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## In Search of a Jewish Audience: New York's Guild Art Gallery, 1935–1937

ANDREA PAPPAS

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How did Jewishness affect the relationships among artists, galleries, artists' groups and collectors?" Scholars have scrutinized the Jewish presence in American art in the twentieth century over the last fifteen years or so in essays, monographs and surveys. Studies of Jewish artists and their works continue to proliferate, and scholars have even examined the connections between art history as a discipline and Jewishness, contributing to both the history and the sociology of art history and to the range of Jewish studies.<sup>1</sup> The re-evaluation of the work of artists such as Raphael Soyer, Theresa Bernstein, Jack Levine, Mark Rothko, Audrey Flack and many others in relationship to their Jewishness reveals a religious and cultural identification with Judaism as an enduring component of American modernism—both before and after WWII—in New York. This, in turn, has enriched our understanding of the interplay between modernism and ethnic and religious identity.<sup>2</sup> Yet scant attention has been paid to the institutional frames in which these artists expressed their connection to Judaism.<sup>3</sup> One such institution was the Guild Art

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1. Prominent examples include: Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd, eds., *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Samantha Baskind, *Encyclopedia of Jewish American Artists: Artists of the American Mosaic* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2006); Samantha Baskind and Larry Silver, *Jewish Art: A Modern History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Lisa E. Bloom, *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Margaret Olin, *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

2. For example, see Samantha Baskind, *Raphael Soyer and the Search for Modern Jewish Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Samantha Baskind, *Jewish Artists and the Bible in Twentieth-Century America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014). Gail Levin, ed., *Theresa Bernstein: A Century in Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); and Andrea Pappas, "Invisible Points of Departure: Reading Rothko's Christological Imagery," *American Jewish History*, 92, No. 4 (2004): 401–436.

3. On institutional framing, see Olin, *The Nation Without Art*; Norman L. Kleeblatt and Susan Chevlowe, eds., *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900–1945, a Tribute to the Educational Alliance Art School* (The Jewish Museum in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1991) an exhibition catalog; and Andrea Pappas, "The Picture at *Menorah Journal*: Making 'Jewish Art,'" *American Jewish History* 90, No. 3, (2002): 205–238.

Gallery (1935–1937). While it may not have explicitly set out to be a “Jewish” gallery, most of the artists on its roster were Jewish, as were its founders, and it mounted at least one major, extended campaign to recruit Jewish patrons. Further, the gallery made concerted efforts to market a modern Jewish masterpiece by an artist associated with the School of Paris—Sigmund Menkes’ enormous painting, *The Torah*—to an elite Jewish audience. Although the gallery closed its doors after only two years, the act of closely tracking its activities in relation to its Jewish-themed work and its campaign to shape a Jewish clientele can tell us something about the intersection of Jewishness, modernity and the art market in New York in the mid-1930s.<sup>4</sup>

### The Gallery

Artists Margaret Lefranc (1907–1998) and Anna Walinska (1906–1997) founded and ran the Guild Art Gallery, (Figures 1, 2). Their self-portraits register their identity as modern artists in their loose handling of paint and their departures from traditional renderings of space and form—the latter style one that was featured in the art of avant-garde cubist painter André Lhote, with whom they both studied. Lefranc, who was born Margaret Frankel in New York, lived in Europe from the age of 13, since her father had moved the family to Germany, where she studied art, both traditional and expressionist. The family moved to Paris in 1923, where she spent a decade before returning to New York.<sup>5</sup> Walinska, the daughter of labor leader and Zionist Ossip Walinsky and sculptor Rosa Newman, also lived in Paris as an art student between 1926 and 1930.<sup>6</sup> Lefranc, whose family resources afforded her a small amount of capital and a very modest income, later recalled that although she planned to start a gallery, she lacked the social connections in the New York art world to do so because of her European upbringing. Similarly, Walinska also recounted that during her stay in Paris, she wished to launch a gallery to bring the modern art she saw there to New York.<sup>7</sup> Walinska’s mother, who was Lefranc’s neighbor,

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4. The gallery closed abruptly because of a falling out between Lefranc and Walinska, compounded by the financial difficulties presented by the Great Depression.

5. Lois Katz, *A Lifetime of Imaging: The Art of Margaret Lefranc*, (Santa Fe: Nouveau Ventures Unlimited, Inc., in association with the Margaret Lefranc Foundation, 2007), 42–91.

6. Anna Walinska Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA/SI) and Atelier Anna Walinska, <http://www.walinska.com/bio.html>. (Accessed December 2, 2013).

7. Rosina Rubin, communication with the author, January 27, 2014.

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Figure 1. Anna Walinkska, *Self-Portrait*, 1936. (Oil on canvas, 22 x 26 in.) Courtesy Atelier Anna Walinska.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To see image go to original article at DOI: 10.1353/ajh.2014.0048

Figure 2. Margaret Lefranc, *Self-Portrait*, 1930. (21 x 18 in.) Courtesy: Margaret Lefranc Art Foundation, Sandra McKenzie, President.

introduced the two women. When Walinska heard of Lefranc's plan, she announced that she knew "practically every working artist in New York" and could provide the contacts Lefranc needed.<sup>8</sup> The two young women formed a partnership in which Lefranc handled the finances and Walinska provided social connections to artists. In the late summer of 1935, they signed the lease on their fifth-floor Guild Art Gallery at 37 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>9</sup>

The bare walls, sparse furniture, and generous wall space between works of art proclaimed the gallery's modernity in visual and spatial terms (Figures 3, 4). The near emptiness of the gallery extended the example that had been set twenty-five years earlier by Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue—known simply as "291"—and that was currently on view at the newly founded Museum of Modern Art.<sup>10</sup> The hard-surfaced floor, undecorated walls, and plain curtains served to direct the viewer's attention to the works one at a time and to mark the gallery's difference from those that sold paintings by the old masters.<sup>11</sup> In the setting of their new gallery, Walinska and Lefranc worked to build a stable roster of artists, and they assiduously pursued many avenues to garner publicity—and, therefore, an audience—for their exhibitions. Their efforts included, at least initially, sponsoring lectures on modern art and regularly sending out letters and announcements to prominent art world figures such as museum curators and newspaper and magazine art critics. Examination of the Guild Art Gallery's records reveals that the gallery dedicated a significant portion of its marketing to searching for a Jewish audience, an effort that places the gallery at the intersection of modernity and Jewishness.

A gallery's roster and the kind of work it exhibited largely shaped the public perception of that gallery. Just as exhibitions of modern works rather than works by the eighteenth-century "old masters" marked a gallery as "modern," so, too, could a steady stream of works by Jewish artists mark a gallery, at least in part, as "Jewish."<sup>12</sup> Jewish artists in the

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8. Katz, *A Lifetime of Imaging*, 104–105.

