Jewish Magic in the Art of Mark Podwal

On display at the Robert Guttmann Gallery until 11 November was a retrospective exhibition of work by the acclaimed U.S. artist Mark Podwal. Entitled “Jewish Magic in the Art of Mark Podwal” and curated by Arno Pařík, this featured a selection of almost 80 drawings and gouaches from the museum’s collection and from the artist’s own collection. 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 (for more information, see Newsletter 2/2012).

This exhibition was seen by a record number of separately paying visitors (8,740) – 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.

On the occasion of this exhibition, Czech Television prepared a film portrait of Mark Podwal as part of its Paths of Faith series, entitled “My Synagogue is in Prague”. In addition to interviews with Podwal, Jewish Museum director Leo Pavlát and Chief Rabbi of Prague Efraim Karol Sidon, it also featured examples of the artist’s current work. The film also documented the exhibition opening on 27 June 2012, as well as the ceremony to mark the dedication of new textiles for the Old-New Synagogue.
Synagogue/Altneuschul (for more information, see Newsletter 1/2012). A documentary team also accompanied Mark Podwal on a tour of Prague, so viewers were able to learn about Prague’s Jewish sites – the Old and New Jewish cemeteries, the High, Spanish and especially the Old-New synagogues – that have such an important place in Podwal’s work. The film premiered on 4 November 2012 and can be seen at http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1185258379-cesty-viry/212562215500007-moje-synagoga-je-in-Prague/.

“You won’t need to see a rabbi.” 500 Years of Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia.

The Jewish Museum in Prague has prepared a special exhibition to mark the 500th anniversary of the first Hebrew book to be printed in Bohemia and Moravia – and in the entire region of Eastern and Central Europe. This is the culmination of a project that has been ongoing for several years. The exhibition is held at the museum’s Robert Guttmann Gallery and runs from 6 December 2012 until 28 February 2013. On display are unique items from the most important collections of manuscripts and early printed books in the Czech Republic and abroad.

In December 1512 a consortium of Jewish printers and financiers in Prague completed the printing of a siddur, a prayer book for weekdays and the Sabbath services. Due to its publication there, the Bohemian lands became one of the first places – after several localities in Italy, the Iberian Peninsula and Constantinople – where there were Hebrew printing presses run by Jewish printers. From then on, Hebrew books were published to varying degrees of intensity in Prague and later in Prostějov, Brno and Mikulov until the first half of the 20th century.

The title of the exhibition is a quote from the heading of a glossary to the Hebrew Bible that was published in Prague in 1604 by Moses Sertels. The exhibition traces the history and development of Hebrew printing in Prague, particularly in the earliest period of this cultural phenomenon – from the 16th century to the 18th. In addition to exploring the general influence of book printing on the democratization and secularization of education, the relationship between the first printed books and manuscripts, the development of typography and decoration, and the gradual expansion of genres, the exhibition focuses mainly on the characteristic features of books printed in the Bohemian lands. It
also looks at the remarkably open co-operation that existed between Jewish typographers and their Christian colleagues, which influenced the external form of Hebrew books printed in Prague for more than a century. Attention is also drawn to the individual printers, authors, editors and illustrators.

The exhibition features up to 50 original printed books, including unique items such as the only preserved copy of the earliest Prague printed book from the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the 1526 Pesah Haggadah from the Braginsky Collection in Zurich, which is regarded as one of the most beautiful Hebrew books of all time. The National Library of the Czech Republic and the Strahov Library of the Royal Canonry of Premonstratensians in Prague have loaned books from the workshops of the Christian printers Pavel Severin and Sixt Palma Močidlanský from the early 16th and 17th centuries; these works have decoration and woodcuts in common with Prague Hebrew books from the same time. On loan from the Research Library in Olomouc are a rare book from Krakow, dating from 1534, which was influenced by Prague typography, and a previously unknown book from Abraham Heida’s workshop, dating from 1621, which was discovered in the library of a local Jesuit college during preparatory research for the exhibition. Also on display are unique original items from the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague – notably, the only extant copy of the second oldest Prague book of hymns for the Sabbath and grace after meals, dating from 1514, a Hebrew bible from 1530 and a Hebrew book printed in Prostějov – the only one of its kind to be preserved in the Bohemian lands. The museum also showcases the results of its research that was carried out in synagogues in Bohemia and Moravia in the 1990s.

