

# MUSE

WALLS MEMORIES: ROBERT POLIDORI AT  
HOTEL PETRA  
12-10-15  
Felicity Carter



*Once grand, Hotel Petra, Beirut remained concealed for 23 years and over this time slowly, quietly, beautifully deteriorated, taking on a different persona. It is this form of decaying evolution that captivated the acclaimed photographer, Robert Polidori whose work has been shown in Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.*

Through Polidori's series entitled Hotel Petra, he presents interior shots of a building that lived through the violence of the Lebanese civil war, and the natural processes of decay. Much more than views of an interior though, these photographs explore the "memories of the walls" and the consequences of social, historical and political changes on a concrete form.

The walls of Hotel Petra are covered with numerous coats of paint that, through ageing have faded and peeled, revealing the underlying colours that have taken on different tones over time, adding to the authenticity of Hotel Petra's aged state.

FC What is it about Hotel Petra, and its form of decaying evolution that you found so captivating?

RP It's rare to see untouched decay in the man-made world. Most of the time it lives with a human co-existence, and because of this man alters a normal organic evolution. The pictures that I took at the Hotel Petra are as much about "Painting".

They resemble in many ways certain modernist non-representational art works. What I find fascinating about these "natural paintings" on the walls of the Hotel Petra is that as aesthetic as they look, they are a product of no one's intent, and furthermore they have such a delicate surface that could only be produced by being undisturbed by human hands for over 2 decades.

FC Do you think there is Romanticism in ruins?

RP This "Romanticism" is an emotional or sentimental reaction that many people inject to the witnessing of decay or ruins in many contemporary Industrial societies. I am reminded of Buddha's last dying words where he stated that decay is inherent to all composite matter. Decay is a measure and trace of time, no more no less. Time waits for no one. Personally, I don't perceive ruins as being "Romantic", I perceive them as being the end product of the phenomena of time.

"MADE OVER TIME BY PAINTING AND DEMOLITION CREWS.  
COLLECTIVE SUBCONSCIOUS SEEMED TO HAVE MADE THESE IMAGES."  
- ROBERT POLIDORI

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