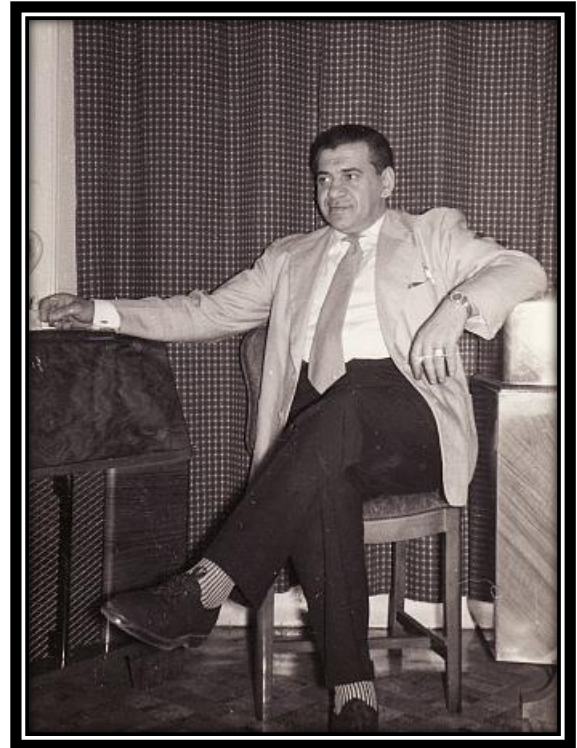


Mark Rybak

Two artistic brothers Leibo.



Jehuda Leibo (1904-1958)



Israel "Henry" Leibo (1912-1987)

Pictures can sometimes tell the story. Just looking at the above pictures we can say that the brothers have very different characters, even that they lived in very different countries – Jehuda in a closed society of the USSR and Israel in a free western country (England).

Both brothers were born in Tallinn. Their father – Elen (or Elias) Leibo was from Narva, mother Bella Abramson - from Tallinn. Elen Leibo kept a watches and jewelry store at Viru 23 in Tallinn.



The advertisement of the E. Leibo shop. 1911.

The brothers were preceded by two girls – Meri (Anna) (1896-1975) and Frieda (1901-1988). One brother – Pinchas - died at the age of three (1897-1900).

1. Jehuda Leibo (Leiba).

“The best doctor among sculptors & the best sculptor among doctors”.



Jehuda graduated from the Revel (Tallinn) Russian male gymnasium in 1922. He was well educated, knew foreign languages, knew and loved Russian literature. But art was his passion. He took sculpture classes¹ with the famous Dora Gordine¹, and, after gymnasium graduation, went to Berlin to study sculpture in the Albert Reimann School of Art and Design. But already the next year he left the school and entered the Tartu

¹ See the story about Dora Gordine here http://eja.pri.ee/Culture/Gordin%20Dora_en.html

University to study medicine. We can only guess what was the reason for that and whether he did so on his own will or under pressure from the family. In any case, his love for arts and especially for sculpturing remained forever.

Jehuda was a very romantic person. We saw a thick pile of love letters from his student years in Tartu to a lady in Tallinn. Written in a high-spirited style, almost every day, they are full of passion and admiration. Eventually, however, the lady married another person. The letters continued for some time and then stopped. What a tragedy it probably was for a young, romantic medical student!

Still he found time for the serious study of medicine. Jehuda (or "Jules" as everyone called him in those years) was a good student. He was also a member of the Jewish student corporation „Limuvia“.



5.12.1924. "Jules" (in the middle) with fellow students (names on the back of the picture: Hermann Kienast, Foma Akimov, Arseni Dubkovski, Valentina Oberpahl, Helmi Peterson).



4.10.1924. Hermann and Friedrich Kienast, "Jules" Leibo and Blanda Hirschfeld.

In 1929 Jehuda graduated from the Tartu University medical department and became a doctor. He worked as a therapist practitioner in Tallinn. 1930-1940 he was a member of the Jewish doctors association in Tallinn.

After graduation from the Tartu University, he took sculpture lessons in the famous art school Pallas in Tartu.

But already in 1927 Jehuda participated for the first time in the art exhibition of Estonian artists. Since then, practically every year his works were shown at the art exhibitions. Some known works (mostly bronze sculptures) made before the war:

- The head (1927)
- Portrait of dr Kallas (1927)
- The head (1928)
- Portrait of M. Martna (1930)
- Portrait of Prof. L. Puusepp (1930) and relief for the medal (1931)
- Portrait of Head of State K. Päts (1932)
- Child's head (1933)
- Portrait of actor A. Lauter (1933)
- The Boxer (1935)
- Portrait of B.V. (1936)
- Portrait of J.S. (1936)
- Portrait of Prof. Dubnov (1937)
- Portrait of painter A. Jansen (1937)
- Portrait of the poet I. Severjanin (1939)
- Portrait of Prof Blumenthal (1939)

