

Text by Rona Sela

Vanishing Zones, was photographed with a toy throwaway camera, the kind containing very small films. Kuper's process was to first print the images taken by the camera and then to separate the photographic paper into its layers; he peeled away layers from the photographic paper until he reached a level of translucency, which could be used in his work as a new negative. The process of separating the external surfaces of the paper (the emulsion, the uppermost layer) from the inner layers was difficult and demanded special treatment, the control over the production of the "new negative" was limited, for the paper had a tendency to tear and disintegrate. More over, in order to produce the "new negative" Kuper printed a contact from the peeled upper layer of paper. Thus it became its own negative, which was then also peeled, and again, he printed an image from it. The process was done again and again, each time more and more details of the original image disappearing, until its total disintegration. Sometimes Kuper would scrape the new negative and damage it, so that details would vanish and texture would be added, and sometimes he left the negative soaking for days in water, or placed it specifically in a place with "bad" conditions, so that the negative would be damaged and mutilated to the desired point of disintegration of the image. Kuper made a decisive choice to work with a negative of translucent and disintegrating paper – the paper fibers of the negative were also picked up in the print process and added to the effect of dimness and mistiness that the artist aimed for.

Kuper decided to neglect the sanctified practices of photography that ruled during the 1980s – the years of modernism in Israeli photography (the "decisive moment" of photography, "correct" photography, the "correct" exposure, the "correct" print, the search for the perfect composition and so forth) – for "rebel" photography, that allowed him to focus on personal and spiritual processes. In some ways Kuper was connected to the wave of personal and experiential photography of the eighties, one of whose common characteristics was photography within the "family territory" (for example Simcha Shirman in Acre, Oded Yedaya in his close environment, and Boaz Tal who set up scenes from art history in his house) – a form of photography that exempted the photographer from dealing with an external reality. But in opposition to this wave, Kuper began a process of breaking free of the formalism of classic photography and its hallowed conventions. He tried to distance himself from the aesthetic idealism and modernist judgement of a work of art, to get rid of the aura of the surrounding photographic image and break through the framework of the immanent discourse in the field. Kuper chose not to use a technical camera, or a professional-conventional one, above them he preferred a throw-away toy camera, of the type sold in photography shops for a few shekels to any passing customer, which are known for the low quality printed images they produce. He chose to connect to the "low" qualities of the photographic process and to accentuate them, so that in a homemade process he created negatives from peeled paper, a replacement of the professional celluloid negative. The use of the peeled paper negative, that because of its repeated peeling and use became torn, added to the mistiness of the images and distanced them from any "correct" photographic convention. Kuper states that during those years he had a model of photographic

works that expressed a negation of the accepted stream of Israeli photography.² He mentions, for example, the work of Dalia Amotz in Israel, who intentionally photographed into the sun and “burnt” large parts of the negative, and the series by the American Robert Frank shot with a Polaroid camera, where the photographer wrote above each picture phrases such as “Be Happy,” “New Year’s Day, 1981,” “holy,” and “Suck of Hell.” He came across these photographic works before *Vanishing Zones* and they formed a mindset for creating the series, which Kuper mulled over for a few years. In the series he produced virtual images – at the time it was called “manipulated photography” – things from his immediate environment: friends, family, objects and views, whose natures were a sort of dark and elusive memory of a moment or continuing situation. As opposed to the frozen photograph on a conventional negative, the photographs in the series carry with them the feeling of extended time, as if created in the dark-room of the subconscious. These images reflect a gradual process of the disappearing and blurring of details, and to an extent they correspond to the gradual disappearance of images in a personal memory. Yet even though the roots of Kuper’s works are in personal memory, they deal with the full scope of the subject of memory, disappearance, hybridization, and disintegration in terms of the collective-architypical. Creativity, expressiveness, and mysticism are all clearly present in Kuper’s works, with the influence of European artists dealing with trauma related memory who also present the image in its physical reality, such as Christian Boltanski. *Vanishing Zones* is the first important series of photographs created by Kuper after his studies at the Hadassah College in Jerusalem (1980–82) and at the State Art Teachers Training College, Ramat HaSharon (1983–84).

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