

Impressions of Eastern Europe: Prints from the Permanent Collection

On view February 23–May 10, 2020 in the Derfner Judaica Museum



Ilya Schor (b. Złoczów, Galicia, Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Zolochiv, Ukraine, 1904–d. New York, 1961), *Jewish Wedding*, 1950s, wood engraving with hand coloring, 8 15/16 x 12 in. (22.7 x 30.5 cm). Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection, Gift of Estelle Reingold, HHAR 6354. © Mira Schor. Reproduced with Permission.

Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection at Hebrew Home at Riverdale is pleased to announce its latest exhibition, *Impressions of Eastern Europe: Prints from the Permanent Collection*, on view in the Derfner Judaica Museum from February 23–May 10, 2020.

The exhibition includes lithographs, etchings, engravings and woodcuts by 16 artists who were participants in some of the most significant art movements of the 20th century. They worked at a time of rapid change, including urbanization, secularization, industrial and technological innovation, and seismic political and cultural shifts. Their genre scenes, folk tale illustrations, portraits and character studies evoke nostalgia for a communal past, solemn awareness of the fragility of life and deep reverence for tradition.

Most of the artists included here were born in far reaches of the Austrian or Russian Empires and sought to make their careers in the major art capitals of Europe: Vienna, Munich, Berlin and Paris. Some found settled lives and success, such as Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921), who was born in Arad, Hungary, then in the Austrian Empire (now in Romania), and studied art in Budapest and Vienna, where he maintained a studio. From a family seeking to escape anti-Semitism, violence and poverty, Bialystok-born Max Weber (1881–1961) found refuge in New York City as a child during the period of mass immigration to the US at the turn of the 20th century. A student of Henri Matisse in Paris, he helped to introduce Cubism to America.

Almost all of these artists experienced multiple migrations in their lifetimes. During the Holocaust, from 1933–1945, Jewish artists faced life-threatening circumstances, forced into exile, but not always finding safety. Rahel Szalit-Marcus (1894–1942), who spent her childhood in Lodz, Poland, and later died in Auschwitz, found success in 1920s Berlin illustrating Yiddish tales by Mendele Moykher-Sforim and Sholem Aleichem. Only one of the artists in this exhibition, Belorussian Anatoli Kaplan (1902–1980), who settled in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg), remained in Russia, where he created rare works with Jewish subject matter, such as *The Little Goat* (1958–1961).

Several artists immigrated to Israel, including Jakob Steinhardt (1887–1968) and Albert Dov Sigal (1912–1970), one before and the other after the Holocaust, and another was born there, Emanuel Schary (1924–1994), though he immigrated to the US to pursue professional opportunities as an artist. Sigal's series of prints of the Cyprus detention camp (1948) provides glimpses of daily life in the British-run internment camp where he was imprisoned with his family while trying to immigrate illegally to Palestine in late 1947 after surviving the War in Europe.



Rahel Szalit-Marcus (b. Kovno, Russian Empire, now Kaunas, Lithuania, 1894–d. Auschwitz, 1942), *The child is pushed out of the cart barefoot. . .*, from *Fischke the Lame (Fischke der Krumme)*, 1922, lithograph, 9 1/2 x 7 1/4 in. (24.1 x 18.4 cm). Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection, Gift of Sigmund R. Balka, 08.07.12.



Jakob Steinhardt (b. Zerkow, Germany, now Poland, 1887–d. Israel, 1968), *Job 2*, 1914, etching, 6 5/16 x 4 1/4 in. (16 x 10.8 cm). Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection, Gift of Sylvia and Tom Rogers, 09.02.03.

Stylistically, the prints in this exhibition reflect the influence of 19th-century art movements, including Naturalism and Realism and avant-garde experiments of the 20th century, such as Expressionism and Cubism. For some, naive or folk art-inspired modes of representation—for example, in the work of modern artists like Ilya Schor (1904–1961)—were well suited to convey the simplicity and piety of the Old World while masking the trauma of forced migration and genocide.

As Jews in 19th- and early 20th-century Europe moved away from traditional communities, Jewish artists became increasingly nostalgic. This was particularly true for artists who were removed geographically from their origins in Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Galicia, and other areas. Artists like Hermann Struck (1876–1944), who was born and lived in cosmopolitan Berlin, was especially drawn to the *Ostjuden*, traditional Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews, who were regarded as emblems of authenticity.

Struck was a master of various graphic techniques and taught other artists, including Steinhardt. During WWI, Struck served on the Eastern Front and became acquainted with the plight of Jews in Eastern Europe suffering anti-Semitism and pogroms, whom he then depicted in his prints. Steinhardt was a cofounder of *Die Pathetiker*, a German



Friedrich (Bedřich) Feigl (b. Prague, Bohemia, now Czech Republic, 1884–d. London, 1965), *Hear Israel*, 1921, woodcut, 6 13/16 x 5 1/2 in. (17.3 x 14 cm). Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection, U.239.

Expressionist artists' group. One of his etchings, *Job* (1914), portrays the suffering of the biblical figure in an angular Expressionist style with an almost apocalyptic energy. *Hear Israel* (1921), a woodcut by the Prague-born avant-garde Czech printmaker and painter Friedrich (Bedřich) Feigl (1884–1965), has a similar intensity.

Throughout history, prints have been an effective means of disseminating art and ideas to a broad public. The present exhibition underscores the impact the movements and upheavals of the 20th century had on Jewish artists and the power of the print medium to communicate their experiences. At a time when mass migrations, detentions, deportations, displacements and ongoing humanitarian crises continue to occur on a global scale, such endeavors remain urgently relevant today.



Anatoli Kaplan (b. Rogachev, Belorussia, Russian Empire, now Rohachow, Belarus, 1902–d. Leningrad, USSR, now Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1980), *Verse 7: Came an Ox and Drank the Water*, from *The Little Goat*, 1958–1961, lithograph, 14 x 10 1/2 in. (35.6 x 26.7 cm). Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection, HHAR 1497.

About Hebrew Home at Riverdale

As a member of the American Alliance of Museums, the Hebrew Home at Riverdale by RiverSpring Health is committed to publicly exhibiting its art collection throughout its 32-acre campus, including the Derfner Judaica Museum and a sculpture garden overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection provides educational and cultural programming for residents of the Hebrew Home, their families and the general public from throughout New York City, its surrounding suburbs and visitors from elsewhere. RiverSpring Health is a nonprofit, non-sectarian geriatric organization serving more than 18,000 older adults in greater New York through its resources and community service programs. Museum hours: Sunday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Art Collection and grounds open daily, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Call 718.581.1596 for holiday hours and to schedule group tours, or for further information, visit our website at RiverSpringHealth.org/art



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