



THE ARTHUR SZYK SOCIETY

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED
TO THE RENAISSANCE OF ARTHUR SZYK

Vol. 2 No. 2

Newsletter

Summer 2000

New Canaan Celebrates Arthur Szyk's Humanity

Connecticut exhibition coincides with 50th anniversary of *Szyk's Declaration of Independence* dedication

The New Canaan Historical Society has opened an exhibition entitled "Humanity: Arthur Szyk's View of the World." This exhibition marks fifty years since Arthur Szyk's completion and dedication on July 4, 1950 of his illuminated "*Declaration of Independence*" to the town and people of New Canaan, Conn. Szyk was a resident of this community from 1946 until his death in 1951. The six-week exhibition featuring approximately one hundred works of art continues through July 28.

Among the pieces on display are Szyk's thirty-eight miniatures, "*Washington and His Times*," (lithographed in Vienna in 1932) which commemorate battle scenes and personalities of the American Revolution. Four original works of art — three watercolors of the "*Holiday Series*" and one political cartoon "*John Bull's Arab Puppet Show*" — are on loan from Yeshiva University Museum. A companion piece "*To My Uncle Sam: With Undaunted Faith in His Justice, 1948*" comes from the collection of The Jewish Museum, NY. Several original miniature costume drawings for the staging of the "Dybbuk" are on loan from a private collection. The original certificate presented to Albert Einstein in 1943 from the Copernicus Society and designed by Arthur Szyk is on loan from the Kosciuszko Foundation.

"Humanity: Arthur Szyk's View of the World" opened on June 17 followed by an evening cocktail party. Recollections of Arthur Szyk were shared by his daughter, Mrs. Alexandra Szyk Bracie and Dr. Ida Davidoff. Dr. Davidoff and her husband, Leo, were among Szyk's closest friends in New Canaan. The atmosphere in the Szyk home was described as "out of a Chekhov play: conversation in Russian, adults coming and going, children running around, statuesque Julia (Szyk's wife) presiding... and the samovar perking. You never knew who you would meet..."

The New Canaan Historical Society is located at 13 Oenoke Ridge, New Canaan, Conn. Tel. 203.966.1776.

Congressman Tom Lantos and Szyk's Daughter Join Society Honorary Board

The Arthur Szyk Society is honored by the added prestige that the Honorable Tom Lantos (D-California) and Mrs. Alexandra Szyk Bracie, daughter of Arthur Szyk, bring to the efforts to grow the Szyk renaissance.

Congressman Lantos, a staunch defender of human rights in the United States Congress and co-chairman of the Human Rights Caucus, entered into the Congressional Record, in the House of Representatives (Friday, November 19, 1999) an impressive and distinguished message on the Library of Congress exhibition "Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom" (enclosed with this Newsletter). He also proudly displays Szyk's lithograph of the *Declaration of Independence* on his Washington office wall. Congressman Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, is also a Board Member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Bracie, the only surviving child of Arthur Szyk, has endorsed the Society from the very beginning, having first served on its Board of Trustees. She continues to be an avid spokesperson for her father's art.

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Lantos

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In recent years, she has loaned parts of her collection to the Wilshire Boulevard Temple exhibit in Los Angeles (1991), the Boca Raton exhibition in Florida (1995), the Mizel Museum in Denver (1997), and the Spertus Museum exhibition in Chicago (1998).

Mrs. Bracie has also donated numerous works to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and, most recently, two prominent works to the Library of Congress. Additionally, she has contributed archival material to the New York Public Library and the Yivo Institute in New York.

University of Judaism Show Planned

The Fine Arts Council of the University of Judaism's Platt Gallery plans to hold a showing of Arthur Szyk works of art beginning Sunday, September 24, at 3 PM. The exhibition will continue through December 3. The University of Judaism is located at 15600 Mulholland Drive, Los Angeles, Calif. Many of the works will be for sale. For further information, contact Shelley Lavender, Tel. 310.476.9777, ext. 203.

