

Michal Heiman

As a person interested in the history of psychiatric and scientific photography in the 19th century, the most exciting thing for me in Michal Heiman's work is the ways in which she makes those strange, painful, and complex photographs resurrect, gain new relevance, and challenge fixed perceptions regarding documentation and testimony, therapy and manipulation, science and art. Her work moves frantically in many directions, past and present, personal and public, canonical and current. She is uprooting images from art books, daily magazines, hospitals archives, asylums folders, and family albums. In my mind, she penetrates into images, attacks and moves them, and tries to rehabilitate them. In her work, the history of photography doesn't rest peacefully in a sealed past, inasmuch as psychoanalytic treatment most likely doesn't rest sealed in a clinic.

Michal Heiman Tests

The *Michal Heiman Tests* are a series of complex works through which Heiman is trying to trace and criticize the ways in which images have been used and appropriated throughout the history of psychology. The *Michal Heiman Tests* consist of boxes she constructs, based on different psychological tests and methods that utilize images as a diagnostic tool. Both the psychological tests and the Heiman tests include manuals that provide instructions on how to employ the boxes.

The first *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 1* is based on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT): a visually-based projective psychological test developed in the 1930s at the Harvard University Psychological Clinic. The TAT box includes cards with ambiguous which are shown to the subject by the examiner that, as Heiman learned, were based mainly on photographs. The *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 1* consists of photographs collected from Heiman's own personal archive – including traumatic images of Israeli wars and military occupation - and placed in box, along the lines of the TAT. The *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 2* is a test based on photographs of women, in a green box. In both the TAT and M.H.T.'s, the subject is asked to talk about the images with the examiner. *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 3: What's on Your Mind?* (fig. 2) was performed in a theatrical setting at the Acre Fringe Theatre Festival, 2004, and was based on the interpretation of short videos rather than still photos. *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4 – Experimental Diagnostics of Affinities* is based on the Szondi Test, a visually-based diagnostic tool developed by the Jewish Hungarian psychiatrist, Léopold (Lipot) Szondi, first published in 1947. The Szondi Test operates essentially through affinity-directed choice-reactions, its stimuli consisting of forty-eight cutout photographs of mental patients and criminals divided into six sets. Each set contains eight pictures of conditions defined as mental disorders by the psychiatric community at the time. In Heiman's test, like the original Szondi test, the subjects examined are asked to declare attraction or repulsion (*like/dislike*) towards cutout portraits.

The *Michal Heiman Tests* are designed for and performed in museums or gallery spaces, in "testing stations," in which an examiner presents a viewer with images from the box and invites him/her to talk about the pictures. Fig. 3, for example, shows the "testing station" of *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 2: My Mother-in-Law – Test for Women* enacted in Le Quartier Center for Contemporary Art in Quimper, France. The test takes place while the subject reclines on a couch with the examiner out of view, as in Freud's traditional prescription for psychoanalysis. Headphones, microphones, and a video camera record the test.

In her tests, Heiman juxtaposes two ways of seeing: the psychoanalytic and the museal, pointing out the relationships these institutions share, problematizing the resemblance between the modes of observation they incorporate, as sites where sight is being tested, where the observer is located in hierarchical relations: "Heiman is attracted to these two systems, seduced by one and functioning within the other, but at the same time she criticizes them, especially by turning one against the other. She bypasses the museum apparatus by way of the psychological apparatus. Within the framework of the museum institution she develops exchange relations borrowed from the psychological apparatus rather than those practiced in the museum, in which the boundaries of the subject are predetermined by the way he or she is placed in front of the artistic object."¹

Throughout her work, Heiman deals with what is called in Hebrew *tzilum metupal*, a term usually defined as "manipulated photography": interventions of the artist that are usually considered as eliminating or hurting the "photographic truth" that is evident in the unmanipulated image. However, Heiman's work invites an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew term, defining *tzilum metupal* as "photography that is nursed or receives treatment," where the photograph becomes the patient, whose latent truth we are trying to extract.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Heiman's work is the ways she makes the photographs "work." Through the stamps she imprints on them, Heiman addresses the photographs, pointing questions at them - questions extracted from the therapist's sofa and her own vocabulary: "What's on your mind?" "Can you remember?" "What did you see?" "Is it up to you?" (fig. 7). Heiman "penetrates" the photographs by transplanting her own image with a camera in hand and the imprinted stamp "I was There" (fig. 5). In her video series *Thirdly* (Fig. 6), Heiman "wakes up" women depicted lying down in photographs by "photo-activating" them through animation. She makes photographs work, extracting them from one context by attaching or confronting them with images that attack their content; and then putting them into action in her *Michal Heiman Tests* enactments (fig. 1-4).

