

To my father, the greatest of them all.

To everyone who makes a wish.

Facing the Wishes

Elyasaf Kowner

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of Tel Aviv-Yafo, Department of the Arts

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To the children of Brenner who shared their wishes and faces with me in the special and close moment.

Introduction

In *Facing the Wishes*, an artist book by Elyasaf Kowner, the mission of project **Karov1** (*karov* means up-close in Hebrew) is realized - the first in an ongoing series of works of art that are made for primary schools, which aims at promoting a dialogue between the artist and the community, within the city boundaries of Tel Aviv-Yafo.

Dealing with dreams, wishes, and the possibility to realize them, **Karov1** is a first practical step in this initiative. It was made possible thanks to the remarkable cooperation and support I received from Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality's Department of the Arts. Artistic activity may choose to dissociate, preserve its autonomy, or exist in the boundaries of its language, but I feel it is strongest when it crosses boundaries, when it bridges over the gaps of languages and attitudes, acting not only as the means of communication, but as a facilitator of communication.

I invited Elyasaf Kowner to create a work for the Brenner Primary School and he chose the format of a book and the genre of portraits as means to generate closeness.

"...the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."
(Deuteronomy, 30:14)

In this frame, within this binding, there are 218 photos of children. They attend the Brenner School in the Neve Ofer neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv. Like most of their peers, they too, spend a great deal of their time in their neighborhood school, playing in the yard, walking

up and down the stairs, running around the corridors, assembling in their classes, taking books and pencils out of their bags, listening to what the teacher has to say.

Here, in this book - a framework created especially for them - the children were asked to take a respite from their daily routine. The photographer asked each one of them: "What is your wish?" "What's the thing you want the most?" "Do you have a dream?" "What would you especially want to ask for?" A few words were exchanged, and their tense faces relaxed. Their unfocused gaze in their eyes calmed down. Now their eyes were fully open up and they gazed forward. "That there would be no more wars. That everyone would be pleased with what they have," said Yossi from 5th grade. "I got everything, but there are too many wars in the world. I want peace," Idan from 5th grade asked from the bottom of his heart. "I want to be famous," stated Ortal from the 2nd grade; and her classmate Naor said that in his dream he can "fly like a bird." "I would want my dad to win the lottery," Ron from 2nd grade said simply, whereas Bar from the 5th grade dreams that "all the houses turn into chocolate."

In a silent eye-to-eye dialogue, the camera picks up the children's gaze, and the wish that was whispered in photographer's ear a moment earlier shows in their faces. For a brief moment, against the common background, they are themselves, taking front stage, performing in a one-man show that is no one else's.

Right after the squeeze, they go back to playing



in the yard, walking up and down the staircase of the building, running around its corridors. They enter and gather in their classes, take books out of their bags, listen to what the teacher says.

In the moment they expressed their wish, something in their faces changed .

What is the face of your wish?

Elyasaf Kowner constructs the process of closeness between him and the children as he speaks to them about their wish. Soon after that, he photographs them with his lens close to their faces, their gaze direct, and their eyes speaking from their depths. A moment's attention can break down walls and dissolve curtains. Children easily and naturally respond to such an invitation, when they feel honest interest in them.

Kowner remembers those moments and the children remembered them too. Each time he returned to the school, they gathered around him, wanting their picture taken again.

The close-ups retain an extraordinary experience of intimacy for both the photographer and the person in the photo.

A few weeks before this book was published, Brenner School Principal Amira Kenan invited the parents of the pupils and the teachers of Brenner to a workshop. The aim of the workshop was to expose the community to the work of Elyasaf Kowner, to introduce the parents to the **Karov1** project and its meaning for their children, and to bring them closer to the power of the photography medium. Prior to the workshop, we asked them to choose and bring a photograph from their family album. Most of them brought snapshots taken on happy family occasions. Most of them show families standing together, smiling at the camera - peak moments.

When they were asked to write about the photograph, about their memory of the actual moment the picture was taken - their stories revealed other parts that were not necessary visible in the photo.

Photographs can be used as testimonies and bring truth into the light, but just as they signify what is, they point at what is not.

The pictures of the children in this book exhibit the joy that is in their eyes in the moment of closeness.

And what is not in them, is brought in this book in the form of a wish.

Idit Porat

Curator of the **Karov** Project

The Place of the Wishes

A moment before this book is done, I feel the need to stop and take time to reflect on the place of the wishes. It seems to me that such a place exists. But where is it? Where is the place of the wishes?

Maybe it is on the eyelash that fell on a finger and wants to fly high, float on the breeze coming from the person who just made a wish.

Perhaps it is in the component of light emanating diodes that flare up the digits of the digital watch that says the time is 11:11.

Far away, perhaps, a wish zaps between the two stars, Rigel and Saiph, that glow in the sky, a meteor burns, runs between his legs of Orion the Warrior, and a pair of lovers are inspired. The wish came to them in the right place, and now they have more time to linger and dream.

Where is this place of wishes? There or here?
Below or above? In the street or at home?

I urge everyone to find out where the place of the wishes is located for him. When is it close and tangible? How is it connected to the body or to home? When does it move away or taken from him, and why does it even happen?

Wishes do not just come. One needs imagination for them. They indicate the daily needs and our deepest intention: the place where we want to go, particularly if we want the wish to come true. Yes, it is recommended to believe they can come true and they usually demand that we make an effort for them. Of course, noteworthy wishes do not materialize on their own. One should advance



towards them through reasonable steps that can be traversed. Human steps!

Sometimes it seems to me that in our day and age, we do not have enough time to pause and let the place of the wishes just be.

Perhaps it has to do with the way we consume so much so fast. For example, in front of the TV. We sit there passively, waiting for the delegates of glamour to come and entertain us, and bring something new every time. This way and without noticing, people dissolve in front of the screen. Hours vanish and we forget that we have the ability to return to our private place - a place where we are the ones who make the wishes.

My wish is for people to consume less junk food; that they again take in the meaning of the sentence written on the sign at Brenner: "A healthy mind in a healthy body." I wish people would pay more attention to listening, to love, to giving. There is something in the place of the wishes that connects with taking responsibility, with the ability to choose, love and know.

I would like us to let the place of the wishes be. This is the intention that made me create this book.

The children of Brenner School shared their wishes with me and I put them here verbatim. The texts of the wishes are in the center of the book, in its heart. They appear in their original Hebrew. Translations can be found at www.kowner.com. The photos are ordered alphabetically, by the children's family names.

The children came down to the schoolyard one by one and had their picture taken in a place I had chosen. We sat facing each other. I was on the ground, facing the school's back wall and the wishing child was usually sitting or standing in front of me, on a chunk of cement that lied there. Each one spoke in his special way, in his time, in his presence. I felt that when the wish was made, it amplified the truth, character, and beauty of the person I spoke to.

While the wishes were crystallizing, transforming from thought to clear words, I endeavoured to capture their gaze at that special place, the place of the wishes. They gazed outside and I wished to bring the moment and gaze into a place I had no words for, but for a moment, I could feel that it was up-close.

I have a feeling that we need to find and go back to that place of wishes.

Elyasaf Kowner