

Benno Schotz RSA

In 1891, Benno Schotz was born into a Jewish family in Arensburg, on the island of Oesel in the Baltic Sea near the Gulf of Riga, before aged two his family moved to Pärnu on mainland Estonia. The son of a watchmaker, Schotz's childhood was filled with tinkering and repairing in his father's studio. This stood him in good stead for his future as a sculptor and he began modelling before his teenage years.

After studying engineering in Darmstadt in Germany, in 1912 Schotz decided to visit his brother in Glasgow, who had escaped to relations there in 1908 after the Russian Revolution had destabilised the Baltic states. The year after he arrived in Glasgow, Schotz returned home, but he had already decided he would stay in Scotland, and this was the last time he would see his parents and the country of his birth.

Schotz would become an artist who was recognised in Scotland for his role and achievements in the arts and would ultimately recognise himself as a Scot and a Glaswegian, who was seen as 'carrying the torch of sculpture in Scotland' for much of the mid twentieth century.

Schotz's legacy is deeply embedded in the cultural landscape of Scotland. He immortalised hundreds of people in his portrait sculptures^[i], from artists to art administrators, from family to friends, and from the workers of our nation, elevated to heroic status in works like *The Iron Knight*, to the eminent individuals who sat for him across his career. Many of these survive in public collections, while he also influenced the landscape of Scotland in his public sculptures, such as his spectacular *Ex Terra* in Glenrothes. His legacy stretches furthermore into art institutions and the teaching fabric of sculpture in Scotland in the twentieth century.

After arriving in Glasgow, Schotz trained at the Royal Technical College and on graduating gained employment as an engineer at the shipbuilders John Brown and Company in 1914. At the same time, he began evening classes at Glasgow School of Art, continuing until 1917 when he was awarded the Evening School Silver Medal for excellence in modelling. This same year he exhibited for the first time at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts and would follow suit at the RSA the next year. In 1924, on the advice of his friend John Keppie, he would dedicate himself entirely to being an artist. Becoming an assistant to the sculptor Alexander Proudfoot RSA gave him the chance to 'change from amateur to professional status'.^[ii]

Glasgow, its culture and its School of Art were central to Schotz's practice and his life; the college would become an important symbol of the friendliness with which he was received into the artistic community in Scotland and in 1938 he would be invited to become Head of Sculpture and Ceramics there, a post he held until 1961. His appointment followed closely his election as a full Academician of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1937. Alongside the painters James Kay and John Maclauchlan Milne,

Schotz was elected an Associate Academician in 1933, having first exhibited at the RSA in 1918 and been runner up to Fanindra Nath Bose in the Associate election of 1925. In a rather amazing run of exhibiting, Schotz would show every year at the RSA Annual Exhibition from 1920 until 1981, and once more in 1983 before his death in 1984. From the 1950s his exhibits began to reflect the change in direction of his art into the abstraction he was inspired into by seeing figures in the trees of Scotland and the olive trees of Jerusalem.

Following his election, Schotz would be instrumental in the election of numerous artists including the Academy's first female Academician Phyllis Bone, and fellow sculptors Norman Forrest, Eric Schilsky, Sidney Birnie Stewart, Hew Lorimer, Elizabeth Dempster, and latterly George Wyllie.^[iii]

His enthusiasm for the work of others also brought to the RSA Annual Exhibition for the first time, in 1949 as guest exhibitors, the modern Italian Sculptors Manzu, Marini and Viani and in 1956 a group of works by Henry Moore, which were shown for the first time in Scotland. Schotz's remarkable commitment was recognised when the Academy commissioned him to sculpt the President's Portrait of *Sir William MacTaggart*, which with Schotz's Diploma Work of *Sir James L Caw* represent in the RSA collections two of his major busts of prominent figures associated with the arts in Scotland. Further recognition came in 1963 when Schotz was made Queen's Sculptor in Ordinary for Scotland and in 1971 the Scottish Arts Council mounted a major retrospective at the RSA.

Schotz's legacy of inspiration to fellow and following artists has continued through the sculpture prizes he established in his name at the Royal Scottish Academy and Glasgow School of Art, which continue to be awarded today.

In 1927 Schotz married his partner Milly and his first child Cherna was born in 1930. Cherna and her brother Amiel, with the rest of the Schotz family, have preserved his legacy through the significant studio gift they presented to the RSA in 2020. A spiritual leader for Scottish sculpture, Schotz was buried in Jerusalem in 1984.

- Sandy Wood, Head of Collections

^[i] Herman, Josef (Introduction), *Benno Schotz Retrospective Exhibition*

^[ii] Schotz, Benno, *Bronze in my Blood: The Memoirs of Benno Schotz*

^[iii] Schotz was the first to propose Wyllie in 1976, clearly seeing something in the newly declared artist. Wyllie would be elected an Associate in 1989.

