

PART 2

From Avant-Garde to Political Activism





Introduction to Part 2

On 6 January 1929 King Alexander Karadjordjević abolished the constitution and introduced a dictatorship. This extreme political act followed the shooting in the Parliament of five members of the Croatian Peasant Party by the Serbian deputy Puniša Račić; two were killed, and the Croatian party leader Stjepan Radić later died of his wounds. This attack sharply escalated the ongoing confrontation between Croat and Serbian politicians: while the former regarded government policy as Serbocentric, the latter accused the Croats of separatism. By using this incident and the resulting political crisis to introduce a dictatorship the king changed the country's internal division by creating administrative subdivisions (*banovine*), which cut across old historic borders and were based on geographic, rather than ethnic, criteria. He also changed its name from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and established a Court for the Protection of the State as a means by which the new regime could put down any dissension. Opposition leaders were imprisoned while more radical ones, headed by Ante Pavelić, fled the country to form a revolutionary movement in exile, Ustasha, the extreme nationalist Croatian fascist and terrorist organization that joined forces in its anti-state actions with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Movement.

Eventually, however, constantly growing dissatisfaction in the country forced the king to consider a more relaxed dictatorship. He planned to introduce democratic reforms and thus meet the demands of the broad Croat opposition, led by imprisoned Vladko Maček and his Croatian Peasant Party. In 1934, while these plans were not yet implemented, King Alexander was assassinated in Marseille during a state visit to France. He was shot by an activist of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Movement, in conspiracy with other anti-government exiles, radicals, and the Ustasha movement. Since the King's eldest son Peter II was a minor, according to the king's will the country continued to be ruled by the Royal Regency Council headed by Alexander's cousin, Prince Paul. As the new government did not introduce many changes, the late 1930s were marked by continuous and growing confrontation between Serbs and Croats who were demanding new ethnic subdivisions of the country and control over neighboring areas—Serbs over Macedonia, Vojvodina, and Montenegro; Croats over Dalmatia and parts of Vojvodina. Both claimed the right to rule Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nazi Germany's annexation of neighboring Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and awareness of an approaching war increased the pressure to resolve these internal conflicts and stabilize the country. Thus, in August 1939

an agreement was reached between Yugoslavia's new prime minister, Dragiša Cvetković, and the leader of the Croat opposition, Maček, on decentralization of power. The agreement allowed the Croats to establish an autonomous administrative subdivision with its own parliament, while Maček was appointed deputy prime minister in the Yugoslav government. But even this solution was short-lived. Fearing invasion by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, on 25 March 1941 Prince Paul signed the Tripartite Pact, thus joining the Axis Powers. By doing so he followed the example of his neighbors—Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria.

The signing of the pact was fiercely criticized by military, clerical, and political groups in Serbia, as well as by the broader population, liberals, and communists throughout the country. Their opposition, fanned by the British who were eager to have Yugoslavia on their side, resulted two days later in a military coup d'état. Prince Paul and Cvetković were overthrown, the seventeen-year-old Peter II was declared to be of age to assume power as king, while General Dušan Simović became the new prime minister. However, the new government of national unity, which included a wide spectrum of political opinion, was incapable of reaching decisions. Still hoping to keep the country out of the war, and without any help forthcoming from the British aside from moral support, the new government re-affirmed the pact with Hitler, hoping to appease his wrath in the wake of the putsch, which he saw as a personal insult and an offense to the Third Reich. Mass demonstrations in Belgrade and other cities followed, unambiguously demanding the abrogation of Yugoslavia's joining the Tripartite Pact and carrying signs with the slogan "Bolje rat nego pakt; bolje grob nego rob" (rather war than the Pact; rather a grave than slavery). Hitler, eager to attack the Soviet Union, lost his patience and ten days later, on 6 April 1941, the Germans bombed Belgrade heavily and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was invaded by the Wehrmacht.¹

In spite of these severe internal tensions, during the entire interwar period the Yugoslav government's official attitude towards the Jews was benevolent and they were treated with tolerance and respect. This tone was set by the Serbs who especially cherished local Sephardic Jews and considered them

¹ Concerning the crucial events of 25–27 March 1941, see Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*, 1, 43–53. For analysis of the political situation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the interwar period, see Dejan Djokić, "(Dis)integrating Yugoslavia: King Alexander and Interwar Yugoslavism," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992*, ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst and Company, 2003), 136–56; see also Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 141–329.

patriotic citizens who bravely fought alongside them in the Balkan Wars and WWI, many falling in battle.²

In contrast, Bosnian and Croatian Jews who served during the Great War in the opponent Austro-Hungarian army were treated more suspiciously. Ashkenazic Jews, often lacking knowledge of Serbo-Croatian and holding foreign passports, were treated as Hungarian or Austrian foreigners and initially—after the end of WWI—were threatened with expulsion from the new country together with other foreign nationals such as Germans, Bulgarians, and Turks. A delegation comprised of prominent Serbian Jews was able to change this decision. Moreover, the members of Belgrade's Jewish community were especially favored and regularly elected to represent all Yugoslav Jewry before the government and the king. Zagreb's Jewish newspaper *Židov* reported that, on the other hand, Ashkenazic Jews living in recently added territories, such as Vojvodina (until 1918 part of Hungary), had to wait a few years until they acquired citizenship and voting rights.³

The Yugoslav government, too, was supportive of the Zionist cause. Although this was initially a means adopted in 1917 by Serbs to gain American support for their war efforts, the sympathetic attitude towards the Jewish rebirth in Palestine characterized Yugoslavia's foreign policy. Parallels were often drawn between Serbian and Jewish history, due to what was seen as a common background: the experience of bondage and struggle for freedom (in the Serbian case from the Ottomans).⁴ The Yugoslav government opened a consulate in Palestine, while in 1936 Prince Paul received Dr Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress. Similarly, during the official visits of such Zionist leaders as Nahum Sokolow (1928) and Menahem Ussishkin (1930) the Jewish delegation received an audience with King Alexander, while Yugoslav Jews in Palestine planted commemorative woods in the names of King Peter I and—after his assassination—King Alexander. In the late 1930s, as the situation in Europe deteriorated, the government repeatedly reassured the Jewish community that nothing could happen to the Jews in Yugoslavia and that they would always be protected.⁵

Government policy, however, was less positive in regard to the large numbers of Jewish refugees who began arriving in Yugoslavia already in 1933. For

² See above Ch. 1, n. 72.

³ "Službeni antisemitizam," *Židov* 6, no. 30 (7 July 1922): 6–7, quoted in Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 183, n. 44.

⁴ The loss of the Temple in Jerusalem was sometimes compared to the Serbian loss of Kosovo in 1389; see, for example, a quotation from the speech by Serbian journalist and author Dušan Nikolajević in "Jugoslovenstvo i jevrejstvo," *Židov* 19, no. 7 (15 Feb. 1935): 5.

⁵ Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 181–82; see also Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji*, 119–30.

many of them the Balkans became a transit station on their way to Palestine, and the Yugoslav government found itself divided between awareness of the politically, militarily, and ideologically ever more threatening Germany and its wish not to complicate relations with the British, who opposed the influx of Jewish emigrants to Mandatory Palestine. It was feared that the large numbers of impoverished Jews arriving in Yugoslavia at a time of deepening economic crisis marking the 1930s would encourage xenophobia and anti-Semitism. While engaging in endless discussions about this predicament, the government did not close its borders, but also did not do much, and actually quietly left the Yugoslav Jewish community to deal with the problem.⁶ In agreement with the Federation of the Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia, Zagreb's Jewish community of 10,000 members, the most affluent and closest to the Austrian border, from where the refugees were arriving, organized a local committee to help the fleeing German Jews. The volunteers worked together with the Joint Distribution Committee and HICEM and in 1933–34 sheltered 8,600 refugees, helping them to decide about and reach their destinations.⁷ Large sums of money were donated by the community members for that purpose.⁸ The situation became more severe after the 1938 Anschluss, with the expulsion and mass emigration of Jews from Austria, and soon after also from Czechoslovakia. The Central Committee for Aid to Jews from Germany, active in Belgrade since 1936, established fifteen refugee centers in various parts of the country to provide shelter and housing for those unfortunate people. The number of intermarriages between the local and refugee Jews increased, while some professionals managed to find jobs and rebuild their lives. In all some 55,000 Jewish refugees were helped during their stay in Yugoslavia.

