

The following pages reproduce a draft letter (April 1993) from Meir Agassi to Leviah Stern, curator of the exhibition "Books" at Kalisher Five Art Gallery, Tel Aviv. This is an excerpt from the anthology of texts *Some Notes Towards the Meir Agassi Museum*® published by Meir Agassi in 1995, and offers some idea of his practice and reflections on artists' books:

### **Artists' Books**

**From a draft letter (4.93) to Leviah Stern, curator of the exhibition "Books", at Kalisher Five - Art Gallery, Tel -Aviv**

There are a lot of answers to your questions...The format of the unique (one off) artists' book (as opposed to the Sketch-book), is for me, at this point, a laboratory, a mental space, **a studio inside a studio**. An ideal space for experimenting with different visual idioms, before reaching any formal conclusion (which only then will take the form of an edition)...

I need to emphasise here something which is important for me - the abolition of one recognisable style. This implies a diversity of styles and activities, a diversity which exists inside me, i.e. - not one artist, but many, not one medium, but many, not one voice, but many, not one technique, but many, not working towards one "masterpiece", but a process of collecting, gathering, amassing. The form of the books is a good vehicle for experimenting with all kinds of visual poetic forms. Exploring them through storing, categorising, cataloguing, classifying, arranging and re-arranging, "albumising" etc.

As you can see, I am interested in the quality of accumulation, of representing a group of things (more about that later)...If you are able to display a group of few books under a glass cabinet or vitrine, where every page of every book, is completely different from it's neighbour, this maybe will help to demonstrate the feeling of variety and diversity, this feeling of "conglomeration" - either in collage, drawing, mixed-media, writing, text, ready-made, or concept.

My feeling is that every book is different and pushing - more or less - towards an unknown and different direction....

The form of Artists' Book is a form of open chances on the one hand, control and design on the other. Between these two factions usually lies the conspiracy to be one, or all of the things below:

A Studio

An Archive

A Museum

Gallery Walls

An Exhibition in a space for browsing and leafing through

An Object for collaboration with a Pair of Hands

A Safe for keeping "Secrets"

A Storehouse for Ideas

A Log of Notes

A Work-Diary

An Image-Diary

A Diary of Dreams

A Chest of Drawers

A Portfolio of a Narrative without a Story

A Space for Occupational Therapy

A Book of Visual Poetry

A Book of Visual Text

A Notebook

A Codex of Hidden Desires

A Comic

A Place

...Artists' books are usually easy to carry around, and therefore are good collaborators for nomadic/travelling/transitional wandering, either mental or physical; from one form to another; from one geography to another; from one mental space to another; from one mood to another and so on. In a shamanistic sense - a device, a fetish to "contain" and trap a spirit-space unaccountable and unmanageable outside itself.

...I like the idea that I can amuse or disappoint myself without being distracted by the desire, or the need, to create this eternal monster we call "a masterpiece"; or to obey the autocratic need for "a statement". I do not agree that this implies by its nature, an anecdotal ease and lack of the tension and density that we usually associate with a painting or a sculpture. I think that by its nature - an order, a combination and a mixture of a form and idea, dealing with a group of images, a sequence with a rhythm of continuity - an artist-book, like any other form of art, can acquire a magical and unique poetic space. ...Those ideas of "dealing with a group of images", or "a sequence with a rhythm" appeals to me very much, because they reflect my growing interest in making pieces which are constructed and reconstructed from many components. As I have pointed out, because of my personal experience, I do not wish to create a "masterpiece" or a big statement. And not only because it is a goal which seems completely unreal to me, beyond my reach, talent and ambitions, and not even because I see it as an irrelevant goal for our times. The main reason lies with my own temperament and interest. It is just suits me as a writer and image maker, an "archivist" and a "Librarian", a "collector" and a "curator", to play these cross-referencing games through the form of artists' books and editions.

...An artist-book is (usually) a modest way to avoid that aura of "expression of importance" which is usually attached or relates to a painting, or a sculpture, or an installation. As I see it, an artist-book is the most modest form of installation I can think of and, together with traditional drawing, maybe the most intimate of all art forms, only parallel to the form of a diary...

...Because of my circumstances, I sometimes find it to be the most practical format for me. It does not demand a big space, only a desk, glue, masking-tape, sellotape, scissors, a knife, a ruler, a ready-made book or a notebook, some pencils, ink, colours, left-overs of magazines and papers, unwanted old books etc, etc.

Looking at some of these books now, I begin to recognise - for good and bad - that as well as their autonomic history, they also reflect the anarchic history of work and thought from the studio, archive, collections, library and museum of Meir Agassi.