

SUBSCRIBE TO HAARETZ DIGITAL EDITIONS

Haaretz.com הארץ TheMarker עבר העיר TheMarker Café

National Israel pays Reform rabbis for first time >



Not a member? Register now

Thursday, January 02, 2014 Shvat 1, 5774

Search Haaretz.com

NEWS | OPINION | JEWISH WORLD | BUSINESS | TRAVEL | CULTURE | WEEKEND | BLOGS | ARCHAEOLOGY | NEWS BROADCAST

Passover In Whistler

pesachonthemountain.com/ski-resort

Passover at a Five Diamond Hotel. Limited Space. Book Your Room Now!

ISRAEL NEWS Prisoner release | 2013: Year-in-Review | Rocket attacks | Word of the Day | Photos of the Year

Like < 98k Follow

BREAKING NEWS 7:52 PM Former U.S. first lady Barbara Bush in hospital (AP)

More Breaking News >

Home Culture Arts & Leisure

Israeli entrepreneur's journey from property to photography

Enrique Rottenberg has enjoyed many jobs, including shoe importer, film producer and real-estate mogul. He reflects on his colorful past and new passion: still photography.

By Nirit Anderman | Jun. 4, 2013 | 6:15 AM

+1 0 Tweet < 4 Recommend Share One person recommends this.



Enrique Rottenberg at his Tel Aviv studio. Credits his daughter for his new direction. Photo by David Bachar

Get HAARETZ on iPhone

Get HAARETZ on Android

Get HAARETZ on iPad

Enrique Rottenberg produced three films by Amos Guttman, was instrumental in introducing gay culture into Israeli cinema, and directed one successful movie himself. However, the producer and businessman left Israel for Cuba in the early 1990s, at the height of his success. He recently returned to Tel Aviv and to artistic work, investing all his time in his new vocation: stills photography.

Text size **A+** **A-**

Comments (0)

Print Page

Send to friend

HAARETZ SELECT



What we talk about when we talk about New Year's

In this response to Yossi Klein's op-ed, Elad Kimelman argues that it is Christians, not Jews, who are ignorant about the holiday's origins.

By Elad Kimelman | Opinion

The contortions and distortions of a prime minister's inner circle

By Alon Pinkas | Opinion

Born in Argentina in 1948, Rottenberg came to Israel aged 13. His family was in the theater business in Buenos Aires, and Rottenberg says his family still owns some 30 theaters there. He didn't stay in the family business, though. When he completed his army service here, he began working as a building contractor. He also worked in marketing and imported shoes - and it's to that shoe-importing business that he owes his first foray into the film world.

It happened the day he went to a shoe store in Ramat Gan to show his wares, and got into a conversation with the store owner. "He said to me, 'Listen, I have a son who doesn't want to work with me in the store. He wants to make movies, and he's looking for a businessman who will invest in his film. Do me a favor and talk to him,'" Rottenberg recalls. "I agreed, and then his son, Amos Guttman, came to meet me, together with Edna Mazia, the playwright and screenwriter. He didn't even give me time to talk about my shoe business. Right away he told me about his screenplay, 'Drifting,' that he wanted to make into a film."

As befits a businessman, Rottenberg started looking into the relevant financial aspects and wondered about the film's profit-making potential. Since the storyline was about the life of a young gay man in Tel Aviv who dreamed of becoming a film director, he figured that the film's potential audience would come mostly from Israel's gay community. When he asked Guttman how many gays and lesbians lived in Israel, Guttman said they made up eight percent of the general population - and that got Rottenberg thinking.

"There were four million people in Israel at the time, and I calculated right away that this meant 320,000 people," Rottenberg says, smiling. "Since I came from a family that worked in a similar field, the investment didn't seem unrealistic to me, and my financial situation at the time was good enough. I decided to do it in the hope that the film would be a great commercial success. But as we know, it wasn't."

While "Drifting" (1982) may not have been a financial success, Rottenberg was persuaded to produce another of Guttman's films, "Bar 51" (1985). He says that at the time, the tax rate for businesspeople in Israel was particularly high. Since he continued running his business while he was involved in the cinema world (he was also involved in constructing malls), and since the investment in the film would bring him various tax breaks, he saw that investing in the film would be worthwhile, even if the film was not a commercial success. Although the critics found Guttman's film interesting, audience response was not enthusiastic.

After "Bar 51," Rottenberg and Guttman got the rights to adapt Yoram Kaniuk's book "Himmo, King of Jerusalem," for the big screen. "One can't think of two more polar opposites than Amos Guttman and the War of Independence," Rottenberg reflects, smiling. "Guttman didn't want to do it, but he agreed when I insisted. After the critics panned him, we fought terribly once more. He said to me: 'I told you I couldn't do that film,' but I still think it's the best one he ever did."

