

ART
IN JEWISH SOCIETY

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ART IN JEWISH SOCIETY

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The Polish Institute of World Art Studies devotes this volume to the memory of Professor **Avigdor Poseq**. Professor Poseq was born in 1934 in Krakow and passed away on November 15, 2016. He was an eminent art historian, associated with the Department of Art History at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In his work, besides publications on the art of the Renaissance and Baroque, his studies were devoted to the works of prominent Jewish artists from Central and Eastern Europe, including Chaim Soutine and Jacques Lipchitz. Prof. Poseq participated in and delivered the key note lecture during the First Congress of Jewish Art in Poland, which the Institute organized in 2008 in Kazimierz Dolny. He was the last Polish professor of art history in Israel.

ART IN JEWISH SOCIETY

Jerzy Malinowski

President of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies

Nicolaus Copernicus University

Introduction

Art in Jewish society is a volume of studies from the Second Congress of Jewish Art in Poland that took place on 24–26 June 2014, organised in Warsaw by the Polish Institute of World Art Studies in cooperation with the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN.

The first Congress of Jewish Art entitled *Jewish Artists and Central-Eastern Europe. Art centers – identity – heritage from the 19th century to the Second World War* took place in Kazimierz Dolny on 27–30 October 2008. The picturesque setting of the congress befitted the memory of the shtetl – Jewish towns in Central and Eastern Europe – evoking images of Jewish artists from the local artistic community, literary works and films. The night screening of the film *Dybbuk*, directed by Michał (Michael) Waszyński, in a local synagogue made a lasting impression on the participants. The congress was held on the centenary of the famous Congress of Jewish writers in Czernowitz (now Chernivtsi) and revolved around the issues of creativity, artistic attitudes and the protection of the cultural heritage of Polish Jews.

A large monographic volume was published in 2010 as a summary of the First Congress. In this book, a group of specialists from a variety of global academic centres presented the results of their research devoted to extensive, often unexplored issues

of architecture, paintings, ritual objects, photography and film. This created a panorama of artistic and cultural events, taking place in Jewish communities from St. Petersburg and Kiev through Vilna, Lwow, Warsaw, Breslau and on to Berlin, Paris, London and New York, as well as an overview of intellectual, religious and political standpoints. In the end, it evoked the image of a heritage preserved or known only from stories. This is the first comprehensive, international and English-language publication to appear in Poland and as a result, the community of historians of Jewish art came together in the international study of Jewish art.

The focus of the second volume is on the relationship between art and the Jewish community. The ideas of the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment), formed at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Berlin, resulted in the inclusion of Jews (after the abolition of legal restrictions) within the political and cultural life of Europe. In the process of modernisation, the Jewish community redefined its relationship to its own artistic tradition, including the prohibition of the presentation of the human form. The beginning of modern painting and sculpture Jewish is associated with the 1860s and 70s. The genesis of the first Jewish artistic community in Warsaw dates back to around 1880. In the late 19th and early 20th century, communities of Jewish

artists and theoreticians, critics, patrons and collectors of art appeared in many cities in Central and Eastern Europe, and artistic groups developed in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and finally in Paris. Independent exhibitions of Jewish artists, starting with the event organised in Berlin in 1907, integrated the community. Before Jewish art appeared on the scene, new horizons had already opened, usually associated with political ideologies. The years from the beginning of the twentieth century to around 1930 was the most important period in terms of the achievements of Jewish artists who, while belonging to the European community, sought their own cultural identity and so at the same time created a separate ('national') art along with independent art institutions (including the Kultur-lige in Kiev and the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw).

In this volume, the authors searched for answers to the questions raised at the congress: of artistic ideas, and so of the attitude to their own traditions, about an artistic life associated with the creation of aesthetic values, of art collection and the acquisition of new traditions and values by the Jewish people.

