

The image features two weathered wooden poles against a clear blue sky. The pole on the left is tall and cylindrical, with a light-colored, textured surface showing signs of wear and discoloration. The pole on the right is shorter and has a more irregular, broken top edge. The text 'SACRED LAND' is printed in large, bold, black capital letters in the upper right quadrant, with the author's name 'RALPH GIBSON' in smaller, white capital letters directly below it.

# SACRED LAND

RALPH GIBSON



# SACRED LAND

ISRAEL BEFORE AND AFTER TIME

PHOTOGRAPHS

**RALPH GIBSON**

PRODUCED BY

**MARTIN COHEN**

Bloomberg Connects  
exhibition audio-guide

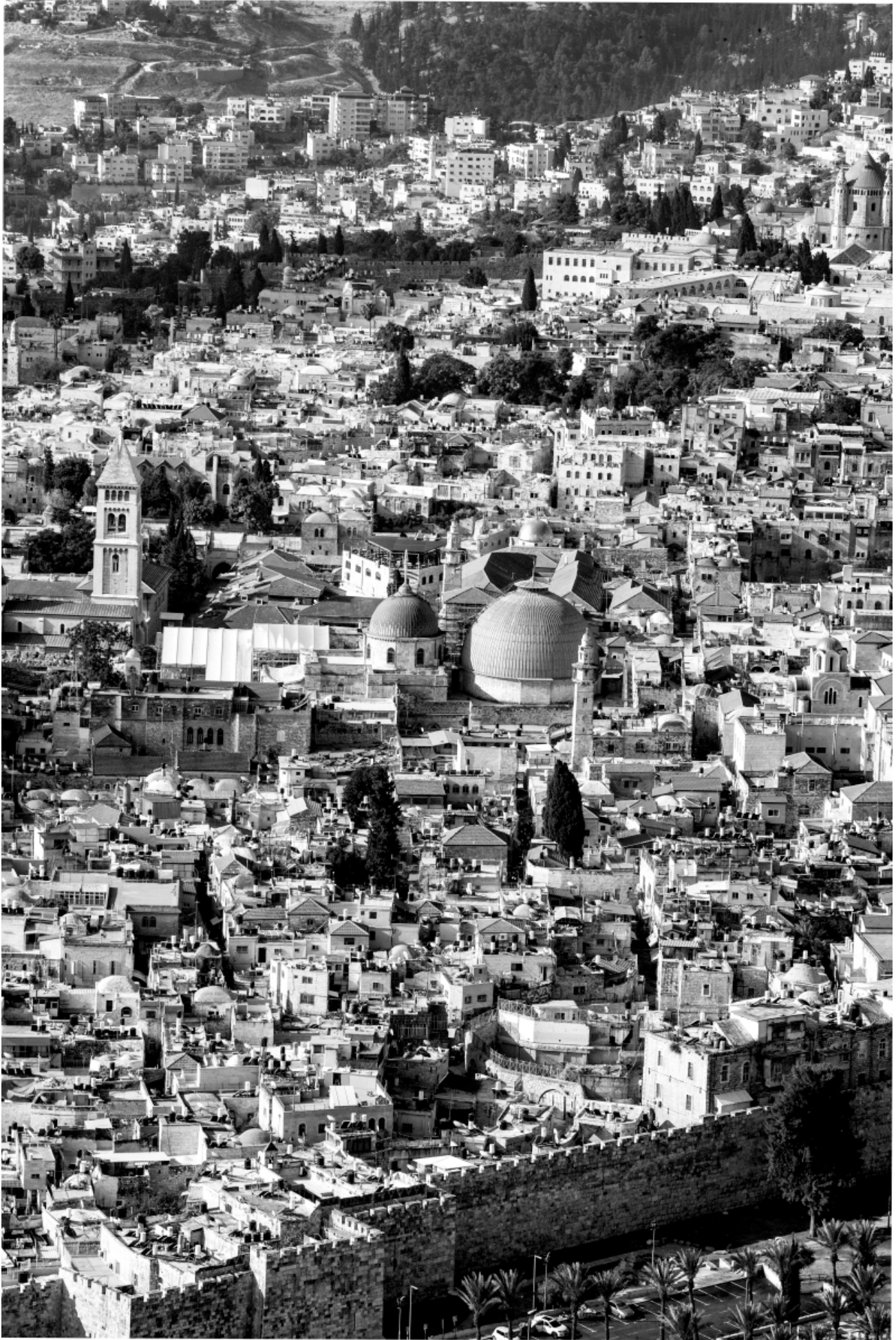
MARCH 19 – JULY 8, 2024

**DR. BERNARD HELLER MUSEUM**

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

ONE WEST FOURTH STREET, NEW YORK

*Presented by the Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Center for Jewish Learning and Culture with the generous support of Michele and Martin Cohen and George, z"l, and Mildred Weissman, z"l*



