

## **Book of Abstracts**

Research Workshop “European Encounters: East-West Discourse in Modern Jewish  
Art, Literature and Culture”  
May, 27 – 29, 2025

## I East-West Encounters and Divides: History and Culture

Olaf Terpitz (University of Graz)

*Imaginations of “East” and “West” in European-Jewish Literatures: Shifting Boundaries and Perceptions*

In cultural and (geo)political discourse “East” and “West” are widely used categories, assumed to be semantically stable. However, in historical perspective, those concepts are constructions – shaped by manifold context-bound subjective assumptions, ascriptions, hopes and aversions.

The talk traces shifting notions of “East” and “West” in European-Jewish literatures from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the present. Addressing imperial, national, and post-national settings in the works of e.g. Pauline Wengeroff, Joseph Roth, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Vladimir Vertlib, and Sasha M. Salzmann – the fluidity of “East” and “West” enabled interactions between various regions, languages, literary and artistic genres, and actors.

Jakub Bendkowski (The Royal Castle in Warsaw - Museum)

*From the Kingdom of Poland to the West and Back: How the Painter Aleksander Lesser, a Polish Jew, became fascinated with the Middle Ages and what came of it*

Aleksander (Abraham) Lesser (1814-1884), today virtually forgotten, was one of the most important representatives of historical painting in 19th century Poland, then divided between three partitioning powers: Prussia, Russia and Austria. Lesser was primarily associated with Warsaw (Russian partition). He came from a wealthy *maskil* family. He took his first steps as an artist at the famous Warsaw Lyceum. In 1830, Lesser enrolled in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Warsaw. However, the outbreak of the November Uprising in the same year and the consequent closure of the university by the Russian authorities forced him to leave for the West. It was in Dresden, and later in Munich, that he fully developed his skills as a painter and began a thorough study of early European art, probably planning to depict events in Polish and European history. He travelled extensively, visiting and drawing monuments of architecture, sculpture, painting and craftsmanship. He paid particular attention to works of medieval art. One of the fruits of his in-depth studies of the monuments of the past was the work: "Images of the Polish Kings", which preceded the famous "Kings and Princes of Poland" by Jan Matejko. In this article, I will introduce the artist and historian, trying to explain how his studies of medieval art (drawings) were reflected in works intended for the general public (paintings and lithographs).

Claire Le Foll (University of Southampton)

*Chagall and Sutin: Catalysts for an East-West Encounter in post-Soviet Belarus*

Marc Chagall has triggered scholarly and public interest, now unanimously seen as at the intersection of Russian, East European Jewish and Western artistic experiences. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chagall has also served as a vehicle for reappropriations and political discourses, even a symbol of Belarus' independent existence. Since the end of the 1980s, Chagall's Vitebsk heritage has been invested with meaning for shaping a new Belarusian national identity: from a symbol of the revival of Yiddish culture in Belarus, to Belarus in the history of art and of the avant-gardes of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chagall has been 'belarusianized'.

However, this process also resulted in long-standing and deep international collaborations, supported by the two Chagall museums in Vitebsk. The Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk (created in 1997) developed thanks to cooperation with western scholars and institutions but also contributed, through the organization of annual international Chagall conferences and publications, to the revival of Chagall studies and cross-fertilisation between Western (French, German, Swiss, British, US, Israeli), Belarusian and Russian researches. A decade later, the creation of a 'Space of Chaim Sutin' museum in Smilovichi (2008) aspired to serve as a bridge with the west (eg. recreating a Parisian Café) and attracting foreign tourists. These two projects have ignited a deep interest in Belarus. Chagall and Sutin became catalysts, as Putin's war in Ukraine has been for Ukraine, for a process of de-colonization and de-centering of western specialists' views on this region.

## II Travels in the East and the West: Travelogues, Diaries and Autobiographies

Marina Dmitrieva (The Leibniz Institute for History and Culture of Eastern Europe, Leipzig)

*Stories from the Maghreb: Czernowitz' Urban Space as Austria-Hungary's Oriental Other*

The paper proposes an interpretation of the urban space in the easternmost province of the Habsburg Empire, Bukovina, and its capital city Czernowitz, as an “Oriental Other”, being perceived in contrast with the Vienna metropolis. Reading sources such as Karl Emil Franzos' journey by train from Vienna to Chernowitz via *Halb-Asien*, *Stories from the Maghreb* by Gregor von Rezzori, architectural guides on the eve of the First World War and other sources, visual perceptions of the city will be analyzed, with its motley multinational population reflecting the diverse cosmos of the Habsburg Empire.

