

The Arthur Szyk Society  
 Art History Publication Series, No. 2



**ONE-MAN  
 WAR AGAINST  
 HITLER**

Arthur Szyk, artist, looks out over his new American homeland from the terrace of his apartment. Below, with his wife. Photo on table is of son who fights with Free French.



Szyk has been decorated by many nations but prefers his Polish Golden Cross (above). His frenetic, armored Hitler (below) illustrates the ferocity of his political anger.



This is a Szyk drawing through Szyk's glasses. Nearightedness helps him in work. Hitler's artist's foe, surrounded by jars of colors, also draws American heroes.

**Arthur Szyk fights  
 the dictators with pen,  
 brush and venom**

In a penthouse overlooking Riverside Drive, New York, a plump, nearsighted man munches over a drawing board. There is nothing about him which suggests the soldier, nothing to betray any turbulence of spirit. But Arthur Szyk isn't as mild as he appears. In his heart burns an anger so fierce that its flame consumes all vacillations, leaving a white-hot core of hatred for the bloody brotherhood—Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini.

Szyk (pronounced Shik) fights the Axis with the weapons of the artist—a brush dipped in arsenic, a pen which knows how to form the strong lines of anger. His cartoons are so exquisitely detailed that they are closer to the art of the illuminator than to that of the cartoonist; so trenchant in their satire that they invite comparisons with the works of Hogarth and Daumier. During the last year they have been featured prominently in many American publications.

A Polish refugee, Szyk has seen his life rudely disrupted by two World Wars. He would like to return to the work for which he is world-famous, the painting of miniatures. (One group, showing American colonial scenes, is in the Roosevelt library at Hyde Park.) But not until the war is over will he cease trying, through his cartoons, to awaken in his fellow Americans an anger as strong as his own against the Axis, its leaders and its political philosophy.

Szyk has little time for recreation. He reads a great deal and sometimes plays cards with his wife. But most of his spare time is spent conversing with visitors.

He has a flair for epigrams. "I'm nearsighted," he will say, peering myopically through thick-lensed glasses, "but not politically." Or, "America can not be vanquished but it can be assassinated."

Neither will happen, however, if Arthur Szyk can help it.



Most of Szyk's ideas come from newspapers. He says American newspapers are the most news-ware in the world, reads them constantly to fuel his hatred of Hitlerism.



# Democracy's Weapon: Arthur Szyk in America

by Harry Katz

Isolated by oceans and sheltered from warfare, no American artist was so utterly prepared as Arthur Szyk to fight the tyranny of hearts and minds he found everywhere in his travels through Europe and even North America, where he dreamed freedom lived. ... He was democracy's weapon, a soldier in art, wielding pen and brush to render the face of racial hatred and social injustice, its horrid features intact for all to see.



When Arthur Szyk first came to America in the early 1930s fascism was on the rise in Europe and the Great Depression held the United States in its terrible grip. He traveled under the auspices of the Polish government, promoting an exhibition of his series of watercolor miniatures portraying *Washington and His Times*, thirty-eight scenes from the American Revolution, “conceived as a tribute to the memory of Washington and the events in which he figured, offered by the Old World to the New.”

To Szyk, the new world of the United States, even in its weakened economic state, represented the spirit of individual liberty threatened in Europe by fascism on the one hand and communism on the other. His series on the Revolutionary era was displayed at the Library of Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The Librarian of Congress, in his report for 1934, described Szyk’s artistry in glowing terms: “work done with the minute elaboration and brilliance of medieval miniature painting, but with an individual and distinctly modern flavor of its own.”



Figure 1 The Declaration of Independence

*“To my fellow Americans, I dedicate with love this immortal heritage of our forefathers. May these words live in our hearts forever and ever, for no good man loses his freedom but with his life . . .”*

—Inscription on Declaration of Independence, Arthur Szyk

Front Cover: Click magazine, August 1942

Virtually unknown in America at that time, Szyk had already established himself in Europe as an artist of considerable skill and intellectual purpose. His illuminated *Statute of Kalisz*, (Figure 2) conceived and painted in the late 1920s, and published in France in 1932, revealed the pattern of his life: applying old world style and eternally humanistic values to modern issues and imagery, lending timeless grace and meaning to scenes of political, social, and religious import. His illustrative style drew from Byzantine icons and French Art Nouveau, Persian illuminated manuscripts, Romantic exoticism, artists of the Renaissance, and fin-de-siècle muralists. His images were invariably intricate and highly decorative, allegorical and emblematic, medieval in sense and setting, closer in spirit to illuminations of the past rather than illustrations of the modern era. He was an anomaly among modern graphic artists, lavishing so much time and attention—laboring with extraordinary professional passion and personal devotion—over original drawings which, although often praised as exquisite works of art, were created primarily to appear as reproductions in books, magazines and newspapers.

