

Naomi Leshem

Looking back at my creative process since its inception in the mid-90's, a seed to each body of work begins with a recollection, even a dream. Throughout my photographic process, my camera, always a Hasselblad, has been a tool to recount stories, which are off-springs of my thoughts, recollections, or research. The square format of the frame is an inherent intention of my perception when approaching a moment or a picture, becoming an integral part of my creative experience.

My work usually entails a journey which drives me to identify a location, a specific space and the accompanying light to manifest a story. I work in a measured process, each step leading to the next, and once a frame is planned in its technical format and lighting, the process also allows the rest to engage in an organic, natural way, where local occurrences arise and become part of the frame.

I am interested in exploring areas of life and being that may be defined as "in between". This is an aspect that feels familiar, having the freedom to shift between worlds - terrestrial and celestial (in *"Way to Beyond"* series, 2003-2006), conscious and unaware (*"Sleepers"*, 2006-2010), directed and accidental (*"Runways"*, 2007). I tend to depict situations that I feel are parts of a course between different stages in life, whether from childhood to adulthood, wakefulness to sleep, life to death.

In both series *"Runways"* and *"Way to Beyond"*, the outdoors present themselves in both glamour and oblivion, a dichotomy which has been second nature personally and professionally. These are landscapes that embody multiple associations, and for me represent the fine line between intimacy and alienation.

While creating *"Runways"*, I felt as though the open space was asking for an epic reaction to it, with a need for a clear separation between earth and sky. These works describe young women who face obligatory military service in Israel, as they're placed not in their natural habitat. The human scale of the figures situated in military air force runways comes as a contradiction to their environment's magnitude.

A similar feel of uncertainty escorted my approach to *"Way to Beyond"*, a series of photographs taken at different locations in Israel, where the linking thread was an accident leading to death, that had taken place at that specific site. In this series, uncertainty comes as part of a more serene atmosphere, where the skyline is not as dramatic as in *"Runways"* – the passage from one territory to another is somewhat gentler, mystic and for me, terrifying as well.

Over the years I have moved towards increasing my “interference” with the photographic outcome: in *"Sleepers"*, 32 teenagers from 5 countries were photographed while deeply asleep. This type of work has been my most recent exploration of elusive and divided areas, dealing with the meeting point between conscious and unconscious. These compositions have much in common with my previous bodies of work, although the visual similarity is not instantaneous, the “horizon” in both is being split in the middle of the viewer’s eye, which is an aspect I like to visualize when thinking of how the viewer stands physically vis a vis my work and the relationship that is created between the photograph and the spectator.

My intention is to try and touch what is tangible and what is in the realm of the beyond, a concept which has lead me to deal with transitions, points of departure from one state of mind to another. In *"Sleepers"*, the element of transition is very vivid – the young adolescents described in these photographs are in the midst of diving deep into their world of dreams, into their own unknown.

The shift that has become apparent in my work, has also mirrored in my action as a photographer: over the course of the past few years, I have moved from natural to studio light, and from exterior sites to interior spaces (and back again in my future project). This process feels like it has developed organically in my search for a truth in what I decide to capture and how I do it, which is a process I intend to further explore.