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Autor: Gitai, Ben
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VIEW #0.5
PAYS ET VISAGES

Ben Gitai

Reflecting on a piece of land can awaken different memories and senses from stories and events that occurred in the past or that might happen in the future. Contemplating our environment is a process that attempts to capture individual narratives and multiple observations of nature in a single moment. The observer takes a traveling gaze at the landscape, which, in turn, provokes an inner journey with a plurality of paths, thus shaping a composite mental landscape.

Rift merges seven different views on the same fragmented landscape into a comprehensive ensemble. The vast landscape that we are referring to is the Great Rift Valley, which has played a central role throughout history as a gateway and crossing point connecting the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. In this valley is situated the Jordan River, which is perhaps best known for its deep religious significance. The Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and Islamic texts associate the Jordan River with the prophet Elijah, the baptism of Christ, and the companions of Prophet Mohammed, giving references to the river as a crossing point and symbol of liberation.

There are numerous sites of valuable natural and cultural importance within the extensive region but unfortunately we also find a collapsing landscape, which has been significantly impacted by recent human catastrophes and civil war. Along the Great Rift Valley, a dramatic geographical fault line extends from the horrendous war in Syria to the disputed civil war in Sudan.

When we look at the Jordan River Valley, we might understand how layers of time fabricate and form the story of a place. At the same time, we have to remember that in the middle of the valley there lies a border, which appears as a scar that fragments the surface of the earth. In the book *Opinions on the World, Mankind, Literature, Science, and Art*, Goethe declared that the beginning and end of all literary activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds us. In this process of reproduction, all things must first be grasped, related, recreated, molded, and reconstructed in a personal and original manner.

Each of the contributors of this booklet refers to the wounds that this landscape has received in his or her own personal way,

thus in a sense also contributing to the healing of this territory. In fact, this issue of *Pamphlet* is a kind of prototype of conceiving of a territory that has been deformed by different types of wounds. It presents a way of viewing this piece of land that takes on a multiplicity of perspectives and voices. These different views give the landscape a “face.”

The Hebrew word for face is *Panim*. Because it does not have a singular form, it is always used in its plural form: faces. *Panim* in itself is a multi-faceted expression that advocates a pluralism of visions and views; it argues that there are different aspects or modes of interpretation to any given surface, of subjects and objects alike. The French word for landscape, *paysages*, is likewise plural and may be read as a combination of *pays* (“lands”) and *visages* (“faces”). The phrases ‘land-faces’ or ‘faces of the land’ capture the human dimension of landscape and in this way also encourage accessing one’s inner—mental—landscape.

The aim of this ensemble is to present the narrators’s different observations on the rift in a Rashomonian manner, that is, as a series of testimonies. In other words, the different perspectives remind us that, as the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa plotted it in his film, there is never *one* story or *one* truth, but rather a plurality of outer and inner reflections.



Listen to Hanna Schygulla read her piece "Some Thoughts on the Valley of the Jordan River"