

## Jankel Adler: A “Degenerate” Artist in Britain, 1940-49

Ben Uri Gallery, 3 June - 8 July 2019



Jankel Adler: *Mother and Child*, 1941

Born into a Jewish family in 1895 in the Polish city of Lodz, Jankel Adler is widely recognised as one of the key participants in the development of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European modern and avant-garde art. He was the co-founder of the Young Yiddish (*Jung Jiddish*) group of artists in Poland and also a member of the Young Rhineland (*Junges Rheinland*) and the Cologne Progressives (*Kolner Progressive*) groups. Well-known to the German (and Polish) authorities as a politically active ‘cultural Bolshevik’, the Nazis branded him a “Degenerate” artist and Adler’s work was included in the infamous *Entartete Kunst* (“Degenerate Art”) exhibition in Munich in 1937.

Adler, however, had already fled Germany for Paris in 1933 – in the same year as Paul Klee – and joined *Atelier 17*, under the tutelage of Stanley William Hayter, where he also met and befriended Picasso. Adler’s relationships with Klee and Picasso were pivotal; both considered him a driving force in modernism.

Adler joined the Polish Free Army, which was assembled in France in early 1940, and with them fled the advancing German troops via the Brittany port of St. Nazaire. He arrived in Scotland, penniless and in poor health, and after a brief time in a camp, was discharged soon afterwards. In Glasgow, he was befriended by Estonian-Jewish émigré sculptor Benno Schotz, through whom he re-engaged with the younger, fellow Polish-Jewish artist Josef

Herman, who also found refuge in Glasgow. Kindred spirits, they supported each other emotionally, as they learned of Nazi atrocities and the loss of Herman's entire family in the Warsaw ghetto. Both were active in the New Art Club in Glasgow and Adler greatly influenced Scottish artists of the period including Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde. In 1941 there were two exhibitions of his work in Glasgow and in 1942 he lived in the artist colony of Kirkcudbright. In 1943 he moved to London, taking a studio in the same apartment as 'the two Roberts' and John Minton. Here, he befriended fellow German émigrés from Nazi tyranny including Kurt Schwitters and English artists including Julian Trevelyan.

In 1943 Adler joined the Ohel Club, a meeting point for immigrant Jewish intellectuals, whose members included, besides Herman, fellow immigrant artists Martin Bloch and Marek Szwarc, as well as David Bomberg, and the Yiddish poet Yitzhak Manger. The Redfern Gallery was the first in London to show his work in 1943. Unlike Herman, who learned his family had perished in the Warsaw Ghetto while in Glasgow, Adler, who was separated from his wife and daughter throughout this period, only heard that all his siblings had perished after the war ended (with only a niece and nephew surviving). Between 1943 and his death in 1949, Adler was exhibited in London at the Redfern Gallery, Gimpel Fils and the Anglo-French centre, where he showed alongside Francis Bacon, Robert MacBryde and Julian Trevelyan, as well as in the Waddington Galleries, Dublin; Galerie de France, Paris; Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and in the Knoedler Galleries, New York. Adler died from a heart attack in Aldbourne, near Marlborough, Wiltshire, on 25 April 1949.

This snapshot survey addresses Adler's short but influential nine years in Britain with a range of paintings and works on paper which ably represent his diversity and creativity in his adopted homeland. This exhibition follows on from the expansive survey curated and held at the Von Der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal, Germany in 2018, to which Ben Uri lent work and wrote extensively for the catalogue.

Co-curated by Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall

Editors notes:

For high res images and further curatorial information please contact Rachel Dickson on [racheld@benuri.org](mailto:racheld@benuri.org)

Exhibition open daily 11am-5pm from 3 - 16 June and the following four Mondays 17 and 24 June and 1 and 8 July, or by prior appointment.

Private View Tuesday evening, 4 June from 6.30-8.30 p.m.

Admission Free

Image: Jankel Adler: *Mother and Child*, 1941, Oil and sand on board, Private Collection © DACS 2019