Activity Update
Summer 2015 – Spring 2016

Wooden synagogue in Kansk, documented by the CJA researchers during the expedition to Siberia in August 2015

Center for Jewish Art
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art

Just as in the previous year, the main efforts of our staff were devoted to the digitization of the Center for Jewish Art collections. The vision of the late founder, Prof. Bezalel Narkiss, came to its realization and the Index of Jewish Art (named after him) is available to all. It can be accessed on the Center’s webpage (http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php) and includes currently 193,000 scanned images. The Index is an iconographical database, which offers the widest representation of Jewish iconography in all media: Ancient art, Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, ritual objects, architecture, funeral monuments, and modern art. The documentation, gathered by the CJA researchers over 37 years and presented in the Index, is a unique source of information on artifacts and monuments, that may have disappeared or changed beyond recognition.

The digitization project is carried out in cooperation with the National Library of Israel. The digitization project is supported by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, Landmarks Program of the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, Harvard University Library, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, and the Morris and Beverly Baker Foundation.
The major achievement of the Center for Jewish Art in this period was a research expedition to Siberia in August 2015. Over the course of 21 days, the expedition spanned 6,000 km and visited 16 cities in Siberia and the Russian Far East: Tomsk, Mariinsk, Achinsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kansk, Nizhneudinsk, Irkutsk, Babushkin, Kabansk, Ulans-Ude, Barguzin, Petrovsk Zabaikalskii, Chita, Khabarovsk, Birobidzhan, and Vladivostok. Sixteen synagogues and four collections of ritual objects were documented alongside a survey of eleven Jewish cemeteries and numerous Jewish houses.

The expedition team consisted of Prof. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, Dr. Vladimir Levin, Dr. Katrin Kessler, Dr. Anna Berezin, and Arch. Zoya Arshavsky. The detailed report on the expedition is available here:

cja.huji.ac.il/Home_Page/Report%20on%20CJA%20expedition%20to%20Siberia%202015.pdf

The expedition was made possible thanks to the generous support of Mrs. Josephine Urban, London and an anonymous donor.
A Catalogue of Wall Paintings in Central and East European Synagogues

The research project conducted by the Center for Jewish Art on wall paintings in Central and East European Synagogues now enters its third year. We have already created a methodology for presenting wall paintings and implemented it in an interactive database. For now, the catalogue contains descriptions of the wall painting programs and individual images from 113 synagogues from Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, and Israel. Those synagogues are represented in three thousand photographs. The images and their descriptions can be browsed according to their origin, iconographical subject, and artist. The catalogue is accessible to the public at the Center’s website: http://cja.huji.ac.il/wpc/browser.php?mode=enter.

The Catalogue will be presented to the researchers in the International Workshop “Synagogue Wall Paintings: Research, Preservation, Presentation” on September 13 and 14, 2016.

Virgo, Zodiac Sign of Elul, Kupa synagogue in Cracow, Poland, 1920s, restored in the 2000s. Photo 2015 by Boris Khaimovich.

Expedition to document synagogue wall paintings in Poland

For the preparation of the Catalogue of Wall Paintings, Dr. Boris Khaimovich undertook an expedition to Poland. He visited Warsaw, Cracow, Tykochin, Łańcut, and Włodawa. Besides photographing the current situation of the wall paintings, Dr. Khaimovich also visited the Institute
of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences and copied archival photographs of destroyed synagogues with murals.

**A Project to document Judaica produced by the Bezalel School in past and present**

The new project of the Center for Jewish Art aims to include into the Index of Jewish Art documentation of objects of Judaica produced by the artists from the Bezalel School of Art (currently the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design), from its establishment in 1906 until today. This project will demonstrate the continuity and change in the production of Jewish ceremonial objects, and place the *oeuvre* of contemporary artists in historical context, thus stressing the tension between tradition and innovation.

*We are looking for grants in order to advance with this project.*

**Documentation of Rimma Bobov Collection**

As one of the facets of our interest in contemporary art, the CJA undertook documentation of the collection of Sabbath candlesticks produced in Israel in the 1950s–1980s. The collection belongs to Mrs. Rimma Bobov; it was described and photographed by our researcher Rony Katz; the documentation is now available in the Index of Jewish Art ([http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php](http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php)).