At the same time, during the 1930s anti-Semitic propaganda began appearing on a more regular basis. Encouraged by Nazi racial theories since 1933 and Yugoslavia's gradual reception of German political influence, anti-Jewish articles appeared in several newspapers published in major cities in Slovenia,

6 Milan Ristović wrote extensively about the problems of refugees arriving in Yugoslavia between 1933 and 1941; see Milan Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem: jugoslovenski Jevreji u bekstvu od holokausta, 1941–45* (Beograd: Javno preduzeće, Službeni list SRJ, 1998), 23–55; see also Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 448–70.

7 HICEM, an organization formed in 1927 to help European Jews to emigrate, merged three Jewish migration associations: HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), which was based in New York; ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), which was based in Paris but registered as a British charitable society; and Emigdirect, a migration organization based in Berlin. The name HICEM is an acronym of HIAS, ICA, and Emigdirect.

8 Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 186–87; Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem*, 27.

Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia, usually without interference by the government. They were encouraged by the Catholic Church, Muslims, or pro-communists, initially promoting clerical and class anti-Semitism, which in the late 1930s was transformed into racial anti-Semitism. In addition, the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared in Croatian (1930; 1936) and Serbian (1934) translations, and pamphlets and brochures on topics such as “Jews and Masons” underlined the “dangers” from both, “unmasking their secret plans to rule the world.” The anti-Semitism of the late 1930s was found in both pro-Yugoslav circles and among Serbian and Croatian nationalists, as well as within the national minorities, especially the ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) and Hungarians. Economic exploitation and pro-Bolshevism were often stressed as the most common Jewish faults. However, a distinction was often made between Sephardim, considered closer to the locals, and the “foreign” Ashkenazic Jews, especially the Zionists among them who were portrayed as being disloyal and unpatriotic. The steadily increasing anti-Semitic propaganda was regularly reported and fought against in the pages of the Jewish press, notably *Židov*, but also through regular petitions and delegations of representatives of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities to government ministers and the Royal Regency Council. Despite that manifestations of anti-Semitism were often curbed and anti-Jewish newspapers banned, the phenomenon grew, especially from 1938 on. Finally, it culminated in October 1940 in two laws passed by the Cvetković-Maček government that directly influenced Jewish lives. The first prohibited Jews from engaging in the wholesale food business or related occupations, which basically initiated the exclusion of the Jews from the economic life of the country. The second was a *numerus clausus* limiting the enrollment of Jewish youth in all high schools and universities to their percentage of the total population. As education was one of the highest priorities among the Yugoslav Jewish population, this law clearly heralded a serious reduction of Jewish participation in the country’s professional life. In spite of bitter disappointment and public accusation of these government acts, the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia still expressed loyalty to the country and hopes for future co-existence.⁹

The pre-wwII artistic activity of three artists that will be discussed in this part of the book—Baruh-Bora Baruh (1911–1942), Ivan Rein (1905–1943), and Daniel

9 For the most comprehensive study of the spread of this unfortunate phenomenon in Yugoslavia in the interwar period, see Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam*. See also Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 379–447 for anti-Semitism during the 1930s, and Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 182–86.

Ozmo (1912–1942)—is marked by intense creativity and connection to international avant-garde movements. Born in the first decades of the twentieth century, they grew up as citizens of a newly formed country—the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This enabled their full integration into a new multicultural society, and also encouraged their interest in the international scene: the *École de Paris*, in the case of Baruh and Rein, and German expressionism in the case of Ozmo. Kabiljo and Weiller, as we have seen, developed primarily as products of their immediate local Jewish surroundings—Sephardic Sarajevo and Ashkenazic Zagreb. The European Jewish renaissance and cultural Zionism encouraged their interest in Jewish subjects and preoccupation with ethnic issues. The younger generation of Yugoslav Jewish artists, in contrast, was closer to the intellectual path marked out by Moša Pijade. But whereas Pijade's Serbian nationalism gradually developed into full acceptance of leftist and communist ideology, Baruh, Rein, and Ozmo from the onset of their artistic careers belonged to a country which included not only the south Slavs but also the ethnic minorities living in the region. This diminished their local patriotism and provided them, as Jews, with an option to more fully immerse themselves into imaginary “Yugoslavism” or even, in Rein's case, universalism. However, with the growing danger stemming from Nazi Germany, the increasing misfortunes of European Jews, and the gradual downfall of liberal democratic European societies, including their own homeland, these artists clearly sided with the socially-aware international Left, and worked to use their art as a tool to oppose reactionary forces.

Bora Baruh's *Refugees*

Baruh-Bora Baruh (1911–1942) was remembered in Tito's Yugoslavia as a pre-war communist, partisan, and national hero, on the one hand, whose tragic death was marked by official commemoration and posthumous honors, and as an artist belonging to the generation of Belgrade's painters active during the thirties and the forties, on the other hand. In contrast to Moša Pijade, Baruh's motivation to paint did not suffer from his political involvement. On the contrary, during his short life he managed to weave into his numerous artistic creations his interests in universal modernism, international communism, and social concerns with the intimacy of portraits, quiet interiors, and Belgrade's old neighborhoods. In many ways his art was dictated by his life and the canvases follow his biography, showing his involvement with French art and Paris, the life of his young family, his concern for the downtrodden and exiled, and ultimately the experience of incarceration and suffering.¹

Baruh-Bora was born in 1911 as the second of six children of Eliyahu-Ilija, a Belgrade tailor, and Zimbul-Bulina Baruh, née Yarhi, originally from Vidin, Bulgaria, like Pijade's grandfather. The daughter of a cantor, prior to her marriage Baruh's mother studied in her hometown high school and spoke several languages. This possibly explains why education of all her children, the boys and the girls, was considered an important aim. Bora spent his earliest childhood in Dorćol, the Belgrade quarter inhabited, as noted, largely by Sephardic Jews. At the outbreak of WWI, when he was three years old, the family left Belgrade: since the father enlisted in the Serbian army and fought in the war, the children and the mother moved to her hometown of Vidin to live with her parents. It was there that the brothers, Baruh-Bora, Josif-Joži (b. 1913), the youngest, and Isidor-Isa (b. 1910), the eldest, attended a Jewish religious elementary school (*meldar*). Captured by the Bulgarians, the father, as a POW, was able to occasionally visit the family and be present at the birth of their first girl Rašela-Šela (b. 1917). Upon returning to Belgrade at the end of the war, the family found

¹ For the most comprehensive monograph on Bora Baruh, see Mirjana Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Radivoje Davidović, *Bora Baruh* (Belgrade: Interprint, 2001). See also the online catalogue of the exhibition held to mark the 100th anniversary of Baruh's birth: Ljubica Miljković, *Baruh-Bora Baruh (1911–1942): izložba slika povodom stogodišnjice rođenja*, [catalogue, Gallery RTS] (Beograd: Narodni Muzej and Radio Televizija Srbije, 2011) <http://www.rts.rs/upload/storyBoxFileData/2013/03/15/3107962/katalog%20Bora%20Baruh.pdf> (last accessed 18 February 2014).



FIGURE 4.1
Baruh family, photograph, 1925.
Private collection

their house and shop destroyed and moved to Požarevac, a provincial town east of Belgrade, where two more girls were born—Simha-Sonja (b. 1922) and Berta-Bela (b. 1924) (fig. 4.1). When in the following year the father got permanent employment in a factory producing army uniforms in the town of Niš, the family moved again. It was while attending high school in those two towns that Bora began to seriously draw and paint with the encouragement of his teachers. He also sculpted, mainly from clay. With a high school friend he opened a first studio and as an autodidact drew and painted portraits, landscapes, and still lifes. In spite of such early artistic interests, following the wish of his parents who wanted to see him acquire a secure and prestigious profession, upon graduating from high school in 1929 Bora enrolled in Belgrade University's law school.² The entire family soon followed him and moved back to Belgrade, residing in Dorćol. While studying law, Bora continued to paint and sculpt. He soon established contacts with professional artists, some of whom had studios in this part of the city, and received instruction from them, notably from Stevan Bodnarov and Ivo Šeremet, who taught him painting, and Svetomir Poček, who helped him master the art of sculpting.³

2 On 10 July 1929, after he graduated from the high school in Niš, Bora Baruh wrote a letter addressed to the Jewish community in Belgrade asking for a stipend that would ease his financial situation and allow him to study philosophy at Belgrade University. In return he promised to place himself at the service of the community (Jewish Historical Museum Belgrade, microfilms from the State Archives Moscow, reel 801422, p. 76). It is possible that due to his parents' pressure he gave up the idea of studying philosophy.