## Preface

While visiting Paris Photo in November 2018, over afternoon tea, I asked Ralph Gibson if he had ever been to Israel. He hadn't, but always wanted to. Having been there many times, and knowing Ralph's body of work, it came to me that a view of this country through Ralph's lens would capture Israel in a unique, moving, artistic, and informative manner

As usual, one's first visit to Israel erases almost all preconceived notions of what this country is about. It is not until you see in person the beauty, history, culture, diversity, and spirit of this nation – as well as its challenges – that you can begin, but only begin, to understand this unique place on earth. Ralph's images demonstrate this exquisitely.

The diversity of Israel's population and visitors is often a great surprise. The "Jewish State" is really home to many other faiths and attracts people from around the world to explore their links to the past. Jerusalem exists at the intersection of nearly all modern religions. There, every individual is unconditionally welcome and comfortable at holy sites that are protected and preserved.

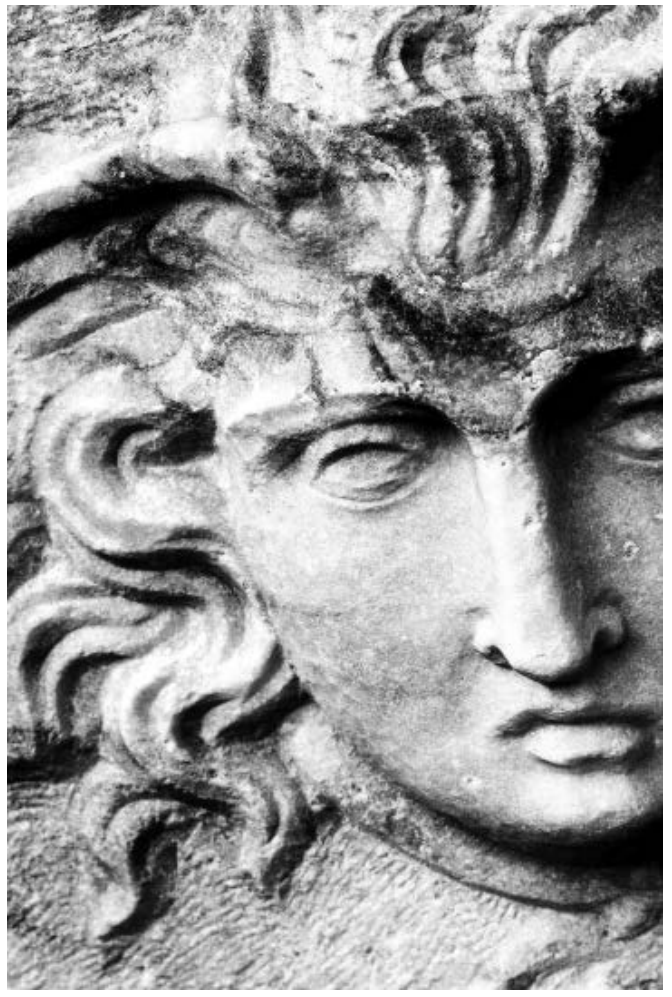
The diversity of landscape and climate, as well as social climate, is another surprise – the Arava desert, the warm Mediterranean shores, and the mountainous north could not be more different. So too is the social climate – Jerusalem becomes totally quiet on the Sabbath while Tel Aviv bustles with social engagement.

Israel is regularly portrayed as a land bursting with conflicts and strife. Not surprisingly, the politics and social issues facing Israel are extremely complex and often maddening. But the objective here is not to offer a commentary on this subject – that has been done, if not overdone, by many others already. On the other hand, the long history of Israel is one of endless external conflict, strife, and threats from every neighboring country. This has often led to all-out war and constantly affects every facet of life there.

Yet Israel and its citizens are consistently ranked among the happiest in the world, even higher than the United States. The spirit of the people is palpably upbeat. Perhaps it is because while internal conflicts may divide them, external threats more strongly unite them.

Thus the overall narrative about Israel is that in this relatively small nation, one can witness and relive the very beginnings of world history; experience the world's most advanced institutions in science, technology, and medicine – and everything in between. That is the central theme of these works.

