PhotoResearcher

Photobooks as Propaganda

A Platform for Power, Protest and Persuasion

Guest Editor
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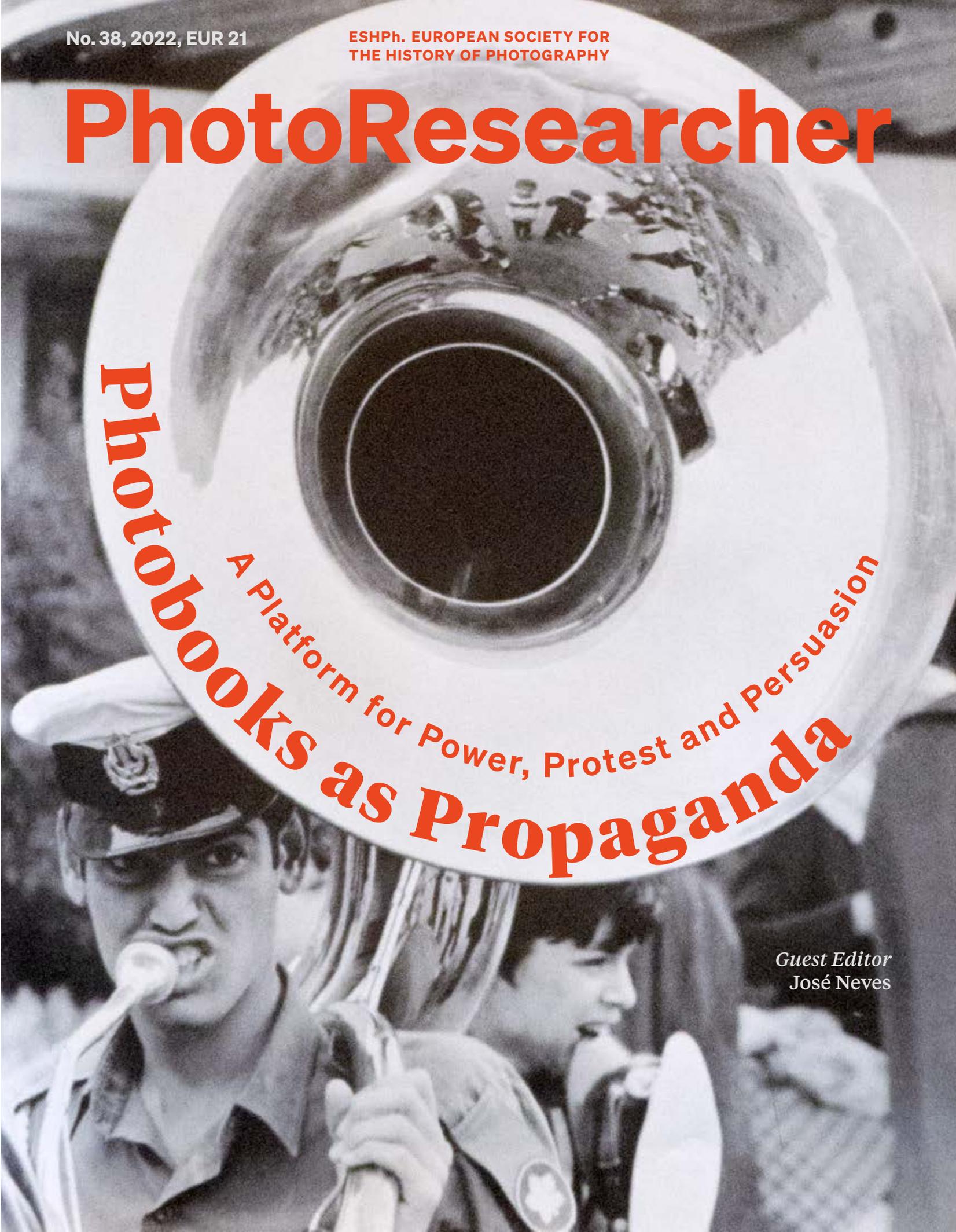
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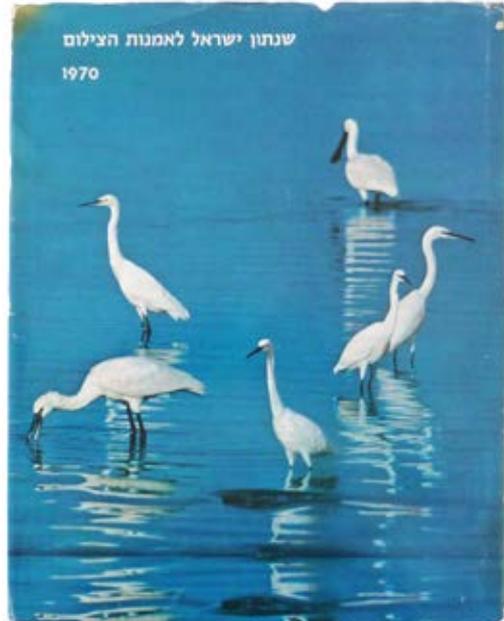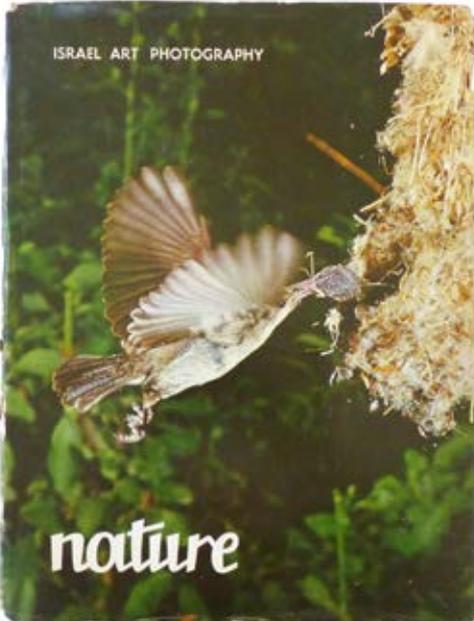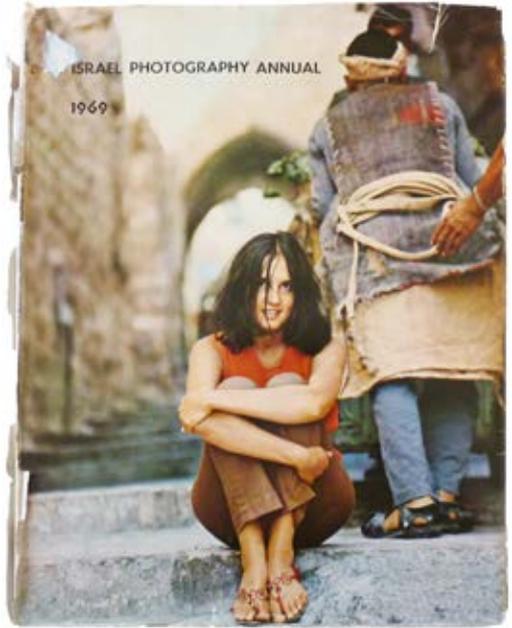## *Galia Yanoshevsky*

fig. 1
Covers of the *Israel Photography Annual 1963–1970:* vol. 1, Agam Publishers, Israel 1963, vols. 2–7, Lamerhav-Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, Tel Aviv 1965–1970; vol. 7, published also as: *Nature,* Am Oved 1970, photographers unknown.

