive it may be, but which is also and always the best possible version of the unknown. Isn't it in fact within the boundaries of the known, the familiar and the unexpected that our relationship with the world and therefore with art plays itself out?

⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, *op. cit.*, p.14.

⁹ Winnicott, D.W., *Playing and Reality*, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005.

¹⁰ Uhl, Magali, “Les montages narratifs de l'intime entre mémoire et fiction. De Stories We Tell à Vies Possibles et Imaginaires”, in *Les Récits visuels de soi. Mises en récit artistiques et nouvelles scénographies de l'intime*, Magali Uhl (dir.), Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2015, p. 242.

posed before the private entrance to one of the parts of the building, thus preventing access to the door. This image can then become a meditation on the voluntary, yet often useless imposition, of power.

These photographs taken between 2015 and 2019¹¹ acquire a meaning that goes beyond evoking travel – that can for the moment appear oneiric. They appear from the perspective of Gaston Bachelard who in *The Poetics of Space* agglomerates the corner together with the nest and the shell as “intimate spaces”. They serve as an invitation to a phenomenological study of the values of intimacy in the interior space. Pasha Rafiy’s strategy thus refers to a phenomenological approach to inhabited space – an understanding of the world from the way we live in it – a way of suggesting that space is in reality a lived-in space to which we give meaning.

Lending meaning, for example, to the photograph of an empty swimming pool basin, we can imagine the photographer entering it to take the image. A swimming pool, a promise of joy and happiness, but which is empty and abandoned and whose meaning becomes more distressing upon consideration of the global ecological issue of water based on this Iranian example. Water is indeed so scarce in Iran, and therefore expensive, that the pool in question has been empty for several years.

We imagine as well the thoughts the image of an empty swimming pool may suggest to occasional passersby. This blue, though washed out, and this swimming pool, abandoned, arouse a kind of expectation. It is in fact expected that at the end of this period of waiting something worthwhile will take place. For this reason, the photograph will be on public display in New York City¹² for the duration of the exhibition.

ABOUT THE IMAGE:

A child’s drawing: a portrait of Saddam Hussein by Pasha Rafiy as part of a primary school assignment. LIAR invites all exhibiting artists to send a drawing or sketch as an image that introduces their exhibition. Pasha Rafiy chose the drawing he made in primary school in Luxembourg when his teacher asked the students to draw a “famous person.” Born in 1980 in Iran, Rafiy and his family left their native country in 1985 to settle in Luxembourg, where he grew up.

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¹¹ Some of them appear in the catalogue *BAD NEWS*, Luxembourg, Lët’z Arles, 2018. Catalogue published for the exhibition of the same name at the Rencontres d’Arles in 2018.

¹² 41 Orchard Street, New York, NY.