

## NEWSLETTER 2004/2

### NEW SPACE FOR THE JEWISH MUSEUM'S ARCHIVE AND DEPOSITORY

April 2004 saw the completion of the reconstruction of the synagogue in Smíchov-Prague 5, which will be used by the Jewish Museum in Prague for the storage of archive materials and as a depository for its art collections.



The Jewish Museum in Prague spends a large part of its funds on the renovation of Jewish monuments. Since October 1994, when it became an independent Jewish institution, it has repaired and reconstructed eight large buildings, both in and outside Prague, including historic synagogues which it uses for exhibitions and specialised activities. The culmination of this work is the repair and reconstruction of the former Smíchov Synagogue, which was founded over 140 years ago. This project was entirely financed by the Jewish Museum in Prague.

Throughout its existence the synagogue has undergone several building alterations; what was probably the most extensive reconstruction occurred in 1930. During the Nazi occupation the synagogue was closed down and converted into a warehouse for storing confiscated Jewish property. It was also used as a warehouse during the Communist era from the beginning of the 1950s. After the fall of the Communist regime, the devastated building was returned to the Jewish community in Prague and has been rented to the Jewish Museum in Prague since 1998. The first restoration work on the synagogue was carried out in 1999, but the bulk of the building activity was not undertaken until 2003. This project was financed entirely by the Jewish Museum in Prague with contributions in part from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.



Since the beginning of 2004, work has focused on fitting out the interiors and installing interior storage systems. A three-storey structure was installed on a steel frame in the main hall of the synagogue for the storage of archive materials (covering 2,400 metres). In the depository for the Museum's art collections, an area of about 1,800 m<sup>2</sup> has been prepared for storing paintings and 6,000 drawings, prints and historical photographs. In May, once the microclimatic conditions had been stabilised, the Museum's specialist staff began moving its

archive materials and art collections to the depositories.

The establishment of new depositories in the former Smíchov Synagogue is an important achievement. For the first time since the founding of the Jewish Museum in Prague, all of its archive materials and collections of paintings, drawings, prints and historical photographs will be stored in a way that complies with generally accepted museum standards, that is to say, in a single place and in stable climatic conditions. The lighting conditions of the depositories and work areas also meet strict museum criteria, as does the manner in which items are stored and protected against mechanical damage and dust. Precise stocktaking of the art collections will gradually be carried out in the new space; this is necessary for further research into the collections – particularly their cataloguing and photographic documentation. The new system for storing items will also facilitate the comprehensive conservation of the holdings, which was greatly neglected in this regard for many years (particularly in the period 1939–1994). Until now, the Jewish Museum's archives have been stored in depositories located outside Prague, which made it hard to provide researchers with access to the materials contained there. The new storage space in Smíchov will remove this difficulty. At present, the archive of the Jewish Museum in Prague contains almost 1,000 metres of archival records, with the earliest dating from 1454 (The king Ladislav Pohrobek's document). Material preserved in a systematic way dates only from the mid-eighteenth century. The main part of the archive comprises material pertaining to the individual Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia and certain Jewish associations and organisations. Most of this material, which constitutes a valuable source for the history of the Jews in the Czech lands, was moved to the Museum during and immediately after World War II. Other post-war acquisitions were only of very limited scope. The new archival space in the former Smíchov Synagogue also has sufficient capacity to facilitate the storage of archival records and other material that document the history of Jews in the Czech lands after 1945.

It is expected that the synagogue will begin to carry out its new mission as a study and research centre for the history of Jewish communities in the Czech lands next year. The public will be served on the ground floor by a study, and a specialized bookstore has already opened in the former lobby of the synagogue.

