

On the last day of the year and to mark the five-year celebrations of the founding of the "[Shamir Brothers](#)" website

Yoram Shamir and Uri Shamir, Dikla Elazar and Galit Gaon met about the mythological studio.



Galit: I am happy to meet again, Uri and Yoram Shamir, how are you?

Uri: Except for the corona, excellent!

Galit: I am happy for the opportunity to speak with you in recognition of five years since the launch of the website that commemorates the work of the Shamir Brothers studio. In the last year, in which we spent more time online than life itself, I have found myself, like many others for sure, getting to know the historical collection again. There is no doubt about the importance of the collections, like that of the institute, the National Library and more, and they do not replace, of course, but sometimes I think that more than the collection itself, its exposure, its use, the research it enables - and all this happens online. I wanted to take you back to the decision to set up a [website that would bring together the great collection of the works of the Shamir Brothers Studio](#), how did this happen?

Yoram: When the book "[The Shamir Brothers, Designers Who Became an Icon](#)" came out we held a launch event. Galit, you will remember it, you were there and gave a speech. The speech is on our site. Well, directly following the book, the idea came from my wife Ruby who said: "OK, the book is out but how many people will it reach? And what if you find more materials?" Today, after five years since we set up the site, I must say that the site is definitely meeting our expectations. For example, two weeks ago we got a message from a man who was an apprentice at the Shamir brothers studio 40 years ago. He told us details like where Maxim and Gabriel's desks were located and information about Uri's mother's role as the studio manager and described the life at the studio in 84 Rothschild Boulevard. In addition, he sent us four packaging designs that we did not have. He's still looking for the only packaging he got to design at the studio, a packing for an anchovy spread, which he has yet to find. The discovery was fantastic! Indeed, following the creation of site, we receive frequent inquiries from professionals such as curators, researchers, producers, and others who want to make use of the works. The feeling is that the name Shamir has entered the global "phone book".



Galit: Do you keep updating the materials all the time? Your story about the former assistant is wonderful! But did the materials he sent enter the site?

Uri: Sure, they were added! We have added over a thousand items since the initial work on the site. I started to be involved by volunteering to help Yoram on the site's English language content but, since I am a computer person, I became responsible for its maintenance and improvement and I

must say that every week there is some work on it.

Yoram: We have expanded our horizons through the site and there is activity beyond collecting and documenting. The site also has works inspired by the designs of the Shamir brothers and historical stories of "behind the scenes". Galit and I, the director and curator of the museum at the time, organized an exhibition at the [Museum of Cartoons](#) called "[Not Just a Symbol](#)" of exactly this kind of material. The site has hundreds of cartoons that include the state emblem by many illustrators. Since I still work as a volunteer at the museum, I have access to historical collections and so I found many more such cartoons.

Uri: Yoram and I had an interesting discussion on this matter. Since the number of cartoons in which the state emblem appears is enormous, we agreed that we would only include works in which the designer used the emblem in some creative way, for example adding a different and interesting graphical element to the state emblem.

Galit: In our previous conversations, Yoram and I talked about the importance of producing documentation that is not static. Your site is one of the most fascinating and relevant sites due to the fact that it is not static documentation - it is continuously refreshed and it encourages new creation. Did something come up that surprised you while working on the site or in the perception of the site by other people? something you did not imagine might happen?

Uri: The first thing that surprised me was the huge amount of material. For example, the Hebrew fonts designed by the Shamir brothers. They invented fonts as early as the 1930s, a period in which there were very few recognised Hebrew fonts. The interesting thing is that their fonts changed depending on the specific theme of a particular poster or ad. This created a rich collection of fonts, and I did not realise this before. In 2014, Yoram organized a design competition for high school students inspired by the "Shamir Brothers". It was fascinating to see through the students' works how they look at contemporary issues and produce a fresh visual expression in the "Shamir Brothers" style. Our latest discovery is finding works by the Shamir brothers from the period of the joint studio that operated in Latvia in the years 1933-34 before they immigrated to Israel.



Yoram: The studio on Albert Street in Riga moved to Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv. Not an ali'ya or a migration, but a real relocation of the studio. And by the way, the Shamir brothers had good taste - Albert Street in Riga, was chosen as a UNESCO heritage site as were, of course, many buildings on Rothschild boulevard



9 Albert Street, Riga



84 Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv

Galit: Yoram, Can you also tell us what surprised you?