The stormy quarrels brought an end to the men's working partnership. When Guttman gave him the screenplay of his next film, "Amazing Grace" - about a young man from Tel Aviv who falls in love with a man dying of AIDS who lives in New York and visits Israel - Rottenberg rejected it out of hand. He didn't know that Guttman was a carrier of the virus himself by that time (Guttman succumbed to AIDS at the age of 38).

[Share on Facebook](#)
[Share on Twitter](#)
[Share](#)

THIS STORY IS BY
Nirit Anderman

RELATED TAGS
[Israel culture](#)

- ▶ ACTIVITY
- ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS

[Log in](#) Log in to Facebook to see your friends' are doing.


Hasidic chakra: Couple introduces yoga to Israel's ultra-Orthodox
 649 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

UP TO **50% OFF** MODERN HOME DÉCOR



DISCOVER WHAT THE WORLD IS MAKING FOR YOU

Dot&Bo [SHOP NOW >](#)

A Hollywood star knee-deep in cow poop? The Big Bang Theory's Mayim Bialik does Israel her way

By Allison Kaplan Sommer | Arts & Leisure



Confessions of a Limmud virgin: Seven takeaways

The weather was awful, and the food not much better- but everything else about this annual British-Jewish mega-event was fabulous.

By Judy Maltz | Jewish World Features

Movie review || 'Frances Ha,' stumbling through life

By Uri Klein | Culture

Forecast for 2014: You will get less

By Moti Bassok | Business

Love, illustrated: The unraveling of a married life

By Yuval Saar | Arts & Leisure

Instead, Rottenberg chose to work with Daniel Waxman on his film "The Appointed" (1990), starring Ronit Elkabetz and Shuli Rand. But after that film also failed at the box office, he decided to write a screenplay and direct a commercial film. "More than 100,000 people came to see 'The Revenge of Itzik Finkelstein' - many more than all the previous films combined," he says.

"The Revenge of Itzik Finkelstein" (1993), won seven Ophirs from the Israeli Film Academy, including for best picture, best director and best screenplay. The audience flocked to the theaters, and the film made the rounds of the international festivals. Despite its success, Rottenberg decided to walk away from it all a year later.

"I realized that film wasn't bringing in any money," he says. "I'd already gotten the honor I wanted, and I decided it wasn't right for me to spend two to three years on every film. Also, it was then I discovered Cuba."

On his first trip to Cuba, he got a chance to meet with the Cuban minister of foreign investment. "He told me, 'Listen: we need an office building here because foreign companies are starting to come to Cuba.' And I was a show-off, like all Israelis, so I said, 'A building? What for? Let's do a whole real-estate project together.' He asked me how much land was required for that. Of course, I had no earthly idea, so I threw out a number: 'A hundred dunams.' Two months later, somebody from his office called me and said, 'Let's get started. We found 72 dunams in the best place in Havana.' So I built the project, which I run to this day, and meanwhile I fell in love with the place."

Five years ago, Rottenberg started taking his first photographs. He began by walking the streets with his camera, taking what he called "National Geographic photos." But he quickly changed direction, abandoning documentary photos for staged ones. He credits his daughter, the successful video artist Mika Rottenberg - who lives and works in New York - with the change.

On the wall of Rottenberg's studio in south Tel Aviv (1 Shvil Hameretz, building 9, third floor) are dozens of his photographs, most of them taken in Cuba (the studio is open to visitors). One series shows bedrooms in various Havana homes. Rottenberg says he walked the city's streets, knocking on doors and asking the residents to allow him inside briefly to photograph their bedrooms. The results are impressive. With overexposure and cropping, Rottenberg creates a slightly surreal, dreamy effect that benefits from unnatural, revealing and fascinating lighting.

In another series, he received permission from a Cuban woman to photograph several women from the neighborhood in Havana as they lay, partially nude, on her bed. A third series portrays a Cuban family, two parents and four children, whose hardship shows on their skin and faces, in various staged situations that are very distant from their real lives.

A photograph taken in Israel is particularly eye-catching, connecting with Rottenberg's distant past. Two men are sitting on a bed, covered in a blanket, their upper bodies naked. One of the men, Rottenberg himself, leans on the wall behind him, embracing the bearded but feminine-looking man in front of him. As the man leans on him, both look directly at the camera with an expression that is part serious, part melancholy.

