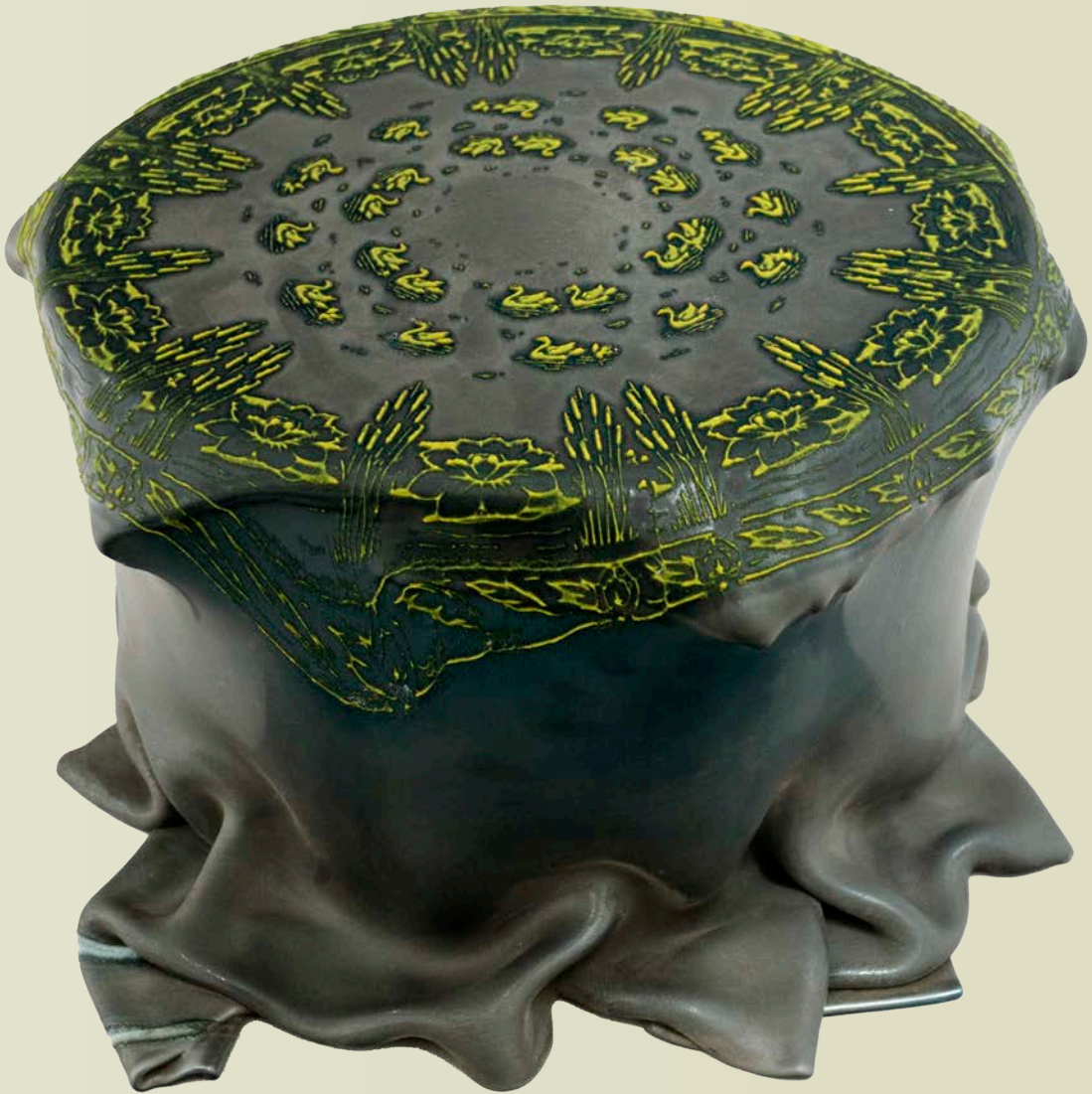


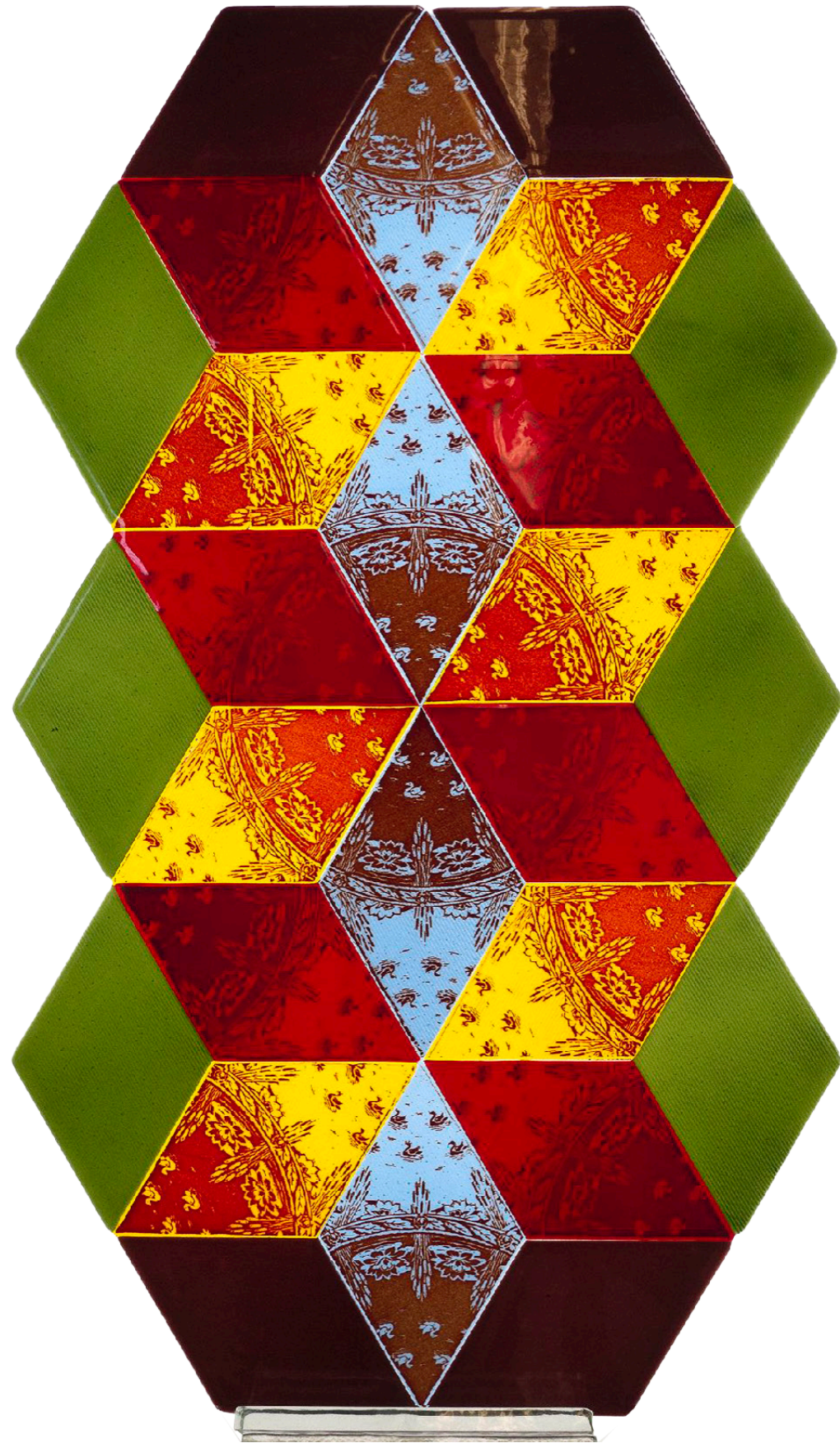
Noah Breuer



Reclamation

Noah Breuer  
Reclamation

To Felix and Rafael



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<b>Regenerations</b>	<i>Sarah Kirk Hanley</i>	30
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*Above:*