Szyk’s first trip to America was fleeting, but in 1940 he immigrated here for good, announcing upon arrival: “At last, I have found the home I have always searched for. Here I can speak of what my soul feels. There is no other place on earth that gives one the freedom, liberty and justice that America does.”



Figure 2 Statute of Kalisz. Boleslav the Pious on the Throne

Szyk clearly admired the United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence as effective blueprints for providing and safeguarding civil liberties and personal freedoms for Jews around the world. He embellished his English translation (Figure 3) of the Statute with imagery derived from the American flag, including portraits of Poles Casimir Pulaski (Figure 4) and Haym Salomon (Figure 5) who helped liberate Americans from British rule. Szyk's illuminated Statute was but his initial effort to remake the Old World politics of Europe into his vision of the New World created in the United States.



Figure 3 Statute of Kalisz. Portion of English text

Szyk first signaled his interest in the United States in the late 1920s, within his illuminated edition of the *Statute of Kalisz*, a thirteenth-century document granting unprecedented rights to Polish Jews. Szyk biographer Joseph Ansell has characterized Szyk's *Statute* as the artist's reentry into the political life of his native Poland after a decade of expatriate life in Paris.



Figure 4 Statute of Kalisz. Detail, Casimir Pulaski



Figure 5 Statute of Kalisz. Detail, Haym Salomon

Between 1929 and 1932 Szyk conceived and executed an ambitious tribute to the American legacy of democracy and freedom: a series of thirty-eight watercolor miniatures entitled *Washington and His Times* (Figures 6, 7, 8).

Comprising a visual history of the American Revolution, the series included portraits of such military, political, and popular heroes as General Washington, Paul Revere, Benjamin Franklin and John Paul Jones, along with their European compatriots, the Comtes de Lafayette and Rochambeau of France, Thaddeus Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski of Poland, Johann De Kalb and Baron Von Steuben of Germany. He depicted such momentous events and significant scenes as the Boston Massacre and the Battle of Bunker Hill, Washington Crossing the Delaware, the battles of Trenton and Princeton, Fort Ticonderoga and Fort Moultrie, Valley Forge, and the surrenders of Burgoyne and Cornwallis. Through this series Szyk sought to bring these historical figures and events once more into focus for a modern world threatened by multiple modes of social and political repression and economic depression. The American experience during and since the Revolution appeared to him a vital, successful model of a free, democratic society.



Figure 6 (above) *Washington and His Times*. Nathan Hale's Last Hour

Figure 7 (right) *Washington and His Times*. Washington the Soldier



Figure 8 *Washington and His Times*. The Battle of Lexington

The *Washington and His Times* portfolio publisher, Max Jaffé of Vienna, included an explanatory preface which reads in part:

*Mr. Szyk has made no attempt to picture a scene realistically, or to recreate it as it may actually have occurred. He has chosen, rather, from the vantage ground of time and artistic insight, to interpret the life and significance of Washington by a series of portraits and scenes in which he expresses the philosophy he finds beneath the surface of familiar events. It is a treatment of history which necessitates the use of symbols and conventions and demands an active rather than a passive appreciation.*

*Mr. Szyk maintains that an essential purpose of art is the expression of ideas and ideals which have governed the development of the human race, and hence, as is natural, he has devoted himself untiringly to historic and traditional subjects, stressing the themes of peace and freedom.*

*The series of paintings which is reproduced for the first time in this portfolio was conceived as a tribute to the memory of Washington and the events in which he figured, offered by the Old World to the New.*

First exhibited in Paris in 1931 at the Exposition Coloniale Interpavilion and subsequently in Geneva at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, the *Washington and His Times* series was published in 1932, the bicentennial of Washington's birth. At the time, Szyk had led a decade of expatriate life in France in which he

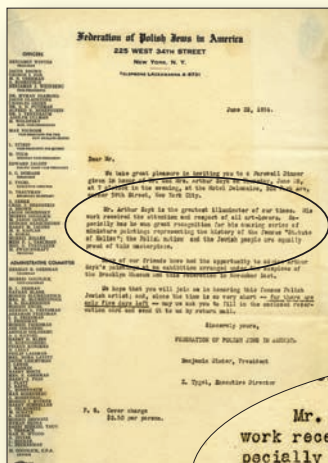
considered Paris his home. Nonetheless, the Polish government proudly sponsored a traveling exhibition devoted exclusively to his work, signaling extraordinary national pride in his achievements and an eagerness to exploit his art as an effective vehicle for official foreign policy and international relations.