*Sabbath Candlesticks with the images of Baba Sali and his tomb in Netivot

*From the Rimma Bobov Collection*
Cooperation with the MASA Program

This year the CJA successfully cooperated with the international Masa "Top Israel Interns" program. Masa brings young Jewish people from abroad to experience the real life in Israel. In the framework of the project, the CJA accepted three interns: Willi Mendelson and Carmen Echevarria from the USA, and Ekaterina Sosenskaya from Russia. During their internship in the Center, Willi, Carmen, and Ekaterina had a unique possibility to explore Jewish visual heritage and contributed a great deal to the development and improvement of the Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art.

Mapping and Evaluating Synagogue Buildings in Europe

This year the Center for Jewish Art and the Foundation for Jewish Heritage, London, began a project of Mapping and Evaluating Synagogue Buildings in Europe. The aim of the project is to map out all extant buildings in Europe, which serve or once served as synagogues, identify the most important ones in terms of their architectural, artistic and historical value, and single out those that are currently at risk of destruction and should be urgently restored.
Commemoration of the late Professors

Ursula and Kurt Schubert

The Center for Jewish Art is one of the organizers of the event dedicated to the memory of prominent researchers of Jewish history and art, Professors Ursula and Kurt Schubert. In 1999, Ursula and Kurt Schubert donated their collection of photographs of Hebrew Illuminated manuscripts to the Center for Jewish Art where it is kept as the “Schubert Archive” and serves researchers from all over the world.

A one-day conference, “Between Jewish Traditions and Early Christian Art,” devoted to the research of Ursula and Kurt Schubert, was held in the Academy of Sciences in Vienna on January 19, 2016. It included a joint presentation by their former students, Prof. Katrin Kogman-Appel and Prof. Bernhard Dolna, as well as concluding remarks by Dr. Vladimir Levin of the Center for Jewish Art. On January 20, 2016 the same presentation was given in the Kurt and Ursula Schubert Center for Jewish Studies at Palacký University of Olomouc, Czech Republic. The same event will be repeated in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on November 13, 2016.

Opening of the conference “Between Jewish Traditions and Early Christian Art,”
the Academy of Science in Vienna
Events

On December 13, 2015, Prof. Shalom Sabar from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem received the Bezalel, Mordechai, and Nessia Narkiss Prize for Excellence in Research on Jewish Art. The award ceremony took place in the Umberto Nachon Museum of Italian Jewish Art in Jerusalem. Prof. Sabar gave the lecture “The image of Shabtai Zvi in Jewish and Christian visual representations in the 17th century.”

On March 31, 2016, the Center of Jewish Art together with the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry, organized a lecture evening “Jewish Museum and Its Place in Contemporary Culture” to celebrate the publication of the album *Museum of Jewish History in Russia*. Dr. Boris Khaimovich and Hillel Kazovsky presented the album, Prof. Shalom Sabar lectured on “Flags for Simhat-Torah in Jewish Folk Culture in Eastern Europe,” and Prof. Ziva Amishai-Maisels, the Israel Prize laureate, spoke on “Art for the sake of Art or Art as document in a Jewish Museum.”

Prof. Ziva Amishai-Maisels lecturing on

“Art for the sake of Art or Art as document in a Jewish Museum”
On December 2, 2015, the Center for Jewish Art together with the Department of Jewish Art in Bar-Ilan University co-organized a colloquium on Synagogue Art. The main participants were Drs. Eszter and Sándor Tárkányi from Sopron, Hungary, who spoke on “Surviving Synagogues of the Forgotten Sopronians: Medieval Architecture and Contemporary Art Project,” and Dr. Ilya Rodov of Bar-Ilan University who gave a paper entitled “Stones and names.”

On November 18, 2015, the Center for Jewish Art together with the Department of Jewish Art in Bar-Ilan University, Art History Department in the Hebrew University, the Cummings Center in the Tel Aviv University, and the Maria and Michael Zeitlin Museum of Russian Art in Ramat Gan co-organized the presentation of the book *Yakov Kagan Shabbtai and his Jewish Artistic Gallery* by Moscow researcher Yakov Bruk.