**Something Stolen / Something New** 2022  
Exhibition installation at Atelier Circulaire, Montreal, Canada

*Opposite:*

**Rainbow Diamond Shield** 2021  
Kiln formed glass, 42 x 24 x .03 in.

## Introduction

Noah Breuer



**Scooter Girl** 2016  
Screenprint on paper  
22 x 22 in.

This monograph represents a summary of my investigation of early twentieth-century Jewish-owned textile companies in Czech Bohemia and Moravia. My artwork responds to their role within a distinct economic and cultural landscape and to their visual legacy. The case study for this research and artwork is Carl Breuer and Sons (CB&S), my family's former textile printing business, founded in 1897 in Bohemia. In 1939, upon the German takeover of Czechoslovakia, the CB&S company was seized and sold to Nazi-approved owners, as was the fate of all other Jewish-owned property in German-occupied areas. In time, most of my family members were sent off to concentration camps and murdered. With the loss of their livelihood and then their very lives, most remnants of their work also disappeared.

During my 2016 research trip to the Czech Republic, I uncovered a substantial company archive of CB&S printed fabric samples and designs, held for decades within the Czech Textile Museum in Česká Skalice. I also consulted the company's business records found in state archives in Zámrsk and in Dvůr Králové nad Labem where the Breuer factory was based. I amassed a rich collection of primary source material in the form of digital scans and photographs depicting original CB&S materials, business records and correspondence. This archival material became a springboard for my art practice and led me to create an array of print-based objects and installations which raise questions about labor, authorship and appropriation while touching on my family's story of persecution. I conceive of this endeavor as a reclamation project in which I resurrect, reinterpret and indeed reclaim the designs of the lost Breuer family business and make them my own.

The artwork included in this book was developed in my studio, in the university printmaking labs where I taught, and at a variety of artist residencies across the country. Elements of the project have been exhibited through solo exhibitions and group shows since late 2016. Much of my research was informed by the work and knowledge of my father, Robert Breuer, which helped to elucidate invaluable details of Breuer family history.

My approach to this project follows a method which I have employed in my art practice since graduate school. I begin my research process as a collector, unearthing and accumulating images and documents from historical archives and records of correspondence. I then act as re-interpreter of this material, creating woodcuts, screenprints, sculptures, books and installations. My artwork seeks to recontextualize my source material so that it can be presented to a contemporary audience in novel ways. The resulting works illuminate my personal feelings, aesthetic associations and research related to my chosen subject.

My art practice consists of two coequal elements: archival research which informs the conceptual content of my artwork; and material research of craft media and techniques. I am a member of a generation of artists who reached adulthood around 2000, as digital technology became affordable and increasingly integral to our studio practices. We are not Digital Natives, and thus maintain a healthy ambivalence towards purely digital artforms. Yet twenty-first century tools have become indispensable to our art practices, inevitably contributing to the forms and conceptual content of our processes. As a result of these circumstances, my prints, paintings and sculptures are filtered through a degree of technological intervention from conception to completion.

While creative ideation and research may drive my decision making, I remain especially invested in expanding the material repertoire of my craft. While my formal training is in printmaking, my art practice centers around the fusion of traditional print techniques with contemporary tools such as digitally-driven printers, routers and laser cutters. While working on this reclamation project, I broadened my knowledge of craft media to include sculptural glass, mold-making, paper-casting, woodworking, and textile dyes, and I created installations and participatory workshops.

Early on during my work on the CB&S project, I began hosting rubbing workshops in conjunction with my exhibitions. I provided tools by which exhibition attendees were invited to collaborate with me on site, producing new artworks inspired by a selection of the CB&S factory designs. Participants used engraved table-top surfaces to make wax rubbings on vellum. These visiting collaborators approximated and reanimated an aspect of the old factory, and imbued it with a new sense of improvisation and play. The resulting wax rubbings represent a further act of reiteration and reclamation of my historic source material, and they serve to challenge the primacy of a single artist-to-artwork relationship.