This volume contains a wide spectrum of interpretations of Jewish art in the social and cultural context. The authors of these studies presented the profiles of artists and people of art as well as artistic trends against the social and cultural background prevalent in the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe from the period of emancipation until the mid-twentieth century. These studies of diversified methods, methodologies and research perspectives included texts devoted to the relationships of the output of Jewish artists with Zionist ideology, Christian threads in Jewish art, the reactions of Jewish artists to political events, such as the pogroms, World War I, or the persecution they experienced after Hitler's rise to power. The last part of the volume is devoted to Jewish museums and collections. The topics presented by the authors are extremely diverse yet at the same time complement each other to form a cohesive whole. The volume contains studies of various aspects of the work of individual artists (Yankiel Katz and his relationship with the art school in Kazan, Theresa Berenstein, Bruno Schulz, Samuel Hirszenberg and Marek Szwarc), as well as more comprehensive studies on Jewish architecture (the synagogues in Volhynia; the designs of Henryk Stifelmann), photography

(a comparative study of the works of Menachem Kipnis and Alter Kacyzne, as well as an article about the South African Litvak photographer) and film (the work of Maya Deren; a 1949 Jewish War Film in Moscow), as well as arts and crafts (Jewish paper-cuts) and monuments (Jewish monuments before 1939). Studies on art education are also included (Jewish students at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts). Three articles examine the topic of the relationship between Jewish artists and European avant-garde circles (David Bomberg, Marc Chagall, Ludwig Meidner). Compatible with the thematic framework designated by the editors of the volume, there are articles on Christian-Jewish relations (Pieta in Jewish art), or the involvement of Jewish artists in important historical events and politics (Jewish artists against the policies of National Socialism, the presentation of pogroms in art), including their involvement in Zionist ideology (Ephraim Moses Lilien, iconographic motifs in the interior of Eastern European synagogues). There are also some interesting articles discussing the activities of Jewish art critics and historians (Tea Arciszewska, Otto Schneider, Zofia Ameisenowa) and patrons (the Margolin family who supported the artist Israel Lejzerowicz), who played an important role as intermediaries between the artists and society. A similar social role in the promotion of culture was played by Jewish museums and private collections, directly represented in this volume by three articles (the Jewish Museum in Prešov, the history of art collections in the Jewish museum of Vilna (now Vilnius), the Judaica collections of the National Museum in Krakow).

Since the release of the first post-congress volume in 2010, the Jewish art research community in Poland has undergone considerable changes. The main research centre operating since 2007 is the Department of Jewish Art at the Polish Institute of World Art Studies, established in 2011 from the merger of the Society of Modern Art in Torun (est. 2000) and the Polish Society of Oriental Art in Warsaw (est. 2006).

In 2015, the Institute – in cooperation with the Museum of the History of Polish Jews – began to publish a monumental series entitled *Jewish art in Poland and Central-East Europe*, financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education. The first one will feature supplemented and revised versions of the work of Maria and Kazimierz

Piechotka. The first – *Heaven's Gates. Wooden Synagogues in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* – was published in both languages in 2015. The second – *Heaven's Gates: masonry Synagogues in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* will be released in 2016. The third – *Oppidum Judeorum. Jews in the Urban Space of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* – will be published in 2017.

The next phase in the series would include outstanding, classical items published in Poland before 1939, which will recall the tradition of the art and culture of Polish Jews such as, among others, Majer Bałaban and Zofia Ameisenowa, supplemented with commentary and introductions, as well as some contemporary pieces only published so far in Polish, which should now appear in English. In the future, the most important goal of the series will be to shape the research conducted in Poland and other countries through the publication of works that have been written especially for the series.

Other series produced by the Institute in recent years have included publications on Jewish art: *Studies and monographs - Jews and Judaism in the mirror of ancient art* by Magdalena Maciudzińska-Kamczycka (2014) and *'A sense of form': the art of David Bomberg* by Dominika Buchowska (2015) in the series *Sources for art history – Choice (Le choix)* by Eugenia Markowa [Gina Pinkus-Szwarc], a novel published in Paris in 1961 translated by Jakub Jedliński and edited by Eleonora Jedlińska (2015), and finally *Jewish artists in Warsaw 1939–1945* by Magdalena Tarnowska (2015) that was not part of any series. Adam Kamczycki, who is associated with the Institute, published a work entitled *Zionism and art. The iconography of Theodor Herzl* (2014). Numerous articles about art and Jewish artists have been published in the Institute's periodicals: *Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych (Fine Arts Diary)*, *Sztuka Europy Wschodniej/Искусство Восточной Европы/Art of Eastern Europe* as well as in the volumes of the series *Studies on modern art* (see www.world-art.pl).