9. Lease contract, Guild Art Gallery Papers (GAGP), AAA/SI.

10. The Museum of Modern Art was still in its temporary location in a nineteenth-century townhouse; period photographs show an interior remarkably similar to that of the Guild Art Gallery.

11. Kristina Forsyth Wilson, "Exhibiting Modern Times: American Modernism, Popular Culture, and the Art Exhibit, 1925–1935." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2001. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (The Lapis Press, Santa Monica, Calif., 1986).

12. For a later example, see Diana Linden, "Modern? American? Jew? Museums and Exhibitions of Ben Shahn's Late Paintings." *The Art of Being Jewish in the Modern World*. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 197–207.

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Figure 3. Interior view of the Guild Art Gallery between 1935 and 1937. Unidentified photographer. Guild Art Gallery records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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Figure 4. Interior view of the Guild Art Gallery between 1935 and 1937. Unidentified photographer. Guild Art Gallery records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

1930s experienced the art market somewhat differently, shrunken as it was, than did their gentile colleagues. Even a cursory glance at exhibition records demonstrates that some galleries gave many more solo shows to Jewish artists than to others. For example, the ACA (American Contemporary Artists) Galleries, run by Herman Baron, had close ties to the Artists' Union—which represented artists working on the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and other government-sponsored projects—and devoted more than half of its solo shows to Jewish artists between 1935 and 1940. Similarly, the Downtown Gallery supported Jewish artists, whose solo exhibitions comprised nearly one third of its shows of individual artists (nine out of thirty-one). This strongly contrasts with other galleries. For example, the Kraushaar Galleries presented the works of Jewish artists in just one of its twenty-one solo exhibitions during the same period.<sup>13</sup> The Guild Art Gallery embraced Jewishness. Fully three-quarters of the gallery's inaugural exhibition season was given over to Jewish artists. Moreover, it showcased a major Jewish work, Sigmund Menkes' *The Torah*, and it developed a concerted campaign to place that work with a Jewish patron or organization. Although Jewishness rarely surfaced as an explicit topic in the art criticism published in non-Jewish publications, it was a topic in daily life; the 1930s saw a swiftly rising tide of antisemitism in the United States, putting pressure on the question of Jewish identity for Jews and gentiles alike.<sup>14</sup> In that climate, in a city with a large Jewish population, the Guild Art Gallery's activities had the potential to mark it as "Jewish."

The gallery's introductory exhibition, a group show, illustrates this. The exhibition opened on October 5, 1935 and featured (in addition to works by Lefranc and Walinska), the works of Boris Aronson, Ahron Ben-Shmuel, Donald Forbes, Henry Major, Rosa Newman, Philip Reisman, Ary Stillman, and Arshile Gorky. Critics received the show favorably: Edward Alden Jewell praised Gorky's "handsome abstract decoration," adding that it "may be said to dominate the show."<sup>15</sup> A

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13. Gallery listings for the ACA Gallery were culled from those appearing in the *New York Times* (hereafter, NYT) between September 29, 1935 and November 1, 1936, and in the *Art Digest* between November 1, 1936 and September 1, 1940. Listings for the Downtown Gallery are from the Downtown Gallery papers. Downtown Gallery Records, 1824–1974, bulk 1926–1969, AAA/SI. I have relied on the list of exhibitions for the Kraushaar Gallery compiled by the Archives of American Art; Kraushaar Gallery records, 1885–2006, AAA/SI. I was unable to make a determination regarding the Jewish identity of four artists. (As is typical in studies of Jewish populations, the use of last names as a marker for Jewish ethnicity introduces some uncertainty.)

14. On antisemitism in the United States, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

15. Clipping in GAGP, NYT, Sunday, October 12, 1935, arts section, page unknown. GAGP, AAA/SI.

writer at the *New York Herald Tribune* singled out Ben-Shmuel and Stillman for special mention and noted, “[B]oth realism and abstraction are encountered in [this] opening show.”<sup>16</sup> Seven of the ten artists exhibiting were Jewish; marking the gallery as, at the very least, Jewishly oriented, while well-known modernists such as Aronson, Ben-Shmuel and Gorky contributed to its modern identity. As we shall see, the subsequent solo exhibitions—featuring the works of Aronson, followed by the works of Ben-Shmuel and Chaim Gross—reinforced this combination of modernity and Jewishness.

Aronson’s paintings and gouaches depicting the New England coastal artist colonies of Rockport, Gloucester, and Provincetown in Massachusetts comprised the second show, which ran from the end of October to the end of November in 1935. Aronson had worked as a stage designer in Yiddish theaters after his arrival in the United States in 1923 and, in 1932, he began working on English-language productions.<sup>17</sup> However, he continued to work as a painter, apart from his work in theater, and these are the works that he exhibited in the gallery. Aronson’s subject matter in 1935—as reflected in the titles singled out in reviews of his work—included *Factories, Warehouses, The Junkyard, Unemployed* and *Town Hall, Provincetown*.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that although Aronson was in Provincetown for at least part of one summer, his attention was directed to the social and physical results of the Depression more than to picturesque scenes of streets and summer beaches. Contemporary life, as depicted in the subject matter, placed his works in the broad spectrum of social realism in the 1930s. This, along with streamlined forms and the somewhat loose handling of the medium, registered their modernity and contemporaneity.

After the Aronson solo exhibition, the gallery featured a two-man show of the watercolors and wood sculpture of Gross and the stone sculptures of Ben-Shmuel; both sculptors worked with the figure as subject matter. Gross, whose later work centered on Jewish subjects, at this time exhibited a number of figural sculptures alongside Ben-Shmuel’s three portrait heads, one torso, one reclining figure and a work entitled *Wrestlers*.

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16. Unattributed press clipping, GAGP, *New York Herald Tribune*, October 13, 1935.

17. On Aronson, see Frank Rich, *The Theatre Art of Boris Aronson* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) and C. S. O’Carroll, “A Larger Scale: The Life and Art of Boris Aronson, *Pakn Treger*, No. 47 (Spring 2005): 8.

18. Dates for artworks are given if known. In the 1930s, exhibition reviews of artworks did not carry dates; exhibitions were presumed to show the recent work of artists unless noted otherwise. In many cases the author was unable to pin down dates of artworks, particularly those known only through mention of their title (often fairly generic) in reviews and exhibition checklists.



Aside from the portraits, present-day life did not figure prominently in the objects made by either artist. Rather, subject matter served mostly as a vehicle for exploring the relationship between form and medium. For example, Gross worked his sculptures in *lignum vitae*, its strongly marked grain topographically mapping the surfaces of the already highly simplified forms of the figures. Gross' subjects leaned toward dancers and circus performers, such as acrobats, a staple subject of modern art since at least the turn of the century. Ben-Shmuel's granite sculptures displayed generic subjects—heads and reclining female figures and torsos—subject matter that highlighted the formal properties of the object rather than inviting the viewer to do much ruminating on the subject matter. Thus, the work of both of these artists disclosed its modernity in its formalist concerns rather than through its subject matter; in this way, the work contributed to the gallery's identity as modernist.

