

NEW EXHIBITION



A new exhibition, Restituted Works of Art - The Collection of Dr. Emil Freund, opened in the Robert Guttman Gallery of the Jewish Museum in Prague on 6 September 2001. For the first time, this exhibition provides the general public with a chance to see artworks from private collections that were confiscated during the war by the Nazis - pictures that bear witness to the life and culture of the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia. On show is a selection of works that were restituted to the Museum from the National Gallery in Prague in October 2000 in accordance with the Restitution Act on the mitigation of certain property violations inflicted upon Holocaust victims. These works were transferred to the National Gallery by order of the former communist regime after ownership of the Museum was transferred to the State in 1950. Specifically, they were paintings and drawings

that were confiscated between 1939 and 1945 from the private collections of Prague Jews who were deported to the ghettos at Łódź and Terezín. The confiscated items represent only a small fraction of the artworks that were stolen from Jews in Bohemia and Moravia during the war. The fact that they were included in the Museum's collection during the existence of the Central Jewish Museum (1942-1945) actually prevented their complete disappearance. After the war the majority of the works could not be restituted since the original owners had died in the extermination camps.

Thanks to the selfless work of Jewish experts during the war, a number of unique examples of Jewish culture, which had developed for over a thousand years, were brought together - and thus rescued - in the collection of the Museum. In this context it is important also to document the activities of Jewish collectors in Bohemia and Moravia who, in addition to collecting Judaica, gained considerable recognition for establishing valuable collections of Czech and European art.

Even though a full provenance research on artworks is a routine task for museum and gallery curators, special emphasis should be placed on investigating ownership in the period between 1933 and 1945. This was the conclusion of participants at the first conference dealing with the confiscated property of Holocaust victims, which was held in Washington D.C. in November 1998. In an attempt to complete this task, the leading world museums and galleries have carried out thorough provenance



research on the artworks in their collections. The search for artworks that had belonged to Holocaust victims was launched in 1996 in Austria and later continued in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and U.S.A. The findings of this research are available to the general public in the form of a database that can be accessed via the internet.

The Jewish Museum in Prague has also become involved in these efforts, having recently undertaken a detailed study of collections of paintings, drawings and graphic art which were assumed to contain works whose original owners could be verified. These also included the artworks that were restituted to the Museum from the National Gallery in October 2000. Apart from a few exceptions, these works were never exhibited, and their origin was of scant interest to the National Gallery. Today, a list of these pictures, including photo-documentation, is available on the websites of the Jewish Museum (<http://www.jewishmuseum.cz>) and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (<http://www.restitution-art.cz>). In the event that a valid restitution claim is made in accordance with the relevant law with respect to these or any other artworks in the Jewish Museum's collections, the Museum is prepared to return the art to the heirs of the original owner.



Of the paintings and drawings returned from the National Gallery to the Jewish Museum in 2000, the art from the collection of Dr. Emil Freund represents one of the rare cases where it proved possible to keep together at least part of the collection that passed through the Prague warehouses of the Treuhandstelle. This private collection was established during the interwar period and was mostly formed by acquisitions from exhibition sales, such as those organized in Prague by the Mánes Association of Fine Artists and a number of other private galleries. The most important painting in the collection is *Riverboat on the Seine (Morning in Samois)* by the neo-impressionist painter Paul Signac from 1901, which was purchased at an exhibition of French art held by the Mánes Association in Prague. Other works include *Portrait of a Young Woman* (c. 1920) by André Derain and four large gouaches (c. 1930) by Maurice de Vlaminck - both prominent Fauvists -, a landscape from *Vire-Calvados* (1932) and a vibrant view of the Church of St. Peter in Montmatre (1930) by Maurice Utrillo, a watercolour by Paul Signac (1927) and a figurative gouache, *Three Nudes in a Garden*, by Charles Dufresne (1924). The Czech modern art in the collection is mostly by leading members of the Mánes Association - two cubist still lifes (1931) by Emil Filla, a landscape (1936) by Václav Špála, and one painting (1926) by Emil Arthur Pittermann-Longen. Works by younger Czech artists include *Sitting Nude* (1926) by Jan Bauch and *Dancing in the Café* (1930) by Zdenek Rykr.

From today's perspective, Freund's collection, the main body of which is a valuable historical document, should be seen as dialogue violently interrupted. The exhibition was prepared by Michaela Hájková, curator of paintings, drawings

and graphic art at the Jewish Museum in Prague, and runs until 6 January 2002.

