

The Art Museum for Everyone

Ben Uri **PRESS RELEASE**

12th January to 24th April 2011

**The Land of Light and Promise
50 Years Painting Jerusalem and Beyond
Ludwig Blum (1891–1974)**



Jerusalem, Inside the Walls, 1926 Oil on canvas, 81 x 140 cm, Signed and dated, Stern family collection

For the first time since being exhibited in London at the Royal Academy and the Fine Art Society in 1938, Ben Uri brings the art of Ludwig Blum to the United Kingdom for his first European Museum survey.

The exhibition traces the career of the Czech born Israeli topographical artist Ludwig Blum, who immigrated to Palestine in 1923 and settled in Jerusalem at the age of 32. He was classically trained; first as a young talent under David Khon in Vienna and then, after serving in the First World War, from 1919 at the Academy of Fine Art in Prague.

This exhibition of some 35 works traces Blum's consistent representation of 'the real' over half a century of painting the Holy Land and beyond. Jerusalem was 'his' city and he never ceased to find inspiration in its architecture, holy places, markets, peoples and the extraordinary changes of light and shadow, which bathes its buildings each day of each season.

Blum's European persona and academic practice never changed in the heat and heart of this very different continent. He is recognised not only as a distinguished artist of the classic mould but also as the finest topographical artist of his time working in the Levant. His was a unique period in history being the 25 years before and after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. He travelled extensively and often across borders to Iran and Iraq, and his work chronicles in realistic and archival fashion the characteristics of different societies during those times.

The exhibition brings together a remarkable body of Blum's work not seen in London since he exhibited at the Wertheim Gallery in 1933, Ben Uri, The Fine Art Society and The Royal Academy in 1938. Included are ten remarkable views of Jerusalem, its landscape and peoples, providing a unique historical glimpse of this majestic and holy city over half a century alongside rare views of building sites during the construction of Tel Aviv. Other subjects covered from his travels show scenes in Iran and Iraq in 1930, pioneering Kibbutzim settlements Kiryat Anavim west of Jerusalem from 1932 and Degania on the Sea of Galilee from 1934, the 1948 War of Independence, farming and new industrial developments contrasting with city life in the '50s and beyond.

Blum's style and palette, his concerns with space and colour, his swift brushwork and sophisticated conveying of the effects of light bring him close to the landscapes of Palestine by London based American painter John Singer Sargent.

The same can be said when comparing Blum's 1920s panoramas of Jerusalem with those of British artist David Bomberg, who similarly arrived in Jerusalem in May 1923 and painted his now celebrated series between 1923 and 1927. Given that Blum was in London in the early twenties before immigrating to Palestine, they were both Europeans living and painting in a new and completely different city and climate, and they painted from similar viewpoints and in similar styles, it is perfectly likely they knew each other.

Blum's work is immediately recognisable whether portrait or still life, landscapes of Nazareth or Jerusalem, Amsterdam or Rome, early or late. He maintained and refined his classic and distinctive manner throughout his long and distinguished career.

Ben Uri is proud to provide the opportunity to London and European audiences to discover the majesty of Blum's practice and travel with him on an extraordinary topographical journey some 73 years after his works were last seen here.

“Blum is an accomplished painter with a sweeping Sargentesque style ... His power of conveying the sense of glare and heat is astonishing.” *The Scotsman*, 1933

“When everything changes (and not always for the best) Blum’s style is an exceptional phenomenon ... almost a rare ‘nature reserve’ – the academic naturalist style, a kind of last century version, par excellence.” Art historian and critic Avraham Rosen, 1960s

Exhibition curator: Dr. Dalia Manor



Camels in the Judean Desert, 1943, Oil on canvas , 80 x 130 cm, Signed and dated ,Private collection



Tel Aviv Promenade, 1946, Oil on canvas, 51 x 74 cm, Signed, titled and dated, Private collection



Jerusalem Snow, 1927, Oil on canvas, 41 x 61 cm, Signed, titled and dated, Private collection

For further information and a complete range of images please contact anna@benuri.org.uk

12 January – 24 April 2011

Open Mon–Thurs 10–5.30pm; Friday 10–3.30pm; Sunday 12–4pm

Adults £5; Concessions £4; Museum friends, Art Fund members and visitors 16 and under are Free

Further Notes for Editors:

The historical context is also interesting as the immigrant artists from Europe, particularly Germany and Austria to Palestine in the first decade of the century tended to be more established and congregated or taught with Boris Schatz at the Bezalel School of Art and Crafts which he founded in Jerusalem in 1906.

By contrast, during the first half of the twenties a wave of younger, emerging émigré artists arrived in Israel, amongst them Blum. Although of the same generation, their backgrounds were diverse. In 1919 the artist Pinchas Litvinovski (age 26) arrived from the Ukraine. Mordecai Levanon (20) arrived in Jerusalem in 1921 from Transylvania. 1922 saw Reuven Rubin (29) from Romania and Hermann Struck (36) from Berlin return and settle. In the same year as Blum's arrival, in 1923, Ukrainian painter Yosef Zaritsky (32) and Polish sculptor Zeev Ben-Zvi (33) arrived and 1924 saw artist Chaim Glicksberg (20)

arrive from Moscow and Leopold Krakauer (34) from Vienna. This was the first generation that embraced and developed European style modernism in the Middle East.

There was then (as could be argued now) a cultural divide between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Blum, living in and wholly engaged with Jerusalem, was one of the few from his peer group who chose not to ally himself with the modernist movements developing around Tel Aviv or later within the artist colonies in Safed founded in 1948 or Ein Hod founded by the Romanian Dada artist Marcel Janco in 1953.

Blum remained true to his convictions and was comfortable being aloof and outside of the new mainstream of modernism that evolved through the engagement with the Jewish School of the L'Ecole de Paris in the thirties and Social Realism and the New Horizons Movements that followed.

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