

Vincent Hložník: Between War and Dream

Extended through August 16, 2015



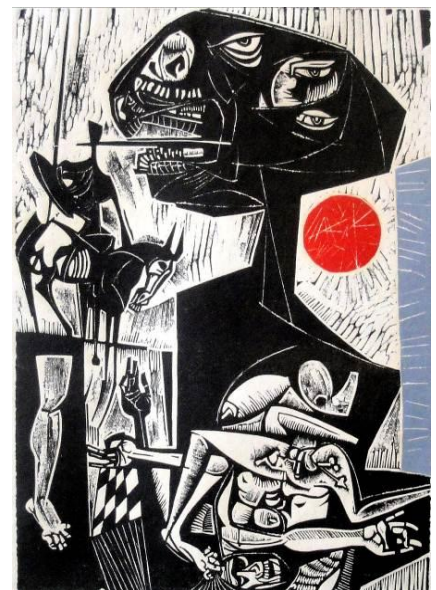
Vincent Hložník (Slovak, 1919-1997), *Untitled*, 1962, linocut, 23 5/8 X 16 3/8 inches. HHAR 1421. The Art Collection at The Hebrew Home at Riverdale.

The Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection at Hebrew Home at Riverdale is pleased to announce its latest exhibition *Vincent Hložník: Between War and Dream*, which features 20 Surrealist-inspired linocut prints by Slovak artist Vincent Hložník (1919-1997) created in Czechoslovakia in 1962. They represent a turning point in the artist's career as his figurative motifs—always related to the exploration of the human condition—began to take on more symbolic and metaphorical meanings. The work is on view from March 29–August 16, 2015.

In the dystopic universe of the prints, detached human limbs, tangled corpses, monstrous figures assembled from eyes and teeth, the Angel of Death, and threatening flanks of silhouetted and stylized archaic warriors signal unspecified danger. Angles and voids activate the space and create an instability marking the very real threat of annihilation, whether from war or nuclear arms. Hložník's approach to art was profoundly affected by his time as a student in Prague during World War II where he witnessed Nazi atrocities. This experience led him to address themes of war, isolation and human suffering in his work.

Hložník is a key figure in modern Slovak art as both a teacher and artist, and had an immeasurable impact on its direction, particularly in the graphic arts. He established the highly influential Department of Graphic Art and Illustration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava after he joined the faculty in 1952. From this department emerged what is referred to as The Hložník School—a generation of Slovak graphic artists who approached art with a “deeply humanist experiencing of the world, on the border of reality and dream, of drama and poetry,” as described by Ľudovít Petránky, author of a monograph on Hložník. They often exhibited together as a group under the same name. Some of the most important figures in Slovak art in the latter half of the 20th century emerged from this school.

After 1948 when the country fell under Communist authority as a satellite state of the Soviet Union, modernist styles in all the arts were officially banned. All art had to adhere to the tenets of Socialist Realism, a figurative style that glorified Soviet ideals. Also described as “official art,” it was the only style allowed in Eastern Bloc countries. However, some modernist artists, including Hložník, for most of his career, managed to



Vincent Hložník (Slovak, 1919-1997), *Untitled*, 1962, linocut, 23 5/8 X 16 3/8 inches. HHAR 1407. The Art Collection at The Hebrew Home at Riverdale.



Vincent Hložník (Slovak, 1919-1997), *Untitled*, 1962, linocut, 23 5/8 X 16 3/8 inches. HHAR 1414. The Art Collection at The Hebrew Home at Riverdale.

innovate and find success even within the confines of official art, surviving the tug-of-war over cultural policies between hardline Stalinists and reform-minded liberals. Around 1962—the same year the prints on view were created—Hložník was serving as chancellor at the Academy and exhibiting at major venues both domestically and abroad.

Although his work drew from modernist styles that were banned or shunned in Czechoslovakia at the time, his subjects were well received and he was a highly-respected artist and teacher. However, in 1972, during the process of “normalization” when new, hardline policies were implemented, Hložník was forced to give up his position. Many other intellectuals suffered similar fates, including art historian and critic Radislav Matuščík (1929-2006), who wrote frequently about Hložník, including the introduction to the catalogue for the artist’s one-person show at the Grosvenor Gallery in London in 1965.

Hložník was born in 1919 in the small Slovak town of Svederník and studied drawing in secondary school. He went on to attend the School of Applied Arts in Prague in 1937. Just two years later, on March 15, 1939, German troops occupied the city. Hložník remained in Prague, and was profoundly affected by the daily atrocities that were occurring around

him. His ongoing commitment to social justice is evidenced by his participation as one of 24 signatories representing important Slovak cultural figures who endorsed the "Declaration on the Deportation of the Jews" a proclamation published in 1987, which denounced antisemitic measures against Slovak Jews during World War II. Hložník died in Bratislava in 1997.

This is the first known exhibition of Hložník’s work in the United States. His work has been widely exhibited and collected throughout the Slovak Republic and was shown during his lifetime in solo exhibitions in Cuba, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Mexico, Switzerland and the U.K., among other countries. At the 1958 Venice Biennale, Hložník was one of three artists—the other two were Antonio Tapies of Spain and Kenneth Armitage of the U.K—to receive an award from the David E. Bright Foundation of Los Angeles. It was the first time in the history of the Biennale that an American organization had presented an award for which artists of any country could be eligible.

As a member of the American Alliance of Museums, 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. The Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection provide 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. Hebrew Home is a nonprofit, non-sectarian geriatric organization serving more than 11,000 elderly persons 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 please visit our website at <http://www.hebrewhome.org/art>



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