¹ Ariella Azoulay, *Death's Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy*. Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2001 [pp.109-113].

Winking and Attacks on Linking

In her work, Heiman is developing “a new discipline that inhabits a field between art and therapy, photography and diagnosis, theory and praxis.”² She uses a variety of materials from various sources, transgressing the boundaries of art and aesthetics to that of “scientific evidence,” and “case studies.” Through various strategies, she extracts images from one context and attaches them to another, producing what she calls “attacks on linking.”³ The term is taken from the title of a 1959 essay by the British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1897-1979) that deals with the destruction from attacks on “links” such as thought processes, language, and emotional development.⁴ By the act of positioning two images alongside each other, says Heiman, one cannot think about them other than as adversaries. Nevertheless, “the constant distinction between the two notions screens the possibility of regarding attacks and links – that take place simultaneously, at times even in different, disconcerting spaces – as paving the way to a new link that awaits discovery.”⁵

In her work *Do-mino No. 10* (fig. 8) Heiman attaches two monochromatic photographs, one of a young woman taken by Albert Londe in France in 1889, and the other of a Palestinian girl that was taken 99 years later by the Israeli photographer Micha Kirshner in Palestine, 1988. In both photos only the subject's right eye is open, while the left eye is closed. On both photos Heiman added stamps: “subject known” and “subject unknown”. Two images of two females taken from distant times and places with only a winking gesture that connects them in this single frame that simultaneously links and attack the links between them. But what do we see? Is this a wink? The wink is a nonverbal form of communication; a meaningful hidden message the receiver should detect. Sometimes it expresses a sexual interest, or flirtation. What message can we identify in those winks?

The photographed child is a “subject known,” as Heiman’s stamp declares. It is one of the iconic pictures taken during the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories in the 1980s. The caption under the photograph gives her name and place - Huda Masud, Jabalia Refugee Camp - that provides the spectator (at least the Israeli and Palestinian) minimum information to suggest the meaning of the “wink”: the Palestinian baby girl lost her eye due to a rubber bullet fired by Israeli soldiers. The original picture of the girl extended lower, and included her genitalia. Heiman treated this photograph by cutting the image at the waist-line. Her forceful action brings to mind the complexity of power relations that are embedded here.

What role does the female nude play in an image dealing with the evils of Israeli occupation? Why, in order to see the girl's damaged eye, are we to see her vagina? Attacking and saving, says Heiman, are a leitmotif in her work. “In most cases, only the act of saving is visible. That which had preceded it is usually concealed. [...] The attackers, once they are done attacking,

² Michal Heiman, lecture/essay 'A Perfect Strike', 'On Perfection', Whitechapel Gallery, Intellect publishers, Bristol UK / Chicago, USA, 2013 (pp. 259-286).

³ Michal Hieman, 2008. *Attacks on Linking*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

⁴ Wilfred Bion, 'Attacks on Linking,' *Second Thoughts* [1967] (London: Karnac Books, 1990).

⁵ Michal Heiman, 2008. 'Through the Visual: A Tale of Art that Attacks Linking, 1917-2008, in Heiman, *Attacks on Linking*, *Ibid.*, p.163.

return to saving, boastfully presenting that which was saved.”⁶ Who is the attacker and who is the savior in this picture? On one hand, the photographer directs the photojournalistic beam of light towards the wounded girl in order to highlight and protest against a state of violence and occupation, yet his illumination flows down and leave us with a supplement. On the other hand, the mother, bigger than the frame but unconscious of its borderline, becomes a hand. This hand - helping, protecting and leading - positions the naked body of her blind child in front of the invasive lens of an Israeli photographer who is shooting her one-eyed portrait in order to show Israelis the results of their actions.

The second wink is more difficult to decipher. The caption at the bottom of Londe's photograph identifies the portrait as *Hysterical Wink (blepharospasm hystérique)*. Londe, a pioneer in medical photography working at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris under the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, advanced photography as a diagnostic tool, an “iconographic document” supplementing the doctor's eye, that “will tell far more than a lengthy explanation,” and preserve “the exact image of phenomena.”⁷ From these documents we know that the woman, who was admitted to a hospital for the mentally ill, was diagnosed as suffering from photophobia - hypersensitivity to light that accompanies paralysis in muscles of the eyelids, catalepsy, periodic loss of color differentiation, and tunnel vision⁸. Her visible wink was the symptom of her internal mental hysteria.