The peculiarity of the urban space of Czernowitz was and still is made up of a variety of styles, with a predominance of the oriental, exotic component in iconic architectural complexes, such as the Residence and the Armenian Church (architect Josef Hlavka) or the Choral Synagogue, built in the Moorish style (architect Julian Zachariewicz). What was the visual presence of the Jewish cultural heritage (ranging from 30% to 50% of the city's population) in this *Gewirre der Culte und Nationalitäten* (Franzos), and how did the Imperial gaze turn this into a colonial setting?

Martina Niedhammer (Collegium Carolinum Munich)

*Traveling to Yiddishland? The Image of Yiddish in Central European Jewish Travelogues on Eastern Europe in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

In July 1901, Jakob Gerzon, a young Jewish scholar from Cologne, successfully defended his doctoral thesis at the renowned University of Heidelberg. In his dissertation, he made an ambitious attempt to describe the Yiddish language in linguistic terms, a project that would have been impossible without the help of his fellow students from Eastern Europe: Four young men from the Northwestern parts of the Russian Empire introduced Gerzon to the language of their childhood. Around 1900, Gerzon was not the only Jew in Central Europe who sought closer contact with the everyday culture of his coreligionists in the "East". Nevertheless, he was one of the few who treated them as equals and not as objects of romanticization, pity, or disdain.

I will focus on the various ways in which Jewish people from Central Europe wrote about Yiddish in and from Eastern Europe in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I assume that descriptions of Yiddish had a special function in autobiographical writing which requires the author to situate himself or herself in a certain linguistic and cultural environment, I mainly rely on travelogues written and later published by Jews from (former) Imperial Germany and the (former) Habsburg Monarchy who made their way from the "West" to the "East." In these texts, Yiddish serves different purposes, from mere illustration to underlining social or religious differences representing a distinct Jewish linguistic identity.



Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Lublin)  
*Innocents in di Goldene Medine: Encounters of East European Jews with the American Landslayt*

In 1869, Mark Twain published a famous travel book humorously describing voyages of a group of Americans to Europe and the Holy Land. Here, we will look in the opposite direction and present selected literary representations of East Europeans Jews emigrating or travelling to North America in the twentieth century and being perceived by Jews settled there (most often their relatives or *landsleyt*, compatriots from various fraternal societies) as “greenhorns.” Some immigrants who had already settled down across the Atlantic, return for a visit to Eastern Europe and are, in turn, perceived by local inhabitants as “Americans.” These perceptions are often ambivalent, a mixture of envy, mockery or even scorn. Encounters between two groups from various periods are similar. The main character of Kadya Molodowsky’s epistolary novel of 1941 experiences similar feelings to those described by Eva Hoffman in her 1989 novel. Often East European spirituality is juxtaposed with American materialism. Newcomers are perceived as poor and backward by earlier Jewish settlers but they, in turn, gave critically at the latter perceiving them as money-oriented, selfish and superficial. Tensions between the two groups have religious, cultural and linguistic aspects. I take into consideration authors writing in Yiddish, Polish and English, including Kadya Molodowsky, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Julian Strykowski, Henryk Grynberg and Eva Hoffman. Mutual perceptions will be discussed against a background of Americanized East European Jews travelling back to Poland and perceiving Jews who remained there. Mutual encounters in the interwar period are different from those soon after WWII and after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Michal Ben-Horin (Bar-Ilan University)

*Belated Journeys: Encounters and Poetic Crossroads in Anna Maria Jokl's  
Essenzen*

"Geographically speaking, there were six lives, always at different focal points of our era: in chronological order, Vienna, Berlin, Prague, London, Berlin-Berlin, Jerusalem." This sentence opens the German prose collection *Essenzen* (1993), by Anna Maria Jokl (1911-2001), an author, journalist and psychoanalyst who after a lifetime detour escaping National Socialism and the communist regime following the Second World War, finally settled in Jerusalem. In this paper, I will focus on stories from this prose collection in the context of a prominent term of trauma theory (*Nachträglichkeit*, afterwardsness), to discuss her working through painful memories. These miniature stories revolve around marginal, unrelated encounters that constitute significant events elaborated in Jokl's oeuvre: Kafka's sister who was later murdered in the Holocaust, an Indian soldier speaking Yiddish in postwar England, an African refugee who plays music in Europe, an Hungarian exiled journalist, and a childhood friend who appears on a trip to the Dead Sea, among others. At the crossroads between personal and collective, nature and culture, East and West, Europe and the Middle East, Jokl's narration depicts various "modes of return" through which she calls into question paradigmatic binaries – spatial and linguistic, exile and homeland, diasporic and national identities.

