

Milcho Manchevski: Five Drops of Dream

Conor McGrady

“In the collection of compositions FIVE DROPS OF DREAM I am interested in two things:

1. The explosion of the visual in the mundane moment; and
2. The wrestle and embrace of the narrative and the formal.

These photographs live only when they are together and when they form compositions. Like notes in a song.”

-Milcho Manchevski

Encompassing photographs taken over a ten-year period, Milcho Manchevski’s “Five Drops of Dream” spans time and multiple geographic locations, which are folded into each other in a series of 49 compositions called *strings*. Each *string* is comprised of 5 photographs aligned in a row, their composition serving as the locus for multiple associative readings. The images themselves are often close ups, or shot from askew angles and peripheral viewpoints, capturing what Manchevski describes as “mundane moments” in time. What initially strikes the viewer about these images is the interplay between the incidental and the mysterious, and between light and texture. The richness of the light illuminates fragments of the built environment - of concrete, walls, roadways and sidewalks - and activates the anonymous lives that define and pass through it. The balance between light and shadow, quite apart from the formal qualities it lends the composition of each piece, accentuates the sense of mystery. Walls and bodies emerge from shadows, and light defines and captures seemingly banal moments in time, its revealing glare asserting and elevating their presence.

In many ways “Five Drops Of Dream” is a painterly project. The use of line, color and shape in defining the formal considerations of each *string*, seems to inherently rely on the strategies and techniques of twentieth century painting. In some of the *strings*, a line cuts or sweeps through the composition, unifying otherwise seemingly unrelated elements, and linking disparate moments in time and space. Images appear within images, and the predominance of windows and reflections add depth to these works, accentuating their spatial considerations and expanding their narrative potential. Vibrant explosions of color and pattern also punctuate the *strings*. A color is picked up in one image and echoed in another. Circles, verticals and diagonals repeat, underpinning the structure of each composition. Form defines these works, from the choices in the framing of the initial photographs, to their alignment into groups of five. This process of selection and arrangement evokes the cut-up method that informed cubism and many of the avant-garde practices that subsequently emerged during the twentieth century. In effect, each *string* is a linear collage; its totality wholly dependent on its separate composite elements. The formal considerations underpinning each composition provide a mechanism for the

viewer to make numerous and overlapping assumptions about the suggested, if fragmentary, narrative or sets of narratives within each work.

In looking at Manchevski's work in film, similar concerns can be distinguished in "Five Drops of Dream". Rapid shifts in time and location characterize his films, as does a desire to play with temporal structure and conventional filmic narrative. While film is inherently dependant on the progression of time, the photograph, through its stasis and silence, remains divorced from this temporal flow. The power of photography, as in painting, lays in the silence of the image; a silence that demands an act of contemplation in order to elicit meaning. Manchevski's films of course, also demand the active participation of the viewer in constructing meaning, refusing to let them become passive consumers of conventional cinematic narrative. But the encapsulation of time and place in "Five Drops of Dream" provides a wholly different experience to that of cinematic time. The grouping of images in each *string* may formally echo the progression of images on a filmstrip, but there the comparison ends. As collages, these works are essentially polyptychs. Each individual image has a power and presence of its own, but it is only in their role as component elements within a larger singular framework that they activate the capacity for multiple readings.

The lived experience of the street predominates in "Five Drops of Dream." It's dynamic rhythm and flow framing the anonymity, work, poverty, and in some cases hints of conflict, that play out in these images. Children and animals form an almost constant presence in the works, foregrounding their poetic, erotic and dramatic context. The viewer is often peripheral, and in many of the works the gaze downwards, drawing attention to the surfaces of the built environment on (and within) which life is played out. In "Five Drops of Dream", the peripheral or seemingly incidental is recast to become not simply a document of a moment in time, but a possibility. In each work the most overlooked aspects of life are transformed into an intimate visual experience that invites the viewer into a world of open-ended associations and potential meanings.

Conor McGrady is an artist whose exhibitions include Miyako Yoshinaga Art Prospects, New York, Gallery Karas, Zagreb, Croatia, and the 2002 Whitney Biennial, New York. From N. Ireland, he lives and works in New York.