I. Artistic ideas in Jewish Society

ART IN JEWISH SOCIETY

Renata Piątkowska
Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews
Polish Institute of World Art Studies

A shared space. Jewish students at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts (1923–1939)

The concept of *frontier*, introduced into Jewish studies by Sander L. Gilman is also useful for research into the milieu and output of Jewish artists in Poland, similarly to the concept of “third space” used by Marcus Silber, in which “members of the ethnonational minority group have adopted cultural elements of both the majority and minority groups, and are active in both spaces.”¹ According to Gilman, the *Jewish frontier* is “the conceptual and physical space where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build. It is the place of the “migrant culture of the in-between.”²

During the inter-war period, one of the main contact zones between minorities and the dominant Polish majority were schools³ and universities. Universal and compulsory primary education resulted in the fact that the young generation of Jews also grew up within the realities of the

Polish socio-cultural space.⁴ Although this mass acculturation and Polonisation did not lead to the disappearance of the Jewish national consciousness, it did however influence the consciousness of this young generation and was also an important, modernising element in its self-development.⁵

Art schools were one of the most significant ‘frontier’ places, in which students of various ethnicities, social classes and faiths mingled. For many young Jews, in particular those from Central and Eastern Europe, they were often the first place where they stepped into the world of European and Christian culture. A place where friendships, conflicts and antagonisms were born.

Since the 19th century, more and more young Jewish boys (and from the beginning of the 20th century, Jewish girls as well) took up art studies, and the only institution of higher education of this type on Polish soil at the time – the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow – was one of the places where Jewish students discovered and often appropriated the Polish symbolic universe (as did Maurycy Gottlieb in his famous *Self-Portrait in Polish Nobleman's*

¹ Silber (2010: 64).

² Gilman (2003: 15). An important inspiration for my article was also the research conducted by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec on the institutions and places of the Polish-Jewish frontier, see Prokop-Janiec (2013) and Kamil Kijek on the consciousness and socialisation of Jewish youth within the Second Polish Republic – Kijek (2010: 85–112); Kijek (2013). Unpublished doctoral thesis. I would like to thank the author for making it available to me.

³ Prokop-Janiec (2013: 47–75).

⁴ As Kijek demonstrates, this took place irrespective of the type of school, since Polish literature, both history of Poland and general history and geography were taught in Polish in Jewish schools as well, see Kijek (2010: 89–90).

⁵ Kijek (2013: 249).

Dress). But the Academy in Krakow was also a place of dispute, rivalry and exclusion.⁶ During the inter-war period, two art academies were active – in Krakow and Warsaw. In Vilna, however, the Faculty of Fine Arts was part of the Stefan Batory University.

The School of Fine Arts, opened in 1904 in Warsaw, was a modern institution, unencumbered by traditional hierarchies both in terms of its programme and its accessibility for all those who wished to attend. The success of the school was dependent upon the personalities of its professors, eminent artists such as: Kazimierz Stabrowski, Konrad Krzyżanowski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Ksawery Dunikowski, Wojciech Jastrzębowski, Władysław Skoczylas, Tadeusz Pruszkowski or Tadeusz Bryer. Many Jews studied there, including those from poor, traditionalist backgrounds such as Mojżesz Rynecki or Ber Kratka.⁷

The Warsaw academy appears to have been an exceptional place, both on the basis of information contained in the documents that have been preserved and the recollections of its students, where open conflicts of a political or ethnic nature never occurred. Władysław Skoczylas, one of its professors, claimed that “in our nation, art should play an important role in nation building. (...) In the domain of the civic responsabilisation of ethnic minorities, more can be achieved through art than through administrative coercion.”⁸

Also in the 1930s, when the political and economic situation of the Jews – citizens of the Second Republic – worsened, when anti-Semitism ensconced itself in other institutions (not excluding the Academy in Krakow), when the normal experience of Jewish students was not only the “bench Ghetto” but also physical violence, Warsaw's Academy remained “friendly and guaranteed security.”⁹ Students and professors jointly opposed attempts to introduce the *numerus clausus* or the “bench Ghetto.”¹⁰ A question therefore arises: is writing about the Jewish students of this institution as a separate group at all justified? I believe it is worth looking at this group of young people, who saw no danger (through ‘assimilation’) in Polish

educational institutions, but instead saw them as a possibility for self-development¹¹, including on the level of national aspirations. Through the experiences gained at the Warsaw institution that, through the voices and activities of its professors, introduced the concept of the ‘artist-artisan’ serving the national cause, these young Jewish creators, entering into their artistic maturity in the 1930s, were prepared to introduce and implement a modern form of Jewish culture in Poland.