Costume Drawings Exhibited

As part of its Spring celebration the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles exhibited "Purim and Passover Treasures" from its collection. Among the gems appearing in the Ruby Gallery March 6 - April 30 were several costume drawings by Arthur Szyk for the Yiddish Art Theatre's performance of *Esterke*, a 1920's version of the *Story of Esther* resituated in Poland. Szyk drew at least twenty-five colorful images for the *Esterke* suite while he was living in London in 1939.



Other costume designs were drawn by Szyk for the "Dybbuk" play while he was living in New York in 1944. And his paintings of the Canterbury pilgrims' dress can be seen in the book *The Canterbury Tales*, New York, Limited Editions Club, 1946.

Cover Story in Library of Congress Information Bulletin Draws Attention to Szyk Exhibition

"Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom" was the lead story for the Nation's most prestigious Library in its first *Information Bulletin* of the new millenium (January 2000). The feature article by Sara W. Duke and Holly Krueger was accompanied by numerous illustrations drawn from the exhibition, which ran through May 6.

Of particular interest are the comments on Szyk's technique by Ms. Krueger, senior paper conservator in the Conservation Division of the Library of Congress. She observes: "It is easy to see why Arthur Szyk is admired not only for the content of his works, but also for the way he constructed his jewel-like creations... "For all of the items on view in this exhibition, Szyk began his composition with a lightly applied but fairly complete "underdrawing" in graphite pencil. Traces of this preliminary drawing can be seen under high magnification along the edges of some of the forms. The design was then built up with successive layers of transparent and opaque watercolors. Many subsequent tiny, precisely placed strokes of color to define the shape of an ear or the features of a face can be discerned. Use of this technique requires a light and supremely confident touch because application of watercolor on top of watercolor can dissolve both strokes into a muddy mess..."

With regard to the *Four Freedoms Prayer* Ms. Krueger writes of the "subtle use of three-dimensional aspects (used by Szyk) to enhance the rendering of the objects. For example, the folds in the Virgin Mary's robes were built of successive layering of ultramarine watercolor adding definition through sculptural means rather than modeling with color and hue differences..."

The chief conservator believes that since there are very few corrections in Szyk's work he apparently "had his final composition firmly in mind upon completion of the underdrawing. That he made few mistakes in bringing this composition to life is also apparent."

Visit Szyk Website

In an effort to provide continuous information and outreach to those interested in following the Szyk renaissance, our Arthur Szyk Society website, www.szyk.org has been enhanced with new graphics and information. We invite you to bookmark our site, particularly the "What's New" page.

Scranton Welcomes the Millennium with Arthur Szyk

by Darlene Miller-Lanning, Ph.D., University of Scranton

As Gallery Director/Adjunct Faculty at the University of Scranton, a Jesuit institution located in Scranton, Pennsylvania, I am fortunate to work at a job I love. I collaborate daily with thoughtful and articulate colleagues and students, and develop art exhibitions and studio workshops for campus and community audiences. As a whole, my work is personally meaningful and publicly enjoyed.

Late in November of 1998, however, my normally pleasant responsibilities to the University Art Gallery were weighing heavily upon my mind. A city-wide initiative to welcome the year 2000 had been announced, and I was expected to plan an event in honor of the new millennium. From an arts perspective, this was no simple task. In a single exhibition, how could one small gallery celebrate and commemorate the beauties, tragedies, and accomplishments of the past two thousand years? Desperate for ideas, I turned to the high-tech assistance of the Internet. There, under the keyword “illumination,” I found my answer — the work of Arthur Szyk.

During the first two weeks of December and from January 3 - February 11, 2000, the University Art Gallery at the University of Scranton was privileged to present “Arthur Szyk: Manuscript Illuminator, Political Artist, and Advocate for Humanity.” This exhibition, which featured lithographs of Szyk’s illuminated *Statute of Kalisz* and *Visual History of Nations* series, as well as political caricatures published in *Ink & Blood* and *Collier’s Magazine*, was curated by Rabbi Irvin Ungar, Board Member of The Arthur Szyk Society. Co-sponsored by the Judaic Studies Institute at the University of Scranton and the Holocaust Museum and Resource Center of the Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation, it was also the University Art Gallery’s contribution to the community-based celebration “Marking the Millennium,” organized by Scranton Tomorrow.