### **KAREL CUDLÍN: PASSAGEWAYS**

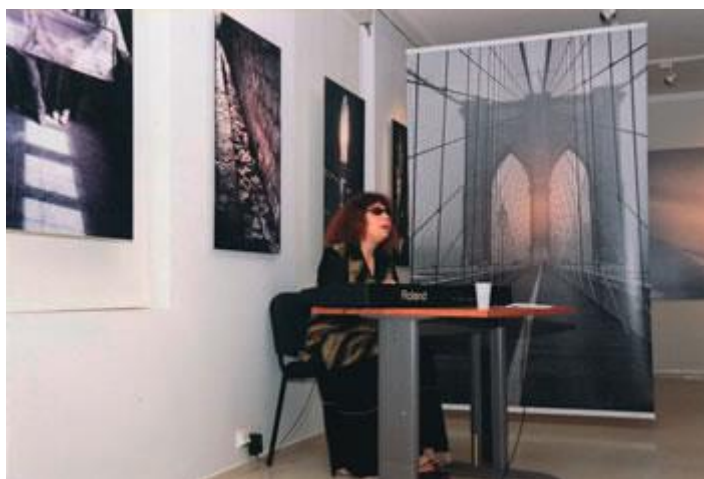
From 22 April through 6 June, the Jewish Museum's Robert Guttman Gallery hosted an exhibition of photographs by the leading Czech photographer Karel Cudlín. To date, the public has been familiar with his black-and-white photographs of the lives of various ethnic and social groups, such as Czech and Slovak Romas, Ukrainian labourers, Russian soldiers leaving Czechoslovakia and Jewish communities, mainly from Prague, post-Soviet countries and Israel. The vast majority of Cudlín's photographs have been taken during his many travels.



Karel Cudlín exhibited last year at the prestigious Leica Gallery in Manhattan and has received a number of major awards for his work. His documentary and portrait photographs, in particular, are known from a number of publications.

The exhibition at the Robert Guttmann Gallery featured Cudlín's work from the first half of the 1990s through to the present, with twenty-five large-scale photographic prints. They were selected by the curator, Michaela Hájková, to reflect the observations of a person who is constantly on the move and to capture events taking place in various parts of the world. The exhibition, entitled *Passages*, also had a clear message: if we accept our nomadism, we are on the right track. Nomadism is a positive state and perhaps a strategy for survival.

This exhibition was put together as part of the series *Jewish Artists' Presence in Contemporary Visual Art*, which is focused on charting the relationship between contemporary visual arts and Judaism. It was prepared with the support of the London-based European Association for Jewish Culture and the Prague studio CD-Photo Bler.



The Jewish Museum prepared a series of programmes to coincide with the exhibition. This was launched by singer Kateryna Tlustá-Kolcová, who enthralled the audience with her beautiful, captivating alto during an evening of Yiddish songs, entitled “Lider fun dor cu dor – Songs from Generation to Generation”. Another musical programme, “Loners, Tradition and Joy”, was presented and discussed by music publicist Pavel Klusák, who focused on a

generation of radical Jewish musicians from the USA through a close look at music and film extracts. The third programme featured new works from the contemporary literary scene of Prague. Vít Kremlička, a Prague poet, novelist and publicist, read selected texts from his work in progress *Manael*. Joshua Cohen, a publicist and writer who now resides in Prague after several years in New York and Israel, acquainted the audience with several of his unpublished texts. To close, Róbert Gál, an aphorist and philosopher and author of *Signs and Sym-ptoms*, read his most recent texts in the original Slovak version.

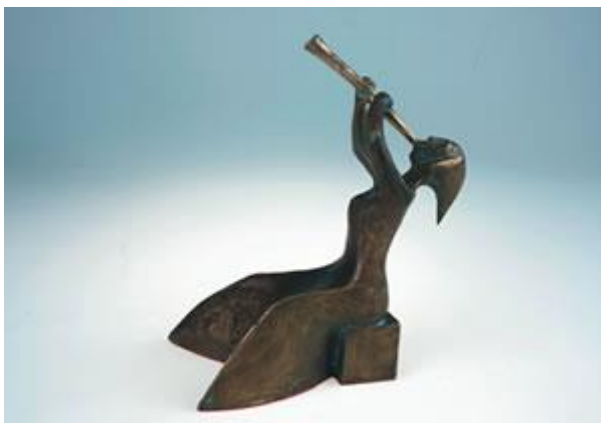
### **TWO IMPORTANT AWARDS FOR THE BOOK “TEXTILES FROM BOHEMIAN AND MORAVIAN SYNAGOGUES”**

In May, the Jewish Museum in Prague received two important awards for its English catalogue, “Textiles from Bohemian and Moravian Synagogues”. This book was published for last year's exhibition of synagogue textiles from the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague at the Imperial Stables of Prague Castle (see Newsletter 1/2003). The Jewish Museum received the highest awards upon assessment of the most notable publications and museum achievements of last year.

