

Newsletter

3 2015

NEW EXHIBITION AT THE ROBERT GUTTMANN GALLERY

The Missing Images: Eugene Van Mieghem and the Jewish Emigrants to the New World

The third exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Prague on the phenomenon of emigration is devoted to the millions of inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe who decided to leave for America between the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries.

The port of Antwerp was one of the main points of departure, and up until 1934 the Belgian Red Star Line, with its efficient network of sales agents in the region and attractive pricing, alone transported ca. 2.4 million emigrants from Eastern Europe.

Among them were hundreds of thousands Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia, who were fleeing poverty, oppression, and persecution. The first large-scale wave of Jewish emigration followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Another wave followed the widespread Kishinev pogrom in 1903 and the failure of the democratic revolution of 1905 in Russia, which also sparked pogroms. Between 1881 and 1914, more than two and a half million Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia and another million left Europe from 1918 to 1939. The statistics show that over a fifty-year period nearly one-third of all Jewish inhabitants in Eastern Europe emigrated.

The Missing Images

Eugeen Van Mieghem
and the Jewish Emigrants
to the New World



Exhibition opening: (from left) Her Excellency Françoise Gustin (Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to the Czech Republic), David Maenaut (General Representative of the Government of Flanders in the Czech Republic), Jewish Museum representative, Erwin Joos (director of the Eugene Van Mieghem Museum in Antwerp), interpreter, Leo Pavlát (Jewish Museum director) and Arno Pařík (exhibition curator)

This exodus was depicted by the painter Eugeen Van Mieghem (1875–1930), who was born and lived his whole life in Antwerp. Since the time of his youth he was in contact with the vibrant world of dockworkers, sailors, and East European emigrants who would become the lifelong subjects of his work. His life witnessed the greatest expansion of the Antwerp harbor and the massive waves of emigration to America. During the First World War, the inhabitants of occupied Belgium became the subject matter of his drawings.



Jewish Museum director Leo Pavlát and curator Arno Pařík

On show are 50 drawings and paintings by Van Mieghem as well as documentation about Red Star Line and period photographs of the Antwerp harbor. The exhibition was organized by the Jewish Museum in Prague in cooperation with the Eugeen Van Mieghem Foundation with support of the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, and is being held under the personal auspices of Her Excellency Françoise Gustin, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to the Czech Republic.

The exhibition will be open to the public until 10 April 2015.

EXHIBITIONS

The exhibition *Shattered Hopes: Postwar Czechoslovakia as a Crossroads of Jewish Life* was on view at the Robert Guttmann Gallery until 23 August. Seen by more than 13,000 people, it was the most visited show ever at the gallery.

Held in collaboration with the Prague City Gallery, the *The Auschwitz Album* exhibition was on view at the Prague House of Photography until 27 September. This unique album of photographs had never before been displayed in the Czech Republic.

*We are currently preparing an exhibition entitled *Castaways in Shanghai: The Hongkew Ghetto Through the Lens of Arthur Rothstein*.*

NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION AT THE MAISEL SYNAGOGUE

The Maisel Synagogue in Prague – one of the dominant buildings in the former Jewish Town of Prague – reopened to the public on 1 July 2015 after a year of preservation and restoration work. Since then, the Jewish Museum’s new exhibition **JEWS IN THE BOHEMIAN LANDS, 10TH–18TH CENTURY** has been visited by thousands of tourists. The synagogue is now being used also as an auditorium for evening events – concerts, recitals and solo theatre performances, seeking to attract mostly Czech visitors.



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM

As of the beginning of September 2015, the Maisel Synagogue is being used for the first time as a venue for evening events. The opening concert *Le-El Elim* (To Mighty God) took place on 3 September and featured works by Jewish composers of the Baroque era (including Salamon Rossi, Abraham Caceres and Cristian Guisepe Lidarti), outstandingly performed by Irena Troupová and the Collegium Musicum Brno.



Opening concert at the Maisel Synagogue

On 9 September the Maisel Synagogue hosted a highly successful literary evening (entitled *Proud Budžes: a Jew and a Bohemian*) with the writer Irena Dousková. Excerpts from her works were read by the actress Bára Hrzánová and the event was moderated by the journalist Jan Fingerland.



In addition to the other evening events at the Maisel Synagogue and the Jewish Museum's Department for Education and Culture, the continuation of the *Our Twentieth Century* series – sub-headed "A View from the Other Side" – was also a success. The September discussion featured the recollections of the 90-year-old Holocaust survivor Hanuš Hron and the 98-year-old Eduard Marek, a leading representative of the Czech Scout Movement.

An exhibition of works by the artist Jiří Winter Neprakta – *The Known and The Unknown* – is currently on show at the Jewish Museum's Department for Education and Culture (Maiselova 15, Prague 1).



More information about these and other events is available on the [Jewish Museum's website](#).