As a twentieth-century artist who addressed both the traditions of the past and the concerns of his day, Arthur Szyk produced works ideally suited to the University Art Gallery’s longstanding arts and education goals, as well as its special mandate to consider the new millennium. Upon viewing Szyk’s *Haggadah*, students enrolled in the university’s art and art history courses readily understood the artist’s mastery of medieval illumination techniques, as well as his respect for the enduring rituals of Jewish culture. Campus and community guests attending the opening gallery lecture, on January 9, 2000, further observed the vibrant colors and meticulous details of Szyk’s work found in an original illumination, which was on display during the presentation. Area elementary and high school students, who are connected with past cultural and artistic traditions, participated in calligraphy workshops. Taking Szyk’s work as their model, these students illuminated their own texts using dip pens, inks, and watercolor.



The Statute of Kalisz
Latin and French Text
Paris, 1226–1228

Works like Szyk’s *Statute of Kalisz* further demonstrated the ways in which the actions of the past can be linked to the circumstances of the present. This series of illuminations, made to illustrate the text of a medieval Polish charter granting civil rights to Jews, contained not only scenes of medieval events, but twentieth century ones as well. Exhibited along with Szyk’s political cartoons, found in *The New Order* and *Ink & Blood*, these images spoke strongly to audiences of the ways in which human rights must constantly be respected and defended.

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Scranton

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Older guests, in particular, responded to this aspect of the exhibition. During Hanukkah, one of the best mornings that I spent at the gallery was with a group of seniors from Scranton's Temple Israel. As Szyk's images sparked their memories, they spoke of family homes in Poland, relatives who had worked at the port of Danzig, and children who had emigrated to America and Israel. Listening to their stories, I became sharply aware of how my own peaceful existence had been shaped by their actions in a less tranquil time, and felt grateful for their courage, strength, and integrity.

In addition to being a wonderful resource for campus and community audiences, "Arthur Szyk: Manuscript Illuminator, Political Artist, and Advocate for Humanity" was also an integral part of the University of Scranton's interdisciplinary course on "The Holocaust," team-taught by professors of History, Criminology, Philosophy, Theology, Art History, and Literature. Students in this course viewed and critiqued the exhibition in three-to-five page written reviews, including, as part of their work, ideas expressed by Rabbi Irvin Ungar during his gallery presentation on Szyk, and experiences shared with the class by three Holocaust survivors. Students unanimously commented on the importance of Szyk's work during World War II as a means of resistance, and applauded his efforts as an "advocate for humanity." Embodied in Szyk's rich and symbolic "Visual History of Nations" series, this message of pride and respect, in one's own culture and for that of others, is a fitting introduction to the new millennium.

Universities interested in hosting an exhibition of Arthur Szyk's works should contact The Arthur Szyk Society. A ten-page booklet of Educational Programming Materials, prepared by Darlene Miller-Lanning, Ph.D., based upon the Scranton exhibition is available free of charge. Among the contents are Program Models in the following areas: Calligraphy and Illumination, Jewish History and the Holocaust, and Historical and Political Art Propaganda. We are grateful to Dr. Lanning for sharing the Scranton community experience with The Society and its Newsletter readers.

University of Maryland Beneficiary of Shneiderman Archives

The University of Maryland Libraries at College Park houses the S.L. and Eileen Shneiderman Collection of Yiddish Books. Mr. Shneiderman, a close friend of Arthur Szyk, published an Arthur Szyk biography in 1980. It was written in Yiddish (to date, it has not been translated into English) and published by the I.L. Peretz Publishing House, Tel Aviv. With the assistance of Mr. Shneiderman's son, Ben, a professor at the University of Maryland and a member of the Arthur Szyk Society, we anticipate learning more about the Szyk biography. For information, visit www.lib.umd.edu/UMCP/SLSES/donors/sl_books/szyk.html

Anyone interested in funding an English translation of Shneiderman's biography of Szyk should contact The Society at ungar@szyk.org or telephone The Society at 650.343.9588.

