

Three Exhibitions
Marking the Centenary of
Jacob Pins



Ticho House | בית טיכו



Pins 1961

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European Imprint:
Jacob Pins and German Expressionism
Ticho House

Perspectives of Protest

In the Body of the Wood: Winners of the
Jacob Pins Prize for an Israeli Graphic Artist

The Jerusalem Print Workshop

In his memoirs, Jacob Pins – eminent woodcut artist and East Asian art collector – wrote about his happy childhood in the rural town of Höxter in North Rhine-Westphalia, where he used to wander alone, taking care not to break the silence. He began to draw at the age of twelve. Two years later he had already decided to become an artist – an aspiration that displeased his father, a veterinarian – but his plans were cut short by the rise of Nazism. Although Höxter was an isolated town with few Jews, the Nazis gained a foothold within this closed, liberal community through vigorous propaganda. Pins's parents managed to send their children away but they themselves remained there until after Kristallnacht, which did not spare the only local synagogue. Pins's father was later imprisoned in Buchenwald, and in 1941 both parents were transported to the Riga ghetto, where they were murdered shortly before the end of the war.

Pins immigrated to the land of Israel in 1936 as a member of the Shabbeth pioneer group. Five years later he settled in Jerusalem, where he remained until his death. In the early 1940s he studied at The Studio under Jakob Steinhardt, a significant figure in Expressionist art in Berlin. Unlike Steinhardt, however, Pins did not yearn for the landscapes of the Diaspora shtetl, nor did he seek to find them in the alleyways of Jerusalem. On the contrary, he avoided Jewish symbolism, preferring natural scenes or themes with a moral. Traces of German Expressionism can be seen in his work, together with an East Asian influence that permeated it from the late 1940s, when he began to collect Japanese woodblock prints. Together with his friends, the Yekke German artists of the fifth wave of immigration to Palestine, Pins was one of the founders of the Jerusalem Artists' House. His teaching in Bezalel's graphic art department, from the 1950s until the late 1970s, was characterized by rigorous precision and a scrupulous striving for accuracy in both concept and execution.

Pins was a devoted friend of the Israel Museum and the Jerusalem Print Workshop. As early as the 1950s he donated some of his own and others' works to the Bezalel Museum (precursor of the Israel Museum), and he continued to do so until the end of his life, bequeathing to the Museum his collection of East Asian art, which he had assembled over 60 years. Pins also donated many of his woodcut blocks, which he had carefully kept and documented, to the Jerusalem Print Workshop. In 2004 he held a solo exhibition at the Workshop that included studies and woodcuts he made for *Michael Kohlhaas* by Heinrich von Kleist. This was a second printing from the plates, whose first prints had illustrated a book in 1953. Some fifty years later these prints were collected in an artist's book published by the Workshop. Pins also exhibited his woodcuts at a solo exhibition with an extensive catalogue at the Israel Museum in 1985. His collection of East Asian art was exhibited twice at the Museum, in 1980 and 1994, in a way that revealed how it had developed. The bulk of his artistic legacy is now preserved in a museum devoted to his work in his hometown of Höxter.

European Imprint focuses on a selection of works by German Expressionist artists from the Israel Museum's Prints and Drawings collection, in particular members of the Brücke group. Their profound influence on Pins's works exemplifies the complex relationship between the German Jewish artists and the country of their birth: in protesting against its treachery, they used artistic tools they had acquired from its cultural heritage. These artists, art lovers, and collectors, who had come to Palestine in the 1930s, motivated by Zionism and by the rise of Nazism, gravitated to the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts and the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, and breathed new life into both, imbuing them with a fresh spirit that was very different from what either had previously known. Some donated the artistic treasures they brought with them when they fled Europe, which were mainly works on paper. They did so out of generosity and a recognition of the importance of a public collection – but perhaps also out of a desire to distance themselves a little from the burden of the culture that had betrayed them. The collection that took shape is thus an assortment of memories that resemble faded family photographs, telling a story of forced emigration and renewal.



Raya Bar-Adon, Israeli, born 1939. *A Chase in the Dark*. Linoleum cut, 240 x 480 mm
Collection of the artist, Hoffit

Perspectives of Protest at the Jerusalem Print Workshop comprises works by Gershon Knispel, Shimon Tzabar, Raya Bar-Adon, Moshe Hoffman, and Avner Katz, who belong to the second generation of Israeli woodcut artists. Their work is largely concerned with criticism and protest common in modern woodcuts, and in this they follow the founding generation of this tradition in Palestine: Marcel Janco, who made Dadaist prints in the 1920s; Josef Budko, who linked German Expressionism to the Jewish shtetl in Poland; Ludwig Schwerin and Jakob Eisenscher, who were also influenced by German art; and Reuven Rubin, whose series the "God Seekers" focuses on the tension between the Jews of the Diaspora and the figure of the New Jew. Apart from Steinhardt and Pins, who instructed their Jerusalem students in the art of woodcutting, many artists of central European extraction – among them Rudi Lehmann and Miron Sima, Paul K. Hoenich and Arie Allweil (who made linocuts as well) – also taught this medium. They enhanced its status and served as mentors to a great number of students. Because of the simplicity and accessibility of the woodcut and linocut techniques, and because of the opportunity they offered to reproduce large numbers of prints, these techniques were popular with many artists, including members of the Kibbutz and Workers' movements, who used the medium's expressive power to convey their sentiments and the ideology that guided their lives.

Despite all this, woodcuts never made their way to the forefront of Israeli art, and during the first few decades after the state was founded they were thrust to the sidelines because their narrative and figurative qualities did not accord with the lyrical abstraction of the New Horizons group, which dominated the local art world from the late 1940s until the early 1970s. Moshe Hoffman, who studied – like Raya Bar-Adon and Avner Katz – under Steinhardt and Pins at Bezalel, was one of the very few artists to use the

woodcut technique in the 1960s and 1970s. In his autobiography, he laments the absence of dialogue with fellow practitioners of the technique and the fact that "the art of woodcutting is disappearing, or else it is going through a dreadfully low phase."



Hilla Ben Ari, Israeli, born 1972. From the series "Seven Repetitions." Woodcut, 2017
785 x 1075 mm. The Jerusalem Workshop

The second exhibition at the Print Workshop, *In the Body of the Wood: Winners of the Jacob Pins Prize for an Israeli Graphic Artist*, reveals that since then the art of woodcut has experienced a new lease of life. The exhibition features works by Hilla Ben Ari, Orit Hofshi, Alex Kremer, Asaph Ben Menahem, and Alexander Vojik, the five winners of this prize, which is awarded biennially by the Israel Museum. Each of these artists exhibits both recent and earlier works which convey an oeuvre of form and concept that powerfully reflects how vibrant the woodcut tradition is today.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem | The Jerusalem Print Workshop

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European Imprint: Jacob Pins and German Expressionism | Ticho House
April – October 2017 | Curator: Ronit Sorek | Exhibition design: Michal Aldor

Perspectives of Protest

In the Body of the Wood: Winners of the Jacob Pins Prize for an Israeli Graphic Artist
The Jerusalem Print Workshop | April – June 2017 | Curators: Arik Kilemnik, Irena Gordon

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On the back: Jacob Pins, *A Walk in the Mountains*. Color woodcut, 1961, 430 x 67 mm
Collection of Martha Lebenstein, Ra'anana