CINEGOGUE 2015

12 + 13 October, 7.30 p.m., Spanish Synagogue, Věžeňská 1, Prague 1

CINEGOGUE is a unique series that combines silent cinema, live music and historic architecture. Entitled *The Poetic Avant-Garde: Between Walt Whitman and Robert Desnos*, this year's CINEGOGUE program will present a series of five short films made by Jewish American artists Paul Strand (1890–1976), Ralph Steiner (1899–1986), and Man Ray (1890–1976). All three were established photographers with an interest in cinematic experiment. The five films form a multi-genre collage that ranges from the (proto)documentary of Paul Strand to the abstract cinematic montages of Ralph Steiner to the Surrealist games and dreams of Man Ray. What connects the three is a distinct

penchant for the poetry of images and words. Indeed, the first and last films incorporate specific works of poetry: in “Manhatta” Strand borrows from Walt Whitman, and Ray’s fantasy “L’étoile de mer” is based on an automatic text by Robert Desnos, who is one of the protagonists in the film. Restored and digitized versions of the films will be shown and accompanied by new music from young Czech composers produced and performed by BERG Orchestra, conducted by Petr Vrábel, the ensemble’s artistic director.

MUSEUM OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

The Jewish Museum in Prague has become involved in the Museum of the Year competition that is organized by the Czech Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Association of Museums and Galleries in the Czech Republic and the Czech Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The main focus of this competition is on museum and gallery visitors, giving them a unique opportunity to express their feelings about a particular museum or gallery they have visited. There are four categories (exhibitions, people in the museum, visitor services and accompanying programmes) covering the visitor’s overall impression of a particular museum or gallery. The top three museums/galleries will be announced at the Gloria Musaealis awards ceremony in May 2016. In addition, three prizes will be drawn for all the visitors who voted in the competition. For more information about the competition (in Czech), see www.do-muzea.cz – where you can also vote for the Jewish Museum in Prague. Many thanks for your support!

PROJECTS

Frontier of Memory

The Frontier of Memory project charts the fate of a large, hitherto undocumented group of Holocaust victims from the Sudetenland – the border regions of Czechoslovakia that were annexed by Nazi Germany after the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938. This project is supported by the Claims Conference and is being carried out by the Jewish Museum in Prague in close co-operation with historians, archivists in the Czech Republic and a number of international museums. The main output will be a database of Holocaust victims from the Sudetenland.

Interviews with Holocaust survivors and witnesses

As part of our oral history project, we are continuing to record interviews with Czech-born Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are now living in the USA (for more information, see newsletters 3/2014 and 1/2015).

In August and September, the survivors Jan Arnet, Joseph Ben-David, Peter Kubicek and Steve Wallner kindly provided us with biographical information. Their various lives



Peter Kubicek



Jan Arnet



Joseph Ben-David



Steve Wallner

are underpinned by a positive approach and a tremendous sense of vitality. Jan Arnet, who left Czechoslovakia in 1965, provided a riveting account of his adventurous escape and other events in his life. Joseph Ben-David left Czechoslovakia for Palestine before the war, working on refugee ships among other things, and came to the USA in 1954 at the invitation of Martin Buber. Having survived six concentration camps during the war, Peter Kubicek left for New York with his mother after the Liberation to be with his father who had somehow managed to leave Czechoslovakia in 1939. Born after the war, Steve Wallner is a second-generation Holocaust survivor who has also provided us with an account of his post-war experience.

Collecting and compiling archival materials and family records (including photographs) is an integral part of the work done by the Archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague. In connection with this, we would like to thank George Sachs for donating documentary material relating to the Koretz family – which will be added to the personal papers in our archives – and John Morawetz for providing a large amount of scanned family photos.

We have received another generous donation from Robert B. Fried, who during his last visit to Prague offered to provide substantial financial support for recording interviews with Holocaust survivors under a project entitled “From Generation To...” Monika Hanková – an archives specialist at the Jewish Museum who conducted the interviews – met with him in New York, as well as with his grandmother Rebecca Fried, whose personal account has already been included in our oral history collection.

(More information about the project “From Generation To...” is available on our [website](#)).

Project supporting apprenticeships

With support from Prague City Hall, we are carrying out an apprenticeship project this year, which will enable students to learn about Jewish traditions and customs at the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture. An interactive workshop will be held for students in the autumn. In total, we will be providing support for more than 300 students.

The Crocus Project

The Crocus Project is an initiative by the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland (HETI) in association with the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture. As part of this project, HETI provides yellow crocus bulbs for school pupils to plant in memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished in the Shoah and thousands of other children who were victims of Nazi atrocities. Participating in the Crocus Project is free. The yellow flowers symbolically commemorate the yellow Stars of David that Jewish children were forced to wear under Nazi rule. In ideal conditions, the crocuses will bloom around the end of January about the time of the International Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January). When people admire the flowers, the pupils can explain what they represent.

If you would like to join the project, please contact denisa.glacova@jewishmuseum.cz.

The Yerusha project in Slovakia

The Yerusha database project, which is supported by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, is one of the major achievements in the digital humanities in Europe. Its aim is to collect and publish information on available sources relating to modern European Jewish history and culture.



