

Legacy Gallery

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The Legacy gallery is dedicated to the cultural heritage of Polish Jews and their contribution to civilization – Polish, Jewish, and global. We want to remember individuals whose achievements are their lasting legacy today and for future generations. Their extraordinary biographies reflect the many stormy historical events through which they lived. At the same time, we want to explore how their Polish Jewish roots sometimes influenced their life choices and inspirations.

For centuries, Polish lands were home to the largest Jewish community in the world. It was here, from the late Middle Ages to modern times, that the foundations of Ashkenazi Jewish tradition and modern Jewish culture were formed. From the end of the eighteenth century, with the prospect of emancipation, Jews moved increasingly beyond the world of tradition and entered the wider society, to a greater or lesser degree, to participate in its social, cultural, and political life. For a variety of reasons, they were attracted to particular fields – whether because of affinities with Jewish values or greater accessibility. They also sometimes brought a new perspective from Jewish tradition to those fields.

One could cite, for example, the leading role of text and study in Jewish religious life or the value placed on community and charity or the principle of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Polish Jews were prominent in revolutionary, reformist, and avant-garde movements and ideologies, often of a utopian nature, such as socialism, communism, psychoanalysis, avant-garde art, and neo-humanist and universalist movements. This tendency resulted to some extent from the historical experience of a minority, a group that was subordinated and excluded during the medieval and early modern periods and that had to fight hard for equal rights in the modern period. New Jewish elites who emerged

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – they were acculturated, in some cases converted and assimilated – believed in the promise of integration and contributed considerably to the capitalist economy and industrial development of Polish lands. Violence and economic hardship between 1881 and the First World War set off a wave of mass emigration, primarily to the United States, where some Polish Jewish immigrants made great careers.

The experience of being a minority or an immigrant, a newcomer from a different world, prompted Polish Jews to seize opportunities in new fields, whether in science and the arts or in business and industry. This was a way to find a place for themselves and recognition from the wider society, as can be seen, for example, from their out-sized role in the creation of modern mass culture – photography, filmmaking, popular music, and commercial sound recording – in Poland, Europe, and the United States.

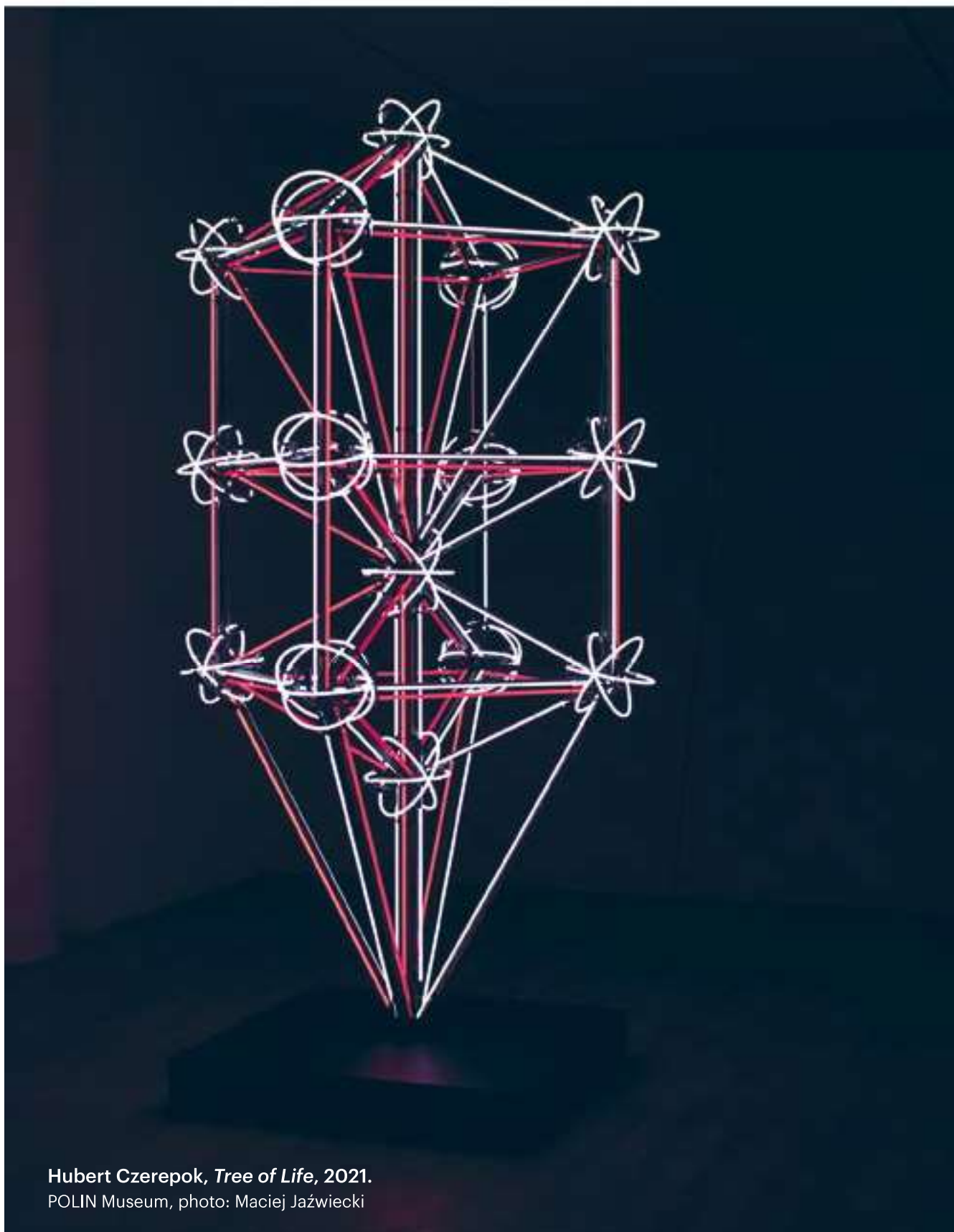
As Polish Jews were making their mark on the wider society, Jewish life was itself transforming. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new forms of Jewish self-understanding were emerging in response to the challenges of modernity, as can be seen in the rise of modern Jewish social and political movements (Zionism, the Bund, Agudas Yisroel, and Diaspora Nationalism, among others); modern Jewish culture in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish (literature, theater, cinema, art); and modern scholarship in a broad range of fields. Polish Jews were active and contributed to these fields not only in Poland, but also in the many places where they made their new homes, whether in the Americas, Israel, where many of the founders of the state were Polish Jews, or elsewhere.

