

EARLY ZIONIST ART AND HANDICRAFTS IN HONOR OF THE 74TH ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE



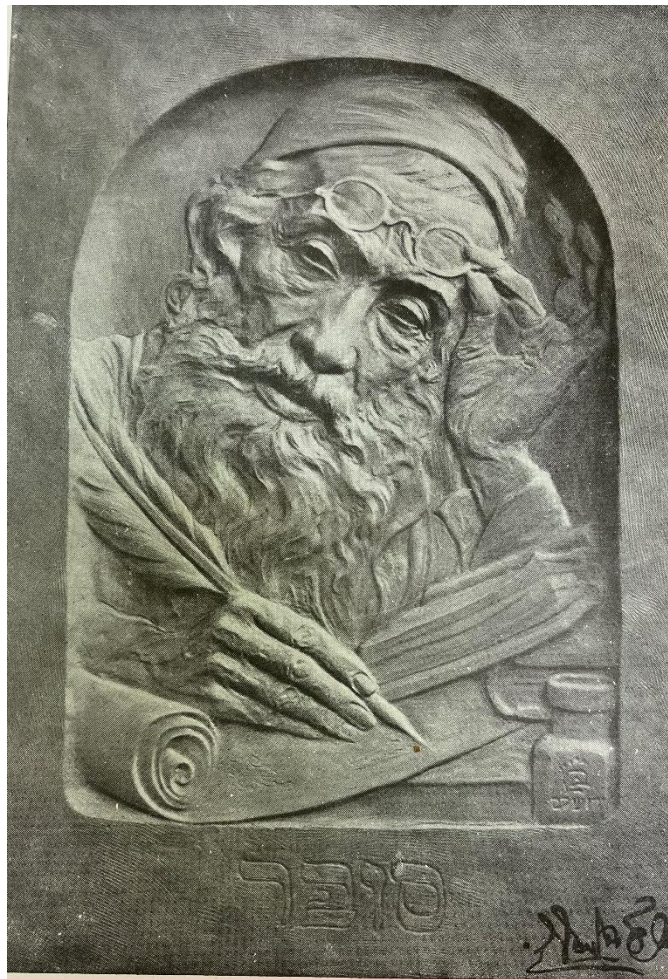
The desire to develop an indigenous Jewish art was a component of the Zionist effort to create a Jewish state in Palestine from the first years of the 20th century. The enterprise was spearheaded by an artist-entrepreneur named Boris Schatz. Schatz is known both for his own artistic creations and for his important role as the founding director of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design he established in Jerusalem in 1906. (The school is named for the biblical artisan

Bezalel, commissioned by Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant which led the Israelites on their journeys through the Wilderness of Sinai).

This exhibit is dedicated to the range of visual and plastic arts – and the spread from “fine” art to kitsch – that characterize the pre-State years through the first decades after 1948.

Most prominent are photographs of six of 40 plates of Boris Schatz’s works in metal, displayed here together with their portfolio case, in the center of which is an example of the plates themselves.

BOTTOM SHELF, LEFT TO RIGHT



Sofer, described on the reverse of the photograph page as “One of our most ancient crafts is that of writing the Scroll of Law... The scribe writes with a quill

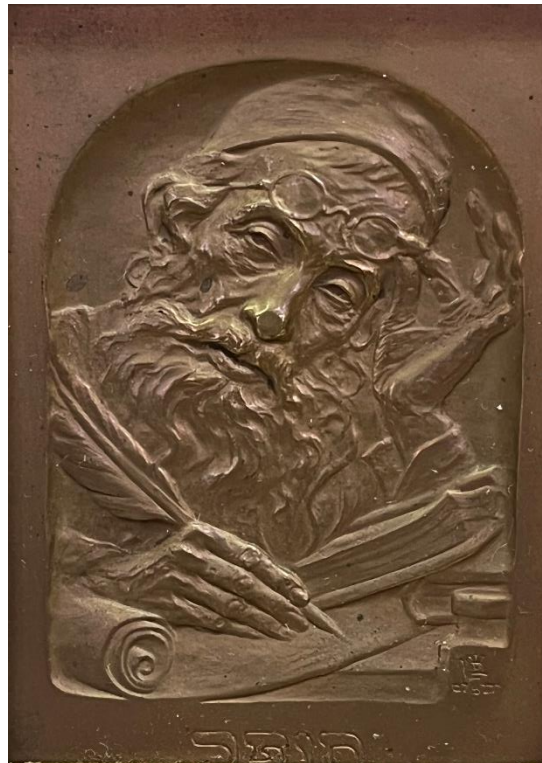
on parchment in the pointed letters of the ancient script.... It is a consecrated work; the scribe himself is considered a consecrated person, not an ordinary person. He must be a Jew, God fearing and learned, possessing the patience of a philosopher, combined with the soul of an artist. Here he is seen sitting calmly at his work, his spectacles set on his broad forehead and gazing before him, shortsightedly, with tired eyes.”



Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement (born in Budapest in 1860, he died exhausted in 1904), having created an actual Zionist organization to foster aliyah by European Jews and to establish a legal presence in Eretz Yisrael through the purchase of land from Arab and Ottoman owners. In his diary, recording the events at the First Zionist Congress (1897), Herzl wrote: "At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it." Schatz's plaque, shown here both in the second photograph from the left and as the inset in the portfolio cover, features Herzl's aphorism: *im tir'tzu ein zu agadah* – "If you will it, it is no dream."

To the right of Herzl's profile is a depiction of an aged Moses leaning on a staff (presumably standing on Mt. Nebo, looking at toward the land into which Joshua, not he, will lead the Israelite people). To Herzl's left is a quotation from one of his predictions: "I believe that there will yet arise a generation of Jews who will be the Maccabees of today. And if this generation fails, another will surely arise after me which will take upon itself the exalted task of Jews who want redemption and will be redeemed."

(Against the back wall) Bronze miniature of the *Sofer*, n.d. but certainly pre-1948.



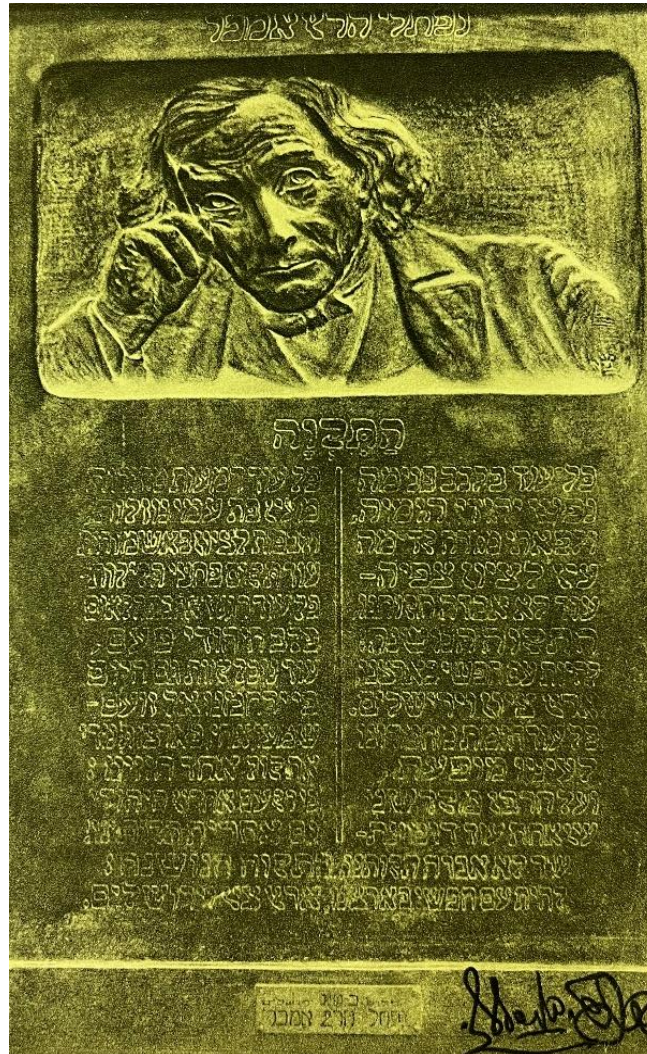
Portfolio Cover

The text on the leatherbound portfolio case reads *Baruch Schatz, His Life and His Works: Monograph Part I* (there was no Part II). Above the text is a silver (perhaps silver plated) bust of Herzl (as described above).



Yosef Trumpeldor (1880-1920) was an early Zionist activist who helped Ze'ev Jabotinsky organize the Zion Mule Corps which served with distinction as part of the British Army in the First World War. Trumpeldor died defending the settlement of Tel Hai against Arab marauders (Tel Hai is in the “finger of the Galil,” just north of the modern city of Kiryat Shmona.) On the site, a large monument in the shape of a lion commemorates his heroism. Schatz’s plaque depicts a lion under Trumpeldor’s image. It is said that Trumpeldor’s dying words were *Tov la-moot b’ad artzeinu* – “It is good to die for our land.” The quote may be apocryphal but the sentiment has

inspired generations of young Israelis who serve in the Israel Defense Forces.



