



Final Analysis

Maria Falconer considers...
Mina Boromand, Lightning II

I want to begin with a little exercise so please bear with me. Close your eyes and picture a giraffe. You know the kind of thing, tall, brownish with very long legs and stumpy horns. Can you see it?

You may be surprised to hear that when I asked Iranian photographer Mina Boromand to close her eyes and picture a giraffe, she found it impossible. She explained that she has a recognised condition called aphantasia, which is an inability to visualise.

Aphantasia doesn't just affect Mina's ability to conjure up images of wildlife, though. It prevents her from 'seeing' any pictures in her head, including her memories.

Mina's personal history is both extraordinary and somewhat traumatic. An active advocate of women's rights in the 1980s, she fled for safety to Afghanistan where she worked as a nurse, and then later to the UK as a political refugee. But if Mina tries to conjure up a mental picture of these events, all she sees is black. Her entire visual hard drive, her back catalogue of mental snapshots, is completely empty.

Mina may not have internal pictures of her past, but she does still have memories. She says that it's difficult to explain how the act of remembering works for her, but it involves words without sounds and a constant conversation unfolding in her head.

In 2021 Mina set about investigating the relationship between aphantasia and visual memory, and before she knew it, she was translating those silent words into images. Not



imaginary pictures, though, but photographic ones.

Mina gathered a number of possessions that had travelled with her from Afghanistan and Iran. A few necklaces, some rings, a handful of dried leaves and one or two photographs. Gazing at the objects, Mina felt a swell of powerful emotions that directly connected her to past events in her life.

'It was as if I time-travelled, experiencing the same emotions of excitement, sadness, loss, anger, and hope – I remembered the story through those feelings.'

Intuitively, she arranged the objects on top of the old photographs, gradually piecing together her fragmented history, reinventing, reimagining, reconstructing her memories. These photographic constructs

'Quote Et andebita quo et derupta ssinis nobistium apello volum rem quo volore'

became part of a body of work entitled Aphantasia.

Fast forward to 2023, and Mina sets about raising the public's awareness of the condition by illuminating aphantasia both literally and metaphorically. Beginning with fairy lights and moving on to torches, spotlights and candles she exposes her prints to bursts of bright light. But as she sets about reframing the newly charged images, an unexpected visceral response directs her attention away from aphantasia towards Iran.

'Moving the lights in front of the printed images stirred strangely incredible emotional feelings, as if I were riding the light through time and space.

I couldn't stop myself.'

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement is gathering momentum, drawing Mina into the protest through her portal to the past. Fuelled with enthusiasm and support for the protestors, she emblazes her stories, empowers the memories, cracks open deep pathways from her heart to her home.

In *Lightning II*, guided by light trails, Mina sees so much more than a two-dimensional giraffe.

Mina's work will be shown as part of the *Family Ties* exhibition at St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PL from 2-29 July, 2024. See more of her work at www.minaboromand.com

Maria Falconer MA, MSc., FRPS, is a photographic practitioner, teacher and writer. A Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, Maria runs various photography workshops across the UK and in Europe. For more on her latest workshops and to book your place, visit www.mariefalconer.co.uk