

Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh
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Images available by request

One Foot in America: The Jewish Emigrants of the Red Star Line and Eugeen Van Mieghem

AMERICAN JEWISH MUSEUM OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF
GREATER PITTSBURGH • JANUARY 10–February 29, 2012

In collaboration with the Honorary Belgian consul for Western Pennsylvania, *One Foot in America: The Jewish Emigrants of the Red Star Line and Eugeen Van Mieghem* is on display at the American Jewish Museum of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh from January 10 to February 29, 2012.

Resulting from a remarkable convergence of entrepreneurship, widespread social upheaval, and shifts in artistic practice, *One Foot in America* explores the compelling narratives of Jewish immigrants during the late 19th and early 20th century rendered by Belgian artist Eugeen Van Mieghem (1875-1930) as they embarked on the journey from Antwerp to the United States on board the Red Star Line.

Influenced by French painter Jean-François Millet and other modern artists who eschewed Romanticism's embellishments and instead objectively represented everyday life, Eugeen Van Mieghem was captivated by the clamorous scenery occurring in the port of Antwerp, fortuitously located near his residence. What intrigued Van Mieghem's creative sensibilities was the swarm of immigrants from throughout Europe waiting to depart on the Red Star Line to the United States. Numerous variables brought travelers to Antwerp's port, including the appeal of beginning a new life and the prospects of gaining economic freedom and personal liberties in America. The pin, for example, on the lapel of Mario Puzo's Vito Corleone read *Red Star Line*. Many of those gathered in the port, however, were Eastern European and Russian Jews, including Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, and Irving Berlin, escaping pogroms and devastating systemic oppression. For Van Mieghem, who aspired to express human plight in artistic terms, the profound human spectacle unfolding in this condensed locale was abundantly fertile.

It was the Red Star Line, a lucrative ocean passenger line founded in 1871 by Philadelphian Clement Griscom, which facilitated Van Mieghem's aspirations and enabled so many beleaguered individuals to escape poverty and oppression. A staggering 2.7 million people left for the United States aboard the Red Star Line between 1871 and 1934, when the line folded. Considered one of the principal shipping lines for immigrants at the turn of the last century, the Friends of the Red Star Lines organization estimates that 30% to 40% of Jewish Americans have ancestors who sailed on the Red Star Line.

The exhibition is comprised of 31 paintings, charcoals, and pastels depicting Van Mieghem's

interpretations of the Jewish immigrant experience in Antwerp. Ephemeral material comprised of Red Star Line menus, postcards, passenger lists and photographs are also included. Interpretative panels detail the history and importance of the Red Star Line, which not only transported immigrants but also had luxury liners that carried passengers including John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his family (who were on board the line's SS Finland in 1905).

This is the final American venue for the exhibition before it returns to Belgium. *One Foot in America: The Jewish Emigrants of the Red Star Line and Eugeen Van Mieghem* was organized by Friends of the Red Star Lines and the Van Mieghem Museum.

Additional resources:

Eugeen Van Mieghem museum: www.vanmieghemmuseum.com

Red Star Line: www.redstarline.eu

New York Times review of Van Mieghem 2006 exhibition at the South Street Seaport Museum:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/21/arts/design/21seap.html>" <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/21/arts/design/21seap.html>

Berger Gallery, 5738 Darlington Road

Monday-Thursday: 7:30 AM-10 PM, Friday: 7:30 AM-6 PM, Saturday: 1-6 PM, Sunday: 8 AM-6 PM

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