

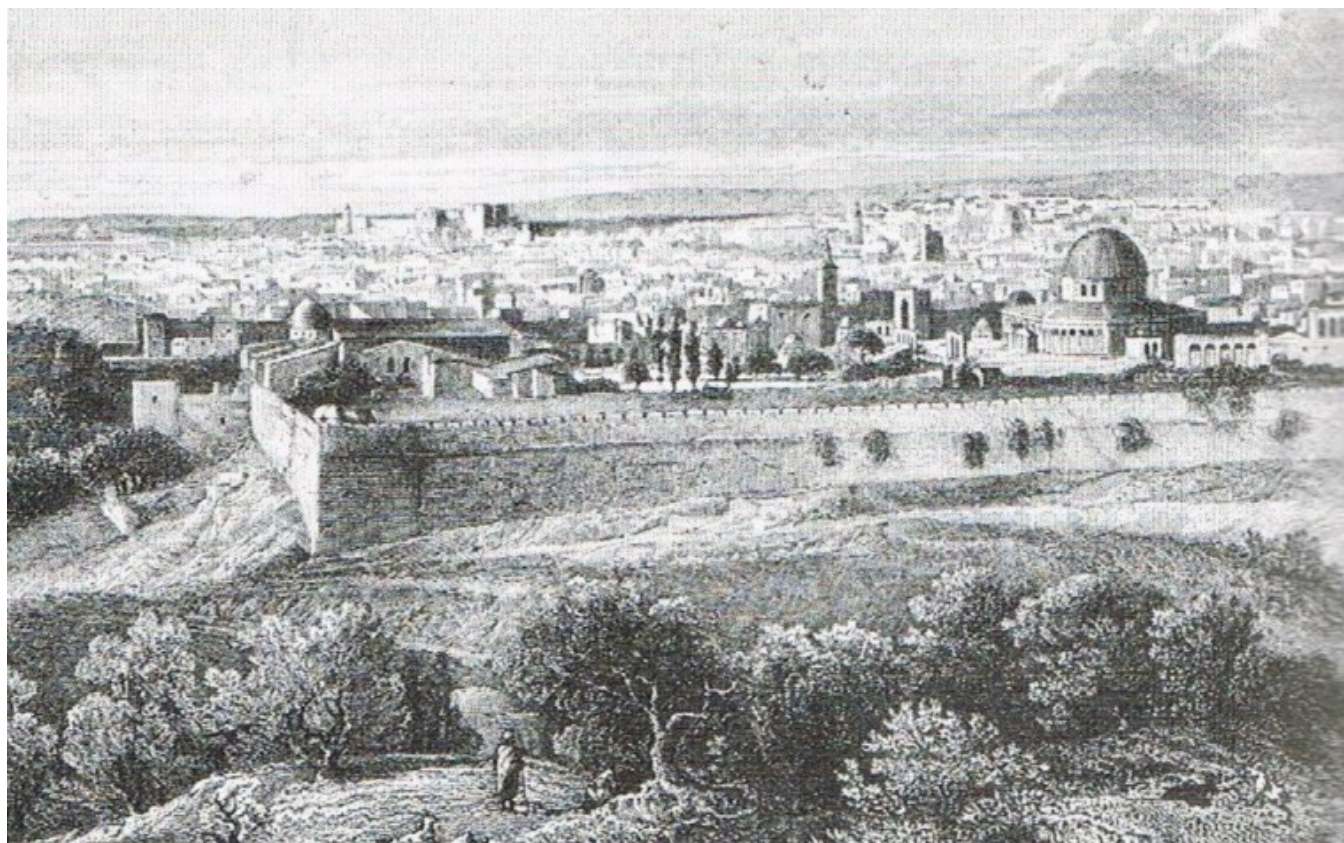


Apocalypse Yesterday

The Dome of the Rock – that golden, volatile rock of contention – is at the center of an exhibition at the Bezalel Photography Gallery. Noa Hazan writes for Tohu about the exhibition and about the visual research that has preceded it, which involved studying hundreds of photographs of the site from the last 150 years, and suggested new terms for looking at its visual representations.