Following Ulrich Baer's analysis of this image, I will argue that this photograph bears a symptom not of hysterical photophobia but of the collapse of the clinical gaze and the diagnostic apparatus. Instead of disclosing her inner truth, this hysterical patient simply imitates what she saw – namely, the lens of a camera: “Charcot failed to recognize that the symptoms of catalepsy, photophobia, tunnel vision, and black-and-white perception corresponded to the characteristics of this photographic diagnostic apparatus.”⁹ Charcot's patient, locked in the Salpêtrière, locked under her diagnosis as hysterical, locked in front of the lens' inquisitive gaze, cooperates with the photographic apparatus by imitating it, turning herself into a camera, and reflecting her own image back to the camera.

Winking, cyclopean, one eyed women emerge from Heiman's work as a guideline, which often features her own portrait: in the video *Thirdly: Animation No. 4* (fig. 6) the lying woman in the still image becomes her own portrait and starts to wink at the spectator; in the series *I was There* (Fig. 5) Heiman's implanted figure appears in famous pictures with a camera in hand, covering one of her eyes, with the lens “documenting” what the shocked eye is “seeing”, mocking the idea of documentation, indexality and testimony; in *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4* again we find her one eyed self-portrait, this time as a child

⁶ Michal Heiman, *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷ Albert Londe, 1893. *La photographie médicale. Application aux sciences médicales et physiologiques*, 3-4, quoted in Georges Didi-Huberman, 2003. *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, (Translated by Alisa Hartz), Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 286.

⁸ *La Nouvelle Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (periodical) 2 (1889): 107-129, 114, in Ulrich Baer, 2002. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, pp. 55-58, notes 75-78.

⁹ Ulrich Baer, *Ibid.*, pp. 55-58.

dressed in a pirate costume (fig. 10), evoking her childhood. Another early self-portrait from 1984 indicates the emotional and biographical aspect of the camera/women in her work: Fig. 9 shows her face covered with her hands, only one eye peeking out from behind them. Talking about this picture in a conversation with Ariella Azoulay, Heiman recalled: "For a long while during my therapy, I needed to get my therapist's face out of focus. I found a way in which, using my hands and face, I built a kind of camera to hide within, peeping through an opening with one eye, like one does when taking a photo."¹⁰

I would like to dwell a little more on the one-eyed-camera-women, which I find paradigmatic of Heiman's work. To do this, I'll pull one last card from *Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4*. This card presents the cutout version of Paul Strand's *Blind Woman*, photographed in 1916.

Strand's photograph of the Blind Woman, published in *Camera Work* (49/50) and exhibited in Gallery 291, marks the direction in which "straight" photography was heading. When photographing his blind woman, Strand was bothered with the question of "how do you photograph people in the streets without their being aware of it?"¹¹ He claimed that to this end he invented a "deceptive angle" camera that had a false lens screwed to front side of the camera box, while the real lens, coming from the side of the machine, was hidden under his arm and directed straight at subjects without them noticing. As Meir Wigoder argues, "Strand's wish to be objective depended on the premise that the viewer would be able to see individuals as they really are, if the photographer remained unseen."¹²

I wish to use Wigoder's analysis of this picture to link the blind woman's 'wink' to Londe's hysterical patient, to Huda Masud's missing eye, and to Michal Heiman's self-portraits. "Strand's Blind Woman," writes Wigoder, "reveals the limits of photographic vision. [...] Indeed, the blind woman appears almost to be mirroring Strand's own activity, with her sign, 'Blind', taking the place of the Ensign camera hanging from his neck. Strand's deceitful strategy, facing in one direction while looking in the other, is also echoed by the woman, whose frontal pose makes us expect her to face us, yet her head is turned away. While the woman's right eye resembles the dummy lens on Strand's camera, her left eye gives the impression it can look sideways, outside the boundaries of the frame, like the real camera lens that photographed the woman from under Strand's arm."¹³

I believe that Heiman's attraction to these figures flows from the potential of the woman/camera to sabotage the links between reality and representation, world and picture, photographer and photographed. With her parody of the camera, she pollutes the transparency that those links require. If the authority, objectivity, and transparency to which scientific, straight, and documentary photography aspire, lie on trying to evacuate or repress

¹⁰ Michal Heiman, A conversation with Ariella Azoulay, 'Using my hands and face, I built a kind of camera to hide within,' d' Israel, Le Quartier, France, 1998 (pp. 72-83).