Yoram: I was surprised by some "behind the scenes" stories. I was surprised



that the philatelic souvenir sheets by the Shamir brothers are unfamiliar to stamp collectors. Here was an outstanding work of the brothers, especially of my uncle Max, who was the "head of the stamp department" in the studio. He designed very sophisticated sheets. For example, a memorial sheet from the Bahamas consisting of four stamps that together make up a map. It was very important to us to present this wonderful work as it is not known to the public. We also uploaded sketches or bids that were submitted in tenders and were not accepted.

Today, there is a great interest in sketches and work processes. In stamp design, when a bid was

submitted for a tender, it was customary to deliver an absolutely perfect final design and the execution was simply amazing. There was also a "philatelic items" category that included the old "air-letter"

Galit: Yes! As a kid, we used to send air letters to my father who used to travel quite a bit. The air-letter was made from the thinnest paper imaginable and written on in small, very dense letters.

Yoram: Air-letters, land tax stamps and postcards were considered to be "Stationery". Unfortunately, the Philatelic Agency catalogued did not include these items. It is very difficult to locate them. I discovered some of them in binders from the early 1970s in Gideon's attic, Uri's brother. There I also found work orders and invoices from the Philatelic Agency.

Galit: I totally agree. The meaning of the stamp as a symbol with the emphasis on the "visual text" that was expressed in these items at the time, was a desire to simplify and maintain cleanliness of the design from ornamentation. This is a minimalist process so a large part of this "text" is lost and we are left with stamps that "have no timebase" that do not hold a story and bring only monetary value.

Yoram: Another interesting branch is the field of packaging design. In Israel there is no museum that deals with packaging. Their packaging design activity was an important part of the income of the Shamir brothers. Some time ago I came to the "Levin Epstein" printing house, an old printing house that, at the time, printed many of their works. I met with the CEO and it turned out that their packaging labels were stored in a photo albums in a cupboard. I made quality scans of some of the designs and when I asked how to phrase the credit for them on our site he replied in jest: "no need for credits, we just don't want another one like you to come and do it all over again"



Galit: What the CEO does not know is that there is no one like you!

Uri: On this subject I would like to add that the amount of packaging we have on our site is very small compared to what it could have been because they were simply not kept. We have packaging from companies like Assis, Ce-De, Marks & Spencer (from the time my father worked in London) and many more. The rest are part of a treasure trove of missing works.

Yoram: One of the reasons you can't find them is the lack of a signature since it is not customary to include the artists signature on packaging. The same goes for a large number of cinema transparencies. We know from correspondence we have, for example, about transparencies made in the studio for an Arab truck importer from 1934, but all of them are gone. I only found one black and white one even though most were coloured and I know there were many dozens ...

Uri: I remember they were printed on glass to be projected on a movie screen and they may not have been kept because they were easily broken.

Yoram: I will mention my mother here. During the time when she was divorced from my father she worked in the studio of Otta Walsh, my father's biggest competitor. But she needed more work. I remember as a child in elementary school how, in the evening, she would sit and colour slides on a tea table made of glass.

Galit: I want to ask about their move to Israel. Now that you can look at the entire scope of their work on the site, it seems that there was a decision beyond the professional field - not only to bring

to Israel a professional studio but, perhaps a pioneering decision, on the studio's role in the field of the emerging Hebrew nation, beyond just the livelihood. To this day I have not come across any statement of intent that says: We decided to do this because our job in the country is not to plough fields, but to produce a visual Hebrew language, for the people who will continue to speak this language from now on. Do you know what was behind the decision to set up the studio here? And was there any change or update to the studio's vision in moving to the country?

Yoram: What you say is very flattering to the Shamir brothers. But I think their desire to make a living was the main objective. They were immigrants who immigrated to Palestine to one small apartment used as a residence for both families and the studio itself. About a year after their arrival in Palestine, in 1936, the Great Arab Revolt took place. The difficult economic situation was reflected even in the press ads of that period. The ads were small and certainly earned "pennies" for them. So I do not think it was a conscious decision. The most important thing for the "brothers" was excellent service and a perfect fit for the needs of the customers. You can see the design style they chose in the advertisements for "Ford" (the Palestine auto-mobile company). It is not certain that the "Hebrew" was a primary objective there. With regards to the design of newspaper ads I should mention Reuven Cohen, the head of the Ruben Institute at the time, who told me that they have very few ads in their collection. So I physically searched through the historical newspaper archives of the Davar and Haaretz newspapers and this is how our collection was built. I think these are exceptional works. When they designed ads for Zionist organizations, the Levant Fair and later for the Israeli government and the Israel Defence Forces, such values were certainly included, but specifically with an understanding of the customer's needs.

