

# ARTHUR SZYK



Art – Propaganda – Memory

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A collection of essays published in conjunction with the exhibition  
*In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Artist and Soldier for Human Rights*,  
held at the Fairfield University Art Museum, September 29 – December 16, 2023,  
and the symposium presented October 4 and 5, 2023.

The exhibition was organized by the University of California, Berkeley,  
The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life.

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Cover: Arthur Szyk, *My People, Samson in the Ghetto (the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto)*, 1945, watercolor, gouache, ink and graphite on board. Courtesy of the Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley.

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# DIRECTOR’S FOREWORD

Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) was a remarkable man, whose life and artistic and humanistic achievements we celebrate with this volume. It captures the essence of the two-day proceedings of the first symposium ever staged focusing on Szyk’s distinguished career. Organized by the Art Museum, it presented new scholarship about Szyk’s accomplishments.

The Art Museum is honored to be the place where we can bring our many communities together for the difficult conversations inspired by Szyk’s activist work around the subjects of antisemitism, fascism, totalitarianism, and racism, as well as where we can bring the scholarly community together to engage in dialogue to advance our understanding of his rich and important history as a Polish citizen, an illustrator, a Zionist, a refugee, an American patriot, a propaganda artist, an upstander, and much more.

Organized by the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley, the exhibition that inspired this symposium, *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Artist and Soldier for Human Rights*, is meaningfully organized around themes of human rights. We are very appreciative of the assistance of the entire team at the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life for helping us to bring this important exhibition to life in Fairfield. Special thanks are owed to Curator Francesco Spagnolo, Director Hannah Weisman, and Registrar Julie Franklin.

It is especially fitting that the Fairfield University Art Museum presented this exhibition, as our distinguished colleague, my trusted collaborator, and the exhibition’s coordinator, Philip I. Eliasoph, PhD, is a scholar of Szyk’s work who has been passionately teaching generations of Fairfield students in his popular ‘art and propaganda’ courses. These learning experiences challenged his students to identify and separate the uses and abuses of propaganda for war and peace, good or evil, while fulfilling their own duties as citizens contributing to the dynamics of a salutary democracy. As a leading expert in the field of American Realist art, he turned his attention to Szyk’s oeuvre in the major essay for this volume. Profound gratitude is due to Dr. Eliasoph for sharing his enthusiasm and expertise about Szyk, for authoring the text that closes this volume, and for helping bring the exhibition and its associated programs to fruition.

We are grateful to Irvin Ungar, Curator emeritus, Arthur Szyk Society, for his dedicated efforts over the last four decades in keeping the importance of Szyk’s artwork at the fore. We are so appreciative of his generosity (and the aid of his assistant Marni Gerber) as he supplied us with books, answered endless questions, contributed to the exhibition programming, and made a significant gift of Szyk artwork to the Museum’s collection.

Thanks as always go to the exceptional Museum team for their hard work in bringing the exhibition and symposium to life, and in stewarding this volume to publication: Michelle DiMarzo, Curator of Education and Academic Engagement; Megan Paqua, Museum Registrar; Rosalinda Rodriguez, Museum Assistant; and Kate Wellen, Museum Educator. We are grateful to Edmund Ross for his design, and the Digital Design team for the creation of this beautiful book.

We wish to express our special appreciation to University President, Mark Nemec, PhD, who has demonstrated a keen interest in this exhibition, and for his deeply personal commitment to the success of this special project. Father Gerry R. Blaszcak, S.J. deserves a note of thanks for unifying our Mission with the urgent lessons revealed in Szyk’s painted portraits of the crises of the human spirit – sacred and profane – witnessed through his testimony in art about our past and present.

Thank you to our exhibition co-sponsors, Glenn Dynner, Director, Bennett Center for Judaic Studies; Gavriel Rosenfeld, President, Center for Jewish History; and Carin Savel, CEO, Jewish Federation of Greater Fairfield Country – and a lifelong Szyk fan herself!

We are so pleased that this exhibition has brought us the opportunity to make new friends with synagogue clergy, professional staff and educators throughout the Jewish community of Connecticut.

This exhibition and book would not have been realized without the support of our donors and sponsors, so we extend huge thanks to all of them, but also to our colleagues in the Advancement Department and the Office of Research and Grants who worked collaboratively with us to help us reach our goals. Special thanks are owed to Marie-Laure Kugel who shepherded this project from its inception.

The symposium and this volume would not have been possible without the rich contributions of the carefully selected scholars who used their expertise to examine and illuminate Szyk’s life and work. We are indebted to each author – representing many of the leading academic authorities in the nation – for devoting their time and thought to transforming our understanding of Szyk with their enlightening insights and critical perspectives. Our hope is that these proceedings will become yet another cornerstone for the expanding recognition of Szyk’s artistic triumphs.

Carey Mack Weber  
Frank and Clara Meditz Executive Director  
Fairfield University Art Museum



# UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

Dear friends:

Fairfield University was established in 1942, as an act of hope during a time of war. It is striking to me that at this founding moment in our history, just a few miles away in Westport and later in New Canaan, Arthur Szyk was in our broader community creating some of his most enduring and powerful works of satire and protest, focusing the world’s attention on the pernicious dangers of intolerance, illiberalism, and hatred.

In a very real sense, the moral certainty that animates Szyk’s work resonates with the courage and faith that inspired our University’s foundation. As an institution, we are very much a product of this turning point in the history of the 20th century, and our mission continues as an ongoing expression of the values that are so deeply illustrated and explored in Szyk’s illustrations – works that reflect and uphold the dignity of the human spirit, concretely represent the belief that human love and spiritual aspiration cannot be suppressed or denied, and ultimately proclaim that the truth – pursued through the application of reason and faith – will set us free.

As a self-described “soldier in art,” and also a Connecticut resident, Szyk’s compelling political cartoons placed Nazi genocide and tyranny on the covers of America’s most popular magazines during the war. He was one of the first public figures to bring attention to the Holocaust – exposing the magnitude of the crimes that were being perpetrated, and thereby strengthening our resolve as a nation to do whatever was necessary to fight for the preservation of our values, and for the future of our civilization.

We are honored to bring *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Artist and Soldier for Human Rights* to our campus – the exhibition’s only stop in the Northeast after having come from the University of California and the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. Our community members have given so much of themselves in support of this exhibition and its programming. In particular: Fairfield’s Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, PhD, professor of history and president of the Center for Jewish History in New York – which houses the world’s largest collection of artifacts celebrating Jewish history and culture outside of Israel; Glenn Dynner, PhD, Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Judaic Studies and director of our Bennett Center for Judaic Studies; and Philip Eliasoph, PhD, professor of art history & visual culture, and Sam and Bettie Roberts Lecturer in Judaic Studies, who was central to the effort to bring this exhibition to Fairfield, and whose essay enriches this catalogue.

We also are most grateful to Ellen Umansky, PhD, professor emerita of religious studies, who first brought the work of her lifetime colleague and friend Rabbi Irvin Ungar to Dr. Eliasoph’s attention as they discussed the annual Roberts Lecture in the fall of 2019. After presenting Ungar’s livestreamed talk (due to the pandemic) in March 2020, plans began immediately to bring this exhibition to the Fairfield University Art Museum. For his contributions at that point, we wish to acknowledge the collegial assistance of Francesco Spagnolo, PhD, associate adjunct professor in the Department of Music and the Center for Jewish Studies, and curator of the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California at Berkeley. Along with his team, we were able to coordinate the travel logistics allowing Fairfield’s community to honor, enjoy, and take inspiration from the artistic legacy of Szyk.

We invite all who engage with this exhibition to participate in the ongoing dialogue with our history and culture that we seek to undertake at Fairfield every day — as a learning institution for our students, as well as a destination for the arts and culture and the free exchange of ideas for our community. The greatest tribute we can pay to the spirit of Arthur Szyk is to continue in our unwavering commitment as a university to promote inquiry, and to uphold the dignity of each and every person, clear-eyed in our obligation to humbly serve the well-being of humankind, without reservation or prejudice.

With best wishes and utmost gratitude,

Mark R. Nemec, PhD  
President  
Professor of Politics



Fig. 1 Arthur Szyk, *Freedom of Speech*, from *The Four Freedoms*, stamps executed to support The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People, NYC, 1942. Washington DC, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Gift of Gregg and Michelle Philipson (2017.227.43)



# ARTHUR SZYK: DEFENDING DIGNITY AND RIGHTS

Gerald R. Blaszcak, S.J.

There is perhaps no time that is not “real,” actual, opportune for an exhibition of Arthur Szyk’s works, particularly one organized around the theme of human rights. But who could deny that here and now we find ourselves caught up in a maelstrom of events and currents of thought which make it especially urgent to welcome his works with all their power and provocation? Arthur Szyk’s enduring artistic legacy draws us into the essential conversations and self-examination which must characterize Fairfield as a Jesuit, Catholic University. At the first assembly of the International Association of Jesuit Universities in Bilbao, Spain in 2018, Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Jesuits, reminded his hearers that the aim of Jesuit education is to prepare young persons to embrace their roles as world citizens:

Citizenship is that facet of our human existence through which the individual becomes a person by recognizing others as their equals in terms of dignity and rights; they are no longer inferior and despicable beings, who must be eliminated because they do not deserve to be among us, or competitors or potential enemies to be eliminated because they are a threat. Citizens’ awareness leads us to see others as people who, because of their diversity, contribute to the common life of all, as companions on the way, necessary for everyone to have a full life (Loyola, 2018).

Speaking to members of that same organization four years later, Fr. Sosa developed this theme, insisting that Jesuit universities contribute to the deepening and expansion of democracy, especially where it is most threatened. He asks all Jesuit universities to combat the promotion of “post-truth, of disinformation and the uncontrollable diffusion of fake news and conspiracy theories that distort reality.” He insists:

For our universities the challenge of participating in public life and offering political formation of the members of the university community includes promoting governance based on truth, strong institutions, and the rule of law. We must contribute to a social environment that considers to be normal an ideological pluralism, a dialogue among alternative proposals (Boston, 2022).

Fairfield University’s presentation of the exhibition *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Artist and Soldier for Human Rights* is an expression of our determination to accept as fully as possible our responsibility to identify and confront the currents of our culture which endanger the health of the culture and the very institutions which guard and guarantee human rights and the flourishing of a democratic society.

Finally, this is the “real time” when we must urgently sound the call against resurgent antisemitism. At the end of his magisterial study of the Holocaust, Yale’s Timothy Snyder writes:

Understanding the Holocaust is our chance, perhaps our last one, to preserve humanity. That is not enough for its victims. No accumulation of good, no matter how vast, undoes an evil, no rescue of the future, no matter how successful, undoes a murder in the past...The evil that was done to the Jews – to each Jewish child, woman, and man – cannot be undone. Yet it can be recorded, and it can be understood. Indeed, it must be understood so that its like can be prevented in the future” (*Black Earth: The Holocaust As History and Warning* [2015], 344).

There is one more reason for this Jesuit, Catholic University to welcome this exhibition into our Art Museum. It provides us with an opportunity to engage in a full examination, an open reckoning with the facts of Catholic, and particularly Jesuit, conduct leading up to and during the Holocaust. Much work has already been done to study the history of Jesuit hostility towards Jews, particularly the violent attacks against Jews in the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*. While there were courageous Jesuits who resisted National Socialism, sometimes at the price of their lives (Jesuits who rescued Jews who would therefore be recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Israel’s Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center), and while there were Jesuits who played crucial roles in the revision of Catholic teaching about the Jews that found formal acceptance at Vatican II, the Society of Jesus, up to the present day, has not imitated Pope St. John Paul II in his model of self-examination, acknowledgement of guilt, and humble expression of repentance.

What American Jesuits have undertaken with regard to their enslavement of and trafficking of enslaved Black men, women and children still remains to be done by the Society of Jesus world-wide with respect to its long and shameful history of antisemitism and anti-Jewish animosity. May Fairfield University’s presentation of this exhibition be one modest step forward toward full recognition of Jesuits’ individual and corporate responsibility, and toward a forthright expression of sorrow and contrition. Further, let our celebration of the art of Arthur Szyk represent grateful affirmation by Jesuits and by

all Christians of the enduring validity of God’s Covenant with his people Israel, the irrevocable calling of the Jewish people to be a source of blessing to the world, to all peoples for all times.

Gerald R. Blaszcak, S.J. holds a PhD in New Testament from Harvard University. He has taught and held administrative posts in various American Universities, as well as at Hekima College, Nairobi, Kenya. At present he is Fairfield’s Alumni Chaplain and Special Assistant to the President.



Fig. 2 Arthur Szyk, *Poland* from the *Heritage of Nations* series, 1946, watercolor, gouache, pen and ink, and pencil on board. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.182)



# THE ARTHUR SZYK LEGACY CONTINUES...

## Irvin Ungar

I was not quite three years old when Arthur Szyk died in 1951. I first met him in 1975, when, as a newly ordained rabbi, I fell in love with his *Haggadah*. About the same year, I also met the young budding Judaica scholar-to-be, Ellen Umansky, for the first time. Fast forward nearly fifty years and I received an invitation from Bennett Center director, Dr. Umansky, to deliver its biennial Samuel and Bettie Roberts Lecture in Jewish Art at Fairfield University on “Arthur Szyk and the Art of the Haggadah.” Through that Zoom presentation I met a kindred spirit, faculty member Dr. Philip I. Eliasoph, and the Connecticut roots which Arthur Szyk planted by settling in New Canaan in 1946 blossomed into this exhibition in Fairfield, some twelve miles from Szyk’s Weed Street ten-acre wooded estate.

Within this opening paragraph are hints of what are all integral parts of my three-decades-long journey to create a renaissance of interest in Arthur Szyk’s art and the man himself. In my post-rabbinic career as an antiquarian bookseller and art dealer, anything I could do to make a once world-famous and virtually forgotten artist famous again, became my calling card and my agenda. This included: a dedication to Szyk’s magnum opus, *The Haggadah*, which led to my publishing a new edition; the meeting of fascinating and creative people who would join the Irvin Ungar-Arthur Szyk journey; the delivering of lectures across the United States, Europe, and Israel widening the Szyk reach; and the assembling of the world’s largest collection of Szyk original art / archives and using them for extensive research and writing, while creating world-class exhibitions to ensure his legacy. The result: the acquisition of my collection by The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley, and its professionally-curated exhibition now at Fairfield University.

What is the Szyk legacy? In his words: “Art is not my aim, it is my means.” Szyk saw himself as a fighting artist, a “soldier in art,” using his pen as his sword and brush as its ally, in his perpetual pursuit of justice and democratic freedoms. Hating hatred, demonizing evil, attacking bigotry and racism, while elevating the dignity of the individual and the soul of humanity were at his very core.

In the year 2000, the Library of Congress held its first exhibition of the new millennium – it was entitled “Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom.” Fifty years earlier on July 4, 1950, on the steps of New Canaan’s town hall, Arthur Szyk’s illuminated *Declaration of Independence of the United States* was dedicated, the chairman of the event calling Szyk “one of the world’s great free men who has dedicated his life and art to the preservation of



Fig. 3 Arthur Szyk, *Thomas Jefferson's Oath*, 1951, watercolor, gouache, ink, and colored pencil on board. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.224)

freedom.” In the prior decade of the 1940s, Szyk would earn the reputation among the military establishment as a “citizen-soldier” of the free world, serving as America’s leading anti-Nazi artist and waging a personal war against Hitler.

This ongoing legacy of the man and his art of standing up to tyranny and fighting for justice continues, as testified to by leading scholars who

are publishing their essays on Szyk for the first time within the pages that follow. Thanks for this are due to the Fairfield University Art Museum’s executive director Carey Mack Weber, and newly appointed Special Assistant to the University President for arts and culture, Professor Philip I. Eliasoph. Working together, hand-in-hand to make this exhibition and its accompanying educational programming possible, they too are now part of the Szyk legacy.

Irvin Ungar is the world’s foremost expert on the art of Arthur Szyk and the tireless force behind the Szyk renaissance. A former pulpit rabbi fluent in Jewish history and tradition, Irvin is the CEO and founder of Historicana, an antiquarian book firm and small publishing house of Szyk imprints.

Beginning in 1987, Irvin first specialized in Szyk’s remarkable illustrated books and quickly expanded his repertoire to include original art, fine art prints, and other important Szyk works. He has curated and consulted for numerous Szyk exhibitions at major institutions worldwide,

including: the New-York Historical Society (New York City); the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin); the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC); and the Library of Congress.

Irvin is the author of *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art* (2017 National Jewish Book Award winner) and *Justice Illuminated: The Art of Arthur Szyk* (1998). His most recent book, *Arthur Szyk Preserved: Institutional Collections of Original Art*, was published in 2023. Additionally, Irvin is the co-producer of the documentary film, “Soldier in Art: Arthur Szyk,” and the publisher of the luxury limited edition of *The Szyk Haggadah* (2008). He also served as the curator of The Arthur Szyk Society (1997-2017) and its traveling exhibition program, and continues lecturing and speaking about Szyk on university campuses, museums and other venues around the world.

Irvin’s memoirs on his life with Arthur Szyk have been accepted by a major university press and will be forthcoming.

# DEPICTING EVIL: ARTHUR SZYK’S ANTI-NAZI ARTWORK<sup>1</sup>

Steven Luckert

The origin of all art is what we call propaganda. The art of Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Renaissance, was the propaganda of religion. I do not say that art is my aim; art is my means.

~ Arthur Szyk, 1944<sup>2</sup>

No watchword better fits Szyk’s personal philosophy and identity better than Action – Not Pity, a phrase frequently used in his publicity campaigns on behalf of the various committees established by the Revisionist Zionist, Peter Bergson (Hillel Kook), in the 1940s. The artist’s political goal was not just to call attention to the Nazi persecution and mass murder of Europe’s Jews but to urge Americans do something about it, whether by joining the Allies in the war against Germany, demanding an official governmental policy towards rescue, or raising funds to aid the victims. In doing so, Szyk aimed to put Jews back on the “map” and to help put an end to the Nazi threat to civilization.

While it would go well beyond the limits of this essay to fully examine the extent of Szyk’s activism either on behalf of the Jews or the Allies during the Second World War, I would like to share some thoughts on how he created a potent, multi-faceted image of the Nazis as an existential threat, not just to the Jews, but to democracy and the world.

Arthur Szyk prided himself on being a propagandist. While such an epithet seems anathema to contemporary audiences, for Szyk it meant he consciously created artwork that carried a message. His causes varied, from forging a strong, heroic self-image of the Jews, to countering negative antisemitic stereotypes and bolstering national pride, to calling out American racism against Blacks. Szyk aimed to shape public opinion and behavior. And this was particularly true during the Second World War, and the Holocaust.

In July 1940, shortly after his arrival in Canada from England, he told reporters that:

There is no use painting flowers or landscapes any more. Art must be mobilized – like everything else.

He further appealed to his fellow artists to draw lessons from the enemy:

We have a lot to learn from the Germans and Italians, who have used the propaganda of the artist to an immense extent. Just because we know our cause is just, we should not leave things undone.<sup>3</sup>

Fighting a just cause for Szyk embodied promoting patriotism, democratic values and exposing the subterfuges of the enemy. In common with most propagandists in the United States, Szyk aimed not just to show what the Allies were fighting for, but what they were fighting against. To do this he drew upon the rich traditions of Jewish and Christian legend, iconography, and symbolism to depict the Nazi as the personification of evil and a menace to mankind.

Certainly, his wide array of wartime caricatures of Hitler, Goebbels, and Göring go beyond the sinister and tragic to incorporate the comic, the vain, and the soon-to-be-vanquished. Such variety is purposeful on the part of the cartoonist since audiences not only had to fear the enemy, they had to believe that he was not invincible. Laughter and ridicule served as the cartoonist’s weapon to mock one’s foe by exposing his weaknesses.

Bolstering morale marched hand-in-hand with a brutal depiction of the Nazi; both served to promote Allied war aims. Szyk commonly used the self-portrait to forge an image of himself as a “citizen soldier.” Here (fig. 4, p. 4) he wears a military-style uniform adorned with Polish military decorations, using his pen to skewer the Nazis. The picture-within-the picture shows Nazi leader, Hermann Göring, resplendent in medals, posing with a skeleton, the traditional Christian symbol of Death.

The skeletal figure of Death features prominently in Szyk’s imagery of the Nazis. Death is commonly shown in the company of Nazi leaders or wearing a German military uniform. The symbol of Death also conjures up links to Satan, since it was the Devil’s seduction of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that in Christian tradition resulted in human mortality. To be sure, the Devil has long been a feature in wartime propaganda; American and British cartoonists in the First World War often showed the Kaiser in diabolic collusion with Satan.

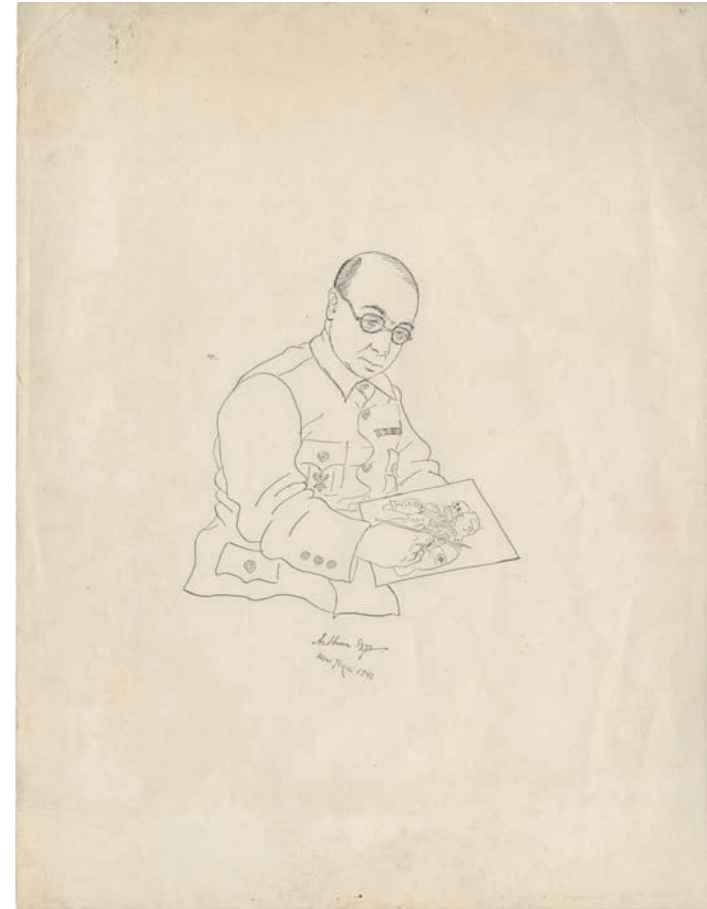


Fig. 4 Arthur Szyk, *Untitled Self-Portrait*, 1941, pen and ink on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.224)

What makes Szyk’s anti-Nazi artwork so fascinating are the ways in which he skillfully drew on the rich legacies of Judaism and Christianity. As an artist-activist, he was attracted to the stories detailing successful human combat against evil and oppression found in rich biblical literature of both religious traditions. His illustrations of the *Book of Esther*, the *Haggadah*, and the *Book of Job* provide ample evidence of this. Yet Szyk’s Jewish artwork served primarily to address the present, rather than depict the past. His choices

of Jewish texts often reflected his concerns about contemporary antisemitism or promoting Zionism. He supplied heroic role models from the Jewish past, such as Judith, David, or Moses, to encourage his fellow Jews to be “Modern Maccabees,” whether in British-Mandate Palestine or in the ghettos and forests of German-occupied Europe. Likewise, Szyk linked the Jewish struggle for survival and liberation to the successful defeat of their enemies, whether Haman, the Egyptian pharaoh, or Amalek. His artistic representations of evil also combined iconographical symbols that were well-known to Christian audiences as well. In his *Haggadah*, the Jewish text read yearly at Passover, Szyk aimed to transform it into a condemnation of Nazism and a plea for Great Britain to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish emigration from Europe. He originally painted swastikas on the ancient Egyptian oppressors of the Jews as well as on the snakes. Ultimately, he was compelled by nervous publishers in Europe to cover them up, rather than provoke Nazi Germany’s wrath.<sup>4</sup> The artistic allusion to the snake, the embodiment of Satan in the Garden of Evil who seduced Adam and Eve with his diabolical wiles, is abundantly clear. During the war years in the United States, Szyk included swastika-emblazoned snakes in ornate works as diverse as *Arsenal of Democracy* (1942) (fig. 25, p. 37) and *The White Paper* (1943).<sup>5</sup>

It may seem surprising for a Jewish artist, such as Szyk, to draw heavily on Christian iconography, but he did so with a purpose. Aside from using symbols and stories familiar to a broader population, he gave them new meaning, often transforming legends that had commonly been used to vilify Jews from ancient times until the present, into potent anti-Nazi messages. Szyk reclaimed both Jesus and the Wandering Jew for the Jewish people, portraying them as would-be victims of Nazi racial hatred and as justifications for the creation of a Jewish state in Israel.

Perhaps most strikingly, he repeatedly alluded to the legend of the Antichrist. Here too, Szyk repurposed the symbol for a contemporary cause. From the Church Fathers onwards, the Antichrist had been closely linked with Jews, sometimes being described as being a member of the tribe of Dan, being circumcised in Jerusalem, or even being the Jewish messiah. Such notions survived for centuries in Europe. As Michael Hagemeister recently pointed out, Sergei Nilus, the figure most responsible for early promotion of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, proclaimed the idea that the

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not reflect those of any other party.

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from his interview with Mary Bragiotti in “Szyk Makes the Axis Writhe,” *New York Post Weekly Picture Magazine*, June 3, 1944, 5.

<sup>3</sup> “Art Must Be Mobilized Declares Great Polish Painter,” *The Ottawa Journal*, Wednesday, July 31, 1940, 12.

<sup>4</sup> See Joseph P. Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 93.

<sup>5</sup> Irvin Ungar, *Justice Illuminated: The Art of Arthur Szyk* (Burlingame, CA: Historicana, 1999), plates 13 and 20.



Antichrist would come in the form of a Jewish messiah, who would mobilize Jews to set up his kingdom on earth.<sup>6</sup> While it is unclear if Szyk was aware of Nilus' apocalyptic introduction to *The Protocols*, he certainly knew of the Antichrist legend and the Book of Revelation, which helped to spawn it.

Traditionally, Christian writers had used the Antichrist legend to attack contemporary political figures, such as the Roman emperor Nero, or the Catholic Pope during the Protestant Reformation. Ironically, Szyk drew on this legend to condemn Adolf Hitler as the embodiment of human evil at a time, when its popularity seemed to be waning. According to religious scholar, Bernard McGinn, there were very few direct references by American premillennialists or others to Hitler as the Antichrist during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Szyk, a proud Jew, resurrected this tale during the Second World War. Although this has been touched on briefly in discussing his two best known works on this theme, *Anti-Christ* (1942) and *Walpurgis Night* (1942),<sup>8</sup> he made repeated references to the legend in his wartime art. While sometimes these allusions are difficult to decipher, and are often missed, one can discern these by reflecting back on the Christian legend.

Traditionally, the Antichrist was described as a false messiah, a false prophet, whose actions mimicked those of Jesus, but predicated on evil. He aimed at world domination, persecuted and murdered those who refused to follow him, and surrounded himself with temporal leaders who served as his lackeys spouting his blasphemous messages around the globe. The Antichrist is often depicted as sitting on a throne and sitting in judgment.

Szyk incorporated many of these motifs into his anti-Nazi caricatures and cartoons. Hitler is shown as a false prophet or false messiah holding his bible, *Mein Kampf*, aloft or marching forward under the symbol of the Nazi swastika, the *Hakenkreuz* (twisted cross). Although it is unclear how well Szyk knew Hitler's speeches, from the 1920s onward, the Nazi leader frequently referred to himself as a "prophet," most infamously in his so-call "prophecy speech" of January 30, 1939.<sup>9</sup> To the cheers of the assembled Nazi Reichstag delegates, he proclaimed:



Fig. 5 Arthur Szyk, *Berlin Sportpalast: To the Shelter*, 1942, ink on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life (2017.5.1.90)

I want again to be a prophet. If international Finance-Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed in plunging the peoples of the earth once again in a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

On multiple occasions, Hitler publicly and privately referenced this prophecy during the Second World War, when Nazi Germany was carrying out the systematic mass murder of Europe's Jews. Szyk's image *Berlin Sportpalast: To the Shelter* (fig. 5, above) alludes to Hitler's September 30, 1942 speech at the locale in which he stated:

In Germany too, the Jews once laughed at my prophecies. I don't know whether they are still laughing, or whether they have already lost the inclination to laugh, but I can assure you that everywhere they will stop laughing. With these prophecies I shall prove to be right.<sup>10</sup>

Szyk portrayed the "prophet" ranting and raving to his fellow Nazis, while his boot appears to be stepping on a skull marked with the word, *Jude* (Jew), and a bullet hole. His drawing reminds his audience that Hitler is fulfilling his diabolical prophecy and murdering Europe's Jews. Szyk also commonly featured Hitler and his allies plotting world domination, by showing them before a globe planting their twisted cross in territories envisioned for conquest.



Fig. 6 Arthur Szyk, *Madness*, 1941, watercolor, gouache, ink, and graphite on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life (2017.5.1.70)

In this image (fig. 6, p. 6), one sees multiple references to Christian iconography, ranging from the skeletal figures wearing SS uniforms and representing Death to the swastika-marked rattlesnake. The German inscription refers to a 1932 Hitler Youth song, written by Hans Baumann, which Szyk parodies. The original German lyric is:

[und] heute gehört uns Deutschland  
Und morgen die ganze Welt.

(Today Germany belongs to us  
And tomorrow the entire world.)

Szyk slightly altered this to "Today Europe belongs to us," an indication that continental Europe has already fallen under Nazi control. The artist also includes a quote from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, referencing the inscription on the gates of Hell:

All Hope Abandon Ye Who Enter Here.

One of the SS-uniformed figures of Death places these words over Europe, while his companion pastes a banner of Nazi propaganda over the Americas indicating that this will be the next target of Nazi machinations.

In *Madness* and in a series of drawings titled or subtitled, *A Madman's Dream*, Szyk alludes to the Antichrist legend, by projecting the false messiah's dreams of world conquest and what the future will be.

Szyk's art provides us with powerful insights into his thinking and his political activism. He used his pens and brushes to call public attention to antisemitism, racism, and the Nazi threat and urged action to combat these evils. Today, when these evils once again raise their ugly heads, it is important to recall his work and words. An "artist" he reminded us, "cannot remain neutral in these times."

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Hagemeister, *The perennial conspiracy theory: reflections on the history of the Protocols of the elders of Zion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).  
<sup>7</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 256-257.  
<sup>8</sup> See Steven Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002), 77-84.  
<sup>9</sup> See the German footage of his speech before the Reichstag, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline-event/holocaust/1939-1941/hitler-speech-to-german-parliament>  
<sup>10</sup> Franklin Watts, ed., *Voices of History 1942-43: Speeches and Papers of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Chang, Hitler, and Other Leaders* (New York: Gramercy Publishing Company, 1943), 507-525, 519.



# A TIME OF HOPE: ARTHUR SZYK’S *STATUTE DE KALISZ*

Glenn Dynner

In 1927, Arthur Szyk undertook a monumental task: an artistic rendering of the very first guarantee of Polish Jewish rights, the 1264 Statute of Kalisz, also known as the Statutes of Boleslaw the Pious, in the form of a medieval illuminated manuscript. It would not be the only time that Szyk would draw inspiration from archaic formats – note, for example, his famous *Haggadah*. But his *Statutes of Boleslaw the Pious* was unique in its Polish-Jewishness. In forty-seven lush, meticulous plates, Szyk managed to blend Polish and Jewish histories into a paragon of ethnonreligious coexistence.

In 1264, Boleslaw had issued a charter guaranteeing religious freedom, economic liberties, and physical protection to Jews who settled in his principality, Kalisz. His statutes were patterned on recent charters granted by Frederick of Austria (1244), Bella IV of Hungary (1251), and King Ottokar II of Bohemia (1254), all apparently intended to attract Jewish settlement and thereby stimulate local commerce. Boleslaw’s charter, in turn, inspired similar privileges in Silesian principalities. It was later confirmed, ratified, and expanded by King Casimir the Great (1334 and 1364) of the recently unified Polish Kingdom, and then extended to newly incorporated cities like Lwów (1367) and eventually Lithuania.<sup>1</sup> It became the basis for colorful legends of Jewish acceptance, as well, such as the belief that the word for “Poland” in Hebrew, *Polin*, means “sojourn here,” and was inscribed on a parchment that fell from Heaven amid the very first Jewish immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

For Szyk, Boleslaw’s statutes represented nothing less than the triumph of good over evil. Lest the point be lost on Christian viewers, an image of St. George vanquishing the dragon of intolerance virtually leaps out of the text of the statute’s first page. There was, admittedly, a *quid pro quo*. Several plates emphasize the Jewish economic contributions that resulted from Polish toleration – for example, stately Jewish merchants are depicted guiding burly workers with bulging

sacks of grain onto a merchant ship (fig. 7, below). Poland, the image seems to say, became the “bread basket of Europe” thanks to Jewish commerce (in actuality, the Polish nobility dominated the international grain trade, while Jews traded more in secondary products and leased the nobility’s non-agricultural enterprises).<sup>3</sup> But Szyk also depicts Jews fighting heroically and selflessly for Polish independence. The overriding message is that tolerance is not only a matter of justice; it yields prosperity and genuine loyalty.

Szyk’s *Statutes of Boleslaw the Pious* made a timely appeal to tolerance. A decade earlier, in 1918, Poland had reemerged after more than a century of foreign domination. However, notwithstanding the fact that some Jews had participated in the fight for independence (whom Szyk made sure to portray), the state’s reemergence had been accompanied by bloody, carnivalesque pogroms. They were not nearly as devastating as those occurring in Ukrainian territories, but they did result in widespread destruction, trauma, and around three hundred deaths – in Lwów alone, up to 150 Jews were killed; in Vilna (Wilno/Vilnius),



Fig. 7 Arthur Szyk, from *The Statute of Kalisz*, Munich, F. Bruckman, 1932, offset lithograph. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.2.65)



Fig. 8 Arthur Szyk, from *The Statute of Kalisz*, Munich, F. Bruckman, 1932, offset lithograph. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.2.1.65)

75. At the same time, Marshall Józef Pilsudski, hero of Polish independence, consistently promoted a more tolerant vision of Poland and denounced antisemitism. When he seized power by means of a coup in 1926 the democratic-minded Szyk was not disappointed, for he saw Pilsudski as the best chance for Jewish safety from Poland’s darker spirits. He dedicated his *Statutes of Boleslaw the Pious* to Pilsudski.

Pilsudski was quite happy to help promote *this* version of Poland. He actively supported Szyk’s project through the Polish embassy in Paris, where Szyk currently resided, supplying him with texts of the statute and images of historical figures.<sup>4</sup> The actual Poland was not much of a beacon of tolerance, however. While Jews had finally been emancipated, each successive regime attempted to “Polonize” their culture by means of mandatory ethnonationalist Polish primary schooling, and “Polonize” the economy by attempting to eliminate Jewish economic niches,

especially in trade. Nevertheless, Pilsudski made positive gestures towards the country’s national minorities, staved off blatantly anti-Jewish measures, and suppressed anti-Jewish violence. Jews felt physically safe within his semi-autocratic system.

Szyk’s *Statutes of Boleslaw the Pious*, after initial gallery and journal appearances, was published in 525 copies in 1932.<sup>5</sup> Alas, the Nazi seizure of power in neighboring Germany the following year, and the accompanying anti-Jewish legislation, violence, and despoliation there, breathed new life into Poland’s anti-Jewish, ethnonationalist Right. Pilsudski’s death in May, 1935, ushered in an era of openly antisemitic propaganda, violent anti-Jewish boycotts and deadly pogroms, in addition to legislative assaults on kosher slaughtering. There was a growing consensus that Jews should leave Poland.<sup>6</sup> When the Nazis invaded in September, 1939, they found a tense, divided, and weakened Poland. Szyk, soon safely in America, put his talents towards sounding the alarm about Nazi genocide.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100-1800* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1982), 25; Francois Guesnet and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Sources on Jewish Self-Government in the Polish Lands from Its Inception to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland—Legends of Origin: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), ch. 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Moshe Rosman, “Polish Jews in the Gdansk Trade in the Late 17th and Early 18th Centuries,” in *Danzig, Between East and West. Aspects of Modern Jewish History*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph P. Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole* (London: Littman, 2004), 52.

<sup>5</sup> See Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia vol. III: 1914 to 2008* (Oxford: Littman, 2012), 73; Glenn Dynner, *The Light of Learning: Hasidism in Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> The Polish government advocated Polish “cultural self-defense” and “economic independence” from Jews. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 86-91; Anna Cichopek-Gajraj and Glenn Dynner, “Pogroms in Modern Poland, 1918-1946,” in Gene Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad, eds., *Pogroms: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).



# SZYK’S HOMETOWN: ŁÓDŹ, POLAND, AND THE HOLOCAUST

Wendy Lower

Fame and memory do not go hand in hand. This is what one journalist reported from Łódź, Poland in 2022 after a futile search in the city for any trace of the famous Łódź-born artist Arthur Szyk (1894-1951). There are no statues, plaques, or street-names in Łódź honoring the renowned illustrator, caricaturist, and highly-decorated Polish patriot (recipient of the Golden Cross of Merit in 1931). His artwork is not on display in local museums.<sup>1</sup> His name does not appear in the tourism literature published by the city of Łódź that touts its multiethnic roots and notable figures.<sup>2</sup>

However this memory loss may be restored as more Polish academics and journalists have started to recognize Szyk and his Łódź years, which he spoke fondly of as his “turbulent youth.”<sup>3</sup> This essay reclaims Szyk’s Polish roots in Łódź, the textile-factory town he felt connected to “with a thousand threads;” and traces the fate of the Jewish community he left behind including family lost in the Holocaust.

For most of his life Szyk self-identified as a Pole and a Jew. His father Solomon had migrated to Poland from the Russian empire to secure a better life and succeeded, directing a factory and then establishing a family business with his two brothers until he died in the early 1920s. Szyk’s mother, Eugenia managed the household and cared for Arthur and his younger brother Bernard. She was also known for opening the home to the needy and her charity made a strong impression on young Arthur who fought for the oppressed for his entire life.<sup>4</sup> From an early age, Arthur drew portraits, and was known for entertaining guests at their home, and people on the street. He recreated biblical scenes inspired by the intricate weaves and bright colors of the textiles and tapestries that surrounded him.

