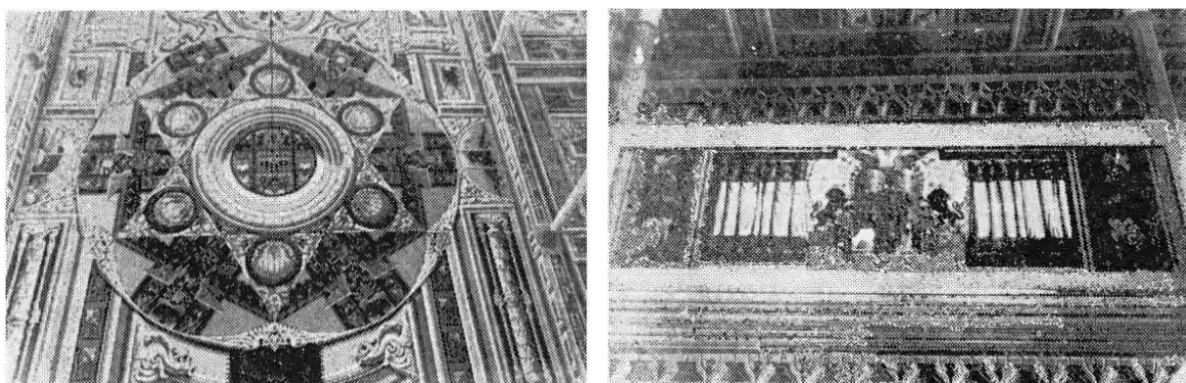


J. Guterman

Professor Perec Willenberg

For many years, Professor Perec Willenberg taught painting and drawing at our Hebrew high school and was much loved by his pupils and the teaching staff. He was not only known in Częstochowa, but also to any Polish Jews who admired the artwork that he painted in 1930 for Częstochowa's Old Synagogue on ulica Nadrzeczna, next to the study-hall.



Professor Willenberg showed what a Jewish painter could achieve when endowed with Jewish knowledge and feelings and being aware of the specific character of genuine Jewish artwork, especially in a sanctified precinct such as a synagogue or study-hall.

We quote [below] from the periodical "*Letzte Naves*" [Yid.; "Latest News"] an excerpt from an article about him by J. Guterman, who was one of his pupils, and who had also helped him to paint the Częstochowa synagogue which, sadly, was [later] burnt down by the Nazi vandals.

This is what he writes:

Professor Perec Willenberg was born in 1874 in the *shtetl* of Maków. His father was a personal friend of Nahum Sokołow, who would often come to their house. Perec Willenberg already showed an inclination to drawing at the earliest age. When he was only fourteen, Sokołow dedicated an article to him in the *Ha'Tzfira* [The Siren], as a child prodigy. After finishing school in Warsaw, Willenberg travelled to study in [St.] Petersburg. Afterwards, he returned to Poland, where he became involved in a whole series of fields in the art of painting. He had a special inclination towards ancient Jewish art, historical and Biblical imagery, which was markedly expressed in his creations. He was commissioned by a long list of cities in Poland to decorate their synagogues and the walls of the synagogues of Częstochowa, Piotrków and Opatów were adorned with his masterly frescoes.

Professor Willenberg was also closely befriended with Y.L. Peretz, who showed great interest in the artist's works.

Besides his artwork, he also conducted wide social-pedagogical activity in the field of art. In Częstochowa, he opened an Art School, which he personally directed. For long years, he held lectures on drawing at the Peretz School in Częstochowa, at the high school and at the Horticultural

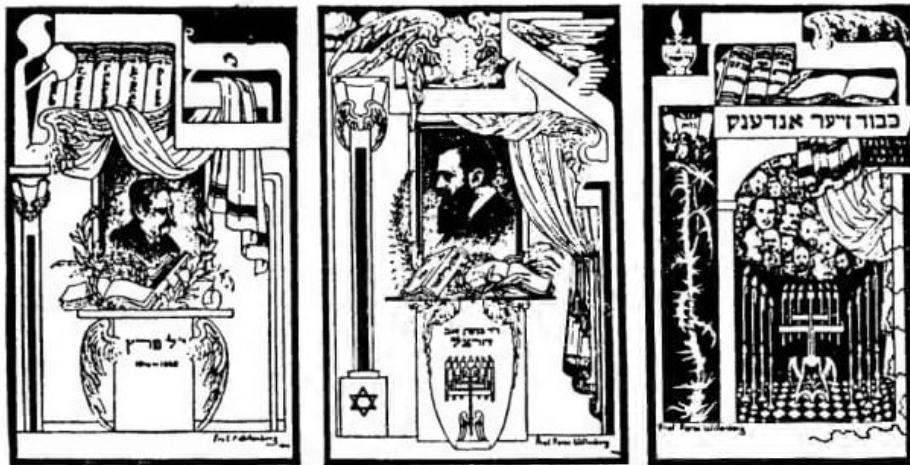
School. The Częstochowa branch of the Jewish Colonization Association, recognising the great benefits the artist could bring them, subsidised his journey abroad, where he met with the most accomplished Western European artists. In Częstochowa, he was awarded a golden badge in recognition of his artistic work and a silver medal for his pedagogical activity. He also gained renown outside the Jewish street with his works and his pictures found a place in the exhibitions alongside the canvases of painters such as Wyspiański, Kramsztyk, Malczewski, Wyczółkowski, Hirszenberg and the Dutch masters Nopréé [?], Urban [?] and Metzelaar.

(Prof Willenberg lived through the years of the occupation on the “Aryan” side, [posing] as deaf-and-dumb. It befell this Jew, with his artistic and sensitive soul, which was filled with the Jewish spirit, to see with his own eyes how Jewish achievements were obliterated. The Germans seized his two daughters from under his own hands and, within 24 hours, they were no longer among the living. The only thing that gave him the fortitude to endure all this was his conviction that no nation can be [utterly] exterminated.

Following Liberation, arriving in Łódź at the age of more than seventy, he felt a strong personal obligation towards the further existence of Jewish art in Poland. He painted and drew tirelessly. He worked on scenes from ancient Jewish history, as well as from the contemporary Jewish tragedy.)

In Łódź, too, Professor Willenberg returned to his social activities. When the Painters’ Cooperative was founded, he was unanimously elected as an honorary member of the auditing committee.

(Below are some of his engravings)



[TN: LR: Y.L. Peretz, Herzl and “In Memory of”]

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The talented Jewish painter, Professor Perec Willenberg, died in Łódź.

With his death, contemporary Jewish society has lost one of the most [intrinsically] Jewish artists. Looking at his works, one may clearly perceive what his Jewish-artistic soul breathed and with what it was filled. Just looking at the walls of his room is enough for one to appreciate the artistic world in which he lived. One picture there is “Talmudists”. A group of religious Jews sit in a study-hall, engrossed in books; a simple Jew comes in to say *Kaddish* and, seeing the Torah students, stands aside motionless, listening to their study and waiting respectfully for them to end. A second painting shows us the Eastern Wall of the Old Synagogue in Łódź. When Professor Willenberg came to Łódź following Liberation, he had the insight to commemorate what was left standing of one of the most original synagogues in Poland. In another picture, we see a fragment of the *Tłomacker Synagogue*¹ in Warsaw, on the background of the ruins made there by the vandals.

Even just these three paintings sufficiently demonstrate Professor Willenberg’s artistic essence.

¹ [TN: The Great Synagogue of Warsaw, which was located on Tłomackie street in Warsaw.]