



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR JEWISH ART INC.  
12 Colburn Drive  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603



Ralph J. Preiss, Treasurer  
Phone (914) 462-7384 Fax (914) 462-1858

June 11, 2000

Honorable Judah Gribetz, Special Master  
c/o Richards & O'Neil, LLP  
885 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022-4802

Re: Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation

Dear Mr. Gribetz:

The International Society for Jewish Art, Inc. submits its request for a portion of the funds realized in settlement of the above class action. Professor Bezalel Narkiss, President, Dr. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, Vice President, and Ralph J. Preiss, Treasurer of the International Society for Jewish Art, Inc. make this submission. The International Society for Jewish Art is a supporting group of Friends of the Center for Jewish Art, which is a research institution at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The heads of the International Society for Jewish Art acknowledge and respect that Holocaust survivors and their heirs should be the primary benefactors of the settlement funds. However, regarding undistributed assets, the mission and purpose of the Center for Jewish Art is worthy of a portion of the settlement fund, as set forth below and in the attached materials.

**The International Society for Jewish Art, Inc. seeks an endowment fund of US \$30 million to carry out its global mission to preserve the endangered visual culture of the Jewish people.**

The aftermath of pogroms, revolutions and the Holocaust have caused the near annihilation of Jewish communities in much of Europe, and the eradication of most of their culture. While today it is impossible to recover the past and bring back these once vibrant Jewish communities, documenting and studying the remnants of their rich visual culture can keep their memory



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alive. Synagogues and their sacred objects, tombstones, Hebrew illuminated manuscripts and modern fine art, reveal to us how these Jews lived – not only how they died - giving us a penetrating picture into their rich communal, cultural and spiritual life. This knowledge augments the historical and textual knowledge we possess, and creates a living testimony to the communities which are no more.

With this goal in mind, Prof. Bezalel Narkiss, an Israel Prize laureate, founded the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University twenty-one years ago. The Center for Jewish Art is dedicated to the systematic and comprehensive surveying and documentation of what remains of the Jewish visual culture throughout the world, from a coin to a synagogue, and from ancient times to the present. It is committed to researching this precious legacy for educational purposes, disseminating it through electronic media, publications, conferences and various study programs for scholars, teachers, curators, lay people, and children of all ages. Thus, the Jewish visual heritage will be kept for present and future generations, forming another link in the continuity of our tradition and a means for strengthening Jewish identity.

The documentation, research and educational programs are implemented by twenty graduate students, specializing in art history and Judaic studies, who are trained at the Center until they complete their M.A. or Ph.D. theses. Over 150 Center graduates are now involved in Jewish art as educators at all levels, and as curators throughout Israel, Europe and the United States.

The Center's main research and educational tool is the *Jerusalem Index of Jewish Art*. This database comprises field documentation and subsequent research data accumulated by the students under the supervision of Hebrew University professors. It is both the largest Jewish virtual museum in the world, and the only interactive iconographical subject lexicon of Jewish art. It includes tens of thousands of ritual objects, Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, coins, ancient and modern art, synagogues and their appurtenances with photographs, detailed technical and art historical descriptions indicating origins and dates, linked with the iconographical lexicon. Thus, with the press of a button, different objects can be compared to each other, or the variant components of the iconography of a subject, such



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as the *Sacrifice of Isaac* or *Noah's Ark*, can be retrieved together with their biblical and rabbinical literary sources (see Appendix 1).

Immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union, the Center embarked on a rescue operation to document abandoned synagogues, which are in various stages of dilapidation. These primary surveys and documentation expeditions to the Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and recently to Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo, have yielded a wealth of information which we have listed in general inventories as well as detailed documentation of buildings. This documentation is used to draw architectural plans and three dimensional computer models created by the four architects of the Center for Jewish Art (see Appendix 2). In addition, we have surveyed and documented in Tunisia, Morocco, Greece, Germany, England, Italy, Holland, Austria, India, Egypt and Israel.

The documentation, although systematic, is by no means complete. In many cases, the expeditions act as rescue missions when it is known that the collapse or destruction of a synagogue is imminent: such was the case of the Berezhany synagogue in Ukraine which collapsed in 1994, and the twelve synagogues in East End London which were destroyed because of construction development. Synagogues have also been vandalized in India, for example and ritual objects have been stolen and sold at Sotheby's or in bazaars in Tunisia.

All the activities of the Center for Jewish Art – expeditions, student scholarships, computerization and educational programs, are financed on a project by project basis by the generosity of foundations and private individuals. The Center is not supported by the Hebrew University, the Israeli government, or by any institutional organization in the Jewish world.

The expeditions we have conducted up to now have revealed a wealth of material, far beyond what we ever hoped to find, albeit neglected and in dire condition. We estimate that in the next ten years most of the abandoned synagogues will either collapse or be totally reconstructed, and ritual objects, manuscripts and Jewish fine art, not housed in museum collections, will be



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dispersed throughout the world. This is an emergency situation if we are to preserve the Jewish visual heritage for posterity.