I would like to concentrate on depicting Jewish students within basic social contexts: family, friends, local circles, i.e. the primary environment. As well as showing the ‘secondary’ contexts – i.e. schools, and more widely, the subsequent educational levels within the social life of the Second Republic. This *frontier* between that which is personal, which applies to an individual's cultural and national identity, and that which is common, which is the surrounding world of the dominant Polish reality, allows us to show the multifaceted aspects of the acculturation of Jewish youth within an independent Poland, their aspirations, hopes and disappointments, through the example of young artists.

The copious, though incomplete, archives of the Warsaw Art Academy for the years 1923–1939 have been preserved.¹² Only those students who indicated Judaism as their religion on their admission applications are taken into account.¹³ Additional declarations concerning their ethnicity and native language show how differentiated the spectrum of their own identities was. Thanks to the admission forms, letters and official documents preserved in their student files, we also obtain copious information concerning the milieu they were from (they state their parents' occupations) and education (including previous artistic education). One finds many personal thoughts in these official documents, thanks to which we can discover their aspirations, plans and hopes for the future, but also encounter their difficult, impoverished everyday existence.¹⁴

¹¹ Kijek (2013: 249).

¹² These are, among others, the Minutes of the Main Council Meetings (Księgi Protokołów Obrad Rady Głównej), etc, Academy of Fine Arts archives, Warsaw, (Archiwum Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie).

¹³ This was a compulsory section. For instance, Aleksander Żyw defined himself as an atheist. But since this category did not exist, he wrote down Judaism, Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1813.

¹⁴ The short “What interests me in art?” essays, written in 1938 by aspiring candidates are interesting for instance.

⁶ Styryna (2005: 133–144).

⁷ About the history of Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts see Piwocki (2004) and *Sztuka wszędzie* (2012).

⁸ Skoczylas (1984: 41).

⁹ *Sztuka wszędzie* (2012: 61).

¹⁰ *Sztuka wszędzie* (2012: 61).

Up to 1939, around 120 Jewish students (both men and women) passed through the institution. They constituted around 10% of all students.¹⁵ Most of them studied during the 1923–1939 period, after the school was reopened, this time as a state institution. They differed in wealth, education and also in their sense of ethnic consciousness and personal identity. I have chosen more than a dozen figures, whose paths, studies and later careers exemplify this diversity.

The most Polonised group consisted of girls. Ever since the second half of the 19th century, modernisation and its associated changes within Jewish society had caused the traditional education of women to change significantly. More and more girls were educated in state and private schools. This broadened the horizons and interests of young women, and opened them to the non-Jewish world.¹⁶ The girls starting their studies at the Academy (irrespective of ethnicity and religion) were most often better educated than the boys (most had their secondary school diploma or had at least finished several years). They were mostly from the middle class; their fathers were lawyers, doctors, industrialists and they paid their tuition fees. Most girls received not only financial help from their families, but above all encouragement for further development and support for their artistic aspirations. On the forms they filled in, most declared Polish as both native language and ethnicity. Even when, for instance, Hanna Rosenman, daughter of the chief rabbi of Białystok, Gedalia Rosenman, declared her ethnicity as Jewish, she declared her native language as Polish.¹⁷

In the 1920s, three women studied painting at the Warsaw Academy – Elżbieta Hirszerzanka [Hirszberg] (1899–after 1961), Gizela Hufnagel (1903–1997) and Mery Litauer (1900–1992), who in 1929 formed the only female art collective of the 1920s, *Kolor* (Colour). They were students

of Tadeusz Pruszkowski, an eminent painter and the most popular teacher at the school, who “knew how to awaken self-belief like no other professor at the time.”¹⁸ Students, both male and female, signed up in droves to study in his atelier.

The members of the *Kolor* group were united by their Jewish origins, though it would seem that this fact only had a personal significance for them. Hirszberzanka [Hirszberg] and Hufnagel were born in Warsaw, in Polonised and assimilated families, while Mery Litauer was from Vilna, where she finished the seven-class secondary school in 1916.¹⁹ They were, therefore, all from families that were wealthy enough to pay for their education and open enough to allow young girls (at the time they started their studies, Litauer was 19 and Hirszberzanka 17) to study art, which in the case of Litauer, also corresponded to leaving for faraway Warsaw. Their links to Polish culture and their patriotism are evidenced in their student files by attestations of their work as part of the “Koło Opieki nad żołnierzem polskim przy Komitecie Obrony Państwa” (‘Association for the care of Polish soldiers attached to the National Defence Committee’) (Litauer) and “Koło Polek miasta Warszawy” (‘Warsaw association of Polish women’) and “Koło Inteligencji” (‘Intelligentsia Association’) on Wspólna 39 (Hufnagel, who was attending the 8th class of secondary school at the time) during the Polish-Soviet war in 1920.²⁰ From their listed addresses, we can see they lived far from the Jewish neighbourhood. They did not present their work through Żydowskie Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych (Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts). Two of them married Christian friends from university: Mery Litauer – Roman Schneider and Gizela Hufnagel – Eugeniusz Arct.

