

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 3, 2017

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Largest single monetary gift to acquire art in UC Berkeley history brings work of major 20th century artist to campus

Taube Philanthropies' \$10.1 million gift allows The Magnes to acquire Arthur Szyk collection

BERKELEY -- The extensive body of work of an artist and illustrator whose subjects spanned some of the most profound events of the 20th century will be available to the world in a public institution for the first time, thanks to a \$10.1 million gift from Bay Area-based **Taube Philanthropies** to **The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley**. The Taube grant is the largest single monetary gift to acquire art in the history of the campus.

This gift provides students, scholars, and the public access to the most significant collection of works by Arthur Szyk, a Polish Jewish artist and political caricaturist who ultimately settled in the United States in 1940. Szyk used motifs drawn from the Bible, history, politics, and culture to pair extraordinary craftsmanship with insightful commentary on a diverse range of subjects including Judaism, the founding of the State of Israel, the American War of Independence, World War II, and the Holocaust.

Taube Philanthropies' \$10.1 million gift to acquire the Szyk collection is a continuation of its support for UC Berkeley in making exemplary Jewish art and culture accessible to wider audiences. In 2010, support by the foundation through a \$250,000 grant helped ensure the transfer of the 15,000-item collection formerly known as the Judah L. Magnes Museum to its current home at the university, where it has thrived as The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life. The new gift is also the largest single monetary gift in the area of Jewish studies in the history of the university.

The latest gift, the voluminous Szyk collection, now known as the **Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection**, is moving from a private owner to a world-class university, exposing new generations to a major artist whose work is drawing significant interest in the art world, decades after his death. The Magnes — which holds the third-largest Jewish museum collection in the U.S., and the only one of such size in the world housed at a research university — is particularly well suited to study and showcase Szyk's work.

"Arthur Szyk's unique contributions to contemporary art and political illustration have not yet been recognized to the extent his work deserves," said **Tad Taube, chairman of Taube**

Philanthropies. “With our shared Polish Jewish heritage, and a relationship my parents developed with Szyk upon first arriving in the United States from Poland in the early 1940s, it is significant to me to ensure that Szyk’s remarkable works are available to today’s and future generations. Through our philanthropic activities at Taube Philanthropies, we hope to create entrepreneurial opportunities. The elevation of Szyk’s diverse, intricate portrayals of European, American and Jewish history, and anti-Nazi political propaganda, in the superb academic setting of UC Berkeley provides an ideal venue for Szyk’s monumental collection.”

“Arthur Szyk operated simultaneously in many countries, cultures, and languages, and he was a refugee for a good part of his life,” said **Francesco Spagnolo, curator of The Magnes Collection.** “The Magnes is committed to exploring and documenting the cultures of Jews in the global diaspora, and this collection furthers that goal. Our curatorial task — and the academic task of the larger Berkeley community — is to thoroughly examine every aspect of Szyk’s work and place it in proper context.”

Added **UC Berkeley Helen Fawcett Professor of History Tom Laqueur,** “It’s really pretty rare for a single institution to have, essentially, the entire corpus of an important artist’s work, in addition to a vast trove of documentary material — which is to say his diaries, financial records, commissions. Arthur Szyk was an important political artist as well as an important Jewish artist who captured and commented on significant world events in his art.”

Born into a middle-class Polish Jewish family in 1894, Szyk lived a life framed by two world wars, the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, and the birth of the State of Israel, before his death in 1951. Much of his work centered around these historical experiences. Szyk was raised in Poland, educated in France, traveled to the Middle East and North Africa, and lived in London and Canada before moving to New York in 1940, where he met Taube’s family.

While much of Szyk’s art is stylistically reminiscent of medieval and Renaissance traditions, many of his works reflect the social and political unease that gripped the world during his lifetime. A harsh critic of Hitler and Nazi totalitarianism, a number of his most famous pieces portray what Szyk called the “madness” of his times.

“Coming under the stewardship of The Magnes as the Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection will mean greater access for the general public to Szyk’s work, opening the door to academic research and scholarship by individuals at Berkeley and beyond, as well as collaborative partnerships,” said **George Breslauer, UC Berkeley’s former Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost who now serves as director of The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life.**

The newly acquired collection represents a range of Szyk’s artistic activities, including many of his most valuable works. They include 450 artworks, comprising paintings, drawings, and sketches from across the artist’s lifespan. Accompanying Szyk’s artwork in the collection is a wealth of documents, including books, newspapers, magazines, and other publications that featured the artist’s work.

These partnerships include a portion of the collection being sent on loan to the New York Historical Society for a major exhibition opening in September, potential international museum collaborations, and cooperation with the Digital Humanities initiatives at UC Berkeley.

RESOURCES:

Select high-resolution images from the Taube Family Arthur Szyk Collection, at The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley, are available for the media's use [and can be downloaded via this online album](#). Complete caption information is included [in an accompanying document in the album](#).

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The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life was established in 2010 following the transfer of the [Judah L. Magnes Museum](#) to the [University of California, Berkeley](#). Its remarkably diverse archive, library and museum [holdings](#) include art, objects, texts, music, and historical documents about the Jews in the global diaspora and the American West. As one of the world's preeminent Jewish collections, and the only one of this size in a research university worldwide, it displays exhibitions, creates innovative programming, and provides highly accessible resources to both [researchers](#) and the [general public](#). magnes.berkeley.edu

Taube Philanthropies was established in 1981 by its founder and chairman, Tad Taube. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, the foundation makes philanthropic investments in Jewish, civic, and cultural life primarily in the Bay Area, Poland, and Israel. Its grant making programs support institution-building, scholarship, heritage preservation, arts and culture, and education. Taube Philanthropies is committed to collaborative grant making for greater charitable impact and actively partners with other philanthropic organizations and individuals. taubephilanthropies.org