From the early days of photography, tourists, researchers, and adventurers were interested in the Dome of the Rock – that golden, volatile rock of contention, threatening daily to ignite the whole Middle East. Ever since then the visual presence of the Dome of the Rock in the Palestinian-Israeli public realm has continued to grow. In this essay I propose an analysis of the photographs displayed these days in the exhibition "the Dome of the Rock," at the Bezalel photography gallery (curators: Avital Barak, Dor Guez, and Noa Hazan), in comparison with historical photographs of the site from the last 150 years, located in Israeli institutions' archives.

Temple Mount-4.jpg



[1]Jerusalem from Mount Olive. Print based on a Daguerreotype by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet. 1839. Possibly the first photograph of Temple Mount

The exposure and analysis of these photographs, as well as the exhibition at Bezalel, are part of a comprehensive critical project I initiated last year, and which I am leading in cooperation with the researcher and curator Avital Barak and the researcher and Jurist Dr.Raef Zreik. The project has been conducted at the Minerva Center at Tel Aviv University, based on visual studies seeking to understand the theological-nationalistic narratives, by which the Dome has been perceived throughout the history of Zionism, as reflected in its manifestations in the local visual field. As opposed to other studies of the history of photography, which ignored the political aspects of Dome photographs, and viewed them as a product of the influence of the romantic-orientalist style in European art¹, this project intends to point out the connection between visual form and political meaning. Following the tradition of visual criticism, this analysis reveals the close ties between the formation of Zionist nationalistic ideas and the way in which the image of the Dome has been manipulated, for purposes of propaganda and public relations, in official Zionist publications. These publications had been published in Palestine and abroad from the late 19th century, as well as in modern Israel.

[Harhabait_at_67.jpg](#) [2]



[3]IDF soldiers facing Jerusalem, shortly before breaching the walls and liberating the city 1967. From: The Victorious War Book. Ed. G. Benjamin. Unknown photographer. Ledory Publishing, Tel Aviv

The basic argument of the project is that images of the Dome of the Rock, produced in the past as well as today by state institutions or under their auspices, carry hidden messages and load the photographed site with meaning according to varying political and ideological requirements. That is to say, the photographs of the Dome, prevalent in the Israeli visual field (some of which I will show here), play a consistent, active part not only in describing and representing public mindsets in Israel but also in shaping and setting them.

So far we have gathered 1500 or so images of the Dome of the Rock from the last 150 years. After sorting the collection according to visual criteria, we created a smaller group of 70 representative images, which have been displayed in public spaces at various critical moments in history. We've sent these images to scholars from the fields of political science, theology, and visual culture, and they responded with critical essays. (The articles will be published, along with the photographs, as a book.) We also sent it to students and lecturers at the Bezalel photography department, inviting them to react to the collection with original visual images.



[harhabait_bamahane.jpg](#) [4]



[5]Cover of "Bamahane" weekly, New Year issue 1967. A view of Temple Mount, from Mount Olive. Photography collection archive, Beit Ariella Library



Even though the Dome already appeared in photographs as early as 1839, it hasn't yet gained the iconic status it holds today. Along with other ancient sites throughout the Holy Land and the Ottoman Empire, it was photographed by wealthy tourists, antique hunters, or European photographers who saw the area's sites and natives as living relics of the Bible and the New Testament. Even as Zionist interest in Palestine was growing, the Dome has remained a relatively marginal subject of visual representation. It tended to appear in Palestine's visual field only as New Year greetings or pictures indicating "east"- marking the direction for prayer (as those that were presented before the International Committee, after the 1929 riots at the Western Wall). The marginality of the Dome in the Israeli visual field continued, surprisingly, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. From that year through the late 60s, the wide-open vistas of the Negev were the most popular landscape to appear in government publications. They represented the national ethos of cultivating the desert and the gathering of the diaspora². In fact, panoramic views centered on the Dome took over the Israeli visual field only after Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Since then, the Dome of the Rock has become one of the most familiar, iconic images in Israel-Palestine, appearing on touristic postcards, postage stamps, calendars, religious objects, key holders, table clothes, home decorations, posters, and fancy coffee-table books.