Figure 9 The Polish-American Fraternity. Thaddeus Kosciuszko

During 1932 the artist and his works appeared in cities and towns throughout Poland. In 1933, the government sent Szyk and the show to England to promote toleration and combat anti-Semitism then escalating in Europe, and to showcase the creative accomplishment of a prodigal native son. By the end of the year the exhibition, with the artist and his wife Julia in tow, had embarked on a tour of the United States, opening at the Brooklyn Museum. Supported by the Polish

government and the Federation of Polish Jews in America, the exhibition was praised as both a symbol of Jewish cultural achievement and a manifestation of Polish solidarity with American values.



Federation of Polish Jews in America letter

...the evening, at the Hotel Delmonico, 222 Broadway, New York City.

Mr. Arthur Szyk is the greatest illuminator of our times. His work received the attention and respect of all art-lovers. Especially has he won great recognition for his amazing series of miniature paintings representing the history of the famous "Statute of Kalisz"; the Polish nation and the Jewish people are equally proud of this masterpiece.

Many of our friends have had the opportunity to admire the paintings at an exhibition arranged under the auspices of this Federation in...

During the exhibition's run in Washington, D.C. at the Library of Congress, U.S. Congressman Sol Bloom awarded Szyk the George Washington Medal in honor of his contributions to the recent bicentennial celebrations of the first American president's birthday. The series of miniatures portraying *Washington and His Times* reached an even wider audience through its publication and dissemination as a portfolio of reproductive prints in England and America.

Following a subsequent venue in Cincinnati and a second show in New York City the Szyks returned to Poland in summer 1934 after a seven-month visit to America. In early 1935 the Polish government purchased the Washington series from the artist and presented it to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a gift of the Polish people. Displayed in the FDR White House for many years, the original watercolor miniatures now reside in the Roosevelt presidential library at Hyde Park, New York. Szyk's high-minded efforts to express his vision of freedom and liberty as core values for Jews and non-Jews in Poland and America, and around the world, resonated at the highest administrative levels in both countries.

The social, economic, and political conditions Szyk found in the United States during this initial visit made a powerful, positive impression on him. Only his wife's demurral due to the oppressive summer heat they encountered in New York City banished thoughts of immediate emigration to America. Arthur and Julia returned to Europe, where he devoted himself to illustrating portraits and allegories depicting a proud, vital Jewry unbowed in the face of growing fascism and anti-Semitism.

The next few years, spent largely in London, were consumed by his creation of an illuminated *Haggadah*, a landmark in the history of illustrated books for which he is justly celebrated. Szyk introduced into his remarkable rendering of this venerable, traditional Jewish prayer book images and symbols drawn from contemporary Jewish life: Nazi swastikas, modern ghetto residents, Zionist settlers in Palestine. His new illuminations invigorated the old text, revitalizing the Haggadah story of Jewish liberation from Pharoahic repression, alluding in no uncertain terms to the current plight of European Jews.

While living in London between 1937 and 1940, Szyk further proclaimed his strong affection for America in a series of twenty-three miniatures entitled, *The Glorious Days of the Polish-American Fraternity* (Figures 9, 10, 11), recalling for his countrymen across the globe the deep affinity he perceived between the American and Polish people, their shared struggle to create governments supporting civil liberties and religious tolerance. Commissioned by the Polish government for the 1939 World's Fair held in Flushing Meadow Park, Queens, New York, the series portrayed the numerous individuals and events which symbolized to Szyk the historic bonds between the two nations, from the apocryphal landing of "the half mythical" Polish explorer John Kolna on the American coast in 1476, sixteen years before Columbus, through the numerous and notable contributions of Polish military personnel during the Revolution, to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's (Figure 11) dramatic call for Polish independence in his Fourteen Points proclamation of 1918, issued in the aftermath of World War I.