In Łódź and across Europe, the “Jewish Question” generated many answers for Jews and non-Jews alike and created more cleavages across society. Middle class Jews like the Szyk family aligned themselves with the Poles and pursued

assimilation; others looked to the Holy Land and joined the Zionist movement; the working class pinned their hopes on socialist reforms and representation in the Bund. Industrial magnates like Izrael Poznanski (1833-1900) built urban palaces with Venetian mosaics and ornate facades similar to the Vienna Secessionists. The most wealthy and orthodox in Łódź sustained the community in various ways, e.g., orphanages, schools, hospitals, and prayer houses. Szyk was a beneficiary of such philanthropy. The prominent Hazamir literary and musical society sponsored his tour of Palestine and the Near East in 1914. This trip transformed Szyk’s politics and aesthetics. He embraced Zionism and the orientalism of Jewish art.<sup>5</sup>

Pre-WWI Łódź fell within the imperial realm of Russia’s Congress Poland. Polish culture dominated in this industrial boomtown that drew fortune-seekers, investors, master weavers, and laborers. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews founded publishing houses and bookstores, co-financed the first tram system, and managed more than 100 factories. The population expanded to 506,100 people, becoming one of the larger cities in Europe (Poles comprised 49%, Jews 34%, Germans 14.8%, and Russians 1.3%). During World War I, Szyk experienced German occupation, witnessing the end of this golden age of Jewish economic prosperity and multiethnic coexistence. He depicted these economic and social downturns in a series of cartoons printed on postcards in 1919.

For Łódź and the rest of the nascent Second Polish Republic, the Great War continued in a struggle against the spread of Soviet communism. Szyk fought the Reds, reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel in the cavalry. During his service, he intervened to protect Jews facing pogroms. Szyk also weaponized his pen and sharp wit as artistic director of the propaganda department of the Polish army in Łódź. Peace finally came in 1921 and Poland retained its independence. By the late 1920s and early 1930s,

Szyk’s fame reached a national level. In 1932, Szyk dedicated his painting, *The Statute of Kalisz*, to Marshal Pilsudski, the uncontested leader of Poland and legendary war hero who held fast to a multiethnic Polish state against the increasing Polish xenophobia and antisemitism.<sup>6</sup>

In 1930s Łódź the most prominent leader of the Jewish community was Jacob Leib Mincberg, a pious man with a modern flair who, like Szyk, admired the Polish statesman Josef Pilsudski, observed Polish holidays, sang the anthems, and urged all Jews to do the same. Interwar crises made this attitude increasingly difficult, especially as the Polish government introduced quotas, segregation, and took over the Jews’ secular and private institutions, hospitals and schools leaving the kehil’s leaders prone to “endless bickering” and “spectacles of squabbling and catcalls” and “chronic, paralyzing deadlock.”<sup>7</sup> After Pilsudski’s death in 1935, anti-Jewish violence increased in Łódź: five bombings and several murders occurred in 1936 alone, triggered by the Polish parliament’s law regulating Jewish ritual slaughter, what Mincberg called a “local version of the Nuremberg Laws.” Indeed the Łódź kehile saw the looming threats. Just before Hitler came to power in 1933, the kehile sent a letter in English to the League of Nations protesting the persecution of Jewish minorities in Germany as an assault on all Jewish people.<sup>8</sup>

Szyk’s hometown was also a special place in the eyes of Nazi invaders who rolled into Łódź on September 9, 1939. Wehrmacht tanks were greeted by a cheering local German population; a few days later, Hitler stopped to acknowledge his Volk. While his deputy, SS and Police Chief Heinrich Himmler embarked on resettlement programs to “Germanize” the region, in Łódź proper the Nazi governor Arthur Karl Greiser and local SS and police forces established the first major Jewish ghetto (in 1939 there were 227,000 Jews in Łódź, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest urban population of Jews in Europe).<sup>9</sup> Escorted by a newly formed

Jewish police force, Szyk’s mother Eugenia (b. 1871) and brother Bernard (b. 1898) joined the rest of the population consigned to the city’s slums in an area less than one square mile. Besides a bed, each person was allowed to bring one suitcase containing clothing and linens, and photographs.<sup>10</sup>

This first ghetto was also among the last. For more than four years, until autumn 1944, the population was decimated through starvation, disease, and mass gassing in the Nazis’ first stationary killing center for Jews at Chelmno (30 miles northwest of Łódź). Along with Polish Jews, the Łódź ghetto received Roma and Jews from western Europe, many of whom were in the final transports of 67,000 victims sent to Auschwitz in August 1944. The controversial Jewish elder, and self-styled “King of the Jews,” Mordechai Rumkowski, could not save “his” Jews or himself, and perished with them; this notorious collaborator-victim became the central figure in Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi’s account of the “gray zones” of Holocaust history.<sup>11</sup>

According to wartime documents from the Łódź ghetto administration, on September 10, 1942, Szyk’s mother Eugenia was deported to Chelmno.<sup>12</sup> She went with her Polish maid who refused to abandon her. They were part of a wave of mass murders in early September when Rumkowski declared on September 4: “A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess—the children and the elderly[....]I must carry out this difficult and bloody operation, I must sever the limbs to save the body.”<sup>13</sup> After declaring a lockdown, German SS and criminal police searched and shot hundreds on the spot who resisted. Close to 16,000 were shoved into freight cars and sent to Chelmno, arriving at the killing center in trucks from the local station. Eugenia and her maid entered the estate, passing through high fences to a large manor house that served as the reception area where SS and police ordered the Jewish victims to undress and relinquish valuables. The Germans announced, “you are all going to labor camps and need to shower first.” They brought the naked prisoners to the cellar, then guided groups of 50-70 persons to a loading ramp and into a large truck, sealed the doors and started the engine to pump carbon monoxide through a tube into the truck cabin, asphyxiating the victims. The truck of corpses drove 2.5 miles to a forest camp set up to process the remains, first in mass graves and later in a crematorium. Anyone found alive when the truck arrived was shot on the spot. Jewish prisoners forced to do the gruesome burial and cremation were killed to

<sup>1</sup> It was displayed in 2005 in the former home of the industrialist Izrael Poznanski’s Palace in Łódź. For the 2022 article on Szyk from the Łódź press, see <https://lodz.pl/artykul/kiedys-slynnny-na-caly-swiat-rysownik-z-lodzi-dzis-zapomniany-historia-artura-szyka-51078/>. Thank you Dorota Glowacka for helping with this Polish source.

<sup>2</sup> M. Budziarek, P. Karczewski, T. Karpinski, *Łódź: Miasto Czterech Kultur* (Łódź, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The Dialogue Center in Łódź featured Szyk in a 2020 program.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph P. Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Ansell, 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Berenbaum, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier, the Artist as Messenger,” in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, ed. Irvin Ungar (London: Historica and the Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 61-63.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Moses Shapiro, “Jewish Communal Autonomy in Poland, Łódź, 1914-1939,” SHOFAR (1998): 27.

<sup>8</sup> Shapiro, 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford, 2010), 127-137.

<sup>10</sup> Registration Housing, Łódź Ghetto Records, RG-15.083M-215-217, Card# 128853, 4, USHMM Archives. Thank you Steve Luckert and Steven Vitto at the USHMM (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

<sup>11</sup> M. Dean and G. Megargee, eds., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, Vol II, Part A (Bloomington: Indiana Press/USHMM, 2012), 75-81.

<sup>12</sup> Records of Łódź Ghetto, RG 15.083M.0165.00000218, USHMM.

<sup>13</sup> Lucian Dobroszycki, *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto, 1941-1944* (Yale University Press, 1987).



keep the operations secret, though some escaped to bear witness. Many of these details of this killing process were also recounted by local Polish and German witnesses in Claude Lanzmann’s film, *Shoah*.

The Nazis murdered at least 172,000 Jews in Chelmno between December 1941 and July 1944. We can imagine how Szyk’s mother suffered. The details concerning the fate of Arthur’s younger brother, Bernard Szyk are not known. A rare though blurry photograph of him exists in the Łódź ghetto records. In October 1940 he had applied for a new identification card, presented himself as an office worker, and attached a small photograph stamped with the seal of the “The Elder of the Jews, Litzmannstadt Getto.”<sup>14</sup> It seems that he perished in 1943 (at 45 years old) since his name appears on a list of the ghetto inhabitants with an address from 28 December 1942; a subsequent address is noted with a question mark. He may have died in the ghetto or was deported to other nearby labor camps.<sup>15</sup>

At this time, Arthur Szyk was in New York, feverishly drawing and advocating for the rescue of Polish Jews. The U.S. State Department and Jewish leaders had confirmed that the Nazis were committing mass murder, and its center was in Poland. Szyk’s *Tears of Rage* epitomizes this acute period of discovery and defiance in late 1942 and early 1943. His mother had already been gassed in Chelmno in September 1942, but he did not know this. What did Szyk imagine? Szyk had access to the international press and reports of the Polish Government-in-Exile. Earlier he had painted Polish Jewish refugees wearing bold white and blue Star of David armbands, evoking the color and symbols of the flag of Israel that had been introduced in his lifetime by Zionists, as if these trudging souls stood at a crossroads of past and future. As the violence increased and expanded, so too did his depictions of blood-thirsty German mass murders and suffering Jewish victims.

Sometime in 1943 Szyk completed a Yizkor memorial book cover for the Łódź Jewish community as an act of mourning and remembrance for his hometown. He also chose to publish a tribute to his mother in one of his most powerful cartoons that appeared in a New York daily newspaper, *PM*. In *We’re running short of Jews* (fig. 9, below) he returned to his popular caricatures of Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, and Himmler. They are seated around a table,

pathetically finger-pointing in various directions satirizing their hubris and pedantry. Himmler points to a document titled the murder of 2 million Jews. Above this scene, Szyk inscribed this statement: *to the memory of my darling mother, murdered somewhere in the ghettos of Poland.....*



Fig. 9 Arthur Szyk, *We’re running short of Jews*, 1943, ink and graphite on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.115)

In 1946, Szyk published a lengthier dedication in the book series that he illustrated, *Pathways to the Bible*:

In March 1943 my beloved seventy-year mother, Eugenia Szyk, was taken from the ghetto of Łódź to the Nazi furnaces of Maidanek. With her, voluntarily went her faithful servant, the good Christian Josefa, a Polish peasant. Together, hand in hand, they were burned alive. In memory of the two noble martyrs I dedicate my pictures of the Bible as an eternal Kaddish for these great souls.<sup>16</sup>

It’s not clear where Szyk received this misinformation about his mother’s death in Maidanek (now known as Majdanek). Was he reading about the Holocaust in Łódź after the war? Did he obtain the widely circulated *The Extermination of Polish Jews - Album of Picture*, a photo album of 250 images, produced by Central Jewish Historical Committee in Poland based in Łódź? In 1945, photographer Henryk Ross, recovered thousands of negatives he had buried in Łódź as evidence of the crimes, including the September 1942 deportations.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Eugenia appears in one of these images. Meanwhile, the Nazi Gauleiter Greiser was on trial in Poland, and hanged in July 1946. This was covered in the *Jewish Telegraph*. Still, details about the specific fate of loved ones was hard to obtain in the immediate aftermath.

Émigré relatives such as Szyk searched for and worried about those left behind. They posted notices in newspapers, such as *Aufbau*, and penned inquiries to international and local authorities. But the success rate for determining the fate of the missing was not high: for Jewish organizations in New York, less than twenty percent. Over time relatives gave up as they accepted that their loved one was gone. In one historian’s words: “When did the ‘missing’ become the perished? When did the tunnel of grief begin?”<sup>18</sup> At the height of his fame and with the extensive connections to Polish Jews and government officials, Szyk was unable to obtain more information, or perhaps he chose not to pursue what was irretrievably lost.

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<sup>14</sup> Records of Łódź Ghetto, RG 15.083M. 192, card # 00249, USHMM.  
<sup>15</sup> Records of the Łódź Ghetto, RG 15.083M. 0217.00000799, USHMM. *Łódź Ghetto*, Volume 5 (Yad Vashem, 1994), 183. [https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source\\_view.php?SourceId=20808](https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source_view.php?SourceId=20808).  
<sup>16</sup> Dedication page in Mortimer J. Cohen’s *Pathways Through the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1946).

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/the-jewish-photographer-henryk-ross.html>  
<sup>18</sup> Jan Lambertz, “Early Post-war Holocaust Knowledge and the Search for Europe’s Missing Jews, Jews,” *Patterns of Prejudice* (2019): 53:1, 61 and 71.



# ARTHUR SZYK: FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

Ori Z. Soltes

One of the more extraordinary individuals to arrive on these shores during the catastrophe of World War II and the Holocaust – and to turn his hatred of injustice into brilliant visual expression – was Polish-born Arthur Szyk (1894-1951). Szyk combined a unique style – he synthesized the most extraordinary of medieval and renaissance illumination concepts with a modernist sensibility that innovated rather than merely reinvigorated a prior artform – with simultaneously particularist and universalist subject matter.

Early in his life Szyk studied in Paris and in Krakow; he divided his time between Poland and France after 1927, moving on to England in 1937, and arriving to permanent residence in the United States in 1940.<sup>1</sup> He carried with him a prodigious talent for endless, perfectly rendered detail that he applied by way of watercolor, gouache, pen and pencil on paper in an unprecedented style and quality that made him arguably the outstanding miniaturist and illuminator of the twentieth century as well as the most important visual political satirist of his era. Images in black and white or color are typically filled to bursting with figures, objects, background elements, often within equally detailed “frames” reminiscent in their richness of oriental carpets – all overrun with an overt and covert symbolic vocabulary.

Szyk’s works explode in diverse directions. In the period between the wars, he illustrated a range of secular and religious literary works, from Flaubert’s *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1926) to Pierre Benoit’s novel, *The Well* (1927). So, too, he updated an aspect of Jewish art: his 1925 *Megillat Esther* offers a lush expansion of the Jewish calligraphy and illumination tradition. Preparatory studies of key characters created the previous year also offer intense portrait images in their own right. But his *magnum opus* between the wars was the series of 48 illustrations created over a six-year period (1932-38) to embellish the Passover *Haggadah*. These vie in magnificence and excel in richness of detail and perspectival brilliance with the most stunning of medieval

*haggadot* – and set a standard against which subsequent works, to the present day, must be measured (fig. 10, below).

It was the project of supervising the publication of the *Haggadah* that brought him to London. But shortly after he had begun to produce these drawings, he had already also begun moving in another direction: producing caricatures of



Fig. 10 Arthur Szyk, *Aaron, Moses & Hur*, from *The Haggadah*, published 1940. Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum

Hitler (in both black and white and color) at least by 1933. The expanding ugliness of political developments in Germany led, in turn, to his investing his *Haggadah* illustrations with topical allusions. Thus the “wicked” among the Four Sons is clearly Hitler; portraits of Goebbels, Göring and others among the Nazi brass appear among the cruel Egyptian leadership, together with swastikas at appropriate places.<sup>2</sup> The printing process for this work took three years – perhaps

extended by the re-do compromises Szyk was forced to make by his English publisher with regard to some of these images<sup>3</sup> – but by the time the work was done he was on his way to America.

The initial reason for his trip was to generate American support for the Polish government-in-exile and for the British war cause. But he had already developed a following in the United States. One of his history series was a group of 32 watercolors, *George Washington and His Times*, a tribute to the Revolutionary War and the first American president, which he had begun in Paris in 1930, and that was exhibited at the Library of Congress in 1934 (fig. 11, above). This series led to a commission from the American government to design a George Washington Bicentennial Medal. So, too, 20 paintings devoted to the contributions of Poles to American history were exhibited in the Polish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. So he arrived into this country to an already warm welcome within both the arts and the political communities – which makes it a bit ironic that he could not enter directly, but immigrated to Canada in July before making his way over the border six months later. If not ironic, then certainly interesting was his choice not to gravitate to the art scene in New York City, with its substantial Jewish presence, but to establish his base of artistic operations in the very different atmosphere of suburban New Canaan, Connecticut. But then his unique form of visual self-expression drew from world events and literary ideas channeled through the sieve of his rich imagination and singular artistic skill and less from the artworld and its discussions, per se.

Not surprisingly, one side of Szyk’s art that expanded during the 1940s in America focused on heroes and villains: his 72 caricatures, *War and “Kultur” in Poland*, already exhibited in London in 1940, emphasized “the brutality of the Germans... the more primitive savagery of the Russians, the heroism of the Poles and the suffering of the Jews, ...[with an] immensely powerful... cumulative effect,” as a reviewer in the *London Times* put it.<sup>4</sup> He caricatured leading American isolationists like Charles Lindbergh whose pro-Nazi sympathies were keeping the US out of the war. Conversely, his black and white 1943 *De Profundis* (fig. 12, p. 15) piled figures and faces, together with a Decalogue and a beautifully-dressed Torah beneath an empty sky in which the words from Genesis 4, “Cain, where is Abel thy brother?” are calligraphed.



Fig. 11 Arthur Szyk, *George Washington*, Paris 1931, paper, ink, paint (watercolor, gouache). Hyde Park, NY, Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Library and Museum

His brilliant shaping of works like the 1945 *Samson in the Warsaw Ghetto* (see cover image) – with a bedraggled but well-armed Jew striding over the fallen figure of a Nazi officer and old and young figures crowding into the frame – together with further caricatures of Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, et al., continued to pour forth as he re-shaped his life and that of his family in America. Eleanor Roosevelt called him a “one-man army” for his uplifting work as the American participation in the war unfolded. Indeed, his drawings were said to have become more popular with American GIs than pin-up girl posters – from Europe to the Pacific rim.

In America Szyk also continued to illustrate books – from biblical *Job* to the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayam to Hans Christian Andersen’s *Fairy Tales* to a new edition of the Book of Esther – and his illumination skills carried in new directions. Inspired by Roosevelt’s 1941 State of the Union – “Four Freedoms” – speech, he calligraphed it embedded in the richly detailed and colorful style that was his artistic fingerprint. This does not mean that he was either blind to or failed to respond to the failures of America to live up to its assertions as a bastion of freedom. He saw the

<sup>1</sup> He also spent some time in Palestine, in 1914, as part of a group of Polish Jewish artists and writers, but that visit was cut short by the outbreak of World War I. Toward the outset of the war he was conscripted into the Russian army and fought at the battle of Łódź – his home town – in November-December, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Hitler was said, in a July 13, 1940 article in the Halifax, Nova Scotia *Morning Herald*, to have put out a bounty on Szyk – although this assertion was never confirmed by any reliable source.

<sup>3</sup> Whether this was due simply to the publishers’ sensibilities or to pressure from British politicians, still at that point pursuing a policy of appeasement toward Germany, is not clear.

<sup>4</sup> The assessment was offered in the January 11, 1940 article, “Polish War Satires: Miniatures by Mr. Szyk.” I have not been able to ascertain the author’s name.



racism so paradoxically present, and extended his war-imagery to encompass the Ku Klux Klan and American soldiers: a black G.I. is depicted commenting to a white G.I. that an appropriate fate for Hitler would be to transform him into “a Negro and drop him somewhere in the U.S.A.” (See fig. 130, p. 97).

Among Szyk’s reported happiest moment was Israel’s coming into existence, and he devoted considerable ink and paint to celebrating that event (fig. 13, right). One might wonder what he would illuminate today in that troubled corner of the world. His autobiographical comment on his work was that “I am but a Jew praying in art.” He understood his output to be informed by a social consciousness and a sense of imperative to improve the world that synthesized his Polish, Jewish, American – his international, *human* – identities.

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Fig. 12 Arthur Szyk, *De Profundis. Cain, Where is Abel Thy Brother?*, 1943, ink and graphite on board. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, (2017.5.1.109)



Fig. 13 Arthur Szyk, *Declaration of Independence for the State of Israel*, 1948, color print on paper. The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Kaplan (78.23)

# COURAGEOUS WOMEN IN THE ART OF ARTHUR SZYK

Ellen M. Umansky

Of the thousands of works by Polish-American artist, Arthur Szyk, a good number feature women notable for their dignity, physical strength, pursuit of justice, and courage. Biblical heroines, queens, activists, early Zionists, resistance fighters, and members of the Israeli military are only some of the women portrayed by Szyk. To date, these portrayals have not received sufficient attention.

who retrieved Moses from the Nile and raised him as her son; Miriam, Moses’ sister, who helped insure Moses’ safety; the charismatic judge and prophet, Deborah, at whose instigation six of the twelve tribes of Israel successfully went to war; Judith, who, in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament/Apocrypha), seduced, murdered, and cut off the head of Holofernes; Ruth, the devoted daughter-in-law of Naomi who initiated a sexual encounter with Boaz to continue the family line; and Esther, Queen of Persia, who saved her people from death. Szyk’s playing card art, featuring heroes of ancient Israel on the face cards, includes Esther, Ruth, Judith, and Deborah.<sup>1</sup>

For his illustrated *Haggadah*, published in 1940, Szyk depicts Pharaoh’s daughter drawing Moses from the Nile (fig. 14, left), a scene that he painted in different versions for over twenty years. She is portrayed as regal and powerful, looking directly at the baby as one of her slaves brings him to her. That Pharaoh’s daughter tells Yocheved, the baby’s mother, that she will pay her to nurse the child, in defiance of her father’s orders that male Hebrews be killed at birth, shows great courage. So does giving the child a name and raising him as her son. Moses’ sister, Miriam, in the foreground, is featured far more prominently than in such early paintings of Szyk’s as *Pharaoh’s Daughter Discovering Moses on the Nile* (ca. 1920-1929). Here in *Baby Moses*, Miriam is near the shore. Yet although physically close to Pharaoh’s daughter, because she is sitting among the reeds, remains unseen by Pharaoh’s daughter and those who are with her. Miriam looks grief-stricken, perhaps because, as the illustration suggests, her brother will be raised as an Egyptian and thus not help free their people from bondage. Or perhaps, if Szyk knew that the god Anubis, painted in the upper right corner, was the Egyptian god who protected the dead on their journey to the afterlife, Miriam’s fear is that her brother’s life and the lives of the enslaved Israelites are in danger. Despite her sadness, she soon boldly approaches Pharaoh’s daughter and asks whether she might take the child to a Hebrew wet-nurse to breastfeed him.



Fig. 14 Arthur Szyk, *Baby Moses*, 1936, from *The Haggadah*, 1934-36, watercolor and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art

Biblical women frequently appear in Szyk’s work. Yet rather than focusing on the matriarchs of Israel (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, who primarily are remembered as wives and mothers), Szyk was drawn to women who actively fought for the survival of their families and the Jewish people. Among them were Pharaoh’s daughter,

<sup>1</sup> Allison Claire Chang, *Heroes of Ancient Israel: The Playing Card Art of Arthur Szyk* (Burlingame, CA: Historicana, 2011). Historicana has reproduced this art in decks of cards. See <https://www.szyk.com/playing-card-art/>





Fig. 15 Arthur Szyk, *Boaz Looks with Love Upon Her*, from *The Book of Ruth*, 1946, watercolor and gouache. Private Collection

Originally, Moses, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter were not included in the Haggadah, to emphasize the belief that God alone liberated the Israelites. Yet Szyk, like previous illustrators, included Moses in the retelling of the Passover story. In addition, because he believed that the liberation from Egypt would not have occurred without human effort, Szyk's illustrations are of Moses not only as a baby but also as a hero. Similarly, he includes courageous, heroic women like Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter.<sup>2</sup>

In 1947, Szyk illustrated *The Book of Ruth*, published by The Heritage Press, which reprinted classic volumes in limited editions. The frontispiece of Naomi, Elimelech, and their sons travelling to Moab, included in the Szyk exhibition *In Real Times* (fig. 15, above), does not explicitly identify them as Jews, perhaps because the text, taken from the (Christian) King James Bible, was intended by the publisher for a wider audience.

Yet, in *Boaz Looks with Love Upon Her* [Ruth] and the end-piece illustration of King David, Szyk

emphasizes the Jewish identities of Ruth, Boaz, and Ruth's great-grandson, King David by adding Lions of Judah and, anachronistically, Stars of David. In *Boaz Looks with Love Upon Her*, a shirtless Boaz, wearing a Star of David on a chain around his neck, looks lovingly at the sleeping Ruth next to him. She is simply yet beautifully dressed, wearing earrings and bracelets. According to the biblical text, after Boaz is drunk and lies down in the fields, Ruth puts herself at risk by approaching him and uncovering his feet, often a biblical euphemism for genitals. She does so because, as Boaz soon realizes, if a closer kinsman than he does not want to marry her, it is his obligation to do so, so that she can bear a child.

Some of the women he drew wielded influence and/or power. Among them were



Fig. 16 Arthur Szyk, *Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi*, illustration for Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Last Days of Shylock*, Paris, 1931

<sup>2</sup> Trans. and commentary by Byron L. Sherwin with Irvin Ungar, *The Szyk Haggadah* (New York: Abrams Publishing), 24, 46-47.



Fig. 17 Arthur Szyk, *Israel Bond Certificate*, 1951, lithograph. Location unknown

the biblical Esther (he illustrated the *Book of Esther* in 1925 and 1950), Deborah, and the Queen of Sheba; 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish businesswoman, philanthropist, and a leader of the Sephardi Diaspora, Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi (fig. 16, p. 17); Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth I (probably painted in 1939); and US Secretary of Labor and architect of FDR's New Deal, Frances Perkins. Several were warriors, like Joan of Arc (1942); the widow, Judith, who beheaded the commander of the Assyrian army, Holofernes (fig. 76, p. 65); World War II resistance fighters; and women who helped defend the land of Israel, pre- and post-statehood.

As an ardent Zionist and self-described "soldier in art," Szyk depicted women as armed fighters, whether defending Zionist settlers from Arab rioters (*Trumpeldor's Defense of Tel Hai*, 1936) or serving in the Israeli military. He also portrayed them as resisters in the Polish ghettos of the 1940s. In his *Samson in the Ghetto* (also called *Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*) (fig. 117, p. 90), in learning of the Nazi order to liquidate the ghetto, Jews are seen fighting back in whatever way they can. Interestingly, of the three men and one woman armed with a rifle, only the woman is seen looking through the barrel, her hands firmly on the trigger. During and immediately after the war, Szyk drew illustrations for banners, magazines, posters, and banners that helped raise awareness and money for such organizations as Hadassah's Youth Aliyah, which rescued thousands of Jewish children. His illustration for Israel Bond certificates

(fig. 17, left). depicts a woman holding sheaves of wheat and a man in overalls holding a shovel, a visual image of women and men equally working the land.

As the art of Arthur Szyk continues to receive the long-overdue recognition it deserves, hopefully his many images of courageous women will be acknowledged as expressions of Szyk's fervent belief that the future of the Jewish people and the world in which we live depends upon the actions not only of men but also of women. That scholars have minimized or overlooked Szyk's many representations of women, from the biblical period through the mid-20th century, is perhaps not surprising. At the very least, his drawings, paintings, and illustrations of courageous women are worth closer examination.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My deepest thanks to Irvin Ungar for his encouragement and great knowledge of and passion for the work of Arthur Szyk, which I have found inspirational and extraordinarily helpful. My thanks as well to Marni Gerber at Historicana for sending many, much needed images to me.



# ARTHUR SZYK’S “MISSING MASTERPIECE”: *SATAN LEADS THE BALL* AND THE ART OF THE WAR CARTOON

Jonathan Petropoulos

As the United States of America entered the war against Germany on December 11, 1941 – in response to Adolf Hitler’s declaration of war against America earlier that day – the American people began to mobilize and focus on the challenge at hand: notably, fighting a two-front war against the Axis powers. This was no small task. The U.S. military was a fraction of what it would become: the Army, to take one

He certainly rose to the challenge. As Philip I. Eliasoph notes in his essay for this catalogue, Szyk was “at the zenith of his artistic career” in the 1940s.<sup>3</sup>

*Satan Leads the Ball* (fig. 18, p. 19), one of Szyk’s “war cartoons,” combined biting satire with masterful artistic technique. Indeed, he elevated the “cartoon” in a way reminiscent of the world



Fig. 18 Arthur Szyk, *Satan Leads the Ball*, 1942, pen, brush, watercolor, India ink on paper. Private collection?

branch, grew from 140,000 in September 1939 to 1.25 million two years later to 5.8 million in 1945, and especially at the outset, many soldiers were unprepared for the conflict ahead, either physically or temperamentally.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Szyk, who had arrived in New York in 1940, recognized that he needed to play his part in mobilizing the nation. Szyk sometimes referred to himself as “President Roosevelt’s Soldier in Art,” as he used his skills as an artist and satirist to motivate Americans, and this included providing insight into the insidious nature of the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

associated with Leonardo da Vinci’s graphic accomplishments (see the Leonardo cartoon in the National Gallery of London). As James Kettlewell remarked about *Satan Leads the Ball*, “we see Szyk at his most powerful and most perfect.”<sup>4</sup> Arthur Szyk’s masterpiece stands as one of his richest and most psychologically astute wartime works.

The power of the portrayals depends on his vibrant colors. As Joos Harskamp noted, “In his work, Szyk mastered the labor-intensive stencil



Detail of fig. 18

(“pochoir”) technique which demands that each layer of color has to be applied by hand. The method became identified with the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements.”<sup>5</sup> Szyk had traveled to Paris in 1921 and absorbed the art scene. Harskamp continued, “He was particularly attracted to Byzantine design and the medieval skill of illuminating manuscripts. Both strands were fused in his work as a book illustrator. A sound knowledge of tradition formed the base of his modernism.”<sup>6</sup> Arthur Szyk quickly developed a reputation as a master of the illustrated book.

Szyk’s understanding of the individuals leading the Axis countries and his ability to convey this insight in an entertaining and hyperbolic manner made him a powerful force in the battle for minds during World War II. He had prior experience in this area, having directed the Polish propaganda department back in 1919-20 when Poles fended off the Bolsheviks. Not lacking in courage, he had also served as an actual soldier in the conflict. Michael Berenbaum has noted that “Szyk was not the only Pole to undertake the role of messenger in the United States,” as he compared him to Jan Karski, the famous courier who delivered first-hand information about the Holocaust to President Roosevelt in the Oval Office of the White House on July 28, 1943.<sup>7</sup> Both Karski and Szyk sought to illuminate the true intentions and crimes of the fascist leaders. In certain ways, Szyk can also be compared to writer Klaus Mann (son of Thomas Mann), who penned the presciently insightful novel *Mephisto* in 1934 and 1935, and at such an early stage, exposed the Nazi leaders (their ruthlessness, greed, and hypocrisy, among other traits), as well as many of those who worked for them.<sup>8</sup> Both Szyk and Mann were good judges of character and offered psychological insight in their treatments of the Nazi elite. And both relished an over-the-top portrayal of these subjects: Mann wrote a *roman à clef*, where the names of the figures have been changed, but the identities were quite clear to contemporaries.

<sup>5</sup> Jaap Harskamp, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier,” in *New York Almanack* (June 8, 2021) at <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2021/06/arthur-szyk-the-artist-as-soldier/>.  
<sup>6</sup> Jaap Harskamp, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier,” in *New York Almanack* (June 8, 2021) at <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2021/06/arthur-szyk-the-artist-as-soldier/>.  
<sup>7</sup> Michael Berenbaum, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier, the Artist as Messenger” in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, ed. Irvin Ungar (London: Historica and the Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 71.  
<sup>8</sup> Klaus Mann, *Mephisto* (New York: Penguin, 1995 [1935]).  
<sup>9</sup> Jaap Harskamp, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier,” in *New York Almanack* (June 8, 2021) at <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2021/06/arthur-szyk-the-artist-as-soldier/>.  
<sup>10</sup> See Wikipedia Commons for one interpretation of the figures in *Satan Leads the Ball* at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur\\_Szyk\\_\(1894-1951\).Satan\\_Leads\\_the\\_Ball\\_\(1942\).New\\_York.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur_Szyk_(1894-1951).Satan_Leads_the_Ball_(1942).New_York.jpg).

Szyk’s portrayals are almost always identifiable, although certain figures in his illustrations remain unclear.

Arthur Szyk frequently combined the classical frieze with the concept of a parade as a vehicle for his satire. The parade, of course, borrowed from one of the Nazis’ methods of garnering support. The Storm Troopers (SA) had marched all over Germany both before and after Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933. The procession in the picture is not the synchronized, goose-stepping spectacle that one associates with Hitler’s troops, but a jumbled mess of bodies. This parade is not proceeding as usual. Of course, the parade format allowed for multiple subjects, and meaningful juxtapositions. Szyk used this compositional technique in other works, including *Parade of the Mighty Warriors* (1942) (fig. 98, p. 80) and *Gran Finale* (1945). In the case of *Satan Leads the Ball*, the parade theme yielded a jumbled effect that showed the disorganized nature of the Axis alliance, where leaders often undertook important steps without informing one another. Another association is with the trope of the Dance of the Dead, which dates to medieval times. As Harskamp noted, “Szyk turned the historical Dance of the Dead into a contemporary Dance of Murderers.”<sup>9</sup>

It is most helpful first to identify the figures in the procession, to the extent that is possible.<sup>10</sup> The parade is led by the devil (Satan, Lucifer), who carries a tome titled *Nibelungen*, which is decorated with swastikas (a reference not only to Wagner and his antisemitism, but also the entire canon of Norse mythology, which provided a foundation for Nazis’ Teutonic nonsense). The demonic figure is misshapen with cloven hoofs and refers back to a tradition in art history that includes Hieronymus Bosch and other sixteenth century Flemish painters (see, for example, *The Ugly Duchess* by Quentin Matsys in the National Gallery, London).

The second figure is likely Hideki Tojo. The swastika adornment on his belt buckle and the armband on the figure’s left arm likely refer to the Axis alliance. The samurai sword, pistol, and decorations speak to a militaristic tradition, while the inscription “Mitsubishi” on the scabbard draws

<sup>1</sup> Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War: 1939-1945* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 182, 226.

<sup>2</sup> Jaap Harskamp, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier,” in *New York Almanack* (June 8, 2021) at <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2021/06/arthur-szyk-the-artist-as-soldier/>.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Eliasoph, “Arthur Szyk: From Yiddishkeit Illuminator to Yankee Satirist.”

<sup>4</sup> James Kettlewell, “The Timeless Aesthetics of Arthur Szyk,” in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, ed. Irvin Ungar (London: Historica and the Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 34.



attention to the role of Japanese heavy industry in this bellicose society. The exaggerated buck teeth are part of Szyk’s caricature of the Japanese leader, but the feature also connects with the broader genre of racist portrayals of the Japanese, as historian John Dower explored in his important study, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*.<sup>11</sup> The Japanese had not loomed large in Szyk’s imagination prior to Pearl Harbor, but he did not hold back once the war in the Pacific commenced. As Szyk noted in 1942, “In my cartoons, I try to accentuate all the vileness, villainy, and bestiality of the enemy.”<sup>12</sup>

The next figure may be Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who sports an SS uniform and cap with a death’s head insignia (he was an honorary officer in the SS). The figure stands in the second row, with beady, mismatched eyes that suggest untrustworthiness, hate, and perhaps insanity. The figure may also be of a stock SS officer, with the eyes suggestive of someone in the hypnotic thralls of followership.

To his left is Erich Ludendorff, the second in command of the German army in World War I and participant in the Nazis’ failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. We see the top of the general’s resplendent uniform, but the head above it is not pretty (Szyk adds a wart on the back of the neck for good measure). This is militarism grown old and flabby. Behind him stands Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, the head of the German High Command. He too is in the second row, mostly obscured by the figure in front of him. That figure is probably not a specific person, but a corpulent capitalist representing German heavy industry (the decoration across his chest secured with Nazi Party badges says *Schwerindustrie* or “heavy industry”). His ostentatious support for National Socialism (even his cigar has a swastika) culminates with his right-arm, with jewel-encrusted rings on his figure, enveloping Adolf Hitler.

In front of Hitler is Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister for People’s Enlightenment and Propaganda and the Gauleiter of Berlin, who holds a Jack-in-the-Box, with a Jewish figure (wearing a Phrygian cap from the French Revolution) serving as the Jumping Jack that his meant to scare people. The Jewish figure holds a hammer and sickle above his head, a reference to the Nazis’ efforts to link Jews with communism. The Goebbels figure is armed to the teeth with a huge pistol case and a knife larger than his leg. The right ankle of the Propaganda Minister is

turned-over, a reference to the disability he had that caused him to limp.

Behind him is Adolf Hitler – in the heart of the pack – holding his autobiography/programmatic statement *Mein Kampf* from 1925/26 and sporting a dagger and a sidearm. The Hitler figure reaches



Detail of fig. 18

around to hold the hand of the Nazi industrialist, while his inscrutable eyes are similar to those of the Ribbentrop figure.

Above Hitler is a representation of Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, known for his over-the-top uniforms. Szyk is accurate with several of the medals, including the Pour le Merit from World War I that is around his neck, and the Luftwaffe badge on his right breast. He holds a volume in royal purple titled “Hermann Göring Works” – a reference to the heavy industry conglomerate he headed.

Behind Göring is death in the uniform of a Nazi soldier. It is no accident that he is close to Göring, who had overseen the Gestapo from 1933 to 1935, as well as Prussian concentration camps at that time. The skeleton in the Nazi uniform seems to be looking at the two French figures behind and below, and even resting his bony hand on the volume before him.

Philippe Pétain is the figure holding the volume – the French hero of World War I (the Marshal of France at the end of the war) turned collaborator, as he headed the Vichy administration. The war hero has seven stars on his cuff (five being the highest rank) and a swastika pin on his epaulette. He rheumatic eyes and hunched posture speak to his age.



Detail of fig. 18



Detail of fig. 18

the disheveled appearance, with his suspenders falling out, speak to more fundamental moral turpitude. Laval steps over a purple piece of cloth that reads, “Europe Belongs to Us, Tomorrow the World.”

The sash is held by a figure representing Benito Mussolini, who has a huge cross on his chest (seemingly a reference to the Lateran Accord and his relations with the Catholic Church). Notably, Mussolini wears no pants, with a naked derriere also adorned with a cross. With swastikas on his epaulettes and a Nazi medal, he is also an agent of Hitler and the National Socialists (the sash Mussolini holds seems to connect to Hitler, but is more like the train of a wedding dress).

Above Mussolini and Pétain is a Brunhilde figure, the only woman in the composition (although she has a very masculine hand holding a lance). Clearly, she is a Wagnerian figure, and a Nazi (besides the swastikas in her headdress the ribbons in her hair read *Sieg Heil*). Wearing glasses and also having a mole on her cheek, she is a curious figure. Some have seen her as an incarnation of *Germania*. She connects to the devil at the head of the parade, both in terms of the Wagnerian imagery, and also in terms of the coloring of the figures. The edge of her robe is adorned with the infamous curse, *Jude verreck* (“Death to the Jew”).<sup>13</sup> This rendition of a hateful Wagnerian figure may provide some insight into Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin naming his murderous mercenaries after the German composer: Putin’s henchman sought the worst Nazi associations of the name when he created his band of killers.