### III East-West Discourse in Jewish Literatures

Nathan Cohen (Bar-Ilan University)

*East European Yiddish Readers Reading West European Authors*

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by the rapid development of the East European Yiddish book market and press. Writers, publishers, and public figures aspired to enlighten the Jewish masses, including introducing them to world literature, natural and social sciences, history. To do so, they employed the vernacular language spoken by their target readers, Yiddish, even though they usually considered it a ridiculous *zhargon*.

Alongside the growing variety of original Yiddish works and Yiddish translations or adaptations of works authored by Russian writers and thinkers, a significant segment of the Yiddish book market, as well as library inventories, was comprised of works by Western European authors. Several aspects of this phenomenon will be explored: which authors were selected, who were their translators, what contents / genres were chosen, and for what purposes?

Maxim D. Shrayer (Boston College)  
*Boris Pasternak: The Creation of Apostasy*

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960), poet, translator, and novelist, was born in Moscow to a family of Jewish-Russian intelligentsia from Odessa that traced their lineage back to Sephardic Don Isaac ben-Yehudah Abravanel (1437–1508). Although conversion to Christianity would have made things much easier for Pasternak's father, he never converted. As late as 1912, in his matriculation papers from Marburg University, Boris Pasternak indicated his faith as "Mosaic." In 1922, his marriage to the artist Evgenia Lurie was certified by a Moscow rabbi.

In a letter to Jacqueline de Proyart dated 2 May 1959, Boris Pasternak spoke of having been baptized as an infant by his nanny in the Orthodox Church. The unconfirmed story of the infant Pasternak's conversion was probably a fantasy cultivated in the 1940s–50s. Although no evidence points to Pasternak's conversion, in the 1940s–1950s he regularly attended Orthodox Church.

Pasternak's path as a Jewish apostate and a great Jewish-Russian poet was a transition from ancestral Judaism, Western European traditions of Jewish acculturation and assimilation, and the poet's early avant-garde poetic experiments toward Eastern Orthodoxy, Russian nationalism, and the classical aesthetic of Pasternak's later years.

In two poems of 1944, Pasternak paid tribute to the destruction of the Jewish-Russian Odessa that had nurtured his parents and Jewish artists. A significant number of Pasternak's wartime poems were suffused with both Russian patriotism and Eastern Orthodox spirituality. Even prior to *Doctor Zhivago* with its morbid manifesto of supercessionism, Pasternak's career pointed away from Jerusalem, Rome, and Odessa, leading the poet further East into the Russian heartland.

Dov Ber Kotlerman (Bar-Ilan University)

*“The Three in Me, a Russian, an American and a Jew”: Peretz Hirshbein the Globetrotter and His Yiddish-speaking and “Western” Tribesmen*

Novelist, playwright, and publicist Peretz Hirshbein (1879–1948) was one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Yiddish literature and theater. In 1908, he founded the first repertory theater in Yiddish in Odessa, closed a few years later by local authorities. A disillusioned Hirshbein left Russia in the spring of 1914 that marked the beginning of years of wandering through South and North America, Oceania, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

These wanderings, which spanned more than 15 years, were detailed by Hirshbein in travel notes, earning him, in the words of the Polish-Jewish playwright Mark Arnshtein, the fame of the “mysterious Flying Dutchman of Yiddish literature”.

A notable portion of these travelogues is devoted to contacts with local Jewish communities, both those close to him of Russian-Polish origin and those of Western origin, particularly British. A marked tension between the two led Hirshbein to raise important questions of identity, language, and belonging.

