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The Picture at *Menorah Journal*: Making “Jewish Art”

ANDREA PAPPAS *

Speaking for myself I can say that the *Journal*, by its presentation of information of Jewish life widely scattered in both time and place, serves to maintain my Jewish self-consciousness as no other publication can. . . . I am sure that without a *Journal* my Jewishness would fall off at many points.¹

As the above excerpt from a letter to the editor in the late 1920s declares, and as scholars have recently demonstrated, *Menorah Journal* was a significant force for the shaping of a modern American Jewish identity.² Scholars have examined the magazine for its role as a crucible of literary modernism as well for its importance in influencing American Jewish identity.³ For example, Neil Jumonville’s study of the group of influential authors known as the New York intellectuals notes the place of *Menorah Journal* in the early careers of many of these writers.⁴ Both

*I would like to thank Nancy Troy for closely reading an early version of portions of this manuscript, as well as Stephen Carroll for his recent and exacting editorial assistance. I am also grateful for the assistance of Lillian Ben-Zion, Margi Conrad at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Emily Coppock at the Mercury Gallery, Eileen Doyle at Art Resource, Dorothy Smith and the staff of the American Jewish Archives, Estelle and Morton Sosland, and the Sosland family. I have made every effort to trace the owner and copyright holder of Manè-Katz’s *Student*, but without success. I would be grateful for information as to its current location and would be happy to correct the credit for this image at the earliest opportunity.

1. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Henry Hurwitz Papers (hereafter AJA/HHP), Box 52, folder 6, correspondence with William Schack, 1924–1930, n.d.

2. Although yet to be the object of a book-length study, accounts of *Menorah Journal* include Lauren B. Strauss, “Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot: Constructing an American Jewish Identity in the *Menorah Journal* of the 1920s,” *American Jewish History* 84 (1996): 315–31; and Lewis Fried, “The *Menorah Journal*: Yavneh in America, 1945–1950,” *American Jewish Archives* 50 (1998): 77–108. A look at the association that spawned the journal is Jenna Weissman Joselit, “Without Ghettoism: A History of the Intercollegiate *Menorah* Association, 1906–1930,” *American Jewish Archives* 30 (1978): 133–54.

3. The magazine was published between 1915 and 1962. Studies of its role in literary modernism include James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York, 1968); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World* (New York, 1986); Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left* (Chapel Hill, 1987); and Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley, 1991).

4. Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 27–50, 57, 63–74.

Jumonville and Alan M. Wald discuss in particular the early career of Elliot Cohen, the managing editor of *Menorah Journal* in its early days who would eventually go on to edit *Commentary*.⁵ Lauren B. Strauss and Seth Korelitz have both studied the influence of *Menorah Journal* on constructions of Jewish identity in the 1920s (Strauss) and in terms of the shift “from race to ethnicity” (Korelitz).⁶ Oddly enough, none of these many studies has paid more than passing attention to the art works that appeared in the magazine on a regular basis. Yet the pictures were central to both the impact and purpose of the *Menorah Journal*; they constituted an important vehicle for the construction of Jewish identity, as American Jews navigated increasingly polarized tensions among race, ethnicity and Americanism, between tradition and modernism, and between religious and secular ways of life in the middle part of the twentieth century.

Menorah Journal, founded in 1915 to foster a “Jewish Renaissance,” published essays, poetry, fiction, and political commentary. Along with articles addressing Jewish life and history, it attended to Jewish visual culture, publishing numerous works of art as well as articles by artists and cultural critics. Over the course of the magazine’s existence, only art magazines carried more reproductions of artworks in their pages. Yet when discussing *Menorah Journal*’s commitment to art, scholars have invariably dealt with it cursorily and as if it was no more than an attractive embellishment to the magazine.⁷ Nonetheless, the illustrations appeared, month after month, year after year, on the covers and within its pages, usually comprising approximately ten percent of the magazine.⁸ Indeed, *Menorah Journal* kept publishing artworks even in times of limited financial resources, particularly in the 1930s.⁹ The fact that

5. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 61, 63–64, 117–18.

6. Lauren B. Strauss, “Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot,” and Seth Korelitz, “The Menorah Idea: From Religion to Culture, From Race to Ethnicity,” *American Jewish History* 85 (1997): 75–100.

7. Strauss, for example, is unusual in mentioning the art at all, but it receives only a short passage in her otherwise very informative essay.

8. A typical issue of the magazine ran around 120 pages, with a frontispiece, an eight to ten page glossy insert, and an illustrated cover; the textual material pertaining to visual art was usually three to six pages long.

9. The magazine suspended the inclusion of glossy inserts immediately after the crash of October 1929, resuming in 1937. The American Jewish Archives holds Henry Hurwitz’s papers, which include the archives for the magazine. Unfortunately, there are no financial records among them; thus, detailed financial information about the magazine (such as account books or records of payments to individuals) is not available, so the extent of the impact of fiscal limitations is difficult to assess. However, the publication schedule is revealing: the magazine published its regular nine issues in 1929, seven in 1930, and only eleven issues in the six years between 1931 and 1936. In 1936, it put out three issues, which would remain the publication schedule for the rest of the magazine’s existence until 1962.

the magazine kept publishing images which required expensive glossy paper, even when it was in difficult financial straits, underscores the key role played by art in its ongoing construction of a modern Jewish identity.

The large number of art works and their persistent presence in the magazine testifies to the importance of visual culture in shaping Jewishness for the magazine's editor, Henry Hurwitz. So important was this art that, in the Summer 1949 issue, Hurwitz declared,

Some day, let us hope, a complete album of our *Menorah* treasury of art plates, in the colors of the original works, with the writings of our critics, may be made available, not alone for their intrinsic beauty and delight but for the illumination of a precious segment of the Jewish mind and spirit.¹⁰

Hurwitz was not an art professional, but his continued engagement with visual art and his desire to produce a treasury of Jewish art reveal his belief that making and appreciating art was a central element of being Jewish in the modern world. The range of pictures appearing in *Menorah Journal*, whether explicitly Jewish or otherwise, reflected what was available through his personal and professional network. Hurwitz's correspondence reveals that he sought out and relied on a group of other people—artists, art historians, and intellectuals whose writings included art and architecture as subjects—to furnish him with artwork for publication. A partial list of these luminaries includes artists Max Weber and William Meyerowitz, historian Cecil Roth, and man of letters Lewis Mumford.¹¹ Artists, New York art dealers, and Roth, a prominent Jewish historian in Britain, furnished Hurwitz with transparencies of artwork for reproduction on a number of occasions. In short, year in and year out, Hurwitz consistently expended time and effort to procure and publish examples of, and texts on, Jewish visual production. For Hurwitz, visual culture was important to the “illumination of . . . the Jewish mind and spirit” and to the “expression of all that is best in Judaism.”¹²

The readership of *Menorah Journal* found these artworks important. For example, in 1940 a letter to Hurwitz from the Counselor to Jewish Students at Columbia University, Rabbi Isidor B. Hoffman, describes the impact of *Menorah Journal's* art coverage:

10. Henry Hurwitz, *Menorah Journal* 37 (1949): n.p.

11. AJA/HHP, Box 35, folder 6, correspondence with William Meyerowitz, 1939–1961; Box 36, folder 14, correspondence with Lewis Mumford, 1936–1961; Box 60, folder 6, correspondence with Max Weber, 1932–1937.

12. *Menorah Journal*, inaugural issue, 1915. Quoted in Introduction to *The Menorah Treasury*, (Philadelphia, 1964) vii. For a study that looks at the relationships between artists—some of them Jewish—and another magazine, see Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses* (Philadelphia, 1988).

The arrival of the latest number of *The Menorah Journal* in the homes of over three hundred Columbia students has proved to be an event of major importance. All over the campus, students are discussing among themselves and with members of the faculty, various articles in the Journal. And there has been more than discussion. The article "Our Art Treasures" has influenced students to propose an exhibition of Jewish art at Columbia.¹³

The consumption of visual art played a role in bolstering the Jewish identity of Rabbi Hoffman's students, so much so that they wanted to see more examples of Jewish visual expression on their campus.¹⁴

Given the primary purpose of *Menorah Journal* as a vehicle for affirming and developing Jewish identity, it is reasonable to assume that the pictures somehow contributed to the complex processes shaping the formation of modern American Jewish identities. In particular, the images addressed the tensions between *Menorah Journal's* readers' "old country" heritages and the WASP-dominant culture in which they lived. The artworks also helped to refute antisemitic stereotypes encountered by Jews in America. The visual culture represented in and constructed by the images in the magazine's pages created an arena in which readers could negotiate their place in a society struggling with conflicting models—assimilation, acculturation, and separatism—for incorporating diverse populations into America's mainstream.¹⁵

The magazine carried art in quantity and from nearly every period of Jewish history, as well as essays on art. Illustrated covers began to appear in 1937 and continued for twenty-five years until the magazine ceased production in 1962. Typically the covers carried pictures of art and artifacts made by Jewish artists from periods ranging from antiquity through the twentieth century. As represented on the covers of the magazine, the art and artifacts of the Jewish people encompassed a "menorah carved on the limestone walls of the catacombs in Beth Shearim, Palestine" in ancient times, fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts, and art by modern artists such as impressionist painter Camille Pissarro (figure 1). In addition to objects from the ancient and recent past, *Menorah Journal* frequently reproduced the work of contemporary Jewish artists, typically as inserts eight or ten pages long in the interior of the magazine, printed on glossy paper. These inserts began in 1922, seven years after the founding of the magazine, and appeared in almost

13. AJA/HHP, Box 7, folder 7, Sidney Hook correspondence, 1941–1961. The letter, dated January 8, 1940, was copied to Hook.