What do Albert Einstein, Nicolas Copernicus, and Arthur Szyk have in common?

Not only did all three appear in some illustrated form in *Time* Magazine's millenium issue (December 31, 1999), but there is more to it than meets the eye.

Einstein & Szyk: Albert Einstein appeared on the front cover of *Time* as the man of the millenium, but he also purchased in 1951 the 200,000th Israel bond sold, and received in appreciation an illuminated scroll by Arthur Szyk from the Israeli government.

Copernicus & Szyk: Szyk's illustration of the astronomer Copernicus appeared also in the 12/31/99 issue of *Time*. It was originally contributed as the front cover illustration for the volume *Nicolas Copernicus 1543-1943* published by the Kosciuszko Foundation in 1943. In that same year, Einstein was presented with the Copernicus Citation award by the Copernicum Quadricentennial National Committee which was illustrated by — you guessed it — Arthur Szyk!



Sometimes There Are Absences Too Big for the Heart to Fill

— For Arthur Szyk, Illuminator (1894-1951) —



Szyk relaxing
on his porch

Professor Robert J. DeMott recalls one childhood day accompanying his father, Jimmy, who was the caretaker of the Szyk estate in New Canaan, Conn. Bob DeMott is a distinguished professor in the English Department at Ohio University. We found this poem quite touching and personal and hope you will too. This poem appeared in The Southern Review, Spring 2000 and is reprinted with the poet's permission.

The day before, hard rains brought down the last late tatters
of elm, oak, and maple leaves, the last slim-stalked butternut
and hickory,
blown in long, wind-work winnows over Arthur Szyk's
expanse of lawn,
scattered down like drifts of brittle parchment over the
box elder gardens
where he loved to dally when another drawing for *Ink &*
Blood was finished,
and another screw put to tyrants, warmongers, vampires of souls...

It is 1950, I am almost seven, and all day, under a sodden
November sky,
in a yard far too big for one person, my father, caretaker of
Szyk's estate,
rakes and hauls a million rust-stained leaves, with me, his
pitiful helper,
kept home from school to aid the labor: first, acidic-loving
pachysandra
blanketed for winter's sleep with oak mulch, straw, and pine
needles.

Then a bookish child's favorite part: mountains of leaves
coaxed to burn
with a long-handled torch of paint rags, where little by little,
gardens of flame
sprout their brilliant fire blooms, their spiraling fronds of
smoke...

Toward dusk my mother calls through haze to remind us of
supper:
in the dank New Canaan air Father lifts the rake from my
blistered fingers,
kisses each one, swirls me lightly into the tractor's lorry, onto
its burlap bed.
His wool shirt, smoky, color of burnt sienna, drapes loosely
over my shoulders.
Lights are on in the big house; people we don't know are
coming and going.

And from their cage of limbs all the night-illuminated trees,
no less stately in their nakedness, sigh wildly in the leaden
breeze.



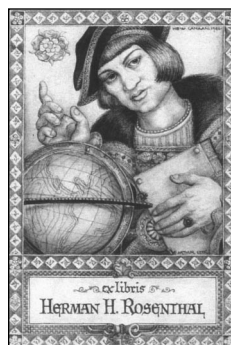
New Canaan Estate

Bookplates Illustrated by Arthur Szyk

by Robert J. Weinberg, Curator of the Rowe Book Plate Museum, Stamford, Conn.

Arthur Szyk — noted international artist, freedom fighter, and illustrator extraordinaire – he was all of those and more. Whether he illustrated the *Book of Ruth*, Hans Christian Andersen’s *Fairy Tales* or *The Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, he was a master. His illustrations for the *Haggadah* have left us in awe of his talent. Although his art ranged from the fiercely political to the biblical in all its ramifications, he did create several bookplates. Granted that they are a small part of his overall work, yet, they do define him as an illustrator with universal appeal.