Far more energetic is the figure below, Vichy Prime Minister Pierre Laval. Known for wearing spats, he is shown here as a corrupt collaborator: the Nazi armband, the bag of silver with its biblical reference to betrayal, and

For all its magnificence, the sad reality is that *Satan Leads the Ball* is now lost. There are some indications that the work was auctioned off in the 1960s, but as stated by Szyk expert Irvin Ungar in his 2017 volume on the artist, its current location remains unknown.<sup>14</sup>

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From 1998 to 2000, Petropoulos served as Research Director for Art and Cultural Property on the Presidential Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, where he helped draft the report, *Restitution and Plunder: The U.S. and Holocaust Victims’ Assets* (2001). He has also been an expert witness in dozens of cases where Holocaust victims have tried to recover lost artworks. This includes Austria v. Altmann, which involved six paintings by Gustav Klimt claimed by Maria Altmann and other family members.

<sup>11</sup> John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Szyk quoted by Steven Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk* (Washington, DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2003), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Jaap Harskamp, “Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier,” in *New York Almanack* (June 8, 2021) at <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2021/06/arthur-szyk-the-artist-as-soldier/>. Yevgney Priogozhin is the head of the Wagner Group, a company of mercenaries who have fought in Ukraine..

<sup>14</sup> Irvin Ungar, ed., *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art* (London: Historicana and the Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 34.



# MASTERING EVIL: ARTHUR SZYK'S STYLE

Donald Kuspit

Arthur Szyk was what I have called a New Old Master; that is, he used Old Master style to make a New realistic art. But its critical realism is deceptive, not because of the ironic distortions of the figure in his caricatures of Nazis – perversely distorted to bring out their perverseness they become monstrous fantasies, their grotesqueness conveying their inhumanity – but because, as the critic Thomas Craven wrote, Szyk's “beautifully composed pictures suggest, in their curiously decorative quality, the inspired illumination of the early religious manuscripts.” More to the point of his style, Craven noted Szyk's “firm and incisive line.” The critic Michael Kimmelman said it was “sublimely obsessive.” Szyk had “the dexterity of a monastic scribe,” he added, echoing Craven. Szyk ingeniously united his lines in images “more intricate than Swiss watch works.” Kimmelman noted that people tended to get “lost in the exquisite details” of Szyk's caricatures, suggesting the evocative power of their lines, not to say their deep emotional appeal. Once the familiarity of their subject matter – the newsworthy Nazis – was acknowledged their composition – the intricate matrix of hypnotic lines that gave them aesthetic and expressive substance – drew us to them. The Nazis disappeared in the dustbin of history, but Szyk's caricatures remain as alive and fascinating as they were when they were made in the 1940s during the Second World War, for the innate vitality of their linear style speaks to our own vitality. More subtly its uncanny abstractness bespeaks our will to the transcendence of nature, especially the evil nature of his vulgar Nazis.

The critical use to which Szyk put his line in his caricatures of the Nazi leaders is the theme of my paper. Craven doesn't say anything about the character of that line, but unless one realizes that it is “in its inmost essence Gothic,” and as such “purely abstract” – a “linear fantasy...which embodies no organic expression...nevertheless of the utmost vitality...an ecstasy of movement far outstripping any possibilities of organic movement,” as Wilhelm Worringer writes, one misses its transcendental, not to say sacred import, less self-evident than its profane import, obvious when it is put to descriptive use.<sup>1</sup> “Again and again diverted into fresh complications of

expression,” Szyk's line, with its “excited, jerky feverishness, conveys “a psychical, spiritual activity of will, far removed from the complexes of organic sensation.” It is an exquisitely abstract line holding its aesthetic own in a representational picture, giving it an emotional depth, it would not otherwise have. If they were only matter-of-factly descriptive, Szyk's caricatures would be passing journalistic fancies rather than lasting imaginative masterpieces, to use Coleridge's distinction. Yet Szyk's caricature is paradoxically both – a clever cartoon about hot news and an insightful scrutiny of the psyches of ruthless tyrants, more broadly authoritarian personalities. If it was only a cartoon it would be of passing interest. It continues to hold our interest because of its style and construction, more particularly I will argue, because it uses Gothic style to undermine the new Goths – the Nazi barbarians.

“The Goths were a nomadic Germanic people who played a major role in the fall of the Western Roman empire.” Modern Europe is heir to the Western Roman Empire; the Nazis attempted to bring about its fall – conquer it. They failed. Strange as it may seem to say so, the Nazis were a nomadic people, for they attempted to re-settle Germans in conquered territories. Nazi art had little or no influence on modern art, but Gothic art had enormous influence on European art, not only in Gothic cathedrals, but in illuminated manuscripts, richly colored, as Szyk's religious paintings are, and meticulously detailed, as his caricatures are. “Gothic” was once a synonym for “Barbaric,” that is, not refined as classical art is. Vasari called Gothic art a “monstrous and barbarous disorder.” If so, then Szyk's treatment of Nazis as disordered barbarians, sometimes with monstrous bodies – Szyk's fat Göring is the case in point – is Gothic. But I will argue that Szyk's elaborated lines are quintessentially Gothic; they hold their own with the intricate lines in the drawings in the margins of the pages of Dürer's *Prayer Book of the Emperor Maximilian*, 1514-1515. Ruskin calls attention to the line's metaphysical autonomy – transcendental independence – in Gothic imagery by alluding to its endless repetition in Dürer's drawing of a wing of the devil in *The Fall of Lucifer*. The lines form



Fig. 19 Arthur Szyk, “The technique was all set out in Hitler's book” [Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo], 1944, ink on board. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress.

an abstract design that seems to exist apart from their descriptive purpose. The comparison I am making may seem farfetched, but one only has to compare the line in Dürer's drawings and Szyk's drawings – his caricatures – to realize that they are both abstractly Gothic.

Gothic art was barbaric for Vasari, but Szyk's Gothic line is “exquisite” and “sublime,” to allude to the insightful words of Kimmelman. Szyk's Nazis are barbaric, but the lines with which he draws them rise above them, have an aesthetic and expressive and abstract autonomy, which is what makes his caricatures artistic masterpieces not simply clever cartoons. To my eye his black and white caricatures convey and distill the linear essence of his art more than his colorful caricatures. Their decorativeness blunts their cutting edge – undermines their critical character – obscures the transcendental import and subversive purpose of his line. Their beautiful color also seems to compromise the ugly human reality they inform by glamorizing it, and with that neutralizes, or at least trivializes their meaning. In a sense it removes them from down and dirty history by lifting them to artistic heaven. Simply put, clothing the Nazis in color is to celebrate them, and with that apologize for them. To bring them to colorful life is to blind oneself to the deaths they caused. It gives them decorative appeal, distracting from the critical meaning of the caricature. To my mind's eye, Szyk's colorful caricatures lack the linear cutting edge of his black and white caricatures. The drama of the line is reinforced by the dramatic contrast – unresolved tension – of the black and white. There is a clarity and concentration to the

linear caricatures that makes the colorful caricatures seem beside the critical point, indeed, seem to unwittingly glorify the Nazis. The colorful caricatures are spectacular showpieces rather than analytically insightful. But the Nazis were after all colorful creatures – Susan Sontag noted their penchant for glamorous, not to say flamboyant uniforms, as though to distract from their murderous behavior, and confirming that they were larger than life supermen. I am arguing that Szyk's richly colored caricatures are as misleading as the flamboyant Nazi uniforms, in contrast to his more sober black and white caricatures, which suggest a more sober appraisal of the Nazis.

The range of Szyk's mastery of what I would call the negative dialectic – to use T. W. Adorno's term – of black and white is self-evident in Szyk's *Hitler Mussolini Tojo* of 1944 (fig. 19, left). Seen from the front, Mussolini wears a black uniform, alluding to his “Black Shirts.” Seated next to him, Hitler is a sort of gray eminence, but his hair and moustache are black as death. Seated opposite them and seen from the back the faceless Tojo is an anonymous gray figure. Like Hitler he has a sword, indicating that he is also a warrior: Hitler is writing *Mein Kampf*. But to me the most telling aspect of the work is the variegated linear abstract patterns that inform the surface and sides of the wooden table around which they sit. The wood is dead, suggesting that the recurrent lines in its grain symbolize the death instinct, reminding us that Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo are plotting to make a deadly war. They are after all angels of death planning an apocalypse. The repetitiveness of the lines is emblematic of their ruthlessness. The inorganic lines de-organize the organic wood they inform, in effect subverting its naturalness, not to say killing it, confirming it is dead wood. And suggesting that Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo are inwardly dead however ostensibly alive. Szyk's lines have a fatal inevitability, perhaps nowhere more than in the table. It is geometrical – structured – on the outside, expressionistic – dare one say gestural – on the inside. The figures are perverse specimens of organic human beings but they depend on an inorganic table, an uncanny geometrical abstraction, for their credibility. The dead wood of the table tells the emotional truth about them: they are inwardly dead however outwardly alive. Or at least destined to become dead wood.

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic* (New York: Schocken, 1957), 40-41.



The table is the most important “figure” in the work. The human figures surround it, depend on it, underscoring its central position. They rotate around it: it is the unmoved mover that sustains their motivation. An object not a human being, it suggests their inhumanity, however useful it is for them. They could not function without it. Without the table, Hitler could not write. Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo meet around the table, symbolizing their unity of purpose, planning to make war, commit crimes against humanity. Without the table, the figures would be at a loss, purposeless curiosities. Similarly, without the abstract lines that inform Szyk’s representations of Nazis they would not resonate unconsciously. They would become clever constructions rather than abstractly expressive, as the Gothic line is.

Szyk’s *Goeringo Il Magnifico* (*Göring the Magnificent*), of 1941 (fig. 20, right) is more covertly abstract than the table: his grossly organic body, as round and fat as a globe, is a construction of abstract lines, sometimes forming impenetrably black shadows, an abysmal inorganic emptiness. To allude to Kandinsky’s distinction between emotionally evocative spiritual abstraction and empirically descriptive materialistic representation, one might say that Szyk’s caricatures are spiritual abstractions to the extent they are ingenious linear constructions, and with that oddly lyrical, and materialistic representations to the extent they describe the human body in all its material detail, and with that oddly epic, indicating their paradoxical character. It is particularly Jewish, considering the fact that Jews became known as money lenders, that is, materialists, and God’s chosen people, that is, spiritual. The contrast between the abstract construction and the organic naturalness of Göring’s body conveys the paradoxical character of Szyk’s Jewish art.

Using the German Gothic line to satirize German Nazis, reincarnations of the Goths that attacked Rome, is Jewish humor at its critical best. “It ridicules grandiosity” – Hitler’s delusions of grandiosity – “and self-indulgence” – look at Göring’s body. It is particularly critical of power – in Jewish humor you can even criticize God – as the caricature is, most famously in Daumier’s transformation of King Louis Philippe into a pear (1834) a slang term for fathead. Daumier’s provocative depiction of Louis Philippe as a fat *Gargantua* (1831) on a throne receiving tribute and shitting medals prepares the way for Szyk’s caricature of a fat, bemedaled Göring. If insult is the essence of caricature – Daumier was accused of “inciting to hatred and contempt of



Fig. 20 Arthur Szyk, *Göring Il Magnifico* (*Göring the Magnificent*), 1941, watercolor, gouache, and ink on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.75)

the government and insulting the king” – then Szyk’s insulting caricatures of Nazis, conveying his hatred and contempt for them – in my opinion not only because they were antisemites and he was Jewish, but because they were inherently inhumane, pathological specimens of humanity at its worst – hold their own alongside Daumier’s insulting caricatures. Keeping the best artistic company, they are the best caricatures of power in modern art.

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He has written numerous articles, exhibition reviews, catalogue essays, lectured at many universities and art schools, curated many exhibitions, and edited several series for UMI Research Press and the Cambridge University

Press. He was the editorial advisor for European Art 1900-50 and art criticism for the Encyclopedia Britannica (16<sup>th</sup> edition), and wrote the entry on art criticism for it. Among his books are *The Critic Is Artist: The Intentionality of Art*; *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*; *The Dialectic of Decadence*; *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s*; *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art*; *Identities: Artists at the End of the Avant-Garde*; *The Rebirth of Painting in the Late Twentieth Century*; *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art*; *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries*; *The End of Art*; *A Critical History of Twentieth Century Art*; and *Psychodrama: Modern Art as Group Therapy*. He has written monographs on individual artists, serves as a contributing editor for several art magazines, and has published six books of poems.



# ARTHUR SZYK'S *GREAT SYNAGOGUE* ARK AT THE FOREST HILLS JEWISH CENTER

Samuel D. Gruber

In 2023, the Forest Hills Jewish Center in Queens, New York, announced the sale of its Synagogue Center complex, which opened in 1948. The building will be demolished, and the site redeveloped, and this points to an uncertain future for the enormous and unique *Ark* designed by Polish-Jewish artist Arthur Szyk for the synagogue sanctuary. This news has sparked a flurry of activity among Judaica curators and scholars who, along with the congregation are (as of this writing) searching for a way to save the Ark.<sup>1</sup>

Szyk's *Ark* in Forest Hills is an unusual work of American Jewish art. It recalls past traditions but was entirely unexpected and unique in the world of post-World War II synagogue art and architecture. It is 30 feet (9 meters) tall, but because of the large size of the sanctuary, it does not overwhelm the space. It is constructed from cast and painted plaster, with bronze ark doors, adjacent bronze menorahs, and intricately designed bronze ner tamid (eternal light). An inner wooden grill hides a choir loft, and the openwork design recalls traditional Jewish papercuts. Rabbi Be-Zion Bokser, who commissioned the ark, described it as a giant Torah breast plate.<sup>2</sup> Its flowing and expansive form also recalls the traditional depiction of curtains or drapery painted on an ark wall.<sup>3</sup> Though three-dimensional, Szyk's original drawings indicate how this architectural form was essentially conceived of as a two-dimensional design.

After the Second World War, the Forest Hills Jewish Center board and rabbi began planning

a larger synagogue complex. The old building no longer met the congregation's needs, or the expected growth due to the return of servicemen from the war and the anticipated baby boom. This was not unusual. Most synagogue construction in America had stopped during the Great Depression and World War II. The end of the war released the energy – and eventually the funds and physical materials – to launch a postwar building boom for the Jewish community nationwide. New building took place on the edge of American post-war optimism, and the Jewish void of horrific loss of life and communities in the Holocaust. Congregations and (some) architects struggled to bridge these tremendous forces.

The new Forest Hills Jewish Center was designed by Joseph Furman in a seemingly simple and sleek style that continued modernist architectural trends of the 1930s. It has an exterior of reddish stone, brick facing, and limestone trim. The cornerstone was set in 1947, and the synagogue and the ark were dedicated on September 18, 1949, in the presence of local dignitaries, including New York mayor William O'Dwyer.<sup>4</sup>

The architecture of the building is not widely known, despite its being one of the first post-war synagogues completed, and one of the first entirely modern American synagogues. The *Ark* has been ignored in most literature about post-War synagogue art and architecture.<sup>5</sup> It was mentioned only in passing by scholars of Szyk's life and art<sup>6</sup> until a detailed article by Susan Fraiman was published in 2020.<sup>7</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer mentioned the *Ark* briefly in her essential 1955 work on American synagogues, but

she did not describe or illustrate it. She implied that the *Ark* was meant to add “spiritual content, color, [and] emotional stimulation,” to the otherwise “plain lines” of Furman's design.<sup>8</sup> This conflict with the “plainness” of modernism also led to the addition to the sanctuary of colorful stained-glass windows designed by Jean-Jacques Duval in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> (fig. 21, below)

the ornate arks of Eastern Europe were little known in the English-speaking world. Eastern European synagogues were not much illustrated in the few English language articles and books about synagogue history and design. The most active Jewish architects who had fled to America, including Erich Mendelsohn, Fritz Nathan, and David Moed, were avowed modernists, as were prominent younger American architects Sigmund Braverman and Percival Goodman, who were yet to make their mark. Mendelsohn practiced an expressive modernism that did allow for some soaring curves, as in his B'nai Amoona in St. Louis and Park Synagogue in Cleveland, but he eschewed the intricate formal patterns and decorative detail central to Szyk's art.

Earlier in the century, a few small immigrant synagogues had created large two-story arks that sometimes crowded their small worship spaces, but these tended to incorporate Gothic and Classical design elements already prevalent in American religious architecture. In New York's Lower East Side Congregation Adas Yisroel Anshe Mezeritch on East 6th Street (destroyed) was a small space dominated by a big

Gothic-inspired ark. In New England, where many immigrant communities employed the services of immigrant cabinetmaker Sam Katz, the classical style was favored.<sup>11</sup> Only the large ark in New York's Bialystoker Synagogue deviated from this pattern. The date and place of origin of the ark are unknown, and it has been claimed that it was carved in either Italy or Poland and shipped to New York. Regardless, it is the closest Americans could get to the style and content of a traditional Polish wooden ark. While Szyk's *Ark* is in that tradition, it more closely resembles the arks of masonry synagogues, such as can still be seen in the partially preserved 18th-century synagogue of Tykocin, Poland.

The Forest Hills Ark was commissioned by Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, a native of Luboml in Poland (now Ukraine), famous for its massive “fortress



Fig. 21 Interior of Forest Hills Synagogue, with Szyk *Ark* at right. Photo: Samuel D. Gruber, 2023

In 1951, Stephen Kayser, then curator of New York's Jewish Museum, wrote of the Forest Hills Jewish Center that “the artist's general inclination is toward renewal of certain picturesque features in Jewish pictorial art and whose thinking is much more in terms of minute details than in monumental structures. The result, no matter how the Aron itself is judged, is a clash between the straight, tectonic character of the synagogue itself and the picturesque and unplayful style of the ark.” One of the many characteristics that sets the Szyk *Ark* apart from other arks of the period is its abundant use of curved lines in almost every part, whereas most arks of the post-war decades are composed with straight lines and angles.<sup>10</sup>

In 1949, it was still imaginable that new synagogue designs might favor traditional motifs, though at the time of the creation of the Szyk *Ark*

1 Alanna E. Cooper, “A Queens synagogue is moving, and the fate of its storied ark is in limbo,” JTA, December 27, 2022 (<https://www.jta.org/2022/12/27/ny/a-queens-synagogue-is-moving-and-the-fate-of-its-storied-ark-is-in-limbo?mibextid=Zxz2cZ>); Melissa Klein, “Queens temple needs to find its massive ark a new home,” *New York Post*, December 31, 2022, (<https://nypost.com/2022/12/31/queens-synagogue-needs-to-find-its-ark-a-new-home/>); Michael Perlman, “Preservation Call: Forest Hills Jewish Center, A Community Cornerstone,” Thursday, August 27, 2020 (<https://regoforestpreservation.blogspot.com/2020/08/ForestHillsJewishCenterPreservationAlert.html>).

2 Ben-Zion Bokser, “An Interpretation of the Ark,” unpublished two-page typescript in the Collection of the Forest Hills Jewish Center.

3 See for example, Samuel Gruber, “USA: The Walnut Street Shul in Chelsea, Mass., A Synagogue Full of History and Art (Part I),” Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art and Monuments (Dec 21, 2018) online at: <https://samgrubersjewishartmonuments.blogspot.com/2018/12/usa-walnut-street-shul-in-chelsea-mass.html> (accessed May 15 2023).

4 I would like to thank Forest Hills Jewish Center Executive Director Deborah Gregor for facilitating my visit to the synagogue in January 2023, and showing me the original drawings in the collection of the congregation.

5 For example, I did not mention the ark in my *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Tradition* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003); nor was it mentioned in Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Building after Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and the Memory of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

6 The essential work about Szyk's life and art is Joseph Ansell, *Arthur Szyk, Artist, Jew, Pole* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), supplemented by Byron L. Sherwin and Irvin Ungar, eds. *Freedom Illuminated: Understanding The Szyk Haggadah* (Burlingame, CA: Historiana, 2008). The rise of interest in Szyk's work in the past 20 years through important exhibitions is also bringing attention to the *Ark*. It was celebrated in an 2002 exhibition organized by the Forest Hills Jewish Center and the Arthur Szyk Society on the occasion of Szyk's 50th *yahzeit*. The ark was subsequently illustrated with a short caption in the exhibition catalog, edited by Irvin Ungar, *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art* (London: Historiana and the Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 218-219.

7 The ark is investigated and explained in detail in Susan Nashman Fraiman, “The Torah Ark of Arthur Szyk,” *Arts* 2020, 9 (2), 60 (<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/9/2/60>) which was an important source for this essay.

8 Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 165.

9 Significantly, the synagogue and the ark are ignored in Avram Kampf's influential *Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945-1965* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966).

10 For illustrations see Samuel Gruber, *American Synagogues*, op. cit.

11 Katz, like Szyk, frequently embellished his arks with Hebrew scriptural passages. He also sometimes topped his arks with American eagles, as a patriotic gesture. On Sam Katz's Arks see David Kaufman, “Temples in the American Athens: a History of the Synagogues of Boston,” in *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, eds. J.D. Sarna and E. Smith (*Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, Boston, 1995), 167-207; Murray Zimiles, *Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: The Synagogue to the Carousel* (Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007).



synagogue.”<sup>12</sup> Bokser and Szyk had become friends in 1941 shortly after Szyk’s arrival in New York, when they were introduced by lithographer and congregant Herman Jaffe. Szyk had the first exhibition of his artwork since arriving in the United States at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, where 56 paintings and illuminations, including his *Haggadah* were exhibited in February 1941.<sup>13</sup> Various works of his appeared subsequently in the synagogue newsletter. When Szyk died ten years later, he was buried in the Forest Hills Jewish Center grounds at the New Montefiore Cemetery.<sup>14</sup>

Fraiman quotes Bokser’s important Kol Nidre message of 1945, in which the Rabbi desires that the new building stand as “a memorial to those historic synagogues that perished in the flames of Nazi vandalism, but whose spirit lives on, and must find in us a new vindication.”<sup>15</sup> Szyk’s work was steeped in Jewish history, and he gained American fame for his anti-Nazi cartooning. He was sympathetic to Bokser’s view. The *Ark*, dedicated in September 1949, was a fulfillment of Bokser’s vision. With its traditional forms and explicit Jewish iconography, it was independent of – and even a corrective to – the stylish but austere modern synagogue in which it was installed. Much more than the building itself, it is a conscious evocation of the destroyed synagogues of Eastern Europe.

The Forest Hills congregation was not alone in incorporating memorial elements in new synagogue design. About the same time, architect Percival Goodman included a stone from the destroyed synagogue of Mannheim, Germany as a Holocaust memorial at Congregation B’nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey, where Max Grünewald, a refugee from Germany was rabbi. Sculptor Herbert Ferber created an exterior relief titled *And the Bush was not Consumed...*, a subject proposed by Rabbi Grünewald, who had been instrumental in encouraging the inclusion of contemporary art in the new building. Grünewald

stated, “The Burning Bush burned but was never consumed, which reflects the fate of our people.”<sup>16</sup> These synagogue commemorations – and possibly others – went forward on a congregational level while the efforts for a large public communal monument planned for Riverside Park in New York were stalled, and then entirely stymied.<sup>17</sup>

As is apparent in the exhibition at the Fairfield University Art Museum, Szyk is best known for his work in miniature: illuminated manuscripts, book illustrations, and political cartoons. The scope of his work expanded following World War II, due to the notoriety he had attained with Jews in America for his prolific, unflinching, and continuous work as an anti-Nazi political cartoonist, and his explicit attention to the plight of European Jews. His war work and his Zionism brought him into close contact with many prominent Jewish American leaders.

In 1946, shortly before the Forest Hills commission, Szyk was engaged by Reform Rabbi Hillel Silver of Temple Tifereth Israel in Cleveland to design a series of commemorative stained-glass windows for a “War Service Alcove,” and memorial chapel complex, honoring congregants who died fighting in World War II. Silver like Szyk was an active Zionist – despite the widespread resistance to Zionism by the America’s Reform movement. In the tradition of Zionist art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Szyk created large windows with Biblical heroes Gideon, Samson, and Judah Maccabee.<sup>18</sup> The names of the 22 Temple congregants who died in the war were also inscribed in the adjoining Gries Chapel, on twelve memorial windows designed by Szyk that represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

When these windows were installed, they were Szyk’s largest artworks, but they are essentially enlarged versions of portraits of Jewish heroes Szyk had previously mastered in miniature. During the Cleveland design process, however, Szyk was



Fig. 22 Arthur Szyk, *Design for Forest Hills Synagogue Ark*, after a painting by William Hingel. Photo: Samuel D. Gruber, 2023

already engaged in the new, larger, and unusual project for the Forest Hills Jewish Center.

Despite the *Ark*’s large size, however, its design is a collection of fine details, like we find in many of Szyk’s illustrations. The general source was the rich Eastern European tradition of ornate Baroque arks, especially those of Greater Poland,<sup>20</sup> almost all of which were destroyed in the Holocaust. It is likely that Szyk knew some of these arks firsthand from his life in pre-war Poland, but possibly also from many Polish, Yiddish, and German publications. Many of these synagogues were photographed by interwar researchers. George K.

Loukomski had published his heavily illustrated *Jewish Art in European Synagogues from the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century* in London in 1947, and Szyk probably had access to this work.<sup>21</sup>

The overall *Ark* is organized symmetrically, but each side differs in detail. The Ark culminates in a giant crown, signifying the “crown of the good name,” held up as the highest of human virtues. It is encrusted with decoration and emblazoned with a pair of griffins. Even today, after the destruction of most Polish synagogues, one can find griffins at the high Synagogue in Krakow – which Szyk might have known from his time studying there. The crown surmounts a large Decalogue, marked with the first Hebrew letter of each of the Ten Commandments. Prominent on the *Ark* in front of the choir lofts is a paired rampant deer and lion, surrounded by a familiar text from the *Pirke Avot*.<sup>22</sup>

Surrounding the *Ark* doors, the surface of larger framing composition is awash in decoration with floral details and various Jewish symbols representing Jewish holidays set into irregular frames against a red background. On top are the tablets of the law (Shevuot); a Seder dish with four cups of wine (Passover); and the etrog and lulov (Sukkot). Elsewhere we see bread, candles, and kiddush cup (Sabbath); a megillah (Purim); and a Hannukah lamp (Hannukah). In another section are scales (Yom Kippur); a shofar (Rosh Hashanah); and a Torah scroll (Simchat Torah). Some of these individual motifs are familiar in American synagogues, but the architectural form is not. The design evokes Poland more than any American Jewish past (fig. 22, p. 30).

The *Ark*’s bronze doors are surrounded by what at first appears to be an architectural molding but is then revealed to be a series of 39 jewels, each made to represent a book of the Hebrew Bible. The row of jewels at the top signifies the breastplate worn by the high priest at the temple services in Jerusalem. The jewels represent the 12 tribes, each of which is given its own device on two ark doors. At the bottom of the Ark opening is a relief of two deer, representing – according to Rabbi Bokser, “the agility with which we are summoned to serve the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> (fig. 23, p. 31) Szyk’s work is a rare American example of an ark

<sup>12</sup> The synagogue was devastated by the Nazi occupiers of the town, but not demolished until 1947. See B. Kagan, ed. *Luboml: The Memorial Book of a Vanished Shtetl* (KTAV Publishing House, 1997).  
<sup>13</sup> Cited in *Arthur Szyk Remembered: An Exclusive Showing of Selected Works by Arthur Szyk in Celebration of Israel's 54th Anniversary of Independence in the year of Szyk's 50 Yahrzeit* (Tuesday April 16, 2002 – 4 Iyar 5762 (The Forest Hills Jewish Center and The Arthur Szyk Society, 2002). Joseph P. Ansell cites the exhibit but without a date in *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 129.  
<sup>14</sup> Fraiman, *ibid.* “During this period, the charismatic Conservative rabbi of Forest Hills, Ben Zion Bokser (1907-1984) was serving as a military chaplain at Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, a jumping-off point for troops fighting in Europe, and from February 1944, the congregation was being led by a student rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Jacob Pressman (1919-2015).”  
<sup>15</sup> Reprinted in the synagogue newsletter and cited by Fraiman, *ibid.* Rabbi Bokser stated his overall mission for the new building: “Because we shall build it in these times, I should like to see in it an answer to the dehumanizing forces released by modern technology whose deadly peril has been dramatized in this war. I should like to see in it a fitting memorial to those fallen, whether on the fields of battle or in Europe’s death camps. And I should like to see in it, too, a memorial to those historic synagogues that perished in the flames of Nazi vandalism, but whose spirit lives on, and must find in us a new vindication.”  
<sup>16</sup> Samuel D. Gruber, “Shuls on Fire? (Synagogue Fire and Smoke Real and Abstract),” Samuel Gruber’s Jewish Art and Monuments (November 24, 2013) online at: <https://samarubersjewishartmonuments.blogspot.com/2013/11/shuls-on-fire-synagogue-flames-real-and.html> (accessed May 15, 2023)  
<sup>17</sup> On the saga of the unrealized New York City memorial see Rochelle G. Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics Behind New York City's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996).  
<sup>18</sup> See Samuel Gruber, *American Synagogues*, op. cit., 53. These windows have now been moved to Temple Tifereth Israel’s new home in Beachwood, Ohio, see Steven Litt, “Temple-Tifereth Israel’s \$24 million Beachwood expansion is rich in historic symbolism,” *Cleveland.com*, May 16, 2015 <https://www.cleveland.com/architecture/2015/05/temple-tifereth-israels-24-mil.html> (accessed May 24, 2023)  
<sup>19</sup> Arlene Fine, “The Temple unlocks key to the past,” *Cleveland Jewish News*, May 21, 2010. ([https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/archives/the-temple-unlocks-key-to-the-past/article\\_5d9fc945-9f21-5a76-854b-a5af426a89ed.html](https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/archives/the-temple-unlocks-key-to-the-past/article_5d9fc945-9f21-5a76-854b-a5af426a89ed.html)) (accessed May 15, 2023)

<sup>20</sup> These arks first became well-known to the English-speaking world with the publication of *Wooden Synagogues* by Kazimierz and Maria Piechotka (Warsaw: Arkady, 1959). Today see Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba: Bożnice murowane na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 1999); *Heaven’s Gates: Wooden Synagogues in the Territories of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Warsaw: Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences / Wydawnictwo Krupski I S-ka, 2004); and Bracha Yaniv, *The Carved Wooden Torah Arks of Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Littman, 2017).  
<sup>21</sup> George Loukomski, *Jewish Art in European Synagogues from the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1947).  
<sup>22</sup> See Ben-Zion Bokser, “An Interpretation of the Ark,” op. cit.; and Fraiman, op. cit., *passim*, for a more detailed identification and explanation of the iconography and texts.  
<sup>23</sup> Ben-Zion Bokser, “An Interpretation of the Ark,” op. cit.



that stands alone as a work of art, separate from the architecture in which it is set. For the most part, American arks were part of the synagogue architecture, unlike many stained-glass windows, to which architects often paid little attention.

Arks helped generate and emphasize the interior design, but they rarely stand out. A lone example, a decade after Szyk, is the so-called Ark of Revelation at B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, by sculptor Luise Kaish.<sup>24</sup> Few other arks either in the interwar or post-war periods can be valued artistically on their own. In the face of the triumph of modernism in the 1950s, retrospectively we see that Szyk's work marks the end of two traditions for synagogue arks; that of the ornate, Baroque-inspired "Jewish architecture" of Eastern Europe and the long-preferred historicism, and especially classicism, employed for ark design in the United States.

The future of the Arthur Szyk's great *Ark* in Forest Hills is uncertain, but its importance in this history of Jewish art is assured.

Samuel Gruber received his BA in Medieval Studies from Princeton University, his PhD in Art and Architectural History from Columbia University and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Rome, where he won the prestigious Rome Prize in Art History. Since 1994, he has taught art history and Jewish Studies at Syracuse University and other colleges.

Gruber is a leader in the documentation, protection, and preservation of historic Jewish sites worldwide years. He was founding director of the Jewish Heritage Program of World Monuments Fund and Research Director of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (1998 through 2008). He presently directs Gruber Heritage Global, a cultural resource consulting firm and is president of the not-for-profit International Survey of Jewish Monuments.



Fig. 23 Detail of Szyk Ark, Forest Hills Synagogue. Gold leaf and painted plaster cast with bronze doors (detail). Photo: Samuel D. Gruber, 2023

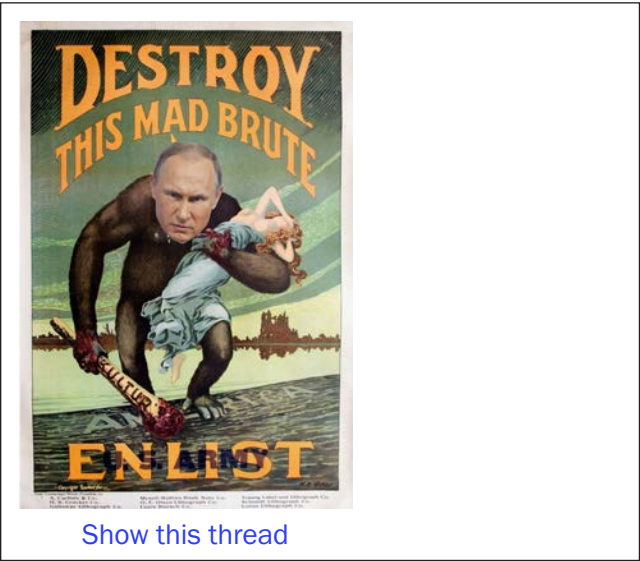
He writes and lectures about Jewish art and architecture; is author of *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (2003), *Synagogues* (1999), and many reports and articles. Since 2008, he writes the blog *Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art and Monuments*. Recently he curated the on-line exhibitions *Romaniote Memories* (Queens College) and *Synagogues of the South* (College of Charleston). Presently, Gruber is a lead researcher on the International Holocaust Memorial Monument Database project.

24 Samuel D. Gruber, "Many Routes to Revelation," in *Luise Kaish: An American Art Legacy*, ed. Maura Reilly (London: D Giles Limited, 2020), 86-101.

# BORN LATE: A SOLDIER IN MEMES\*

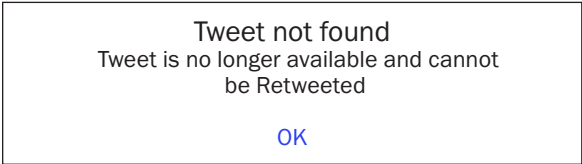
Gavriel D. Rosenfeld

**StanUkraine** @stanUkraine2014 \* Mar 24, 2022  
So tired of leftwing tankies apologizing for Putin pulverizing Ukraine. Putin's a brute.  
F – - Vladimir Bru-tin!



229 2,653 6,210 180K

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [StanUkraine](#)  
Not bad. But THIS MEME wins today's internet.



1,724 3,798 29.2K 1.5M

**StanUkraine** @stanukraine2014 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Holy crap. That's insane. Putin's gonna FREAK.

1 2 28

**BLated100** @blated1894 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
WTF. The post's gone. What was it?

3 3 297

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [Blated1894](#)  
Vlad in devil drag. Red skin, Flaming dress, demented grimace. Satan-o-rama! :-0

1 5 23 1,706

**SarahSNS** @ SorryNotSorry222 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Ha! He's vomiting corpses too. Image is up on Reddit.

12 58 313 5,859



**VZelenny** @ Zelly333 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
F – ing Musk deleted it. Wanna-be oligarch wants to protect Russia ties. It’s BS that he’s “committed to ridding platform of hate speech.” Anyone who shields Vlad promotes hate. Musk = Musk-o-vite.

43

56

1,055

**SarahSNS** @ SorryNotSorry222 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
No surprise there.... Musk also let Adolf Trump back into the chicken coop. I wish Trumpler would just off himself in his Mar-a-Bunker:



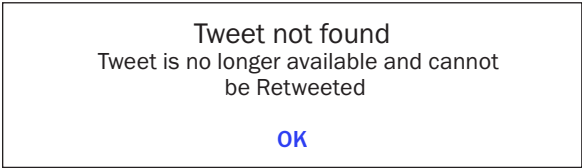
23

670

2,332

31.7K

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [SorryNotSorry222](#)  
That Trumpler meme is mid. Look at this one.



1,324

7,846

32.3K

2.3M

**VZelenny** @ Zelly333 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LL2022](#)  
Jesus christ lol. Trump is gonna flip. Though tbh, his gut doesn’t exactly sag all the way to the floor like that. His throbbing neck and protruding eyeballs are spot-on, though. Gorging himself with cash ‘til it explodes from all his orifices – LMAOOO

2

27

58

1,141

**AntifaFred1945** @AFrd \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Image is gone. Musk is outta control with the deletions. I just heard he suspended the dude who made the meme. Permanently. The same dude who made the Putin meme....

8

18

26

1,747

**FJan6criminals** @ FJ6 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [AFrd Mar 24](#)  
Who is he?

3

29

64

6,590

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [FJan6criminals](#)  
That’s my boy Artie. Artie Chic. We went to school together – in Rego Park. Graduated Queens-Metropolitan High School in ’12. We took a bunch of art classes together. Used to hang out on weekends reading comics we got off eBay – Robert Crumb, Frank Miller, Art Spiegelman. Classic golden age comics too (Will Eisner) and offbeat later stuff by Gahan Wilson, Gary Larson, and Bill Kliban.

3

18

48

802

**FJan6criminals** @ FJ6 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Lol what kind of name is Chic?

2

8

44

774

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [FJan6criminals](#)  
Polish – but Jewish. His parents Americanized their last name after emigrating to the U. S. in 1992 from Kyiv. Artie grew up hearing stories about his family’s suffering during WWII. Grandparents fled east to Kazakhstan during World War II and survived, but most of his relatives died in the Holocaust. Artie’s parents made it back to their hometown (Łódź) after 1945 but lost everything. Commies seized their textile factory. 1/3

27

43

354

15.1K

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [FJan6criminals](#)  
Family decided to move to Kyiv and stayed there for a few years after communism fell. They did ok but wanted out when the wall came down. Artie only went back to visit for first time a few years ago. Saw his old family home. Told me it was a surreal trip. Made him wonder how his life would’ve been different if he’d lived there during the cold war. 2/3

27

43

354

15.1K

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [FJan6criminals](#)  
He knows he’s lucky to be in the States. He hates injustice. When Trump got elected, Artie started venting online. Made a ton of memes and posted ‘em everywhere. Putin invading Ukraine put him over the edge. Seeing his parents’ home city bombed and all. He retaliated with his laptop and Photoshop. Said he saw himself as a “soldier in memes.” Went “defcon savage.” I’m not surprised his account got suspended 3/3

27

43

354

15.1K

**FJan6criminals** @ FJ6 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
I’ve seen his stuff before. Lotsa people love Chic. His work is sick.