The exhibition also has a multimedia section which gives visitors the opportunity to look through selected books in digital form. In addition to a detailed exploration of the individual topics, this includes examples from an on-line bibliography of Hebrew printing in Bohemia and Moravia with an overview of the results of several-years’ systematic research into the books and collections of major institutions in Europe, USA and Israel. (For more on the project, see www.jewishmuseum.cz/hebrewprinting).

The exhibition is accompanied by a monograph (in Czech and English), entitled “Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia” (for more on this, see the New Publications section of this newsletter), published by the Jewish Museum in Prague in association with the Academia publishing house.

Robert Guttmann Gallery, U Staré školy 3, Prague 1
open daily, except for Saturdays, public and Jewish holidays,
Winter time: 9 a.m. – 4.30 p.m., Summer time: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Currently under preparation

*Symbols of Emancipation. Nineteenth-Century Synagogues in the Czech Lands* (Opening 20 March 2013)

THE POLISH SEASON AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE

Held throughout 2012 at the Jewish Museum in Prague, the Polish Season followed on from the previous year’s successful Israeli Season. The aim was to showcase the history of what was once Europe’s largest Jewish community and to draw attention to contemporary Jewish culture while showing how it is received in the wider society. The Polish Season was organized by the Jewish Museum in Prague in association with the Polish Institute in Prague. It included Q&As on various historical and social topics with leading experts from Poland and the Czech Republic, concerts by top Polish bands inspired by the Jewish musical tradition, and screenings of the most recent works of Polish cinematography that focus on 20th-century Polish-Jewish relations.

On 19 September there was a screening of “Birthplace” (Miejsce urodzenia, 1992), based on the book “Heritage” by the Polish-Jewish author Henryk Grynberg, now living in the U.S. Directed by Paweł Łoziński, this documentary film has received many awards but has also provoked a great deal of controversy. The screening was followed by a discussion with the Israeli architect, academic and honorary consul of the Polish Republic in Jerusalem, Zeev Baran, who was born in Vilnius in 1935 and survived the Holocaust as a child. The other guest was the historian and journalist Piotr Zychowicz, who is the executive editor of the new monthly “Uważam Rze – Historia”, which focuses on the history of Polish-Jewish relations.

On 24 October there was a meeting with the novelist and essayist Piotr Paziński. This Polish-Jewish writer belongs to the third generation – the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors – who are now searching for their roots and identity. The first literary response from this generation was Paziński’s novel Pensjonat (Boarding House), which received the prestigious annual Polish award Paszport Polityki (Polityka’s Passport) and was recently published in Czech translation. During the meeting, Piotr Paziński spoke about Jewish culture in Poland and showcased the Jewish cultural magazine Midrasz, the importance of which on the Polish intellectual scene transcends the borders of the Jewish community.

The star of the final concert in the Polish Season was André Ochodlo, a German-born Polish musician who is one of the world’s most outstanding vocalists in Yiddish. He appeared at the Spanish Synagogue on 6 November with the Odem Trio, which comprises Adam Żuchowski (artistic director, bass), Piotr Maślanka (percussion) and Zdzisław Kalinowski (keyboards). The concert programme revolved around his latest project – “Layla” – that has contemporary Polish composers (including Jerzy Satanowski, Adam Żuchowski and Ewa Kornecka) writing music inspired by texts from leading Yiddish poets (such as Abraham Sutzkever, Itzig Manger, Rokhl Korn and Lajzer Ajchenrand).
The Polish Season came to a close on 14 November with the Czech premiere of director Agnieszka Holland’s most recent film “In Darkness”. The screening was at the Spanish Synagogue and was attended by the director. The film is based on true events that took place in Nazi-occupied Lvov (formerly in Poland, now in Ukraine). Leopold Socha, a Polish sewer worker and small-time thief, helps a group of Jewish escapees from the Lvov ghetto hide in the labyrinthine sewer system, at a price. Initially motivated by money, he gradually forms a special bond with the group, which intensifies with every new dramatic situation. When they run out of money, Socha realizes that he cannot abandon the group, so he continues to hide them at the risk of death for himself and his whole family. “In Darkness” has an Academy Ward nomination for best foreign-language film and has won a number of prestigious awards in Poland and internationally.

From the film In Darkness.

