

INSERTING HERSH FENSTER'S *UNDZERE FARPAINIKTE KINSTLER* INTO ART HISTORY

Abstract

In 1951, Hersh Fenster published *Undzere farpainikte kinstler* (*Our Martyred Artists*), a 300-page yizkor book in Yiddish that commemorated 84 Jewish artists who had worked in France in the interwar period and perished in the Holocaust. Unlike most memorial books, which are collaborative group endeavors sponsored by landsmannschaften groups or communal organizations, this volume was researched, written, and published entirely by one individual. This article situates Fenster's initiative within the genre of the yizkor book and commemorative practices in the immediate postwar period more broadly. I argue that Fenster's volume is not only a memorial tombstone (*matseyve*) for the murdered artists, it also offers a "window" (*fenster*) into an entire generation of Jewish artists lost to art history, illuminating their lives through not only portraits, critical reviews, and reproductions of works of art, but also through anecdotal information based on the recollections of friends and family who survived. Whereas Holocaust scholars have generally resisted using yizkor books as historical documents, this article suggests important ways in which *Our Martyred Artists* opens up new frames for art historical inquiry.

Right after the great disaster, when I went back to Paris, the first thing was to know who remained alive from the

fire. I went to Montparnasse, where I had several friends, where Parisian Jewish artists, from all Jewish centers, worked in their poor ateliers, would meet in the cafes there, and over a glass of coffee would talk about art and artistic creation ... The thought of them and the memory of their creation came to life in me in great grief ... And with the veneration and awe one has for martyrs, I began to immortalize their work as their memorial.

—Hersh Fenster

In 1951, Hersh Fenster published an unusual yizkor book that commemorated 84 Jewish artists who had worked in France in the interwar period and perished during the Holocaust, *Undzere Farpainikte Kinstler* (*Our Martyred Artists*).¹ Like so many Jews in France, Fenster had spent the war years on the run, trying to evade the Nazis and their Vichy collaborators.² When he made his way back to Paris after "the great disaster," the "first thing" he did was try to find out who among his Parisian Jewish artist friends "remained alive from the fire" (Fig. 1).³ He spent roughly three years researching and compiling sources, and then another three writing and raising funds to support the publication of the book.

¹ The epigram is from Hersh Fenster, "To the Reader," preface to *Our Martyred Artists* [in Yiddish] (Paris: Abécé, 1951), trans. Barbara Harshav (see pages 26–27 in this issue). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are from the original Yiddish by Barbara Harshav and Elena Hoffenberg. Translations from the French edition are my own, from the recent French translation, *Nos Artistes Martyrs*. All references to this translation are to that book. I first encountered *Our Martyred Artists* over five years ago in 2016, when I was tasked with researching the collection of Oscar Ghez, comprising 137 works made by persecuted Jewish artists who had worked in Paris, which he had donated to the Hecht Museum of the University of Haifa, where I teach. Relying on Fenster, Ghez began searching and buying works to preserve them from "dispersion or destruction." Oscar Ghez, "Preface to the First Catalogue of the Ghez Collection," in *Memorial in Honour of Jewish Artists, Victims of Nazism* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1978). Ghez noted that "it was in France that most of them were arrested by the Gestapo and its collaborators, and later transferred from there to the death camps. Thus, it was in Paris that I was able to find and acquire all these works." In the first year, we published the first substantive catalogue of this forgotten collection, *The Oscar Ghez Collection: A Memorial in Honor of Jewish Artists, Victims of Nazism* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 2017), which reproduced all the works in color for the first time. In the second year, we curated an exhibition entitled *Arrivals, Departures: Salvaged Works by Persecuted Artists*

at the Hecht Museum (June–November 2018). Throughout the preparation of this exhibition, I relied heavily on Fenster's work.

² After the armistice, Fenster fled with his family to the Dordogne region in the Free Zone. He was then interned in the camps of Mauriac and Saint-Georges-d'Aurac, before making his way to a refugee camp in Switzerland.

³ Fenster, "To the Reader," in this issue, 26–27 (all such references will be to pages in this issue). Born in Barnev (Baranów Sandomierski) in Galicia, Fenster had moved to Paris in 1922, working as a journalist and art critic (and between 1925 and 1930 as Sholem Asch's secretary). In March 1939, Fenster opened an organization to support recent immigrants and refugees from the Reich, *Dos Yidishe Vinkl* (The Jewish Corner), at 41 rue Richer (9eme), with the sculptor Naoum Aronson (and described in his entry on Aronson on page 275 of his work); they offered hot meals, clothes, and community (celebrations for holidays as well as conferences). Rivka Kope, "Hersh Leyb Fenster," in Nachman Blumental, *Sefer-Yizkor Baranov* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1964), 147. After the war, he opened another soup kitchen – Ri-Riche Kitchen – for surviving refugees, which served as a meeting place for Yiddish culture in the first postwar years but also, no doubt, was where he sourced his information. "Memorial-Literatur: Jiddisch in Hebräischer Schrift und die Frühen Polnischen Opferbilanzen," *Memoriart* 33–45, n.d., www.memoriart33-45.org.

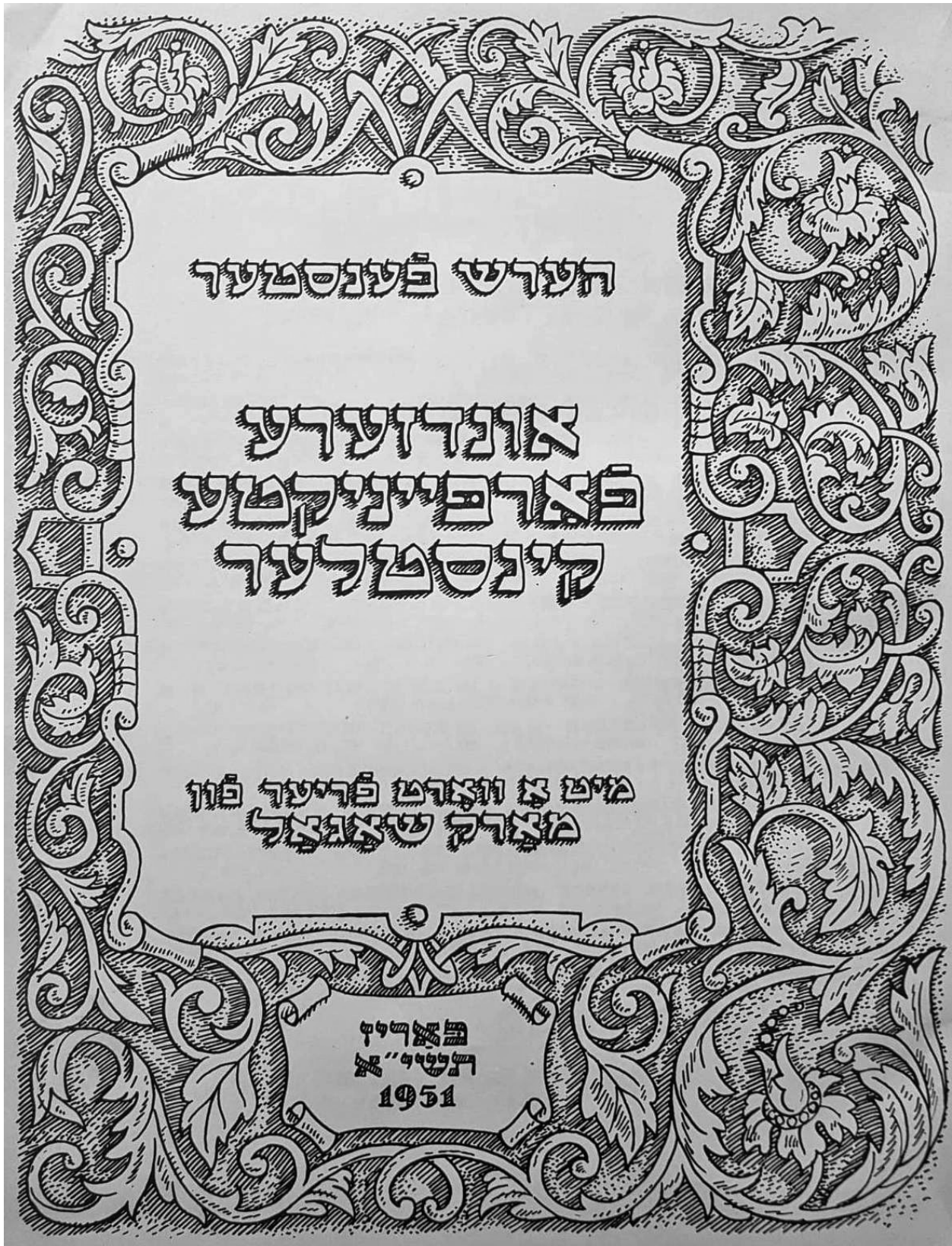


Fig. 1 Cover of Hersh Fenster, *Our Martyred Artists* (Paris: Abéc, 1951). Designed by Arthur Kolnik, Author's Collection.



Fig. 2 Colophon designed by Arthur Kolnik, © MAHJ, Paris. Donation of Ariel Fenster.

“To the Reader,” Fenster’s foreword to *Our Martyred Artists*, is a gut-punch. It slides between survivor’s guilt – “one felt guilty for staying alive” – and a need to, as he writes, try to “at least justify it.”⁴ Motivated by a sense of “holy obligation,” Fenster also intended it to act as a “powerful accusation against the world.”⁵ Throughout, he stresses the difficulty of his task as an amateur *zamlar* (a collector driven by a mission): “The work has not been easy: to seek traces of them after the catastrophe in big Paris, where no one has ever found any.”

Originally conceived of as a gravestone (*matseyve*) or paper memorial, *Our Martyred Artists* includes book decoration and design by the artist Arthur Kolnik and

opens with a guilt-ridden, handwritten poem by Marc Chagall, who mourns all “the unpainted pictures” and “the unachieved years which [the murdered artists] had saved up and looked forward to for fulfilling their dreams” (Fig. 2).⁶ It concludes with a list of artists murdered in other countries, but at its core are 84 biographical entries on the victims, which are supplemented not only by photographic portraits, critical reviews of their exhibitions, and reproductions of their work but also ego documents (autobiographical writings such as letters and diaries) and anecdotal information based on the recollections of friends and family who survived. Entirely self-published, only 375 copies were printed.⁷

⁴ Fenster, “To the Reader,” 26–27.

⁵ “Puissante accusation portée contre le monde.” Hersh Fenster, Letter to the Congress for Jewish Culture, October 21, 1948, MEDEM, Archives Fenster, Box 7, cited in Hersh Fenster, *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 302–303, here 302.

⁶ Marc Chagall, “For the Slaughtered Artists,” in this issue, 26–27.

⁷ Fenster, *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 264. Fenster autographed the first 75.

In significant ways, Fenster's work deviates from the standard template of the *yizkor* book and steps outside of its conventions. Instead of being based on a geographical place of origin, it centers rather vocation and geographical site of professional activity.⁸ Unlike so many, if not most, memorial books, which were collective, collaborative endeavors organized by one or several editors and *landsmannschaften* groups (immigrant benevolent organizations formed and named after the members' birthplace for the purpose of mutual aid and hometown aid), this was researched and written entirely by one individual. But his purpose was the same: as he put it, it was to immortalize the lives and work of the dead artists as their memorial.⁹

Fenster's project should not be taken for granted. As Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin write of *yizkor* books more generally, "the fact that the retellings did not only remain solely oral," that he was "willing to commit pen to paper at all, should not be taken for granted as a natural response to the catastrophe. The alternative of silence was always available and had its advantages."¹⁰ He was working alone, and one can only marvel at his tenacity and sense of mission to tackle an undertaking of this scope in the face of tremendous odds.

