
Rania Matar

Growth Amidst Decay, or the Lost of Innocence?

Rania Matar creates the perfect balance of framing and contrast in this timeless image. Taken as part of the project 'She', a series that examines womanhood and growing up, this image depicts a young woman near the detention center in the southern city of Khiyam. The photograph is comprised of two layers in particular. The outer layer is the photograph itself, featuring a decrepit rock formation and a faceless figure standing in the rubble at the base. However, the rock formation itself creates another frame, one that encapsulates the youthful girl holding a bright red rose against her breast. With her face hidden behind the upper part of the doorway, the barefoot girl retains a sense of anonymity, a symbolic representation rather than an individual portrait.

The contrast between the inorganic and organic aspects of the photograph are captivating. There is the rock structure, and rubble underneath, which exude feelings of abandonment, decay, and collapse. There also stands the central figure. Fresh, vibrant, and dynamic. Her white dress, often a symbol of innocence or purity, moves in the breeze. There is push between the forces of growth and hope, and those of imminent breakdown caused by neglect of the built environment. From one perspective, she is a beacon of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape. From a different point of view, she is being slowly pushed out of the frame, her fleeting innocence no match for the structures that have withstood the test of time.

While this photograph has the potential to represent many situations, it currently serves as an important metaphor for the situation befalling Lebanon. According to Matar, "In Lebanon, the backdrop is the texture of the walls, even some of the destruction, and even for those young people who didn't live through the war, it's part of that collective memory." Recent events are etched onto the walls much in the same way. In the lower left-hand corner, a discarded curl of barbed wire recalls the countries weakened system. Opposing this, on the right side, a portion of a Roman style column is a reminder of the rich, and so often neglected, history of the region. If the girl represents hope, she represents a burgeoning one that is comparably weak against the weight of the surrounding structures. The structure itself could serve as a not-so-subtle nod to the dysfunctional infrastructure and lack of care that the country suffers from.

Whether it is considered as a metaphorical image, or simply a striking depiction of beauty in an unusual landscape, the framing of the photograph and the contrasting elements make for a composition that merits deeper consideration.



PHOTO PICK



Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Taniz/Beirut

Rania Matar, Ghinwa, Khiyam, Photograph, Lebanon, 2019, Part of the series 'She'