



Documents as a Palette of Life: The Genealogical Self-Portrait of Arthur Szyk

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Arthur Szyk often painted images of himself into his depictions of Jewish themes and his personal visions of the war-torn world in which he lived. His regular use of self-portraiture demonstrates his emotional involvement in the subjects of his art —images of himself bear witness to the world events and political issues that most compelled him. Szyk's intense personal connection to the defining events of the first half of the 20th century is evident even in seemingly banal tasks such as filling out regulatory paperwork. The trajectory of Arthur Szyk's life, when viewed through such documents, and embellished by the experiences of those who knew him personally, presents a unique self-portrait of the man and the artist.



The Early Years

In the year of Arthur Szyk's birth, 1894, Poland did not exist as an independent nation. Rather, it was in its Third Partition period, subject to Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Szyk's hometown of Łódź was located in Russian Poland's Piotrków Gubernia, a province which existed from 1867–1917.

During this period of Russian Imperial rule, which encompassed Szyk's birth through his adolescence, Łódź experienced a rise in industry. Throughout the 19th century, Jews relocated their factories and businesses from other areas of the Russian Empire to Łódź in compliance with the Pale of Settlement, a governmental decree made by Catherine II that restricted permanent Jewish residence to the western territory of the empire. As a result, Łódź had 105 Jewish-owned factories (and 156 non-Jewish-owned factories) between 1881 and 1900. In the dominant textile industry, in which Arthur's father, Solomon Szyk, (Figure 1) was an entrepreneur, the workforce was more than 33% Jewish, and Jews owned about 40% of the plants and manufactured about 33% of the annual textile production.

It is likely that the Szyk factory, owned in partnership with Solomon's brother, Herman, was small (i.e., less than 15 employees) and non-mechanized, as Solomon and Herman Szyk are not ranked among the most prominent Łódź entrepreneurs of the time.¹ From 1900 to 1907, Łódź saw political unrest and subsequent uprisings against factory owners. During the June Days of the Łódź insurrection in 1905, one of Solomon's workers threw acid in his face, blinding him.²



Figure 1
Parents Eugenia and Solomon Szyk with their sons Markus and Arthur in Łódź.



Łódź in the 1930s. Photograph by Roman Vishniac.

The birth certificate of Arthur Szyk, the middle child of a well-to-do Polish family, provides a view of the world in which he was born.³ Written in Cyrillic script, the document testifies both to the Russian occupation of Poland and to the historic transition from the Gregorian calendar to the Julian calendar. Typical of birth records of the period, Szyk's birth date is recorded as both a Gregorian date (Polish structure) and a Julian date (Russian structure)—June 4th and June 16th respectively. However, in other documents which record his birth date, Szyk consistently used June 3, 1894. The reason is subject to conjecture.

The birth certificate reports that Szyk's father, Shlioma [Solomon] Szyk, was a permanent resident of Polotsk, Vitebsk Guberniya, and Szyk's mother was Eugenia Rogacka. The certificate also states that Shlioma [Solomon] Szyk was late in filing the statement of birth due to family reasons. Whatever those reasons were, Solomon ultimately filed in 1895, more than six months after the birth of his son, a delay that perhaps led to the later June 3 vs. June 4 discrepancy.

Jewish textile factory owners lived the comfortable life of the bourgeoisie. Arthur was raised, as he would later raise his two children, in a world of household servants, governesses, international travel, cultural sophistication, and multilingualism. Alexandra Bracie,⁴ Szyk's daughter, as well as her cousins Liliana Weissman⁵ and Julian Padowicz,⁶ describe their upbringing in keeping with this class of society.