Never translated, Fenster's book has remained largely sidelined by art historians – until now. Seventy years after its publication, the book's first translation was just released by the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire

du Judaïsme in Paris – *Hersh Fenster, Nos Artistes Martyrs* – in conjunction with the exhibition *Paris Pour École, 1905–1940* and its pendant exhibition, *Hersh Fenster et le Shtetl Perdu de Montparnasse* (June 2021) (Fig. 3).¹¹ For the first time, this untapped resource is accessible to a wider audience. A remarkable – and necessary – achievement, it is fitting that the first translation of *Our Martyred Artists* is in French, the language of the country that welcomed these artists in the first decades of the twentieth century but then abandoned them and assisted the Nazis in deporting them to the camps.¹² Even after the war, the Jewish victims' death certificates were stamped with the galling phrase "mort pour [for] la France" (an honor awarded by the government to people, usually soldiers, who died in service of the country), when in most cases they died not *for* but *because* of France.¹³

In addition to showcasing over 300 photographs, self-portraits, and reproductions of the works of the murdered artists, *Our Martyred Artists* includes anecdotes, recollections, testimonies, and letters that Fenster collected and inserted into his *magnum opus* (Fig. 4). Can we confirm them, verify them? They pack a punch, but what do they tell us? For one, his editorial decision to incorporate many of these "overheard," secondhand comments also speaks volumes about *his own* project and about his motivations. In his entry on Jacques Gotko (born Yankele Gotkovski in Odessa), Fenster relates that while "at Drancy, the artist vowed,

⁸ The artists Fenster memorialized came from all over: Ekaterinoslav, Vitebsk, Kiev, Kharkov, Nijyn, Nijni-Novgorod, Smilovitchi, Odessa, Orgeiev, Prague, Budapest, Vilna, Warsaw, Kielce, Lodz, Drohobytch, Bialystok, Radom, Berlin, Stolp, Stuttgart, and even Salonica as well as numerous smaller villages.

⁹ Fenster's understanding of the importance of collecting and recording predates the Holocaust. In 1937, Fenster embarked on an ethnographic expedition to Poland with the painter Jacob Macznik. They were "seized with the terrifying vision of the approaching catastrophe" and wanted to document Jewish culture in Poland, and particularly its synagogues, before it was too late. See Zaynvl Diamant "O Earth, Cover Not Thou My Blood (Job 16:18)", Review of Hersh Fenster's Book, *Our Martyred Artists*, *Yidishe Kemfer (Jewish Fighter)* 8 (1953): 11–12, in *Bukh mit Presse Oyshhnitn (Book with Press Clippings; hereafter Prese Oyshhnitn)*, MEDEM, A.FEN.II(2).

¹⁰ Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 18. On *yizkor* books, see also Annette Wiewiorka, *Les Livres du Souvenir. Mémoires Juifs de Pologne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

¹¹ The MAHJ's translation, *Hersh Fenster, Nos Artistes Martyrs*, was written by Rachel Koskas, Natalia Krynicka, Judith Lindenber, Pascale Samuel, and it was edited by Juliette Braillon-Philippe and

translated by Nadia Dehan-Rotschild and Evelyne Grumberg for the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (Paris: Hazan, 2021).

¹² In his review of *Our Martyred Artists*, Daniel Leybl lamented that in France – "famous as a land where art is supported by protection and help from the state and by openness, without regard to who the artists are by their origin, nationality, or religion" – the art academies had not assisted their students during the war "as they were deported to be incinerated in the gas ovens of Auschwitz, Belzec, and Treblinka." Daniel Leybl, "A Monument far Umgekumene Yidishe Kinstler" ("A Monument for Murdered Jewish Artists"), n.d., in *Bukh mit Prese Oyshhnitn*, MEDEM, A.FEN.II(2).

¹³ The phrase "mort pour la France" (died for France) was first used for the dead of World War I. On the unsettling connotations of the term today, see the conclusion of James McAuley's recent book, *The House of Fragile Things: Jewish Art Collectors and the Fall of France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 255: "But Béatrice de Camondo did not die 'for' France; if anything, she died *because* of France, and specifically because she had been Jewish in France ... She had been classified as undesirable ... But here on her birth certificate that nation still claimed her as a fallen comrade, as if nothing had happened, as if she was a partisan killed in combat defending the flag."

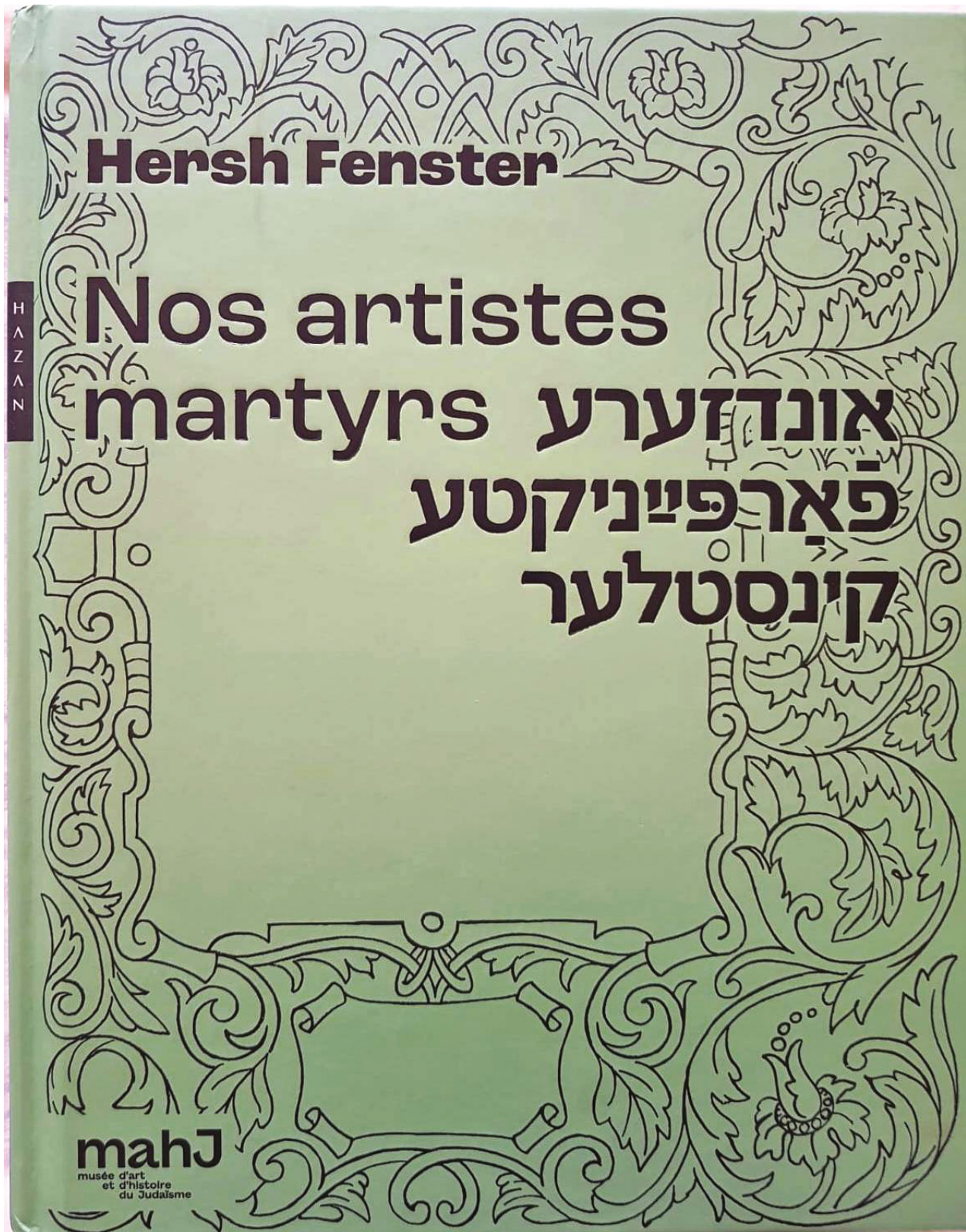


Fig. 3 *Nos artistes martyrs* (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme-Hazan, 2021).



Fig. 4 Photographs collected and pinned by Hersh Fenster, Paris, 1945–1950. Fenster 2 archives, © MAHJ. From left to right: Georges Ascher, Abraham Berline, Meyer Cheychel, [non identified], Yehouda Cohen, Jules Graumann / Meyer-Miron Kodkine, Isaac Kogan, [non identified], Jacob Milkin, Alexandre Riemer, Raphael Schwartz / Leopold Sinayeff-Bernstein, Joachim Weingart.

if he came out alive, to make a film about the camp, not with professional actors but with the victims themselves, because,” he said, “the world must know what happened there. We have to show them all the vileness and desecration of the word man.”¹⁴ Fenster’s inclusion of this statement reads as a kind of ventriloquism for his desire to allow “the victims themselves” to speak in order to let “the world know what happened there.”

Together, the memories and last words that Fenster gathered certainly bring the artists to life for us, allow-

ing us to flesh out the contours of their biographies with events, facts, dates, and details that would have otherwise remained lost to history. Ezekiel Brownstone wrote that Fenster “resurrected them” (*mekhaye-meysim zayn*).¹⁵ Rivka Kope wrote of a “resurrection of the dead” (*tkhies hameysim*).¹⁶ Not necrologies, the entries buzz with details about the artists’ experiences, contacts and, where possible, personalities. Moreover, each entry is different not only in content but in style, language, and tone – as different as each of the artists

¹⁴ *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 69. In his entry on Gotko, Fenster mentions Georges Wellers without citing him as his source for this anecdote. Wellers was a Jewish Russian-born historian and doctor, who was in Compiègne, Drancy, and Auschwitz with Gotko but who survived and published one of the CDJC’s first books after the war, *De Drancy à Auschwitz* (Paris: Éditions du Centre, 1946), which he dedicated to Gotko and his mother and sister. Wellers also co-founded the CDJC’s journal, *Le Monde Juif* (*The Jewish World*) in 1945. Compare Fenster’s edited version with Wellers’s initial account (I have underlined information that Fenster omitted):

If one day I get out of here alive, I will make a film that I’ll call “Stairway to Departure” and I will show the world what happened here ... I know about cinema: it could be very powerful! This film will be made without a single professional actor, only with the former camp inhabitants ... The whole world must know about the ignominy of Drancy, mustn’t it?

Gotko was arrested at his home in Meschers and deported to Compiègne on June 27, 1941, and from there taken to Drancy on September 5, 1942, before being moved to Auschwitz on July 18, 1943, on Convoy 57, where he perished on January 2, 1944. He worked as an art director and production designer for some of the most important films made in the 1930s, among them those of another Jewish immigrant to France, Max Ophüls’s *Divine* (1935) and *La Tendre Ennemie* (1936).

¹⁵ Ezekiel Brownstone, *In Pardes fun Yidish* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Menorah, 1965), 178–179.

¹⁶ Rivka Kope, *Intim mitn Bukh Mekhabrim, Bikher, Meynungen* (Paris: Éditions Polyglottes, 1973), 127. *Tkhies Hameysim* (*The Resurrection of the Dead*) was the name of a handwritten newspaper published in the liberated Buchenwald concentration camp a few days before the end of the war. See <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/exhibition-displaced-persons>.

were. Instead of intervening and imposing a homogeneous authorial voice to unify the entries, Fenster made an editorial decision to allow his sources to speak directly to us, affording each entry its own character and individuality.

What value does Fenster's *yizkor* book have today for the art historian? There has been a long-standing reluctance to use *yizkor* books as a source for historical research, a skepticism borne of the authors' proximity, emotional attachments, and personal affiliations. They have been traditionally considered flawed or compromised documents, tainted by bias, plagued by hearsay, with little attempts at detachment or "objectivity."¹⁷ Written retrospectively, most tend toward idealized, reverential hagiography or nostalgic sentimentalism. The preservation of memory is not always a contribution to knowledge.

