



One circular piece of text sits in the top left area of sky to represent a sun. There are no trees or other discernible landmarks or signs of life. Apart from a few spots of a purplish red colour, the image retains only the colours of the faded and burnt pages, giving the image a sepia tone, much like an old photograph.

## **Looking Closely**

### **Form and Composition**

The area of land fills over two thirds of the paper, showing a jagged horizon high up on the page. The high horizon line positions the viewer at a relatively low point, making the landscape appear vast and dominates the viewers' attention. The horizon seems a long way off, almost as though there is no end to this bleak landscape.

The positioning of the sun and the blank off-white pages for the sky suggest it is daytime on a clear day, although the absence of colour prevents us from knowing the season. However, the sepia hues and charcoal tones of the burnt areas give an arid, parched sensation of heat.

### **Materials and Techniques**

The collage was made by layering torn book pages. The pieces vary in size and are arranged on the page to overlap and display the text at different orientations.

Holes and scorch marks can be seen on some of the text fragments and the burns appear to have been spread purposely over some areas to create shadow and definition – particularly around the sun and the line of the horizon.

### **Contents and Ideas**

The first Nazi book burnings of 1933 were a prelude to an era of state censorship. Any literature deemed unsuitable or against the Nazi ideals were burnt in ceremonious displays of national 'cleansing'.

Dresner relates directly to this in his collage by the use of actual pages from books, which he too has burnt. By including passages of Hebrew text, he is also drawing attention to the Jewish literary works that perished in the book burnings.

On a deeper level, when considering the Hebrew elements, we are faced with the more sinister facts of the Nazi regime of anti-Semitism. Dresner's work becomes a testament to

all the Jews who lost their lives in the holocaust as part of the Nazi 'cleansing' as they were declared impure.

The subject of loss is reiterated in the title 'The Ghost Town' which suggests an empty town, where the inhabitants have left, are missing, or deceased.

The theme of the work now becomes haunting and we could even imagine that the torn pages represent the town; the way that they are torn into rectangular shapes could be viewed as buildings, once occupied by Jewish people, and now burnt, crumbling structures that are devoid of life.

## **About The Artist**

Shmuel Dresner was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1928. He was brought to England by the British Government with the help of the CBF from Theresienstadt. Presuming that he was held at Theresienstadt from its opening in 1941, he would have been there for four years, aged 13-17yrs.

Records inform that Dresner spent 1945-49 in sanatoriums and it was here that he first started painting. He would have been in recovery (perhaps from his experience of Theresienstadt) from the ages of 17-21yrs. It is likely that he painted as a form of physical and emotional therapy.

In 1949 he studied at Heatherly School of Art in London, under the tuition of Iain MacNab; and in 1953 he studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, also in London. 1956 saw a move to Paris to attend the André Lhote Academy, with a return to London afterwards.

Dresner exhibited extensively from 1955-1981, with many one man shows. His images are collected in numerous private and public collections in the USA, UK, Israel, and in Germany.

## **Why Is This Work Important?**

'The Ghost Town' is particularly important as it references a significant part of Nazi culture – 'to cleanse by fire' – which began with the start of the book burnings in 1933 (which continued throughout Nazi rule and to the end of the war) and culminated in the gas chambers and incinerators of the war camps.

It serves as an important historical record and also a poignant piece of memorial artwork.

## Terms Explained

**Theresienstadt** The Nazis converted the town of Terezin, Poland, into a ghetto labour camp; it housed many elderly residents, artists and scholars. Approximately 60,000 people were crammed into living quarters intended for just 7,000; this resulted in insanitary living conditions and a lack of water and electricity. The Nazi's restricted food and medicines, although in general it was believed to be one of the better camps to be in.

At Theresienstadt, the Nazi's created a façade to fool the Red Cross on their visits, making them believe that the inhabitants were well cared for and happy to be there. The camp and images of camp life were used in propaganda films and documents which were used to fool the officials.

**Sanatorium** There are different definitions for these depending on country and time period. As it was 1945 and in England, and Dresner had just arrived from Theresienstadt where there were various health epidemics (most notably, typhus), it is likely that the sanatorium Dresner was placed in would have been a medical facility for the treatment of long-term illnesses.

**Anti-Semitic** Prejudice against Jewish people. Anti-Semitism is not exclusive to Nazi Germany, as there are many historical events related to the hatred of Jews, dating back to the Crusades of 1096; and it still continues today. However, the term 'anti-Semitism' originated in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany and was coined to replace the more obvious 'Judenhass' which translates as 'Jew-hatred'.

**CBF** Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation.

The CBF was founded in 1933 in response to Hitler's anti-Semitic regime. Its primary purpose is to help Jews anywhere in the world and by any means necessary.