The Szyk family also fostered Jewish identity. Szyk's mother Eugenia kept a kosher home and probably taught him Jewish traditions and bible stories. But the Szyks may have been less religious than many Jews in Łódź: although Alexandra, Julian, and Liliana recall Seders in the homes of their other grandparents, they do not remember attending Seders in the home of Solomon Szyk. Furthermore, the family's choice to bury both Solomon [Shloima] (d. January 25, 1922, of natural causes) and Herman [Chaim] Szyk in Section A of the mixed quarter (Figure 2, below) of the Łódź Jewish cemetery, rather than the separate men's quarter, may have been an intentional departure from traditional Jewish custom.⁷ Alternatively, the choice of burial plots located on the prestigious and expensive

main avenue of the cemetery may simply be a function of the Szyk family's high social status and wealth.⁸

Whatever the Szyk family's specific beliefs, Arthur Szyk continuously explored Jewish themes throughout his prolific career. He often depicted biblical and historical events that reflected the struggles and triumphs of the Jewish people, most significantly in his 1930s illumination of the story of Passover, *The Haggadah*.

To gain knowledge and further appreciation of his thematic interests, in 1914 Szyk engaged in an extended tour of Palestine and the Near East, where he encountered ideas that would influence his unique miniaturist style and his Zionist convictions.⁹

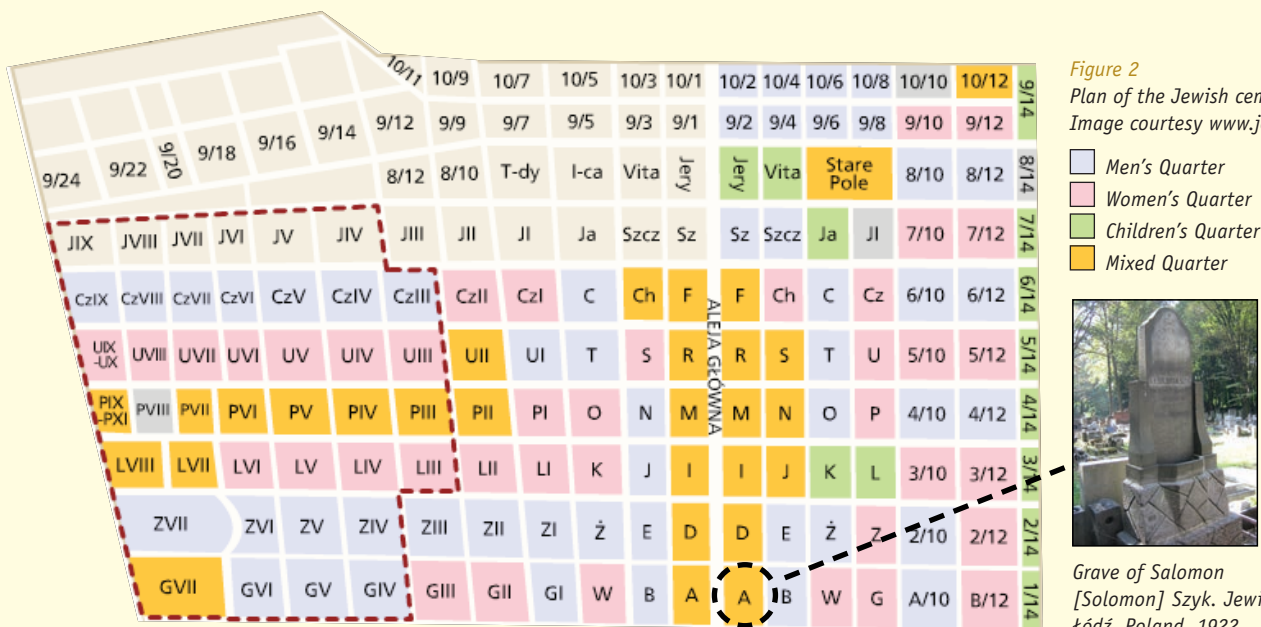


Figure 2
Plan of the Jewish cemetery, Łódź, Poland.
Image courtesy www.jewishlodzcmemetery.org

- Men's Quarter
- Women's Quarter
- Children's Quarter
- Mixed Quarter



Grave of Salomon [Solomon] Szyk, Jewish Cemetery, Łódź, Poland, 1922.

Worldwide Residences

In Szyk's 1941 Application for Preexamination, which initiated his U.S. citizenship process, Szyk wrote that he had previously resided in Poland, France, the United States, and England for more than one year (Table 1, at right). His multiple relocations resulted from following his personal and artistic interests as well as escaping the rising tide of World War II. Two periods of Szyk's life were not accounted for in this document, as his location changed too frequently to qualify for inclusion: his extended tour of Palestine and service in the Polish and Russian armies (1914–1921); and his travel in the United States and Europe in conjunction with his exhibitions (1934–1937).

