



I Leave Again, Self-Portrait Sardinia 2005

Youssef Nabil

A Photographer's Self-Portrait

Growing up in the city of Cairo, the birth place of Middle Eastern cinema, Nabil was intrigued with the golden age of its magic and glamour. His works draw inspiration from his childhood memories of black and white films filled with elegance and melodrama, but also follow a clear lineage of the tradition of the studio photograph. Through using the age old technique of hand coloured photographs, Nabil constructs scenes that are both beautiful and conflicting, creating images of longing, loss, sensuality, sex and death.

The works refer to a misplaced nostalgia of a past era in his signature re-appropriation of the hand colouring technique of black and white photographs. Nabil views his life as a movie and the captured images are certainly cinematic in their compositions and allusions to narrative.

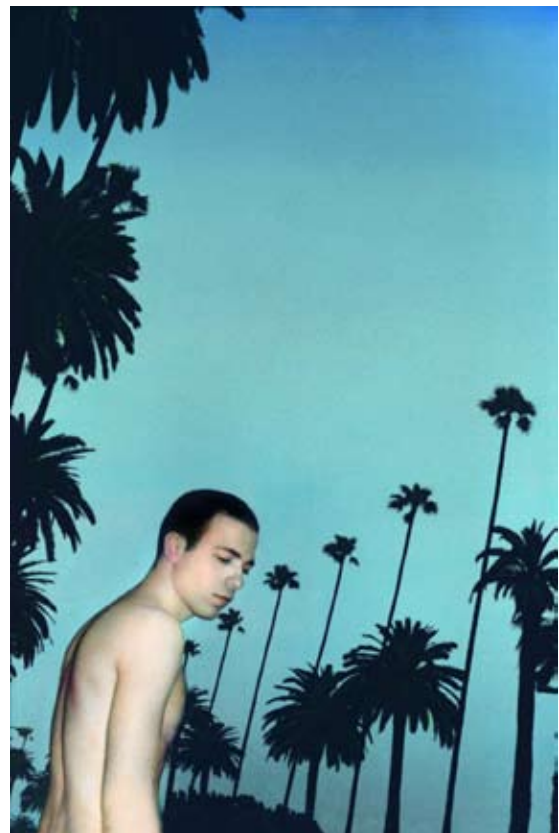
The photographs are made up of a variety of forced and some contrived poses, at times depicting a person, situation, place or event. Open ended narratives are alluded to, both in the mise-en-scene of the works, as well as with additional clues in the titles which include locations and dates. The self portraits taken often depict the artist sleeping or lying pensively, but Nabil increasingly takes on a performative role in them, creating rhythm in multi panel works, where, for example, he is seen disappearing into the ocean.



I Will go to Paradise, Self-Portrait Heyers 2008

With a special emphasis on self-portraits, Nabil's works portray the artist revealing himself in different places, scenes and moods taken over a period of time. "I do them in different cities," Nabil explains. "I was a visitor in all of them and I knew that I must leave. My relationship to my whole life is the same – for me, it is about coming to a place that is not yours and having to go." These self-portraits are in sharp contrast with his regular portraits, the latter of which are carefully constructed presentations in which Nabil controls every nuance and circumstance while the subject gets to dream and often confront the viewer's gaze. In contrast, Nabil as his own subject asserts a voyeuristic relationship with the viewer, always presenting himself in profile or looking past the lens, gazing into a far-away, imaginary place, "There is always something that we look for, that we wish to have or understand or achieve."

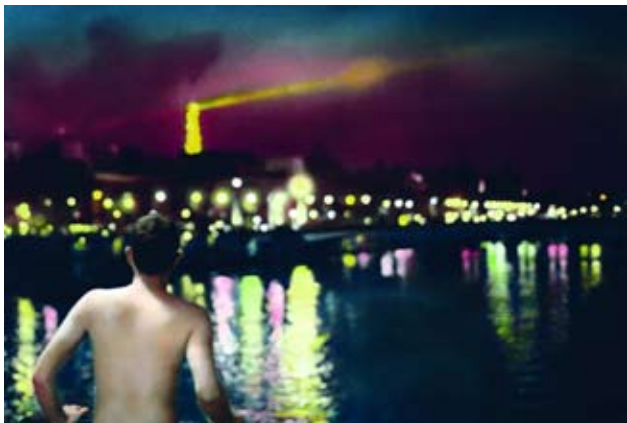
As with the very nature of photography, Nabil captures and preserves a moment by tapping into his subject's power, beauty, or a cliché even. Everything has an end yet may continue existing forever in a photograph. "When I was a kid, and while watching old Egyptian movies, I used to ask my mother about all the actors, who they all are," he recalls. "And mostly the answer was that they were all dead. It was a strange idea to me to watch and love all these beautiful dead people. I think it did something to my subconscious. Later on in my work when photographing people, I always think of how to make the moment eternal; before they die, or I die."



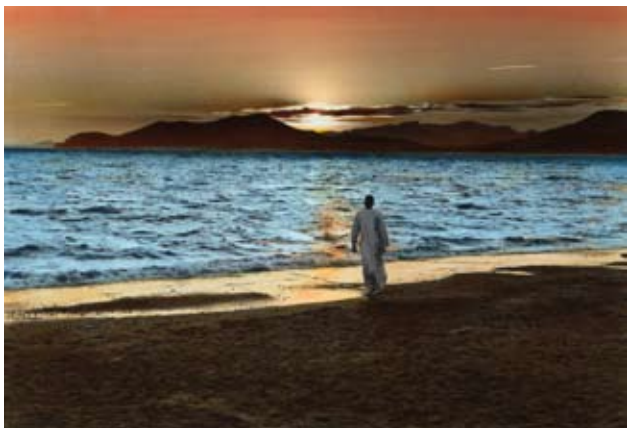
Self-Portrait Beverly Hills 2008



Hope to Die in My Sleep, Self-Portrait, Vinales 2005



Self-Portrait at Night, Paris 2005



I Will go to Paradise, Self-Portrait Heyers 2008 (detail of image 1 of 4)



*Self-Portrait with Roots,
Los Angeles 2008*

I Won't Let You Die

I Won't Let You Die, the book, captures Nabil's signature approach to portraiture that blends photography and painting in an evocation of an era long passed – Cairo's golden age of cinema. The book features text by the artist himself, as well as an extended essay from art critic and curator Octavio Zaya. It also includes conversations between the artist and three of his former subjects: Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, and legendary Egyptian actress Faten Hamama. With 272 pages and 137 illustrations in color and published by Hatje Cantz (Germany), this is the first comprehensive presentation of Nabil's photographs of artists, his friends, himself, and images staged over the past fifteen years.



Faten Hamama, Cairo 2008

About Youssef Nabil

Nabil's work has been presented on numerous solo and group exhibitions at venues including the British Museum, London; Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City; North Carolina Museum of Art, North Carolina; BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle; Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town; Galeria Leme, São Paulo; Townhouse Gallery, Cairo; FotoFest Houston, Texas; Centre de Cultura Contemporànea de Barcelona; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Kunstmuseum, Bonn; The Third Line, Dubai; Volker Diehl Gallery, Berlin; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla; and Aperture Foundation, New York.

Nabil, born in 1972, presently lives and works in New York.
www.youssefnabil.com

All images are courtesy of the artist and The Third Line Gallery



THE END 2007