3 On Bodnarov and Šeremet see Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 456, 476; on Poček, see Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 20.

1 “Four *Mahaneh* Portraits”

In 1933, the Belgrade Jewish community enabled Bora to locate his first studio on the premises of the Jewish elementary school in the neighborhood. At that period he also participated in some Yugoslav Zionist youth activities. Thus, in October 1931 his four caricatured portraits of well-known Jewish youth activists—Paja [Pavao] Wertheim, Iva Steindler, Lujo Davičo, and Maks Košicki—appeared in the youth magazine *Hanoar* with the caption “Four *Mahaneh* Portraits” (fig. 4.2).⁴ These portraits are the only evidence of Bora’s involvement with a Jewish youth movement, in this case the socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair. Since they were reproduced among the published reminiscences of this youth movement’s July 1931 summer camp in Gozd, Slovenia, he must have taken part in it.⁵

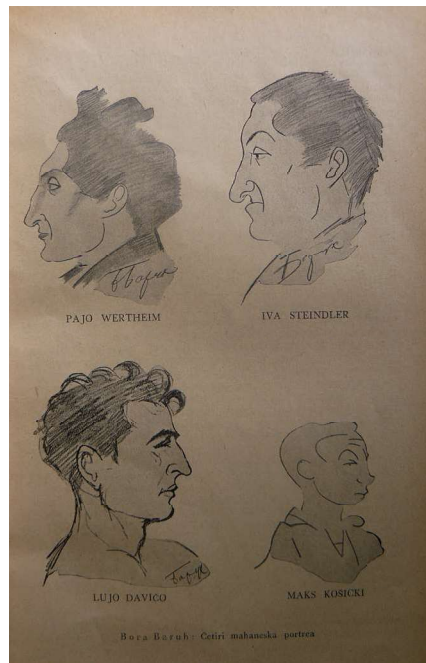


FIGURE 4.2
Bora Baruh, *Four Mahaneh Portraits*, 1931,
whereabouts of the original unknown,
reproduced in *Hanoar* 5, 1–2 (October 1931): 27

- 4 “Četiri mahaneška portreta”; *mahaneh* is the Hebrew word for camp, in this case a summer camp; *Hanoar* 5, nos. 1–2 (Oct. 1931): 27.
- 5 Gozd, a rural settlement and nature resort in the municipality of Kranjska Gora is nowadays known as Gozd Martuljek. On the development of Hashomer Hatzair (the Young Guard) in Europe in general, see Rina Peled, *The ‘New Man’ of the Zionist Revolution: Hashomer Hatzair and Its Roots in Europe* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002), 19–112. For the activities of Hashomer Hatzair and other Jewish youth-movements in Yugoslavia, see *Jewish Youth*

In the same October 1931 issue of *Hanoar* that published Baruh's caricatures, an anonymously authored article "Among Many Chasms" elaborated upon Yugoslav Hashomer Hatzair's credo:

Among many chasms leads the path which we began to follow when we decided to overcome assimilation and achieve the Zionist ideal. This task often seems too big, unattainable for one who does not possess a strong will and assiduous strength. *The serenity of life* for which we are trained in the school, in the family, and in the entire society; *the comfort and tranquility* that our prolonged education should guarantee; *the respect of the society* that surrounds us and which will recognize us only if we will amenably and blindly bow to all of society's lies concerning family, public, sexual, sociological, and cultural life—all these are baits causing our downfall from the heights of the ideal into a bottomless pit of a satiated and sleepy mock-existence. And whoever does not want to be pushed into this pit, society knows how to set him another trap, even more effective: to punish him with social contempt, or even some more severe punishment ...

Among many chasms leads our path. But we do not give in, because before us is the goal: a free Jewish society in Eretz Israel, a brotherly human society in the entire world.⁶

Hashomer Hatzair's summer camps were indeed preparing predominantly urban Jewish youth for a non-conformist life based on physical labor and communal life in an imagined kibbutz society in Palestine. However, although imbued with secular socialist-Zionist idealism (the summer camps' program included numerous lectures and discussions about life in Palestine, learning spoken Hebrew, singing Zionist songs around the campfire, sharing responsibilities in running the camp, etc.) it also brought together youth from the entire territory of Yugoslavia, more affluent Ashkenazic Jews and often working-class Sephardim. It thus simultaneously promoted the idea of Yugoslavism, which was, as shown, officially imposed in the region by the king after his implementation of the 6 January dictatorship. While preparing themselves for outdoor life in the imaginary fields and valleys of the Land of Israel, they were actually

Societies in Yugoslavia, 1919–1941 [catalogue], ed. Milica Mihailović and Vojislava Radovanović [in Serbian and English] (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum, 1995), esp. 27–34; *Jewish Youth Movements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1919–1941*, ed. Zvi Loker [Hebrew with English abstract] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Hitahdut Olei Yugoslavia L'she'avar, 1997).

⁶ "Izmedju mnogih ponora," *Hanoar* 5, nos. 1–2 (Oct. 1931): 1. Emphasized words appear in the original text.

learning to enjoy the beautiful nature that surrounded them: in the case of the Gozd *mahaneh* these were the magnificent Alpine mountains to whose peaks they hiked while walking through the surrounding woods and swimming in the rivers.⁷ Moreover, during the school year in their hometowns, as recalled by one of the movement's members, in their free time they practiced a communal lifestyle organized around a *kvutzah* (they used the Hebrew word for group) in which, aside from widening their knowledge of Jewish history and culture, Zionism, and life in Palestine, they practiced living in a classless society, stressing equality and sharing their private pocket-money.⁸

The individuals Bora Baruh portrayed in his caricatures belonged to this world. In the lower right corner appeared Maks Košicki, from Nes Zionah in Palestine, who as Hashomer Hatzair's emissary (*shaliah*) maintained constant contact between the movement's headquarters in Berlin and the Yugoslav Jewish youth activists.⁹ In contrast to him, Pavao Wertheim, the local Zagreb activist shown in the upper left corner, trod the path from socialist Zionism to communism, the path often taken by Yugoslav Jewish youth due to the deteriorating situation in Europe and wish to fight it back.¹⁰ As will be shown,

7 For Jewish youth movements' influence upon the transformation of middle-class Jewish youth into nature-loving youngsters proud of their outdoor skills and physical strength, see Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 147–74. See also Moshe Zimmermann, "Juden jugendbewegt," in *Aufbruch der Jugend: Deutsche Jugendbewegung zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Verführung* [catalogue], ed. Claudia Selheim and Barbara Stambolis (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2013), 105–12.

8 Teodor Kovač, "Something about Hashomer Hatzair and its 'Ken' [Nest] in Novi Sad," [in Hebrew], in *Jewish Youth Movements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, 71–78.

9 Zvi Loker, "Eretz Israel's Emissaries in the Hashomer Hatzair Movement," in *Jewish Youth Movements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, 112; correspondence in German between Košicki, writing from Hashomer Hatzair's Berlin headquarters to Drago Steiner, an activist from Zagreb, is in the Eventov Archives, file *aleph* 458.