Mikhail Krutikov (University of Michigan)

*Borukh Glazman's Search for Jewish Authenticity Between the American Midwest and the Soviet Union*

A native of Mozyr, Belarus, and a graduate of Ohio State University, Borukh Glazman (1893–1945) was considered by many critics to be the most American Yiddish writer, both in terms of the style and themes of his prose. He was also one of the most pessimistic authors in American Yiddish literature. Fluent in English and fully acculturated in America, he devoted his entire career to writing in Yiddish, even though he did not believe in the future of Yiddish in America. His disappointment with American Jews led him to Eastern Europe, where he spent about five years between 1924 and 1930—first in the Soviet Union, then in Poland—in search of authentic Yiddishkeit. He was excited about the Soviet experiment of settling Jews on the land and admired the traditional lifestyle of Polish Jews; nevertheless, he remained deeply attached to America. I attempt to untangle the complexities and contradictions of Glazman's literary imagination by examining key dichotomies in his works along the West vs East axis. I argue that this forgotten author offers insight into contemporary anxieties concerning Jewish authenticity and the Jewish future.

#### IV East-West Discourse in Jewish Art and Visual Culture



Michaela Sidenberg (Jewish Museum of Prague)

*On the Periphery's Edge: Jewish Female Artists in Bohemian Lands of the Late Empire and Interwar Czechoslovakia*

Researching the identities, lives, and careers of Jewish female artists who emerged and developed in the heart of Europe from the turn of the Grand Siècle until the outbreak of WWII offers an important, yet until now understudied, parallel to the grand récit of the European avant-garde. I focus on women who, despite the geographical centrality of their place of birth, found themselves on the fringes of intellectual and artistic discourse. Marginalized due to their gender, with their professional and artistic aspirations constrained by prevailing social conventions of their period, these women had to demonstrate determination, creativity, and resilience to succeed in the artistic scene.

Although their ethnicity was not as drastically limiting a factor as in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the relative stability of the bourgeois status quo was not always a blessing. I examine socio-economic, cultural, and political underpinnings that shaped the situation of Jewish women with artistic aspirations, focusing on four artists born between 1883 and 1908.

Mariann Farkas (Bar-Ilan University)

*East-West Discourse in Hungarian Jewish Art: Painters of the Zionist Journal Mult és Jovo (Past and Future)*

Although scholarly exploration of East–West discourse in European art began in the last decades, interwar Hungarian Jewish art is still under-researched. The works of painters associated with the journal *Mult és Jövő (Past and Future)* are introduced, thematizing their ambivalent relationship to East European Jews.

Hungarian painters of Mosaic faith were an integral part of local art by the beginning of the 20th century. Many studied in Western European centers which they considered models of civilization. Returning home, they played leading roles in the promotion of Western European avant-garde movements in Hungary and avoided Jewish themes in their works. Nevertheless, painters like Lipót Herman, Alfréd Lakos, and Endre Vadász associated with the cultural Zionist *Mult és Jövő* openly dealt with their Eastern origins and with the question of “Galizianers”, Yiddish speaking traditional Jews who arrived in central Hungary from Carpathian Ruthenia in several waves. The encounter between these groups caused internal rift within Hungarian Jewry manifested in written and visual media.

Paintings and drawings housed in public collections will be explored from methodologically diverse points of view, including the perspective of art history, sociology, and Jewish studies. Analysing the works and placing them in a wider context provides an opportunity to better understand the changing Central European Jewish experience in the first half of the twentieth century.

Renata Piątkowska (POLIN, Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw)  
*Zber, Themersons and others: Polish-Jewish Artists in France on the Eve of World War II*

The new wave of Polish-Jewish artistic emigration to France in the second half of the 1930s will be presented and analyzed.

Young Jewish artists from Poland joined their older colleagues – Leopold Gottlieb, Marek Szwarc and others – but their creative explorations ran in other directions. Educated at the Polish Academies of Fine Arts, in Paris they were looking not only for education, but above all for freedom – both in artistic exploration and from antisemitism. Fiszyl Zylberberg (in France under the pseudonym Zber), Franciszka and Stefan Themersons, Ilya Schor and Resia Ajnsztajn (Schor) came to France in 1936–1937 and stayed. Their artistic paths and identity choices differed, each bringing their own language to European art, adding a perspective on Polish-Jewish identity. The Themersons tried to continue their avant-garde explorations in the field of visual arts and film, Zber sought a balance between the Polish and French landscapes, and Ilya Schor developed modern Jewish art in the field of visual arts and crafts. With their roots in Poland, they leaned towards a different, new world as they found themselves in the artistic circles of Paris.