Gross, like Aronson, had strong associations with Jewish organizations. He regularly exhibited his work at venues associated with Jews, such as the Educational Alliance Art School (on the Lower East Side of Manhattan), where he also taught from 1927 onward, and at the Jewish Art Center.<sup>19</sup> This exhibition history further involved the gallery in the discourses on Jewish art in New York.

The next exhibition, Gorky's abstract drawings (his first solo show in New York), which opened in December of 1935, temporarily lent the gallery an avant-garde cachet. Gorky, who was not Jewish, although he was an immigrant, like Aronson and Gross, exhibited his abstract, quasi-surrealist drawings (at least some from the *Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia* series) made in the years 1931–1934. It attracted considerable attention through its short, three-week run.<sup>20</sup> Nearly every critic in New York found the show worthy of special mention. Gorky had signed an exclusive contract with the Guild, but when Philip Boyer, who had shown Gorky's work in 1934 at the Mellon Galleries in Philadelphia, offered him a stipend, Lefranc and Walinska, unable to match it, agreed to dissolve the contract.<sup>21</sup> Gorky was the only abstract artist on the roster and, once he left, the gallery would no longer show abstract art; there was no shortage of it in New York, but abstract art—because it references neither Jewish life nor customs—did not function at that time as a carrier of Jewish identity.<sup>22</sup>

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19. Kleeblatt, *Painting a Place*, 174. The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation has extensive biographical information on Gross on its website: [http://www.rcgrossfoundation.org/foundation/index.cfm/fa/c.life/decade\\_id/20](http://www.rcgrossfoundation.org/foundation/index.cfm/fa/c.life/decade_id/20) December 11.

20. The exhibition ran from December 16, 1935 to January 5, 1936. GAGP, AAA/SI.

21. Letter to Lloyd Ney, GAGP, AAA/SI.

22. Acceptance of abstract art as a vehicle for specifically Jewish expression does not appear in American art until the 1960s. For abstraction and modern Jewish identity, see Pappas, "The Picture at *Menorah Journal*," 230–233.

Gorky aside, the gallery's exhibition record shows a strong connection between Jewishness and modernity. The subject matter and formal features of the work displayed in the Guild's first four exhibitions firmly established the modernist orientation of the gallery, while the identity of the artists linked it to Jewishness.

### In search of a Jewish audience: Sigmund Menkes' *The Torah*.

One unusual, long-term major exhibition effort stands out strongly from the background of the gallery's steady rotation of three-week shows. The Guild exhibited a large work executed in 1928 by Sigmund Menkes, *The Torah (Uplifting the Torah)* (Figure 5), in early 1936; Walinska and Lefranc attempted to find a buyer for it by writing to many Jewish organizations and leaders in New York.<sup>23</sup> This correspondence provided information about the artist Sigmund (Zygmunt) Menkes (1896–1986), and the painting while underscoring Menkes' prominence in the history of modern Jewish art production.<sup>24</sup> A monumental easel painting for its time (nearly seven-and-a-half feet tall and more than five feet wide), *The Torah* depicts the ritual display of a large, heavy Torah scroll. The image, painted in a loose, expressionistic manner, features nine figures—eight men and an older boy; the latter makes eye contact with the viewer, inviting the viewer to complete the minyan, or prayer group. The painting thus explicitly envisions the viewer as a Jewish man and any room in which it is hung as a space for Jewish practice.

Painted in 1930, the canvas had been destined for a major museum in Germany, the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin, an institution with a department dedicated to the exhibition of work by contemporary artists and an important forerunner of New York's Museum of Modern Art. The Guild Art Gallery records indicate that Menkes had held a contract with the museum as late as 1932. However, when Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany the following year, the museum was forced to back out of the agreement, informing the artist that this was because of the subject matter of the painting (a Jewish ritual) and because he was Jewish. Three years later, in October of 1936, Joseph Goebbels purged the Kronprinzenpalais of its modern art and closed the museum.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Hanfstaengl Press in Munich discontinued a set of color reproductive prints of Menkes' painting on account of the Jewish subject matter

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23. I have made every effort to locate the current owner of the painting, but to no avail. I would be happy to amend the credit for this image at the earliest reasonable opportunity.

24. Baskind and Silver, *Jewish Art*; Eliane Strosberg, *The Human Figure and Jewish Culture* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2008). Correspondence files, GAG, AAA/SI.

25. Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 48, 61.

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Figure 5. A photograph of Zigmund Menkes' painting *La Grande Torah*, ca. 1930 Unidentified photographer. Guild Art Gallery records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

and the artist's Jewishness, even though the press had already paid the artist "a considerable sum of money" for the reproduction rights. The press destroyed the plates of the painting and only one print survived this censorship.<sup>26</sup> Menkes, part of the School of Paris between the wars, was born in 1896 in Poland, moved to Paris in 1923, and immigrated to the United States in 1935, where he enjoyed the patronage of Mary Quinn Sullivan, one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Both Menkes and his magnum opus were refugees.

Sometime between Menkes' arrival in the United States in December 1935 and the painting's arrival in the gallery in early 1936, the Jewish Club in New York became involved in determining the fate of the canvas, although exactly how this came about is unclear.<sup>27</sup> Gallery records document representatives of the Jewish Club asking the gallery for help with a reception to celebrate the painting and the artist, which took place at the club on Monday, May 25, 1936.<sup>28</sup> The gallery's role was to find sponsors for the reception; prominent individuals were asked to lend their name to the event in order to bolster its cachet. When marketing *The Torah*, Walinska and Lefranc targeted professional organizations and individuals, with the goal of finding a permanent home for the painting. The extant gallery papers include many documents related to this canvas, by far the largest single group of correspondence—most of it over Walinska's signature—for a single object. Although the gallery records are incomplete, the surviving correspondence portrays a fairly clear picture of the events of 1936 with regard to the painting and its fate.

The extant correspondence regarding *The Torah* dates from February 1936 to the winter of early 1937. When looking for sponsors and potential buyers, the gallery targeted wealthy individuals who were prominent in Jewish life in New York as well as leaders of Jewish organizations (e.g., banker Felix M. Warburg, chair of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)). An early letter from the gallery, dated February 16, includes in its opening paragraph a declaration that the matter at hand is of "significance which should concern those interested in the creation and development of a Jewish art." The penultimate paragraph returns to this theme: "It seems to us, in view of the fact that a renewed interest in Jewish culture has been awakened by recent world events, that effort should be made toward the development and conservation

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26. Gallery information sheet for *The Torah*. A letter to J. Leitman gives the artist's fee as 4,000 Deutsche Marks. GAGP, AAA/SI.