10 Dr Pavao Wertheim (1911–1941), a well-known biologist, was active in the 1930s both in Hashomer Hatzair and in communist circles, editing and publishing articles in *Hanoar* as well as in illegal Croatian communist journals and newspapers. From the outbreak of WWI he was active in recruiting youth into the National Liberation Movement organized by the Communist Party. His activities were discovered and he was killed in a Zagreb prison by the Ustasas; see Tvrtko Švob, "Dr. Pavao Wertheim (1911–1941), sjećanja i podaci o istaknutom biologu," *Novi Omanut* 21 (1997): 2. Lujo Davičo (1910–1942), also appearing in Bora's caricatures, was a ballet instructor in Belgrade. Active in Hashomer Hatzair in the prewar years, he composed revolutionary songs for the movement sung at the summer camps. With the occupation of Belgrade, he escaped to Montenegro and joined the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement. After throwing a bomb into an Italian soldiers' cafeteria killing a number of officers, he was caught by the Italian Fascists, tried, and shot in Podgorica, Montenegro; see Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije, 1941–1945: žrtve genocida*

Bora and all of his siblings developed similarly: while distancing themselves during the late 1930s from their Jewish background, they became increasingly involved in the struggle for social justice and against fascism. Although not visible in Baruh's early canvases, it is possible to argue that while he remained unreceptive to Zionist ideology, such an experience opened up his world and possibly reassured him in his decision to follow his talent. Rather than becoming a successful lawyer, he began to follow his elder brother Joži, a student of philosophy and adherent of the leftist political movement, both of whom apparently angered his father. In 1935, upon losing his job in a Belgrade firm that produced military uniforms, the father, unable to find other work, moved to seek employment in Sarajevo and never reunited with the family.¹¹ By that time the Baruh brothers were increasingly involved with the anti-government movement and were often imprisoned due to their participation in demonstrations organized by the communists.¹²

2 The Early Works

Baruh's first preserved work is a 1932 oil painting showing a still life in the young painter's studio (fig. 4.3). According to Bora's wife, apparently due to the lack of means he painted it on cloth from an old shirt rather than on a canvas.¹³ The painting combines his different worlds: in the center is a sculpture of a nude seated couple, whose entangled legs and joined heads allude to their amorous relationship; to the left of it is a pair of "masculine"- and "feminine"-looking painter's bottles—a dark, taller one and a transparent shorter one—that create a parallel to the sculpture. To the right of the sculpture is an object identified by Belić-Koročkin-Davidović as a candleholder, seemingly alluding to a more traditional Jewish world.¹⁴ In the background another painting is visible that depicts yet another studio interior with an easel and a painting on it, thus creating dual worlds, a painting inside a painting, with a segment of a "real"

i učesnici NOR (Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski muzej Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980), 350. For the involvement of Jewish youth in the prewar Communist Party and their activities, see Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 292–95.

¹¹ Miljković, *Baruh-Bora Baruh*, 5.

¹² Dušan Nedeljković, "Porodica Baruh—porodica revolucionara," in *Porodica Baruh—porodica revolucionara*, ed. Vidosava Nedomački, [catalogue] (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1976), n.p.

¹³ Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 21.

¹⁴ Such candleholders are used with a thick, braided candle during the ceremony of *Havdalah*, marking the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the week.



FIGURE 4.3
Bora Baruh, *Still Life with a Sculpture*, 1932,
oil on cardboard, 36.3 × 51 cm. Private
collection

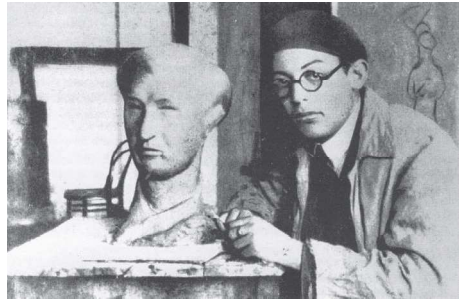


FIGURE 4.4
Bora Baruh in his studio, photograph,
1933. Private collection

window included on the left, opened towards the outer life. Such “layers” that Baruh included in this work refer to his diverse interests and identities at the time—sculpting and painting; Jewish and artistic; secluded in an inner world yet open towards outer reality. Another of his studio paintings of that same year, *Atelier in Solunska St.*, less suggestive in the choice of objects he depicted in the center of the floor—a bucket, a small broom, and a pan—still stresses his love for both sculpting and painting by showing in the background a stand with a sculpted woman’s torso and a portrait hung on the wall. A 1933 photograph of Bora continues this duality, showing him in his studio as a sculptor working on the bust of his artist friend, while a modernist drawing is visible on the wall behind him (fig. 4.4).

That same year Bora, then twenty-two, participated for the first time in the Sixth Autumn Exhibition of the young Belgrade painters presented in the city’s well-known art pavilion on Kalemegdan, supported by the Cvijeta Zuzorić art society. The critics described Baruh’s art as “recalling impressionism” but were still uncertain about his talent.¹⁵ The following year Baruh graduated from law school and, due to the difficult financial situation at home, began to work

¹⁵ Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 21.

as a lawyer's apprentice. This did not influence his artistic work. He moved to his second studio, now in the Jewish community building, and the main subjects of his works became city landscapes, interiors, and still lifes. In 1935 he also experimented with art criticism, as did the brothers Pijade, writing about the art of Leon Koen, the tragic Belgrade Jewish artist discussed earlier who had died the previous year.¹⁶ Baruh's article, published in *Židov*, introduced the commemorative exhibition of Koen's works planned to be held in Belgrade's Cvijeta Zuzorić Salon. While mentioning in the opening lines that the Balkans produced two great artists of Jewish descent—Leon Koen and Julius Pinchas-Pascin—Baruh, as a true painter sensitive to color and its expressive value, went on to analyze several of Koen's masterpieces. Baruh's rich and poetic language reveals his literary talents as well.¹⁷

3 Paris: A Painter and a Revolutionary

Mention of Pascin indicates Baruh's awareness of Paris as the art center. Thus, certainly, the most important event in his life that year was his decision to leave Belgrade and to continue his art education there. Upon receiving a modest stipend from the Belgrade Jewish welfare society Potpora (Support) and a private donor,¹⁸ he arrived to the French metropolis of arts in early 1935 and joined its already established colony of more than twenty young Yugoslav artists.¹⁹ Baruh shared his first studio, situated in Impasse du Rouet in the Montparnasse area, with two Belgrade colleagues, Stevan Bodnarov and Vera Čohadžić, and judging from the reminiscences and letters sent home by some of their studio visitors and friends the atmosphere was bohemian, marked by frequent lively parties.²⁰ Their lifestyle and the art they created reflected in many ways the Montparnasse school which between the two world wars, comprised numerous artists who came to Paris from all over the world.²¹ Like the others in the 1930s, Baruh and his friends also frequented the famous Montparnasse café

16 See Ch. 1, n. 92.

17 Bora Baruh, "Umetnost Leona Koena," *Židov* no. 7 (15 Feb. 1935): 5–6. For Pascin and his Balkan "Orientalism" see Ch. 1, 33.

18 On Potpora and its welfare activities, see Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 118–19, 293 n. 13.

19 M. P., "Pismo iz Pariza: Osamnaest jugoslovenskih slikara i četiri arhitekta izlažu u Parizu," *Politika*, 10 April 1937, p. 7.

20 Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 23; Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 476.

21 See Ch. 1, 32.

La Rotonde or Deux Magots—the well-known intellectual hangout of the Surrealist writers and artists on Boulevard St. Germaine. In order to supplement his stipend, Baruh worked as a waiter in the Latin Quarter, and very soon felt at home in his new surroundings.

A number of Yugoslav artists studied at that time in the studio of André Lhote. As pointed out by Trifunović, this French artist and excellent educator enabled them to combine tradition with modernism, a sensitive interpretation of life with cubist aesthetics.²² As an artist who in 1912 belonged to the Section d'Or group and was close to Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, and Roger de La Fresnaye, when teaching in the 1930s Lhote used his cubist background to revive new realism and bring back the influence of Cézanne. Baruh visited his school, also situated in Montparnasse.²³ Lhote's dualism seemed to appeal to Baruh as he began to combine his own love for color and impressionist brushwork with a more firm, Cézanne-like, structure in his new depictions of Parisian urban scenes and city landscapes.

Another important influence on Baruh's development in Paris was his studies at the Académie Ozenfant. The school was founded in 1932 by Amédée Ozenfant, known since before WWI as a cubist artist who, together with famous architect Le Corbusier, formed the purist movement. After teaching during the 1920s in a free studio together with Fernand Léger, in the mid-1930s Ozenfant opened his own school (in premises designed by Le Corbusier) which called for a much broader interdisciplinary approach that inaugurated Ozenfant's shift towards color theories and their use in architecture.²⁴ In 1936 his Paris school established a branch in London, and it is from its promotion leaflet that we can learn about the school's rich curriculum. It focused primarily on drawing, painting, and sculpture, and each day provided a live model and the master's corrections and instructions. The program also promised additional interdisciplinary lectures by art critics, architects, engravers, poets, and musicians. The leaflet was accompanied by Ozenfant's statement of his doctrine. Some of his postulates are worth quoting, as they must have impressed the young Baruh and influenced his ideological development that eventually led him towards social awareness and the use of art to express it:

²² Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 95–97.

²³ M. K., "Beogradski slikar Bora Baruh izlaže u Ulrichovom salonu," *Novosti*, 23 March 1939, p. 10.