Table 1: Worldwide Residences¹⁰

City/Town	Province/State	Country	From	To
Łódź	Łódź	Poland	1894	1910
Paris	Paris	France	1910	1914
Paris	Paris	France	1921	1932
New York	New York	USA	1933	1934
London	London	England	1937	1940

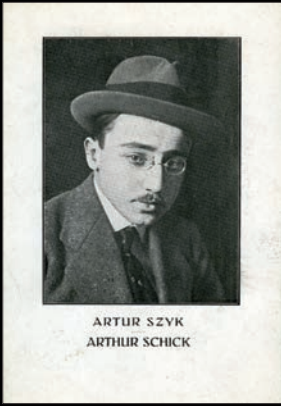
The variant information Szyk provided to the clerk may provide insight into Szyk’s thinking at the time. The change of occupation from artist to painter (a more specific type of artist) is only the first of many instances in which this switch occurs. The change in national identity, on the other hand, is unique and calls for interpretation. Szyk may have identified himself as Hebrew as a public expression of pride in his Jewish identity. However, his assertion of his Jewish identity

should not be understood as a rejection or demotion of his Polish origin or citizenship, though he did periodically take issue with the Polish government and its policies.²² In 1933, Szyk would have been enthusiastically supportive of Poland; after all, the Polish Consulate had organized the U.S. tour for Szyk—a talented, well-respected Polish Jew—as a demonstration of Poland’s resistance to growing antisemitic sentiment in Europe.²³

Table 2: Szyk’s self-portrait through documents. Biographical information as reported in key documents from Szyk’s life.

Year	Document	Complexion	Height	Weight	Hair	Eyes	Occupation	Nationality
1933 Dec 30	Manifest <i>SS Champlain</i>	Fair	5’4”	---	Cht [chestnut]	Blue	Artist painter	Polish Hebrew
1940 Aug 20	Canadian National Registration	---	---	---	---	---	artist	---
1940 Oct 3	Canadian border manifest at Buffalo, NY	Med	5’6”	---	Bwn	Blue	artist	Polish
1940 Oct 9	Alien Registration Form	---	5’6”	175	Brown	Blue	artist (painter)	---
1941 Mar 23	Application for Preexamination		5’5”	160	Dark	Blue		
1941 Oct 30	Preexamination Border Crossing Identification Card	Med	5’4”	160	Brn	Grey	---	Polish
1941 Nov 14	American Consulate at Montreal. Application for Visa (Quota)	Medium	5’4”	160 -going bald	Dark	blue	---	---
1941 Nov 16	Canadian border manifest at Rouses Point, NY	Dark/bald [sic]	5’4”	---	Blue [sic]	NR [sic]	painter	---
1942 Apr 25	WW II Draft Registration	light	5’6”	158	Brown	Blue/ wears glasses	artist	---
1942 Apr 28	Declaration of Intention	light	5’3”	180	Brown	Blue	artist painter	Polish
1948 May 17	Petition for Naturalization	fair	5’3”	165	brn	blue	artist painter	---

Faces of Arthur Szyk



Postcard portrait of Arthur Szyk.

Throughout his early career, Arthur Szyk experimented with many different spellings of his name. He enrolled at the Académie Julian under the Austrian/Galician surname "Schick," which he signed to numerous works from the early 1910s. His illustrations for *Fun der Natur: Tseichenungen un Paisazhen* (Warsaw: A. Gitlin, 1914) are attributed to "Chic," selected for its sound and, perhaps, its associate with the French word for "stylish and elegant." The artist also transliterated his name into Hebrew characters, occasionally simplifying it to the monogram **שז**. By the 1920s, the identifiably Polish spelling "Szyk" became his standard, though his signature did alternate between the Slavic "Artur" and the French "Arthur" up to the mid-1930s.



Self-portrait as soldier, Łódź, circa 1915.



