The Peoplehood Papers 18
December 2016 | Kislev 5777

Jewish Peoplehood and Jewish Museums

TAUBE FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH LIFE & CULTURE

המרכז לחינוך לעמיות יהודית
THE CENTER FOR JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD EDUCATION

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Front Cover: Main lobby of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; photo © Iñigo Bujedo Aguirre
Back Cover: From the temporary exhibition "My Jewish Parents. My Polish Parents."
Photo courtesy POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

General Editor: Shlomi Ravid
Issue Editors: Shana Penn and Tressa Berman
Managing Editor: Alice Z. Lawrence
Copy Editor: Vera Hannush
Designer: LaserCom Design

The Peoplehood Papers provide a platform for Jews to discuss their common agenda and key issues related to their collective identity. The journal appears three times a year, with each issue addressing a specific theme. The editors invite you to share your thoughts on the ideas and discussions in the Papers, as well as all matters pertinent to Jewish Peoplehood: **publications@jpeoplehood.org**

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The UJA-Federation of New York cares for those in need, rescues those in harm's way and renews and strengthens the Jewish people in New York, in Israel, and around the world. **The Commission on the Jewish People** is dedicated to building connections among the diverse elements of the Jewish People and develops and supports efforts to forge linkages among Jews wherever they may live and support Israel as a vibrant, democratic, and pluralistic Jewish state.

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UJA Federation of New York

ISBN 978-0-9839042-3-6
Printed in USA

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Shlomi Ravid
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The Peoplehood Papers

The Peoplehood Papers, a publication of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, in collaboration with the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, celebrates the second anniversary of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, with a special issue focused on Jewish museums, and how museum professionals understand their respective missions to educate, build community, and cultivate a sense of Jewish peoplehood. The challenges that Jewish museums face in our globalized and assimilated 21st-century world are numerous: Museums aim to present an evolving narrative suitable for pluralistic and diverse audiences. Their interpretation of Judaism and Jewish history needs to be faithful to the past, resonate with current perceptions, and inspire visions of the future. And Jewish museums are expected not only to construct and present a narrative but also to engage in it. Museums can possess transformative agency, says Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, chief curator of the POLIN Museum.

In this diverse collection of essays, written by leading museum professionals in Europe, Israel and the United States, we hope to provide a window into the complex arena of Jewish cultural representation and inspire a conversation on the role and impact of Jewish museums as both educational platforms and civilizational engines. It is also fascinating to note where our our contributors' perspectives align or diverge, influenced by their geographic locations and sociopolitical contexts. We definitely live in a "glocal" world.

Special thanks to Shana Penn, Tressa Berman, and Alice Lawrence who co-edited this issue of the *Papers* and to the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture for their support of its production. Many thanks also to our contributors. Please send us your comments: **info@jpeoplehood.org**

Enjoy reading.

Introduction

Shana Penn
Executive Director
Taube Foundation for
Jewish Life & Culture

When Shlomi Ravid visited the POLIN Museum soon after it opened, he suggested we collaborate in a discussion about Jewish museums and peoplehood for the readers of *The Peoplehood Papers*. His interest made sense. Jewish museums are arbiters of notions of peoplehood: civic-minded and secular at heart, they portray Jewish life as a culture with an enduring legacy that in myriad ways has shaped the societies of which it is a part. Particularly since the end of World War II, Jewish museums have become successful public cultural institutions engaged in the formation, strengthening, and shaping of Jewish identities for Jews and non-Jews alike. Since the end of the Cold War, scholars and curators have reimagined and theorized anew the purposes and possibilities of Jewish museums as they explore the communal experience and offer narratives about the past that illuminate contemporary themes.

In this collection of essays, museum professionals in Europe, Israel, and the United States address themes of peoplehood, identity, nationalism, oppression, and inclusion. The authors discuss the history, religion, culture, customs, and society of which they are a part. They recognize the educational role of the museum and its interpretative responsibility. They are comfortable with new technologies and challenged to attract diverse and young audiences. Some of the museums own collections. Some are history museums; others focus on cultural themes; one is an art museum; another is a heritage museum. Two are in the midst of redesigning their permanent exhibitions. One was founded by a public-private partnership, another owes its origin to an Orthodox religious organization. Several are truly 21st-century museums, having opened only in the last 16 years in symbolically powerful buildings designed by award-winning architects. Two are in renovated buildings — a former mansion and a warehouse. For most, the site on which they're located is a meaningful part of their story. Despite their diversity, each seeks to engage their visitors, Jewish or not, in participatory experiences of cultural and spiritual learning that traverse the boundaries of time and space.

This collection is book-ended by essays of scholars who study the roles of museums in shaping modern Jewish culture but do not work for a museum. Jeffrey Shandler, chair of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University, in "The Jewish Museum Effect," explores the various kinds of public engagement evidenced by Jewish museums around the world. He wonders what the implications of practices are in which visitors are not just the objects of museum agendas but function as agents of their own involvement. The essays that follow, each in their own way, are also concerned with the agency of display and narrative, as well as the agency of the viewer.

Since the end of the Cold War, scholars and curators have reimagined and theorized anew the purposes and possibilities of Jewish museums.

The three pieces that focus on the POLIN Museum in Warsaw discuss the meanings of a thousand years of Jewish history in Poland. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the chief curator of POLIN's core exhibition, describes the bold approach that made it the country's first national history museum. She notes that the POLIN Museum has constructed a social history of a minority population rather than a dominant national history. It has created a new kind of historical place for Jews in Polish history and also a new kind of larger national narrative, and has done so "without becoming a Holocaust museum."

Chief historian Antony Polonsky places the POLIN Museum in the post-cold-war era of museum openings across Europe and suggests the challenges faced by POLIN Museum as it sought to reinterpret a contested Jewish past. Samuel Kassow, historian of the Interwar Gallery, affirms the self-determination and peoplehood of Polish Jews and the modern Jewish world they created, telling the story of a community that was diverse and nationally conscious, rooted in Poland and yet notably Jewish.

> Several of the museums are located on sites that form a meaningful part of their story.

The European museums, located in Poland, Germany, and Russia, are post-Holocaust, post-communist museums, built in the current century. The concerns expressed by the authors form a conversation. The museums could only be possible with the opening of borders and of archives, the reunification of Germany, and with the conscious intent to present a narrative in which Jews are actors in a national history. Uri Gershowitz, of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow, stresses the vital importance of a viable Jewish communal infrastructure after decades of political suppression. Gershowitz, who heads the museum's research center, views the museum as one important agent in the reconstruction of a new Russian nationalism that includes Jewish citizens and condemns antisemitism.

Nowhere is the emotional context of the portrayal of the national historical narrative more fraught than in Germany. Cilly Kugelman, Program Director and Vice Director at the Jewish Museum Berlin, writes about the new permanent exhibition opening in 2019. She raises the metaphysical and epistemological questions that haunt the relationship between Jews and Germany. She also notes that in the decades since the first Jewish museum opened in Frankfurt, the generational trope has shifted. Punishment and atonement have modified as new questions about Jewish cultural and national identities have emerged.

National Museum of American Jewish History, located on the Independence Mall in Philadelphia.

Jewish Museum, New York, housed in the former Felix M. Warburg mansion on Fifth Avenue.

In contrast is the epic history of four millennia that board chair Irina Nevzlin claims for Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People. Undergoing a lengthy process of reinvention from the Diaspora Museum, its organizing principle is Jewish peoplehood and the variety of Jewish historical experiences. Identity and culture in all their diversity offer this museum an extraordinary canvas to tell the story of the Jews. With broad strokes, the museum ascribes the continuity of identity from ancient Israel onward to shared sacred rites, practices, texts,

and values, and emphasizes the kinship felt by Jews around the globe despite the overarching zeitgeist of an historical place and age.

A beacon of Jewish culture is the Jewish Museum in New York, the first Jewish art institution in the United States and the oldest existing Jewish museum in the world. Curator Susan L. Braunstein explores exhibitions that stir a rethinking of Jewish rites and traditions. Making use of the museum's remarkable collections, she seeks to expand the viewers' imagination by placing traditional religious objects in unusual settings that render the objects relevant to the viewer in new and unexpected ways.

The permanent exhibition of photographs at the regional Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, described by co-founder and co-curator Jonathan Webber, shares an analogous impulse with Braunstein. In vivid color photographs of Jewish material heritage in various stages of ruin and restoration across the Galician landscape, the exhibition reorders the viewer's expectations about time. Rather than a linear presentation that moves from before to after the Holocaust, the exhibition "portrays … present-day realities using contemporary color photographs arranged by theme" to suggest different "ideas about what can be seen today about the past."

Ivy Barksy, CEO and Director of the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, asks questions about what modern museology means for the future of American Jewish life. She also discusses the challenges faced by Jewish museums with regard to how actively they are supported by their key constituents and how they strive for relevance and resonance, describing recent examples of American Jewish museums that, in their respective roles as custodians of history, have responded to mainstream incidents of racism and religious intolerance.

In the final piece, American Jewish studies scholars Benjamin M. Jacobs and Jenna Weissman Joselit of George Washington University explore the burgeoning educational establishment that has become a part of the modern museum and the ways in which it structures the relationship between institution, exhibitions, and viewers, too often neglecting opportunities to spark the viewer's imagination.

Kugelman, who places the museum in the forefront of the future, captures the tenor of her colleagues. The curatorial mission is an encounter with the past for today and tomorrow. The past is both instrumental and absolute. The museum will both illuminate and educate. It will also shape a collective narrative of many parts. The eleven pieces in the collection suggest the vibrancy and diversity of a modern Jewish exploration of a worldwide peoplehood in the 21st century. ■

A view of the Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind.

The Jewish Museum Effect

Jeffrey Shandler
Rutgers University

"The Shtetl" exhibit at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town.

The term "museum effect" is usually used either to explain how exhibiting an object transforms its significance by removing it from one context and displaying it in another, or to discuss the impact museums have on visitors, structuring their viewing and thereby shaping the public's encounters with history, science, and culture. Consider as well the museum effect as a form of public encounter with museums' practices, in addition to these institutions' structures and holdings. In these practices, visitors are not only the object of museums' agendas but are also the agents of their own engagements with the contents and workings of museums.

This essay is an abridged version of a paper presented at the symposium "Creating Culture/Making Memory," co-organized by the Graduate Theological Union's Center for Jewish Studies and the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, in Berkeley, on April 3, 2016.

The Jewish museum effect — whether on objects or people — is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since first appearing at the turn of the twentieth century in several large cities in Europe and the United States, Jewish museums have become a staple of Jewish culture internationally in the post-World War II era, quickly evolving from an adventitious presence in Jewish public life to one of its most prominent fixtures. Visiting Jewish museums has become a mainstay of Jewish practice for both local communities and tourists. To some extent, this development is part of a larger concomitant expansion of the number, variety, and salience of museums generally; still, it is not inevitable that museums would become so important in Jewish life.

Beyond the dozens of Jewish museums in major urban Jewish population centers around the world, these

institutions also appear in places where few Jews now live. Jewish museums have grown in both number and variety, including museums with a particular focus, such as local history, Holocaust remembrance, or contemporary art. The inventory of Jewish museums can extend to institutions in which Jews are part of diverse religious or ethnic groups on display, as well as historic homes and buildings significant in Jewish life. Among these are former synagogues; in addition, some functioning synagogues have museums within their buildings. Jewish museums are also found in unusual settings, embedded within a senior citizens' residence (the Derfner Judaica Museum in the Hebrew Home, Riverdale, New York) or a summer camp (for years the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience stood on the campus of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi). Though Jewish museums are rooted in secular practices, some *haredi* communities now have their own museums, such as the Jewish Children's Museum, the Living Torah Museum, and the Amud Aish Memorial Museum, all located in hasidic neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

> It is not inevitable that museums would become so important in Jewish life.

As Jewish museums have proliferated, so has the Jewish museum effect. To some extent, this reflects broader trends in museum practices. For example, many museums invite interactive engagement with exhibitions, eliciting responses or materials from visitors that then become part of the installation. An exhibition in the Jewish Museum of Australia in Melbourne on the history of Australian Jewry explains when Jews immigrated there and invites visitors to write about their own families' immigration histories on paper tags, which are then put on display. These accounts situate Jewish stories within Australia's ongoing history of immigration and demonstrate the museum's significance for a diversity of non-Jewish visitors. The act of writing and displaying their personal information also implicitly positions visitors within Australian Jewish history, as their stories of origin implicitly become Jewish museum artifacts.

"The Whole Truth … " Exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin, 2013, in which volunteers from the Jewish community sat in a transparent box to answer questions about Jews and Judaism. Photo by Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Cape Town's South African Jewish Museum proffers a different interactive practice in its "reconstruction of a typical Eastern European *shtetl,*" presented as the point of origin for most South African Jews, whose ancestors immigrated there from the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. The reconstruction deftly merges an enlarged vintage photograph of a street in the Lithuanian town of Rietavas with full-scale fabricated facades of buildings and a faux cobblestone "street," enabling visitors to enter — and, if they wish, to be photographed in — a virtual *shtetl,* which hovers between two and three dimensions, sepia and color, the specific and the generic, Eastern Europe and South Africa, past and present. The photograph records both the visitors' temporary entry into the museum's narrative and their subjunctive journey through time and space to turn-of-the-century Lithuania.

Perhaps the most provocative example of interactivity in a Jewish museum is the "Jew in a Box" display at

the Jewish Museum Berlin, part of the 2013 exhibition "The Whole Truth ... everything you always wanted to know about Jews." Volunteers from the local Jewish community sat in an open, transparent vitrine, labeled "Gibt es noch Juden in Deutschland? / Are there still Jews in Germany?" and answered visitors' questions about Jews and Judaism. One volunteer, Dekel Peretz, then a doctoral student of German Jewish history in Potsdam, reported in a press interview that being on display in the museum reflected his experiences as a Jew living in Germany: "In many ways my everyday life is anyway a bit like living in a box ... your mere presence in a pub triggers debates about the Holocaust or Middle East politics — so I wasn't fazed about taking part [in the exhibition]." [1]

Judaica displayed in private homes as a domesticated museum practice; in the SF Bay Area, left, and in Frankfurt, right. Photos courtesy Libitzky Family, left; Peter Loewy, *Judisches / Jewishness* (1996), right.

As museums have become fixtures of many Jewish communities, local populations often develop proprietary relationships with these institutions. Some community members act on this feeling by volunteering as docents, greeters, educators, or fundraisers. This sentiment is also manifest in more routine practices, such as the messages visitors write in comment books, often leaving remarks that affirm their feelings about Jewishness rather than commenting about the museums' exhibitions. There can be less amicable outcomes from this sense of ownership — most notably, protests of exhibitions that members of Jewish communities regard as inimical to a Jewish museum's purpose. In response, a museum can close an exhibition — as happened with "Imaginary Coordinates" in 2008 at the Spertus Institute in Chicago — or address these complaints by issuing press statements and supplementing the exhibition and its attendant programming, as was the case for "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," exhibited at The Jewish Museum New York in 2002, which drew public protests even before it had opened.

