

towards Mozdok-Kizlyar, from Kizlyar by boat to Terskaya, then down the Caspian Sea coast to Petrovsk to await Admiral Bubnoff, then on with him to Guriev-Uralsk.” The routes and geographic places are easy to follow with the aid of two maps, donated with the diary, which indicate sites where Litovchenko stopped on his way to Siberia.

In many entries, Litovchenko refers to the economic situation in the country, such as the “hunger ... approaching Odessa,” or the cost of living in Kislovodsk, which is much lower than in Novorossiisk. He later states that he has “not yet discovered the greatly praised Siberian low [food] prices,” which, in fact, “are slightly higher ... than in the Caucasus,” and that “everything is terribly] expensive in Omsk (firewood is almost 1500 rubles ... a pound, candles 100 rubles and so on).” On the last page of each notebook of the diary, Litovchenko records his personal earnings and expenditures.

Despite his personal plight and the disastrous situation in the country, Litovchenko still appreciates and enjoys simple things, such as observing nature, and ordinary people. “My clean room here with its comfortable bed is a real Paradise,” he writes in Kislovodsk on April 15. “We took a dip in its famous salt lake, where it is very difficult to swim as the water is so salty that it pushes you up to the surface and out” (June 23). Two days later, he notes, “it was such a pleasure to sleep in a freight car after those ghastly carts. It was so comfortable to sit on the floor of the freight car and not be shaken up all the time as [I was] in the carts.” Trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy, he

and his friends “celebrated Easter, breaking the fast in the proper manner.”

Landscapes he passes through are often described using vivid literary language, enriched with similes and metaphors: “Our carts dragged along the bare [lifeless] steppes ... under the broiling sun;” “the Caspian Sea gives a most awful impression;” “beachless and full of sand banks, it looks like a vast dirty puddle” (May 9); “we spent all day riding through the steppes, which are flat as a pancake and devoid of vegetation” (June 14). “The countryside is beautiful with many rivers and forest-covered hills,” he writes on July 23-24, while Omsk appears “awful, dirty and dusty” (July 8-10). Litovchenko devotedly writes down his impressions of people he meets: “the native Cossacks,” “cheerful ... and very hospitable,” offering the officers a “warm welcome, so unusual nowadays;” “the old Ural people ... full of spirit and determination not to surrender under any circumstances;” and people populating the steppes, who “lead a good and prosperous life” and “are much more cultured than people in Russia.”

“In the diary there is nothing personal. He expresses his personal feelings only when he says how much he misses his family,” writes Tatiana Litovchenko-Vycheslavtsoff in the introduction. Indeed, it is not until July 25 that personal notes enter his diary, and he starts talking about his family: “I am feeling very gloomy. I try to think that at home all is well and yet at the same time I have had no news at all for half a year.” After this date, Litovchenko adds personal remarks to his business-like diary almost in every entry, confessing he feels “terribly depressed”

and longs to see his “dearest loved ones.”

The diary moves from hope to disillusionment and despair, showing the evolution in Litovchenko’s state of consciousness as the White Army retreated deeper into Siberia. Expectations that in all likelihood Bolshevism would collapse on its own and that “hopefully, there will be a popular uprising inside the country” gradually transform into a sense of catastrophe when “the army is totally demoralized, some units refuse to fight, there is no longer a frontline and everybody is fleeing anywhere to the east, pursued by the Reds.” Yet, faith, hope, and a desperate desire to live remained with him until the last day: “I keep ... hoping that these cursed times will [quickly] pass ... and that one will be able to start living again...” Sadly, for Litovchenko, this hope was never fulfilled.

Litovchenko’s diary, an important witness to a tragic, tumultuous time in Russian history, is now available to researchers at the Fisher Library. We are grateful to his daughter and granddaughter for the donation of this precious family heirloom.

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¹ All quotations are taken from the translation of the diary by Lucy Potts (see below) unless otherwise specified.

² Tatiana Litovchenko-Vycheslavtsoff, *Introduction* to the diary.

³ Transliteration of the Russian names and geographic places in the quotations is kept as it appears in the Potts translation; in other places, the Library of Congress transliteration system is followed.



Decorative flourish

Otto Schneid: Artist with a Mission

Otto Schneid was a painter, sculptor, art historian, writer, and thinker. He was born in Jablunková, Czechoslovakia on January 30, 1900 to parents who had migrated there from Poland. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Bielitz, Silesia, where he attended school. He began to express his artistic talents at an early age, creating expressive and realistic drawings as well as clay models for sculptures. He attended university in Vienna and later in Paris, studying Anatomy, Art History, Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Ancient Near Eastern History. Since he had hoped to pursue a

career in medicine, he did not enrol in an art academy. However, he soon found that his true interests lay in art and he decided to specialize in art history.