1

34

104

2,621

**AntifaFred1945** @AFrd \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
I dig Chic’s sick schtick!

12

16

292

**VZelenny** @ Zelly333 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
I wonder how he would have trolled Hitler if he had lived back in WWII.

2

8

44

774

**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [VZelenny](#)  
Your wish is ChatGPT’s command!



298

675

23.5K

1.3M



**LiberationLarry** @LL2022 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [VZelenny](#)  
And this one too:



298 675 23.5K 1.3M

**AntifaFred1945** @AFrd \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Damn – Chic would have slayed in the '40s

3 18 48 802

**FJan6criminals** @FJ6 \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
Long live Art(ie)!

68 65 736 481.9K

**AntifaFred1945** @AFrd \* Mar 24, 2022  
Replying to [LiberationLarry](#)  
In every era!

12 16 292

*\*Editorial note: in keeping with the spirit of Szyk's satire and Professor Rosenfeld's current interests in counterfactual history, we invited him to submit an essay parodying the meme format for the 450 million monthly tweets on the X platform (formerly known as Twitter).*

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld is President of the Center for Jewish History in New York City and Professor of History at Fairfield University. He is the author of numerous books, including the forthcoming co-edited volume (with Janet Ward), *Fascism in America: Past and Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023) and *The Fourth Reich: The Specter of Nazism from World War II to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). He is an editor at the *Journal of Holocaust Research* and edits the blog, The Counterfactual History Review.



Fig. 24 Arthur Szyk, *The New Canaan Declaration of Independence*, 1950, watercolor, gouache and ink over typeset. Library of Congress



# FROM YIDDISHKEIT ILLUSTRATOR TO YANKEE SATIRIST

Philip I. Eliasoph

## I. An Introduction to Arthur Szyk

The exhibition to which this essay is responding represents a timely showcase of Szyk's work.

*In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights, 1926-1951* was conceived and organized by the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley. As the only venue in the Northeast of a national tour that included the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, the Fairfield University Museum of Art wishes to rekindle and reignite the civic pride experienced by New Canaanites nearly 75 years ago, by welcoming an immigrant artist, Arthur Szyk, back to his beloved American home: Connecticut.

Reassessing the artist's extraordinary legacy, Francesco Spagnolo offered a curatorial preface to this exhibition's 2020 inaugural showing:

...aesthetics are deeply connected with the political scope of his art. Medieval and Renaissance techniques, multilingual literary quotations, witty visual allegories, as well as modernist depictions of technology regularly recur in his works, and are often paired with enticing decorative themes that have made his oeuvre both popular and successful during, and well after, the span of the artist's life.<sup>1</sup>

In its exploration of Szyk's artwork and thematic approaches, the Magnes show enhances the reputation of this major talent's visual legacy. While Szyk is hardly a household name even in the art world, a number of critically-praised exhibitions have uniformly argued for a reevaluation of Szyk's obscured, if not entirely, veiled position within the global history of art. These include major exhibitions at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C., 2002), the Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin, 2009), the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco (2010-11), and the New-York Historical Society (2017).

Szyk's following during his lifetime formed an international spectrum, from pious Talmudic scholars, to Jewish families opening their most beloved edition of his sumptuously designed Haggadah, to the front-line American soldiers

and their families back home. Szyk's anti-Axis cartooning offered humorous relief for those worrying about the safety of their loved ones exposed to peril in the Pacific or European theaters.

But how did a Polish Jew ever break free from the traditional beliefs and practices of his forefathers and advance to the forefront of the artists fighting against the ideologies of Nazi aggression? What aspects of Szyk's political cartoons placed him at the very apex of the most noteworthy and admired "cover artist" illustrators of the war years?

Throughout this exhibition *In Real Times*, we are guided towards images and ideas that help us search for a new, inclusionary way to analyze and contextualize Szyk's life journey. His late arrival to America in 1940 intensified his visibility while simultaneously detracting from his opportunities for fame. Securing his role as artist in America for the brief span of only eleven years (1940-1951), Szyk literally "fell between the cracks." While he was recognized among the most formidable graphic illustrators and cartoonists of World War II, his presence in American art history was but a faintly recorded heartbeat in this brief period of barely more than a decade.

Along the way we aspire to fully comprehend: who was Arthur Szyk? Using the platform of themes constructed in the Magnes exhibition, the Fairfield University Art Museum frames Szyk's art at the intersection of Polish, Jewish, and American realities of the arts, humanities, and politics, all of them woven into the fabric of human rights and social justice. In the coming months we will welcome students from nearly every major within the humanities curriculum to explore this exhibition and shape their own observations. Many class discussions and faculty-led dialogues will be sparked from the themes of this exhibition as we find new ways to project Szyk's symbolic statements, as our own community faces ongoing threats of racial injustice, religious intolerance, and prejudices violating gendered identity and freedom. In retrospect, the humanitarian challenges addressed in Szyk's prewar artwork are even more magnified in our "broken" world of 2023.



Fig. 25 Arthur Szyk, *Arsenal of Democracy* (detail), 1942, watercolor and gouache. Private Collection

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Spagnolo and Shir Ghal Kochavi, *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights (1926-1951)*, exhibition catalogue (Berkeley, California: The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, 2020). <https://magnes.berkeley.edu/exhibitions/in-real-times-2/>



Using the pathways laid out in Fairfield’s Jesuit-inspired Magis Core curriculum, we are honored to widen the lens to fully enjoy and be enriched by Szyk’s fertile imagery. For our students, faculty, and community, this exhibition ably demonstrates why freedom, democracy, and human integrity are the values ensconced in a well-endowed education guided with Ignatian values.

Why did Szyk’s political satires bear such consequences in his own time? And finally, how do the themes of his art reflect back at us the crucially relevant challenges of our time: social injustice, immigration, human rights, and tolerance for the “Other”?

Central to our thesis is the primacy of viewing the life and art of Arthur Szyk within cultural history’s instructive textbook. With unflinching honesty and naked transparency, he eviscerates the human corpus dividing decency and evil. Alert to injurious lessons of the past, his contributions are reimagined and rejuvenated here through the lens of human rights, with an eye towards our contemporary afflictions. The sins of violence, persecution, and hateful intolerance are continuously charging into current news headlines with the renewed ferocity of Albrecht Dürer’s *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (fig. 26, right).

Deeply enriched by the multi-disciplinary perspectives of the guest scholars whose essays have preceded this one, a uniform consensus admires Szyk’s masterful visual responses to the destructive human rights crises of the last century. Additionally, the study of this treasury of Szyk’s images offers us much to reflect upon by paralleling “then and now.” Seen from the differing viewpoints of college students, mature scholars analyzing human history, or members of the Jewish community with personal relationships in memory of the Holocaust, Szyk truly unleashed an onslaught of inked nightmares and moving entreaties through his artwork. Entwining past and present, sadly these human follies remain ingrained within our own mercilessly conflicted world.

Through his sweeping studies of humanity’s irrepressible will to create, construct, and design, American historian Lewis Mumford points to the purpose of history as a project for honoring and reconnecting to the past. “Indeed, a primary purpose of his work has been to accomplish what he terms the ‘reclamation of human history.’”<sup>2</sup> *In Real Times*, therefore, not only reviews the 20th

century’s apocalyptic abyss, but as Mumford suggests, allows us to relearn these lessons as a “reclamation” project we must ‘Never Forget.’

So why is it crucial for us to review and revive the remarkable art and life of Szyk today? With the benefit of historical perspective, we have gained an even greater appreciation for his role as a multi-talented creative genius illuminating the darkest days of the 20th century. His astounding achievements come to animate the interiority of his Jewish soul gazing out externally to “real times.”



Fig. 26 Albrecht Dürer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, ca. 1497-1498, woodcut. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, 1940, (40.139.6(5))

With extraordinary talent Szyk stands proudly at the epicenter of modern history. His story reveals the intersection of geo-political events, most notably World War II; the eternal struggle for human dignity and religious tolerance, highlighted in the curse of antisemitism resulting in the Shoah; and the realization of the promise of the Jewish people’s reclamation of Eretz Israel, by



Fig. 27 Main gate of Auschwitz, Poland, 1945, site of 1.1 million murdered opponents of the Third Reich

contributing to the birth of the modern state of Israel. For this, and innumerable heroic acts, we salute an artist who self-describes his mission: “To those of my people, who fight for the right to die with their boots on: my pride, my love, my devotion.”<sup>3</sup>

**II. From War-Torn Europe to the “Next Station To Heaven”**

Five years and eight weeks after V-E Day, May 8, 1945, on July 4, 1950, a lively turnout of townsfolk in a thriving American hamlet converged to honor their nation’s birth. Brimming with optimistic hope, waves of young families were rebuilding their lives, trying to erase memories of the war years, and moving forward

This suburban community of New Canaan, Connecticut was thriving, along with dozens of other sprawling towns of post-war America. Among these fortunate (and almost exclusively white) families many were veterans finishing college, starting new businesses, and beginning to raise children. Blocks of newly built “Greatest Generation” boom homes sprouted off of exits 37 and 38 of the rolling W.P.A.-constructed greenway, the National Scenic Byway of the Merritt Parkway.

Gliding along this thoughtfully landscaped motorway brought New Canaanites between town and country, down to the threshold of Westchester with easy access to their careers in Manhattan. Their lives were revitalized with

generously extended low-interest residential home loans of the GI Bill. The dark memories of Adolf Hitler’s “Fortress Europe” were finally fading, with a new page turning towards the prosperity of the 1950s.

In Europe, in the wake of unimaginable destruction, the Third Reich’s embers were still smoldering. Europeans were struggling to rebuild after the Second World War, and were still subjected to rationing and daily hardships.

But on this side of the Atlantic, for New Canaan’s residents the Fourth of July holiday of 1950 would unexpectedly thread together America’s Independence with an artistic vision of human freedom, one that dated back to the Israelites’ emancipation from biblical times of pharaonic oppression.

Amidst the prosperity of this Kodachrome-perfect July day in southern New England, one newly arrived resident was struggling to erase the haunting memory of the murder of six million of his fellow Jews. Gazing out into the crowd, Arthur Szyk might have been conjuring up the *neshamah*, or soul, of his own mother and younger brother, now gone. Doubtless, in their absence, he felt the fatal silence of their voices, two of the victims swallowed into the Third Reich’s gas ovens and killing fields. With the megaphone blaring patriotic speeches, high school marching bands in lock step, and fireworks exploding overhead, the internationally-renowned immigrant must have felt as if he’d been transported through time and space.

Listening to the *um-pah* tuba of Sousa’s band music, and the chattering games between uniformed Girl and Boy Scout troops, Szyk was unable to dismiss the reverberating echoes of the nightmare of the not-yet-evaporated past.

Nazi Germany’s 4,200 extermination camps, ghettos, and incarceration sites had blighted Europe between 1933-1945, leaving flesh-burning images tattooed into his consciousness. But for this jubilant moment he was surely savoring the Independence Day festivities. Szyk was also savoring the fulfillment of a dream: becoming a naturalized American citizen only two years earlier.

<sup>2</sup> Frank G. Novak, Jr. “Lewis Mumford and the Reclamation of Human History,” *Clio* 16, no. 2 (1987): 159-181.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph P. Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 201.



For its annual “Glorious Fourth” celebration, New Canaan’s town fathers, marshals, judges, bands, and civic organizations marched and prayed for God’s blessing since the colonial era’s founding of the town. In 1731 a charter had been given to Canaan Parish by the colonial legislature in Hartford, followed by the founding of the Congregational Church there two years later. Affectionately known as “the next station to heaven,” the *Wall Street Journal* describes New Canaan today as an “affluent town in southern Connecticut...” [blessed for its] “bucolic countryside, expansive parks, and a quaint New England village – all within commuting distance to Manhattan.”<sup>4</sup>

With 300 people in attendance inside the neo-Georgian styled Town Hall, the bespectacled figure of Mr. Szyk (fig. 28, right) was introduced by Mr. Carlton Hill, chairman of the entire afternoon’s ceremonies. A new community treasure, one magnificently illuminated like a medieval papal bull, was being gifted from the brush and pen of an immigrant Jew from Poland. Szyk rose to dedicate to his newly-adopted hometown a gift for the ages: *The New Canaan Declaration of Independence* (now in the Library of Congress) (fig. 24, p. 36), a radiantly painted copy of America’s founding document, surrounded by swirling flourishes of calligraphy, state flags, and scenes of the heroes of Valley Forge under the leadership of General George Washington. To the stunned audience, it must have appeared as if John Hancock and Thomas Jefferson had decided to commission a copy of their manifesto of freedom from the brushes of John Trumbull or Charles Willson Peale. Earning admiration from this crowd of local Yankees, generations of farmers mixed in with more affluent newly arrived suburbanite commuters, Hill punctuated his introduction. With the artist standing nearby, the crowd was challenged to the cause of being “vigilant” protecting our freedoms

The attentive crowd rose to their feet giving a thunderous ovation to their new neighbor. “Szyk Given Great Ovation at July Fourth Ceremony” was the banner headline across the top right of *New Canaan Advertiser*: “Mr. Szyk was deeply moved by the standing ovation...the spectators rose to applaud as the flag draped across his illumination was lifted and folded by Girl Scouts.”<sup>5</sup> “Mr. Szyk, who was unable to speak because of his doctor’s advice to avoid excitement,” was described by the master of ceremonies, Mr. Hill,

as “one of the world’s great free men and has dedicated his life and his art to the preservation of freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

This was a once-in-a-lifetime moment for an artist raised in the newly-dug Jewish graveyard of war-ravaged Poland. Tearfully, he was now relinquishing this exquisite example of his artistry as a model for the highest principles of American values. As he introduced the guest of honor, Hill exclaimed: “if only enough of U.S. hold it as dear to our hearts as does Arthur Szyk, the perhaps we may see the day when we say the tyrants are not just temporarily defeated - but tyranny is dead.”<sup>7</sup>

This was an overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant audience, and some might well have entertained a reflexive reaction of disbelief that they were witnessing America’s founding creed redrawn by the descendent of a line of Yiddish-speaking rabbis. After all, all of this unfolded in New Canaan, just a short ride to the neighboring town of Darien, the setting for Laura Z. Hobson’s 1947 bestseller *Gentleman’s Agreement*. The book (and the Oscar-winning film adaptation of the same year) laid bare the endemic antisemitism of such “all-American” towns, as if no lessons on religious intolerance had been learned from the war.

A character in Hobson’s book bluntly states: “And New Canaan’s even stricter about Jews than Darien.” It’s this quietly “polite” antisemitism intoned with whispers at country clubs but actively transformed into admissions quotas invoked at Ivy League colleges that ensured that uppity Hebrews were held in check. Long before current legal issues of Affirmative Action were adapted to equalize access to higher education, antisemitic policies were enforced by America’s most prestigious schools designed to keep Jews out.



Fig. 28 Arthur Szyk, Self-portrait from *The Haggadah*, 1934-36, watercolor and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art



Fig. 29 Advertisement for *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) 20th Century Studios, Inc.

In the film version, a respectable Gentile magazine author, Phil Schuyler Green (played by Gregory Peck) poses as a Jew to flesh out his investigative story. To his dismay, he quickly encounters how embedded tensions and bigotry are politely tolerated in the upper echelon suburban towns of Westchester and Connecticut.



Fig. 30 Szyk in his New Canaan home, 1950 with *The New Canaan Declaration of Independence*

This was far from fiction. Many well-to-do Connecticut towns at this time still openly retained antisemitic title covenants prohibiting Jewish families from purchasing residential homes. Film director Elia Kazan noted, “for the first time someone said that America is full of antisemitism, both unconscious and conscious and among the best and most liberal people.”<sup>8</sup> Among its groundbreaking details, the film’s

script included the very first time the word “Jew” was ever heard in any Hollywood film.

There could be no greater contrast in the artist’s memory than the millions of ghostly lives he attempted to rescue by means of his brush and pen, and the public affection he was receiving for his magnificent gift to the town of New Canaan on that summer day. It was as if decades of his life were being being placed onto a hidden shelf – far from the present moment – to embrace the Szyk family’s new role as public citizens in this New England enclave.

In July of 2000, the New Canaan Historical Society staged a special exhibition, *Humanity: Arthur Szyk’s View of the World*, at their Town House Museum. Presented in conjunction with the Library of Congress, the exhibition presented more than 100 works of the artist. Historical Society executive director Janet Lindstrom proudly noted the town’s sense of being honored in this golden thread linking Szyk to New Canaan’s history. Under the *New York Times* headline “The Power of Pen and Ink: The Political Cartoonist,” Lindstrom explained: “This is a statement of one man’s creative fight against oppression and search for freedom.”<sup>9</sup>

**III. “Cartoon Crusader”: A Hebrew Knight**  
“The Jewish artist belongs to the Jewish people, and it is his mission to enhance the prestige of the Jews in the world. He is the international ambassador of the international people, scattered all over the globe...His task is to reveal to the world our great art treasures, to acquaint it with our glorious past as well as with our tragic present.”<sup>10</sup>

This quotation defined the *raison d’être* of the Polish-born Arthur Szyk. Inexorably tracking the triumphs and misfortunes of the Israelites spanning four millennia, in his career Szyk pictorialized a tribute to his peoplehood. Every masterfully executed Szyk image is imbued with the hope of achieving social justice, tolerance, and charity, while affirming an unshakeable dedication to preserving and defending the land of his forefathers: Israel.

As he explored novel approaches to timeless themes, Szyk infused his art with Judaism’s core value of *Tikkun olam*, or “repairing a broken world.” His lavishly illustrated Bible narratives and biting political satires were imaginatively

<sup>4</sup> Melanie Lefkowitz, “New Canaan, Happy to Be Off the Beaten Path,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013.  
<sup>5</sup> “Szyk Given Great Ovation at July Fourth Ceremony,” *New Canaan Advertiser*, July 6, 1950.  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Saul Austerlitz, “When Hollywood Was Scared To Depict Anti-Semitism, It Made ‘Gentleman’s Agreement,’” *Tablet Magazine*, May 15, 2014. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/gentlemans-agreement-tcm>  
<sup>9</sup> Bess Liebenson, “The Power of Pen and Ink: the Political Cartoonist,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/16/nyregion/the-power-of-pen-and-ink-the-political-cartoonist>  
<sup>10</sup> Jacob Beller, “An Artist’s War on Hitler: An Interview with Arthur Szyk,” *The Southern Israelite*, 21, April 1944. Quoted in Steven Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, exhibition catalog (Washington, D.C.: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002).



expressed by a progressive Jew, addressing his people's traditions with visual observations accumulated from the time of Moses all the way to modernity.

With the accuracy of William Tell's arrow, Szyk's political caricatures were weaponized during the prelude to and course of the Second World War. Self-described as a "soldier in art," he turned his prodigious talent towards higher purposes. Szyk recognized early on the potency of his most effective tool: satirically-infused political propaganda. "The origin of all art is what we call propaganda...I do not say that art is my aim, art is my means."<sup>11</sup>

In 1946, Universal Studios produced a featurette of a visit to Szyk's studio. In *Cartoon Crusader*, the artist appears on screen with a gentle smile and beaming attitude. The camera zooms into focus introducing the artist at his drawing table while a harp, violins and trumpets in the orchestra signal an upbeat tempo. The film's stentorian narrator calls to our attention: "unique in conception – the paintings of Arthur Szyk – carry a political impact as powerful as an atomic bomb...his caustic cartoons have become more popular with young America than pin-up girls."

Through the power of his brush, this most unlikely hero, a portly Polish Jew, morphs into a valiantly armored Hebrew knight, slaying bigoted persecutors through the ages. Collapsing the abstractions of time and space, from villainous Haman in ancient Persia to the genocidal carnage of Hitler, his art links past and present as an eternal moment. Donning the glasses of an introspective librarian, yet wielding his pen and brush like a poisonously-tipped lance, he attacked monstrous fascist enemies and despots while defending not only his Jewish brethren, but all freedom-loving nations and peoples.

Szyk wasn't the only one to see power in cartooning. In the 1930s, two American Jewish artists, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster from Cleveland created the character of Superman.

Superman debuted in *Action Comics* #1 (June, 1938) with many parallels to Moses; Moses was a boy dispatched to safety in a small vessel down

the Nile River, while the Last Son of Krypton was transported in a tiny rocket to America. Superman's birth name, Kal-El, also suggests the Hebrew suffix "El" denoting God. And similar to Szyk's own wanderings from the "old world" of Yiddish-immersed Poland, in Superman's story we encounter a saga of separation, transformation, and survival: "Superman's arrival as a refugee immigrant from Krypton, an old world destroyed – conjuring the biblical flood and the Holocaust in post-World War II comics – to the safe haven of America."<sup>12</sup> Like Siegel and Shuster, who combated the rising tides of antisemitism and "America First" nativism of the 1930s, Szyk's



Fig. 31 Arthur Szyk, *Bar Kokhba Revolt Against Roman Rule*, 1927, watercolor and gouache on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life (2017.5.1.30)

cartooning empowered him to also create characters to combat Nazi-fascism.

From where did this "Hebrew Knight" hail? Szyk was classically trained in Paris, beginning his education at the Académie Julian between 1910-13. In those pre-World War I years, he would have shared studio space at the academy with fellow students like Thomas Hart Benton, Diego Rivera and Jean Arp. When he returned to Paris in the 1920s, along with his vivacious wife Julia Likerman, he lived in a comfortable manner among a circle of sophisticated, educated friends. The Szyks were known as lively entertainers. Although not affluent, they enjoyed an artistically elegant bourgeoisie lifestyle. They entertained guests frequently at warmly appointed residences on Rue du Banquier (13e); Villa du Park de Monstouris (14e), and Rue Emile Deutsch de la Meurthe (14e). Even today the 13th

Arrondissement is known for its Jewish bakeries, kosher restaurants, and cafes, many closed on Shabbat Saturdays.



Fig. 32 Andy Warhol, *Myths: Superman*, 1981, screenprint on Lenox Museum Board, 38 x 38 inches. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

© The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

Renaissance styles filtered into an Ashkenazic quilt threaded with motifs ranging from Persian, Islamic, Mizrahi to Slavonic folkloric details. Accordingly, Szyk never occupied a role in the avant-garde; his was a more insular journey of rethreading traditional art styles into the warp and woof that could reflect the tapestry of Jewish civilization over the centuries.



Fig. 33, Arthur Szyk, *David and Saul*, ca. 1921, watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life (2017.5.1.16)

The prints and illustrations of his youthful style can also be seen as a fascinating hybridization of Aubrey Beardsley's *Ars Nouveau* exotica fused into his own concoction (fig. 71, p. 63) Szyk

There is no evidence of Szyk interacting with Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani, or Chaim Soutine, fellow Jewish bohemians who also immigrated to Paris in the pre-World War I years. Unlike these artists, who would eventually gain international reputations, Szyk was generally unfazed by modernist tendencies or experimentation. Instead, he devised a stylistic reformulation of medieval and

resurrects the Babylonian motifs of monuments recently excavated from the period of King Nebuchadnezzar II, in the early sixth century BCE. Adapted into his work, such as in his masterful rendering of the *Book of Job* from 1943-45 (fig. 72, p. 63), we see many of the same gleaming glazed floral motifs and silhouetted figures found on the polychromed bricks of the Ishtar Gate, excavated by German archaeologist Robert Koldewey in the late 19th century.

Szyk constantly reveals his essential nature more as a draughtsman than an expressive painter. Szyk's works often amalgamate layers of historic eras with the zig-zagging cadences of Babylonian ziggurats, synchronized into the rhythms of the Jazz Age. Instinctually delineating his fine line drawings, he tends to design by bending towards flattened, silhouetted forms with little volume, as in his *David and Saul* from 1921 (fig. 33, left). With roots imbedded in the Aesthetic Movement's reliance upon linear expressivity, Szyk's manipulation of abstracted forms with calligraphic strokes becomes the basis for his figurative story telling.

But absent the warmth of flesh, his style in the "grand manner" rarely pulsates with the Italian radiance seen in drawings of Botticelli, Leonardo, or Raphael. One might note that Szyk's mannerism is an ethno-theological form of visualized Judaism, as Szyk squeezed out of his mind and inkwell a personal idiom, a kaleidoscopic alloy that we might playfully term "Neo-Assyrian/Art Deco/Hebrew Modernism."

Also exploring unprecedented Jewish modalities, we can think laterally of a contemporary such as the Russian Lazar Markovich El Lissitzky (1890-1941). He retells the Passover rhymes of "Had Gadya" in his own inimitable cubo-futuristic *shtetl* style (fig. 34, p. 45). Similar to the distinctive melodies of Klezmer music, Szyk's Ashkenazi-styled Jewishness permeates into his modernist vision. It's as if the purity of Picasso's cubism or Boccioni's futurist fantasies are given a Yiddish-inflected tonality; Hebrew modernism using Babylonian stylization.

Noting how Szyk was inspired by everything from Polish "decorative schemes that appear on folk costumes [and] applied to buildings and furniture," Tom L. Freudenheim targets the faintly known elements of Central and Eastern European "nationalist movements." Szyk includes traces of folkish accents from "Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, etc." as Freudenheim brilliantly points

<sup>11</sup> Mary Bragloti, "Szyk Makes the Axis Writhe," *The New York Post*, June 3, 1944.  
<sup>12</sup> Samantha Baskind, review of *Is Superman Circumcised?: The Complete Jewish History of the World's Greatest Hero* by Roy Schwartz, *Jewish Book Council*, June 22, 2022. <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/is-superman-circumcised-the-complete-jewish-history-of-the-worlds-greatest-hero>



out: “Indeed, this convergence of *traditions*, rather than of *styles*, gives Szyk’s work its unique qualities.”<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, while working in Paris, Szyk had already earned a global reputation for his fanciful illustrations and book projects taking on a wide range of subjects. An early Szyk masterpiece is the exceptionally powerful illumination of 45 watercolor and gouache miniature paintings for the historic *Statut de Kalisz* (*Statute of Kalisz*), published by Editions de la Table Ronde de Paris in 1932. It depicts the Polish law signed in 1264, under the benign rule of the Grand Duke, that welcomed Jews to Poland and even granted them protections from harm.

From the archives of the Brooklyn Museum we have an early glimpse of Szyk’s ability to visually mesmerize an American audience – even before he had stepped foot in the country. His series of 38 paintings honoring George Washington and the heroes of the American Revolution helped to earn him the George Washington Medal, which was presented at an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1933 organized by the Federation of Polish Jews in America. A press release noted: “Although thoroughly a European and never having been a visitor to America, the Polish artist succeeded in capturing an uncanny representation of revolutionary America.”<sup>14</sup>

He was among the most prolific cartoonists during the war years; between 1939 and 1945, over 250 of Szyk’s political caricatures and cartoons were published, lambasting totalitarian despots in popular print publications including *The American Mercury*, *The Chicago Sun*, *Collier’s*, *Esquire*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *The New York Post*, and *Time*. In each of his editorial cartoons, Szyk’s draftsmanship executes line, form, and while fusing foibles with curves, and grisly brutality with swinging rhythms.

Szyk’s signature penned style, seen in the 1919 drawing (fig. 35, p. 46) has a linear manner traceable to its Polish ethnographic roots in popular folkloric illustration. Sacred texts or wicked satires of conniving dictators all fall into the Szyk visual encyclopedia of forms: inflated *art nouveau* figures see their anatomical parts pressurized into the comically blown-up distortions.

With his academic refinements, the drawings become eastern Polka-like cartoons crystallized

around the margins of the experimental constructs of Picasso’s Bateau Lavoir studio in Montmartre. Always conceived for its optical depth on the flattened, two-dimensional brushed



Fig. 34 Lazar Markovich El Lissitzky, *El Lissitzky, Father Bought a Kid for Two Zuzim, Had*, 1919, lithograph on paper. New York, The Jewish Museum

or printed page, he often references historical styles while never departing from the post-cubist, streamlined amalgamated language of early-20th-century modernism.

Ever observant of key figurative compositions in the Western canon, Szyk capriciously purloins, appropriates or recycles iconic imagery. For example, his watercolor of Judith decapitating Holofernes (1921) (fig. 76, p. 65) conspicuously borrows Caravaggio’s formulaic device as sword and head are firmly gripped. As if writing out the “David & Goliath” scene in Hebrew calligraphy from right to left, Szyk reverses the Caravaggio template placing Holofernes’ head into Judith’s right hand.

Szyk transforms the stark tenebrism of Caravaggio’s icy beheading (fig. 75, p. 65) into a rhapsodic whimsy. Holofernes’s black curls stand out behind a turbulent sea of exquisitely woven surface decorations and fantastically enlivened, luxurious patterns. Silken threads form undulating arabesques laced into floral textile patterns

known in the finest rugs from Persia’s 16th century Safavid court ateliers.

Szyk’s work draws us in with its refined images delineating grace. Often, he then plunges us into the “suspension of disbelief” with characters drawn with the quiet demure of an enchanting Pre-Raphaelite muse. Often, we see traces of William Morris decorative patterns ingeniously corrupted with Middle Eastern elements. Assyrian inspired cylinder seal forms, lamassu statues, and flattened relief carving motifs are infused with



Fig. 35 Arthur Szyk, illustration from the 1919 book *Rewolucja w Niemczech* (*Revolution in Germany*), in which a Valkyrie-like figure stands on a globe stamped with the Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz).

the freedom of Victorian design elements within Szyk’s amalgamated vocabulary. After the 1925 landmark Paris *Exposition internationale des arts decoratifs et industriels modernes*, Szyk forges an even more stylized version of his idiosyncratic Assyrio-Hebraic-Slavic mishmash of ethnic/modernism.

Turning towards his political satire, his drawing method shifts from Mesopotamian designs to the early cartooning of Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer’s Felix the Cat (1919), or Walt Disney’s anthropomorphized characters like Pegleg Pet (1925), Clarabelle Cow (1928) or Mickey and Minnie Mouse (1928). Animating murderous leaders of the Third Reich, Mussolini’s “New Roma,” Imperial Japan, and their Axis

collaborators, Szyk draws tyrants as inflated cartoons of pomposity and depravity.

Deploying a broadly manneristic figurative drawing method, Szyk pumps up these proto-Zap Comix style cartoons by pushing the line between appropriate taste and taboo visual debauchery. Heavily accenting edges, volumes, and tubular extremities in the style of R. Crumb (fig. 37, p. 47), Szyk draws Eve like a post-semitic Marlene Dietrich with bouncy, curling locks, while Adam mirrors Rudolph Valentino’s irresistible *punim* (a person’s face), capturing his boyish avatar (fig. 36, p. 47).

Inspired and ignited by his devotion to the People of the Book, Szyk emerges from the lost world of Sholem Aleichem’s *Fiddler on the Roof* or Marc Chagall-inspired visionary dreams. With a deftly deployed touch, Szyk transformed his artworks and especially his political cartooning into a nearly timeless tapestry of art history’s golden threads. Cherry picking some luscious moments from the flowing stream of art historical styles, Szyk playfully reinvigorates the hallmark motifs and characteristic forms from medieval to modern art.

#### IV. “Our Descendants Will Turn Back to Arthur Szyk”

The early morning of May 22, 1983 began with a heavy rain showers as thousands of families and friends assembled on the Great Lawn of Bellarmine Hall prepared to celebrate Fairfield University’s commencement exercises. Amidst a sea of colorful umbrellas, ponchos and raingear, the disappointed graduates of the Class of 1983 found their seats as the opening invocations and greetings began with a depressing drizzle under dark grey skies.

Offering his testimony as the world’s most recognized literary survivor of Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel inspired our community as the honored keynote speaker. But just as the author of *Night* rose to speak at the podium, an unforgettable moment occurred. As if the Divine hand of Yahweh set his finger down on Bellarmine’s lawn, a scene from the post-diluvian days of Noah unfolded.

To the graduating students’ delight, suddenly: “the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain stopped falling from the sky” [Genesis 8]. Sensing the joyous relief of the crowd seeing a blue sky and sunshine emerging from the darkness, Dr. Wiesel seized the moment before his prepared speech. With his broad smile, he announced: “Friends - is there any doubt

<sup>13</sup> Tom L. Freudenheim, “Arthur Szyk in Context,” in *Freedom Illuminated: Understanding the Szyk Haggadah*, ed. Byron L. Sherwin and Irvin Ungar (Burlingame, CA: Historiana, 2008), 25.

<sup>14</sup> “Water Colors and Illuminated Manuscripts by Arthur Szyk,” press release, Brooklyn Museum, November 26, 1933. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/1514>



that when Catholics and Jews work together – miracles surely can happen!”

Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo three years later, he cried out: “Can this be true? This is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How can the world remain silent?...For I belong to a traumatized generation, one that experienced the abandonment and solitude of our people.”<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 36 Arthur Szyk, *God's Good World [Adam & Eve]* from *Pathways Through the Bible*, Philadelphia, 1946

Decades earlier, Szyk had tried to use his artistic talent to prevent the crimes to which Wiesel referred. Szyk employed a miniaturist painting method, magnifying with bejeweled luster astonishing images that came to inspire, encourage, and even astonish his global audience.

Powerfully interweaving religious traditions and propagandistic images, his art attempted to expose the Nazi genocide and to save millions of human lives. If the goal of propaganda art is to effectively persuade viewers by electrifying their emotions, then Szyk's images place him among the most compelling political satirists of the modern world.

In 1946, Pulitzer prize-winning author and historian Carl Van Doren had already positioned Szyk as an artistic titan among the ages: “Of all the works produced by the present war, there is no one more certain to be alive two hundred years from now. Just as we turn back to Hogarth and Goya for the living images of their age, so our descendants will turn back to Arthur Szyk for the most graphic history of Hitler and Hirohito and Mussolini.”<sup>16</sup>

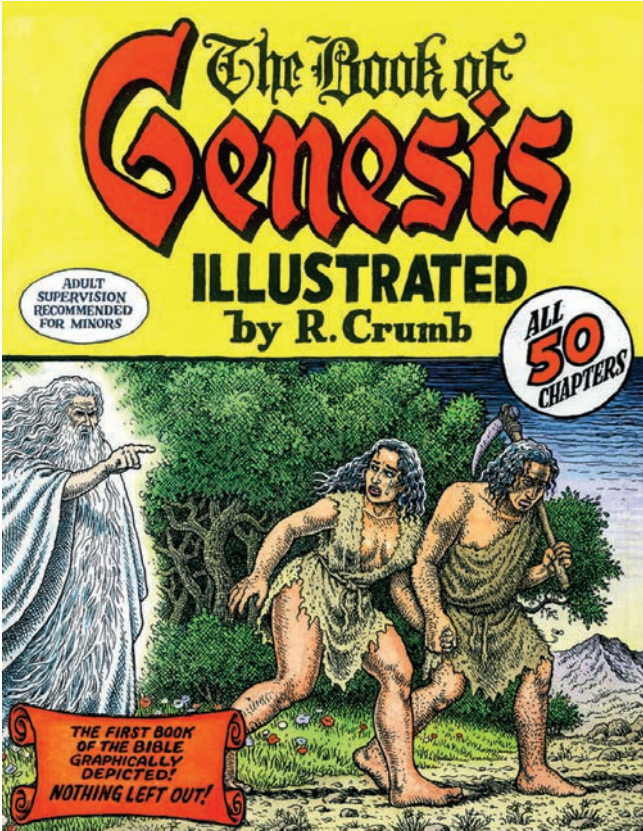


Fig. 37 From *THE BOOK OF GENESIS ILLUSTRATED* by Robert Crumb. Copyright © 2009 by Robert Crumb. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

One might even develop a counter-factual form of art history by asking which past masters would have taken pride in seeing how Szyk appropriated and reinvented characteristic elements of their art? Why would we not expect the most notable Persian miniaturist of the 15th century, Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād (fig. 73, p. 64), to admire Szyk's ability to emulate the dreamy characteristics of his distinctive style? Szyk's neo-Persian figures from *The Megillat Esther* (fig. 74, p. 64) convey the same oddly angled three-quarter and then profile view. Szyk's Jewish figures reveal the absence of perspectival depth, while using various angles in picturing the elements within a single painting



Fig. 38 Hans Holbein, the Younger, *Sir Thomas More*, 1527, oil on panel. New York, Frick Collection, Henry Clay Frick Bequest (1912.1.77)

– effectively fusing Persian miniatures with Judaism's beloved stories of persecution and redemption.

Or how might a prodigious portraitist like Hans Holbein relate his likeness of Thomas More (fig. 38, above) to Szyk's depiction of the chief rabbi of Amsterdam?

Szyk's 1927 painting of *The Scribe* (fig. 39, above) is executed with the same breathtaking level of optical veracity. Szyk's presentation of an Erasmus-like Renaissance scholar is concocted with whimsically detailed historical anachronisms. Reminiscent of those irreverently designed pages of *Mad* – the American humor magazine (1952-2018), Szyk transforms the sobering portrait of the Renaissance humanist into a hybrid of satirical irreverence laced with caustic criticism of modern art. He anticipates the regular feature of 'scratch your head' comedic drawings by *Mad's* all-star cartoonists, which challenged readers with “What's Wrong with this Drawing?”

Suspending the viewer's disbelief, we are plunged into a deeply constructed spatial illusion of a late medieval townscape echoing the aerial perspectives of a northern Renaissance panel painting. But suddenly – blink twice now – we



Fig. 39 Arthur Szyk, *The Scribe*, 1927, watercolor miniature. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life (2017.5.1.28)

realize that along an old river bridge a locomotive chug into the scene, while a single-engine bi-plane ascends into the sky at the upper left. In the upper right corner, a contemporary synthetic cubist painting fills the wall with the letters “PICA/SSO” wedged into the image with a stylized African mask grinning with a contemptuous wink.

Floating triangles intersect the faux-cubist farce as if Szyk wished the viewer to catch his ironic view on the art world's fashionable trends in 1927. Above the imagery of Wassily Kandinsky's floating triangular shapes, a United States one dollar bill is crowned by a pair of putti insouciantly smoking pipes. Two years later, it would take the Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte to expand these visual shenanigans by famously painting a pipe with the droll inscription: “Ceci n'est pas une pipe.” In Magritte's iconic *The Treachery of Images* (1929) we appreciate Szyk's preemptive critique of avant-garde art: as “this is not a pipe.”