Jewish museums also respond to proprietorship by seeking ways to make Jewish visitors feel at home in these institutions — for example, offering special programs on December 25, thereby addressing some Jews' sense of alienation on Christmas. On other occasions, Jewish museums open their doors to make a political statement. Following a 2014 terrorist shooting at the Musée Juif de Belgique, the Museo Ebraico di Roma invited the Italian public to visit as a gesture of

1 Kharunya Paramaguru, "'Jew in a Box' Exhibition Causes a Stir in Germany," *Time*, April 04, 2013 http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/04/04/jew-in-a-box-exhibition-causes-a-stir-in-germany/

solidarity with the Brussels museum and as an act of "defiantly us[ing] culture against terror."[2]

Complementing these museum-driven practices are others initiated by members of the public. Consider, for example, the display of Judaica found in many private homes as a domesticated museum practice. These arrangements variously include ritual objects, figurines, photographs, medals, jewelry, paintings, and books, typically arrayed in cabinets and vitrines or on mantels and endtables — home furnishings meant for display. In some instances, these items were purchased in Jewish museum gift shops, making their movement recursive, the domestic array evoking or even mirroring, on a small scale, museum exhibitions.

> Jewish museums have become a staple of Jewish culture internationally in the post-World War II era, quickly evolving from an adventitious presence in Jewish public life to one of its most prominent fixtures.

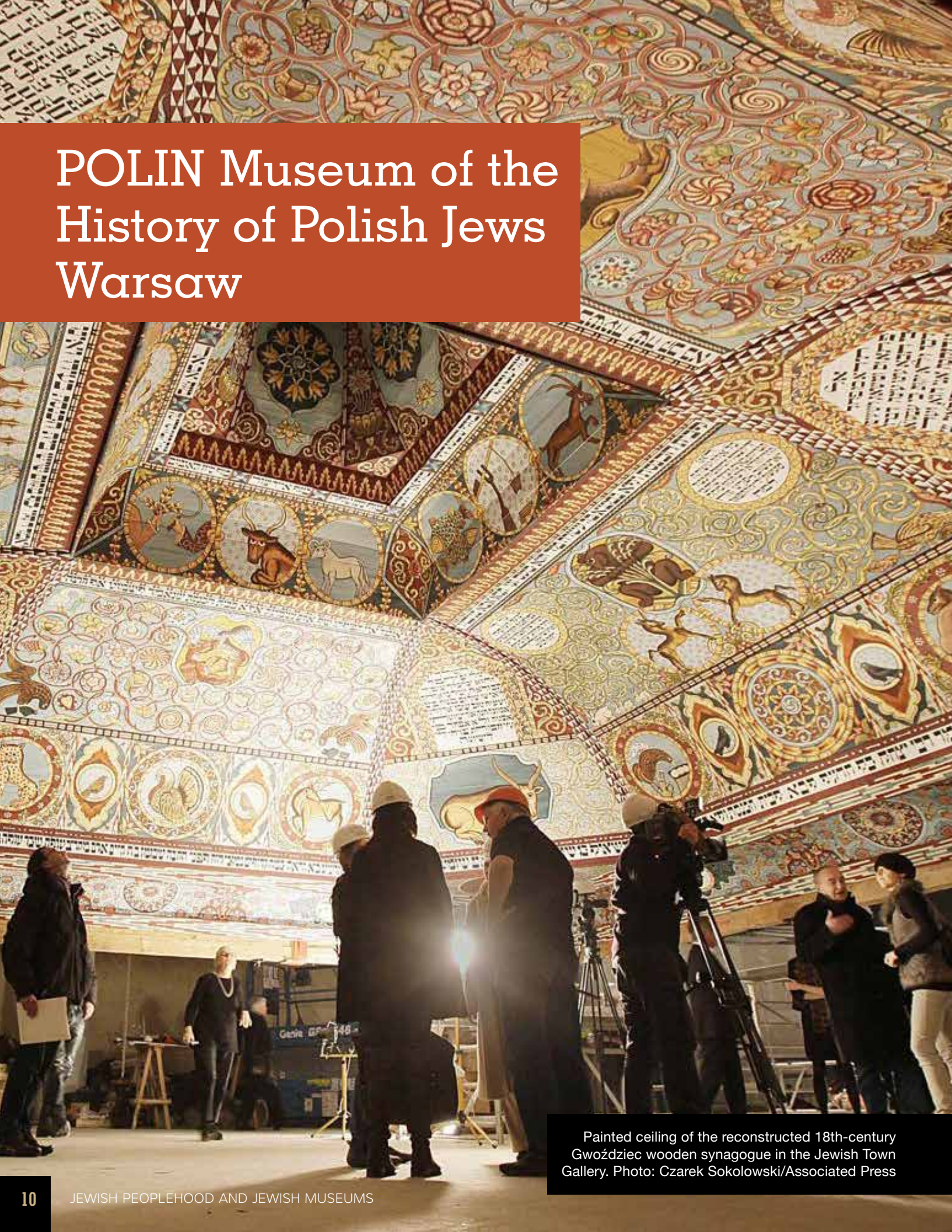
Sometimes, Jewish museum visitors make themselves at home in these institutions on their own terms, even incorporating the museum into ritual activity. For example, Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History has an extensive collection of contemporary American *ketubbot,* all individually crafted works, hand-inscribed and richly decorated. In the 1990s, the museum displayed some of these Jewish marriage contracts on a wall leading from the building's foyer to the museum offices. At the time I learned from the museum's director that it acquired many of its contemporary *ketubbot* in a remarkable way. Noting that half of all marriages end in divorce, she explained that when couples separate, they're often unsure what to do with their *ketubbot,* which often had been displayed in their homes. So, at their own initiative, some couples donate their *ketubbot* to the museum.

Thus, members of the Jewish public have, in effect, repurposed the museum as a repository for these unwanted documents. Divorced couples' donation of their *ketubbot* to this and other Jewish museums might be regarded as a new, self-styled rite of popular religion. These donations might be understood as symbolic gestures, locating the complex interrelations that this document had symbolically united, and which are now sundered, within a venue that renders the *ketubbot* — and the marriages they represent — as artifacts of communal history and culture. Rather than destroying them, relegating them to the attic, or depositing them in a *genizah,* donating these documents to a Jewish museum may also evince desires to validate Jewish continuity through participation in a public form of Jewish visual culture, the museum understood as a communal keeper of cultural relics.

As museums become an increasingly familiar presence in the public sphere, the museum effect extends beyond unilateral movements from these institutions outward. Examples of recent museum practices in contemporary Jewish life demonstrate how museumgoers have taken the museum effect home with them, have found ways to make themselves at home in the museum, and have redirected the agency of the museum effect, asserting their own valuations of the role of Jewish museums onto the institutions themselves. ■

2 "AEJM statement on Brussels attack; thousands visit Jewish Museum in Rome," *Jewish Heritage Europe*, Posted: 27 May 2014

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews Warsaw



Painted ceiling of the reconstructed 18th-century Gwoździec wooden synagogue in the Jewish Town Gallery. Photo: Czarek Sokolowski/Associated Press

Twelve Principles

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

In the Paradisus Iudaeorum Gallery (1569–1648), visitors view an interactive scale model of Kraków and Kazimierz, presenting the rich culture of the local Jewish community. Photo by M. Starowieyska/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews was created from the inside out. Before there was a museum, before there was a building, before there was a collection, there was a plan for the exhibition. The story — the thousand-year history of Polish Jews — came first. All else followed. We envisioned the museum and the story it tells in the core exhibition to be an agent of transformation. Polish visitors encounter a history of Poland, but in a way they have never experienced. Jewish visitors discover a history of what was once the largest Jewish community in the world and a center of the Jewish world. An estimated 70 percent of Jews today, more than 9 million people, are thought to descend from this territory. All visitors encounter a Poland about which little is known and much is misunderstood, a country that was one of the most diverse and tolerant in early modern Europe, a place where a Jewish minority was able to create a distinctive civilization while being part of the larger society.

As a result of the Holocaust, 90 percent of Poland's prewar Jewish population of 3.3 million was murdered, and the world they created in Poland was destroyed with them. Those who survived, whether in hiding, concentration camps, or the Soviet Union, returned to a Poland that lay

This essay is adapted from "A Theater of History: Twelve Principles," *TDR: The Drama Review 59:3* (T227) Fall 2015.

in ruins. What had been the largest Jewish community in the world was now one of the smallest, and a country that had been one of the most diverse was now one of the most homogeneous. Today, the hundreds of thousands of tombstones in more than one thousand Jewish cemeteries, and the many empty synagogues and other Jewish communal properties, testify not only to Jewish absence but also to a vibrant Jewish presence that had been a defining feature of Poland itself. That history — a thousand years of continuous Jewish presence in this part of the world — has faded from view, largely overshadowed, understandably, by the Holocaust.

All the more reason that it was important to bring the history of Polish Jews, all one thousand years of it, to life in Poland, the place where the story took place. In 1994, the City of Warsaw designated the location for the future museum — it would face the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes — in Muranów, Warsaw's prewar Jewish neighborhood and the heart of the Warsaw ghetto. Until POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened its doors to the public in 2013, one honored those who perished by remembering how they died — at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. Today, we can honor them, and those who came before and after, by remembering how they lived — at the museum. The museum completes the memorial complex.

At a display of Jewish publishing houses in 16th-century Poland, visitors interact with the era's printing technology. Photo by Magdalena Starowieyska/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

What is the story the exhibition should tell and how should that story be told? While the exhibition avoids a master narrative, it is guided by *metahistorical principles* — namely, concepts that underpin the story and our way of telling it. We refer to these as the twelve principles.

Principle 1

Our approach to this thousand-year period is chrono-thematic. In other words, while the exhibition is divided into periods, the historical narration proceeds not only chronologically, but above all thematically.

Principle 2

The history of Polish Jews is not a footnote to Polish history. We have constructed what could be called an integral rather than a contextual history of Polish Jews, which is a way of saying that Polish Jews were *of* Poland and not only *in* Poland.

Principle 3

The exhibition presents a broad spectrum of relations, which visitors will experience as a story of coexistence and competition, conflict and cooperation, separation and integration — without reducing the history of Polish Jews to a history of Polish-Jewish relations (all too often treated as a history of antisemitism). Above all, Jews are

The First Encounters Gallery (960-1500) includes the story of Ibrahim ibn Yakub, who visited Polish lands in the tenth century. His written account is an early source that mentions Jewish trade in Poland. Photo by M. Starowieyska, D. Golik/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

agents of history, and not only objects onto which others projected their fantasies and fears.

Principle 4

It is precisely the interplay of separation and integration that made possible the creation of a civilization that was "categorically Jewish, distinctly Polish" (Rosman, 2012). A perfect expression of "categorically Jewish, distinctly Polish" are the magnificent wooden synagogues created during the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795).

Principle 5

We tell the story from the perspectives of those whose story we are telling, and we do so in the historical present — without foreshadowing and without back shadowing. We ask visitors to enter into the very moment of the events as they are unfolding. We do this by keeping the horizon in front of the visitor short, just as it was for those in the period, who could not see into the future. At the same time, the past gets longer with each step the visitor takes through the story.

This approach is especially powerful in the Holocaust Gallery, which we base largely on the clandestine Oyneg Shabes archive organized by Emanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto. We narrate the story in the historical present.

This narrative strategy is essential to the way the Holocaust figures in the thousand-year history of Polish Jews presented in the exhibition. Most Holocaust exhibitions situate the Holocaust within a history of hate. The logical endpoint — the telos of hate — is genocide. In contrast, the history of Polish Jews does not start with hate and does not end with genocide.

Principle 6

We avoid taking as our starting point misperceptions (whether antisemitic and philosemitic stereotypes or the stereotype of "Polish antisemitism") in order to defend the history of Polish Jews and the history of Poland against such mistaken ideas. In other words, misconceptions should not set the agenda for what would become a defensive historical narration.

Principle 7

The history of Polish Jews is the history of all Polish Jews, not just its heroes and elites. The exhibition does not take as its starting point the demonstration of Jewish worthiness, whether in collective or individual terms.

Principle 8

Keep open questions that seem to beg for definition. Some said the exhibition should answer two questions even before visitors enter the poetic Forest Gallery that begins the thousand-year journey: Who are the Jews? What is Judaism? Rather than providing a priori definitions, we ask our visitors to look for answers in the history of Polish Jews.

There is no normative presentation of Judaism, no trans-historical displays of the Jewish life cycle or Jewish holidays, as are common in many Jewish museums. Instead, visitors to the exhibition experience religious life as an integral part of Jewish life, not as a separate category in a section called "religion" or "Judaism."

Principle 9

Bring the visitor face to face with those whose story we tell. This is history in the first person, which is why we lead the narration with quotations from primary sources.

In this way, visitors come into direct contact with voices from the period — not one voice and not only the voice of the historian, but many voices that together form a chorus.

Principle 10

Our goal is to be authoritative without being authoritarian, to create an open narrative in multiple voices, and to invite visitors to add their voices to the conversation.

Principle 11

Materialize history in the absence of original objects. If we had more objects, if other institutions had been willing to loan us more objects, we would have shown them, but for the medieval period, spanning almost 600 years, we can point to only two objects that Jews in Poland made or were involved in manufacturing: tombstones and coins. What we do have is intangible heritage, materialized in texts. The most important sources in the medieval period come from rabbis in German lands who responded to questions from rabbis who were passing through or living in Poland. These questions often take the form of a story.

Perhaps the most dramatic examples are the magnificent wooden synagogues, created in the 17th and 18th centuries, none of which exist today. In collaboration with Handshouse Studio, hundreds of volunteers and

View of the Royal Cake installation in the Encounters with Modernity Gallery (1772-1914). Photo by M. Starowieyska, D. Golik/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

experts reconstructed the painted ceiling and timber-frame roof of the 17th-century synagogue that once stood in Gwoździec. Today, this element is a centerpiece not only of the 18th-century gallery, but also of the core exhibition — indeed, of POLIN Museum itself.

Principle 12

Enter a theater of history, a story told in four dimensions — time is the fourth dimension. Only as the visitor moves does the story unfold.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is part of the very history that it presents. It is an agent in that history, not simply a mirrored reflection of it. Our goal has been to create an exhibition that is memorable. To be memorable, the experience must be emotional; but to be worth remembering, it must be thought-provoking. There is no end to the debates provoked by any history of Polish Jews, not least the one presented in the core exhibition. Our challenge is to create an exhibition worthy of debates worth having, including those that will surely arise from the exhibition itself. ■

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To view supplemental materials related to this article, please visit http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/DRAM_a_00471.

The Jewish Street

Samuel D. Kassow
POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

The Daily Life installation, inspired by the 1930s Landkentenish Movement that emphasized tourism and sport and encouraged Polish Jews to bond with their landscape and Polish history. Photo by M. Starowieyska / POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

When Jews think of Poland, when Jews intersect with Poland, they tend to do so through the prism of the Holocaust and through visits to the Nazi death camps. But it's rather inaccurate to look at Polish Jewish history only through the prism of the Holocaust because Polish Jewish history goes back hundreds of years and not just the four years in which the Nazis murdered six million Jews. And what do we have to show for those many centuries when Jews lived in Poland? If one is Jewish today and if one is an Ashkenazi Jew, chances are 95 percent that you are descended from people who used to live in what used to be Poland. In this Poland, it's the first Polish Republic, the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th to 18th centuries, the borders stretched from just east of Berlin all the way to the Dnieper River. In this early modern era, Poland was the largest country in Europe. And until the eve of World War II, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in the world.

