

Copy for biography page on website for the sale of The Arthur Szyk Collection

About Szyk

Arthur Szyk (1894-1951)

Arthur Szyk (pronounced “shick”) is the outstanding miniaturist and painter-illustrator of his era, and America’s leading political artist during World War II. His celebrated original works are exhibited worldwide and also have been published extensively throughout the world.

An Artist For the Greatest Generation

Szyk’s life as an artist-activist directly influenced the most significant historical events of the first half of the 20th century: World War I and its aftermath; World War II; the Holocaust of European Jewry; and the creation of the State of Israel. As a Polish Jew who immigrated to America—and whose mother and brother were killed by the Nazis—Szyk’s well-informed yet passionate hatred of hate inspired his adopted nation to fight tyranny and injustice at home and abroad.

The totalitarian regimes of Germany and Japan indeed did fear the persuasive impact of Szyk’s 1940s anti-Axis art on the American public. (Reportedly Adolf Hitler placed a bounty on Szyk’s head, to stop him from producing anti-Nazi propaganda.) Today, Berlin and Tokyo have published books and periodicals that seek to understand the role that Szyk’s powerful art played in their national histories and to explore how his timeless body of work speaks to our own time.

IMAGE: Polsce, Chrystusowi Narodów.

An Artist For Equal Rights

Years before the Civil Rights movement, Arthur Szyk was an outspoken critic of racism against African-Americans in the United States. In his eyes, “each negro lynching is a national disaster, is a stab in the back to our government in its desperate struggle for democracy” (1949). He used his popular art to promote a vision of an integrated free society, in the past, present, and future.

In Szyk’s world, black colonials fight for American independence on the Concord bridge; black and white American G.I.s defeat the Axis together; and Native Americans and black sharecroppers are as integral as white cowboys in the story of America. A self-described “soldier in art,” Szyk’s stated philosophy—“Art is not my aim, it is my means”—guided his tireless campaign to motivate his fellow citizens against oppression and terror, and fueled his advocacy for freedom and justice among the peoples of the world.

IMAGE: White, Black, and Jew in Common Cause.

An Artist Decorated by Three Nations

In his day Arthur Szyk was famous throughout the Western world as an artist and public figure. The American press called him a “citizen-soldier of the free world.” Three countries honored his outstanding service with medals: Poland, the land of his birth, awarded him the Gold Cross of Merit; France, the country of his early artistic career, decorated him with the Ordre des Palmes Académiques; and the United States, his adopted home, presented him with the George Washington Bicentennial Medal.

IMAGE: Photo of Szyk’s three medals.

An Artistic Legacy for a Global World

More than sixty years after his death, Arthur Szyk and his powerful art continue to attract unprecedented levels of interest and critical acclaim. With numerous world-class exhibitions in the past decade alone, Szyk’s international reputation is expanding exponentially in breadth and impact. In truth, this transformational epoch of disruptive technology and powerful ideology is not so different from Szyk’s own. Threats to democracy must still be faced and fought, the commitment to equality and liberty must be renewed with blood, sweat, and tears. In this priceless Collection, Arthur Szyk’s timeless message of freedom, tolerance, and justice reaches across history to inspire new generations across the globe.

IMAGE: Thomas Jefferson’s Oath