Skewering a rogue's gallery of Axis figureheads, goons, and villains, he stamped into modern illustration a handwrought style of singular eccentricity. For his forays into the Hebrew Bible, the Passover Haggadah, and assorted

<sup>15</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Acceptance Speech,” The Nobel Peace Prize, 1986. [www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/acceptance-speech/](http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/acceptance-speech/)  
<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Irvin Ungar, “Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man,” in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, ed. Irvin Ungar (London: Historica and The Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 19.



drawings related to the birth of the State of Israel, Szyk's brush imitates the precision of a diamond-cutter. Creating imaginative flourishes and organic touches, we are dumbfounded by the endless patience exhibited in his execution of the microscopically foliated marginalia of entwining vine scroll motifs.

Szyk's experimentation with light and color brushed into foliated arabesques, dynamic curvilinearity and organically explosive calligraphic forms is unmatched by any illustrator of the modern world. His method seizes upon the interrelatedness of figures and forms fused into the patterns framing the main body of the text.

Elegantly enlarged letters like those that adorned medieval manuscripts (fig. 48, p. 52) mushroom into billowing Gothicized shapes swirling into forms of the feudal era. Szyk entwines the spirit of refined medieval illumination with the subject matter of modern calls for freedom and social justice, producing an oft-bewildering and largely unprecedented iconography. The inscrutability of his artistic vocabulary is perhaps one of the reasons that the artist did not find an easy home in later canonical classifications of art history.

There is another tantalizing thread of art-historical reference hidden within Szyk's extravagantly rendered marginalia fantasies. Although he was deeply steeped in the late medieval tradition of the Franco-Flemish manuscripts, Szyk's designs also harken back to the painted frescoes of ancient Rome. At the Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome and Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, the *groteschi* patterns explode with stylized animals, floral arrangements, and curvaceously twisted bio-morphic forms. During the Renaissance, in the small Umbrian village of Deruta, these fantasies were imitated in the production of an especially prized form of "maiolica" pottery using a pre-fired tin-glazed base (fig. 42, above).

As has been illustrated, Szyk can be categorized in many ways: as a miniaturist, illustrator, cartoonist, calligrapher, and political satirist.

He was also, of course, a Polish Jew. However, unlike the more renowned Jewish artists of his generation – Chagall, Modigliani, Soutine – all of whom who were secular modernists, Szyk never attempted to sever his Jewishness from his central identity. Instead, Szyk felt urgently that Jewish destiny was to "stand straight and tall, to cultivate the land [of Israel] and even to take up arms."<sup>17</sup> An emancipated, modern Jew, Szyk clearly felt liberated from the image of the "an old man bowed by the weight of history, bent over the heavy Talmudic volumes he studied and incapable of standing firm."<sup>18</sup> With this conviction of the modern Jew as a fighter, Szyk looked to the figure of Judah Maccabee as a heroic prototype.

Szyk fulfills the biblical role of an archetypal prophet – the individual prepared to shout out to the crowd of human failings and inequities. His biography unfolds along the "hero's journey"



Fig. 40, detail of fig. 39



Fig. 41 Arthur Szyk, Detail of marginalia from *The United States of America*, 1945, watercolor and gouache, pen and ink and pencil on board. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, (2017.5.1.18)



Fig. 42 Italian, *Deruta*, Dish, 1530–40, maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware), lustered. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of V. Everit Macy, in memory of his wife, Edith Carpenter Macy, (1927, 27.97.3)

as outlined in Joseph Campbell's monomythic narrative of a Jungian cycle.<sup>19</sup> The artist's lifetime follows a trajectory of trials and tribulations culminating with recognition late in life – having earned an honorable recognition by the end of his short-lived career. Rising from obscurity, self-identifying as a servant of the people of Israel, his artistic persona "shone" with the same "radiance" illuminating the face of Moses [Exodus 34:29].

Emerging from long-established Jewish roots in central Poland, his origins already shaped the ambiguity that would impacting much of his career. By the time he was five years old, he attended a private art school in Łódź. At the tender age of 15 he was sent to Paris and enrolled at the Académie Julian, a training ground for the next generation of modernists, as discussed above.

Returning to Poland in 1913, he took advanced courses at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. Early in 1914, just before the outbreak of the First



Fig. 43 The Limbourg Brothers, *The Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, 1405-1408/1409, tempera, gold, and ink on vellum. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1954, (54.1.1a, b)

World War, Szyk joined a study tour of art and antiquities, making his first and only trip to the Holy Land. This sojourn to historic Israel proved to be a pivotal moment as he developed his passionate interest in the political dimensions of the Zionist project. He began to draw the imaginary clouds of the yet-to-be-established Jewish homeland. Nowhere to be seen, in these innocent years before the rise of the Third Reich, was the specter of the Jewish people's near-annihilation.

This early travel adventure solidified several key elements of Szyk's later art. On an immediate

level, it exposed him to the styles and motifs of Orientalized, Middle Eastern art. Secondly, it exposed him to the newly established Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, founded in Jerusalem in 1906. Szyk scholar Joseph P. Ansell points out how it would have aroused Szyk's "ideological sympathy" as it merged the idea of "establishing a "Jewish art" [by depicting] biblical themes."<sup>20</sup> Finally, this experience in *Eretz Yisrael*, the sacred Land of Israel, proved to be pivotal as it "strengthened Szyk's interest in Zionism and his resolve to create Jewish art."<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 44 Arthur Szyk, *Four Freedoms Prayer*, New Canaan, 1949, watercolor, gouache, ink. Washington, D.C., The Library of Congress

How did Szyk assume this role while recognizing his obligation to speak out amidst the tragic fate of his fellow Jews? With our historical hindsight regarding the looming catastrophe for the Jews of Poland, Szyk's survival alone seems miraculous. In 1919, during Poland's war against the Soviet Bolsheviks, Szyk had served as a second lieutenant while also appointed as Artistic Director of the Department of Propaganda for the Polish Army. (Thirty years into the future, Szyk would be tarnished as a Soviet sympathizer during the McCarthy era's witch hunts, but in his

<sup>17</sup> Michael Berenbaum, "Arthur Szyk: The Artist as Soldier, the Artist as Messenger," in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, ed. Irvin Ungar (London: Historica and The Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 63.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon, 1949).

<sup>20</sup> Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 20.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



youth he served in Poland as an anti-Communist propagandist.) Always proud of his Polish heritage, he was honored with the Gold Cross of Merit in 1931, Poland’s highest civilian award.



Fig. 45, detail of fig. 44 Szyk, *Four Freedoms Prayer*, also called “The Madonna of Connecticut,” with details of Hartford State Capitol Building and State Shield

But the fate of Poland’s Jews shifted over the course the 1930s from tolerance to mass murder. “On the eve of the German occupation of Poland in 1939, 3.3 million Jews lived there. At the end of the war, approximately 380,000 Polish Jews remained alive, the rest having been murdered, mostly in the ghettos and the six death camps: Chelmo, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau.”<sup>22</sup>

As a survivor from the now destroyed culture of pre-World War II Eastern Europe, Szyk felt an obligation to honor his Polish heritage even after he became an American citizen in 1948. This identity was often conflicted, as “the Jews had a different language and religion as well as different customs and a separate communal life. Most ethnic Poles thought of the Jews as Jewish, not Polish, and maintained that one could not be both; and many Polish Jews felt that same way.”<sup>23</sup>

Szyk was painfully aware of his blessings and good fortune to have escaped as the war against the Jews was in its early (but still deadly) phase. “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.”<sup>24</sup>

As the peril of the European Jewry increased, *The Haggadah* (figs. 81-82, p. 68) became, for Szyk, a personal and political statement spanning 3,500 years of Jewish enslavement between Egyptian

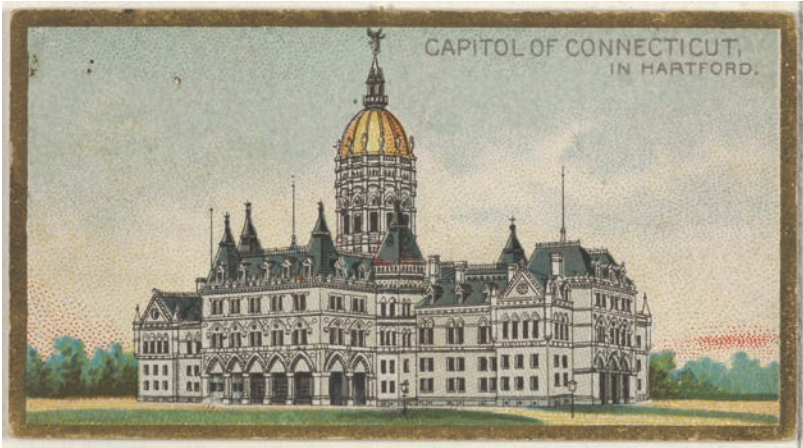


Fig. 46 The Gast Lithograph & Engraving Company, *Capitol of Connecticut in Hartford*, from the General Government and State Capitol Buildings series (N14) for Allen & Ginter Cigarettes Brands, 1889, commercial color lithograph. Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick, (63.350.201.14.15)

pharaohs to Hitler’s taskmasters of death. Developed between 1934-36 and featuring the laser-like precision of Gothic illuminators like the Limbourg brothers’ treasured *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (1412-14)(see fig. 43, p. 50) Szyk’s magnus opus was finally published in 1940, the very year that he landed in America.

Dedicating his Exodus narrative to King George VI, Szyk acknowledged the key role that England – his temporary place of residence prior to his emigration to the United States – had to play in Jewish survival. In his thunderously acclaimed *Haggadah*, Szyk transformed the Passover story into a compilation of sumptuously painted text and images, worthy of a royal library. A specially inscribed copy from Szyk was delivered to Buckingham Palace, and his inscription opposite the title (fig. 81, p. 68) begged for England’s valiant defense of the Jewish people and the Free World at large:

“At the Feet of Your Most Gracious Majesty i [*sic*] humbly lay these works of my hands, shewing forth the Afflictions of my People Israel. arthur szyk [*sic*], illuminator of Poland.”<sup>25</sup>

The *Times of London* reviewer proclaimed it as “worthy to be placed among the most beautiful books that the hand of man has produced.”<sup>26</sup> Limited to an edition of 250 copies printed on

vellum by England’s Beaconsfield Press, original copies sold at that time for \$500 (the showroom cost of a 1940 Ford standard model was \$660). In the current auction market, rare copies of this first edition have hammered at \$60,000.

Already celebrated as a first-ranked illustrator with an international following, when Szyk arrived in this country the New York press announced that the anti-Nazi cartoonist had come to live in America. Several tabloid clippings of that time buzzed with the gossip that Szyk was honored to have a “price on his head” coming from Berlin – reportedly being directed from Hitler’s own desk.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 47, detail of fig. 24, p. 36

**V. Art on the Homefront: Rescue Mission**  
*Madness* is Szyk’s fateful watercolor, gouache, and ink illustration which appeared nationally as *Collier’s* magazine cover for the January 17, 1942 edition (fig. 87, p. 72). Significantly, it was signed and dated “Arthur Szyk, NY, Sept. ‘41,” meaning it was created four months before Admiral Yamamoto’s waves of 353 dive bombers appeared over the skies at Pearl Harbor at 7:58am on Sunday, December 7. With the sinking of 5 battleships, 6 cruisers and destroyers damaged, 347 aircraft destroyed or disabled, and the deaths of 2,500 soldiers and civilians lost in the carnage, President Roosevelt’s designation of this “Day of Infamy” would alter the course of modern history.

And there was Szyk, as if shouting to the world from his Manhattan apartment: *Madness* was a graphic warning to the readers of *Collier’s*. Sensing that Hitler’s European aggression would soon explode, Szyk’s cartoon presciently predicts a coming “world war” on the horizon. Within a few months of him signing this portentous illustration,

the United States was “all in,” with the Allies facing humanity’s most catastrophic global conflict. Proving “America First” isolationists’ folly, the Polish Jew’s urgent call to stop Hitler in his tracks would prove to be prophetic.

While increasingly worried about Hitler’s strategies and the personal safety of his family in Poland, Szyk established a safe haven living with his wife Julia and daughter Alexandra in a cozy, sun-filled penthouse apartment at 323 West 74th Street in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Dealing with his mother and sister’s unknown fates after *Einsatzgruppen* death squads had



Fig. 48 Detail from *The Book of Kells*, 9th century, ink on vellum. Dublin, Trinity College Library, (MS A. I. [58])

committed mass executions across Poland, Szyk also had no information about his son George while he was serving with the 1st Free French Army’s campaigns in the French colonies of Syria and Lebanon.

As a European Jew who had attentively watched – and been terrified – by the Nuremberg Racial Laws (September 1935), the murderous violence of Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938), the establishment of seven large concentration camps within Germany (1936-39) including Dachau, Buchenwald, and Ravensbrück, Szyk’s art of the 1930s and 1940s pulsates like a neon sign above Time’s Square. His eye-popping *Collier’s* cover radiates like a final warning sign:

“Beware – Global War Ahead.” *Madness* issues a clarion call to an indifferent, non-interventionist American public.

In alignment with this exhibition’s focus on “Human Rights, and their Collapse,” it seems as if Szyk heard the calling of Rabbi Hillel’s message: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am

<sup>22</sup> “Murder of the Jews of Poland.” Yad Vashem. The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Accessed February 18, 2023. [https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/fate-of-jews/poland.html#narrative\\_info](https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/fate-of-jews/poland.html#narrative_info).

<sup>23</sup> Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ungar, “Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man,” 17.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>26</sup> *The Times of London* Literary Supplement, February 22, 1941, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Sara W. Duke and Holly Krueger, “The Art of Arthur Szyk: ‘Artist for Freedom’ Featured in Library Exhibition,” *Library of Congress* 59, no. 1 (2000).



only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" The Magnes' exhibition dramatizes Szyk's "overarching concerns about the dangers of tyranny, totalitarianism, and human rights violations...Soon after the news of Nazi massacres spread beyond Eastern Europe, the artist associated himself with a host of Jewish political activists and created new artwork supporting a demand for direct action from the Allied forces, especially the U.S. government."<sup>28</sup>

Dante's harrowing warning before descending into the Inferno forcefully informs the damned as Szyk spells out in the *Madness* cartoon: "Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here." Inserting this memorable phrase from 14th century Italian literature with the living hell of the death camps creates a striking parallel. Dante's warning at the gates of the Inferno was similar to the signage above Auschwitz and other camps: *Arbeit Macht Frei*, or "Work Makes One Free." (fig. 27, p. 40)

Propaganda was birthed out of the Holy See's robust challenges to the Protestant heretics of the north. Recognizing the power and the value of visual persuasion, the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* [Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith] was founded in 1633 under the supervision of Pope Gregory XV. With swarms of deliriously talented Baroque master artists – from Bernini to Rubens – it sent artistic missionaries to the four corners of the globe. From Rome's "Via di Propaganda" they carried the papacy's and St. Ignatius' message of educating – *urbi et orbi* – from the city to the world.

Today, defenders of free and accurate news information are witnessing massively increased numbers of conspiracists, militia groups, and neo-fascist regimes active throughout the world today. Journalists are increasingly remorseful about the growing acceptance of blatantly falsehoods threatening democratic institutions.

This is nothing new to scholars of 20th-century history. Exploring how Hitler effectively employed a vast network of propaganda organs, Jeffrey Herf describes "Nazi propaganda presented Germany's war against the Allies and its intention to exterminate the Jews of Europe as part of one overarching war of retaliation and defense. "Fascists despised the small truths of daily existence...They used new media, which at the time was radio, to create a drumbeat of propaganda that aroused feelings before people had time to ascertain the facts."<sup>29</sup> There was of course, an abyss between Nazi propaganda

presented the Third Reich as the innocent victim of other's malice and the reality of Hitler's long-planned policy of expansion and aggression."<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 49 Bronisław Wilkoszewski, *Widoki m. Łodzi* – Synagoga i Willa p. Hertza, 1896, reproduction print of original photograph. Łódź, Museum of the City of Łódź.

We view through the lens of history the sweeping success of Hitler's National Socialist movement, which expanded from a fringe, minority party in the early 1930s to ultimately capture a majority of Germany's government. Political scientists, journalism experts, and media psychologists have uniformly credited Hitler's savvy implementation of the triple-headed hydra of radio, film, and persuasive poster art to hypnotize the German populace.

Holocaust scholars highlight how Goebbels' deviously effective Ministry of Propaganda shaped public behaviors and attitudes. Perfecting these psycho-iconic cutouts, the Nazi state elicited a palpable willingness to exterminate the "infectious" Jewish race. In using these propaganda tools to mythologize the superiority of a purified Aryan state, race consciousness was the bread and butter of the Third Reich's racial legislation condemning "sub-humans" to extermination.

Observers of Russia's current aggression against Ukraine detect the same underlying propaganda techniques even as he carries out crimes against humanity before the world. An analysis in the



Fig. 50 *Win WWII*, 1942, three-cent postage stamp issued by United States Postal Service.

*New York Times* points out "Why Vladimir Putin Invokes Nazis to Justify His Invasion of Ukraine": "The "Nazi" slur's sudden emergence shows how Putin is trying to use stereotypes, distorted reality and his country's lingering World War II trauma to justify his invasion of Ukraine."<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 51 A billboard near a highway in Sevastopol, Ukraine reads: "On March 16 we will choose" and shows a map of Crimea with a swastika and a map of Crimea with the colors of the Russian flag on March 10, 2014

*Madness* also reached deep into the iconographic traditions of global triumphalism – from the Counter-Reformation to the rise of totalitarianism. Similar to the allegorical serpent detailed in Jan Vermeer's painting (fig. 53, p. 55), a snake is festooned with scales marked with swastikas. It is about to pounce while fascist allies, Benito Mussolini and French collaborator Marshal Philippe Petain are helpless, miniaturized puppets.

Yet another possible influence for Szyk's imagery appeared in Charlie Chaplin's brilliantly choreographed film *The Great Dictator*. With Chaplin acting and directing, filming began in September, 1939. By the time this spoof about a Hitler prototype named Adenoid Hynkel was released in the fall of 1940, audiences in London



Fig. 52 *Collier's* war reporter, Martha Gellhorn, the only female press correspondent, talks to Indian soldiers of the British Army on the 5th Army's Cassino front.

movie theaters found themselves oddly laughing while bravely enduring the Luftwaffe's merciless Blitz bombings. England's "Finest Hour" became a hallmark as Churchill worked to raise his nation's spirits during nightly German air raids conducted September 1940 through May 1941.

*Collier's* national circulation of approximately 2.5 million, sold on newsstands and through mail subscription, offered Szyk a powerful window into the American home. Try to imagine the impact of a blistering magazine cover of this intensity before an American public decades before our current social media saturated landscape. In a time before the invention of cable television, digital news platforms or the ubiquity of cell phone screens pinging out instant messages, it is necessary to carefully weigh the visual power of magazine illustrations and political cartoons to shape public opinion.

Szyk's forecasting of a global catastrophe in 1941 makes his cover illustration of *Madness* the front bookend to the *Collier's* report that would be published on June 23, 1945. In that issue, the calamity of modern civilization was reported by a courageous woman, Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998). Hers is a remarkable saga of an unsung female hero as a working war correspondent and journalist, and a tough front line battle eyewitness. (fig. 52, below) Defiantly, she would not be out-punched by *Collier's* war reporter on assignment, her ex-husband Ernest Hemingway.

Plans for D-Day were under way as the great Allied attack to reclaim the Continent. Gellhorn managed to join the troops on nearly 5,000 vessels were being launched across the Channel toward Normandy, in the largest amphibious assault the world had ever seen. She had no real plan on that dock, but when military personnel approached her, she flashed an expired press badge, pointed at the largest thing in view—a hulking white hospital barge with a red cross on its side—and said she was there to interview nurses. To her shock, she was waved through. Hemingway's story soon appeared in *Collier's* alongside hers, with top billing and more dazzle, but the truth had already been written on the sand. There were 160,000 men on that beach and one woman. Gellhorn.<sup>32</sup>

Even more unbelievably, Gellhorn was the only female correspondent given the sickening assignment of reporting of the horrors she witnessed riding along with the U.S. Seventh

28 Francesco Spagnolo and Shir Ghal Kochavi, *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights (1926-1951)*, 2.

29 Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2021), 63.

30 Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy, Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006), 32.

31 Anton Troianovski, "Why Vladimir Putin Invokes Nazis to Justify His Invasion of Ukraine," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2022.

32 Paula McClain, "The Extraordinary Life of Martha Gellhorn, the Woman Ernest Hemingway Tried to Erase," *Town and Country Magazine*, July 12, 2018. <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/tradition/a22109842/martha-gellhorn-career-e>



Army's 45th Infantry Division liberation of Dachau on April, 29, 1945. Imagine the immeasurable shock for those *Collier's* readers who remembered Szyk's early 1941-42 warning cartoons to now see the results of the Third Reich's murder campaign. Gellhorn's summary is a scathing condemnation of the world's indifference towards the Jews being led to slaughter. "We are not entirely guiltless, we the Allies, because it took us twelve years to open the gates of Dachau."<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 53 Jan Vermeer, *Allegory of the Catholic Faith*, 1670-2, oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, 32.100.18

Szyk's illustration of *Madness* (fig. 87, p. 72) was intended to awaken an ambivalent, decidedly isolationist American public as a dire warning of the dark struggle ahead. On the nativist right – especially spread across the Midwest and Plains states with large Germanic and Scandinavian immigrant populations – the America First Committee was the most influential grassroots citizen group of the late 1930s. It boasted an active membership of over 800,000 comprised of anti-New Dealers with a xenophobic outlook. In the pre-Vatican II era of "Nostra Aetate," the Holy Week teachings suggested that the "Christ-killing Jews" were never expunged of the Israelites' ultimate sin: deicide.

At the same time, the rise of the pseudo-science of eugenics, which sought to use

forced sterilization of up to 350,000 persons to purify the hereditary blood lines for a healthy America of "undesired" elements of mental or physical disabilities, impacted the most socially disadvantaged in the nation. Over 30 states adopted eugenics-related policies. This Draconian legislation between 1934-1945 cast a dark shadow as many Americans condoned, accepted the bad data, and ignorantly entertained implementation of racial science as a modern medical practice.



Fig. 54, detail of fig 87, p. 72



Fig. 55, detail of fig. 53

In his blueprint manifesto *Mein Kampf* of 1925, Hitler attributed his own strategic plan to scapegoat and then "exterminate" Europe's Jews to America's own racial laws sweeping midwestern and rural states. The blossoming eugenics movement was popularly embraced, mixed into the sludge of Jim Crow laws, antisemitic restrictions, and nativistic "white Aryan" only country clubs with gate signs: "No Blacks, No Jews, No Dogs." Even among the swankiest beach clubs and golf courses of New England and the mid-Atlantic coast, signs with "No Irish, No Sicilians" were also commonly seen (fig. 59, p. 56).

Poisoned with disinformation, antisemitic articles were regularly published in Henry Ford's blood-libel-drenched chronicle *The Dearborn*



Fig. 56 Poster for *The Great Dictator*, United Artists (1940).



Fig. 57 Ernest Howard Shepard, "Germany Shall Never Be Encircled," *PUNCH* magazine, 1939

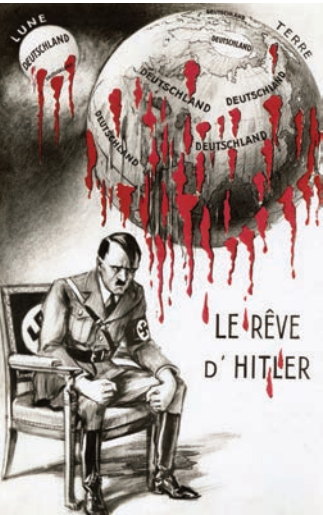


Fig. 58 Unknown Artist, *Adolf Hitler's Dream of World Domination*, circa 1939.

*Independent*. Its inflammatory editorials influenced millions of American readers. It encouraged anti-interventionist political groups by blaming Bolshevik funded, Jewish conspiracists as instigators of Europe's darkening threats. Between 1920-27 it fueled racist intolerance in full alliance with the expanding Jim Crow bigotry, and Ku Klux Klan branded uber-Americanism in large swaths of the Midwest and Southern states.

stood against any U.S. armed intervention into the "fight against Germany."<sup>34</sup>

Prominently featured as an avidly pro-German spokesman in these years was "Lucky Lindy" – America's greatest aviation hero, Charles A. Lindbergh. Crowned with international fame, the tall Minnesotan was slim, blonde and blue-eyed. The irresistibly handsome Lindbergh had earned worldwide fame for his daring transatlantic solo flight of 1927. Unfortunately, Lindbergh's "golden boy" image yielded him a dangerously loud megaphone. Sympathetic to the progressive steps of Germany's rearmament and Nazification campaign, he was decorated by Reichsmarschall

Göring with the Service Cross of the German Eagle at a dinner in Berlin on Oct 18, 1938 (fig. 60, p. 57). President Roosevelt's White House advisors and Pentagon brass later stripped Lindbergh of his military air corps rank during the war. Practically dismissing his treasonous leanings, Lindbergh tasted the bitter pill of national embarrassment.

Americans were being confronted with increasingly explosive truths in a disquieting cartoon of June 2, 1941 by Dartmouth graduate and Oxford-trained political activist turned cartoonist, Theodore Geisel (better known as the beloved post-war children's author Dr. Seuss). He draws a gleeful figure of Lindbergh with slicked back hair. The pro-Nazi sympathizer is gently patting the head of an anthropomorphic image of sea monster replete with swastika scales, and with Hitler's grinning-sea serpent face complete with a tiny, brushy moustache.



Fig. 59 Signs at the entrance to Beverley Beach in Ann Arundel County, Maryland, ca. 1945-1955. Annapolis, Morris Lieberman Collection at The Maryland State Archives (MSA SC 226-1-279)

Ford's audience swallowed defamatory myths about a global Jewish cabal. No wonder that in *Mein Kampf* the singular American cited by Adolf Hitler as a "great man" was Ford. In the Gallup Poll following Germany's Blitzkrieg into Poland in the first week of 1939, 84% of the American public

33 Martha Gellhorn, "Dachau: Experimental Murder," *Collier's*, June 23, 1945.

34 R. J. Reinhart, "Gallup Vault: U.S. Opinion and the Start of World War II," *Gallup*, August 29, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/vault/265865/gallup-vault-opinion-start-world-war-as.px>



Considering his future renown for children of all ages, the politically oriented ideas of Theodore Geisel inks a parallel pathway to Szyk’s own cartooned missives. “It has been recently rediscovered in the “Dr. Seuss, beloved purveyor of genial rhyming nonsense for beginning readers, stuff about cats in hats and foxes in socks, started as a feisty political cartoonist who exhorted America to do battle with Hitler? Yeah, right!” exclaims Art Spiegelman, the graphic novelist who created *Maus*, in the foreword to a 1999 book.”<sup>35</sup>

Returning to these early war fantasies – ridiculing dictators, shellacking sycophants, the pomposity of these farcical characters rising as Europe’s new “Holy Roman Emperors,” Geisel – now Dr. Seuss reflected:

When I look at them now they’re hurriedly and embarrassingly badly drawn, and they’re full of many snap judgements that every political cartoonist has to make... The one thing I do like about them, however, is their honesty and their frantic fervor. I believed the USA would go down the drain if we listened to the America Firstisms... I probably was intemperate in my attacks on them. But they almost disarmed this country at a time it was obviously about to be destroyed, and I think I helped a little bit – not much, but some – in stating the fact that we were *in* a war and we damned well better ought to do something about it.<sup>36</sup>

Equally as dangerous as Lindbergh was the notoriously antisemitic Father Charles Coughlin, dubbed “The Radio Priest.” From his powerful radio station in Royal Oak, Michigan, he fulminated viciously barbed sermons to 30 million spellbound listeners in his nationally syndicated addresses. Coughlin’s sermons whipped up nativist, xenophobic audiences, pointing out Jewish sabotage acting on behalf of Bolshevik-based, Soviet-blessed, godless atheism.

In the view of the Rev. Kevin P. Spicer, C.S.C., James J. Kenneally Distinguished Professor of History at Stonehill College, Hitler’s recycling

of Christianity’s inherited antisemitism was weaponized into a malignant fusion of doctrinal politics. The synthesis of a millennial defamation of the Jews was forged into the swastika/cross as a perniciously-crafted political agenda. Father Spicer explains:

Over the centuries, the process of the vilification of the Jews by bishops, priests, theologians, and lay Catholics unequivocally had an impact on all Christians in Western society. Such language enabled Christians to view Jews as ‘the Other’ – Christ killers who

fundamentally were not to be trusted. History has demonstrated that there were clear social and political repercussions from such teaching: discrimination, ghettoization, expulsions, pogroms and murder. At times, Church leaders directly or indirectly encouraged the promulgation of edicts or laws enacted by Christian states and their Christian leaders against Jews. Ultimately, the last stop on this path of persecution and murder was the Holocaust.<sup>37</sup>

Days after Kristallnacht, Father Coughlin teased his listeners with the hateful agenda of the America First movement: “communistic government of Russia [was beholden to] the Lenins and Trotskys...atheistic Jews and Gentiles” [having seized] “\$40 billion dollars of Christian



Fig. 60 Hermann Göring presents a medal to Charles Lindbergh (detail), 1936. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-1362



Fig. 61, Artwork from *The Plot Against America* by Philip Roth, published by Vintage

property.”<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, by 1942, with America now in the fight, responsive Catholic Church superiors curtailed his antics while the FBI targeted him officially as a “person of interest” suspected of aiding the nation’s enemies in Nazi Germany.

Deeply shaken by Coughlin’s radio broadcasts, a young Philip Roth collected these alarming memories into his semi-fictional account of being a Jew in Lindbergh’s “America First” times. Readers of Roth’s 2004 *The Plot Against America* (fig. 61, p. 57) are unnerved by the openly offensive and violent antisemitic language. Describing how multi-cultural Newark, New Jersey could be seething with pre-war racism and antisemitism, Roth uses this alternative history to recall the chilling daily realities painted as genuine nightmares lived during his teenage years.



Fig. 62 Southbury, Connecticut citizens protest Nazi youth training camp purchased for German American Bund, 1937. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

In 1937, with Hitler-inspired dreams of ruling America by building a training camp for the pro-Nazis in Southbury, Connecticut, German-American Bund “Führer” Fritz Kuhn had planned to transform rural farming acres. According to the Connecticut Humanities Council’s History Project, on October 1, 1937 “Stamford resident Wolfgang Jung purchased 178 acres of land in [Southbury’s] Kettletown district. Nobody thought much of the purchase until about 6 weeks later when residents noticed a large group of people working feverishly to clear the land for construction...[To be named Camp General von Steuben] as it turned out, Nazi loyalists in the U.S. had designs on turning the area into a camp for Nazi youths.”<sup>39</sup>

Marching with signs in front of Southbury’s town hall (fig. 62, left) proclaiming “Southbury Wants No Swastika” and “No Nazi Camps” the “community beat back the Bund by enacting zoning laws and arresting members for working on the sabbath, in violation of old Connecticut blue laws.”<sup>40</sup>

Two years later, the *New York Times* reported for its February 21, 1939 headline how “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden.” the blood-thirsting American audience staged a militaristic theatricality in imitation of Albert Speer’s awe-inspiring Nazi party Nuremberg rallies (fig. 64, p. 61). With a seething crowd of Bund followers, the Hitler-saluting crowd proudly marched to the ‘star Spangled Banner’ and then saluted swastika decorations, framed beneath hanging banners of General George Washington. The event is chillingly detailed in the 2017 Academy Award-nominated documentary, *A Night at the Garden*. Filmmaker and director Marshall Curry wonders how in “a city that was diverse, modern and progressive,...these American Nazis used the symbols of America to sell an ideology that a few years later hundreds of thousands of Americans would die fighting against.”<sup>41</sup>

Fritz Kuhn poked fun at President “Frank D. Rosenfeld” and received roaring laughter calling the New Deal the “Jew Deal.” Warning of a “Bolshevik paradise,” Kuhn explained why he was waging a war due to the fact that the “press, the radio and the cinema were all in the hands of the Jews.”<sup>42</sup> One can only wonder if the lessons of these perverted symbols and their miscreant followers continue into the present.

History’s cyclical rhythms were famously noted when Harvard professor George Santayana warned: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>43</sup> With disturbing parallels we witnessed the “Unite the Right” rally staged in Charlottesville, Virginia, August 11-12, 2017 (fig. 66, p. 61). Chanting “Jews will not replace us” while imitating Nazi torch-lit parades, white nationalists ominously recycled the symbols and hate-speech of the past. A key component of this exhibition, as organized by the Magnes’ curators, is its focus on “Human Rights and their Collapse.” They note the “overarching concerns about the dangers of tyranny, totalitarianism, and human rights violations often recur in Szyk’s entire opus, culminating in his highly publicized denunciations of the Holocaust.”<sup>44</sup>

35 Fiona Macdonald, “The surprisingly radical politics of Dr Seuss,” BBC Culture, March 2, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190301-the-surprisingly-radical-politics-of-dr-seuss?zeph->

36 Ibid.

37 Kevin P. Spicer, “When Theology and Racism Mix: Catholicism, Antisemitism, and National Socialism,” in *The Holocaust and Nostra Aetate: Toward a Greater Understanding*, conference proceeding of the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education (Greensburgh, PA: Seton Hill College, 2017), 82.

38 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Charles E. Coughlin.” <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/charles-e-coughlin>  
39 “Southbury Takes Out the Nazis,” Connecticut History.org, December 14, 2022. <https://connecticuthistory.org/southbury-takes-out-the-nazis/>  
40 Bob Falcetti, “Southbury’s Finest Hour,” *Republican American*, November 23, 2013.  
41 Marshall Curry, *A Night at the Garden* (2017). [anightatthegarden.com/](https://anightatthegarden.com/)  
42 “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1939, 1, 5.  
43 George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (Charles Scribner’s, 1905), 284.  
44 Francesco Spagnolo and Shir Ghal Kochavi, *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights (1926-1951)*, 2.



The cogent theme of social justice is inextricably woven into the Magis Core curriculum guiding Fairfield University’s Ignatian mission. Spelling out our commitment, we have designed our mission goals in the areas of “Inclusive Excellence, Global Engagement, and Radical Hospitality.” The fourth critical area of our mission is to promote a “Diverse Community.” “As a distinguishing hallmark of Jesuit education. We recognize the inherent value and dignity of each person, guided by our Jesuit heritage as informed by the contemporary context. Fairfield is committed to shaping a community of learners from diverse social, economic, racial, cultural, national, and religious backgrounds.”<sup>45</sup>

In this context, the dramatic uptick in antisemitism in the United States challenges both members of our academic community and citizens at large. The “normalization” of antisemitic expression in America’s public life and social media – as conducted during Szyk’s era and throughout the pre-war years – is experiencing a boomerang effect today. The Associated Press is currently reporting: “Antisemitic Celebrities Stoke Fears of Normalizing Hate”: “A surge of anti-Jewish vitriol, spread by a world-famous rapper, an NBA star and other prominent people, is stoking fears that public figures are normalizing hate and ramping up the risk of violence in a country already experiencing a sharp increase in antisemitism.”<sup>46</sup>

Leaders of the Jewish community in the U.S. and extremism experts have been alarmed to see celebrities with massive followings spew antisemitic tropes in a way that has been taboo for decades. Some said it harkens back to a darker time in America when powerful people routinely spread conspiracy theories about Jews with impunity.<sup>47</sup>

In recent decades, critical opinion has been kinder toward the “Great American Illustrators” generation of the first half of the 20th century. In their emotional appeals to the newly drafted infantryman from Indiana or enlisted navy sailor from Idaho, a salvo of commercial illustrations were transformed into marching orders answering

Frank Capra’s propaganda films: *Why We Fight*. With their “happy-go-lucky” All-American optimism, patriotic hymns, and victory-themed images, these propaganda posters, editorial cartoons, and newspaper drawings spilled

across the pages of the entire spectrum of the nation’s print and poster media. Exploding with colorful images in the popular pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Coronet*, *Esquire*, *Liberty*, *McClure’s*, *Reader’s Digest*, or *Collier’s*, and of course the pictorial weeklies, *Life* and *Times*, news from the front-line was kept at a symbolic basis. Perusing the pages of these weekly image-laden propaganda venues, editorial policies purposefully sanitized the eye-witness reports coming out of the blood-soaked battlegrounds.

In a stark contrast to his fellow illustrators, Szyk chafed to expose the more unpalatable stories by this point widely circulating with stomach-churning reportage from the death camps. Consider the alternative agenda between N.C. Wyeth’s uplifting 1942 poster to *Buy War Bonds* (fig. 63, p. 60) versus Szyk’s horrific depicting of a dead rabbi clutching a Torah scroll amidst murdered congregants, published in the *New York Times* early in 1943 (fig. 84, p. 70).

Wyeth’s enraged Uncle Sam surges forward with American soldiers mounting what General Eisenhower would ask his troops to embark on D-Day’s “Great Crusade” to attack the Axis occupied “Fortress Europe.” In its dire urgency, Szyk’s drawing visually quotes from Michelangelo’s iconic *Pietà* sculpture in St. Peter’s at the Vatican. Szyk’s intentional use of Christ’s sacrifice ensures that the American public is fully cognizant that Europe’s Jews were being martyred *en masse* as the 20th century’s Lamb of God (fig. 85, p. 70).

Why did the military prioritization of defeating the Axis allow for Allied policies of indifference – resulting in the Nazi’s mass murder campaign – to proceed virtually unchallenged? At the tip of the sword of Holocaust scholarship today, the unresolved issues remain: how and why did President Roosevelt, the State Department, or Supreme Commander of Allied Forces General Eisenhower respond when unimpeachable evidence came to Washington by late in 1942 of the total liquidation of the Jews in Axis-occupied Europe? Leading scholarly studies, including Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The War Against the Jews* (1975); David S. Wyman’s *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust* (1984), and Ken Burns’ recent PBS documentary series, *The U.S. and the Holocaust* (2022) are questioning American’s lack

of response and shedding new light on history’s greatest mass genocide.

As the war crisis deepened, the heavy casualties of 1943 were beginning to cause consternation and irresolution in an impatient American public.



Fig. 63 N.C. Wyeth, US Department of Treasury poster, 1942. Library of Congress

bitter struggles cost over 100,000 Allied casualties and compromised our will to fight.

No wonder that at the Pentagon’s Office of War Information, the leading American artists of the day were pressed into national service. Their task: to harness the average laborer, farmer, or small business owner into a “war emergency” state of mind. Art was the primary vehicle for evoking responses that would ensure that liberties were kept aloft. The American voter was thousands of miles away from the war theatres in Europe and Asia. The charge of this small cadre of fine artists was to paint, design, and create cinematic imagery to persuade the American public of the need to persevere in actions against the Axis powers. And this had to convey enough patriotic willingness for immeasurably painful sacrifices of “blood and treasure.”