Uri: I will support this claim by adding that the "Shamir Brothers" designed for many of the political parties of that period. They worked for every party that paid except, perhaps, for the most extreme ones. The site has over 1000 newspaper ads. In the early decades many of the ads dealt with a topic that is less popular today - cigarettes, especially for the Bejarano brothers. It was customary to bring out new cigarette brands fairly frequently resulting in a large collection of ads and cigarette packaging designs.

Dikla: Are there any sketches of the studio work left?

Galit: I remember Yoram and I came across the cartoonist Zeev's collection. We were amazed to see that Zeev used to keep sketches in personal files without a date ... He used to mark a red circle around his favourite sketches - stylistically, to remember to use them next time as a basis for new cartoons. Not noting when they were created and, of course, not in what context I believe that in the field of advertising and packaging the situation is similar. No marking was made for a next time since all such work started from scratch. We start by looking at the client and his needs in order to give an answer to a specific question, so the sketches did not seem important.

Uri: True, but in series of works it is different. For example, a series of packages for the same manufacturer that sometimes lasted for a long time required a lot of creativity when it was necessary to innovate and bring something completely different for similar products. This is especially noticeable in stamp design. Every year, in preparation for Christmas or Easter celebrations, countries issued stamp series. A large number of different countries commissioned stamp for the same holiday and it was necessary to come up, every year, with a new idea for each of them. There were countries that were happy with an up-to-date modern style and others that demanded to preserve the traditional.



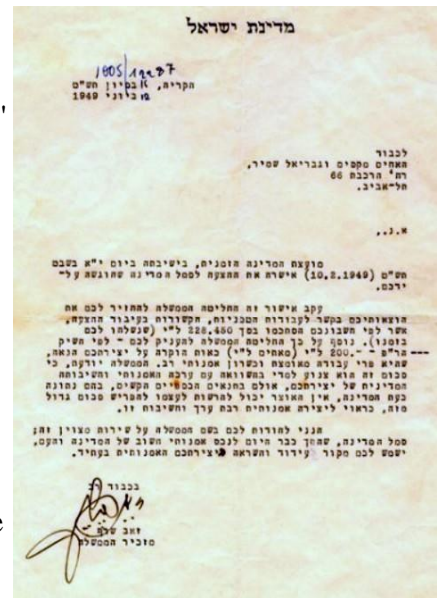
Yoram: Speaking of sketches, on the wall in my house hang sketches for a portrait of Ben-Gurion made in the process of designing a Ben-Gurion medal, I could not give them up. Next to them hangs a sketch of a poster for a sports competition at the university that my father did voluntarily. It disappeared and my father was very angry about it until, years later, it was found.



Galit: Can you tell us something about the studio in Latvia? Did they talk at home, or in the studio about the difficulty and complexity of moving artistically to Palestine - against the cultural background - as Europeans? Did the old studio in Riga retain a romantic and nostalgic feeling, as some immigrants experienced, or did the studio in Israel become their favourite place to operate?

Yoram: They loved their studio in Israel. The brothers loved to work together, which is quite rare. They enjoyed the public reactions to their work. As for Riga, my mother who was also a graphic designer, was very proud of the studio in Riga. But I did not feel from my father and uncle any special pride in it. They were very proud of the mention they received in Berlin, at the Higher School of Applied Arts. Uri Do you remember them embracing their Latvian past?

Uri: They didn't talk about it at home. When they immigrated to Palestine, I was not yet born. The studio existed but there was financial difficulty. Over the years they may have "just managed" but not much more than that. For instance, we have [the official letter](#) notifying them that their design of the state emblem has been accepted and that a payment of 200 lira will be sent to the studio. The letter also includes a comment on the state's economic hardship and the difficulty to pay them a fair amount for the artistic value and political significance of the work. Even the income from stamps, despite their large quantity, was small. For countries that issued stamps this was a nice income, not because of the number of people who used stamps, but because of the global philatelic stamp collecting interest. A fascinating thing about the stamps activity was the research involved and the search for correct content for the stamps for the various countries. This research was done by my mother. She was their "Wikipedia" of the time and spent a lot of time in libraries to collect materials on the specific characteristics of the countries such as: [animals](#), [vegetation](#), [national events](#) and the like. On one or two occasions an animal was included on a stamp that did not fit the country. We learned about these cases from observant collectors, after the fact, but the research work she did was amazing in scope.



Dikla: Were all the investigations done from Israel? Did they visit the different countries?

