

[THE MIRROR PROJECT]

Kevin McElvaney: The Mirror Project

What is Iraq like today - after decades of war and ongoing IS occupation? What stories are being told by people in the self-governed region of Kurdistan about their past and present, and how do they view the future? How are Iraqis living in other parts of the country, where terror isn't an everyday occurrence?

These questions are what drew Hamburg-based photographer and artist Kevin McElvaney to northern Iraq last year. He travelled to find answers, and get a glimpse behind the Western world's often one-sided perspective.

Interviews allowed McElvaney to get closer, both metaphorically and geographically, to the last Islamic State (IS) stronghold, Mossul. The interviewees he met along the way were diverse: young and old, men and women, soldiers and monks, and even an IS fighter. The interview process, on the other hand, always followed the same concept: alone in a room, in front of a two-way mirror hiding the camera, the interviewees read and answered a range of biographical questions about their past and present. The final question completed the social experiment, drawing on a theory by the psychologist Arthur Aron. The theory states that 4 minutes of eye contact will fundamentally change the way we see people.

McElvaney asked his interviewees to imagine their future. They were asked to simply stare into the mirror in silence for an unspecified length of time. The viewer sees this person on the screen in a moment of self-reflection, and can look into their eyes - what is happening to the interviewee during these few minutes? Does this experience move, or even change the viewer?

'The Mirror Project' is more than a project to counter the one-sided view and representation of Iraq. Rather, McElvaney's video project searches for the 'indescribable' side of war, and seeks to give this region and its people not only a voice, but many voices - and captures images and words that make the heterogeneity of the Iraqi as well as the Kurdish reality and identity more easily understood.

'The Mirror Project' is Kevin McElvaney's first video project. The interviews will be shown for the first time in the 'Social Bus' on 14.02.2017 during the Berlinale, and published as episodes on www.The-Mirror-Project.org.

Kevin McElvaney is known for his work as a socially critical photographer that focusses on people. This Hamburg-based artist's stories include environmental themes such as the Agbogbloshie electrical waste tip in Ghana and sulphur workers at a volcano on Java, Indonesia. He most recently gave refugees a voice in his #RefugeeCameras project - the exhibition toured internationally. National Geographic, The Guardian, AlJazeera, die Süddeutsche Zeitung, der Stern, ZDF, RTL and NDR are among the publishers and outlets that have reported on his work.

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