**Exhibitions**

Ido Noy, a researcher in the Center for Jewish Art, served as a curator and catalogue editor of the exhibition “Bezalel: In and Out in Jewish Contemporary Art,” organized in the framework of the Second Jerusalem Biennale for Contemporary Jewish Art in October 2015. Dr. Vladimir Levin spoke on the festive opening of the exhibition.

In February 2016 the Center for Jewish Art together with the Art History Department of Hebrew University, organized the exhibition “Ima Iyla’ah: the Art of Motherhood” in the Humanities Faculty in Mount Scopus. The exhibition is a continuation of one of those undertaken during the Jerusalem Biennale for Contemporary Jewish Art and curated by Nurit Sirkis-Bank and Noa Lea Cohn.

On October 15, 2015, Dr. Sergey Kravtsov gave a lecture at the opening of the exhibition “Jewish Marriage Contracts. Collection of Ketubbot in the Borys Voznytsky National Gallery” in Lviv, Ukraine.
In the beginning of August 2015, Dr. Vladimir Levin participated in the field school expedition of the Moscow-based Center “Sefer.” The school expedition worked in the westernmost region of the Russian Federation. It documented Jewish cemeteries and collected oral history in Smolensk, Luibavichi (the town where the leaders of the Habad Hasidism resided for one hundred years), Shumiachi, Roslavl, Monastyrshchina, and Petrovichi (the birth place of Isaac Azimov).

Michal Sternthal gave a lecture “Introduction to Hebrew illuminated manuscript” in the Senior Club, Hashmonaim, in July 2015.

Dr. Sergey Kravtsov gave five seminars at the “Festival of Slow Reading,” Eshkolot Program of Jewish Studies in Moscow on December 4–6, 2015.
Participation of the CJA researchers in conferences

In June 2015 Dr. Vladimir Levin participated in the Seminar “Mental Maps and Making of National Spaces: The Case of Lithuania” of the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius. He lectured on “Lite in Jewish Mental Maps.”

In September 2015, Dr. Sergey Kravtsov and Dr. Vladimir Levin took part in the International Workshop “Constructing and Deconstructing of Jewish Art” in Bar-Ilan University. Dr. Kravtsov gave a paper “Polish-Jewish Art History Discourse: From Karol Maszkowski to Zofia Ameisenowa” and Dr. Levin spoke on “Between History and Architecture: Eastern European Synagogues in Siberia.”

Zoya Arshavsky participated in the conference “Dialog of Cultures on the Great Silk Road,” held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on November 11-13, 2015.

Dr. Kravtsov gave a lecture “Artist’s Destiny in Jewish Collective Memory” at the Sefer Conference in the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow on December 3, 2015.

In December 2015, Prof. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin and Dr. Vladimir Levin participated in the workshop “Network for Jewish Material Culture,” organized by our colleagues from the Beit Tfila Research Unit for Jewish Architecture in Europe (Braunschweig, Germany). The workshop was held in Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald and lead to the establishment of the Israel Jakobson Network, which united the majority of German institutions and researchers dealing with Jewish material culture. The next meeting of the members of the network will take place in Braunschweig in April 2016 and will be devoted to the topic “Object and Script.”

Recent Publications of the CJA researchers


Zoya Arshavsky, “Archaeological Sites of the Western Part of the Great Silk Road in the National Parks of the East Mediterranean,” in *Materials of the international scientific conference*


Vladimir Levin, From Revolution to War: Jewish Politics in Russia, 1907–1914 (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2016) [In Hebrew].


Future Events


October 2016 – Exhibition of the Rimma Bobov Collection of Sabbath Candlesticks, Department of Jewish Art, Bar-Ilan University.

November 13, 2016 – Conference "Between Jewish Traditions and Early Christian Art," devoted to the research of Ursula and Kurt Schubert.

December 2016 – Bezalel, Mordechai and Nessia Narkiss Prize for Excellence in Research on Jewish Art.