The first award was the main prize in the “Gloria Musaealis” competition for museums in the Czech Republic – in the category Museum Publications of 2003. This competition, now in its second year, is organised by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries. Apart from the best museum publications, it also comprises categories for the best museum exhibition and museum achievement of the year. This year, twenty-nine museums and galleries from throughout the Czech Republic entered the competition and forty-five projects were presented. The main prize was awarded to representatives of the Jewish Museum on 18 May at the Pantheon of the National Museum in Prague.



The second award for the catalogue of synagogue textiles was the main award in the Most Beautiful Czech Books of the Year competition for 2003 – in the specialist and scientific literature category. This competition is organised by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic in association with the Museum of Czech Literature. It consists of seven categories: scientific and specialist literature, belles lettres, children’s and youth literature, textbooks, pictorial publications, bibliophilic books and catalogues. In total, 770 publishers entered 157 publications, of which 45 were short-listed. The awards ceremony of the 39th competition was held on 22 April at the Strahov Monastery.



The catalogue of synagogue textiles is a deluxe large-format book (360 pp.) containing 500 full-colour illustrations. It is edited by Ludmila Kybalová, Eva Kosáková and Alexandr Putík. The breadth with which each theme is covered makes the book a unique work from an international perspective. In addition, it is an important contribution for specialists dealing with Jewish material culture and specialised textile collections. The extensive register of

personal names and Jewish communities which is included in the catalogue serves also as an important genealogical source. This award-winning book will be of value to specialists and will undoubtedly attract artists, teachers, students and art lovers alike.

This book, which was prepared and published by the Jewish Museum at its own expense and without the usual participation of a specialised publishing house, symbolises, in its way, the museum’s ten-year development as a non-state cultural facility. Its publication would not have been possible if the Museum had

not first put together a specialised textile depository or had not put together a state-of-the-art photo department. The book also represents the fruition of the long-term specialist work of the Museum's experts and reflects the achievements of the publications department. The Jewish Museum in Prague intends to publish further deluxe books showcasing its own collections, focusing next on its silver items and then on its early manuscripts and printed books.

To order a copy of the book, "Textiles from Bohemian and Moravian Synagogues", contact the mailing address of the Jewish Museum in Prague, email: ✉ [sales@jewishmuseum.cz](mailto:sales@jewishmuseum.cz) or visit our website at [www.jewishmuseum.cz/shop/ashop.htm](http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/shop/ashop.htm).

### **REMEMBERING ANNE FRANK**

On 9 June, the Jewish Museum's Education and Culture Centre, in association with the Centre for Ecumenical Encounters and Dialogue in Olo-mouc, held a memorial evening to mark the 75th anniversary of the birth of Anne Frank. Part of this programme was a presentation of a Czech edition of the famous "Anne Frank's Diary", as well as a screening of a new documentary film entitled "The Short Life of Anne Frank". Anna Hájková, from the Institute of the Terezín Initiative, opened the evening with a talk on the situation of Jews in the Netherlands during World War II. Translator Michaela Jacobsen talked about the new edition of the diary and Hildegonda Rijkssenová, from the Centre for Ecumenical Encounters and Dialogue in Olomouc, talked about the travelling exhibition "Anne Frank – Legacy for the Present". This exhibition, which includes a section entitled "A Children's Story – Drawings from the Terezín Ghetto", has been travelling across the Czech Republic since March 2001. It is being held in association with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the Jewish Museum in Prague. Excerpts from "Anne Frank's Diary" were read by Ivana Gabalová. Those who attended the evening had an opportunity to view photographs from the above-mentioned exhibition, as well as from the life of Anne Frank. The event was attended by Hilde Jansen, cultural attaché at the Dutch Embassy, Levien Rouw from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the



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### **PRAGUE SPRING CONCERT AT THE SPANISH SYNAGOGUE**

The Spring musical season at the Spanish Synagogue culminated on 2 June with a concert held as part of the

Prague Spring International Music Festival. The vocal group Adash from Ostrava with choirmaster Tomáš Novotný put on a programme featuring Hebrew spiritual compositions from various periods and styles. Of particular interest were two modern premieres of the work of František Škroup (1801–62), the composer of the Czech national anthem. These are synagogue compositions set to Hebrew texts composed in the nineteenth century for the Association for Reform Service at the Old Shul (which once stood on the site of today's Spanish Synagogue and where František Škroup played the organ for ten years). The two-hour concert given by Adash was an unforgettable experience, thanks to a deeply felt and thoroughly professional performance.

