5 New Hebrew Aesthetics

Christians often thought of Jews as ugly people who dressed differently, spoke their own ugly language, ate unfamiliar food, and smelled bad. This perception of Jews persisted in the modern era and became part of antisemitism, which singled Jews out as vulgar parvenus who lacked "good [German/French/English] taste" (see Figure 5.1). One of the first tasks Zionists turned to, then, was an aesthetic regeneration, as they called it, that would bring beauty back into Jewish life and make it attractive. The question was, how?

It was a bias that preoccupied Herzl and his contemporaries, who dedicated the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 to disproving it. Organizers of the congress mounted an exhibition of works by various Jewish artists – illustrations, paintings, sculptures – that were meant to showcase Jewish artistic genius and aesthetic sensibilities. The commissioned works revolved around Jewish themes and, in general, depicted two extremes, the illustrious Jewish past in ancient times and the pathetic state of Jews in the present (see Figure 5.2). Later, Zionists would regard the entire period of Jewish life outside the Land of Israel, from the loss of sovereignty in the second century CE to the establishment of the Yishuv in Palestine, as "non-history," a black hole.

The call for new Jewish aesthetic standards brought up the question of art in traditional Jewish culture more generally. It was a lively debate at the time. People like the poet Mordechai Tzvi Maneh challenged Jewish intellectuals "to raise the love of beauty in the hearts of Jewish youth" to "sweeten our lives and give us a taste of heaven on earth."[1] Others, such as Ahad Ha'am, spoke against such mimicry and called for a more original modern Jewish culture based on what he vaguely termed Jewish ethics.

[1] Mordechai Tzvi Maneh, "General and Jewish Aspects of the Art of Painting" (חכמת הציור בכלל ובין בני עמינו בפרט), available at https://benyehuda.org/read/5376.

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Fig. 5.1 Theodor Herzl, who was very serious about changing the perception of Jews as unattractive, imposed a strict dress code of black tie for the opening of the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. "For the ceremonial opening session," read the delegate cards, "black party dress and white tie are mandatory." Many delegates resented the demand, including Herzl's right-hand man, Max Nordau. Representatives from Eastern Europe were especially anxious. Many of them were not familiar with these conventions, and some could barely afford the dress. But Herzl insisted. It was an opportunity to show the world that Jews were a civilized people too: dignified, respectable, aesthetic – or, in other words, white. Image of the Second Zionist Congress, Basel 1898. Kevin Viner, Elevator Digital, Toronto, the David Matlow Herzl and Zionism Collection, www.herzlcollection.com.

The argument, not new by then, focused on the tension between Jewish particularism and a wish to assimilate into the greater European culture, to be "human and Hebrew" at one and the same time, as author and pundit Micha Yosef Berdichevsky put it, and unite general knowledge with Jewish heritage.[2] When the Zionist intellectual Nahum Sokolow visited the celebrated Dutch painter Jozef Israëls, he marveled

[2] Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, "At the Crossroad, an Open Letter to Ahad Ha'am" (על פרשת דרכים מכתב גלוי לאחד העם), *Hashiloach* 1 (1896) (התרנ"ז): 154–159.

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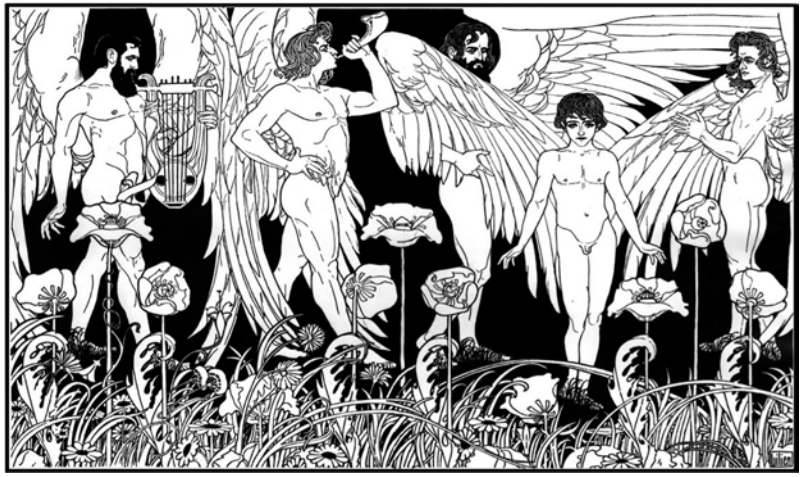


Fig. 5.2 One of the artists featured in the Fifth Congress was Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874–1925). His elegant *Jugendstil* illustrations embodied the aesthetic call of Zionism, a complement to a cultural and political revolution that would put Jews on par with other modern Europeans. The drawing shows a group of beautiful men whose Jewish beards, Greek bodies, and wings – one of them is clearly Theodor Herzl – reveal some of the deepest desires of Zionists and gives their political agenda a distinct aesthetic form.

at his ability to capture the inner soul of the subjects he painted, "even the sea," by dint of his Jewish heritage. "Do Jews paint differently from Gentiles?" replied the old master, mystified by the essentialism of his visitor. "How exactly is an ocean Jewish?" he wondered.[3]

For Zionists the answer to this question was obvious. Without a place of their own, they claimed, a territory where they would develop an authentic national culture, Jews would not be able to develop a distinct aesthetic sense. None of them could define the nature of Jewish art, although all agreed how to achieve it, by creating a national space where Jewish heritage could be reengaged in a secular context. Speaking at the 1901 "art congress," Martin Buber reminded delegates that Jewish artists do not necessarily create Jewish art. A national art, he said, requires a national soil and a national community. In time, both

[3] Nahum Sokolow and Jozef Israëls. https://benyehuda.org/read/5354. Published in *Hatzfira*, October 22, 1915 (ידי בחשון תרע"א).

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would nurture artists who would internalize the spirit of the new Hebrew nation and give it aesthetic expression, as he and others thought they should. Jewish art would be the Jews' sentimental education, declared Buber, who suggested that since art and truth go together, "Jewish art will give voice to our Zionist essence. … By looking at it, we will know ourselves."[4] It was an open conversation about the role of (Jewish) art in the service of (Jewish) national life that laid bare the civic theology behind a utopian aesthetics, a relationship that Zionists cultivated enthusiastically, sometimes openly, at other times less so.[5]

The call for cultural regeneration seems vague and even naïve today. Real art is not created by committees. But it highlights the very premise of culture, any culture, as a process of formation. Many of the Jewish leaders and intellectuals who concerned themselves with the Jewish Problem at the time came up with various ways to ease the tension between Jewish tradition and modernity. The exact nature of these suggestions was often unclear even to those who proposed them. Art in its most abstract sense was an important part of these cultural wake-up calls, not just because of its symbolic value, but also because it was suggestive without being too specific and expressed the inchoate nature of the calls themselves.

