

A Home at the End of the World

Ghislain Amar

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Gouwstraat 21, Rotterdam

Ghislain Amar and I once tried to photograph an image from a dream I had, with the help of another friend and artist Pascale de Graaf. Explaining a dream is usually a disappointing kind of sharing. Your listener may struggle to access the shifting scales of time, size, and place your dream likely occupies, and you, articulating what was last night so vivid, may be chase a fading recollection through articulation. It can become a race against time: say the dream before saying the dream catches up to and erases itself. The logic of language erodes with articulation the many unarticulated logics upon which a dream world operates.

This "race against time" is similar to the feeling of resisting, for the first days of meeting them, the logic of "knowing" someone. Between recognition (you'd be able to see them in a crowd) and intimacy (you don't know if their parents are alive) is a space where acquaintances have the potential to be anyone, before they fit or develop into a role as someone in the logic of familiarity.

Ghislain Amar's *A Home at the End of the World*² is an analog slide-show with four projectors and a 45-minute video. Amar hired three non-professional actors and a production assistant to spend four days with him in a small house in rural France to produce his work. He wrote in the original call for non-professional actors:

Unlike other times, I would prefer people I don't know at all, or not well.

This preface "Unlike other times" is written for readers who know him and his previous work. For years, Amar has been working with photography, video, and painting to make portraits of those he is in close relation to: friends, lovers, and what he calls his community. He distributed this call widely through social media channels and personal connections, hoping to reach the edges of this network that have also often been his subjects. The resulting group – Ariela Bergman, Simon Mielke, and Kenny Owens, with Gianna Surangkanjanajai as production assistant – were all artists that Amar had not yet known. Their roles as subjects were clear, as was Amar's position as photographer. The resulting work, *A Home at the End of the World*, flourishes both with this clarity of relation, as well as the distanced and growing familiarity of the whole group to one another.

Intimate photographic portraits can often interrupt intimacy: the camera wedges its way between eye-to-eye communication, inviting other errant eyes temporally and relationally distant. Contrarily, Amar's photographs in the installation *A Home at the End of the World*, projected on four separate DIA carousels that each show one day of the trip, show a different kind of intimacy. Repeating images follow one another with slight changes to exposure, photographer's position, or subject position. In one image, a subject stares into the camera lens; in the following, they look away. The directions of the cameraperson – Amar – are made evident. The group of people who do not yet know each other, in the four days they get to know each other, are clear on their roles in the project at hand: creating *A Home at the End of the World*.

The work travels along a mutual trip taken together from strangers through acquaintances towards something else³: the between place before the logic of familiarity can begin to make short-cuts to concretize the relation of these people in each other's lives.

The four day trip was finite, but the four projectors "play" those four days on an infinite loop in one room. Refusing a nostalgia, a "remember the time when we", it insists as a continuation through the gestures of a photographer often made obscure through still images: directing, re-shooting, pushing exposures, editing, and sequencing are all present and insisted upon in this one work. They repeated over and over through a cycle of still images, as a film before the video in the following room. An insistence.

In an early edit of the video *A Home at the End of the World*, a character⁴ says:

I feel sometimes I am the pepper without the pasta. [...]

I had this conversation once - I thought that I was an adjective, not a noun or a verb.

If I personify grammar in the way I think I understand her doing, a noun has a concrete finality, a verb an unchanging purpose, and an adjective changes in relation to what it is sidled up against. Ghislain Amar is invested in these three "characters" not only in relation with one another, but in relation to himself. Amar's work has been, and now continues to refine, his fascination in the many ways life is lived through the personal, the specific, through relation. *A Home at the End of the World* does not present a narrative or story with three characters, but there is something that happens there, outside of the logic of temporality, sequence, or scale of storytelling: familiarity happening. Something that is, as a dream, is very difficult to describe as a phenomenon.

Returning to the "race against time", the works cycle on loop towards knowing, but doesn't get there. That will result inevitably somewhere else, in the future of the work, life, or otherwise of Amar and the others involved in *A Home at the End of the World*.

Available & The Rat is presenting the premiere of *A Home at the End of the World* in November 2021, three months after the trip Amar organized to the house. The exhibition is in Rotterdam, the city where Amar has lived and worked since 2008.

¹ Pascale de Graaf lived in Available & The Rat and programmed the space for six months in 2019.

² *A Home at the End of the World* is the title of a 1990 novel by Michael Cunningham about, roughly, the relation between three people over the course of decades. Amar was influenced by the novel in the conceptual development of his own work, but told me later during a studio visit that he "had a lot of expectations when he reread it that weren't filled". Some images in Amar's *A Home at the End of the World* are based on the covers of different editions of the novel. I chose not to write about the relationship between this book to Amar's work mostly because I have not yet read the book myself.

³ On 12 November, Ghislain Amar's project space Peach will be exhibiting a group show that includes the works of Simon Mielke and Gianna Surangkanjanajai, artists Amar was originally introduced to through this project.

⁴ Is she a character, or just Ariela Bergman? I write from the position of a viewer, so assign the role "character", but Ghislain's work makes me question this impulse.

⁵ There is much that self-destructs through articulation; or perhaps operates on a level outside of language that is transmitted through writing or speaking. I started a list of things that fall into this category, as alluded to in elements of Ghislain's *A Home at the End of the World*:

- a. Explaining to a group of people you don't really know how to play a card game only you know;
- b. Encountering a manufactured scent (perfume, cleaning product, processed food) that you cannot place where you've smelled before;
- c. Rereading a book that made you feel many things the first time and feeling nothing this time;
- d. Explaining why you live in the city you live in to people who don't live there.