

Graphic Office

Categories: Institutions

The Graphic Office was part of the [Statistical Department](#) (vide) of the Jewish ghetto administration. The Jewish draftsmen employed in this office produced visuals of statistical data enriched with texts and photographs in the form of charts and albums. Materials were produced for the German ghetto administration (vide *Gettoverwaltung*) and for the internal needs of the Jewish ghetto administration. The official visual documents produced were forms of propaganda and advertising, portraying a positive image of the closed district and forced labour in the ghetto. The graphic designers employed were also involved in other artwork, including the preparation of settings for festivities and exhibitions presenting goods produced in the ghetto. Materials were produced in a consistent geometric style, popular in industrial advertising and propaganda of the interwar period. The visual layer of the materials, together with the constructed narrative, was intended to emphasise the rationality of the organisation of production and the modern way in which the ghetto was managed. The ghetto Jews were depicted in a way that was contrary to the image of the so-called *Ostjuden*, a term for Central and Eastern European Jewish people, created in Nazi propaganda. The materials produced were part of the ghetto's visual policy in line with Rumkowski's strategy of survival through labour. The Graphic Office employed up to twelve draftsmen. During its entire operation, the team's output included at least twenty large-format albums, some of which were more than two hundred pages (based on what survived the war, reproductions or what has been mentioned in different sources), several reproductions made in the ghetto and more than a hundred charts and posters.

The Statistical Office was set up in May 1940 within the framework of the Registration Office (vide), headed by Henryk Neftalin (vide), following a German order for the Jewish ghetto administration to compile a census of the ghetto's inhabitants, with a breakdown by age and sex. Following this task, studies for internal ghetto needs began to be compiled on Neftalin's initiative. At first, the data from

the Health Department focused on death and illness. In August 1940, rules for the office's cooperation with other departments were established and gradually a wide-range of data was compiled.

The unit was headed first by Samuel Bronowski (vide), and, beginning in September 1940, by Samuel Erlich (vide). This was when the office was transformed into the independent Statistical Department, which was part of the Registry Departments headed by Neftalin. Initially, officials produced studies exclusively on millimetre paper, or graph paper.

The Graphic Office, created in July 1940, was to present statistical data pictorially and to create photomontages that serve propaganda and training purposes. With the hiring of the first draughtsman, construction technician George Priest, graphs began to be produced with data compiled in the department. Another draughtsman, engineer Abram Tales, was assigned to the office at the end of October 1940 (he was transferred to another unit within two weeks). In the beginning, draftsmen with technical training were employed, then they were joined by visual artists and advertising graphic designers, who in time made up the majority of the staff.

The first artist employed was Pinchas Szwarc (vide), a former student of Władysław Strzemiński, a renowned Polish avant-garde artist in Łódź. For nearly a year and a half, Szwarc directed the office's activities, and it was he who had determined the style of the documents. In January 1941, Łódź painter Mojżesz Gurewicz (vide) joined Szwarc. Mendel Grossman, who had been employed at the department's Photographic Division in April 1941, was involved in graphic and retouching work (vide). In the second half of April, additional graphic artists were taken on: Josek-Moszek Grinwald (vide) and Szymon Szerman (vide). In July, the first woman, Luba Lurie (vide) was hired. The Graphic Office staff grew with the start of work on large-format albums. Early projects included the Central Labour Office album and the Statistical Yearbook prepared for the Records Departments' anniversary. The draftsmen also participated in the first exhibition of ghetto production. The growth of the Graphic Office's output and the demand for albums in the ghetto (vide) administration led to another increase in staff towards the end of 1941.

New staff included Sara Gliksman (vide) and Jakub Natanson (vide) from Łódź, as well as Hermann Sonnenfeld (vide), Herbert Izrael Pick (vide) and Arnošt Viniářski (vide), who, that autumn, had been deported from Germany and what was then Czechoslovakia. In March 1942, the scale of orders at the office reached a level that forced Neftalin to issue a circular addressed to all departments and ministries, stating that the Statistical Department was no longer accepting orders without the prior approval of the ghetto administration managers at Bałuty Rynek. In March 1942, Ernst Kowanitz (vide), a Czech doctor, joined the draughtsmen, and, in April, Czech graphic artist Marie Aleš (vide) was added to the staff, initially employed as an assistant photographer. In June 1942, the draughtspeople began to be directed by Gurewicz, replacing Szwarc who had been assigned to create an exhibition on ghetto production.

