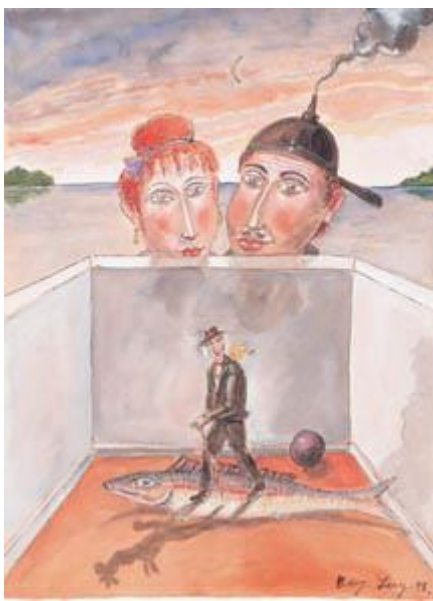




The robe and flag of the messianic pretender Solomon Molcho

The Jewish Museum in Prague is one of the first museums to have designed a unique "vitrine safe" for the housing and display of rare historical items. Part of the permanent exhibition in the Maisel Synagogue devoted to the earliest history of the Jews in the Czech lands, this special showcase, which opened to the public in April, gives visitors the opportunity to see two rare historical exhibits: the robe and flag of the messianic pretender Solomon Molcho (born c. 1500 in Portugal) who was burned at the stake in Mantua in 1532. Both relics were once used by this Kabbalist, religious heretic and devotee of David Reubeni's messianic movement. For many years they were housed in Prague's Pinkas Synagogue (earliest reference dated 1628), from where they were sent in a relatively poor state of repair to the Jewish Museum. Although they were restored several times in the past, it has

not (until now) been possible to display them on a long-term basis. An internal space in the Maisel Synagogue was therefore set aside and specially designed under expert supervision so as to meet the Museum's exacting requirements for the comprehensive preservation of its collections: security, stable micro-climate, lighting and protection against UV and IR radiation. To meet these requirements, it was necessary first of all to install heating devices with precise round-the-year temperature regulation, Art-sorp absorption panels for optimum humidity, and special optic cables with UV and IR filters for the channelling of light. The walls of this space have been coated with a special paint that provides for a high degree of light absorption; this facilitates and improves viewing conditions with low intensity lighting. All heat from light sources is diverted away from the above space so as not to affect the micro-climatic conditions inside the exhibition. Thanks to the above solution, these rare artefacts can now not only be well-preserved but also placed on public display.



Encounters – exhibition of the Israeli-American painter Benjamin Levy in Prague

In April and May 2002, an exhibition of drawings, watercolours and gouaches by the contemporary Israeli-American painter Benjamin Levy, entitled Encounters was held in the Jewish Museum's Robert Guttman Gallery. Although Levy's work is not so well-known in the Czech Republic, it can be seen in many private and public collections

throughout the world. During the last 30 years he has held over 80 one-man shows and has taken part in over 100 group shows in Israel, the United States and Europe. The opening of the exhibition on 24 April 2002 was attended not only by the artist himself but also the Israeli Ambassador to the Czech Republic Arthur Avnon.

Benjamin Levy was born in Tel Aviv in 1940. He studied art in Israel under Abraham Yaskil, in Paris at the École de Montparnasse and in New York at the Pratt Graphic Art Center. After his studies he returned to Tel Aviv, where he set up a studio and later got married. In 1965 the Levy family moved to New York, where Benjamin soon achieved success and recognition. He now lives in New York, Tel Aviv and in the Ein Hod artistic colony in Israel.

The work of Benjamin Levy is pervaded with memories of his family. Many of the figures we see in his paintings stem from family recollections and stories. He grew up in the colourful environs of the Yemen district of Jaffa and to this day his paintings are filled with exotic images from his childhood. He has drawn a great deal of inspiration from his collection of family photos, many of which were taken before he was born. His paintings have absorbed a lot of the magic of these old photos, which is reflected in the odd rigidity of his figures and the dream-like quality of his set pieces. Figures in Levy's paintings communicate with each other and with us through silence in the form of an almost forgotten language of symbols, which permeates all his paintings. His barely sketched language of symbols links him to an old artistic tradition which surprisingly communicates with us in the present. In the mysterious and paradoxical world of Benjamin Levy, figures from the artist's life and his subconscious encounter each other in the space between reality and dreams. They send out signals which emphasize the unreal and dream-like realm of his paintings and evoke an atmosphere that recalls the metaphysical works of de Chirico and Magritte and Chagall. His paintings give us an unexpected sense



of déjà-vu, bringing to mind encounters with our own forgotten past. Exhibition curator: Dr. Arno Pařík.

Euroclio 2002

An international conference of history teachers with over 130 participants from the whole of Europe was held in Prague between 12-17 March 2002. Lectures and discussions focused mainly on the co-existence of major population groups with minorities in a historical and contemporary context. The Jewish Museum in Prague was involved in various activities at this event. The director of the Museum's Education and Culture



Centre, Dr. Miloš Pojar, gave a paper on the co-existence of Czechs, Germans and Jews in the Czech past. The educational programmes of the Centre were represented by a presentation of the Jewish Wedding workshop under the supervision of lecturer Veronika Schmiedtová and a presentation on the theme "Researchers in the area of Judaism" with lecturer Tereza Foltýnová. The Lost Neighbours exhibition (see Newsletter 4/2001), together with an exhibition of the Anne Frank House, was installed for participants of the conference in the Hotel Pyramida in Prague. On the next day, the Jewish Museum prepared a tour of all its exhibitions for the participants.