Introduction

At a time when photography in Israel was state funded and photographers were concerned about working "with the state" to establish its image,[1] Peter Merom offered an alternative vision of a "normal state" by editing the *Israel Photography Annual (IPA)*. Spanning eight years, from 1963–1970, this series is an attempt to give photography its place in Israel, as an art among other arts, like painting and sculpture. Peter Merom draws on existing models of British and American photography annuals, but he adjusts them to the local market. Despite a felt pressure to include photos from major national events like the Six-Day War of 1967 and its consequences, the series remains essentially devoted to the art of photography. This is reflected in both the relationship between the texts and images in the layout of the albums' pages, and in the emphasis put on techniques of photography, even in the most political scenes, rather than on the ethical consequences they embrace. The prefaces of each of the series' volumes provide an introduction to Merom's philosophy and method, as well as the *raison d'être* of his project.

Photography in Israel's Early Statehood

To grasp the uniqueness of Merom's project to normalize the esthetic of photography, one needs to understand the context in which the photographers operated during the foundational years of the State of Israel. Prior to the foundation of the state in 1948, Zionist propaganda operated within the formal framework of the two national funds, KKL (Keren Kayemet le'Israel) and Keren Hayesod that, from the onset, catered to hegemonic ideology. Photography was an integral part of this propaganda mechanism.[2] The funds encouraged institutional and monopolistic photography, used to propagate visual images of the country, which were published in albums, photo binders, calendars, books, and postcards. They were propaganda in the sense of a repetitive message, cultivated and disseminated by an institutional, principal, and authoritative body. The photographers, who in most cases were also journalists, were not particularly ideologues, but worked for the institution to make a living.[3]

1 ___ Galia Gur Zeev, *Beno Rothenberg. Photographed and Reported,* 1947–1957, exhibition catalog, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv 2007; Galia Yanoshevsky, 'Circulation, critique et patrimonialisation des photographies. Le cas de figure de Beno Rothenberg', in: Magali Nachtergael and Charlotte Foucher Zarmanian (eds.), *Circulation, critique et patrimonialisation des photographies,* PUR, Rennes 2021, 223–239.

2 ___ Ruth Oren, 'Constructing Place: Propaganda and Utopian Space in the Landscape in Zionist Landscape Photography, 1898–1948', *Devarim Hahadim* vol. 2, Van Leer Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1997, 13–31.
3 ___ Oren 1997 (reference 2); Rona Sela, *Photography in Palestine/Eretz-Israel in the 1930s and 1940s,* Herzliya, Herzlia Museum, 2000; Guy Raz, A Short History of Local Photography, Tel Aviv, Sal Tarbut 2010.

As elsewhere in Europe and America, the Israeli photobook is closely linked to photojournalism. In Israel, photojournalism developed in the late 1930s prior to the foundation of the state.[4] Photography was then used to produce 'photojournalistic' images for national funds, much less for reporting, but more for the purpose of showing a utopian space of the developing life, from the perspective of colonization; a space that was free of political or social conflicts, and ethnic clashes. In fact, Jewish photography from the early 1920s until the founding of the state in 1948 centered exclusively around the construction of a Jewish national identity and, at the same time, served as a means of obtaining donations from the Jews of the world for the Zionist movement in Eretz Israel (the land of Israel).[5]

Between 1933 and 1948, the developing industry of Jewish photography in the land of Israel created an image of the new Jew and constructed the symbols which were to accompany the Zionist ethos for many years to come. Intellectuals, artists, and photographers who immigrated to Israel from Germany and Central Europe imported a deep awareness of the use of photographic images and mass media. They also strongly identified with Zionist and national agendas and felt obliged to work towards a 'cultural affinity' with the new land by recognizing and representing its landscapes. The cultural and intellectual flourishing that characterized the 1920s and 1930s in Germany, was brought to Israel by photographers who were influenced by the "Neue Sachlichkeit" and new photojournalism.

The representations and ethos developed in the context of Zionist and institutional photography, committed to promoting Zionist agendas and marketing the image of the Jewish institution in Israel and in the world, continued to dominate the national marketing landscape until the mid-1960s. The recurring themes were portraits of road constructors, farmers cultivating the land with modern tools, towers of the new colonies as symbols for the new settlements and so forth.[6] They were also used for ethical improvement: photographed reportage appeared in the illustrated press sponsored by the establishment's *Davar* and *Bamachaneh* newspapers.[7]

From 1948 to 1973, photography in Israel was characterized by two different trends: on the one hand, committed photography and, on the other, documentary, subjective and critical photography.[8] As we shall see here, Peter Merom was part of the latter tendency. Furthermore, photography in Israel has been subject to influences such as Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' (1952), an approach to life's moments that embodied the essence of a human story and greatly influenced photographers, such as Beno Rothenberg and Peter Merom, who took part in album projects.

Peter Merom's place in the landscape of Israeli photography

Though Peter Merom's career spanned only 20 years,[9] he was one of the most prolific photographers in Israel. Of the same generation as Boris Carmi and Beno Rothenberg, he worked from the periphery – a Kibbutz in the Upper Galilee – at a time when photography did not enjoy an esthetic status in Israel. Peter Merom lived in Kibbutz Hulata and worked as a fisherman in the Hula Lake. In 1954, during the project of

4——— Raz 2010 (reference 3), 37–38
5——— Oren 1997 (reference 2), 13-31; Ruth Oren, 'Photography has taught me two things' (Beno Rothenberg, Photographer, in *Beno Rothenberg, Photographed and reported 1947–1957, Eretz Israel Museum,* Tel Aviv 2007, 18; Sela 2000 (reference 3), 13.