FOUNDATION DETAILS

The Jewish Museum in Prague Foundation was established in 1992, since when it has contributed to a number of different projects, such as the installation and maintenance of an exhibition devoted to the history of the Jewish settlement in Benešov and its surroundings (sited in the Benešov Memorial), and the restoration of a rare Hebrew manuscript for the Aleš Hrdlička Museum in Humpolec. At this May's meeting the Board decided to focus more attention on supporting Jewish communities in the Czech Republic which are part of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic. The Foundation will provide financial resources for projects based on one of the following three areas:

- a) restoration and conservation of objects which are part of the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague, are being used by Jewish communities under an agreement with the Museum, or are to be loaned to Jewish communities by the Museum,
- b) arrangement and establishment of technical conditions for cultural or educational activities, especially exhibitions (permanent and temporary), lectures and seminars which aim to make the public aware of the Jewish history and culture in the Czech Republic and which are held by Jewish communities in collaboration with the Jewish Museum in Prague,
- c) publications, such as exhibition catalogues and informational, educational and other printed matter directly related to one of the above-mentioned activities of Jewish communities.

The Foundation is based at the Jewish Museum in Prague, U staré školy 1, Prague 1.

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JEWISH CEMETERY OPENED IN PRAGUE - ŽIŽKOV

The Jewish cemetery in Fibichova Street in the Žižkov district of Prague was opened by the Jewish Museum on 2 September 2001 to mark the European Day of Jewish Culture. It can now be visited on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9 am and 1 pm. In an attempt to curb the continuing devastation of this significant Jewish site (dating from the period of the Enlightenment and Emancipation) and to open it up to the general public, it was placed under the administration of

the Jewish Museum in Prague by the Prague Jewish Community in 1999. The cemetery was established in 1680 as a plague burial ground for the Prague Jewish Community and served as Prague's main Jewish cemetery between 1787-1890.

As mentioned in Newsletter 4/2000, the Jewish Museum arranged for the construction of a new cemetery wall and a caretaker's house. The first stage of the reconstruction was completed in the spring of 2001 with a major extension of the cemetery grounds and the construction of a 167m long wall with brick pillars and a metal railing.

The reconstruction is, however, far from over. The next stage will see a continuation of alterations and remedial measures to correct inappropriate changes made in the 1980s. It will also be necessary to restore the unique classical-style Zapperta Well (1792) with inscription tablets. Long-term and costly repairs are also required by the tombstones, which have already been partly restored. Attention is being paid, above all, to the tombstones of prominent figures buried here, including the important scholar and chief rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793) and members of his family, Landau's pupil and member of the rabbinic board Eleazar Fleckeles (1754-1826), the physician Jonas Jeiteles (1735-1806), the historian David J. Podiebrad (1803-1882), the Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist Joachim Popper (1731-1795) and the entrepreneur Moses Jerusalem (1762-1824). With regards tombstone designs, the cemetery covers a broad range of styles, from Classicist, Empire and Romantic to the common forms of the mid-19th century.



NEW GENIZAH DISCOVERED IN NEVEKLOV SYNAGOGUE

In May 2001 Museum staff found another genizah, this time in the attic of a synagogue in the small town of Neveklov in the Central Bohemia Region. The Jewish community here was established in the first half of the 17th century and developed until around the mid-19th century, when its population started to decline as a result of migration to larger towns. The local community was snuffed out during the Second

World War. The genizah was found in the synagogue not far from the square. This stone building dates from 1730, when an earlier synagogue that had been gutted by fire was renovated in a Baroque style. Today, it is a simple oblong structure with stone walls, semicircular windows and a flat ceiling.

The remains of the genizah were found in the attic, near the entrance leading from what used to be the women's gallery. The genizah remained behind perimeter beams in the entire west and north-west facing area of the attic and in certain other spots. The genizah probably dates from the early 19th century, when the building was given a new ceiling and rafters. The age of the genizah corresponds to the age of the printed books (18th - early 20th century) that were found here. There are hardly any manuscripts (only two fragments of Torah scrolls). The most interesting items to have been found are textiles - one Torah curtain, several Torah mantles and, above all, several embroidered and printed Torah binders. A binder with an embroidered Star of David from 1715 is the oldest object to have been found in the repository. The genizah contains also the usual kinds of objects traditionally kept in such repositories: tallitot (prayer shawls), decorative covers, several plain candelabra and a brass scone. Other objects that were found include fragments of tefillin (phylacteries) and various ink bottles and an interesting stoneware container. After careful sorting, most of the contents of the genizah were placed in sacks and prepared for burial in the local cemetery.



