

Exhibition: The Story Continues at the Robert Guttmann Gallery

<http://www.praguepost.com/142-culture/38917-exhibition-the-story-continues-at-the-robert-guttmann-gallery#ixzz3VwwpFHEk>

- 9 May 2014
- daily life, exhibition, Robert Guttmann Gallery



Selections from works acquired in the past two decades show a picture of daily life

The Jewish Museum in Prague doesn't just look for gold and silver sacred items, although it does have those. It makes a goal of preserving all aspects of daily life in the Jewish community from Bohemia. The museum gained its independence from the state 20 years ago, and set off to rebuild its collections. Before 1994 the focus of the museum was different. It mainly functioned as a tourist attraction. Part of the collections were also sold off to raise money, the current operators state.

The last 20 years has seen the museum rebuild its collections, putting an emphasis on being able to tell a complete story. A little more than 100 items out of the thousands the museum has acquired in those two decades are now on display.

“The collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague include a number of representative illustrations and documentary images, as well as a large amount of small historical mass-produced items and private ephemera: objects that have been made, acquired, collected, preserved and handled with love. They include portraits and topographical items, as well as advertising objects, souvenirs and commemorative trifles whose meaning is usually not entirely clear at first glance to the uninitiated,” Michaela Sidenberg, visual arts curator at the Jewish Museum in Prague, said in a press release.

“Revealing these hidden meanings involves a process of examining the slightest connections that have been lost in the passage of time but also – within the context of Jewish history – in a vortex of tragic events,” she said.

The form of the exhibition puts the viewer in the role of a treasure hunter of sorts. Save for some paintings on the wall, the rest of the objects are in a custom built wooden cabinet behind closed doors or in slide-out drawers. Opening the doors reveals everything from handmade children's toys to silver page turners.

As you go from window to window, seeing clothing, jewelry, diaries, kitchen items and family photos, a full picture of daily life starts to emerge. And some items are more than they seem at first glance. An ornate wallet is actually meant specifically for dowry money. An armband with a star on it is actually from a pro-Zionist student group in the 1930s. The toys were made at Terezin, the Holocaust-era transit camp that was the [focus of the museum's previous exhibit](#).

One religious item in particular is of interest. For the first time, visitors can see a Torah curtain from Mladá Vožice, dating from the mid-19th century. It is the first missing piece of Bohemian Judaica that the museum has successfully reclaimed from the US.

While overall in the exhibition the strictly religious items are the most impressive, the daily items help to remind people that there was an active community of people who did more than just attend services. They got married, made meals using spices from jars with Yiddish inscriptions, sent postcards and sealed business letters with monograms in wax. People kept diaries and made sketches. They had portraits painted and photographs taken. These often tell us more than the silver and gold pieces.

The Story Continues:

Acquisitions in the
Collections of the
Jewish Museum in Prague,
1994–2014

When: To August 3

Where: Robert Guttmann Gallery

www.jewishmuseum.cz