The Legacy gallery features 26 individuals. The biographies of those we chose for the gallery, when considered together, represent the wide spectrum of fields in which they made outstanding contributions, the diversity of their relationships to the Jewish world and wider society, and the many places where they lived and made their mark. All of them are Polish Jews. All of them were born into Jewish families and raised for the most part in Poland. Some of them abandoned the Jewish world and Poland but continued to feel a deep connection to both. Others made a uniquely Jewish mark on the world, whether they stayed in Poland or left for the United States or Israel. Throughout, however, we can detect how the world of Polish Jewry had an impact, to a greater or lesser degree, on their life choices.

We hope that our visitors and readers will appreciate that this constellation of heroes, when considered as a whole, creates a collective portrait of Polish Jewry, in all its diversity, as seen through the lives and achievements of individuals who are at once exceptional and representative. This was an important consideration in making the difficult decision of who to include in the Legacy gallery, keeping in mind that this volume would include many more of them.

THE TWENTY SIX:

- **Julian Tuwim**, one of the most admired creators of modern Polish poetry, who combined the creative potential of language, poetics of the paradoxes of everyday life, and reflection on the condition of a modern man;
- **Isaac Bashevis Singer**, Nobel laureate who, in his novels written in Yiddish but translated into many languages, evoked the world of traditional Jewish life in Poland;
- **Shmuel Yosef Agnon**, Nobel laureate, a leading figure in modern Hebrew literature, where his Polish hometown of Buczacz, in Austrian Galicia, and the Land of Israel meet;



Hubert Czerepok, *Tree of Life*, 2021.
POLIN Museum, photo: Maciej Jaźwiecki



- **Bruno Schulz**, writer and graphic artist who combined literature with art and turned his provincial hometown of Drohobycz into a mythical center of his artistic microcosm;
- **Henryk Berlew**i, one of the founders of the Jewish and Polish interwar avant-garde and pioneer of modern typography;
- **Alina Szapocznikow**, artist whose highly personal sculpture, at the juncture of body, memory, and trauma, defined a new direction in contemporary art;
- **Ida Kamińska**, doyenne of the Yiddish stage as actress, director, and theatre manager before and after the Holocaust;
- **Arnold Szyfman**, founder of modern Polish theatre as director, playwright, and institution builder;
- **Samuel Goldwyn**, one of the leading figures of Hollywood cinema, a film producer known for excellence in all regards;
- **Aleskander Ford**, key figure in twentieth-century Polish cinematography and director of the iconic film *Krzyżacy* (Knights of the Teutonic Order)
- **Henryk Wars**, popular composer for cabaret and film, remembered to this day for his hit tunes in both Poland and the United States;
- **Artur Rubinstein**, virtuoso pianist, considered the greatest interpreter of Chopin of his era;
- **Bronisław Huberman**, celebrated violinist who founded the Palestine Symphony Orchestra (forerunner to the Israel Philharmonic) in 1936 and helped musicians flee Europe for British Mandate Palestine on the eve of the Holocaust;
- **David Ben-Gurion**, first Prime Minister of Israel, signed the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948;
- **Rosa Luxemburg**, activist of the Polish and German socialist movement, supporter of democracy and the proletarian revolution who paid with her life for her involvement in the revolutionary movement;
- **Marek Edelman**, member of the Bund, the Jewish Labor Movement, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, active in Poland's postwar democratic opposition;
- **Ludwik Zamenhof**, father of Esperanto, the most successful international language, in support of the utopian ideal of universal humanity;
- **Janusz Korczak**, educator, pediatrician and writer, founder of Jewish and Catholic orphanages, creator of a modern pedagogy that supports the autonomy and rights of the child;
- **Sara Schenirer**, founder of a network a network of pioneering Beys Yankev schools, which transformed the education of Orthodox Jewish girls, and which continue to this day in Europe, North America, Israel, and South Africa;
- **Abraham Stern**, brilliant mathematician and inventor, active in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first Jew to be admitted to the Warsaw Society of the Friends of Science;
- **Helene Deutsch**, disciple of Sigmund Freud, cofounder of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute, pioneer in the study of female psychology;
- **Moses Schorr**, rabbi, historian, Member of Parliament, cofounder of the Institute of Judaic Studies in Warsaw, and leader in Jewish communal life in Poland during the interwar years;
- **Joseph Rotblat**, nuclear physicist who worked on the atomic bomb, but abandoned that project to devote himself to research on the devastating effects of radiation, received the Nobel Peace Prize for his advocacy for nuclear disarmament;