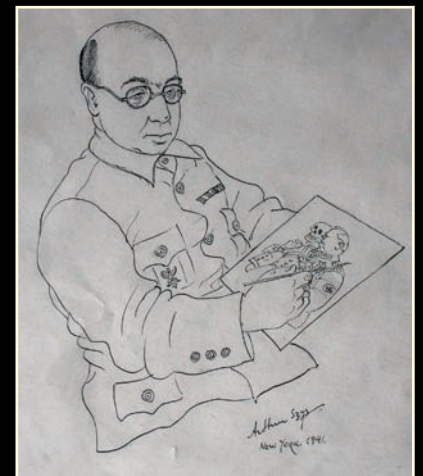
Cover illustration for *Al' dos Guts* (All Good Things), Łódź, 1922.



Szyk as Scribe
Le Livre D'Esther,
Paris, 1925.



Arthur Szyk—Enlumineur. Probably 1935. This pen and ink drawing shows Arthur Szyk as an illuminator extraordinaire, decorated with medals from three countries.



Self portrait, New York, 1941.

From 1934 to 1936, in Łódź, Szyk expended considerable effort completing his capstone work, *The Haggadah*. In 1937, he relocated to London, where he supervised *The Haggadah's* printing and publishing. London city directories reveal that he lived at "19 Belsize Crescent, N.W. 3" in 1937 and at "63 Belsize Park gdns N.W. 3" from 1938–1939. The historic Belsize estate area was then a community of artists and architects that contributed much to the intellectual life of Hampstead, London.²⁴ Interestingly, according to Alexandra Bracie, it was also an ethnically German neighborhood.²⁵ When the family of Liliana Rozenbaum Weissman, Szyk's cousin, moved to London in order to escape rising antisemitism in Poland, Szyk assisted them in finding a nearby apartment.²⁶

In July 1940, the Szyk household relocated from London—first to Ottawa, Canada, in conjunction with an exhibition planned by the Polish government—and then to the United States, where his powerful anti-Axis caricatures would be best-positioned to build U.S. support for the war in Europe. From Szyk's personal statement, on file with England's Ministry of Defence, it appears the English government supported his eventual relocation to the United States.²⁷ Szyk's artistic

prominence and his social/political connections likely smoothed his family's path to North America. Szyk entered Canada at the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, on July 12, 1940, aboard the *SS Monarch of Bermuda*.²⁸ The following day, *The Halifax Herald* reported the arrival of Szyk, "one of Germany's most dangerous enemies" (Figure 5). Alexandra's recollection of that journey with her parents reveals that the *SS Monarch of Bermuda* carried not only the Szyk family but also priceless treasures of the Polish state, ostensibly removed from the European continent for safe-keeping during the war. The ship traveled in a convoy to ensure safe crossing of the dangerous and war-torn Atlantic Ocean.²⁹

The Szyk family resided in Ottawa due to its proximity to the Polish Embassy, for which Szyk was doing considerable work. Subsequent to Szyk's arrival, all men residing in Canada were required to complete the National Registration (Figure 6, below), a form enabling the Canadian government to evaluate human resources available for the war effort. Completed on August 20, 1940, Szyk's signed National Registration provides striking insight into how Szyk interpreted his role in the war.³⁰



Figure 5 The Halifax Herald (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada). July 13, 1940.

Figure 6 Canadian National Registration. Ottawa, 1940.

As expected, he reported that he served in the Imperial Russian and Polish Armies from 1914–1918, where he was a lieutenant in a guerilla warfare unit. He also listed his occupation as artist, noting his 25 years of experience. Between 1933 and 1940, Szyk consistently identified himself as an artist, as opposed to painter, on official documents. However, to the question, “What other work can you do well?” he answered, “Fight.” Further into the form, Szyk was required to “...describe specifically the type or types of work in which you are specially equipped by training or experience.” Szyk answered, “War propaganda cartoons.” While completing a compulsory form, Szyk reveals the militaristic mission of his art, which lasted the duration of World War II.



Figure 7 Advertisement for General Motors in the Lethbridge Herald (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada). January 6, 1941.

the Nazi domination of his native land.”³¹ This endeavor is an example of how Szyk consistently promoted the Allied war effort whatever his nation of residence or citizenship.