Fenster addressed these concerns head on. In his preface, "To the Reader," he took great pains to manage expectations and differentiate his work from both literature and history writing proper: "I haven't sought to create a literary work of art, with literary effects, but rather a work that should be simple and truthful."¹⁸ Above all, he insisted, "it is not a work of art criticism." His book did not purport to be academic; he did not always cite his sources or ever use footnotes, the kinds of things the historian craves. But he did not efface them entirely either. He leaves us clues, and we can, in most cases, trace his sources of information (many of

which were saved and then donated to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme [MAHJ]).¹⁹ Lacking access to many institutional archives (pages of deportation, municipal records), Fenster relied on unofficial sources (word of mouth, eyewitness reports, letters, objects, and photographs): largely firsthand accounts from the perspective of the victims, their next of kin, and their close friends.²⁰ Among them were the last letters Otto Freundlich wrote to his wife from Toulouse and Drancy along with a letter his widow received from the social worker in Gurs after his deportation, which attested to the fact that he was "the most courageous of all the deportees."²¹ For his entry on Gotko, Fenster relied on two sources, one of which was the 1946 book by Georges Wellers, *De Drancy à Auschwitz*, one of the first books published by the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC), which he dedicated to Gotko and his mother and sister. But Fenster also consulted and cited official perpetrator documents such as the transport lists, which had only just recently been archived in the Ministère des Prisonniers, Déportés et Réfugiés.

Like all historical sources, Fenster's ego documents and microhistories need to be verified and cross-referenced with deportation pages and archival databases to corroborate or amend them. Yet, although there are discrepancies between Fenster's biographies and what we can glean from the official records today, the former are surprisingly accurate.²² Indeed, once

¹⁷ Early on, historians such as Philip Friedman were wary of *yizkor* books as historical sources. See Abraham Wein, "Memorial Books as a Source for Research into the History of Jewish Communities in Europe," in *Yad Vashem Studies* 9 (1973): 255–272. On this issue, see Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, "*Yizker Bikher* and the Problem of Historical Veracity: An Anthropological Approach," in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Israel Gutman (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), 519–536; and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Adam Kopciowski, and Andrej Trzcinsk, "Les Livres du Souvenir, Une Source de Savoir sur l'Histoire, La Culture et l'Extermination des Juifs Polonais" ("Memory Books: A Source of Knowledge for History, Culture, and the Extermination of the Jews of Poland"), trans. Patrycja Kowalczyk, *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah* 2014/1, no. (200) (2014): 21–82.

¹⁸ Fenster, "To the Reader," 26–27.

¹⁹ Fenster's archives were donated to two institutions in Paris, the MAHJ and the Maison de la Culture Yiddish, Bibliothèque Medem [Fonds Fenster Inv. AR/1502 and AR/1524], heretofore and hereafter abbreviated as MEDEM. They consist of correspondence, notebooks, address books, photographs, and negatives as well as diaries dated from 1920 to 1950, many of them collected and written in preparation for *Our Martyred Artists*.

²⁰ Among them, in the archives of the MAHJ are Mordechai Perelman on the last days of the sculptor Moise Kogan (AR 1502.23);

the artist Yosef Pressman on his friends Meir Sheyshel, Léon Weissberg, Yaakov Cytrynovitch, Levi Zarudinsky, Yéhuda Cohen, Israel Lewin, and Samuel Granovsky (AR 1502.18); the painter Z. Menkès on his friends Joachim Weingart, Alexandre Riemer, Yaakov Cytrynovitch, and Léon Weissberg (AR 1502.9); and the painter Philippe Hosiasson on Alexandre Fasini (AR 1502.14). Several spouses also contributed reminiscences, such as Rosa Klein, who wrote on her husband, the Czech painter Karl Klein: "Who is Karl Klein? I don't want to say 'Who was he?', because I can't imagine that the man who in his life mastered matter is no more" (cited in *Nos artistes martyrs*, 242).

²¹ *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 221. In his last letter from Drancy, Freundlich wrote his wife: "I hug you in my arms with all my love. I pray to God to send you courage, and to me too, so that we always keep our hope. We know how much we love each other. How I love to think of you. Your birthday is approaching ... The little painting I wanted to finish for you remains in my soul. My whole soul belongs to you, Jeanne dear."

²² For instance, Fenster tentatively refers to Georges Ascher as "probably a cousin" of the artist Roman Kramsztyk, which we can today confirm. Fenster gives us the names of Ascher's wife Rayzle Brody and daughter Shoshana, but he states that he and his wife were taken to Gurs and from there to an "unknown destination," whereas their teenage daughter was staying with friends in Lyon,

Fenster had completed his collecting, he doubled back and revisited his sources, with the assistance of the sculptor Mordechai Perelman, who was the president of the Association des Artistes, Peintres et Sculpteurs Juifs de France (APSJF) from 1946 until his death and whom he thanks in his acknowledgments.²³

Despite all his best attempts to be, as he put it, “truthful,” in some cases, Fenster provided information that is faulty. But even this is of great value. *Our Martyred Artists* gives us great insight into the nascent period of Holocaust memory *in real time*. It reveals how difficult it was to find sources of information and how little was known immediately after the war. In the Appendix, Felix Nussbaum, for instance, is not *the* Holocaust artist he is today, with a museum dedicated to his work in his hometown of Osnabrück designed by Daniel Liebeskind. He was only listed by his last name as a painter and mistakenly as a Polish artist. Charlotte Salomon is not listed, nor is Horst Rosenthal, who created the extraordinarily precocious graphic narrative *Mickey Mouse in Gurs*. Bedrich Fritta is one of only two Czech artists – there is no reference to Pavel Fantl, Leo Haas, or Alfred Kantor – and he was only brought to Fenster’s attention by an exhibition at the Ben Uri Gallery in London in 1948. Of the countries listed, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, Germany and German artists are noticeably absent.

Moreover, with hindsight, we can note the lopsided, grossly disproportionate representation of women versus that of men. Women make up only 8 out of the 84 artists he included: Sophie Blum-Lazarus, Erna Blum, Alice Hohermann, Frania Hart, Jane Levy, Elisabeth Polak, Chana Kowalska, and Rahel Szalit-Marcus.

although she was tragically killed in a car accident. In fact, we can now see that Ascher was separated from his wife. On February 27, 1943, at age 59, he was deported from Gurs on Convoy 50, arriving in Drancy on March 1, which left Drancy on March 4 to its final destination, Majdanek and then Sobibor. There were 770 men on this transport, including another well-known foreign-born artist, the German painter and sculptor Otto Freundlich. Ascher’s wife Rayzle, age 51, was in fact with her daughter Shoshana/Suzanne, age 15. They were first interned at Les Milles. On October 7, 1943, they were deported from Drancy to Auschwitz-Birkenau on Convoy 60. Another woman who had taken refuge in the south of France was present on the same transport: the artist Charlotte Salomon, who was five months pregnant with her own child. Although he lacked the specific details, what Fenster had heard and then recorded was nonetheless accurate: all three perished.

²³ He thanks the “sculptor Mordechai Perelman, for verifying with me most of the sources for this work.” Perelman was the president of the Groupement des Artistes Juifs en France in 1948.

I think we would be mistaken to attribute this exclusion to Fenster’s sexism or to a blind spot vis-à-vis women. Indeed, when Fenster approached the Congress for Jewish Culture in 1948 to lobby for financial support, he specified – as a source of great pride and a special selling point – that “among these murdered artists are also women who have distinguished themselves in all artistic fields.”²⁴ Instead, these absences were shaped by his contacts and access to information, but they also speak to the institutional frameworks that excluded women like Nathalie Kraemer, who is woefully missing in his pages.²⁵ Like so many Jewish women artists coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s, she was not written out of art history; she was never written into it. Moreover, Jewish women died in much larger numbers in the camps than their non-Jewish peers, who were often political prisoners.²⁶

Our Martyred Artists is structured around these silences. This tome comprises but a fraction of the Jewish artists working in Paris in the interwar period who perished during the Shoah. Fenster was constrained by time, resources, and funds. Not only are there missing artists, but the entries themselves are incomplete and uneven in content and length. Fenster worried that the shorter entries would give the impression of bias, whereas, he anxiously asserted, “their memory is just as holy and dear to me.”²⁷ Addressing this imbalance, he explained that “if part of the works of some martyrs are in more detail, that is because I had access to more materials, more information about them, or that they were more widely known.”²⁸ The artists without children who perished with their spouses (Alexandre Fasini, Abraham Berline, Jacques Cytrynovitch, etc.) left little behind. Those whose

²⁴ Fenster, Letter to the Congress for Jewish Culture, 302.

²⁵ For a recent study on Kraemer’s life and work, see Rachel E. Perry, “Nathalie Kraemer’s Rising Voice,” *Ars Judaica* 15 (2019): 95–146. Born and raised in France, Kraemer had a studio in Paris (next door to Robert Doisneau) but lived with her husband in Vichy, away from the center. Friendly with André Salomon and Louis Marcoussis, her teacher, she was an affiliated Jew who donated to her local synagogue, which carries a plaque in her memory. She only began exhibiting in the late 1930s and apparently did not frequent the artistic circles in Montparnasse.

²⁶ There were many non-Jewish French women (political prisoners) who returned from Ravensbrück and created art about their experiences but very few Jewish women: Germaine Tillion, Violette Lecoq, Jeanne Letourneau, Suzanne Emmer-Besnière, and France Audoul.

²⁷ Fenster, “To the Reader,” 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

spouses survived were able to preserve their work and share their experiences. Henri Epstein was married to a non-Jewish woman who survived and was able to save his work. Much of what we know of Adolphe Aizik Feder is thanks to his wife Sima Gradowski, who survived Drancy because of her status as a citizen of British Mandate Palestine. She was sent from Drancy to Vittel and was thus able to save the paintings he had made in Drancy, which she then donated to the Ghetto Fighters' House and Museum. And she offered Fenster Feder's heart-wrenching last letter written in Drancy on December 12, 1943, bequeathing her all his material possessions and wishing her "courage, courage, courage."²⁹ While problematic as historical writing, Fenster's book is invaluable as a primary source. Ultimately, *Our Martyred Artists* tell us as much about the artists as it does about the time and circumstances in which Fenster was writing and the needs of early postwar commemoration.

Myth of Silence

The art historian Benjamin Buchloh has long argued that the postwar period in Europe was marked by a pervasive "repression of catastrophic historical experience," a belated acknowledgment of the recent past, a "dynamic of disavowal" most strongly present "in those contexts where the encounters with fascism and the Holocaust had been most dramatic"; within

European reconstruction culture, he writes, "the silence on the subject of history, is almost total."³⁰ Yet this narrative fails to take into account the large corpus of artworks that were published in books, as opposed to being exhibited in galleries. In this first memory wave, countless artists in Europe addressed the Holocaust; however, art history has failed to admit these works into the Avant Garde canon. They are invariably marginalized and stigmatized – one hesitates to say ghettoized – as "Holocaust art," cast more as diaristic memoirs, documentary reportage, or autobiographical catharsis than as art.³¹

Today, Buchloh's verdict is, as Zachary Baker notes, not only something of a cliché but also a "considerable exaggeration" given the extensive documentary evidence to the contrary.³² In the last decade, Holocaust historians such as David Cesarani have debunked this "myth of silence."³³ The survivors did not keep silent, as Laura Jockusch's extensive work on the postwar historical commissions and documentation centers has amply demonstrated, they "collected and recorded."³⁴ In Paris, the CDJC was established, drawing on the extensive documentation collected during the war by Isaac Schneersohn in Grenoble to preserve evidence of Nazi war crimes for future generations. Monuments were built. Exhibitions were staged. And in 1946, a *yizkor* book dedicated to Yiddish writers was published, featuring a frontispiece illustration by Chagall, which no doubt served as an important catalyst for Fenster.³⁵

²⁹ Fenster, *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 213. The entire letter reads: "I am leaving tomorrow. I am in good spirits. I implore you to keep your spirits up. We will see each other again soon and we will never be apart. Take care of my business. Everything that is mine is yours. Courage, courage, courage."

³⁰ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art 1955–1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 257–283, here 260.