6——— Sela, 2000 (reference 3), 14.
7——— Oren, 2007 (reference 5), 15.
8——— Raz 2010 (reference 3), 41.
9——— Guy Raz, 'Elegy of a metal closet. Guy Raz in conversation with Peter Merom', *Studio, Journal for Art*. Special issue on the history of local photography (guest editor Guy Raz), no. 113, May 2000, (Hebrew), 74.

draining the lake, he procured a camera and a dark room enlarger and started shooting what was to become his best-known album *The Song of a Dying Lake* (1961).[10] Extremely subjective and poetic, this album deplores the disappearance of natural life, as the project advances. Though Martin Parr and Gerry Badger view it retrospectively as one of the first environmental books,[11] Merom, in an interview given to Guy Raz, emphasizes the graphic and esthetic aspects that attracted him to this project: "what fascinated me from the beginning to the end was pure nature looking like graphic elements, un-staged and non-artificial abstract [forms] along with nature's composition, no fabrication, no staging."[12]

Largely self-taught, Merom spent three months in Paris, where he studied photography, met Henri Cartier-Bresson, became acquainted with his concept of the 'decisive moment', and gained experience in mass printing of photographs. Between 1954 and 1973 Meron conceived, designed, produced, and published nearly thirty photobooks, eight of which are part of the *Israel Photography Annual* series studied here. His books dealt with various subjects such as nature, children, sunlight, theater, and nudity. The success of his books allowed him to make a living and, as a member of the Kibbutz, he was encouraged to continue in this profitable field.[13] Despite his success, his photography career was short-lived: in 1974, only 20 years after he first started taking pictures, he retired from photography, selling all his equipment. On quitting the field, he commented: "I have stopped taking pictures [because] I have reached the pure and the perfect, what else can you aspire for?"[14] Between 1974 and 1978, he developed a new business of mass photography by reprinting hundreds of thousands of photos from existing archives, glued on plywood and sold all over the country.

Merom worked independently and created on a large scale unheard of in Israel at the time, especially in the production of photobooks. His albums were released at a time when photographers like Boris Carmi and Beno Rothenberg were publishing books with similar themes.[15] But contrary to them, he was not working in parallel as a photojournalist and did not produce war albums.[16] Rather, he focused on esthetics and on visual drama in landscapes, extracting compositions and working spontaneously, taking many pictures not to miss the moment.[17] Though he always operated on his own initiative, and did not produce work commissioned by state authorities, his contribution to the field of photography was nevertheless recognized by the state, and in 2000 he received a prize for life accomplishment from the Museum of Israel in Jerusalem.[18]

The influences on Peter Merom's art came from photography magazines from abroad, British and American photography annuals, and art books. He viewed photography as a subjective and democratic art, based on framing objects considered and selected by the photographer.[19] Furthermore, his preferred vehicle for the photos was

10 ____ Preceded by his first photobook entitled *Adventure in the Lake* published in 1956 by Hula Publishing House Hakibutz Hameuchad Lyd. (January 1, 1956), this book gained great success at the time. The album was published in three successive editions (1960, 1961) and sold thousands of copies.
11 ____ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History,* vol. 2, London/NY, Phaidon, 2005, 100–101.
12 ____ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 78. All translations from Hebrew are by the author.
13 ____ He was first supported by the Kibbutz, who bought him his first camera, and in return he took pictures of Kibbutz children (cf. for instance "Plio't rishonot" [First Amazements], Tel Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1966).
14 ____ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 78.

15 ____ Beno Rothenberg, *Land of Israel,* Shocken Publishing House, Tel Aviv 1965 [1958]; Beno Rothenberg, *Off the Beaten Track,* Mitzpe, Tel Aviv 1953; Boris Carmi and Ephraim Talmi, *My Kineret,* Yavne, Tel Aviv 1963; Boris Carmi and Ephraim Talmi, *The Emek Album,* Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1964; Beno Rothenberg, *The Struggle for Jerusalem. A Picture Story,* Illustrated book publishing company, Tel Aviv 1950.
16 ____ Beno Rothenberg, *The Story of Jerusalem, A pictorial report,* Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1967; Boris Carmi 1964 (Reference 15); Carmi, Boris 1963 (reference 15); Carmi, Boris, *Operation Sinai.* Photography: Boris Carmi and others, Tel Aviv, M. Biran 1956.
17 ____ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 75.
18 ____ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 77.
19 ____ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 75.

not the exhibition in the museum, but the photobook, because "it is a sort of permanent exhibition. [...] In general, and graphically speaking, the book is a complete object, which remains a document containing a full theme, not to mention that the reader/spectator is controlled by the artist, as opposed to the spectator at an exhibition."[20]

The annual vs. the photobook

Merom sets his series of *Israel Photography Annuals* against the backdrop of photo albums, a thriving industry in Israel from the 1950s to the 1970s, and his preferred form of photographic dissemination. However, in the introduction to the 1968 annual, he notes that the 1967 war brought about "an ongoing stream of average [quality] albums, and less so," and that "many of the photos have no artistic objective, they are means of communication and information only."[21] So before delving into the annuals and understanding the gap they needed to fill – according to Merom – a word needs to be said about the photobook as a genre and the context in which it emerged in Israel.

1. The photobook

Parr and Badger claim that many photobooks are basically instruments of propaganda, even in democratic countries, because they shape reality.[22] Indeed, photographic projects like the one undertaken by Roy Stryker's historical section in the FSA (Farm Security Administration) as part of Roosevelt's plan to deal with the Great Depression in the America of the 1930s, or the *Direction de la Documentation et de Diffusion* and its publishing house and the photography projects it was engaged in in post-war France in the 1950s,[23] served simultaneously as an instrument for propaganda and for (re-)constructing a collective image of the nation. Photobooks of Israel are thus part of the photographic landscape that participates in cultivating the Israeli collective consciousness.[24] As such, they play a role in the production of the "imagined community"[25] through a set of photos recording and picturing the nation by showing several of its aspects: its landscapes, its faces, its people, etc. [...].[26] Even prior to the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, and until the 1970s, photojournalism and albums were the main stage for exhibiting photos in the evolving state,[27] covering key moment in the country's existence. This was also the case for many of the Israel albums produced over the years, like Isaiah Klinov's *The Encyclopedia of Israel in Images* (1950–1952), as well as a range of albums and books of more or less poetic photographs, such as Merom's *Song of a Dying Lake* (1960), Beno Rothenberg's albums, and the victory albums that followed the Six-Day War (1967) all of which contributed to constructing the Jewish Israeli collective memory.[28]

The photographers who took part in such an enterprise were often photojournalists because photobooks were mainly documentary at the time.[29] In documentary photography, the emphasis is on the verbal contextualization of the photo: the text is meant to disambiguate the photo. As Roland Barthes puts it: It is a matter of an-

20 ___ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 76
21 ___ Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 5, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1968, Introduction.
22 ___ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History,* vol. 1, Phaidon, London/NY 2005, 146–185.
23 ___ Nir Avissar, *Between Humanist Photography and Propaganda: The Illustrated Campaign for National Reconstruction by the Documentation Française, 1946–1960,* unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Virginia University, 2016.
24 ___ Raz 2010 (reference 3), 45.