27. The contract between the artist and the gallery is dated February 14, 1936. GAGP, AAA/SI. Walinska and/or Lefranc may have encountered Menkes in Paris in the 1920s.

28. Letter to the *Jewish Daily Forward*, GAGP, AAA/SI.

of Jewish art.”<sup>29</sup> The gallery seems to have targeted individuals on the board of directors listed on the letterhead of the JDC. A letter from J.B. Lightman on that letterhead has checkmarks next to half of the officer’s names, as well as the names of fifteen of the twenty-six directors residing in the greater New York area. Lightman’s letter is dated April 16, and a copy of a letter to Edith Lehman, the wife of one of these other individuals, New York Gov. Herbert H. Lehman, survives in the gallery files. Like other letters to women, the letter to Edith Lehman, dated May 12, refers to previous correspondence with her husband. In combination with the checkmarks on Lightman’s letter, this strongly suggests that Walinska sent letters bearing information about the painting’s history and an invitation to the May reception to all the other men.

Walinska revised the letters over the course of the spring of 1936. Letters sent in February apparently were ineffective, so, in early March, Walinska contacted David A. Brown, president of *The American Hebrew* magazine, for editorial help with the letter. Brown (whom she addressed at the magazine) replied promptly with a list of suggested changes that tightened the prose and, he noted, “...will make a very readable two page letter.” The changes mostly concern paragraphing and formatting and some minor tweaking to the wording; Walinska put his changes in place and continued to send out letters throughout the spring of 1936. However, the fact that Walinska would seek help from someone she did not know personally indicates how seriously she took the mission of finding a home for *The Torah*.

The new letters discussed the history of the painting and framed the mission of finding a home for *The Torah* as a matter of some urgency. The letters mentioned “a renewed interest in Jewish culture... awakened by recent world events,” clearly referring to the purges of Jewish and modern artists and intellectuals from their jobs and public life in Germany (such as the Kronprinzenpalais) and to the frightening abuses of power perpetrated by the Nazis in the three years since Hitler had been named Chancellor of Germany. Walinska cast her letter as an appeal to rescue and preserve for posterity what she saw as a landmark modern Jewish painting. Through her appeal, we can see the increasing pressure the events in Germany put on American Jews to act on behalf of their European brethren and to assist, rescue and preserve Jews and Jewish culture—a pressure that would become critical at the advent of World War II.

Felix Warburg, an early recipient of gallery correspondence on the topic of *The Torah*, was already taking this mission seriously. The JDC,

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29. Letter to Bernard Semel, GAGP, AAA/SI.

originally called the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers, had been aiding European Jews since the end of World War I, seeing, in particular, the poverty of the large population of Eastern European Jews as constituting a crisis in need of an American response. Warburg served as one of the first chairmen of the JDC and, in 1919, he called for American Jews to aid the “half the Jewish population of the earth” who resided in Eastern Europe.<sup>30</sup> The gallery’s invitation to Warburg to view *The Torah* indicates that it saw him as a potential advocate for, and possibly even a purchaser of, the painting. Warburg, however, was not interested; the reply to the gallery’s two-page letter was a short note from his secretary saying that due to “many urgent matters,” he would not be able to view the artwork.<sup>31</sup> This pattern repeated itself with a number of other possible patrons for *The Torah*; the invitations were declined, one by one, due to busy schedules, lack of interest, tight institutional budgets and, in one case, grave illness.<sup>32</sup> The gallery’s initial efforts to cultivate an elite Jewish audience for this explicitly religious painting, aside from the May reception, repeatedly fell on stony ground.

The letters also display an interesting gender divide: In the spring of 1936, Walinska directed her correspondence to the wives of some of the most eminent Jewish men in New York. Her letters did not attempt to recruit the women into the pool of potential purchasers; rather, they concerned the reception only. The list included Louise W. Wise (wife of Zionist activist Rabbi Stephen S. Wise of the Free Synagogue) and Iphigene Bertha Ochs, wife of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*. The letters do not discuss the significance of the painting. Rather, they mention previous correspondence with the woman’s husband and then delicately ask for help: “[W]e would be honored if you would lend your name as one of the sponsors of this reception. Naturally, this is without any obligation whatsoever on your part.”<sup>33</sup> The reception was thus framed as the concern of a kind of “ladies auxiliary” to the Jewish Club and the gallery. The gallery thanked the women who lent their names to this cause, such as Rebecca Reis, wife of art patron Bernard Reis, with invitations to distribute to their friends, and the exhortation to “feel free, also, to ask any of your friends who might be interested to attend. Mention of your name will be sufficient for them

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30. NYT, November 12, 1919, p. 7.

31. Letter from Warburg, GAGP, AAA/Sl.

32. Gallery correspondence files. Recipients include Henry Morgenthau, James N. Rosenberg, Sidney Matz and Dr. Samuel Goldenson. Goldenson was senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, New York City. GAGP, AAA/Sl.

33. Correspondence files, GAGP, AAA/Sl.

to be admitted to the reception.” Although Walinska does not seem to have thought of these women as potential purchasers, she successfully marshaled some of the significant social power wielded by these women in service to Menkes’ cause.<sup>34</sup> The extant correspondence indicates that women were, on the whole, more willing than their husbands to assist the gallery in repatriating the painting and more likely to see themselves as custodians of Jewish culture.

By mid-March of 1936, *The Torah* was on display in the gallery alongside the regularly scheduled shows, potentially adding a dimension to the impact of the works exhibited, particularly to the viewer raised in an even loosely observant Jewish household (and reminded of that upbringing by seeing *The Torah* upon entering the gallery). It would have been inappropriate for such a large painting to have been located in the main room with the solo exhibits; therefore, *The Torah* must have hung in the smaller room of the gallery, near the entrance, rather than in the primary exhibition space. Visitors could thus see the painting when entering and exiting the gallery, framing their experience of the works that lay in the room beyond. The first of these was a group show running from March 16 to April 4 in which eight of the twelve participants were Jewish.<sup>35</sup> Menkes was not included, but the nature of a group show—two or three works by each artist—would have tended to position *The Torah* as a painting in the exhibition. In this case, its location and size would have singled it out for special notice among the smaller paintings by other artists.

