

Jewish Homosexuals are not a Defined Group Adi Ness and Nomi Talisman - Photographs, Camera Obscura Gallery

By Vered Maimon (translated from the Hebrew)

Adi Ness and Nomi Talisman's exhibition is the result of a joint project under the misleading title "Documentation of the Jewish homosexual community in London." Misleading because it presumes that there is a community with these characteristics, and that the role of the photographer is to document its members. In actuality the project attempts to examine if such a community exists, and if it is sufficient for a community whose members are homosexuals and Jews to make it unique with a certain feeling of solidarity and sharing. In the accompanying text Talisman points out the problematics of the title. "A salient feature of documentary photography," she writes, "is identifying the title in the works themselves... this group of Jewish homosexuals is not necessarily a unique event, but if one uses significant visual signs of both groups together... the absence of such significant signs, and the choice not to announce the title in the body of work, makes it possible to speak about a cultural ghetto without creating it."

The photographs go beyond the traditional documentary genre and create an album of a journey that documents selected moments in an encounter between the photographers and their subjects, it also includes photographs of people in their homes and staged photographs of Ness and Talisman on their visit to London. In the square shiny color photographs a delicate equilibrium is maintained between the loneliness of the photographers in a foreign place, and the intimacy that is eventually created between them and their subjects, reaching a climax in a joint photograph. The joint photograph, Talisman says, is also an attempt to move away from the division of roles of photographer and subjects, and this is especially felt in the photographs in which the photographers take pictures of themselves.

This exhibition necessarily raises questions that relate to stereotypes, and almost instinctively the spectator seeks signs that will fit the title. The collection of photographs addresses this instinct in certain ways. Thus, for example, there is a photograph of a man in a sailor shirt, reminiscent of the stories of Jean Genet; a fat woman in an aggressive masculine pose; a cropped-haired punk rocker; Ness and Talisman at a New Year's dinner or a couple of older lesbians in the sukkah. But the seeming agreement with stereotypes does not create a community, a differentiated group, but rather signifies, against the background of other photographs, the impossibility of cataloguing even according to traits so crucial as Judaism and homosexuality. There are many other notable characteristics, such as social status, profession, character and temperament.

The question of cataloguing appears in an extraordinary photograph, in which all the subjects appear at the opening of the exhibition in London. This photograph, in contrast to all the others, is far from being festive or moving. A group of people photographed from afar, almost none of whom are looking at the camera, and more than a community the photograph documents a feeling of detachment between the people and the photographers.

Ha'ir
14.1.94
Photography