²⁴ William W. Braham, *Modern Color/Modern Architecture: Amédée Ozenfant and the Genealogy of Color in Modern Architecture* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002).

Every man is a combination of a 'man-eternal' and a 'man-temporal'. The modern artist must satisfy them both. It is by satisfying the eternal element that he assures the duration of his works; and by satisfaction of the contemporary man that he is one of his time and useful ...

The characteristics of the contemporary environment, the ends which the modern work of art must attain, are studied in our Academy, by discussion of Psychology, Physiology, Sociology and Economics, so as to oblige the artist to be conscious of his possibilities, privileges and duties.

... to be an artist of one's time it is not sufficient to declare oneself modern. An artist is capable of creating works necessary to his epoch only if he lives fully the life of this time. Too many artists isolate themselves from life, and ignore precisely that which imparts originality to their age.²⁵

Although his connection with Ozenfant is usually only briefly mentioned, such ideas must have been significant for the young Baruh.²⁶ They appealed to him not only from the artistic point of view but also served as guidance for his development, begun already in Yugoslavia as a leftist intellectual confronting the difficult times.

At the time Baruh visited the Académie Ozenfant, its founder was himself going through a problematic period. Ozenfant identified himself with the Left and was active in the French Front Populaire (Popular Front), an alliance of the left-wing parties which included the French Communist Party, the Radical and Socialist Party, and the French Section of the Worker's International. In 1935, when Baruh studied at his Parisian Académie, Ozenfant experienced personal and economic losses. Since 1930 he had been acquainted with Erich Mendelsohn, the well-known German-Jewish architect, for whose Berlin villa he designed unique paintings complementing its architecture. While visiting Germany at that time, he already witnessed Nazi rallies and brutalities. Nevertheless, he, Mendelsohn, and the Dutch architect and graphic designer Hendrik Wijdeveld planned an international art and architecture school, the Mediterranean Academy, for which they acquired land in 1933 on the coast near St Tropez and invited an international group of architects and artists to join them. The project did not develop: soon after Hitler's rise to power Mendelsohn, now a refugee, left Germany for London. Incidentally, about the

²⁵ Ibid., 84.

²⁶ Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 23; see also M. K., "Beogradski slikar Bora Baruh." It is indeed unusual that Baruh turned to Ozenfant's Académie at a time when most Yugoslav artists in Paris mainly studied with Andre Lhote. The reasons for this decision still await further research.

same time fire destroyed the initial project for their Mediterranean Academy in southern France. Finally, the constantly growing economic crisis, the loss of investments, and stagnation of his Paris Académie led Ozenfant to move to London as well. A number of his students—some, like Mendelsohn, fleeing fascism and looking for a shelter—were already there. Still, Ozenfant often returned to France, attending the anti-fascist meetings of the Popular Front and exhibiting his work. It seems that his large allegorical composition *Life* impressed Baruh, as he would use it as a starting point for the series of works, created throughout his artistic career, entitled *Refugees*.²⁷

Aside from studying with Lhote and Ozenfant, Baruh, like many other foreign artists in Paris, learned from visits to museums, galleries, and exhibitions. His early Belgrade impressionist beginnings led him now to explore the art of Pissarro and Sisley while his new interests drew him to the work of Cézanne. Already in 1935, the year of his arrival, he participated in the group exhibitions of the Yugoslav artists, both in Paris (Salon de Tuilleries and Galerie Niveau de Montparnasse) and in Belgrade (Eighth Autumn Exhibition of Belgrade painters and sculptors). In addition, he exhibited together with French artists in Paris, Belgium, and London.²⁸ In that year he also joined the Communist Party and became active in its French and Yugoslav branches.

The works that Baruh exhibited expressed the new stage in his life, his political identity, and artistic development as he began to show an interest in social issues. They depicted cityscapes with smoking factory chimneys and homeless Parisian vagabonds sleeping under the bridges of the Seine (fig. 4.5). The old subjects, such as interiors of his studio and landscapes, were now constructed with Cézanne-like colorful facets. Just as Ozenfant demanded of his students, the turmoil of the time strongly affected Baruh. By 1935 Paris was filled with refugees, many of them German Jews. The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe singled out also Baruh as a Jew, and he felt even further drawn towards the ranks of radical activism.

Aside from Baruh there were a few additional Yugoslav artists of Jewish origin active at that time in France and Paris, such as the earlier mentioned Marko Čelebonović and Rajko Levi from Belgrade,²⁹ Ivan Rein from Zagreb, who will be discussed later, Josip Monsino Levi from Sarajevo, and others. All of them reacted differently to the current situation, but Baruh was the most

27 For Ozenfant's *Life* (1935) see Braham, *Modern Color/Modern Architecture*, 46–48; Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 23. See also Amédée Ozenfant, *Journey through Life: Experiences, Doubts, Certainties, Conclusions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939).

28 Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 131.

29 See Ch. 1, n. 95.

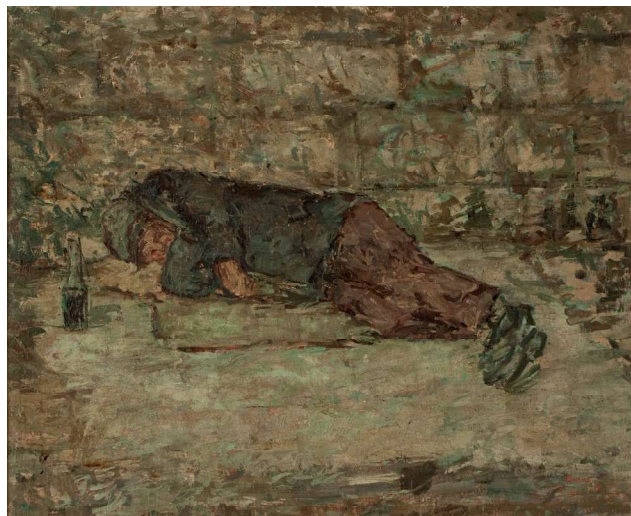


FIGURE 4.5 Bora Baruh, *Parisian Homeless Man*, 1935, oil on canvas, 45 × 54 cm, Inv. No. 032_1347. National Museum in Belgrade

politically active among them. This stand was further strengthened by his romantic relationship with and eventual marriage to a young French woman, Elvira Julia. Before becoming a couple in 1936 they lived in the same building, in Impasse du Rouet, and according to her recollections she thought that he was a German.³⁰ Indeed, his Semitic features and round glasses befitted well the image of German-Jewish intellectual refugees arriving in Paris. Elvira was studying music and the violin, and they met when going to the same demonstrations. Bora introduced himself as a Yugoslav artist; only a year later did she discover that he was also a Jew: it was the Jewish New Year and one of their friends brought them some traditional Sephardic delicacies. The wish to include his non-Jewish French girlfriend into this part of his Jewish identity was further expressed by an announcement that she would have the opportunity to learn more about Jewish (Sephardic) food in his parents' home when he would take her there. "But this did not mean anything to us," continues Elvira with her recollections, "we were indifferent to which religion or nationality one belonged, what was important for us was that one is a human being."³¹

Such a liberal universalistic standpoint in 1936 in many ways reflected French politics. In May of that year the Popular Front, founded in 1934 to confront the growing fascist movement and ease the economic crisis, won the elections

³⁰ Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*

and socialist leader Léon Blum, a French Jew, became the prime minister. It was the first time that a socialist and a Jew held this office. The government, strongly supported by the communists, was entirely comprised of members of the French Section of the Workers' International as well as socialist and radical ministers, and aside from several Jews included three women as well (at the time that women in France did not have the right to vote).³² A number of new labor laws and reforms were passed until August of that year, reflecting the socialist ideology of the new government. Even more important for Baruh must have been the new and revolutionary approaches to visual art and endeavors to bring it down from the "ivory tower" to the masses. Léger's "new realism" calling for incorporating into art images of the industrial technology understood by the workers producing them, the rehabilitation of social concern, or Ozenfant's call to reinvigorate art by drawing its strength from the masses, must all have made a strong impression upon Baruh.³³ The Popular Front government was actively opposed by right-wing politicians and pro-fascist, anti-communist movements who often turned to anti-Semitism in their campaign against Blum and other Jewish ministers. The encounter of Baruh and Elvira, their search for a balance between their different religious and national backgrounds, on the one hand, and their sharing the same political beliefs which helped them overcome those differences, on the other, became part of the world that surrounded them.

