

HOPE

by Filippo Betto, Colors contributing editor

The question is always the same: “What do you hope for?”. The answers are always different. Very different. People’s dreams are as individual as their faces. While a little girl dreams of owning a pure breed dog, an eighty-year-old priest hopes that God will send him to China, and the doorman of a housing project wants everyone to finally have a full stomach. After the fall of the Twin Towers and the aftermath of “Ground Zero” everyone thought they had lost the much sought after hope forever, crushed by rubble and impotence. The stock market plummeted, just like the World Trade Center and like the morale of a nation—which became a representative of the Western world—turned upside down by two planes gone crazy and by the hate of kamikaze pilots. The costly and inefficient war that followed was useless—only good for placating wounded pride. And probably only temporarily suspended—waiting to pinpoint and bomb both old and new enemies. Now, one year later, things slowly seem to be getting moving again. People are beginning to hope again. People are beginning to build again. People are beginning to live again. The area around Ground Zero is being repopulated and not just with ghosts. Shops, bars and pizzerias are reborn. The first projects for reconstruction are coming in. The long crisis seems to be heading towards extinction.

The exhibition “Visions of Hope” tells about this change of route. In a word it deals with hope. Almost thirty portraits of people from around the world, young and old, men and women, concentrating with eyes closed, are captured in the same gesture of forcefully wishing their greatest dream to come true. The exhibition is of course hosted in New York City, in the prestigious Condé Nast Building designed by Frank Gehry. The faces are marked by the effort of resolutely wanting the desired dream to come true. There are small dreams and big dreams, concrete and metaphysical, mystical and everyday. But what they all have in common is the desire to make things better, attempting to make life less sad, both for themselves and for others. This gallery of dreaming faces has a radically poetic effect. The tragic incident of September 11th seems almost a pretext. It is not just the city that recounts its desire to go back to hoping, but the whole of humanity, regardless of gender, age or borders. As if the one-year anniversary of an American tragedy turned into an occasion for each individual to want to see the quality of life improve for both themselves and everyone else. As if Ground Zero were a departure point for everyone from which launching a universal campaign for a world less afflicted with pain.

The mood of the exhibition is absolutely transversal in a symbolic effort to reunite age, gender and cultures from all over the world. The main character of the exhibition remains the ability to dream again, symbolized by closed eyes—the only true leitmotiv of the entire project.

“I would like to learn as many things as possible every day of my life. And travel a lot”. “I would like my children to grow up healthy, get a good education and a good job”. “ Do something that will be remembered after I am dead”. These are some of the quotes taken from the micro-stories collected for the exhibition. But, after having said basically everything—apart from the fact that the exhibition will also be a fund-raiser in favor of the victims of September 11th —we have a doubt: what would the portrayed people have answered if the question had been asked before that fatal day? We answer for them: probably the same things. Dreams don’t change; normal lives remain (almost) normal. Both before and after wars and catastrophes. Change the date by two years under each portrait, leaving the response intact: as in the well-known corollary, the order of the addenda does not change the results. This is an exhibition entirely dedicated to hope (as you will have gathered), but it is not and does not want to be about the American dream of an economic comeback or of prestige. It is about a global project of wellbeing and a return to normality, a cross-over of aspirations without a plaque and without a date. As if September 11th had never happened.

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