³¹ Most of these early illustrated books in France are by non-Jewish survivors: Georges Horan, *Camp de Drancy, Seuil de l'Enfer Juif (The Drancy Camp: Threshold of Jewish Hell)* (Paris: Pouzet, 1946); France Audoul, *Ravensbrück: 150,000 Femmes en Enfer (Ravensbrück: 150,000 Women in Hell)* (Neufchâtel: Éditions de La Braconnière, 1946); Léon Delabre, *Croquis clandestins: Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dora, Bergen-Belsen (Hidden Sketches: Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dora, Bergen-Belsen)* (Besançon: Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, 1945); Henri Gayot, *Le Struthof-Natzwiller* (Paris: Fédération des Déportés, Internés Résistants Patriotes, 1945); Violette Rougier-Lecoq, *Témoignages: 36 Dessins à la Plume: Ravensbrück (Testimonials: 36 Pen Drawings)* (Paris: Les Deux Sirènes, 1948); Julien Cain, *Boris Taslitsky: III Dessins Faits à Buchenwald (Boris Taslitsky: III Pictures Made in Buchenwald)* (Paris: La Bibliothèque Française, 1946); and Jeanne Lévy, *La Vie à Drancy (Life in Drancy)* (Paris: Gedalge, 1945).

³² Zachary M. Baker, "Resources in Yiddish Studies: The Holocaust," in *Geveb* (June 2017), <https://ingeveb.org/pedagogy/resources-in-yiddish-studies-the-holocaust> (accessed May 30, 2021).

³³ See David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012); Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); François Azouvi, *Le Mythe du Grand Silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la Mémoire (The Myth of the Great Silence: Auschwitz, the French, and Memory)* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); and Judith Lindenberg, ed., *Premiers Savoirs de la Shoah (The First Knowledge of the Shoah)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017).

³⁴ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁵ *Yizkor Bukh tsum Ondenk fun 14 Umgekumene Parizer Yidishe Shrayber (zum Andenken Shreiber)* was edited by Y. Spero, G. Kenig, Moshe Shulshteyn, and B. Shlevin, and was published in Paris in 1946 by the Union des Juifs pour la Résistance, running 248 pages in a massive edition of 3,000 copies. An extremely early collaborative endeavor, it was nonetheless narrow in its focus on only 14 writers. Its frontispiece was an illustration signed by Marc Chagall (Fig. 10).



Fig. 5 Jacob Mącznik, Shmulik, Hersh Fenster, in Sandomierz, Pologne, 1937, Paris, © MAHJ, Paris.

But for the visual arts, there were very few who were as engaged in *khurbanforschung* (“destruction research”) as Fenster was. As the painter Alfred Aberdam acknowledged, he was an outlier, “one of those few who seeks to save.”³⁶ The exception to the rule, Fenster was a pioneer (Fig. 5). Rather than looking where French art was going – as Waldemar George did in his article entitled “Où va la Peinture Française?” (“Where Is French Painting Going?”) in 1946 – Fenster looked backward at where French art had been and what had happened to it.³⁷

Fenster was not a professional archivist. His was a grassroots initiative, which relied on a vast circle of contacts. Shortly after he returned to Paris, he sent out a call for testimonies, receiving responses from as far away as New York.³⁸ And he networked. He went to cafés, visited friends, consulted archives, and attended some of the many (today forgotten) commemorative postwar art exhibitions (referred to as *expositions souvenirs*) mounted in the immediate postwar period.³⁹ His project was driven by a sense of urgency, a last-ditch effort to record and salvage the last remaining

³⁶ Letter from Alfred Aberdam to Fenster on the artist Marcel Slodki, n.d., MAHJ AR.1502.13, cited in *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 299.

³⁷ Waldemar George, “Où va l’Art Contemporain? Un Salon d’Art Abstrait,” *Résistance*, July 26, 1946, and Waldemar George, “Où Va la Peinture Française?” *Nouvelles Littéraires*, January 10, 1946.

³⁸ Hirsh Abramovitch sent a letter from New York about Meyer-Miron Kodkine on February 12, 1947, cited in *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 231.

³⁹ For instance, Fenster became aware of Léon Droucker because, as he tells us, “after the Liberation, his friends, renowned artists and writers, organized a memorial exhibition [*exposition souvenir*]” at the Salon d’Automne with his remaining works. *Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 93. A full list of these early postwar commemorative exhibitions needs to be compiled, but they were numerous. In addition to Droucker at the Salon d’Automne, there were the following: Henri Epstein at the Galerie Berri-Raspail, Paris, in 1946, prefaced by René Barotte; Erna DEM, November 1947, at the Galerie Kirby Beard; Georges Kars at the Galerie des Beaux Arts,

November–December 1945 (with reviews by Jacques de Laprade, Claude Roger-Marx, and Raymond Cogniat); and Michel Fink, gallery unspecified, organized by his father, the Yiddish writer Yankev Yisroel Fink (with a review by Borvine Frenkel in *Undzer Shtime* [Paris], May 13, 1947). See *Oeuvres des Artistes Juifs en France (Works of the Jewish Artists in France)* (Paris: The Jewish Welfare Board, 1945). Also notable was the considerable work of the Groupement des Artistes Juifs en France (GAJEF) and its successor, The Association des Artistes Peintres et Sculpteurs Juifs en France (AMANOUTH), which provided financial assistance to artists and out of which came several publications in the late 1950s devoted to the artists that credited as its source “above all the moving book by H. Fenster.” As Fenster was finishing writing in 1948, an exhibition was mounted in Warsaw, Poland, curated by Jozef Sandel, *In Memoriam to 263 Jewish Painters, 209 Sculptors, 13 Architects, 11 Historians of Art Who Were Murdered by the German Occupants, 1939–1945*.



Fig. 6 Fenster Archives, © MAHJ. Photo Christophe Fouin.

vestiges of the deported (Fig. 6). It was prompted not only by what had already been destroyed by the Nazis and their collaborators but also by how quickly the traces of what had remained against all odds were being destroyed *after the war*.

As the Yiddish newspaper associated with the Jewish Socialist Labor Bund noted in 1948, even after the war's end these treasures "were actually going to

waste among Parisian antiques in the markets," where artwork by deported Jewish painters were sold for cents: "There was a danger that not only their paintings would be gone, but their names would be gone, too."⁴⁰ Fenster decried the inaction taken by the Jewish cultural fund of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) as Jewish antiques and works of art "fell into private and non-Jewish hands" and were being sold cheaply in

⁴⁰ Bor-Fren [Pseudonym], "A Bukh Vegn Umgekumene Yidische Kunst-moler (A Book about Murdered Jewish Painters)," *Undzer*

Shtime (Paris), November 10, 1948, in *Bukh mit Prese Oysshnitn*, MEDEM, A.FEN.11(2).

the markets of Paris just after the war. Because of its inaction, he wrote in 1954: “When they want to present an exhibit of the works of murdered Jewish artists, the paintings are nowhere to be found.”⁴¹

Already in 1945, these “signs” were disappearing or being deliberately erased. Some of the most remarkable things Fenster collected included a set of negatives with drawings, texts, graffiti, and objects from the Drancy camp (10 in total), which he highlights in his letter to the Congress for Jewish Culture, describing them as “drawings and inscriptions that were on the walls of the Drancy camp and that I managed to have photographed *before they are effaced*” (my emphasis) (Fig. 7).⁴² No doubt inspired in part by Henri Calet’s book *Les Murs de Fresnes*, which was published in 1946, Fenster went on a pilgrimage to Drancy in search of material witnesses, a trip that predated that of Michel Borowicz two decades later, which is recounted in his *Écrits des Condamnés à Mort sous l’Occupation Nazie, 1939–1945 (Writings of Those Condemned to Death under Nazi Occupation, 1939–1945)*.⁴³ After the war, Drancy was used for the internment of collaborationists awaiting trials during the postwar purges, before it went back to its original purpose as an area for low-income housing in 1946. And these newcomers were actively erasing the victims’ traces. Given the rapid and ongoing process of effacement by time, humidity, and wear and tear, the stakes could not have been higher.

Lost in Translation?

In his appeal to the Congress for Jewish Culture, Fenster argued that *Our Martyred Artists* “should be found in every Jewish home”; he had high hopes that it would “be a great success.”⁴⁴ Deliberately shunned or inadvertently ignored, it did not have the shelf life that he hoped for. The book’s belated recognition has every-

thing to do with Fenster’s choice of language. There were, of course, important reasons why Fenster wrote in Yiddish; this was, after all, the preferred language for *yizkor* books, and Fenster was committed to Yiddish as the *mame-loshn* (“mother tongue”) of the victims: an all but destroyed language was fitting for a writing of witness. However, the language barrier ensured that *Our Martyred Artists* would remain within small circles of East European survivors, with profound consequences for our understanding of an entire generation of Jewish artists, not the least of which is that it artificially fashioned a “community” out of rather disparate artists. Many of the artists, like Gotko, did not know Yiddish. Wellers noted that, although he was born in Odessa, he “lived in France and only spoke French.”⁴⁵

Fenster had actually wanted to translate the book in order to expand its audience. He actively explored possibilities of publishing the work in either English, French, or Hebrew. Shortly after it appeared in print, he lobbied Yehuda Y. Shapiro of the American JDC but was rebuffed; the JDC was unable to fund such a project.⁴⁶ Daniel Leybl argued that the newly founded State of Israel had “the duty ... to provide for a general work that would memorialize the murdered Jewish artists of Europe,” and should, at the very least, pay to publish Fenster’s work in Hebrew.⁴⁷ Like Leybl, Fenster openly lamented the State of Israel’s abandonment of Yiddish, criticizing how it had become a “foreign language” in the Jewish state.⁴⁸ When Mané Katz passed away and his library full of books on Jewish art and life were brought from Paris to Israel, Fenster decried the fact that the volumes in Yiddish were left behind. Comparing this to the studios that had been liquidated after the artists were deported, Fenster described how “like a pile of trash, books in the Yiddish language were left behind” – among them the work by the writer of these lines, *Undzere Farpaynikte Kinstler*; “after the murder

⁴¹ Hersh Fenster, “Di Tsore fun Nisht Visn” (“The Trouble of Not Knowing”), *Arbeter Vort (The Worker’s Word)* (Paris), November 12, 1954, in *Prese Oysshnitn*, MEDEM, A.FEN.12(1).

⁴² Fenster, Letter to the Congress for Jewish Culture, 302: “drawings and inscriptions that were found on the walls of the Drancy camp and that I managed to have photographed before they were erased.”

⁴³ Michel Borowicz, *Écrits des Condamnés à Mort sous l’Occupation Nazie (1939–1945) (Writings of Those Who Were Condemned to Death under Nazi Occupation (1939–1945))* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

⁴⁴ Fenster, Letter to the Congress for Jewish Culture, 303: “dans tous les foyers juifs.”

⁴⁵ Wellers, *De Drancy à Auschwitz*, 180: “vivait en France, ne parlant que le français.”

⁴⁶ Letter from Yehuda Y. Shapiro in Paris to Hersh Fenster in Paris, July 9, 1951. Briv 293, MEDEM, A.FEN.7(39).

⁴⁷ Daniel Leybl, “A Monument far Umgekumene Yidishe Kinstler” (“A Monument for Murdered Jewish Artists”), MEDEM A.FEN.11(2).

⁴⁸ Hersh Fenster, “Mit Tsar un Farbitertkayt” (“With Agony and Bitterness”), *Undzer Shtime* (Paris), 1–2 February 1958, no. 27 (3806), in *Prese Oysshnitn*, MEDEM, A.FEN.12(2).



Fig. 7 Photograph of graffiti in Drancy taken by Hersh Fenster. © MAHJ, Paris, donation of Ariel Fenster.

of millions of Jews, for whom Yiddish was holy and dear ... holy Yiddish letters ... [were] scattered and seen as weak and embarrassing.”⁴⁹

It was, in fact, in Israel, after a rather protracted period of neglect, that *Our Martyred Artists* was rediscovered, primarily by Israeli scholars focused on the Holocaust. The first exhibition on the subject was

held at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1968, *Jewish Artists Who Perished in the Holocaust*. In the 1980s and 1990s, Miriam Novitch of the Ghetto Fighters’ House and Museum relied on it (along with Pnina Rosenberg) as well as Ziva Amishai Maisels in her book *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*.⁵⁰ More recently, it was used extensively by

⁴⁹ “Di Kharpe in Pariz” (“The Disgrace in Paris”), *Fraye Arbeter Shtime (Free Voice of Labor)* (New York), November 15, 1963, 6, in *Prese Oysshnitn*, MEDEM, A.FEN.12(1).