Project partner: Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Warsaw)
Collaboration on the musical component: Junior klub Na Chmelnici
Collaboration on the film component: Verbascum Imago

The project was held with the support of the Czech-Polish Forum.
Medial partners: Lidové noviny, lidovky.cz, Rádio Classic FM, Rádio Express and Rádio 1
NEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT “OURS OR FOREIGN? JEWS IN THE CZECH TWENTIETH CENTURY”

Conference on anti-Semitism for the 60th anniversary of the Slánský Trial

Rudolf Slánský was born in Nezvěstice near Pilsen on 31 July 1901, the son of a Jewish merchant. He joined the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) in 1921 and became a KSC delegate in the National Assembly in 1935. As a leading representative of the party, he managed to escape Nazi persecution by fleeing to Moscow while most of his family members perished in the Terezín ghetto and in other Nazi concentration camps. In 1946 he was elected General Secretary of the KSC and, as a representative of the hard-line Stalinist core, he contributed in a major way to the establishment of the Communist dictatorship and to the persecution of its political opponents after February 1948. In November 1951, however, he was arrested and, together with 13 other prominent party members, was accused of plotting against the republic. He was later condemned to death in a stage trial on 27 November 1952 and subsequently executed.

On 27 November 2012, the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Terezín Initiative Institute held a conference for teachers in Pilsen to mark the anniversary of the trial of the Slánský Trial. The conference was launched with a screening of the 2000 documentary film Prague Trial (Pražský proces), which recreates the atmosphere in Czechoslovak society between the end of the Second World War and 1956, followed by a discussion with its director Zuzana Justman, which was moderated by Kateřina Čapková from the Institute of Contemporary History at the Czech Academy of Sciences. The journalist and historian Petr Brod talked about the trials’ international and internal political connections, causes and effects while the documentary filmmaker Martin Šmok from the USC Shoah Foundation focused on the role of the media and the trial’s impacts on society and on the Jewish community. At the end of the conference, there was a presentation of the methodology for elementary and secondary school teachers with focus on anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s.

The aim of the project “Ours or Foreign? Jews in the Czech Twentieth Century” is to integrate into lessons at Czech schools the history of the Jewish community as an integral part of the Czech modern history. It is based on the preparation of educational and methodological materials in direct interaction with teachers, pupils and students, whether in the form of thematically focused workshops, seminars or conferences. The project is co-financed by the European Social Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic as part of the Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme.

Unwelcome Foreigners, or Refugees Yesterday and Today

On 6 December 2012, the Jewish Museum in Prague presented a new educational programme for elementary and secondary schools, entitled “Unwelcome Foreigners, or Refugees Yesterday and Today”. By drawing on the example of Czechoslovak refugee policy of the late 1930s, it aims to encourage pupils and students to become involved in an active debate about the topic of refugees, also in its contemporary context.

In 1938 Nazi Germany annexed Austria and, after the Munich Agreement, occupied the border area of Czechoslovakia. Hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing tyranny, the Gestapo and the concentration camps, many being persecuted and forced out because of their Jewish origin. A number of them found themselves at the
Czechoslovak borders while escaping. How did Czechoslovakia behave towards these people in need? Did it receive them or did it close its borders to them? Did Czechoslovak citizens help the refugees? These are just some of the questions to be dealt with by the participants of the individual two-hour workshops.

“The priority of this programme is its thematic overlap into the present, which makes it possible to discuss a number of current issues that may concern each of us and those who are close to us. A critical stance on the refugee policy of Czechoslovakia and other countries before the Second World War, a time when ethnic minorities were being persecuted and human rights were being abused to an unprecedented degree, is also a prerequisite for a differentiated perspective on one’s own national history and for an awareness that democratic states can also fail when faced with totalitarian regimes and genocide. This fact can bring interesting parallels from the present-day world. This is why the workshops place emphasis on the formulation, sharing and discussion of ones’ own opinions,” according to Zuzana Pavlovská, head of the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture.

At the start of the workshops, students will be asked to answer five general questions relating to the topic of refugees. After a brief introduction to pre-war developments in Europe and to the position of refugees in Czechoslovakia in 1938, focus will be on the study of original archive and other documents. After being divided into home groups, each of them chooses to focus on one of four specialist topics, along with similarly oriented ‘experts’ – examining the personal stories of refugees, the reaction of the authorities and the general public to refugees, or the activities of organizations that helped refugees. The individual expert groups familiarize themselves with particular documents from this period and, through discussions, try to find the answers to several questions. The students then return to their home groups where their main tasks awaits them – by drawing on their recently acquired ‘expertise’, to put together a simplified convention on refugees from various perspectives.