The prefatory text to a twenty-postcard souvenir portfolio of the series cited President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's comments upon the 50th anniversary of the death of General Vladimir Krzyanowski, Commander of the "Polish Legion" in the Union Army during the American Civil War:

*Throughout centuries and storms, no matter if the sun was shining or obscured by temporary clouds Poland forever fought to carry high the light of Liberty. As we treasure in common the same idea of Liberty, our friendship with Poland was longstanding and uninterrupted. It is an honour and a privilege to bear witness how the U.S.A. is indebted to people of Polish blood. We acknowledge the merit of the fearless heroes, fighting for liberty, of Kosciuszko (Figure 9) and Pulaski, whose very names became the watchwords of freedom. Their feats form an immortal chapter in the history of American freedom.*

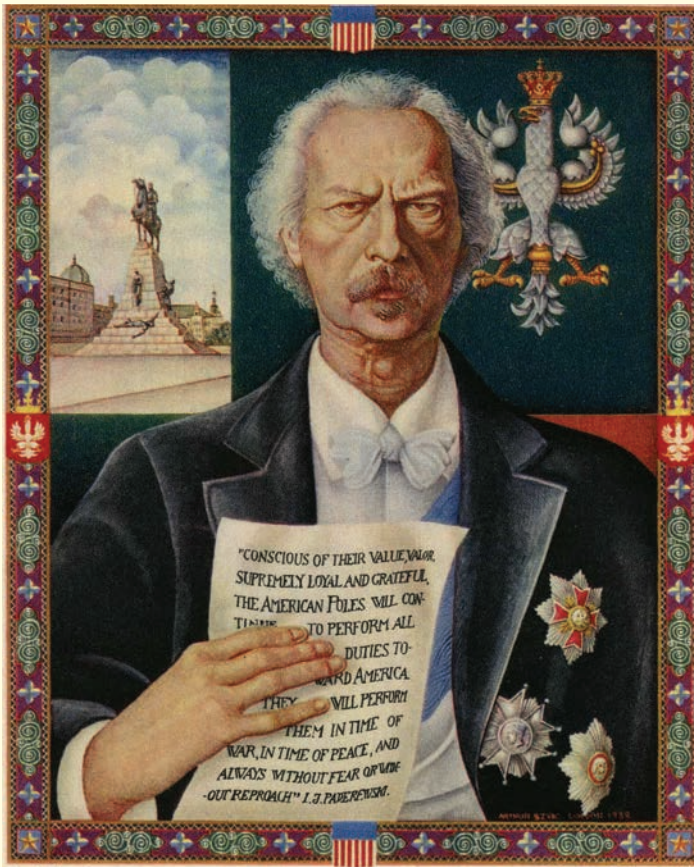


Figure 10 The Polish-American Fraternity. Ignacy Paderewski



Figure 11 The Polish-American Fraternity. Woodrow Wilson

Following the 1939 invasion of Poland by Germany Szyk, still living in London, was increasingly sought after to produce drawings and satires in support of the Allied war effort. His anti-fascist, and specifically anti-Nazi, stance was known throughout Europe; also, he had experience as a soldier and artist during World War I, (his 1919 *Revolution in Germany* was his first published political book) creating graphic satires and inspirational art and serving in the Polish armed forces.

Figures 12, 13  
Collier's magazine covers

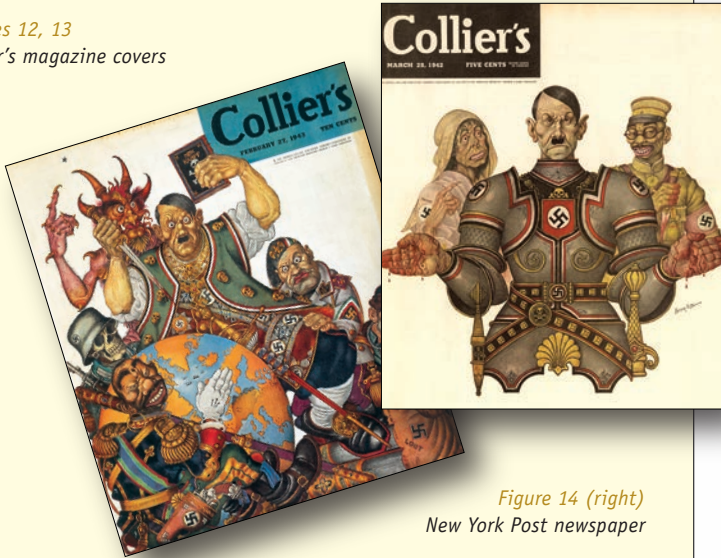


Figure 14 (right)  
New York Post newspaper

In London, he produced exhibitions of war drawings for the English government. In summer 1940 he left Europe for the British Commonwealth nation of Canada with his family, remaining there for six months to inspire the war effort, explaining, "When we work for Britain, we work for our own country. Britain is the only stronghold of democracy in Europe." By late 1940, the Szyks were in New York to stay, as biographer Joseph Ansell reports, "He was on a mission, partly at the request of the British and the Poles but mostly a self-appointed one, to alert and inform the Americans about the gravity of the situation in Europe." An entire year would elapse before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor impelled America into the global conflict, nonetheless Szyk did his part early and often to compel Americans to join in the fight.