"For many years, gays and lesbians were persecuted in Cuba. That sexual

#1 For Naples Dating ▶
www.naplessingles.com
 Dating Service For Busy Singles Meet
 Amazing Singles Ages 40+

**"Shocking" 2014
 Horoscope** ▼

**#1—Volkswagen
 Clearance** ▼

ARTS & LEISURE

MORE FROM THE WEB

- Is Brooklyn Decker the Most Attractive Swimsuit Model...**
(StyleBistro) 
- 25 Celebrities You Didn't Know Were Black!**
(Styleblazer) 
- Can't Miss Photos of HOT Sportscaster Kristen Ludlow**
(Rant Sports) 
- Top Pictures of George Clooney's Ex-Girlfriends Will...**
(Rant Lifestyle) 
- Broke and Famous. 15 Stars That Lost It All.**
(She Budgets) 

Recommended by

Newsmax SPONSORED LINKS

- **Palestinian Ambassador Killed in Blast**
- **Facebook's Zuckerberg Tops 2013 Charity List**
- **Sotomayor Delays Obamacare Mandate**
- **Ban on Light Bulbs Begins Today**
- **MSNBC Mocks Romney's Black Grandson**
- **Top Doctor: How to Beat Thyroid Disorders**
- **Seniors: Increase Social Security Payouts With Weird Trick**
- **Rate Obama's Presidency — Vote Now**

[What's This?](#)

preference was considered antirevolutionary," Rottenberg says. "And then, a few years ago, the gay and lesbian association in Cuba began fighting for their rights and decided to mount an exhibition on the subject. They commissioned works from 20 artists, myself included. I sat and thought about what to do. Then I remembered Amos [Guttman], and asked myself what would happen if he were alive today. That's where the idea of that photograph came from. I spoke with my friend, the photographer Ariela Shavid, and she suggested that she dress up as a man. That's how the photograph came into being. It was sent to the exhibition and was very successful."

MORE FROM HAARETZ.COM



Does your rabbi own an iPhone? If so, your wedding doesn't count
(Haaretz | Blogs)



How South Africa's apartheid regime saved Israel's defense industry
(Haaretz | News)



Is Morocco the new go-to-place for Israeli fugitives?
(Haaretz | News)



Proust: Jew, Jewish-hater or both?
(Haaretz | Weekend)



Gal Gadot lands role of Wonder Woman in 'Batman vs. Superman'
(Haaretz | Culture)



Opposing Hitler: The extraordinary stories of two men
(Haaretz | Culture)

FROM AROUND THE WEB



25 Celebrities You Didn't Know Were Black!
(Styleblazer)



Can't Miss Photos of HOT Sportscaster Kristen Ludlow
(Rant Sports)



Is Brooklyn Decker the Most Attractive Swimsuit Model in the World?
(StyleBistro)



Top Pictures of George Clooney's Ex-Girlfriends Will Shock You
(Rant Lifestyle)



These are the 30 Hottest Jewish Women Under 40
(Rant Lifestyle)



Broke and Famous. 15 Stars That Lost It All.
(She Budgets)

Recommended by

COMMENTS

Name

Subject

Comment

By adding a comment i agree to this site's [Terms of use](#)

Safari Power Saver
Click to Start Flash Plug-in



anyclip

Safari Power Saver
Click to Start Flash
Plug-in



Stay
connected
to Haaretz



Subscribe Now

HAARETZ
Your direct link to Israel

NEWS: Diplomacy and Defense | National | World | Middle East | Features | Opinion | Israel weather | [GA: Israel 2013](#)

JEWISH WORLD: News | Rabbis' Round Table | The Jewish Thinker **CULTURE:** Books | Food and Wine | Arts & Leisure

HAARETZ.COM BLOGS: A Special Place in Hell | West of Eden | Diplomania | Routine Emergencies | Eyes Wide Open | Jerusalem Vivendi | Strenger than Fiction | Modern Manna | The Fifth Question

HAARETZ.CO.IL: הארץ | חדשות | מג אוויר | גלריה | חדשות חוץ | ביקורת מסעדות | מפלס הכנרת | ספורט | ספרים

FAQ | Contact us | Terms and Conditions | Privacy Policy | Management | Editorial | Employment Opportunities | Advertise on Haaretz.com | Haaretz News Widget

Design by Roni Arie | Accelerated by cotendo

Haaretz.com, the online edition of Haaretz Newspaper in Israel, and analysis from Israel and the Middle East. Haaretz.com provides extensive and in-depth coverage of Israel, the Jewish World and the Middle East, including defense, diplomacy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the peace process, Israeli politics, Jerusalem affairs, international relations, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Israeli business world and Jewish life in Israel and the Diaspora.

© Haaretz Daily Newspaper Ltd. All Rights Reserved