National Hebrew Art in Palestine

As the pragmatists they were, Zionists decided to nudge the Jewish muse, and in 1906, five years after the 1901 congress, they established an arts and crafts academy in Jerusalem under the direction of the energetic artist and activist Boris Schatz (1866–1932). Ephraim Moses Lilien designed the seal of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts, as it was called. His design celebrated the school's namesake, the biblical craftsman Bezalel ben Uri, chief decorator of the Israelite tabernacle in the wilderness. The crest shows two of Ben Uri's creations, the Ark of the Covenant and the tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was yet another reference to the ancient Israelite past so beloved of Zionists, who ignored the religious significance of the symbols and stressed instead the skill it took to make them, an emphasis on craft rather than art that distinguished the school at first.

[4] Sara Chinsky, *Kingdom of the Meek* (מלכות ענווי ארץ), Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, 2015, p. 73.
[5] Ibid., p. 22.

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Bezalel made a big splash in the small Jewish community in Palestine, but its success in engineering a new Hebrew aesthetics was hotly debated, probably because of the early focus on crafts. Not everyone was happy about commercializing an art school, which focused on producing artifacts for export during its first phase – the school closed down in 1929 and reopened as a more conventional art school in 1935. Director Schatz, however, was open about it and proud of it. "The first department that is planned," announced the Jerusalem newspaper *Hashkafa* on December 26, 1905, "is a weaving workshop for expensive rugs" that "will provide employment and a stable source of income for local Jews." The rugs would surely appeal "to the thousands of tourists who come to Palestine every year" and would "have a big market abroad," especially in the USA, "where several big stores have already shown an interest in the merchandise, provided it is of high quality." Woodworking, metalworking, and needlepoint were also planned. "By working together," concluded the paper, "the Jewish artisans and their teachers will gradually develop a sense of beauty that will turn their craft into art." Indeed, the first art classes at Bezalel served the production of crafts. Drawing classes were held in the evenings and were open to "any crafter who would like to hone their drafting skills and become better at their job."

The philanthropic nature of Bezalel did not add to its stature as an academy of art either. Schatz was eager to hire unemployed Jews and make them more productive, as Zionists put it. Most of those workers were women and Yemenis, who were instructed how to manufacture rugs, silverwork, ceramics, and woodwork in a distinctive style. The idea was to replace a Christian and European visual dictionary with references that would be more Jewish, would reflect Palestine more closely, and would eventually become part of a uniquely Jewish visual subconscious.[6]

The Bezalel style, as it came to be known, was a collection of visual cues that drew on Jewish folkloric traditions, on the Jewish past and Jewish mythology, on the geography and ethnography of Palestine, and on Zionist politics, as a 1920s Hanukkah menorah illustrates (see Figure 5.3). The winged lions on either side of the candelabra motif refer to Assyrian art as well as to the Lions of Judah. But their posture and symmetry also suggest the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. The temple imagery is reinforced by the colonnade at the bottom and

[6] Ibid., p. 78.

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Fig. 5.3 Hanukkah menorah or candelabra, Bezalel, 1920s. Jewish Museum/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.

by the two iconic columns on the sides – the columns have names in the Bible, Yachin and Bo'az – that create a tableau of the inner sanctum of the Jerusalem Temple. Small circles above the columns show local flora, and Hanukkah benedictions above and below add a more familiar Jewish touch. The words "Bezalel, Jerusalem" at the top give Zionist credentials to the object.

The weaving workshop created a similar mixture of Judeo-Zionist images and produced ornamental rugs that featured the image of Herzl, iconic sites from around Palestine, such as the tomb of Rachel the matriarch near the town of Bethlehem, or the Tower of David in Jerusalem. Rugs were usually framed by interlocking stars of David with the word "Zion" woven in the middle, and Hebrew verses from the Bible would often be included, as well as flowers that reflected the local flora, which were collected in the school's small museum to inspire domestic (read: authentic) design.[7]

[7] Reuven Gafni, ed., "A Temple in the Wilderness" (מקדש במדבר), *Et-mol* 186 (Spring 2006): 23–24.

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"I have an important idea, and you will help me realize it," Schatz told zoologist Yisrael Aharoni, soon after Bezalel was established. "As you know," he explained, weavers everywhere "decorate their carpets with the lovely birds and butterflies of their countries." He suggested doing the same. A zoologist shouldn't have too much difficulty in breeding attractive butterflies "so that our artists can draw them and other birds and glorify our carpets with them."[8] The Bezalel museum – it later became the Israel Museum – was soon filled with dried flowers, stuffed animals, archaeological findings, and various artworks Schatz had collected. It was all meant to shape the new visual dictionary he envisioned.

The museum epitomized the greater ambition of the Bezalel project to create a cosmology of objects that would be defined and categorized as Hebrew.[9] Not everyone was impressed with the doctrine. Painter Reuven Rubin, a renowned graduate of the school, saw the museum as "a filthy stable … the most revolting collection one could imagine … a caricature … covered … with smears of the impotents who make Jewish art … I am disgusted by them."[10] But the invented style of Bezalel was, arguably, among the most innovative initiatives of Boris Schatz, who envisioned a Hebrew room in Jewish homes around the world with handsome collections of Jewish traditional ritual objects – Passover plates, scent boxes, Hanukkah menorahs – redesigned in the distinctive style of Bezalel, which often blended the organic forms of *Jugendstil* with elements borrowed from various folk traditions, such as that of the Yemenis, Romantic National imagery, and themes and verses from the Hebrew Bible.

Following John Ruskin, Schatz believed that beauty should have a political purpose, and he measured the value of modern art by its ability to serve the Jewish national ideology. Crafts could communicate it more clearly than paintings or sculptures because they were more concrete and required little interpretation, especially familiar ritual objects. It was a modernistic idea that, in typical Zionist fashion, tried to turn religion into art, a neat solution for creating a new Hebrew folk culture from scratch. The riches of the Jewish religious tradition were reworked in

[8] Y. Aharoni, "Reminiscences of a Hebrew Zoologist" (זיכרונות זואולוג עברי), in Nurit Cohen, *Schatz's Bezalel 1906–1929* (בצלאל של שץ), exhibition catalogue, Israel Museum, 1983, p. 319.
[9] Chinsky, *Kingdom of the Meek*, p. 127.
[10] Dalia Manor, *Art in Zion: The Genesis of Modern National Art in Jewish Palestine*, Taylor & Francis, 2005, p. 91.

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the Bezalel workshops and redistributed as objets d'art that blended elements from the Hebrew Bible, Palestine, and Zionism.

It was a conspicuous orientalism that played on the negative image of Jews as orientals in Europe and, in the spirit of Zionism again, turned it to advantage. First, by stressing the ancient Jewish connection to the Eastern Mediterranean. Second, through a production process that employed "exotic" Jewish workers, mostly women and Yemenis, whose poverty and traditional background validated the products they manufactured as folklore, even though few of them were designed by them. Yemenis were frequently featured as the Jewish folk of Palestine whose primordial culture was the ancient kernel from which the new Hebrew nation would spring.

It was pure invention, of course. Yemeni Jews had arrived in Palestine in the 1880s, and although they had a rich silversmithing tradition, little of it was used in Bezalel, where Ashkenazi masters dictated the style. "Make it in the following way," wrote Shmuel Persov, who was in charge of filigree design at the school: "form two circles into one. Make a small ring of thin dotted wire in the middle … produce three meters of this, and we can later decide if we want to make more of it."[11] But since Yemenis were the only Middle Eastern Jews who took part in the formation of Zionism as a community, and since they looked so different from local Jews – "When we arrived in Jerusalem in 1881," said Rabbi Shlomo Kassar, "no one believed we were Jewish … because we were brown … we looked like Arabs"[12] – they were often exoticized by Eastern European Zionists, who, ironically, were themselves exoticized by German Jews in Europe.