Western art history is replete with Caesars, emperors, and kings, who like the political opportunists of the Axis’ tyrants, used the alchemy of art to justify their political objectives. Unleashing the psycho-projected persuasion translated images into slogans, the visual powers of art could promote virtues or

Winning from serious losses in the Pacific theater at Wake, Midway, and Guadalcanal, national mourning for these boys being lost in multitudes was being felt stateside. The push into Anzio and up through Monte Cassino in 1943 saw the raw flesh of death, as news photographs appeared in the national print media. Against brutal hand-to-hand combat with well-fortified Germans, the Italian campaign’s

diabolical wickedness. By employing eloquently refined paintings and graphics, the black arts of propaganda reached their zenith – on both sides of the conflict – during the poster, stamp, and public print campaigns of the 20th century’s global warfare.

Washington relied upon the incalculably effective propagandist paintings of respected narrative social realist artists of mid-century including Dean Cornwell, Adolf Dehn, James Montgomery Flagg, Thomas Hart Benton, Stevan Dohanos, Henry Koerner, J.C. Leyendecker, Bernard Perlin, Norman Rockwell, Ben Shahn, and Robert Sloan.

In direct opposition to Hitler’s infamous *Entartete Kunst* exhibition of anti-modernist “Degenerate Art” that toured Germany in 1937, Rockwell’s paintings, extolling Democracy, were showcased on a specially-designed cross-country train. Traveling to sixteen cities in 1943-44, the exhibition encouraged over one million people to make contributions by purchasing print and stamp reproductions, raising over \$133 million dollars towards war bonds.

Before Rockwell, in a more elaborately designed a set of watercolor and gouache paintings, Szyk had contextualized FDR’s thematic “Four Freedoms” (fig. 86, p. 71). Image, action, and intent are all forcefully married into a quartet in Szyk’s *Emergency Committee* poster stamps of 1942. Bold in conception, and focused in their messaging, the themes of President Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” expressed in his State of the Union address in January 1941 are animated by Szyk in 1942 into the plight of Europe’s Jewish survivors. It represents the patriotic psycho-ideogram of American democracy, reimagined by the immortal Norman Rockwell in the *Four Freedoms* Office of War Information posters in 1944. This legendary set of illustrations appearing in the February, 27, 1943 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post* was commissioned by the Curtis Publishing Company. Igniting the nation’s imagination, the *Post* received an avalanche of requests as over 25,000 reprints were distributed. Both Szyk and Rockwell crystallize the purest ideals of immeasurable pride, and national consciousness for humanity at risk.

Szyk designed medieval knighted figures signifying a democracy’s highest functions. Each colorful poster stamp in this quartet created in 1942 was used to promote awareness of the atrocities happening abroad by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe.

45 “Diversity Vision Statement.” Fairfield University. <https://catalog.fairfield.edu/undergraduate/overview/vision-statement/>.

46 Michael Kunzelman, “Group reports record tally of antisemitic incidents in 2021,” *AP News*, April 26, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-religion-israel-new-york-city-b3907ff4bb2f5b6c7e70c5e6f07797a2>

47 Michael Kunzelman, “Antisemitic Celebrities Stoke Fears of Normalizing Hate,” *AP News*, December 3, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/twitter-inc-entertainment-sports-business-racial-injustice-d3a65fc9f71f3bcbdbab643c38fd135c3>



Drawing a parallel between the wider, national propaganda campaign promoting the America's armed forces with material support for the men and women engaged on the front lines, there are curious similarities and difference seen in Szyk's



Fig. 64 More than twenty thousand attend a meeting of the German-American Bund, which included banners such as "stop Jewish Domination of Christian Americans," February 20, 1939.

more targeted appeal for rescuing the Jews of Europe. Recognizing the very limited visual scale of the poster stamp's dimensionality, he simplified the design into a set of single figures each heralding a human right: Freedom of Speech and of Religion, with Freedom from Fear and Want as the complement.

Assuming a dramatically descending viewpoint for the image, each desk, table or prayer niche rotates smoothly at forty-five degrees into the picture plane. Notice in the "Freedom of Speech" painting how Szyk incorporates the Renaissance-era kneeling stool with its richly carved scrolled side panel. This device echoes the "turn into the picture plane" first invented by the early Trecento's "father of perspective," Giotto (1266-1337).

Within Giotto's *magnus opus* fresco cycle at the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (1305-6) he economically deploys this illusionistic visual formula. By rotating the figure of *Prudentia* (fig. 67, p. 62) and her cubical desk 45 degrees, Giotto creates the earliest indications of a volumetric presence of forms for the proto-Renaissance. Szyk imitates this optical illusion of spatial drafting, and thus maximizes his ability to project the seated figure of his "Freedom of Religion" author out beyond the two-dimensional flatness of the space.

This merger into a matrix of ideograms shapes the iconography of the Jewish freedom fighters

of that era charged with the dual burdens of defending the Free World and Allied nations while, cautiously, creating a visual *raison d'être* for the victorious emergence of the Jewish State by 1948.



Fig. 65 The crowd responds with a Hitler salute as uniformed members of a German-American Bund color guard march at a gathering in New York's Madison Square Garden, Feb. 20, 1939. (AP Photo)



Fig. 66 "Unite the Right" Rally, Charlottesville, VA, August 10-11, 2017.

Equally as powerful as the stamps are Szyk's appeals for the "Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe," and the American League for Palestine. On their official letterhead and pamphlets, a list of eminent scholars, political progressives, literary types and Broadway personalities – Szyk's name is listed on the executive committees.

From a socio-cultural perspective, it's a fascinating insight of the arts and political alliances in New York's "smart set" composed of leftists, Trotskyites, New Dealers, classical musicians, rabbinic scholars, Broadway entertainers, Greenwich Village coffeehouse intellectual professors, poets and random outliers all creating a cultural "gestalt" united in their commitment to defeating Hitler's fascist mindset. Szyk's name was published on these broadsides along with allies: Edie Cantor, Dorothy Parker, Moss Hart, Ben Hecht, Paul Muni, Edward

G. Robinson, Billy Rose, and Kurt Weill. The members of this illustrious list of pro-democracy advocates would be thrown into Senator Joseph McCarthy's odious meat grinder years later, when many were placed under suspicion of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

*They Shall Not Die – Save Human Lives and Help Us Survive* (figs. 102-103, p. 82) were heartwarming appeals fusing the Rockwellian themes into pro-Zionist driven agit-prop in the transitional years of the Second World War

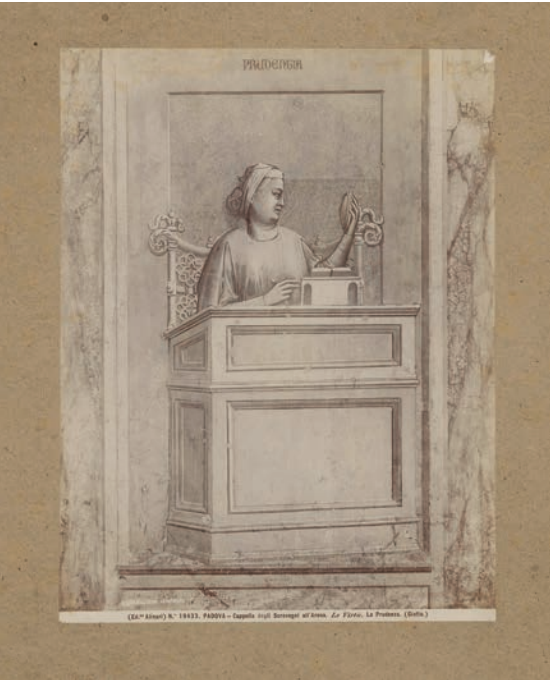


Fig. 67 Photoreproduction after Giotto, *Prudentia*, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, 1305-06.

ending and the birthing of Israel among the nations in 1948. Although not approved for official postal usage, these images contributed to the consciousness of awakening military and financial support for Israel's nascent national defense forces.

**VI. The Anatomy of Satire: Szyk's Political Caricatures**

"Of all the works produced by the present war, there is no one more certain to be alive hundred years from now. Just as we turn back to Hogarth and Goya for the living images of their age, so our descendants will turn back to Arthur Szyk for the most graphic history of Hitler and Hirohito and Mussolini,"<sup>48</sup> noted Szyk scholar Irvin Ungar.

Arthur Szyk's unsparing activist humor harkens back to the origins of politically-inspired satire in ancient Greek comedies. Many of the comedic

rhetorical devices visualized in Szyk's drawings originated at the dawn of the "Greek miracle" in the early fifth century BCE. Lampooning Olympian deities, titans or known public figures holding office in the Assembly of Athens became fair game in the emergence of the Western idea of self-critical, public-oriented civic thought. Provoked by the bitterness and savagery of the Peloponnesian War, artistic satire in Greek theater exposed humanity's foibles, follies, and vices through a combination of fantasy, risible absurdity, and light-hearted musical choruses,



Fig. 68, detail of fig. 86

which uplifted the ethical lessons in these works to expose the arrogance, futility, and utter stupidity of warfare.

In ancient Rome, too, satire was a critical tool. Attacking the corruption of the Roman Senate and the brutalities of human conniving and greed, the first-century Latin wit Juvenal sharpened his verbal carving knife. His characters, including the mythical, goat-like satyrs of Greek origin, the satyrs, had the artistic license to literally "tell the truth" at the ancient Forum while laughing. For the Romans, it became

known as the *lanx satura*. As the satyrs became the etymological source for serving up full dishes loaded with the ridicule and stupidities shaping our modern notion of satire, the term "caricature" evolving from the Latin term *carricare* – "to load up a wagon or cart." Western art history is replete with the delightful parodies, blistering sarcasms, and caustic lampoonery of masters of the trade. Leonardo da Vinci was well-known for making comical drawings of his neighbors in the piazzas of 15th-century Florence, which were called *caricature* (fig. 101, p. 81). His agile drawings mercilessly exaggerated an individual's most prominent features. Da Vinci's victims had over-developed eyes, lips, ears, and noses, which became the vocabulary for unloading on their physiognomic irregularities. By the time of Louis XIV's Court at Versailles in the 17th century, the French term *caricature* gave artists permission to unleash completely ludicrous facial representations. Caricaturists would especially

<sup>48</sup> Ungar, "Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man," 19.





Fig. 69 Arthur Szyk, *Pieśń nad Pieśnią* (Song of Songs), Łódź, 1924. Book reproduction



Fig. 70 Albert Charles August Racinet, *Assyrian Style*, plate XVII from 'Polychrome Ornament', engraved by Dufour and Lebreton, published Paris, 1869, color lithograph. Private Collection.

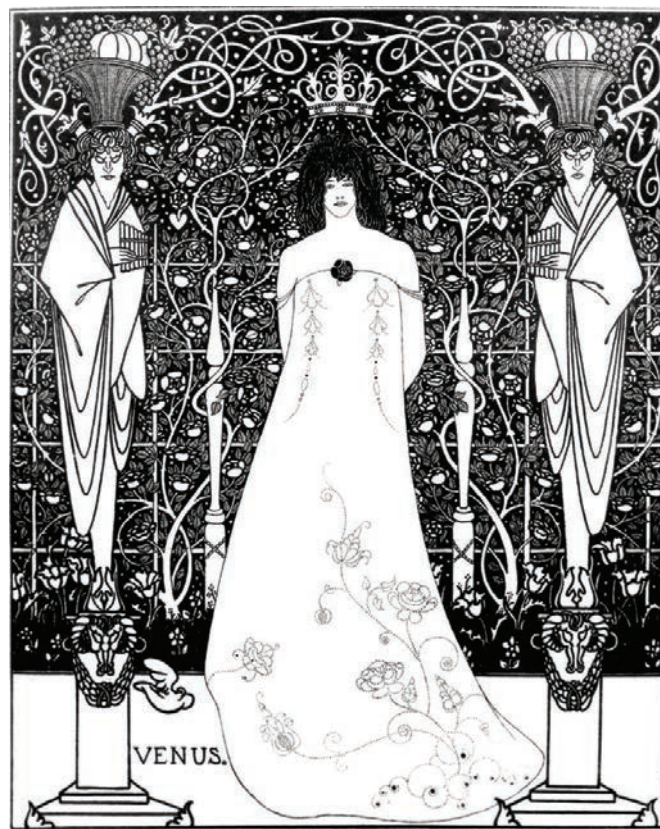


Fig. 71 Aubrey Beardsley, *Venus between Terminal Gods*, 1895, India ink on paper.



Fig. 72 Arthur Szyk *There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job* from *The Book of Job*, New York, 1946, gouache and ink. Private Collection.



Fig. 73 Kamal al-din Bihzad, *Dancing Dervishes* (detail), Folio from a *Divan of Hafiz*, ca. 1480, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Rogers Fund, 1917, (17.81.4)



Fig. 74 Arthur Szyk, from the *Megillat Esther*, 1926, chromolithographic print. Location of original artwork is unknown





Fig. 75 Caravaggio, *David and Goliath*, 1607, oil on canvas. Rome, Galleria Borghese



Fig. 76 Arthur Szyk, *Judith Holding the Head of Holofernes*, Paris 1921, watercolor, ink. Private Collection



Fig. 77 Caravaggio, *The Cardsharps*, c. 1595, oil on canvas, 47 1/16 x 51 9/16 inches (unframed), Fort Worth, Texas, Kimbell Art Museum (AP 1987.06)



Fig. 78 Arthur Szyk, *The Silent Partner*. "In this game, Adolph [sic], Two Aces is More Than Three Kings," *Collier's*, November 1, 1941, offset lithograph. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, (2017.5.4.2)



Fig. 79, detail fig. 78





# The Living Voice of the Dead

*In vain they have spoken in their own behalf—Now they speak in our behalf...*

Out of the depths they speak . . . nor man nor committee nor organized 'hush-hush' can stop them 2,000,000 sensitive human beings tortured, starved, butchered, in an orgy of hate reaped by Hitler but sown in the very soil of Christian civilization, sown in the texts of intolerance.

What fools must learn tomorrow the wise will heed today. Listen then to the living voices of the dead — listen to the voices of 2,000,000 Jewish martyrs:

*"You in America — we shall speak plainly, sometimes it is kinder to be harsh—you would not save our lives when you could have done so; at least make our lives worth living. The heaviest casualty list in this war is behind these words of ours . . ."*

*"You, America, are in grave danger. Your pre-war isolationism was a black shadow. Your post-war isolation will be a blacker substance. Not splendid but shameful, for from proudly proclaiming it you will vainly disclaim it. The leprosy that was Europe will be America . . . unless . . ."*

*"No army conquered Europe. Europe fell exactly as America will fall, conquered by fiends whose secret brew of hate will poison democracy from within . . . unless . . ."*

*"Since democracy is the fruition of the Jewish Christian tradition where that tradition could develop freely, therefore if you wished to destroy democracy you would naturally cut the root of that tradition by setting Jew and Christian against one another. Especially so since this can be done easily by re-opening and aggravating the old wound of spiritual pride which is the devil's way with faith."*

*"There are many ways of serving men's ancient enemy, now incarnate as Fascism. One way is to speak of the Jews as a convenient scapegoat or of anti-Semitism as merely an incident of Fascism. To do this is to obscure the vital truth that anti-Semitism is the indispensable wrecking bar thrust into the 2000-year-old fissure in the foundation wall of Christendom. There is no other wrecking bar to take its place, and therefore those who screen or play down anti-Semitism serve well the enemy of men, serve well the enemy of Christendom."*

*"Dwelling as we do in the fields of far horizons we can see the road you tread—beyond your power of foresight . . . and what we see fills us with dread unless an old thing re-assert itself in your midst . . . an old stubbornness in facing facts however ugly and truth however bitter . . ."*

*"The ugly facts are that day after day in your schools your children imbibe the poison of falsehood and hatred . . ."*

*"The bitter truth is that unless you, America, take hold of this situation at once with vigor and determination and stop this teaching, you American, are doomed to reap a crop, worse, yes, even than Europe is reaping today. We pray you, even though it burn your hands, upset this broth of hate and keep its poison from the innocent lips of your children!"*

**Is Your Child Reading and Studying These Hate - Breeding Falsehoods?**

*"The Jews said no, but within forty years their opinion was destroyed. The same violence that they used towards Jews was used toward them. The same arrogance and covetousness and ambition that He condemned led them to fight each other and to fight Rome, and brought on the ruin of their nation."*  
—From a textbook for Teachers

*"The Jews, dear children, seemed to love God not for His goodness, as we do, but for His gifts."*  
—From a children's Bible History

*"The occasion for the introduction of the Inquisition in Spain was furnished by the Spanish Jews. No other European State had suffered, to the extent that Spain was then suffering from the unrelenting system of usury and organized extortion practiced by these dangerous aliens."*  
—From textbook in Religion for High School and Adult Groups

*These are statements from textbooks used in weekday and Sunday Schools in America. To avoid even the appearance of sectarian discrimination the Textbook Commission refrains from specifying the denominational sources of this material.*

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Fig. 80 "The Living Voice of the Dead." *Chicago Sun*, February 12, 1943.



Fig. 81 Arthur Szyk, *Dedication to King George VI from The Haggadah*, Łódź, 1936, watercolor and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama

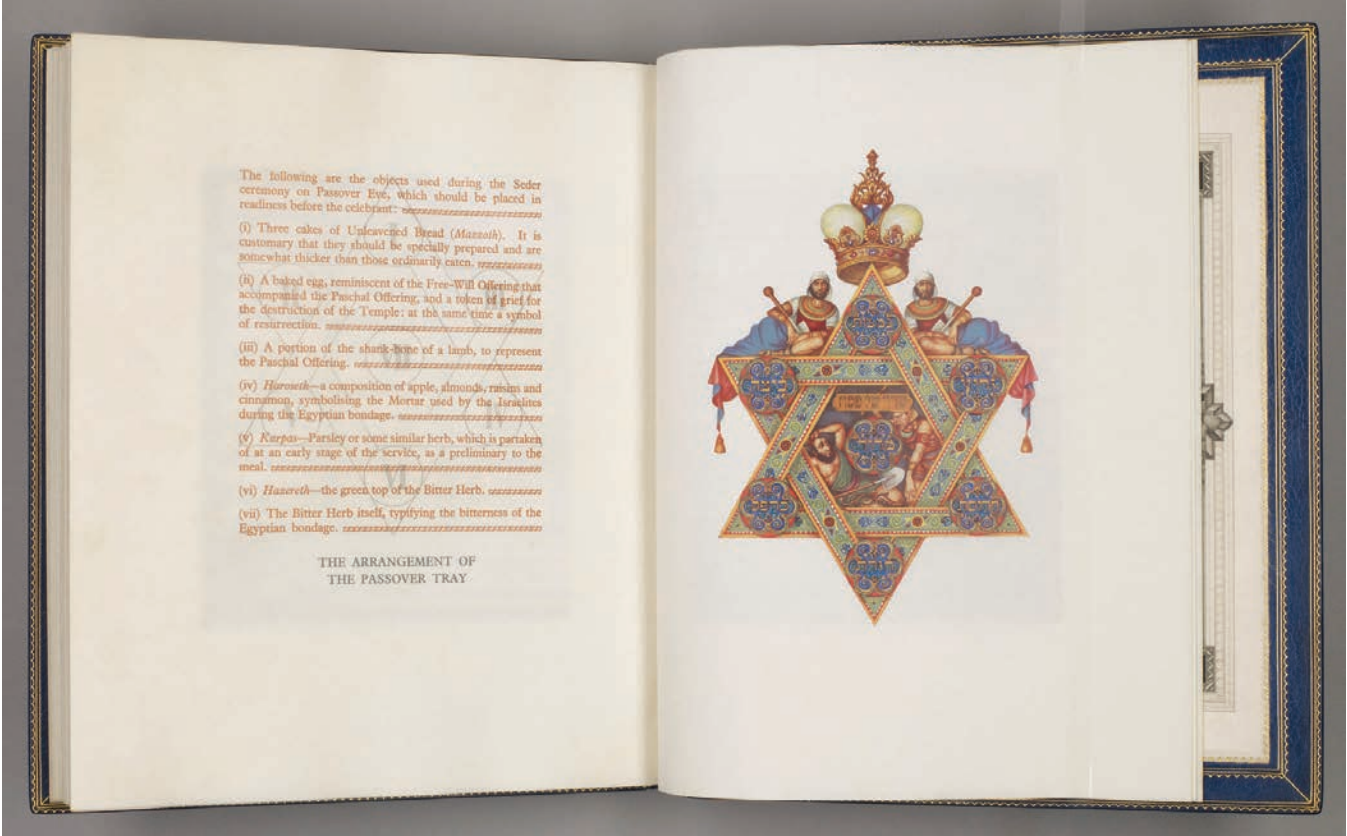


Fig. 82 Arthur Szyk, *The Haggadah*, edited by Cecil Roth, 1940. London: Beaconsfield Press, Limited. Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum









Fig. 86 Arthur Szyk, *The Four Freedoms*, executed to support The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People, NYC, 1942, gouache and pencil on paper.



Fig. 87 Collier's magazine cover, January 17, 1942





Fig. 88 Arthur Szyk, *F.D.R.'s Soldier in Art*, 1946, graphite, watercolor, ink, on paper. Hyde Park, NY, FDR Presidential Library (1948.92.117)

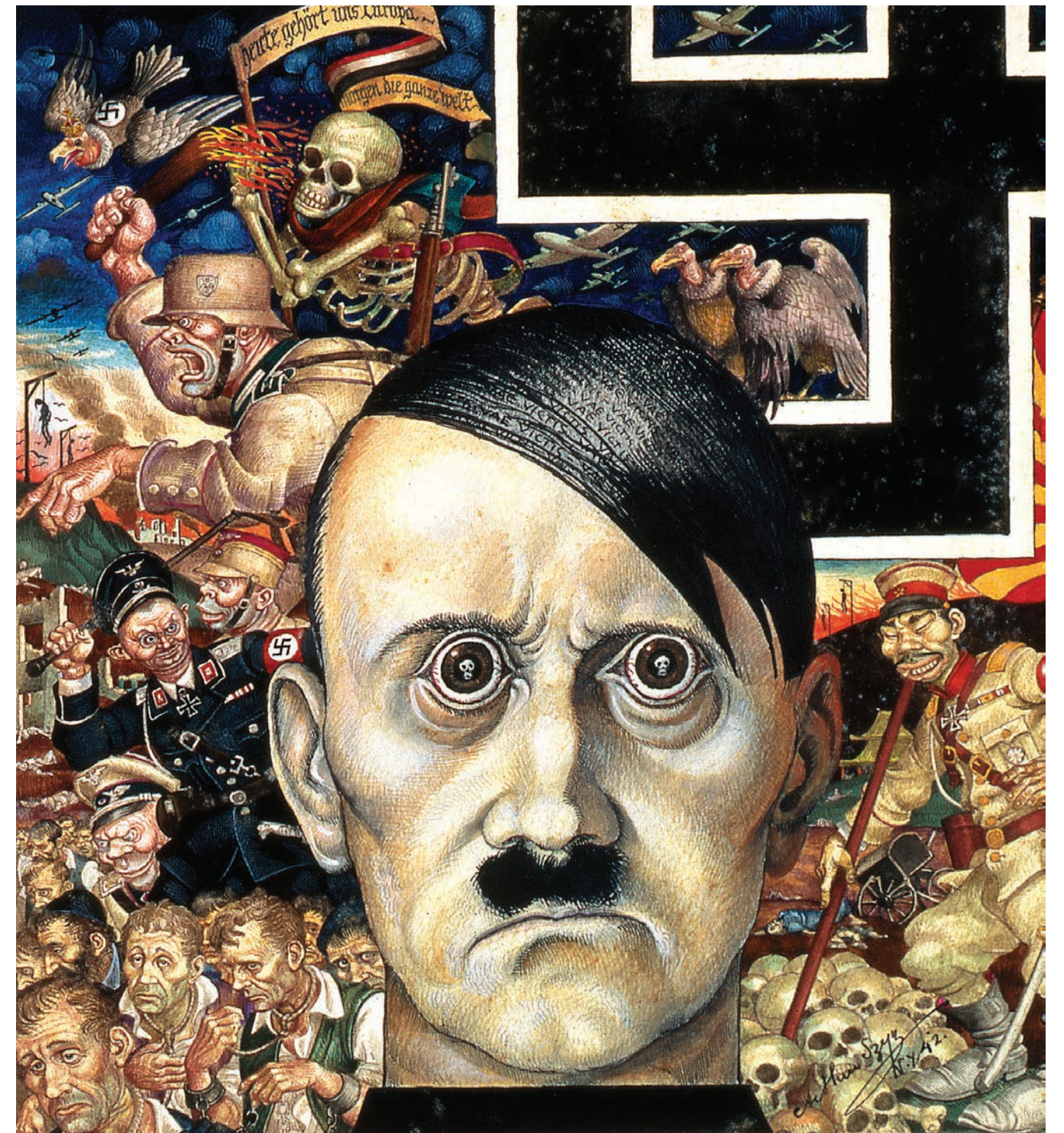


Fig. 89 Arthur Szyk, *Anti-Christ*, 1942, watercolor and gouache. Private Collection





Fig. 90 Arthur Szyk, *Declaration of Independence for the State of Israel*, 1948, color print on paper. The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Kaplan (78.23)



Fig. 91 Arthur Szyk, *Young Kibbutznik Seeding the Land of Eretz Israel*, detail of fig. 101.



Fig. 92 Arthur Szyk, *The Four Questions* from *The Haggadah*, Łódź, 1935 watercolor and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama





Fig. 93 Arthur Szyk, *Lwów Medallion*, 1933, pen and ink. Private Collection. Szyk's self-portrait represents his dual loyalties as a proud Polish patriot and Jewish artist; his head is framed by the arms of a menorah, the Polish eagle with a Jewish star at its center, and his name spelled out in Polish and Hebrew letters.



Fig. 94 Arthur Szyk, *Ink and Blood*, 1946. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of Joseph and Alexandra Braciejowski (1995.40.61)





Fig. 95, Louis Léopold Boilly, *Grimaces*, 1823, lithograph. Fairfield University Art Museum, Gift of James M. Reed, (2017.35.127)



Fig. 96 Honoré Daumier, *The Past, the Present, and the Future*, 1834, lithograph. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1941, 41.16.1



Fig. 97 Arthur Szyk, *Benito the Terrific* (detail), 1942, ink and graphite on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.82)

aim their pens at the ridiculously coiffed, perfumed, and attired courtiers floating amidst the court.

These methods of artistic parody have continued through the centuries. In the 18th century, William Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* and Thomas Rowlandson's bumbling courtiers mocked England's aristocracy. Their unflattering works depicted a period of debauchery, gluttony, and unvarnished vanity and were also funny. In the 19th century, more biting critiques were unleashed by Honoré Daumier, Louis Léopold Boilly (figs. 95-97, above) and Thomas Nast as a pungent tool of political embarrassment, and commentary on contemporary society. Many 20th-century public figures would be given equally disfiguring exploitation by contemporary caricaturists like David Levine and Al Hirschfeld, from President Nixon's shifty eyes and Lyndon Johnson's floppy ears (fig. 99, p. 80), to Bill Clinton's bulbously reddened nose.

Working from this rich inheritance, Arthur Szyk took up his pen in the 20th century, imbuing his cartoons with humorous and illusionistic wizardry, to create a new wincing, body-blow form of political satire. Szyk's uncommonly eccentric wwcartooning, as evidenced in his masterpiece *Parade of Mighty Warriors* of 1942 (fig 98, p. 80), which jabbed and awakened the world "in real times" to the consequences of Nazi-fascist criminality.

In *The Silent Partner* (fig. 78, p. 66) Szyk ingeniously stages the black comedy playing out in Europe. Appearing as the AP cover illustration of *Collier's* and published on November 1, 1941, Szyk's

notes on the work reveal his intent, "In this game, Adolph [sic], Two Aces is More Than Three Kings."

Perhaps inspired by Caravaggio's *The Cardsharps* of ca. 1595 (fig. 77, p. 66), where the choreographed set of cheating hand signals, gestures and furtive glances allows the viewer to slowly watch the scamming appear with comic sensibility, Szyk places into the hand of the Red Army's "Ivan" two aces: Great Britain and the United States. The viewer looking over Hitler's shoulder sees his left hand, and the reality that he has to defend "The New World Order" with his three Jokers [the so-called Kings]: the Axis leaders of Japan, Italy, and Vichy France. Through the visual metaphor of poker hands held by gamblers, we are led to understand the stakes are perilously high: the future of civilization hangs in the balance.

The historic background to these dealings is chilling. The Hitler-Stalin Pact signed on August, 23, 1939 (officially designated as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) was a non-aggression promise between Germany and Russia, dividing up most of Eastern Europe as their shared spoils. On June 22, 1941, Stalin ultimately "lost his hand" through Hitler's treachery. In the mightiest air and armored assault in world history, the Hitler-Stalin alliance was shattered when Nazi Germany commenced "Operation Barbarossa." From that day forward, the Eastern front saw more than 6 million Axis and Soviet soldiers pitted against each other in a fight to the death. During the next four years, over 5 million military deaths resulted from freezing temperatures, starvation, and disease – not to mention the fury of nearly 15,000 tanks engaged in hellish battles along the blood-drenched 1,800-mile-long Eastern front.



Fig. 98 Arthur Szyk, *Parade of Mighty Warriors*. New York, ca. 1942, watercolor, ink, and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art

In January 30, 1942, ten days after the Wannsee Conference articulated the Third Reich's industrialized extermination campaign to eradicate Europe's Jews, Hitler spoke at Berlin's *Sportspalast*. Announcing the Reich's successive victories on all fronts, crowds cheered while he promised that the "last Jews would be driven from European soil" repeating his foreboding prophecy of 1939 promising the complete "annihilation" of the "Jewish race."<sup>49</sup>



Fig. 99 David Levine, *Lyndon B. Johnson*, 1966, ink on paper. Editorial cartoon for the New York Review of Books. © Matthew and Eve Levine



Fig. 100, detail of fig. 18, p. 19

In a dramatic announcement at a press conference on November 24, 1942, "Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress, announced that the State Department had confirmed information that two million Jews had been killed by the Nazis as part of a systematic campaign of extermination."<sup>50</sup> This

<sup>49</sup> Peter Longerich, *Hitler: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 794.  
<sup>50</sup> Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, 98.  
<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 99-103.

news had a personal significance to Szyk. Having moved to the United States in 1940, by this point Szyk was safely established in Manhattan, but was without any direct contact with his mother Eugenia and brother Bernard, who remained in Nazi-occupied Łódź. Neither survived.

*We Are Running Short of Jews*, which appeared July 20, 1943 (fig. 9, p. 11), shows Hitler reviewing a printed page proclaiming: "Gestapo Reports 2,000,000 Jews Executed – Heil Hitler!" In the drawing's upper right he wrote: "to the memory of my darling mother, murdered by the Germans somewhere in the ghettos of Poland." At the time Szyk created this work he had been misinformed about the location of his mother's death. Clarifying this confusion, Stephen Luckert explains: "Unbeknownst to him, his mother had been deported from the Łódź ghetto to the Chelmno killing center in September, 1942,...in late March 1943, his brother Bernard perished."<sup>51</sup>

Szyk memorializes the martyred heroes of the Second World War's most gruesome hand-to-hand urban combat in the blood-curdling epic composition *'My People,' Samson in the Ghetto (Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto)* of 1945 (cover and fig. 117, p. 90). It debunks the perception of the docile *Yeshiva bocher* [observant bookish student] Jew obediently lining up as a lamb to the slaughter. A spectrum of Jewish resistance groups formed the mix of political and religious militias networking for the historic encounter in a life-and-death struggle of courage versus human sin, with the Nazis – many of whom were university graduates – burning human lives to death.



Warsaw’s thriving Jewish pre-war population of 350,000 was the largest community of Jews in Europe. By 1943, approximately 265,000 of them were transported and murdered at the Treblinka camp located 52 miles from Warsaw (after Warsaw’s insurrection, another 42,000 would perish at the Lublin/Majdanek concentration camps). With approximately 50,000 Jews sealed within Warsaw’s walled and barbed wired prison, various youth groups united into the alliance of the *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa* or ZOB, the Jewish Fighting Organization, in the summer of 1942. Another Jewish militia was known as the *Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy* or ZZW – the Jewish Military Union. Commencing on Passover eve, April 18, 1943, male and female street fighters emerged from subterranean tunnels, armed with crudely fashioned Molotov cocktails and bootlegged firearms, all of them prepared to fight to their deaths.

The Nazis’ genocidal orders are satirized here by Szyk (fig. 117, p. 90) as the Jewish resistance fighter brandishes “REICHSOBERSCHICKLGRUBER” Heinrich Himmler’s decree: “WARSAW GETTO (sic) EASTERN AREA ORDER TO ALL THE TROOPS TO MURDER ALL JEWS! SIEG! HEIL! GEZEICHNET HIMMLER.” The name “Schicklgruber” became a linguistic poison dart of comedic irony, one thrown at Hitler’s Austrian paternal grandmother, Maria Schicklgruber (who died in 1847 and was the household cook of an eminent Jewish family) as an allusion to the mythology of the Fuhrer’s obscured Jewish origins.

Conceived as a Jewish-led *Götterdämmerung*, a Gestapo officer is slain in Szyk’s haunting image of retribution and redemption. Resisting the Nazis as if they were modern Philistines, Szyk transmutes the biblical hero Samson (“with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men,” [Judges: 15-21]) into the approximately 800 Jewish men and women who fought to their last breaths. In the cyclical rhymes of Jewish history, this recalled the 967 Jews who chose to take their own lives rather than submit to Rome’s invincible Xth Legion at Masada in 74 CE. Warsaw’s tiny band of Jews, armed only with homemade weapons, staved off 2,000 well-equipped SS troops for the same number of days that it had taken the entire Polish Army to collapse during the Nazi Blitzkrieg of September 1939. It is estimated that at least 7,000 Jews were killed while hiding in the ghetto through

May 16. On April 18, 2023, commemorating the 80th anniversary of the “Jewish Resistance,” the observance in Israel of *Yom HaShoah*, the Day of Remembrance for the Holocaust, was marked with special recognition of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

“This extraordinary affair provided a potent symbol of a so-called different type of Jew – one marked by bravery and a desire to die on one’s own terms, rather than by a stereotypical bookishness and passivity,” notes art historian Samantha Baskin.<sup>52</sup> In the 2018 *The Warsaw Ghetto in American Art and Culture*, a tour-de-force of post-modernist analysis, she explains how popular culture’s authors and film directors transformed valiant ghetto fighters into Yiddish-speaking Superman. Despite the Eisenhower era’s willful intention to avoid Holocaust themes, a flurry of wildly popular Warsaw-related sagas burst into the American public’s view after the war. John Hersey’s *The Wall* (1950) and Millard Lampell’s play *The Wall* (1961) retold the heroism of Warsaw’s darkest hour. Leon Uris’s novel, *Mila 18* (1961) relied on factual evidence of the underground headquarters of the Jewish fighters at *Ulica Mila 18* – 18 Pleasant Street – in the heart of Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Within the discourse of the Shoah, the complexity and contradictory events of Jewish submission versus courageous action consistently demands a more nuanced understanding of these painful events.

Baskind’s probing eye also links Szyk’s use of fearful Warsaw ghetto youth. In a 1943 drawing, *To Be Shot, as Dangerous Enemies of the Third Reich* (fig. 116, p. 90), Szyk “manipulates the viewer by picturing wide-eyed children doomed to die simply because they happen to be born Jews.....[they are] not rosy cheeked children looking toward the future but innocents who will soon meet their death.”<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 101 Leonardo da Vinci, *Caricature of a Bald Old Man*, ca. 1485-90, pen and brown ink. London, British Museum

By 1945, when Szyk dipped his watercolor brush to consecrate ‘*My People*’ at Warsaw, he was conjuring up iconic themes of Jewish resistance and salvation. In history’s cyclical rhythms recalled by sages, it invokes the burnt scars of survival and resilience: Moses defying pharaoh Ramesses II; the Third Jewish Revolt – *Bar Kochba* – challenging Roman oppression; or countless victims of the Spanish Inquisition and the brutality of modern pogroms in the Eastern Pale of



Fig. 102 Arthur Szyk, *Help Us Survive*, September, 1944, poster stamp sheet. Private Collection

Settlement. Szyk’s Warsaw/Samson archetype smashes down the ghetto’s walls while dismissing images of cowardly Jews sleepwalking into the gas chambers. Szyk’s calligraphic inscription bordering ‘*My People*’ hurls eternal damnation: “To the German people, sons of Cain, be ye damned forever and ever, amen.”

Unlike any other featured war cartoonist appearing in print at this time, Szyk had the singular distinction of translating the murder of his own family members to the American public through his art. To some degree, this personal involvement eventually compromised his artistic reputation; his cumulative exasperation was fed by his outrage at the magnitude of the news of the genocide of European Jews. Instead of lighthearted jabbing, readers came to sense the artist’s desperation as the trains to the death camps continued unabated.

“Szyk’s cartoons became increasingly bitter as the situation worsened,” comments Andre Schiffrin in his richly documented text, *Dr. Seuss & Co. Go to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of America’s Leading Comic Artists*.

<sup>54</sup> Andre Schiffrin, Andre, *Dr. Seuss & Co. Go to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of America’s Leading Comic Artists* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 21.  
<sup>55</sup> Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 160.

His cartoon *We Are Running Short of Jews* shows Hitler and his staff “pleased with the death of 2 million Jews, fearing that they will soon run out. Sadly, Szyk was far too optimistic, since the Germans would find another 4 million to kill...Mrs. Roosevelt was equally optimistic in her praise of the cartoonist.”<sup>54</sup>

Szyk’s cabinet of wartime horrors appeared in the book *Ink and Blood* (fig. 94, p. 78), published in 1946. The title conveys an ironic twist, as it plays upon Otto von Bismarck’s 1862 speech urging Prussians to unify with *Blut und Eisen*, or “Blood and Iron.” Szyk’s drawings became starker and bleaker, as they chronicled the torment of the war years, public reaction often took the form of repulsion about the cartoonist’s dark humor. The cover image shows the artist industriously laboring over his artwork, which comes to life in the form of miniaturized Axis demons and vultures. The artist grips his pen like a weapon, becoming Szyk’s psychic *schadenfreude* punishing the puppet of Hitler on his desk.