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34. A further discussion of the role of gender at the intersection of Jewishness and art collecting is beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, more work needs to be done on the history of American women as consumers and collectors of art. The major studies are: Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, ed., *Before Peggy Guggenheim: American Women Art Collectors* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2001); Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) and Inge Reist and Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, eds., *Power Underestimated: American Women Art Collectors* (Venice: The Frick Collection and Marsilio Editori, 2011). The gallery’s records refer to other attempts to marshal the social networks of Jewish women in the gallery’s history. For example there is an undated entry in the gallery daybook from early April 1937 which reads: “Miss Renee Lehman asked us to loan [the] smaller gallery for 2 days [at the] end of April for an auction conducted by E. Warburg for the Joint Distribution Committee.” This plan seems to have fallen through, as there is no further mention of it in either the daybooks or the correspondence. Gallery daybooks, GAGP, AAA/SI.

35. Gallery announcement. Boris Aronson, Ahron Ben-Shmuel, Chaim Gross, Rosa Newman, Philip Reisman, Ary Stillman, Anna Walinska, and Jacques Zucker. Other participants were Lloyd Ney, Donald Forbes, Arshile Gorky, and Perkins Harnly. Exhibition files, GAGP, AAA/SI.

A solo show of the work of Philip Reisman followed from April 6 to April 25.<sup>36</sup> Reisman's canvases portrayed mainly street scenes from New York's social margins, particularly "the immigrant sections of downtown New York." His paintings carried such titles as *Bowery*, *East Tenth Street* and *Salvation Ann*, the latter a depiction of a Salvation Army worker standing on a street corner, energetically pounding her drum in support of her fundraising efforts.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, his *Forces Oppressing the Negro* illustrates Klansmen, the Catholic Church (represented by the pope), and a lynch mob. Reisman's colorful, expressive paintings did not deal with Jewish religious themes, although the titles of *East Side Poultry Market* and *East Tenth Street* locate the images in the Lower East Side (as may *Third Avenue*). Moreover, his subject matter called attention to marginalized members of society and those who try to help them, and thus fell within the purview of a distinctly Jewish outlook on social responsibility: the repair of the world. As Passover began the day after the show opened, traditional values (embodied in *The Torah*) would have been on the minds of Jewish visitors to the gallery.<sup>38</sup> Reisman's exhibit, and the urgency communicated by his expressive handling of paint, would be given coherence and gravity by the Jewish imperative of repairing the world, an internal logic perhaps invisible to the non-Jewish gallery visitors who lacked this idea as part of their interpretive apparatus.

In addition to Jewish values, *The Torah's* presence addressed the Jewish experience of modern life even when the work on offer did not highlight socially conscious themes. The first three weeks of May featured an exhibit of Ary Stillman's work—nineteen scenes of urban life and the urban landscape—followed by another group show that closed the season, running from late May to the middle of June.<sup>39</sup> As with Reisman's exhibit, the Stillman show featured images of secular life. The paintings bore such titles as *Wharf, East River*; *Manhattan Bridge*; and *Interior No.2*, images that critics did not view as engaged with social justice issues in the way that Reisman's paintings did. However, some viewers saw *Manhattan Bridge* as an occasion for Jewish pride. Designed by a Yiddish-speaking Jewish engineer, Leon S. Moisseiff, the actual bridge had opened in 1909, linking Jewish neighborhoods in Manhat-

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36. For recent work on Reisman, see Martin H. Bush, *Philip Reisman, People Are His Passion* (E.A. Ulrich Museum of Art: Wichita State University, 2006).

37. Clipping from *Art Digest*, April 15, 1936. GAGP, AAA/SI.

38. Passover dates from <http://www.shirhadash.org/calendar/holidays.cgi?y=1936+CE>

39. For recent work on Stillman, see James Wechsler, ed., *Ary Stillman: From Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism* (Merrell Press, 2008). The Stillman-Lack Foundation's website is also useful <http://www.stillmanlack.org/index.html>



tan and Brooklyn.<sup>40</sup> Depending on one's view, Stillman's paintings of the activities and places of daily life either complemented *The Torah* or marginalized it. On the one hand, the sequestration of the painting in a separate room could indicate incompatibility between modern life and Jewishness. On the other, placing such a large painting in an area that it completely dominated could have created a kind of sacred space complementing the streets of America visible in Stillman's paintings and through the windows of the gallery itself. Gallery visitors thus traveled back and forth between the two spaces, with their visions of religious and secular life, tradition and modernity, the past and present, and perhaps, "the old country" and America. This moving back and forth between these overlapping, sometimes interlocking visions—and the tensions this often engendered—characterized Jewish experience in the United States at that time.<sup>41</sup> But, because this experience was visual and spatial, visitors did not have to resolve the tensions that bluntly appear in the verbal description above, rather, they could be held in suspension. Viewers could bypass Jewishness on the way to modernity, so to speak, or start from and return to Jewishness in the experience of modernity. Either way, *The Torah's* imposing presence shaped the viewer's experience.

Ultimately, the May reception and ongoing exhibition of *The Torah* failed to produce a buyer for the painting, and the gallery continued with the task of finding it a home. The canvas was quite expensive compared to other work in the gallery; the gallery insured it for \$3,000—about ten times the amount commanded by any other object the gallery had ever exhibited. This posed a significant challenge; it meant reaching well beyond the audience the gallery had already acquired. The gallery thus could not rely on its usual foot traffic (the median price of sales over the gallery's lifespan was \$87) and it needed to attract the attention of individuals or institutions that hitherto had demonstrated little or no interest in the gallery's exhibitions.<sup>42</sup> To that end, the Guild Art Gallery, in addition to the usual publicity efforts made for any exhibition, again targeted Jewish organizations, newspapers and individuals, plus a few

40. The Brooklyn Jewish Historical Initiative. <http://brooklynjewish.org/timeline/1900-10-2000/>. Accessed January 11, 2014.

41. The literature on Jewish life in America and assimilation is too large to be summarized here. Two standard studies are Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005, and Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1981.

42. This figure is based on prices that can be connected to specific works. Other works were sold, but since the gallery records are incomplete, it is not always possible to know what some of these works sold for. The bankbook records several deposits per month in most of the months of the gallery seasons (though some of these have to be Lefranc's capital contributions), so the real sales figure is almost certainly a bit higher.

museums. Letters to Jewish individuals referenced “your deep interest in Jewish culture,” whereas letters to gentiles (found principally among the museum correspondents) modified this to “your deep interest in art.”<sup>43</sup> Walinska attempted to leverage her professional network to get new visitors through the gallery doors; a June letter to Jewish American philosopher Horace Kallen, listing—unusually—both Walinska and Lefranc as signatories, mentions art historian Meyer Schapiro: “Professor Meyer Schapiro has seen this painting and he liked it very much. He suggested that it may be of interest to you to see it and asked us to write you about it.”<sup>44</sup> The extant gallery daybooks reveal that Schapiro visited the gallery more than once, and this letter suggests that either Walinska or Lefranc had asked him for help in locating a home for the painting. However, even assistance from this distinguished quarter did not advance the painting’s fortunes.