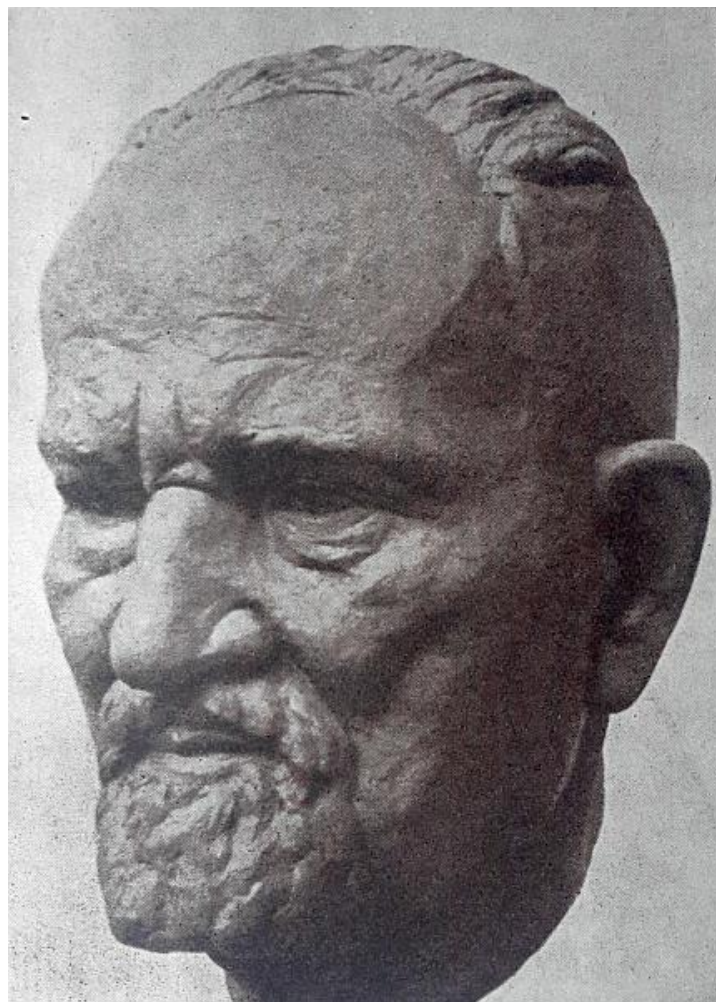
First (and may be the best) works of Jehuda Leibo.



Child's head. Bronze. The picture from "Kunsti album III". Tallinn, 1937



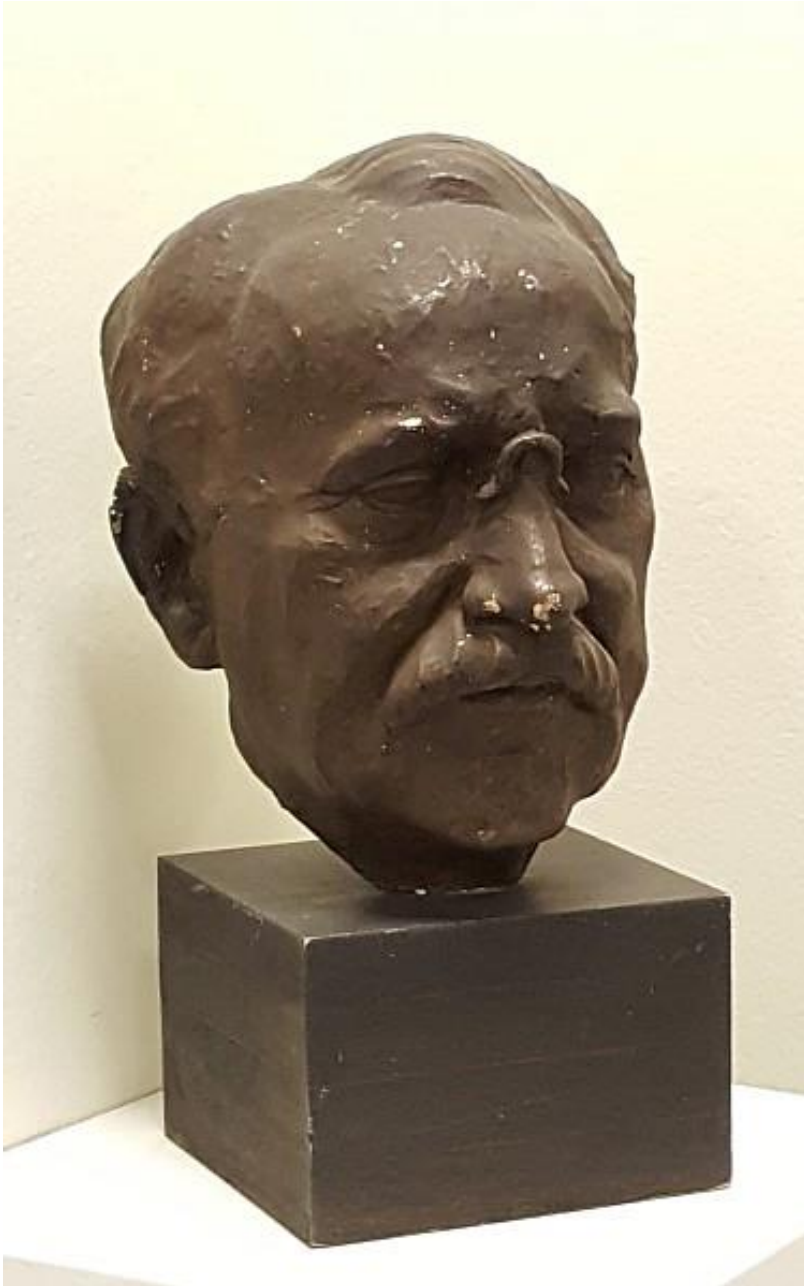
Portrait of the politician and journalist M. Martna
The picture from "Kunsti album II" - 1935



Portrait of the historian and writer Prof. Simon Dubnov
The picture from "Kunsti album IV" 1938



**Child's head. 1933 (?)
Art Museum of Estonia**



**Prof. Ludvig Puusepp (1930), gypsum.
The Estonian Health Care Museum**



**Portraits of B.V. and J.S. (1936)
Tartu Art Museum**

The tabloid „Uudisleht“ („The Newspaper“) published an article titled „Doctor modeled the Head of State“ (27.3.1933, N47). Most of the article was about Dr J. Leibo. Here it is translated from Estonian:

„Undoubtedly, the most unconventional doctor in Tallinn is doctor J. Leibo, who, along with his medical practice, is eagerly involved with sculpture.

