



Antiques

Eve M. Kahn

Yiddish Theater Sets Take Center Stage

The characters in "Fiddler on the Roof," the 1964 musical being revived this season on Broadway, pine for their fading traditions, but the original sets had roots in avant-garde graphics.

The stage designer, Boris Aronson, a Russian immigrant, had worked on Yiddish productions after settling in New York in the 1920s. His early stage designs, inspired by Cubist and Constructivist trends in Germany and the Soviet Union, called for skewed floors and asymmetrical costumes made of contrasting fabrics. That disorienting aesthetic resurfaced in the jagged hovel roofs on his "Fiddler" backdrops.

On Nov. 14, about 60 of the murals, costumes, sketches and paintings for Yiddish theater sets by Mr. Aronson, who died in 1980, will go on view at the Vallois America gallery in Manhattan.

(The gallery is selling some of the works, ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 each.) The Paris gallery Le Minotaure organized the exhibition, "Preparing the Miracle: From the Bronx to Broadway, Boris Aronson and the Yiddish Theater." It draws on the voluminous family archive maintained by Mr. Aronson; his wife, Lisa; and their son, Marc Aronson, a writer in New Jersey.

The artworks at Vallois depict outfits for actors playing demons, angels, beggars, newlyweds and Jewish peasants, against backdrops of synagogues, huts, castles, skyscrapers and subway cars.

The Aronson family will lend more material to an exhibition, "New York's Yiddish Theater: From the Bowery to Broadway," which opens in March at the Museum of the City of New York. "Fiddler" artifacts will include a wooden model for the family home of the milkman hero, Tevye.

Edna Nahshon, a professor at

the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the guest curator of "New York's Yiddish Theater," said that no major museum survey of the subject had been presented. "It is a topic that begged to be dealt with," she said.

Alisa Solomon, the author of "Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of 'Fiddler on the Roof'" (Metropolitan Books/Picador), is writing an essay about portrayals and perceptions of Tevye for the Museum of the City of New York's catalog. She has pored over archives amassed by Mr. Aronson and his collaborators, including Jerome Robbins,

and she has studied mass-produced "Fiddler" souvenirs.

Ms. Solomon's own collection of knickknacks includes a ceramic serving set for chips and crudités; the outer bowl is inscribed "To Life, To Life . . . — L'Chaim!" and has a fiddler figurine along the rim. The dish for dipping sauces is shaped like Tevye trundling a pushcart.

"I love the kitsch," Ms. Solomon said in an interview. "They're not just tchotchkes. They're invested with the power to confer or express identity."



BORIS ARONSON

Boris Aronson's costume sketch and set element for "The Tenth Commandment," a 1926 play by Abraham Goldfaden.