Here are some amazing statistics about Jewish population growth in the vast territory that used to be Poland. In 1500, perhaps 30,000 Jews lived there, as many Jews as there are around Hartford, Connecticut. By 1800, by the time Poland no longer formally existed due to the Partitions, there were a million Jews. And by 1900, on those same territories, there were 9 million Jews (counting those who migrated to Hungary and

other lands). So, the 30,000 in 1500 became 9 million in 1900. This is a record of demographic expansion that we've never seen before or since in the history of the Jewish people.

Po-Lin, "Here you will rest" (Hebrew)

One way of understanding how Polish Jews used to look at Poland, not with horror and revulsion but with great nostalgia, is to look at the many Jewish stories and legends of origin. In one story, the first Jews who came to Poland entered the forest and saw Hebrew letters on the bark of the birch trees. The Hebrew letters said Po-Lin, the Hebrew word for Poland. It also means "Here you will rest." "Here will be your resting place." The exterior walls of the POLIN Museum are made of glass panels etched with this word, Po-Lin, in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish. And the first gallery of the museum's core exhibition begins with visitors entering this mythical forest where the word Po-Lin is etched in the trees and its legend is recounted.

Di Yidishe Gas, The Jewish Street

As the lead scholar of the Interwar Gallery in the POLIN Museum, I faced some real challenges, one symbolized by the way the gallery ends. The gallery is entitled "The Jewish Street," and at the very end of that street, suddenly, with no warning, surprised people look up to the sky and to the first German bombers. The exhibition ends abruptly, on September 1, 1939. Did those Jews have any inkling what was in store? The answer is no. The exhibition depicts interwar Polish Jewry on its own terms, without referring to the looming disaster. While Jews had certainly suffered a mounting wave of discrimination and antisemitism in Poland, we wanted to stress the agency and the peoplehood of Polish Jewry and not to regard them through the prism of the Holocaust or to see them as trapped, helpless victims.

Not so long ago people who looked for books on pre-war Polish Jews could choose from such titles as *On the Edge of Destruction* by Celia Stopnicka Heller, *No Way Out* (English Title) by Emanuel Meltzer, or *Oyfn Rand fun Opgrunt* (*On the Edge of the Abyss*) by Jacob Leshchinsky. There was also the 1966 film entitled *The Last Chapter*. It is not my intention to denigrate these valuable projects but there's no denying the message that these titles convey.

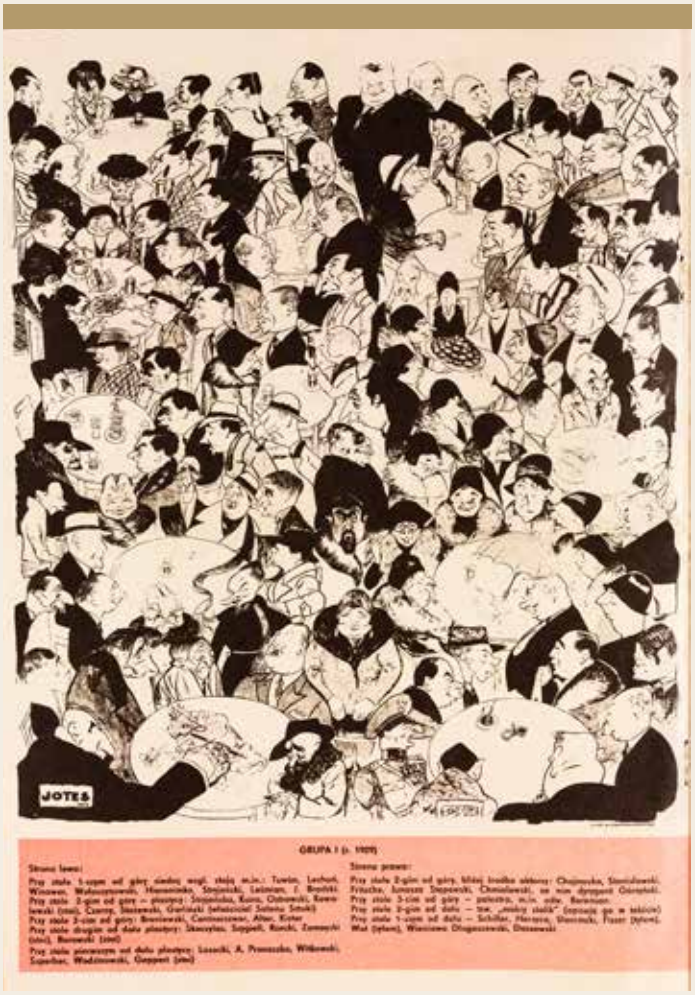


Illustration by Jerzy Szwajcer of Jewish artists at Little Ziemiańska cafe in 1930s Warsaw. Photo courtesy POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

At a conference on the museum held at Princeton University in April 2015, some first-rate scholars criticized the exhibition for not adding the prism of the Holocaust. The catastrophe, they emphasized, was too important to be put "into brackets." As a child born to Holocaust survivors in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany in 1946, just one month after my parents left Poland, I understand this view quite well. I remember their story about how, in 1946, they felt much safer in Germany than in Poland. I am also quite aware that the escalating antisemitism of the late 1930s, as well as the largely hostile attitude of the Catholic Church, played no small role in what was, at best, the indifference of large parts of the Polish population during the war, as well as in the widespread violence and murder of Jews by Poles (as analyzed by Jan Tomasz Gross, Jan Grabowski, Barbara Engelking, and others). Reasonable people can disagree about how to show this antisemitism in the museum space and, frankly, there is some room for improvement on our part — both in the transition space and in the Interwar Gallery. As a historian, I completely support a basic principle outlined by Barbara Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett: this is a museum about Polish Jewish life, not a museum about Polish antisemitism or about Polish Jewish relations. Another key principle was that there would be no back shadowing, that we would use no texts written after 1939. Therefore the exhibition is entitled "The Jewish Street," not "On the Edge of Destruction." There were indeed many Jews who felt trapped in Poland and frantically tried to leave. But there were others, like Senator Ozjasz Thon, who reminded his brothers and sisters in 1932 that for all its serious problems, it was only Polish Jewry — not US Jewry, not Soviet Jewry — that had the intellectual resources and national vitality to lead the Jewish people. The Yiddish poet Melekh Ravich recalled that in 1934 he ran into the young historian Emanuel Ringelblum on a Warsaw street. Ravich was about to migrate to Australia and he told Ringelblum to get out of Poland as fast as he could. But Ringelblum replied that he believed that Polish Jewry had a future. By the same token Lucy Dawidowicz recalled how in the summer of 1939 YIVO Director Max Weinreich was preparing for the third world conference of the YIVO scheduled to take place in 1940. Weinreich wanted Dawidowicz to remain in Vilna as a graduate student. He too was optimistic about the future. Foolishness? False optimism? Whistling past the graveyard? Perhaps. We can even safely assume that most Polish Jews were not as sanguine as Max Weinreich. But we have to tell their story based on what they knew then, not what we know now.

One major theme in the gallery is the sheer diversity of interwar Polish Jewry. It included Jews in big cities and small towns, Polish speakers and Yiddish speakers, yeshiva students and Bundists. Interwar Polish Jewry was also a work in progress as Jews from the different partitions slowly overcame their cultural differences to find a common identity as "Polish Jews." Just as Warsaw brought together long-divided Poles, so too did it bring together Jews, thanks to its growing role as the center of political parties, the mass press, and welfare organizations. On the eve of the war, one in four Jews lived in one of the five biggest cities, but half still lived in small towns. But at the same time the most remote Jewish *shtetl* was linked to and influenced by the big city: Yiddish newspapers, lectures by visiting writers, hard-fought political campaigns, and even dance competitions and beauty contests. There was a powerful tide of secularization but the exhibition does not forget the many Polish Jews who journeyed to their *rebbe*, or studied a page of *mishna* or Eyn Yankev after work.

Although Polish Jewry constituted an enormous reservoir of Jewish national energy, we tell the story not just of a collective people, but also of individuals who hiked, danced, loved jazz, who lived their own lives, worried about their personal problems, and, like everybody else, played their childhood games, skipped school, struggled through adolescence, fell in love, married, and raised children. One of Jewish Poland's most beloved songwriters, Mordkhe Gebirtig, penned a song about a Jewish girl who insisted that her religious boyfriend, Leibke, learn how to dance:

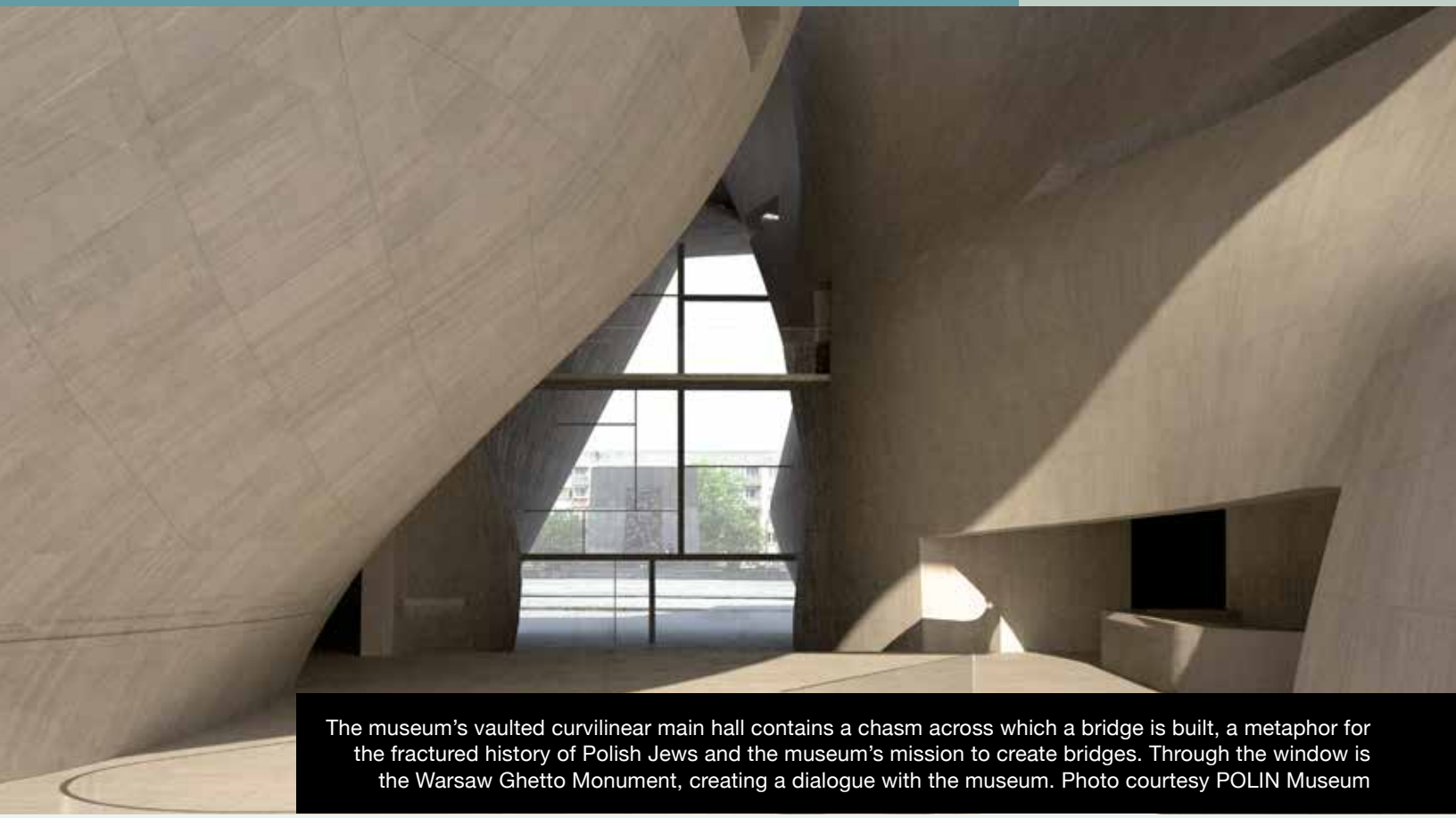
You can be what you want, a Zionist, a Bundist – who cares? But Leibke, the time will come when even the most religious Jews will have to learn the Tango and the Charleston!

The exhibition depicts interwar Polish Jewry on its own terms, without referring to the looming disaster. . . . We have to tell their story based on what they knew then, not what we know now.

The literal translation of the Yiddish expression *di yidishe gas* is "the Jewish street," but the wider meaning is "the Jewish world" — referring to the creation of a modern Jewish world that was at once diverse and nationally conscious, rooted in Poland and yet distinctively Jewish. During the interwar years, Poland became a living laboratory for experiments in modern Jewish life. These adventures produced new models of politics, self-help, and culture. Polish Jews saw themselves — and were often seen by others — as the most culturally vibrant Jewish community in the world. Because the war cut these developments short, a stroll down the "The Jewish Street" of the Interwar Gallery highlights beginnings rather than final results, journeys rather than final destinations. ■

Context and Controversy

Antony Polonsky
POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



The museum's vaulted curvilinear main hall contains a chasm across which a bridge is built, a metaphor for the fractured history of Polish Jews and the museum's mission to create bridges. Through the window is the Warsaw Ghetto Monument, creating a dialogue with the museum. Photo courtesy POLIN Museum

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have not only seen the establishment of a large number of new museums, but a significant change in their function, now becoming "a forum as much as a treasure box,"[1] notes Sir Nicholas Serota, director of Britain's Tate galleries. This change in function has brought in a much larger public as museums have sought to provide narratives for their exhibitions, establishing a context for the objects they display and making extensive use of electronic means of communication. In the year 2012, American museums received 850 million visitors, in England over half the adult population visited a museum or gallery, while in Sweden the percentage was three quarters. In the same period, the Louvre in Paris, the world's most popular museum, had 10 million visitors. The number of museums has increased in the last two decades from around 23,000 to at least 55,000. Many are housed in striking buildings, such as that designed by the Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry for the Guggenheim Museum in the decaying port area of the Spanish city of Bilbao, which has also had the added benefit of reviving this blighted area of the city. Some

1 Fiametta Rocco, "Temples of Delight," *The Economist*, December 21, 2013

are also located in what the French historian Pierre Nora has described as *lieux de memoire*[2] such as the *USS Arizona* Memorial at Pearl Harbor, the Alamo museum in Texas, and the museum at the battlefield of Culloden in Scotland. Most in the developed world are financed by a combination of public, corporate, and individual support.