In June, the gallery extended its reach, sending short letters to the curators or directors of the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, the Jewish People’s Institute in Chicago and the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh, and to yet more individuals, noting that *The Torah* constituted a major artistic achievement. The letters noted, “[P]olitical events prevent this painting from taking its rightful place in a museum of importance,” adding, “[T]hese extraordinary circumstances have made the painting available for exhibition and acquisition.” The letters thus offered each institution the opportunity to intercede in the painting’s fate and in world politics in a heroic manner, restoring the work to its rightful place in history. Walinska included an attachment with information about the artist and the troubled history of the painting. She closed with an invitation to “honor us with a visit when you are in the city” and noted that the gallery was open in July and August “by appointment.” Sad to say, these efforts also proved fruitless. Summer, when many of New York’s elite retired to resort towns, turned out not to be the best time to undertake this kind of campaign.

That fall, the gallery had another opportunity to cultivate a Jewish audience; the gallery gave Menkes a solo show that ran from November 8 to November 28. Although *The Torah* may have left the gallery in October, other works in the solo show definitively marked the artist as Jewish, such as the painting of a “young Talmudist.”<sup>45</sup> The gallery’s

43. Gallery correspondence files, GAGP, AAA/SI

44. Ibid.

45. GAGP, AAA/SI. The gallery records do not tell us what happened to *The Torah*, although it is now in a private collection. A letter from the gallery’s insurance agent in the gallery papers, received in mid-October, records the intent to remove the painting from the policy and substitute other objects to be covered for the same amount. GAGP, AAA/SI. Press clipping, the *Art News*, November 21, 1936.

publicity efforts for the show emphasized the Jewish dimension of the exhibition. Letters plugging the exhibition addressed to the *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York and the *Day* in Connecticut noted, “Zygmunt Menkes is considered along with [Chaim] Soutine and [Marc] Chagall as one of the most important of living Jewish artists. We do hope you will find time to come in the beginning of the week to review the exhibition. It deserves special attention, and should attract a large Jewish audience.”<sup>46</sup> Although the Yiddish-language *Jewish Morning Journal* in New York, the *Day*, and the *Jewish Daily Forward* were already on the gallery’s list of newspapers receiving regular press releases, in this case Walinska and Lefranc made a special effort to reach out to the Jewish press by sending letters in addition to the usual announcements.

No doubt mindful of the relatively steep prices for Menkes’ work, Walinska sent out more letters on November 23, 1937, including one to Edward M. M. Warburg, the youngest son of Felix M. Warburg, regarding the Menkes works. Warburg would shortly take up a position as co-chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, a position he would occupy until 1965.<sup>47</sup> The appeal seems to have fallen flat, as did a letter to the Consulate General of the United States in Toronto dated a few days earlier. The letter to the consulate includes a brochure with prices and the information that two paintings from the Menkes show had already sold—one for \$400 and one for \$450—“prices established in the art markets of Paris and New York based on the artistic reputation of Mr. Menkes.” These fairly hefty prices didn’t hold. There are several copies of the exhibition brochure in the gallery files listing different prices for Menkes’ paintings and watercolors; the letter to the consulate indicates that the gallery had previously sent an initial list of asking prices that ranged from \$200 to \$1,500, with most in the \$350 to \$500 range. But one copy has prices handwritten in at a 10 percent discount (though not for Menkes’ *Troubadour*, which kept its asking price of \$1,500). A third copy reveals some severely reduced prices: *The Breakfast*, originally listed at \$350, dropped to just \$125. Interestingly, *The Troubadour* (a “large canvas” according to the *Art News*) was still listed at \$1,500—apparently, Menkes was unwilling to budge on the value of this painting.<sup>48</sup> *The Troubadour*, like *The Torah*, was executed before Menkes’ flight to the United States. Thus, it may have functioned as a potent personal talisman of his life among the Parisian avant-garde,

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46. Correspondence files, GAGP, AAA/SI.

47. NYT obituary, “Edward Warburg, Philanthropist And Patron of the Arts, Dies at 84.” September 22, 1992, p. B9. Correspondence files, GAGP, AAA/SI.

48. Brochures, clipping from the *Art News*, November 21, 1936, in exhibition files, GAGP, AAA/SI.

an avant-garde—with his place in it—impossible to reconstruct on the western side of the Atlantic. Walinska and Lefranc, however, had marketed *The Torah*, and now *The Troubadour*, only secondarily as avant-garde paintings; the pieces' primary identification for the gallery was as landmark Jewish masterpieces.

For most of 1936, then, *The Torah* occupied a central place in the gallery's marketing and outreach efforts—efforts that ultimately proved futile. Yet, throughout this time, the painting both framed and was framed by the other, secular works on display; Jewishness was an enduring presence in the visual and physical experience of the exhibitions at the Guild Art Gallery.

### Positioning Jewish Art

The gallery's appeal, framed in terms of the “creation and development of a Jewish art,” parallels the efforts of at least one other Jewish institution, the New York-based *Menorah Journal*, under the leadership of its editor-in-chief, Henry Hurwitz.<sup>49</sup> Established in 1915 to “foster a Jewish renaissance,” it was, by 1929, promoting Jewish art from all eras in every issue—but particularly modern, not traditional, Jewish art—and featuring Jewish art on its covers.<sup>50</sup> Notably, only art magazines carried more reproductions of art works. Several of the articles appearing in the journal over the years dealt with a vexing set of interrelated questions: Was there such a thing as Jewish art? What were its characteristics? And, what was its relationship to Judaism and Jewish culture? The answers varied widely. Some asserted that simply being made by a Jewish artist, observant or not, was enough to make the art Jewish. Others declared that treating Jewish subject matter (such as recognizably Jewish people and customs) was sufficient to make the art Jewish, and still others claimed that depictions of secular life in Jewish neighborhoods and homes were Jewish art. One author took the extreme position of avowing that Jews had had no art until the advent of artistic modernism, but that they were uniquely suited to making it because of a supposed innate tendency toward abstraction ingrained by Jewish tradition and the second commandment.<sup>51</sup> The editor, writers and readers of the *Menorah*

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49. The role of the *Menorah Journal* in shaping both modern intellectual history and modern Jewish identity in American culture is well documented. For example, see Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and Lauren B. Strauss, “Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot: Constructing a Modern Jewish Identity in the *Menorah Journal* of the 1920s,” *American Jewish History* 84 (1996): 315–331.

50. Pappas, “The Picture at *Menorah Journal*,” 206–207.

51. On the intersection of this discourse and Jewish modernism, see Pappas, “The Picture at *Menorah Journal*,” 220–227.

*Journal* embraced these positions to differing degrees; however, the lively debate carried out within its pages testifies to the vitality of this issue in the wider Jewish community in New York and beyond. The Guild Art Gallery positioned itself in this discourse by promoting Jewish artists and explicitly participating in efforts to preserve and develop Jewish art.

