

## Keeping memory alive with Guy Raz

Israeli photographer honored for lifetime of work chronicling history of the region

• By HANNAH GAL

Photographer and curator Guy Raz is a passionate advocate of Israeli photography. For more than three decades, the Tel Aviv lensman has honed his craft documenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while delving deep into the history of the region's photography.

For his work as a photographer and curator, Raz has been awarded the 2019 Hans and Lea Grundig prize, with judges noting Raz's life mission to establish an institute for centralizing the region's photographic archives.

The prize, under the patronage of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, honored Raz in the category "Art Education /Art History," for bringing to light the country's often forgotten Jewish and Arab practitioners and communities. From Ein Harod to China, early 1800s to contemporary creatives, Raz continues to examine the region's photographic past and daringly presents it like a mirror in the face of society.

"With this award, I am being recognized internationally for taking the initiative to delve deep into the photographic history of this region and the many photographers who documented its journey," Raz told *The Jerusalem Post*.

Raz's extensive research led to the landmark 2003 book, *Photographers of Palestine - Eretz Israel - Israel*, and exhibits and projects with names like "Borders, Tunnels, Lifeguard Tower" and "Two Seconds."

He's also curated shows worldwide which celebrate and spread the diverse word of the region's photographers, past and present. Spanning nearly 200 years of subjects, the shows explore the way in which society's collective memory is impacted by the work of photographers such as pioneering Zoltan Kluger and Avraham Soskin, the iconic David Rubinger and fellow Arab photographic pioneers.

"As a photographer, I am engaged with



GUY RAZ and the cover of one of his books: The early photographs documenting the nation's early struggles deserve to be preserved. (Courtesy)

the conflict and am always on the seam zone (*kav hatefer*), my current Arab photographic partner is the gallery in Umm el-Fahm, where in 2008 we had the ambitious joint project about the history of Wadi Ara," said Raz.

"We took an entire area without any archive or a collective photographic document of itself, and literally created a visual memory for it, an aspect of my work that the prize committee has commented on, but I should note that this is not political or one-sided, I did the same

thing in 2016 for Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev Desert, which also has no archive, through the exhibition 'Mountain of Dreams,' I created a visual memory for the place," he said.

Raz went on to exhibit four shows in Umm el-Fahm, including the 2008 exhibition "Shadows of Time," where Arab and Israeli photographers took pictures of Wadi Ara's elderly inhabitants.

Still, to Raz it is "not about Arab or Israeli, but about the people who deserve to have a memory".



PHOTOGRAPHERS OF Palestine - Eretz Israel - Israel, a landmark chronicle of Israel's photographers, from the adventurous 1800s travelers documenting barren Palestine, to Israel's contemporary practitioners. The project brings to light Raz's belief that photographers determine history, "by choosing which piece of reality will be part of society's memory."

Reflecting on the art of curation, Raz speaks of the show becoming an entity in itself and the joy of "developing a dialogue with the photographer's work as you put the show together, this is particularly poignant where the photographer is still alive."

Currently serving as photographic curator at Tel Aviv's Eretz Israel Museum, Raz is known for his thought-provoking displays and eclectic curating choices, from pioneering Soskin and Kluger, to iconic war images of Rubinger, Micha Bar-Am, kib-

butz life and Israel's Yemenite community.

"Many will call it eclectic, but to me the thread is the photographer's eye and soul, this is what I connect to when curating, regardless of the creative's culture of background," Raz said. "I delve as deep as time and budget would allow, often coming across some of the best images in the very last minutes before the show goes on display, sometimes, things are revealed long after the show is over and the shows themselves become part of history."

Raz's current project is a list of 105 unknown female photographers in Israel dating from 1850 to 1978.

"The show opening November 27th will display the women's portraits on a 'table of memory,' asking why these women were never at the forefront," he said. Like so much of the work Raz curates, there is no other record of this group of forgotten photographers.

"It is rather sad that all the thousands of photographs along with decades' worth of research are in my head and my laptop," concludes Raz. "They should have a home and I am grateful that the jury supports my efforts to establish an institution devoted to the history of photography of the region," and to make it a medium for an exchange between Israeli and Arab artists and photographers.

"To this day, there is no home for Israeli photography," explained Raz. "There are different collections at various museums and institutions, but there is no place that holds together the stills of Israeli photography through the ages."

"This remains my dream, perhaps it is utopian, but I am still searching for partners so we can make this huge photographic treasure accessible to the wide public," he said. "The early photographs documenting the nation's early struggles deserve to be preserved for eternity so future generations could revel in them and examine their own history through them."