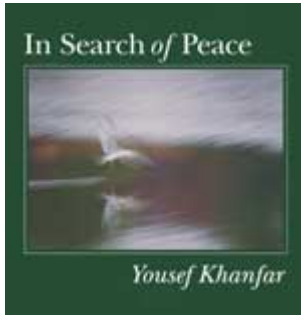


Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, August 2007.

In Search of Peace

By Yousef Khanfar, Art Blanc, 2006, 136 pp. List: \$50.

Reviewed by **Matt Horton**



AT THE AGE of six, Yousef Khanfar had yet to speak his first word. His concerned father, Deeb, a Palestinian refugee living in Kuwait, took Yousef to the doctor—who, ruling out physiological causes, prescribed art. Yousef’s father dutifully took him out to the desert and taught his son how to use an old Nikon camera. Excited by the magic which occurred in the darkroom and echoing his father’s praise of his early photographs, Yousef soon uttered his first word: “beautiful.”

Today, Yousef Khanfar is one of the world’s greatest landscape photographers. He has been honored by such publications as *Oprah*, *International Photo Art*, *Amateur Photographer*, *Persimmon Hill*, *Photo Life*, *Outdoor Photographer* and *Nature’s Best*. Listed by Rotovision in 2003 as one of the best 38 photographers in the world, his work is included in the permanent collection of the International Photography Hall of Fame. Khanfar’s first solo publication, *Voices Of Light*, was published in 2000.

His latest project, *In Search of Peace*, is arranged as a symphony in three movements (“Sublime,” “Freedom” and “Divine”), with photographs forming the musical staff. The “symphony” is accompanied by original poetry in a

prophetic and transcendent form that invokes fellow Levantine Kahlil Gibran. Khanfar's composition, use of light and angle, and brilliant eye create a masterful collection that demonstrates his world-class talent.

Talent alone, however, cannot account for the brilliance of his work. The collection of photographs also demonstrate the qualities that make Khanfar a truly great landscape photographer. His discipline, determination, patience and strong understanding of the natural world add a Zen-like quality to his images that embodies his strong sense of internal peace and intimately imparts some of this peace upon the viewer.

The title of his first photographic movement, "Sublime," describes not only the awe-inspiring scenes he has captured, but the photographer's symbolic interplay between natural elements. Khanfar frames the fleeting motion of liquids and the eternal stoicism of solids with the supernatural qualities of gas and light to explore conflict. Masterful images, through scenes that depict the fragility of relationships between elements, convey ferocious inertia. "This universe is transient, and our lives are brief," Khanfar writes. "Our souls are infinite, our breaths are numbered, our moments are borrowed, yet our conflict and madness immense."

The second movement, "Freedom," departs dramatically from the harsh reality of the previous one, with abstract, surreal and impressionistic images that introduce new ways of looking at similar subjects. With increased attention to plant life and the use of varying degrees of focus, the stark

contrast between elements in “Sublime” melts into internal dialogue within subjects and less distinguishable delineation between elements. The abrupt change of style between the two movements laments the vast distance between what is and what could be. Images like “Plate 28: Free Minds” and “Plate 43: Velvet,” where subjects are simultaneously in and out of focus, explore relationships between color and line, dream and reality—inviting the viewer to imagine that another world is possible.

While the third movement, “Divine,” returns to the realism of “Sublime,” it represents an alternate reality. Whereas “Sublime” depicts a natural state of conflict, and “Freedom” imagines alternatives, “Divine” depicts a natural state of peace where elements effortlessly and harmoniously move in and out of each other. “The symphony of peace,” Khanfar writes, “is the whisper between the soul of the earth and the heart of heaven.”

As one of six million voiceless Palestinians living in exile, Khanfar has developed a powerful and unique voice of his own that has reached the heights of his profession. In a world where Palestinians are more frequently the subjects of photography, Khanfar’s images provide an unfiltered, intimate and human vision for a more peaceful world. His photographs—devotions to the places he travels—are a worthy love song for the homeland and the peace to which he will one day return.

Matt Horton is the Washington Report’s communications director.