

## **From Reality to Abstraction; From Inside the Photo to Outside of the Subject**

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Rather than referring to real things, realistic elements in Mehrdad Afsari's photos tend to take the viewer to a place which is subjective and curious: to an unexpected spot, to vague things, to a space that exists between us and things on the verge of oblivion. It is as though his camera wants to remove a veil from reality to penetrate the nature of things. Now the camera does not hinge its possessive role upon reality, but in a different dimension, invites obvious things from the fringes to be discovered. *Doubting that which is being observed* is perhaps the most significant driving force behind Afsari's approach to his own personal peculiarities, which he wants to display in a new light each time they are being presented to viewers. This observation belongs more to an inside realm rather than the outside world. The use of the media of photography can be considered the most significant choice which overlaps this approach to things. This can be traced in most of Afsari's works, except for "Shahnameh" and "America, Suspended Land" series. For, at root, it is this very act of "seeing" which is being processed through photography, albeit in a different way. In a time that enormous quantities of images and events are viewed every day, people do not seem to be conscious to their own ability in observing things. In other words, we presently rely more on our eyes rather than our brains in the process of understanding—which is exactly where contemporary photography and modern humanity intersect. In Afsari's recent series, "After Grandma", something is spilling out of the past, in the nature of which, traces of loss can be found that are deeply rooted in the memory. Yet, this memory is not depicted in the photos. Instead, pictures of flowers are shown that, in their visual turmoil, implicitly weave our gaze to their owners. Having been planted in the earth once, these flowers used to stand firm by a thread. In fact, in passive sentences of the past, the subjects can be recognized which draw our attention by the series' title. Perhaps it is obvious that the viewer can naturally identify himself with the pictures. However, while being graceful and coquettish, Afsari's approach is simultaneously awesome and terrifying. The direct light of camera's flash, momentarily captures the dim world, so that viewers might gaze at that bleak incident—and also at the plants suffering in the darkness of inexistent—with their minds' eyes. A light is shed by the photographer and the camera's dark chamber turns to a place that envelope that fantastical reflection. With the light he has shed, the photographer has pinned his own presence on the pictures' subjects. In a different level, this simple, offhand technique leaves us hanging between the inner and the outer realms. The flowers only appear to be on the outside and exposed to light. But because the pictures are taken at night, and consequently, murky backgrounds as the negative area—giving the photos a quality similar to a painting—they make us feel insecure and uncertain. A purgatory that has been left unexperienced in the everydayness of life, suddenly comeback at us. Have we been caught between being and not being? What has been left in our inner realm and what has left our outer realm? The photographic method is constantly driving us towards and away from the moment the image was shot—and to a point where the light was shed. This is a place tied closely to darkness, whether we like it or not. And it is here that time becomes important once again. I wonder if there were anything before the flash went off, or if anything exists thereafter. Light and

darkness take a metaphorical quality and suspension dominates the scene. In the meantime, however, there are photographs left behind that are mere pretexts for losing and being found: losing as the main subject and finding one's status as something that gives meaning to the works' existence. As a result, photos are simultaneously real and surreal; not because of their format, but because they have brought into existence things that used to exist in the past. Where *loss* is the subject of the photographs, it makes a curious link to the picture itself as an object. All the pictures are dreary, because, above all, they refer to a sense of loss. The photographer ties the implicit absence in the photos to his own absent subject through his grandmother's flowers, which seem flat and shallow and are spectacular in such large proportions. Flowers in the fringes of a generative house; captivating memories, carrying anxiety; square frames, moving meaning with themselves, not with their contexts. The accentuated details are not those of a plant and its stem and leaves, but things that are concretely grafted into the viewer's mind. Once again, the abstract approach to the subject becomes a painterly attitude that has laid forms and minimalistic surfaces on the frames' bodies. A reductionist, photographic act is woven to a painterly augmented act, distancing the pictures further from self-sufficiency. Such an approach is obviously far from being conventional, which is the cause of contemporary photography's dynamism, presenting the works to viewers as texts ought to be read. This is a type of photography that turns appearances to pretentious, while concealing its meaning in the viewers' mind.