The staff remained unchanged until February 1943, when two more people from Czechoslovakia, Helga May (vide) and Eva Schneider (vide), were hired. That year, the first of the office's graphic designers died: in March, Sonnenfeld, and, in September, Pick. Although the office continued to function until the ghetto was liquidated, by the end of 1943 the number of staff began to drop. Some artists moved to other departments, and, beginning in August 1944, with the liquidation of the ghetto, more people were deported to Auschwitz. Of the office's staff, only Gliksman remained in the ghetto until liberation.

The materials created in the Graphic Office fulfilled different functions, depending on when they were produced and to whom they were addressed. Albums were initially commemorative and documentary in nature. They were made with future historians of the ghetto in mind and a hypothetical post-war era, and perceived as being objective through the use of statistics in the studies. In the Encyclopaedia [of the Łódź Ghetto?] they were called "archival-scientific" material. The office also produced photographic reproductions of albums and posters for the [Archive](#) (vide), which was part of the Records Departments (vide). The documents produced in the office were intended to confirm Rumkowski's merits and that of his staff in the future, and can therefore also be regarded as a kind of alibi. This can be evidenced by the Yiddish-only albums produced beginning in the second half of 1943. As the testimonies left behind show, the data were subject to manipulation as conditions in the

ghetto worsened. The materials created were, at the same time, part of the internal politics of the ghetto and the power relations within the Jewish administration. Handed out by department employees to Rumkowski or by staff to their superiors at numerous ghetto ceremonies, they were part of a system of so-called patronage. Both the department employees ordering the albums and the creators of these projects could count on additional food vouchers.

Office employees also designed exhibitions. Posters and charts decorated the halls where the ceremonies were held, as well as the headquarters of the departments and offices. Szwarc also participated in the design of ghetto banknotes and won a competition to create a ghetto stamp (vide the [Philatelic Department](#)). Other employees also took part in this competition.

Albums and posters played an important role in the ghetto's survival strategy. They were produced as materials to persuade the German administration to extend the operation of the closed district and to encourage visiting German industrialists to place orders. To this end, the labour ministry albums illustrated the production process in detail, presenting photographs and sometimes miniature models of the goods produced in the factories. The German administration also ordered albums to represent its achievements in exercising control over the district. The training nature of the ghetto documents show the operation of different departments and ministries in a pictorial and synthetic way through visualised statistical data. In this way, they were intended to push their managers to be more efficient.

In 1941, the Statistical Yearbook (vide), which illustrated the ghetto administration's functions, and the first albums describing the activities of individual units were produced. By August 1944, albums had been produced showing the products of the Textile Factory, the Shoe, Upper, Straw Shoe, Underwear and Clothing, Carpentry and Upholstery departments, and documenting the Health and Welfare departments, the Labour Office, as well as educational and vocational training programs, rest homes and food vouchers. Another Statistical Yearbook of the ghetto was due in mid-1944, but was probably not completed. Most of the materials were characterised by a repetitive narrative structure. They usually began with a dedication to Rumkowski, or possibly other high-ranking officials, such as Aron Jakubowicz (vide) or Helena Rumkowska (vide), or, in the case of albums commissioned by the

German administration, to Hans Biebow (vide). Officials of a department were shown on consecutive pages, according to hierarchy. Subsequent pages presented the heads of the units, a brief history, their important role in the ghetto's production system or in the smooth operation of the administration, often along with a description of the difficulties overcome in organising the units. Additional sections of the album provided a closer look at the activities of the individual units, with a description of the departments or the production process of the goods produced, sometimes with a catalogue of the products offered. The activities were illustrated with diagrammed statistical data, photomontages and short texts and propaganda slogans.

