



LEICA FOTOGRAFIE INTERNATIONAL

ENGLISH EDITION



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1606805110886174

D 6,90 € NL 8,10/10 € I 10,20 € UK 8,20 £
7.2020 OCTOBER

He is considered the most important chronicler of the State of Israel:
for many decades, Micha Bar-Am has documented the country's struggles and aspirations, highs and lows, armed conflicts and everyday life. In honour of his 90th birthday, we present a selection of the Leica photographer's remarkable oeuvre.

LEICA CLASSIC

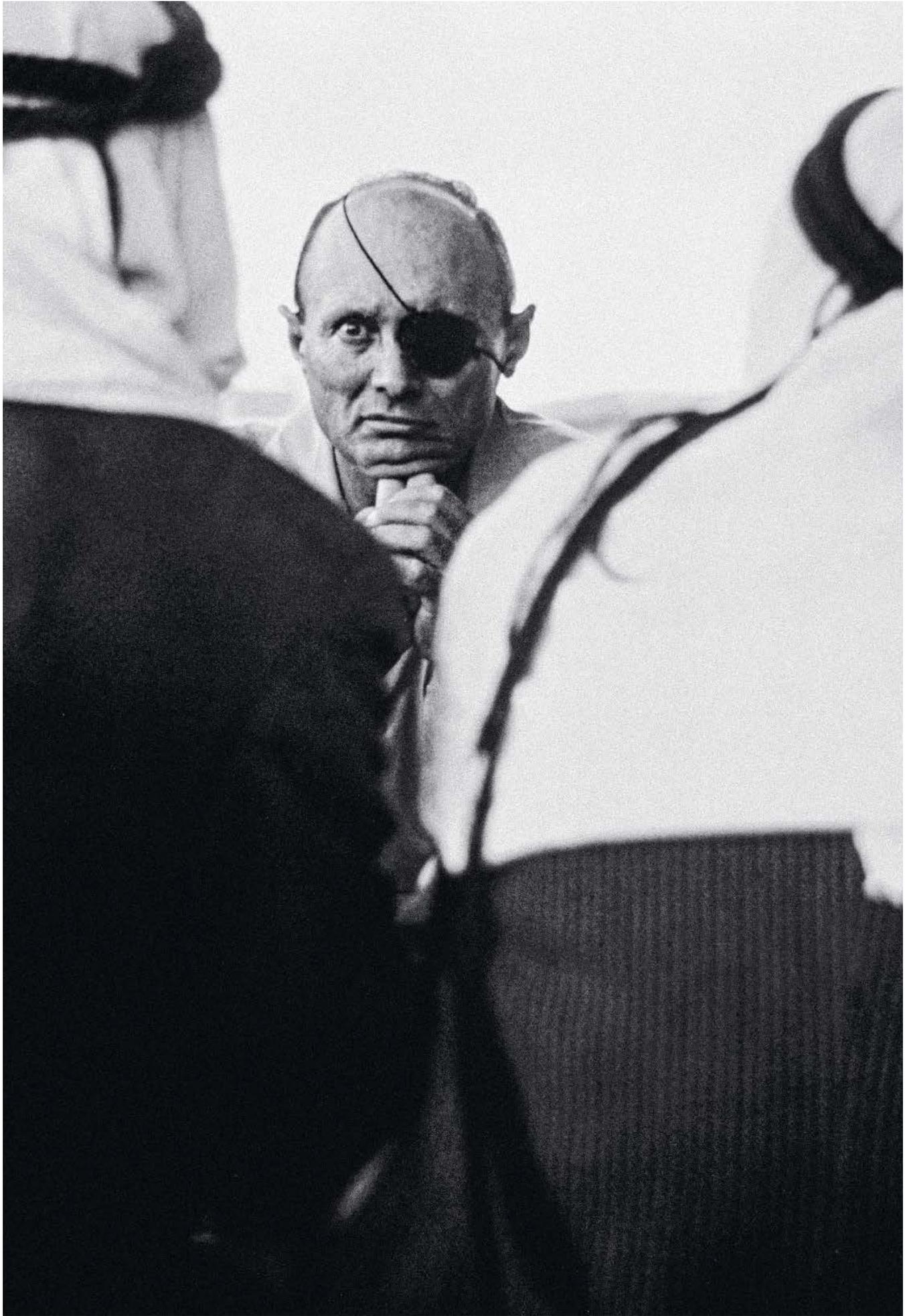
Micha Bar-Am

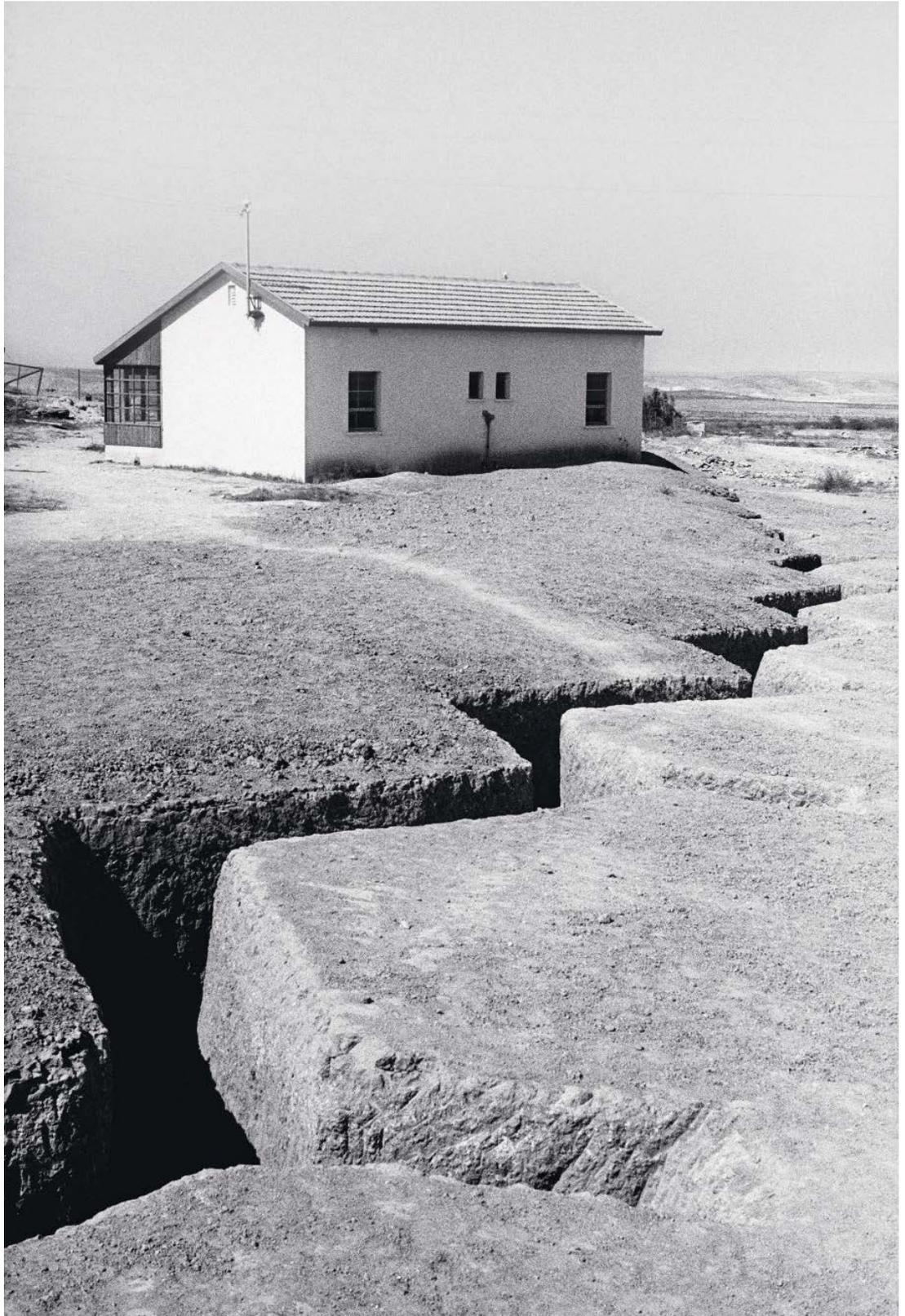






Beduin Children in the Negev Desert, 1957 (top). In the eye of the storm: Artillery barrage on Israeli soldiers and Egyptian prisoners, Suez Canal, 1973 (left); Previous page: Homage to Rodchenko, *Thirst*, 1962





Trenches at the Kibbutz Hatzerim, Negev 1956 (top). Israel's Defence Minister Moshe Dayan (1915–1981) in a meeting with Palestinian elders, Qalandya 1967 (left)