He developed exhibitions of war drawings, cartoons, and caricatures for galleries in New York, Washington, and San Francisco. His art garnered praise wherever it appeared. Szyk was everywhere in America during the war years, developing exhibitions of original works and producing illustrations for reproduction in such leading American newspapers and magazines as *The New York Post* (Figure 14), *The Chicago Sun*, *The American Mercury*, *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *PM*, and *Time* (Figure 15).

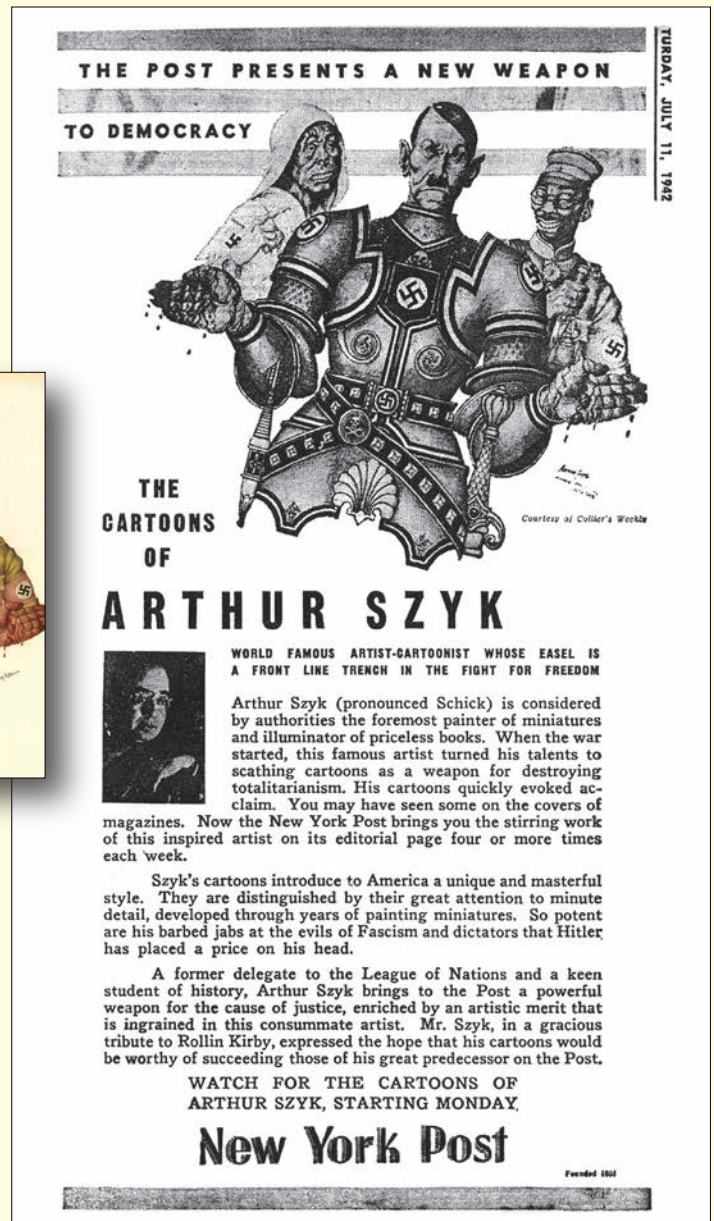


Figure 15 Time magazine cover

His numerous covers for *Collier's* (Figures 12, 13), one of America's most popular magazines, were bold and colorful, inspiring devotion to the Allies or fear and loathing for the Axis. *Time* embellished its cover with his chilling caricature of Japanese admiral Yamamoto (Figure 15), architect of the aerial assault on Pearl Harbor, just days after the event shook the nation to its core. *Esquire* magazine featured a large, colorful and dramatic new Szyk war cartoon each month from February through August 1942.



