

Meir Rakocz מאיר רקוץ

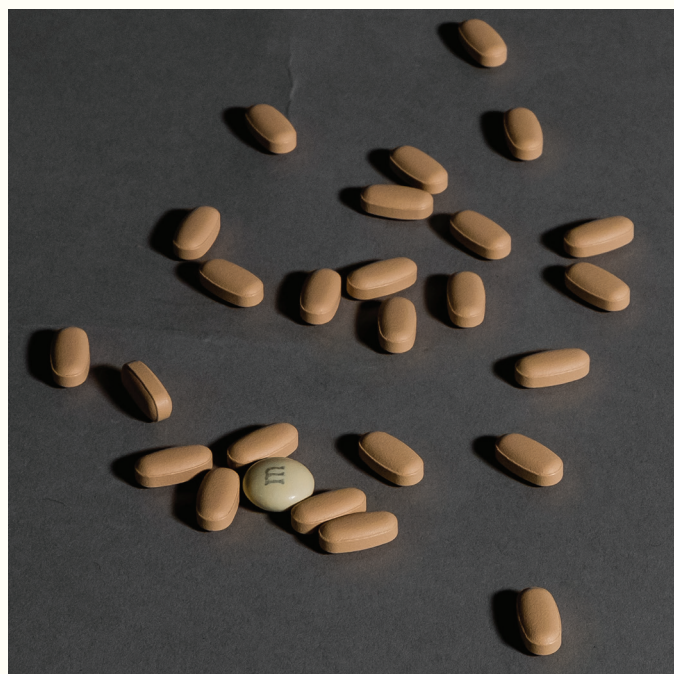
# Morbidity & Mortality

Report

In an intercontinental Skype conversation between Meir at his studio in Tel Aviv and me in a shared rental apartment in Brooklyn, sometime in November of last year, I told him that I see cancer as something abstract and invisible – which, for me, is seriously terrifying. You can figure it's there because you were told so, and perhaps you're feeling a little less fit, but you see this thing only based on test results, conversations with doctors, or the faces of those who love you. Meir listened to me intently and with understanding, and when I finished pontificating, said with a smile, "You're being dramatic. You are glorifying something that is, after all, fairly common." Of course that is what Meir said, since his attraction to nothingness, his desire to reveal what cannot be seen at the surface, his quest for what lies in-between things, had begun long before the disease found him. His interest in the inadequacy of commemoration, in the fluidity of memory, is part of the narrative of an Israeli generation forged between Holocaust and Resurrection, and of a man who has lived with an army widow.

Meir is used to, and is curious about, positioning himself in the interaction between the full and the lacking, in the shadows, in the memory that he creates with the camera – which is an extension of his hand. In our conversation he went on to say, "This disease simply places you somewhere on the scale between normal and abnormal. Imagine that I find myself praying that they find that I have some kind of tumor-cell mutation, or abnormality, that puts me beyond the statistics – or at least, on its good side." So how does one portray the invisible? How does one document something private, while linking it to what is public, to beauty, to photography?

The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report – or M&M, for short – is a weekly report by American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, containing statistics that place the ill and the healthy on a scale between life and death. Statistically speaking, we are all on this scale – plus-or-minus a deviation of a few percentage points. Meir Rakocz wants you to see both the banal and the monumental, arranged on a spectrum in his photographs. The pills that he takes, which may save his life, are transformed into a "landscape" or "Japanese drawing."



They are like candy for the camera – posing for it, either in carefully staged studio lighting, distinct and elegant, or defiantly, flung casually on the ground of a building site or simply lying about amidst beautiful beach pebbles. The various methods of treatment of his "novel models" both reflect the inner wrangling within the photographer as he engages in documentation and commemoration while also poking fun at them in his incidental images. The M&M Report exhibition, which features new works, is the result of changing data that ignite within Meir the desire to become a relentless producer of content: every day a new work, another proposal, another idea, another question. The materials available to the camera are laboratory test subjects – patient and doctor.

At the heart of the exhibition, the artist's nude figure comes into view, wearing an improvised chamber-pot hat, and a disposable urine-collection device clamped between his legs. This is the image that sparked our exchange when Meir sent it to me in an email as a New Year card. In another Skype conversation, we laughed at his huge figure gazing at the horizon. That picture, in all its grotesque immensity, is a fine example of how one can represent something that cannot be seen. While most of us don't know how to deal with horror, Meir offers himself exposed – strong in his vulnerability.

Ruth Patir