14. For a discussion of the history of antisemitism at Columbia, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York, 1994), 85, 87–88, 156, 158.

15. Korelitz, "The Menorah Idea," provides an insightful discussion of *Menorah Journal's* ongoing debates over the meaning of culture.



Fig. 1. Menorah at Beth Shearim. Photographer unknown. Cover of *Menorah Journal*, courtesy of American Jewish Archives. Photograph by Andrea Pappas.

every issue. In addition, every issue of *Menorah Journal* included a frontispiece. The frontispiece often carried the work of a living artist, but images from the Jewish past, such as a seventeenth-century portrait of Spinoza, sometimes appeared as well.¹⁶ Frequent articles on art examined work by contemporary artists or reviewed the most recent exhibition season. Usually such articles featured a glossy insert of monochrome illustrations and a short biographical or survey essay.

The very range of this material is significant. Traditional Jewishness (usually male and Orthodox) is represented by artifacts, particularly ritual objects such as Haggada pages, menorahs, and the like, from the

16. This appeared in the February 1927 issue.

ancient and pre-modern eras.¹⁷ However, images of traditional ways of life drawn and painted by contemporary artists also frequently occur. Works by living artists that depict contemporary, often secularized, ways of life represent modernity. The transnationalism produced by the Diaspora registers in the inclusion of artists from Europe, Palestine, and America. All these representations function, in their variety, to construct a framework for Jewish identity that is inclusive and that takes account of the tensions between the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular, and European and American cultures.

However, this inclusiveness was not entirely even-handed; the magazine favored some kinds of art over others. Notably, modern art and art by living artists received the lion's share of space within the pages of *Menorah Journal*. Only rarely did art produced prior to the advent of artistic modernism around 1850 appear in the special glossy insert in the center of the magazine. This is consistent with the journal's mission: it was dedicated to the forging of specifically modern Jewish identity. Art was one of the most visible markers of modernism; even the nonprofessional could easily distinguish modern art from its traditional, academic predecessors by its abandonment of long-held conventions for representing space, the human body, and the natural world. Such pictures, without perspectival space, employing distorted forms and non-naturalistic color, did not always result in art that everybody enjoyed, but it was recognizable as modern. Given this prominence of visual art in signaling modernity, it is no surprise that modern art dominated the images displayed in the magazine.

These illustrations most frequently appeared in the company of an essay. Usually this took the form of a short biographical essay about the artist, accompanied by approximately ten illustrations of the artist's work. A typical example of one of these surveys occurs in the series of twelve plates, *Hassidic Portraits*, by Manè-Katz, accompanied by a short introduction by Lion Feuchtwanger, the celebrated author, which appeared in the 1941 Autumn issue (figure 2). Manè-Katz's portraits are executed with thick, sketchy strokes of the brush. Such marks, evoking contemporary masters such as Soutine, register his modernity as an artist, and suggest, along with the term "portraits," that they were done from life. In fact, Manè-Katz was living in Paris, and the paintings are the product of memory, a look back at the "immensely vivacious world"

17. I will use the male pronoun to refer to the reader of the magazine in order to reflect its gendered assumptions about its audience. The argument regarding the gender of the audience is outside the scope of this paper and is not examined here.



Fig. 2. Manè Katz, *Student*. Before 1941. Whereabouts unknown. Photograph of reproduction in *Menorah Journal* by Andrea Pappas.

of the ghettos of Eastern Europe.¹⁸ The opening painting, *Student*, shows a young boy with sidelocks lost in thought over an open book, presumably a Talmud. The next two paintings are of rabbis, followed by eight small reproductions of paintings of musicians—including a Tevya-style fiddler—in traditional, Eastern-European dress. The closing image depicts *Two Disciples*, one of whom wears a *tallit*. Images of religious identity thus bracket the images of musicians. This article was followed immediately by a related text, “The Poetry of Hassidism,” by Koppel S.

18. Lion Feuchtwanger, “A Note on Manè-Katz, Painter,” *Menorah Journal* 29 (1941): 286.

Pinson. Two aspects of a certain kind of traditional Jewishness were thus presented for consumption to the presumably somewhat secularized audience of *Menorah Journal*. This group of text and images worked to foster an aesthetic or nostalgic appreciation for a type of Judaism from which many of the readers of the magazine were probably moving away as a result of either modernization or assimilation. By appreciating these images readers could claim that traditional Jewish life as a heritage without necessarily living it. Likewise, these readers could incorporate Manè-Katz, a visibly Jewish artist, into a constellation of cultural associations making up their own modern Jewishness. Both strategies allow the secularized reader to feel some connection to his past and to the broader spectrum of contemporary Jewish cultures. At the same time, readers who were also practitioners of traditional forms of Judaism would find their lifestyle celebrated by these images. These different forms of identification with Jewishness were thus supported by a single set of images within the pages of the magazine.

The depiction of obviously Jewish themes, such as rabbis, observant individuals, or images of the Sabbath, shores up Jewish identity by promoting, through depiction, Jewish religious practice. These images characterize Jewishness as a religious identity without reference to, although not necessarily excluding, the modern world. However, the magazine dedicated itself to the pursuit of a modern Jewish identity and consequently went beyond a narrowly religious definition for Jewishness. This was one way for the magazine to respond to the spectrum of observance (or non-observance) among its audience. Similarly, images of Jewish neighborhoods and supposedly “Jewish looking” individuals—Manè-Katz’s *Hassidic Portraits* are a good example—published in *Menorah Journal* shaped Jewishness more broadly: as a form of ethnicity, moving away from “race” and all that it entailed.¹⁹ Readers of

19. If some artworks in the magazine promoted Jewish identity as a form of ethnicity, others, especially in the years around World War II, depicted Jewishness as a form of national identity. Images of Palestine and art and photographs by Jewish Palestinian artists appearing in the magazine did more than connect Diasporic Jews across large geographic distances. Such images projected one possible Jewish future, and therefore identity, an identity circumscribed by national borders rather than parameters of race or ethnicity. This aspect of the visual culture of *Menorah Journal*, deserving of a study of its own in light of the complex issue of Zionism, is not examined here. For some work on the role of photography in the complicated relationship between Americans, Israelis, and Palestinians, see Kerri P. Steinberg, “Photography, Philanthropy, and the Politics of American Jewish Identity” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1998). For a look at images produced in Palestine in relation to national identity, see Ruth Oren, “Zionist Photography, 1910–1941: Constructing a Landscape,” *History of Photography* 19 (1995): 201–209. See Korelitz, “The Menorah Idea,” on the relationships among religion, culture, race, and ethnicity in the magazine.

the magazine could see in its pages a wide range of representations of Jewishness. Such plurality marked the reader's distance from the "world of our fathers" and offered an array of choices for identification with Jewishness. The presence of such choices is an important difference between race and ethnicity. Race marks the individual primarily through discursive structures rooted in biology; ethnicity relocates this marking into discourses of culture. One can often choose which, and how much, of these cultural discourses of ethnicity with which to identify; the individual generally has more agency in his self-fashioning under the rubric of ethnicity than under that of race.²⁰ The existence of such agency was not explicitly acknowledged by the magazine, but it forms one of its basic subtexts and was a *raison d'être* of its founding.

On the other hand, some readers objected to the inclusion of traditional images, seeing them as too stereotypical to furnish a useful model for Jewish identity in the modern world. For example, in April 1925, shortly after he published one of Max Weber's paintings of Jewish men studying the Talmud, Henry Hurwitz received the following from one of his readers living in Canada:

Dear Sir, Some time ago, a fellow subscriber to your worthy Journal called your attention to some of the pictures of so-called Jewish artists, which you saw fit to reproduce in your magazine, in which he called your attention to the fact that those subjects were not the kind that could in any way be enlightening, and certainly not a credit to anyone worthy of the name Jew. I was absolutely in accord with his views, and we were both hoping that in the future, your Journal would discourage Artists of that type. To my great surprise, I have just noticed in your Spring issue another example of that same so called Art, and while I do not by any stretch of the imagination claim to be a judge of Art, I am sure that the picture which is titled "Talmudists" by Max Weber, is not in any way uplifting, but rather a bad caricature of our people. Imagine a none [*sic*] Jew looking at that picture, and imagine his reaction to it. For my part I feel that if there are such specimens, the sooner we get rid of them, the better. . . .²¹

20. The literature on these topics is vast and cannot be examined here. I have found discussions of whiteness to be most helpful in my thinking about this problem. A very useful study that traces the passage of one immigrant group from race to ethnicity as part of attaining the status of whiteness (itself a racial position) is Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (London, 1995). I realize that the transition from race to ethnicity that I am describing is part of the process of "whitening" for American Jews. However, this topic is beyond the scope of the present argument. See Karen Brodtkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick 1998).