The Unwelcome Foreigners workshop can be booked free of charge from the Department for Education and Culture, Jewish Museum in Prague:
Prague: education@jewishmuseum.cz, tel.: 222 749 350
Brno: brno@jewishmuseum.cz, tel.: 544 509 651

Sample workshop prepared by the Jewish Museum in collaboration with Gymnázium Duhovka.
NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Tuvia Beeri – Colour Etchings
On 13 September 2012, the Brno office of the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture hosted the opening of an exhibition of colour etchings by the Israeli painter Tuvia Beeri, which was attended by the artist in person.

Originally from Topolčany in Slovakia, Tuvia Beeri emigrated in 1948 to Israel where, a few years later, he began his studies at the Art Institutem, Kiryat Tivon. In 1961 he went to Paris for a two-year study period and after his return he became a teacher at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, and at the Avni Institute of Art and Design in Tel Aviv. In 2001, Beeri was awarded the Eli Oshorov Prize from the Association of Israeli Painters and Sculptors (IPSA) for contribution to Israeli art.

Let’s Get Started: Whoever plays is not naughty!
The leisure festival “Let’s Get Started: Whoever plays is not naughty!”, which is organized by the Brno–Centre Town Hall and its cultural and educational centre, was held in Brno on 16 September 2012. Employees of the Brno office of the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture took part in the festival, showcasing its own programmes for schools, interest groups and the general public and presenting examples of its work. A small art workshop was prepared for the youngest children interested in Jewish culture.

The Roma genocide in the Second World War
On 29 October 2012, the Prague office of the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture, in co-operation with the civic association “Slovo 21” (Word 21), hosted the opening of an exhibition on the Nazi genocide of 90% of the pre-war Roma population of Bohemia and Moravia.

The touring exhibition of Brno’s Museum of Roma Culture traces the measures taken against the Roma and Sinti in a Europe-wide context from as early as 1933. The focus of attention, however, is the story of the Roma population of Bohemia and Moravia, who were marked by the tragedy of the so-called gypsy camps in Lety near Písek and Hodonín near Kunštát, as well as other concentration camps and the
The exhibition also includes separate panels on the involvement of Roma in the anti-Nazi resistance and on the fate of the property that was taken from the persecuted Roma.

“Vedem” (In the Lead): The Journey of the Terezín Boys Continues

On 6 December 2012 the Prague office of the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture hosted the opening of an exhibition that focuses on a unique educational experiment.

In December 1942, a self-administration for 14-16 year old children was set up at “Home One” in the Terezín ghetto. The boys from the home designed the emblem and composed the anthem for their self-administration, which they called the SHKID Republic. (The abbreviation SHKID comes from the Russian shkola imeni Dostoevskogo – Dostoyevsky School, a boys’ orphanage in Saint Petersburg). For two years they secretly published a magazine called “Vedem” (In the Lead), in which they described ghetto life and presented their own poems, stories and drawings. This exhibition details the life of the “Boys from Number One” and features the individual columns and the most interesting articles from the magazine, some of which are being published for the very first time. The final part focuses on the magazines that were created by students at dozens of elementary and secondary schools from throughout the Czech Republic in the 2011/2012 school year as part of the “Pick up the Terezín Baton” contest. Students at Gymnázium Přírodní škola and the public-benefit association Opona contributed to the exhibition. It is on view until 17 January.

Currently under preparation:


Unique photographs documenting the life of the present-day Kiev Yeshivah, a Jewish school intended mainly for the study of the Talmud and Halakah (Jewish religious law).
CINEGOGUE 2012

In 2012, the Jewish Museum in Prague and the BERG Orchestra prepared a continuation of the successful CINEGOGUE (‘cinema’ + ‘synagogue’) series which is based on a unique combination of film, music and architecture. On 15 and 16 October 2012 there was a screening in the Spanish Synagogue of the 1923 Austrian film “East and West” – a comic story of two worlds colliding starring American vaudeville icon Molly Picon – with a world premiere music score by the young Czech composer Jan Dušek.

