

## HANA. A WORLD ENTIRE

Hagar Cygler

I have sympathy for hoarders. I mask my inability to say goodbye by reorganizing my memorabilia in carefully categorized boxes and binders. Old photographs I have taken and collected throughout the years are neatly ordered so that I could use them later on to produce new works. I have inherited a pile of photos taken by my grandfather, an engineer by profession and photographer by hobby, who loved shooting doors, bridges and dams – a pile of photos with no aesthetic, but only sentimental value. These photos have passed the selection and categorization process, but in the course of planning this work they had been meant to be part of, I realized I would have to destroy them. I was still not ready to part from them and looked for substitutes.

I bought a bunch of photo albums in the market down the street, disassembled and reassembled them. Hundreds of photos of a large family, at home and on vacation, grouped in front of the camera, modeling another happy moment. I made a pile of the best ones, including those of Hana, the same woman who appeared in most photos and wrote her name on the back. Hana loved being photographed, she did it gracefully, always smiling and beaming to the camera, enjoying every documentary moment. One recurring image was of her at the entrance to her home, a photo journal of her changing fashions. The fern growing on the wooden grating and the changing flowerpots on the entrance table testify to the passage of time – an entire decade of nearly identical photographs, scattered in the various albums.

Hana's photos intrigued me. It's not every day that you encounter a woman in her sixties modeling her wardrobe. They seemed familiar and strange at the same time, encapsulating different worlds in a moment and raising so many questions about Hana, her act of posing for the camera and photography in general. Hana unsettled me. I looked for an appropriate platform which could group that magnificent series of pictures together and display all the layers, thoughts and complexities that were running in my head every time I looked at them.

Detective work can be very exciting, matching assumptions I had made based on the photos with reality. Hana had seemed charming, humorous and lively to me, but as soon as I arrived at her doorway and saw a mailbox with an old sign that had her and her husband's name (Joseph) on it, my reality changed. Both Hana and her husband had passed away. Her family and neighbors brought the stories and I brought the photos, and each of us discovered something new. For me, Hana turned from a mother and grandmother with a predilection for documentation into a childless aunt who loved and photographed other people's children. For them, Hana turned from a kindhearted and ordinary woman into a fashion icon revered by an artist from the big city.

A photo album is a parallel reality, one that selectively captures the moments we have seen fit to document. Hana's family and friends were content with a few photos of their beloved aunt and neighbor so that the reality she had constructed in her albums found its way to me. The photo collection which became this book represents two years of looking for a way to convey what Hana has evoked in me. In an unsettling and even enviable way, Hana managed to produce what every photographer would have wished for – photos that are completely unpretentious, and yet capture a world entire.

## BETWEEN HANA AND HAGAR

Yonatan Amir

Hagar Cygler's *Hana Project* presents dozens of photographs left behind by a woman named Hana. Cygler discovered them by accident, after they had been thrown out and found their way into a store in Jaffa's flea market, a moment before they got scattered and lost. In every photo, Hana is standing at the entrance to her apartment, smiling to the camera, and wearing something else each time. A date is written on the back of each photo. The earliest is in 1980 and the latest is in the early 1990s. The identical location and similar pose serve to emphasize the little differences between the pictures: in addition to the different clothes, some interior design items are added and others are gone, jewelry, keys stuck in the door, lighting differences, and so on. Time also leaves its marks.

Hana documented herself before the age of the Internet, Facebook and Instagram. She didn't even have an email account. She mailed some of the photos to friends and family members, and kept others in albums, together with hundreds of still other photos. Her fashion photo series includes 47 pictures taken in more than a decade, probably without giving any thought to their destiny after the photographer and model have passed away. These photos, collected here before you, paint a certain picture of Hana, but what kind of picture is it, and what does it say?

*Hana Project* is a book that immortalizes something. That much is clear. But what? Hana? The clothes she wore and modeled? The apartment's decor? Printed photography in its dying days? Or maybe it immortalizes Cygler, who found the photos and created the conservation project? And if the book does immortalize Hana, which Hana is it? The Hana seen in the pictures of which we know next to nothing? Who is Hana? What did she do when not posing at the entrance to her apartment wearing her Sunday best? Why did she pose that way for years and what did she do with the pictures? Apart for formal documents stored in archives, the moment this book is published, it will become Hana's central and almost exclusive representation, despite the fact that it only presents a small piece of her life. Does her presentation through the photos in this book – again, a random selection thrown away and discovered by accident – do justice to her as a person, depicting her fully and reliably? Did Hana ever dream of perpetuating herself in such a book? How would she have reacted had she known it would be published one day?