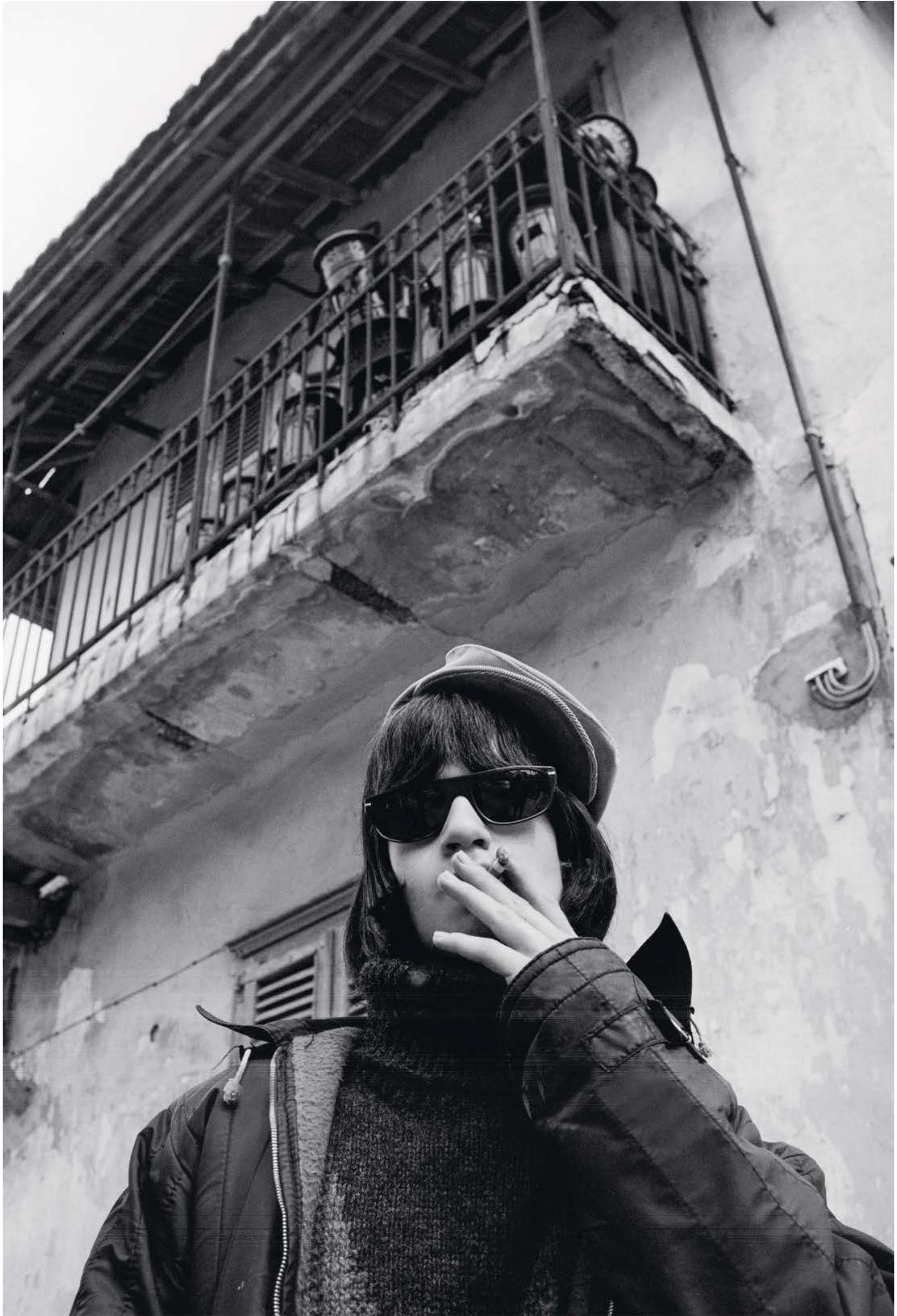


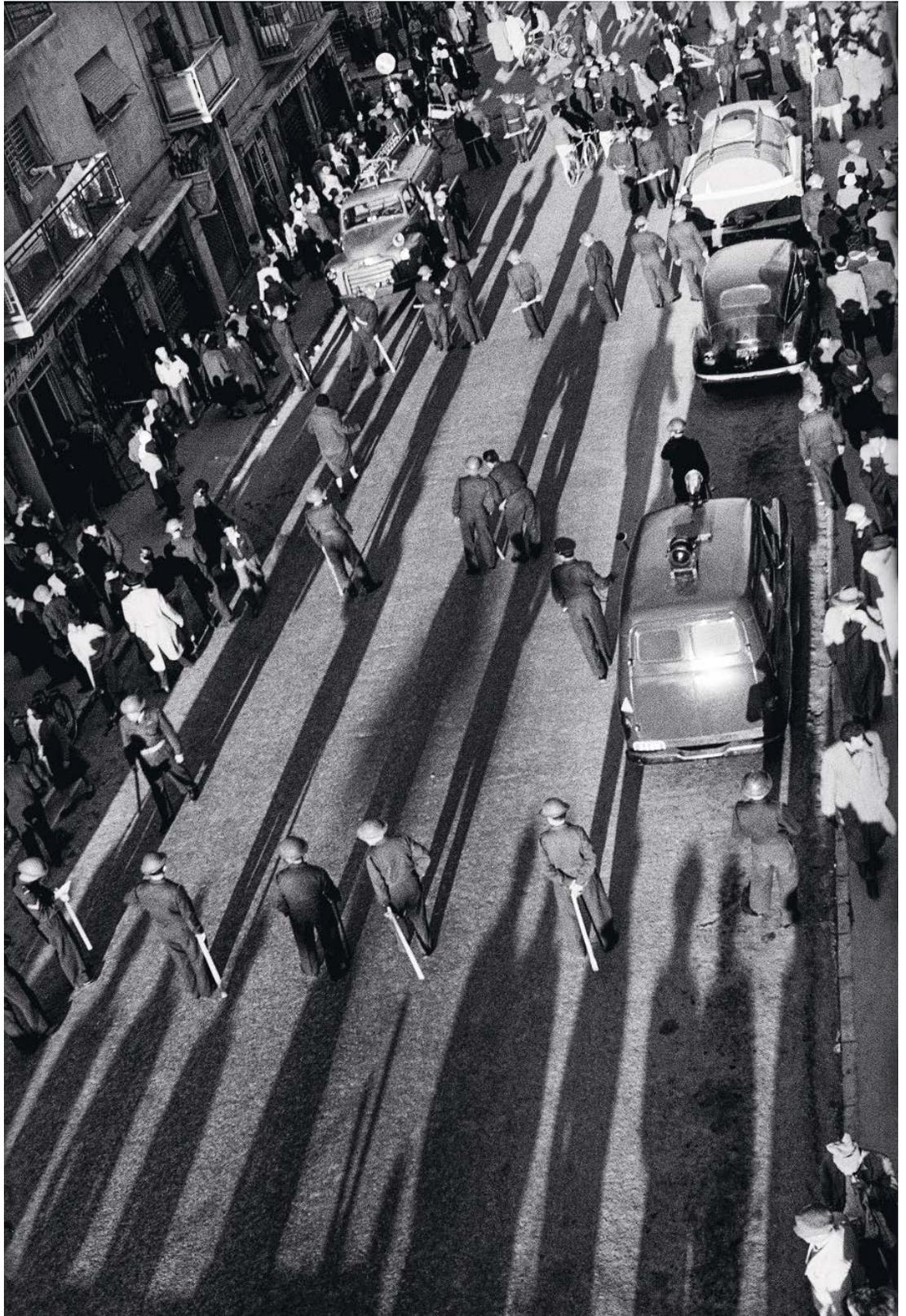
Ultra-orthodox protestants, seeking to prevent women from praying at the Western Wall, are throwing back gas grenades employed by the police, Jerusalem 1989 (top). Family portrait whilst sheltering from a gas attack during the Gulf War, Ramat Gan 1991 (left)





Clothes lines outside Jerusalem's Old City Walls, viewed from the West, 1976 (top). Freed hostages arriving at Ben Gurion Airport on July 4, 1976: commandos of the Israeli Defence Force saved 102 passengers by storming a hijacked Air France plane in Entebbe, Uganda (left)





Demonstration against the withdrawal from the occupied Sinai Peninsula, Ben-Yehuda Street, Jerusalem, 1957 (top).
Portrait captured in Neve Tzedek, Tel Aviv's artist quarter known as 'Little Paris', February 1967 (left)





Fashion show at the Bahad 12 military training base for women, Tzrifin 1963 (top). Soldiers learning Krav Maga, an Israeli self-defence discipline, Wingate Institute 1972 (left). Self portrait with a smuggled camera, Mount Scopus enclave, Jerusalem 1958 (next page)



Photos: © Micho Bar-Am/Magnum Photos

MICHA BAR-AM

Born in Berlin on August 26, 1930, as Michael Anguli; his father was the manager of a department store in Ulm; in 1936 the family emigrated to Palestine, he grew up in Haifa and on a kibbutz. He was an active member of the anti-British underground; his code-name, Bar-Am, stayed.

