

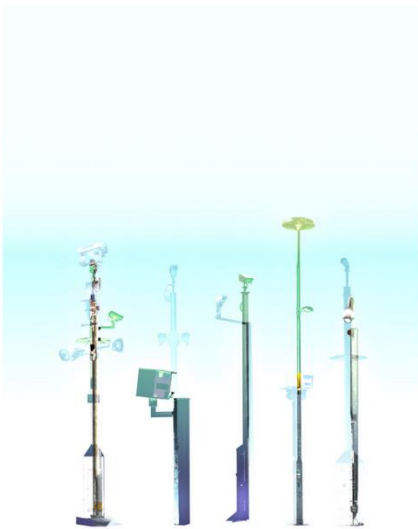
1.21.12 By Nili Goren, Tel Aviv Museum

The text first appeared in the framework of the exhibition, currently on view in Tel Aviv Museum as part of Shaham's win of the Constantiner Award for Photography 2012. Shaham received the Shpilman grant for Israeli Photography Students 2011.

Assaf Shaham uses new ways to convene old souls to discuss mythological issues that have fascinated visual culture even before it was assigned theories. With calculated lightness, Shaham travels the tracks of discourse in parallel, opposing and circular directions. He creates poetic images while provoking the artificial intelligence of sophisticated mechanisms, disrupts the operating instructions of advanced equipment and defiantly breaches the accepted codes of ethics and esthetics.

He applies basic manipulations onto complex instruments, thus juxtaposing myths of prehistoric culture—e.g. the primitive belief that drawing a living creature subjugates it or removes its soul—with modernism in art, with constitutive theories of 20th-century history of photography, with post-modernist subversion and with contemporary commentaries of popular, virtual and cellular culture. With a seemingly innocent move, whose visual expression is simple and succinct, he renews complex controversies that were considered long outdated. He posits, near a bluish field of wireless-controlled security cameras standing erect like flowering squills—collected throughout public spaces in London and joined into one photograph whose gradual colorfulness is reminiscent of three-dimensional imaging—reminders to the early days of photography, among them a key work that defines the basic principle of photography.

New Ways to Steal Old Souls



The photograph **Writer/Storyteller** has a black-and-white three-dimensional scan of hollow portraits from August Sander's book **People of the 20th Century**. Shaham cut out the images and turned this colossal project into a topography depleted of 20th-century characters yet reflecting, through the cuttings, theories of physiognomy and typological photography. On the surface of the scanned object, which is also a sculpture of a book and an archeological excavation of the history of photography, is the author's missing reflection, with the designation "Storyteller" added in the title.

In a 2011 inkjet printing of a three-dimensional scan, the author from Sander's 1929 silver print meets **The Storyteller** of Jeff Wall's colorful light box (1986).

This meeting convenes a re-reading of Roland Barthes' 1968 essay "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's response to it, the following year, in the essay "What is an Author?" as well as of post-modern literary criticism and of the cultural studies of the past two decades, offering a reflexive model of reading literature according to subjective reality and reading reality according to textual interpretation. Through other works by Shaham, that include quotations, appropriations and reproductions, the discussion is extended towards the arena of cyberspace, beyond the death of the author and the written work to the era of electronic words and details, and to the birth of the hyper-reader and hyper-text.



Time After Time and Again

The photograph **Writer/Storyteller** has a black-and-white three-dimensional scan of hollow portraits from August Sander's book **People of the 20th Century**. Shaham cut out the images and turned this colossal project into a topography depleted of 20 th-century characters yet reflecting, through the cuttings, theories of physiognomy and typological photography. On the surface of the scanned object, which is also a sculpture of a book and an archeological excavation of the history of photography, is the author's missing reflection, with the designation "Storyteller" added in the title. In a 2011 inkjet printing of a three-dimensional scan, the author from Sander's 1929 silver print meets **The Storyteller** of Jeff Wall's colorful light box (1986).