Miriam Rajner (Bar Ilan University)

*Post-Holocaust Reception of East European Jewish “Artists of the Ghetto” in Israel and America*

Several recently re-discovered letters written by the chief curators of central Jewish art institutions in Israel and America reveal the museums’ attitudes towards two major Jewish icons created by the Polish Jewish artist Samuel Hirszenberg, addressing the trials and tribulations of Eastern European Jewish life: his monumental *Wandering Jew* and his mythical *Exile (Galut)*. The first painting is kept for years in storage, almost never exhibited; the second (as new research shows) survived World War Two, but is currently missing. The paper highlights the reasons for this deliberate lack of interest in works of art created by the so-called East European Jewish “artists of the ghetto” and offers a different understanding of such diasporic, “unheroic” modernist art, simultaneously Jewish and universal.

## V East-West Discourse in Popular Culture

Susanne Korbel (University of Graz)

*Central European Spa Culture as a Meeting Space between East and West*

I explore the Jewish co-constitution of *Sommerfrische* – the Habsburg term for summer retreats. At the end of the 19th century, city dwellers began spending the summer months in rural regions. Usually located near water – lakes, occasionally also at the Mediterranean – and/or in the Alps, summer resorts and spa towns mushroomed between Ostend and Abbazia, and from Marienbad to Lake Balaton. Urban structures – popular entertainment culture, coffee houses, bakeries, but also kosher restaurants or stores – were temporarily relocated to the rural idyll. Because of the informal and relaxed setting, both fleeting and long-term relationships developed. The spa towns functioned as arenas of interaction for an ethnically, nationally, religiously, politically, and socially heterogeneous cohort of visitors. Writers from Peter Altenberg to Theodor Herzl, from Jizchok Leib Perez to Sholem Aleichem shaped the imaginary of the *Sommerfrische* towns and resorts as long-term spaces of opportunity opened up. However, as antisemitism grew and radicalized, many of these resorts declared themselves "Jew-free" in populist slogans and campaigns. Both historical sources and the literary imagination reveal that the spa towns functioned as meeting spaces for Jews and non-Jews. In addition, they were also contact zones for encounters among Jews that has received little attention in previous research: for example, between working-class and middle-class Jews, between the secular and observant, between political and cultural Zionists. I investigate these complex contact zones 'between East and West' through a close reading of literary imagination and historical sources in late Habsburg-Central Europe. The field of tension between East and West is examined in respect to culture and religion and supposed boundaries are called into question in the face of everyday practice at *Sommerfrische* destinations.

Maya Balakirsky Katz (Bar-Ilan University)  
*Evacuation Animation: The Brumberg Sisters in Samarkand*

This paper will demonstrate that wartime animation during its evacuation from Moscow to Samarkand disrupted pictorial typologies. Valentina (1899–1975) and Zinaida Brumberg (1900–1983), known as the “grandmothers of Soviet animation” for their work in the fairytale genre, both evoked and challenged dominant constructs of homeland during the otherwise repressive Stalinist regime in their film *Sindbad the Sailor* (1944). Although conventionally understood as a central plank of Russian nationalist myth-making during the Second World War, I argue that the Brumberg sisters also wove autobiographical perspectives on the “Jewish War” into the film.

Marcos Silber (University of Haifa)

*From West to East and Back: Multidirectional Cultural Transfer Through Popular Music in Interwar Poland*

Drawing on popular songs from interwar Poland, including their various linguistic versions and adaptations, recordings, sheet music, contemporary reviews from Polish and Yiddish press, and revue theatre programs, the paper will examine encounters between Eastern European and Western European cultural spheres that challenge established cultural-geographical dichotomies. By analyzing how musical productions moved across Jewish and non-Jewish, Polish and non-Polish, American and non-American cultural spaces, the paper will trace how these crossings transformed meaning and cultural practices.

It is argued that popular music in interwar Poland functioned as a dynamic space where cultural transfer operated in multiple directions. Through processes of translation, adaptation, and performance, songwriters and performers created innovative cultural expressions that transcended traditional East-West dichotomies. This cultural production suggests that Popular Culture in interwar Poland became a hub of Jewish, Polish, and “cosmopolitan” hubs at the epicenter of a complex process of cultural negotiation that produced new, hybrid forms of expression, simultaneously changing both Eastern and Western cultural spheres.

## VI East Meeting West: Visual and Architectural Creativity



The embrace of Sephardism and Orientalism by Western, especially German Reformed, Ashkenazi communities, was a key element of nineteenth-century Jewish East-West discourse, a means of demonstrating cultural and religious sophistication and asserting supposed origins in the 'Orient'. This included the likening of Hebrew pronunciation to a medieval Sephardic ideal. Visually, it resulted in the construction of Oriental-style synagogues.