Blum's government was also strongly affected by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. Although the entire French Left supported the republican government in Madrid while the Right sided with Franco and nationalist insurgents, Blum's cabinet adopted a policy of non-intervention and together with Britain and a number of other European countries formalized an agreement prohibiting the sending of munitions and volunteers to Spain.³⁴ Nevertheless, numerous volunteers, mainly allied with the leftist and communist parties from more than fifty countries, entered Spain, often illegally, and formed the famous International Brigades to help the republicans and—so they believed—fight European fascism at large. Soon, however, the republicans began to lose ground and more than half a million political refugees crossed the border into France and remained there in refugee camps. Baruh was intensely involved with the Spanish Civil war. In 1937, as a member of the illegal committee to help Yugoslav volunteers cross the Spanish border and

32 Julian T. Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934–38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–13, 42–61.

33 *Ibid.*, 127–28.

34 *Ibid.*, 201–9.

join the International Brigades, he falsified their documents, sought lodgings for them in Paris, and his studio was often the scene of meetings of communist leaders and volunteers. He became the secretary of the Union of Yugoslav Communist Students and used *noms de guerre* such as Mika and Emil.³⁵

In 1937 the Blum government became involved with another grand project, directly related to Baruh's activities: support of the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne.³⁶ In order to get a passport and legally leave the country for Paris, a number of Yugoslav communists used the International Exhibition as a pretext. However, the Yugoslav pavilion, to which the international committee awarded the Grand Prix and a gold medal for its interior design, did not include any significant display of contemporary national art. All major Slovene and Croat—later to be joined also by Serbian—artists decided to boycott the government appointed committee, deeming it unsuitable to choose which artists should represent the country, since it was appointed without any regard for the artist unions and organizations and was found to be undemocratic. The whole incident reflected the tense political situation in Yugoslavia.³⁷ Bora Baruh, expressing his political views, painted instead the building of the Soviet pavilion, which was topped by the majestic socialist-realist 24.5 m stainless steel sculpture created by Vera Mukhina depicting a victorious couple—a male worker and a kolkhoz woman (fig. 4.6).³⁸

In 1937 Baruh moved to another studio with his Belgrade acquaintance, the female painter Ljubica Cuca Sokić who had just arrived in Paris and who would befriend the artist Ivan Rein of Zagreb. The third artist sharing the new premises was the above-mentioned Belgrade Sephardic painter Rajko Levi. It was also in 1937 that Jean-Claude, the son of Baruh and Elvira, was born. Filled with happiness and creative energy, Baruh painted and exhibited in a number of exhibitions; he participated in the exhibition of the newly founded Union of Yugoslav Artists in Paris, showing even fifteen canvases of interiors,

35 Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 27.

36 See Chara Kolokytha, "The Art Press and Visual Culture in Paris during the Great Depression: Cahiers d'art, Minotaure, and Verve," *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 29 (2013): 184–215; Andrew Dudley and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

37 *Večer*, 24 Feb. 1937. The pavilion, beautifully designed, stressed mainly Yugoslavia's tourism, folk heritage, and natural resources; see introductory text in the exhibition catalogue, Josip Siessel, "Jugoslovenski paviljon na međunarodnoj izložbi u Parizu 1937," *Grđevinski vjesnik* 8 (1937): 116–19.

38 For Mukhina's sculpture on top of the Soviet pavilion in Paris, 1937, see http://cccp.narod.ru/graph/foto/plakat/rab_kol3.jpg (last accessed 18 February 2014).

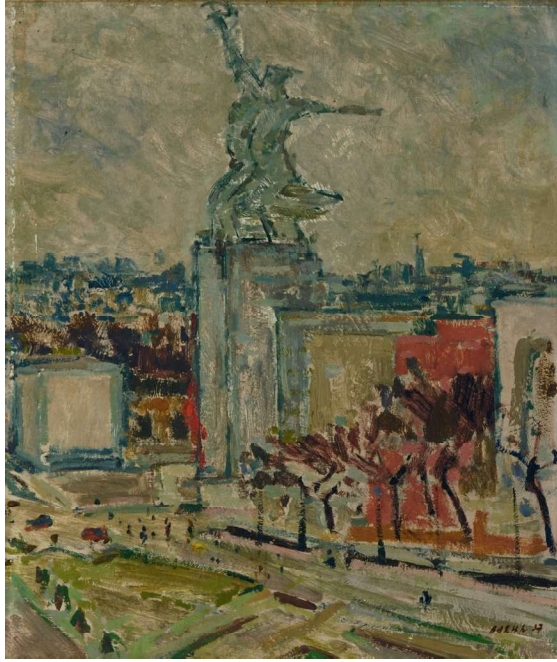


FIGURE 4.6
Bora Baruh, *The Soviet Pavilion*,
1937, oil on canvas, 45 × 38 cm,
JHM Art Collection, Jewish
Historical Museum, Belgrade

Paris cityscapes, still lifes, and portraits.³⁹ He also sent works back to Belgrade and participated in spring and autumn group exhibitions with more socially aware works showing a portrait of a worker and city suburbs. Also among them was a portrait of Elvira and their baby son. The critics, both in Paris and Belgrade, received them well and praised Baruh for his solid work and lyrical warmth.⁴⁰ Somewhat surprisingly, among Baruh's 1937 works there is also a small oil showing Don Quixote in his armor, mounted on a horse (fig. 4.7). The painting clearly resembles Honoré Daumier's 1865–1870 image of the same character, a romantic and simultaneously ironic vision of a fearless hero fighting the windmills.⁴¹ The connection between Baruh and Daumier continued in the following year as well.

39 M. P., "Pismo iz Pariza"; Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, Bora Baruh, 25.

40 For Baruh's works online, see <http://www.rts.rs/upload/storyBoxFileData/2013/03/15/3107962/katalog%20Bora%20Baruh.pdf> (last accessed 10 July 2014).

41 Daumier's *Don Quixote* is presently at the Neue Pinakothek, Munich; see <http://www.wikiart.org/en/honore-daumier/don-quixote-and-sancho-pansa-1870-1> (last accessed 10 July 2014).



FIGURE 4.7
Bora Baruh, *Don Quixote*, 1937, oil on
cardboard, 46.5 × 38 cm, Inv. No. 032_697.
National Museum in Belgrade

4 Painting *Refugees*

It was in 1938 that Baruh began to explore the theme of refugees which would preoccupy him until the end of his artistic career and life. Once again it is possible to compare his painting to Daumier's exploring the same subject (figs. 4.8–4.9). As I have shown elsewhere, Daumier developed the theme of refugees in a number of works—paintings and reliefs—with which he reacted to two traumatic events in his and French people's lives: the 1848 February Revolution which resulted in the death and expulsion of thousands of republicans, and the 1870–71 Franco-Prussian War, which caused numerous people to flee the battle areas.⁴² In his own days Baruh witnessed similar disasters, albeit on a much larger scale. Thus, his *Don Quixote*, a Spanish literary hero, seemed to inaugurate the sense of a fruitless and lost battle. In 1938 many of Baruh's own battles and that of the world he believed in and was fighting for seemed to be lost: Blum's government fell and he was removed from office, the

42 Mirjam Rajner, "The Continuity of 'Jewish Iconography': Images Depicting the Migration from Eastern Europe, Pogroms, and Deportations as Models of Holocaust Art," *Legacy: Journal of the International School for Holocaust Studies* 4 (2011): 19. Daumier's refugees also influenced other artists of Jewish origin reacting to the condition of exile; see Samuel Hirszenberg's *Exile* (also known as *Galut*) and the discussion of it in Richard I. Cohen and Mirjam Rajner, "Invoking Samuel Hirszenberg's Artistic Legacy—Encountering 'Exile,'" *Images* 8 (2015): 46–65.



FIGURE 4.8 Bora Baruh, *Refugees I*, 1938, oil on cardboard, 46 × 55 cm.
City Museum Belgrade



FIGURE 4.9
Honoré Daumier, *The Fugitives*, c. 1848–1852,
oil on paper mounted on canvas, 39.5 ×
68.5 cm, Inv. No. 1949.4
© OSKAR REINHART COLLECTION 'AM
RÖMERHOLZ, WINTERTHUR

Spanish republicans were being badly defeated while the Vatican recognized Franco's Spain, and Hitler annexed Austria. The German-Jewish refugees and liberal Germans who had fled the Nazis in 1933 were now joined by Spanish republicans and Austrian Jews fleeing from their own countries. The reaction to current events was most probably augmented by Bora's own memories of an unsettled childhood: the flight from Belgrade and frequent moving due to WWI. To this one could also add the fact that he, as a Sephardic Jew whose ancestors were themselves expelled from Spain, was still aware of the memory of that tragedy, which was transferred from one generation to the other for centuries and preserved in nostalgic adherence to tradition (even in such a remote way as through the culinary delicacies recalled by Elvira). Refugees as a theme of his art indeed became a choice that most profoundly expressed his current feeling of disappointment and defeat.



