

## NEWSLETTER 1997/2

### **New exhibition organised by the Jewish Museum**

On 5 May 1997 the exhibition Children's Drawings from Terezín 1942-1944 was opened to the public by the Jewish Museum in the Memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the Pinkas Synagogue. Following the exhibitions The History of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia in the Maisel Synagogue and Jewish Traditions and Customs in the Klaus Synagogue this is the third exhibition prepared for visitors to the Jewish Museum. It replaces the original more broadly conceived exhibition held in the Ceremonial Hall – Drawings from the Terezín ghetto. The Ceremonial Hall is temporarily closed but next year, after the completion of repairs, is to house an exhibition on the Burial Society.

The exhibition Children's Drawings from Terezín 1942-1944 which is installed on the first floor of the Pinkas Synagogue conceptually differs from the exhibition held in the Ceremonial Hall. Visitors can become acquainted with the project for the preservation of the children's drawings in the ante-room where the main part of the exhibition is installed.

In the main hall visitors have the opportunity to see a completely new collection of children's drawings, or rather their high quality reproductions. Various techniques are represented in the collection, e.g. drawings in pencil, pastels, coloured chalk, pen-and-ink, water-colours, distemper and collages. The selected collection of drawings provides an insight into the absurdity of everyday life in the ghetto and into the inner world of the children, as reflected by the individual themes into which the collection is divided: Life before deportation – transports – topography of Terezín – everyday life in the ghetto – accommodation in children's homes – the world around us – festivals – biblical motifs – the Terezín Theatre – memories of home – fairy tales: good and evil – through the looking glass – dreams about Palestine – dream about returning – history – the present – transports into darkness – Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and art lessons in Terezín – some of us.

These moving drawings were done by children from 8 to 15 years of age, most of whom died during the war (from about 6,000 Czech Jewish children only a few hundred were to return from Terezín). Included in the exhibition is a collection of photographs taken of the children whose drawings are displayed. Special attention is devoted to the prominent Viennese painter and Bauhaus graduate, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, who along with other teachers gave art lessons to the children in the ghetto. The children's drawings are accompanied by documentary photographs (transports to Terezín, scenes from everyday ghetto life) and actual objects from the ghetto – transport luggage, a ghettowachmann puppet (a member of the Jewish police in the Terezín ghetto), a child's doll, a Red Indian puppet, a pendant bearing a transport number, an unknown girl's diary.

The exhibition provides a dignified complement to the memorial (reopened in April 1996) to the nearly 80,000 Czech and Moravian Jewish victims of the Genocide whose names are inscribed on the walls of the Pinkas Synagogue. The curator of the exhibition is Michaela Hájková.

The Jewish Museum is responsible for looking after almost 4,500 original drawings by children from Terezín. The project to preserve these drawings (see Newsletter 4/96) is currently taking place. At present the drawings are being stored in a newly designed depository to provide the best possible storage conditions.

### **Restoration of tombstones in the Old Jewish Cemetery**

The Jewish Museum in Prague is continuing with its extensive preservation of the Old Jewish Cemetery, which is one of the most important historic sites of the Jewish Town in Prague. Its history dates back to the first half of the 15th century – the oldest surviving gravestone, belonging to the scholar and poet Avigdor Kara, dates back to 1439. A wide range of factors has affected the overall state of the cemetery, in addition to the natural ageing of the tombstones – especially the unsuitable climatic conditions such as the generally warmer temperatures, frequent rainfall and mists, and the high level of noxious substances in the atmosphere. As a result of such hostile environmental conditions the gravestones are in danger of decay and fragmentation, and the ornament reliefs and texts are gradually disintegrating. Thanks to the systematic care taken by the Jewish Museum, which is collaborating with a team of external restoration specialists, extensive preservation work was carried out on tombstones during 1994–1996. Alongside these emergency measures the museum has secured and is still securing the systematic conservation and restoration of tombstones (of which there are about 12,000) in selected areas of the cemetery. Conservation work mainly involves cleaning the stones and removing dirt, the aim of which is to fix the preserved state and prevent further decay. The restoration work ensures the return of the gravestones to their original form and slows down the process of decay.

Only last year 88 gravestones were restored at an overall cost of 19,270 US\$. The photograph shows one of the tombstones that was originally seriously damaged and successfully restored in 1996. This is the tombstone of Samuel Lichtenstadt (d. 1752) who was rabbi at the Klaus Synagogue.

The Jewish Museum will continue to devote its attention to the Old Jewish Cemetery in the years to come. After the completion of the conservation and restoration work the focus will be on preservation measures.

### **From the art collection of the Jewish Museum**

The Jewish Museum's extensive art collection includes a. o. drawings, prints and sculptures from the 17th century to the present. Thematically it contains works connected to Judaism, a collection of mostly 19th century portraits, and a collection of period photographs recording the Jewish Town of Prague before the slum clearance, i.e. from the turn of the century. As part of its documenting of the Holocaust the museum looks after the collection of works by Jewish artists and of children's drawings created in Terezín. Included in the Jewish Museum's art collection are works by Jewish modern painters from the inter-war period (e.g. Alfréd Justitz, Bedřich Feigl).

Among the prominent artists represented in this collection is Jiří (Georg) Kars who is considered to be one of the most significant Czech Jewish 20th century artists. He was born in Kralupy nad Vltavou in 1880 and graduated in 1905 from the Munich Academy of Art. His work was exhibited in the 1920s and 30s in a number of European cities. The first collective exhibition of Kars's work was held in Paris in 1937, where he mostly lived before the second world war. Following the capture of France by the Nazis he moved to Lyon for a short while from where he also had to make a hasty retreat. He left for Switzerland where he tragically died in Geneva in January 1945. Jiří Kars's work is dispersed across private and public collections in the Czech Republic and abroad. Since the end of the war there has only been one minor exhibition of his work which was arranged in 1965 in the Gallery of Vincenc Kramář in Prague.