The synthetic style of Bezalel was ridiculed as manneristic, old-fashioned, and irrelevant already by 1923.[13] The forced attempt to merge (European) modernity with (Jewish) mythology was seen as too prescriptive, and a few years later, in 1929, the academy closed. The closure was welcomed by local artists who had felt constrained by Bezalel. But ideology continued to exercise a strong influence on art in the Yishuv and on the different forms it took. It was manifest in the local

[11] Gideon Ofrat, "The Bezalel Colony in Ben-Shemen, 1910–1913" (מושבת בצלאל בבן שמן), *Katedra* 29 (July 1981): 123–164, at p. 147.

[12] Rabbi Shlomo Kassar in Nitza Droyan, *The First Yemeni Immigrants 1882–1914* (חלוצי העליה מתימן), Zalman Shazar, 1982, p. 15.

[13] Gil Weissblai, *The Revival of Hebrew: Book Art in Weimar Germany* (קב ונקי), Carmel, 2019, p. 133; Avigdor Hameiri, *Doar Hayom*, December 14, 1923.

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modernistic school of painting and sculpture that flourished after the school was closed, in the drawing styles that developed in the Yishuv, in photography, in graphic design, in book design and calligraphy, and even in font design and book illumination, all of which were shaped by Zionist ideology.

Painting in Hebrew

Two versions of the town of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee come close to capturing a transformative moment in the evolution of Zionist art from its formative beginning in a tourist poster by Ze'ev Raban (1890–1970) to a more conventional European Modernism in the oil painting by Nahum Gutman (1898–1980) (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5). Raban was a leading teacher at Bezalel and one of the main creative forces behind the school's distinctive style, which straddled the blurred line between



Fig. 5.4 Ze'ev Raban, *Come to Palestine*, 1929, Poster for the Society for the Promotion of Travel in the Holy Land, Lithograph H: 99 X W: 64 cm. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. B02.0801. Photo Elie Posner, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

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Fig. 5.5 Nahum Gutman, *Tiberias*, 1926. Nahum Gutman Museum, Israel.

craft and art. This tourist poster is not very different from his other decorative work. It is a neat orientalist image of a Palestine where the Hebrew Bible and local Arab culture are brought together harmoniously. Gutman's painting reflects the local landscape more ruggedly through movement and light that show the dry hills and the humble character of Tiberias as a small mountain village. The impression of reality is more personal and follows modern artistic conventions, where the politics of art – unlike those of Bezalel – are less direct and presented as spontaneous, unique, and individual.

Gutman was part of the so-called Modernist school that turned away from the manifest orientalism of Bezalel and chose more updated ways to handle it. His work points to Western artistic influences that softened the blatant exoticism of Bezalel by giving it more modern figurations, such as Primitivism. Artists like Gutman, who rejected Schatz's vision, were committed Zionists, but they showed their commitment in different ways. Few painters depicted the drastic transformation that the Zionist movement made to Palestinian space by industrializing farming, rerouting waterways, and dressing the land with "concrete and cement," as described by the poet Nathan Alterman in his early 1930s love poem to the Land of Israel, "Morning Song," which charts a total spatial makeover:

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From the slopes of Lebanon to the Dead Sea,
We'll criss-cross you with ploughs.
We'll plant and build you,
We will make you beautiful.

We'll dress you with concrete and cement,
and carpet you with gardens …

We'll build a road through your desert,
We'll drain your swamps …[14]

Not many artists appear to have noticed this makeover, as a visitor to a 1926 exhibition of contemporary art in Tel Aviv noted, complaining that the works "have nothing to do with labor and laborers in this land."[15] Unlike the clearer passion of modern Hebrew literature and poetry, visual artists showed their revolutionary commitment in other ways and were less direct about articulating a new cultural identity.

Instead, some artists used more traditional Jewish motifs to show their fealty to the Zionist cause, as in a 1925 painting by Reuven Rubin (1893–1974). Viewed from west to east, the Old City of Jerusalem on the left is small and dark, pitted against the bigger and brighter hills above it to the right. The blackened rocks below the city look charred, and the roads around it appear to strangle it. Against this crammed and oppressive image of the holy city, the empty hills above it to the east glow with bright light. There are no traces of the Zionist project in the picture, but the potential for it is there. It is implied by the dramatic conflict between the Old City below, dark and depressing, and the space above, empty and full of light, dotted by neat gardens of green trees, close to the heavens and ready to be impregnated with new meaning (see Figure 5.6).

The desire to create an authentic Hebrew identity and gain direct access to the land, either through dead remains such as ruins or through living remains such as "biblical" Yemenis or native Arabs, was shared by the early Bezalel school and the modernists, although in very different ways, as Dalia Manor and Yael Gil'at note.[16] Was it the kind of identity

[14] Nathan Alterman, *Popular Songs* (פזמונים ושירי זמר), Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, vol. 2, 1979.
[15] Manor, *Art in Zion*, p. 171.
[16] Ibid., p. 185. Yael Gil'at, *Yemeni Art and the Creation of National Visual Culture in Israel* (צורפות בכור היתוך: אמנויות יהודי תימן והתהוותה של התרבות החזותית הלאומית בישראל, 1882–1967), Ben-Gurion University Press, 2009, p. 155.

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Fig. 5.6 Reuven Rubin, *Jerusalem*, 1925, oil on canvas, Rubin Museum collection, Tel Aviv.

Buber, Schatz, Sokolow, and some of the other Zionists from the 1901 congress had in mind? Let's put aside our intellectualism and sophistry, Buber told his listeners, and create art that will allow Jews to express themselves fully, independently, and truthfully. Let Jewish art teach the nation about itself.

The road to authenticity, whatever it means and however defined, was long. Some works by Modernists such as Siona Tagger, one of few female artists at the time, nudged it along with the random snapshots it took of life in the Yishuv, as in her iconic 1928 painting of Tel Aviv, titled simply *The Water Tower and Clock in Rothschild Boulevard*.[17] As the cultural capital of the Yishuv and a city designed as an urban Zionist utopia, Tel Aviv was more frequently painted than labor and laborers. However, the partial view of it in Tagger's work underplayed any kind of ideological grandstanding, even if its prosaic nature was

[17] For a photo see https://lib.ta.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=18879.

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meant to stress the opposite, to signify the success of a revolution that created the setting for such mundane views in such a short time.

Sculpting in Hebrew: Canaanism

The boldest expression of Modernism in the Yishuv was offered by a local Primitivist movement that flourished for a short time in the 1940s and a bit beyond. Disparagingly dubbed Canaanism at first, it was a local expression of wider trends in Western art at the time. Like all Primitivists, Canaanites used pre-industrial society as a retroactive telescope that allowed them to imagine a primordial past, often as a basis for what they promoted as a purer or more genuine national culture.[18] For Canaanites this meant a protest against Zionist politics and the kind of sentimental use of biblical tropes that characterized Bezalel. The romance of the Canaanites stretched far back to an ancient Middle Eastern universe they considered nobler even than the Hebrew Bible, with its petty "diasporic" politics of patriarchs, kings, and prophets.