The *Menorah Journal* mainly featured American artists, such as Theresa Bernstein, A. Mark Datz, and Jacques Zucker, and, significantly, did not publish abstract art, since it was an insufficient carrier of markers of Jewish identity.<sup>52</sup> Rather, moderate or “mid-garde” modernist art served the audience for the *Menorah Journal* well. It retained traditional visual elements (recognizable form, for example) so as to convey Jewish subject matter and experience, but it incorporated enough non-traditional characteristics to allow its readers to position themselves as both modern and Jewish through the consumption of the images in the magazine. Unlike much of the traditional art the *Menorah Journal* reproduced, the modern art, although by Jewish artists, did not generally depict explicitly Jewish subjects. Rather, it relied on the framing of the images by accompanying texts and through the simple fact of their appearance in a Jewish magazine to convey to its readers the significance of the art for both modernity and Jewishness. Similarly, the Guild Art Gallery exhibited art displaying formal characteristics, such as the expressive handling of the medium, the non-naturalistic use of color, and distortions or simplifications of natural form sufficient to mark it as modern—precisely the kind of art frequently displayed in the *Menorah Journal*. The gallery framed it with *The Torah*, and trusted the viewer to make the connection to Jewishness through the subject matter or through the identity of the artist. This indirect identification and framing were common strategies carried out by the two institutions.

Although the gallery did not explicitly undertake the task of developing a Jewish art, it participated in this effort—or, at least, it contributed to the support of Jewish artists—because its roster was so heavily Jewish and its major publicity efforts promoted a profoundly Jewish object. On at least two occasions, the gallery exhibited artists or particular works that had previously been presented in the *Menorah Journal*. For example, Chaim Gross’ sculpture *Jazz* appeared as a frontispiece in the February 1930 issue of the magazine, and one painting in Jacques Zucker’s show, *The Artist’s Wife*, had been featured as a frontispiece in the *Menorah Journal* in the spring of 1934, a few months before the gallery opened. There are other parallels between the gallery and the journal, although the gallery’s engagement with Jewishness was more complicated and

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52. Ibid, 233–238.

subtle. Rather than appearing in a forum with its dedication to Jewishness made explicit on its masthead and in its pages, as with the *Menorah Journal*, the art in the gallery was framed visually and socially. The ongoing presence of *The Torah* cannot help but have functioned as a kind of masthead, branding the gallery as concerned with “the development and conservation of Jewish art.”<sup>53</sup> The gallery, unlike the magazine, did not overtly concern itself with a Jewish modernity except insofar as it played out around the production and consumption of art, but its program—intentional or not—resembled that of the *Menorah Journal*.

### Collectors

Although the gallery’s extended efforts to place *The Torah* with either a private or a public collection do not seem to have met with success, they did attract at least two notable Jewish collectors. Collecting art is a complex process, one that participates in the construction and maintenance of identity, whether personal, social or professional. Some art purchased from the Guild Art Gallery bolstered the professional identity of the buyer. In early 1937, E. Felix Shaskan—stockbroker, art collector and supporter of the Zionist cause—purchased four paintings from the Guild Art Gallery that depicted assorted themes: two landscapes, a circus scene and *Fiscal Agent*, a painting related to money management.<sup>54</sup> The landscapes and circus scene were delivered to his office, and *Fiscal Agent* to his home (although gallery records suggest that at one time his corporation was going to purchase it).<sup>55</sup> This indicates that he found in the display of these artworks a way of supporting his social and professional position in public and in private. A picture on the wall that noticeably departs from tradition signals a willingness to entertain contemporary—modern—methods of conducting one’s life and business. But a painting that deviates too sharply from what the mainstream public sees as art flags a potential capacity for breaking rules in other areas—not necessarily a desirable character trait in a professional on Wall Street. Shaskan, through his acquisition of this kind of mediated modern art, communicated to his professional and social circles his forward-looking, forward-thinking views. He also conveyed, by avoiding an outré purchase, such as an abstract painting, his reliability and stable character. Shaskan’s engagement with Zionism testifies to his identification with

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53. Gallery correspondence files, GAGP, AAA/SI

54. His obituary notes that he had amassed an “extensive collection of paintings.” *NYT*, August 25, 1943, pg. 19.

55. Gallery correspondence and financial records, GAGP, AAA/SI.

Jewishness; his repeated purchases of contemporary art equally attest to his identification with modern life. Shaskan's purchase of four works from the gallery in a short time suggests that he found in it a congenial meeting of Jewishness and modernity; reciprocally, his patronage contributed to the Guild Art Gallery's position in the discourse surrounding Jewish-American modernism.

Herman Shulman, a well-to-do corporate lawyer and a friend of Felix Shaskan, also collected modern art.<sup>56</sup> A supporter of Zionism and a man who strongly identified as a Jew, Shulman eventually became vice president of the American Zionist Emergency Council. His wife, Rebecca Beldner Shulman, was also very active in Jewish causes; she was the first vice president of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, which was the largest Zionist organization in the world. Shulman also purchased art from the Guild, including Philip Reisman's *Salvation Ann* from his April 1936 exhibition.<sup>57</sup> The gallery daybooks indicate that Shaskan, whose office was in the same building as Shulman's, had introduced him to the gallery; Jewish social networks helped the gallery to sell art.

Shulman was in his late thirties when he was buying art from the Guild Art Gallery; in 1954, nine years after his premature death at the age of forty-eight, his wife donated twelve paintings to the Israeli Government, which displayed them at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Israel's national school of art. The *New York Times* coverage of the gift notes that he had more than 300 paintings in his collection. Among the gift of works to Israel were *Girl and Still Life* by Sigmund Menkes, *Synagogue Interior* by Max Weber, and *Planning Solomon's Temple* (1940) by Jack Levine.<sup>58</sup> Shulman's purchases from the gallery—*42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1936) by Theodore Roszak and *Quarry* by Jean de Martini—display an engagement with contemporary urban life. Roszak's painting depicts 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in a highly abstracted manner, exaggerating the long view down the street and reducing forms to simple geometric shapes with clean, tight edges; the city appears to be a complex machine. Shulman's purchases from various galleries show a range of subject matter—some explicitly referencing Jewish life and history, and some, like *A New York Art Gallery* by

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56. Information about Herman Shulman here and below is from his obituary: *NYT*, July 24, 1945, p.23. Information about Rebecca Beldner Shulman is from her obituary: *NYT*, April 5, 1997. The friendship between Shaskan and Shulman is mentioned in the gallery daybook for spring 1937. GAGP, AAA/SI

57. Account book, GAGP, AAA/SI.

58. "American Paintings Presented to Israeli Government." *NYT*, December 13, 1954, p. 19. At least six still lifes were on offer during Menkes' exhibition. Checklist, GAGP, AAA/SI.