¹¹ Calvin Tomkins, Paul Strand: 60 Years of Photographs, New York: Aperture, Monographs, 1976, 114, quoted in Meir Wigoder, 2003. "Paul Strand's New York Portraits: Privet Eye – Public Space", *History of Photography* Vol. 27, No. 4, Winter, 350.

¹² Meir Wigoder, *ibid.*, 357.

¹³ Meir Wigoder, *ibid.*, 358.

all suspicion of mediation and presence of the photographic apparatus from the data registered in the photograph, ways that scientists registered, then the one-eyed winking woman is the return of the repressed.

Michal Heiman is an artist and theoretician, based in Jaffa-Tel Aviv. Heiman teaches at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem; the Tel Aviv University, Faculty of Arts; the Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Psychotherapy Program; and the Israel Winnicott Center. For almost three decades she has been developing a new discipline that inhabits a field between enactments/performances and psychoanalytic theory, photography and diagnosis, theory and praxis. Among her notable works are a lecture/film on British psychoanalytic Wilfrid Bion, and video works based on case studies by psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and W.D. Winnicott. She is the first winner of the Shpilman International Prize for Excellence in Photography, awarded by the Israel Museum.



Fig. 1. Michal Heiman Tests: Upper right - Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T). No. 1 (1997); lower right - Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 2: My Mother-in-Law – Test for Women (1998); left - Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4 – Experimental Diagnostics of Affinities (2010-2012).

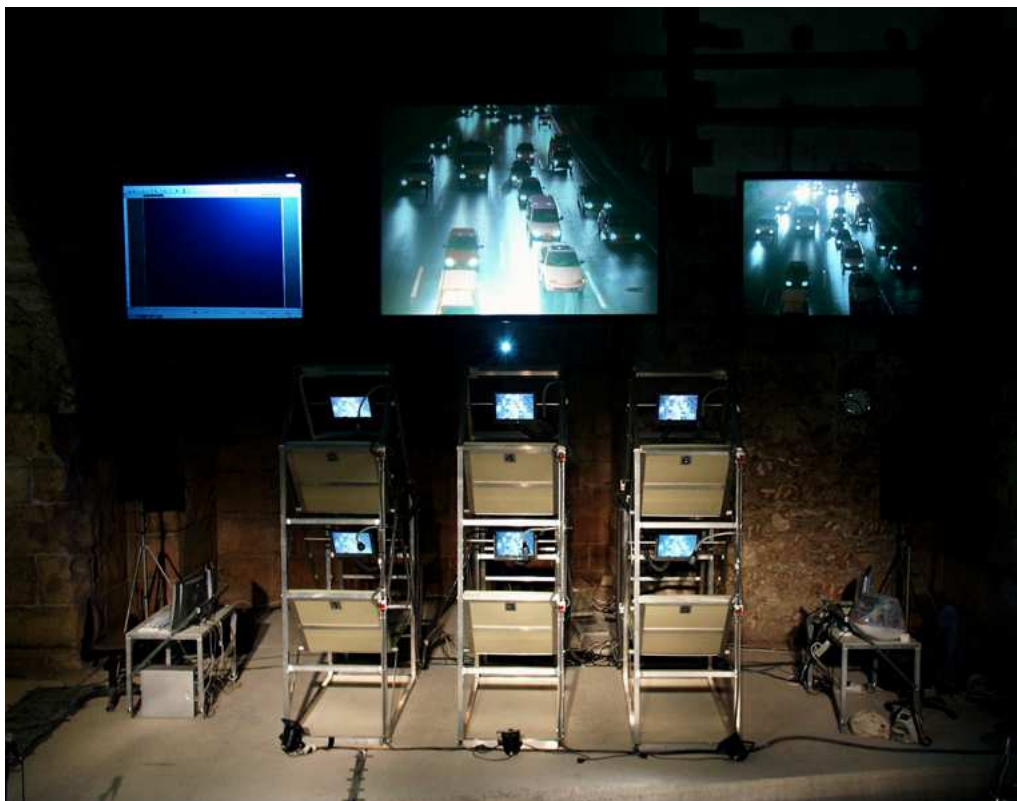


Fig. 2. Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 3: What's on Your Mind? Enactment, 2004, Israeli Fringe Theatre Festival, Acre; Photography: Oren Sagiv



Fig. 3. Michal Heiman Test (MHT) No. 2: My Mother-in-Law – Test for Women, Enactment, Quimper, France, 1998.