The beginning of Canaanism is usually attributed to Yitzhak Danziger (1916–1977) and his 1939 statue *Nimrod*, a striking Primitivist figure: the falcon on the lad's shoulder is pharaonic, the boyish look recalls Greek sculptures of adolescent boys known as *kouroi*, the wide and flat nose is Polynesian, and the slender and sensual body brings to mind ancient Indian sculpting conventions (see Figure 5.7).

Uncircumcised and standing at about a meter tall, the handsome statute captivated people in the small Yishuv. When it was first displayed in the window of the Israel Gallery on Ben Yehuda street in Tel Aviv, "young women would press their lips to the glass and kiss the statue," recalled Danziger's older sister, Hava Magnes.[19]

Danziger spoke lovingly about "the grainy feel, the sandy essence of the stone and its red hue" which he used for making the statue. The alleged origin of the stone in Petra, the ancient Nabatean city carved in stone, was an attraction too. "I tried to bring together matter and spirit," he explained, "to create an emotional and material

[18] Chinsky, *Kingdom of the Meek*, p. 63.

[19] Neri Livneh, "The Legend of Danziger" (אגדת דנציגר), *Haaretz online*, February 19, 2002, available at www.haaretz.co.il/misc/2002-02-19/ty-article/0000017f-e1e7-df7c-a5ff-e3ff80320000.

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Fig. 5.7 Itzhak Danziger, *Nimrod*. Courtesy of Nurit Reches Danziger and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

completeness of a hunter, a falcon, a sandstone, Petra and the Nabateans, a meeting of a heroic myth with [Palestine] and the sandy desert rock."[20]

Canaanism presented New Hebraism with a revolutionary aesthetics that resonated far beyond a vague, brief movement. Against the tragedy of World War II, the Canaanites offered a radical position that took the central tenets of Zionism to their logical extreme. "Forget the Jewish diaspora and its pathetically passive so-called heroism," the Canaanites wrote in their 1943 *A Call to Hebrew Youth*: "shake it off," "clear the fog of the Jewish diaspora that stands between you, your country, and your past." Instead, "let the glory of the Hebrew era shine for you" and welcome "the ancient and intense world of our great ancestors, the people of this land since then" in all its glory and reality.

[20] Gideon Ofrat, "Nimrod, the Whole Story" (נמרוד: כל הסיפור), in *Gid'on Ofrat's Storeroom* (המחסן של גדעון עפרת), June 1, 2011, https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2011/06/01/נמרוד-כל-הסיפור/.

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Elements from ancient Middle Eastern art had been used in Bezalel before that – some artists created entire works in the spirit of ancient Mesopotamia, such as Abraham Melnikov's *Roaring Lion* statue, made in the early 1930s as a monument for fallen Hebrew soldiers. But with the Canaanites, with the audacious connections they made to an imagined Israelite past, Hebrew irredentism received its boldest visual expression. "Danziger and I were complete romantics," recalled the sculptor Kosso Skorohod, who later changed his last name to Eloul, an Akkadian word for harvest and the name of a Hebrew summer month. "Exoticism was everything for us. … We looked for the past in the bible of the present [*sic*]. … I visited archeological sites whenever I could," and the more remote and biblical, the better. "I imagined myself as a Nabatean … who shaped clay into forms that would one day mean the world to us, Young Hebrews." Egyptians and Assyrians? "They were too refined. The crude simplicity of the Canaanites spoke to us much more," Eloul confessed.[21]

Many of these energetic attempts to create an original Hebrew art, whether at Bezalel or by Canaanites, were at first considered forced, artificial, and orientalist. "Paint a pioneer, a camel, a donkey, or an Arab village and, voila! you have a native Hebrew artist," quipped the painter H. Glicksberg in 1933.[22] Most Jewish artists in the Yishuv ignored Arab Palestine and developed instead a Continental Modernism that appealed to them as Europeans, or European wannabes. Bezalel initiated that discourse, first by prescribing a distinct national aesthetics, and second by upholding art as a European cultural ideal that filtered the local environment and made it more meaningful to Zionist settlers. Zalman Shazar, who became Israel's third president, admitted that the familiar lens of modern art helped him and other immigrants from Russia accept the alienating environment of the Middle East and "fall in love once more with the homeland and its landscapes."[23]

Landscape, climate, and especially light were mentioned by artists again and again as markers of an elusive sense of place that eventually

[21] Kosso Eloul in conversation with Tamar Manor-Friedman, "Kosso Eloul 1920–1995," *Gid'on Ofrat's Storeroom*, October 18, 2019, https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2019/10/18/1995-1920-קוסו-אלול/

[22] Gila Ballas, "Who Are We, Really? East vs. West in Early Israeli Art" (מי אנחנו בעצם? מזרח מול מערב באמנות הישראלית בעשור הראשון למדינת ישראל), *Iton* 77: 230 (1999): 24–29.

[23] Dalia Manor, "Imagined Homeland: Landscape Painting in Palestine in the 1920s," *Nations and Nationalism* 9: 4 (2003): 533–554, at p. 551.

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became part of a visual vocabulary that eased some of the difficulties of acculturation. "Every country has a unique light that gives it a unique color," wrote Y. Kopalivitz in a 1928 art review that called on local Jewish artists to pay more attention to it. "In the Land of Israel," he advised, "we have neither the operatic blue of Italy nor the sugar-whiteness of its houses. … Light here blends the colors more evenly; it is more serious than Italian light, spiritual in nature," a fitting background to the cradle of monotheism, he concluded complacently.[24]

In the early 1980s the Israeli sculptor Yigal Tumarkin was asked about his artistic sense of place. He replied with the truism that good art is local even when it uses international vocabulary to express itself. Except that in the context of the Zionist cultural revolution it was more truth than truism. "I can't create without a soil, without a sense of place, without affinity to tangible things like a Jerusalem of Stone, [like] light, sea, desert, olive trees, and grapevines or a more spiritual sense of hope."[25] This obvious observation about any kind of local art echoed the prophecy Buber had made eighty years earlier when he spoke about the natural connection between place and art, between the establishment of a Jewish national community and the distinct art it would naturally inspire.

Drawing in Hebrew

Drawing tells the story slightly differently, and perhaps more clearly, because illustrations are crisper and less layered than paintings or sculptures, especially those for children. Zionists were consumed with their children, the first native generation of the future Jewish state, and paid great attention to books that instructed their young. Again, this was not unique to Zionism. In Europe, illustrated children's books became common tools of acculturation from the nineteenth century on. The tales of the Brothers Grimm in Germany, *Mother Goose* in Britain, Charles Perrault in France, Alexander Afanasyev in Russia, and Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark: nation after nation produced compilations of so-called fairytales that socialized children and taught them

[24] Y. Kopalivitz, "Mera'ava: The Seventh Artists' Exhibition in Jerusalem" (מֵרְאָוָה: תערוכת האמנים השביעית), *Ktuvim*, May 3, 1928.
[25] Ballas, "Who Are we, Really?" p. 28.