Doctor has repeatedly participated in art exhibitions with his works and received good reviews. He has also modeled several of our most important personalities, showing that he was quite successful in this area.

We found the doctor and questioned him, revealing some interesting things about his favorite field of sculpture.

Doctor and sculptor in one person is not a day-to-day experience. Therefore, the author of these lines rushed to Viru Street, Dr. Leibo's apartment, with the aim of hearing something interesting about the doctor's close bonds with sculpture.

I was greeted by a young gentleman less than thirty years old. Doctor welcomed me hospitably, and after expressing the reason for my visit, the thread of speech started to turn around art issues.

"In fact, I am half a doctor, half a sculptor," the doctor smiles. As it turns out, my chat interlocutor is very interested in both areas. Overall, the doctor's close relatives are with medical inclinations. For example, there are now six doctors there!

And all are interested in art. Interest in sculpture awakened in dr. Leibo already in childhood. Being particularly interested in Tolstoy and Napoleon, he was already modeling both major figures of history at the age of seven. There were, of course, their pictures for the original. And the boy was sitting for hours and modeled until he finally reached the point: both the portraits of Tolstoy and Napoleon were completed by the hands of the child. Both works are still in his house.

Later, as a schoolboy, Doctor studied sculpture with the well-known female sculptor Dora Gordine, who was already known at that time in Tallinn. Later Dora made a long successful artistic trip to India, and currently she is living and working in artists Mecca - Paris.

Upon graduating from high school, the young person did not go to university to study medicine, but traveled to Berlin to follow up with his beloved art. In Berlin, he studied with the famous masters Kolbe,



Rodin and Isenstein. The daughter of the famous professor Einstein was also studying at the Art Academy at that time. Through her he got acquainted with the old scientist himself.²

Doctor Leibo has very good memories of Einstein, who's house he was visiting quite often. Here, Dr. Leibo also saw how enthusiastic was the man about his work. Day by day sat prof. Einstein in his tiny cabinet, which was literally filled with mathematical books³ from floor to ceiling. Only rarely the scientist was seen at the social gatherings.

After Berlin, the sculptor traveled back to his homeland and began to study medicine in Tartu. After graduating from the university, a young doctor has been practicing for many years now in two areas at once - medicine and art. Of course, the first one was more profitable, because - "who still needs artwork nowadays" as the doctor-sculptor himself said.

Working in Tallinn, Dr. Leibo has been modeling many of our well-known personalities. He made bronze portraits of the Head of State Päts, Mihkel Martna, Puusepp, col. Grünberg, etc.

The Head of State Päts was modeled by the sculptor last summer. The modeling took place at Head of State estate in Kose, and lasted for 3 weeks. Although the honorable Head of State is already in respectable age, he often modeled for 2-3 hours without interruption, without revealing any signs of tiredness or fatigue. The Head of State was a very diligent and attentive model, and the sculptor had the real pleasure of working on modeling such a person.



With the honorable Professor Puusepp doctor worked in Tallinn as well, using professors' rare visits to the capital.

Doctor tells about his artistic creation, that he is trying to model a particular spiritual person. He looks at his portraits through spiritual prism.

We will give readers here two examples of dr. Leibo works - the portraits of Head of State Päts and M. Martna.⁴

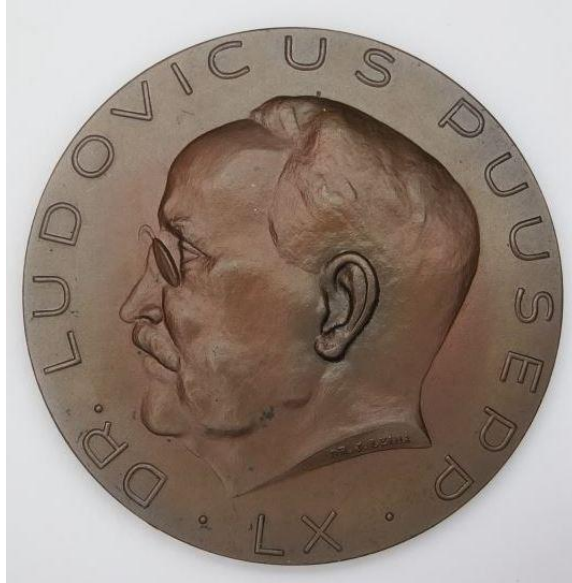
Talking about his foreign studies, the doctor notes, by the way, that in

Portrait of Head of State K. Päts. Berlin he also became acquainted with the well-known German writer Gerhard Hauptmann who was a passionate sculptor. An old writer has also a good name in Germany as an artist."

² Albert Einstein did not have a grownup daughter. His step-daughter Margo really was a sculptor. But according to the Einstein Encyclopedia by Alice Calaprice, Daniel Kennefick, Robert Schulmann, p.64, Margo was studying sculpture at Columbia University in the 1930s and not in Berlin in the 1920s. [M.R.]

³ Probably books of physics, not mathematics [M.R.]

⁴ The portrait of M. Martna can be seen above. The very bad quality picture from the newspaper of the portrait of K. Päts is given here as „better than nothing“ [M.R.]



J. Leibo. Medal to 60th Jubilee of Dr L. Puusepp (1935)

Since April 1941 Jehuda was the plastic anatomy teacher in the State Applied Art school.

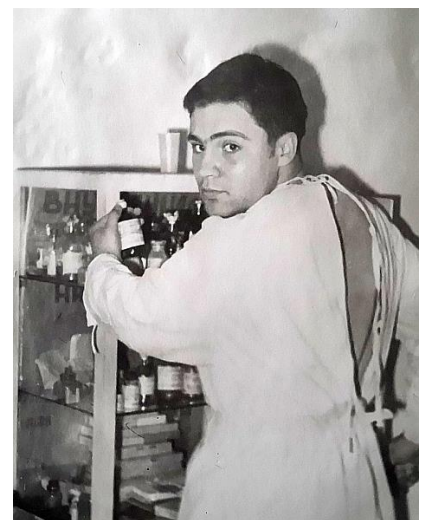
In June 1941 he evacuated to Tatarstan and worked as a head of the hospital in Ksõl-Jul. Since April 1943 was mobilized to Soviet Army and worked as a therapy division assistant head in the field hospital.

After the war Jehuda worked as a physician in the I Tallinn Polyclinic, later in the internal medicine division of the II Tallinn Hospital. It looks that because of the “Doctors’ Plot” of Stalin he lost his job and worked as a doctor in “Estonia” theater till the end of his life.

At the same time he continued to work as a plastic anatomy teacher in the Applied Arts institute in Tallinn.

In 1940 Jehuda married Johanna Köpp.

During the war Jehuda had lasting relationship with much younger Maria Dolgova. Their son Vitaly was born in February 1945. Next year they registered their marriage,



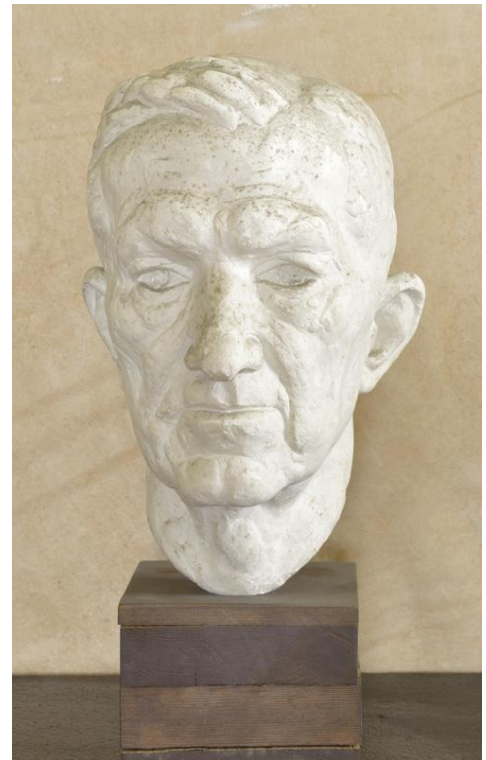
Vitaly Leibo as a medical student

but it can't be called a happy one. When Jehuda died (in 1958) Vitaly was only 13 years old. The colleague of Jehuda – Leida Tölpt took care of the boy. Vitaly (1945-2010) became a doctor like his father, was a good sportsman and also had some artistic talent. Jehuda proudly showed his son works to colleagues in the Art school.

After the war, at times of the Soviet compulsory „socialist realism“, the works of Jehuda became less interesting. He worked mainly as a doctor, not a sculptor. Here are some of his last works:



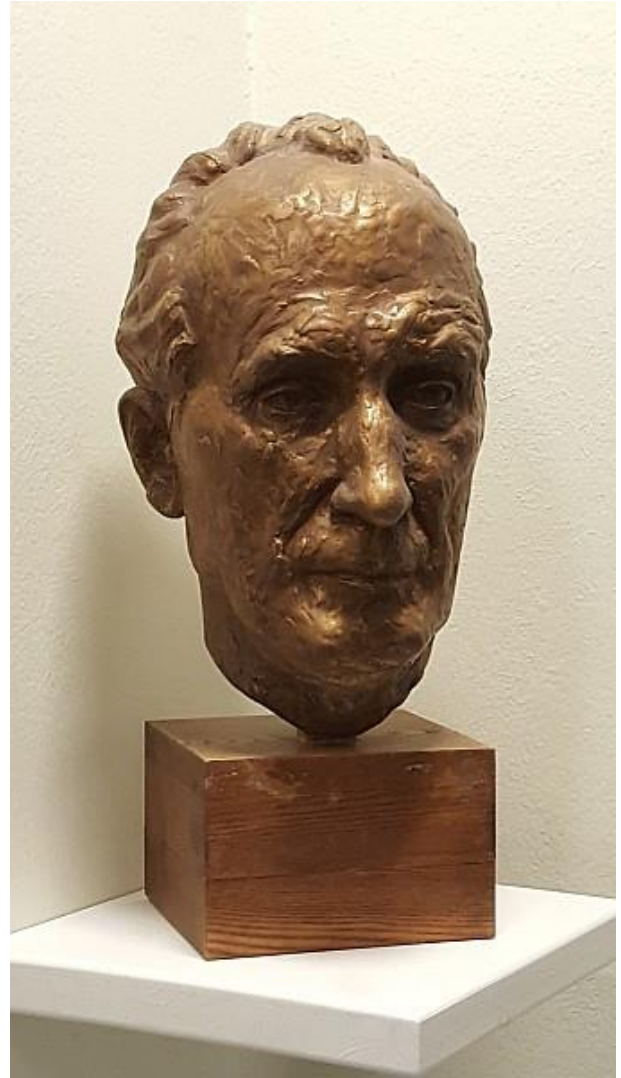
Modeling Minister Jüri Nuut.