I will use the symmetry between Israel's territorial occupation of the Dome and the Dome's visual takeover of Israel's visual field to analyze the photographs, with the help of two mechanisms by which the visual field is manipulated to affect the actual, real one. The first mechanism is visual initiation, a term I would like to introduce here for the first time; the second is the linkage between vision and control.

[Harhabait_gold.jpg](#) [6]



[7] Temple Mount in a tourist postcard from the 1970s

Visual Initiation

As I look at old and contemporary photographs of the Dome of the Rock, I would like to coin the term Visual Initiation: the process by which repeated displays of an object within fixed forms of representation - in the same composition, from the same angle, or in the same color palette - train the viewer's eye to identify the subject of the image by its patterns, even when it is absent. The term defines initiation instruction and training, as well as a developmental stage the initiated must pass as a condition of induction into the group (e.g. an initiation ceremony). Although not a conscious process, visual initiation, as in traditional initiation stories, involves some loss on the part of the initiated, his to bear as a mark of his loyalty to the community to which he wishes to belong. The fixed form of representation the object is trapped in, and the fixed position of the viewer in relation to it, limit and set the range of meanings, values, and narratives through which the viewer is meant to perceive the observed object, thus abolishing and eradicating other possible narratives. The process of initiation does not necessarily take place in typical educational contexts, but rather anytime we meet the visual image of that object, incidentally or intentionally, in public or private spaces. Despite the oppressive connotations this description of the process may raise, it is likely that most of the readers of this essay have undergone it themselves.



[harhabait.jpg](#) [8]



[9] Temple Mount in a tourist postcard from the 1970s

[הר הבית.jpg](#) [10]



[11]David Adika. Temple Mount/conceptual art in Tel Aviv. Inkjet digital printing, 80*60 cm. 2015

This process of visual initiation may be understood by looking at the diptych *Urban Landscape* (2015), by Ariel Hachohen, and at the photograph *Temple Mount/conceptual art in Tel Aviv* (2015), by David Adika. While Hachohen omits the Dome of the Rock from the gap between the two landscapes, ostensibly by accident, in Adika's work a golden balloon, against blue skies, appears in its stead. Both works refer to the accepted form of representation of the Dome without actually showing it. In both images, it is recognized as the subject of the images based on the viewer's prior acquaintance with similar pictures. These works reveal the Dome's well-known form of representation in the Israeli-Palestinian visual field, and the visual conditioning under which we have been trained to see the place: balanced earth and sky, central composition, a wide-angle shot, and vivid coloration³. Under these conditions of visibility, the Dome becomes a fabulous image, unreal, static, stable, and always remote.

[ariel.jpg](#) [12]



