



Lest We Forget

"Crammed with memories, and at once filled with forgetting; his memories, even recent ones, were faded, they had hazy outlines, they overlapped in this effort of his, as if someone were making drawings on the blackboard, then only half erasing them, before making new ones on top of the old. Perhaps this is how a man remembers his life when he is a hundred, or how the patriarchs, who were nine hundreds, remembered. Perhaps memory is like a bucket; if you want to cram into it more fruit than it will hold, the fruit is crushed."
- *'If Not Now When'* by Primo Levi.

My series, 'Liquidation' was created in the course of a journey into the past, the lost past, the past that once was so tangible and real, the past that evaporated and disappeared.

Photography can instantaneously memorise and preserve the present, engaging the now with eternity, constituting fleeting moments as history, but by the same token photography is helpless in relation to the past.

This journey back to the southwest region of the Ukraine was a journey into the darkest times, the time of Nazi occupation and the brutal elimination of the entire Jewish community.

In an attempt to negotiate between past and present, the film inside the camera was exposed for a very long time, hoping to capture the passage of time, hoping to resist the brutal photographic dissection of the eternal flow.

The long exposures bleached the film; the light of the sun first created and then destroyed the image, erasing it from the surface of the film.

The images become transparent, only traces of the concrete reality remain.

The landscape is there, unchanged, the villages are there as ever before, but simultaneously all has gone, evaporated from the surface. Ghost, traces but mainly voids.

My father-in-law hid here for three years, his mother was shot in the nearby forest and many relatives were buried alive in the pit on the mountain top.

Searching for particular places, finding and failing at the same time. Hoping to bridge the gaps between the objective record of the camera and the subjective overflow of being there, below the dark clouds of the daunting past.

Debating the perception of the real, drifting away from depiction into impression, aiming to supercede the anecdotal.

The spaces are empty, and the more empty the more space they leave for the projection of feelings and thoughts.

The silence and the contemplative atmosphere correspond with the essence of time and the emptiness of the depicted spaces.

In contrast the film,

The Forest,

Concrete and loud, trees are crashing in the romantic forest.

Without a clear reason or an apparent cause, they fall through the forest.

The sound is monumental, interfering with the tranquil ambience of the photographs.

The film is open ended, no story or a didactic explanation,

More and more trees are falling through the forest.

Many have died there, hundreds of thousands,

And many have hidden there,

The forest was a place for refuge, but also the back stage for normality,

The villages kept their daily routines while the Germans massacred so many innocent lives.

The film is photographic in nature, it delivers images,

Sensual experiences.

It is not the story, but the primal sense of a major disaster that suddenly occurs and is almost immediately forgotten, life goes on, the tranquil ambience quickly restoring itself.

One disaster after another,

One experience while others are being forgotten.

In memory of what is already lost.

☞ Ori Gersht

Photographs from the 'Liquidation' series by Ori Gersht.

Ori Gersht's work The Forest is currently showing at CRG Gallery, 3rd floor 535 22nd West St, NY. It has recently finished showing at The Photographers Gallery, London.

A book titled The Clearing which includes the entire Liquidation series was published in December by Film and Video Umbrella and is now available.

I was born in Gdansk and brought up in Sopot, right next to Gdansk, on the coast of Poland. I first came to London in 2000, while still studying at the Technical University of Gdansk. After graduation in 2002, with a Masters in Business Management, I moved permanently to London and started studying photography as I had no interest in a career in my profession. Currently, I'm a second year student of BA Photography at London College of Communication. ☞ *Marta Michalowska*

*pages 62-67 Photographs by Marta Michalowska
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