25 ___ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.1983, 6.
26 ___ Susana S. Martins 'Between Present and Past: Photographic Portugal of the 1950s', in: Jan Baetens, Alexandre Streitberger and Hilde van Gelden (eds.), *Time and Photography,* Leuven, Leuven University Press 2010, 85–102, 86. See also Susana S. Martins text on pages 42–65.
27 ___ Oren 2007 (reference 5), 25–26.
28 ___ Raz 2010 (reference 3), 46.
29 ___ Parr and Badger 2005 (reference 11), 118.

choring the image, by "fix[ing] the floating chain of the signified in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs."[30] For Parr and Badger, the context of the photograph entirely determines its meaning. The image/text format adopted by the photographic essay – that is, the conjunction of photo sequences, prefaces, postfaces or titles – ensures the reader's understanding and good interpretation of the photos.[31]

2. The Annual

An annual, on the other hand, is essentially a serial publication appearing regularly once per year with successive numbering in a format and scope usually mirroring previous ones in that series. Some annuals review events that have transpired during the previous year. The term 'annual' may also be used to describe the frequency of certain publications such as directories, proceedings, and reports, which provide current information for a particular year.[32]

A yearbook is an annual volume of recent developments in descriptive or statistical form or both. Some yearbooks are general in scope, while others are limited to a special field, geographic area, and so forth,[33] like Portugal's annuals of tourism in the 1950s and 1960s published in two versions: one covering Continental Portugal, the second devoted to the then Portuguese colonies. Numerous professional societies published surveys of their year's work in both general and specific fields. In 19th century photographic research, for instance, commercial annuals were an essential source for photography because they listed the (professional) photographers operating in different cities in a specific year. In the 20th century, photography annuals were available in several forms in a number of countries. In Portugal, for example, international salons of photographic art were organized yearly (from 1937 to 1953) and provided a catalogue, which was a sort of annual national and international showcase of photographic practice.[34]

Whether published by professional societies, for commercial purposes, or for other reasons, yearbooks are of historical value to the presentation of recent events from a present-day perspective, thereby crystalizing the contemporary attitudes for the historian of the future.[35] As such, Merom's *Israel Photography Annual* can shed light not only on the state of photography as art in Israel in the 1960s and early 1970s, but also on the themes that preoccupied the people and the nation at the time.

The Israel Photography Annual

Peter Merom's annual of photography (___fig. 1) is a singular phenomenon in 1960s Israel. Though influenced by British and American annuals of photography,[36] the format the album acquired in Israel and for the Israeli public was based solely on his own editorial decisions. Following an open call, with no restriction on the choice of themes or places, many thousands of photographs were sent to him each year, from

30___ Roland Barthes, 'La rhétorique de l'image', *Communication,* no. 4, 1964, 40–51, 44.
31___ Parr and Badger (reference 22), 118–119.
32___ *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science,* vol. 1, 2005, "Annuals", 434–435.
33___ *Encyclopedia* (reference 32), 442.
34___ Susana S. Martins, personal communication, July 2022.
35___ *Encyclopedia* (reference 32), 443.
36___ Since Merom left no specific references to the annuals which influenced him, we can only infer from what he said laconically in the interview he gave to

Guy Raz in 2000, and on what was available at the time in Israeli libraries and bookstores. These could have included the Pictorial Photographers of America, published in five volumes during the 1920s, or the *American Annual of Photography,* the longest running (1887–1953) and most significant yearly published in the United States, covering three generations of photographers (for a list of these annuals, see Christian A. Peterson, *Index to the Annuals of the Pictorial Photographers of America,* CA Peterson, 1993. <https://christianapeterson.com /catalog-8/)>, (18.08.22). They could have also been the various annuals of the *British Journal of Photography,* which began publication in 1964, almost parallel to the first volume of the Israeli Annual.

which he made a selection guided by his wish to "represent as many photographers as possible, as well as to show numerous varied aspects of photography, while constantly maintaining the general level."[37]

The albums' general format (28 × 22 cm. ill.; print run: unknown but in the thousands per album) includes an introduction, in imitation of the *British Journal of Photography Annual's* foreword, it announces the periodicity, defines the public, and its purposes to present "what is typical of photography in the present epoch,"[38] it compares the present issue with previous ones, and explains how the selection of photos was made. As with the British annual, Merom allows for photographs by both professionals and amateurs, and in the later editions of the annual, for portfolios and pictures of both up-and-coming amateurs and renowned international photographers (Cornell Capa, Ken Hayman and Leonard Fried). Where the British annual chooses a more professional venue, with a vast and extremely detailed technical section (making up a third of the entire volume, in the case of the 1967 edition) on progress in photography (color and black-and-white photography, reprography, camera design and image quality), the *IPA* has a much slimmer section of technical descriptions, and these are rarely presented from a scientific perspective as in the British annual ("Light is composed of electromagnetic waves [...] colour depends on wavelength,")[39] but usually from a subjective point of view, i.e., how the photographer used the equipment and for what purpose:

> [description of a photo of a pregnant woman by Yair Shazar]: *"Bringing out the essential: to emphasize the pregnancy, Yair Shazar left the woman out of focus, by fixing depth of field to minimal distance. Canonflex-RM, f: 1:8, f/2, 1/25, Isopan F".*[40]
>
> [description of a photo of a water fountain in Rome]: *"Bettina Openheimer admires the water fountains in Rome. The play of light and shadow captured her attention. Leica M-2, Summarit 5 cm, f/8, 1/100, Plus X".*[41]

As opposed to the British annual, which mainly targeted a professional and cultivated audience (with publicity for photography equipment, portfolios of several well-known local and international photographers, and essays on progress in photography), the *IPA* is primarily concerned with the general, mainly local, public.[42] While seeking to be a platform for "anyone who wants to advance in his field, the art of photography, who does not have a showcase for their worthy photography,"[43] its primary goal remains educational, as it aims to train both professional and amateur photographers in esthetics, by showing them original photos printed on quality paper, and to elevate photography in Israel to an international level.[44] Merom, who deplores those who forget esthetics when making a living through photography, hopes that the albums will show them "beautiful or interesting things, even if they do not make

37____ Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 1, Agam Publishers, Kibbutz Hulata 1963, Introduction.
38____ Arthur J. Dalladay (ed.), *British Journal of Photography Annual,* 1967, foreword.
39____ *British Journal of Photography Annual* (reference 38), 196.
40____ Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 2, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1965, photo number 49.
41____ Merom 1963 (reference 37), photo number 23.