The travelling exhibition Lost Neighbours

The Lost Neighbours exhibition is based on the project of the same name (see Newsletter 4/2000) and features the resulting literary and documentary work of high school students. Travelling around individual regions in Bohemia and Moravia, it brings the general public close to the lives of people who became Shoah victims. The exhibition was first presented to the public in November



2001 as part of the Terezín international conference The Holocaust in Education; in February 2002, it was installed in the Prague 1 Information Centre. In March 2002, the 8-panel exhibition was presented to participants of the Euroclio conference of history teachers, as well as over 500 visitors, mostly from Prague schools, and

teachers involved in the Schola Pragensis event held by Prague City Hall. The Lost Neighbours exhibition is now being displayed across Czech regions, along with the Anne Frank Legacy for the Present show. In April it moved to the Brandýs nad Labem District Museum, together with the Jewish Holidays and Traditions exhibition, which was held in association with staff from the Jewish Museum in Prague. Both exhibitions were then featured in the Rear Synagogue in Třebíč. From 11 June 2002 the Lost Neighbours exhibition has been on view in the Senate of the Czech Parliament. Two new panels from Ostrava and Lipník nad Bečvou have been included here and the exhibition is complemented by ceramic works by children from Lipník on the theme of Jewish monuments in Lipník and its environs. From 26 July to 11 August 2002, the exhibition will become part of an event for young people entitled Holidays in Telč, where it will be accompanied by concerts of Jewish music.

In addition, an exhibition comprising copies of the original eight display panels travelled to the areas where the individual works were made: Chomutov (May 2002) and Sokolov (June 2002). Two new panels on the history of the Jewish communities in the Sokolov district and Zábřeh are also being prepared.

Claude Lanzmann in the Jewish Museum in Prague

The international One World Film Festival was held in mid-April 2002 in Prague. Every year this festival presents outstanding documentaries on human rights, crisis areas and global problems. It was organized by the People In Need Foundation at Czech Television and part of its programming was financially supported by the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Community of Prague. This year's festival was attended by the famous French writer and film director Claude Lanzmann. Several of his films *Why Israel* (1973) *The Shoah* (1985), *Sobibor, 14 October 1943 at 4 o' clock* (2001), *Tsahal* (1994) and *The Visitor from the Empire of the Living* (1997) were screened as part of a retrospective block, which was followed by a talk given by the director in the Archa Theatre. On 16 April 2002, a discussion on the theme *The Shoah in Art: Documentary or Fiction* was held with the director in the Jewish Museum's Education and Culture Centre. The meeting was attended by people for whom this topic is still fresh in the mind, or of interest from an artistic or humanistic perspective. It therefore brought together senior citizens, for whom the wartime period is linked to strong personal experiences and memories, and the younger generation, who were interested in the form and treatment of the theme in Lanzmann's films. Representatives of the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Community of Prague met with the director at a banquet held in his honour. Claude Lanzmann then went on a tour around the Jewish Museum's exhibitions.

New publication - The Boskovice Synagogue



To mark the completion of the long-term renovation of the Boskovice Synagogue, the Jewish Museum in Prague has prepared an illustrated guide to this unique monument dating from 1639 and to its rich decorative paintings. The murals from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, which were uncovered and restored during the renovation project, represent the oldest and most integrated example of the ancient eastern European tradition of synagogue ornamentation in the Czech lands, the importance of which goes far beyond the country's borders. In addition to decorative and symbolic paintings and inscription panels with prayer and blessing texts, there have been findings of numerous valuable dedicatory and memorial inscriptions bearing the names of individual painters, initiators of synagogue ornamentation, donors and members of the local Jewish community. The importance of the uncovered paintings and inscriptions for charting Jewish history in Bohemia and Moravia is all the greater in that they were made at a time that was marked by strong messianic hopes – a period that to date has only been partly covered. The overall picture of life in the Boskovice Jewish community has been considerably supplemented and enriched

by throwing light on the paintings and inscriptions in its synagogue. The 64-page guide is in Czech and English and is accompanied by almost 90 photographs that depict the synagogue in the past and the present, together with local ritual objects from the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague, and document the course of the restoration. The text deals with the history of the building and the symbolic paintings, using data from archive materials to place them in the context of the era in which they were made. The book can be ordered from the Jewish Museum in Prague






Prominent visits

- 20 May 2002 – the First Lady of the United States, Laura Bush with her daughter Jenny
- 3 June 2002 – representatives of the Latvian foundation for the support of the Jewish cultural heritage of Vilnius
- 5 June 2002 – Ambassador of India to the Czech Republic Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar



Thanks

As we mentioned in Newsletter 1/2002, thanks to the support provided by the media for the Help in the Search for Lost Neighbours project, the Jewish Museum in Prague has managed to bring together many interesting and historically valuable materials from the Holocaust period.

 Respekt	 Právo	 MF Dnes
 Lidové noviny	 Rádio Classic FM	 Hospodářské noviny