⁵⁰ For the most part, when *Our Martyred Artists* has been used by art historians in the past, the information is often repeated

verbatim as fact and without citing Fenster as the source. Miriam Novitch, *Spiritual Resistance, 1940–1945* (Milan: Comune of Milan, 1979). Miriam Novitch and Lucy Dawidowicz, *Spiritual Resistance: Art from the Concentration Camps, 1940–1945* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981); Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction*

Nadine Nieszawer as the basis for her *Jewish Artists of the School of Paris 1905–1939*.⁵¹ Fenster's work is surprisingly absent from books on Holocaust art published in the United States, and is most notably absent from Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton's *Art of the Holocaust* and from Mary Costanza's *The Living Witness*, which are both from the early 1980s.⁵²

In France, only a few individuals and collectives acknowledged and continued Fenster's work. In 1955, the Musée d'Art Juif presented the exhibition *Oeuvres d'Artistes Morts en Déportation (Works by Artists Who Died after Being Deported)* at the Galerie Zak, and the Association des Artistes peintres et sculpteurs juifs de France issued a series of publications beginning in the late 1950s that acknowledged Fenster in its title, *Nos artistes. Morts Victimes du Nazisme (Our Artists: Victims of Nazism)* (Fig. 8).⁵³ Finally, in 1963 the Polish Jewish art critic Chil Aronson published his monumental tome, *Bilder un Geshtaltn fun Montparnas (Scenes and Figures of Montparnasse)* in Yiddish, which remains to this day untranslated.⁵⁴

It is quite an indictment that Fenster did not have many backers in France, either personal or institutional. He had a long list of contacts throughout France with notes on whether people have libraries, indicating to whom he may be able to sell a copy of his book in advance in order to support its production.⁵⁵ But with the exception of the cultural wing of the French branch of the American JDC, which donated 50,000 francs, most of his institutional donors came from the United

States, such as the Yidisher Arbeter Komitet (Jewish Labor Committee) and Der Arbeter Ring (the Workmen's Circle).⁵⁶

Translated, Fenster's book will gain exposure and accessibility, but what is lost in translation? What is at stake when we bring this *yizkor* book into new linguistic and institutional contexts, with new functions and new audiences? Translation requires interpretation but also, by necessity, adaptation. It is not just language that changes, but form, structure, content, readership, meaning, function, genre, and value. For its first readers, the survivors and their descendants, this book primarily fulfilled a commemorative function, serving as a missing gravestone (a book-tombstone, *seyfer matseyve*, for the people of the book, *am haseyfer*). Today, *yizkor* books are being used in all sorts of ways by scholars for genealogical purposes (on the JewishGen website) and for academic research. As Rosemary Horowitz has written of this trend more broadly: "The readers of the original books used the volumes for communal and commemorative purposes; whereas the readers of the translations and new media versions use the books for research purposes"; as a result, the value of these books "as monument, chronicle and heirloom is diminishing while their value as artifact and source document is increasing."⁵⁷

In the case of the new translation from Yiddish to French, we also move from black and white to color; from private readers to a public audience; from individual initiative to institutional backing (the copyright

and Interpretation: *The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993); Pnina Rosenberg, *L'art des Indésirables: L'Art Visuel dans les Camps Français (Art of the Undesirables: Visual Art in the French Camps)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003). Novitch's mission began in the French internment camp in Vittel where she met Yitzhak Katznelson, whose wife and child had been in Treblinka. Katznelson instructed Novitch to "collect the tears of the Jewish people," which was the impetus for her mission to collect art and artifacts from the Holocaust.

⁵¹ Nadine Nieszawer, *Peintres Juifs à Paris, 1905–1939 (Jewish Paintings in Paris, 1905–1939)* (Paris: Denoel, 2000) with a new edition by Les Étoiles Éditions in 2020.

⁵² Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, *Art of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1981); Mary S. Costanza, *The Living Witness: Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos* (New York: The Free Press, 1982).

⁵³ Fenster would be the main source used for the important exhibition *Oeuvres d'Artistes Juifs Morts en Déportation* organized by Museum of Jewish Art in Paris in 1955 at the Galerie Zak. Beginning in 1957, the Association des Artistes Peintres et Sculpteurs Juifs de France published a series of volumes entitled *Nos Artistes*.

⁵⁴ Chil Aronson, *Scènes et Visages de Montparnasse (Scenes and Faces from Montparnasse)* (Paris: Abécé, 1963). By contrast with Fenster's book, Aronson's is a social history that focuses on Paris as a site of bohemian activity, and its social institutions and

networks (cafés, banquets, models, and galleries). A compilation of articles published in the *Naye Presse (New Press)* based on interviews with artists, his vast panorama over 700 pages is elegiac and nostalgic in tone.

⁵⁵ We know from Fenster's notebooks and list of press contacts in the collections of MEDEM that he was in touch with socialist Yiddish newspapers in North America (*Forverts, Yidisher Kemfer*), an English-language Jewish paper (*Jewish Journal*) in New York, and Hebrew publications in Mandatory Palestine (*Davar, Haaretz, and Ha-Boker*). He established strong contacts with instructors at Bezalel in Jerusalem. On one page of his notebook from 1947, he noted that he had met the director of that school, Mordechai Bronstein (also known as Max Bronstein and Mordecai Ardon, 1896–1992).

⁵⁶ Published with the support of the Cultural Department of the JDC; the Association d'Aide aux Malades des Juifs Originaires de Baranow, New York; the Societe de Litterature Kropotkine, Branch 413, A[rbeter] R[ing], Los Angeles; the Yidisher Arbeter Komitet, New York; the Société Les Amis de Levertov, Paris; and the group Fraye Arbeter Shtime, London.

⁵⁷ Rosemary Horowitz, "A History of Yizker Books," in *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meaning of Yizker Books*, ed. Rosemary Horowitz (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011), 7–27.

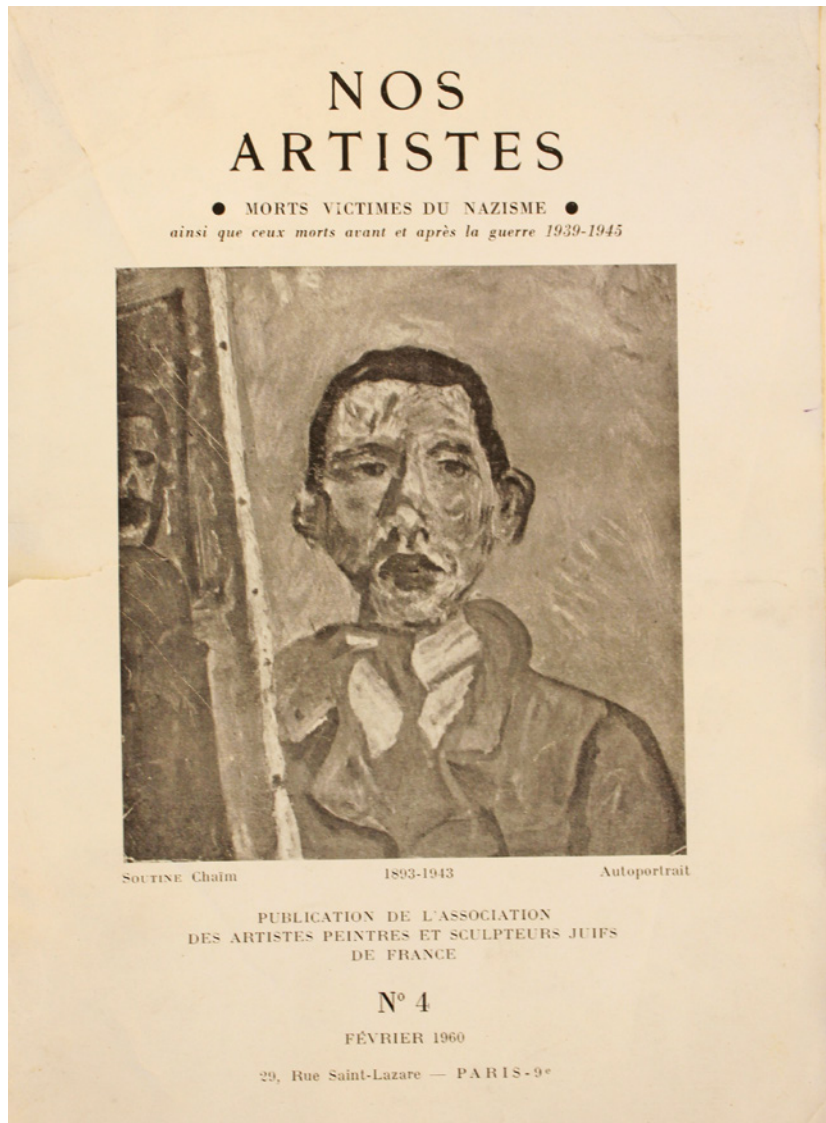


Fig. 8 *Nos Artistes. Morts Victimes de Nazisme*, Association des Artistes Peintres et Sculpteurs de France, no. 4, 1960. © MAHJ.

is held by the MAHJ); from a transnational project to a national one (it is subsidized by the French Ministry of Culture); from materiality to textuality (or objecthood to content); and from *yizkor* book to art history.

Fenster's book was intended as a tangible object, a personal monument or keepsake to place prominently on one's bookshelf in pious homage. The translation

is considerably smaller in size; compact, it is portable and user-friendly. For all its aesthetic qualities, the new translation prioritizes the transmission of facts and information. To wit: throughout his *yizkor* book, Fenster included facsimiles of Salon registers as well as handwritten letters (for example, see the entries on Jacob Macznik, David-Michel Krewer,⁵⁸ Elie Grinman)

⁵⁸ Among these documents is the letter that David-Michel Krewer sent to his parents from the camp (*Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 246):

Dear parents, I received your package. Thank you very much. Why don't you write? In the package the jam leaked, but it was well wrapped. I would like to know if you have received the package I sent you, because one can never know what may happen, and

I would not want it to be lost. Klapisch464 was deported from the camp, 1,000 men, and 1,000 men from the other camp. In two words, we will survive them, don't worry, everything will be fine. I send you kisses, your son Michel.

Krewer was arrested on May 14, 1941, in the Billet Vert roundup, and interned in Beaune-la-Rolande and then transferred to Pithiviers on July 13, 1942 and from there to Auschwitz on Convoy 6.

that are translated but not reproduced in the new edition such that we lose their indexicality. More significantly, Fenster opened *Our Martyred Artists* with a handwritten copy of Chagall's heart-wrenching poem "To the Martyred Artists," a direct, personal address to the dead. He reproduced the original autographic script in full, at scale, over four pages, with Chagall's calligraphic tilt, his page numbering, signature and date (Fig. 9). In the translation, it is condensed into two pages and printed in standardized type-lettering. Although it gains in legibility and comprehension, it loses its status as material gesture, a handwritten trace of both the artist's body and his "firsthand" testimony made expressly for the book.

That Chagall did not submit a drawing or work of art – as he did for the 1946 *yizkor* book on martyred writers from Paris – but a *text* suggests that he did not want to compete with or upstage the artists or their work (Fig. 10). Fenster, too, deliberately reigned in his book's aesthetics. Compared with other *yizkor* books, which feature elaborate iconographic tropes such as candles, Torah scrolls, and emaciated figures, Arthur Kolnik's leafy art deco scrolls are restrained. As Zaynvl Diamant suggested, Fenster was "probably quite fearful that when reading the book, you would be caught by certain reproductions of the martyrs' artistic works. You would perhaps enjoy it, and still holding the book in your hand you would forget the goal of the book."⁵⁹ The gorgeous color reproductions incorporated into the translation add to the beauty and art historical value of the book, but they also complicate its memorial function as a *yizkor* book. So too, placed under the aegis of a French institution, the book loses its original character as an independent initiative and a transnational project.