42____ Although the first album announces that the annuals target an international public as well, numbers the pages from left to right, rather than from right to left (as is customary in Hebrew), and features the name in English, the following volumes remain essentially Hebrew.
43____ Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 3, 1966, introduction.
44____ Merom 1963 (reference 37); Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 2, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1965; Peter Merom, I*srael Photography Annual,* vol. 6, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969.
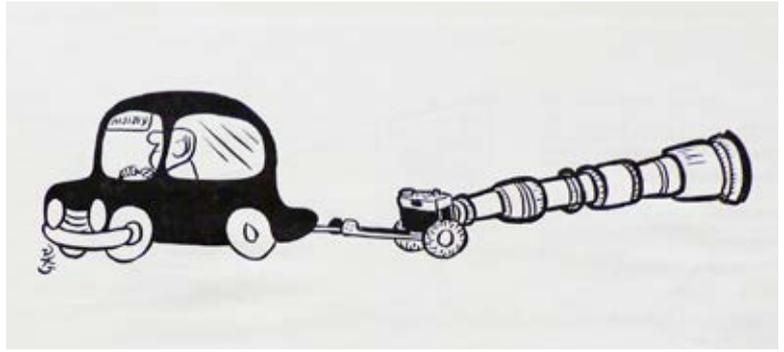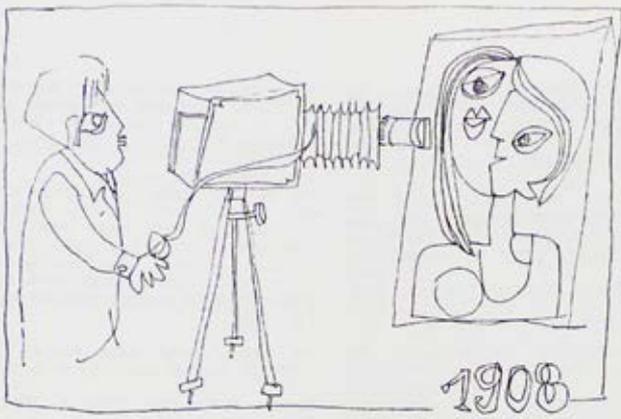
a living from them" and remains convinced that "the most interesting and creative photographer remains the same advanced and serious amateur photographer who does not aspire to sell his photographs, but [who works] for the esthetic pleasure that results from his work."[45]

The choice to include illustrations and caricatures by established artists in each volume's index (— figs. 2a & b) frames photography within the arts, and is also a reflection on the practice itself: The caricatures feature the relationship between tourism and photography and photography vs. painting, as the annual attempts to "demonstrate the different possibilities – both graphically and aesthetically – that lie in photography as a means of human expression."[46]

The caricatures also illustrate the use of sophisticated equipment in ridiculous situations. On this, Merom comments that excessive replacement of equipment may not necessarily lead to great photos and advises the readers to acquire one reliable technical means, concentrate on the object, look at many photobooks and visit photo exhibitions, and try to surpass everything one sees.[47]

Merom does not prioritize professional photographers over amateur ones: Great names like Micha Bar-Am, Boris Carmi, David Rubinger, Alex Levak, and Bettina Openheimer, and amateurs including Uri Shaani, and Amikam Shuv appear in the same index. Similarly, there is no thematical hierarchy: All albums contain portraits (— figs. 3a & b), photos of animals, photos of children and nudes, landscapes from Israel and abroad, techniques (light, movement, angle, zoom and focus, different developing techniques), and compositions.

The annuals' layout reflects a minimal approach. Whereas the British annual includes captions and sometimes long descriptions alongside the photos, Merom opts for the name of the photographer only, relegating the explanations to the index. This is where Peter Merom's approach to the annual departs from the standard conception of photobooks.[48] In photobooks, the meaning of the photo is fixed directly by the caption, the legend, and the page layout adopted by the photographic essay.

fig. 2a
Moshe Amar, '1908 vs. 1968', in: *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 4, Tel Aviv, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1967.

fig. 2b
Ze'ev, A car pulling a camera with a huge objective, in: *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 7, Tel Aviv, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1970.

45 —— Merom 1966 (reference 43).
46 —— Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 4, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1967, introduction.
47 —— Merom 1966 (reference 43).
48 —— Parr and Badger 2004 (reference 22).

fig. 3a
'This soldier symbolizes for Alex Cohen the joyful spirit of the Army', in: *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 6, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969, 44.

fig. 3b
Beno Rothenberg's soldier portrait in Helmar Leski's *Israeli soldiers* 1942–1943 series style: Beno Rothenberg, 'Young Soldier', in: Isaiah Klinov (ed.), *Israel Reborn,* La'am, Tel Aviv 1951, 90.

In other words, the text anchors the floating meaning of the images and directs the readers' gaze by providing them with an interpretation that reflects a given ideology. Peter Merom's attitude to the composition of photobooks deviates from this standard conception by emphasizing the importance of the layout's graphic and esthetic aspects over meaning.[49]

In the annuals, the layout is largely determined by the esthetic effect created by juxtaposing similar themes or forms on opposite pages (__figs. 4 & 5). The immediate text is reduced to the minimum of the photographer's name, and the information on the technical aspects is relegated to the index.

In the album following the 1967 war, Merom feels obliged to devote a section[50] to "one of the most photographed wars" that brought about a "steady stream of mid-level and lesser albums," and a few extraordinary photographs "from an artistic point of view or in terms of the originality of [their] concept" compromised by "poor print and the bad quality paper."[51] However, the composition of the war section leaves him deeply dissatisfied, because "clearly, many of the photographs have no artistic purpose, their role is to serve as a means of communication and information […]" and that "good combat footage is extremely rare."[52] Despite that, an effort is made to frame the war photos differently than in some of the photobooks published after a war (__fig. 6), or the victory albums that followed the 1967 war (__fig. 7).

49 __ Raz 2000 (reference 9), 76.
50 __ Thirty-six of the 162 photos featured in the album are war related.
51 __ Merom 1968 (reference 21).
52 __ Merom 1968 (reference 21).

fig. 4
From right to left: untitled photographs
by Yehuda Sofrin, Amiram Arev, and Eli
Chen, in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photogra-*
phy Annual, vol. 5, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz
Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1968, 44–45.

fig. 6
Beno Rothenberg, 'A Sniper and a soldier on two opposite sides', in: Beno Rothenberg, *The Struggle for Jerusalem. A Picture Story,* Illustrated book publishing company, Tel Aviv 1950, 74–75. A very detailed legend gives a long narrative of the events and contextualizes the photo within the Arab-Jewish conflict:
Page 74: "Arab's [sic.] vibrant reaction to the UNO resolution was immediate. Yet, Haganah patrols entered the quarters of Jerusalem and stuck posters on the walls, calling upon the Arab population to keep the peace."
Page 75: "The Arab Higher Executive, directed from Cairo and Beiruth, told the Arabs that the whole Middle East would mobilize to fight the Jews and the UNO. It called the Arabs to arms."

fig. 5
Right: '"Ballet in Khaki" was photo-
graphed by Beni Hadar on an obstacle
course while doing a reportage on the
Israeli Defense Forces. The photogra-
pher laid in the sand and pointed his
camera upwards and created an illusion
of height by using a wide-angle lens.
Nikkomat F T N, Nikkor 28 mm, f 11,
1/500'.
Left: 'David Gefner photographed a
squadron of Fuga aircraft in an aerial
demonstration of the Airforce. He used
a yellow filter. Speed Graphic, Graflex
150 mm, f 11, 1/400,' in: Peter Merom,
Israel Photography Annual, vol. 6,
Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad,
Tel Aviv 1969, 76–77.