Arthur Szyk believed in the goodness of man. His fondness for humanity is shown in the bookplate that he designed for George M. Gold. So intent is Szyk in getting across the message of Hillel, an early sage and rabbi, that to “love thy neighbor” was so necessary that he inscribes it in the bookplate in both Hebrew and English. For there is no message as vital to each one of us as the need to reach out to our fellow man. Finally, we have the point of teaching by the old to the young, in which Szyk stresses one of the basic tenets of Judaism. Also, note the way he has inserted a candle in the lower right hand corner to emphasize the point that learning is “a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” - Psalm 119.

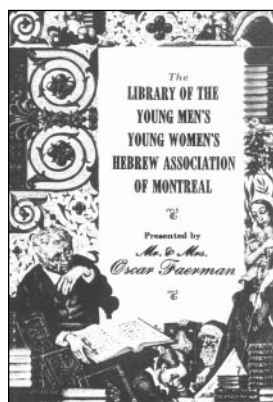


In the bookplate that he designed for Herman H. Rosenthal, there is the figure of the adventurer, perhaps Columbus, with a book held close to him, and a globe of the Americas and the New World. Here, there is the desire in each of us to seek our own freedom with knowledge from books leading the way.

From the bookplate of the American Friends of the Hebrew University, the Serge Koussivitzky Collection, we know that Szyk was a fervent advocate of the State of Israel during the early stages of its birth. Here, we have the “lion rampant,” one of the icons in Jewish illustrations, playing the harp but staring ferociously and daring you to stop the music as had happened to the Jews before and during the Second World War. The cornucopia is a sign of the abundance and continuing fount of music that emanates from Israel. The treble clef reminds us that the donation is in the name of the Koussivitzky Collection of music.



through the Music Library Committee of the
AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY



The bookplate of the YM-YWHA of Montreal (adapted from a poster Szyk designed for Jewish Book Month) depicts a bibliophile reading amid his books. The recurring theme of the father teaching the son, surrounded by books, is an ever present characterization of the transmission of Jewish knowledge to the young. Also note the scrollwork in the upper left corner of the bookplate — this is one of Arthur Szyk’s favorite designs. It is found on many of his illustrations with Biblical themes.

Though I was not fortunate enough to have met Arthur Szyk — but having read of his life, his background and his political and religious affiliations, I can only admire, respect and pay homage to his work.

'Evenings with Arthur Szyk' Continue

On Wednesday evening, February 9, the Los Angeles Judaica Collectors Club met in the home of Alex and Ann Lauterbach of Encino, Calif. to hear Irvin Ungar, Board member of the Society, speak about Szyk. Among the over thirty people in attendance were Grace Cohen-Grossman, curator at the Skirball Museum; Rabbi William Kramer, author and HUC professor; and representatives from the University of Judaism who are anticipating a future exhibition of Szyk's work.

Among the guests was Mrs. Lillian Trilling, who brought with her an original Szyk miniature watercolor and gouache portrait of her mother. Szyk knew and painted her mother in Lodz, Poland. As a child, Mrs. Trilling seemed to recall two full-length oil paintings of her mother by Szyk. Though works in oil by Szyk are unknown, this would be a fascinating revelation if it can, at some point, be confirmed.

Szyk is known to have painted a few portraits of acquaintances, though we are generally familiar with his numerous portraits of historical figures, among them Martha and George Washington, Simon Bolivar, Joan of Arc, Peter the Great, and Polish General Sikorski, to name a few.



Ann & Alex Lauterbach

The evening's hosts are very much connected to the Szyk goings-on — Alex is a Board member of The Society, and Ann is a niece of Szyk's daughter, Alexandra Bracie. Most notable among the evening's highlights were Ann's home-baked deserts, which included a pie with her great-uncle's name written across the top!