After completing his doctorate at the University of Vienna in 1926, he continued to study and travel, lecturing on art and producing paintings and sculptures. In 1934 his first book appeared, devoted to the representation of plants and animals in Chinese art. He spent the years 1936-1938 in Vilna, where he established an art museum under the auspices of YIVO, the Yiddish Scientific Institute. The museum contained over one hundred works of art

by such artists as Marc Chagall, Mane Katz, Mark Antokolski, Yankl Adler, Maurycy Gottlieb, B. Kratko and Chaim Nisn Tyber. The art in this collection was either donated by the artists (Chagall, Cukierman, and Katz), by a distinguished citizen or by a community group that supported YIVO and its work.¹ The collection was representative of the contemporary Jewish art scene, but also contained religious art and ritual objects, thus reflecting the totality of Jewish life at the time. When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, the collection was confiscated by Alfred Rosenberg and was apparently shipped to Germany. It has never been recovered.

During the early 1930s Schneid began to work on a monograph on twentieth-century Jewish artists. In the course of conducting his research he corresponded with artists all over Europe, who sent him their biographies, samples of their work, either on postcards or in reproduction, and catalogues of their exhibitions. He also travelled extensively and visited artists in their ateliers and homes. He enjoyed the full cooperation of his fellow artists and compiled an extensive collection of material for his book. When Hitler rose to power in 1933, he soon targeted the Jewish community for segregation and discriminatory legislation. He also declared war on Jewish art, calling it and other contemporary German art degenerate, morally decadent, and a waste of tax revenues. Joseph Goebbels' Degenerate Art Commission seized art from both public museums and private art galleries,



Previous page: portrait of Miriam Schneid, the artist's wife.

Above: Schneid's self-portrait in bronze, 1959, now on display in the Maclean Hunter Room of the Fisher Library.

and sold much of it to foreign dealers. But Goebbels also reserved a large number of items for propaganda and instructional purposes, displaying them in a travelling exhibition called "Degenerate Art" (*Entartete Kunst*) which showed in major German cities in 1938. The show, which featured many confiscated works of Jewish Expressionists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Oskar Kokoschka, Otto Dix, and Max Pechstein, created a sensation. According to Goebbels, "the frightening and horrifying forms of the Exhibition of Degenerate Art in Munich demonstrated how deeply the perverse Jewish spirit had penetrated German cultural life," and that the suppression of this perversity had nothing to do with the suppression of artistic freedom and the progress of society.

When Schneid learned of this vicious campaign against the Jews and their art, the completion of his book project became an urgent necessity. He felt that he could write a book which would prove to Hitler and the Nazis the essential value of Jewish art and convince them that their views were misguided. In the introduction to the Hebrew version of the book, he describes how he came to write it and the challenges that it presented to him:

This book was written under difficult circumstances during the tempestuous years between the two world wars and has since become a historical witness to an entire world that is no more. The decision to write it was taken at a time when the great crime or the great madness [National Socialism] was seen as one of the nationalistic movements, which could still be influenced by propaganda and persuasion. The authors of the actual destruction were still amassing arguments against their victims. At that stage they were still interested in displaying before Germany and the world the extent of the poisonous influences of the Jews in all areas of human endeavour, the economy, politics, and culture. The enemies of Communism needed to see the Jews at the root of this movement and the enemies of capitalism needed to ascribe this system to the very same Jews. In these propaganda campaigns, culture played an important role and the plastic arts became a central focus. In sensational exhibitions of painting and sculpture by Jewish artists, the viewer was confronted with the poisonous creations of this people and everyone had to inevitably conclude that evil itself was a Jewish creation. At that time I took upon myself the complicated task of responding to all these accusations as objectively as possible. Under these

conditions, there did not seem to be any possibility or hope for a Jew to be scientific or objective. But I was inspired to overcome these difficulties by the example of the Bible, which is completely devoid of cheap idealization. On the contrary it describes its characters with fearless truthfulness, with an honesty that does not hesitate to reveal and immortalize disgraceful deeds and scandals with humane and unadorned realism.

Schneid rises to the challenge and produces a work, which treats modern Jewish art honestly and fairly, without sinking into sentimentality or crass promotion. One of the main tasks Schneid set for himself in his book was finding a common denominator among the various Jewish artists, despite their geographical separation and ideological differences. He also decided to include in his book only artists who he felt truly belonged to the twentieth century and its struggles and sufferings, and not those who seemed representative of nineteenth-century movements.