Firstly, some of the images included in the album are taken from the photographer's viewpoint and, without proper framing, could not qualify as depictions of the war (__fig. 8).

Secondly, where photos in commissioned state albums bear a symbolic or iconic[53] value, an important number of photos in the annual concentrate on form, rather than on the subject (__fig. 9). Clearly, Merom is looking for "artistically interesting photos"[54] to cater to the pedagogical purposes of the publication.

Finally, as in photobooks of early statehood, some photos show 'the other', the Arab. But instead of referring to the social consequences entailed by the encounter with the other, they focus on the photo's staging (__fig. 10) and the explicative text that accompanies the photograph.

The 1969 annual opens with sights from the newly occupied territories. Following the conquest of East Jerusalem, the West Bank (the Samaria region), and the Sinai Desert, waves of travelers flooded these areas, and Merom received an exceptional number of photos, which he published under the section *Views from Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel). Deceived by the sparsity of "artistically and photographically interesting [photos], showing the unique, which expresses life,"[55] he opts again for the photographical conditions (staging, light) of the photos rather than the consequences of war and occupation.

fig. 7
Daniel Rosenblum (ed.), *The Victory Album. Historical Photos of the Six Day War,* Ramdor, Tel Aviv 1967, cover.

In 1970, two annuals are published, which are to be the last of the series. The first one is devoted to eight portfolios, three by international photographers. Micha Bar-Am, already a renowned photographer at the time, is showcased here with six photos entitled "atmosphere", and the emphasis is again on photographical aspects: "Micha first intended to photograph the silhouettes in one of the arches of the Old City, but when the head of a curious person suddenly appeared in the doorway on the right, he was focused on him and shot the picture (Nikon F, 200 mm)."[56] (__fig. 11)

The second 1970 annual focuses on one theme: nature, with landscape photography, in both micro and macro. The interest in nature is already clearly marked in the first 1970 volume, as the cover does not feature a female portrait, as was the case in all annuals (and customary in many portraits of countries), but of birds (__fig. 12). Three

53___ Like Helmar Leski's portrait of the soldier (fig. 3) used in Klinov's *Encyclopedia of Israel in Images,* to represent the function of the person who contributes to the construction of the State.

54___ Merom 1968 (reference 21).

55___ Merom 1969 (reference 44).

56___ Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 7, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1970.
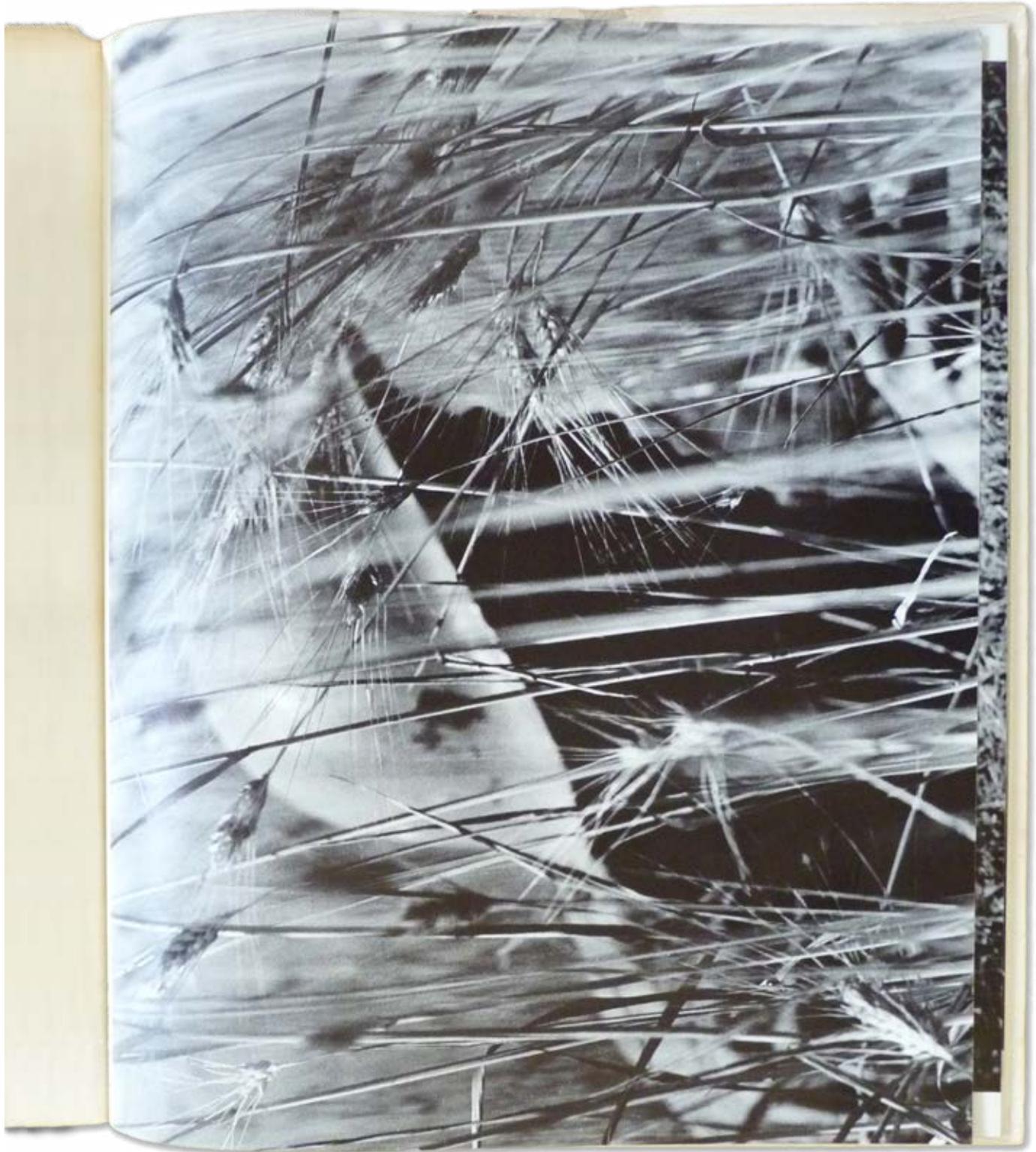
fig. 8
'Ephraim Kidron found himself very close to Mother Earth when he took this picture while under Enemy Fire in Jenin', in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 5, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1968, 36.