Naftali Herz Imber

Naftali Herz Imber (1856-1909) was the poet who composed the verses that became the national anthem of Israel. His poem, written in 1877 and published in 1886, was set to music in 1888 by Samuel Cohen, based on a Moldovian song which had already become part of Bedrich Smetana's symphonic poem, "Die Moldau." Originally called *Tikvateinu*, it was sung at Zionist Congresses beginning in 1901. Schatz inscribed many of the verses of Hatikvah under his portrait of Imber.



Leaning against the back of the shelf is a silver-plated miniature entitled *Ehad Me'ahm ha-Sefer* – “One of the People of the Book.”

MIDDLE SHELF, LEFT TO RIGHT

Exhibited on the shelves is a miscellany of Bezalel-inspired pieces, some exquisite, some decidedly “green-patina-kitsch” (see next pages).



Yemenite with drum, seated on a log. Folk art figure of wood, cloth, and raffia. Pisanty Arts. Israel, 1950s.

Complex whimsical (hideous?) accessory for a dedicated cigarette smoker, this most unusual stand seems to be for matchbox, deep cup for rolled cigarettes, and a covered container for loose tobacco mounted on the raised arm of a nymph who seems to be balancing on the edge of a pool (whose center is the ashtray). Bronze, Israel. n.d.



Hanukkiyah

Another very complex item is this green patina Hanukkah menorah with polished brass highlights. The Hebrew words behind the candle holders on the horizontal base read *haneirot halalu kodesh*, “these candles ... holy.” The word *heim*, “they (are)” is omitted, either from lack of space or lack of knowledge. The backplate is composed of a seven-branched menorah – an artist’s stylized

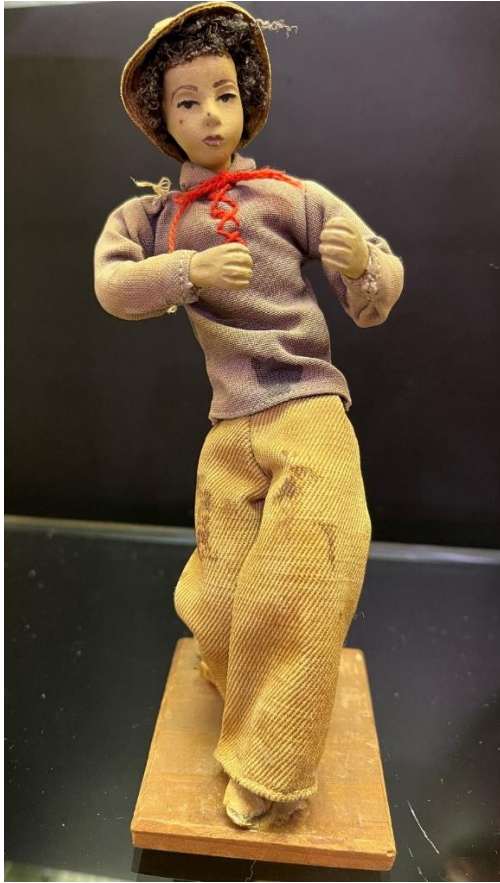
(and very imperfect) rendition of Benno Elkan's menorah that stands in a little park across the street from the Knesset, Israel's Parliament. The *menorah* is the symbol of the State of Israel. This hanukkiyah features a tablet of the Ten Commandments in the middle of the central column, surrounded by sprigs of laurel. Israel, 1950s.