The synagogue, which only recently was returned to the Prague Jewish Community, is soon to undergo complete reconstruction, starting with the roof. Once renovated, it will house an exhibition devoted to the history of local Jewish communities and sites and especially to the Chief Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder (1875-1970), who was born in the nearby town of Václavice. The exhibition will also highlight the history of the nearby camp of Bystřice (where men from mixed marriages were interned between 1942-45) and of the entire region during the war (when it was evacuated to make way for an SS shooting range).

GOLEM SCULPTURE BY PEARL AMSEL INSTALLED IN THE JEWISH MUSEUM



The Golem is the main figure of Prague's Jewish legends, according to which it was created in the late 16th century by the renowned Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, known as the Maharal, to protect the Jews of Prague. It has remained a source of fascination and inspiration to this day. In 1985-87, the Czech-born American sculptor Pearl Amsel created a bronze sculpture of the Golem, 244cm in height and weighing 480 kg.

Her monumental Golem is the embodiment both of an ancient myth and of recent experience, for it is intended to commemorate the bygone protector of Jews and, at the same time, is dedicated to the

memory of the victims of Auschwitz, where Pearl Amsel was sent during the war. Although the sculpture is mostly abstract in form, it effectively conveys the heaviness of the material and the extraordinary strength of a being that resists and tries to free itself from it. The bulky stalking figure of the Golem (which could be female or male), stooping with a child in its arms is clearly identifiable.

This sculpture has been dedicated to the Jewish Museum by Dr. Harold Amsel from New York in memory of his mother. It is now sited in the inner courtyard of the Museum complex near the facade of the Spanish Synagogue.

BOOK PROVENANCE RESEARCH

Museum library staff launched a special project in May aimed at ascertaining the original ownership of books that are now part of the library collection. This involves a systematic search of all the library's volumes and is closely related to the post-war history of the library (see Newsletter 2/99, 3/99, 4/99) - after 1945 the library acquired a number of books from the wartime Central Jewish Museum and the Terezín ghetto library as well as books stolen by Nazi authorities (RSHA) from various Jewish, Masonic and monastery libraries in Europe which were shipped to several mansions in the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1944 and partly transferred to the Jewish Museum at a later date.

Because these books are classed as primary acquisitions, it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive search of the whole collection (currently over 100,000 books). The identification process which is being carried out in the depositories of the library, is painstaking and time-consuming work. On the basis of current findings, we assume that the entire project will take about three years to complete. The findings of this research are being stored in a specially created database. In order to speed up the whole project, we are entering only the identification symbol of a book (shelf-number, acquisition number), information concerning the owner (an abbreviation for an institution, a name for an individual), and the type of record used (stamp, ex-libris, signature, gloss, de-dication note, etc.).

All legible and identifiable records concerning the owners are included in the database regardless of when the proprietary record was made and the means by which the book was acquired. The database therefore also includes printed books that were donated, purchased in second-hand bookshops or exchanged. The information garnered from this systematic research of the book collection will become a basis for eventual restitution claims and, in addition, a valuable historical source.

NEW SEASON OF EVENTS LAUNCHED BY THE MUSEUM'S EDUCATION AND CULTURE CENTRE

In October there will be a new series of lectures on American Jewish Literature by Dr. Hana Ulmanová (Philosophy Faculty, Charles University), which follows on from previous literary series. Lectures will cover such prominent authors as Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Chaim Potok. Also in October, there will be a lecture on Joshua in the Hebrew Bible by Dr. Leonard Greenspoon (Department of Jewish Civilization, Creighton University, Nebraska).

In collaboration with the Austrian Institute in Prague, the Centre will also be featuring a lecture by the historian Dirk Rupnow on his book *Täter, Gedächtnis, Opfer* (Picus Verlag, 2000). On 22 October there will be a literary evening with writer Ivan Kraus, following on from a series of author's evenings. Of a number of exhibitions that have been planned, the one that stands out in particular is an exhibition of paintings and artefacts by Jan F. Kovář.

It should also be noted that the series entitled *The Shadow of the Shoah over Europe* is coming to an end, (the last six lectures being on the Shoah in Italy and Albania, Rumania, Hungary, Spain and Portugal, Switzerland and Turkey).



PROMINENT VISITS

June 2001 - Pierre Moscovici -
French Minister for European
Affairs

July 2001 - The President of
Portugal Jorge Sampaio