**Martin Cohen**



Israel is essentially built out of limestone, calcaire. Soft and easy to saw into blocks at the quarry, it hardens with exposure to air. And thus speaks louder and stronger every thousand years or so. It becomes as permanent as time itself, an ineluctable fact owned by man and loved by architects, engineers, and clerics. The durability takes one back very far into time. This explains how and why we are told “King David lived here” or “Jesus walked there,” and so on.

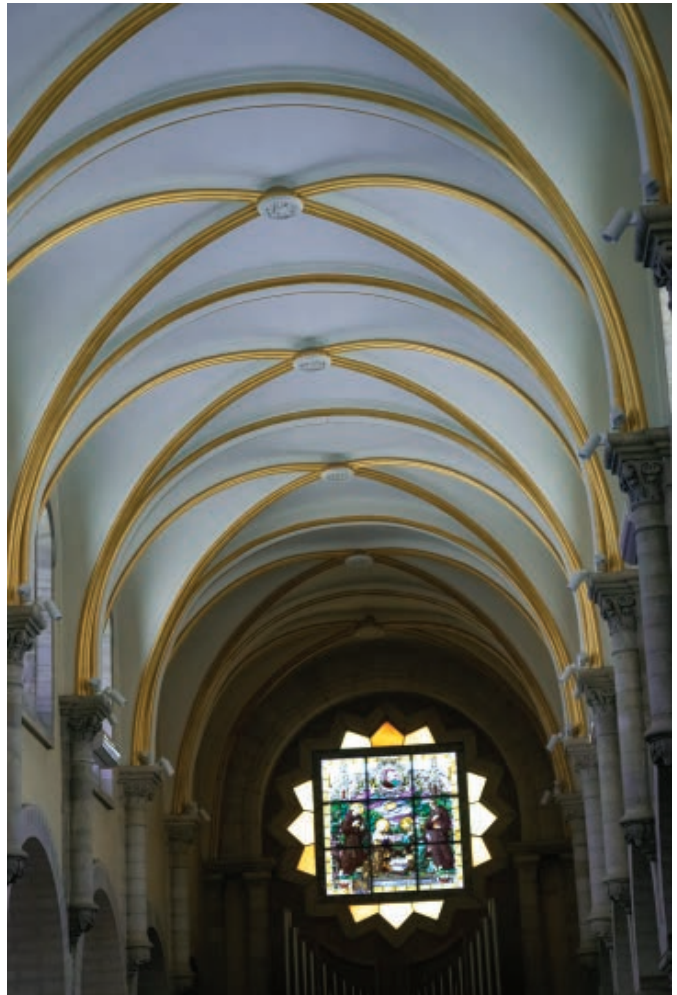
The light is clarion, optical, and of a Mediterranean hue. This ancient luminosity refracts into mythology and biblical wisdom. One feels positioned as a human being. I like to think that in the long life of a city, each person on the street becomes their own personal archaeologist. While walking alone through the streets of Jerusalem, I sensed my humanity for the first time.

The words carved into stone thousands of years ago or written on parchment in the ancient tomes reveal an early need for knowledge and expression. A chisel at one time was considered hi-tech. The knowledge of today continues to advance in the even higher-tech computer science and bio-technology labs, where the best minds of the land pursue humanity’s ambitions.

Israel is the oldest and youngest country in the world and struggles for survival from without and definition from within. The country is surrounded by enemies who want to drive her into the sea and confronted by its own citizens who challenge the nature of her statehood. Yet Israel is recognized by the free world as a miracle in our time. As the great composer Morton Feldman said, “Tragedy is what occurs when both parties are right.”

And what would the world be without the Jewish diaspora that spread intellect and culture like seeds around the entire planet?