The road to art studies for young men was more winding and more difficult. Many of them came from small towns, from poor, traditionalist milieux (e.g. Natan (Nusen) Gutman from Rypin, Chaim Goldberg from Kazimierz on the Vistula river,²¹ Izaak Krzeczanowski from Dobrzyń

Essays written by two Jewish men attempting to enroll have been preserved: Moszek Grynfas from Grójec (who again failed to be admitted) and Chaim Tyber from Kutno, who did not commence his studies for financial reasons, Arts Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files, 264, 1581.

¹⁵ Kozielska (2008: 52); pre-war data: *Almanach* (1938: 97).

¹⁶ Stampfer (1992: 96–97). See also: Hyman (1995), Parush (2004).

¹⁷ Arts Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1232. Similar declarations were submitted by Resia Ajnsztajn (Schor), Zofia Gleichgewicht (Zawadzka), Frejda Golfeder, Dwojra Sowa, Pessa Zajtman, among others.

¹⁸ Lorentowicz (1971: 48).

¹⁹ In her admission application from 3 October 1923, Litauer stated that her “certificate and licence for finishing the secondary school were taken to Połtawa in Russia” and presented her attestation for being accepted into the 7th secondary school class, Arts Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 743.

²⁰ Arts Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 332.

²¹ “I spent my childhood with my parents and the difficult financial situation forced me to become an earner. Education

(now: Golub-Dobrzyń). Not many of them had finished their education with a *high-school certificate* (e.g. Samuel Lieberwert), some had a few secondary school classes behind them (e.g. Hirszej Chejchman, Leon Chejfec). Others, like Natan Gutman, had only received “home schooling,” that is he attended a *cheder*. Their artistic aspirations rarely found favour among their families. “Against the will of my parents, I made my way to Warsaw, in order to receive an artistic education” – wrote Gutman.²² Similarly, Mojżesz Psachis stated: “so my parents tried to force me to study and forbade me to draw.”²³

Despite the interdictions, they found the strength and determination within themselves to develop their talent. This was hardly easy, especially when the onus of upkeep fell upon the student. The studies demanded time, added to which students, including guest students, paid tuition fees and bought their own canvasses, brushes and paints. In the student files, we find numerous requests to be exempted from tuition fees and to receive grants: both from the state and from the Samuel Hirszenberg fund for Jewish students set up in 1928 by Diana Eiger.²⁴

The school attempted to help students. It exempted them from fees, fully or partially. Sometimes, as in the case of Jehuda Wermus, for nearly the entire duration of their studies.²⁵ According to the financial capacity of the institution, which was plagued by constant difficulties, monetary prizes for distinguished achievements were awarded at the end of each semester.

was out of the question, I worked as a house painter. In 1931, I met a student named Saul Zylbersztajn (Silberstein), who took care of me until 1932. Through him, I met professor Kuna and Kronstein the lawyer, who on account of my poverty help me with 40[?] zł a month. Thanks to them I can live and study. 9 Sept 1934.” Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 264.

²² Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 272.

²³ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1150.

²⁴ The first to receive the Hirszenberg scholarship (5 March 1929) was Menasze Seidenbeutel during the 1928/1929 academic year. Among those who applied for the Samuel Hirszenberg scholarship were: Izaak Ciechanowiecki, Chaim Cytryn (refused), Chaim Funtowicz, Abraham Frydman (received), Mojżesz Gurewicz (refused), Samuel Lieberwerth (received), Dawid Pfeffer, Ilya Schor (received), Fiszyl Zylberberg, Natan Rapoport applied three times, to finally receive the scholarship, intended for artistic voyages abroad. The scholarship was attributed outside of the School and minutes etc. are not preserved.

²⁵ Academy of Fine Arts archives, Minutes of the Main Council Meetings.

