

Eli Leskly (Erich Lichtblau)

Eli Leskly was born as Erich Lichtblau on 16th June 1911 in former Austro-Hungarian Hruschau near Ostrau (today Ostrava in the Czech Republic). After his apprenticeship in Ostrava as a decorator and window dresser he attended around the 1930s to the *Hamburger Decorationsfachschule (Ha-De-Co)* [Hamburg Decoration School] and did thereafter window decorating in several department stores in Ostrava. In March 1937 he married Else Silbiger in Andrychów in Poland. With the occupation of



Erich and Else Lichtblau in Písek, Bohemia (former Czechoslovakia) in 1940.

Nazi Germany and the establishment of the *Reichsprotectorat Böhmen und Mähren* [Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia] the persecution of the Czech Jews began. Erich Lichtblau and his wife Else first moved to Prague where Erich worked as a construction worker. Later they were forced to work on a farm house in Dobešice, a small village near Písek. On 26th November 1942 they were deported with transport Cd from Klatovy to the Ghetto Theresienstadt.

In the Ghetto Erich Lichtblau did different kinds of building works at the so called “Bauhof” [building yard], a place where many workshops of various craftsmen were located, while Else was forced to clean the children homes and to work in the kitchen. Erich Lichtblau was also assigned as a sign and lettering painter and he did some stage designing for the Terezín theatres. From August 1944 to February 1945 he worked together with other prisoners from Theresienstadt at camp Wulkow in East Germany, where they had to build a secret evacuation quarter for the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* [Reich Security Main Office] in Berlin.

After the liberation of the Theresienstadt Ghetto in May 1945 Erich and Else Lichtblau had some recovery time in Prague before they went back to Písek and later to Teplice-Šanov (German: Teplitz-Schönau). Because of Anti-German sentiment Erich Lichtblau officially changed in 1945 his name into Eli Leskly. In October 1949 he immigrated with his wife and his two children Mira and Rami (born 1946 and 1948) to Israel where he made his living from painting houses. Later he got a job in his profession at a department store in Tel Aviv and did graphics and window decorating. Eli Leskly died on 2nd October 2004 in Tel Aviv.

Art works made in Theresienstadt and after the liberation

In the Theresienstadt Ghetto Eli Leskly did not reveal himself as an artist but as a builder. However he created after work clandestinely sketches and watercolours of the ghetto life from his bunk bed in the male dormitory that only a few friends and Else were allowed to see. On each of his pictures he put satirical slogans and his signature. Because of his work as a sign painter he had access to art materials like papers, pencils, inks and paints.

In April 1945 when the German defeat became clear, the SS searched the ghetto for documents and other evidence of persecution and murder, so Eli Leskly cut his pictures into pieces and destroyed the incriminating slogans and signatures. The remaining fragments were hidden by Else under the wooden boards of her barrack and in other places.

Shortly after Eli and Else Leskly were freed they collected many of the hidden pieces and later in Israel, Eli Leskly reassembled the fragments and recreated the captions and slogans. In the same year he retired from his job in 1976 a first exhibition of his works from Terezín took place in *Beit Theresienstad*, Givat Haim Ihud, Israel. Between 1976 and 1984 he painted large watercolours on cardboard based on the original pictures made in the Ghetto and dated them back to the time when the

originals were made between 1942 and 1945 in Terezín. These watercolours and the fragments from Terezín were shown 1984 in an exhibition at the *Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust* and then donated to this museum. In the following years Eli Leskly made smaller reproductions of his watercolour series and put them together in an album.

Further pictures and sketches are also found in Yad Vashem, Beit Theresienstadt and in private collections in Israel.