

100 for 100: Ben Uri Past, Present & Future

Ben Uri Celebrates its Centenary and its next 100 years, exploring Art, Identity and Migration

UNVEILING OF A MASTERPIECE IN RECOGNITION OF OUR CENTENARY.

Painted in Krakow by immigrant artist Alfred Aaron Wolmark, the monumental canvas *The Last Days of Rabbi ben Ezra* was the centrepiece of his major 1905 exhibition at London's Bruton Galleries. Subsequently purchased in Berlin in April 1911 by Mr. Sally Guggenheim, this iconic painting was taken to the Villa Guggenheim in Switzerland, then passed by descent to the current owner, Eli Guggenheim, hanging for several decades in the family dining room in San Antonio, Texas. From May 1997 through to July 2012 the painting was on loan to the Jewish Museum in New York, forming the centrepiece of its Judaica department. The Guggenheim family have now decided that Ben Uri's Centenary is a fitting opportunity to return Wolmark's greatest work to his adopted city of London on long-term loan to the museum. This display marks the first opportunity to unveil this remarkable painting to a new audience.

NEW CENTENARY EXHIBITION AT CHRISTIES SOUTH KENSINGTON

From 21 May until 9 June 2016, at the generous invitation of Christies, Ben Uri Gallery and Museum presents a unique exhibition celebrating its past, present and future sharing the vision driving the museum into its second millennium. Bringing together 100 works for 100 years – the majority from the celebrated permanent collection with a number of loans from contemporary artists from émigré and refugee backgrounds – **the exhibition displays work by some 90 artists across a range of media and practices, highlighting the significant relationship between immigration and art.**

Works by Jewish artists from migrant backgrounds – including Bomberg, Gertler, Epstein and Wolmark, who all worked in London, as well as Chagall and Soutine – who worked in Paris – and wartime refugees – including Auerbach, Bloch, Herman and Segal – are displayed alongside contemporary artists from migrant and refugee backgrounds, among them Behjat Omer Abdulla (from Kurdistan), Güler Ates (from Eastern Turkey) and Salah Ud Din (from Pakistan).

A registered charity and museum, Ben Uri began as a Jewish art society founded in London's Whitechapel's ghetto in July 1915 in the midst of the First World War. The collection has now grown to over 1300 works by some 400 artists from 35 countries, highlighting both its international flavour and British focus. Uniquely within the museum community, 23% of the artists represented are women (compared to an average of less than 5%) and 65% of the artists are immigrants.

Ben Uri – the last 15 years building the future

Currently based in a small temporary space in Boundary Road, St. John's Wood, Ben Uri's collection spends most of its time in storage. *100 for 100* will showcase works usually hidden from view, including masterworks by London-based Jewish artists including Frank Auerbach, David Bomberg, Jacob Epstein, Mark Gertler and Leon Kossoff, alongside their international contemporaries, whose work Ben Uri has acquired in recent years including Marc Chagall, Georg Grosz and Chaïm Soutine. The final room in the exhibition features work by acclaimed contemporary artists, drawn both from the collection and from gallery exhibitions in recent years and from across the immigrant landscape, signifying the future of the Ben Uri collection.

Alongside seminal works, the exhibition will also feature lesser-known, but no less historically important artists, accompanied by newly-uncovered archival material. The archive display narrates Ben Uri's colourful history from venues dotted across London (including a 32-year-stint in Soho) to the society's wide cultural exchange programme with topics ranging from Yiddish folklore to

Shakespeare and Dickens, to the great influence of émigré artists on the teaching and character of London's art schools.

Visitors will be encouraged to share their own stories under the inclusive Ben Uri banner of 'Art, Identity and Migration', facilitated by a variety of innovative and interactive digital displays. Throughout the exhibition, volunteers will be on hand to help guide through and illuminate exhibition content, alongside enhanced online access to the entire Ben Uri collection, which will be available to the public for the first time.

THE FUTURE

The majority of Ben Uri's collection and archive remains frustratingly inaccessible to the public, a situation which the gallery urgently aspires to change. Ben Uri is currently looking for a central London space to house its extensive collections, or a fruitful partnership with a distinguished museum and /or university. As well as making the collections permanently available to the public, the move will also complete Ben Uri's evolution into the 'Museum of Art, Identity and Migration', highlighting the capital's diversity in modern times.

Aiming to create an international centre of scholarship focused on the themes of identity and migration, underpinned by Ben Uri's history and collection, the museum would be the first of its kind in London. The new museum would be a pioneer in many distinctive ways, not least by sharing its space with other émigré communities, using the joint exhibition programme to exhibit their art and tell their stories of migrating to and living in London.

CEO David Glasser says: 'Ben Uri is a 100-year-young art museum, founded by émigré Jews in Whitechapel in July 1915. Our heritage is the source and inspiration for our strategy of a large, encompassing Museum of Art, Identity and Migration, celebrating the contribution of all immigrant communities to the modern and contemporary cultural landscape of London. The opportunity to unveil Wolmark's iconic work *The Last Days of Rabbi ben Ezra* in London for the first time in over 100 years is extraordinary. We are greatly appreciative of the Board of Christies and the partnership of Christies South Kensington to be able to exhibit in such a wonderful space and surroundings. The opportunity to facilitate this important testimony to the scale and depth of contribution that Jewish and other immigrant communities add to the rich cultural mosaic of our great capital city is a significant landmark.'

21 May – 9 June 2016

Christies South Kensington, 85 Old Brompton Road, London SW7 3LD

Images, left to right: For High Res please email admin3@benuri.org

Fig. 1. Alfred Aaron Wolmark, *The Last Days of Rabbi ben Ezra*, 1905, c. E, Guggenheim, R.Guggenheim & Family on long term loan to Ben Uri collection

Fig. 2. Lazar Berson, *Circular Design for Ben Uri Arts Society*, 1915-16, Ben Uri Collection, c. The Estate of the Artist

Fig. 3. David Bomberg, *Ghetto Theatre*, 1920, c. The Estate of David Bomberg Ben Uri Collection

Fig. 4. Dodo Bürgner, *Federn*, 1926, Ben Uri Collection, c. The Estate of the Artist

Fig. 5. Marc Chagall, *Apocalypse en Lilas, Capriccio*, 1945, Ben Uri Collection, c. ADA GP, Paris, DACS, London 2016

Fig. 6. Chaïm Soutine, *La Soubrette*, c. 1933, Ben Uri Collection

Fig. 7. Frank Auerbach, *Mornington Crescent*, 2004, Ben Uri Collection, c. The Artist

Fig. 8. Eva Frankfurter, *West Indian Waitresses*, c. 1955, Ben Uri Collection, c. The Estate of Eva Frankfurter

Fig. 9. Behjat Omer Abdulla, *Hajy Khalil*, 2010, On load to Ben Uri Collection, c. The Artist

Fig. 10. Jasleen Kaur, *Lord Napier*, 2011, On load to Ben Uri Collection, c. The Artist

Fig. 11. Fowokan George Kelly, *Natty Roots, Natty Bongo*, 2012, On load to Ben Uri Collection, c. The Artist

Fig. 12. Güler Ates, *The Ruins of Eternal Maharana II*, 2013, On load to Ben Uri Collection, c. The Artist

