



Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years

Matthew Baigell

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Calling attention to the local cultural scene as well as to events taking place in Europe, Matthew Baigell considers the art produced by Jewish artists who were inspired to respond to the murders of their fellow Jews during World War II. Although there were only a few instances of visual documentation of events until the war's later stages, responses to news reports and the very few authentic images received of the atrocities of the Holocaust varied from avoidance and denial to scattered attempts to create direct visual representations. Those artists who chose the latter alternative did so with little support from the Jewish intelligentsia of New York City. Art critics such as the influential Clement Greenberg purposely avoided addressing this issue at all. Jewish artists were left to cope with the events of the war in isolation, without a collective visual memory to deal with the traumas presented by news reports. Baigell discusses how the limited access to images, information and support during the war led to a unique artistic response created not only by the conflict itself, but also by the anti-Semitic social climate of the United States. Surveys taken in the US between 1940 and 1946 demonstrate that the general population considered Jews a greater menace to the welfare of the country than the Germans or the Japanese. Artists featured include Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, Barnett Newman, Abraham Rattner, Mark Rothko, and Max Weber.

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