

Counting Days, Recounting Instants (extract)

Fatoş Üstek

The incident that I met you grew out of being a coincidence, once I was there to meet you again, for the second time. Our initial encounter was impregnating moments to come, and change our lives for good. From the perspective of now, what we have lived and shared is a long story without a certain beginning. That is, I cannot - even though I have tried, allocate when it was exactly that we silently joined our lives to gather and share... I am now writing you in the absence of your presence. A loss? It always is.

A compilation, of a certain genre, medium or objects is an attempt to phrase and value. Collections of books, stamps, music, stones or photographs fall into the category of compilations as a gathering of any sort, can never represent the whole, but the idea and the feeling of the selected group of things. A photography album of a family, brings together key moments of births, celebrations, and moments that may seem to be irrelevant or obscure in retrospect; moreover it gratifies a social portrait, a representation of the time that the family resides. An album, at times, may serve as an evidence, a cultural asset to be facilitated for common use; and at times stays within the family that is portrayed to serve for generations to come as a reference and locus of belonging.

It was the morning in which I woke up to sounds, your youngest collected fresh eggs from the hens with screaming joy, she was very young and flabbergasted by the whole experience of observing an egg being brought to life. It was indeed astonishing to see how her face changed when that same egg got scrambled for her breakfast. I did not have the words, but eyes to understand how hurt she was with the incident. Do you perhaps think that is what fired her unruly persona, that years later I would print her wild correlation on photography paper...

An album can be referred as a micro collection, which collates and makes visible instances that are marked as significant. The moments that are chosen over the ones that are not, request an idea of the personal identity and social conditioning. Photography as a document of gestures and modes of being inserts itself as a portrait, at times even in the absence of any subject, thus it portrays the scene and the feeling of the time it has frozen in a frame. On the other hand, no portrait talks truly about the subject, but the subject's relationship with the world that surrounds him or her.

Was it that day, after an enduring ride in your car, when we gave a break to stretch our legs you told me about your days in the army? The bridging posture, as you told me was an act of balance. I may not be remembering this right. That day, with its wonders of watching nature through the car windows, your enthusiasm to be among the mountains, the whole family being rammed in four cubic meters with songs. Was it that day, I asked you to teach me how to stand up and lean back, stretching your core, your backbones? It is hazy now, though the picture suggests we may have engaged in perfecting that pose.

[...]

For an immersive reader; this text is written in the memory of the pictures from the compilation presented in this book. Neither the narrative nor the inner dialogues correspond to the actual experiences, in other words it is a fiction within a certain reality, a reality within fiction.

Fatoş Üstek curator and art writer, is the Director of the Liverpool Biennial. Having been associate curator for the 10th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea in 2014, she

went on to curate the internationally acclaimed fig-2, 50 projects in 50 weeks, in London the following year and then Art Night 2017 in East London. She is an external member of the Acquisitions Committee for the Arts Council Collection (2018-2020). More recently she curated Do Ho Suh's largest commission in the UK for Art Night and Sculpture in the City (2018) and was Director and Chief Curator of the David Roberts Art Foundation (2018 - 2019).

This is an extract from the essay included in the book *WE* published by Kerber Verlag in 2019 to accompany John Peter Askew's exhibition at the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK.