

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

ISKOWITZ, Gershon

b. 1921

Born at Kielce near Warsaw, Poland, the son of a writer, and one of four children, he wanted to become a painter when he was only six. At 16 (1937) he entered The Warsaw Academy of Artists and a year later he was accepted by the Cracaw Academy of Fine Arts.¹ His studies were ended when the Nazi army overran Poland in 1939.² Iskowitz and his brothers were placed in forced labour gangs and by 1942 his whole family was living in a ghetto at Kielce. Then his father, mother, one brother, and sister were taken away for "resettlement" and he never saw them again (they were gassed to death at Treblinka). In 1943 he and his remaining brother were shipped in cattle-cars to Auschwitz where his brother was killed. Iskowitz survived and was transferred to the camps of Dachau, Mjdanek and just before the camp was liberated by the American army at Buchenwald.³ He fled a work party as it was beyond the wire fence and was shot by a guard as he took cover in the nearby bush. The bullet struck him in the leg and he was left for dead. He was so emaciated that when his body struck the ground he fractured his hip. Later that day his fellow prisoners managed to bring him back to the camp and put him in bed.⁴ Then the Americans arrived. After a long period in hospital Iskowitz recovered and went on to study at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts where he won a scholarship in 1948 (for a years study in France and Italy).⁵ He arrived in Canada in 1949 and settled in Toronto where he has established himself as an artist. While in the concentration camps he made sketches on brown wrapping paper and hid them from sight. Describing this period Kildare Dobbs⁶ noted, "This painter had none of that self-defeating pride that answers evil with silence; as the minstrel-boy in the song tore out the strings of his harp that they might not sound in slavery, Iskowitz made himself a witness." These drawings were reproduced in *Saturday Night* with Dobbs' article.⁷ Iskowitz has exhibited his paintings in one man shows at the following galleries, Hamilton Art Gallery (1957); Vancouver Art Gallery (1957); Greenwich Gallery, Tor., (1958); The Hayter Gallery, Tor., (1957, 1958); The Here & Now Gallery, Tor., (1960, 1961); Dorothy Cameron Gallery, Tor., (1963); and at the International Cinema, Tor., (1963) when Luba Eleen⁸ noted, "Gershon Iskowitz formed his attachment