**Jüri Nuut, Minister. 1946.
Art museum of Estonia.**



**Maria Leibo (Dolgova) portrait. 1950-1955. Gypsum.
Art Museum of Estonia.**



Dr L. Mardna. 1955. The Estonian Health Care museum.

2. Israel (“Henry”) Leibo.

Why “Henry”? The daughter of Israel Leibo Susan Ellis (Leibo) writes: *“They married in Russel square registry office where the soldiers would marry before deployment. My mother’s family did not attend this marriage due to them being roman catholic, in their eyes she was marrying a Jewish man from the ghetto which they did not approve of. In due course time they started to like him. My Father and Mothers witnesses during their wedding were a tramp from Russel square who was an ex professor (He lost everything in a fire, including family) and the park keeper, this is how my father got his name Henry, they said he looked like a Henry”.*

For some unknown (to me) reason, there is almost no public information about Israel Leibo – no articles about him and his work, no catalogues from the museums – nothing... I am very grateful to Israel’s daughter Susan Ellis (Leibo) for her help and copies of his paintings and the two articles. One is written by Dr. Ernst Heineman, the director of the Gallery of Modern art, Brussels and another (in Hebrew) is written by the Yosef Galili in 1976. Both articles contain some wrong information, e.g. the sculptures made by Jeguda Leibo are attributed to his brother Israel and so on. But, as they are almost the single source of information, I will give here the translation of the Hebrew article. Yosef Galili went to London to meet Israel Leibo. The article is biased – the Jewish theme and the leftist views of Israel Leibo were obviously close to the heart of the author.

The obvious nonsense is deleted and replaced by “...” (like description of the sculptures made by Israel Leibo including portraits of ballet dancers Fokin and **Shaljapin(!)**...).

Portrait of an artist as an "eternal Jew"

A meeting with a painter Israel Leibo.

By Yosef Galili.

“Israel Leibo was born in 1912 in Tallinn, Estonia. At the age of 8 he began painting. As did his friend and mentor Marc Chagall, he carried with him, for most of his life, the memories of the ghetto.”⁵ These were childhood experiences, engraved deep into the soul of the Jewish child. His educated parents gave him a strong education and a connection to Zion, a connection that accompanied him through countries and continents.

The parents, who dealt with the art of goldsmithing wanted Israel to be a doctor like the rest of his brothers and sisters. His brother Jehuda was a surgeon. His sister Miriam was a doctor and a well-known pianist. A second sister is a schoolteacher.

Israel studied medicine at Tartu University in Estonia. After two years he abandoned his studies and became addicted to his heart's inclination - painting. In his free time, he played the violin. At 18 he left Estonia. He traveled to Scandinavian countries where he had an exhibition of his works. In the late 20s he arrived to Berlin. He studied painting for a year at the Reiman School under the guidance of Prof. Max Lieberman. In 1932 he traveled to Paris. He joined the Russian-Jewish group, which included Soutine, Chagall, Kisling, Liechtenstein, Rybak, and Manet-Katz. During this period his ties with his friend and mentor Marc Chagall strengthened.”⁶



Israel visiting his mother Bella shortly before her death in 1965.

⁵ Estonia became independent in 1918 when Israel was 6 years old. Before that it was part of Russian empire, but outside of Pale of Settlement were most of the Jews were concentrated. There were no “shtettles” and no “ghettos” as in case of Marc Shagall. [M.R.]

⁶ Susan Kennet (Leibo) writes: “You may also find interesting that my father lived with Picasso when he was 19 maybe 20 in Paris with his wife. Then when Picasso fell ill he sent my father to live with Marc Chagall. It was to guide him through his last years of his art work.”

The Russian group in Paris founded the Cubist school in those days. Jewish artists in this school of thought immortalized the Jewish ghetto that they had left behind in Eastern Europe. Soutine was the spiritual leader of this group: "We were all influenced by his vitality and creative power".

Israel Leibo presented a series of exhibitions in Paris. His pride as an artist was, when the Petit Gallery in Paris acquired a painting from his exhibition. This painting shows a Jewish tailor in the ghetto. It is still displayed in the gallery. Starting in 1935, he had exhibitions in the capitals of the world. In the Latvian capital, he presented a portrait (sculpture) of the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow;⁷ At the Royal Library in Copenhagen, a portrait of Christian, the Danish king, is shown today, a work that earned the painter a lifetime's pension as a tribute to the royal family;⁸ In 1937 he accepted the invitation of the Colonial Office of Belgium to commemorate the Congolese tribes, and during his two years in Congo he made around 80 paintings.⁹

Upon his return to Belgium in 1939, he met his friend Kisling, and they decided to jointly present an exhibition in London. They were invited to exhibit at the Leferve gallery in London. The two arrived to England on the day of the outbreak of World War II. As a citizen of a neutral country (Estonia) Leibo received a permit to remain in London, and he is still proud that his painting - a Jewish old man - purchased by Sir John Rotenstein, the director of London's renowned Tate Gallery, has been on display ever since.

The painter noted with satisfaction that his "old man" was shown next to a picture of the ghetto landscape drawn by Marc Chagall and that his paintings were purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the Portuguese Museum in Amsterdam, by the Hildesheim collection in London and New York (today, the collection of Oppenheim in New York).

...

His pictures glorify public institutions, hospitals, and private homes of connoisseurs of art, in appreciation of the artist's works, Dr. Ernst Heiman, director of the Modern Art

⁷ The sculpture of S. Dubnov was made by Jehuda Leibo [M.R.]

⁸ This portrait could not be found in any of today's museums or libraries in Denmark. The name Leibo is not known by professionals in Denmark today. [M.R.]