Bezalel 1906 1929



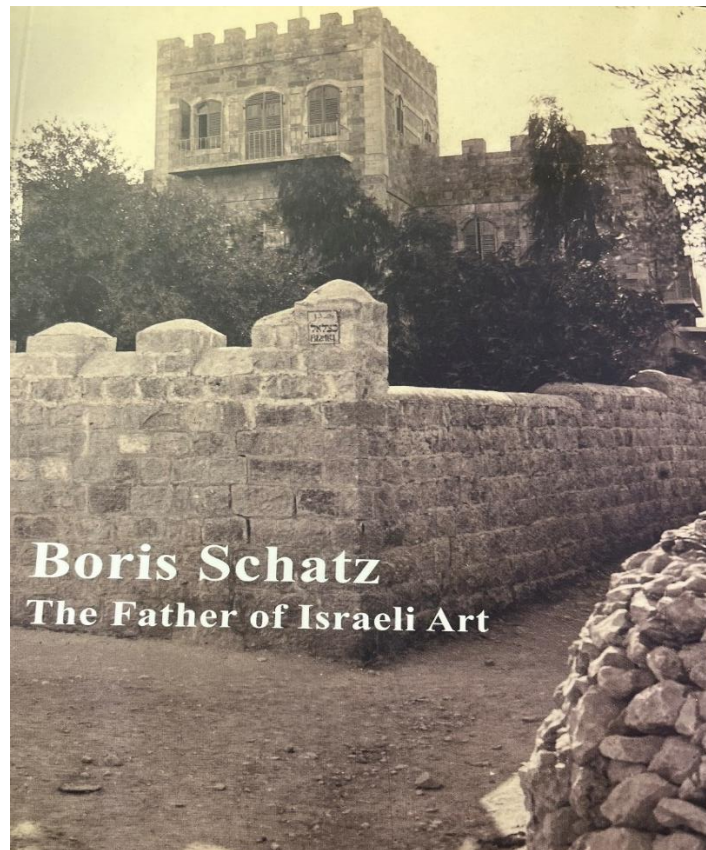
This book is a comprehensive history of the Bezalel School and the movement that Boris Schatz founded. The book was published by the Israel Museum in 1983.



Edith Samuel Dolls

Two dolls flank another hideous green patina menorah, in the case but not pictured here. This time, the laurel leaves surround a stylized depiction of an ancient oil jug.

The dolls are part of an amazing collection created for WIZO (Women's Israel Zionist Organization) in the 1950s by Edith Samuel (1907-1964) and a group of women under her instruction. They were beautifully crafted and detailed. The two figurines here have seen better days. The figure on the left is a kibbutznik. He originally held a hoe, ready to dig in the soil of Eretz Yisrael. The figure on the right is a newsboy, who holds in each hand remnants of the multi-paged newspaper he was carrying. Since the earliest years of Israel, there has been a flourishing press, with newsboys out on the street hawking a variety of papers, attracting attention by loudly calling out the words of the most dramatic headlines. That's what the newsboy doll is doing. Look: his mouth is wide open!



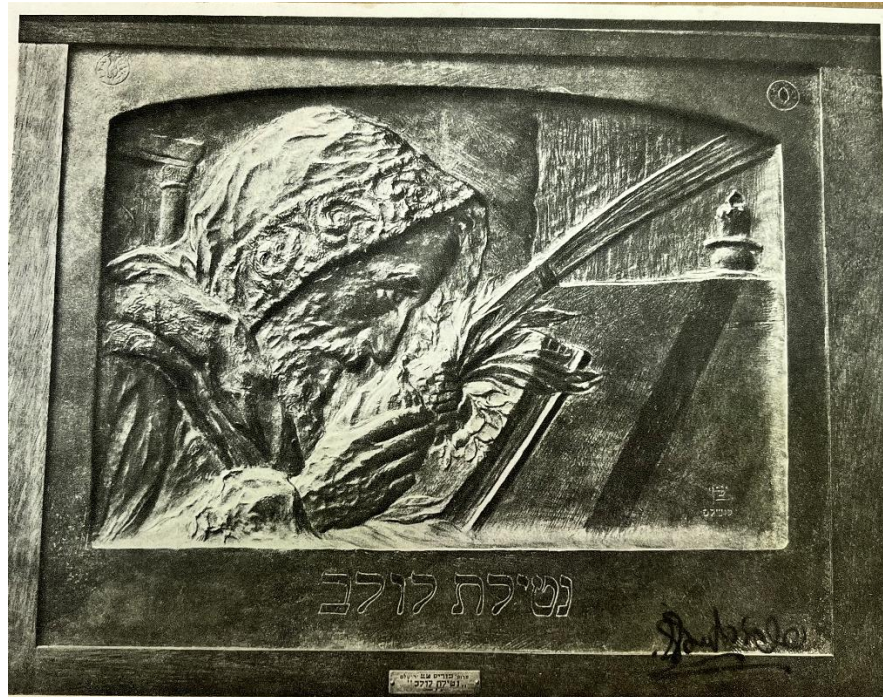
This book (Israel Museum, 2006) describes the checkered career of this enormously creative, entrepreneurial, and very flawed individual. Even before his death, Schatz's work was rejected by the serious artists who had competed to get into the school he had founded. The disdain for his work was on display at an exhibition in the Tower of David as early as 1921. The exhibition featured the art they created in modern Western style. The cover picture is of the Bezalel School in Jerusalem. Can you read the name on the street sign?

