

PETER RIEDLINGER US/THEM
Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem
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by David Rap

The first rate Anadiel Gallery in East Jerusalem has reopened with a photography exhibition by the German artist Peter Riedlinger. He shows a series of works photographed in Palestinian settlements under the loaded title "US/THEM", and manages to avoid the obstacle of clichés.

He analyses the concept of us/them in its widest sense, as the tension between two points of reality, not only between Israeli and Palestinian but also between old and new, traditional and modern, and even between reality and photography.

From this comes his occupation with games. Riedlinger distills the dichotomy in his photograph of an empty billiard hall. The balls carefully arranged on the tables hint at competitive character of what takes place there. Another photograph shows a Palestinian boy kicking a ball. The photographer places the viewer as the goal-keeper, as the intended and inevitable recipient of the kick.

Of the figure placed with his back to us, staring like us at some image, it cannot be said if he is friend or foe, and in an additional work Riedlinger turns the colorful prayer carpet spread on the lawn into a kind of chess board made up of squares in two shades. The visual content is not harmed by the artist's intention of a symbolic message. The contrast of the cold fluorescent lights, giving of a glaring, alienated light, with the "traditional" character of the prayer hall in the photograph of the mosque is neither strained nor clashing.

The duality that Riedlinger depicts is illusory. Opposite a photograph of a horse and rider it is hard to avoid associations of demonstrations dispersed from the Intifada shared by "us" and "them". The identity of the rider as a Arab boy actually creates an interesting reversal of the stereotypical reality of all of us.

Translated from hebrew by Timna Seligman