- **Raphael Lemkin**, lawyer who coined the word “genocide” and fought tirelessly for the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified in 1948;
- **Leopold Kronenberg**, entrepreneur, industrialist, banker, and philanthropist active in Polish and Jewish worlds during the nineteenth century;
- **Helena Rubinstein**, businesswoman who created one of the first cosmetic empires in the world, revolutionizing the idea of beauty; art collector.

Seen together, these 26 individuals, so diverse in their life experiences and career paths, reflect the rich and complex Polish Jewish world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: acculturation, assimilation, emigration, leaders in new political, artistic, and intellectual movements, and creators of popular culture and modern Jewish culture. They lived in multicultural borderlands, they were multilingual, and whether raised in a traditional Jewish home or in an assimilated one, they were open to the world and to new values and new skills. Unfolding in many countries, on many continents, and during turbulent historical events, their stories reveal great mobility – personal and professional, cultural and political, social and geographical.

We try to express the dynamism, openness, and cosmopolitanism of these individuals in the Legacy gallery by means of a massive wall map that locates the places where these individuals were active, whether in large Polish cities (Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Lwów, Białystok) and provincial Polish towns; European capitals (Vienna, Berlin, London, Paris); cities in the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and even Asia, where some individuals lived out the war; or Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, New York, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, and other places to which they immigrated. Lines symbolizing “paths of life” connect the places, which appear on the map as points of light, forming a dynamic network. This map is one of the leading symbols in this gallery and appears also on the video wall dedicated to the 26 chosen individuals: dots on the video map turn into a galaxy of stars, which symbolize these individuals, their lives, and unique fates.

When creating the Legacy gallery, it was particularly important for us that the visitors could assess the importance of each person by familiarizing themselves with their work, often recognizing aspects they know from everyday life. For this reason we prepared interactive presentations devoted to the biographies and achievements of the 26 individuals, on touch screens in the gallery. Visitors can read excerpts from their literary works, explore their works of art, watch segments of their films and plays, listen to their music, and hear stories about their lives and careers – in a word, they can meet these interesting people face to face. While capturing the uniqueness of each person – their roots, their milieus, the historical events that shaped their lives, their personal choices, and their predispositions – these presentations also highlight common threads and universal themes.

It is our hope that visitors will be inspired by these individuals to reflect on the aspirations and potential of humanity. May the lives and achievements of outstanding Polish Jews prove that it is possible to overcome limitations, that it is worth pursuing a goal, and that taking responsibility for one’s own and others’ lives is the highest priority. We also want to encourage our visitors to reflect on their own lives. What are my roots? What has influenced who I am and hope to become? What are my goals? What am I willing to fight for? What are my dreams?

This universal message is expressed in Hubert Czerepok’s sculpture, “Tree of Life,” a centerpiece of the Legacy gallery. In search of a metaphor that would capture the heritage of Polish Jews in ways both universal and Jewish, collective and individual, the artist found inspiration in the symbolism of the kabbalistic Tree of Life, a dia-

gram representing the ten aspects of the Divine. Czerepok's "Tree of Life" represents the kabbalistic diagram in three-dimensional glowing neon. Each of the ten *sefirot*, represented in the traditional kabbalistic diagram as circles that symbolize divine emanations, is given new meaning. Czerepok dedicates them to spheres of human creativity: art and literature, cinema, theater and music, science, politics, economics, and law, and education. These are among the fields that form the foundation of our civilization. Individuals shape these fields through their hard work, passion, and perseverance, never giving up in pursuit of their goals, overcoming obstacles with their openness and courage, following their passions and dreams, while contributing to the common good. Czerepok's sculpture expresses the idea that creativity and human endeavor are ways to realize our humanity and, at the same time, act as a universal charter to repair the world. This too is the message of the Legacy gallery.