⁹ These paintings are not known to the professionals in Belgium today [M.R.]

Gallery in Brussels, wrote: "Israel Leibo is one of the last great cubists of the Paris school".

In the United Kingdom, Leibo married the Englishwoman Lily, and now they have a son and a daughter and four grandchildren. The man is not religious. Yet he was proud that the son and the grandchildren had been circumcised. He proudly carries his Jewish heritage and tradition. In his youth he was influenced by the revolutionary movements in Russia and France. Even today he defines himself as a leftist. "In the Jewish circles in London, which he adopted for his "temporary" residence, they call him "the eternal Jew". "In his youth he belonged to a pioneering movement in which he was very active,¹⁰

He still remembers some Hebrew that he learned in cheder, and is proud of his family, which was Zionist.

His home, which lies in the heart of London (Chenies Street), was Jewish. Judging by the traditional Jewish dishes on their table on weekdays and

holidays, his wife Lilly is also seen by his friends as "a Jewess in her spirit." There is no doubt about his Jewish identity, as expressed in his works. They revolve around Jewish life in the ghetto and with the colorful nature of the inhabitants of the Jewish town, although he has spent most of his life on land and continents and lived among foreigners, yet he feels like a Jew.



Israel Leibo family around 1956. Left to right: Susan Ellis (Leibo), Israel Leibo, Lilly Leibo (Mears), David Leibo.

¹⁰ Israel Leibo was a member of "Hashomer Ha'Zayir" organization and later was an active member of Estonian Young Socialist organization. He even worked as a painter preparing nice leftist proclamations.. [M.R.]

What is your attitude toward Israel?

"The Jews are entitled to a homeland and a state of their own, just like any other people," he said, adding that "there are ways to reach an understanding with the Arabs of the country as equal citizens with equal rights in the Jewish state."

As an internationalist and as a Jew he can not accept the bloody conflict in the Middle East that threatens the peace of the state and the world. He has "a sense of identity and identification with Israel, and for that reason I am anxious for her fate."

His personality is divided between two loyalties: his world view is a mixture of revolutionary and national ideas that stirred the world in the 1920s, 1930s, and 70s. He believes in "a world revolution that will happen in my lifetime." His state of health at the age of 64 and his heart problems did not overshadow his optimistic belief in "a true socialist society in the world and in Israel as an equal people among equals."

Israel Leibo was not satisfied with the description of technical side of his and his group's art. He explained at length it's roots, which are nourished by a complete philosophy of life, of Jewish life in the ghetto and in general. As for art and artists in Israel, he emphasized that the mixture of different cultures that merged in Israel is insolent and will crystallize into original Israeli art, with its own style and patterns. As a result, he added, some of her artists occupy a prominent place in the world's artistic family already today."

From Susan Ellis (Leibo) we know some additional facts about the works of her father:

- My father painted a picture of the Sunflowers which was hung in the Tate Gallery in London, and Picasso's "The sunflowers" was hung next to it and was exhibited in the French rooms for some years. Where the painting is now i don't have a clue.
- My father also created a book titled the "Shir Ha'shirim"¹¹. It was sold around 1964. Again i have no idea where or who it was sold to. Hand made book of illustrations in gold leaf and colour.

¹¹ The Song of Songs {MR}

- In 1958 a German television company came to our house to make a documentary about my father, about his life and works. This documentary was shown for 2 weeks only on German Television
- 5 years ago friends of mine saw his work in the Barcelona art gallery.
- Lord Mountbatten and Lord Snowden bought art work from my father.

This is about all we know about the life and work of Israel Leibo. May-be Ernst Heineman (the director of the Modern Art gallery in Brussels) was right when he wrote in annotation to the works of I. Leibo: "One detects in his works a strong link of his sensitivity and intellect. His style is varied; however we find a strong talent of expression. ... My opinion is that he is more suitable for the collectors that for the commercial world."

May be this could explain almost total lack of information about his works.

The author will be very grateful for any additional piece of information, pictures of works etc.¹²

Following are the illustrations from some of his works.

¹² Mark Rybak, mr@eja.pri.ee

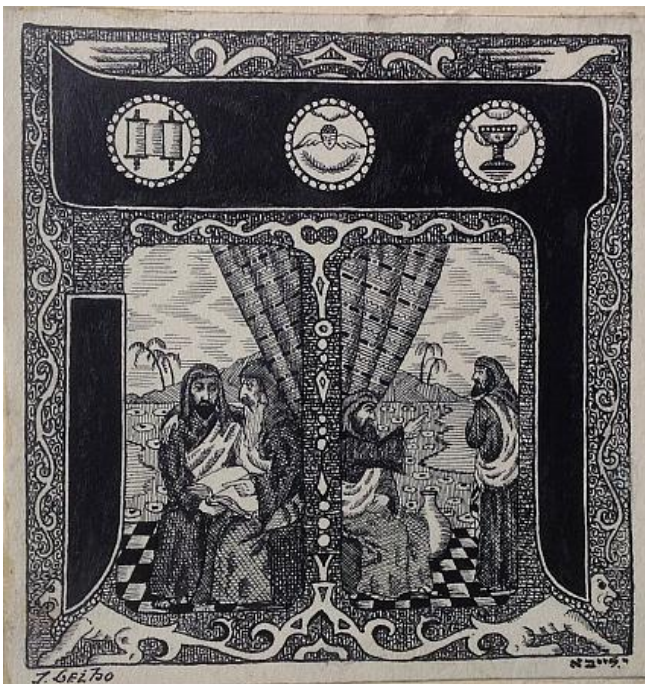
The Hebrew alphabet – 14 sheets out of 31. Tallinn, 1933.