21. AJA/HHP, Box 60, folder 6, Max Weber correspondence, 1932-1937. Max Weber had a long career and was one of the better-known modern artists in New York in the pre-war years. He is today known mostly for his contributions to early American modern art and for his participation in the group of artists around Alfred Steiglitz. However, Matthew

The writer's tone suggests a reader who strongly objects to the "old country" image of traditional, Orthodox Jewish manhood celebrated in Weber's painting (figure 3). Such an image, for this writer, was not an occasion for nostalgic reflection on the Jewish past, but rather an offensive "caricature." He clearly saw this kind of imagery as too narrow a vision for Jewish identity. He also disliked the image on the grounds that it could perpetuate antisemitic stereotypes among "none [*sic*] Jews," antisemitism to which he, presumably, was potentially subject. Furthermore, he took the magazine to task for publishing such images on more than one occasion. The virulence of this response, especially when contrasted with the positive response of other readers, indicates the power of the visual to shape identity, as well as the emotional charge accompanying the tension between traditional and modern modes of Jewish identification.

But what about artists who did not always depict such traditional subjects? A typical example of the way the magazine coped with a more complex presentation of Jewish identity can be seen in Louis Lozowick's 1926 essay about Nathan Altman, a modern Russian artist who participated in many of the most radical avant-garde groups in Russia during and after the 1917 revolution.²² Lozowick, himself an avant-garde artist identifying strongly with his own Jewishness, gives an overview of Altman's training and career in which he highlights the latter's identification with Judaism. For example, when discussing Altman's early career in Russia, Lozowick writes,

The period just prior to the World War witnessed one of the recurrent waves of Jewish nationalism, political and cultural. Theoretical tracts were published; Jewish folk music and folk art were collected and classified. Nathan Altman was one of the first to join this movement. He participated in the organization of the "Society for the Encouragement of Jewish Art" and his "Jewish Graphic Art" was one of the first and finest contributions to this tendency.²³

Lozowick goes on to describe Altman's modernist stage designs and to praise his commitment to left-wing politics, remarking "it is refreshing to find [art] associated . . . with a revolutionary doctrine."²⁴

Baigell has recently identified him as one of the founding figures in the creation of an American Jewish art. Matthew Baigell, "Max Weber's Jewish Paintings," *American Jewish History* 88 (2000): 341-60.

22. Louis Lozowick, "The Art of Nathan Altman," *Menorah Journal* 12 (February 1926): 61-64.

23. *Ibid.*, 62.

24. *Ibid.*, 64.

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Fig. 3. Max Weber, *The Talmudists*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 127 x 85.7 cm. Gift of Mrs. Nathan Miller. JM51-48. The Jewish Museum. Copyright The Jewish Museum of New York/Art Resource, NY.

The eight pages of illustrations that follow Lozowick's article not surprisingly reproduce many of the objects dealt with in the essay. But the order in which they are placed does not parallel the chronologically-ordered treatment of Altman's career. Logically, one would expect to find the reproductions in the same sequence in which they are considered in the essay, in order to facilitate the reader's examination of them while following Lozowick's discussion. However, rather than opening with the earliest work that Lozowick mentions—Altman's portrait of the celebrated avant-garde Russian poet, Anna Akmatova—the reproductions begin with a sculpture, *Head of a Young Jew*. Because of its position at the beginning of the sequence, this portrait of an explicitly Jewish figure, which displaces the image of the non-Jewish Akmatova, is made to be emblematic of the artist's work. This glossing of *Head of Young Jew* is reinforced by the inclusion of a title above it, "Reproductions from the Work of Nathan Altman." These editorial choices regarding the opening image emphasize the Jewishness of the artist and his subjects; the reader is invited to see him as a Jewish rather than a Russian or Revolutionary artist. By extension, this emphasis strongly encourages the reader to identify with his or her own Jewishness. Furthermore, highlighting the Jewishness of the artist furnishes an occasion for the exercise of cultural pride.

The article and the sequencing of images presents a model for thinking about an identity that is necessarily fragmented. When the magazine presents Jewishness, rather than Russianness or modernity, or say, maleness, as the salient fact about this artist, it tacitly offers the reader this model for structuring the multiple facets of his own identity. Through the ordering of the visual materials, the reader is led to place Jewishness first. The first image, *Head of a Young Jew*, and the artworks immediately thereafter on the next two pages (*Old Jew*, a painting, and *Grandmother*, an etching or a mezzotint) remind the reader of who he is; these explicitly Jewish images ground the reader in Jewishness, a recognizable, traditional identity.²⁵ The structure of the sequence then leads the reader to images that register modernity more obviously than they register Jewishness.

The next image is a self-portrait in a Russian Cubo-Futurist style typical of the Russian avant-garde prior to 1917. Then, nearly halfway through the sequence, the reader finally comes to the portrait of Anna

25. The illustrations are printed in monochrome, and are not of the highest quality by late-twentieth-century printing standards. The *Menorah Journal* also only sporadically provided information about the media of the art it reproduced; in the case of graphic work, it can sometimes be difficult to determine exactly what kind of print was reproduced.

Akmatova, the first artwork mentioned by Lozowick. Akmatova was an experimental poet celebrated by the Russian avant-garde. Not Jewish herself, in this sequence she represents Altman's Russianness as well as his participation in modernist enterprises. The sequence so far presents the reader with a continuum of possibilities for managing a multi-faceted identity. The images obviously offer both traditional and modern references in the people who are represented in the paintings. The references to Russian culture also provide a contrast to the reader's own location in America, while the Cubo-Futurist images evoke modernity. The sequence creates a series of axes along which the reader can organize his thinking about the multiple aspects of his own identity. Nevertheless, the arrangement of plates keeps returning the reader to explicitly Jewish images. Following Akmatova's portrait, we find traditional Jewish cultural production. The next page reproduces a print called *Two Fantastic Creatures*, which is loosely based on traditional Russian Jewish Haggada illuminations as well as the folk art of the Pale, both alluded to by Lozowick in his essay. The penultimate page includes two photographs of a pair of Altman's modernist stage designs for *Uriel Acosta*, although this play is not even mentioned by Lozowick. The closing image is a portrait of one Dr. Pasmanik. He resembles *Old Jew* with a trimmed beard, and Lozowick's discussion of the portrait alludes to Pasmanik's Jewishness. This final image acts as a kind of coda to the opening image of the *Young Jew* and closes the frame, as it were, of Jewishness around the material embedded in the sequence which has non-Jewish references. The sequence as a whole serves as a sampler of Altman's work, but is arranged to contain the secular stage designs and Akmatova's portrait within the Jewish frame provided by the other images.

The sequencing of the reproductions works by beginning and ending with images that are touchstones for Jewish identity; they are representations that the magazine's readers can agree on as representing Jewishness, although not necessarily modern Jewishness. These touchstones help the reader accommodate to the range of images and identities about which there was likely to be less agreement. Hurwitz himself registered these tensions when discussing his criteria for selecting visual works for the magazine, referring to "contemporary painting and sculpture by artists who have not altogether lost or torn up their Jewish roots."²⁶ Hurwitz's comment evokes the difficulty, even pain, of assimilation; roots are "torn," a choice of words that registers a violent or traumatic change

26. AJA/HHP, Box 50, folder 6, correspondence with Cecil Roth, 1944-1953, Hurwitz to Cecil Roth, November 11, 1952.

from one environment to another. Just how far from these roots modern Jewish identity was to grow in American soil was precisely the issue which the magazine was founded to address. Hurwitz also conveys in the word “altogether” that some artists had managed, at least in part, this transplantation process, and that their art provided a way of demonstrating their success in re-rooting their Jewishness in America. In short, the disjunction between the ordering of the pictures and the chronological organization of Lozowick’s biographical essay discloses the anxiety that drove many of the *Menorah Journal’s* writers, that surrounding the question of how to be Jewish in the modern world. Visual art was a means of negotiating this question.

Fifteen years later, the illustrations accompanying William Schack’s lengthy review of the 1940–41 gallery season in New York followed the same pattern to an even more pronounced degree than that established by Lozowick in his discussion of Altman. The series of ten pages of glossy plates in Schack’s article opens with Ben-Zion’s *Joseph’s Dreams* (figure 4), continues with Arnold Friedman’s *Harbor Scene* and other secular images ranging from portraits to cityscapes, and closes with Max Weber’s *Discussion*, which features three very traditional-looking Jewish men in an interior, perhaps a synagogue. True to *Menorah Journal’s* view that Jewish art does not necessarily treat only Jewish subject matter, Weber’s and Ben-Zion’s works are the only images to exhibit explicitly Jewish themes, and they are only two of twelve paintings represented. Nevertheless, by their positioning—Ben-Zion’s biblical *Joseph* at the beginning of the sequence, and Weber’s present-day, although very traditional, Jews at its close—they serve as a frame for the other paintings. Secularized Jewish artists and their presumably more complicated relationship to their Jewish identities are bracketed by a pair of artists whose identities and art read as explicitly and straightforwardly Jewish. The reader finds these images of daily life—street scenes, groups of figures, American landscapes—metaphorically circumscribed by Jewish history.