At the same time, these communities regarded their Ashkenazi and Sephardi co-religionists from Eastern and Southeastern Europe as inferior and backward. Consequently, the latter engaged in a process of Westernization, aiming to be perceived as progressive and civilized, in short, as European.

In this context, the so-called Türkische Tempel, the synagogue of the Sephardi community of Vienna emerges as an interesting site of encounter between Western and Eastern Jews, and consequently a site of negotiation of those East-West paradigms. The Sephardi community of Vienna, despite its association with the 'Orient', occupied a distinctive and privileged position within the broader context of Viennese Jewry. However, beyond its historical local embeddedness, their new synagogue, constructed in the 1880s, established new standards for Viennese Reformed synagogues. The modernizations incorporated into its architectural design resulted in some of the most progressive spatial solutions for a Jewish house of worship in Vienna. This was especially true of the musical and acoustic aspects. It is argued that the model character of the Türkische Tempel for both Western and Southeastern European communities undermined the common East-West discourse of the 19th century.

Michele Migliori (Bar-Ilan University)

*Eastern Europe meets Western Europe... in Argentina: Synagogue Art, Jewish Immigrant Self-Identification, and Jewish Narratives in Buenos Aires and Beyond*

When the Jewish community was officially founded in Buenos Aires in 1894, most members were of Western European origin. The first Jewish wedding on Argentine soil, in 1860, was between two French Jews, and the first minyan, two years later, included French, British, and Belgian Jews. Additionally, the first ordained rabbi in Argentina was a British businessman. Within a few decades, the demographic landscape shifted with the arrival of a substantial wave of Eastern European Jews fleeing the harsh conditions of the Pale of Settlement.

Interactions between Eastern and Western European Jews during the early decades of Jewish immigration in Argentina are well-documented in literature, arts, and local lore. Eastern European Jews settled in the *Once* neighborhood, founding synagogues and yeshivot associated with various *fereins*, associations of Jews from specific Eastern European cities or regions (e.g., Galicia, Bialystok, Grodno). In contrast, Western European Jews resided in the *Microcentro* neighborhood, centered around the city's first synagogue on Libertad Street.

This paper explores the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges between these two macro-communities, focusing on literature and Jewish visual arts in Buenos Aires and its environs, shedding light on the complex processes of Jewish immigrant self-identification and the creation of unique Jewish narratives in Argentina, exploring the cultural integration and coexistence of Eastern and Western European Jewish groups within a single urban landscape.

Zvi Orgad (Bar-Ilan University)

*The Shape of Ideology: Transforming Jewish Symbols (Synagogues)*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, synagogue paintings in Eastern Europe and Israel began incorporating the Star of David and the Temple Menorah—symbols rarely featured in early modern synagogue art. These symbols were predominantly employed decoratively: as patterns reminiscent of wallpaper, in elongated strips with repetitive sequences, or as central elements organizing figurative compositions. Existing scholarship on the Menorah and Star of David in the 'Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem has mentioned influence from the Art Nouveau movement. This paper proposes an additional source of influence: 'neo-Moorish' temple decorations of nineteenth-century oriental synagogues which utilized geometric forms, including both explicit and implied Stars of David and seven-branched Menorahs. Originating in Western Europe, these designs generally eschewed nationalistic connotations. This approach continued in Eastern European temples until the early twentieth century when these decorative elements began to be incorporated into smaller synagogues traditionally characterized by figurative art. In these contexts, the newly introduced motifs—now imbued with Zionist themes—integrated with established figurative traditions, significantly transforming Eastern European synagogue painting. This paper examines the evolution of these motifs from aesthetic 'oriental' elements to symbols of Zionist nationalism and their compositional impact on twentieth-century synagogue decoration.

Sergey Kravtsov (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)  
*Józef Awin: "Jewish" Architecture between East and West*

Józef Awin (1883–1942) was a Jewish architect born in Lviv (Lwów, Lemberg), educated in technical universities of his native city, Vienna, and Munich, and active in Lviv between 1907 and 1939. Born into a traditional Jewish family and a youthful adherent of cultural Zionism, he perceived himself and was perceived by his milieu as a “cultural bud” liberated from the “horrible desert sand” of the ghetto and Diaspora and able to contribute to the Jewish national art. In Awin’s opinion, such art could be steadily developed from “traditional” Jewish art in southeastern Poland, believably rooted in the Biblical past and ancient culture. He undertook personal efforts and headed collective endeavors to document and preserve this heritage, as well as popularize it in the West. He succeeded in the establishment of the Commission for Preservation of Jewish Art (1925) and the Communal Jewish Museum (1934) in Lviv.