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about their national myths of origin and other local particulars. Early twentieth-century innovations in printing enriched the visual impact of those works and enabled the production of magnificent children's books, such as Me'ir Gur-Aryeh's 1925 illustrated Zionist tales, *Elijah the Prophet*.

The book was a collection of Zionist stories celebrating the Land of Israel and its new Jewish community. The obvious idealism of the tales, where Bible, Talmud, and Zionism combine to create distinct Hebrew myths of origin, is matched by an equally rich visual style, a dazzling display of Zionist orientalism à la Bezalel. The only difference between the illustrations of Gur-Aryeh and other Bezalel products was their high production value and an intensity that highlighted the Central European materiality of the imagery. The difference became more obvious in illustrations for children because those needed to convey ideas and tell a story simply and clearly, unlike more independent works of art. But if some of the magnificent illustrations for children in Europe reflected a rich and developed society, the lush visuals in Gur-Aryeh's book clashed with the reality of a small, fledgling national community.

The challenge lay in matching form to content. German Jews went through a similar search when faced with some of the pressures that gave rise to Zionism, except that in Germany assimilated Jews chose a cultural revival instead of a national one – a revival that relied on Eastern European Jewish sources and was later stimulated by the rise of Nazism. The wealthy businessman Salman Schocken encouraged his coreligionists "to go back to their roots," take traditional Judaism out of the ghetto, and bring about a cultural renaissance. "Let's entrust our tradition to the hands of poets and writers" instead of rabbis, he said, and helped to establish a Jewish cultural committee that oversaw the process.[26]

But turning religious tradition into art was no easier in Germany than it was in Palestine, even if the German Jewish community enjoyed a broader artistic context, attracted more artists, and had more money to support it. The spectacular failure of ספר האותיות, *The Book of Letters*,

[26] Ada Vardi, "The German Illustrated Book, 1900–1933," in Marit ben Yisrael and Ada Vardi, eds., *Book of Tom* (ספר תום), Asia Publishing/Mineged, 2022, p. 189.

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highlights the complexity of the challenge. In 1919 Schocken invited two rising artists, the illustrator Tom Siedmann-Freud and the Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon, to collaborate on an illustrated book that introduced the Hebrew alphabet to children. Siedmann-Freud was commissioned to draw the letters of the alphabet, and Agnon was asked to write short rhymes for each of them, a simple enough project that was eventually abandoned because of the difficulties it met with. Each of the artists failed in instructive ways. Siedmann-Freud's avant-garde art, steeped in the aesthetics of German Gothic and Christian Romanticism, "had no Hebraic spirit at all," as Bialik said elsewhere.[27] Agnon's art reflected the traditional Jewish Rabbinic world. When the two worlds met on the pages of the book, they clashed, or, as Agnon drily put it, it felt like having "to fit a foot for a shoe" instead of the other way around.[28] Even after both provided clarifying notes, Siedmann-Freud on her illustrations and Agnon on his verses, the book was shelved, along with plans for a Jewish version of a Brothers Grimm anthology.

It turned out that growing Semitic roots to order was not very realistic, as Boris Schatz and artists such as Gur-Aryeh realized when their visual vocabulary became progressively less relevant. The Hebrew culture that was forming in Palestine called for something entirely different, for new aesthetic notions that would capture "the charm of children's life [here in Palestine], the freedom they enjoy, their spirited nature ... their new stories and the Hebrew fun they have," as one reader observed in 1910.[29]

It was a formidable challenge that was exacerbated by the strong influence of Europe, especially on artists who grew up there, like the German graphic designer and illustrator Fritz Ruschkewitz. Although he changed his name to Peretz after immigrating to Palestine, Ruschkewitz's work remained deeply connected to his former home, as in a 1939 children's travelogue that he illustrated entitled *To Children's Land* (לארץ הילדים) (see Figures 5.8 and 5.9).[30]

[27] Marit ben Shaul, "Illustrations of our Own" (ציורים משלנו, על הספר הגנוז של ביאליק ותום), in ibid., n. 58.

[28] Nehama ben Aderet, "On Agnon's Book of Letters" (אני קטן ושר לילדים קטנים, על ספר האותיות מאת ש"י עגנון), *Agnon Research Journal* (כתב עת לחקר יצירת עגנון) 1 (2011), at p. 1.

[29] Quoted in Ayala Gordon, "Hebrew Illustrations" (איורים עבריים), in *Hebrew Illustrations: The Hebrew Illustrated Book in the International Era, 1900–1925* (הספר העברי המאויר לילדים העידן הבינלאומי, 1900-1925), Nahum Gutman Museum, 2005, p. 51.

[30] Nir Feldman, "Peretz Ruschkewitz, the Yekke Illustrator" (פרץ רושקביץ המאייר הייקה), *Et-mol* 258 (2018). The booklet is housed at the Israel Museum, Illustration Library, Youth Section.

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Fig. 5.8 Few children in the Yishuv had the inclination or the means to go on the kind of recreational trips abroad described in this middle-class travelogue, written by Anda Pinkerfeld and illustrated by Ruschkewitz. Moreover, save for a cactus on the right and a small palm on the left, it would be hard to tell that we are no longer in Europe. Israel Museum, Illustration Library, Youth Section.



Fig. 5.9 During their journey the children visit iconic pioneering sites, a kibbutz, a construction site, and finally make it to Tel Aviv. The details are all correct: the modernistic buildings of Tel Aviv, the palm trees, the cypresses, and even the uniformed traffic controller with his Ottoman fur hat. But like Ruschkewitz himself, perhaps, the boy in the picture, driving a car, wearing a jacket and cap, and smoking a pipe, belongs much more in London or Berlin than in Tel Aviv. Israel Museum, Illustration Library, Youth Section.

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The evolutionary jump in the formation of a distinct local style of illustration can be linked, as is usual with such changes, to a particular artist and the circumstances that shaped their art. The artist was Nahum Gutman again, and the circumstances were the sparse conditions and ideological asceticism of Yishuv life. Both likely inspired Gutman's airy minimalism, an early version of what Sara Breitberg-Semel later called דלות החומר, literally "want of material," impoverished art, or Arte Povera, as Italian artists dubbed it a bit later and for similar reasons.

Gutman's light touch was enthusiastically embraced by the public and the local art world alike, probably because the style was both sketchy and cheerful without being too colorful or seductive like Ruschkewitz's illustrations. It was a good fit for the fledgling and optimistic Yishuv community, as in a sketch of early Tel Aviv (see Figure 5.10). The empty spaces between the few flimsy houses on the sands of what later became the hub of Jewish life in Palestine are filled with swirling footprints (left by excited settlers?). A convoy of donkeys at the bottom, fluttering in as light as butterflies, carry heavy sacks of sand for the buildings that will soon crowd the empty space and make a more permanent mark on the dunes. There is no visual symbolism here, no references to an aesthetic tradition, only a scant materiality that marked Gutman's work and that of other illustrators who followed him.

