

- Home
- Search
- Contact Us
- Subscribe

Home > Arts & Entertainment > Books

The Simple Beauty of the Land

10/21/2004

About six years ago, the Jewish Publication Society issued one of its most beautiful books to date, titled *Documentors of the Dream*. The subject of the work, as its subtitle announced, was *Pioneer Jewish Photographers in the Land of Israel 1890-1933*. The choice of pictures and layout was as exquisite as the title makes it sound, an extraordinary record, in creamy blacks and grays and whites, of how an astonishing idea managed to take shape over the course of more than 40 years.



Robert Leiter

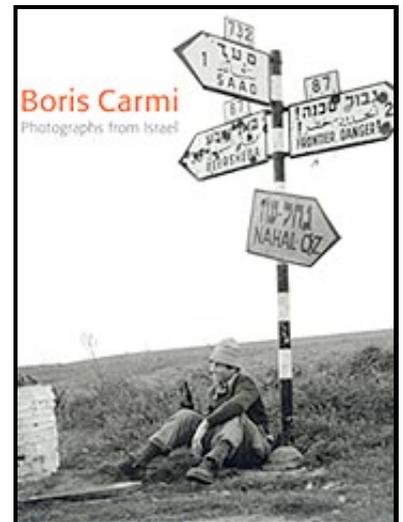
I bring up the book because if that title hadn't already been appropriated, I'd suggest it for the new book of photos by the late Boris Carmi, a work recently brought out by the masterful Prestel publishing house. The book is as lovely and substantive as any other title by Prestel, but its been saddled with perhaps the most uninspiring title ever bestowed on an important set of images: *Photographs From Israel*.

Ignore this prosaic moniker; what exists between these covers is magical. Here is not only a documentor of dreams, but a documentor of the far more elusive truth we call everyday reality.

By all accounts, Carmi was an extraordinary and humble individual who lived only to make photographs. He never thought of his work as art, and never liked to talk about what he had done or wished to do. He was a photojournalist, out to get "a story." It was just that everywhere he pointed his camera, he found something alive and vibrant and most often beautiful, even when it was ragged and worn.

According to an essay in the book by Alexandra Nocke, Carmi was born Boris Vinograd in Moscow in 1914 and left Russia in 1930, following the death of his parents. He was 16 years old. He lived for a time in Warsaw, then in Italy and finally in Paris, where he studied ethnography at the Sorbonne. At the same time, he took up photography.

Writes Nocke: "In 1936 he moved to Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) and remained there for three years waiting for a permit to emigrate to *Eretz Israel*. On obtaining this, in 1939, he left on a citrus freighter bound for Jaffa. As he later reported, he had anticipated the terrible events that were soon to occur in Europe and had decided to sail to Palestine from Danzig rather than traveling overland to a mediterranean port. On arriving in Palestine, after so many years of wandering,



- MarketPlace
- Jewish Links
- Archives
- Masthead
- About Us

- Books

Ads by Goooooogle

Palestine

The New York Times brings you the latest news on today's top stories
www.nytimes.com

IsraeliPalestinian

What are the just resolutions? Pros and Cons from credible sources
www.IsraeliPalestinianPr

Arab-Israeli Conflict

Latest news and analysis plus archives of FT.com reports.
FT.com

Bush on Israel, Palestine

Stories You Won't Find Elsewhere. News Service For Professionals
www.uspoliticstoday.com





he wanted finally to shake off the sense of being a foreigner and to gain a foothold in a place that would become his new homeland.”

**GOLDEN EAGLE
DINER
& RESTAURANT**

He would achieve this through his camera; and in time, photography even allowed him to make a living. It was a dual coming of age. As Nocke writes, “[T]hrough the lens of his camera ... Carmi came to know his initially alien Jewish homeland, literally acre by acre: He was witness to the evolution and growth of this new country in the Middle East.”



Carmi managed to capture Israeli life in all its heartbreaking vibrancy: We see young soldiers preparing for war in 1948; olim in transit camps in the early years of the state; the housing units that begin cropping up, and the hopeful couples inhabiting them; the simple beauty of the land; the sharp pace of life in Tel Aviv; the great leaders and pioneers; and always, always beautiful women. This is a splendid testament to an artist who wanted only to record life in all its abundance.

Copyright © Jewish Publishing Group - All rights reserved

ethanallen.com