The materials were produced in a geometric style inspired by constructivism, usually in photo collage. The choice of such a style was not accidental, and its use carried specific meanings related to discourse on the rationality of work and the modern organisation of the individuals described. The compositions consisted of coloured lines and planes placed on a geometric grid. Photographs and photomontages were often supplemented with props (forms, stamp impressions) or miniatures of manufactured shoes or clothes. The photographs used in the photo collages, taken to order by photographers employed by the Photographic Desk (vide) of the Statistical Department, were archived in the albums containing thematically catalogued contact sheets and were often reused many times in subsequent materials. The Graphic Office, together with the photographers, was also responsible for making photographic copies of documents for the Archive, which was part of the Registry Departments.

The Graphic Office was not the only place for the production of visual materials in the ghetto. On the initiative of Szyi Klugman (vide), commemorative albums were also produced in the Carpet Department, and, in some units, such as the Order Service (vide) or the Fire Brigade (vide); albums were made independently or commissioned from artists not employed by the Graphic Office or the Carpet Department. Few photographs were used in their production, mainly identifying photographs [clear?]. These materials were semi-official and their production was not approved by the management, but they were given as gifts to managers or to Rumkowski, while some albums were copied for the Archives. In the Graphic Office, according to Gliksman, conspiratorial materials were

produced from a certain point onwards, presenting real data and illustrated with photographs secretly taken by Grossman. According to the artist, these materials, unfortunately, were not hidden to be preserved. Many places ended up being looted and burnt after the liberation. The Graphic Office's infrastructure was also used by Arie Princ (vide), a friend of Grossman, who created a photomontage album parodying these official albums and their messages, and criticising Rumkowski's policies.

The materials created in the Graphic Office that survived were dispersed after the liberation. Today, they can be found in the State Archive in Łódź, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Ghetto Fighters' House museum at Lohamei HaGeta'ot, Israel, , the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, the Central Archive for the Study of the History of the Jews in Germany, in Heidelberg, as well as in private collections.

Paweł Michna

Resources

APŁ, 221/0/5.1.5/29042, k. 7, 77, 278; *ibid.*, 725–839; *ibid.*, 888, k. 41, 88, 89, 100, 104, 105, 107, 109; *ibid.*, 981, k. 33, 34, 43, 56, 64; *ibid.*, 896, k. 226, 436, 837; *ibid.*, 897, k. 65; *ibid.*, 902, k. 48, 69; *ibid.*, 913, k. 2, 12, 23, 72, 300, 410, 414, 436; *ibid.*, 1090; *ibid.*, 1122–1123; AYIVO, RG 241, 80; *ibid.*, 842, k. 3, 6–14; *ibid.*, 1050–1054; AYV, FA45; *ibid.*, FA46; *ibid.*, FA47; *ibid.*, FA48; *ibid.*, FA48A; *ibid.*, FA74(1); *ibid.*, FA74(2); *ibid.*, FA75; *ibid.* AYV RG O.3/3889, Testimony of Sara (Gliksmann) Fajtlowicz, k. 3–10, 18–20; AŽIH, 205/333, k. 7–13; *ibid.* B-166; B-167, B-177/5; B-419; B-348; B-522/2; B-840; B-1123; GFHA, 187, 1313; 3576;

Kronika, t. 1, s. 108, 1.03.1941; t. 1, s. 229, 12.07.1941; t. 1, s. 293, 30.09.1941; t. 1, s. 397, 22.12.1941; t. 2, s. 96, 10–14.04.1942; t. 2, s. 674, 24.12.1942; t. 3, s. 501, 30.09.1943; t. 4, s. 338, 2.06.1944; Jewish Museum in Prague, The Oral History Collection, No. 1015, Rozhovor: Alešová Marie; *ibid.*, No. 91, Rozhovor: Roubíček Hanuš.

M. Broderson, *Jud. Poemat*, Łódź: Druk. H. Prowizor, 1939; A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, „Ratowało mnie malarstwo”. Rozmowa z Pinkusem Szwarcem, [w:] *Łódzkie sceny żydowskie. Studia i materiały*, red. M. Leyko, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2000, s. 122–142; A. Pietroń, „Fotomontaż jako sposób opisu Zagłady. Analiza albumów fotograficznych z łódzkiego getta”, praca magisterska, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2007; N. Zonabend, *The Truth about the Saving of the Łódź Ghetto Archive*, Stockholm: N. Zonabend, 1991.

Tags

[Jewish administration](#) [German administration](#)

Updated: 16-03-2026

Added: 16-09-2025