However, besides several references to regional Carpathian lore, Awin’s architectural works exhibit Western influences: national romanticism in German forms before World War I, expressionism in the 1920s, reference to emerging modern architecture in Palestine around 1930, and full-fledged modernism in the 1930s. In 1935, Awin explained his retreat from the Jewish romantic program with the transient nature of national romanticism and hailed the Jewish contribution to international architecture.

## VII Expression of Trauma in Art

Monika Czekanowska Guttman (University of Warsaw)

*Looking Through Guernica: Representations of the Trauma of the Shoah in the Art of East European Modern Jewish Artists*

This paper explores references and paraphrases of *Guernica*, Picasso's iconic anti-war work, by modern Jewish artists in the first two decades after WWII. *Guernica*'s iconography, including representations of a weeping mother, screaming women, and a dead soldier, as well as its complex composition and symbolic language inspired Jewish artists such as Isaac Celnikier, Zygmunt Menkes, Halina Olomucka and Erna Rosenstein. These artists apparently chose *Guernica* as a reference point to emphasize the universal character of the Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.

Daniel Véri (Central European Research Institute for Art History Budapest)  
*Memory on the Move: Early Postwar Holocaust Memory between Hungary, the US, and Israel*

Early postwar memory of the Holocaust – in Hungary and other countries alike – led to production of narrative, graphic fine arts series depicting the history of the Holocaust from the survivors' perspective. Simultaneously, memorials were small-scale and/or dedicated to the local memory of the victims, of a city or, less frequently, a country.

Lipót Herman's triptych, its travels, and his related plans for building a memorial in Israel transcend national boundaries, as well as conventions of form and iconography. The large painting (ca. 15 m<sup>2</sup>), titled *Ezekiel's Vision* after its centerpiece, was finished in 1949 and sent subsequently to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee as a gift of the artist and Hungarian Jewry.

It combines Biblical scenes with the depiction of various forms of victimhood and – in the context of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones – resurrection of martyrs. A decade later, following astounding negotiations through the Iron Curtain and the Atlantic between the artist, the Joint, and Yad Vashem, the work finally arrived in Jerusalem. This paper also analyzes the artist's early postwar plans to create a monumental memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Israel, based on the iconography of the triptych, an endeavor strikingly similar to Simon Wiesenthal's contemporary plans.

Olga Gershenson (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

*Sergei Loznitsa's Babi Yar. Context: Reorienting Holocaust Discourse from West to East*

This presentation examines Sergei Loznitsa's documentary *Babi Yar. Context* (2021). The film expands upon and challenges the Western-centric Holocaust representation cinematic narrative established by Claude Lanzmann's seminal *Shoah* (1985). Analysis of Loznitsa's archival montage suggests that the film makes two crucial interventions in Holocaust discourse. First, it shifts the geographic focus eastward to Ukraine, illuminating the "Holocaust by bullets" that claimed millions of lives in Soviet territories—a narrative often overshadowed by the camp-oriented Holocaust representation dominant in Western discourse. Second, Loznitsa establishes an alternative approach to ethical representation while maintaining Lanzmann's commitment to integrity. Where Lanzmann rejected archival footage and reenactment, Loznitsa deliberately engages with it, creating a complex audiovisual historical document that combines perpetrator, bystander, and survivor perspectives. In that, his use of sound plays a crucial role: reenactment occurs exclusively in the soundtrack. By examining Loznitsa's meticulous sound design and his strategic use of both German propaganda materials and Soviet documentary footage, the film creates a multifaceted historical representation of the Babi Yar massacre and its broader context. The presentation considers how Loznitsa's approach both draws from and departs from Lanzmann's ethical framework, particularly in handling graphic imagery, testimony, and reenactment. *Babi Yar. Context* emerges as a critical contribution to the study of Holocaust representation that expands our understanding of the genocide beyond Western European discourse.