**Ralph Gibson**







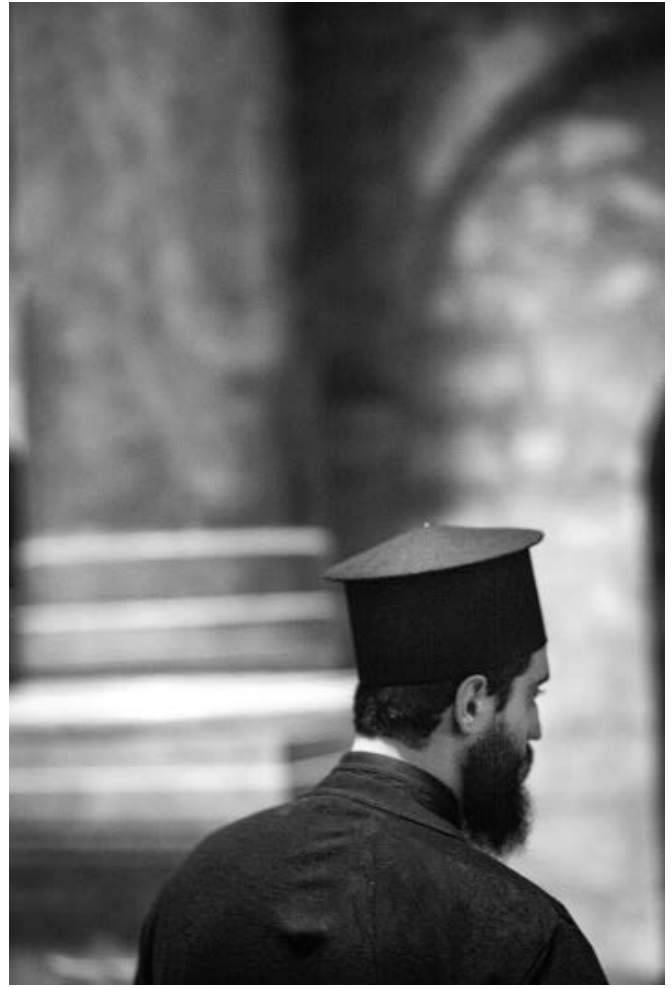
These photographs seek to capture the essence of ancient forms and textures. The qualities that have descended with the generations, with a patina of weathering, migrating and changing cultures, whose timeless qualities we associate with the Holy Land.

Moshe Safdie, *Architect*



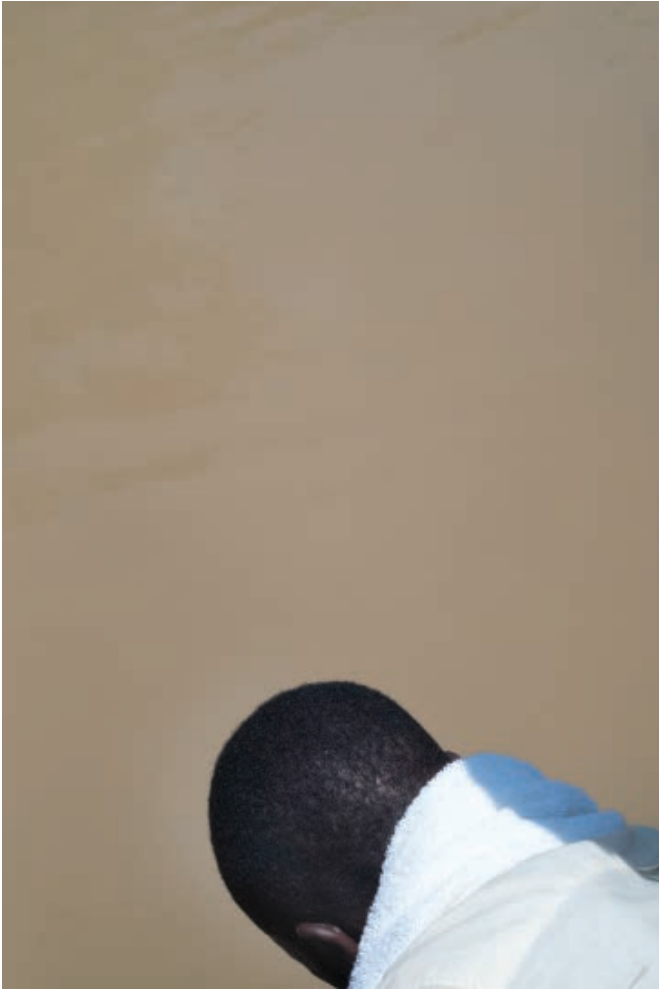
The diversity within this sacred land – a multiplicity of ethnicities, faiths, and backgrounds – exudes each being’s essential humanity. One senses that this place is holy to all, across all of the differences that rupture this part of the world.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft, *Director, Dr. Bernard Heller Museum*