Another difficulty to solve problem was finding cheap and suitable lodgings, which amounted to a miracle in Warsaw at the time. Some could count on affordable places in the Żydowski Dom Akademicki (Jewish Student Halls of Residence) in the Praga district, which offered comfortable rooms, served cheap meals in its cafeteria and also housed ateliers for painters.²⁶

The lower educational level of the boys resulted in, quite evidently, a lesser experience of the world, lesser knowledge of culture and art, and sometimes problems with the Polish language itself which (though it should be noted that, while not always adhering strictly to grammar and spelling, was nevertheless rich and fluent). However, everyone wanted to learn. Their dreams and aspirations were summed up by Leon Chejfec: “Currently, my sole goal is to enter the School of Fine Arts, so as to no longer be separated from art.”²⁷

Let us take a closer look at some of artists involved in the Warsaw Art Academy – each representing a different path in his artistic approach and development.

Jehuda Wermus (1908–1943) is the least known of this group. He was born in 1908 in Warsaw, into a wealthy and religious family. On his admission application, he wrote in impeccable Polish: “My education consists of 6 finished secondary school classes in the humanities, (...) I am self-taught (...)” “Until 1923, I attended the Jewish Takchemoni seminary.”²⁸ This private school was something between a *yeshivah* and a modern secondary school. During the 1920s, its director was the historian Majer Bałaban. Apart from religious study (Judaic and Talmudic), its pupils received a secular education corresponding to the level of state secondary schools specialising in the humanities. Wermus did not graduate from the school²⁹ since, as a 16-year-old full of Zionist zeal, he departed for Palestine. He spent several years in a kibbutz there and studied drawing under “Prof. Herman Sztruk”³⁰ (Hermann Struck). He returned to Poland in 1927 and

²⁶ Żebrowski (2014: 188–215).

²⁷ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 61.

²⁸ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1649.

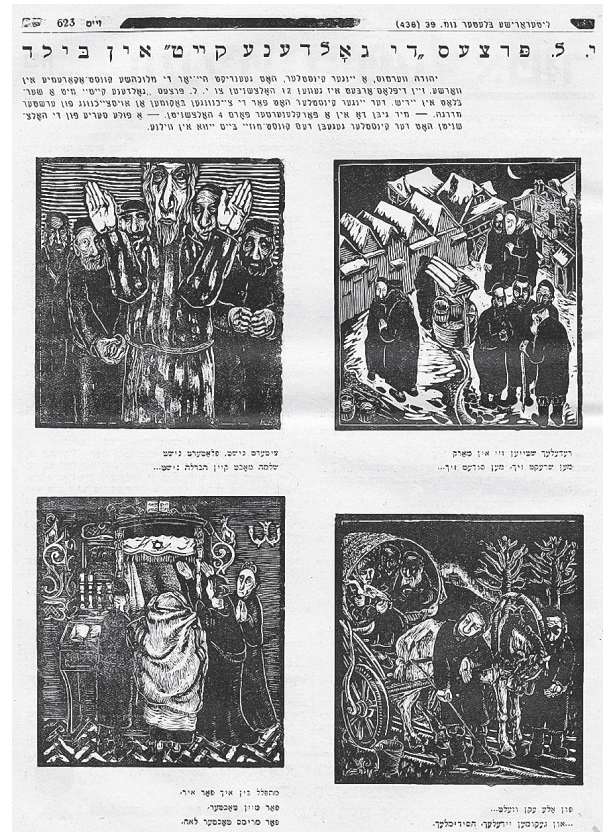
²⁹ It is worth noting that the Wermus finally resolved his lack of formal education by passing his *high-school certificate* exam with a satisfactory result, which allowed him to enroll as a normal student at the School of Fine Arts, see letter from 18 March 1929. Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1649.

³⁰ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1649.

in January of the following year, started his studies at the School of Fine Arts. This was disapproved by his parents who, as he himself wrote “are not in a position to help me financially and refuse to do so, as a consequence of which I have no means to support myself.”³¹ Luckily, “his talent and hard work”³² allowed him to be exempted from tuition fees. He was a student of Władysław Skoczylas and prepared his diploma work under his care – a series of illustrations for I. L. Peretz’s *Di Goldene keyt* (*The Golden Chain*)³³ (ill. 1). For later generations, Peretz remained the Jewish national writer, a symbol of the struggle for Jewish culture. The young artist donated the series to the Museum of Fine Arts at the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO) in Vilna.³⁴