Kever Rachel (Rachel's tomb)



Aviv (Spring)



Hillel and Shammai



David Ha'Melech (King David)



Heder (Religious school)



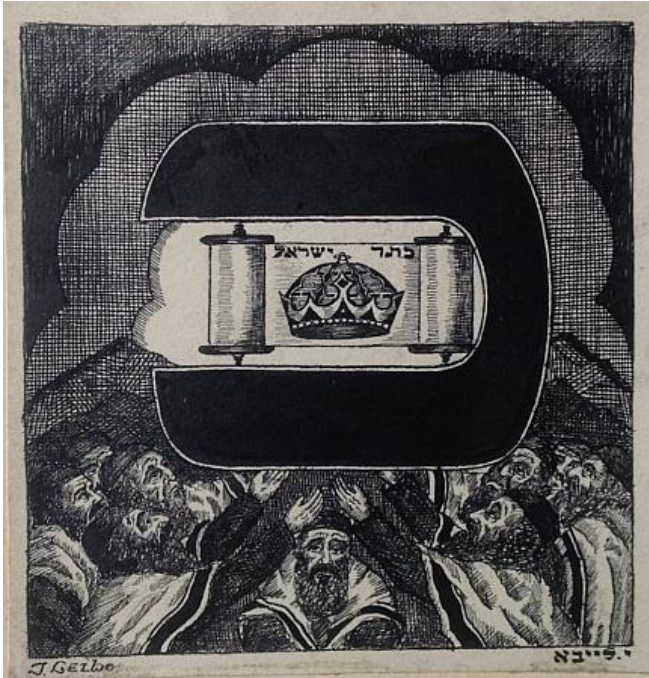
Zkenim (Elders)



Jashar (Justice)



Talit (Tallit)



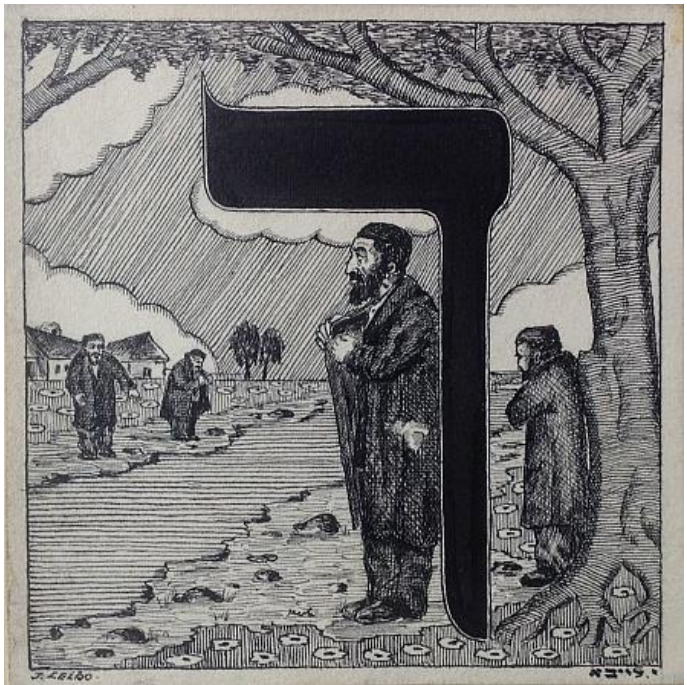
Keter Israel (Crown of Israel)



Kadur Ha'aretz (Earth)



Laila (Night)



Tashlikh (High Holy Days ritual)



Yam Suf (Red Sea)



Menorah (Six-branches lampstand)