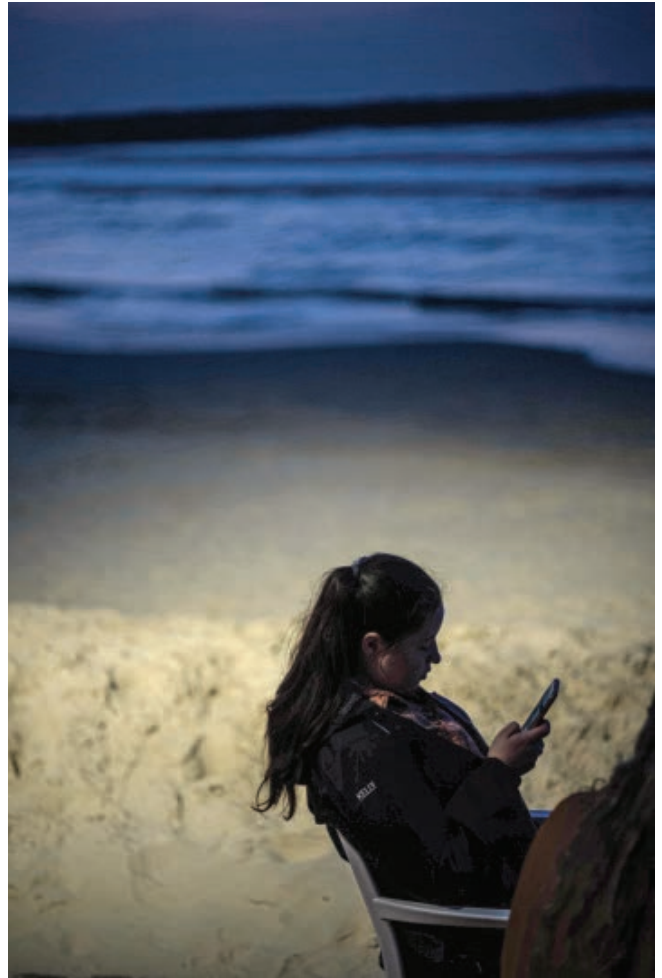


Ralph Gibson captures the majestic mountains and stark hills and valleys of this land, but never forgets its human landscapes, the auras of its Christian and Muslim and Jewish forms of religious piety, and its contrasting secular and irreverent citizenry and the vibrant pulses of its modern life.

Rabbi David Ellenson, z”l, *Chancellor Emeritus,  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*

The spirit of these photographs is found in their intimacy. The details – a particular gesture, a candid pose, a fragment, a moment – offer a glimpse at a deeper meaning.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft



Natural beauty and millennia-old archaeological artifacts evoke a timeless sense of wonder and spirituality. Man-made, industrial, and urban images convey the impact of human imagination, ingenuity, and necessity. Through their unexpected affinities, the eternal and instantaneous converge. Each juxtaposition sparks our imagination in making the connections and expresses aspirations for a peaceful future.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft







**Locations/Legends** (photographs dated 2019)

Front Cover: Untitled (Caesarea)

Inside front cover: Untitled (Ramon Crater, Makhtesh)

- 2 Untitled (Jerusalem)
  - 4 [above, left to right]: Untitled (Arriving Tel Aviv);  
Untitled (Gorgon head on lid of sarcophagus,  
Caesarea); [below, left and right]: Untitled (Mount  
of Olives)
  - 6 [above, left to right]: Untitled (Church of the  
Nativity, Bethlehem); Untitled (Church of the  
Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem); [below, left and right]:  
Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem);
  - 7 Untitled (Sun through clouds)
  - 8 Untitled (Western Wall, Jerusalem)
  - 9 [above, left to right]: Untitled (Bedouin village,  
Rahat); Untitled (Bedouin village, Rahat); [below, left  
and right]: Untitled (Mosque, Bethlehem)
  - 10 Untitled (The Dead Sea)
  - 11 Untitled (Baptism, Jordan River)
  - 12 [above, left and right]: Untitled (Baptism, Jordan  
River); [below, left to right]: Untitled (Masada);  
Untitled (Bedouin Village, Beresheet)
  - 13 Untitled (Royal Tombs, Petra, Jordan)
  - 14 [left to right]: Untitled (Aqaba); Untitled (Aviv  
Beach)
  - 15 [above, left to right]: Untitled (Ethiopian student,  
Rehovot school); Untitled (Qes Samal Elias,  
Ethiopian Jewish spiritual leader, Rishon LeZion);  
[below, left to right]: Untitled (The Israel Museum,  
Jerusalem); Untitled (Tel Aviv)
  - 16 [left to right]: Untitled (Talmudic King Shappur, The  
Israel Museum, Jerusalem); Untitled (Graffiti, Tel  
Aviv)
  - 17 Untitled (Candy, Old Akko)
- Back Cover: Untitled (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem)