The sequencing here creates one narrative of the contemporary Jewish experience in America. In this narrative, the reader, anchored by his past, goes out into the world and returns to Jewishness at the end of his journey. Like the lives of many Jews living in modern America, there are aspects which are metaphorically represented by this journey that relate to tradition and to religious practice. The religious references of *Joseph’s Dreams* and Weber’s *Discussion* allude to the ongoing presence of religion as a component of modern Jewishness. Likewise, the presence of the contemporary landscapes and portraits connects to the often secularized, modern experience of living in a multicultural society. America as

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Fig. 4. Ben-Zion, *Joseph's Dreams*, ca. 1939. Oil on canvas, 35 x 45 inches. From the collection of the Sosland Family.

the site for this journey is registered in the landscapes and street scenes, just as the cityscapes and other images that include markers of modernity (such as modern architecture or machines) depict this life as modern. In the end, the reader is returned to Jewishness, as if coming home at the end of his odyssey.

And yet, the sequence itself yields up competing readings. The secularized scenes that closely relate to the reader's everyday life are both enclosed by and, in their secularism, alienated from this vision of Jewish history. Rather than reading the explicitly Jewish opening and closing images as a home-like historical frame, the audience could read them as marginalized, testifying to the sense among some American Jews that the religious core of Jewish identity was vanishing in America's society. Likewise, the positioning of these two images says something about modern secularism in relation to traditional Jewish ways of life. The explicitly Jewish images are literally outside the overtly secular images. Secularism is thereby positioned as incompatible with or even eroding Jewishness.

We do not have to choose between these readings, nor did the audience. Jewish identity in this period encompassed all these elements;

the reader of the magazine had a relationship with both the past and the present, with religious and secular life, with tradition and modernity, with the “old country” of his youth (or of his parents) and with America. These relationships were not always easy to sort out. Indeed, such interlocking, often competing relationships in large part constituted the Jewish experience in the United States before World War II. The positioning of the images relative to each other creates a mechanism for coping with the tensions generated by these relationships. The audience can read the sequence in any of the ways here suggested; moreover, the visual embodiment of these readings means that the reader can have his cake and eat it too. That is, he can entertain these multiple readings simultaneously. Tensions that become explicit in a verbal description of the sequence do not have to be resolved when experiencing it visually. Indeed, it is unlikely that the reader untrained in analyzing visual images would do so. This complex process testifies to the power of the visual realm in negotiating these tensions, even if only by allowing the reader to hold them in suspension.

However, the art did more than create an arena for Jewish identity formation for the audience; one cumulative effect of all these pictures and their placement relative to each other is the creation of a loose definition of what makes a “Jewish” artist. As seen in Hurwitz’s statement regarding “artists who have not altogether lost or torn up their Jewish roots,” such identification was part of the magazine’s engagement with visual art.²⁷ As represented in *Menorah Journal’s* written discourse (reviews and articles), simply being Jewish is enough to make one a “Jewish” artist. For the magazine, a Jewish artist was a Jew who depicted any aspect of Jewish life. More narrowly, as represented in *Menorah Journal’s* visual discourse (covers, plates and illustrations), recognizably Jewish subject matter is privileged in its ability to secure Jewish identity for both the audience and the artist. Artists who did not depict recognizably Jewish subjects had to be positioned in such a way as to recoup their Jewishness. The magazine was clearly treading a very narrow line. *Menorah Journal* allowed for non-Jewish subject matter, but when this was the case such subject matter had to be framed by explicitly Jewish images so as to control its non-Jewish references and, as we have seen, to emphasize Jewishness over other aspects of the artists’ (and audiences’) identities. This also worked to secure the Jewish identity of the artist. A Jewish artist can be defined as someone who produces Jewish art, just as a landscape artist is someone who produces land-

27. Ibid.

scapes. This locates the Jewishness of the artist in the artwork; the artist produces his public Jewishness in part by making such work. However, the artist can also be identified as Jewish by exhibiting work in a venue associated with Jewishness. In these cases, *Menorah Journal* itself contributed to the construction of the Jewish identity of the artist by featuring his work and life story within its overtly Jewish context; this was particularly so for modern artists.

Subject matter could sometimes alleviate the perceived tension between the conventions of modern art and Jewish tradition. The April-May 1926 issue presented the work of Altman's contemporary, Eliezer Lissitzky (more familiarly known as El Lissitzky).²⁸ Lissitzky was a well-known Russian constructivist artist, famous for his abstract art associated with and promoting the Russian Revolution and for his innovative graphic work—posters, advertisements, and the like. However, the magazine does not display Lissitzky's abstract work or his avant-garde material extolling the Revolution. Rather, it presents Lissitzky's *Had Gadya*, a series of illustrations for an edition of the Jewish folk tale of the same name which was produced in Russia in 1919 (figure 5).²⁹ Lissitzky's *Had Gadya* registers its modernism in its cubo-futurist style. As the term "cubo-futurism" implies, *Had Gadya* incorporates formal elements from both Italian Futurism and the cubist experiments of Picasso and his circle in Paris. The *Had Gadya* therefore features a nearly complete absence of such traditional Western pictorial conventions as perspectival space and naturalistic treatment of form, color, space, and volume. Instead, the forms are abstracted, color is non-naturalistic, and space is fractured and flattened.

Lozowick's discussion of Lissitzky's *Had Gadya* addresses the thorny problem of Jewishness and modernity in art. He notes that, for the avant-garde Jewish artist, this question of style poses special difficulties: "The conservative academician established his affinity with nationalism easily: for him the Jewish theme determined a Jewish art. Not so the radical artist with whom the theme was of far lesser importance than the treatment."³⁰ Lozowick thus locates the modernity of modern art in its experimental formal qualities, rather than in its subject matter. His statement also suggests the avant-garde artist has a greater difficulty than the traditional, academic artist in creating an "affinity with nationalism," i.e., art embodying a kind of "national character," in this case, a

28. Louis Lozowick, "Eliezer Lissitzky," *Menorah Journal* 12 (1926): 175–77. I have retained Lozowick's spelling of Lissitzky's first name.

29. This tale appears in the Passover Haggada.

30. Lozowick, "Eliezer Lissitzky," 175.

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Fig. 5. El Lissitzky, "Then Came a Fire and Burnt the Stick," from the *Had Gadya* Suite (Tale of a Goat), 1919. Colored lithograph on paper, 10 3/4 x 10 inches. Gift of Leonard and Phyllis Greenberg, 1986-1218. Photograph: John Parnell. The Jewish Museum. Copyright The Jewish Museum of New York/Art Resource, NY. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Jewish one. Lozowick's statement further assumes an innate incompatibility between the values of modern art and Jewish identity. To Lozowick, the modern artist is one who is interested in formal experiments, in "the treatment," not in the depiction of narrative subject matter. The modern artist is therefore already not-Jewish in some way by virtue of his modernity; his Jewishness could not be constructed by the images he chose to paint.

But Lozowick and the magazine refused to abandon the possibility of a modern Jewish art and, concomitantly, a modern Jewish artist. If subject matter, "the theme," would not serve to secure Jewishness, than perhaps style, "the treatment," could. By introducing this polarity between style and subject matter, Lozowick implies that this registration of "nationalism" (Jewishness) must be done by one or the other. However, he dismisses subject matter as a possibility for the modern

artist, leaving only style to carry his Jewish identity. Lozowick does this by noting that in Lissitzky's milieu it was thought that the radical artist did indeed have a vehicle for expressing his Jewishness:

A formal approach to art—that is, placing emphasis on plastic qualities, treatment, rather than theme, subject—can render truly the racial identity of the artists. Academic practice precludes the free play of innate mentality by a forced adherence to the external aspects of nature. The formal method, on the contrary, because it depends on the spontaneous reactions of the artist, because it springs from his intuitive subconsciousness, permits an unhampered objectification of the national strain. Whatever the theme, the manner in which the work is treated, the way in which the constituent elements (form, color, line, volume) are organized will be determined by the racial stock of the artist.³¹

In other words, the nuances of an artist's treatment of his subject matter will reveal, as dreams reveal the workings of the subconscious mind, the racial origins and identity of the artist. The logical consequence of this line of reasoning is that there necessarily is such a thing as a "Jewish style." However, having introduced this idea, Lozowick backs away from it almost immediately, discounting its relevance for (American) audiences of the mid-1920s. He carefully refrains from discussing such an implication directly, preferring to note that, "however sound or specious much of this reasoning may appear today, it was one of the factors that encouraged the creation of such work as . . . Lissitzky's *Had Gadya*."³² Lozowick's discomfort with this line of reasoning is quite understandable; as historians have noted, the definition of Jewish identity was undergoing a shift from one of race to one of ethnicity. Indeed, *Menorah Journal* contributed to this process.³³

Lissitzky's *Had Gadya* was, as Lozowick indicates, a product of the interest in Jewish art and culture that flourished briefly around the time of the Revolution in some avant-garde circles in Russia. Lozowick's discussion seems to imply that Lissitzky's Jewishness could be expected to show up in the style of his illustrations for *Had Gadya* rather than in the subject matter. However, because Lissitzky's *Had Gadya* does portray traditional subject matter, it will register as "Jewish art" despite its very modern treatment. This question of style versus subject matter in registering Jewishness is, in this case, a conveniently moot point. Why

31. *Ibid.*, 176.