Schneid completed the manuscript of his book, entitled *Der Jude und die Kunst*, in 1938 and submitted it to his publisher in Vienna. The book was set to be published that year, but before it could see the light of day the plates were confiscated by the Nazis and it never appeared. Schneid then became a wanted man, pursued by the Nazis because of his work. He went into hiding in Poland for six months, moving from friend to friend, until he surrendered to the police, thinking that they would be sympathetic to his plight. Instead they imprisoned him. He was held for three days, until somehow his friends in the Warsaw Jewish community were able to secure for him a student visa for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In this way, he barely managed to escape the clutches of his Nazi pursuers and was able to leave Poland with a suitcase full of his precious archival materials and a manuscript copy of his book. He arrived in Palestine in the summer of 1939 and stayed there throughout the war, eking out a meagre living. His art and poetry during this period reflect his despair over the personal losses he suffered—many of his family members perished at the hands of the Nazis—and his fear for the future of humanity. In 1945 he met and married Miriam Goldshmid, a young poet and native of Palestine, and he received a new lease on life. The following year his book on the biblical frescoes of Dura-Europos, *The Synagogue Drawings at Dura-Europos: an Ancient Jewish Creation and Its Place in the History of Art*, was published in

Hebrew, a language in which he had become fluent. His two sons Yaakov and Adam were born in 1946 and 1950 respectively, and between those years he also published books in Hebrew on the biblical paintings of Rembrandt, and on classical Greek art. From 1947 to 1960 he taught art history at the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology), in Haifa, Israel and continued to write about art. In 1957 he completed a Hebrew version of his magnum opus on twentieth-century Jewish art, which he called *Our Art in the Diaspora*. Schneid considered this latest version of his book to be a memorial to the hundreds of Jewish artists who perished in the Holocaust. Perhaps this was the main reason he did not expand the scope of the work, although he states that he felt that he was not familiar enough with the Jewish art of the Soviet Union or Israel. Concerning his attitude to his work after the Holocaust, he says: "I read today these pages with a shudder; many of the words written in them have assumed an aura of holiness, and I stand in silence before them, unwilling to add to or subtract from them." He did, however, update the biographies of the artists, both of those who had perished in the Holocaust and those who had survived.

Though he had an agreement with a publisher, at the last minute the latter reneged, apparently for commercial, rather than academic reasons. Schneid was devastated by this unfortunate turn of events and never returned to the project. In 1960 he decided to concentrate on his creative work – poetry, painting, sculpting, and writing—and moved to the United States, where he lived until 1964. During that period he had seven one-man shows in the United States and one in Canada. In 1964 he moved to Toronto, where he continued to paint and to write until his death in Toronto in 1974. His art works are located in the British Museum in London, The Pitti Palace in Florence, the Albertina Museum in Vienna, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the University of Toronto Art Centre, the Roosevelt Memorial in Hyde Park, the Everhart Museum, Scranton Pa., and in important private collections.

Otto Schneid's life is typical of many Holocaust survivors. It is marked by tragedy and disappointment on the one hand, and resilience and determination to persevere on the other. The Holocaust left an indelible mark on his psyche, which is reflected in much of his artistic work. The self-portrait in stone, which he completed in 1959, shows the artist with his eyes

closed, with a bird perched on his head, its beak digging into his forehead. The bird, which is probably an eagle, is symbolic of German persecution and the portrait shows how the weight of the Nazi atrocities still oppressed him. Schneid also completed a model for a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, entitled, "A Monument to Death and Resurrection." It is a conic structure rising in two opposing spirals. Below are the bodies of the victims, above the heroic partisans. Out of their bodies rises the phoenix, symbol of hope and rebirth. Unfortunately, for lack of funds, the sculpture was never completed.

In 1998, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library was approached by Otto Schneid's widow, Miriam, who offered to donate his archive, which she called his "treasure". The donation was made in two instalments, the larger one in 1998, followed by a smaller but substantial one in 1999.

The archive is extensive, consisting of over five thousand items, and includes 1) the manuscripts of Schneid's books, both published and unpublished; 2) Schneid's articles on art history; 3) correspondence with world leaders and public figures about the state of the world; 4) correspondence with artists; 5) photographs of artwork by some 180 European Jewish artists from the early 1930s; 6) exhibition catalogues of these artists (4 boxes); 7) autobiographies of the lives of some 160 artists.

All of this material awaits scholarly attention. Schneid was a remarkable man, a humanist with a troubled, but generous soul, who was deeply concerned for the future of humankind. Schneid's book on twentieth-century Jewish art deserves to be published in English so that it can reach as



Assez! by I. Iser. From the Schneid Collection.

wide an audience as possible. The archive of art that he assembled deserves to be studied and its contents made available to the public. The material in the archive presents a rich picture of the varieties of Jewish artistic expression in Europe in the interwar period. Many of the artists featured in the archive perished in the Holocaust and this archive may contain the only records they left behind. This valuable resource, accompanied by a detailed finding aid, is available for consultation at the Fisher Library.

Barry D. Walfish
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

¹ See Carl J. Rheins, "Recovering YIVO's Stolen Art Collection," *YIVO News* 191 (Winter 2000-2001):3.