More on the Szyk Haggadah

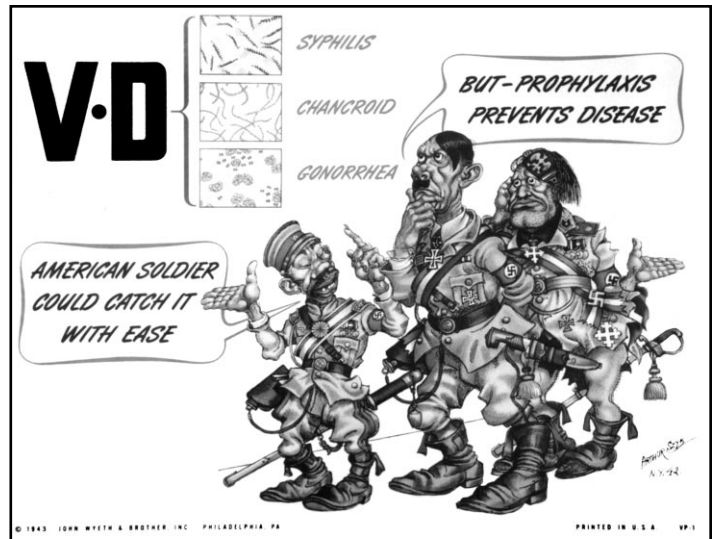
The Washington Jewish Week (April 20, 2000) carried an article entitled "Szyk's Haggadah: A timeless call for freedom". Written by Irvin Ungar, the essay provides background into the creation of the Szyk masterpiece and its continuing popularity today. Rich in metaphors and dazzling in its palette of colors, the *Times Literary Supplement* (London) proclaimed the *Szyk Haggadah*, on its publication (1940) to be "worthy of being considered among the most beautiful of books ever produced by the hand of man." "Its timeless rendering of art and spirit," Ungar writes, "lives on into the new century." Copies of the article may be obtained by contacting The Society.

Szyk Poster Equates Axis with Venereal Disease

by Mark Gerrard

The Szyk poster, "*V-D: American Soldier could catch it with ease*," was found at Woodhouse Farm in Ilton, Somerset, England in 1997. My aunt and uncle, while preparing the house to be painted, came upon what seemed to be a bricked-up door in a wall. They knocked the wall down and found a small room, roughly 8' x 8'. The room was bare except for a shelf on the wall, and on the wall was this poster, folded into quarters covered in dust. The poster was in quite good shape considering its age, and looked to have been hung on a wall at some time.

My aunt and uncle have since determined that the room was an armory when the house was occupied by the U.S. Armed Forces as an auxiliary/triage hospital for wounded GIs after the invasion of Normandy. Right behind the house is what is currently called HMS Heron, a flight-training airfield for British Naval helicopter pilots. Prior, it was called Merrifield, used by the U.S. to stage D-Day.



The poster measures 17" x 22". We are aware of one other companion piece of the same subject matter comparing Hitler to syphilis, Hirohito to chancroid, and Mussolini to gonorrhoea. John Wyeth & Brother, Inc., Philadelphia published both posters in 1942 and 1943 respectively.

“Art is not my aim, it is my means.”

– Arthur Szyk

Thomas Jefferson once wrote: “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” Deeply inspired by Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington and the Biblical heroes of ancient times, Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) forged an artistic commitment in defense of human dignity and individual freedom. Using his pen as his sword and his paintbrush as its ally, Szyk served as an advocate for all humanity. It is from this passion and this spirit that The Arthur Szyk Society was founded in California in 1991, with the commitment to create a renaissance of this great 20th century artist, his works of art and their social messages. In 1994, tax-exempt status was granted to The Society. And in 1997 its office relocated to Burlingame, Calif.

Join The Arthur Szyk Society

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Goals of The Society

- To rediscover the art and messages of Arthur Szyk
- To facilitate scholarly research in art history and other liberal arts fields
- To promote public awareness through outreach to teachers, students, their families and communities
- To catalyze social action through the arts
- To network the activities of The Arthur Szyk Society worldwide

Membership Categories:

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LAUNCHES ONLINE SZYK EXHIBITION

In what surely must be seen as continuing recognition and status of the art and messages of Arthur Szyk, the Library of Congress has announced its online exhibition of “Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom.” This Internet version of the exhibition held in the Swann Gallery of the Jefferson Building (December 9, 1999 - May 6, 2000) captures all of the images and descriptions that highlighted the prominent Library of Congress showing. The online exhibition can be viewed at www.locweb.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/szyk and is posted for an indefinite time.