32. *Ibid.*

33. See Korelitz, "The Menorah Idea," in particular. An extensive treatment of this process can be found in Eric Louis Goldstein, "Race and the Construction of Jewish Identity in America, 1875–1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2000).

then, did Lozowick raise it at all? Wouldn't it have been much more straightforward simply to note that modern styles can be used to depict traditional subjects? Further, *Had Gadya* is representative of a very early, brief period in Lissitzky's career. He was much more well-known for his totally abstract *Proun* series, which were among the founding objects of Russian Suprematism, an extreme avant-garde movement. The choice of the *Had Gadya* to represent Lissitzky as an artist reveals some discomfort—either his own or the magazine's—with extremely modernist art as an adequate vehicle for carrying Jewish identity.

Lozowick's discussion implies that Lissitzky's cubo-futurism was somehow prompted by the artist's Jewishness. While Lozowick does cast doubt on this style-as-racial-fingerprint line of reasoning, he does not go so far as to refute it directly, for example by citing the work of non-Jewish cubo-futurist artists who were Lissitzky's contemporaries. By raising the point at all, Lozowick seems to be alluding indirectly to the view in contemporary American debates over art that saw modernist painting and sculpture as "Ellis Island Art," that is, a foreign import and therefore un-American.³⁴ As an immigrant and modern artist himself and, like Lissitzky after World War I, a constructivist artist, Lozowick surely must have felt the sting of such derogatory comments. What we seem to have here in this discussion of style, subject matter, and "racial stock" is an assertion of Lozowick's own anxieties over the relationship between his Jewishness and his own modernist artistic practice. Appearing in the magazine *ipso facto* helped secure the Jewish identity of the artists, regardless of the subject matter or style associated with them. In this case, Lozowick's regular contributions to the magazine worked to shore up his own Jewish identity. Thus the magazine's claiming of artists on behalf of Jewishness ran both ways at times.

In contrast to this uneasiness with the style of modern art, some writers saw extremely modern, indeed abstract, art as in fact highly conducive to carrying Jewish identity. Aaron Spivak articulated this viewpoint just three years later in an article published in *Menorah Journal* in 1929. Spivak attempted to account for a supposed Jewish "tendency" toward abstract concepts as a way of explaining the large number of Jewish artists who were "suddenly" visible in France in recent years. He proposed that the supposed lack of Jewish art prior to this development was not a result of the Second Commandment. Rather, the injunction against "graven images" and the dearth of Jewish artists were

34. The phrase is Royal Cortissoz's, critic for the New York *Tribune*, and was occasioned by the blockbuster Armory Show in 1913. Cited in Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York, 2002), 65.

produced by the same cause, a cause located in Jews themselves: “a lack of a certain type of capacity. . . to see the plastic, the pictorial, the ‘form’ in Nature.”³⁵ Spivak figures Jews as possessed of a kind of blindness. He uses the example of the imagery of the Song of Solomon, which he describes as all metaphors and similes, with no direct description, to claim that this trait dates back to Biblical times. Bizarrely, Spivak avers that if an artist followed the text of the Song of Solomon literally, “one would have a perfectly cubistic picture!” Further, “Solomon when he wrote this poem had no plastic image of the Shulamite in his mind, but an abstract, synthetic image; the Shulamite in his mind was a metaphorical, we might even say, cubistic Shulamite.” Having associated abstract ways of thinking with cubism, he goes so far as to say “the fact is that Jews are by nature metaphorical, cubistic.” What had been, until the modern era, a handicap resulting in aniconism (a culture with no images), now became an advantage. According to his analysis, although he makes no attempt to furnish any examples, Jews are “by nature” modern, and, therefore, modern culture having arrived on the scene, Jews can now participate in the art world. A further consequence of this is that all possible tensions entailed in the process of coping with artistic modernity and its discontents now vanish magically; no assimilation or accommodation is necessary because Jews are already modern in this arena.

Spivak here invokes a racist model to explain a common, though mistaken, perception about Jewish culture: that there had been few Jewish artists prior to the modern period. This view sees culture as a consequence of biology rather than as a product of human ideas and actions. Such a conception of culture denies the artist much agency; Jewish artists can, according to Spivak’s arguments, flourish in the modern period, but only because of a happy coincidence between the emergence of modern, “cubistic” art and Jewish “nature.” Spivak then turns part of the stereotype of the anti-visual Jew on its head, claiming that he “who sees with too much precision and accuracy cannot forget what he sees when he undertakes to create his own values.” In other words, the lack of this literally-seeing, “plastic eye” is a help to painterly creativity and in particular to Jewish creativity. Spivak goes on to extend this reasoning to argue that it is because modern art has departed from traditional, figurative values (i.e., realism) that Jewish artists are so numerous. As he explains, the Jew “has been able to express himself so

35. Aaron Spivak, “The Jew Enters the Plastic Arts,” *Menorah Journal* 16 (1929): 400–408.

well in the art of our day because its spirit happens to be so akin to his spirit.” In other words, Jewish artists can be successful in modern art precisely because of their supposed lack of “plastic vision,” their alleged inborn tendency toward abstraction.

Spivak was unusual in coupling this supposed congenital inability to imitate nature with the notion that it somehow gives rise to creativity and innovation, in that imitation was usually part of an antisemitic charge leveled at Jewish artists who utilized the vocabulary of the Diasporic cultures within which they resided. Inverting the usual negative judgment of this supposed inability, he concludes “it becomes, then, quite clear why Jews today have become great plastic artists: it is because modern plastic art—cubism, futurism, etc.—is abstract, intellectual.”³⁶ Spivak was claiming there was no incompatibility between modernism and Jewishness as far as art went; on the contrary, modern, abstract art was an especially effective vehicle for conveying Jewishness.

Given Lozowick’s insistence that formal experimentation is the marker for modernism in art, given Spivak’s essay, which nearly amounted to a call to Jewish artists to pursue these experiments to the point of abstraction, and given the magazine’s consistent advocacy of modernism, why did no truly abstract art ever appear within its pages? This omission is striking, not just because of the view that sees abstraction as particularly congenial to Jewishness, but also because the mission of the magazine was to promote modern culture—and abstraction, after all, enjoyed a premier status in signaling modernity.

There are a number of reasons why the magazine’s editor, Henry Hurwitz, ignored abstract art. First, he, like many people outside the art world, was not entirely comfortable granting abstraction the status of “art.” A letter dated April 5, 1950 from Hurwitz to the American artist Abraham Walkowitz includes the following passage:

Now too for the first time, with your distillation of Isadora Duncan’s movements, you give me some understanding of the significance of “abstract art.” (But I still hold that most “artists” who go in for abstraction as an end in itself are fakirs: they have not the sound, deep, honest sensuousness—that is, esthetic corporeality—to abstract from.)³⁷

Hurwitz was clearly uncomfortable with art that did not retain some recognizable reference to the world around him. Yet this alone is not enough to explain the absence of abstraction in the magazine. Hurwitz was committed to pluralism, and in offering a range of opinions on art

36. *Ibid.*, 407.

37. AJA/HHP, Box 60, folder 18, Henry Hurwitz to Abraham Walkowitz.

and other subjects in the magazine, he inevitably published material that did not accord with his personal views, including material, such as Spivak's, that promoted abstract art as Jewish. Thus his personal discomfort with abstraction as art is an insufficient explanation for the dismissal of abstraction within the pages of the magazine. And, as the letter to Walkowitz shows, Hurwitz was willing to be educated by the artists and writers with whom he corresponded.

Thus it is surprising that Hurwitz did not follow the lead of his friend and advisor, Lewis Mumford, on the question of abstract art. In a 1936 letter to Hurwitz, Mumford speculates that there is a "Jewish *Weltanschauung*" that propels Jewish artists toward abstraction. According to Mumford, this worldview, "like the physical concepts of Einstein, refuses to be translated into concrete images."³⁸ Mumford, like Spivak, sees Jews as somehow predisposed to abstract art. Their theories rest on a presumed affiliation of the abstraction of the paintings with the Second Commandment's proscription of certain kinds of imagery. An abstract painting can be "Jewish" in this light because it does not carry a representational image; the abstraction, figured as a kind of absence, enables the reading of the painting as "Jewish." Yet this line of reasoning, even coming from so prominent a figure as Mumford, did not convince Hurwitz as to the innate "Jewishness" of abstract art.