Apart from their artistic merit and Wermus’ debt to Skoczylas’ own style, what is equally interesting is their proximity to the concept of national art promulgated by Skoczylas, whose nature, according to him, was a “certain defined world of emotions” and its goal “maintaining the identity of the nation and its persistence.”³⁵ The young artist took a similar path, wishing to give Jewish national culture a modern form. Before his departure for the USSR in 1934, where he died in a Gulag a few years later, Wermus had the time to present his work at the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (10 Dec 1933 – 31 Dec 1933) as part of the so-called Grupa Młodych (*Young Group*), students and graduates of the Academy: Fiszel Zylberberg, Jehuda Wermus, Ilya Schor and Natan Rapoport³⁶ (ill. 2).

Over time, it transpired that all four previously mentioned artists had confirmed and developed their talent. The most prominent figure among them was Natan Rapoport (1911–1987) – the creator of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw. He came from a moderately wealthy Warsaw



Ill. 1. Jehuda Wermus, Illustrations for I. L. Peretz’s *Di Goldene keyt* (*The Golden Chain*), *Literarische Bleter*, 39 (1932): 623

family, lived on Bonifraterska, in the heart of Warsaw’s New Town and completed seven elementary school classes (though as he stated, he was home schooled during classes 5–7). As he himself wrote: “Since early childhood, I had an affection for drawing and dreamt of the possibility of being educated in this domain.”³⁷ For three years, he attended the Miejska Szkoła Sztuk Zdobniczych i Malarstwa (Municipal School of Decorative Arts and Painting) while simultaneously working in the Aleksander Veith sculpture and stucco atelier and the Stanisław Jakubowski sculpture atelier in Wilanów Palace.

Rapoport was one of four Jewish students who, apart from their Jewish ethnicity, declared Hebrew as their native language (ills. 3, 4), (the others were: Lutka Pinkusewicz (1928), Mojżesz Psachis (1930) and Benjamin Rozenbaum³⁸ (1931). The choice of Hebrew was a political statement on the part of supporters of Zionism. Rapoport was a member of Hashomer Hatzair, and at an exhibition

³¹ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1649.

³² Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1649.

³³ Some of these drawings are known to us from reproductions which appeared in *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 46 (1933): 6 and in *Literarische Bleter* – Peretz’s (1932: 623).

³⁴ Peretz’s (1932: 623).

³⁵ *Sztuka wszędzie* (2012: 48–49).


³⁶ 10 Dec – 31 Dec 1933 Young artists’ exhibition (Zylberberg – painting, Wermus – engraving, Schor – miniature, Rapoport – sculpture) as well as Jewish ex libris from the Kazimierz Rejchman collection and a series of drawings [?] by [Reuven] Rubin (Palestine) from the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (ŻTKSP) collection, ŻTKSP gallery, Wierzbowa 7. For the exhibition, see Frydman (1933: 847); Strakun (1933: 6); Grupa (1934: 17); Weinzieher 1934.

³⁷ Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1181.

³⁸ In the picture included with his school certificates, Rozenbaum is wearing a Hashomer Hatzair badge, Academy of Fine Arts archives, student files 1231.

Raport Nafal
(Nazwisko i imię kandydata)
Donikatenko 31 m 16.
(Miejscowość adres w Warszawie)

N 21 /
10.12.30.
1949 MESTYR



DOPUSTĘ 3049 DO EZAMINU
DN. *1.8.30.* 10 30 M.
PRZY. *59* DO SZKOŁY
DN. *13.8.* 10 30 M.

Do

Pana Dyrektora

Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych

w Warszawie.

Proszę o przyjęcie mnie do Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie
w charakterze ucznia zwyczajnego (słuchacza wolnego).

Przy najmniejszym załączam:

- Świadectwo dojrzałości Poproszę o zmianę, wyjechałem na wojnę
- Metrykę urodzenia z dnia *1.9.1904* z tego dnia
- Życiorys (na 3-ciej stronie niniejszego podania).
- Świadectwo wojskowe z dnia *1 października 1929* z tego dnia
- Pięć fotografii.
- Dwie deklaracje.
- 5* praca własnych z zakresu malarstwa (rzeźby) (plastyki)

Pracownia w Warszawie
dn. 20.8.30.

Nafal
(Podpis - Proszę o nazwisko)

SZKOŁA SZTUK PIĘKNYCH

[illegible]

Kup ksi k