

2016-08

Jessica Zaydak talks about the Life and Art of Alfred Skondovitch

Fairbanks, Alaska

March 16, 2016

Series: Tanana Yukon Historical Society tapes

Ron Inouye talked about the History Day awards. Christa Kerry and Kitty Harris were the elementary school winners and Rosalie Bertram was the winner in the senior group. He introduced the lecture for the evening.

Jessica Zaydak introduced herself and spoke about her background and love of art. She moved to Fairbanks, Alaska in 2006 and worked at the University of Alaska after graduation. Meeting Patti Skondovitch. She attended an exhibition on Skondovitch's work and decided to pursue graduate thesis on Alfred Skondovitch. Her focus is on art history. Her research and analysis is on specific turning points in Skondovitch's life and how it influenced his art. She is focusing on the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp connection. She talked about the interviews done with Skondovitch before his death. She is also working with local and contacts in New York. She said is also using various articles and books on Skondovitch. She is evaluating his life history in chronological order. She discussed turning points in his life.

Zaydak said she only briefly met Alfred Skondovitch, but there are others who have known him and she is open to learning about Skondovitch. She talked about his stories about events. She said she will discuss a review of his life. Skondovitch was born in 1927 in England and lost his mother at a young age. She talked about where he grew up in London and how that influenced his life. In the 1930s Skondovitch was evacuated from London because of bombings. He returned to London for his Bar Mitzvah which occurred during a bombing. Joining the Youth Zionist movement and helping to liberate the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. This influenced Skondovitch and his views of humanity. Skondovitch returned to London and attended school. Skondovitch met Kokoschka and was influenced by him. Zaydak said Skondovitch started smuggling arms for the Zionists. In 1946 or 1947 he was arrested by the Turkish.

Skondovitch jumped ship in New York City and started a new life in 1947. New York offered opportunities for him. Skondovitch lived with a cousin in New York for a while. He lived the bohemian lifestyle. Zaydak talked about the mentality of artists after the war. Skondovitch participated in the second generation of abstract expressionism. He participated in a movement that encouraged and allowed freedom of expression and raw emotion. He was unable to express himself as well as other artists. He began studying at the Hans Hofmann School in 1949. He was influenced by the teachings at the school. Skondovitch used these values for the rest of his life. He continued to interact with other artists including Poindexter. In 1956 Skondovitch was included in an exhibition of expressionists. He always felt pressure to always provide. He felt he was sacrificing his art for the sake of other artists. He

questioned if he could keep creating and showing art. His illegal status was a concern to him. Skondovitch met Ursula in New York and had a troubled relationship. In 1956-57 he traveled back and forth to California and Texas. It was a difficult time for him. He connected with a group of artists in Claremont, California. They would paint in the winter and fight fires in Alaska. He moved to Alaska and met and married Patti. They tried living in New York for a while, but returned to Alaska. Zaydak talked about his artistic life in Alaska and the stability it provided.

Question from the audience about Skondovitch and his immigration issues. Zaydak said Skondovitch gained sponsorship before he moved to Alaska.

Ron Inouye asked about going through his paintings and finding new things. Zaydak said that is an overwhelming experience. She talked about going through his artwork. She wants to order his work chronologically.

Comment from a member of the audience about the energy of Skondovitch.

Zaydak asked for stories about Skondovitch. Martin Gutoski said he knew Skondovitch through buying surveying equipment.

Unidentified person said Skondovitch talked Kris Kristofferson out of being a boxer. Discussion about Skondovitch boxing. He also taught boxing.

Question from the audience about Skondovitch's involvement with the Zion Youth and how he got to Bergen-Belsen. Zaydak said both of his brothers were involved with the Zionists. He was supposed to go into the camp and identify athletes in the camp population.

Zaydak explained how Skondovitch was grazed by a bullet. Zaydak explained Skondovitch's education including Jewish school after his regular school. He started to attend engineering college.