On October 3, 1940, Szyk crossed the Canadian border by train at Buffalo, NY, to begin residence in the United States. A later notation on Szyk’s Buffalo, NY, crossing manifest indicates Szyk’s passport was revalidated through June 12, 1942,³² an indication of his non-immigrant status in the U.S.³³ Julia and Alexandra crossed the Canadian border by train one week earlier at Detroit, MI, in order to visit Julia’s American stepsister in Chicago. During this railroad journey, Alexandra Szyk met her future husband, Joseph Braciejowski, a Polish businessman. On October 9, both Arthur and Julia Szyk completed Alien Registration Forms in New York City.³⁴ The Szyk family then leased a penthouse in New York City brokered through the Morgenthau-Seixas Company, Inc.³⁵

Among Szyk’s activities during his short residence in Canada was a tour of General Motors’s plant at Oshawa, Ontario. Inspired by this visit, Szyk later created an advertisement to sell War Savings Certificates (Figure 7, left), the Canadian equivalent of U.S. War Bonds, which includes a short biographical statement about the artist, “an exile from



Figure 8 *The Polish Pioneers in Virginia in the 17th Century, Pictures from the Glorious Days of the Polish-American Fraternity. London, 1938.*

During his first month back in America, Szyk likely attended the New York World’s Fair, which was in the last weeks of its second and final season, to see his major series of 23 paintings, *Pictures from the Glorious Days of the Polish-American Fraternity* (Figure 8), on display in the Polish Pavilion. The Nazi occupation of Poland in September 1939 could easily have doomed the Polish Pavilion

to an early closure at the end of the first season of the World’s Fair. However, the Polish government-in-exile decided not only to maintain but to expand its presence during the second season, updating its display to include a gallery of photographs showing the destruction that the Nazis had visited upon historic buildings and sites of Poland.³⁶

About seven months after the Szyk family took up U.S. residence they stood at the New York harbor to welcome Arthur’s cousin Berta [Barbara] Rogacka Padowicz Wajsbrem and her son Julian Padowicz, who arrived as refugees under Szyk’s sponsorship. The passenger manifest of their ship, the SS *Uruguay*, reports that Rosa Rogacka, Barbara Wajsbrem’s grandmother and Szyk’s great aunt, continued to reside at Szuchu 2, Warsaw, Poland.³⁷ Many Nazi officers had occupied homes in this upscale neighborhood, displacing former residents. One can only speculate what the Wajsbrem family experienced in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and how much the family would have known about their situation prior to their arrival in New York.

Upon reaching the U.S. shore, Julian Padowicz, who was nine years old in 1941, recalls his excitement: “It was like coming home to Poland because the Szyks were the first relatives I saw, the first people I knew, since escaping from the Bolesheviks... people who spoke Polish.” Joseph Braciejowski drove them all in his Studebaker to the Szyk home at 323 West 74th Street, a spacious New York penthouse apartment overlooking the Hudson River, where the Wajsbrems stayed for several weeks. Julian remembers attending Alexandra’s wedding soon after his arrival and even recalls seeing the burnt remains of the SS *Normandie* (January 1942) from the balcony of Szyk’s apartment.³⁸ Also aboard the SS *Uruguay* were Szyk’s boyhood friend and artistic collaborator from Łódź, Julian Tuwim, and Julian’s wife Stefania. The Szyks and Tuwims certainly enjoyed a reunion.

United States Citizenship

Szyk's path to U.S. citizenship began in March 1941 with the completion of his Application for Preexamination, a requirement for those who entered the U.S. with non-immigrant status but wished to establish their eligibility for immigration.³⁹ Szyk's answer to a citizenship application question succinctly explains the motives behind his emigration from Poland: "Would you be subject to racial, religious, social, or political persecutions if you were now in your native country or the country of your citizenship?" "Yes." "If so, why?" "On account of my religion and citizenship I would be subjected to the inhuman treatment by the enemy."