In the 1950s he co-founded a kibbutz, worked as a welder and locksmith before starting to make a living with photography. Received the Robert Capa Award in 1959 and 1960, and worked freelance from the mid-sixties onwards. In 1961 he married Orna, with whom he has three sons.

He has been a correspondent for Magnum since 1968, remaining the agency's only Israeli member. In 1974 he helped establish the ICP in NYC; from 1977 to 1993, curator for photography at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Bar-Am lives in Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv.

MAGNUMPHOTOS.COM

BAR-AM.DE: More pictures can be seen in the project room BarAm, Berlin

BÜCHER: (selection) MICHA BAR-AM: KIBBUTZ (Beit Shturman Museum, Ein Harod 2019); MICHA BAR-AM LOGBOOK (Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2017); MICHA BAR-AM'S ISRAEL: INSIGHT (Walter König, Köln 2011); ISRAEL: A PHOTOBIOGRAPHY - THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS (Simon & Schuster, New York 1998)

Water, at last: rarely has the visceral longing for salvation been visualised in a more palpable form. The strictly pared-down, tightly framed scene has a sculptural power, making it a perfect homage to the expressive constructivism of Russian avant-garde artist Alexander Rodchenko. Like many of Micha Bar-Am's images, this masterful shot is comprised of few graphic elements: the tilt of the head, the arch of the arm lifting the liquid to the subject's lips – all skilfully separated from the background of a searing, bright sky.

A self-taught photographer, Bar-Am initially pursued a number of different occupations. It was only when he began to be recognised for his distinctive visual style, that he decided to dedicate himself to the medium full-time. Prior to this, he had worked in the port of Haifa, became an active member of the pre-state underground, and was drafted to fight in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Later, he had several jobs on a kibbutz. "My first encounter with a Leica was when my friend Yoav received a camera from relatives who had immigrated to Israel after WW2. Yoav was generous and lent me his Leica so I could experiment with it – and we were fascinated by the results. The compact size and simple operation was a big change from the bulky cameras at home. My path to visual adventures had begun," he remembers. "My life changed when I finally bought my first Leica – vintage 1930, the year I was born. In a small notebook, I began recording the exposure times and lighting conditions of every photo I took and, gradually, by trial and error, I taught myself photography. On weekends I would display my work on the bulletin board in the communal dining hall, and eventually my photos began to be published."

Since the founding of the State of Israel, Bar-Am documented its development. His first book, *Across Sinai*, was published in 1957 – after which he became a photojournalist for Ba-Mahaneh, the magazine of the Israeli Army. He photographed everyday life on the kibbutz, the conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, the hopes and hard-

ships of new immigrants, and accompanied the Eichmann trial in 1961. He also covered every major conflict in the Middle East – however, he never thought of himself as a war photographer. "Working at the scene of the action, I adopted Robert Capa's saying: 'If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough'. But in retrospect, I'd like to add a corollary: if you're too close, you lose perspective. It is not easy to be fair with the facts and keep your own convictions out of the picture. It is almost impossible to be a participant as well as the observer, witness and interpreter of an event. The effort brings great rewards and, equally, great frustration."

This realisation in itself might well have played a vital role in his international success. Even when documenting political conflicts, the human experience tends to be his primary focus. "The tension between the outside dramas and daily life at home was a challenging issue to express," he explains. And yet, he managed to capture the complexities and contradictions of Israel's everyday reality in his images. A prime example is a picture that is especially close to Bar-Am's heart: taken during the Gulf War in 1991, it shows a mother and her two sons crouching in an air-raid shelter. All three are wearing gas masks; the woman protectively cradles the family cat in her arms. It is a solemn scene, but at the same time captivating with underlying drama. It also represents a deeply personal memory – as the people in the picture are the photographer's own family.

Throughout his career, the now ninety-year-old has compiled a huge archive of images, which he is currently categorising in digital form. "Today I am no longer active as a photographer, though I do have a small digital Leica V-Lux 20 which I use to record my grandchildren as they grow up." Without doubt these pictures, too, will be characterised by the photographer's unique vision. ULRICH RÜTER