Gutman immigrated to Palestine with his parents in 1905 at the age of seven and grew up in Tel Aviv. He began his studies at Bezalel and completed them in France, where he was likely influenced by contemporary artists such as Matisse and Dufy. But unlike the French artists, according to the illustrator Yirmi Pinkus, Gutman's lines are fewer, airier, and often not entirely closed, reflecting the elemental state of the Yishuv as a work in progress.[31] Light returns here as a central motif of the new Jewish life in Palestine.

After Gutman began to work for the new children's supplement of the leading daily *Davar* in the early 1930s, his lean style became

[31] Personal interview, Tel Aviv, November 6, 2022.

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Fig. 5.10 Nahum Gutman, *The Beginning of Tel Aviv*. Gutman Museum, Tel Aviv.

a new standard, a dynamic minimalism that was picked up by other illustrators, such as Aryeh Navon and Rut Schloss. The breezy figures were no doubt shaped by material and logistical considerations – budgets, publication deadlines – but to the minds of many they

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visualized the essence of a new, no-frills Hebrewism, where children are happy, playful, and energetic, they don't cry much, and they are not anxious.[32]

Hebrew Photography

But it was photography, more than any other art form, that gave Zionism its iconic shape and spread it at home and abroad. Like other nationalists, Zionists recognized the power of pictures early on. "You may well ask yourselves what photography has to do with our national revival," wrote Yaakov Zerubavel in 1912, "and yet I tell you that there is nothing more useful for our revival than photography."[33]

"Photographic exhibitions cost little and produce nice results," wrote another Zionist functionary a few years later in 1920, "and we should organize them in many countries."[34] A 1929 letter to the Jewish National Fund urged administrators to get with the times: follow Soviet Russia, where politics is communicated through photographs, and do the same for Zionism.[35] "Please hire me," wrote the pioneering filmmaker Yaacov Ben-Dov in passionate letters he sent to Jewish agencies in 1931. "The conditions of our movement today … demand a firm response from us. I can help," he wrote. "Commission me to make a series of photographs of construction workers, farmers, builders. ... There is good reason to take such photos ... and a great demand for them ... they will strengthen our hearts and lift our spirits and shine the light of our truth on the path leading to Zion."[36]

Photography was enlisted in the service of Zionism much more than any other art form, and for obvious reasons. First, it was immediate and accessible – a genuine record of the real world rather than a manipulation of it, as most people thought of it at the time. A more significant

[32] Muki Tzur, "To Educate a Thinking Reader" (לגדל קורא חושב, from a museum catalogue, *Davar Supplement for Children*, דבר לילדים), curated by Monica Lavie, Nahum Gutman Museum of Art, 2015, p. 108.

[33] Ya'acov Zerubavel (signed as Sagi Nahor), "Flutterings" (רפרופים), *Ha'ahdut* (האחדות) 1912 (ידי בניסן תרע"ב שנה שלישית), no. 25–26, at p. 19.

[34] Yosef Gal-Ezer, Keren Hayesod, 1920.

[35] From an unsigned letter to the JNF, November 12, 1929, quoted in Rona Sela, *Photography in Palestine* (הצילום בפלסטין/ארץ ישראל בשנות השלושים והארבעים), Hakibbutz Hame'uhad and Herzlia Art Museum, 2000, p. 40.

[36] From two different letters of 1931, in ibid., pp. 44–45.

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reason was economic. Camera equipment and the picture-production process were expensive, and since the distribution of photos relied on a number of agents, most photographers worked with sponsors, underwriters who made specific demands. "I want to establish a photographic agency in Palestine" and use it to show the face of Zionism around the world, wrote Nachman Shifrin in 1933. Shifrin owned one of the biggest photo-distribution agencies in Berlin at the time. "Has the world press seen what life on a kibbutz is really like?" he asked, "has it seen the hard and long work of Jewish farmers, the bravery of our pioneering men and women?"[37]

A number of photographers produced more independent work – ethnographic, artistic, personal – but the majority worked in the service of Zionist organizations and cast members of the Yishuv as extras in a grand national opera. Given the nature of the medium and of Palestine, it was not surprising. Before the Zionist era, Palestinian photographers engaged in their own politics when they took pictures of archaeological sites and cast locals and tourists in the role of biblical figures to promote tourism to the Holy Land: "Native outfits for customers," read an advertisement that hung in the window of the Jerusalem studio of Joseph Toumayan, a local Armenian photographer.[38] And when the Palestinian photographer Khalil Raad developed his ethnographic portfolio, his images of a rooted and traditional Palestine were very different from the modernistic pictures of the land that Zionists curated.

Zionist organizations used photography on a larger and more intensive scale by employing professionals such as the Hungarian photographer Zoltan Kluger (1896–1977), who became a Zionist house photographer by accident. When events in Europe forced Kluger to extend his 1933 visit to Palestine indefinitely, the compelling pictures he began to take in the Yishuv soon turned him into an important designer of the Zionist "look" (see Figures 5.11 and 5.12). Kluger worked for Nachman Shifrin and various Zionist organizations

[37] Letter to Leo Herman, general secretary of the United Israel Appeal, July 23, 1933, in Rana Oren and Guy Raz, *Zoltan Kluger: Head Photographer 1933–1958* (זולטן קלוגר צלם ראשי 1933-1958), exhibition catalogue, Eretz Israel Museum, 2008, p. 10.

[38] Guy Raz, *Photographers of Palestine / Eretz Israel* (צלמי הארץ מראשית ימי הצילום ועד היום), exhibition catalogue, Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, 2003, p. 31.

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and produced some of his best art as a news photographer in their service. In his sponsored trips across Palestine he focused primarily on those parts that showcased the Zionist settlement project in all its glory, including aerial photography – Kluger had served as an aerial photographer in the Austro-Hungarian air force during World War I – photos that extended the domain of Zionism to the sky and highlighted its proportions as a grand modern epic.

Kluger was a talented practitioner of the art and its modernistic aesthetics, a style that played into the self-perception of Zionists as revolutionaries, members of an anti-traditional movement that was aligned with industrial development and technological innovation. Like most of the Jewish photographers in the Yishuv he was trained in Europe and informed by contemporary trends, mostly German, such as photojournalism and New Objectivity, a clean, dynamic snapshot technique that aimed at capturing "objective" action. Soviet Russia was another source of influence, especially the manipulation of social reality. But Kluger, who was known for his motto "better staged well



Fig. 5.11 Zoltan Kluger, *Workers Coming Home after Work in the Fields, Hefer Valley*. National Photo Collection of Israel, Government Press Office, Wikimedia.

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Fig. 5.12 Zoltan Kluger, *Youth Aliyah Members from Germany Dancing the Hora in Kibbutz Ein Harod*. National Photo Collection of Israel, Government Press Office, Wikimedia.

than photographed badly," was not always happy with his assignments. "I can't breathe," Shifrin remembered him saying; "I'm dying here, I make no progress, I have no time to keep up with other photographers in the world. People here are dying of malaria, they languish in poverty, they are exhausted and gloomy, and I have to take pictures of them smiling." Unlike Ben-Dov, Kluger was "tired of taking pictures of cheerful pioneers."[39]

But there were photographers who still managed to do it, to capture the modernistic essence of Zionism in a more personal or artistic way, as it is often called. The avant-garde photographer Helmar Lerski was one of them. Lerski (1871–1956) was a special case, a unique artist, who had established his credentials before coming in the early 1930s to Palestine, where he made his signature industrial portraits of Yishuv members (see Figure 5.13) and created the iconic pioneering film *Avodah* (Labor). "It was not very difficult for me to create those pictures," Lerski

[39] Nahman Shifrin, quoted in Oren and Raz, eds., *Zoltan Kluger*, p. 26.