*The Saturday Review of Literature* discussed editorial reactions from nine publishers who rejected the *Ink and Blood* project as being too “grim.” Szyk’s illustrations were deemed excessively “bitter” for the post-war American public.<sup>55</sup>

**VII. De Profundis: Ecumenical Appeals from Torah to Gospel**

Perhaps no other drawing from Szyk’s repertoire addresses the interchangeability of Scripture so much as that in the ink and graphite illustration *De Profundis. Cain, Where is Abel Thy Brother?* (fig. 80, p. 67). Published in the *Chicago Sun* in February, 1943, Szyk’s image fills half of the printed advertisement underwritten by the “Textbook Commission to Eliminate Anti-Semitic Statements in American Textbooks.” The ad was sponsored by the *Protestant Digest*, a progressive inter-faith project with a circulation of 50,000 subscribers. Its anti-fascist editorial opinions represented many of the leading public intellectuals of the day including theologians Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and John McKay, President of the Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>52</sup> Samantha Baskind, “Propaganda in the Best and Purest Sense of the Word,” *American Jewish History* 103, no. 2 (April, 2019): 127.

<sup>53</sup> Samantha Baskind, *The Warsaw Ghetto in American Art and Culture* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2018), 155.



With a funerary pyre of murdered victims heaped up like grain sacks, the text desperately appealed to the “Living Voice of the Dead – In vain, they have spoken in their own behalf.” Seeking attention for the ongoing slaughter, the ad uses the Latin term *De profundis* [Psalm 130] while stating “Out of the depths they speak...2,000,000 sensitive beings tortured, starved, butchered, in an orgy of hate reaped by Hitler but sown in the very soil of Christian civilization, sown in the texts of intolerance.”

Szyk inserts the Hebrew Bible’s text [Genesis 4:9] with the beseeching cry: “Cain, where is Abel thy brother?” How Cain, the son of Adam and Eve could have denied his responsibility to his brother Abel’s well-being raises one of humanity’s most disturbing questions. Facing Nazi barbarism, the American public’s moral clarity was being tested as the passage continues: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Scholar Darlene Miller-Lanning notes that “for Szyk, the parallels that existed between Biblical accounts of the first murder and contemporary accounts of mass murder were clear: by interlacing a swastika and Star of David in the capitals of the worlds “Cain” and “Abel,” Szyk explicitly identified the Nazis as murderers of the Jews.”<sup>56</sup>

Szyk recognized that an essential element of his mission was to discover meaningful symbolic vehicles to alert Christians to the unimaginable scope of the coming *Shoah* (this, the Hebrew word for “catastrophe,” would come to mean the killing of nearly six million Jews in Europe during World War II).

In the days and months after America’s entry into the war in late 1941- early 1942, the nation underwent a massive rearmament campaign. Preparing to wage war on multiple continents and oceans, the highest national priority was to rapidly turn out of tanks, munitions, naval vessels, and aircraft while millions of young men were being drafted or enlisting into military service.

For its 2018 exhibition *Americans and the Holocaust*, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) refuted the myth that the American public was largely unaware of

Germany’s industrialized campaign for the total extermination of Europe’s Jews. The exhibition worked to “challenge the commonly held assumptions that Americans knew little and did nothing about the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews as the Holocaust unfolded.”<sup>57</sup>

To this end, Szyk’s *De Profundis* adroitly depicts *Yahshua* [Jesus] clutching the Ten Commandments in his left hand while the figure of a young Yeshiva boy is seen close to death. (fig. 106, p. 84) As blood droplets from the Crown of



Figs. 104-105, details of fig. 80

Thorns fill the Messiah’s forehead, Szyk infers that a flood of vital life fluids from Holocaust victims will be oozing out of Europe’s extermination camps and killing fields.

By reinforcing Jesus’ rabbinic presence, Szyk exploits the duality of the Jewish Jesus by quietly reminding his audience of the entwined roots of the Judeo-Christian faith traditions. Pondering the historical nexus of the Jewish Jesus, Susannah Heschel argues that “efforts by nineteenth-century Protestant theologians to discover the historical Jesus in order to follow his faith led inevitably to the frightening realization that Jesus was a Jew whose faith was Judaism... Although central to the modern quest for the historical Jesus, the problem of Jesus’ Jewishness is something no scholar of modern Christian thought has yet investigated.”<sup>58</sup>

Szyk’s image is predictive of remarkable leaps in the post-war era’s reconciliatory warming between Jews and Christians after centuries of conflicting estrangement and open suppression. Szyk’s achievement is noted in the Jewish publication *Moment*: “Barring new traumas, the next 50 years of Catholic-Jewish relations will

extend the meaningful dialogue begun with *Nostra Aetate*, and create a shared future marked by mutual respect and responsibility rather than mistrust and pain.”<sup>59</sup>



Fig. 106, detail of fig. 80 (p. 67)

It is entirely plausible that Szyk made strategic use of Marc Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* (fig. 107, right), painted in 1938, as a response Kristallnacht’s orgy of anti-Jewish violence in that year. Chagall would eventually escape from Nazi-occupied France for America in July 1941 thanks to the heroic work of Varian Fry. Fry was the first American to be honored at Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem’s memorial of the “Righteous Among the Nations.” He lived in Redding, Connecticut after the war and attended graduate courses in education at Fairfield University during the early 1960s. Fry died in 1967 at the age of 59. Known today as the “Artist’s Schindler,” his dauntless courage in foiling Vichy Nazis from the Villa Air Bel outside of Marseilles helped over 2,000 Jewish intellectuals and artists to escape into neutral Spain.

Pope Francis I has noted his personal affection for Chagall’s ecumenical work, now in the Art Institute of Chicago. *The National Review*’s George Weigel explains: “Francis spoke of his fondness for Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*, one of the most striking religious paintings of the 20th century. Chagall’s Jesus is unmistakably Jewish, the traditional blue and white *tallit* or prayer-shawl replacing the loincloth of the Crucified One.”<sup>60</sup>

Ziva Mmishai-Maisels of the Hebrew University notes: “In the *White Crucifixion*, Christ is depicted

wearing a short headcloth rather a crown of thorns, and a fringed garment...[as a] variant on the Jewish ritual prayer shawl...[Chagall will stress] Jesus’ Jewish character, as Aramaic is written in



Fig. 107 Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*, 1938, oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago

Hebrew characters and was a language spoken by many Jews in Jesus’ time...The combination of Christian and Jewish motifs would have been complicated enough, but Chagall added to their complexity by placing the historical Jesus in a modern setting.”<sup>61</sup>

In turning to this Christian imagery, Chagall and then Szyk are both expressing their religious and political motivations for this symbolic meditation. As Nazi propaganda was exploiting the killing of the Jewish Son of God in preparing for their own extermination campaign, these images attempted to unambiguously point out the hypocrisy of such persecution. And yet, the cry of Jesus at his final hours at Calvary, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” or “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [Mark 15:34] is the unanswered question Szyk poses.

<sup>56</sup> Darlene Miller-Lanning, curator of “Arthur Szyk: Manuscript Illuminator, Political Artist and Advocate for Humanity,” University of Scranton Art Gallery, February 2000.  
<sup>57</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Americans and the Holocaust,” 2018. <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust>  
<sup>58</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Allison Claire Chang and Irvin Ungar, “Nostra Aetate at 50: Jewish Art, Christian Conscience,” *Moment*, October 21, 2015. <https://momentmag.com/nostra-aetate-at-50-jewish-art-christian-conscience/>  
<sup>60</sup> George Weigel, “The Christ-Centered Pope,” *The National Review*, September 20, 2013. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2013/09/christ-centered-pope-george-weigel/>  
<sup>61</sup> Ziva Mmishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s White Crucifixion,” *Art Institute of Chicago Studies* 17, no. 2 (1991): 138-181.



VIII. The First Lady’s “Soldier in Art”

Within one year of his arrival in Manhattan in 1940, Szyk published an astonishingly foretelling book, *The New Order*. With the distinguished imprint of G.P. Putnam’s Sons, it dished out a barrage of cringe-worthy takedowns of the free world’s increasingly menacing enemies. Without any precedent published in the United States at that time, Szyk’s cartoons present a savagely predictive peek at the chain of despots bringing the world into darkness.

Already on the retail book shelves in every American city and town before Japan’s surprise military destruction of Pearl Harbor, Szyk’s book – like his *Madness* cover for *Collier’s* – became noteworthy for his “early alert” in revealing the soon-to-come barbarity of the Axis forces. His fame grew exponentially as American and Allied losses mounted. By the conclusion of 1944 – after much American blood was lost in the Sicilian and Italian campaign and at Midway in the Pacific, the *Art News* singled him out: “Through his now famous cartoons, [Szyk] has given more if his time, his thought, his genius and his unflagging energies to fighting the Axis evils than perhaps any other artist of his generation.”<sup>62</sup>

Announcing the book’s publication, *The New Yorker’s* “Toast of the Town” [August 2, 1941] column noted that Szyk is “regarded by many critics as the leading living miniature painter,” and described him as “a short, round, bouncy man with an intense air.”<sup>63</sup> Szyk described his purpose: “I consider myself as being on the line of duty in my cartoons...we are not entitled to do the things we like today.”<sup>64</sup>

The influential art critic Thomas Craven raved about the book’s intense caricatures, naming Szyk as “one of the most original political cartoonists... his designs are as compact as a bomb, extraordinarily lucid in statement, firm and incisive of line and deadly in their characterizations.”<sup>65</sup>

Szyk attracted the attention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who wrote in her nationally published “My Day” column of Szyk’s satirically aimed Howitzers fortifying the arsenal for democracy. With an audience of up to 4,000,000 readers, published in 62 leading newspapers across the nation, Mrs. Roosevelt used her column to vigorously champion the New Deal’s agenda. Eloquently and convincingly, she gave an

uplifting voice of inspiration while promoting her husband’s lofty ideals set forth in “The Four Freedoms” State of the Union speech of 1942. These remarkable essays – partly hard news mixed with kitchen-table domestic small talk – advocated for women’s rights, civil rights, and social justice.

On January 8, 1942 after viewing Szyk’s acerbic satires of the Führer’s henchmen at the Seligman Galleries on East 57th Street, Mrs. Roosevelt admitted in her column: “I know of no other miniaturist doing quite this kind of work. In its way



Fig. 108 Arthur Szyk presents signed poster stamps created to raise funds for the British-American Ambulance Corps to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, New York, 1941.

it fights the war against Hitlerism as truly any of U.S. who cannot actually be on the fighting fronts today.”<sup>66</sup> In an undated note, the First Lady noted that “this is a personal war of Szyk against Hitler, and I do not think that Mr. Szyk will lose this war.”<sup>67</sup>

In a display of virtuoso caricature transformed into a living illustration, Szyk inscribed a drawing of Roosevelt to the First Lady: “To MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, From Arthur Szyk, F.D.R.s SOLDIER IN ART, N.Y. 1946” (fig. 88, p. 73). Depicted at the center of this global struggle, the opposing portraits of “Democrat versus the Dictator” – the forces of human freedom and humanity lift the Allies to the “V” of Victory at the tip of FDR’s lit cigarette.

Conversely, in Szyk’s portrait of Hitler, entitled *Anti-Christ* (fig. 89, p. 74), the dictator’s maniacal head is placed upon an altar as a colossal effigy akin to an antique Roman imperial bust. Hidden within the strands of black hair crossing Hitler’s forehead is the Latin phrase *Vae Victis*, or “woe to the vanquished ones.” Even more diabolical are the two skulls placed into the center of Hitler’s eyeballs.

Szyk’s *Anti-Christ* Hitler portrait recalls the medieval imagery of the *Totentanz*, or “dance of death,” that emerged in popular media after the bubonic plague decimated Europe’s population in the 14th century. *Anti-Christ* recycles countless iterations of the *Totentanz* theme from medieval and Renaissance sources (fig. 120, p. 92). A macabre skeletal figure streaks across the background unfurling the Wermacht’s marching song: “*heute gehört uns Deutschland / morgen die ganze Welt*,” or “today Germany is ours, tomorrow the whole world.” On the distant horizon a pair of gallows documents the public hanging of Jews rising from the battlefield’s smoke led by *Einsatzgruppen*, the Eastern front’s mobile killing squads. Drawing on such commonly-known scenes of hell and death, Szyk attempted to bring urgent attention to the ongoing Inferno of the war, from the killing



Fig. 109 A panel from the three page underground comix story, “Maus” that led to Maus, the Graphic Novel, years later. ©1972 art spiegelman.



Fig. 110 Bill Mauldin, “I’ve got a hangover. Does it show?” *Stars and Stripes*, 1945. Chicago, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, The Bill Mauldin Estate Gift (952120711). Copyrights held by and image courtesy of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library

fields of the Eastern front to the industrialized gas chambers” being designed for the diabolically-conceived “final solution” of the Nazi plan of genocide for almost the entirety of the Jewish population of Europe.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman conveys the traumatic story of his

own family’s encounter with Nazi executioners in his harrowing *Maus* graphic novel of 1972. In Spiegelman’s work, “Death’s Head” symbol (used by the infamous *Schutzstaffel* or SS) is transformed into a vengeful cat-skull on the armband (fig. 109, left).

Szyk was far from the only cartoonist to be recognized for his wartime work. The era’s most recognized cartoonist and winner of a Pulitzer Prize was Bill Mauldin, who covered much of the war as an eyewitness in the 45th Division’s Italian campaign from 1943 forward. Mauldin and Szyk’s approaches were as different as their experiences of the conflict; Mauldin published authentically-inked foxhole chronicles, following a pair of muddled infantrymen named Willie and Joe (fig. 110 left), while Szyk launched his incisive political satires from the warmth of his Manhattan apartment.

Mauldin’s nationally-syndicated cartoons presented tales of downtrodden GIs, balancing comic relief and consternation from the common man’s viewpoint. Mauldin was especially loved for contrasting the hardships of the typical GI grunt with that of the military’s top brass. He was famously dressed-down by General Patton at his Luxembourg headquarters in March 1944 for depicting battle-weary GIs with scruffy, unkempt uniforms: “Now then, sergeant, about those pictures you draw of those god-awful things you call soldiers...the krauts ought to pin a medal on you for helping them mess up discipline for us.”<sup>68</sup>

Where Mauldin’s cartooning offered lighthearted humor, solace, and support to the GIs families back home, Szyk focused his cartooning on exposing the cruelty of the Nazi regime and the psychotic ravings of its leaders, while simultaneously imploring the American people for their empathy for the refugees, captives, and murdered victims. Of course, Szyk also remained sympathetic to America’s own fighting men, and curated his media image “as a direct participant in the war...[he appeared periodically to the American public as one of their] fighting artists.”<sup>69</sup>

Szyk’s cartoons also occasionally lobbed caustic mortar shells that highlighted the racist realities of Jim Crow segregation back in the States. In one such cartoon (fig. 130, p. 97), Szyk laces the outline of the two GIs, one white and the other black, guarding a file of German soldiers being placed into captivity. Szyk scholar and collector Irvin Ungar emphasizes the cruel irony of the exchange Szyk depicts between the two soldiers.

62 “Arthur Szyk,” *The Art News* 43 no. 17 (1944): 21.  
63 Charles Cooke and Geoffrey T. Hellman, “Lodz’s Szyk,” *The New Yorker* (August 2, 1941): 12.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Stephen Worth, “Editorial Cartoons: Arthur Szyk The New Order,” Animation Resources. <https://animationresources.org/caricature-arthur-szyk-the-new-order/>  
66 Ungar, “Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man,” 18  
67 Ibid., 28.

68 Library of Congress, “Mauldin at War: 1943-1945,” 2003. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/mauldin/mauldin-atwar.html>  
69 Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 155.



“By challenging American attitudes towards racism and its segregated military units,” Ungar notes, Szyk’s “cartoon of the white GI and the black GI will forever remain a classic...the white GI asks the black GI, ‘What would you do with Hitler?’ and the black soldier replies, ‘I would have made him a Negro and dropped him somewhere in the USA.’” Szyk recognized injustice and human rights violations on all levels. It took America 50 years after the war to award its Congressional Medal of Honor to a black soldier, but Szyk, already in the 1940s, attacked the inequities of the hour.”<sup>70</sup>

Underscoring the “precise and deliberate” qualities in Szyk’s editorial cartooning, Joseph P. Ansell highlights a technical approach that was distinct from most of the newspaper cartoonists of the day. Ansell points us to Szyk’s chosen medium: “quill pen and ink, sometimes combined with soft, controlled pencil shading...[Szyk’s drawings are] extremely tight and concentrated.”<sup>71</sup> This was, of course, not the only way in which Szyk differed from other cartoonists of World War II, even those battle-tested on the front lines; he was the only cartoonist working from a Jewish perspective, whose family and friends were about to be murdered by the Nazis. In the context of Szyk’s painful singularity, the art press came to appreciate the ferocious magnitude of his cartoons. His images displayed the hallmarks of first-rate editorialized cartooning: wit, irony, and the ability to metaphorically transform the individualized character into a statement of universality. No other American artist commented on the war’s brutality with the vigorous severity of Szyk’s cartoons. An unsigned review appearing in *PM* magazine noted: “A man of right instincts and intense convictions, Szyk has always been on the side of humanity. No brush has told the story of Hitler’s crimes against the world more tellingly.”<sup>72</sup>

**IX. Polish Immigrant to Connecticut Yankee**

How did this precocious descendent of a long line of Polish rabbis and merchants end up in the leafy, quaint outer suburb in Connecticut? We have to marvel at the unexpected route of the boy raised at the turn of the 20th century at number 15 Cegielniana Street in the central Polish town of Łódź, and who came to reside in a spacious colonial style home at 952 Weed Street, [renumbered to 934] in New Canaan, Connecticut.

In the footsteps of the Polish-born writer Anzia Yeziersak (1880-1970), Leon Rosten (also born in Łódź, 1908-died in NY, 1997), or Isaac Bashevis Singer (born in Poland, Izzak Zynger 1903-died in Florida, 1991), Szyk was a visual artist co-traveler and spiritually-connected *lantzman*, or a “fellow Jew from the same Eastern European *shtetl* or provincial region.” He demonstrated a remarkably swift entry into the hubbub of Manhattan’s intelligentsia in the early 1940s. Along with his wife Julia, they attended jazz soirees and entertained many intellectual notables, authors, and the swanky Broadway theater crowd. At one moment he is involved with Zionist leader Vladmir Jabotinsky, and next we find him with Eleanor Roosevelt during a radio program. Blessed with good fortune, fueled by Szyk’s uncannily employed talents, the artist was immediately appreciated by an alert pool of art directors stewarding several newspapers and magazines in Manhattan. This Polish refugee’s immigration story symbolizes the tens of millions of less favored families in the world today who are continuing their quest in seeking freedom from oppression. In the era of the Second World War we witnessed the plight of millions of refugees who sought out freedom and safe harbor. Through herculean humanitarian efforts such as the *Kindertransport* (1938-40), thousands of Jewish children were funneled to England before the curtain of doom fell.

But not all Jews were so fortunate, as Szyk knew only all too well. One of the most tragic episodes of a failed escape was the doomed *M.S. St. Louis* (fig. 112, p. 88). The liner, carrying more than 900 passengers, most of them Jewish refugees attempting to flee from the tentacles of the Third Reich’s racial laws departed Hamburg, Germany on May 13, 1939, sailing towards Havana, Cuba. After an antisemitic protest of 40,000 Cubans, the government invalidated the passengers’ visas. Steering towards the U.S. with the hope of gaining political asylum, the ship cruised off of Miami,



Fig. 111, detail of fig. 89 (p. 74)



Fig. 112 Map showing the Voyage of St. Louis. May 13 - June 17, 1939. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives.

without being given permission to dock. In their desperation, Jewish passengers wired their pleadings to President Roosevelt at the White House. Regrettably, due to the deeply antisemitic attitudes prevalent within the U.S. State Department, it failed to issue emergency visas to the passengers, and the *St. Louis* was forced to return to Europe. Docking in Antwerp, Belgium by June 17, the shameful episode resulted in 254 of its Jewish passengers being murdered in Nazi extermination camps by the end of the war. In Jewish history, the *MS St. Louis* affair is the unforgiveable *shanda*, or disgrace. By failing to rescue 254 endangered immigrants, their martyred memories mark America’s failure in perpetuity.

In this exhibition’s timely relevancy, we should underscore an ongoing concern to defend “The Rights of Global Refugees.” Countless refugee stories have appeared in news headlines of recent years with waves of desperate immigrants escaping civil wars and military regimes in Syria, Iraq, or Ukraine, to only name a few. The surge of migrants along the US/Mexican southern border has included skyrocketing numbers from countries that were barely represented in previous years, presenting a challenge that experts say the U.S. is not equipped to address.

In his own time, Szyk’s art shone a guiding pathway towards righteousness by addressing the dangerous conditions of his fellow Jews facing an aggressive implementation of the Wannsee planning for “The Final Solution.” The former congregational Rabbi Irvin Ungar, who has dedicated his life to ensuring Szyk’s legacy, argues that Szyk was both a “great artist and a great human being...There is nothing simple or comfortable about Szyk’s art or his message. The perpetual battle against injustice is neither simple nor comforting. Szyk’s work challenges U.S. morally, stimulates U.S. artistically, and

demonstrates how human existence can be elevated to a life of moral meaning.”<sup>73</sup>

Noting how Szyk was an “advocate for Humanity,” Ungar argues that “he was among the first artists called upon to articulate and illustrate the Covenant of the League of Nations.”<sup>74</sup> Following World War II and the establishment of the United Nations, Szyk’s vivid illustrational style was harnessed to create postage stamps, national emblems, and historical mythology for the new nations of the post-war and post-colonial lands of Asia, Africa and South America.

Beyond his political cartooning in major newspapers, Szyk was earning a livelihood in New York through “work for hire” commercial illustration commissions. His distinctive caricature



Figs. 113-114 *Compo Beach, Old Mill, Westport, CT, circa 1930*, Westport Museum for History & Culture

style appeared in print ads for war production, as well as general retail advertising. Casco Products in 1943 was the subject of ads in *The Bridgeport Post* newspaper praising workers’ efforts for war production. The local Bridgeport automotive parts industry transformed its factory line to produce nearly three million in armor piercing bullets and fuses for mortars and oil bombs. Among his other “board work” are war related ads published in the *Saturday Evening Post*

<sup>70</sup> Irvin Ungar, *Justice Illuminated: The Art of Arthur Szyk*, exhibition catalogue (Berkeley: Historicana, 1998), 22.  
<sup>71</sup> Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 136-137  
<sup>72</sup> “Hats Off,” *PM* (December 26, 1944): 19.

<sup>73</sup> Ungar, *Justice Illuminated: The Art of Arthur Szyk*, 13.  
<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



and *Fortune*. Additional ads were designed to promote Asbestos Limited, Inc., General Motors, Lumbermen's Mutual Casualty Company (fig. 9, p.xx), Philco Corporation, and United States Steel.

By the summer of 1942 Szyk's rental of a beach cottage in Westport, Connecticut made headlines in the society pages and gossip chatter in many of New York's leading newspapers. Indicative of his rising celebrity, banner stories appeared announcing: "Caricaturist Rents Home," [*New York Times*, July 18, 1942]; "Arthur Szyk Rents Cottage in Westport," [*New York Post*, July 21, 1942]; "Cartoonist Leases Place in Westport" [*New York World Telegram*, July 21, 1942].

*The Bridgeport Post* announced: "Anti-Axis Art Creator Rents Westport Home," following up with details about the "noted caricaturist famous for his anti-Axis cartoons rented the[Douglas] Fairbanks cottage at the Old Mill, Westport... So important are Szyk's cartoons considered as a medium for awakening men in the United States armed forces to the issues at stake in this war that the U.S.O. has arranged to hang his outstanding recent cartoons in some 500 recreational centers throughout this country. Esquire is furnishing colored reproductions for this purpose." [July, 19, 1942].

A curious item, "The Editor Speaks Up" appeared in a column published in the *Fairfield News* announcing that "This office is now adorned with two prints of Arthur Szyk, the Polish gentleman, now living in Westport," [August 14, 1942]. Meanwhile, the *Westport News* published a long article about Szyk's local exhibition: "'Y' To Display Work of Artist, Living Here." Local reporter Wes Porter wrote: "One of the most outstanding cartoonists of this war, Polish exile Arthur Szyk has joined the already large and lively known colony of artists living in Westport." [August, 6, 1942].

The *Stamford Advocate* noted how the editor and radio personality appointed to the War Writers' Board, Clifton Fadiman, had "selected at the YMCA Westport showing" a Szyk cartoon for a major exhibit at Fort Dix [August 14, 1942]. Szyk's cartoon depicted the "brutalities of the Nazis" as SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler directed the murder of 340 residents of a Czech village on June 10, 1942.

An example of Szyk's visibly powerful presence even after the war's conclusion was the commission for the urban crossroads of the world, Manhattan's Times Square, where he took center stage with a billboard recounting Abraham

Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" in 1946 (fig. 115, right). Sadly, there are no extant photographs that document of Szyk's creation of this massive mural. How did he do it? Was it fabricated from a painting and photographically enlarged? Located above the old Nedick's hot dog luncheonette, Szyk is prophetically a generation ahead of Pop Art master James Rosenquist's Times Square billboards.

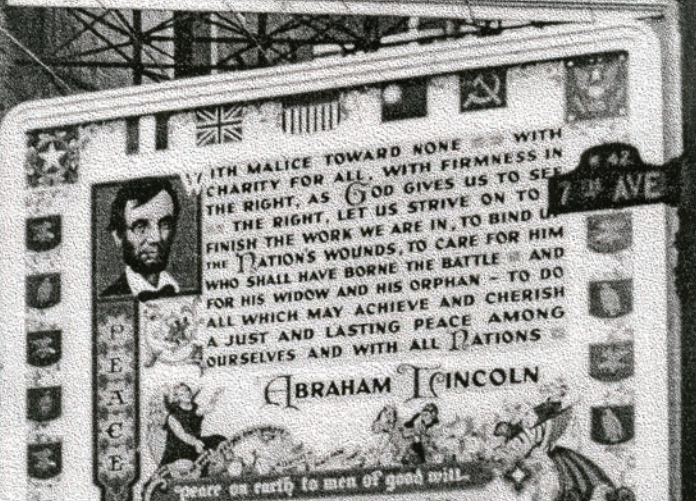


Fig. 115 Arthur Szyk, *Lincoln's Gettysburg Address*, Times Square billboard, 1946.

Adorned with the flags of the victorious Allies – reminding those below that human rights and freedom had been secured – Lincoln's hope for "a just and lasting peace among ourselves and all nations" would soon be tested in a new dimension. Not the Battle between the States which once shattered America, but a world on the cusp of a new kind of Cold War.

In 1948, Szyk fulfilled a long-held dream of becoming a naturalized American citizen. Doubtless he experienced the same tropes that echoed through the literary testimonials of the Jewish-American immigrant narrative: separation, alienation, acceptance, and finally, a rewarding sense of "belonging" to New York's multi-cultural, progressive, arts-oriented, literati circles. It's not clear how the Szyks decided in 1946 to purchase their home in New Canaan, Connecticut. Even with his international fame, Szyk surely appreciated that New Canaan was not a particularly hospitable town for a Polish immigrant Jewish family. One possible connection is that among the Szyk's dearest of friends was a notable immigrant couple who had become distinguished New Canaan residents in the early 1940s. The eminent Latvian-born physician, Dr. Leo M. Davidoff was Szyk's confidant, old world companion, and intellectual sparring partner.

After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1922, he became a world-renowned neurosurgeon and one of the founders of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University. He was



Fig. 116 Arthur Szyk, *To Be Shot as Dangerous Enemies of the Third Reich!*, 1943, ink and graphite on paper. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.114)

decorated by the Czech government, headed World Health Organization medical missions, and authored 11 medical texts.<sup>75</sup> His wife, Dr. Ida Fisher Davidoff, was also a highly admired expert



Fig. 117 Detail of cover image. Arthur Szyk, *'My People', Samson in The Ghetto - (The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto)*, 1945, watercolor, gouache, ink, and graphite on board. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley (2017.5.1.129)

on aging and life strategies. She was born in Lithuania and met her husband in 1926 at Harvard. She became a beloved family therapist practicing in New Canaan and visiting lecturer in psychiatry at Einstein until her death in 2001 at age 97.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> "Dr. Leo Davidoff, Surgeon, 73, Dies." *The New York Times*, December 25, 1975. <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/12/25/archives/dr-leo-david-off-surgeon-73-dies-neurological-expert-helped-found.html?auth=login-googleitap&login=googleitap>.  
<sup>76</sup> "Ida Fisher Davidoff, 97, an Expert on Aging," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2001. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/19/nyregion/ida-fisher-davidoff-97-an-expert-on-aging.html>.

Although Szyk rarely engaged in ritualistic synagogue life, he remained active in the 1940s as the most visible draftsman, cartoonist, and image-shaper for Jewish appeals in Europe.

He was an activist for the emerging Zionist project, and a supporter of world humanitarian causes as a representative of a modernist, socially responsive and beneficial belief in living Judaism. Szyk was especially focused on the necessity for the creation of the new state of Israel. Just two years after the Holocaust, on November 29, 1947, the UN's favorable vote on Resolution 181 ensured another of Szyk's dreams came true as Israel officially became a "Light Among the Nations." Perhaps no greater legacy to Szyk's own vision for the triumphant creation of Israel was his illumination the *Declaration of Independence of Israel* of 1948 (fig. 90, p. 75).

While several photographs survive of Szyk standing before this unique document, it is regrettable to note that its current location is unknown. The trail goes cold when, according to this author's research, Szyk's *Declaration of Independence of Israel* was last seen in the auction at New York's Parke-Bernet Galleries, on November 24, 1961 as Lot #36 in the sale. "Arthur Szyk, inspired by the words of this Declaration, produced the present illuminated copy of the text." With widely circulated reproductions ubiquitously present in Jewish homes and schools between Tacoma and Tel Aviv, we can hope that Szyk's current revival will bring this greatly significant historical document – the gouache and watercolor original – out from the shadows.

Given that the late Bronze age settlers of the ancient Levant were ethnically considered the "Canaanites," is there some accidental irony for Szyk to land in the tony hamlet of New Canaan? Straddling across old Europe's *Yiddishkeit* lost world to the charming elegance of a Yankee village is the storybook ending for a European Jew. Who could imagine that in journeying from the old world to the shores offering Emma Lazurus' plea to "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Szyk's destiny delivered him to New Canaan's picturesque doorstep?



With its manicured properties, New Canaan attracted many high-profile titans of business, public affairs and the arts. Szyk's final years there found him among luminaries living nearby including pioneering International Modernists architects Philip Johnson and Eliot Noyes.

Despite feeling blessed in his new American life, Szyk's final years were tormented by the very pro-justice social activism he had fought so hard for. Only a year after being honored for dedicating the *New Canaan Declaration of Independence* as a statement of his pride in becoming an American citizen, he was swept into the grotesque jaws of the anti-Soviet paranoia of the Red Scare. Senator Joseph B. McCarthy's threatening House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) named the artist as a "member of an "un-American" organization." Ansell points out the particular cruelty of this charge, since Szyk devoted his every waking hour during the recent war to helping the United States and its allies defeat the enemy – all in the name of freedom and liberty."<sup>77</sup> If the expression rings true of the idiom, "A man is judged the company he keeps," we should cite the fellow artists rounded up by the HUAC's odiousness. In league with Szyk, these notable artists were under suspicion as communists: Charlie Chaplin, Adolf Dehn, Philip Evergood, William Gropper, Jacob Lawrence, Arthur Miller, Paul Robeson, and Orson Welles.<sup>78</sup>

The HUAC investigation drilled into attendees and signers for the "Review of the Scientific and Cultural Conference for World Peace Committee," held in New York City in March, 1949. At the dawn of the nuclear age, leading intellectuals were desperately attempting to head off any conflicts between the newly formed NATO alliance versus Stalin's Soviet empire. Szyk was suspicious for his involvement with other luminaries who were present including: Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, W.E.B. Du Bois, Howard Fast, Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller, Dmitri Shostakovich, I. F. Stone, Dalton Trumbo, and Henry Wallace.

Tragically, the HUAC charge proved egregiously harmful to Szyk. At 57 years of age he suffered a massive coronary seizure at his New Canaan home on Sept 13, 1951. "It was his second heart attack in four months and the third in two years. He kept up his grueling work schedule almost until the day of his death." His wife of 35 years, Julia would later express her belief that the humiliating stigma of being listed by HUAC had catalyzed his early death.<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 118 Main Street, New Canaan, early 1950s. From the collection of the New Canaan Museum & Historical Society, New Canaan, CT

Countless generations have intoned the ancient Aramaic prayer of "Kaddish." Szyk should be memorialized for his unwavering servitude to the Jewish people. Despite his progressive, unorthodox Judaism, he would have respected the ritualistic tradition of bowing heads in



Fig. 119 Residence of Arthur and Julia Szyk, purchased 1948, currently 934 Weed Street, New Canaan.

reverence. Szyk would have surely have expressed with fervent gratitude and without question the hand of an Almighty Elohim, who guided the renewal of the modern state. For: "He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for U.S. and for all of Israel; and say, Amen."

**X. "A Prophet Without Honor" – Reassessing Medieval Methods for Modern "Real Times"**

Aided by hindsight, assessing and reevaluating Szyk's indelible contributions, we are confronted with a set of problematic factors. Although Szyk's reputation exceeds any defense, astute observers may lament that he has been too often marginalized and even dismissed. Open questions remain as to why curiously misguided judgments and curatorial decisions of influential



Fig. 120 Michael Wolgemut, *Dance of Death*, leaf from *The Nuremberg Chronicle*, 1493, woodcut. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Herbert Mitchell, 2008, (2018.839.160)



Fig. 121, detail of fig. 89, p. 74



Fig. 122 SS silver skull and death's head (Totenkopf) cap insignia. Lofoten War Memorial Museum, Svolvær, Norway

art historians, critics, and museum officials at leading Jewish art institutions between Israel and America have failed to feature his career with solo retrospective exhibitions.

Responding to the question – "was Szyk a great artist?" – demands a more nuanced attention to the particular anomalies of the timing that impacted his life and art. To champion his nearly monumental achievements, we may offer possible judgments impacting the bittersweet reality that he merits the appellation of "the greatest Jewish artist of the 20th century."

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Chairman of the United States Memorial Council, explained Szyk's weighty artistic mission: "The term propagandist is not generally used honorifically – but Szyk made it into an honorable calling. In his cartoons and caricatures, he portrayed "the brutality of the Germans...the heroism of the Poles and the suffering of the Jews."<sup>80</sup>

Determining Szyk's critical status within art history can be unraveled by considering the direction in which the art world's tides were flowing during his career. One may well argue that his rightful place in art history was somewhat elided by these currents – to the point of drowning his contributions entirely. We also need to acknowledge how Szyk's position was swirled into the overlapping set of identities that comprised his personal, civic, and religious life. Although repeatedly recognized during his lifetime for his many achievements, Szyk's subsequent reputation within the Jewish and non-Jewish world seems to verify the passage from scripture: "Only in his home town, among

his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor" [Mark 6:1-4]

Art director Stephen Heller notes that "Szyk was not as well-known as he deserved to be. He was relegated to the netherworld of ephemeral illustration" and became a "lost illustrator and forgotten artist."<sup>81</sup> Also lamenting his near invisibility is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's senior curator Steven Luckert. Introducing the USHMM's 2002 exhibition, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, Luckert notes: "Despite this seeming popularity, neither Szyk nor his artwork has yet to receive the scholarly attention they merit...[His] work has been largely ignored or minimized by art historians, even those specializing in Jewish art and artistic representations of the Holocaust."<sup>82</sup>

Art historian James Kettlewell argues that despite the extraordinary qualities of Szyk's art – achieved through his idiosyncratic, manipulation of "expressive colors, ornamental patterns, and harmonious compositions" – three sets of obstacles converged into Szyk's now-obscured standing. First, his "main profession was illustration, that he was essentially a commercial artist." Secondly, despite his "immense skill," Szyk was a bound to "representing empirical reality." This became an unexpected handicap, especially after his death when "Abstract Expressionism" was gaining an audience; as it was considered almost a crime for artists to copy reality. Finally, Szyk's subject matter zigzagged between biblical themes and the "potent political images he was obliged to depict in view of the "plight of European Jews during and after World War II."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 228-29.

<sup>78</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities, "Un-American Activities," (Washington, D.C.: April 19, 1949). <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2012195>.

<sup>79</sup> "Way Back When...1951," *The New Canaan Advertiser*, September 16, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, xiii.

<sup>81</sup> Ungar, "Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man," 9.

<sup>82</sup> Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*, 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> James Kettlewell, "The Timeless Aesthetics of Arthur Szyk," in *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*, exhibition catalogue (London: Historica and The Arthur Szyk Society, 2017), 31-32.



1. *“Commercial Taboo”*: The graphic power embedded in the armature of masters such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper and Andy Warhol confirm the fluid sensibilities of commercially-initiated design. Nor was this a novelty of the modern age; all art was, to some degree, “work for hire,” from Sandro Botticelli’s flattering allegories of the Medici family to Ingres’ deification of Napoleon.

America's "Golden Age" of illustration art married fine art to mass-market publishing, producing leading figures of the Brandywine school, Maxfield Parrish, Howard Pyle, and N.C. Wyeth. In the same period, Contemporary America's look and style were transformed by the ubiquitous designs pioneered by Milton Glaser and Seymour Chawast of the Pushpin Studio agency.