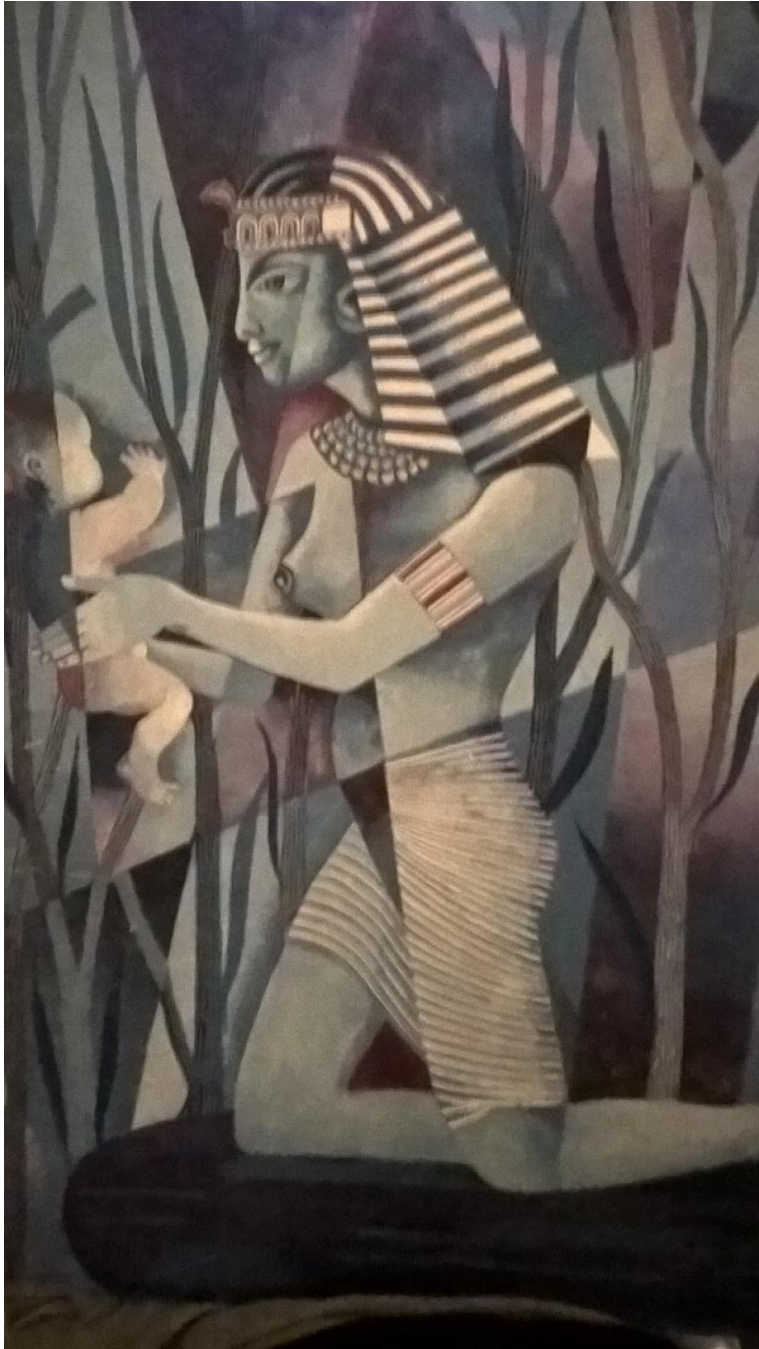


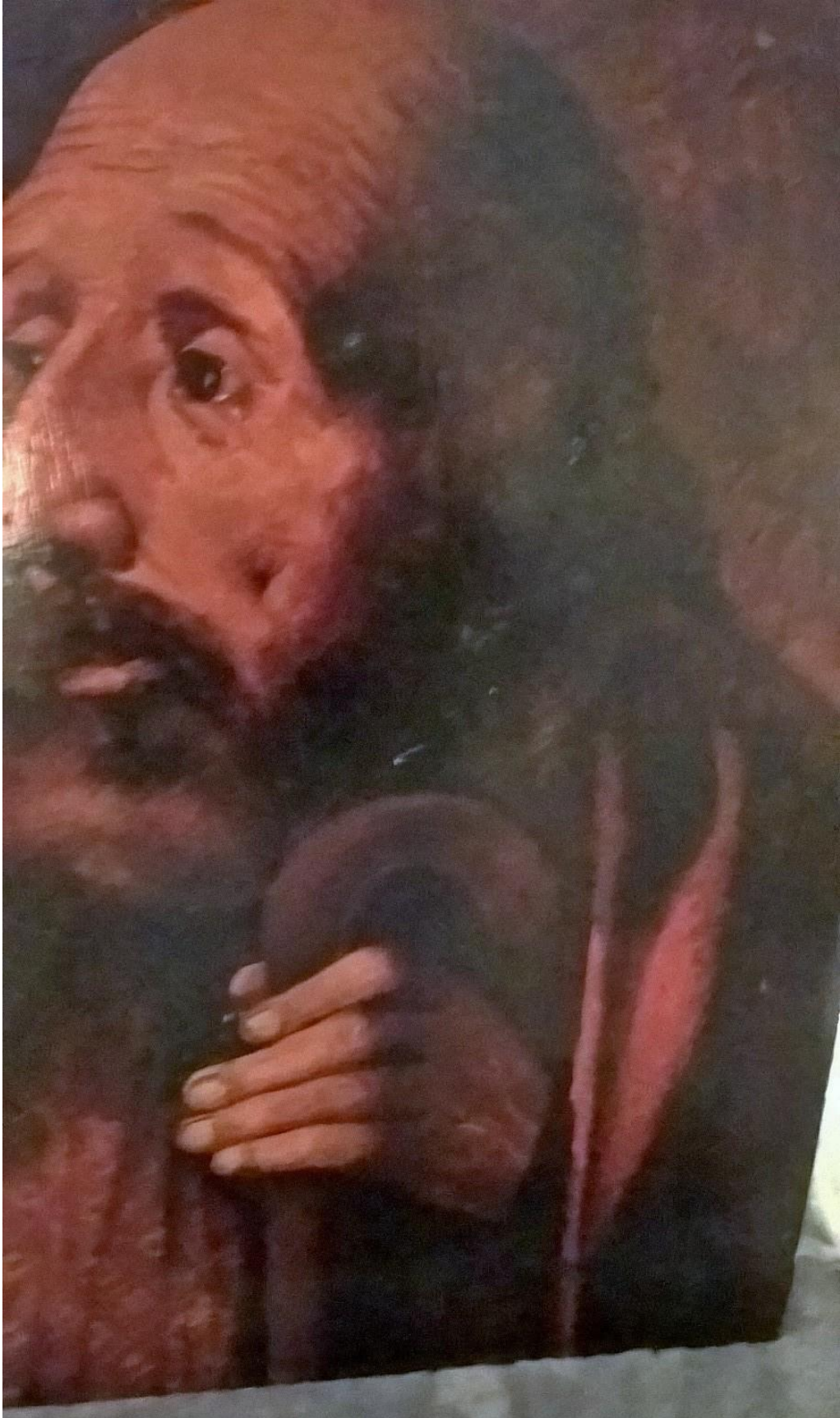




Landscape with Plough. 1935.









Die Heimatsiden 5. 1876

Homesickness



Die Betenden 5. 1876

The prayers.



“Portrait of Israel Leibo he did himself. He was going blind, so he had mirrors all around him. This was painted 6 weeks before he passed away”. (Susan Ellis (Leibo)).