These phenomena have also affected the world of Jewish museums and that of historical museums in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2010, the new home of the National Museum of American Jewish History was opened on

In Poland, since the end of Communism, museums have changed greatly, reflecting the debates in the country over identity and Poland's desire to be part of an integrated Europe. The display in the state museum at Auschwitz has been revamped and a new memorial has been created at Bełżec. An Auschwitz Jewish Center, containing both a museum and a synagogue, has been established in the town of Oświęcim, while Kraków is the home of the history museum created in the former offices of Oskar Schindler's enamelware factory and of the photography-based Galicia Jewish Museum. There

At the left, a gathering of Zionist youth living in a kibbutz in Kielce who were among the victims in the July 1946 pogrom. At the right, the names of other sites of postwar pogroms. Photo by M. Starowieyska, D. Golin/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Independence Mall in Philadelphia. Jewish museums have also been established or reorganized in Europe, most notably that in Berlin, housed partly in the remarkable building designed by Daniel Libeskind, and in Moscow, where it is also described as a "Tolerance Center," and is located in the restored Bakhmetevsky Bus Garage, a key avant-garde building erected in the 1920s. There is also the comprehensive remodeling of the Diaspora Museum (Beit Hatfutsot) in Tel Aviv into The Museum of the Jewish People, which will culminate with the opening of the new permanent exhibition in 2018.

are also more general museums devoted to the tragic history of the twentieth century, including the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising in the former power station providing electricity to the Warsaw tram system and the planned Museums of Polish History in Warsaw and of the Second World War in Gdańsk. In the wider east-central European context, a Terror House has been established in Budapest to examine the impact of the two totalitarian systems on Hungary (some have argued that it downplays domestic fascism), a Genocide Museum has been created in Vilnius (which has been criticized for placing little emphasis on the Holocaust),

2 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984-1992)

and museums of the Soviet occupation have been created in Riga and Tallin, the one in Riga in the former Soviet-period museum of Red Latvian Riflemen.

At issue was the divide in Poland between those who took a more self-critical view of the country's history and, in particular, of Polish-Jewish relations, and those who adopted a more apologetic approach.

It is in this context that POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews came into existence. Like a number of the museums we have described, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the result of a partnership between private and public bodies, the first of its kind in Poland. Under this partnership, the Culture Ministry and the City of Warsaw were responsible for supervising and financing the construction of the museum's building, as well as for the major part of the its annual budget. The City of Warsaw donated the plot of land on which the museum was to be built, which faces the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland was responsible for financing and organizing the production of the core exhibition and now contributes to the annual budget for educational and public activities, while the government finances general operations and programs.

The museum is also situated in a highly symbolic *lieu de memoire*, in the heart of Muranów, the former Jewish district of Warsaw and center of the Warsaw ghetto. The square on which it stands was the place where the first fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place and is only a short walk from the bunker on 18 Miła Street where at the end of the uprising, its leader, Mordechai Anielewicz, and his comrades took their own lives rather than be taken prisoner. On the square there are the two monuments to the Ghetto Uprising, the smaller one erected shortly after the war and the larger and more grandiose one, with its sculptures by Nathan Rappoport, the making of which is described in the museum.

The museum is housed in a remarkable building, the result of an open competition won by Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki. The exterior is glass, square, and in the modern architectural style, echoing the large monument to the Ghetto Uprising and the residential buildings that surround the square. The building was commissioned when the permanent exhibition had already been planned, so that it fits well into its interior, whose soaring post-modern curvilinear character is a striking contrast to the exterior. It is ruptured and contains a chasm across which there is a bridge, described by POLIN chief curator Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as "a fitting metaphor for the history of Polish Jews, whose history was fractured by the Holocaust, and for the museum, whose mission is to create bridges across time, continents, and people." [3]

In January 2014, Poland's Culture Minister Bogdan Zdrojewski appointed Dariusz Stola, an internationally respected 20th-century historian, to direct POLIN. His first task was to ensure that the core exhibition was accepted by the Council of the Museum so that it could be opened on the planned date of October 28, 2014. This proved to be a challenging task. The exhibition plans had been reviewed by a number of well-known historians. However, although many of the changes they had suggested had been incorporated into the plans, no clear supervision of this process had been established. In addition, when the Ministry of Culture and the President's office expressed reservations over the way some critical and controversial issues had been addressed, this had aroused strong resistance against political interference in a scholarly matter. At issue was the divide in Poland between those who took a more self-critical view of the country's history and, in particular, of Polish-Jewish relations, and those who adopted a more apologetic approach. Those responsible for the core exhibition were very much in the former camp, whereas the politicians involved in the work of the museum, who represented the moderate Citizens' Platform government, were nervous about being attacked by the right and, above all, by the Truth and Justice party for allowing the "good name" of Poland to be attacked. In order to resolve these differences, Director Stola set up a collegium made up of leading historians from Poland and abroad that reviewed all

3 "Introduction," Catalogue of the POLIN Museum

the disputed issues and was able to reach an agreed compromise on them. Its members took as a guideline a paper by the Israeli historian Ezra Mendelsohn delivered at the conference on Polish-Jewish history at Oxford in September 1984, which constituted a major turning point in the investigation of the Polish-Jewish past, provocatively entitled "Independent Poland: Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews?" He showed clearly that neither formulation enabled one to understand the complexity of the Polish-Jewish past and that one should seek rather to embed the history of the Jews in the Polish lands in the larger Polish context.[4]

The collegium was also determined that in the permanent exhibition we should avoid apologetics and we should see the museum, in the words of chief curator Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, as a "zone of comfort," in which discussion of the many controversial issues in Polish-Jewish history, which is a necessary part of the creation of a tolerant and pluralistic society, can be conducted in a free and collegial manner.

Certainly the museum building, the core exhibition and its impressive catalogue, and the temporary exhibitions are receiving worldwide acclaim. An important program in international academic cooperation, inaugurated at the time of the museum's grand opening, is the Global Educational Outreach Program (GEOP), an ambitious program aimed both at encouraging Polish-Jewish studies and Jewish museum studies internationally at the university level and at making the history of Polish Jews better known to the next generation, in Poland and in the wider world. GEOP offers research fellowships for doctoral students and junior faculty, doctoral seminars, visiting lectureships, conferences, workshops, and internships for undergraduates. Through GEOP, the museum is establishing closer ties with other university centers engaged in Jewish studies, above all with the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) in Warsaw, which also has an extensive and important archive. There is another complementarity between the museum and the JHI. The Institute has a large collection of artifacts and art works but few places to display them, whereas the opposite is the case with the museum.

During the March 1968 antisemitic campaign, the state used television as a powerful propaganda tool. Photo by M. Starowieyska, D. Golik/POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Under these circumstances, one can hope that the existence of the POLIN Museum and its core exhibition will be transformative both in Polish-Jewish relations and in the development of the study of the history and civilization of the Jews of Eastern Europe. The Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews and Stalin's efforts to eradicate their culture ultimately failed. There are still Jews in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, and the complex civilization the Jews created here remains a source of admiration and inspiration to both Jews and non-Jews. It is our hope that the museum will contribute to the preservation and informed appreciation of the history and accomplishments of the Jews of this region. Leszek Kolakowski has written, "We study history not in order to know how to behave or how to succeed, but to know who we are." This is the essential goal of the museum and one which I very much hope it will be able to achieve. ■

4 For this exchange, see *W sieci*, August 26 and September 8, 2013

The Jewish Museum and Jewish Community in the Context of Russia

Uri Gershowitz
Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow

Migration Hall. Photo courtesy Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center

The emergence of Jewish museums in the former Soviet Union marks a new milestone in the process of Jewish cultural revival in the former Soviet republics. The almost complete destruction of Jewish communities and any public manifestations of the traditional Jewish way of life has led to at least three generations being totally divorced from their ethnic and religious roots. Beginning in the form of illegal protest movements and based on the enthusiasm of the very few, the search for Jewish identity since the 1970s has grown into a complex project of resuscitation of Jewish life after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This project was carried out by various (mostly foreign) organizations, which often had very different visions of what "normal" Jewish life meant. Jewish cultural and educational centers were founded, synagogues were reopened, and books that introduced Jewish culture to Russian-speaking Jews were published. For more than two decades, Jewish cultural life formed and emerged in Russia under the influence of many factors — social, economic, political, demographic, and cultural — the analysis of which would require a separate study. The emergence of solid Jewish communities, which consolidated relatively large groups of Jews, was one of the main aspects of this process. The concept of "community" has ceased to be a purely speculative term to designate Jews living in the former USSR. Since then, the term "Jewish community" has recovered its initial meaning.

Russian Jewish communities of today unite people with shared lifestyles and cultural traditions. The second important aspect of renewed Jewish cultural life is the emergence of patrons eager to support ambitious educational and cultural projects. It was at this stage of revival of Jewish life in the 2010s, when a collective identity formation emerged into a complex and integrative body, that the "Jewish Museum" became possible.

In keeping with the forms of Jewish cultural survival in Moscow, the establishment of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center was initiated by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FJC), which positions itself as an influential religious organization dedicated to Orthodox Judaism. From the perspective of the religious Jewish community, what role exactly is the museum intended to fulfill? Why does the community need the museum? The answers to these questions are complex and bipartite.

Unlike many Jewish museums in the world, the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center, although created by a religious community, is not focused on an audience deeply immersed in Jewish culture. The museum does not seek to create a distinctively pronounced Jewish narrative, but instead gravitates towards universality and in this reveals Jews as an integral part of Russian history, while at the same time depicts various aspects of the life and deeds of Russian Jewry. Such presentation is meant to evoke a sense of pride in Russian Jews for their people as well as earn respect for Russian Jewry among non-Jews.

The World War II Hall exemplifies these themes. As compared to many Jewish museums, the topic of the Holocaust does not prevail. There is a special room to commemorate all the victims of the war, of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin. What is emphasized is the contribution of Jews in the victory of the Red Army, since victory in particular defines the attitude of the Russian people to World War II.

Tolerance Center, which holds interactive classes for students

World War II Hall, with filmed commentaries of war survivors.
Photos courtesy Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center

Universality in approach is also specific to the conception of temporary exhibitions. Apart from exhibitions on Jewish themes, there are also exhibitions of contemporary and modern art. Among the most successful projects are "My Red Homeland" by Anish Kapoor, and "Upon request. Russian Avant-Garde Collections from Regional Museums," running concurrently. Together with educational events on Jewish topics, the Educational Center regularly holds public lectures about the Russian avant-garde, screenings of cinema classics, and other events. The successful achievement of the objectives set for the museum by the community might lead to certain changes in the attitude towards Jewish communities (and, possibly, towards ethnic cultures in general) in Russia.

The very emergence of Jewish community as part of the Russian sociocultural reality and its positioning as a particular denomination and cultural revival requires self-representation. The way Jews were perceived in the mass consciousness of the Soviet era was indeed very far from both the historical modes of existence of the Jewish people and from the contemporary modes that have appeared today, both of which are in one way or another connected to Judaism. Judaism itself remains unknown and obscure to most Russians, leaving certain questions to be asked: Who are we? What is the Jewish people? What is its history and what part does it play in Russian history? These are important questions that Russian Jews must answer since they are self-aware and perceive themselves as a subject of the political, cultural, and historical life of Russia. These answers are obviously closely linked to the idea of tolerance in a multicultural and multireligious country. It was this very idea that fueled the founding of the Center of Tolerance within the Jewish Museum, which was opened in November 2013.

However, there is also another challenge. After all, many Russian Jews know their history about as poorly as any other Russians do. Indeed, one of the results of the universalism of "Jewishness" as an aspect of Russian society is that many Jews do not associate themselves with the Jewish community and do not participate in the life of the community. Rather, they tend to assimilate into the larger Russian society. They do not have a strong identity as Jews and they often shun institutions with a pronounced religious orientation. Therefore, a museum that relates the history of the Jewish people, its roots, and its history within Russia allows for an ideal form of acquaintance with Jewish history. Here is how

> At this stage of the revival of Jewish life in the 2010s, when a collective identity formation emerged into a complex and integrative body, the "Jewish Museum" became possible.

Photo courtesy Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center

Boruch Gorin, one of the museum's founders and current chairman of the museum board, describes the objective of the museum: "For the Jewish community it is very important to provide everyone with intrinsic information about Jewish culture and its development in Russia and thus unobtrusively contribute to the emergence of a cultural identity."

For Russian Jewish communities of today, the narrative of the Jewish people and its history within the history of Russia is extremely important. It is also important that both Jews and non-Jews hear this narrative. For the former, it might engender interest and curiosity for their origins and encourage self-identification. For the latter, it might contribute to respect for Jewish culture as one culture among other Russian national cultures, and thereby strengthen tolerance. A museum is precisely the kind of institution that works toward both objectives. However, for the successful achievement of these objectives several conditions must be met.

The first condition is the absolute candor and unbiased credibility of historical and cultural information. After all, as soon as the visitor senses a whiff of propaganda, the objectives are lost; as soon as the narrative is compromised in part, it appears doubtful as a whole. It is common knowledge that avoiding bias in the presentation of history is a very difficult task. Taking this difficulty into account, the founders of the museum, headed by Alexander Boroda, President of the FJC, decided to entrust the creation of the museum's narrative to Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA) (a design firm that won the museum's contest) and agreed not to interfere with RAA's work. Ralph Appelbaum assembled an international advisory council, which included such prominent historians as Professor Oleg Budnitskii (Higher School of Economics, Russia), Professor Natan Meir (Portland University, US), Professor Jonathan Dekel-Chen (Hebrew University, Israel) and the Council's Head Professor Benjamin Nathans (University of Pennsylvania, US). According to the members of the expert council, they were pleasantly surprised by the fact that FJC applied neither censorship nor pressure to their work. The fashion in which the council was organized as well as respect for the international expert body became guarantors of the striving for objectivity in the retelling of history.

The second condition for the successful achievement of the aforementioned objectives is the form of presentation of information. The main target audience of the museum are non-Jews and non-affiliated Jews. Because of that, the narrative of the history and culture of the Jewish people should reflect familiar terms and concepts. The information itself presents new content for visitors to understand and to integrate. If we want to attract large audiences, standard ways of presenting the information will not function and the educational effect will not be achieved. This realization formed an understanding that the museum should be created in an "edutainment" format, allowing the learning of historical facts in an exciting or entertaining way, combining fun with learning. Analyzing the experience of U.S. entertainment formats and educational high-tech parks led the creators to the idea to look for solutions in these types of media platforms. The advantage of this format is the fact that media technologies allow the museum to fill the exhibition with high volumes of content and at the same time to constantly add new information. It provides the possibility of development of the museum.

Another important condition for the success of the museum is the retelling of the history of Russian Jewry within the larger history of Russia. A subtle mix of unknown or little-known information together with well-known, recognizable facts enables the visitor to put the new information into familiar historical contexts and find common points of relating. This helps to achieve the education and understanding the museum seeks.

The history of any country consists of many narratives through the intertwining fates of the diverse ethnic groups, communities, and minorities living in it. An objective historical picture can only be obtained by taking into account all these separate narratives and examining the complex interactions among cultural viewpoints. It is obvious that the history of a minority cannot be considered outside of the historical destiny of the entire country. One could say that the museum's exhibition fulfills its purpose only if it is able to convey the idea of such a relationship to the visitor. In understanding this relationship, tolerance is born and questions about history and identity become activated. ■

Times That Are A-Changin': Jewish Museums in Germany Today

Cilly Kugelman
Jewish Museum Berlin

Shabbat table, permanent exhibition. Photo courtesy Jewish Museum Berlin

Jewish museums can be very different in orientation, message, and outlook, depending on the national context. They can be community-engaged museums, as are many in the United States, or Great Britain, or they can be entire city quarters, as in Prague. More common are specialized local history museums or Holocaust museums that are taken for "Jewish museums," thereby conflating "Jewishness" with the Holocaust and nothing more. In this landscape, the Jewish Museum Berlin defines itself as a German history museum with a special focus on the Jewish minority in Germany from late antiquity to today. As part cultural atonement, the Jewish Museum Berlin serves a political and educational function in Germany's postwar effort to come to terms with its Nazi past.