Rachael and Rob Fried and Rebecca Fried

These sources are currently in various stages of arrangement and have various levels of damage. They are scattered across the archives of various institutions, from state archival systems through to private collections. Judaica are hidden away in the vast collections of public authorities, schools, police institutions and financial organizations and in various other fonds and collections. The basic vision of the Yerusha project is to unite and publish information about the scattered Jewish documentary heritage. It will result in an online portal containing archival collection descriptions with relevance to Jewish history, as well as research infrastructure linking specialized institutions and researchers, and a platform for publishing digital finding aids, catalogues and academic studies.

The Jewish Museum in Prague has been involved for a year in the Yerusha project in Czech archives with focus on the search for sources relating to the history in the Sudetenland and the phenomenon of Moravian Jewish political communities. As of this autumn, the Jewish Museum in collaboration with the Bratislava-based Holocaust Documentation Centre, will also be contributing to Slovak research for the Yerusha database with a topic entitled "*Periphery*": *Jewish Sources from Slovakia*. The research aims to explore the collections of state archives, museums and specific Jewish communities in relation to Jewish history from 1848–1938, the emancipation and transformation of Jewish social and economic structures, and the period of increasing nationalism and antisemitism in the hitherto neglected regions of south and north-west Slovakia. The project task will be carried out by a group of experts from the ranks of archivists and historians who will be undertaking research in regional archives. Under the supervision of the Holocaust Documentation Centre and the Jewish Museum in Prague, they will create archival collection descriptions with relevance to Jewish history in accordance with international norms at the fonds level.

Providing research infrastructure and a database of sources relating to Jewish history, the Yerusha portal will enable researchers to prepare their research and projects in a user-friendly environment with the maximum amount of information that is needed in the context of local and international history. Giving access to the documentary heritage of Jewish history and culture in Europe in this way can provide fundamental support for current research and historical understanding.

ONLINE TRIBUTE TO NICHOLAS WINTON – EXHIBITION: I REGARD THE PARENTS AS THE HEROES

Sir Nicholas Winton, who organized the rescue of 669 children from Nazi persecution in 1939, died aged 106 on the 1st of July 2015. In honour of Sir Nicholas, we have put together an online exhibition, entitled *I regard the parents as the heroes*. This exhibition contains excerpts from an interview with Zuzana Marešová, who is one of "Winton's children", together with unique photos and documents from her family archive.

The exhibition can be seen at this site:

http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/simpleGallery/Show/displaySet/set_id/128



JUDAICA BOHEMIAE

A new issue of the journal *Judaica Bohemiae* 50 (2015), 1 came out in September 2015. This volume includes a study by Zdeňka Stoklásková on the life and academic career of Bertold Bretholz, a historian and archivist of Jewish descent. It is followed by the final part of a study by Markéta Lhotová and Vlastimila Hamáčková that explores in detail the way that Jewish organizations in the Czech border regions were liquidated during the Second World War. In the 'Reports' section, Arno Pařík looks back at the life and work of the historian Jiří Fiedler who tragically died recently; this includes a bibliography of Fiedler's work compiled by Daniel Polakovič. There is also a collective report by J. Kuntoš, P. Schneider, M. Sidenberg, L. Uličná and D. Veselská on acquisition activity in the Jewish Museum's 'Judaica' sub-collection between 1994 and 2014. Michal Frankl discusses the Jewish Museum's recent exhibition at the Robert Guttmann Gallery, *Orient in Bohemia? Jewish Refugees during the First World War*. Julie Jenšovská and Jarka Vitámvášová review the workshop *Archival Traces of Jewish History and the Holocaust in the Czech Republic*.

The final section of the journal contains reviews of the books *Vybrané hebrejské a jidiš prameny k dějinám Židů na Moravě: středověk a raný novověk* [Selected Hebrew and Yiddish Sources on the History of the Jews in Moravia: The Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period] (T. Visi – M. Krappmann – A. Drexlerová, eds., Olomouc 2014), *Vanished History. The Holocaust in Czech and Slovak Historical Culture* (Tomas Sniegon, New York 2014), and *Von der Hauptstadtposse zur Erfolgsgeschichte. Die Entstehung des Jüdischen Museums Berlin 1971–2001* (Daniel Bussenius, Göttingen 2014).

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JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE 2015

PROMINENT VISITS

On 4 September 2015 the Jewish Museum was visited by Aliza Lavie, a member of the Israeli Parliament, accompanied by Dov Eichenwald (EIC Yedioth Sfarim) and Hagit Kfir with her husband. The guests were shown around the museum by the visual arts curator Michaela Sidenberg.



- 9 September 2015: The opening show of the exhibition *The Missing Images: Eugene Van Mieghem and the Jewish Emigrants to the New World* was also attended by their Excellencies, the U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Andrew Schapiro, and the Israeli Ambassador to the Czech Republic, J. E. Gary Koren.



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