[13]Ariel Hacoheh. Urban Landscape. Digital printing, 212*77 cm. 2015

[jpg.Copy - Copy - אנדי וורהול](#) **[14]**



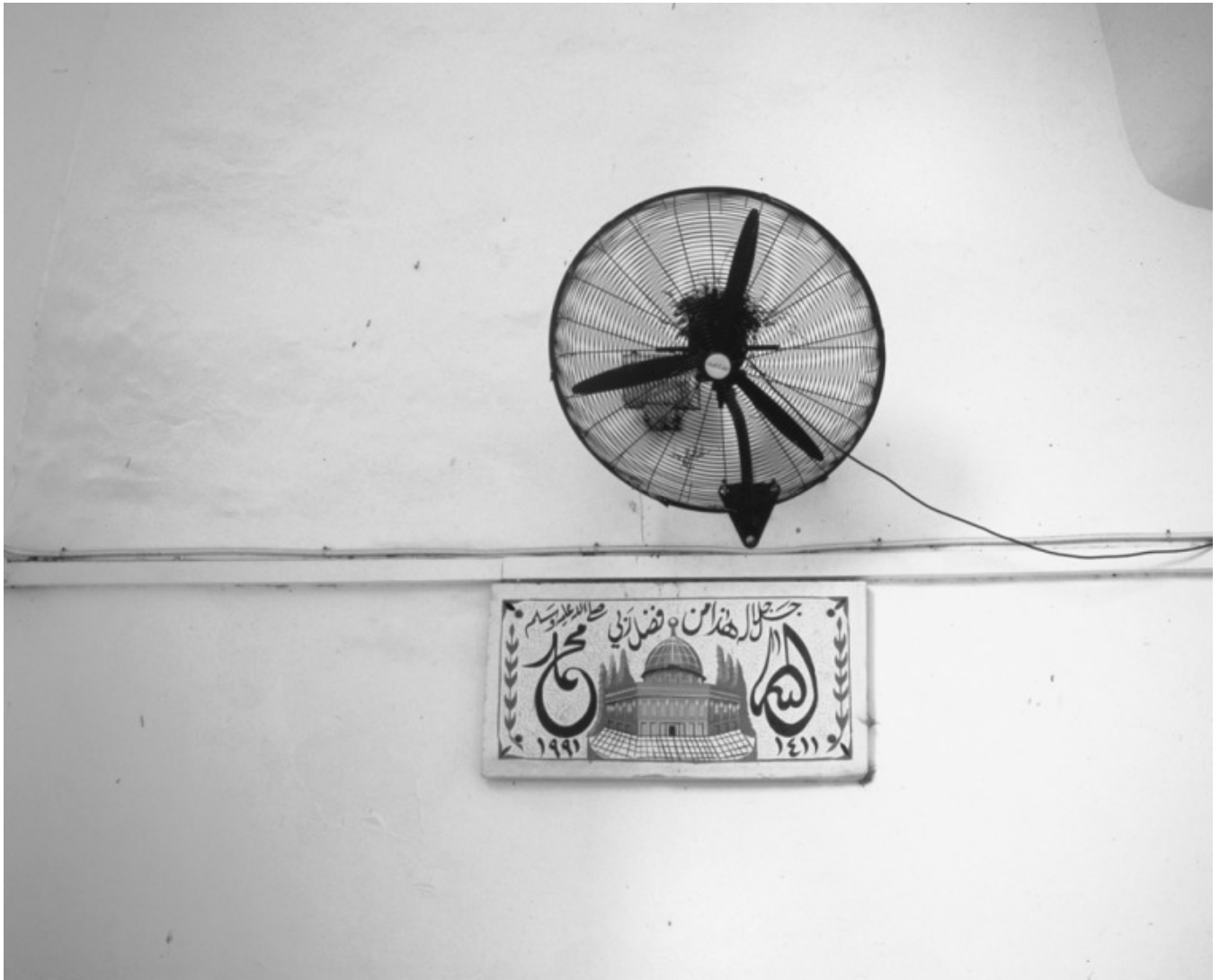
[15]Niv Ben-david, Marilyn Monroe. Digital printing, 60x60 cm. 2015

In the current political situation, when threats of blowing up the mosques are made at least once a year, and when manipulated photographs of the Western Wall *sans* the Dome are distributed in schools, the elimination of the Dome as a typo or as a bursting balloon, in the works of Hacoen and Adika, may be perceived as more than a mere reflection of the traditional visual manipulations. These works allow us to imagine what the end of the world would look like when the vision of the Apocalypse comes to life.