Uri: The family lived in London for a year. During that time my father established contacts with the local Philatelic agencies and later with international agencies. Once they returned to Israel international stamp design became my father's main activity in the studio. For countries like the Maldives and Togo Maxim Shamir was their exclusive stamp designer for several years. It worked like a real factory, and without ever visiting these countries.

Yoram: Just like Jules Verne who locked himself in a boat and never went out except in his imagination. I want to emphasize about stamp design: you have to create stamps with designs that

are authentic to the place. Here is a small example: On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II of England, Prince Philip, whom we all know from the "Crown" series, was sent to visit the Falkland Islands. A stamp was commissioned for the occasion of the visit. The saddle on the horse in the stamp that Shamir designed was not the kind used in the Falkland Islands, and therefore, a correction was required. In the studio they did not know what the saddle should look like and they were finally sent a picture of the correct one which was included in the final design.



Uri: Another thing is my father's sense of humour. For example, Maxim included an image of our poodle dog in the design of a stamp for Togo. In another stamp he included our



phone number 624830. It was very amusing. And further on the topic of the style and the connection to Latvia, I recognize that in the beginning the Soviet style was easily recognizable in their early posters, which was the local style they knew and learned there.



But, unfortunately, I do not know the reason why my parents at the ages of 24 and 21 decided to migrate from Riga to Tel Aviv, but it was probably not out of pure Zionism.

Yoram: Both my father and my mother said that it was a time of severe anti-Semitism. Although it was not a Nazi regime, it was a Latvian nationalist regime. Why did they come to Palestine? It is not clear to me, but they adapted very quickly. joined the Haganah and worked with public institutions. What amazes me to this day is their rapid adaptation to the Hebrew language. The languages they spoke mostly were German and Russian, but our mothers spoke seven languages.

Galit: What comes up in our conversation here is that without your mothers the studio could not have operated.

Yoram: That's right. My mother was an executive graphic artist. After the divorce from my father she became a graphic designer. The studio revolved around my aunt who managed and ran the studio and, as mentioned, was also their main researcher. She was responsible for all the phone calls and correspondence with the companies that commissioned work from London and New York. I remember my aunt typing letters and correspondence with post offices or agencies from 20 different countries.

Galit: That is, she managed the financial aspect of the studio, and also managed the guys who sat and designed.

Uri: My mother also worked outside, in the "Ha-Meshakem" for many years. She did so to provide some additional income since did not receive a salary for her work in the studio. She worked there out of love ...

Galit: I think this may be the article that is still missing on the site: "The Women of the house of Shamir"

Yoram: Good idea!



Galit: The two women, one designer and one office manager, without whom, I'm not sure that we would see such an incredible amount of their works today. Sounds super interesting to me to write about it!

Yoram: My mother lived to the age of almost 94 and continued to paint, and here on the wall behind me hang some of her paintings.

Yoram: When Uri told me earlier that his mother had to go to work, it reminded me that my mother also went to work in a zincography (Balat printing) that included working with heavy materials. It was during the Arab Revolt and she was travelling by bus to Bat Yam where, on the way, Arabs were shooting and throwing rocks at the bus. The two wives had to go out to work due to the hardship of the time and this in addition to doing all the house work and looking after the children.

Galit: A bit like during this period, that we are locked in the house and at the same time have to take care of the children, the household chores and also work and manage the world. I think of my mother who went to work in an architects' office while Izika was a commercial art graphic student at Bezalel. When I was born Izika had to find a permanent job and this is how his career at the Israel Museum began. Equality in burden is not reflected in life itself - it must have been present in texts or in public discourse but it seems that in practice it was not applied as it should have been.

Uri: On this subject you can see a visual expression in the posters. For example, women from this period appear regularly in the designs. There was an ideological desire for equality, even if not in practice.

Yoram: In Shamir's works for the Histadrut, the female representation is equal to that of the male, but this was only propaganda.

Uri: As well as in the banknote designs.



I recently wrote an article about the images of women in recruitment posters where the call to women at first was: "Come help because the guys can not do without you" and then there was a call to "come cook for the men" and only at the third stage, came the call "Come wear your glory clothes." In the Shamir brothers' poster - come enlist for an important and significant position.

Galit: of



Yoram: The renowned designer Abram Games also worked with the ATS and the first poster he designed for them was outrageous and reached a parliamentary debate during the blitz! The female in it looked like a blonde "Hollywood" bombshell. The poster was finally taken down as these were not the values they wanted to promote. But this was done about the same time as the poster you mentioned "Wear your glorious clothes," by Shamir.

