



Aydin Umut, 2011 from the series *Seconds Out - Faces of Boxing* © Piek

Erwin Olaf

I recently wrote a few words of introduction for the photo book *Seconds Out - Faces of Boxing*. Portraits of boxers, sweaty and reviving themselves in the corner of the ring after their efforts, photographed at their most vulnerable moment by Piek, my former and very first real assistant.

Many of the portraits made an impression on me; tough hunks of flesh and muscles captured at the moment they had been changed into little boys, often weary and beaten. In every portrait Piek's character is reflected, just the way I'd become acquainted with her: an unassuming but tenacious woman, who sought out the soft side of the hard world of men with a great deal of compassion. It was not the harsh blow that particularly interested her, but the moment of transformation, from man to boy.

One of the images that has stayed with me the most is a close-up of an exhausted face being pushed back by a man's hefty hand, to stop his nose bleeding. Breathing through his open mouth, his finely focused brown eyes gaze to the left. His cheeks are pushed together by his tightly fastened, red-leather head-guard. Emptiness is the main emotion showing in the man's face. He's no longer sweating. And that's what I find so fascinating about this image – the lack of sweat and emotion give me all the room I need to make up my own story. ●

Erwin Olaf (b. 1959, The Netherlands) is a Dutch fine art photographer. Recently Olaf won the prestigious Dutch State price of the Arts, Johannes Vermeer Award 2011 for his entire body of work. He has also earned several Silver Lions for his commercial work, which is increasingly sought after by magazines such as the *New York Times Magazine* and *London Sunday Times*.