A second possible explanation for Hurwitz's refusal to publish any abstract art is the representational opacity of abstraction. Whereas *Menorah Journal's* readers could see themselves in the history reflected by the range of Jewish artifacts (such as menorahs, Haggada pages, Jewish portraits, and the like), such identification is not possible when confronted with a painting comprised of only a few squares, such as one of Lissitzky's *Proun* paintings. Subject matter, since it is not visible in abstract work, cannot claim these images for Jewry; an abstract image has to be contextualized in some way in order to carry meaning. Abstract art could have been "framed" as Jewish by positioning it between works that did register Jewishness more overtly, a strategy, as we have seen, that the magazine employed to control the references to secular subject matter. This tactic would have at least allowed for the inclusion of Jewish abstract artists in the roster compiled at *Menorah Journal*. Yet, oddly, the magazine did not do this. Perhaps the abstract images were simply too far removed from modern American Jewish daily life to allow for their reframing in this way. This seems unlikely, however, given that abstract art was a topic in the news as early as 1913 on the occasion of the

38. AJA/HHP, Box 36, folder 14, Lewis Mumford to Henry Hurwitz, April 1, 1936.

Armory Show in New York, got a real boost with the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, and continued to be visible throughout the period in gallery exhibitions and fashionable storefront windows. Abstract art was not something that was invisible in the daily life of modern Americans, Jewish or not, who were interested in contemporary culture.

Abstract art, could however, be framed as “Jewish” through the arguments made by Spivak and Mumford. They allude to the possibility that somehow abstraction is innately more “Jewish” than other styles. Both arguments rest on an old, stereotypical characterization of Jews as aniconic, somehow propelled away from concrete, realist images, or indeed any imagery at all. This stereotype rests mainly on two kinds of blindness: according to a very narrow reading, the Second Commandment supposedly forbids the making of images; and the biases of Western culture render Jewish visual production invisible to eyes attuned only to Classical and Christian traditions.³⁹ This latter blind spot in the Western view of Jewish culture can be invoked as a “fact” to support the narrow reading of the Second Commandment. The result is a view that sees Jews as unable to make art, or, in the modern period, only able to create abstract art. Hurwitz was probably uncomfortable with this racialist line of reasoning, and this is yet another possibility for the exclusion of abstraction from the magazine. However, Hurwitz was willing to entertain this logic in print, and it is hard to see how the inclusion of abstract images would have been any more egregious than the printed text. Nevertheless, representations of abstract art did not accompany Spivak’s article. Such an omission makes the lack of abstraction in a magazine dedicated to the pursuit and construction of modernity even more striking.

Louis Lozowick’s opinion regarding abstraction shows us a more compelling possible explanation for this phenomenon. Slightly earlier than Spivak’s article, Lozowick had characterized abstraction as an essentially escapist mode, one that was by definition not Jewish.⁴⁰ In

39. The literature treating the origins and effects of these two factors is growing rapidly. For a definitive historical overview of the Second Commandment stereotype, see Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, 2000). For a discussion of the effects of the antisemitic biases built into the founding theories of art history as a discipline, see Margaret Olin, “C[lement] Hardesh [Greenberg] and Company,” *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, Ex. Cat., The Jewish Museum, New York, March 10–July 14, 1996 (New Brunswick, 1996), 38–59. See also the volume edited by Catherine M. Soussloff, *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* (Berkeley, 1999) for a collection of essays treating the intersection of Jewishness and art history.

40. Louis Lozowick, “Jewish Artists of the Season,” *Menorah Journal* 10 (1924): 282–85.

1924, he bluntly declared that, for many Jewish artists, abstraction offered “an almost perfect escape from the specific demands of both his personality and his racial and social environment.”⁴¹ The works of art selected for reproduction in *Menorah Journal* with Lozowick’s 1924 article and their arrangement reinforce this exclusion of abstract art in the spectrum of Jewish accomplishment. The sequence opens on a right-hand page with Gabo’s sculpture, *Project for a Monument in Observatory Square*, attesting to the fame of this constructivist Jewish artist. This model for a proposed sculpture was the only arguably abstract work ever published within the history of the magazine. Gabo, by his location next to Lozowick’s remark, is positioned as an artist who, at best, has had his Jewishness over-ridden by his modernity; at worst, he is no longer Jewish, having “escaped” it by virtue of the abstraction of his art. Yet, by appearing in the magazine at all, Gabo is marked as a Jewish artist in spite of his pursuit of abstract art. This illustrates some of the very tensions the magazine set itself to resolving: those between secular modernity and Jewishness rooted in religious tradition. Gabo here appears as an assimilated artist, and assimilation, the erasure of Jewishness, was not an option the magazine favored.⁴² Instead, the magazine tended to pursue a strategy of acculturation, one that sought to demonstrate the parallels between Jewish and American culture, Jewish and modern values. The problem is that Gabo’s absolutely abstract sculpture—it is composed of geometric shapes—has no visual anchor in Jewishness. Once one rejects the aniconic arguments in favor of abstraction, it has no conceptual anchor in Jewishness either. For Hurwitz, Gabo probably qualified as an artist who had torn up his roots.

The stylistic smorgasbord present in the magazine’s art coverage also serves another purpose: scrupulously demonstrating, apart from the issue of abstraction, that there is no such thing as a “Jewish” style. Lozowick is careful to include representatives of nearly every major tendency in the 1920s: artists working in a late impressionist or urban realist mode such as William Meyerowitz and Theresa Bernstein; cubist-influenced Max Weber; painters with expressionist leanings such as Moses Soyer; and constructivists, among whom he includes himself. Yet, in Lozowick’s writings about Jewish artists, as we have seen, there exists a certain dissonance regarding the relationship between style, particularly abstraction, and Jewishness. With the single, brief exception of Gabo, Lozowick does not discuss the work of any abstract artists. This

41. Ibid.

42. See Fried, “The Menorah Journal,” on acculturation and assimilation in the magazine.

absence is telling, inasmuch as Lozowick himself was far from hostile to abstract art, as his own highly stylized images of the period and his self-identification as a constructivist artist attest. While cautioning against an “extreme preoccupation with formalism” which was “likely to degenerate into decoration and ornamentation,” he was at pains to defend abstraction as a legitimate part of the creative process. Thus he points out that, particularly for graphic art, “even in the work of the most conservative artists conventions are employed which are basically abstract.”⁴³ Yet the very need for even such a limited apology for abstraction testifies to the degree of discomfort with which Lozowick’s audience received abstract art. Indeed, his apology for abstraction did not even appear in *Menorah Journal*, although it was an issue clearly close to the heart of his own artistic practice.

Because every artist whose work is featured in the illustrations within the *Menorah Journal* is Jewish, and because the article and the pictures appear in a forum devoted to Jewish culture, the images necessarily describe *Menorah Journal’s* view of what it is that constitutes Jewish artistic production. While the magazine’s texts all but declare that there is no style which is unavailable to Jewish artists, it nevertheless does pass such a judgment. The collection of images within its pages constructs a view of Jewish art by the type of examples it furnishes. The magazine continued to eschew abstraction even in the post-World War II period, when critics hailed abstract expressionism as the “triumph of American painting,” and when several of its most prominent practitioners were Jewish.⁴⁴ The absence of abstraction, in spite of the old aniconic stereotype, implies that such a mode is inappropriate or ineffective for registering Jewish identity. Although the magazine conceived of Jewish artistic production and Jewish identity as inclusive of a variety of positions, that inclusiveness had limits. Abstraction, even Jewish abstraction, was outside those limits.

The images included in *Menorah Journal* render this silent judgment about the style of “Jewish” art repeatedly throughout the life of the magazine. Obviously, a picture of a rabbi is figurative. Yet as noted above, among the secular images included in *Menorah Journal* there was no abstract art. Apparently, it was not Jewish art for the *Menorah*

43. “Lithography: Abstraction and Realism,” *Space* (1930), reproduced in *Survivor of a Dead Age*, Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1977), 285–87.

44. The phrase is Irving Sandler’s and is the title of his pioneering text, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York, 1970). Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb are among the core group of eight to ten abstract expressionist painters commonly given credit for founding the movement.

Journal circle. The sculptures of Zadkine and Archipenko, *Mourning* and *Moses Pleads with God*, represent the extent to which magazine was willing to entertain abstract tendencies in the name of “Jewish” art. These figurative sculptures are abstracted in that the forms are blocky and lack the embellishment of detail. Yet the works remain strongly figurative and therefore narrative; their subject matter rescues them from possible non-Jewish readings. Archipenko’s sculpture represents Moses, complete with the tablets of the law, and Zadkine’s sculpture depicts a female figure leafing through a book held on her lap. The presence of the book in conjunction with the title, *Mourning*, suggests the comfort that religious texts may offer in times of grief. Zadkine’s work appeared as the frontispiece in the Summer 1943 issue, which also carried an “Homage to the Christian Poles and the Maccabean Jews of Warsaw” on the pages immediately preceding Zadkine’s sculpture.⁴⁵ This positioning cast *Mourning* as explicitly referring to the dead heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, rather than as a generic allegorical figure. Artists whose work more closely approached abstraction, such as Adolph Gottlieb (later to garner fame as an abstract expressionist), at times received mention in print, but did not rate inclusion in the reproductions.⁴⁶

The problem with abstraction lay in the need to have art within the magazine function as a carrier for Jewishness. Subject matter frequently took care of this, as we have seen. When the subject matter was secular, the imagery could be framed as Jewish by the way it was positioned relative to other works reproduced in the magazine. Abstract art could not be treated in the same way because, unlike secular images, say of Jewish neighborhoods, the viewers did not have a readily available way to insert themselves into the image. Simply put, abstract art could not support a visual narrative of Jewishness of any kind in America.