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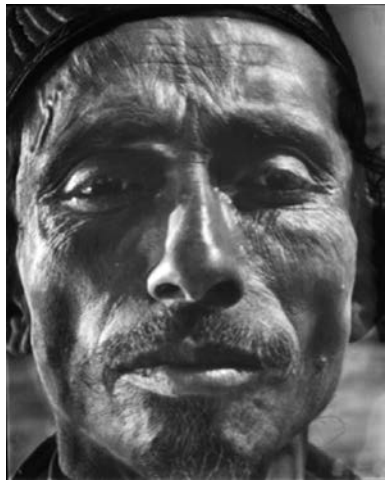


Fig. 5.13 Helmar Lerski, *Jemenit, aus der Reihe: Jüdische Köpfe / Araber und Juden, 1931–1935* (Yemeni, from the series: Jewish Heads / Arabs and Jews). Silver Gelatin Print. Estate Helmar Lerski, Museum Folkwang, Essen.

said in 1944, because "my work reflects the emotional reaction I had to everything I saw in Palestine when I first arrived."[40]

The first photographic exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1943 was made possible thanks to Lerski's artistic cachet. Called למשק ולנשק (roughly translated as "Farmers and Soldiers"), the exhibition was a retrospective of photographs commissioned by the National Fund in previous years. It was naked Zionist propaganda, and everyone knew it, which is why the museum objected to displaying the pictures in the first place. In the end, it was המצב (the Situation), as Israelis came to refer to their perpetual state of emergency, that tipped the scales, on condition that only pictures of the highest quality were selected. It was a convenient evasion, of course, though Lerski, for one, had no problems with it. Like Walter Benjamin, he believed that good art had the potential to reveal the moral value of ideology, or, as he put it, "the thought that one of my friends abroad will see my contribution to the Jewish war effort in Palestine gives me great satisfaction."[41]

[40] Sela, *Photography in Palestine*, p. 48.
[41] Ibid., pp. 6, 230.

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Hebrew Graphics

Graphic design joined other arts in propagating Zionist ideology through a variety of products designers were commissioned to create, from political posters, advertisements, book jackets, and fonts to more esoteric projects, such as an illustrated botanical dictionary of local flora. As with many of the Zionist cultural innovations, Germany was influential here too, especially after the rise of Nazism pushed many Jewish artists to Palestine, where they found work at Bezalel in architecture, landscape design, book design, dance, and music.

Attention to graphics began at Bezalel, where the study and practice of decorative art was part of the school's curriculum as early as Schatz's days. But when the artist and typographer Yosef Bodko became the director of the New Bezalel in 1936, design became even more important as a way to promote Jewish cultural regeneration.[42] In fact, the discipline was called practical design rather than graphic design at the time, a name that speaks for itself. "Practical design is not created for its own sake," explained a magazine article in 1943. "It is an artistic way to communicate with the public in order to convey specific messages: commercial, cultural or communal." Graphics "are efficient means for circulating new ideas," and the role of designers "is to explain to buyers what the seller wants."[43] The writer goes on to specify how: be a proficient illustrator with a good sense for color, understand the needs of consumers, and know the psychology of the target audience. These fundamentals of advertising were used in the service of Zionist ideology.

The expansion of the Yishuv and its economy during World War II professionalized the practice and used the art more directly to promote commerce and ideology, often together. This was the story of the brothers Gabriel and Maxim Shamir, formerly Sheftelowitz, who moved to Palestine in 1935 and began to ply their trade with flare and savvy (see Figure 5.14). They were also prolific, which made their work iconic, a graphic complement to Kluger's photographic work. Working within the pared down, simple, and forceful modernism that turned away from embellishment after World War I, the Shamir

[42] Hezi Ami'or, *Elly Gross Retrospective* (עלי גרוס, אותיות ועיטורים: מלאכת הספר של עלי גרוס), exhibition catalogue, copy by Gil Weissblei, Sifriya Le'umit, 2012, p. 14.

[43] *9 in the Evening* (בערב 9), February 18, 1943, unsigned.

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Fig. 5.14 In these ads for cigarettes, the Shamir brothers used the brand's name, Dugma, meaning example or model in Hebrew, for national socialization. The three boxes from right to left read: A Model Soldier, A Model Secretary, A Model Driver. They appeared separately in the daily *Haaretz* on December 28, 1948, November 12, 1948, and January 4, 1949.

brothers designed posters and other official signs – their studio designed the state's seal and some of the first banknotes – on which they often employed conspicuous Zionist tropes: iconic landscapes, pioneering imagery, and soldiers.

The Shamir brothers, like Kluger and other Yishuv artists, were products of their time and their countries of origin. From a design perspective their Zionist art was similar to contemporary political art in other countries, mainly in Europe, the USA, and Japan. It was marked by sharp, modern forms, strong colors, simple and often angular fonts, and images of intent and earnest-looking people. Initially the Shamir brothers were informed by a modern European aesthetic that came across in the elemental look of their work, such as that of the Hungarian Israeli designer Pesach Ir-Shay (István Irsai, 1896–1968). Later, as their world was plunged into a second big war, Soviet sensibilities became more visible in the emphasis on youth, on community, and on heroism.[44]

[44] Examples of Ir-Shay's work are available online; see, e.g., https://onegshabbat.blogspot.com/2015/03/blog-post_25.html. Old and new are contrasted in this symbolic and almost abstract modern poster. The round shape and thorns of the cactus on the left are a reminder of the wild and inhospitable nature of

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The differences were in the local context and the Hebrew language, of course. This is not meant as a slight but as a reminder of the cultural sources and the nature of the Zionist cultural revolution. The new content and context of these images were revolutionary for Jewish history and Jewish culture. People like Gutman, Lerski, and Ir-Shay matched form to content in more original ways, but most filled borrowed vessels with new wine, which was, after all, the goal of a revolution that called on Jews "to be like all other nations."

Hebrew Fonts

Fonts that displayed the spirit of New Hebraism soon followed graphics. Once again, the cultural context was European – more British in this case, as in the work of Edward Johnston (1872–1944), an Arts and Crafts typologist and calligrapher who drew inspiration from Old English and Latin manuscripts in the spirit of folk nationalism. This may have been the reason behind Johnston's popularity in Germany, where he taught for a while in the early 1910s, and where he may have influenced artists who later moved to Palestine. But Johnston is just an example of wider contemporary trends.

Fonts received a lot of attention in industrial economies at the beginning of the twentieth century. In part, this was due to the spread of mass communication and the rise in literacy. Both called for new letter shapes that would keep up with printing technologies and with the need to quickly process a growing number and variety of reading materials. But the industrialization of printing also inspired a countertrend that sought to revive older and slower writing traditions, as practiced by Johnston; a trend that thought of older scripts as symbols of the nation's soul.

