

# CONVERSATION, 1989

Arnon Ben-David and David Reeb

Arnon Ben-David: Is the personal touch in a work important to you?

David Reeb: It's important to me that there's a handwriting, but I don't want it to hide the rest of the work. When I copy from a photograph or an actual landscape, there exists my intervention, or a kind of interference, which adds a vitality or a kind of interest to the information which the painting conveys. But the difference between a copy I make and a copy someone else makes has no value significance. That is to say, my intervention at the time of copying, or at the time of making a visual idea concrete, is one more quantitative formal component in the work, a component less important perhaps than the size of the work or the choice of materials for the painting.

A.B.D.: What does your choice of media for the work reflect?

D.R.: The choice of photography, for example, is a choice of a material. Generally I use materials that aren't too charged with meanings, which tend to the general or the ordinary, because to me they aren't the focus of the events which create the painting. Photography of course has an efficacy of another kind, and I take a lot of interest in the press photographs done here in the last year or two. There have been a lot of interesting photos published, some of them astounding. A painting after a photograph like that, despite the differences the process makes, returns the photograph to its original

environment, in the way that it is connected to the original function of the image.

A.B.D.: Actually you return the particular picture to its original environment after you have stripped it of the printing technique, and it then incorporates the information of the transmission process.

D.R.: If the picture's printed in a newspaper, it is again more similar to the original photograph than to the painting.

A.B.D.: I recall one of your series of paintings after photographs of ruins in Beirut taken by Sophie Ristelhueber. What were your considerations in selecting these photographs as material for your work?

D.R.: First of all the photographs are beautiful, very effective. They give good documentation of the situation in Beirut in '83-'84, and this is something that for me has strong meaning and emotional content. Her book has a mythic basis; it describes, for example, a continuity from the ruins of Baalbek to the ruins of Beirut today. The photographs are very artistic, very unlike press photography, and because of that, this raw material is problematic for me. That's why I have an ambivalent attitude to this series, and in any case I try to give credit to the photographer.

A.B.D.: In her photographs there is a sense that she's dealing with the architectonic aspect, and the allegorical dimension of her work is prominent.

D.R.: Look, I also take an interest in building, in ruins, in bombed buildings. I remember well the ruins from the period when I was a soldier in the army. Kuneitra, for example, before they razed it down to the foundations, was a ghost town. There was a tremendous presence there of all the people who had lived in the town.

A.B.D.: That perhaps influenced your choice of the pictures we spoke about before.

D.R.: Could be. Israel too is full of groves and forests under which there are ruins of villages and towns.

A.B.D.: Within the bounds of the Green Line.

D.R.: Within the bounds of the Green Line. I painted the grove at Abu-Kabir, "The Haganah Grove," where you can see traces of the original Abu-Kabir destroyed since '48.

A.B.D.: In your works the Green Line appears on the one hand as the Pale of Settlement, as what bounds our living space, and it also has a didactic sense—look, see the Green Line.

D.R.: This is the map I learned when I was a child. It's a map that represents our and our children's chance to go on living here.

- A.B.D.: It also represents Israel before 1967.
- D.R.: For me it doesn't represent any kind of nostalgia, but a reference to the past and to a possible future, and my non-acceptance of the dictates of our government.
- A.B.D.: That means that the Green Line becomes a symbol of a desired political situation.
- D.R.: In a certain sense, although this function is of course absurd in painting. It represents a refusal of the existing situation.
- A.B.D.: The symbolic force of the Green Line is increasing, because of the time that is passing. The weight of the years gets greater, and the recurring use of the Green Line reminds us of the space we've been living in since the beginning of the Occupation.
- D.R.: More and more people are ready to face the recognition that what seemed a sweet dream in 1967 has turned out a nightmare.
- A.B.D.: How does your choice of a photograph of a deportation victim, for example, connect with your tendency to ordinariness in your choice of subjects?
- D.R.: If you look at the paintings, every one of them depicts a situation. It's not a portrait, it's not just a painting of a deportation victim, or a prisoner. I painted a house here, I painted the landscape or the jeep with the soldiers and the background, the place.
- A.B.D.: In other words, you choose the photographs that you work from because of the great weight they have in our situation. You choose the photographs not so much because of the political situation they reflect, but because they are central in our range of vision.
- D.R.: Of course. You see them in the newspaper or on TV, and how that gets translated into everyday life, in our emotional values.
- A.B.D.: To what extent is this connected to your concept of social justice, if at all?
- D.R.: I paint what I paint because it interests me. Sometimes I try, through my painting, to serve an extra-artistic cause. Of course, I don't believe such an act has much effectiveness, but it is definitely an aspect of the work. It stems from the fact that none of us works only in art. We also take part in other people's reality.