Also, in offering alternatives to the traditional images of Temple Mount, from which they draw their inspiration, both works point out how manipulative and limiting the Dome traditional scheme is, but also how fragile and insecure.



[b_r \(1 of 3\).jpg](#) [16]



[17]Barak Rubin. In el-Ramel Mosque, Acre. Digital printing, 46*37 cm. 2013

In *Marilyn Monroe* (2015), by Niv Ben-david, the iconization of the dome is radicalized by duplication and changes of color, reminiscent of the work of the American Pop artist Andy Warhol, who, in the 1960s, made multiple copies of images of celebrities and suggested viewing them as marketable products. Conversely, in Barak Rubin's pair of photographs from 2013, the Dome of the Rock has been displaced from its Jerusalem landscape to el-Ramel Mosque, in Acre, and to the Great Mosque, in Ramla. Ben-david's works, like Rubin's, indicate the artists' incorporation of the fixed patterns for showing Temple Mount into their consciousness. Having digested the pattern, they can now abuse or deny it.

To Look and to Control

It would be interesting to consider the works in the "Dome of the Rock" exhibition, and their connection to the historical photographs assembled for the project, in light of one of the well-established axioms of visual studies, which claims lineage between the right to display and to contemplate an object, and the control and ownership of it. According to this claim, regardless of



whether the object of sight is a person, a piece of land, or an object, its appearance in the image necessarily includes a controlling vs. controlled relationship between the object and the presenter (the painter or the photographer), as well as the viewer.

Visual study of the historical collection of photos reveals that the viewpoint for capturing the Dome, starting in 1967, is similar in a way to the panoramic, dominating position evident in earlier cases, with one apparent difference. While earlier photographs tended to be free of human presence, thus granting the landscape mythical, ideal qualities, in post-1967 images the Dome has acquired a viewer, always masculine, gazing at the Dome from above and from a distance. The fighter jets, police, and soldiers who are looking at the mosques occupy central positions in these photos, and although they remain anonymous, their dominating gaze, armed with binoculars and rifle sights, is easily recognizable. That gaze articulates Israel's control and ownership over the photographed landscape, creating a clear separation between the looker, which belongs to a modern, Western, State organization, and the area he is looking at, easily identified by its architectural style and its population as pre-modern, aboriginal, and oriental. The figure of the viewer – the soldier or the pilot – within the frame of these photographs makes the Dome a place to control, to overpower. Ironically, a deep rift has opened between the State of Israel and a place perceived as one of the ancient origins of Judaism.

[jpg.11001](#) [18]



[19]Gaston Zvi Ickowicz. Wall (Old City, Jerusalem) .2015



In challenging contrast to the axiom looking=controlling, some of the works in the exhibition are unwilling to appropriate the place they are documenting. Unlike in traditional landscape photography, where appropriation and visual control are made possible by a full view of the site, the works in this exhibition offer a disrupted, incomplete gaze on the mountain and the mosque. At the same time, they emphasize manipulations such as blurring, cropping, displacement, concealment, change of angles, or replacement of the image of the Dome with something else. For example, the quick, colorful, spray-painted flashes in *Wall (Old City, Jerusalem, 2014)*, by Gaston Zvi Ickowicz - the Dome, a crescent moon, a palm tree, and the Kaaba Stone in Mecca, whose random scattering on the wall attests to their hasty, spontaneous creation - remind us that any attempt to control, police, and educate the gaze through these images is doomed to fail.

Finally, the two video works in the show cancel the remoteness and cohesion of the familiar Dome image in two different ways. In *Gas, stun, smoke*, 2015, by Shabtai Pinchevsky, the interior of the mosque is seen during a violent struggle between demonstrators enclosed in it and security forces who are fighting them from the outside. Stun grenades, parts of furniture, and other objects fly through the interior while figures run back and forth, shouting. The work is based on clips of real battles which have taken place in the mosque in recent years, which the artist has edited into one piece. The disjointed peek inside the mosque echoes the late 19th-century attempts by painters, architects, writers, and Christian theologians to invade the mosque. Despite the severe prohibition on the admission of non-Muslims to the place, which has been effective through 1919, and the real risk of being apprehended, these adventurers sought to go beyond the walls and see the mosque for themselves. The most well-known penetration occurred in 1833, by three Englishmen who pretended to be representatives of the Pasha. They stayed inside for six weeks, drawing the interior, measuring it, and making paintings of its various parts, under the claim that they were preparing for the renovation of the mosque.