The plot opens as Morris Brown, a New York gambler acquainted more with his checkbook than his prayer book, returns to Galicia with his very American daughter, Mollie (Molly Picon) for a family wedding. The bride, daughter of his religiously observant brother, and Mollie, whose exuberant antics fill the film, could not be more different. But Mollie unexpectedly meets her match, an engaging young yeshiva scholar who forsakes tradition and joins the secular world to win her heart.

“East and West” features classic scenes of Molly Picon lifting weights and boxing, teaching young villagers to shimmy, and stealing away from services to gorge herself before sundown on Yom Kippur. The directors Sidney M. Goldin and Ivan Ambramson affectionately portray the contrasts that emerge from an encounter between two different worlds – the traditional shtetl and the modern secular life of 1920s America. This antithesis also inspired Jan Dušek’s score for the film, which incorporates classical and Jazz elements.

A restored and digitized copy of the film was provided by the National Center for Jewish Film.

Currently under preparation:

CINEGOGUE 2013 – Henryk Szaro: A Strong Man (Mocny człowiek, 1929)
ON-LINE MATERIAL RELATING TO THE JEWS OF OSTRAVA

To mark the 70th anniversary of the Jewish transports from Ostrava to Terezín, the Jewish Museum in Prague has published on-line a unique collection of personal and family documents that illustrate everyday Jewish life in Ostrava before the Second World War and the fate of Ostrava’s Jews during the Holocaust, as well as the stories of those who survived. About two thousand letters, photographs and official documents have been made available to the public in the Jewish Museum’s new on-line collections catalogue at http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/.

This catalogue includes an on-line exhibition based on the Goldberg family’s unique correspondence. The Goldbergs were divided by the Holocaust: three brothers – Oskar, Moses and Norbert – managed to escape to Britain in 1939 while their parents and sisters with their children stayed behind in occupied Europe, where they perished. Full of sadness at being separated and longing to be reunited, their letters effectively illustrate how difficult it was for the Jewish inhabitants of the ‘Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia’ to escape to the free world with the obstacle of visas, permits and closed borders.

This collection of documents is the result of several years’ work by volunteers at Kingston Synagogue in southwest London, which has a Torah scroll from pre-war Ostrava on permanent loan. A large collection of scrolls that were confiscated and sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague during the Nazi occupation were seized by the Czechoslovak Communist state in the 1960s and sold abroad. Many of these scrolls have since been distributed on loan to synagogues throughout the world via the London-based Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust.

Kingston Synagogue’s Ostrava Group set to work under the supervision of David Lawson in 2006. Apart from documenting the fate of the Jews of Ostrava, this group also intends to revive people’s memory of them. A ‘virtual’ community of Ostrava Jews scattered across the world is being gradually created in this way, and they are being helped to re-establish their relationship with their home town and that of their parents or grandparents.

The Jewish Museum in Prague became involved in the activities of the Ostrava Group in Kingston two years ago. In a joint project, the museum saw to the cataloguing, digitizing and publication of this unique collection. The project was presented at the Jewish Museum’s Department for Education and Culture in Prague on 10 September. This involved a discussion moderated by Petr Brod with Norbert Goldberg, David Lawson, Libuše Salomonovičová (who is documenting the fate of Jewish families from Ostrava) and Michal Frankl (head of the Jewish Museum’s Shoah History Department).

COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST SYSTEMATIC DEPORTATIONS OF JEWS FROM BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

After the compulsory registration of Jews and the confiscation of Jewish property, the organized deportation of Jews during the German occupation was the next phase of the so-called “final solution to the Jewish question.” The first deportations from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were dispatched to the occupied territories of Poland (the General Governmen) as early as October 1939. Systematic deportations began two years later on 16 October 1941, when the first transport was sent to the Lodz ghetto. The year 1942 – which is commemorated in the Czech Republic mainly for the assignation of Reinhard Heydrich and the obliteration of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky – is when the co-existence of Czechs and Czech Germans with Jews was definitively broken. At the start of the year the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia were still living among their non-Jewish neighbours, albeit separated by an invisible and increasingly impenetrable wall of prohibitions and orders; at the end of the year, it was
being deported to the ghettos, concentration camps and death camps. By December 1942, more than 61,000 men, women and children had been deported to the Terezín ghetto alone, which had been established on 24 November 1941. Most of the deportees ended up in the concentration camps and death camps in the east – particularly in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the first Terezín transport was dispatched on 26 October 1942.