Under the Alien Registration Act of 1940, immigrant visas could only be awarded to inbound travelers through a U.S. port of entry. This policy meant that non-immigrants already residing in the U.S. who wished to become citizens were obligated to "re-immigrate." Upon the approval of their Applications for Preexamination, these would-be citizens left the country—usually heading to nearby Canada—only to come back to the U.S. a day or so later. They could then receive their visas and create a record of admission of permanent residence while passing through an official port of entry. Many World War II-era "re-immigrants" were European Jews who had made their way to the United States in the 1930s or very early 1940s.⁴⁰ Szyk received his letter of approval in April 1941, prompting him to declare he would cross the Canadian border immediately in order to create the needed paperwork.⁴¹ However, this exit and re-entry to the United States did not occur within his intended timeframe.

Fortunately, Szyk soon had occasion to acquire his immigrant visa, as a result of joining his daughter on her Canadian honeymoon.⁴² The "honeymoon documents" include the U.S. marriage certificate of Aleksandra [Alexandra] Miriam Szyk to Joseph Braciejowski,⁴³ the Application for Immigrant Visa (Quota) filed in Montreal, Canada,⁴⁴ and the passenger manifest of the Szyk family's return to the U.S. after the post-wedding trip to Canada.⁴⁵

The Certificate of Marriage Registration for Alexandra Szyk and Joseph Braciejowski is dated November 11, 1941. Both bride and groom listed their address as 323 West 74 St., an upscale building where both Arthur Szyk and the Braciejowskis rented apartments. The marriage record shows the ceremony was performed by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Rabbi Wise and Arthur Szyk, though friends and eventual neighbors in

Westport, CT, had strong opposing viewpoints on Zionism. Szyk was a "militant revisionist Zionist,"⁴⁶ while Wise fostered a pacifist approach to Zionism. Although both were outspoken in their philosophies, their political beliefs did not outweigh their personal friendship. The marriage record also reveals that Julian and Stephania Tuwim, who resided nearby at 25 West 69th St., were witnesses to the Szyk-Braciejowski marriage.

The Szyk and Braciejowski families left New York City the day after the wedding, drove to Canada, and stayed just long enough to return legally to the U.S. with their new immigrant visas. It is possible the trip was rushed because Szyk was especially busy fulfilling political cartoon commissions, his primary artistic focus at the time. The Application for Immigrant Visa (Quota) for Arthur, Julia, and Aleksandra [Alexandra] was filed at the American Consulate in Montreal on November 14, and the Rouses Point, NY manifest was created upon the Szyk family's reentry into the United States on November 16, 1941, a mere five days after the wedding. Though the term "manifest" usually refers to the passenger list of a ship or plane, this manifest indicates the Szyks traveled by auto. Neither Szyk nor any of his immediate family knew how to drive, much less owned a car. Alexandra's new husband, Joseph, however, did own a Studebaker; he chauffeured the trip.

A close examination of the manifest reveals additional information: Arthur Szyk still held a Polish passport valid until June 12, 1942 (a fact also noted on his 1940 Canadian border crossing manifest); his given occupation reverted to painter; and he claimed to be a speaker of English, French, Polish, and German. Curiously, he omitted his fluency in Russian.⁴⁷ The manifest also declares Szyk was in the United States from October 3, 1940 to November 13, 1941, confirming the family left for Canada the day after Alexandra's wedding. The physical description of Szyk conjures a humorous portrait; since some responses were typed in the wrong boxes, he is reported as having a dark/bald complexion, blue hair, and no eyes (*Table 2*).

The Szyks quickly settled into an active social life on the East Coast. While an ardent supporter of the common man and a spokesperson for tolerance, Szyk was well-connected with the elite in entertainment and political venues who he met through his associations with charities and activist organizations. He frequently attended fundraisers, such as a benefit sponsored by the British-American Ambulance Corps in Washington, D.C. in the first weeks of 1942. A reporter described



Arthur Szyk working at his desk, early 1940s.

