



PHOTOGRAPHY MAXINE HELFMAN

WORDS LIUCIJA ADOMAITE

Maxine Helfman is the master of light, the subtle uninhibited gaps in time that last millions of “one hundreds of a second” on average. During these time bends, she captures paralyzing moments of what we look at when we type in the word “human” in the search box of our current shared existence. One is invited to play a match of the Hangman’s game where the answer is supposed to unfold itself.

Helfman is a self-taught photographer, a portraitist, a fine artist, a former stylist and art director. But more than anything she is a storyteller. While demining Maxine’s complex terrain of visual clues and elements, the viewer gets a feeling that everything that is visible in the shot has already happened a while ago, and the aftermath is a single thing that is left alive. The history, they say, should not be heroic and Maxine Helfman is the one bringing this historical voice to the mortal ones. What are they trying to tell us while gazing so silently from this remote depth of the pictures?

It is important to understand that speech, a tool of language, is an exercise or rather an act exercised upon. It can be equally directed in both ways, that of love and hate or freedom and censorship. Judith Butler claimed that there’s a fundamental force in language that “binds us so severely that no act of censorship can undo”. If so, then the question is not just how we communicate, but more importantly – why? It worries me because if it’s an exercise, it can also be a weapon.

Maxine Helfman is telling us that “freedom of speech has a socio-economic factor, and those who don’t have that factor, don’t really have a voice”. Thus the voice is not simply an integral element, it is a solid promise to fulfill one’s entirety altogether. Such a factor can determine what one can say, if not how much one is actually listened to. We call this widely popular phenomenon “opinion making” and it usually, for better or worse, conquers little to vast areas of influence.

But do you still count if your voice gets taken away? And who is able to take it away? Is anyone or anything able to do this? I can almost imagine Helfman taking a deep breath. “It’s almost so loud it gets drowned out. Who are the voices that rise above and get noticed?” We get immersed into the ping-pong of questions that don’t require answers. This is the point when you’re forced to search for them in the Helfman’s visual world. Unwritten history breathes in and out inside the images while reality sleeps covered with already worn out sheets of oblivion.

Behind the curtains of such visual and intellectual flirt, Maxine Helfman leaves us with a promise covered with a thick layer of modern dust. “A Free World is Coming” claims an inscription in one of her images. The daylight is partly coming through. The sun is mute, at least for now.







