

Newsletter

2 2012

EXHIBITION AT THE ROBERT GUTTMANN GALLERY

Georges Kars (1880–1945) – Early Works

An exhibition of the early work of Georges Kars, showing a selection of his paintings and drawings from 1905 to the early 1920s, was on view at the Robert Guttman Gallery until 17 June. It was held in collaboration with the Zlatá Husa gallery, the Municipal Museum in Velvary, the National Gallery in Prague, the Municipal Museum in Kralupy and private collections. Apart from a minor show at the Franz Kafka Centre in 1998, it was the first ever comprehensive presentation of this painter's work in Prague. The main aim was to commemorate Kars's life and work, thereby contributing to a greater understanding and assessment of his oeuvre (for more details on this show, see our previous newsletter).

The exhibition was seen by more than 5,000 separately paying visitors (the gallery can be visited as part of an overall tour of our sites, at a discount price in combination with a tour of the Spanish Synagogue, or separately). From their responses, it is clear the vast majority of them were very interested in this artist and would like to see more of his work. Although almost forgotten in his home country, abroad Kars is considered to be one of the most well-known Czech Jewish artists.

Jewish Magic in the Art of Mark Podwal

The Georges Kars show was followed by an exhibition of work by the acclaimed U.S. artist Mark Podwal. Curated by Arno Pařík, this is part of our series on Jewish artists.

Mark Podwal (b. 1945, Brooklyn) studied medicine on the wishes of his parents but loved to draw since early childhood. In 1967-68, while at university, he began to sketch posters against the Vietnam War. These were noticed by editors at the New York Times who then offered him a job. His first drawing for the NYT was of the Munich Olympic massacre and was published in 1972. And so began a more than 30-year period in which Podwal continued to publish political drawings and cartoons about American politics and events in the Middle East. Podwal also soon made a name for himself in the cultural world – among other things, he designed a gold medal for the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and a Congressional Gold Medal. His work has also been animated for television in a film about a Passover Seder with Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel.

Attracted by Jewish tradition, stories about angels, demons, the Golem and life in the Shtetls of Eastern Europe (from where his parents emigrated to the United States in the 1920s), however, Podwal soon began drawing traditional subject matter, which gradually came to dominate his work. As he himself says: "As a physician, I believe in



G. Kars, In Hamburg, 1906, oil on canvas, Jewish Museum in Prague.



M. Podwal: Shabbat, 2002, paper, acrylic, gouache and coloured pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague.

science. As an artist I believe in legends." He is inspired by old manuscripts, amulets and ritual objects, as well as by the Signs of the Zodiac, but also by the shapes of Hebrew letters and their role in the Creation and in the joining of the heavenly and earthly realms. Although Podwal's drawings may appear simple in terms of form, they bring a new perspective on things that are seemingly familiar, as well as providing new meanings and connections, metaphors and wit. It is no co-incidence that children's books occupy a special place in his work.

Prague has an important place in Podwal's life and work. In 2005 and 2006, he collaborated with the acclaimed filmmaker Allan Miller on a documentary film about Prague's Old Jewish Cemetery. He designed a limited edition silkscreen print (*Star of Prague*) to commemorate our 100th anniversary. His most recent book, *Built by Angels* (2009) focuses on the history and legends associated with the Old-New Synagogue (the *Altneuschul*). He also designed a series of new textiles for this synagogue – a Torah curtain, Torah mantles and covers for the Torah reading table and cantor's lectern – which were dedicated earlier this year.

This show, entitled *„Jewish Magic in the Art of Mark Podwal“*, features a selection of almost 80 drawings and gouaches from our collection and from the artist. These works are inspired by the mystical ideas of the Kabbalah and Jewish magic concerning the arrangement of the universe, as well as by the colourful legends from the Talmud and by the daily world of prayer and celebrations of the Shabbat and Jewish holidays. The exhibition includes a screening of an interview held with Podwal for the television talk show *Na plovárně*, and of the video *Footsteps to Prague*, which was produced by Zachary Paul Levine for a Podwal exhibition at Yeshiva University Museum, New York.

A catalogue has been published in conjunction with the exhibition. This includes an introductory text by Elisheva Carlebach (professor of Jewish history and culture at Columbia University) and illustrations of almost all of the works on display.

Robert Guttmann Gallery, U Staré školy 3, Prague 1,
Open daily, except Saturdays and Jewish holidays
27 June – 26 October, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.; 28 October – 11 November, 9 a.m. – 4.30 p.m.



M. Podwal with Norman Eisen, the U.S. Ambassador to Prague, at the exhibition opening.

LAUNCH OF THE POLISH SEASON AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Our focus this year is on the Polish Season, which follows last year's successful Israeli Season and runs until November. By promoting concerts, film screenings and meetings with leading experts on various historical and social topics, this project aims to showcase Polish Jewish culture and its forms of reception within the wider society.