Long neglected or undervalued, Fenster's *Our Martyred Artists* is an invaluable source for historical and cultural research, but as it now reaches new audiences of readers – those without affiliation – it will congeal into an authoritative source. It is perhaps a truism,

but it bears repetition: in remembering some histories, we forget others. More than ever, we need to conduct provenance research on the text and begin to "make trouble in the archives" (Fig. 11).⁶⁰ As Fenster did for the artists, we need to write a biography of the work from its first birth pangs to its auspicious debut and its complicated afterlives. Like the recent work on Claude Lanzmann's outtakes, we need to learn more about Fenster's process:⁶¹ how he went about his collecting and recording. What kind of selection filters did he use? What fell to the wayside by either deliberate or accidental omission because he was too close to his subject or because of his limited access to information? What are the layers of mediation? By comparing Fenster's own sources held in the archives of the MAHJ and the Maison de la Culture Yiddish, Bibliothèque Medem, with his drafts and finished text, we can track what he privileged and preserved and what he excluded.

Fenster as Frame

With this move into art history, what new frames does *Our Martyred Artists* offer us as we approach these artists and the so-called "École de Paris" more broadly? If nothing else, it encourages us to rethink the historiography of this period and the ways in which the subject may be written in the future. It asks us to rethink our classifications, periodizations, and disciplinary boundaries, and suggests a more expansive cross-disciplinary approach across art history, Holocaust studies, Yiddish studies, and even provenance research so that we can have a fuller understanding of Jewish experiences in France between the wars.

How might we rethink this period through Fenster? First, he organized the artists alphabetically, like an encyclopedia, instead of ranking them by importance or popularity or evaluating them by their skill and talent.⁶² Chaim Soutine has more pages devoted to him than other artists, but his life and work were no more and no less valued. Fenster did not divide or

⁵⁹ Zaynvl Diamant, "O Earth, Cover Not Thou My Blood (Job 16:18)." This was a review of Fenster's book for a socialist Yiddish publication in North America.

⁶⁰ Griselda Pollock, "Trouble in the Archives," in *Looking Back to the Future: Essays on Art, Life and Death* (London: Routledge, 2001), 23–40.

⁶¹ Sue Vice, *Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); Jennifer Cazenave, *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019); Erin McGlothlin, Brad Prager, and Markus Zisselsberger, eds., *The*

Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020).

⁶² There is one notable exception: Fenster's close friend, the sculptor Naoum (Nachum) Aronson, whose name begins with the first letter *aleph*, was the last entry. He also did not die in occupied Europe at the hands of the Nazis, but in exile in 1943 in New York City, where, Fenster writes, "he felt deracinated. This is undoubtedly the reason for the death of this still vigorous man by heart attack" (*Nos Artistes Martyrs*, 275). I take this irregularity to be a personal tribute by Fenster to a close friend with whom he had opened and run the Foyer Amical before the war. It also allowed Fenster to

פאר די קינסטלער - קדושים

די האב איך זיי אלעגאן געקענט ? די ביל איך געווארן
 אין זייער אטעליער ? די האב איך געזען זייער קונסט
 פון נארנט די פון ווייטן ?
 און איצט גיי איך ארויס פון זיך, פון מיין יארן
 איך גיי צו זייער אומבאקאנטן קבר.
 זיי רופן אים. זיי שלעפן אים אין זייער גרוס
 ארמין - שייך צום אומשולדיקן. דעם שולדיקן.
 זיי פירען אים: וואו דיסטו געווארן ?
 - איך בין אנטלאפן...
 זיי האט גען געפירט צו די טויט דער צו
 וואו זיי האבן פארזוכט דעם טעם פון זייער שוליים.
 יוצאט האבן זיי דערוואן די ליכט
 פון זייערע ניט דערגאלטע בילדער.
 זיי האבן געצויגן די ניט דערגעבט יארן
 וועלכע זיי האבן אפגעהיט און אפגעווארט
 כדי ארויסצופירן די טרויגן זייערע -
 ניט דערגעפונען, פארשלאפערע.
 זיי האבן אפגעזוכט אין זייער קאפ
 דעם קינדער ווינקל, וואו די לבנה ארוםגערינגלט
 אים שטערן, האט זיי אנגעזאגט א העלע צוקונפט.

Fig. 9 Marc Chagall's handwritten poem in *Hersh Fenster, Our Martyred Artists* (Paris, 1951), n.p. Author's Collection.



Fig. 10 Chagall, frontispiece for *Yizkor bukh tsum ondenk fun 14 ungekumene parizer yidishe shrayber* (zum andenken shreiber), eds. Y. Spero, G. Kenig, Moshe Shulshteyn Moshe, B. Shlevin (Paris: Union des Juifs pour la Résistance, 1946). Author's collection.



Fig. 11 Fenster archives at the MAHJ. Author's photograph.

categorize his subjects by gender, religious affiliation, or country of origin. This egalitarianism is an ethical stance. His title, as Jack Kugelmass and Daniel Boyarin argue of *yizkor* books more broadly, “reveals much about its origins and intent.”⁶³ *Our Martyred Artists* denotes an inclusive, transnational community joined by profession rather than grounded in a geographical location or national identity. Consider, by comparison, the Polish art historian Józef Sandel’s tome published

six years later, *Umgekumene Yidishe Kinstler in Poyln* (*Jewish Artists Who Perished in Poland*): it was a massive biographical encyclopedia consisting of 175 monographs and 166 black-and-white reproductions of Polish Jewish artists, art historians, critics, and scholars in an edition of 2,000 copies in two volumes, running 562 pages. Although Sandel’s work was also written in Yiddish, it claimed these artists for a national narrative, for Poland: Jewish artists in Poland.⁶⁴ Fenster’s

end the book with this very poetic tribute based on his sculpture *Le Martyre*, which is reproduced in the original but missing from the French edition (Fig. 14):

All the works left behind in his studio were sold at auction. No trace of them remains, nor of his studio at 93 rue de Vaugirard and his workroom at rue Antoine Bourdelle. It is only in memory that everything remains so alive: this studio where Jews met up with each other, the light marble sculptures, the paintings and the precious carpets on the walls, the piano with its vase of flowers, the bas-relief of the *Martyre* which represents an old Jew and a murdered child. The expression on their faces, the holiness that surrounds them are a deep-seated accusation by the artist Naoum Aronson against a barbaric and ruthless world. And in a corner, here he is, this sleeping giant, this tortured man. When he wakes up, he will demand justice for all the iniquities. *Nos artistes martyrs*, 275.

⁶³ Kugelmass and Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden*, 2.

⁶⁴ Józef Sandel published *Umgekumene Yidishe Kinstler in Poyln*, 2 Vols. (Warsaw: Yidish Buch, 1957). “Every historian of the Jewish plastic art in the first half of the present century,” wrote Leo Kenig, “will have to resort to the work of Y. Sandel on our suffering artists.” Leo Kenig, “Unzere Oysgeshokhtene Kinstler”

(“Our Slaughtered Artists”), *Di goldene keyt* (Tel Aviv) 31, 236–239. Sandel returned to Poland and settled in Warsaw in 1946. There, he became the leader of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts (Polish: Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych or ZTKSP; Yiddish: Yidishe Gezelshaft tsu Farshpreytn Kunst), a revival of an organization that had been active in Poland before the war. The society provided material assistance to Jewish artists, helped to promote their work, and fostered art education for Jewish youth. It mounted some 98 exhibitions in Warsaw and four exhibitions that were presented throughout Poland – two devoted to the work of individual artists Rafael Mandelzweig (1946) and Lea Grundig (1949), and two in 1948 in honor of the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which featured works of Jewish artists who were killed in the Holocaust. After the dissolution of the ZTKSP, in September 1949, the artworks that Sandel and his colleagues had assembled were integrated into the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. From 1950 to 1953, the institute operated a Gallery of Jewish Art, which Sandel directed. See <https://www.jhi.pl/en/articles/jozef-sandel-biographical-timeline,28>; and the article by Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts / Di Yidishe Gezelshaft tsu Farshpreytn Kunst: An Attempt at the Continuation of Jewish Artistic Life in Postwar

possessive “our” stresses above all their Jewish identity as a personal filiation carrying with it the burden and responsibility of intergenerational remembrance.

Second, he does not make schools and groups. He specifies his return to Paris and Montparnasse, but the term “École de Paris” is not mentioned once. I take this not as accidental omission but as a deliberate decision not to box them into a label that had a complicated antisemitic connotation born of interwar xenophobia (as the foreign-born École de Paris was set against the nativist, nationalist École Française).⁶⁵ Moreover, after the war, precisely when Fenster was writing, the term was being evacuated of its association with Jewish artists and repurposed as a catch-all umbrella term that played into a concerted national campaign to promote Paris as the capital of the arts. Rebranded, the École de Paris was used as a last-ditch attempt to restore French cultural supremacy after the stain of the occupation and demonstrate *le rayonnement de la France* (“the radiance of France,” or “the reach of France,” a truly French concept that goes back to Louis XIV, the Sun King).⁶⁶ Compared to an approach that would corral these artists within the École de Paris, Fenster’s approach seems infinitely more ecumenical and probably also more accurate. He did not retrospectively superimpose a term that was used to define them but that they did not use to define themselves.

Third, Fenster reassembles. He not only bears witness to the artists’ deaths but also to the world they created, their relationships, and their art. Today, we keep our École de Paris and our “Holocaust art” emphatically separate. Our periodization of the twen-

tieth century has traditionally been divided into neat segments: a “before” and a “during” the war. Most histories of French modernism end in June 1940, precisely where studies of “art of the defeat” begin.⁶⁷ *Our Martyred Artists* does not fit easily into our disciplinary boundaries or our institutions. Because of the ways our archives and collections are organized, works by Gotko made in the camps can be found in the collections of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Ghetto Fighters’ House and Museum, and Yad Vashem – but his work that predates the Holocaust is of considerably less interest for them. These artists’ interwar works languish in basement storerooms; they never see the light of day and are badly in need of repair and conservation. In Jewish museums, the opposite is true; the École de Paris is often presented without the war years. This is the part of the story we love; it bolsters our ideas of endless possibility, vitality, transcultural exchange, and reinvention. These artists’ tragic deaths are rarely represented, and when they are they are separated into different physical or discursive spaces (e.g., art history, Holocaust studies) because they complicate our rose-colored nostalgic dreams.

But Paris was *both* their school (the title of the MAHJ’s exhibition is *Paris pour école*) and the antechamber to Auschwitz. The MAHJ wisely coupled its exhibition on the École de Paris with a smaller exhibition on the murdered artists entitled *Hersh Fenster et le Shtetl Perdu de Montparnasse* (*Hersh Fenster and the Lost Shtetl of Montparnasse*).⁶⁸ This second exhibition was not planned at the outset. Originally, only an exhibition on the École de Paris was scheduled for

Poland, 1946–1949,” in *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. Elvira Grözinger and Magdalena Ruta (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 77–96.

⁶⁵ Romy Golan, “The École Française versus the École de Paris: The Debate about the Status of Jewish Artists in Paris between the Wars,” in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris, 1905–1945*, exh. cat., ed. Kenneth Silver and Romy Golan (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1985), 80–87. This argument is developed in Golan’s book, *Modernity and Nostalgia: French Art and Politics between the Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). The term was coined by André Warnod in “L’École de Paris,” *Comoedia* (January 25, 1925): 1. It was popularized by Waldemar George in a two-part article, “École Française ou École de Paris?” *Formes* (June–September, 1931): 92–93, 110–111.

