

# David Schneuer

## Biography

David was born December 16th, 1905. In his early childhood the family, on its way to America, delayed in Hamburg, and eventually settled for good in Munich. "My father, a handsome man, belonged to the middle intelligentsia. He had studied in a Yeshiva and knew his Talmud. He wanted to be a writer but was forced by circumstances to become a businessman. His German was faultless, "whereas my mother spoke a mixture of German and Yiddish", When his father was conscripted into the army during the First World War, his mother brought up the children, eking out an existence from a dress shop. "I went to a Catholic school and grew up to some extent at home, and more in the streets, playing with the Bavarian children of the neighbourhood". Towards the end of his studies at the OBERREALSCHULE (secondary school), Schneuer was a member both of BAR KOCHBA, a non-Zionist Jewish sports club, and of BLAU-WEISS, an association preparing its members for Zionist activity. In this framework, Schneuer was sent to East Prussia and trained in assorted farming chores: loading the harvest on horses, sowing potatoes. Schneuer underwent some of the formative experiences of his life before the age of 20. Meanwhile, he did not know whether to be a German, a German Jew or a Zionist Jew, a farmer, or a merchant. Of medium height and broad-shouldered, diligent, and energetic, he was destined to become a "craftsman". "Farming was actually my first preparation for craftsmanship," Says Schneuer. The turn of events, combined with his intuition and strong sensuality, were to make the craftsman onto an artist.

Upon returning from Prussia, he took to lettering and painting signboards for Jewish shops in Munich. He spent six months with a sign painter in Berlin. Upon returning to Munich, he applied to the Kunstgewerbeschule (school of arts and crafts) in the Louisenstrasse. Schneuer relates: "Professor Richard Klein, who was in charge of the Munchner Konsterfeste, assigned us to design a poster for the event. I submitted two sketches and was thrown out of school for 'insufficient talent', only to discover that the actual poster announcing the Kunstlerfeste was based on one of my sketches". From there he went on to the Berufsschule (vocational school) in the Werkenriederstrasse, under the direction of professor Ruckert. "It was a good school where I learned to make decorative designs". To support himself during his studies, he designed "expressionist and simple" posters. Among his Munich friends was Georg Gidal brother of the well-known photographer Tim Gidal, and a photographer in his own right. He persuaded Schneuer to go to Paris. Schneuer followed his advice. "Why Paris?" he asks today. "For no particular reason. I was naïve. I arrived in Paris with a scanty knowledge of French, laboriously acquired during six years of study. A friend found me a hotel in Montparnasse. For half a year I lived in a room on the sixth floor, a tiny room with a tiny table. In the evenings I would sit drawing from my imagination, and during the day I roamed the streets". Most of the drawings he did in Paris disappeared together with his books after his release from Dachau.

Upon his return to Munich – once more taking the advice of Georg Gidal – he introduced himself at the Münchnern Kammerspiele Im Schauspielhuse and was engaged at the theater. The first part of his artistic career had begun. It was to come to an end five years later, in 1932.

In November 1933 Schneuer found himself walking along Allenby Street in Tel Aviv like “Gulliver among die Lilliputians”. The eclectic style of the city, barely 25 years old, lent it an almost historical air, somewhere between Orientalism and the style of Eastern Europe. But the newly arrived immigrants from Germany, highly educated and employed in the liberal professions, brought with them the new BAUHAUS style of architecture -plain, unadorned, white three-storeyed houses, all but unknown in conservative Munich - and the suburbs of the “white city” began to indent the coastal dunes at a rapid rate.

The Munich period had come to an end in the first part of the same year. Schneuer was arrested, whether because of his Jewishness, or because of his Communist sympathies, and deported to Dachau. After being detained for two months, he was released and left Munich like a thief in the night, his suitcase full of drawings executed on sheets of the drawing pad purchased at the Bon Marche and a ‘handful of books. Exhausted, he reached Prague, where he met friends, refugees like himself: Julius Gellner who helped him procure a small sum of money from one of the wealthy Prague Jews and Thomas Theodor Heine, frequenting an emigre cafe. A month and a half later the emigration certificate to Palestine, obtained by the instrumentality of Tim Gidal, arrived from Berlin, and Schneuer got up and left.