In a clear demonstration that the pendulum has now swung back across the aesthetic minefield, we await the opening of a new landmark museum dedicated to all forms of “visual storytelling” : The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, in Los Angeles, scheduled to open in 2025. On its futuristic-looking 11-acre campus, its spaceship-designed museum will feature major works by narrative masters including Paul Cadmus, Robert Colescott,

*The New Order*  
BY ARTHUR SZYK

Arthur Szyk

THE NEW ORDER

Putnam

*Introduction by Roger W. Straus, Jr.*

Ironically, Szyk's reputation had already been ignominiously "buried" in 1946, in a cartoon parody by Ad Reinhardt, published in the pages of *PM*, a pro-New Deal, leftist New York daily. Between 1940-1948, this working man's daily pitched a strong anti-fascist message, featuring

[illegible]

Among those who would soon be cast aside (according to Reinhardt, a future graveyard companion to Szyk) was Paul Cadmus, whose *Shore Leave* (1933) (fig. 126, p. 95) employs

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Quattrocento deep space perspectives that now appeared to critics to be insufferably retrograde in their archaic narrative, storytelling content. In a similar vein, Szyk's macho sailor in *The Yellow Shark of Tulagi* (1942) (fig. 127, right) is an American Adonis ready to land at Iwo Jima. This unexpected linkage has not gone unnoticed by an astute critic such as J. Hoberman, who notes "Szyk does have minor affinities to a handful of contemporaries (the magic-realist painter Paul Cadmus, the great Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias) and certain successors."<sup>86</sup>

Witnessing the invigorating resurgence of visibility of Paul Cadmus in recent years with this author's championing of his under-valued contributions to American art, Szyk merits equal admiration and reassessment. Similar to the way in which museum curators and art historians marginalized Cadmus during the pre-Stonewall era, Szyk's overt "Jewishness" was another uncomfortable identity for mainstream museum exhibitions. Exhibiting Cadmus' explosively queer painting, *The Fleet's In!* (1934) and earlier *Shore Leave* (1933) (fig. 126, right) in the celebratory gay exhibit *Camp* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, spring 2021) we may compare the fates of both comic satirists. Depicting a sailor orgy with hookers in Riverside Park, Cadmus' satirical fantasy rocked the ship – and infuriated FDR's homophobic New Deal team launching the legendary WPA art projects. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Bryan Martin explained:

"Through exhibition, advocacy, and research, scholars ensure that the artistic contributions of the LGBTQIA+ community are not forgotten. When works of art circulate as part of the public dialogue, history can be celebrated and, when necessary, reevaluated. For many years Paul Cadmus existed on the periphery of mainstream cultural interests, but the recent exposure of his work heightens our appreciation for the complex and vibrant ways that queer culture has manifested throughout history."<sup>87</sup> Equally emerging from the repressive opprobrium of art history's neglect, we now fully embrace Szyk's radiancy.

From his high horse of art theory, critic Clement Greenberg denounced representational painting in his iconic essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939). Lacking transcendent, poetic or abstract values, according to Greenberg, realist art of Szyk's manner was to be condemned in league with the putrefied propaganda of Stalin's socialist realist" state art or Hitler's sappy *Volksgemeinschaft* or national folkish art.



Fig. 126 Paul Cadmus, *Shore Leave*. 1933. tempera and oil on canvas. Overall: 33 x 36in. Gift of Malcolm S. Forbes Whitney Museum of American Art/New York, NY/USA (Inv. N.: 64.43)



Fig. 127 Arthur Szyk, *The Yellow Shark of Tulagi*, New York, 1942, watercolor, gouache, pen, and ink on paper. Triangle, VA, National Museum of the Marine Corps



Fig. 128 Arthur Szyk, *Poland, the Christ of Nations*, watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, ink on paper, 1939. Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, (2017.5.1.47)

By coining the term "Action Painters," Harold Rosenberg would de facto erase any semblance of realist content for a pictorial agenda. In his "De-Definition of Art" (1972) he pulverizes the careers of narrative, realist artists like Szyk and his colleagues, junked as "obsolete, has-beens." As secular Jews with Trotskyite leanings, these influential esthetes preached the virtues of Abstraction in the pages of the art press. Abstract painter Adolph Gottlieb even had the *chutzpah* to proclaim: "We're going to have perhaps a thousand years of nonrepresentational painting now."<sup>88</sup>

By the late 1960s, the next generation of New Super Realists – Chuck Close, Audrey Flack, Richard Estes, Robert Cottingham – had already invalidated Gottlieb's specious claim. Over the top, blown up hyper-realist paintings causing us to double-blink reemerged, incorporating the optics of Jan van Eyck onto America's shopping malls, hippie culture, and neon signage.

3. "Political Images:" How an artist must be synchronized in relation to his times was the attitude of Gustave Courbet. Breaking new ground at the dawn of modernist painting, Courbet felt that talented genius should be "applying his personal faculties to the ideas and



Fig. 129 Thomas Hart Benton, *Again from '1941: Year of Peril' series*, 1942, oil. Columbia, MO, State Historical Society of Missouri Art Collection, (1944.0002)

the things of the period in which he lives."<sup>89</sup> And to this end, Szyk's moral compass determined that his *oeuvre* would be largely impacted by the mortal threats of Nazi brutality for the last half of his adult life. It would be unduly harsh to diminish Szyk's artistic genius in view of his unyielding sacrifices towards the destruction of the Third Reich's unspeakable villainy. Yes, by responding to the emergency of his life and times, he followed Courbet's guidance – making his political art his most potent weapon was his only option.

As bittersweet as it sounds, we can propose that Szyk merits the appellation as "the greatest Jewish [author's italics] artist of the 20th century." This boastful nomination in no way presumes that the Polish Jew might supersede the global presence of iconic European masters such as Chagall, Modigliani or Soutine. Even placing Szyk's diasporic persona against American representatives – like Alex Katz, Mark Rothko [Marcus Rothkowitz], Louise Nevelson, Larry Rivers, Lee Krasner, Ben Shahn, Judy Chicago, George Segal, or Miriam Schapiro – is also a wobbly comparison.

But what if we were to slightly alter the nominative phrasing from "who was the greatest Jewish artist of the modern world? – to "whose art most faithfully served the Jewish people?" In that latter case, Szyk's life and achievements make an unimpeachable case for this title. His magnificently crafted illuminations, including *Le Livre d'Esther* (Paris, 1925), *The Haggadah* (1940), *The Book of Ruth* (1947), and the *Ten*

<sup>86</sup> J. Hoberman, "Jewish Heroes and Nazi Monsters," *The Tablet*, Oct 16, 2017. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/arthur-szyk-jewish-heroes-nazi-monsters>  
<sup>87</sup> Bryan Martin, "Paul Cadmus and the Censorship of Queer Art," June 25, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2021/6/paul-cadmus-the-fleets-in>

<sup>88</sup> Edward Sorel, "The Undressed Art: A Passion for Meaningful Lines," [review] *The New York Times*, September 12, 2004. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/12/books/review/the-undressed-art-a-passion-for-meaningful-lines.html>  
<sup>89</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Styles of Art and Styles of Life* (London: Royal Academy of Arts Reynolds Lecture, 1991), 15.



*Commandments* (1947) are universally prized as the most elegantly-conceived Jewish book editions of the modern world. They alone would justify the title.

But among the most contentious issues, perennially and intensively debated within the realm of Jewish artists in the 20th century, is the chicken-or-egg problem of identity: is one an artist who happens to be born Jewish? Or, am I by my ancestry and genetic code, a Jew - while my artistic vocation is a career choice of happenstance? Unlike those renowned Jewish painters of the 20th century - many of whom were secular modernists - Szyk never attempted to sever his Jewishness from his central identity. How, then, can we understand his position, his work, and his legacy?

We cannot ignore the relevancy of identity politics hovering over art history scholarship of the past 40 years. In waves of discourse since second wave feminism, Black civil rights, LGBTQ+ liberation, indigenous peoples and Latinx, through today's theoretical weavings of intersectionality, there's no question that injustice has too often prevailed over marginalized, powerless, and exploited communities of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and economically enslaved persons. At the same time, we can also acknowledge that questions of "identity" run the risk of atomizing into benefits or liabilities. One current of art criticism demands identifiers, while counter arguments seek to focus directly on the artist's intentions as viewed in the artwork.

It's a quarrelsome conundrum, perhaps best tempered by seeing in the long view of cyclical trending. Georgia O'Keeffe, for example, consistently denied being viewed as a feminist icon. She played with her womanhood with ambiguity: "The men like to put me down as the best woman painter. I think I'm one of the best painters."<sup>90</sup> The agnostic Mark Rothko was a depressive, saturnine figure who was described by Stanly Kunitz as a "rather magisterial authority, [with] a sense of transcendence;...you could imagine him being a grand rabbi."<sup>91</sup> Paul Cadmus publicly wrote that "gayness is not the *raison d'être* of my work,"<sup>92</sup> while Jean-Michel Basquiat famously insisted, "I am not a black artist, I am an artist."<sup>93</sup>

In titling an overview of contemporary Jewish artists, senior Rutgers art historian Matthew Baigell explains the "use of the term "complex identities" [to denote] the varieties of complementary and conflicting identities within Jewish cultures and national cultures."<sup>94</sup> He continues to trace the ambiguities of "Jewish art" in *Jewish Art in America*, with the realization that "despite the general tendency within American society to emphasize autonomy and personal fulfillment, probably more artists than ever before began to identify as Jewish openly even if, for some, the ties to religion and community were and are minimal. Probably first and foremost,



Fig. 130 Arthur Szyk, "And what would you do with Hitler?" cartoon, pen and ink, 1944. Private Collection

identifying Jewish is no longer considered embarrassing or as a career-inhibiting as earlier in the last century, especially after the great boost in Jewish pride following the Six-Day war in 1967."<sup>95</sup>

Another difficult challenge in dubbing Szyk as the "greatest Jewish artist" of his day is the untangling of the semantic lexicon: "what then is Jewish art?" Sparking a debate for this conundrum, Harold Rosenberg's long shadow was cast in 1966 when he addressed a jam-packed auditorium. At the newly expanded modernist building, formerly the Felix Warburg mansion at 92nd and Fifth Avenue, The Jewish Museum would forge a symbiotic *shidduch*, or marital match, between Judaism and Modernism. Rosenberg's rabbinic authority as the nation's leading secular art critic from his pulpit of *The New Yorker*, stunned an audience comprised of

Manhattan's Jewish cultural elite. With a profound sense of intellectual rigor mixed in with the stand-up comic irony of Lenny Bruce, Rosenberg began his now historic talk by wondering out loud: "Is There a Jewish Art?" With the audience squirming in their seats in this newly-dedicated sanctuary of Jewish culture, Rosenberg wasted no time in wondering out loud: "First they build a Jewish Museum, then they ask, Is there a Jewish art! Jews!"<sup>96</sup>

Rosenberg's iconoclastic wordplay imitated Moses smashing the Tables of the Law at Sinai. "In the last fifty years, Jews have become quite prominent in painting and sculpture, and if Jews produced art, it would seem that there must be Jewish art. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that there is no such thing as a Jewish style in art. The upshot, is that while Jews produce art, they don't produce Jewish art."<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, without parsing any words, for Szyk, the entirety to his soul was committed - in spirit and form - to the merger of his Jewishness into the fabric of his identity and his art. By the time of his death in 1951, there was perhaps no greater nor more talented image-maker before the American public who presented himself as a self-identifying Jew without a trace of concealment.

Concealment is a tradition that goes back to the *conversos* of late medieval Spain who purposefully hid their Jewishness. Continuing through centuries and across continents, this Jewish strategy of "invisibility" has impacted the careers of many modern artists and creative talents. Regrettably, these individuals felt their Judaism was simply too burdensome in light of the antisemitic attitudes prevailing in most arenas of public, civic, and business affairs. This resulted in many artists, authors, and theatrical figures who openly, intentionally, and in some instances - shamefully - employed strategies for camouflaging themselves as non-Jews.

Employers often published advertisements seeking applicants with names that were clearly "Christian" or "Anglo Saxon," Among those children of Jewish immigrants who transformed their profiles were Red Buttons (Aaron Chwatt), Lauren Bacall (Betty Perske), George Gershwin (Jacob Gershowitz), Jerry Lewis, (Joseph Levitch), Joan Rivers (Joan

Molinsky), Mel Brooks (Melvyn Kaminsky), and Kirk Douglas (Issur Danielovich Demsky).

Whether the motive exposed social climbing aspirations, economic access, or a chilling fear of being shunned, we have few examples of modern artists who audaciously announced their Jewishness in Szyk's manner. Ansell highlights the fact that as early as 1933, Szyk's anti-Hitler cartoons were being signed using clearly identified Hebrew calligraphy. He was not ducking away from engaging whatever consequences were to impact his future career - full-bodied engagement with the Jewish cause in the coming decade was something he openly embraced.<sup>98</sup>

As Szyk felt the desire to become a well-assimilated member of his Connecticut community by the late 1940s, the harrowing shadows of the Shoah were tenuously suspended. New paranoias and "allegiances to the flag" were being tested during the Cold War's blurry political alliances. In reconstructing attitudes in the post-war era, the Holocaust was not a subject of "public discourse" for the American Jewish community. "American Jews," comments Hasia Diner, "pursued their lives, individually or collectively, with scarcely a nod to the cataclysmic events of the World War II era. Their lack of engagement functioned as both an internal and external silence."<sup>99</sup>

Seeking an intermediary zone of neutrality, "the question as to whether Jewish identity and artistic identity can be reconciled - [or] whether the apparent contradiction between them can be overcome," is the dilemma of defining Jewish Art in Donald Kuspit's view.<sup>100</sup>

Szyk occupied the center stage of his international artistic fame during the 1930s-40s. Within New York's cosmopolitan news and magazine circles, his brilliantly-executed work's critical reception was subsumed by the greater cause he was serving: the defeat of Nazism. He was an artist devoted to the Jewish experience in an era when survival was foremost, at a time when many co-religionists were consciously evading scrutiny.

Matthew Baigell introduces an unexpected shift for the next generation in his text, *Jewish Identity in American Art: A Golden Age Since the 1970s*: "This is a story that needs to be told.

90 <https://www.georgiakoeffe.org/quotes/>

91 Jeremy Sigler, "The Kabbalah of Rothko," *Tablet*, February 23, 2018. <https://www.tabletmag.com/contributors/jeremy-sigler>

92 Paul Cadmus, "Letter to a Young Art Historian," *Art in America*, January 1993. Jonathan Weinberg, "Cruising with Paul Cadmus," *Art in America* (November 1992), 102-108. See also Philip Eliasoph, "Modernist Muscle," *Art in America*, Summer 2019, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/modernist-muscle-62684/>

93 <https://www.jean-michel-basquiat.org/quotes/>

94 Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd, *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), xiv.

95 Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Art in America* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 148.

96 Harold Rosenberg, "Is There a Jewish Art?" *Commentary*, July 1966.

97 Ibid.

98 Ansell, *Arthur Szyk: Artist, Jew, Pole*, 89.

99 Hasia Diner, "Post-World War II American Jewry and the Confrontation with Catastrophe," *American Jewish History* 91, nos. 3-4 (2003): 445.

100 Donald Kuspit, "Meyer Schapiro's Jewish Unconscious," in *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron*, ed. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (New York and New Haven: The Jewish Museum and Yale University Press, 2006), 73.



It is not about American artists who happen to be Jewish but who ignore or denigrate Jewish subject matter...Rather, it is about one of the most interesting and arresting developments in the history of Jewish American art – the great number of artists born from the 1930s to the 1960s who since the 1970s have explored Jewish religious as well as secular themes in ways never before seen in the history of Jewish American art.”<sup>101</sup>

But beyond the unsolvable question of defining who or what constitutes a “Jewish artist” – there is yet another impediment blocking Szyk from being named as the “greatest Jewish artist” of the modern era. Turning away from the unspeakable abyss of the war years, it is widely understood that Holocaust avoidance became a strategic method for putting the past into a sealed box of nightmares. A two-pronged cultural-historical narrative bringing Judaism into a new light in the post-Holocaust era was accelerated by two unrelated events. The first was the unexpected literary, Broadway and eventual cinematic success of the *Diary of Anne Frank* (winner of the Pulitzer Prize 1955, Twentieth Century Fox 1959, nominated for 8 Academy Awards, winner of 3) and the second was Israel’s gloriously hailed victory in 1967’s Six Day War.

These events saw game-changing consequences for many American Jews as decades of wavering discomfort with their grandparents’ immigrant identity had fallen by the wayside. Israel’s General Moshe Dayan or the fearless young paratroopers who were martyred at Mount Scopus and Ammunition Hill in recapturing east Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were suddenly thrust into limelight as newly worshipped Jewish heroes. Their heroism replaced faded images of the intellectual young “Yeshiva bocher,” Torah student with curled *payes* or the black-hatted Hasidic old rabbi mumbling while immersed in prayer.

It ignited an unprecedented renewal designing a greatly embroidered newly enlivened tapestry for understanding of modern Jewish history. Rather than the Shoah’s bottomless pit of profanity and evil, these new realities of Israel and Jewish life in the diaspora suddenly enjoyed a blossoming of Jewish institutions, scholarship, college departments, and perspectives on the questions about Jewish art.

Deborah Lipstadt’s keen insights present a view of post-war trauma, denial and open avoidance. She points out: “In 1945 at the Nuremberg trials in Germany, the word Holocaust was not used...

[it was not] until 1968 the Library of Congress added the category “*Holocaust.Jewish*” to its list of classifications.” In 1978, when NBC aired its blockbuster miniseries on the destruction of European Jewry by Germany during World War II, it called the show *Holocaust* with no explanatory subtitle, such as *The Destruction of European Jewry*.<sup>102</sup>



Fig. 131 Arthur Szyk, *Accidents Help the Enemy*, Lumbermens Mutual Casualty Company, *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 12, 1942. The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley, Gift of Sanford Koretsky (76.122)

Under these contradictory and totally unavoidable conditions – the war, antisemitism in America, the rejection of illustrational realism as abstract non-figuration went from theory to a craze – all impacted Szyk’s reputation. Yet Szyk seems to qualify as the artist whose fame is unmatched as being anointed for its greatly uncompromised expression of Jewish ideas, culture, and even political resistance.

The emergence and unabashedly proud discourse on “Jewish art” was accelerated into dimensions

that Szyk might never have imagined. The Jewish Theological Society presented *A Memorial Exhibition of Original Miniatures and Paintings* to honor Szyk a year after his passing, staged at The Jewish Museum, in the fall of 1952.

Four decades later, a landmark exhibition in 1996 threw down the gauntlet by wondering: – *Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities*. Filled with irony, multiculturalist critiques, and expanding on topics such as: “Hasidism, Jewish Princesses, Desire and Consumption, or Jewish Barbie,” the exhibit is premised on the notion that “while multicultural exhibitions have abounded in the years since 1989, there has been little focus on Jewish artists or Jewish subject matter. The interrogation of this absence – and of what makes Jewish artists less marginal than other groups,” comments Norman L. Kleeblatt. This becomes paramount as we are critically reevaluating Szyk’s contributions with the understanding of how “*Too Jewish?*” was an exhibit which could by “no means attempt to codify issues of identity in general and Jewish identity in particular.”<sup>103</sup>

Encapsulating The Jewish Museum’s own self-criticism of the inherent flaws in attempting to define “Jewish art” earlier in the 20th century, Szyk’s standing as a “great Jewish artist” is even more precariously fixed. Admitting that “little focus on Jewish art or subject matter” was either ignored, minimized in service to higher philosophical aspirations for *l’art pour art*, or simply hidden due to cowardice mixed with self-serving embarrassment, the constellation of Jewish art stars in the early 20th century was without any reliable instruments of celestial navigation. Szyk’s reputation within this galaxy is therefore out of the range of art history’s telescopic lens – as he was simply “too Jewish.”

Consequently, Szyk’s herculean role as a Jewish activist, anti-fascist, and promoter of the Zionist project was too quickly swept away. Absent from major textbooks or survey exhibitions of Jewish artists, his vibrant visual heartbeat was faintly measured, if at all. In the euphoric relief of the post-war era, his “Jewishness” was totally antithetical to the agenda of universalist agenda and non-sectarian splashed canvases of the New York School.

Tethered to its anachronistic figurative content, ridiculed as bordering on saccharine kitsch, and often too painful as a graphic recollection

of Hitler’s incalculable ruination of the previous generation, Szyk’s art was purposefully forgotten. Its harrowing memories of defeated fascist tyrants ran counter-intuitively to the dreams of the idealistic Jewish narrative of the post-war era. Even within the Jewish community, it was time to let go now – but to “Never Forget” – those indelibly burned images of the death camps with heaps of skeletal corpses being bulldozed into trenches to the horror of the civilized world.

As the blue hexagram of the Magen David on a blue and white striped flag of the new state was being raised in 1948 to the heartwarming tune of “Hatikvah,” – it was “the hope” of Judaism’s future. Looking forward, addressing Israel’s newly established Knesset, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared on December 5, 1949 that the people of Israel “believe in the principles of peace and justice [and] will respect the rights of Israel in Jerusalem just as Israel respects the rights of all religions in its holy capital and in its sovereign State.”

Szyk’s nerve-rattling, propaganda against the forces of tyranny, his fusion of political invective satirical cartooning, and his “punch you in the gut” style of illustration, was intended to shift the course of modern warfare, alert the world to an unimaginable genocide, and defeat a satanic axis thereby ensuring the future of humanity. His visual appeal to intervene had served its purpose, but now it was time to move forward. Szyk’s art – with its attic filled with the ghosts of six million martyrs – was regrettably placed too quickly into the dustbin of art history. That his esteemed stature will not be as well known to future generations as those major artists “who happened to be Jewish” – and many others who actively suppressed their heritage – is a distinction woven deeply into the fabric of a well-worn *Tallit*.

“Arthur Szyk has become, through his dedicated art, the living chalice in which the divine spirit has brewed a rich mixture of passion, conviction, and beauty that brings its elixir of life to the Jewish people and mankind,” noted Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen in the *Jewish Book Annual* of 1946.<sup>104</sup>

Out of his Judaism, his immense pride for his native Poland, and a global citizen who with newly adopted residencies in England, Canada and finally coming to the USA, Szyk stamped his international passport – never denying his identity in art.

101 Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Identity in American Art: A Golden Age Since the 1970s* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020), 1.

102 Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Holocaust: An American Understanding* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 1.

103 Norman L. Kleeblatt, “Passing into Multiculturalism,” in *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, exhibition catalogue (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), x.

104 Ungar, “Behind the Great Art and the Great Messages Stands Arthur Szyk, the Great Man,” 27.



Confronting head on the deathly threat to Jews throughout Europe and to all democratic states in the West, Szyk's art desperately sought to alert an indifferent American public, along with an indifferently-antisemitic State Department. He was among the very few who understood the advent of an unimaginable pogrom – the murder of six million Jews. Faced with no other weaponry beyond the potency of his graphic tools, he unleashed a life-saving crusade in the spirit of Frantz Fanon's memorable method: "by any means necessary."<sup>105</sup>

The artist's nearly solitary determination to arouse a politically ambivalent American public, rife with its own endemic history of racism, ethnic violence, and institutionalized antisemitism, has opened new pathways in the research of Dr. Deborah Varat.

Critiquing the art historical evidence and mass media cutting across swathes of the non-interventionist cultural horizons before Pearl Harbor, she demonstrates how Szyk reshaped the language of popular cartooning and satire to wage a full throttled artistic war against Hitler's effective propaganda organs.

"No, Szyk did not succeed in saving Jews of Europe through art, Varat observes, "but what he did was bear witness. He spent the war years totally dedicated to exposing the evils of fascism through art. He showed people what they did not want to face by insisting on the truth well before mainstream news sources did so. It is impossible to claim in retrospect that the American public just did not really know what was going on. Yes they did – because Szyk made sure of it."<sup>106</sup>

Today we are to gratefully honor his personal courage volunteering for artistic active duty while transforming his career as a commercial illustrator in service to the defense of democracy as well as countless victims of Nazi aggression.

Enough esteem cannot be bestowed upon this indominable 'soldier in art' for sounding a clarion call to arms. With few allies on the visual landscape before Hitler's plans for world domination were recognized, Szyk singlehandedly waged his own one-man war on the battlefield with hundreds of magazine and newspaper illustrations. His unnerving Collier's covers and political cartoons were eventually proven to be all too truthful but tragically far too late. By wondering in 2023 'how did the unimaginable



Fig. 132 Arthur Szyk, *Arsenal of Democracy* (detail), *Collier's* cover, Labor Day, September 12, 1942.

happen?' we'd do well to remember Szyk's prophetic roadmap marking Nazi fascism's ascendancy being willfully ignored.

Ferociously, he manipulated his artistic tools as weapons to be front and center in the American public's eye at the very height of the Second World War's most intensive visual assaults on Nazism's deadly assault on the values of freedom



Fig. 133 Thomas Hart Benton, *Coal scene from America Today*, 1930-31, egg tempera with oil glazing over Permalba on a gesso ground on linen mounted to wood panels with a honeycomb interior. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2012.478a-j) © 2023 T.H. and R.P. Benton Trusts / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

and justice sacred to Western civilization. Throughout, he was depicting the most ennobling affirmations of human dignity, racial and religious tolerance, while appealing for universal brotherhood for peoples of all creeds, ethnicities, and faith traditions.

A latter-day avatar following the lyrics of Julia Ward Howe's 1861 call to arms, Szyk becomes an oracle of Jewish art history. Defiantly marching to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" lyric, "He hath loosed the fateful lightning / Of His terrible sword; His truth is marching on." As artist, human being, and prophetic message bearer, his unforgettable cartoons, caricatures and Judaic illuminations are international treasures. The unfolding destiny of the descendants of Abraham – from King Solomon to the Shoah – became his singular focus and life purpose, animated in the artworks we honor today.



Fig. 134 Arthur Szyk, *The Great Hallel* (detail), from *The Haggadah*, Łódź, 1935, watercolor and gouache on paper. Los Angeles, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama.

No artist of the modern world, even when measured amidst iconic Jewish titans from the canon of art history, has produced such a massive oeuvre focusing on Judaism as the core armature of its subject, spirit and design. As the rabbinic sages teach us the trinity of the Hebraic tradition is an unswerving devotion to 'God, Torah, and

Israel' – then Szyk is to be crowned as Judaism's most distinguished visual artist of the 20th century. "I am resolved to serve my all my art, with all my talent, with all my knowledge," was the credo gilding his incomparable legacy.

Swashbuckling with his razor-sharpened pencil, precisely-guided ink pen, or finely tipped sable-brush, we may now refocus our attention to an undeniable artistic genius illustrating piercing commentaries "In Real Times." With prophetic imagination, Arthur Szyk passionately transformed his artistic implements into mighty swords and shields in fulfilling his oath of affirmation to the Jewish people:

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither." [Psalms 137:5].

Philip I. Eliasoph, PhD is Professor of Art History and Visual Culture at Fairfield University. In a teaching career spanning six decades he has contributed to the university's mission by founding the Fairfield Florence Campus study abroad program (1986), the Bennett Lectures in Judaic Studies (1987), the Walsh Art Gallery (1991), the Quick Center's Open VISIONS Forum (1997) and the Open MINDS Institute (2016). As of Fall 2023, he serves as Special Assistant to the President for Arts & Culture.

Recognized in the field of American art for his pioneering contributions to the study of the Magic Realist movement, his exhibition catalogs, lectures and curating have widely impacted the fields of social realist art, queer studies, and psycho-cultural art criticism. His books, catalogs and journal articles focus on artists with a social realist outlook while championing their under-valued careers. The revival of curatorial interest in artists such as Paul Cadmus, Colleen Browning, Robert Vickrey, Adolf Dehn – and now Arthur Szyk – is largely thanks to his spirited advocacy. His articles have appeared in *The American Art Journal*, *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, *Art in America*, *Drawing*, and *Antiques & Fine Arts*. In 1987, he was elected as a working press member of UNESCO's Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art. In 2016 he was appointed Faculty Curator for Visual Arts & Culture for *The New York Times* "InEducation" global learning platform and continues his weekly blogs on art history, museum ethics, and gallery reviews for faculty and students around the world.

<sup>105</sup> Addressing the Accra Positive Action Conference in 1960, activist author Frantz Fanon coined this politically charged phrase. See Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 654.

<sup>106</sup> Deborah Varat, "Arthur Szyk's *The New Order*: How the Cartoons of a Polish Jew Helped Prepare the US for War," lecture presentation at the Westport Women's Club for the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, May 21, 2023.



# TIMELINE OF THE ARTIST’S LIFE

- 1894** – On June 3, Arthur Szyk is born in Łódź, Poland, to textile manufacturer Salomon Szyk and Eugenia Rogacka.
- 1910** – Szyk enrolls at the Académie Julian in Paris. While a student, he sends social commentary and political drawings back to Łódź for publication in satirical newspapers.
- 1914** – Conscripted into the Russian army, Szyk fights against the Germans in the battle of Łódź.
- 1916** – Szyk marries Julia Likerman. Their son, George, is born in 1917; their daughter, Alexandra, is born in 1922.
- 1922** – Gallery owner Auguste Decour hosts Szyk’s first of four solo exhibitions in France. New York-based Harry Glemby purchases most of the works exhibited, becoming Szyk’s major patron during his Paris years.
- 1923** – France decorates Szyk with the *Ordre des Palmes académiques* [Order of the Academic Palms], a national order honoring distinguished achievement in culture and education.
- 1926** – Szyk begins work in Paris on his monumental illuminated manuscript *Statut de Kalisz* [Statute of Kalisz].
- 1931** – Poland awards Szyk the *Złoty Zrzyż Zasługi* [Gold Cross of Merit].
- 1933** – Adolf Hitler comes to power in Germany. Szyk is invited to the United States to exhibit his works on freedom at the Brooklyn Museum and the Library of Congress. During this visit, he receives the George Washington Medal.
- 1934** – Szyk returns to Łódź and begins his masterwork, *The Haggadah*.
- 1936** – Szyk leaves for London with his family to supervise the printing of *The Haggadah*. He continues creating anti-Nazi political cartoons for British newspapers and magazines.
- 1940** – Beaconsfield Press (London) publishes *The Haggadah* in a signed edition of 250 copies on vellum. At 100 guineas (\$500), it is the most expensive new book in the world.
- The Polish government-in-exile and the British government sponsor Szyk’s relocation to North America to endorse U.S. involvement in the war in Europe. He arrives in Canada in mid-July, and immigrates to the United States in October.
- 1941** – Szyk publishes *The New Order*, the first overtly anti-Nazi book widely circulated in America, and numerous political covers for *Collier’s*, *Time*, and *The American Hebrew* magazines.
- 1942** – Szyk becomes a syndicated political artist for the *Chicago Sun*, the *New York Post*, and *PM*. The U.S. military displays reproductions of his work at 500 USO recreation centers. At Mitchel Field, Colonel Edward E. Glenn, Eastern Defense Command chief of staff, calls Szyk a “citizen-soldier of the free world.”
- 1945** – After the war, Szyk returns to illustrating books, creates triumphal Americana, and advocates for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.
- 1948** – Szyk is naturalized as an American citizen. He celebrates the birth of the nation of Israel with his large illumination of the *Proclamation of the Establishment of the State of Israel*.
- 1951** – On September 13, Arthur Szyk dies of a heart attack at age fifty-seven. He is buried at the New Montefiore cemetery in Pinelawn Memorial Park in West Babylon, New York.

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# SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITION HISTORY

- National WW II Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights*, September 1, 2022-May 7, 2023. (2nd venue)
- Magnes Collection for Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley. *In Real Times. Arthur Szyk: Art & Human Rights*, January 28-December 18, 2020, September 1-December 15, 2021, January 19-May 11, 2022. (1<sup>st</sup> venue, exhibition organizer)
- New-York Historical Society, New York, New York. *Arthur Szyk: Soldier in Art*. September 15, 2017-January 21, 2018.
- Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, California. *Arthur Szyk and the Art of the Haggadah*. February 13-June 29, 2014.
- Legion of Honor: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, California. *Arthur Szyk: Miniature Paintings and Modern Illuminations*. December 4, 2010-March 17, 2011.
- New Britain Museum of American Art, in partnership with the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford, New Britain, Connecticut. *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Swords: The Art of Arthur Szyk*. October 24, 2010-January 30, 2011.
- Broome Street Gallery, New York, New York. *Methods of a Master Illuminator*. April 13-25, 2010.
- Broome Street Gallery, New York, New York. *Arthur Szyk Illuminated*. April 7-26, 2009.
- Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston, Texas. *A One-Man Army: The Art of Arthur Szyk*. October 20, 2008-July 29, 2009.
- Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Germany. *Arthur Szyk: Drawing Against National Socialism and Terror*. August 29, 2008-January 4, 2009.
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*. April 10-October 14, 2002.
- The New Canaan Historical Society, New Canaan, Connecticut. *Humanity: Arthur Szyk’s View of the World*. June 17-July 28, 2000.
- The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. *Arthur Szyk: Artist for Freedom*. December 9, 1999-May 6, 2000.
- Spertus Museum, Chicago, Illinois. *Justice Illuminated: The Art of Arthur Szyk*. August 16, 1998-February 29, 1999.
- Mizel Museum of Judaica, Denver, Colorado. *Arthur Szyk: The Man and His Art*. September 11-December 4, 1997.
- Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles, California. *Arthur Szyk: Illuminator*. May 17-October 31, 1991.
- Yeshiva University Museum, New York, New York. *Arthur Szyk: Illuminator (1894-1951)*. November 1974-February 1975.
- B’nai B’rith Building, Washington, D.C. *The Work of Arthur Szyk: A Memorial Exhibition of Original Miniatures and Paintings*. September 27, 1959-January 4, 1960.
- Laing Galleries, Toronto, Canada. *Paintings by Arthur Szyk*. January 9-30, 1954. This exhibition was sponsored by the Canadian Jewish Congress.
- The Jewish Museum, New York, New York. *The Work of Arthur Szyk: A Memorial Exhibition of Original Miniatures and Paintings*. October 24-December 4, 1952.
- Pan American Union, Washington, D.C. *Simón Bolívar and His Time: 51 Miniatures by Arthur Szyk*. April 14-May 12, 1952.



Sinai Temple, Mount Vernon, New York. *Arthur Szyk, Great Artist and World Humanitarian*. April 1951. This was the last exhibition during Szyk’s lifetime.

The Stamford Museum, Stamford, Connecticut. *An Exhibition of Paintings by Arthur Szyk*. December 19, 1948-January 13, 1949.

M. Knoedler & Company, New York, New York. *Exhibition of Original Miniature Paintings by Arthur Szyk*. August 26-September 13, 1946.

The Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *An Exhibition of Illuminations and War Satires by Arthur Szyk*. February 20-March 11, 1945.

Messrs. Wildenstein & Co., New York, New York. *An Exhibition of Miniatures and War Satires by Arthur Szyk*. December 7-30, 1944.

Telfair Academy, Savannah, Georgia. *Arthur Szyk’s Paintings of The New Order*. May 1943.

National Conference for Palestine of the United Palestine Appeal, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *The First Complete Showing in America of the Original Illustrations from The Haggadah of Arthur Szyk*. May 1-2, 1943. The first showing of *The Haggadah* actually took place at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, Queens, New York in February of the same year.

Andre Seligmann Inc., New York, New York. *War Satires and Miniatures by Arthur Szyk*. January 1943. This exhibition was sponsored by Writers’ War Board.

United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland. *Miniatures and Anti-Axis Satires*. November 16-29, 1942.

United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. *Cartoons and Illuminations*. September 14-28, 1942.

USO Club, Wrightstown, New Jersey. *Arthur Szyk’s Weapons of War*. August 22-29, 1942. Note: Reproductions of Arthur Szyk’s art were shown at over 500 USO Recreational Centers during the War; it is believed that more than one million American servicemen saw his art on exhibition.

Mitchel Field (Mitchel Air Force Base), Long Island, New York. Exhibition Untitled. Exhibited in Officer’s Club of the First Air Command July 28-29, 1942 and Enlisted Men’s Club July 30-August 3, 1942. During this exhibition Szyk was named “Citizen-Soldier of the Free World.”

Whyte Gallery, Washington, D.C. in collaboration with the Knoedler Gallery, New York. *War Cartoons by Arthur Szyk*. January 7-31, 1942. This exhibition was under the patronage of His Excellency, The Polish Ambassador, The Hon. Jan Ciechanowski.

Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, California. Exhibition Untitled. October 1941.

M. Knoedler & Company, New York, New York. *War Satires and Illuminations by Arthur Szyk* for the Benefit of the British American Ambulance Corps. May 22-June 7, 1941.

Mellor-Laing Galleries, Toronto, Canada. *Arthur Szyk: Exhibition of War Paintings, Illuminations, Miniatures and Original Illuminated Manuscript, the Statute of Kalisz*. September 14-28, 1940.

The Fine Art Society, Ltd., London, England. *War and ‘Kultur’ in Poland by Szyk*. January 1940.

Arlington Gallery and Brook Street Galleries, London, England. *Exhibition of Miniatures and Illuminated Manuscripts by Arthur Szyk*. April 3-17, 1939 (Arlington Gallery), followed by April exhibition at Brook Street Galleries.

The Rosenbach Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *Exhibition of Illuminations by the celebrated Polish Artist, Arthur Szyk*. June 26-29, 1934.

The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Exhibition Untitled. January 15-February 15, 1934.

The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York. *Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts and Water Colours by Arthur Szyk (Polish Illuminator)*. November 26-December 10, 1933. This exhibition was presented under the auspices of the Brooklyn Museum and the Federations of Polish Jews in America.

Bishopgate Institute, London, England. *Polish Charter of Freedom Granted to the Jewish People Illuminated by The Eminent Jewish Painter Arthur Szyk*. July 4-8, 1933. This exhibition was sponsored by the World Alliance for Combating Anti-Semitism.

International Art Galleries, London, England. *Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts and Water Colours by Arthur Szyk (Polish Illuminator)*. May 30-June 17, 1933.

*Okrężna Wystawa Dziel Artura Szyka*. April 1932-April 1933. This traveling exhibition was shown in fourteen cities in Poland and featured *Statut de Kalisz* (Statute of Kalisz) and *Washington and His Times*.

Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland. Exhibition Untitled. 1931. This Geneva exhibition was held under the patronage of the Polish foreign minister, Auguste Zaleski. Note: Although no record of the title exists, this exhibition was most likely given the same title as the 1930 Paris exhibition at Musée Galliera.

Musée Galliera, Paris, France. *Exposition Arthur Szyk Enluminures*. March 29-April 19, 1930.

*Artur Szyk: Statut Kaliski*, 1929. This traveling exhibition brought Szyk’s *Statut de Kalisz* (Statute of Kalisz) to three cities in Poland: April in Warsaw, May in Łódź, and June in Kalisz.

Galleries A. Decour, Paris, France. *Arthur Szyk, enlumineur, expose son oeuvre*. December 23-30, 1928.

Galleries A. Decour, Paris, France. *Exposition Arthur Szyk*. May 19-June 5, 1925.

Grand Hotel, Łódź, Poland. *Wystawy obrazów Artura Szyka*. December 1922.

Galleries A. Decour, Paris, France. *Exposition de l’oeuvre d’Arthur Szyk*. January 25-February 10, 1922.

Jewish Art Exhibition, Łódź, Poland. *Wystawy Sztuki Żydowskiej*. Spring 1921. This group exhibition was sponsored by the Łódź-based publisher Tel Awiw. Many Polish-Jewish artists nationwide were shown in this exhibition, but Szyk, with thirty-two works, was shown more than any other artist.

Grand Hotel, Łódź, Poland. *Exhibition of War Cartoons, Miniature Paintings, and Drawings on Local Topics*. January 1916.

#### **Selected Institutional Collections of Arthur Szyk**

Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley, California. The Magnes Collection also holds The Arthur Szyk Archives.

The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York

U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

The Jewish Museum, New York, New York

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

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