FIGURE 4.10
Bora Baruh, *Refugees II*, 1938, oil on
canvas, 37.5 × 45.5 cm. The Elementary
School “Braća Baruh,” Belgrade

In his work, Baruh, as Daumier before him, depicted a column of people—men, women, and children—fleeing through an open landscape towards a hilly horizon. As in the older artist’s work, two characters are mounted on white horses, in Baruh’s painting leading the column. We see them from their backs and understand that the group is following them towards the mountains. In another version, also created in 1938, the riders do not appear and the people, grouped together in an open landscape, now move towards us, while the mountains on the horizon remain behind them (fig. 4.10). These two apparently unfinished oils could thus indeed depict the escape of refugees led by guides on horses over the border (the Pyrenees?) and their arrival in our realm—we face each other, forced to be aware of their tragedy. On the left of the group Baruh singled out a young mother holding a baby. The red upper garment she wears and the way she holds her child recall a portrait of Elvira holding their baby son painted a year earlier.⁴³ Their inclusion indicates Baruh’s identification with the refugees’ destiny.

In 1938 Baruh’s illegal efforts to help volunteers join the fight of the republicans in the Spanish Civil War became known, and he was expelled from France. Elvira and Jean-Claude were left not knowing why he was suddenly ordered to leave, as he kept his activities secret. Upon arrival in Belgrade, Baruh was immediately arrested and spent a month in the Belgrade City Administration’s prison, the notorious Glavnjača, where he was interrogated about his political activities in Paris. Once released, he remained under police surveillance.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he continued to feverishly paint and participated in the Tenth

43 The painting *Elvira and Jean-Clod*, 1937, is in the Baruh’s family collection. For its reproduction see Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 43.

44 For the maltreatment of the Baruh brothers in Glavnjača prison, see Nedeljković, “Porodica Baruh—porodica revolucionara,” n.p.



FIGURE 4.11 Bora Baruh, *Refugees III*, sketch for the composition, 1938, oil on cardboard, 33.3 × 41.2 cm. The Elementary School “Braća Baruh,” Belgrade

Spring Exhibition at the Cvijeta Zuzorić art pavilion with two canvases—a still life and a Parisian cityscape. At that time Baruh painted numerous Belgrade landscapes, seeking inspiration in the city’s park and fortress Kalemegdan, in Zemun, and the city’s outskirts. Towards the end of 1938 he opened his first one-man show at Belgrade’s Engineers House, exhibiting forty paintings, mainly created in Paris. *Židov* published a review of the exhibition stressing that a number of young Jewish and Serbian people came to see his works and admire his artistic abilities. The article also quoted one Serbian critic who maintained that three Belgrade Jews—Baruh, along with Leon Koen and Marko Čelebonović—made one of the “nicest contributions to our culture.”⁴⁵ The catalogue accompanying the exhibition listed all the works while the critics praised the sense of color and detected the influence of Pissarro in some of the Parisian works.

One of the versions of *Refugees* was also displayed in this exhibition (fig. 4.11).⁴⁶ Although it is not entirely certain if this was the one exhibited in the show, the flat, colorful composition reminiscent of Cézanne depicts a group of people—mainly women and children—standing huddled in a motionless

45 “Izložba slika Bore Baruha,” *Židov* no. 45 (11 Nov. 1938): 9.

46 Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 29.

circle outdoors against the background of a hilly landscape. Even though it deals with the same subject of refugees, it offers a different iconographic solution than the two previous ones. Instead of showing the fugitives as a fleeing procession of people in movement, as did Daumier, here Baruh follows a different iconography by showing them as a static, displaced group of people. Such solutions were occasionally used by east European Jewish artists who, from the early twentieth century on, similarly reacted to the expulsion of Jews and the results of the pogroms in Russia.⁴⁷ Probably unaware of such paintings, by 1938 Baruh came face to face with the groups of Czech and Austrian Jewish refugees who, as noted, began to appear in Yugoslavia. As in the case of Spanish refugees, their displacement and human suffering encouraged him to search for a pictorial solution that would express their condition. Three years later, German-Jewish artist Felix Nussbaum, himself by that time a refugee hiding in Belgium, powerfully presented such a tragic human condition in his work *The Storm (Exiles)*.⁴⁸

5 Two Directions: The “Art for Art’s Sake” and the Socially Engaged Art

In November 1938 Elvira, after many arguments with her parents who were reluctant to let her go, came with Jean-Claude to Belgrade to join her husband. They lived with his mother and siblings in the family home in the Dorćol area. By now Baruh expressed himself artistically in two clear directions. One was marked by numerous paintings that, while employing rich impressionist colors and following Cézanne’s expression of form, depicted Parisian and Belgrade cityscapes, the cities’ outskirts and their rivers—the Seine and Danube, still lifes (some even including portraits of Cézanne), and self-portraits and portraits of family members. The other direction, initiated by the *Refugees* series, developed into art with a social and political message that forcefully responded to the current deteriorating situation which would soon profoundly affect his own existence. Among the first group of works showing city panoramas, *View of Belgrade with the River Danube*, 1939 (fig. 4.12) is deserving of special attention. Painted not far from where they lived, it offers a view towards the Dorćol quarter that includes two small reddish domes of the

⁴⁷ Rajner, “The Continuity of Jewish Iconography,” 24–25.

⁴⁸ For Felix Nussbaum’s *The Storm (Exiles)*, 1941, see <https://www.museumsquartier-osnabrueck.de/en/> (last accessed 18 July 2019).



FIGURE 4.12 Bora Baruh, *View of Belgrade with the River Danube*, 1939, oil on canvas, 72 × 100 cm. City Museum Belgrade

Sephardic synagogue Bet Israel (next to the street and a tree) and the mosque with the adjacent minaret behind and to the right of it. The presence of the Jewish and Muslim (mainly Albanian) minority in Serbian Belgrade, addressed in this city view, offers one of the last prewar pictures of the multicultural and interreligious harmony that still marked the city.⁴⁹

In 1938 Baruh's social awareness and the need to express it in his art led him to join the art group called "Life" (*Život*). The group, which had already emerged in 1934 advocated social criticism and included a number of Belgrade leftist artists. Although Baruh continued to paint "unengaged" landscapes and still lifes, the group's aesthetics influenced him and appeared in his later works, mainly drawings created during his imprisonment and the first days of the war.⁵⁰

49 During the WWII the synagogue was destroyed and was never rebuilt. Behind the synagogue (to the right in the painting) is the Jewish Community building to this very day, while the mosque is still in place on the same location.

50 The ideology and aesthetics of the "Life" group of artists strongly influenced the art of Daniel Ozmo, and will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

In March 1939 Baruh held his second one-man show, this time in Zagreb's well-known gallery Ulrich. The exhibition received coverage in Zagreb's Jewish press. It was announced in *Židov* and a lengthy review was published in *Omanut*, a monthly for Jewish culture edited by Hinko Gottlieb. The author of the article stresses Baruh's connection to Cézanne, but sees in his paintings also an individual development which, especially in his landscapes and still lifes, presents a spiritual dimension. Most interesting is the reference to the "large painting *Refugees*" which is defined as a masterpiece:

With brave and decisive color surfaces he achieved a reduction of details which (without regard to the size of the painting) contribute to the monumental feeling. Before this painting we have an emotion of a storm that bends all in front of it, but we feel strong and stable—we go towards it and breathe with full lungs ...⁵¹

Although it is not clear if the author refers here to the now lost final version of the painting, mention of "color surfaces" and "reduction of details" does recall the 1938 version depicting a huddled group of people in an open landscape (fig. 4.11). What is remarkable is the optimism that *Omanut's* reviewer saw in Baruh's painting: the stability and strength that will enable "us" to courageously face the powerful storm. Although by 1939 the threat of anti-Semitism increased rapidly throughout Yugoslavia, until the beginning of the war anti-Jewish declarations and acts were balanced by liberal and democratic forces, seemingly strengthening the optimism and belief in good overpowering evil, as was expressed in the review.⁵²

Although not all the critics were so positive, Baruh's exhibition was well received by Zagreb's art lovers and he was able to sell ten of the forty-two canvases which he exhibited. He divided the handsome sum of money he received between his mother's household and a trip to the southern Adriatic coast with his family. Several photographs and a number of works painted at the beautiful spots between Dubrovnik, Herceg-Novi, and Budva testify to the happy

⁵¹ Hinko Gudac, "Bora Baruh (Salon Ulrich 21 III–4 IV)," *Omanut* 3, no. 3 (Mar. 1939): 55. For the announcement in *Židov* see "Izložba slika Bore Baruha u Zagrebu," *Židov* no. 11 (17 Mar. 1939): 7.