fig. 9a
Right: 'A. Retner photographed the aerial demonstration on [Israel's] 20th Independence Day as he approached the [Independence Day] March event in Jerusalem. Canonet Q L 19, F E 45 mm, f 8, 1/500 + yellow filter';
left: 'Initially, Zvi Nahor photographed a single stork in the sky, without a filter. The picture was created by the use of a laboratory technique (multi-print). Leica, Elmar 90 mm, f 8, 1/500', in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 6, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969, 125–126.

fig. 9b
Right: 'Itzhak Ostrovsky photo-
graphed through the small window
elderly praying near the tomb of
Rabbi Meir Baal Haness Nikon F,
50 mm, f. 5.6, 1/25';
left: 'In the backyard of the Israel
Museum were found lying three
one-meter diameter sewer pipes.
Yosef Alon used a long focal length
lens to photograph the Beit
HaKerem neighbourhood through
the pipes, and the statue leaning
on its elbow on a pillar, which is
actually closer to the camera.
Topcon Uni, 135 mm, f 16, 1/120',
in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography
Annual,* vol. 6, Lamer'hav-Kibbutz
Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969,
123–124.

Galia Yanoshevsky – Peter Merom's Israel Photography Annual
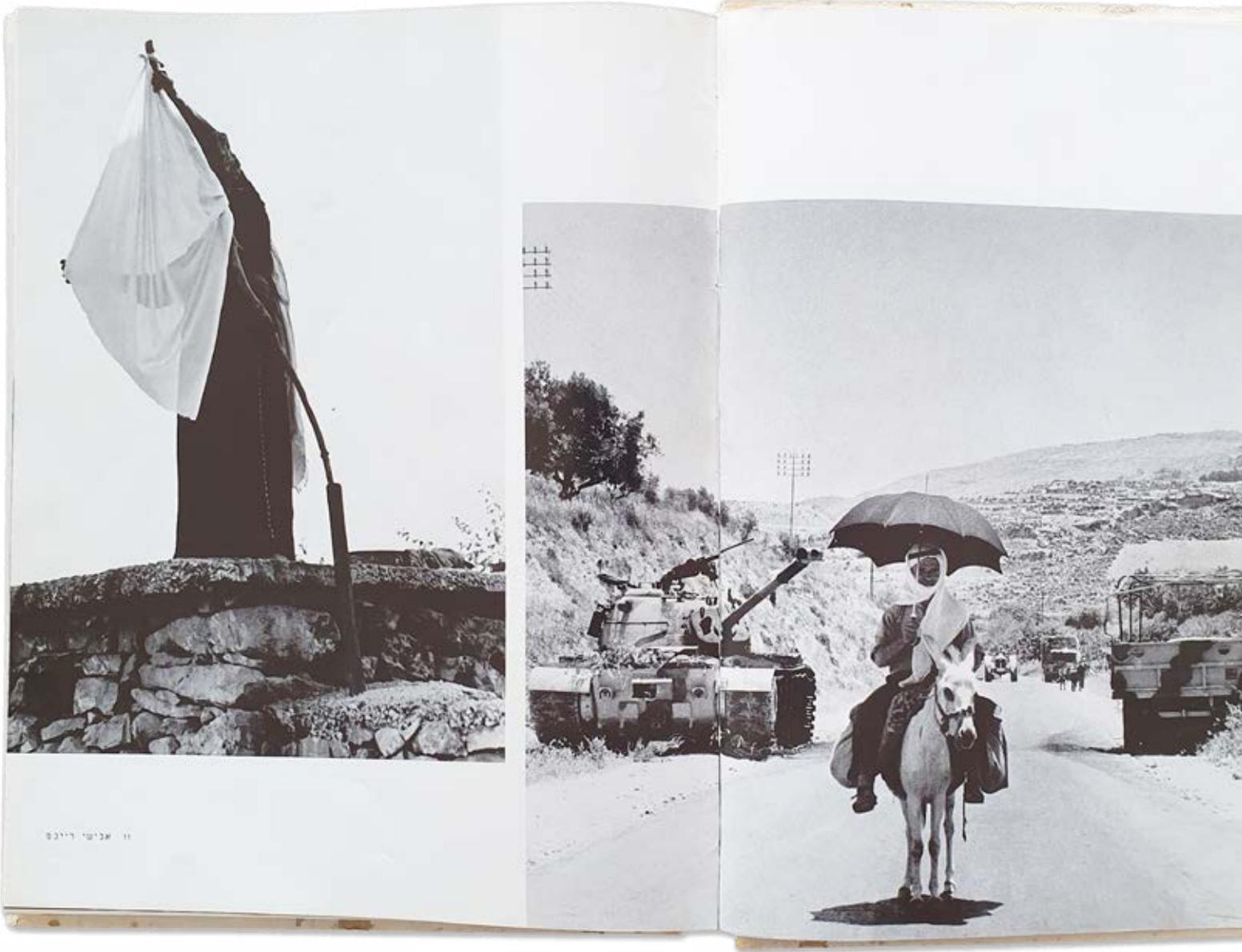
fig. 10
The old man with the umbrella: 'David Perlmutter dared and succeeded. While meeting an Arab riding his donkey and in his hand an umbrella protecting him from the midday sun, he asked him to pull back some 100 meters to give the photo the appearance of the days succeeding the battles. To his surprise and joy, the Arab agreed. Mamiya C 33, Sekor 1:2.8, f 22, 1/250', in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* Tel Aviv, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, vol. 5, 1968, 10.