Hana is no longer alive. Neither is her husband Joseph, who took the pictures but appears in none (although his finger is captured in one of them as it inadvertently covers the edge of the lens). With no offspring to treasure them in family albums and pass them on to the next generation, the photos were inherited by Joseph's family members, who kept a few and did away with most, which wound up in the flea market. Cygler's quest to discover Hana's identity, following clues found in some of the photos answered some of the questions raised here, but these are all partial and secondhand, and remain no more than hypotheses. Thus, to many questions the most reliable answer remains "We don't know" – begging the next question: "Does it matter?"

What does *Project Hana* document? Is it a history of a certain fashion in a certain period? In many senses it is, and nevertheless the answer is complex. A conversation with a fashion reporter who looked at the pictures and their dates revealed that the clothes worn by Hana embody a bygone fashion. Not bygone nowadays, but already when worn and shot. In the 1980's, Hana dressed according to the stylistic trends of the 1970's, and in the 1990's, her outfits adhere to an

1980's aesthetic . Thus, the photos not only document a certain style, but also betray a provincial fashion consciousness grounded in a pre-global world, reacting to international developments and adopting them fashionably late. This belatedness goes hand in hand with Joseph's delightfully amateurish style as a photographer, with its imprecise angles, faulty lighting and limited focus. It seeks to emulate acceptable fashion photography stylistic standards and yet remains unperturbed by the sloppy technical outcome.

As often happens in the cultural interaction between center and periphery, some contemporary professional photographers seek to reconstruct the kind of homely and provincial aesthetics embodied in Hana's photos and exploit it in the service of the photography industry, but a great distance separate the two outcomes, and it has to do not only with each photographer's level of self-awareness but also with their cultural environment. A contemporary fashion photographer employing such aesthetics would seek to displace the domestic look into the mass culture. Hana, on the other hand – and to a large extent also Joseph – sought to borrow something from the mass culture for their own domestic use, amongst a small circle of family and friends. These photos are clearly inspired by fashion magazines, but they are far from fully applying their principles. They are made in a manner reminiscent of the advertising world, without in the least bit seeking to be advertised. The result is an alternative history suggesting a historical alternative: a moment of diagonal development which is not disconnected from the center, but neither reproduces it.

In an epoch that feels light years away from Hana's photos, we document ourselves in hundreds and thousands of files uploaded to the web every second. Files launched into cyberspace take off, break away from gravity and venture along an independent and random route. What will become of them in a year's time, in thirty or a hundred years' time? Many companies now offer to archive people's digital and online information postmortem, but there is a certain degree of purposelessness in the attempt to regain control over information that spreads unbridled through the web, growing more uncontrollable with each passing day. Against this background, Hana's photos seem like a sweet memory from the past. Not only the memory of a specific individual, but also of a form of social communication, the romantic view of the photograph as an authentic document, together with the problematic aspect of its function as such.

Thus, despite our awareness of the fact that this is actually more than a commonplace photo album designed to preserve the past, and despite the almost total anonymity of its protagonist, and despite the photographer's lack of refinement and technical skills, and although the fashion it depicts is not exactly in vogue, I find in those photos and the decision to group them in a book something both touching and judicious. *Project Hana* is to a large degree a nostalgic project and at the same time one that externalizes the problematic nature of nostalgia and its potential phoniness. It pushes our sentimental buttons, but also refers to the ease in which they can be pushed, crowns Hana with a renewed halo and shatters it simultaneously. Hana's photo album as recreated by Cygler is a monument to bygone environment, habits and vogue, to a certain relationship, intimacy and memory, to a technology and technological culture that have been totally transformed, to the aura that radiated from the picture, if only for a fleeting moment, as it was being taken, without taking into account the possibility that one day it will find itself in some dusty pile in a flea market. From this perspective, the photo book represents more than a documentation of a woman called Hana, but also an attempt to rethink the status of the photographed image and the ease in which it is produced and disposed of once it has served its designated purpose, only to be reincarnated in a different context.