To mark the anniversary of these tragic events, the Jewish Museum provided free access to the Pinkas Synagogue memorial to the Jewish victims of the Shoah from Bohemia and Moravia on 14 October and 25 November 2012. Museum staff were available throughout the day to help visitors and answer questions.

The memorial was built in the 1950s by the then State Jewish Museum under the supervision of Hana Volavková. Prior to its construction, it was necessary to undertake an extensive survey and alterations in Pinkas Synagogue, which was chosen for its proximity to the Old Jewish Cemetery. The names of the victims on the synagogue walls represent a symbolic extension of the cemetery for those who have no actual grave. This unique memorial is the work of two painters, Václav Boštík and Jiří John, who not only put together the impressive concept but also hand painted the 77,297 names on the walls.

The memorial dates from a time when Shoah commemoration was primarily an internal matter for the Jewish community and when the genocide of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia was mentioned only at the periphery. It was tolerated by the authorities because it was not in a public space but in a synagogue. In the period after the Soviet invasion of 1968, the memorial’s concealment from the public culminated in its long-term closure and the removal of the inscriptions from the walls. It was only after the fall of Communism that the Jewish Museum could begin restoring the memorial, which reopened to the public in 1996.

TEREZÍN ARCHIVE COLLECTION PUBLISHED ON-LINE

On 25 November, as part of the commemoration of the tragic events 70 years ago, the complete Terezín Collection was published on-line at http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/.

Many of the original documents drawn up by the Terezín ghetto’s commandant and by the Jewish “self-administration” were destroyed on Nazi orders at the end of the Second World War. Several prisoners and groups of prisoners, however, took it upon themselves to save as many of these documents as possible, and some survivors continued this work on their own even after 1945. The Terezín Archive Collection contains, for example, fragments of original proceedings of the Jewish Council of Elders in Terezín and documents on setting up the ghetto’s structure and operations, on the education of children, or on the cultural life of inmates. This is one of the most important extant collections relating to the history of the Terezín ghetto in the Czech Republic and abroad.

The digitization project was made possible with the financial support that has been provided by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany since 2009. With this support, more than 100,000 pages of archival materials have been researched, re-catalogued and provided with structured metadata.

The fate of the deportees is also commemorated by new materials for schools that are focused on the places from where the individual transports were dispatched (see http://www.nasinebocizi.cz/?p=587).
PARTICIPATION IN THE 2012 EUROPEAN PATCHWORK MEETING

On 13-16 September 2012, the Jewish Museum in Prague presented a unique set of patchwork and appliqué items that had never before been exhibited in their entirety to the 18th European Patchwork Meeting (European Patchwork Meeting), which is held every year in St. Marie aux Mines, Alsace, France. This area is known historically as the birthplace of the Amish movement, for whom the patchwork and quilting techniques are characteristic. One of the co-organizers was the French Association of Anabaptist and Mennonite History.

The set of items exhibited by the museum comprised 19 textiles, the oldest of which being a 17-th century appliqué that was used on a mantle from Moravia. As expected, of most interest to the visitors were the unique synagogue curtains, as well as the patchwork covers and binders. The accompanying programme included a lecture by M. Veselská on the museum’s history and collections. The museum’s involvement in the patchwork gathering was a great success – its exhibition attracted about 8,000 visitors over the four days it was on display. It also had success with the sale of its publications and other materials that were on sale at the event.
NEW PUBLICATIONS

Silver Judaica from the Collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague

The collection of ritual silver objects at the Jewish Museum in Prague has never before been published extensively or separately. This situation has now been rectified by the publication of a selective catalogue in English, comprising about a tenth of this part of the museum’s holdings.

The catalogue is written by the museum’s metal curator, Jaroslav Kuntoš. The text deals with the structure and time frame of the collection, and with the localities where the objects were made. It ascertains the proportion of items of local and foreign provenance and explores their connections and the routes through which they came to be in this country. With regard to objects of local origin, it describes the special features of the main types and shows how they differ in various regions. It traces groups of Christian master silversmiths who worked in various localities for Jewish clients and shows the proportion of ritual objects in the collection that were made by them. It focuses on the special status of Jewish producers, the differences in their products in various regions, and their share in the total number of ritual objects in the collection; it also seeks to clarify the reasons for the relatively small amount of items that came from their workshops. In conclusion, it draws attention to interventions by the Austrian state at the beginning of the nineteenth century – which had a strong influence on the structure and number of items that have been preserved to the present day – and explains how the individual Jewish communities dealt with this situation. The catalogue section is arranged according to the individual types of objects and comprises a total of 475 items with all the relevant information. There is also an index of places and names.

Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia

A monograph (in Czech and English) entitled “Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia” has been published by the Jewish Museum in Prague in association with the Academia publishing house for the exhibition “You won’t need to see a rabbi.” 500 Years of Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia. This book includes essays by eight authors from the Czech Republic and abroad which look in detail at various aspects of the topic and place them in a wider context. It is illustrated with more than 200 photographs of printed books from various collections from across the world, most of which are being published for the very first time.

Looking at Hebrew printing from a broader cultural and historical angle, Pavel Sládek’s study takes us into a world in which this phenomenon was still something new and shows how it was regarded, appraised and utilized by contemporaries. There are two studies by the editor of the book, Olga Sixtová: the first provides an overview of Prague Hebrew printing in 1512-1672, the second deals with the earliest period in the development of the typography and decoration of Prague Hebraica, and also includes a detailed bibliography of about the first fifty years (1512-1569). Facilitated by the bringing together of a unique collection of pictorial materials, Petr Voit’s original study casts new light on the extent of the first Jewish printers’ association with their Christian colleagues and the aesthetic trends of the day. The essays by Andrea Jelinková and Lenka Veselá focus on Jewish printing in Prostějov and Christian Hebrew typography in Bohemia. Shlomo Z. Berger examines the printing of Yiddish books in Prague through a comparison with that other major centre of Jewish printing, Amsterdam. Alexandr Putík tackles censorship and denunciation affairs, examining previously unpublished archive materials. Focusing on Moses Israel Landau – the leading Jewish intellectual of Prague – Iveta Cermanová’s essay explores the last creative period of Hebrew printing in the Bohemian lands.
NEW ISSUE OF JUDAICA BOHEMIAE

A new issue of the journal Judaica Bohemiae (47/2012, 2) came out at the end of December 2012. This volume includes a study by Marie Buňatová on commercial relations between the Jews of Prague and Krakow in the period before the Battle of White Mountain. On the basis of a thorough analysis of sources from Czech and Polish archives, this study uncovers the operation, form and development of Czech-Polish trade in the 16th century, as well as the key role played therein by Jews. Ivo Cerman’s paper deals with the almost forgotten work “Jüdischer Blut-Eckel” (1753) by Alois von Sonnenfels – a Jewish convert and father of the famous representative of the Austrian Enlightenment, Joseph von Sonnenfels – which was written in defence of Jews for the purpose of disproving allegations that they used Christian blood. In the Documents section, Alexandr Putík presents and analyzes in detail a new source relating to the trial of Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller from 1629-1630, and Jitka Korbelová provides information about the so-called Schulfassionen – an important, hitherto little-explored source relating to the history of Jewish education in Moravia.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS

The Jewish Museum in Prague has once again taken part in the European Heritage Days, which were held by the Historic Settlement Association of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. On 12 September, as part of this event, we provided free access to the Jewish cemetery in Prague-Žižkov (Fibichova Street). This cemetery (known as the First Israeli Cemetery) was established in 1680 as a plague burial ground for the Jewish community of Prague and was in use until 1890, when a new Jewish cemetery was established in the Strašnice district of Prague. As many as 40,000 people are buried here, including a number of prominent rabbis and scholars. The most visited grave is that of the Chief Rabbi of Prague Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793), whose tombstone was fully restored in 1993, together with those belonging to other members of his family.

JILL ROGOV IN CONCERT

The Jewish Museum in Prague became a partner of the 21st St. Wenceslas Festivities in Prague. On 13 September, as part of this event, the Spanish Synagogue hosted a concert by Jill Rogov, an acclaimed Israeli performer of medieval songs. With guitar accompaniment, Jill Rogov performed traditional Jewish music from various corners of the world, singing in Hebrew, Ladino, Yiddish, Aramaic, Kurdish and Arabic.

