

The Erl-King – Elon Ganor

Minshar art gallery, Tel Aviv, 27.10.2011 – 01.12.2011

Curator: Erez Golan, Head of Photography Department, Minshar for Art

The Father, the Son, and the Time Tunnel / by Erez Golan

Tunnel vision is the symptom of the medical condition *retinitis pigmentosa*. It is a vision defect in which the eye only sees objects which are directly in front of it. The condition, which has hereditary factors, is often progressive, leading to gradual loss of peripheral vision and sometimes to total blindness. While this process is irreversible, temporary tunnel vision can develop as a result of deficient oxygen supply to the area in the brain responsible for vision and as well the eye muscles. In most cases the tunnel phenomenon has physiological origins but psychological circumstances, such as extended stress leading to an anxiety attack, have also been recognized as causes.

In psychological terms, tunnel vision is a serious condition in which, under long exposure to stress, a person perceives his life only through its negative aspects, he is unable to see the positive side, and thus “he sees no light at the end of the tunnel.”

The tunnel experience is otherwise described, in a qualitative study from 1975¹, as a near-death experience. “...the experience is of being pulled along, moving into the darkness at high speed, and then reaching a zone of a bright, golden-white light. Despite reports of fear (among study subjects) they do not sense that they are on the way to Hell, or have fallen into it...” The encounter with the light was described as contact with an undefined being, who was full of love, cast an atmosphere of tenderness and loveliness, and was able to carry out a non-verbal conversation with those who experienced near-death.

In 1782 Johan Wolfgang Goethe wrote a ballad, based on a Danish legend, which tells the story of a father and son riding through the forest at night. The Erl King – the pursuer of children’s souls – is revealed to the boy while they ride. The boy tries in vain to convince his father of the Erl King’s existence, but the father, late to acknowledge the child’s anxiety, rides faster to bring his son.

*Who rides there so late through the night dark and drear?
The father it is, with his infant so dear;
He holdeth the boy tightly clasp'd in his arm,
He holdeth him safely, he keepeth him warm.*

*"My son, wherefore seek'st thou thy face thus to hide?"
"Look, father, the Erl King is close by our side!
Dost see not the Erl King, with crown and with train?"
"My son, 'tis the mist rising over the plain."....*

... "My father, my father, and dost thou not hear

¹ Dr. Raymond Moody - Life After Life, 1975– The Tunnel Experience

*The words that the Erl King now breathes in mine ear?"
"Be calm, dearest child, thy fancy deceives;
the wind is sighing through withering leaves.".....*

*... "I love thee, I'm charm'd by thy beauty, dear boy!
And if thou aren't willing, then force I'll employ."
"My father, my father, he seizes me fast,
For sorely the Erl King has hurt me at last."*

*The father now gallops, with terror half wild,
He holds in his arms the shuddering child;
He reaches his farmstead with toil and dread,—
The child in his arms lies motionless, dead.*

In the current exhibition Elon Ganor pulls together distant worlds in a masterful stroke, inventing a common ground by way of the dark series of photographs he has created over the past two years. Considering the artist's biography – he has studied medicine, headed a technological company, and then turned to art – this is not surprising. The series' point in time is not coincidental and is based on a relationship between father and son. For the first time in his life the artist confronts death and must take leave of his father, whom he has cared for in his last days. The wheel of time has turned son into father!

In his recent works Ganor displays continuity and development from his previous series, the Box Photographs, which he has shown in 2008. It is easy to ascribe some of the characteristics of tunnel vision mentioned earlier to Ganor's earlier series, but the viewer should not be distracted by formal attributes present in the box photograph series, since the tunnel vision in his new body of work is a complex way of seeing, which is not based on formal factors alone. Even if we assess the formal component in this new work it would not be surprising to discover an important development in the act of taking the picture itself: the peripheral visual information in the image creates the tunnel and it requires no mediation. This trend continues no less interestingly when the last two images in the series (ErlKing 13 and 7) are taken with a technical view camera which requires the photographer to cover himself with a black cloth and thus disengage from his environment (periphery). Ganor physically enters the tunnel, the same one he used to gaze out of when he was making this series, and in that instant vision is restored.

While the romantic and the poetic elements in art are the obvious inspiration for these pieces, their realization within an optic prism or a dark chamber, which exhibit a physiological aspect similar to hypermetropia is uncommon in photography. In farsightedness, the aging retina loses its curvature and our ability to see near objects is impaired. This phenomenon takes center stage in Ganor's work. (ErlKing 8 and 11) For a moment it seems that the processes described earlier influence the process of photography itself. Passively, this is photography whose depth of field has gone awry, as in some tragic-comic gag. Actively, it defies the romantic perception and becomes an image which explores the gap between human vision, with its eye-brain bond, and the camera lens, also known as an "objective."

The long focal length is doubly utilized in Ganor's new work of art, establishing the metaphorical tie to the image revealed in the photograph. The choice of a long focal-length, and the decision to shoot from a dark place into the light, compress the layers which make up the image. This compression has dual meanings. On the one hand the compression of the visual features of the image, such as the peripheral vision transforming into a tunnel, and the subject in the tunnel's center, not necessarily distant or in focus, and on the other hand the compression of the attendant values discussed earlier, alluding to the medical, poetic, and visual aspects of each piece. There's a sense of clicking a "merge layers" button, and at that moment all the different components come together as one.