Shabtai Pinchevsky. GAS, Stun, Smoke. 2015

Safaa Khateeb. Salati. 2015

_ [20]

The rendering of the interior of the mosque complemented the panoramic photography of it and became another way of presenting to people in Europe not only a comprehensive picture of one of the most important sites in the Middle East, but also, and in particular, a sense of their thorough knowledge of the place. Unlike these attempts at depiction and documentation, Pinchevsky's video provides no clear, complete picture of the interior of the mosque. Instead of the whole, static image there's a choppy picture, continually disrupted by dark figures, odd angles, and flashes of light. Ironically, what gives this work cohesion is the noise of gunshots coming from the outside, accompanying the video with a constant rhythm.

Similarly, in Safaa Khateeb's video, *Salati (My Prayer)*, the sound rather than the image functions as the significant anchor of the work. Here the viewers participate in the ritual of the artist's prayer, through a camera perched on her head. Together with her, we kneel on the prayer mat or focus on her personal possessions, which are scattered around the room, or on the pictures on the walls. Here too, the mosque is made present not through its visual icon but the physical attitude towards it, both in the praying person's position and in the words of her prayer. This approach undermines the perception of the mosque as a remote visual icon, controlled by the gaze. Like the shooting sounds in Pinchevsky's video, Khateeb's words of prayer penetrate the image and negate it, or at the least make it unnecessary.



[HarHabait_camals.jpg](#) [21]



[22] Temple Mount in a tourist postcard from the 1970s

We can consider the differences between the contemporary works in the “Dome of the Rock” exhibition and the historical representations of the Dome in archives by using the distinction between “place” and “space” suggested by the French philosopher Michel de Certeau⁴. According to de Certeau, place represents the order in accord with which elements are distributed. A place excludes the possibility of coexistence of two elements, and it strives for static stability. In relation to place, de Certeau writes, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is perceived in its vagueness within actual reality and is defined by the changes which arise within the context. Contrary to place, space lacks the stability of the correct, appropriate and proper.

[harhabait air force journal.jpg](#) [23]



[24]Fighter jets flying over the Dome of the Rock. Poster enclosed in the Air Force's magazine, late 1960s

In times when the status of the Dome of the Rock, as an emblem of Temple Mount, is gaining power in the Israeli and Palestinian discourse as a place of well-grounded, static symbolic meaning, which cannot contain the co-existence of the two nations, the works in the exhibition suggest the place of the Dome, trapped as it is in its tangle of concrete facts, as a new space where unforeseen kinds of relationships are emerging, between looking and control, between representation and reality, and between past and future.

- [1.](#) Eyal Onne, 1980, Photographic Heritage of the Holy Land, 1839-1914, Paperback Ayshe Erdogan , 1999, The Victorian Market for Ottoman Types, History of photography 23:3. 269-273. Nissan N. Perez, 1988, Focus East: Early photography in the Near East (1839 -1885)
- [2.](#) Hazan, Noa, 2017. Race and Visual Culture in Israel. Forthcoming.
- [3.](#) Unlike other iconic structures, such as the Eiffel tower in Paris, or the Empire State building in New York City, which may be photographed in a wide range of directions, angles, and compositions, the option for seeing the Dome of the Rock in official visual documents is limited to that same panoramic, symmetrical view.
- [4.](#) De Certeau, 1988. Spatial Stories, "Spaces and Places", p. 117



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