fig. 11a
'During his stay in Sinai, Peter Merom photographed three Bedouin children who did not agree to be photographed unless paid', in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 6, Tel Aviv, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969, 27. The context of colonization is mediated by the transaction with the photographer.
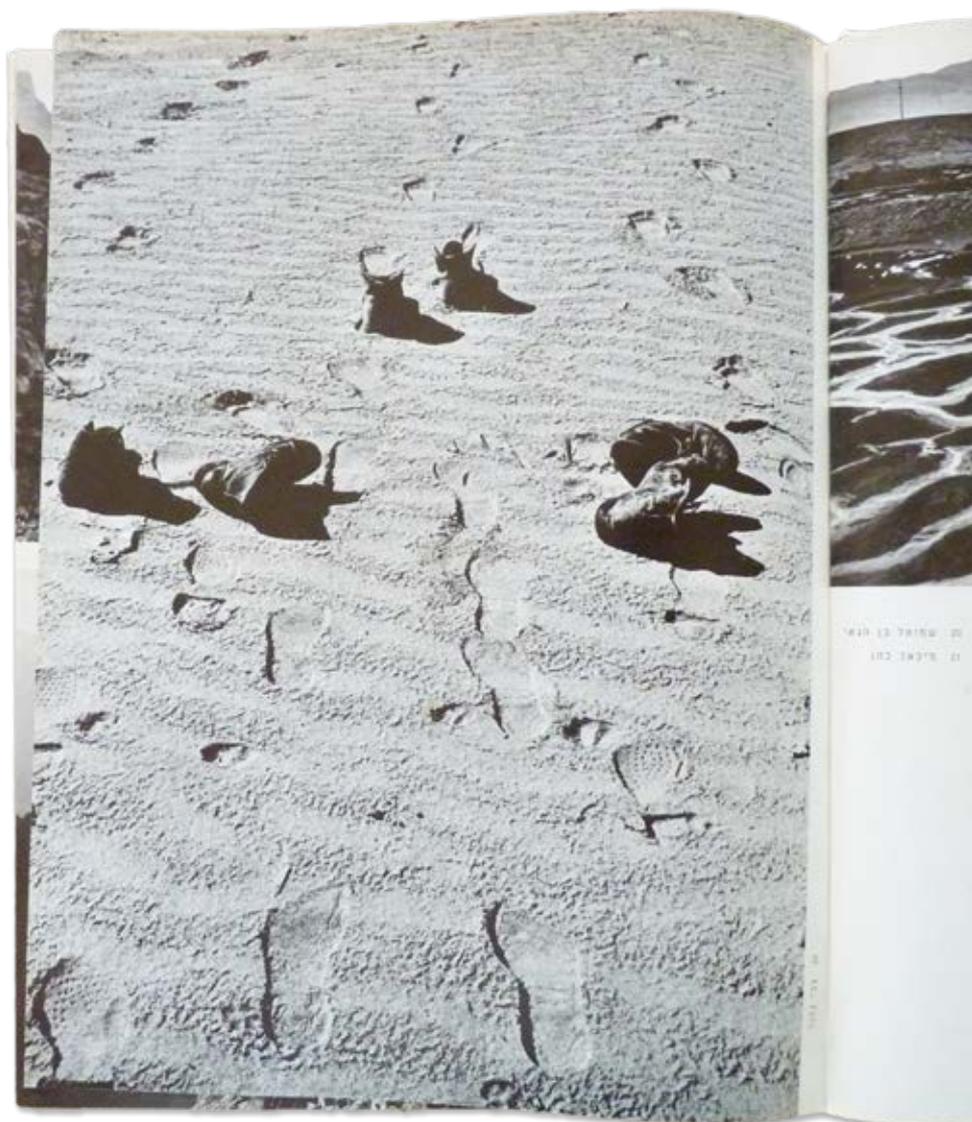
fig. 11b
'Bentzi Nahor found three pairs of abandoned shoes in the desert near the Suez Canal. The shoe prints in the frontstage of the photo and the barefoot prints in the background were staged for the sake of the photo', in: Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 6, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1969, 22.

מיכה בר־עם - אווירה

fig. 12a
Micha Bar-Am, portfolio "atmosphere",
Silhouettes in the Old City, in: Peter
Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,*
vol. 7, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz
Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1970, 1.

years after the war and its immediate effects, the annual of photography seems to be normalized, focusing on places around the world, human sites, and looking for originality and surprise not in human action, but in the sites of nature.

Conclusion

Peter Merom's publishing practice worked against institutional and commissioned photobooks. The latter were often driven by the need to make a living and suffered from inferior quality printing. As a response to these shortcomings, he devised the Israel Photography Annual not only as a showcase of current tendencies in amateur and professional photography, but also as an educational tool, meant to elevate both amateur and professional photography by showing original and unique photos in quality print. He selected photographs that experimented with movement and light, and that seemed to him original. Some of the choices were clearly influenced by European and American tendencies in photography like the "Neue Sachlichkeit", humanist photography, and the decisive moment.

But Merom's annual project fell short of being outright anti-institutional. Firstly, he published his albums within publishing houses of the Kibbutz Movement (La'merhav Hakibbutz Hameuchad) and the Labor Party (Am Oved). Secondly, some of the photographers who contributed to the Annuals, like Micha Bar-Am, Boris Carmi, David Rubinger, and others, were either working as photojournalists and/or involved in state-commissioned projects. Thirdly, in publishing numerous portraits of places and faces in Israel – alongside experimental photos, photographs of nature,

and pictures from abroad – the annuals remained essentially humanist, mainly concerned with the everyday experience of Israelis, but also responding to major national events like the war and its consequences.

In retrospect then, the eight *IPA* albums are a snapshot of Israel in the 1960s, informing us of the state of photography as art in the country, of everyday life, and of major events like the war and colonization and their representations in Israeli society. In this respect, the *IPA* series can be taken as a country portrait in the sense proposed by David Martens; namely, a loose ended photo-textual genre, a linear succession of pages of combinations of numerous images, and texts, which forms the portrait of a country by documenting its landscapes, its people, its events.[57] As further noted by Martens, "in country-portrait albums, photographs have at once a documentary and aesthetic value, as demonstrated by the format of most of these books and the care taken in displaying the pictures."[58]

fig. 12b
Peter Merom, *Israel Photography Annual,* vol. 7, Lamer'hav-Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv 1970, cover.

In the Israel Photography Annual series, Peter Merom aimed to counteract propaganda through the poetic and technical perspectives of photography, as he strived to "normalize" the young state by elevating photography from the threshold of photojournalism and livelihood to the level of noncommissioned art. However, by doing so, he not only documented the evolution of photography in Israel, but also provided readers with a slice of Israel's everyday life in the 1960s. Who acquired the annuals? Who enjoyed their photos and updated their photographic knowledge thanks to them? Our knowledge about the reception of these publications is scarce. They were distributed in the thousands in Israel, and – from their availability today on international second-hand book dealers' websites – we may assume that a fraction may have circulated abroad. There is hardly any trace of how they were received in newspapers of the period or in specialized journals, but a short review in the *Journal of Nature and Geography* in 1971 reads as follows: "Nice album. We liked the fact that the editor decided to devote the album to nature. Today, when printing in color is common, there is a particular interest in this album, representing nature in black and white photos. [...] This album will be of interest and pleasure to both nature and photography lovers."[59] If the Annual sparked interest, then, it is no doubt because in its very last volume, it succeeded in appealing to those interested in nature and esthetics, a sign of normalcy in a country which in the 1960s and 1970s was still inundated by national photobooks and war albums.

57 ___ David Martens, 'What is a Country Portrait? Functions and forms of a minor genre', in: Catalina Fara (ed.), Israels, Portraits of *Israel in Tourist Guidebooks and Photo Albums,* Ramat-Gan, Bar-Ilan University and MDRN, KU-Leuven. December 2021, 11–32.
58 ___ Martens 2021 (reference 57), 26.
59 ___ 'Review of *Israel Photography Annual',* Nature and Land (Teva ve'Eretz: *Journal for Nature and Geography),* 13 (4), 1971, 197.

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