The identity of a Jewish museum is shaped by both the national political context and the internal question of the understanding of its "Jewish" character. The latter strongly influences the profile of the collections with respect to what a Jewish artifact might be. In contrast to a general history museum with a Jewish collection, in a Jewish museum, dealing exclusively with Jewish history and culture, the question of defining a "Jewish object" is not always easy. For one thing, the attribution "Jewish" is not necessarily self-evident and is often ambiguous.

The presentation of "Jewish history" is confronted with similar considerations. Should a permanent exhibition demonstrate the contribution of the Jewish population

to society as a whole or, rather, should it draw the visitor's attention to conflicts created by the surrounding societies? Should Jewish museums present Jewish religious diversity, or should they demonstrate that Jews are "just like anybody else"? In other words, should "otherness" or indistinguishability be emphasized? Do exhibitions in Jewish museums have to confirm over and over again the outcry of Shakespeare's Shylock: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?"

During the first 16 years of its existence, the permanent exhibition of Berlin's Jewish museum depicted Jews and Judaism as a distinct development in a process of increasing abandonment of Jewish particularity in favor of participation and involvement as Germans into German society. A new permanent exhibition, which will open in 2019, will shift the emphasis to the historical interaction of Jews and Christians, particularly Jewish Germans and Christian Germans who influenced each other in varying degrees. In Germany, Jewish museums were perceived as a public expression of troublesome retrospections, which were based on painful arguments between perpetrators and victims with the aim to find a cooperative consensus. Jewish history exhibitions in Germany therefore remain closely linked with questions of general memorial policies and the actual historical-political discourse.

As time goes on, we can observe a slight shift of public attention away from the interest in the Nazi period and the debates about guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust. After the unification of the two German states 25 years ago, a new national self-understanding continues to slowly grow. Imperceptibly, Germany accepted the role of being a major political power in Europe, governing European politics, and determining the guidelines of solving global economic and social problems such as the international refugee issue. The postwar period in Germany is ultimately coming to an end. And with the end of this era, the "historicization" of the Nazi period and the Holocaust seeks completion in national discourse: Germany accepts the responsibilities for the crimes committed against the Jewish people by supporting Israel and financing Jewish museums; has introduced history curricula in schools and universities; supports Jewish memorial sites and Jewish institutions in Eastern Europe; and finances institutions outside of Germany that deal with German-Jewish issues. Memorial culture is now ritualized in friendly cooperation with Jewish institutions.

Another important aspect of the shift in Jewish-German relations is the demographic change of German society due to the recruitment of foreign labor forces from Turkey, Italy, and the now independent countries of the former Yugoslavia. Among the 80 million inhabitants

Animated films on questions of belief. Photo courtesy Jewish Museum Berlin

Audio takes: selected voices of how to grow up as a Jew in Germany. Photo courtesy Jewish Museum Berlin

of Germany, more than 4.5 million identify as Muslim. In particular districts of Berlin, school classes consist of exclusively immigrant children, with only the teachers being "ethnic" Germans. The Jewish communities with only 120,000 members (of whom 80% are immigrants from the former Soviet Union with little to no knowledge about Judaism) constitute a *quantité négligeable* with respect to the aforementioned 5.5% Muslim residents.

These two developments make clear that the national context of Jewish museums in Germany is dramatically different from the situation almost 30 years ago, when the first independent Jewish museum opened in Frankfurt in 1988. The mere fact that a Jewish museum was created caused tremendous public interest and generated controversial debates. When the Jewish Museum Berlin opened in September 2001, the nationwide operating "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" published without comment the guest list of the opening dinner, which read like a Who's Who of German politics and cultural life. Today such an event would still receive attention but not at the level and political importance of the past.

These ongoing changes in the political and social situation in Germany will have a tremendous influence on the Jewish museums of the country. Just a few years, ago, one could count a steady number of museum visitors, due to the mere fact that a museum presented Jewish content. Today, a museum has to offer a subtle and controversial exhibition program to compete with other museums. The question of how "Jewish" such a program can and should be will determine its success.

How then can we rethink Jewish museums? Can they still organize a permanent exhibition along the lines of the model exhibition executed by the "Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition" in 1887 at the Royal Victoria & Albert Hall in London? This "Jewish system" of exhibiting Jewish culture and history still acts as a pattern for displays in Jewish museums today: the division of history

> In a Jewish museum, the question of defining a "Jewish object" is not always easy. For one thing, the attribution "Jewish" is not necessarily self-evident and is often ambiguous.

Special exhibition: "Home and Exile (Jewish Emigration From Germany Since 1933)," projection of emigrés on broken glass. Photo courtesy Jewish Museum Berlin

and religion, with the Jewish holidays, the male life cycle, and the synagogue with its furniture and equipment in the center of the religious part, while the documents, coins, medals, awards, household, and business artifacts focus on the historical part. Clearly, this model has outlived its relevance in today's shifting contexts of national atonement for the Holocaust and the steady flux of immigration.

The question of the attribution "Jewish" can be theoretically answered rather easily for the pre-modern period. This entire epoch describes a time when Jewish life was defined by religious laws. The "Jewish questions" emerged at this time in the interaction and debate with Christian institutions and led to an internal as well as external exchange of ideas and approaches. The impact of the specific political living conditions (letters of protection, legal status of the servants of the royal chamber) on the economic, religious, and social life of the Jews among themselves as well as between the Jews and their Christian neighbors are diverse. As long as the life of Jews is embedded in Jewish laws and thinking, surrounded by identifiable Jewish objects, we clearly deal with something that we can call "Jewish history."

The challenge in representing "Jewishness" in modern history is when "Jewishness" is no longer obvious with respect to these attributions. The complexity of modernity is in describing a process of assimilative aspects of Judaism — the turning inward of its traditional sacred core and the outward turn to the public world of identity formation. Internal questions concerning inclusion and exclusion are posed anew and answered in complicated and diverse ways. That which remains evident from the "sacred core" are parts of a tradition that can assume a variety of shapes. These parts are not easy to trace, hard to define and even harder to exhibit.

After 1945, the experience of the Shoah, which from an internal Jewish perspective was viewed as the failure of all emancipatory expectations, is tied to the establishment of the State of Israel. The seizure of power by the Nazis, the stigmatization and elimination of German Jews from public life, the "Kristallnacht," the outbreak of World War II, and the mass murder of European Jewry are interpreted emotionally by both Jews and Germans as the prerequisite and backdrop for the creation of a "Jewish state."

"Jews" and "Germans" were contrary concepts for many decades after 1945. The victim-perpetrator experience of the Shoah was translated in postwar society into a Jews and Germans dichotomy. Jews and Israelis became conflated identities, and expected an obligation from Germany to support Israel. Germany confirmed this expectation of "Wiedergutmachung" by means of an all-embracing support of Israel that was very naturally not met without resistance, by both Germans and Israelis, yet for very different reasons. The relationship between Germans and Jews, which was characteristic of the postwar period, the special cultural sensitivity for Jewish interests and the "Jews-are-news syndrome," is gradually dissolving. A repositioning of the role that Jews intend to play in Germany and Europe has just begun in the Jewish communities, with a still uncertain outcome and accompanied by sizable conflicts: fights for political power and positions in the Jewish congregations between the long-established Jewish communities and the newcomers, mutual distrust about the general orientation of a Jewish congregation, and a much stronger attraction to the Lubavitcher congregation on the side of the post-Soviet immigrants. The small group of Jews who represented the Jewish Community of the "old" Federal Germany regarded the foundation of new Lubavitcher branches in Germany since the 1980s with distance and discomfort.

In summary, all these trends indicate that Jewish museums in Germany will have to reconsider their image and profile with regard to their content and audience — which is more than three generations now from World War II, which includes Jews born or partly educated in other countries with no current family ties to Germany. In short, Jewish museums must keep pace with social realities. They will have to continually reinvent themselves to maintain the interest of Jewish constituents, as well as general audiences in Germany, which are also increasingly international and diverse. ■

Multi-Dimensional Narrative at the Galicia Jewish Museum, Kraków

Jonathan Webber
Galicia Jewish Museum

Rymanów synagogue in mid 1990s (before renovation). Photo by Chris Schwarz

The Galicia Jewish Museum is a small, private institution located in a prewar vernacular building in the Kazimierz district of Kraków. It opened in 2004 on a shoestring budget. It consists of a core photographic exhibition, as well as space for two temporary exhibitions, an education room, a café, and a large bookstore specializing in books on Jewish subjects and the Holocaust. The late British photographer Chris Schwarz and I co-curated the core photographic exhibition, called "Traces of Memory," and published a companion volume.[1] It is not at all an exhibition of Polish Jewish history arranged chronologically. There are no black-and-white historical photographs. Rather, the exhibition portrays just the present-day realities, using contemporary color photographs arranged by theme, with the intention of showing different ideas about what can be seen today about the past.

Putting the original exhibition together required a creative collaboration over a number of years between myself and Chris Schwarz. Working village by village and town by town, I talked to local people to find the sites, and Chris later photographed them. The photographs he took on the basis of my research offer a completely new way of looking at the Jewish past in Poland that was left in ruins after the Holocaust.

The exhibition popularizes the subject for visitors, guiding them in the present, rather than taking them on a journey into the past. Specifically, the Galicia Jewish

This essay is excerpted from a paper presented at a POLIN Museum inaugural conference, May 2015. Since that time the Galicia Jewish Museum has been substantially enlarged.

1 Jonathan Webber (author) and Chris Schwarz (photographer), *Rediscovering Traces of Memory: The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009).

Museum offers a post-Holocaust narrative focusing on the dramatic changes that have happened to Jewish culture in Poland, principally bringing to the surface the simultaneity of contradictions and paradoxes. Among the disadvantages of offering a strictly "present-day" approach to the subject is that, by definition, the evolution of Polish Jewish history is not foregrounded in this exhibition, though that is rectified as far as possible in the captions that I wrote to the photographs. For example, the photographs and the captions include reference to both the historical "at-homeness" of

Lesko cemetery. Photo by Chris Schwarz

Synagogue wall, pre-renovation, Dąbrowa Tarnowska.
Photo by Chris Schwarz

Polish Jews in Poland as well as historical moments of anti-Jewish violence — in that way highlighting the contradictions to be found in the history. On the other hand, one advantage to the present-day orientation was that it allowed me to showcase and take issue as necessary with the stereotypes which persist in simplified, mythologized and subjective memories of the past, and which continue to influence (and sometimes obscure) an understanding of today's realities.

At the end of the 18th century, Poland was occupied and divided up between three powerful neighbors and consequently disappeared off the political map of Europe. For the next 150 years or so, much of southern Poland was a province of Austria (or, from 1867, the Austro-Hungarian empire) known as Galicia. After the end of World War I, Poland reappeared as an independent nation and this time it was Austro-Hungary and Galicia that disappeared off the map as distinct political entities; the territory of Galicia was incorporated into the newly independent Polish Republic. After the upheavals of World War II, the boundaries were changed once again. The territory of old Galicia was divided in half: what had once been eastern Galicia was annexed by the Soviet Union and eventually became part of Ukraine (as it is to this day); Poland kept only the western half. But the memory of Galicia remains very strong, both among local people and also among the descendants of Jews who were born there. The most important town of western Galicia was in Kraków, and this is why we have our exhibition here.

The exhibition is divided into five sections or themes, and the photographs were taken in about fifty different places in southern Poland, inside the former borders of old Galicia. The opening section presents the popular Jewish stereotype that Poland is nothing but a vast Jewish graveyard. In keeping with this view, the first section includes the raw, shocking sight of ruins and desolation — for example, photographs of destroyed synagogues or ruined Jewish cemeteries. The following section then moves on from the ruins of the past and explicitly contradicts that theme, by showing photographs which offer glimpses of the pre-Holocaust Jewish world that can still be seen today — for example, synagogues or Jewish cemeteries that are in reasonably good condition, either because they were never damaged or because they have been restored. In fact, to achieve its objective, the five sections of the exhibition are intended together to articulate a multi-dimensional view — in other words, to introduce the visitor to a range of mental landscapes

and messages and thereby convey the idea that today's realities reflect a very profound diversity of meanings.

For example, the diversity of modern Jewish identities becomes clear from the photographs of the cemeteries. We show tombstones with inscriptions only in Hebrew, some of them visited by Orthodox Jewish pilgrims who believe in the inherent sanctity of this country because of the outstanding rabbi scholars who lived here, and whose grave sites remain here. We also show that even in the early twentieth century there were Polish Jews who did not live in a Yiddishland or *Shtetl*-land but were conscious of their *Polish* Jewish identity, as some of their tombstone inscriptions are in Polish only, while others are in both Polish and Hebrew. The "Traces of Memory" exhibition also shows tombstones marking the graves of victims of Polish anti-Jewish violence.

> Our museum offers a post-Holocaust narrative of the dramatic changes to Jewish culture in Poland.

The third section, which shows photographs of the different kinds of landscape settings where local events of the Holocaust took place, is deliberately in the middle of the exhibition. In other words, the exhibition's narrative does not either begin with the Holocaust nor does it end with the Holocaust, something which the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews has consciously done as well (see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, this volume). The idea of not ending with the Holocaust was operationalized in the POLIN Museum by including a substantial section of its own on the post-Holocaust history of the Polish Jews. In the Galicia Jewish Museum, the thinking behind this was rather different: the "Traces of Memory" exhibition does not in any case follow chronological order, for if it had, the second section (glimpses of the pre-Holocaust Jewish world) would have come first, followed by the Holocaust section, followed by the section showing the ruins. I felt that quite a different narrative structure was needed to tell the story of the Holocaust today, in the particular context of this exhibition of post-Holocaust realities. Put simply: genocide turns the world upside down, and to drive the point home I resisted chronology altogether and so started the exhibition with the post-Holocaust ruins as the key present-day reality (or, in other words, presenting the result before the cause), and then proceeded to show the surviving traces of pre-Holocaust Jewish culture. Only after that does the exhibition move to the Holocaust itself, which is displayed not in terms of the perpetrators but rather the local settings of Holocaust atrocities in the Polish landscape, i.e. in forests, in open countryside, and in cities — not only in the large death-camps such as Auschwitz or Bełżec. Needless to say, we include reference to both Polish collaborators and Polish rescuers.

Following the Holocaust images is an important fourth section focusing on the different ways people in Polish Galicia continue to cope with a difficult past — including both the erasure of memory in recent decades and also the opposite of that, i.e. sustained memorialization projects of many different kinds, made by Poles as well as Jews. The photographs for these first four sections are not peopled — a powerful symbol of Jewish absence.

