

Curt Singer: Between Worlds - The Rediscovery of a Lost Jewish Painter

By Dr. Sigalit Meidler-Waks, 29 May 2025

Curt Singer was a German-Jewish painter whose life and work exemplify the precarious path of many artists who experienced fascism, exile, and identity loss in the 20th century. Often referred to as part of the "Lost Generation," Singer's career never gained broader recognition for its contribution to modern art, despite the powerful expression of his artistic oeuvre. For a long time, it was mistakenly assumed in literature that he took his own life in 1938 in Paris, a testament to how little was known about him. In reality, he managed to escape to Palestine.¹ His career was interrupted by persecution and migration, but his creative voice never fell silent. Today, his works are an impressive testimony to displacement, resilience, and memory. His artistic journey began in Hamburg, led to exile in Palestine, and culminated in his late rediscovery in Israel.



Curt Singer (Kurt Singer) was born on February 27, 1905, in Karlsbad, then Austria-Hungary, today Karlovy Vary, Czechia, into a wealthy Jewish family. In the year of his birth, his family moved to Hamburg-Altona, where his father, Viktor Singer (1877-1943), ran an art antiquarian shop and the *Verlag für Graphik*, a graphic art publishing company at Neuer Wall 9. His mother, Berta Singer, née Heller (1876-1967), operated her own corset manufacturing company.

Singer grew up in Hamburg in Oberstrasse 1, graduated from high school in 1922, and subsequently studied philosophy, economics, and art history at the University of Hamburg. Already during his studies, he devoted himself to painting. A scholarship from the Amsinck Foundation allowed him to travel through the Netherlands and to Paris and Marseille in 1927/28, an experience that profoundly influenced his art.

Fig. 1 Curt Singer, Self-portrait in Hamburg, etching, from: Bruns, Maik. *Kunst in der Krise*. Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2001. p. 359.

At the end of the 1920s, he became a member of the *Freunde graphischer Kunst* (friends of Graphic Art) in Hamburg-Blankenese and participated in the exhibitions of the *Hamburgischen Secession* in both 1927 and 1929.

At the Art Exhibition Altona 1929, organized by the *Altona Artists' Association* in the exhibition hall at Flottbeker Chaussee (now Elbchaussee), four works by Singer were exhibited: *Badestrand bei Kattwick*, *Finkenwärder*, *Rummelplatz bei Wilhelmsburg*, and *Övelgönne*.² Singer received one of the donated cash prizes for the exhibition in 1929, and one of his works was purchased by the city of Hamburg.

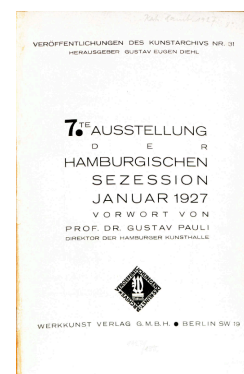


Fig. 2 Exhibition catalog of the Hamburg Secession, 1927. Singer received one of the donated cash prizes, and one of his works was purchased by the city of Hamburg.

The titles of his works provide information about his artistic motifs. Singer portrayed many views of his surroundings in Hamburg, including the port, as well as impressions from his travels to Paris and Marseille, in fine, light-filled colors. Animal representations painted in watercolor are also found in his oeuvre. In contrast to many contemporaries who turned to

¹ This error has been clarified thanks to the meticulous archival search by the founders of the virtual museum "Lost Generation Art": <https://lostgen.art/> accessed on 25.03.2025.

² See exhibition catalog Art Exhibition Altona 1929, September/October, organized by the Altonaer Kunstverein.

abstraction, Singer remained committed to the figurative. He worked with oil, watercolor, gouache, and ink. In addition, etchings, including a series of ten views of Hamburg, have survived. His works testify to his technical precision and emotional sensitivity.

Only in 1930 did Singer begin to study art at the Berlin University of the Arts. After graduating in 1932, he taught at the Hamburg School of Applied Arts, specializing in crafts and painting. He was also a member of the *Hamburgische Künstlerschaft* (Hamburg Artists' Association) and participated in their exhibitions.

In addition to the group exhibitions, Singer is known to have had two solo exhibitions. One took place in 1933 at the *Hamburger Kunstverein*, the other before 1934 at the Fischer Gallery in Prague.

In January 1933, the Hamburg Senate Commission acquired another painting by Singer for the Hamburger Kunsthalle – *Alsterdamm* – which is still part of the museum's collection today. The painting captures the autumn mood at the Alster in pastel colors. Yet, in April of the same year, he was excluded from the *Hamburger Künstlerschaft* (Hamburg Artists' Association) for being Jewish, together with other artists of Jewish origin.