### **KAFKA-BORGES/ BUENOS AIRES-PRAGUE FESTIVAL**

In association with the Argentinean Embassy in the Czech Republic and the Franz Kafka Centre, the Jewish Museum co-organised the cultural festival Kafka-Borges/Buenos Aires-Prague, which was held between 3 June – 3 July. Twenty-three cultural events were held during the festival within the anniversary dates of Kafka's birth and death. These included a literary evening, entitled The Radiance of Letters, in honour of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, whose work was influenced by Kafka, literary evenings with the writers Ivan Klíma, Roland Costa Picaz, Arnošt Lustig, Jiří Gruša and Lenka Reinerová, as well as a one-day seminar on the work of Kafka and Borges, a number of theatre performances, film screenings, exhibitions and concerts.

On 7 June, the Jewish Museum's Education and Culture Centre hosted readings from the libretto of Alan Levy's opera, In the Penal Colony, which was inspired by Franz Kafka and Václav Havel. Participants included Nancy Braun, Matthew Hayes, Daniel Lamken and Joel Sugerman from the International School in Prague.

The American journalist Alan Levy, for many years editor-in-chief of The Prague Post and one of the most popular and respected figures in Prague, died on 2 April. One of the fruits of his diverse intellectual and artistic talents is the opera libretto for which René Staar composed the music.

The Kafka-Borges/Buenos Aires-Prague festival was held under the auspices of the former Czech President Václav Havel and under the patronage of the Chairman of the Czech Senate Petr Pithart and the Chairman of the Czech Parliament Lubomír Zaorálek.

### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, THE FUTURE OF JEWISH HERITAGE IN EUROPE**

On 24–27 April, Prague hosted an international conference which dealt with the preservation, renovation and future use of Jewish sites and also with the work of Jewish museums, archives, libraries and documentary centres. The conference was organised by the European Association for Jewish Culture in association with the Jewish Museum in Prague and with the support of many sponsorship organisations. Leo Pavlát, director of the Jewish Museum, gave a lecture in the section on "Jewish Museums: Their Role in the 21st Century". As part of the accompanying programmes, the Jewish Museum in Prague prepared special guided tours of its depositories of textiles, metalworks and three-dimensional items for conference participants. Those taking part also visited a reconstructed former synagogue in the Smíchov district of Prague, which will now be used as the Museum's archive and depository of artworks. Some of the visitors viewed

the Museum's permanent exhibitions, which are located in historic buildings, as well as the Old Jewish Cemetery. As part of the conference, the Spanish Synagogue hosted a concert of works by Jewish composers, which met with a tremendous response.

### **SPECIALIST STAFF OF THE MUSEUM AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES**

The annual conference of the European Museum Forum was held in Athens on 5–9 May. This conference, at which is announced the European Museum of the Year Award, was attended by Michaela Hájková, the Jewish Museum's fine arts curator. The Jewish Museum was nominated for the annual prize at last year's conference in Copenhagen.

The Text and Culture conference, organised by "Paidea", the European Institute for Jewish Education, was held in Stockholm on 23–24 May. The Jewish Museum in Prague was represented by Michael Dunayevsky, Hebraist and library employee.

A conference on the Jewish cultural heritage was held in Luxemburg on 18–20 June, at which Arno Pařík, the Jewish Museum's exhibition curator, gave a lecture on "Renewal of Jewish Monuments in the Czech Republic".

### **PROMINENT VISITS**

#### **April**

Ambassador Yoav Biran, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel

#### **June**

Gloria Raquel Bender, Director of the Cultural Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Argentina  
Silvan Shalom, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Israel