Fig. 4. Test card number 14 UH (3) from Michal Heiman Test (MHT) No. 1: a file of man marching with their arms raised in the air. Photographer: the late Yoram Mohilever; El Arish, Six Day War, 1967. On the left: the back of images 4 G (1), 15 S (2) and 10 BG (2).

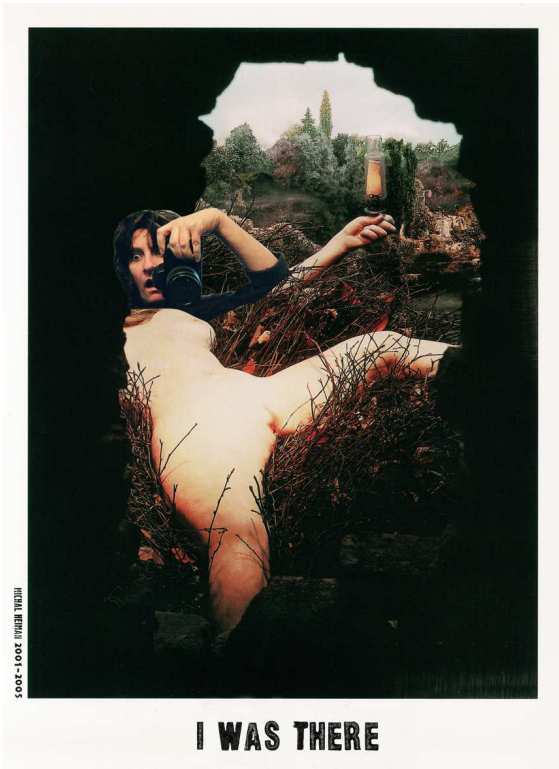


Fig. 5. Michal Heiman, I was There No. 6 (Marcel Duchamp / Given, 1946-66), 2004-05, digitally printed manipulated readymade and stamp, 62x45cm



Fig 6. Michal Heiman, Thirdly: Animation No. 4 (Michal and Subjects Unknown) 2008, photo activation 1:30 min.



Fig. 7 Michal Heiman, What's on Your Mind, 1984-2005.

מה את חושבת ?