The fifth and last section reverses all of what came before. It consists entirely of portraits of the wide range of people who are positively involved as memory-makers — scholars, politicians, Holocaust survivors, souvenir dealers, pilgrims, priests, tourists, and students, as well as those ordinary local people of Kraków who participate in the extensive activities of the city's JCC (established in 2008) and the massive annual Festival of Jewish Culture (established in 1988) and thereby demonstrate an interest in, and even support for, what is widely understood nowadays as the renewal or revival of Jewish culture in present-day Poland.

Taken together, these five sets of photographs offer a sense of immediacy, representing the conflicting truths and the "chorus of voices" (per Kirshenblatt-Gimblett) that coexist with each other today. What they articulate is the highly complex nature of memory culture in a country that has witnessed the overwhelming catastrophe of the Holocaust. It is certainly true that in Poland today one can find ruined synagogues, ruined Jewish cemeteries, sites of former concentration camps, and the erasure of Jewish memory; but it simply is not true that this is all that one can find. There is also active memorialization in many locations as well as Jewish revival, Jewish heritage tourism, and a strong sense of Polish nostalgia for the Jewish past alongside attempts at healing. Collectively,

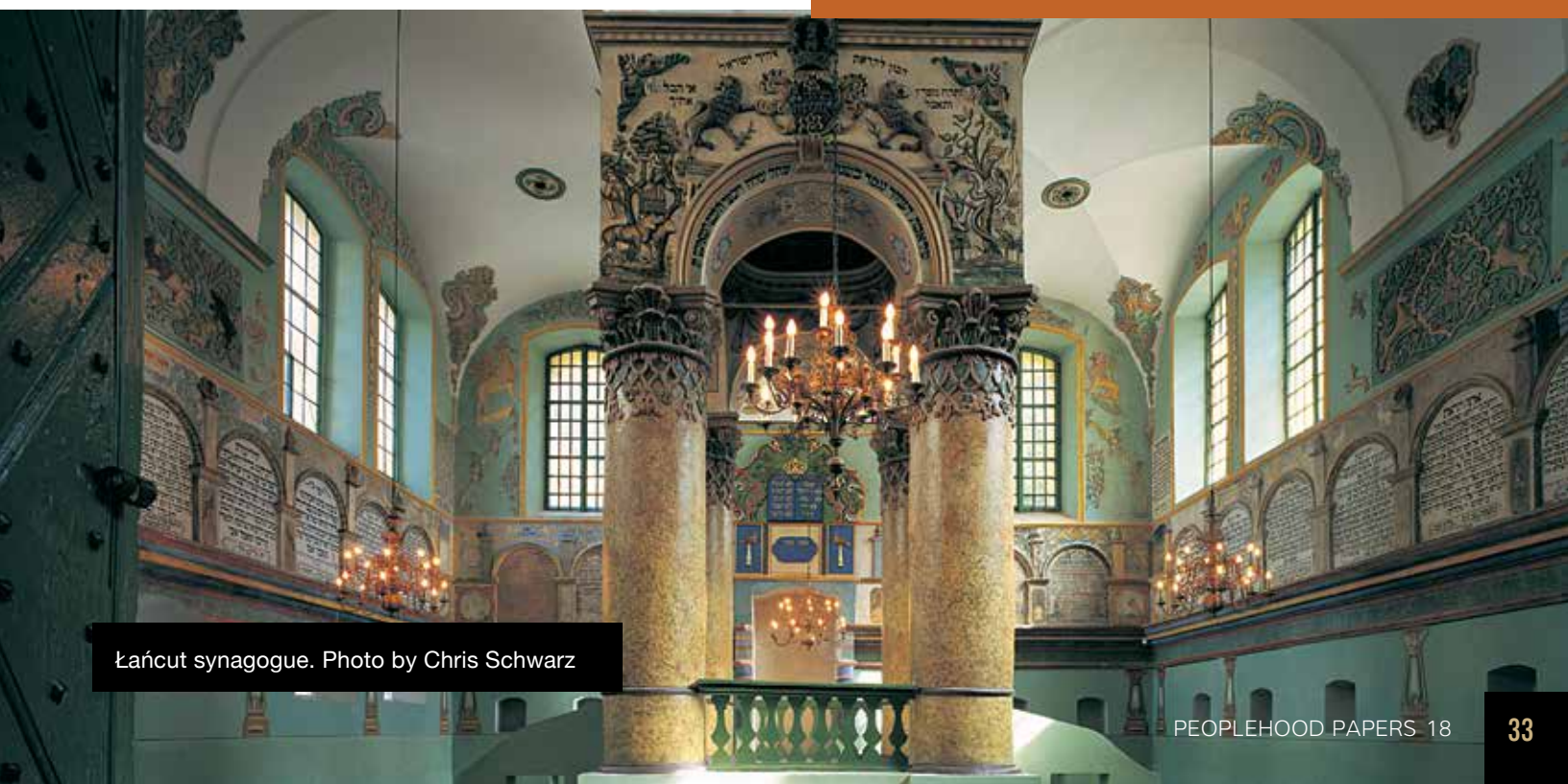
these clearly suggest open-ended, alternative futures. It is precisely the encounter with the multiple narratives, including the contradictions, paradoxes, and incongruities, that form the cacophonous, central message. Visitor feedback indicates that such multi-dimensionality is appreciated as highly instructive and as a space for critical reflection through the museum experience.

Polyphonous Voices of Visitor Experience

The approach of the Galicia Jewish Museum to its subject is certainly unconventional. But it squarely fits within a new paradigm shift, now massively developed by the POLIN Museum, as a major agent of social and intellectual transformation about how the history of Jews is shown and told in a museum context. In the multi-dimensional narrative of the Galicia Jewish Museum, there is no single interpretative model, and — unusual for a Jewish museum — there are no Jewish ritual objects on display. These curatorial choices are in keeping with the central fact that local models and explanations of Polish Jewish culture have in any case continued to undergo profound changes and transformations during the years since the end of communist rule in 1989. Visitors are thus tuned in to understand that there has been a major shift away from the Poland-as-death-camp model of Polish Jewish history — its pinnacle site symbolized by the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site and museum — and instead are presented with five ideas, five simple take-home messages that underlie the multi-thematic, multi-layered realities of the present day. The core exhibition is tiny — occupying just 400 square meters, it is about one-tenth of the size of the POLIN Museum — and all it shows are 140 fully captioned present-day photographs in color. Visitors can easily walk through it in one hour, but they emerge feeling they have learned something about this difficult and indeed incoherent, tangled, and chaotic subject.

The Galicia Jewish Museum is widely regarded as a Jewish space. It is a fully active civic institution, serving as a platform for intercultural dialogue by hosting numerous cultural events on Jewish themes of all kinds, including music, films, book presentations, lectures, workshops, and conferences. Performing Jewish music in such a space, for example, is not simply an act of performing Jewish music; it is an act of post-Holocaust tribute to the destroyed Jewish culture and as such, it is also a contribution to Jewish cultural revival. From this example and visitor responses to the exhibition, there is no doubt that the re-contextualized narratives to be found in a Jewish museum in Poland act as agents for social transformation, contributing significantly to new ways of thinking. ■

The photographs for these first four sections are not peopled — a powerful symbol of Jewish absence.



Łańcut synagogue. Photo by Chris Schwarz

What Colonel Sanders Taught Us About Jewish Museums

Irina Nevzlin
Beit Hatfutsot,
The Museum of the
Jewish People

Synagogue Gallery.
Photo by Yaakov Brill

Back in 1991, a branding agency in the United States by the name of the Schechter Group made its most famous contribution to popular culture. The agency successfully convinced its client, the restaurant chain Kentucky Fried Chicken, to rebrand as KFC, offering an elegant way to drop the word "fried," which had started to sound unhealthy. The restaurant was moving with the times, diversifying its menu to add healthy, family-friendly options. In fact, "Kentucky Fried Chicken" was banished entirely, appearing in no promotional material for over a decade. New products were introduced and sales grew substantially. Fourteen years later however, faced with a slowdown, the original, full name was reintroduced, this time in tandem with the snappy acronym. In essence, what the fried chicken people came to realize was that while innovation is essential and positive, it rarely benefits from disowning the past entirely.

Although this story may seem an unusual launchpad into what follows below, it remains a timely allegory and reminder of the ten-year journey to rejuvenate Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People. For the modern Jewish museum, ours or any other, finding that same balance for which corporate brands strive — between invention and continuity — is critical.

Unlike corporate brands, however, defining "success" for a Jewish museum today is decidedly difficult. Visitor

numbers, both online and in person, are an ineffective indicator of actual impact. Equally, the idea of impact itself is far from straightforward. Are we looking to impart a specific experience — transformative and disruptive even — or to facilitate a more personal, less prescriptive response? If the former, are the visitors we're attracting even the right kind of visitors to effect the change we wish to see?

Naturally, different institutions around the world will draw their own conclusions, reflective of their own needs and objectives. In each instance, however, the questions should serve as tramlines for any credible program of conceptualizing a Jewish museum in today's environment. In the case of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, three separate conceptions of what a museum ought to be have led to some bold answers.

The Museum as a Temple

There is a charming little book written in 1917 by Benjamin Ives Gilman, the long-serving secretary of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In the book, in a section titled "The Aims of Museums: The Ideal of Culture," Gilman politely takes aim at the tendency to offer museum visitors context or explanation to aid their intake of the exhibitions. "A museum," Gilman wrote, "is in essence a temple."

While Gilman's vision has died away over the past century, an alternate view — less elitist, more attentive to the needs of the visitor — is taking its place.

In the case of the modern Jewish museum, and certainly The Museum of the Jewish People, it's clear that helping visitors connect is a must. For anyone with any semblance of interest in the continuity of Jewish Peoplehood, there is no value in building palaces of conceptual thought that don't resonate with the everyday visitor. In our case, the vastness of our subject area — 4,000 years of diverse Jewish life, culture, and history — mandates an approach that brings the material to life, while empowering visitors to assess and reassess how they relate to the Jewish people.

To achieve this, the new core exhibition at Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, opens with a dramatic opening statement, focusing on two key aspects: identity and culture.

First, following an ascent to the uppermost floor, visitors begin their museum journey with a series of interactive features showcasing the diversity of Jewish life today and offering opportunities for visitors to explore and contribute their own input. Here, the display creates a space and a toolkit for visitors to form and substantiate their own unique and personalized Jewish identity. In doing so however, while the museum unabashedly hopes to inspire a strong and committed identification with the collective experience of the Jewish people today, it makes no claim as to what conclusions visitors should or should not reach.

The vastness of our subject area mandates an approach that brings the material to life, while empowering visitors to assess and reassess how they relate to the Jewish people.

Second, as a further illustration of the multiple orientations of Jewish life today, the exhibition proceeds with a powerful introduction to the contribution Jews have made to global civilization and culture. The focus on contemporary Jewish achievement and influence reflects a drastic break with tradition in many Jewish museums globally, which often lean heavily towards the past, focusing on Jewish history, the internal mechanics of Jewish life, and antisemitic persecution. While each of these features is important, and each will find its place within The Museum of the Jewish People, our approach differs. Up front, we're opting instead to draw attention to modern Jewish creativity and action.

Within this section of the museum, the visitor's role is ultimately passive. Even when seemingly contributing to the experience, by engaging with the extensive technological, interactive features on show, visitor input is essentially geared towards absorbing a narrative, albeit a narrative that is deliberately open-ended and customizable. In fact, as a tool to support the museum's core narrative, the role of the exhibition's actual features

— be it the cinema of Woody Allen, the Golden Age in Spain, or the literary treasures of the Jewish canon — is secondary. Each exhibition exists primarily to tie together the museum's cumulative sense of Jewish experience, whose prominence far outranks the aesthetic or didactic value of any individual feature.

Essentially, Gilman lives on, although perhaps not in the sense he had intended. While the museum is a "temple" — in that it is designed to inspire reverence, and even adherence to a certain way of thinking — that reverence stems from the subjective feeling of connecting, not through the austerity of velvet-lined partitions.

The Museum as a Platform

Gilman himself argues that the museum exists "primarily in the interest of the ideal," rather than the real. In the framework of Jewish Peoplehood, where the real seems frequently underwhelming, there is a clear value instead to present a stylized notion of the ideal. *Not things as they are, but things as they could be.*

In that light, there is a magnificent quote taken from a televised interview with Abba Eban, marking Israel's tenth anniversary in 1958. The interviewer, Mike Wallace, presses Eban to define what it means to be a Jew. With disarming off-the-cuff eloquence, Eban responds that (it) "is a religion and it is a peoplehood, and it is a civilization, and it is a faith, and it is a memory; it is a world of thought and of spirit and of action and it cannot be restrictively defined." Currently, no site in the Jewish world — not in Israel nor any other global location — gives voice to this holistic effort to understand and explain the Jewish experience in its entirety. In rectifying this, The Museum of the Jewish People will offer not just a symbol for the Jewish people to embrace their own unity and diversity, but a platform to effect positive change.

On a narrower level, one specific challenge stands out, for which The Museum of the Jewish People is uniquely impelled to act. Although there are exceptions to the

There is an overarching goal: to offer an institution of genuine importance in the evolving relationship between Israel and the Jewish world.

Synagogue hall. Photo by Yaakov Brill

rule, it is regrettable that many voices in Israel still appear to lack the confidence to embrace and acknowledge the role of the wider Jewish world. The most probable root cause of this is that Israeli Jewry is routinely brought up with a lack of awareness about Jewish life outside of Israel. While Jewish educators around the world work tirelessly to teach their communities about Israel and its people, Israel often places little or no focus on the realities, achievements, and challenges of world Jewry.

Ultimately, both sides lose out from this ongoing trend. While Jews from around the world end up feeling distanced from Israel, Israeli Jews end up underexposed to the vibrancy and creativity of Jewish life across the globe.

In short, when the leaders of the Jewish world want to ensure that their voice in Israel can resonate effectively, The Museum of the Jewish People can be their springboard. Under this model, over and above the museum's core daily focus — to apply the richness and diversity of Jewish life to connect the Jewish people — there is an overarching goal: to offer an institution of genuine importance in the evolving relationship between Israel and the Jewish world — an "unofficial embassy" for the Jewish people in Israel.

The Museum as an Incubator

Finally, it is worth considering briefly the limitations of any given vision or mission statement, including those laid out above. Although even the very best museum can actively seek to transmit its values, and even to apply those values beyond its walls, the human filter through which this change takes place will have its own voice to impart.

Ten years ago at The Museum of the Jewish People, we established the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies (ISJPS), our in-house educational wing, dedicated to cultivating a sense of belonging and identification with the Jewish people. Through its diverse range of programming, the ISJPS provides a constant supply of fresh voices and fresh thinking, with a shared commitment to the collective future of the Jewish people.

Moreover, through an ongoing series of temporary exhibitions and cultural events, hundreds of artists, filmmakers, designers, innovators, musicians, and thinkers are granted an open space at the museum within which to explore, perform and collaborate. By showcasing creative talent from around the globe, these activities internalize and reiterate the inclusive spirit of the museum.

Across the global spectrum of Jewish life, the task we face — as lofty as it sounds — is to lead the Jewish people toward an embrace of its own unity and diversity.

On both counts — the young leaders we nurture at the ISJPS and the creative talents we incubate through an open-door approach — the museum ensures a democratic, participatory-driven culture, with the lowest possible barriers to entry. We may have built the museum, but we don't claim to own every inch of it — ownership comes with participation.