Here again we are in need of Schneuer’s testimony in order to reconstruct the story of his life and work. However, as he likes to intertwine people and events in his reminiscences, and as he usually puts at most only his signature on his drawings, we have to go by the dates on which the posters appeared, cafes and hotels were opened, ships were launched and his friends immigrated to the country, in order to bring works of art and events together in time.

Schneuer’s life in Israel can be divided into four main periods: The first Tel Aviv years (1933-1937), Jerusalem (1938-1939), back to Tel Aviv (1939-C.1965), and 1965 to the present. It is possible to define the first period as an adjustment to everyday life and to the dynamics of the rapidly emerging culture. This was a period of prosperity, culminating in the Levant Fair of 1934. The ensuing depression forced him to move to Jerusalem, but he soon returned to Tel Aviv and to a period of renewed building activity. The fourth, and final period is characterized by a gradual abandoning of applied graphics and of work in collaboration with architects, and by seclusion in the studio.

The works that Schneuer began in the late sixties - at the onset of his fourth Israeli period - deal less with reality than with its reflection. In these works, he takes up images which for a long time have been suppressed, together with the past, at the back of: his mind. The new experiment occurs on a purely existential level, his artistic experience, in all its prior transmutations, having been fundamentally technical in character.

True, the human figure in the advertisements is the Very same as that represented in the paintings: stylized, sensuous, performing a part. The same, yet different. The restrictions resulting from a specific purpose are loosened and replaced by freedom of action, and by sheer creative zest.

His friend Steinhardt once told him “You will become a good artist - you are not afraid of erasing”. Schneuer, spontaneous as he is, composes his painting quickly, almost hurriedly. First with colour — red and blue, toned down to opaque shades of violet, grey, light-blue and Sienna red. If the hue does not seem right to him, he wipes it out and starts afresh. Once, painting a ceiling, he began using the remainder of the glue in the bucket “in order to achieve delicate shades”. Now he uses dirty water for the same purpose. “That’s my trick”, says Schneuer. The means — the “tricks” - are simple and employed for the final formulation of the painting. The scene is represented frontally - a theatrical parade of attractive men haunting loose girls in imaginary bars, which Schneuer, shy as he is, probably never frequented; figures from the world of *Les Enfants du Paradis*, *La Boheme*, of Baudelaire, of Toulouse-Lautrec, Cheret and Mucha – a Munich version of Paris, fashioned in Tel Aviv. All the figures are linked, all the elements are joined into what Schneuer regards as the main thing: “Plasticity and dynamics, balance and line”. “A splash of colour turning into a body”, he adds, “into a face, into hair”. The composition is constructed on two levels - the division of the surface into areas of colour, which are further divided into linear rhythms, groups of figures, a female bust facing the erect, arrogant figure of a man. Both levels not only strike a harmonious chord, but primarily set up a new configuration in which Schneuer’s past as stage designer and illustrator fuses and periods and memories intertwine.

“Elegance”, said Raymond Radiguet, the author of *Le Diable au Corps*, “should look somewhat slovenly”. In Schneuer’s elegant figures, the “slight slovenliness” is expressed in a sense of candid eroticism which accompanies them. Perhaps this elegance is only the outer expression of an ironic ceremony in which the fashionable and ridiculed protagonists’ parade like actors on a stage. Schneuer admires Picasso, but unlike the latter he remained aloof and did not participate in the lives of his protagonists. In a realm of obsessed imagination, the show must go on.

Schneuer was the original documentarian of the French café and bar scene – articulating his life there onto paper from within, rather than just romanticizing the era from afar like so many other artists of our time.

## Museum Collections & Exhibitions

Muenchener Stadtmuseum, Germany

Spertus Museum, Chicago

Boston Fine Art Museum, Massachusetts

Tel Aviv Museum, Israel

Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Vancouver Museum, Canada  
Rupertinum, Salzburg, Austria  
Joensuu Art Museum, Finland  
Provincial Museum for Modern Art, Oostende, Belgium  
Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum, Los Angeles, California  
BASS Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida  
Everhart Museum, Pennsylvania  
Erie Art Museum, Pennsylvania  
Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana  
The Appleton Museum of Art, Florida  
Huntington Museum of Art, West Virginia  
The Grand Rapids Museum of Fine Arts, Michigan  
Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta, Georgia  
Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, New York  
Crook County Museum, Wyoming  
Carrol Reece Museum, Tennessee  
Fairfield County Museum, South Carolina  
Musée du Montparnasse, Paris, France