

## Museutopia Chapter: Israeli military museums- Curators statement written by Eyal Danon and Hadas Zemer Ben-Ari



Museums have served as a history-shaping instrument for centuries. The accumulation of objects, natural and artificial alike, naming and systematically classifying them, is one of the ways to know the world. However, it is clearly evident that museums have also been shaped by the varied contexts and basic premises that were dominant in different periods and different places.

A museum, therefore, is not a final object. It is not a fixed entity that is created in the same way at all times and in all places, nor is it grounded in ancient models and ideas that underpin its existence. A museum is a mechanism. It is a culture- and history-making machine. Its identity, aims, and the functions it fulfills change in accordance with the hegemonies and order of privileges customary in a given society. A museum – a society's storyteller – is therefore a political and social product that reflects the power relations that created it, and the contexts within which it operates and which it is supposed to represent.

However, a museum does not only tell a story, classify, and document; it also erases. In his photographic project *Museutopia*, Ilya Rabinovich studies national museums, observes how they represent ideology and myth, and examines the kind of society reflected through the perspective they create – and the kind of society reflected in the perspective itself.

Rabinovich photographed the first part of the project (also presented in the exhibition) in his hometown, Kishinev, the capital of Moldova. He chose to photograph the second part of the project in eleven military museums in Israel, to which he immigrated when he was eight, and from which he moved to Holland where he currently resides. In their article for the book that accompanied the project in Moldova, Huub van Baar and Ingrid Commandeur quote Slovakian dissident Milan Šimečka who claimed a few years before the fall of Communism that communist regimes were surprisingly successful in organizing collective forgetting. It may well be that Communist era museums were not the only ones

[1] In this context it is interesting to observe the transformation undergone by the museum institution, according to art researcher Didier Maleuvre, which he illustrates by means of the process undergone by the Louvre Museum. It was founded during the French Revolution as an innovative and even revolutionary institution, but has since become an establishment for validation and preservation: "...the museum in today's world is associated with cultural preservation, it first appeared as a means of social renewal: as a way of breaking, rather than bonding, with the ways of the past. The museum was meant to further the momentum of a historical putsch, in reaction against history conceived as the politics of the status quo". For further reading, see Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*, Stanford University Press, 1999.

[2] Anat Rimón-Or, From the Dying Arab to "Death to the Arabs": The Modern Jew and the Arab Residing Within Him, *Theory and Criticism* 20, Spring 2002 (Hebrew).