Presumably at this time, Curt Singer replaced the initial “K” letter of his first name with “C”, due to confusion in contemporary literature with the doctor and musicologist Dr. Kurt Singer and henceforth signed his paintings with C. Singer or Curt Singer. Dr. Kurt Singer played a significant role in founding the *Jüdischer Kulturbund* (Jewish Culture Association) in Berlin. This organization was founded in 1933 in Germany after Jewish artists and cultural creators were excluded from public cultural life by the National Socialist government. The organization provided Jewish artists with the opportunity to continue performing and Jewish audiences to attend cultural events, albeit under strict control of the National Socialists. Despite the restrictions, the *Jüdischer Kulturbund* became an important cultural and spiritual refuge for the Jewish community until it was finally dissolved in 1941.



Fig. 3 Kurt Singer, *Alsterdamm*, purchased by the Hamburg Senate Commission for the Hamburger Kunsthalle 1933, HK-2649, Image Credit: Hamburger Kunsthalle / Photo credit: Elke Walford.

After the Nazis took power, Curt Singer presumably immigrated to Palestine in 1935, probably via Prague. This is suggested by the fact that his Palestine Immigrant Certificate was issued in Prague. Upon arriving there, he joined the Kibbutz Heftziba in the Jezreel Valley in the north of present-day Israel.

Arrival in Palestine did not spark an immediate new beginning for his art. On the contrary, Singer worked in agriculture from then on, in particular in the vineyards of the kibbutz. In the collectivist environment of the kibbutz movement, art had no significance. Singer's creative activities came to an almost complete standstill. Only in winter, when it was not possible to work in the vineyard due to rain, did he resume his painting. The years of silence and physical work left a lasting impression on him. It was not until 1943 that he left the kibbutz and moved with his family to Jerusalem, where he slowly found his way back to painting.



Fig. 4 Palestine Immigrant Certificate (Kurt Singer). Ancestry, uploaded by [Enosh Doron], 2015. Retrieved March 17, 2025, from [Ancestry](#)

To earn a living for himself and his family, Singer pursued various professions in his early years in Jerusalem. However, in the mornings and evenings, he devoted himself entirely to his painting. Presumably due to a lack of money, he created many works in oil on paper during this time, as canvases were significantly more expensive.

In 1955, Singer was able to rent an empty house in Ein Kerem, which, in the first year, had neither running water nor electricity. Many of his landscapes and portraits were created here. At that time, he was also a co-founder of the Artists' House in Jerusalem and initially held the position of treasurer of the association.

In Jerusalem and later in Kibbutz Nir Oz, he captured the light and atmosphere of his surroundings in sensitive, bright renderings. He created works in which he portrayed his new Israeli environment with European techniques.

From 1957 on, Curt Singer received reparation payments from Germany. At the same time, his daughter joined the Israeli army, making it financially possible for him to concentrate exclusively on his painting.

Singer's painting themes were based on impressions of the country's landscape, emphasizing the personal connection he developed to the unique atmosphere of the country and its landscapes. He often painted the inhabitants of the country in their daily lives, portraying the different ethnicities, religions, and minorities that make up the Israeli cultural mosaic. Singer painted his pictures with great sensitivity and humility, bringing life and dynamism to his paintings. The color palette he used is bright and radiant, giving his paintings light and atmosphere. Singer's artistic vision is optimistic, idyllic, and gentle.

After suffering a stroke in 1982, Singer moved to Kibbutz Nir Oz with his wife, where their daughter lived, and where he lived until his death on April 10, 1989. In a poignant twist of history, his granddaughter became a recent victim of vicious antisemitic persecution. Yehoud Arbel was kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz on October 7, 2023, and was released from captivity after 482 days of captivity by Hamas terrorists at the end of January 2025.

For a long time, Curt Singer remained unnoticed in art history, neither recognized as a German modernist nor as an Israeli painter. It was only in recent years that a rediscovery took place. Auction houses are offering his works again, and art historians now associate Singer with the "Lost Generation" of artists whose work was silenced by persecution and exile or forgotten. Singer's work is a bridge between cultures and times, a testament to inner steadfastness and silent humanity.

Sources (Selection)

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***Please find additional sources in which Curt Singer is mentioned in the artist registry here: [Persecuted Jewish Artists, Curt Singer].**