ARTIST BROCHURE

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Yosl Bergner

Yosl Bergner was born in Vienna and grew up in Warsaw. With rampant anti-Semitism in Europe, the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation was formed in July 1935, to search for a potential Jewish homeland. Soon afterwards a pastoral firm offered the League c16,500 square ks in the Kimberleys, stretching from the north of Western Australia into the Northern Territory. As history showed, the plans went nowhere. But for a time, the Australian idea was at least worth considering. Bergner's father, Melech Ravitch, became involved in a serious investigation of the Kimberleys.

Thus the Bergner family moved to Australia. Yosl immigrated to Australia in 1937 and studied in the National Gallery Art School until the outbreak of War World II. He served for four and a half years in the Australian Army, and later continued his studies at the Art School.

In Melbourne from 1937-48, Bergner befriended many of the local artists who now epitomise modern Australian art: Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, John Perceval and Arthur Boyd. Adrian Lawlor moved with his wife to a cottage at Warrandyte where they lived for 30 years. Bergner was a frequent visitor at this Warrandyte home. All the men socialised together. Bergner encouraged them to go beyond their traditional landscape style and he introduced a more radical concern for working families, thus having an important impact on Australian art.

Bergner may not have been prepared for the plight of many struggling Australians. Yet he felt a strong connection between the suffering of people everywhere, whether they were the Jews that he remembered from Europe, landless blacks in the heart of Australia or hungry children in inner urban Melbourne.

He left Australia in 1948 and after two years of travelling and exhibiting in Paris, Montreal and New York, he settled in Israel. He lived in Safed until moving to Tel Aviv in 1957.

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