ILSE WEBER: LETTERS AND POEMS FROM TEREZÍN (1933-1944)

On 24 September, the Jewish Museum in Prague became involved in an event at the Goethe Institute at which Ilse Weber’s letters and poems were read out. This event was held in conjunction with the publication of a Czech translation of Ulrike Migdal’s book “Wann wohl das Leid ein Ende hat: Briefe und Gedichte aus Theresienstadt” [Will the Suffering Ever End? Letters and Poems from Terezín].

The poet, children’s author and composer Ilse Weber was born in Vítkovice (Ostrava), in 1903. In 1930 she and her husband Willim settled in Prague, where she worked for Czechoslovak Radio and contributed to children’s magazines. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Protectorate, the Weber family was struck by tragedy – while the eldest son Hanuš managed to get to Great Britain and then to Sweden as part of the Refugee Children Movement, the rest of the family – Ilse, Willi and their youngest son Tomáš – were deported to Terezín in February 1942. Ilse worked as a nurse in the children’s ward at the ghetto. When her husband was summoned for deportation
to Auschwitz-Birkenau on Transport En in October 1944, she volunteered to go with him and her son. On the day she arrived, she perished along with her son and other children from Terezín. Ilse Weber wrote about 60 poems and songs in Terezín, the most well-known of which is “Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt” (I wander through Terezín).

UNESCO OPEN DAY

The Jewish Museum provided free entry to the Pinkas Synagogue on 2 December 2012 as part of an open day for major Prague sites. This event was organized by the Prague Information Service and took place on the 20th anniversary of the inclusion of Prague’s historic centre in UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

NOTIFICATION OF A RESTITUTION CLAIM

The Jewish Museum in Prague hereby gives notices that a claim has been filed for the restitution of the following item from its collections:

JMP 89.261
Antonín Fila (1796-1869)
Portrait of Man with Sealed Letter, 1841
Oil on canvas, 68.5 x 57.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Ant. Fila pin. / 1841
Recently restored, relining, new stenter frame

This painting was confiscated from Arnošt Schiller (b. 5 July 1886), who was deported from Prague to Terezín (Transport W) on 8 February 1942 and from Terezín to Auschwitz on 26 October 1942, where he perished.

In accordance with the “Terms for the assertion of restitution claims with respect to objects in the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague that were unlawfully taken during the period of Nazi occupation” (“the Terms”), a one-year deadline for filing any additional claims with respect to the artwork in question shall run from the date of publication of this notice of delivery of claim (1 November 2012). After this deadline has passed, a decision will be made with regard to the claim in accordance with the Terms. Applications delivered at a later date shall not be taken into consideration.
GIFT TICKETS TO VISIT THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE

The Jewish Museum in Prague now offers gift tickets (an unlimited number per person) to visit its sites. The ticket price depends on the choice of sites to be visited.

The basic museum tour includes seven sites: Maisel Synagogue which houses an exhibition on the history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia; Pinkasovu Synagogue which houses the memorial to the Jewish victims of the Shoah from Bohemia and Moravia and a unique exhibition of children’s drawings from Terezín; Klausen Synagogue and the Ceremonial Hall, which house exhibitions on Jewish traditions and customs; the beautifully ornate Spanish Synagogue which houses an exhibition on the recent Jewish history of Bohemia and Moravia and a wonderful exhibition of synagogue silver; the Robert Guttmann Gallery which features temporary exhibitions; and, of course, the world famous Old Jewish Cemetery.

This tour can be extended to include a visit of the Old-New Synagogue or a guided tour as part of the “Prague Jewish Museum and Jewish Community Educational Programme Against Anti-Semitism in the Czech Republic”, which takes place every Sunday at 2 p.m.

Gift tickets are valid for one year from date of issue. Each ticket is valid for seven days from first use, which means that you can spread your tour over several visits (each site can be visited only once).

Where you can buy gift tickets:
Reservation Centre, Jewish Museum in Prague, U Starého hřbitova 3a, 110 00 Prague 1,
tel. 222 317 191
Means of payment: cash only

PROMINENT VISITS

September
~ Judges of the Constitutional Courts of the Czech and Slovak Republics

October
~ Daniela Schadt, journalist and partner of Joachim Gauck, the President of Germany
~ Robert Badinter, former Justice Minister and President of the Constitutional Council of France

Daniela Schadt visiting the Jewish Museum in Prague.
Pierre Levy, French Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Robert Badinter and the Secretary of Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic Tomáš Kraus at the Old Jewish Cemetery.