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FAITH

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TEMPLE BETH EL



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"Krasinski Park" is a 1930 painting by Moshe Rynecki, a Polish artist who perished in the Holocaust. His great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Rynecki, is giving a talk Sept. 14 at Temple Beth El in Eureka, about her quest to locate many of his long-lost paintings.

Finding Moshe's art

Missing: Great-granddaughter searches for paintings lost during World War II

Artist: Rynecki painted scenes of Jewish life in 1920s and '30s, died in Holocaust

The Times-Standard

One usually thinks of an artist's legacy as the physical evidence that he once lived; in other words, his paintings or other works of art. In some cases, though, much of the artwork has disappeared, sending the artist's descendants off on a quest that can last a lifetime.

IF YOU GO

Elizabeth Rynecki will speak at Temple Beth El in Eureka on Sept. 14.

A Q&A session will follow the talk. Temple Beth El is located at the corner of T and Hodgson streets in Eureka.

For more information, visit <http://rynecki.org/category/scheduled-talks/> and <http://templebetheureka.org>, or call 444-2846.

Perhaps that will be the case with documentary filmmaker Elizabeth Rynecki, who will speak at Temple Beth El in Eureka on Sept. 14 (a week from Sunday) at 4 p.m., about paintings by her great-grandfather, Moshe Rynecki, the bulk of which were lost or stolen during the World War II. She will discuss her family's subsequent attempts to locate the works, and where their story fits into the larger picture of art restitution issues.

"I don't think my search will ever end."

— Elizabeth Rynecki

For more than a decade, Rynecki has searched for the lost paintings of her great-grandfather. Moshe Rynecki was a Warsaw-based artist who painted scenes of the Polish-Jewish community in the 1920s and 1930s and subsequently perished in the Holocaust. Her quest has connected her with individuals and museums around the world, discovering information and paintings in highly unexpected places.

The Rynecki family story begins in the interwar years when Moshe Rynecki was a prolific artist, producing more than 800 paintings before the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. As the Nazis conquered Poland, Moshe divided his collection into a number of bundles which he hid with friends in and around the city of Warsaw. He anticipated that eventually he or his family would be able to find the bundles and make the collection whole again, but



"Synagogue Interior" is a 1930 painting by Moshe Rynecki.

it was not to be. Moshe died in the Holocaust, and after the war the surviving family recovered just a single bundle of 120 pieces. After much fruitless effort, they gave up looking for the other pieces, assuming the rest had been destroyed during the repeated devastations suffered by Warsaw during the war.

Moshe's son, George, as well as his daughter-in-law and grandson Alex (Elizabeth's father), survived the Holocaust. After the war, they emigrated from Poland to Italy, and subsequently to the United States, ultimately ending up in Eureka in the mid-1950s.

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Lost art

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George Rynecki ran G&R Metals at the foot of First and H streets for many years, and eventually retired to Loleta. His son, Alex, graduated from Eureka High School and attended Humboldt State University. Alex's daughter, Elizabeth, still manages the family's local business and has ties to the community.

The key moment in her decision to begin searching for her great-grandfather's art began in 1992 shortly after the death of her grandfather, George. Her father, Alex, discovered a memoir George left behind about his life in Poland before and dur-

ing WWII. "There are hundreds of books on the subject," George wrote. "Nevertheless, I am a Jew and I write. I'll do it till the end of my days. If only for my granddaughter, Elizabeth, to know the truth, and not to be afraid of it."

Rynecki took her grandfather's message to heart. Her first step was the construction of a website in 1999 to share her great-grandfather's art. Initially, it was a way to offer the family's collection as a resource for Jewish art historians and holocaust educators.

To date, the family has accounted for at least 80 previously lost paintings. How many are left to be discovered is a question that may never be fully answered. Rynecki readily admits that the prospect of discovering

previously unknown works is irresistible.

"I don't think my search will ever end," she said.

Her talk will recount the many twists and turns, dead ends, and serendipitous finds that make the search for the art compelling.

Rynecki is excited to bring her talk to Temple Beth El. Some of her great-grandfather's paintings once resided in Humboldt County and she's certain there are still people in the community who remember her grandpa George.

"I hope people come and share their remembrances of my grandfather and the art that hung in his home," she said. "Perhaps someone in Humboldt has a Moshe Rynecki painting."