



Salman Edan Alwastey: Time Lapse, Recent Photos from Baghdad

Although I was interested in photos years before, my journey with a camera started when I was 12 years old when only film cameras were used. I was fascinated by some illustration books that contained photographs of old and new types of trains, cars, and airplanes. But what impressed me the most and attracted me to the camera before I knew and used it was a little toy camera I received as a gift from a relative visiting Iraq. I used it as a child to view some beautiful photographs of cities.

In a closed country like Iraq, and during the previous dictatorship rule, it was not that easy to get a new camera. Plus, the danger of using it in public spaces. One day in 1983, my older brother and I were taking pictures on Al-Jumhuriya Bridge in Baghdad, a bridge that was in front of some government buildings. Police stopped by and started to question us about what we were photographing. They took the film from our camera and damaged it before letting us go. After that incident, my passion about cameras stopped. However, during the war and peace periods my country went through, my visual passion ebbed and flowed depending on the public and private government modes we lived through worlds.

In 2007, my interest in visual imaging returned strongly, but this time through fine arts as I was working as a salesman in one of the famous art galleries in Amman, Jordan after moving there from Iraq. I found my passion for the camera again because of my work in photographing artists' artworks and art meetings held at Dar Al-Anda Gallery. I also started to write critical reviews and articles about the Iraqi and Arabic plastic arts at that time.

I immigrated and traveled to the United States, settling in Arizona. There I studied graphic design along with a variety of courses in arts and photography at Phoenix College. Here a new journey with a camera started again, and my visual interests developed dramatically. I became more experienced with the camera due to my education and being able to use most kinds of cameras.

This exhibit with Phoenix Institute of Contemporary Art showcases a collection of photographs I took during my most recent visit to Baghdad, Iraq in March 2022. Here is my visual view of that city I left many years ago. My vision was confused due to destruction of the mental and visual memories of Baghdad I had treasured since childhood and youth as soon as I saw the city. During the first week of my visit, I tried focusing on Baghdad's old neighborhoods and places and how they have been affected by wars and social, political, and economic dynamics. I was trying to compare the beautiful images I had in my memory about Baghdad with what I saw during that visit, utilizing my sharpened visual experiences, educational skills, and the continuous practice of photographing. I could feel the effect of the time lapse and the visual gap between the past and the present.

Therefore, my work in some images here was an attempt at combining two aspects together, time and light and showing their effects on individuals and buildings in the streets of old Baghdad neighborhoods. Many of these buildings, because of the reflection of light and shadow on their facets and walls, gave incredibly beautiful and colorful compositions as if they were paintings on canvases. This was true in specific old buildings that were built following the aesthetics of Arabic and Islamic architecture via the usage of arches, ornaments, calligraphies, and religious symbols.

My experience in this collection of photographs is my visual journey from the past of Baghdad to its present, and it also shows how my photographic vision has been influenced and developed throughout times and places.

Salman Edan Alwastey

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