



TRIBUTE # 01
JACOB MAĆZNIK

www.ladpe.fr/hommage-jacobmacznik

Introduction

By Samson Munn

Nephew of the artist

The École de Paris was a group of French and mostly émigré artists whose work centered in Paris, primarily 1900 to 1940. (The name was also extended to classical music composer émigrés also working in Paris then.) There was no building. The campus was the city of Paris. There were no faculty; or, all the artists may be considered to have been faculty, teaching each other, learning from each other, while painting and sculpting in their ateliers, on the sidewalks of Paris, and in the countryside of France.

The École de Paris was not an art movement. The artists worked each in his or her own style, sometimes experimenting with styles. Its name refers to Paris as the center of western art in the early 20th century. Prior to World War I, the center was Montmartre; by the 1920s, the center was Montparnasse. The term "École de Paris" was coined either by Roger Allard (the French poet, critic and essayist) in response to the 1924 *Salon des Indépendants* exhibition in which artist were segregated by country of origin, or by André Warnod in 1925, the French writer, art critic, illustrator, and singer, who described the unorganized group of primarily non-French artists who lived their lives and displayed their works in cafés, salons, shared workspaces, and galleries.

Early École de Paris artists of renown included Chagall, Soutine, Modigliani, Mondrian, and Picasso. Others then and later included Foujita, Hohermann, Kikoine, Kisling, Codreanu, Krémègne, Lipchitz, Derm, Dufy, Mané-Katz, Nordau, Maćznik, Brâncuși, Halicka, Dobrinsky, Gotko, Kandinsky, Orloff, Kars, Kraemer, and over a hundred others.

Many, perhaps most, were Jewish, and most were émigrés. Many of their works are today in museums, galleries, and archives throughout the world.

The term *École de Paris* referred primarily to the preponderance of its artists who were émigrés in Paris. The term soon came into wide use, and was often used derogatorily by critics who viewed the foreigners, many if not most Jewish, as a threat to the purity of French art. For example, the art critic Louis Vauxcelles (who coined the terms "fauvism" and "cubism") called these émigré artists dirty "Slavs disguised as representatives of French art." Marginalization

of École de Paris artists progressed through the 1930s. Once the Vichy government was in power in June 1940, École de Paris artists could no longer exhibit in Paris at all.

The journalist Stanley Meisler wrote in his book *Shocking Paris: Soutine, Chagall and the Outsiders of Montparnasse*, "It makes more sense to think of the School of Paris as a historical phenomenon – an unprecedented and unexpected migration of young artists, mostly Jewish, many from the Russian empire." And, the journalist Wendy Smith wrote in *The Washington Post* in 2015, "the resentment toward them by French critics in the 1930s was unquestionably fueled by anti-Semitism." Some went so far as to refer to the *Jewish* artists of the École de Paris as the *Jewish School of Paris* or as the *School of Montparnasse*.

Several École de Paris artists are well known and their works highly valuable. Many others hardly had the opportunity to become well known. Among the latter was Jacob Mącznik, who arrived with his wife in Paris in 1928 from Lodz, Poland. He became a highly esteemed young artist in the latter years of the *École de Paris*, certainly one of its rising stars by the late 1930s, to whom Hersh Fenster (the journalist, writer, and art critic in Paris in the 1920s, 1930s, and after World War II) devoted a large and laudatory entry in his sterling 1951 book about murdered artists of the École de Paris (*Undzere Farpainikte Kinstler*). Devastation of the École de Paris by the Nazis and their collaborators included the murder of scores of European artists and destruction of vast numbers of their works. Among those Paris artists tortured and murdered by the Reich was Mącznik. After Auschwitz, his final days were in the Ebensee division of the Mauthausen camp in Austria, where he died at just 39 years of age in 1945.

People composed the *École de Paris*. With no formal classrooms and no school buildings, the murder of artists and ruination of the *École de Paris* were synonymous and simultaneous. Édouard Roditi, the poet, essayist, critic, translator and art historian, wrote that these were "among the more prominent artists who died as victims of Nazi extermination camps," that they were "gifted with outstanding" "individual talent," and that had they "lived to profit from the post-war international boom in contemporary art," they "might indeed have now enjoyed considerable fame."

Encyclopedia Judaica notes of the *École de Paris* victims, "Among the more prominent artists who died as victims of Nazi extermination camps were" [seventeen painters are then listed, including] "... Jacob Macznik 1905–1944 [sic] ..." The entry continues, "These martyred artists were gifted with such outstanding and diverse talents that it would now be as unfair to try to force them all into a Jewish school as it was, under the Nazi regime, [as it would be] to deny them their human rights because they were Jews."

It was simply because of that unfortunate timing that Mącznik's level of artistic accomplishment, then locally acknowledged and on the brink of wide renown, remained known decades later only by few. His works were exhibited October 1932 and November 1932 at *Jeune Europe*. The directeur was Antonio Aniante, the Italian writer and playwright who fled Italian fascism to Paris, where he authored biographies and held art exhibitions. He wrote, "I consider Macznik (with Carlo Levi and Halé Asaf) as the best painter of my new avant garde troupe. Macznik moves away from them with this surprising quality of populist artist. ... Macznik arises from the people and suffering, but also from love. You will find in these paintings, the joy of freedom and the charm of poverty rendered without

any artifice. Macznik is a realist, all honesty and all faith. He is a poet, a thinker, a wise man who expresses himself in color and form. Having understood his past, his present, and his future, and being the first to encourage it, to impress the crowd, here is the best book I have written this year."

Mącznik also exhibited at *Salon des Indépendants* in 1931 and 1932, at *Galerie d'Art Jack* (Nevers) September and October 1935, at *Fédération des Sociétés Juives* January (likely 1937), and at *Salon des Tuileries* June 1939. In 1937, he and Fenster took their renowned journey of resistance art, decades before the term "resistance art" was coined, traveling eastward to document synagogues before they would be destroyed by Nazis and their collaborators.

A small number of Mącznik's surviving works have long been in museums in France, Canada, the U.S.A. and Israel, while the remainder are in private hands. Widening capability of the internet beginning in the 1990s facilitated discovery, imaging and collection of a number of his paintings and drawings, as well as archival materials.

Here, you may view images of ten of his paintings. For more information regarding Jacob Mącznik, see macznik.org.