TOP SHELF, LEFT TO RIGHT



Definitely a souvenir because the word “Israel” is prominent at the top, this hideous ashtray is in the shape of a guitar. The folk-dancing man and woman, dressed in what look like North African clothing rendered in colorful enamel-painted bronze, flank the neck of the instrument. At least one person bought it, which is how it ended up at the TSWE rummage sale.

Netilat Lulav 1914



Boris Schatz's bronze plaque of a man holding a *lulav* and *etrog* in observance of the Festival of Sukkot. His head is covered with his *tallit*. If you look closely, you

can see the *pitom*, the tip that keeps the fruit from rotting and whose absence renders the etrog *treif*.

The elaborate commentary on the back of the page reads:

With a shining countenance and prophetic eyes, he stands in the House of Prayer on the festival of Succoth, the Feast of Ingathering. With love and tenderness he holds the Lulab and Ethrog, the precious fruits of our Land, the land of our forefathers. He scents the fragrant fruit a breath of Palestine—dreaming of the blue skies and sunshine under which they grew. The bitter exile, the difficult struggle for a livelihood, trade: all these are now

driven from his mind and completely forgotten. He dreams of our native land so distant yet so near to his heart. There blossomed the Ethrog and the stately palm, there where once we dwelt a free people when the Temple stood there, and Jerusalem was in her glory, pilgrims from every corner of the land flowed to her for the Feast of Ingathering. The psalms of David were upon their tongues and with awe their lips muttered a prayer to the Merciful God.

Pitcher



An unusually elegant, beautifully proportioned example of the generally justifiably maligned patina ware that was the most popular non-ritual tourist purchases in Israel in the 1950s, another being objects made of olive wood.



Sounding the Shofar 1914

The information on the back of this final Boris Schatz page is presented in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish, a Jewish multilingual presentation in an era when many of the readers were fluent in all three languages.

<p>Enwrapped in his praying shawl, his heart filled with awe, the spiritual messenger of Israel stands on a raised platform, blowing the ram's horn. His face is moist with tears, his eyes half closed, his emaciated cheeks expanded and with his last ounce of strength he endeavours to give vent to the various symbolic sounds in a devotional manner accompanied by prayer:</p> <p>„Sound the great ram's horn for our freedom“</p>	<p>Below the platform the congregation pours out their heart in prayer :</p> <p>„And it shall come to pass in that day“ „The Great Trumpet shall be sounded“ „And they shall come those that were ready to perish in the Land of Assyria“ „And the outcasts in the Land of Egypt“ „And shall worship on the Holy Mount of Jerusalem“</p>				
<p>בעל־תוקע (1914)</p> <p>עטוף בטליתו, בלב מלא רטט ווייז עומד על גבי הבימה שליוויו של עם ישראל, התוקע. פניו רטובי מני דמעות, עיניו עצומות למחצה, לחייו הצגומות מתנפחות, בשאריית כוחותיו הוא מתאמץ להפליט את הקולות תקיעה, תרועה, שברים, ולכן בכל הכונות:</p> <p>„תקע בשופר גדול לחרותנו!“</p> <p>ולמטה, יורד כל הצבור בבכי ושופך את נפשו לפני השם יתברך:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>והנחיים בארץ מצרים</td> <td>והשתחו ליהוה</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ובאו האוברים בארץ אשור</td> <td>בחר הקדש בירושלים...</td> </tr> </table>		והנחיים בארץ מצרים	והשתחו ליהוה	ובאו האוברים בארץ אשור	בחר הקדש בירושלים...
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<p>בעל־תוקע (1914)</p> <p>איינגעהילט אין טלית, אין הארצן פול מיט פחד און מורא, שטייט אויף דער בימה דער בעל תוקע, דער שליח פון עם־ישראל, און בלאזט שופר. זיין געזיכט איז אויסגעווייקט פון טרערן. די אויגען האלב צוגעמאכט, די טרוקענע באקן אנגעבלאזן, מיט די לעצטע כחות שטרענגט ער זיך אן ארויסצובריינגען די קולות: אקיעה, תרועה, שברים, און אלע סימבאלן מכוון צו זיין:</p> <p>בלאזט מיט א גרויסען שופר פאר אונזער פרייהייט!</p> <p>און אונזען וויינט שטיל דער עולם און בעט ביי זיין ליבען גאמען:</p>					