Cukunft brings a dynamic modern sound to traditional music.

The series was launched in the Spanish Synagogue on 24 April with a concert by the Polish band **Cukunft** (led by guitarist Raphael Rogiński) whose work combines elements of traditional klezmer, jazz and rock. On the same day, our department for education and culture hosted a presentation of the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews – the largest project of its kind aside from the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The programme director of the Warsaw-based museum, Albert Stankowski, accepted our invitation to Prague and gave a captivating talk about the concept behind its activities, the architectural design of its building, its exhibitions and its programmes under preparation. At the end of the meeting, there was an internet presentation of the **Virtual Shtetl** project which, with help from the general public, charts the history and fate of Jewish communities in Poland. The spring portion of the series was completed on 2 May with a screening of **Po-lin. Slivers of Memory**, a unique feature-length documentary on the vanished world of Galician shtetls.

On 18 July, as part of the summer portion of the Polish Season, the Spanish Synagogue hosted a concert by **Shofar**, a band that seeks a 'common denominator' between jazz improvisation and religious Hassidic music from the area of what is now Ukraine and Moldavia.

The following are being planned for the autumn portion of the Polish Season:

- Screening of the documentary **Birthplace** ("Miejsc Urodzenia"), based on Henryk Grynberg's book "Heritage", followed by a discussion with the film's director Pawel Lozinsky (19 September, Polish Institute in Prague)
- Presentation of a Czech translation of Piotr Pazinski's book **The Boarding House** with the author in attendance (24 October, Department for education and culture)
- Concert by Poland's most famous singer of Yiddish songs, **André Ochodlo** (6 November, Spanish Synagogue).

Our partners for the Polish Season are the Polish Institute in Prague (which contributed to the preparation of last year's concert by Poland's leading klezmer band Kroke) and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The entire project would not be possible without the financial support of the Czech-Polish Forum.



Albert Stankowski at the launch of the Polish Season in the Spanish Synagogue.

At the **Klausen Synagogue**, new pantile roofing tiles were installed, the attic space was cleaned out, the roof frame was repaired and treated, the plasterwork of the cornices and chimneys were repaired, vapour-permeable insulation material was added, new lathing was put on, and the external waste water pipes were repaired. The total cost of this work was CZK 2.8 million (approx EUR 109,700).

The roof of the **mikveh** at Pinkas Synagogue was also repaired. New ceramic tiles were installed, new lathing was put on, the wooden features were repaired and protected, the external waste water pipes were repaired, and the attic was insulated with vapour permeable insulation (mineral fibre) and sealed for pest protection. This work was financially supported by the Jewish Community of Prague, which uses the mikveh. The total cost of the work was CZK 700,000 (approx EUR 27,400).



Mikveh at Pinkas Synagogue after overhaul.

NEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT "OURS OR FOREIGN? JEWS IN THE CZECH TWENTIETH CENTURY"

Conference on the topic "Refugees"

On 12 May 2012, as part of the project "Ours or Foreign? Jews in the Czech Twentieth Century" (for more information, see Newsletter 1/2011 and 1/2012) – which we are organizing in collaboration with the Terezín Initiative Institute – the Brno office of our department for education and culture hosted a conference entitled "Refugees". Michal Frankl, who is the main co-ordinator of the project, gave the introductory lecture, entitled "Czechoslovakia and Refugees from Nazism". Kateřina Čapková followed with a talk on the everyday life of refugees in Czechoslovakia between the wars.

In the afternoon section, the project methodologist Roman Anýž presented one of the project's new methodological materials with emphasis on the possibilities of its use in practical lessons. Judita Matyášová from the Military History Institute in Prague then outlined the fate of Jewish children who, in October 1939, managed to escape from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to Denmark and then to Sweden. The presentation by Petra Levrincová from the United National High Commission for Refugees examined an interesting thematic overlap with problems that refugees are currently facing in the Czech Republic. The conference was attended mainly by teachers from various regions of the country. It finished off with a tour of the Brno Synagogue.

Presentation of the Lodz Ghetto Workshop

We presented the Lodz Ghetto Workshop at an international conference on Holocaust education, which took place in Jerusalem between 18 and 21 June. As part of this workshop, pupils and students have the opportunity to study archive documents, photographs and survivor testimonies to find out about the history of the ghetto in Lodz and the fate of Jews who were deported there from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in October and November 1941 (for more information, see Newsletter 3/2011). Our presentation met with a great response from the representatives of educational institutions from throughout the world who attended the conference – Yad Vashem, for example, expressed interest in including this workshop in its educational activities.