Mor Presiado (Bar-Ilan University)

*Art, Motherhood, Identity, and the Search for Home: Tali Ratzker's War Diary  
Photographic Series Following October 7, 2023*

Tali Ratzker's *War Diary* photographic series was created in response to the events of October 7, 2023, and the ongoing war. Ratzker, who immigrated to Israel from Ukraine in 2000 at the age of twelve, builds upon her earlier exploration of self-portraiture and personal documentation. This began with *Mother Tongue* in 2019, where she focused on her new role as a mother, and continued with *Potatoes in Uniform* and *Warriors Rest*, developed after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. These works explore her relationship with her mother against the backdrop of both post-Soviet Ukrainian and Israeli cultures and their shared search for a sense of home. The *War Diary* series deepens these themes, now framed by the horrific events of October 7. Photographs depict the subjects as warriors or in states of connection, escape, and protection, offering the perspective of an immigrant woman whose two homelands are at war. Ratzker's *War Diary* photographs are set against the dynamic backdrop of transnational experiences. Freud's concept of the uncanny and Kristeva's theory of the abject, along with their feminist developments, further inform this analysis. This approach highlights how Ratzker's photographic techniques of alienation, estrangement, and humor—interwoven with themes of motherhood and the fusion of cultural elements—create a space of testimony that reflects her experiences. Ratzker's work allows her to articulate an independent voice that navigates the complexities of multiple cultural identities. Through her art and exploration of the mother/daughter relationship during periods of conflict and displacement, Ratzker creates a powerful metaphor for an elusive home.

## VIII Russian Art and Literature in Israel and the West

Roman Katsman (Bar-Ilan University)

*East-West European Discourse in Russian Israeli Literature*

Over the course of a hundred years of its history, Russian-Israeli literature has inevitably been not only a reflection, but also an integral part of the multi-level interrelations between Eastern European and Western European Jewry (including writers who moved to Europe after having lived in Israel). This was expressed in biographies of writers, themes and motifs in their fiction and non-fiction texts, poetic tendencies, philosophical and political views, and cultural practices. Now that the center of Russian-Jewish culture, creativity, and imagination has moved to Israel, Russian-Jewish East-West discourse has moved along with it. Moreover, in Israel it is acquiring special acuity today due to the rise of the concept of “Jewish genocide”. I will examine this dynamic through the examples of several Russian-Israeli writers representing periods from the 1920s to the 2020s, such as Avraham Vysotsky (1920s), Yuli Margolin (1950s), Zinovy Zinik (1970s), Dina Rubina (1990s), Alex Tarn (2010s).

Lola Kantor-Kazovsky (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

*"Malevich the Prophet" and the Historiography of Russian Avant-garde East and West of the Iron Curtain*

The catalogue of the exhibition *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-30*, organized by curators of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1981) included an article on Malevich by Michail Grobman, an Israeli artist of Russian origin. Grobman compared Malevich's suprematism with the idealism of Jewish prophets and warned of confusing it with constructivist rationale that was merely production of practical things. His thesis of suprematism as "artistic Judaism" is exotic, but the spiritualist view of Malevich was characteristic of Russian historiography. This is in contrast to the mainstream perception of Russian avant-garde in the West that was and still is focused on the new practices of constructivism and tries to downplay the spiritualist theories of artists, treating them as post-Romantic, non-avant-garde stage of Russian art. Grobman's article serves a starting point for investigation of a surprising asymmetry between two historiographies, Western and East-European, rooted in Cold War culture.

Ilia Rodov (Bar-Ilan University)

*'I'm in the East, My Heart in the West': Intercultural Encounters in the Works of Soviet-Born Israeli Artists*

In Soviet mental geography, the East-West axis had a flipped nature. From a global perspective, the Soviet Union was the East as opposed to the West, which was located in Western Europe and the USA. This West was officially understood as a bitter opponent to the Soviet Bloc, culturally as the cradle of European civilization, and unofficially as a haven of freedom.

In the national domain, the European part of the USSR was considered the West, whereas the Central Asian republics were deemed the East. This East experienced state paternalism, romanticist idealization by liberal intellectuals, and occasional xenophobia from the "western" commonfolk.

Deeply involved in these dichotomies, Soviet Jews simultaneously viewed Israel as a historical Orient, a cultural Levant, and a political West. Reflections on and transmutations of the East-West cultural dichotomy are explored in works of contemporary Israeli artists who were born and, in many cases, professionally educated in the former Soviet Union.