Hebrew was swept up in this trend too, although modernizing its fonts was complicated by the antiquity of the language and by some of the hallowed traditions of writing it. Hebrew scribes were often bound by font shape and by writing regulations. And while printing was less encumbered, early printers still felt constrained by them, even secular printers such as the German Rafael Frank (1867–1920), who came

Palestine, which Zionism has tamed and turned into a modern and orderly universe, represented by the angular lines of the houses and trees of the new settlement on the right, awash in green.

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up with the Frank-Ruhl design, one of the first modern Hebrew fonts (see Figure 5.15). "Changing a Hebrew font," he wrote, "is complicated and requires consulting the *Shulkhan Arukh*," an important halakhic text.[45] The historical and typographical details that occupied Frank guided Zionist designers too. Some designers, like the hardened modernist Pesach Ir-Shay, put the past behind them and focused on geometry alone. Others, such as Elly Gross, had a more romantic approach that incorporated graphic elements from older Hebrew traditions.

When Ir-Shay published his first poster, people were scandalized by the modern shape of the letters he designed and thought of him as a "lunatic who defied Jewish tradition and dared to defile the [holy Hebrew] letters with his secular hands." But after the poet Bialik encouraged him to carry on with his work, he "felt that Hebrew print has received a new meaning, and that Hebrew has become a living language." "We all felt the need for change at that time," he recalled, "for a new form that will distinguish between the letters of scripture and the letters we use daily."[46] Ir-Shay named the font Haim, after Haim Nahman Bialik (see Figure 5.16).

As a font, Haim became widely used for newspaper headlines and obituaries that relied on the power and bluntness of the thick block letters. Ironically, it is often used in Jewish religious fatwas or pashkevils, plastered broadsides that rely on the crude visual power of a simple

אבגדה

Fig. 5.15 In 1924 the new Hebrew font Frank-Ruhl was introduced to the public in the Berthold Printing Press catalogue. Frank based his new design on a fifteenth-century prototype, known as the Bomberg type, after the Venetian printer Daniel Bomberg. He evened out line width, minimized curves, and replaced all embellishments by finishing the tops of all letters with a uniform tip.

[45] Rafael Frank, *On Printing Letters and Fonts* (על אותיות דפוס וגופנים), p. 10, available at www.tau.ac.il/~stoledo/fonts/frank-hebrew.pdf. Translation of the German original by Moshe Yarden, in *Halishka letipografia ivrit* blog, available at https://yaronimus.wordpress.com/.

[46] Pesach Ir-Shay, "The Creation of the First Hebrew Letter" (כך נוצרה האות העברית הראשונה), in *Halishka letipografia ivrit* blog, available at https://yaronimus.wordpress.com/2015/01/16/פסח-עיר־שי-כך-נוצרה-האות-העברית-המודרנ/.

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Fig. 5.16 Haim font, designed by Pesach Ir-Shay

and unsentimental font that shows no graphic trace of older Hebrew writing traditions.

Elly Gross (1921–2014), on the other hand, was more attuned to the romance of Hebrew nationalism. "Before designing letters," she wrote, "I always studied archaeological findings and old manuscripts because I wanted to preserve the unique character of Hebrew letters" (see Figure 5.17). "I was careful not to allow Latin script to influence my work," said Gross, who grew up in Vienna, came to Palestine with her parents at the age of eighteen, and studied graphics at Bezalel. The department put its students through a demanding curriculum of Hebrew revivalist history. For her qualifying examination, Gross was given four days to "produce at least six pages with several types of Ashkenazi script, including a [book] jacket."[47] The idea was to educate a new cadre of designers by giving them a solid foundation in the history of Hebrew scripts to enable them to use it as a basis for creating something new, a promise Gross fulfilled. During her productive career she produced an impressive portfolio that ran the gamut of Hebrew calligraphic traditions.

Hebrew Book Illumination

A more esoteric project, which shows the realm of Zionist cultural imagination, was a plan for an illustrated encyclopedia of local flora with a special mention of biblical plants. The project was the brainchild of the botanist and educator Ephraim Rubinowitz-Hare'uveni (1881–1953), who was the inspiration behind the botanical drawing classes at Bezalel. "I must tell you that I found a great sense of beauty and art in your work," Schatz wrote to Rubinowitz-Hare'uveni and his

[47] Gil Weissblei, ed., *Elly Gross: Letters and Ornamentations* (עלי גרוס: אותיות ועיטורים: מלאכת הספר של עלי גרוס), exhibition catalogue, National Library of Israel, 2012, p. 24.

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Fig. 5.17 For this 1944 jacket of a book on ancient Israelite economic history, Gross drew inspiration from a first-century CE Hebrew script found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. National Library of Israel.

wife, Hannah, after he visited the small botanical museum they had set up in their home. "Your work will be very useful to artists. I was greatly inspired by it."[48] At one point the couple drew up detailed plans for a "historical garden where a collection of plants mentioned in the Bible and in the Talmud would be on display," a garden imbued with "the spirit and good sense of the prophets and sages."[49]

The concept behind the couple's projects was a desire to do away with the separation between science and religion and join them together in the spirit of Zionism. "My heart tells me that you have chosen a true path," Bialik wrote to them after he too visited their home museum. "You approach our plants not as strangers, but as old friends … in joining together the plant world with the world of our ancient literature you are renewing the covenant between the nation and its flora," he added earnestly.[50]

[48] Tamar Manor-Friedman, ed., *The Song of the Grass: Shmuel Haruvi's Paintings* (שירת העשבים, ציורי שמואל חרובי), exhibition catalogue, Israel Museum, 2006, p. 10.
[49] Ibid., p. 30.
[50] Ibid., p. 31.

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The Rubinowitz-Hare'uvenis commissioned a friend, the landscape painter Shumuel Haruvi (1897–1965), to produce a series of watercolor studies. Haruvi was educated in the old Bezalel, where he learned to style local flora into decorative shapes. However, the naturalist watercolors he created for the encyclopedic project could not have been more different. And although the reference book never materialized, Haruvi's flowers remain a graceful visual index of the Palestinian natural world and a testament to the Zionist attempt to domesticate it (see Figure 5.18).



Fig. 5.18 Shmuel Haruvi, *Sage*, 1923. The botanist Ephraim Rubinowitz-Hare'uveni believed that the sage plant was the inspiration behind the design of the Temple menorah or candelabra. He planned to give it a prominent place in the garden of historical plants he and his wife, Hannah, designed. In the 1960s a modified version of the garden became part of a national park, Ne'ot Kdumim (ancient pastures). From *The Botanist's Brush: Shmuel Haruvi's Drawings for the Hareuveni Floral Treasury of the Land of Israel*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2006, courtesy of Ziva Seidler.

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Or, in Zionist parlance, a symbol of the Jewish aesthetic regeneration, which the drawings exemplified.

In the end, all of these artistic works and artifacts became Hebrew not because of the quality of the light in Palestine, not because of Jewish history, and not because of Jewish ethics, which Zionists dreamed of visualizing somehow. What made art "Hebrew" was the prosaic fact that it was created by Hebrews – that is, by a community of artists who were distinguished by a set of characteristics we call "national." And if the art itself was not unusual, the community that created it was formed in unusual ways that were reflected in its art.

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