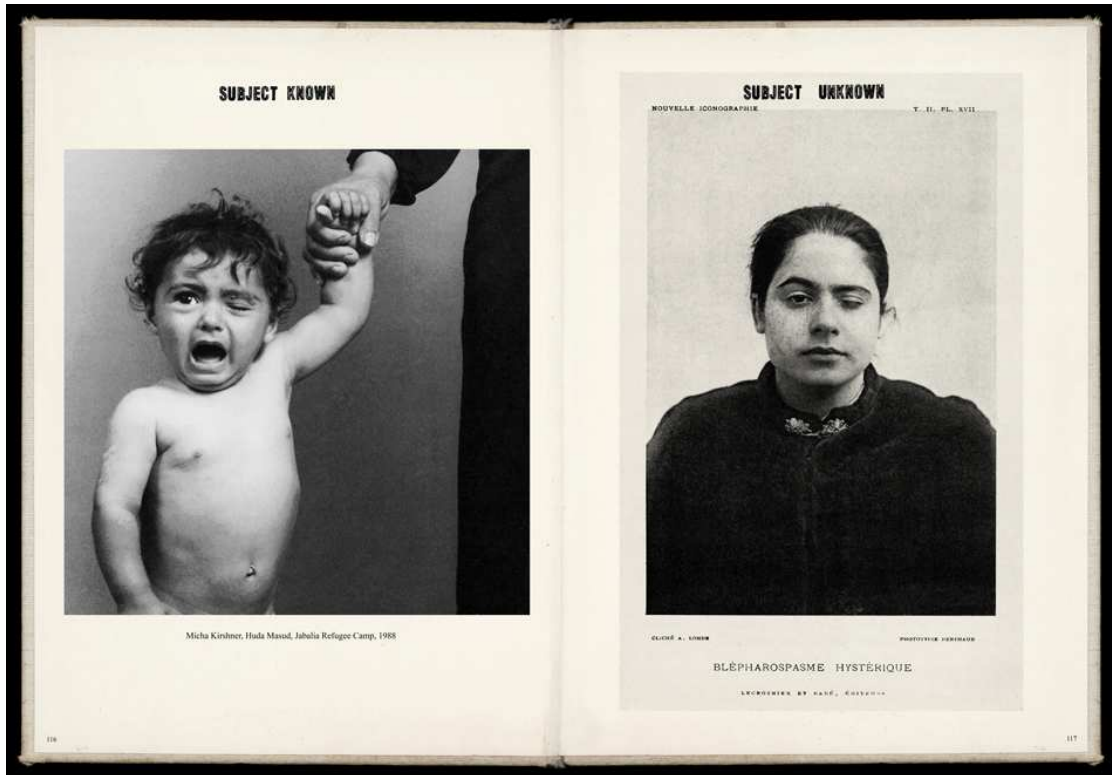


Fig. 8. Michal Heiman, Do-mino No. 10 (Micha Kirshner, Huda Masud, Jabalia Refugee Camp, 1988/Albert Londe, The Hysterical Wink, 1889), 2008.



Fig. 9. Michal Heiman, Self-portrait, 1984.



LIKE?



Fig. 10. Right: Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4 – Experimental Diagnostics of Affinities (2010-2012); Left: one of the cards from the Michal Heiman Test (M.H.T.) No. 4, with a cutout portrait of Strand's Blind Woman.

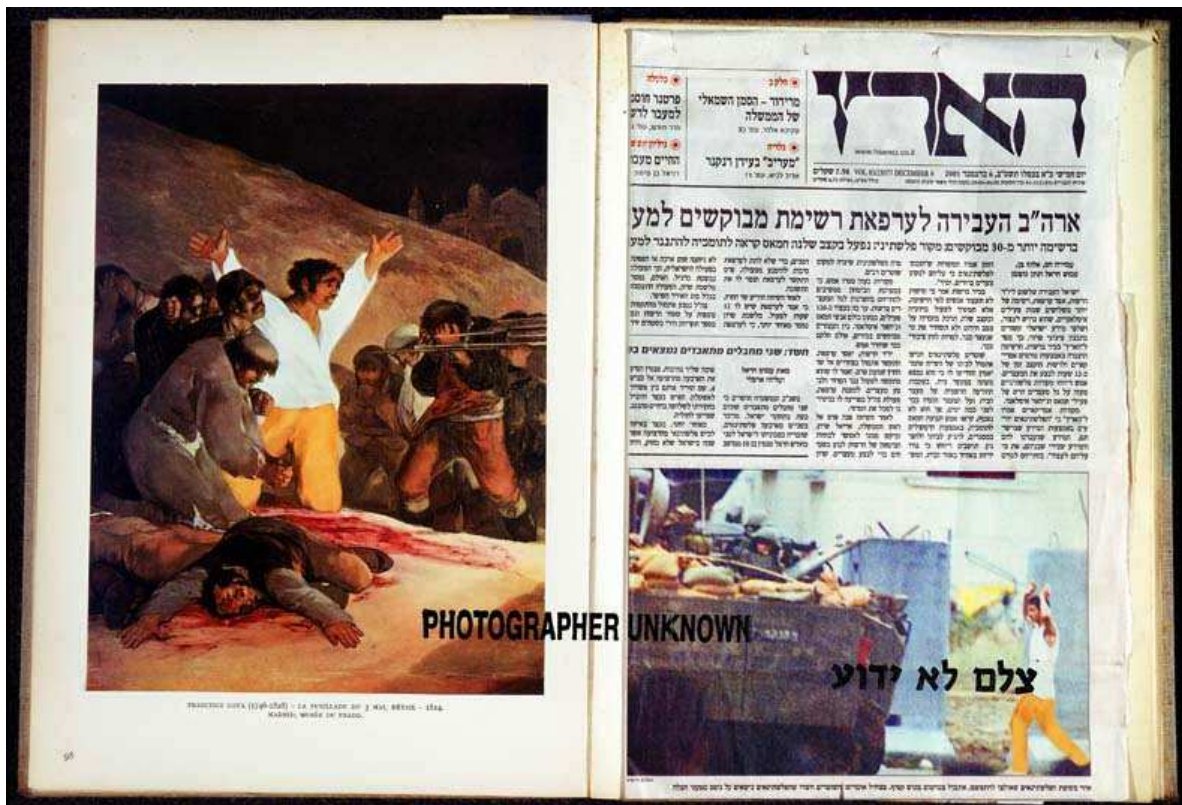


Fig. 11. Michal Heiman, Do-Mino No. 1: Francisco Goya, The Third of May 1808 (1814)/ Photographer Unknown (Reuters, Haaretz), Gush Katif (6 Dec. 2001), 2008.