Raphael Soyer (also part of the gift to Israel), registering modern life and its activities, such as gallery-going and appreciating and collecting art.

### A Jewish Artists' Group

Like the Guild Art Gallery's overt positioning of itself as a modern—rather than a Jewish—art gallery, “The Ten,” a group of modernist Jewish artists (organized in 1935), was ostensibly in pursuit only of public exposure in the form of exhibitions. Artists' organizations might be organized around style, as was the American Abstract Artists group, for example. They also might position an artist in terms of politics and, in some cases, ethnicity. An artists' group, like any other voluntary association, marks a member as sharing interests or needs in common with other members. At the same time, it sets the group apart from society as a whole in some way. Group membership, through this social differentiation, contributes to the identity of the individual. Similarly, associations between a social group and an institution or business mark them both. The membership of “The Ten” overlapped that of the other organizations, some Jewish, some not: Louis Lozowick and Ben-Zion (Benzion Weinman) were members of the Yiddisher Kultur Farband (Jewish Culture Association, YKUF), for example, and all the artists belonged to the American Artists' Congress.<sup>59</sup> Style did not differentiate “The Ten” from other artists' groups, either; Ilya Bolotowsky was a member of both “The Ten” and the American Abstract Artists group. Like the Guild Art Gallery's exhibition list, the group's roster changed slightly over the years, but remained almost exclusively Jewish; Jewishness, what the artists had in common, registered subtly, but persistently.

The first exhibition of “The Ten” included only nine artists, all of whom were Jewish. Initial members included Ben-Zion, Ilya Bolotowsky, Adolph Gottlieb, Louis Harris, Jack Kufeld, Marcus Rothkowitz (soon to be Mark Rothko), Louis Shanker, Joseph Solman and Nahum Tschacbasov. This ethnic-religious makeup seems to have been important to at least some members of the group at the time. Years later, Solman indicated that the group's name, “The Ten,” may have referenced the minyan, the group of Jewish men who form a quorum for prayer. A minyan numbers ten and, Solman remarked, “The original group . . . made only nine, but we felt an open space was convenient and we could always invite

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59. Isabelle Dervaux, “The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York, The Ten 1935–1940.” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1992). Dervaux's study remains the major study of this group's history. On artists associated with the YKUF, see Louis Lozowick, *One Hundred Contemporary American Jewish Painters and Sculptors* (New York: YKUF Art Section, 1947).



a ‘tenth man’ once we obtained a place in which to exhibit.” Solman’s emphasis on the “tenth man,” while not conclusive, does seem to indicate that the name of the group had a special, religious meaning for him and for the other Jewish-identified members of “The Ten.”<sup>60</sup>

Like the art seen in the Guild Art Gallery, references to overtly identifiable Jewish subjects or themes (e.g., Ben-Zion’s *Friday Evening*, shown in 1935) were infrequent in the exhibitions of “The Ten.” Over the years between 1935 and 1940, the group as a whole moved away from figurative subjects to landscapes and cityscapes.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, any references to Jewish life generally had to be made with the specific locale depicted; Gottlieb’s *Grand Concourse*, painted around 1927, depicts a view of the main street in a prominent Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx. In the group’s first exhibition, Bolotowsky exhibited *Sweatshop* and *Sewing Machine*, and Rothkowitz (Rothko) exhibited *Woman Sewing* (c. 1934); all three paintings depict places, objects or people engaged in the garment industry—a trade associated with Jewish immigrants.<sup>62</sup> However infrequent, representations of subject matter associated with Jews in exhibitions by “The Ten” would have contributed to the Jewish identity of the group.

## Conclusion

What we see in the activities of the Guild Art Gallery, its clients for whom we have records, the *Menorah Journal*, and “The Ten” is an extended, if quiet, dialogue between modernity and Jewishness at a time when world events and American antisemitism put increasing pressure on Jews and thus on their identities as Jews, particularly those negotiating the complex processes of assimilation. Deeply connected to this process was the ongoing modernization of American culture in general and American art in particular. This modernity was visible in the styles and the subject matter of the art works, which often registered the transformations in the artists’ social and physical environments. Having an identity as a modern citizen or an artist did not, as a rule, square well with an old country religious practice or the visible signs of one’s recent immigrant family history. Yet many Jewish artists and the people who bought their art refused to “tear up their Jewish roots,” particularly in the context of the disturbing world events alluded to by Walinska in her letters.<sup>63</sup>

60. Joseph Solman Papers, Roll N68–98. AAA/SI.

61. Dervaux, “Avant-Garde in New York,” p. 18.

62. Andrea Pappas, “Mark Rothko and the Politics of Jewish Identity, 1939–1945” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1997): 49–52

63. Letter from Henry Hurwitz to Cecil Roth, November 1952. Henry Hurwitz/Menorah Association Collection, American Jewish Archives.

Making, selling, buying and collecting art provided a means to address the tensions between American life and traditional Jewishness which the dual imperatives of holding onto personal religious identity as a Jew and being modern in America (which at that time required one to erase external signs of ethnicity) gave rise to. Thus, the gallery and its clients, the *Menorah Journal*, and “The Ten” engaged in the reciprocal framing of Jewishness and modernity—with Jewishness signified principally by spatial, institutional, or social framing.

In sum, the Guild Art Gallery, in the first fifteen months of its twenty-one month lifespan, largely showcased Jewish artists, directed a substantial part of its marketing efforts to Jewish art, and expended a great deal of energy in a quest for a Jewish (often elite) audience. It did so in the pursuit of a pair of larger modernist projects: the promotion of modern art generally and, inadvertently or otherwise, the modeling of a Jewish artistic modernity. The former manifested itself in the overtly modern artwork on the walls: their bright colors, expressive paint handling, contemporary subject matter and forays into abstraction, plus even a dash of the “primitive” injected by a small exhibition of gothic sculpture and the work of noted “village color minstrel” Lloyd Ney.<sup>64</sup> All this proclaimed the gallery’s commitment to fostering the cause of modern art. Jewish artistic modernity surfaced in a less direct manner. *The Torah* aside, overtly Jewish subject matter was not regularly on offer, although, as we have seen, the Jewish imperative of repairing the world was. The Guild Art Gallery’s association with Jewishness therefore registered along several axes: in the framing effect of Menkes’ *The Torah*; in the gallery’s position in the discourse around Jewish art; in the Jewish identities of the gallery’s community (the gallery’s owners, artists, correspondents and clients); and in the gallery’s extended and ardent pursuit of an elite Jewish audience. Though its lifespan was brief, the Guild Art Gallery played a part in the development and conservation of Jewish art.

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64. Howard Deveree, *NYT*, January 12, 1936. Clipping in exhibition files, GAGP, AAA/SI.

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