Figure 16 Satan Leads the Ball

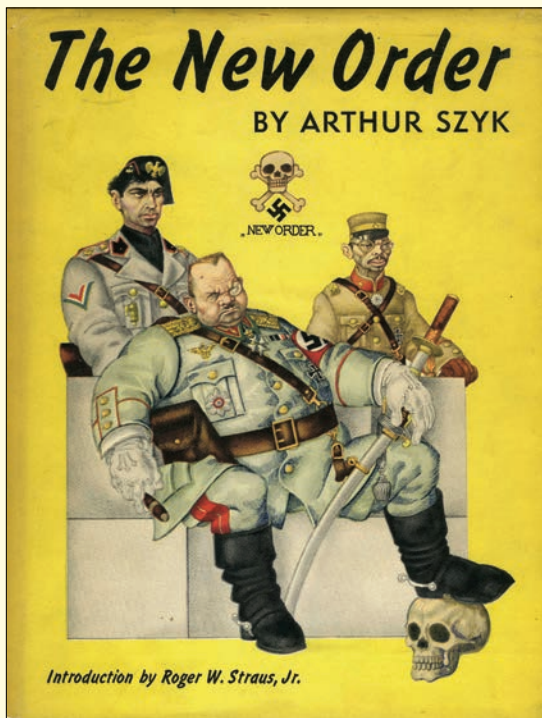


Figure 21 Arthur Szyk, *The New Order*, dust jacket

Szyk embraced a new life in a new land, becoming one of America's leading political artists during World War II, producing hundreds of anti-Axis illustrations and cartoons in aid of the Allied war effort. In America, he had no equal. His political cartoons were far more detailed and dramatic than those produced by the nation's editorial artists, led by the likes of Herb Block, Ed Marcus, and Rollin Kirby. His illustrations were more abstract and allegorical than those created by the country's celebrated illustrators, including Norman Rockwell. Americans were used to a simple cartooning style, blunt commentary, and realistic illustrations. Szyk set a new standard for technical mastery and uncompromising ideals.



Figure 22 Saul Steinberg, *The New Order*



Figure 23 Rollin Kirby, *Hanging on to the Demagogue*



Figure 24 Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss), *The Latest Self-Portrait*



Figure 17 *Satan Leads the Ball.*  
Detail, A Japanese General



Figure 18 *Satan Leads the Ball.*  
Detail, A German Industrialist



Figure 19 *Satan Leads the Ball.*  
Detail, Hitler and Goebbels



Figure 20 *Satan Leads the Ball.*  
Detail, Mussolini

During World War II, Arthur Szyk delineated for Americans the vicious face of European and Asian militarism and fascism as frequently and effectively as any artist anywhere. His work was demonstrably different from other artists and cartoonists across America, more ubiquitous and visible in America and Western Europe than that of such celebrated contemporaries as George Grosz, by 1940 a New York City resident and past his glory days, or John Heartfield, the great Soviet propagandist. Yet he spawned no imitators, no school of Szyk; perhaps his art was born of too much knowledge, passion, devotion, skill and sacrifice.

His detailed, Byzantine, medieval style and meticulous technique contrasted dramatically with the simpler gestural line drawings typical of American cartoonists and illustrators. In Europe his work finds echoes in the war drawings of the Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers or the Polish illustrator Wladislaw Benda, but in America Szyk was without peer. Editorial cartoonists in America were led by the likes of Ding Darling, Rollin Kirby, and Herbert Block (aka "Herblock," the same cartoonist who labeled "McCarthyism" and gave Richard Nixon hell for fifty years). Norman Rockwell was in his prime, and a new generation of graphic humorists, including Saul Steinberg (Figure 22) and even Ted Geisel (better known as "Dr. Seuss") (Figure 24), were producing war-related work.

Rollin Kirby (Figure 23), whose career spanned the two world wars, warned Americans of Hitler's rise in the early 1930s while Ding Darling's cartoons epitomized the enthusiastic, patriotic, "can do" attitude taken by mainstream Americans toward involvement in the war. Herblock helped turn the tide of American public opinion from isolationism to interventionism, winning the first of four Pulitzer Prizes for his early war work. Ted Geisel's largely forgotten cartoons for PM, a progressive daily paper published in New York City which also featured Szyk's drawings, are a footnote to World War II cartooning: a gentler take on a terrible time. Saul Steinberg, at the outset of his brilliant career as the nation's most influential conceptual cartoonist, produced a number of humorous and telling satires of Axis leaders. He caricatured Hitler as a witless dunce unable to draw a proper swastika. He depicted Stalin standing next to a gas pump telling Hitler "the oil is very expensive around here, about 10,000 Nazis to the gallon." Stylistically, Steinberg comes as close to Szyk as anyone in America. His comic drawing of Axis leaders in "The New Order" (Figure 22) offers an effective example for comparison with Szyk's more detailed, colorful, and menacing treatment of the same subject.