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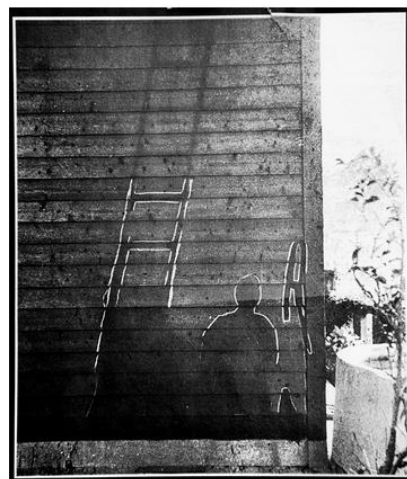
Writer/Storyteller

Unlike the masterpieces of photography that Sherrie Levine appropriated in the reproductions carefully printed and exhibited in her name, Shaham presents anonymous images downloaded from databases or file-sharing websites or scanned from books and journals. For Shaham, photographs disseminated in any media are common objects, and just as the early ready-mades were transposed from their original surroundings to museum spaces through changing their context and function, so he samples photographs from advertisements and websites onto the body of his work and to the space of the exhibition.

The series "**Full Reflection**" continues Shaham's silent iconoclasm, desecrating not only books of master photographers and rights of anonymous ones, but also his own status as an artist, and praising the works of table scanners. The color surfaces and lines—originally geometrical frames, developed in the past year to diagonal and curved lines—are the outcome of two reciprocating scanners. The works are light-only photographs, devoid of matter, plot or subject; a visual mapping of technical implementations, coordinates of dancing machines; strips of light from one scanner received in another scanner and commanded by the artist/equipment operator in different time points to be processed to a digital file. The scanning pace, determined by technical variables (such as resolution) dictated by the operator, creates manipulations resulting in varied versions of geometrical abstract in photography.



From the Series "Full Reflection"



Hiroshima

Shaham emphasizes the choosing and editing that are fundamental for photography. These actions, he says, turn the photographer into a small-scale curator. Alongside photogram-style photographs, created by direct photography of objects placed on color-reflecting surfaces, Shaham presents a small reproduction of an anonymous photograph from Hiroshima, from a 20th-century photography journal—a tragic shadow-illustration of a figure and a ladder etched onto a wall in Hiroshima, a result of the intense light and heat that accompanied the atomic explosion. It is a stunning photogram with delicate outlines demonstrating the optics and chemistry of photography through the physics of calamity.

Opposite the small image of Hiroshima that was imprinted with light and heat in the collective memory card stands a huge image of an Ilford photographic paper package; the image in its center, usually some impressive landscape or still life, has been replaced by Shaham with the famous photograph of the rape-like photo shoot scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's film "Blow-Up." In the photograph, blown up to immense size, Shaham implanted an image from this film that deals with blowing up photographs in order to discover information obtained there without the photographer noticing it on the scene. Through the relation between photographer, photographed object and the event, and between an event and its appearance in the photograph, the film deals with the relation between reality and subjective imagination and hallucination, and doubts the photograph's ability to represent anything beyond itself.

The photograph Shaham chose to implant at the center of the immensely blown-up envelope, without losing its resolution, is taken from the violent photo-shoot scene at the studio, which typically deals with the relation between photographer and photographed object, and not from the scene dealing with blowing up the photographs. The essential theme emerging from those long minutes when Thomas, Antonioni's photographer, blows up the photographs he had taken the previous day in the park, and discovers in them what he takes to be a murder plot, is the elusive relation between the information in the photograph and what exists in reality. With his camera Thomas rages and makes passionate love with Veruschka, the submissive model hunched under him and surrendering to his harsh camera. Thomas soon thereafter faces the photographed reality, as he tries to intensify photography's enlarging properties and reaches a void, the blurring created when the patches of information in the photograph expand to over-large distances and white spaces erase the chance to understand the photographed from the enlargement.