⁵² Cvi Rothmüller's response to the 1930 publication and distribution of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Zagreb is symptomatic for the Jewish stand at that time: "The objective public will know to decide where lies the irresponsibility and dishonorable frivolity, and where honesty and honor. Jewry will not be bewildered even with such documents of human injustice. We believe in the progress of humanity, in the victory of justice"; *Židov* no. 19 (1931), quoted in Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 381.

and relaxed days the three of them experienced. Occasionally the brushstrokes in the works created on the coast reveal Van Gogh's influence. Once back in Belgrade, Baruh participated in an exhibition at the Salon of the Independent artists and at the "Art Fair," an exhibition of paintings organized in the framework of Belgrade's Autumn Fair. Both the Salon of Independent artists and the idea to exhibit art at the fair visited by multitudes, among whom were youths, peasants, and workers, many of them from provinces, was the outcome of the "Life" group's ideas and ideology that strove to bring culture and art to the broad masses of people.

The major change in Baruh's life and art occurred after the mass demonstrations in Belgrade on 14 December 1939 with the participation of more than fifty thousand workers and students. The demonstrations grew out of activities of the Revolutionary Students Organization that gradually developed from the 1920s on. The student organization was initially founded with the aim of improving the material condition of Belgrade University's students, to enable their involvement in decision-making processes concerning tuition fees and exam policy, and to safeguard the university's autonomy. As the political situation deteriorated both in Yugoslavia and in Europe, and with much influence from the illegal Communist Party, the organization adopted a more radical stance and a number of its activities, especially in the 1930s, took on a political character. Uniting with student organizations in other Yugoslav universities and maintaining contact with international student bodies, Belgrade University's student organization was known to be very leftist and its home institution would soon be nicknamed the "Red University." It organized groups to extend help and volunteer for the International Brigades in Spain and staged anti-fascist and anti-government demonstrations. There were frequent clashes with nationalist student groups and especially with the police, whose brutality against the students often ended in cases of imprisonment and death. The 14 December demonstrations were exceptionally violent, with eight students killed.⁵³

In the aftermath of the demonstrations the police began mass arrests of Belgrade's communists. After holding them in the city's Glavnjača prison, a number of them—among them Bora Baruh and his brother Joži—were sent to the Bileća prison camp, a newly founded prison for political opponents, primarily communists, situated in an old Austro-Hungarian military barracks in eastern Herzegovina, on the border with Montenegro. Aside from Baruh, other

53 Milan Radanović, "Revolucionarni studentski pokret na Beogradskom univerzitetu, 1929–1941: antifašizam se kalio u skamijama," <http://www.e-novine.com/drustvo/57978-Antifaizam-kalio-skamijama.html> (last accessed 18 July 2019).

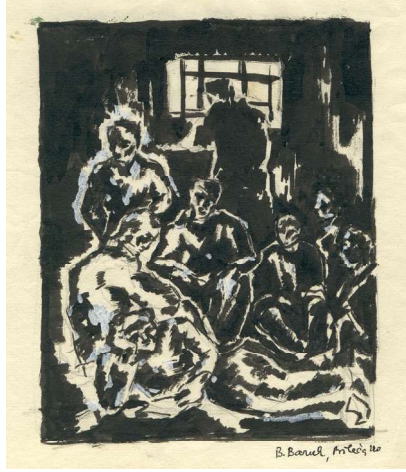


FIGURE 4.13
Bora Baruh, *Prisoners*, 1940, ink and tempera on paper, 20 × 14.8 cm, Inv. No. 1578.II.5/3. Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade

artists among the prisoners were Moša Pijade and Đorđe Andrejević-Kun. They began to use their art to document their surroundings, depicting interiors and portraying other prisoners.⁵⁴ Conditions were not so strict, and soon after the intervention of some visiting parents (in this case Dr Ivan Ribar who came to visit his son Ivo Lola Ribar) the prisoners were allowed to receive packages, books, and art supplies and were thus able to pursue their intellectual activities: to read, write, and create art.⁵⁵ Baruh drew primarily with pencil and pen and diluted India ink. His works were now quick observations, capturing other prisoners, his friends, as they sit next to a table placed underneath a barred window and read, write, stand next to the window, or doze. Sometimes he portrayed a group sitting together in animated discussion, or melancholically sitting and standing behind the bars, looking through the window (fig. 4.13). His style now became more expressive and the black-and-white surfaces of black ink on a white sheet of paper recall woodcuts by German expressionists. Some of these drawings were later reworked into larger oil paintings in which the atmosphere remained similarly expressive and gloomy due to the use of dark colors. In Bileća Baruh also continued with the composition of a column of people, moving towards us, reminiscent of his 1938 *Refugees*, only now they are no longer on the run but captured and led by the armed soldiers in the background (fig. 4.14).

54 Belić-Koročkin-Davidović and Davidović, *Bora Baruh*, 50.

55 On art created in Bileća prison, see *Koncentracioni logor Bileća: 1940* [catalogue] (Bileća: Zavičajni muzej, 1966).



FIGURE 4.14
Bora Baruh, *Prisoners Being Led by the Guards to the Bičica Prison*, 1940, ink and tempera on paper, 17.2 × 20.1 cm, Inv. No. 1576.11.5/1. Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade

Despite his prison experiences, upon his release in May 1940 Baruh continued to live the life of a loyal citizen and a family man. He took part in the Spring Salon at the Cvijet Zuzorić art pavilion, and one of his canvases was even bought by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once again he used the money to spend a relaxing summer with his family on the southern Adriatic coast, in Herzeg-Novi and Igalo. Once again his canvases depict his wife and young son enjoying the tranquility of these beloved summer resorts. Upon their return to Belgrade, Baruh was appointed vice-secretary of the Union of Visual Artists in Serbia and worked hard to prepare the Autumn Salon where, next to *Olive Trees* painted in the summer, he exhibited *An Old Worker*, thus juxtaposing his “French” and “social” interests in art.

This kind of reality changed entirely once again. Immediately after the exhibition ended, officials once again considered Baruh to be a dangerous provocateur and undesirable communist and he was called up as a reservist for military training in the army barracks in Smederevska Palanka. Often treated more as prisoners than reservists, Baruh and other communists were apparently taken off the streets of Belgrade at the time the government signed the Tripartite Pact on 25 March 1941. As noted, two days later a military coup d'état overthrew the government and violent mass demonstrations broke out in Belgrade condemning the pact with the Axis Powers. Baruh was not there. Released from his military exercise, he arrived in Belgrade on 5 April. The following morning Belgrade was bombed and World War II began in Yugoslavia.

Bora Baruh's artistic development, taking place during the event-filled decade preceding the outbreak of WWII in Yugoslavia, was thus characterized by the interaction of his aesthetic interests and social awareness. While enthusiastically immersing himself in universal modernist painting and leaving

behind his ethnicity as a Jew (addressed only briefly during his involvement with the Hashomer Hatzair movement), the tense political situation with its pronounced threat of fascism and anti-Semitism encouraged Baruh to side actively with the Left. Nevertheless, his concern for the plight of the refugees fleeing from Spain and his identification with their destiny, which became one of the central themes of his art on the eve of WWII (and will continue to be, as will be shown, during the war years), reveals his own sense of dislocation and feeling of otherness.

The artist Ivan Rein, whose artistic development is discussed in the following chapter, further intensifies Baruh's experience. As a baptized Croat Jew, he was even more distant from Jewish communal life. His prolonged stay in Paris brought him even closer to contemporary art; yet, the growing threat and danger he felt and experienced sharply influenced his artistic creativity and the self-image as the "other."