Galit: In Shamir's fourth recruitment poster, "Join us, dear sister," in which the three women are seen walking together, women of different types appear. There already seemed to be an insight that you are not only going to dress nicely and drive a jeep with leather gloves, but engage in strenuous work. The poster also looks different in terms of its visual language, almost unusual in the series. It leads me to the next question, regarding copywriting and the text used. Today we are used to advertising agencies having copy writers in charge of the text and someone separate dealing with images and shapes. How was it then?



Yoram: We do not know for sure. In my opinion the advertiser was the one who

provided the texts. As a professional advertiser I guess so. But it seems that from time to time there were Shamir brothers' ideas included in the texts, though not regularly.

Galit: It seems that the use of language was, on occasion, in the form of amusement in Hebrew. I guess for new immigrants such writing in rhymes did not come easily. What is noticeable is a very beautiful unity between the idea, the text and the visual expression. I know that sometimes the designers would also write the texts as part of the conceptual work and sometimes they would invent the content like the example that Uri gave in the beautiful story about the inclusion of the family dog and the phone number, which were designed into stamps.

Uri: If one pays attention, one can see an example of this in the signatures of the Shamir brothers on their the works over the years. On the posters from Latvia that we found recently, the signature was small and stylish as a symbol. Then the letter Shin was stylized. It is definitely an interesting question to find out when and why the changes to their signatures occurred.



Yoram: You can see this in their ads, on the website of the Jewish Historical Press. By the 1940s, they had come to the conclusion that the full name, Shamir, should be signed.

Galit: As part of a marketing move?

Yoram: Exactly. Regarding the "no signature" I would be very happy if it were possible to find out why not all their works were signed. This is a matter that concerns us to this day. The site has a reference to this, a section called "Works Attributed to the Shamir Brothers" dealing with this phenomenon. Any item that does not carry a signature but its design is distinctly Shamir-ish in terms of layout, typography, characters enters the section.

Uri: There are 41 such items. Their identification is uncertain only because there is no signature. The satisfaction we get when the signature exists is huge.

Dikla: Even in work related to the political parties, one is not always keen on identification.

Yoram: That's right. Something surprising about the stamps is that Shamir did a lot of work for Muslim countries which also issued stamps for Christian holidays. You can find stamps for Christian holidays from Muslim countries with the signature of the Shamir brothers. In the context of shaping politics, my father always stated: "I do not work with the fascists". Still, when I visited the Lavon Institute to look for posters by the Shamir brothers, I was surprised to find three signed posters of the Herut Party. I was shocked! Later, when I visited the Jabotinsky Institute, I found three more posters.

Galit: Summary question: Five years to the site. How do you see the site in the next five years? It is clear that it will expand, but is there anything in particular that is the challenge for the coming years?

Yoram: For me it is important to find more lost works. For example, of all the posters printed on metal we have only four. Such works are not preserved. The material rusts. But these posters are of higher quality than on paper. Second thing are the movie transparencies mentioned earlier. They do not carry signatures, so identification can only be done based on the customer. It makes me happy that students, yours for example, continue to use Shamir materials. We publish such student works

on the site. There is even a weaving work of a carpet with a Shamir motif. We opened a section “what happens after Shamir” and it fills up all the time.

Uri: The two important things for me are: one, to find more works from Latvia. We got to the Latvian National Library and the little we found was with their help. The second thing is to continue with what I started. I entered the name “Shamir” on sites that track auctions around the world. That's how I get to surprising items with the name Shamir. We already found dozens of items we did not know about this way. When an item is discovered, it's a real celebration for us. I am convinced that there are hundreds more items if not thousands that we have not found or that we did not know existed. Our archive is, as you defined, a living archive, and as long as there is air in our breath we will continue! The question is what will happen when Yoram and I will not be ...

Galit: I think your spirit is so strong and I have no doubt that the site will continue to exist and develop. At the same time, maybe it's time to think about a next generation to train the eye of more people to recognize the Shamiri DNA.

Uri: I wish. The thing with the archive is that it needs resources, and a lot of work. Another thing we did not mention is that we are working on creating collections by topic and recently curated a collection of Shamir posters on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Histadrut.

Yoram: I turned to Dr. Mordechai Naor at the time to write the historical background for the posters. For me, I did so as a gift and I would be happy if these texts would be used to understand the historical background of posters by other designers from that period.

Galit: Finally, I want to wish you both a long and long life! I have a lot of plans for further collaborations together.