Scholarly opinion at the time also subscribed to this view of “Jewish” art as essentially figurative. Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein voiced this directly in her 1944 essay, “Reflections on Jewish Art,” published in *Jewish Review*.⁴⁷ Wischnitzer-Bernstein was a prominent scholar who focused on the cultural production of Jews; among other accomplishments, she was a pioneer in several projects aimed at producing a history of Jewish art. As an expert familiar with a wide range of Jewish cultural production, she spoke with authority. After praising the variety of art

45. Zadkine’s work appears in *Menorah Journal* 31 (1943). Archipenko’s work appeared on the cover of the Winter 1943 issue.

46. William Schack, “A Live Year of Art,” *Menorah Journal* 29 (1941): 185.

47. Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, “Reflections on Jewish Art,” *Jewish Review* 2 (1944): 202–208.

produced by Jews, Wischnitzer-Bernstein suddenly declared, "it would lead us too far afield to refer to the Jewish adepts of non-objective art."⁴⁸ Here abstraction appears as an esoteric practice, one that leads away from Jewishness. Apparently, abstraction's inherent inability to represent Jewishness, or anything else, meant it was "too far afield" to count as part of the history of Jewish visual production, in spite of the identification of the artists as Jewish. Wischnitzer-Bernstein, along with *Menorah Journal*, was reluctant to point to any one style or concrete sensibility as an indicator of Jewishness. Nobody wanted to declare some kinds of art more Jewish than others; such declarations would too easily lead back into the racist discourse against which these writers were working. Yet, by their omissions, alluded to in Wischnitzer-Bernstein's remark, some kinds of art ranked as less Jewish than others. In the 1930s and 1940s, abstraction, far from providing a Jewish art compatible with the "Jewish *Weltanschauung*" invoked by Lewis Mumford and Aaron Spivak, was on the contrary not "Jewish" enough, perhaps not even "Jewish" at all.

This contrasts strongly with the renewed link between abstraction and Jewishness in the post-war period. For example, the paintings of Barnett Newman, one of the major members of the New York School, were not seen as "Jewish" when they were first exhibited. Yet Jewish identity has since come to figure prominently in discussions of Newman.⁴⁹ When first encountering his abstract "zip" paintings in 1950 and 1951, critics saw little more than striped wallpaper.⁵⁰ This is remarkable when we consider that titles such as *Abraham*, *Joshua*, and *Covenant* openly invite the viewer to see the paintings as invoking Jewishness. However, even with these suggestive titles, it was almost twenty years before critics would see these extremely abstract paintings as "Jewish" art.⁵¹ Similarly

48. *Ibid.*, 207.

49. See for example, Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*, Ex. Cat., Museum of Modern Art, October 21, 1971–January 10, 1972 (New York, 1971). More recently, conference papers presented by Nancy Nield Buchwald have discussed Newman's *Stations of the Cross* series in terms of Newman's Jewishness. Nancy Nield Buchwald, "Beholding the Outcry: The Collision of Utterance, Inscription, and Image as Revenants of the Holocaust in Barnett Newman's 'Station of the Cross,'" Annual Conference of the American Studies Association, October 12–15, 2000, Detroit; "Re-Tracing the Unruly Boundaries of the Jewish Body in Barnett Newman's 'Stations of the Cross,'" Race and the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Conference, November 15–17, 2001, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

50. Thomas B. Hess discusses the critical reaction to Newman's shows of 1950 and 1951 in his *Barnett Newman*, *passim*.

51. See, for example, Hess, *Barnett Newman*, wherein he rereads most of Newman's career in terms of Jewishness; Matthew Baigell, "Barnett Newman's Stripe Paintings and Kabbalah: A Jewish Take," *American Art* 8 (1994): 33–43; and Nancy Nield Buchwald,

in 1971, Werner Haftmann, a prominent art historian, famously proclaimed in regard to Mark Rothko's large, abstract canvases that "Judaism, which for two thousand years remained 'imageless', has found its own pictorial expression and now has a Jewish art of its own."⁵² Haftmann's characterization has often been repeated, solidifying this view of abstraction (when employed by Jewish artists) that identifies it as the paradigmatic case of Jewish art.

It is worth examining the pre- and post-war views side by side. Louis Lozowick bluntly remarked in 1924 that, for many Jewish artists, "the more abstract tendencies in modern art offer the artist an almost perfect escape from the specific demands of both his personality and his racial and social environment."⁵³ Half a century later, Haftmann and others would reverse Lozowick's declaration.⁵⁴ Lozowick's comment and the politics of style that it engaged have passed into obscurity. Yet to accept Haftmann's view of things is to ignore history. What the contradiction between the views of Lozowick and Haftmann points to is that this re-reading of abstract art in scholarly circles as canonically "Jewish" is a historically recent inversion. The identification of abstract art as paradigmatically Jewish had been resisted in the pages of *Menorah Journal* on behalf of Jewish audiences throughout much of the twentieth century. That resistance makes problematic the identification of abstraction with "Jewish art" that Haftmann and others in the later post-war period advanced.

However, abstract paintings by Rothko, Newman, and other artists have taken their place in the ongoing construction of a history of Jewish art in the post-war period in America and abroad. As we have seen,

"Anxious Embodiments: Speculations Upon Tropes of American Jewish Masculinity in Barnett Newman's 'Stations of the Cross'" (Ph.D. Diss., in progress, University of Chicago). Nield's conference papers on this topic are listed in n. 49, *supra*. I am grateful to her for stimulating conversations, as well as for her generosity in sharing an unpublished manuscript with me.

52. Werner Haftmann, *Mark Rothko*, Ex. Cat., Kunsthau Zurich Museum of Fine Arts, March 21–May 9, 1971 (Zurich, 1971) (Trans. Margery Schärer), x. Mark Rothko (then Rothkowitz) had published an illustration to an article in *Menorah Journal* in the March 1928 issue. His figurative drawing accompanied "Jungle Jews," an article about a seventeenth-century Jewish colony in Suriname.

53. Lozowick, "Jewish Artists of the Season," 282.

54. A case in point is Avram Kampf, *Jewish Experience in the Art of the 20th Century* (South Hadley, 1984), 201. He says of Barnett Newman's post-war paintings that they are "in the classic 'no graven image' tradition of Judaism." See also Robert Pincus-Witten, "Six Propositions on Jewish Art," *Arts Magazine* 50 (1975): 66–69. Pincus-Witten rehearses the "no graven image" argument. A more recent study of the origins and developments of this line of reasoning is Bland's *The Artless Jew*.

Menorah Journal made early, if unsystematic, attempts to construct such a history for Jewish visual culture. Its efforts bear a family resemblance to others like it, as, for example, the recovery and construction of a lineage of art by women, Latinos and Latinas, African-Americans, and gays and lesbians. These recovered histories play important roles in the challenges to the identities traditionally assigned to these marginalized groups. Recent studies of Jewish art have paralleled the efforts of feminist and other inquiries in their examination of the assumptions behind the exclusions from the standard canon. Revisionist accounts have challenged those that overlooked the visual and material production of Jews or assimilated their work to the art of the cultures in which Diasporic Jews reside.⁵⁵ Such revising of standard histories cannot proceed without a related project, namely, identifying and recovering the cultural production marginalized or excluded by the canonical accounts.

Because of the pre-existing canon for Western art, *Menorah Journal* writers faced a difficult problem: constructing a narrative for Jewish art, an alternative to the canon of "great art" that would yet meet its standards of quality and historical import. While *Menorah Journal* published the work of Jewish artists only, what it said about them in the accompanying texts placed those artists within a standard "Gentile-centric" narrative, an essentially assimilationist project. At the same time, featuring them in *Menorah Journal* highlighted their status as Jews, resisting such assimilationist pressures. But the assimilationist project, too, was not without conflict, inviting as it did the continued marking of Jews and modern Jewish artists in American society as "other." Given that modern art received an uneasy, even hostile, reception in the United States during the decades before World War II, classifying modern Jewish

55. The literature dealing with art by Jewish artists, whether ancient or contemporary, is rapidly expanding. Likewise, studies of visual signifiers of Jewish identity form a new area of interest in many fields. Thus any list is necessarily incomplete. However, representative recent literature includes the mammoth *Treasury of Jewish Art*, the steady stream of exhibition catalogs produced by the Jewish Museum in New York, Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb's recent book, *The Jew in the Text* (London, 1995), and Matthew Baigell's *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, 1997). Likewise, the literature on American art and American national identity is large; recent key texts are Matthew Baigell, "American Art and National Identity: The 1920s," *Arts Magazine* 61 (1987): 48–55, anthologized in Mary Ann Calo, ed., *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings* (Boulder, 1998) and Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999). For a review of the role of national identity as a structuring idea in the development of the field of American art history, see Wanda Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988): 188–207. Revised and anthologized in Calo, *Critical Issues*.

artists as “American” could prove especially problematic. One needs only to recall the denigration of modern art as “Ellis Island Art” to see the resistance to granting modernist art a place in America’s cultural production. Abstract art was thereby tangled in a mass of controversy that undercut its usefulness in staking a claim to a modern American Jewish identity. It was an extreme manifestation of “imported” modernism, and perhaps signaled its “foreign-ness” too strongly, in spite of its modernity, to make it useful in a journal that sought to portray Jews as central to American life and culture. Similarly, because mass audiences did not always accept it as art, it could potentially undermine the positioning of Jewish artists as masters of modern idioms of art. Finally, the claiming of abstraction as an innately Jewish mode rested on invoking stereotypes and ideas that were, at heart, intensely antisemitic. It is little wonder that abstraction proved, in the eyes of *Menorah Journal*, unsuitable material for constructing Jewish art and Jewish identity.