⁶⁶ Widely used by French critics and art historians after the war, the term *rayonnement* was used by Jean Cassou for his introduction, “Le Rayonnement de la France,” to the exhibition *Cent Chefs-D’oeuvre des Peintres de L’École de Paris* (Paris: Galerie Charpentier, 1946). See Nathalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944–1964* (London: Ashgate, 2009); and Catherine Dossin, ed., *France and the Visual Arts since*

1945: Remapping European Postwar and Contemporary Art (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018). On the use of the art of the École de Paris for cultural diplomacy in the immediate postwar period as a “missionary position,” see Rachel E. Perry, “Immutable Mobiles: UNESCO’s *Archives of Colour Reproductions*,” *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 166–185.

⁶⁷ This is the title of a book by Laurence Bertrand d’Orléac, *L’Art de la Défaite, 1940–1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

⁶⁸ A note on the titles of these exhibitions. The poetic title *Paris pour école* is a way of circumventing the problematic term “École de Paris” through inversion. “The Lost Shtetl of Montparnasse,” however, strikes me as a misnomer. Although the MAHJ is using the term to denote a Jewish village or community, Paris was a bustling, cosmopolitan metropolis. Most of these artists *left the shtetl* because it was too provincial, too restrictive, or too homogeneous; they did not want to recreate the *shtetl* in Paris. There were enclaves – of Russian or Polish speakers joined by linguistic and cultural traditions – but they never kept exclusively to themselves. Using *shtetl* also suggests that they all spoke Yiddish, when this was hardly the case.

the spring of 2020; because of COVID and innumerable postponements, the museum decided to take advantage of the delays to translate *Our Martyred Artists* and add an additional exhibition on Fenster and his *yizkor* book, one of the few fortuitous results of quarantine. “Le Shtetl Perdu de Montparnasse” acts as a necessary coda and picks up where the first leaves off, a section entitled simply “1940,” which features the poem that Marc Chagall contributed to *Our Martyred Artists* alongside a wall of portraits of the murdered artists taken by Marc Vaux. Located several floors underground, in the museum’s cool, vaulted cellar, its subterranean setting dramatizes the largely hidden history of Fenster’s tome and the artists it remembers.

Fenster’s last lesson might have come straight from Pirkei Avot 2:16: “Rabbi Tarfon used to say: it is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.” ולא אָתָּה, וְלֹא עֲלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמְרָהּ, וְלֹא אֶתָּה. Time and again, Fenster frames his project as a preliminary attempt to be taken up by others. He anticipated, or hoped, that it would be expanded upon.⁶⁹ Throughout the volume, he acknowledged its limitations – “I don’t claim that it is perfect”⁷⁰ – and underscored its incompleteness. In more than a few instances, he notes the lacunae left behind, writing: “Despite all my efforts, I could not gather any information on the murdered artist.”⁷¹ Instead of an authoritative *Book of the Destruction*, he deliberately exposes what Henry Raczymow called a “memory shot through with holes.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Nadine Nieszawer has added considerably to Fenster’s initial inventory of persecuted Jewish artists in her impressive *Jewish Artists of the School of Paris 1905–1939*. One could, in fact, go further by working backwards from the perpetrators’ deportation lists, searching under the heading “profession” for entries for artists, painters, sculptors, draughtsmen, etc. See Serge Klarsfeld’s *Le Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France* (Paris: Klarsfeld, 1978; repr. Paris: Fils et filles des Déportés Juifs de France, 2012) as well as the digitized transport lists available online on the CDJC website. See <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/archives-and-documentation/the-documentation-center/the-history-of-the-cdj.html>.

⁷⁰ Fenster, “To the Reader,” 26.

⁷¹ Of Jules Graumann, Fenster writes, “Despite my best efforts, I have not been able to obtain more information on the life and work of this artist,” *Nos artistes martyrs*, 74. So too for Henri Hague, who was the author of the graffiti drawn in Drancy. He was recently identified by the MAHJ as Heinz Greiffenhagen, born 1899 in Berlin, arrived in Paris in the 1930s. He hid in Lourdes (Hautes-Pyrénées) during the war but was arrested and deported to Drancy April 23, 1944, and to Auschwitz on May 15 on Convoy 73.

Like its bookends on either side, *Our Martyred Artists* opens with a heart-wrenching dedication to the “unknown Sinti or Roma brother who turns towards his Jewish companions on their common route towards the gas chambers and says to them, “They will write about you, but who will remember us?” (Fig. 12). And it concludes with a “list of martyred artists from other countries.” The very last words in the book, before the ending epigraph and acknowledgments, are: “This list is incomplete.”⁷³ Even today, after 70 years, there is still much work to be done. But thanks to the new translation, we can now all share in Fenster’s project. Together with Melekh Ravitch, who wrote to Fenster shortly after the book was published, we can say: “Generations will thank you for that book.”⁷⁴

Mir Zaynen Do (We Are Here)

Among the many works of art that Fenster reproduced in the pages of *Our Martyred Artists* is one by Erna DEM (Ernestine Davidoff):⁷⁵ a gorgeous interior of a Parisian apartment with glossy herringbone wood floors, thick, decorative wall moldings, a glass chandelier – and, at the center – floor-to-ceiling French windows that open onto an iron balustrade and beyond the silhouette of the Pantheon (Fig. 13). This painting has been removed from the translation in favor of one of DEM’s colored porcelain heads. DEM’s painting bespeaks a sense of feeling at home (*chez soi*) in Paris: a belonging grounded in one’s belongings (lush fabrics, mahogany furniture, crystalline fixtures) but above all in the

⁷² Henri Raczymow, “Memory Shot Through With Holes,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 85 (1994): 98–105.

⁷³ Fenster, 257; *Nos artistes martyrs*, 279. His ending epigraph is the acronym תַּנְצַח הָיָה. It comes from the *Book of Samuel*: “May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life” (25: 29).

⁷⁴ Letter from Melekh Ravitsch c/o the Jewish Public Library in Montreal to Hersh Fenster in Paris, May 26, 1953. MEDEM, Briv 79, A.FEN.5(9).

⁷⁵ Erna DEM is the name of Ernestine Davidoff, wife of Marc Wolfson. Before they were deported, they sold their belongings, including paintings by Gustave Courbet, one of which is kept in the Musée d’Orsay (*Landscape at Étretat*). Their goods are part of the Musées Nationaux Récupération (MNR). DEM was a painter and ceramist who collaborated with the Sèvres factory and participated in several exhibitions at the Salon d’Automne and at the Tuileries.

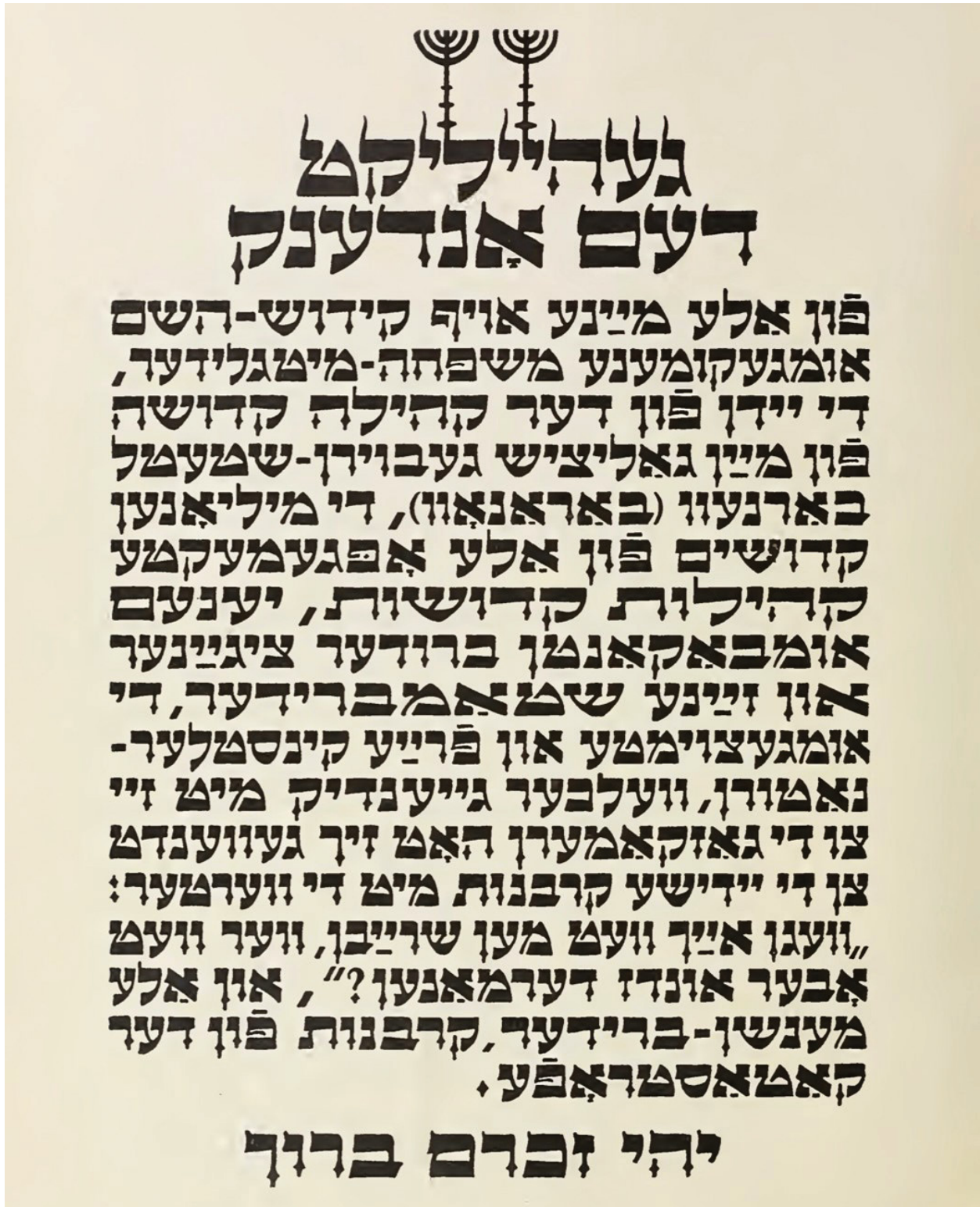


Fig. 12 Dedication page, designed by Arthur Kolnick, of Hersh Fenster, *Our Martyred Artists* (Paris, 1951). Author's Collection.



Fig. 13 Erna DEM (Davidson), *Interior* reproduced in Fenster, *Our Martyred Artists* (Paris: 1951), 65.



ג. אראנסאן — קידוש-השם בארעליעף

דאס האט בלי ספק, צוגעאיילט דאס אוועקגיין פון קינסטלער, פון נאך קרעפטיקן מענטש, וואס האט אין ניויאָרק, אין יאר 1943, אויסגעהויכט, דורך אַ האַרץ-שלאַג, זיין נשמה.

בעת דער קינסטלער האט זיך געפונען אין ניויאָרק, זיי-גען אלע קינסטלער, וואס זיינען געווען אין זיין אטעליע, אויספארקויפט געוואָרן אויף אַ ליציטאָציע. ס'איז קיין זכר נישט געבליבן פון זיי, פון דער אטעליע, וואס האט זיך געפונען אויף רי דע וואַזשיראַר 93, און פון זיין אַרבעט-אטעליע, וואס האט זיך געפונען אויף רי אַנטוואַן-בורדעל.

בלויז אין דער מחשבה איז נאך אַלין אזוי לעבעדיק: די דאָזיקע פרעכטיקע יידישע אטעליע, וווּ יידן פלעגן זיך טרעפן, די העלע סקולפטורן פון מירמלשטיין, די בילדער און די איידעלע געוועבן אויף די ווענט, די פּיאַנאָ, אויף וועלכער ס'איז געשטאַנען, אין אַ גלאַז וואַסער פּונאַנדער-געשפּרייט, בלומען, דעם קינסטלערס באַרעליעף „קידוש השם“, וואס שטעלט פאַר אַ דערהרגעסן אַלטן ייד מיט אַ דערהרגעט יידיש קינד. דער אויסדרוק אויף זייערע פנימער, די קדושה, וואס רוט אויף זיי אין גאַנצן, זיינען אַ טיפער אַנקלאַג פון יידישן קינסטלער נחום אַראַנסאָן קעגן אַ רויער, אכזריותדיקער וועלט.