Figure 9 *Detail, Seal of America*



Figure 25 Normal Rockwell, *Four Freedoms*



Figure 26 Arthur Szyk, *Four Freedoms Prayer*

Norman Rockwell's design for a poster illustrating The Four Freedoms (Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear, Freedom of Speech) (Figure 25), articulated by President Franklin D.

Roosevelt in his 1941 State of the Union address, offers yet another point of comparison with Arthur Szyk's American work. In his own rendering of *The Four Freedoms Prayer*, Szyk produced an exquisitely intimate and moving image, markedly different from the far more monumental and realistic designs painted by Rockwell for posters commissioned by the *Saturday Evening Post*. Small in size, Szyk's Prayer is nonetheless a dramatic, coherent, and unified composition conveying the emotional intensity and spiritual depth of a Renaissance pieta.



Figure 27 Arthur Szyk, *Four Freedoms Prayer, Detail*



Figure 28 Arthur Szyk, *Four Freedoms Prayer, Detail*

In comparison, Rockwell's designs for posters illustrating the Four Freedoms earned Ben Shahn's remark that they treated Americans "as if they were twelve years old." During World War II, Rockwell's "pictures for the American people" depicted people who were almost exclusively middle class and white, Jews were rarely seen and blacks virtually nonexistent. His impulse toward diversity appeared only decades later as race riots and demonstrations consumed American cities during the 1960s.

Rockwell and most of his contemporaries in America lagged behind Arthur Szyk in their awareness of and concern for social justice and civil liberties, even in their own country, which he had so recently adopted.

Szyk, for example, produced during the 1940s two startling cartoon comments on racism in America.

In a 1944 drawing he depicts two GIs, one white and one black, conversing while guarding German prisoners of war. The white soldier asks his black counter-part, "And [what] would you do with Hitler?" The black GI responds acidly,

"I would have made him a Negro and dropped him somewhere in the USA." Several years later, in 1949, a year in which the Tuskegee Institute reported three lynchings to the NAACP, Szyk drew a cartoon depicting a black man bound and on his knees, watched over by

armed, robed, and hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan. Above his head appears the caption, "Do not forgive them oh Lord for they do know what they do!" Inscribed below is an additional caption in Szyk's hand which reads, "Each Negro lynching is a national disaster, is a stab in the back to our government in its desperate struggle for Democracy."

Searing images with captions like these rarely appeared in mainstream American publications. Among nationally syndicated American editorial cartoonists only Herblock and, later, Bill Mauldin and Jules Feiffer, addressed the nation's race problem with the commitment and sensitivity revealed in Szyk's work.

Arthur Szyk's killing pace of production—he died too young at age 57—slowed but never faltered after the end of World War II. He refocused his sights on the welfare of Jewish Holocaust survivors, the emerging State of Israel, and the ongoing fight to safeguard in America the civil liberties and tolerant atmosphere so many had fought and died to preserve. The post-war years in the United States were overshadowed by palpable fears of nuclear warfare and Congressional investigations into the "un-American" activities of Communist Party members and sympathizers.

In spite of his remarkable, unstinting and indefatigable contributions to the Allied war effort and his self-proclaimed status as "Roosevelt's Soldier in Art" (Figure 29), Szyk came under suspicion as a Communist fellow traveler in the last few years of his life. His name appears repeatedly in reports

compiled and issued by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the United States House of Representatives.



Figure 29 (left) Dedicated to Eleanor Roosevelt by F.D.R.'s Soldier in Art

Figure 30 (above) Szyk and Mrs. Roosevelt

In the HUAC report released in April 1949 he is listed as a member of numerous "subversive" and Communist-sponsored groups and committees: the Win-the-Peace Conference, the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, the American Slav Congress, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, the Peoples Radio Foundation, Inc., the Committee for Free Political Advocacy, for example. On these lists his name appears with other notable American artists, writers, stage and screen performers, and public figures including Langston Hughes, Rockwell Kent, Paul Robeson, Artie Shaw, Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Nicolai Cikovsky, Aaron Copland, W.E.B. DuBois, Philip Evergood, Albert Einstein, Howard Fast, Robert Gwathmey, Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman, Jose Ferrer, Judy Holiday, Crockett Johnson, Ring Lardner, Norman Mailer, Thomas Mann, Arthur Miller, Dorothy Parker, Ben Shahn, Edward Weston, John Sloan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Dehn, Max Weber, Studs Terkel, Jacob Lawrence, Paul Strand, Linus Pauling, and Isaac Stern. The list goes on.