In 1924, Louis Lozowick, himself a modernist artist, wrote in the pages of *Menorah Journal* about the relationship between the Jewish community and Jewish artists: “The Jewish community as such makes practically no claim upon the artist, offering him neither encouragement nor requirement.”⁵⁶ Lozowick thus gently reprimanded the Jewish community for its dearth of patronage for Jewish artists, as well as for the lack of a common community standard for Jewish art that could provide guidelines, even “requirements,” for Jewish art. Such a state of affairs seems to preclude the possibility either for a “Jewish” art or for its history. Yet *Menorah Journal* itself, by its frequent articles on work produced by Jewish artists and through its many reproductions of art from the Jewish past and present, did in fact lay claim to Jewish artists on behalf of the Jewish community. The magazine saw itself, and made itself, an important link between Jewish artists and their Jewish audience. Indeed, in the Spring 1944 issue it exhorted its readers to support Jewish artists “for the strengthening and beautifying of Judaism.”⁵⁷ Jewish art was being created in the very process of *Menorah Journal*’s identification of Jewish art and artists.

In its engagement with visual art, the journal found itself caught between two competing imperatives. On the one hand was its self-imposed task to display the work of Jewish artists. Hence, the magazine’s

56. Lozowick, “Jewish Artists of the Season,” 282.

57. William Meyerowitz, “On the Need of Art,” *Menorah Journal* 32 (1944): 59. Note that this wording, “strengthening” Judaism, implies that visual art is important in the securing and maintenance of Jewish identity.

representation of Jewish visual culture included artifacts from the past, paintings and sculpture produced by living American and European Jewish artists, and, representing a Jewish future, art produced by Jewish artists living in Palestine. On the other hand were the demands of *Menorah Journal's* art critics to judge art according to aesthetic rather than ethnic standards.⁵⁸ However, it was precisely the Jewishness of the artists, past and present, that was the essential criterion for inclusion in the magazine in the first place. For example, we find illustrations of works by Pissarro but not by Monet, by Chagall but not by Picasso or Malevich.

The difficulty here is the perception of inherent incompatibility between two standards of measure for cultural value. Aesthetic quality is supposedly objective and culturally neutral or transcendent—at least such was the view of things prior to the feminist challenges of the 1970s, and hence the search at *Menorah Journal* for a “Jewish Picasso” or a “Jewish Monet.”⁵⁹ On the other hand, aesthetic quality is a notion constructed by canonical art historical narratives, narratives that largely exclude Jews. In this situation, caught between the need to create a visual heritage on the one hand and the exclusionary canon of art history on the other, limiting the selection to Jewish artists alone opens the door to the charge of exercising parochial rather than aesthetic judgment. Prior to the feminist challenges to art history, art historians did not have the vantage point from which to see the canon as an exclusionary structure of culture. Unable to see, much less challenge, the antisemitic biases of the Western canon, the writers at *Menorah Journal* were stuck with a notion of the canon as a product of the innate “greatness” of the works within it. Jewish art, therefore, had to be defined in terms of the existing canon. In retrospect, the magazine unknowingly engaged in a postmodern project without the conceptual tools with which to carry it out.

As we have seen, the editors and readers of *Menorah Journal* had a large stake in representations of the Jewish past and present. In its articles, editorials, fiction, poetry, and especially in its images, the magazine represented an unbroken continuum of Jewish culture in which the reader could position himself. Further as we have seen, a range of options for this position was on offer in the pages of the magazine. Pictures of artifacts from the Jewish past both made that past available (if only in representation) to the present-day American-Jewish reader, and provided visible proof of Jewry's past cultural production. The

58. Schack, “A Live Year of Art,” 185.

59. The founding text is Linda Nochlin's essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *Art News* (1971): 22–39.

images served as reminders of the traditions and history that were the heritage of the reader. To the degree that the reader constructed his own self-image with reference to this cultural history, such images would reinforce or sustain his Jewish identification. The reader, by consuming these images in various ways, could experience his distance from that presumably less complicated past, noting by contrast his position in modernity. Whether this was an occasion for regret or rejoicing (we have seen both) was left to the individual, although the magazine encouraged its readers to take pride in that past while also celebrating modernity. Similarly, the reproduction of art made by living Jewish artists provided evidence of the ongoing artistic and cultural activities of Jews around the world. The reader could thus see that he was part of a vital, creative visual culture that had not been extinguished by the advent of the Diaspora. Shared pride in a Jewish artistic past and present could also provide one potential mode of bonding between modern Jews, maintaining a shared visual culture that otherwise could erode in the onslaught of other visions of American art and its history.

Epilogue

Ultimately, postwar developments and financial difficulties would overtake *Menorah Journal*. In the summer of 1949, Hurwitz still had plans to exalt the art of Jewish artists around the world by producing a book surveying the accomplishments of Jewish artists. In a special issue of the magazine (Summer 1949), consisting only of a one-page introduction to sixty plates of illustrations, Hurwitz, hailed the magazine's achievements in the visual arts:

In the course of a generation the *Menorah Journal* has presented the works of some 200 Jewish artists, in over 700 plates. Most of these painters and sculptors—of the School of Paris, of the rest of Europe . . . and of Palestine—were introduced to the American public in our pages. Similarly many American artists found here their first recognition and reproduction. . . . It may be noted . . . that no other magazine in the world has brought out such a wealth of Jewish art.⁶⁰

Hurwitz was justifiably proud of this accomplishment. Indeed, in his correspondence in 1952 with historian Cecil Roth, he discussed the possibility of the production of a large, one-volume survey of the entire history of Jewish art produced in collaboration with *Menorah Journal*:

60. Henry Hurwitz, "Editorial Introduction," *Menorah Journal* 37 (1949).

I have not forgotten your interest in a Menorah Book of Jewish Art. In the case of a Jewish Art Book, we are confronted with an editorial problem, though nothing too serious. I'm not sure that we have in our back issues enough of genuine Jewish art to make up a book—as distinguished from the work of modern Jewish artists who happen to be of Jewish birth. Some of these, to be sure, have also Jewish feeling and might be said to be in a way creating “Jewish Art.”⁶¹

Roth's reply two weeks later reveals his thinking on this topic:

As for the Book of Jewish Art: I suggest that a quarter each for ancient and medieval (i.e., ritual), ‘classical’, modern and American would be adequate, even tho’ I would personally prefer the first section to be more heavily weighted.⁶²

Roth's vision follows the layout of the standard art-historical survey text, such as Janson's *History of Art*, and preserves the old division between “modern” and “American.” Roth was ultimately to publish such a book in English in 1961 without Hurwitz's collaboration.

Menorah Journal's legacy in the visual arts survives in the recent boom in Jewish art historical studies. However, with the exceptions of established masters with international reputations—Chagall, for example—the artists championed by the magazine were shortly to be eclipsed by the so-called triumph of American painting: abstract expressionism. Indeed, many of these artists remain virtually unknown outside the pages of the journal.

The tragedy of *Menorah Journal's* ambitious effort is that its strategies for coping with the tensions—between modernity and tradition, between American and European cultures, and between the secular and religious realms—made it impossible for it to acknowledge abstract art as an option for Jewish artists or to include it within its pages. As a result, when abstract expressionism appeared on the scene in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a movement whose pioneers included several Jews, the magazine was precluded from claiming this art as not merely the “triumph of American painting” but as the triumph of American Jewish painting. Perhaps the greatest American Jewish artists of the time, and undoubtedly the most influential contribution of Jewish artists to modern American art, never graced the pages of *Menorah Journal* because the writers' thinking could not escape the modernist paradigms that tied them to incompatible goals.

61. AJA/HHP, Box 50, folder 6, correspondence with Cecil Roth, 1944–1953, Hurwitz to Cecil Roth, November 11, 1952.

62. *Ibid.* Roth here uses “classical” to refer to the Renaissance period, rather than to the art of antiquity.