An urgent plan is imperative:

- 1) a comprehensive documentation, country by country, where Jewish communities flourished, giving priority to regions where communities are dwindling or no longer exist;
- 2) research and computerization of the gathered data, including archival material;
- 3) dissemination of the researched material to the general public via the Internet, CD-ROM, books and various educational programs;

Although the three stages would be enacted concurrently, as they are being done at present, research and its dissemination are lengthy processes. To facilitate this ambitious plan, more students and architects have to be engaged, and an endowment fund needs to be established to ensure continuity of the process. Currently, the annual operating budget of the Center amounts to \$1,500,000 (see Appendix 3).

Two years ago, we won international recognition from the World Bank, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, for our methods of virtually preserving the Jewish culture, which can serve as a model for other endangered minority cultures. Our methods of documentation and utilization computerized templates are sought by various conservation and documentation institutions throughout the world, such as the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, the Council of Europe's Committee for Religious Monuments, the Heritage Council of Ireland, the Princeton Index of Christian Art, and Islamic scholars. In addition, we have taught our methods of documentation and computerization to East European curators and students, German architectural students and lay people in North America.

The Center for Jewish Art's commitment to education is expressed in our ongoing educational programs, such as:



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- 1. Triennial international seminars in Jerusalem devoted to Jewish art and its relationship to Christian and Islamic cultures:** The Fifth International Seminar held in 1996, was dedicated to *Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art*; the Sixth International Seminar on Jewish Art, *The Bible in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art*, was held in June 1999; and the Seventh International Seminar, *Sacred Space in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art*, is scheduled for June 2002. The seminar brings together hundreds of scholars, art professionals and enthusiasts from all over the world and serves as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas in the field.
- 2. Biennial symposia on Jewish Art of a particular region:** The upcoming symposium, *Jewish Art in Alsace*, is scheduled for September 2000. The symposia feature lectures by experts from the Hebrew University as well as local universities and cultural institutions. Symposia have been held in Israel, Greece, Catalonia, Provence, Piedmont, Turkey, Bohemia and Moravia.
- 3. Training Programs for Eastern Europeans:** Since 1991, an annual training course in Jewish Art is held alternately in St. Petersburg and Jerusalem for over one hundred scholars, educators and students. The course's aim is to teach Jewish values through art by introducing the participants to biblical and rabbinical sources in Jewish Art, as well as to expose them to Jewish culture and customs in different communities throughout the world.
- 4. Training programs for Israeli educators:** *A Teacher's Kit: The Zionist Experience in Art*, was developed by the Center for pre-school through high school curricula. This program uses art as a tool for introducing concepts of Zionism in a historical context. Other teaching kits, including the Jewish Life Cycle and the Festival Cycle, as well as Biblical and Midrashic Stories are in the process of being developed in cooperation with the Melton Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora and with the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.
- 5. Lecture series and seminars:** The Center also organizes lecture series and seminars in Israel and abroad to inform the public of its recent discoveries and groundbreaking research. In Israel, the Center aims to promote Jewish art awareness among the public.



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Likewise, the Center's resources are distributed by various publications addressed to diverse groups of readers. Among these publications are:

1. A biannual newsletter with a worldwide distribution of 15,000. The newsletter reaches out to the Center's broad audience, reporting on the diverse aspects of its work, and providing the incentive for readers to pursue the subjects of particular interest to them in direct contact with the Center.
2. The annual *Jewish Art* (the last volume 23/24, **The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Art**, 690 pages). Since its first issue in 1974, this publication continues to be the only periodical devoted to the subject of Jewish art. Its articles examine the historical connections of Jewish art to Christian and Islamic art as well as to the influence of local styles and cultures.
3. **Ingathering of the Nations – Treasures of Jewish Art: Documenting an Endangered Legacy** by Ariella Amar and Ruth Jacoby in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the State of Israel (133 pages). This publication is a sampling of remarkable finds from ten countries showing the variety and beauty of the Jewish artistic tradition. The photographs are accompanied by English and Hebrew texts providing an introduction to the Jewish community in each country and condensed descriptions of each object with the preliminary results of research.

In addition, the Center publishes special studies and catalogues on a variety of topics such as Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, ancient synagogues and Jewish ethnic communities, as well as a series of glossaries for the description of artistic objects. These publications have become indispensable to scholars in the fields of art history, religion and ethnography.

The Center is currently involved in an initiative to promote the use of its resources on interactive educational Internet sites. The goal is to have the *Jerusalem Index of Jewish Art* templates of about 200,000 objects available to the general public.



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The International Society for Jewish Art, Inc. is hereby requesting US \$30 million of the settlement fund to create an endowment fund for the Center for Jewish Art. The yield will permit the Center to ensure adequate funding in perpetuity to maintain an ongoing operation aimed at accomplishing its comprehensive mission. In particular, as the singular institution in the world which researches and documents the visual culture of the Jewish people, the Center for Jewish Art justifies this support.

Thank you for considering this application. For any additional information or further examples necessary for your deliberations, please contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,

*Bezalel Narkiss*

Professor Bezalel Narkiss  
President

*Aliza Cohen*

Dr. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin  
Vice President

cc: Dr. Israel Singer, Secretary General, World Jewish Congress  
Mr. Harvey Krueger, American Friends of the Hebrew University

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