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INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Projekt CZ.1.07/1.1.00/14.0089 Tvorba výukových materiálů a zavádění výukových programů k dějinám Židů ve 20. století je spolufinancován Evropským sociálním fondem a státním rozpočtem České republiky.

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

On 9 May our department for education and culture hosted a meeting with Tom Segev, whose book **Simon Wiesenthal: The Life and Legends** was published in Czech a few days earlier. With the media and a large audience present, a lively discussion was held about the character and life of the famous Nazi hunter and about the broader contexts behind the book.

Five days later, we opened the exhibition **Sephardim in the World**, which was prepared by the European Sephardic Institute with the support of the Belgian Embassy in Prague. Conceived by Rivka Cohen, this exhibition focuses on the fate of Sephardic Jews and their life in various periods of exile, particularly in Europe. On display is a range of postcards, which are supplemented by brief texts.



Tom Segev is one of Israel's so-called 'New Historians'.



The exhibition opening was attended by Renilde Loecx, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium in the Czech Republic (second from the left).

NEW ISSUE OF JUDAICA BOHEMIAE

A new issue of our peer-reviewed journal *Judaica Bohemiae* (47/2012, 1) came out at the beginning of July 2012. This volume includes a study by Marie Malivánková Wasková on the development and gradual demise of the medieval Jewish community in Pilsen. It is followed by a paper by Peter Kónya examining the origin of the Jewish community in Prešov and the forming of relations between the Jews of Prešov and the town's inhabitants. In the next paper, Adam Dobeš explores the historical background to the little known anti-Jewish incidents in the southern Bohemian towns of Jindřichův Hradec (Neuhaus) and Nová Bystřice (Neubistritz) that occurred in 1859 in connection with Second War of Italian-Independence. The final paper, by Andrea Jelínková, focuses on the war-time and post-war fate of the Terezín books – books that were part of the Central Library of the Terezín Ghetto and the large Terezín collection of Hebraica and Judaica looted by the Nazis in various libraries and institutions in occupied Europe.

SUPPORT FOR CONTEMPORARY ART IN PRAGUE

Together with the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, we provided support for the project **Artwall:Link**, which was organized by the c2c association of curators and critics and held between April and May under the auspices of the Mayor of Prague. In response to the rapid development of social networks on the internet and the prevalent use of smart phones, this project focused on linking the public and virtual spaces. Work by 11 young Czech and foreign artists was displayed on available advertising spaces and in an online gallery – at first glance concealed – accessible from QR codes. Our contribution involved providing photographs from 1942–1944 for Daniela Deutelbaum's presentation **We Have Already Confiscated** („Už jsme zabavili“), which sought to create unsettling parallels between contemporary items of everyday use and items that were confiscated from Jews during the Second World War.



The project involved placing 250 posters in trams and 10 City-Light posters at public transport stops.

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS FROM TEREZÍN ON VIEW IN MACEDONIA

Back in March we loaned the touring exhibition **The Children's Story – Children's Drawings from Terezín** for display in Macedonia. These drawings from the Terezín ghetto were made in 1942–1944 during art lessons organized by the Bauhaus graduate Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. The first stop on the exhibition's tour of Macedonia was the Holocaust Memorial Centre for the Jews of Macedonia in the capital, Skopje, on the first anniversary of its opening. By the end of May it was seen by 5,000 visitors, especially pupils and students. The next stop was the Bitola City Museum in south-west Macedonia, from where in the summer the exhibition will head east to Strumica and Stip, then it's back for the Summer Festival in Ochrid. From September the local organizers intend to show the exhibition to elementary schools across Macedonia.



Opening of the exhibition of Terezín children's drawings in Skopje.

YOM HA-SHOAH 2012

This year we were one of the partners of the annual event held by the Terezín Initiative Institute and the Holocaust Victims Foundation to mark Yom Ha-Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April – 16 May 1943). On the afternoon of 18 April (2 – 5 p.m.), the names of Shoah victims were read out at Náměstí Míru (Peace Square) in the centre of Prague. The event also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the first deportations of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. It was held under the auspices of the Mayor of Prague, Bohuslav Svoboda.

PRAGUE MUSEUM NIGHT

On this occasion, we provided free access to the Maisel and Spanish synagogues. In less than three hours, the Maisel – which also hosted a children's programme – received 1,333 visitors, the Spanish Synagogue as many as 1,765. We would like to thank all those who came to visit us, especially for their great interest and for their patience in the queues! We look forward to seeing you again at next year's event.



Our guides were on hand for visitors during Prague's Museum Night.

PROMINENT VISITS

May

- President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
- Prime Minister of the State of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu



The museum was visited by the President of Iceland along with the First Lady of Iceland, Dorrit Moussaieff.

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