The Invention Test

There's a fundamental question that the leaders of any museum, or any nonprofit for that matter, should not be afraid to ask. It goes like this: If we didn't exist, would it matter? Or, put differently, if we hadn't been established already, would someone think to create us today? In either case, if the answer is no, the road ahead is often bleak.

In the case of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, through the three models outlined above, the museum carries an ominous task, which no other institution can adequately address. Across the global spectrum of Jewish life, the task we face — as lofty as it sounds — is to lead the Jewish people towards an embrace of its own unity and diversity. This, in effect, is our "brand." It exemplifies our shared commitment to conceive of the Jewish people in terms that apply to its entirety. Answering "no" to that challenge would go against both the test of time, invention, and expression of Jewish Peoplehood.

Answering "no" to that challenge would be criminal. ■

Making Judaica Relevant

Susan L. Braunstein
The Jewish Museum, New York

Installation view of the exhibition "Repetition and Difference," March-August 2015. The Jewish Museum, NY. Photo by David Heald

The Jewish Museum, New York, is an art museum that uses its unparalleled collections, exhibitions, programs, publications, and digital initiatives to explore Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. In recent years, we have been striving to reinvigorate our curatorial program, in order to enable visitors with highly diverse associations with Judaism to create their own "Jewish experience" — to forge their own connections that make Jewishness relevant to them.

The museum has taken several strategic approaches to achieve this aim. The first is to feature more of the Judaica collection in dynamic temporary exhibitions in addition to its long-term display, entitled "Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey." These objects — of both a ceremonial and historical nature — are physical embodiments of multiple aspects of Jewish identity and existence. One can "read" in their function, style, imagery, inscriptions, material, and makers' names, as well as in their provenance and historical context, a wealth of details about the lives of Jews around the world. Once touched by real people, these objects now have the power to transport the visitor to other times and places.

Other approaches entail displaying and interpreting Judaica in a variety of frameworks — as ritual appurtenances, as works of art, as witnesses to history,

as evidence of social, political, and economic status and conditions, as counterpoints to received wisdom derived from written sources, and as touchstones for contemporary situations, to name a few.

For example, a changing exhibition series called "Masterpieces and Curiosities" centers on one piece from the collection and examines and rethinks it by placing it in unusual and diverse contexts through the display of additional objects. Chosen by individual curators, some objects exhibit great beauty, value, and significance, while others are oddities that deserve closer attention. For example, the first iteration of the series featured a medieval aquamanile, or hand-washing vessel, in the shape of a lion. It was created in Northern Germany in the late twelfth century. Most likely first used in a Christian home or church, it was transformed into a sanctified Jewish ritual object some time after 1550 by the addition of a Hebrew inscription engraved into the lion's side. The inscription proclaims: "This is a donation of the honored Berekhiah Segal." Segal, whose last name indicates he was descended from the Levites who served in the ancient temple in Jerusalem, most likely presented the aquamanile to a synagogue in Germany, where it served for the Levite ritual hand washing before the recitation of the priestly blessing.

The aquamanile was shown with other works that illuminate the many levels on which it can be understood: as an important early example among medieval aquamanilia in general, as a work converted from the secular to the sacred and from a Christian to a Jewish context, and as an old and valued object repurposed centuries ago. The piece also raises probing questions about who assigns value to objects and how. As a rather plain lion-shaped vessel in less than pristine condition, it might not command much interest for medievalists and art collectors, but the added Hebrew inscription is a rarity and increases its worth exponentially within the realm of Jewish ceremonial art, depending on the age of the inscription.

Another exhibition that placed Judaica in a new interpretive context was "Repetition and Difference" (2015). It featured multiple examples of nearly identical collections displayed together with contemporary art. The exhibition explored how repetition in art, traditionally

Marriage contract, Isfahan Iran Persia, 1930. The Jewish Museum, NY. Photo by Ardon Bar Hama

seen as the antithesis of originality and exclusivity, can be beautiful and historically important in its own right. While most of the works could initially be perceived as formally the same, a close examination revealed crucial differences among the iterations, which in turn speak to social and political conditions, the expression of individuality, consumer culture, and the joy of artistic invention. An illustration of how a community internalized a crucial social and political shift in its ceremonial art is found in a group of eight very similar marriage contracts (*ketubbot*) from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Isfahan, Iran. A marriage contract is a record of a legal union, but it is also a document that protects the bride financially in the event of the loss or divorce from her husband. The most salient element on the Isfahani *ketubbot* is the lion with the sun rising behind it, a symbol of the Persian Empire and a probable reference to the Isfahan Jewish community's once central position in the former capital. Yet from around 1920 to 1941, a new political symbol replaced the Persian lion — a Star of David enclosing the word "Zion." It emerged soon after the signing of the 1917 Balfour Declaration of British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and continued during the years when the Zionist Association was banned in Iran.

This group of eight *ketubbot* was displayed opposite a 2015 work by Abraham Cruzvillegas, in which an

entire wall was filled with ephemera — newspaper clippings, photographs, postcards, envelopes, tickets, posters, flyers, recipes, napkins — that he had collected on his travels. He had painted the backs gold and gave instructions to mount them in whatever pattern we chose, but with the printed sides toward the wall. Cruzvillegas was referencing his childhood in a poor neighborhood of Mexico City where residents construct the walls of their homes from found materials and unusual objects, plastered over and whitewashed so the wall construction appears uniform. New items continually join or replace old ones. Besides reflecting social issues, both of these works — the Isfahani *ketubbot* and the Mexican artist's autobiographical "wall" — tell a story of symbolically creating a new home amidst the transitory nature of life.

Inviting other perspectives to interpret the Judaica collection besides those of the curators has also proven a fruitful avenue for creating new connections to historic objects. A recent example is an installation by Barbara Bloom entitled "As it were... So to speak: A Museum Collection in Dialogue with Barbara Bloom" (2013). Bloom is an artist who has devoted her career to questioning the ways we value objects, often using a light touch and subtle wit. She discovered many quirky and previously unseen works, which she displayed in evocations of furniture as if in a home. The exhibition consisted of conversations on many levels: between artist and curator, between objects, text, and display furniture, and between historical guests from diverse times. Visitors were invited to eavesdrop on their conversations, carried out through juxtaposing Bloom's writings, found texts, artworks, and furniture-shaped cases. While Bloom offered clues on how to read these tableaux, it was up to the audience to draw their own

> Exhibitions are not the only means by which the museum strives to create relevance and contemporaneity with its collection.

Installation view of the exhibition "As it were . . .So to speak: A Museum Collection in Dialogue with Barbara Bloom," March-August 2013. The Jewish Museum NY. Photo by Ardon Bar Hama

connections among the different elements. One striking tableau invoked two composer giants of the twentieth century who embodied diametrically opposed musical styles — Arnold Schoenberg and George Gershwin — discussing tennis around a piano. The strings of the open-topped piano were comprised of more than one hundred and thirty Torah pointers lined up in rows, the hands of some poised over the piano keys as if striking chords from both Gershwin and Schoenberg compositions. Visitors could learn about what Torah pointers are and admire the imaginative variations in their forms. They could also allow the Judaica objects in their surprising settings to transcend their traditional functions and spark new dialogues about Jewish cultural life and its connections to the larger world.

Exhibitions are not the only means by which the museum strives to create relevance and contemporaneity with its collection. Commissions of Judaica by contemporary artists, not all of whom are Jewish, provide a more global perspective on what unites people, whether it be similarities in religious belief or practice, shared life or historical experience, or the power of art to comment on and sometimes affect social views. We are currently working on a commission for a *ketubbah* with Shahzia Sikander, a Pakistani-born artist who now lives in New York. Sikander works in multiple media, including painting, installation, video, and film. Inspired by Indo-Persian schools of miniature painting, her work interrogates the perceptual distances between the cultures designated as "East" and "West," focusing on processes of social transformation and disruption as a means to cultivate new associations. For the commission, Sikander was inspired by a *ketubbah* in our collection, created in Persia in 1898, that belonged to a member of the Mashhadi Jewish community. These Jews were forced to convert to Islam in the nineteenth century but kept their faith in secret, creating two *ketubbot*: a publicly displayed one in Persian, and a hidden one in Hebrew. The artist was very taken with this notion of hidden practices, as it echoed her own past growing up in a repressive Pakistan. The Mashhadi *ketubbah* also brought to mind the notion of duality, of leading two lives and having two identities, which is also part of Sikander's life in the United States. Finally, the artist saw the *ketubbah* as a document that protects not only the rights of women, but one that today symbolically honors the egalitarian principle of partnership, whether it is between two people marrying or of different cultures, disciplines, or opinions. All these elements will be reflected in the *ketubbah* design. Sikander's marriage contract, which creates a bridge among different religions, disciplines and life experiences, will make its way into the Jewish community through the museum's participation in the web-based ketubbah.com. This company provides reproductions of *ketubbah* borders from our collection for couples to use in their own contracts.

[Visitors] could allow the Judaica objects in their surprising settings to transcend their traditional functions and spark new dialogues about Jewish cultural life and its connections to the larger world.

As a whole, these projects provide various points of entry into works that arose out of traditional Jewish practice and historical experience, rather than recounting a single narrative, which can be exclusionary. This approach seems more consonant with the interests and perspectives of today's audiences, many of them younger, whose identities are often multiple or hybridized, who are globally linked to each other, and who frequent contemporary galleries. We aim to build on the basic attributes of form and function to ask new, relevant questions of the material and spark new dialogues and appreciations, allowing visitors to make their own connections or reconnections to Jewish culture. ■

Jewish Museums as Catalysts for Community

Ivy Barsky
National Museum of American Jewish History

President Obama helping light the Hanukkah menorah in the White House, December 2013. Official White House Photo by Lawrence Jackson. Photo courtesy National Museum of American Jewish History

"They took all the trees/
And put them in a tree museum/
Then they charged the people/
A dollar and a half just to see 'em"[1]

The quote from singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell points to the perception that museums are where things go to die. Everyone, from the 20th-century artist Marcel Duchamp to the esteemed rabbi and scholar of blessed memory Arthur Herzberg, has asserted this claim. Jewish museums are subject to double jeopardy. One might conclude that if museums are where things go to die, then Jewish museums are where Jewish things go to die. Hence, we are tolling the death knell for Judaism or Jewishness.

The museum field has not done a terribly good job of countering the stereotype. Like many stereotypes, it contains a shred of truth. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, museums were more likely to be storehouses to preserve history than hotbeds of new thinking. However, the dissemination of information has long been an essential function of museums, and has evolved into a public mandate resulting in robust and innovative education programming.

1 Joni Mitchell, "Big Yellow Taxi," 1970

Ed Rothstein (former art critic for *The New York Times,* more recently of the *Wall Street Journal*) wrote: "...a Jewish religious object put on exhibit was no longer playing its vital role in synagogue or home; taken out of its context and function, it had been turned into a relic, more closely resembling the artifacts of a fading Native American tribe in a museum of natural history than a 17th-century Dutch portrait at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Even today, a museum of Jewish religious artifacts is partly a Jewish morgue, less a tribute to Judaism's continuity than a memorial to the world of belief left behind...." [2]

Obviously, those of us who toil in the field of Jewish museum work must take issue with this. None of us would do this work if we thought those were the ends. In fact, I would argue, Jewish museums are doing quite the opposite. We're just not making the case strongly enough. We're also allowing Jewishness to be defined narrowly by its ritual attributes rather than by all the many things that really make, and keep, Jews Jewish.

Jewish museums may not be the answer to Jewish hand wringing, borne by the 2013 Pew study,[3] which posited that fewer Jews are affiliating Jewishly in traditional ways. Nor are we alike. But we are, I would argue, an essential part of the ecology of Jewish history and identity. Most of all, we *are an important part of a vibrant Jewish future.*

In this data-driven time, our anecdotal evidence is not sufficient. But it is powerful. In the National Museum of American Jewish History's collection is a beautiful menorah, made by Manfred Anson. (There is a version in the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York, and at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles.) Anson, himself a former refugee, created the menorah for the 1986 centenary of the Statue of Liberty. The NMAJH was honored to be asked to bring our menorah to the White House in 2013 for the Hanukkah celebration.

There, it was lit by a Jewish family whose husband and father was deployed in Afghanistan. President Obama lifted one of the children to light the candles and those

Menorah made by Manfred Anson for the 1986 centenary of the Statue of Liberty. Donated by Dr. Aaron Feingold. Photo courtesy National Museum of American Jewish History

gathered recited the prayer and sang Ma'oz Tzur. If that isn't Jewish life, I don't know what is.

Jewish museums and historic sites provide ways to think about the present (and future) with knowledge of our past.

Many of my colleagues in American Jewish museums are using their standing in the community and their role as the custodians of history to act on current events. For example, the Jewish Museum of Maryland helped to stem racial tension in Baltimore in the aftermath of Freddie Gray's death, an African American youth shot and killed by Baltimore police, and a landmark case in contemporary race relations in the United States.

At the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, a long time education program called the Living Museum Project has produced the Interfaith Museum project, in which Muslim students and Jewish day school students

2 Edward Rothstein, "The Problem with Jewish Museums," *Mosaic* Magazine, February 1, 2016.

3 Pew Research Center, "Portrait of Jewish Americans," 2013.

partner over the course of a school year to investigate ritual (and other) objects from their homes and to discuss their own traditions. They find differences, of course, but they also uncover profound similarities and understand each other as individuals. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the program occurs when the Muslim and Jewish families and teachers of the 5th and 6th graders gather at the museum in lower Manhattan to view the exhibition that the kids have curated and organized and share a meal together.

In this highly charged, contentious time in America, where better to address the hot topic of immigration than at the Tenement Museum, Eldridge Street Synagogue, or the National Museum of American Jewish History?

I gave a tour of NMAJH to an interesting family that taught me a lot about the muscle of the museum. The patriarch, his three children, their spouses, and some grandchildren arrived. They had grown up squarely Reform. One of the grown kids married a similarly Reform partner, another married a Catholic man and they were raising their children "both." The third had become Orthodox with children attending *yeshivot,* their heads covered. Where else could this family have come together to comfortably explore their shared heritage but a Jewish museum?

Recently, we had a small family group that bid for a tour of the museum at their synagogue auction. The group included the parents of one partner of a young lesbian couple. The wife-to-be was not Jewish. For those smart parents, the museum provided an unthreatening space for that family to discuss Jewishness, tradition, and innovation, and to casually explore family history and practice. Incidentally, it also provided a place to learn about the role of queer Jews in the larger struggle for LGBT rights in this country and to find an appropriate, same sex, interfaith *ketubbah* (Jewish marriage contract) Maybe this is not so incidental, but rather a sign of the malleability of "Jewishness" and Jewish traditions to accommodate societal change.

> But we are an essential part of the ecology of Jewish history and identity. Most of all, we are an important part of a vibrant Jewish future.

Immigration Gallery. Photo by G. Widmans, courtesy Visit Philadelphia

The Jewish philanthropic field is mixed in its reviews of museums and whether to support them. We will always have funders who want to support a narrow stream of activity and stay in their lane with discipline and precision. Some explicitly state in their guidelines that they won't support museums or entertain proposals from them. I suspect those funders don't really understand what we do and our potential impact. The consequence of their narrow focus means that they lose the opportunity to engage those who have a broader vision of Jewish identity, vitality, community, and religious meaning.