It probably did not comfort Szyk that he was in such astonishingly good company. Roosevelt was dead and the worldwide war of bombs and bullets gave way to a new global conflict of ideas and ideology. With the onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s the meaning of patriotism and sacrifice in America shifted as a new generation of politicians came to power.

The fact that Szyk produced during this last troubled period in his life some of the most patriotic, eloquent, and important examples of twentieth-century graphic art ever created in the United States—his illuminated Declaration of Independence (*Figure 1*), Bill of Rights, and Four Freedoms Prayer (*Figure 26*)—only heightens the irony and pathos of his late career. His Declaration of Independence, completed in 1950, is a spectacular masterpiece of artistic detail and historical allegory, positively glowing with sincerity and passion. Below the illumination Szyk inscribed these words: “To my fellow Americans, I dedicate with love this immortal heritage of our forefathers. May these words live in our hearts forever and ever, for no good man loses his freedom but with his life . . .”

Was it physical ailments from a difficult life and profoundly exhausting mission that killed him, or the irony of embracing a country which to him symbolized freedom only to find shackles of the mind and spirit he could never have imagined would appear in a free democracy?

In the end, Arthur Szyk was unique in his artistry, his mission, and his message. No wonder his art looks so different. He had fought as a soldier and knew first-hand the horrors of war. He had lost his mother Eugenia to a Nazi death camp and personally confronted the bottomless depths of racial rage.

Isolated by oceans and sheltered from warfare no American artist was so utterly prepared as Arthur Szyk to fight the tyranny of hearts and minds he found everywhere in his travels through Europe and even North America, where he dreamed freedom lived. Szyk set a new standard for technical mastery and uncompromising ideals. His late masterpieces of the Bill of Rights, Four Freedoms Prayer, and Declaration of Independence were the culmination of his life’s artistic journey, graphic odes to the freedom from tyranny he sought in America and the idealistic values and spirit from which the nation had been forged. He brought all of his knowledge of terror and its implications to bear in his art, like Dorian Gray painting a collective portrait of evil presented daily to a world at war. He was democracy’s weapon, a soldier in art, wielding pen and brush to render the face of racial hatred and social injustice, its horrid features intact for all to see. His postwar masterpieces, in contrast, are transcendent, reminding Americans of the ideals upon which their government was founded, their shared values and common capacity for warmth, compassion, tolerance and understanding. ■



*Figure 31 Lady Liberty, Liberty magazine, November 20, 1943*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Independent curator and writer Harry Katz is former Head Curator of prints and photographs at the Library of Congress. His clients include the Washington, D.C. based Herb Block Foundation and the Library of Congress. He created in fall 2000 the Library of Congress exhibition Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom, and has produced numerous books and exhibitions devoted to historical and contemporary American graphic art, including “Eyes of the Nation: A Visual History of the United States” (Library of Congress and Alfred Knopf, 1998), an American Association of Museums “Book of the Year.” He is the co-author of “Humor’s Edge: Cartoons by Ann Telnaes” (Pomegranate Press, 2004). He divides his time between Del Mar, California and Washington, D.C.*

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The Arthur Szyk Society, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991, is dedicated to preserving the artistic legacy of Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) as a cultural hero and national treasure. The Society presents the artist’s prolific body of works for broad and diverse audiences in the U.S. and worldwide. The goals of The Society are to: commemorate the art and messages of Arthur Szyk; facilitate scholarly research in art history and other fields of humanities related to the life and art of Arthur Szyk; promote public awareness of Szyk’s life and works through education outreach to teachers, students, their families and communities; and catalyze social action through the arts.

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The Arthur Szyk Society is soliciting papers for publication on works of art by Arthur Szyk. Proposals should include your name, address, phone number, email address, institution, title for your paper and a one-paragraph summary, and a 25 word personal bio. Please email your proposals to: [Curator@szyk.org](mailto:Curator@szyk.org). This paper is copyrighted ©2005 by The Arthur Szyk Society.