The 6th Festival In the Centre of Europe is to take place in Bavaria, Saxony and the Czech Republic (Euroregion Egrensis) from 13.7. – 31.8.1997 and will focus on cultural relations of Czechs, Jews and Germans from this area. Part of this rich cultural programme is the first monographic exhibition of Kars's work since his death and only the second show of such scale since 1937. It will take place from 24. 7. – 24. 8. 97 in the State Gallery of Visual Art in Cheb (Western Bohemia). The Jewish Museum in Prague is contributing to this major cultural event by loaning several of Kars's works from its collection.

### **The Genizah Project**

Genizah (Hebr. „hiding place“) applies to a place in the synagogue in which mostly discarded sacred writings and Torah scrolls were deposited before being buried. The Genizah later served as a storehouse for other written material (legal documents, court rulings) and for other ritual objects such as prayer straps (tefillin), tallits and Mezuzahs.

Genizahs can be found in a number of localities in Bohemia and Moravia. In 1995 employees of the Jewish Museum made partial finds in connection with repairs and reconstructions of synagogues in Bohemia and Moravia. On the basis of these findings the Jewish Museum decided to focus more systematically on Genizahs. In 1996 a group of specialist employees from the museum under Dr. A. Pařík , and in collaboration with the Federation of Jewish Communities in Prague, initiated a systematic survey of synagogues and other buildings in selected localities. This long-term project has been divided into several stages. At present museum employees are surveying separate localities and protecting finds (including their registration). In this connection a space is being prepared for their hygienic storage. After necessary treatment (esp. microbiological examination, cleaning), or restoration, the material will be stored and subject to detailed study. The public will be informed of the results in specialist publications.

### **The Spanish Synagogue – preparatory repair work started**

In spring 1997 initial building work was carried out in the Spanish Synagogue by removing part of the floor from the main nave. The purpose of this work is to enable an archaeological survey of the building before actual repairs are carried out to the synagogue. The synagogue is situated on the site where,

according to the records, the oldest house of prayer in the Jewish Town of Prague, the „Old School“, was based in the 11th or 12th century. Whether remnants of the original building will be found, as was the case with the Klaus Synagogue (where part of the original bimah – tribune was revealed during repairs) will be seen after the completion of the survey work . The Jewish Museum in Prague welcomes any kind of financial support for the repairs to the Spanish Synagogue. Donations can be sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague Foundation, account number 1669452-038/0800, address: Česká spořitelna, a.s. Rytířská 29, 110 00 Praha 1 or through the American Friends of the Jewish Museum in Prague, address: Project Judaica Foundation, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 205, Washington D.C. 20002, fax: 001/202/3710898 (such donations are tax-deductible).

### **Visits to the Jewish Museum**

On 25 May 97 the Jewish Museum was visited by a group of 90 prominent representatives from The International Council of the New York Museum of Modern Art led by the president of the organisation, Mrs. Jo Carol Lauder. The guests looked round the historical buildings of the Jewish Museum with great interest.

The Jewish Museum was also visited by Mrs. Lauder's husband, Mr. Ronald S. Lauder. In 1987 Mr. Lauder established the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation whose aim is to support Jewish communities in Central and Eastern European countries in the field of Jewish education. The Foundation has contributed to the establishment of Jewish schools, kindergartens and other educational institutions in for example Poland, Belorussia, Hungary and Slovakia. The Foundation also financially supports the activities of the Jewish Museum's Educational and Cultural Center.

The main reason for Mr. Lauder's visit to Prague, however, was to attend an important event that was to take place on the grounds of the Jewish Community in Prague. With financial support from the Foundation, the Jewish Community in Prague will open the Jewish Elementary School in September 1997. It was in this connection that 26 May witnessed the ceremonial unveiling of the tablet bearing the inscription Lauder Prague Elementary School „Gur Arieħ.“ The ceremony was attended by Mr. Lauder in person.

### **From the production of the Jewish Museum**

A new issue of the Jewish Museum periodical – Judaica Bohemiae came out in April. Included are the following interesting contributions:

**Leo Pavlát:** Activities of the Jewish Museum since October 1994

**Alexander Putík :** The Hebrew Inscription on the Crucifix at Charles Bridge in Prague. The Case of Elias Backoffen and Berl Tabor Appellation Court

**Lenka Matušíková:** Konskription der Juden in der Herrschaft Veselí nad Moravou im Jahr 1727

**Jiří Kuděla:** Zeitgenössische Reaktionen auf die josefinische Toleranz der Juden in Böhmen und Mähren. Prager und Wiener Diskussion über die Toleranz der Juden zwischen 1781 und 1782

**David Chaloupka:** Buchillustrationen von Alfred Justitz

**Anna Hydráková – Anna Lorencová:** Systematic Collection of Memories



Organized by the Jewish Museum in Prague – IV

**Daniel Polakovič:** The Jewish Museum in Prague (A Selective Bibliography).  
Price of copy – 7 US\$

On the occasion of the opening of the new exhibition in the memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the Pinkas Synagogue the Jewish Museum commissioned a poster (designed by Hana Pavlátová) which is available at 2 US\$. It is also possible to acquire the beautiful publication I have not seen a butterfly around here (children's drawings and poems from Terezín) at the museum (cost – 9 US\$).

More information on any of the museum publications can be obtained by contacting:

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Jáchymova 3,  
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Fax: 00420-2-2310681