Jewish funders and Jewish museums alike should invest more in what messages our non-Jewish audiences cull from us. Jewish funders who have a singular goal of "Jewish continuity" often don't factor in that Jewish continuity in America includes our hyphenated identity. We need to meet folks on both sides of their hyphen and appeal to their whole selves. For example, the exhibition "Bill Graham and the Rock 'n Roll Revolution" (organized by the Skirball, and opened at NMAJH in September 2016) is most appealing to rock 'n roll fans, but attracts Jews and non-Jews who learn the astounding story of how a Holocaust orphan, who began his American life in foster care in the Bronx at age 10, grew up to stage manage the rock revolution. Or our recent induction of Julius Rosenwald into our Only in America Hall of Fame. We have been sharing the little known story of this first generation Jewish American whose incredible innovation and entrepreneurship as president of Sears and Roebuck made him a very wealthy man in the early 20th century. He used his fortune to engage in his civic community (for example, helping to build what is now the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago), his Jewish community (by helping to save Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms), and the African-American community in the rural south, for which he helped build more than 5,000 schools for African-American children who did not have access to quality education because of segregation. Promoting the story of Julius Rosenwald helps us instill pride in being Jewish *and* American, while inspiring our audiences to dream, dare, and do more to transform the world in which we live, and address injustice where they see it.

NMAJH just celebrated our fourth annual Freedom Seder. This is an intentionally interfaith, interethnic visitor experience of 300 or so dining together, with another several hundred participating by livestream video. Everyone in attendance participates in the program through music and storytelling that encourages real dialogue about the contemporary meanings and struggles around notions of freedom. It ends with a stirring version of *Od yavo shalom aleinu*.[4]

Now, Ed Rothstein and, to be fair, many others, might assert that this is pandering — privileging the American narrative over the Jewish narrative. But Jewish museums can, and should, be catalysts for community writ large.
It is interesting that as an international community we think most about the importance of museums and historic sites during conflict and war, and the importance — symbolic and otherwise — of their preservation or destruction. After the Russian Revolution, the Russians proclaimed that all historic monuments were to be protected. Conversely, we witnessed the recent tragic destruction of religious and historic sites in Iraq and Syria. The good guys and the bad guys understand that the evidence of history is central to the spirit, pride, and continuity of people.

Jewish continuity in America includes our hyphenated identity. We need to meet folks on both sides of their hyphen and appeal to their whole selves.

We need museums, and Jewish communal support for Jewish museums, because we need to experience collective history to see how the past resurfaces in the present in order to remain civilized in the future. "Societies build these institutions because they authenticate the social contract. They are collective evidence that we were here,"[5] and continue to be. ■

4 An Israeli folksong about peace, often used referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and includes "salaam," the Arabic word for peace as well as "shalom."

5 Elaine Heumann Gurian, "The Many Meanings of Objects in Museums," *Daedalus* Vol. 128, No. 3 (summer 1999).

The Curriculum and the Vitrine

Benjamin M. Jacobs and
Jenna Weissman Joselit
The George Washington
University

From the "Museum on Wheels," a mobile educational exhibition of the POLIN Museum. Photo by Jakub Nowotyński, courtesy POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Some of the most extraordinary and engaging museum experiences occur when one's imagination is allowed to run wild.

Ever since 1891, when the citizens of New York City, many of them immigrants, circulated a petition calling on the Metropolitan Museum of Art to open its doors on Sundays, museums have become the talk of the town. Generating headlines as well as crowds, they have become an essential perquisite of modernity and a hallmark of the civic square, let alone a boon to the economy. No flourishing culture is without them.

Little wonder, then, that great quantities of ink, or its digital equivalent, have been spilled in an attempt to take the measure of this most robust of cultural institutions. Within and without the academy, on the street and at conferences, the inner life of the museum has been variously chronicled, exposed, mediated, and scrutinized. Everything from text labels to traffic patterns, the competing claims of authenticity and simulation, as well as the role of the curator and the agency of the visitor, has, of late, been up for scrutiny. Less apparent from much of the scholarly discussion is the relationship between museums and pedagogy. It's not that the educative function of museums has been ignored. The steady growth of Museum Education and Museum

Studies programs throughout the country certainly suggests otherwise. It's that thinking explicitly, and in a sustained manner, about exhibitions as a form of curricular expression has not received its due. What would happen, we wonder, if the curriculum were given as much pride of place as the vitrine? Curatorial decisions, after all, are much like curricular decisions. Both are fraught with value choices regarding what to include and what to exclude. What's more, museums, like schools, share the weighty responsibility of representing the culture, politics, and social mores of a given place and time and — equally important — of imparting it to the general public. Looking at museums through a curricular lens furnishes museum professionals with a sense of how curation, display, explication, and interaction can be geared intentionally toward educational ends, such as knowledge acquisition, skills development, emotional engagement, socialization, connoisseurship, and spiritual growth.

Visitors, in turn, might be redefined as learners who find in the museum's galleries an opportunity for collective and individual inquiry, discovery, and edification. Within its precincts, they typically encounter a museum curriculum that illuminates the subject matter and explains it normatively, often in an exhibition that guides them lockstep through the chronological development of a theme. Take, for example, the core exhibition at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, which shepherds visitors from *Jewish Life A Century Ago,* through *The War Against the Jews,* and toward *Jewish Renewal* in the 21st century. On display are thousands of objects, personal artifacts, photographs and videos that, in the words of the museum, "celebrate the richness of Jewish culture and traditions" of the modern age (1st and 3rd floors), and that also commemorate the tragedies of the Holocaust (2nd floor).

At the same time, museums provide abundant opportunities for self-directed learning, prompting visitors to stray from the museum's prescribed narrative, linger for lengthy periods of time in one place or another, and of course, interpret displayed objects in whatever way they will, no matter the official through-line. In much the same way, students in a history class gain different perspectives from analyzing original documents than they would from reading a textbook. More to the point, perhaps, the premise of hands-on exhibitions, interactive media, and simulation games, which have become increasingly prevalent within the walls of the museum, is that some of the most extraordinary and engaging museum experiences occur when one's imagination is allowed to run wild.

What would happen, we wonder, if the curriculum were given as much pride of place as the vitrine? Curatorial decisions, after all, are much like curricular decisions. Both are fraught with value choices regarding what to include and what to exclude.

All the same, individual exploration is still bounded by the normative content of the museum's curriculum. Visitors may emerge from the museum with a greater understanding and appreciation of a cultural phenomenon and still not know that phenomenon in all its complexities. They know only as much as the museum shows and tells them.

It is to these kinds of issues, or what might be more profitably characterized as creative tensions, that the students in George Washington University's graduate program in Experiential Education & Jewish Cultural Arts grapple with week in and week out. In our courses on the history of Jewish arts and culture and the theory and practice of experiential Jewish education, our students contemplate the contours of Jewish expression and edification with an eye toward how they may be artfully synthesized. Over a 13-month course of study, generously supported by the Jim Joseph Foundation, they engage in a series of progressively intensive internship experiences in Jewish cultural organizations that serve educational functions, such as museums, community centers, and historical societies. We train them to be curious about what cultural experiences

engage Jewish audiences and what pedagogical approaches might enable arts organizations to maximize their impact.

As our students have discovered, the vexed relationship between heritage and history is one arena where the "curricularizing" of exhibitions is at its most generative. For some time now, historians and other academicians have been increasingly mindful of the manifold distinctions between these two forms of constructing the past. For some, such as David Lowenthal, "history is the past that actually happened, heritage a partisan perversion, the past manipulated for some present aim." (*The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, 1998) Historians might shudder at the prospect, but for many museum visitors, Lowenthal points out, heritage is far more "serviceable than the stubborn and unpredictable past revealed by history. Such an unrevised past is too remote to comprehend, too strange to be exemplary, too regrettable to admire, or too dreadful to recall. It may also be too dead to care much about." For others, such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, heritage is more of a construct than an emotional disposition. "Heritage," she explains, "is not lost or found, stolen and reclaimed. Despite a discourse of conservation, preservation, restoration, reclamation and recovery....

> Only when visitors are confronted with complexity can they be inspired to conjure their own thoughtful narratives of the Jewish past.

A participant in "Graffiti Week" at the Galicia Jewish Museum. Photo courtesy Galicia Jewish Museum

heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse to the past." (*Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 1998). As for history, well, it tends to be what the individual or the community makes of and takes from it, rather than the pronouncements of professionals. What, then, are curators to do? Take sides? Hedge their bets by temporizing?

At this juncture, consciously thinking of an exhibition as a curriculum comes into play, making room for both history and heritage in the recounting, recollection, commemoration, and memorialization of the past. Museums need a heady dose of heritage to keep visitors engaged and perhaps even inspired and an equally heady dose of history to keep things on track. We don't propose separate galleries dedicated to each domain, of course. Rather, we suggest that the wonders displayed behind the vitrines can be brought to life through critical examination of the historical circumstances in which they were created and in light of contemporary concerns.

Museums need a heady dose of heritage to keep visitors engaged and perhaps even inspired and an equally heady dose of history to keep things on track.

How much more imaginative and interactive might a museum caption be if, instead of merely providing a description, it raised difficult questions for the visitor as well. Alongside an elaborate pair of silver candlesticks, curators might ask: Must form follow function in the creation of Jewish ritual objects? Is it appropriate to have such ostentatious display in the service of piety? Who could afford such an expensive ritual object? And how much more compelling would the distinctive nature of Jewish culture be if it were juxtaposed against artifacts from other cultures in a comparative frame, rather than being surrounded almost exclusively by other self-referential Jewish objects?

From the exhibition "Heroes — Trailblazers of the Jewish People" at Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People. Photo by Yaakov Brill

The pedagogical function of the museum should be implicit throughout and not just confined to its educational wing (which all too often is dedicated to simplistic scavenger hunt-style activities for schoolchildren). When it comes to instilling an appreciation of the Jewish past and trust in Jewish values, heritage, to be sure, has a role to play, but in the teaching of the Jewish past, museums have an obligation to do even more. They must convey the story in all its intricacies. Only when visitors are confronted with complexity can they be inspired to conjure their own thoughtful narratives of the Jewish past. At that point, history can be their heritage and heritage their history. ■

About the Contributors

Ivy Barsky has been the CEO and Gwen Goodman Director of the National Museum of American Jewish History, in Philadelphia, since June 2012. Previously she served as deputy director of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

Tressa Berman is Principal Consultant of the Institute for Inter-Cultural Practice in Los Angeles, and former Associate Professor of Art and Anthropology at Arizona State University and the California College of the Arts. She served as visiting faculty at the University Technology, Sydney (UTS) and the San Francisco Art Institute, where she helped launch the Exhibition and Museum Studies Master's program. She has worked with a range of museums, including the California Academy of Sciences, Smithsonian Museums, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and contributed to UNESCO's document on the protection of cultural heritage. She is a special project consultant to the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture.

Susan L. Braunstein started working at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1980, and was appointed the Henry J. Leir Curator in 2012. She is primarily responsible for the collections of historical and contemporary Judaica, antiquities, and numismatics. Her specialties include the archaeology of Israel and Hanukkah lamps; in 2004 she published a catalogue of the museum's entire collection of 1,022 Hanukkah lamps. She has also created numerous exhibitions including "The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World," "Jewish Life in Tsarist Russia," and "Repetition and Difference."

Uri Gershowitz directs the Research Department of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow. For several years he simultaneously studied Talmud at the Yeshiva Har Etzion and analytical philosophy and history of Jewish thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, receiving his PhD in 2008 in medieval Jewish philosophy.

Benjamin M. Jacobs is a Visiting Associate Professor at The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development, specializing in Experiential Education and Jewish Cultural Arts. He also serves as chair of the Network for Research in Jewish Education, the leading academic organization in the field.

Jenna Weissman Joselit is the Charles E. Smith Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of History at The George Washington University, where she is also the director of two graduate programs in Jewish cultural arts. She is the author of several books on American daily life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and on the American Jewish experience, including *The Wonders of America*, winner of the 1995 National Jewish Book Award in History, and *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*. Her latest book, *Set in Stone: America's Embrace of the Ten Commandments*, will be published in the spring.

Samuel D. Kassow is the Charles H. Northam Professor of History at Trinity College, author of the award-winning *Who Will Write Our History?: Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, and a member of the core exhibition Academic Team of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. He was the 2016 Jacob Kronhill Visiting Scholar at YIVO.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is chief curator of the core exhibition of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. She is university professor emerita and professor emerita of performance studies at New York University. Her books include *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage; Image before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland,* 1864–1939 (with Lucjan Dobroszycki); and *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (edited with Jonathan Karp). Her edited volume *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron* won a National Jewish Book Award in 2006.

They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust, which she coauthored with her father, Mayer Kirshenblatt, also won several awards.

Cilly Kugelmann is the Program Director and Vice Director of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Previously, she worked at the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt am Main. She has also been involved in the publication of several books on the postwar history of Jews in Germany and on antisemitism.

Irina Nevzlin is Chair of the Board of Directors of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People and President of the Nadav Foundation. In her capacity as Board Chair, she is leading the vision and transformation of the museum's core exhibition. As President of Nadav, she oversees the strategic management of the foundation, which supports initiatives that promote Jewish Peoplehood, build collective Jewish identity and forge lasting ties between Jews around the world. In addition, Irina serves as Founding Co-Chair of the Israeli Center for Better Childhood and on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Funders Network.

Shana Penn is Executive Director of Taube Philanthropies, and a Visiting Scholar at the Graduate Theological Union Center for Jewish Studies, in Berkeley. She is the author of *Sekret Solidarności* (W.A.B., 2014), *Solidarity's Secret: The Women who Defeated Communism in Poland* (University of Michigan, 2005) and co-editor with Jill Massino of *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist East and Central Europe* (Palgrave USA, 2009).

Antony Polonsky is chief historian of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and Vice President of the American Association of Polish Jewish Studies. He is the author of many historical works on the Holocaust and on Russian and Polish Jewish history.

Shlomi Ravid is General Editor of the Peoplehood Papers and Executive Director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education. He was the founding director of the Israel Center of San Francisco, the founding director of the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies at Beit Hatfutsot, and the founder of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education.

Jeffrey Shandler is Professor and Chair of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University. His most recent books include Shtetl: *A Vernacular Intellectual History* (Rutgers University Press, 2014), and *Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory* (Indiana University Press, 2012). He has curated exhibitions for The Jewish Museum of New York, the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Shandler has served as president of the Association for Jewish Studies and is a fellow of the American Academy for Jewish Research.

Jonathan Webber taught Jewish studies at Oxford University for twenty years, then spent eight years as a UNESCO Professor in Jewish and Interfaith Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK), and then five years as an Associate Professor at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków. His research on the Jewish heritage of Galicia became the basis of his collaboration with the photographer Chris Schwarz that led to the creation of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków and to their co-curating its "Traces of Memory" exhibition, for which he wrote the companion volume, published in 2009.

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ISBN 978-0-9839042-3-6