Szyk as “small and dark with a quizzical expression,” and complimented Szyk’s wife, Julia: “Mme. Szyk, who is lovely to look at...wore a lovely pink satin sailor hat, topped with violet flowers, to top off her mink coat and dark dress.”⁴⁸

On April 25, 1942, Arthur Szyk complied with a U.S. government directive to register for the fourth draft of World War II, commonly referred to as the Old Timers Registration.⁴⁹ This registration form, completed in his handwriting, provides an updated, if somewhat flattering self-portrait. For the draft registration, Szyk claimed a height of 5’6” and a weight of 158 pounds, three inches taller and 22 pounds slimmer than the height and weight he reported in his Declaration of Intention for U.S. citizenship a mere three days later on April 28, 1942. (Table 2).⁵⁰

Szyk’s Declaration of Intention, commonly known as first papers, included a signed photograph of the self-described artist painter and a physical description that evokes his many artistic self-portraits (Table 2). In accordance with naturalization law, Szyk waited the requisite five years before filing his Petition for Naturalization and closing the citizenship process with the Oath of Allegiance on May 17, 1948—coincidentally, three days after Israel’s declaration of independence.

“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.”

According to Alexandra’s oral testimony, Szyk’s friend, Judge Simon Rivkind, sat on the bench for this auspicious occasion. Although Rivkind’s signature does not appear on the naturalization documents, he did serve a judgeship for the Southern District of New York naturalization court at the time. The witnesses, who must be citizens themselves, were Szyk’s son-in-law, Joseph Braciejowski, and Szyk’s Forest Hills business associate, Herman Jaffe.⁵¹ Szyk’s association with Herman Jaffe, who was his printer, would eventually lead to Szyk’s commission to design the *Aron Ha-Kodesh* (Holy Ark) for the Forest Hills Jewish Center,

described as “one of the most exquisite Arks in the world.”⁵²

With his naturalization, Szyk’s immigration to the United States was at last fulfilled. He reportedly stated, “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.”⁵³



From left to right: Alexandra, Julia and Arthur Szyk, and Herman Jaffe. 1940s.

The Holocaust — A Personal Experience

As previously mentioned, Szyk's fame and political connections expedited his immigration to America. However, many members of his extended family remained in Poland and were soon at the mercy of the Nazis. Of all the information gleaned from the postcard-size Canadian border crossing manifest of 1941, Szyk's heart-rending response to the question, "Name and address of nearest relative or friend in country when applicant came," may be the most striking. The answer speaks for itself: "Mother—Eugenia Rogacka—somewhere in Poland." Szyk knew his mother and younger brother Bernard had been in Łódź when Poland fell to Hitler's regime, but he clearly was uncertain of their fate.⁵⁴

Szyk's lack of information about his family's whereabouts persisted even after the end of the war. His dedication for his 1946 *Pathways through the Bible* read: "In March 1943 my beloved seventy-year-old mother, Eugenia Szyk, was taken from the ghetto of Łódź to the Nazi furnaces of Maidanek..."⁵⁵ However, according to Stephen Luckert's *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, Szyk's mother perished at Chelmno in 1942.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the Łódź Ghetto Book 5 reports that Eugenia (Rogacka) Szyk was deported on Dec. 28, 1942. The destination of the transport is not listed.⁵⁷



We're Running Short of Jews, New York, 1943.

Szyk's Final Years

On January 14, 1946, Szyk once again facilitated an immigration, this time for his son, Georges, and Georges' French wife, Germaine. Georges traveled cabin class aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* from Beirut, Lebanon, to join his parents in the United States at their home at 45 East 66th Street, one of New York City's first luxury apartment houses and now a designated landmark.⁵⁸ Soon after Georges' arrival, Szyk moved from New York to New Canaan, Connecticut. The Westport, CT, directories of 1946 and 1948 list Szyk's occupation as cartoonist, a small but potent tribute to his contribution to the Allied victory.⁵⁹



Moving announcement card. New York, 1944.

Despite the American patriotism Szyk had expressed throughout his artistic career, he was caught in the crossfire of the fervent McCarthy era. According to House Report No. 1954, prepared by the Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, 1950, Szyk maintained membership in, and worked for, many activist organizations, such as: The American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born; The American Slav Congress; Committee for Free Political Advocacy; Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee; Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace; People's Radio Foundation; and the Society for the Prevention of World War III.