און אין ווינקל שטייט ער, דעם קינסטלערס דרימלענדיקער ריז, דער געפייניקטער מענטש. אַז ער וועט זיך איבער-וועקן, וועט ער פאַדערן דין והשבון פאַר אַלע עוולות...

דאס שאַפן פון „יידישן ווינקל“, די היים פאַר די פליטים פון אומעטום, וווּ הימלער הרשע האט אויסגעשפּרייט זיין רוצחישע ממשלה, האט גורם געווען, אַז איך זאָל נאָך אַפּטער קומען צום קינסטלער, וואס אין זיין אטעליע איז, אזוי צו זאָגן, געבוירן געוואָרן די דאָזיקע אינסטיטוציע. ווען ס'איז געוואָרן אַ מאַל אומעטיק אויף דער נשמה, אומעטיק פון די ידיעות, וואס האָבן זיך געטראָגן פון די יידישע ישובים, אַדער פונעם אַנבליק אויפן שטראַס גע-פלאַנטע יידן, וואס זיינען געקומען קיין פאַרזי, איז מען געגאַנגען אויף רי דע וואַזשיראַר 93, דעם קינסטלערס אטעליע.

אַבער אַראַנסאָן איז שוין דעמאלט געווען טייל מאַל דע-גערווירט און אפילו גערייצט.

אַט זיינען זיי געקומען, די גאר שווערע צייטן, וווּ די ברוינע אכזרים זיינען געשטאַנען פאַר די טויערן פון פאַרזי. נחום אַראַנסאָן פאַרלאַזט די שטאַט, צו וועלכער ער איז געווען צוגעבונדן אין משך פון צענדליקער יאָרן. ער האט זיך געמוזט שידן מיט זיין אטעליע, מיט די ווערק, וואס זיינען געווען דער תוכן פון זיין לעבן, מיט די וונדערלעכע קונסט-קאלעקציעס, און זיך לאָזן אין וועג אַרײַן אַפּריכטן גלות.

דער קינסטלער האט באַוווּזן צו קומען קיין אַמעריקע. נישט געקוקט אויף דעם קרייז פריינד, וואס ער האט דאַרמין געהאַט, האט ער זיך אַבער געפילט אויסגעוואַרצלט.

Fig. 14 Naoum Aronson, *Le Martyre*, n.d. Reproduced in *Our Martyred Artists* (Paris: 1951), 250 but missing from the French edition.

view, just outside the window, of the skyline of Paris, which beckons in the distance. The windows mark the liminal space between interior and exterior, domestic and metropolitan, the private and the public. DEM (an acronym of her last name Davidoff, first name Erna, and Marc, her husband's first name) was born in Kiev and moved to Paris in 1922 and lived, according to the information they provided to the Nazis on the transport list, at 272 Blvd. Raspail, an imposing Second Empire building on a wide, tree-lined street. In other words, the painting depicts her own home, bathed in light and warmth, and her daily view of her adopted city. But the apartment shows no signs of human life; the chairs are pushed back and empty, as if strangely foreshadowing the artist's fate. DEM was arrested on July 22, 1942, with her husband, Marc Wolfson, and deported to Auschwitz on Convoy 9.

DEM's painting could have been used as the very cover of Fenster's book, which is itself a window onto the past. Bringing into sharper focus early historiographic and commemorative practices, *Our Martyred Artists* is, as Fenster first promoted it, "a work of national, cultural and historical significance."⁷⁶ It opens up new frames for art historical inquiry and affords us a view, until now largely obscured, into the diverse experiences of Jewish artists working in Paris in the first half of the twentieth century. Like DEM's vacant Parisian apartment, art history is still haunted by ghosts who continue to whisper and remind us: *Mir zaynen do* ("We are here").⁷⁷

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go to a long list of friends and scholars who discussed Fenster's *Our Martyred Artists* with me: Romy Golan, Maya Balakirsky Katz, Simon Goldberg, Elena Makarova, Kerry Wallach, Sarah Wilson, Nina Lichtenstein, and David Mazower of the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. Elena

Hoffenberg translated some of the archival sources in the exceptional MA paper she wrote for my course entitled "Hersh Fenster and the Memorialization of Jewish Artists of Paris" (University of Haifa, 2019). I was first introduced to Fenster by Nadine Nieszawer, who graciously shared her knowledge and archival sources with me. Rachel Koskas and Judith Lindenberg were instrumental in facilitating my access to the archives at the MAHJ, as was Karen Taeib at the CDJC and Natalia Krynicka at the Maison de la Culture Yiddish, Bibliothèque Medem. Above all, I owe a debt of gratitude to Pascale Samuel, Paul Salmona, and the entire team at the MAHJ in Paris for inviting me to speak at the conference "Chagall, Modigliani, Soutine ... Les Leçons de l'École de Paris" (June 17–18, 2021) in conjunction with their exhibition *Paris pour École, 1905–1940* and its pendant exhibition, *Hersh Fenster et le Shtetl Perdu de Montparnasse*.

Rachel Perry is a scholar of postwar French art and teaches in the Weiss Livnat Graduate Program in Holocaust Studies at the University of Haifa and in the History of Art department at Tel Aviv University. She was a Senior Research Fellow at the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research and the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at CASVA (National Gallery in Washington DC). She is currently completing a manuscript on early postwar exhibitions related to the Shoah, *Exhibiting the Holocaust: Histories, Practices and Politics in the Immediate Postwar Period, 1944–1949* thanks to a Sharon Abramson Research Grant from the Holocaust Educational Foundation at Northwestern University and an EHRI Fellowship at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris. Her articles have appeared in *October*, *History and Memory*, *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, *Revue 20/21ème siècle*, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, *French Cultural Studies*, *RIHA*, *Art Bulletin* and *Ars Judaica*.

⁷⁶ Fenster, Letter to Congress for Jewish Culture.

⁷⁷ "Mir zaynen do" is the refrain of "Zog nit Keyn Mol" ("Do Not Ever Say"), the Partisans' song, which was written by Hirsh Glik for the Vilna Jewish United Partisan Organization (FPO) and became the hymn of the Jewish uprising. The hymn was sung in the Vilna Ghetto and among the Vilna Partisans, spreading to the labor camps, concentration camps, and other Partisan groups.

The song later became the hymn for Holocaust Day remembrance ceremonies in Israel and abroad. It was recorded for the Jewish Historical Commission, Munich, 1946:

Never say you are going on your final road,
Although leadened skies block out blue days,
Our longed-for hour will yet come
Our step will beat out – we are here!

Appendices

Hersh Fenster, Dedication
In *Our Martyred Artists*, 1.

In memory

of all the Jews who were murdered because they were Jews, the members of my family, the inhabitants of Barnev (Baranów), my native Galician shtetl, the millions of martyrs of all the annihilated communities; in memory of this unknown Sinti or Roma brother and his family, these free natures of artists, who walked with the Jews to the gas chambers, and addressed these words to them: "They will write about you, but who will remember us?" And to all our fellow human victims of the catastrophe.

May their memory be blessed.

Hersh Fenster, "To the Reader"
In *Our Martyred Artists*, 3–4 translated by Barbara Harshav from the original Yiddish.

When the evil storm that raged over enslaved parts of the world was at its height, and the miraculously living remnant of the murdered people were robbed of all their property and savings, they suddenly saw before them the horrible end that terrified them: six million Jews from the most creative Jewish settlements, their own flesh and blood – gassed and burned, killed in various ways.

Generations of old Jewish communities, where Jews lived, worked, created and dreamed their dreams, were torn up by the root and wiped out. Considering a great Jewish catastrophe, the deep grief and woe, one felt guilty for staying alive, and tried at least to justify it.

Right after the great disaster, when I went back to Paris, the first thing was to find out was who remained alive from the fire. I went to Montparnasse, where I had several friends, where Parisian Jewish artists, from all Jewish centers, worked in their poor ateliers, would meet in the cafes there, and over a glass of coffee would talk about art and artistic creation.

They, the eternal dreamers of beauty, who gave their most internal essence an artistic form, their winged vision of humans and the world, they, the spiritual understanders of our folk, have fallen: they were ripped away by the storm.

The thought of them and the memory of their creation came to life in me in great grief, may their memory be a bless-

ing for future generations, their holy sacrifice. And with the veneration and awe one has for saints, I began to immortalize their work as their memorial.

The work has not been easy: to seek traces of them after the catastrophe in big Paris, where no one has ever found any.

I have often come upon a photograph, a painting, a reproduction of a work or obtained of information about the martyrs. All this time, my only wish has been to be able to live long enough to complete the work project.

I don't claim that it is perfect. But I can say – with a clear conscience – that I have done what one person alone, without material or other advantages, can do. I have been at pains to convey the life, creation and holy victims of our artists. It is not a work of art criticism, but of veneration. If part of the works of some martyrs are in more detail, that is because I had access to more materials, more information about them, or that they were more widely known. As for the others, I have only presented what I knew was true, and had discovered about them. Their memory is just as holy and dear to me and I bow my head deep to their holy legacy.

In this work, there are also some Jewish artists who simply died a natural death, but they were also victims of the horrible time. And those who took their own life, not knowing what was to come, with their deeper sensibility, could no longer bear their own and their people's pain – that is, martyrs who fought in uprisings. I have considered it a holy obligation to mention them.

I haven't sought to create a literary work of art, with literary effects, but rather a work that should be simple and truthful, as simply tragic and truthful as the sacrifice of all the creative Jewish people mentioned there, as the death of six million.

•••

I am deeply grateful to all my friends, the Parisian Jewish artists, for their material aid, and all my friends who have shown me their sympathy and understood and appreciated the importance of this work.

My sincere gratitude to all the members of the committee that published this work, for their warmth, and the great Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in France for their help.

A special thanks to my dear life partner– Leah – for her abundant, quiet cooperation in this memorial book.

H. Fenster

Marc Chagall, *For the Slaughtered Artists*, 1950

Trans. Barbara and Benjamin Harshav in *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, ed. Benjamin Harshav (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 113–15.

Did I know them all? Did I visit
 Their ateliers? Did I see their art
 Close up or from afar?
 Now I walk out of myself, out of my years,
 I go to their unknown grave.
 They call me. They pull me into their grave -
 They counted the years un-lived,
 Which they cherished and waited for
 To make their dreams come true –
 Not slept through, overslept.
 In their head, they sought and found
 The nursery where the moon, ringed
 With stars, promised a bright future.
 The young love in the dark room, in the grass,
 On mountains and in valleys, the chiseled fruit
 Doused in milk, covered with flowers,
 Promised them paradise.
 The hands of their mother, her eyes
 Accompanied them to the train, to the distant
 Fame.

I see them: trudging alone in rags,
 Barefoot on mute roads,
 The brothers of Israels, Pissarro and Modigliani,
 Our brothers – pulled with ropes
 By the sons of Dürer, Cranach,
 And Holbein – to death in the crematoria.
 How can I, how should I, shed tears?
 They have been steeped in brine –
 The salt of my tears.
 They have been dried out with mockery, and I
 Lose my last hope.

How should I weep,
 When every day I heard:
 The last board is torn off my roof, when I am too tired
 to make war
 For the piece of earth
 Where I rested,
 Where I will later be laid to sleep.
 I see the fir, the smoke and the gas
 Rising to the blue cloud,
 Turning it black.
 I see the torn-out hair, the pulled-out teeth.
 They overwhelm me with my rabid
 Palette.
 I stand in the desert with heaps of boots,
 Clothing, ash, and dung, and mumble my
 Kaddish.

And as I stand – from my paintings
 The painted David descends to me,
 Harp in hand. He wants to help me
 Weep and recite chapters
 Of Psalms.
 After him, our Moses descends.
 He says: Don't fear anyone.
 He tells you to lie quietly
 Until he again engraves
 New tablets for a new world.

The last spark dies out,
 The last body vanishes.
 Calm, as before a new deluge/
 I stand up and say farewell to you.
 I take the road to the new Temple
 And light a candle there
 Before your image.

Paris 1950