Unfortunately for Szyk, most of these organizations came under observation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Even though each of these organizations was ultimately declared not subversive,⁶⁰ the FBI investigation into Szyk's associations caused him to lose commissions.⁶¹ Szyk's son George[s] sent a memorandum to friend, Judge Simon Rifkind, defending his father, stating that Szyk did not

belong to any political party and was even anti-Communist; he cited Szyk's artwork as testimony to his democratic values and commitment to the ideals of freedom.⁶²

The accusation of being un-American deeply disturbed Szyk. The stress may have been a contributing factor to his heart disease and deteriorating health. He was medically unable to attend the Washington, DC, exhibition of his series *Simon Bolivar and His Times*, held at the Venezuelan Embassy in July 1951; his son served as his representative.⁶³

Szyk never lived to be subpoenaed to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The death certificate reveals that Szyk had been treated for a coronary occlusion during the two years prior to his fatal acute myocardial failure on September 13, 1951, at his Weed Street home in New Canaan, CT.⁶⁴

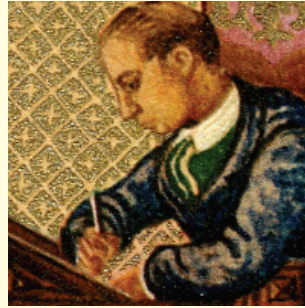
Julian Padowicz, who was present at Szyk's deathbed, stated, "He had such a solid understanding of who he was that other people's opinions didn't bother him...He knew who he was. He knew very well that he was a warrior through the art medium."⁶⁵ Szyk's friend, Judge Simon Rifkind, delivered the eulogy at his funeral.⁶⁶ Another eulogy was also delivered by Rabbi Ben-Zion Bokser of The Forest Hills Jewish Center, New York.

Arthur Szyk was buried in New Montefiore Cemetery within the plot belonging to the Forest Hills Jewish Center. The family headstone, standing over the graves of Arthur Szyk, his son Georges (died 1958), and his wife Julia (died 1974), bears an image of the menorah he designed for the synagogue's *Aron Ha-Kodesh* (Holy Ark). Judaism, art, and politics were as much a part of his death as they were of his life.



Arthur Szyk Footstone, New Montefiore Cemetery, Queens, New York.

Conclusion



Self-portrait,
Statute of Kalisz.
Paris, 1927.

Forms and documents are artifacts of daily life. When considered together, they reveal the milestones as well as the small details of a lifetime. Though typically considered ephemera, when viewed through the lens of history, such ephemera comprise the colors of the palette of life, revealing the rich and varied experiences of an individual.

In the introduction to the *Statute of Kalisz* (issued in 1264, and which was illuminated by Arthur Szyk in the late 1920s), the document which provided unprecedented privileges to the Jews of Poland, Duke Boleslaw the Pious states: "The deeds of man when unconfirmed by the voices of witnesses or by written documents, are bound to pass swiftly away and disappear from memory."⁶⁷ These words clearly resonated with Szyk and informed his work. His art addressed important historical and contemporary events in an effort to both revitalize their significance and preserve them for future generations. His self-portraits lend immediacy and continuity to his body of work and ensure that his personal role in its creation will not be forgotten.

The written documents that Szyk completed during his life fortunately have not disappeared from memory and they provide another perspective from which to consider his impassioned aims and deeds. They reveal the historical and political climate at the time of his birth, the details of his extensive travels, the support he provided to his extended family escaping from Hitler's regime, his ignorance of the fate of his immediate family trapped in Europe, his efforts to gain U.S. citizenship, and his commitment to fighting a war through art. Arthur Szyk was a man who held strong beliefs and values, upholding Jewish traditions and ideals of human dignity by making them eternal in his art and in the documents that survive from his life. ■

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*Self-portrait. Haman at the Gallows.
From The Book of Esther, 1950.*

Front Cover Artwork

Top Left: *Self-portrait, Dedication to the Jews of Lwów,
The Haggadah, Łódź, 1936.*

Top right: *Self-portrait, Ink and Blood, New York, 1944.*

Middle left: *He's at the end of his rope now...New York, 1943.*

Bottom left: *Self-portrait, Dedication to King George VI,
The Haggadah, Łódź, 1936.*

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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 exhibitions, publications, and 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: info@szyk.org.

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