This book is being published on the occasion of the exhibition, *Noah Breuer: Reclamation* at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The exhibition is the culmination of six years of work and includes screenprints I made just after my 2016 Czech research trip, an engraved plywood installation created for the show, and more than a dozen other artworks. ♦



**Bohemian Showroom 2018**

Cyanotype and dye on cotton, wooden dowels, 54 x 188 in.  
Space Gallery, Portland, Maine

*Opposite:*

**Bohemian Showroom 2019**

Cyanotype and dye on cotton, cedar, 18 x 8 ft.  
Installation at Jule Collins Smith Museum, Auburn University





**Something Stolen / Something New 2022**  
Exhibition installation at Atelier Circulaire, Montreal, Canada



**Cabbage** 2021  
Exhibition installation at VisArts  
Rockville, Maryland



**Table Settings** 2023  
Exhibition installation at Urban Glass  
Brooklyn, New York



At the turn of the 20th century, Prague had one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe, and during this time in the nearby town of Dvůr Králové my ancestors built a synagogue in which their community would worship. The "Dvůr Králové Temple" was erected in 1891, (above left, circa 1900); while it initially thrived along with its congregants, it was desecrated by the Nazis in 1939, then neglected by the Communist Czechoslovakian regime that followed the war, and finally demolished in 1966 (above right). The glass and steel artworks shown above can be read as windows without buildings —referencing the stained glass windows of the lost temple, printed with a reimagined assemblage of CB&S tablecloth designs.



**Shattered** 2019  
Kiln formed glass  
20.5 x 20.5 x .3 in.

Through the first half of the 20th Century, the Carl Breuer & Sons textile printing business produced all manner of table linens and cotton and silk items including handkerchiefs with playful design themes. This piece appropriates original CB&S handkerchief designs, now screenprinted on semi-opaque glass plates using enamel ink. After printing, the plates were broken and the resulting shards were fused in a kiln onto a larger, fiery red/orange glass sheet. The final composition is meant to reference Kristallnacht, also called "the Night of Broken Glass." On that day, November 10, 1938, Nazi-instigated pogroms broke out throughout Germany, Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia. On that very same day, Noah's grandparents successfully obtained United States visas in Prague. Meanwhile, back in their hometown of Vienna, forty synagogues were destroyed or damaged.



**CB&S Floral Swatch 2** 2016  
Woodcuts on raw silk  
38.5 x 28.5 in.



**CB&S Floral Swatch 4** 2016  
Woodcuts on raw silk  
38.5 x 28.5 in.



**Tatra Tassel** 2017  
Woodcut, screenprint and uv reactive dye on linen and raw silk  
40 x 40 in.



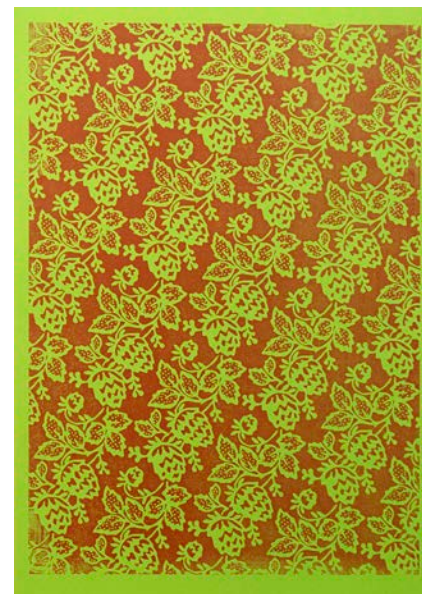
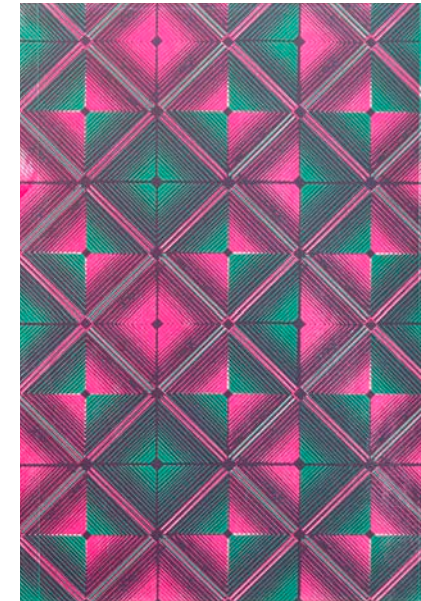
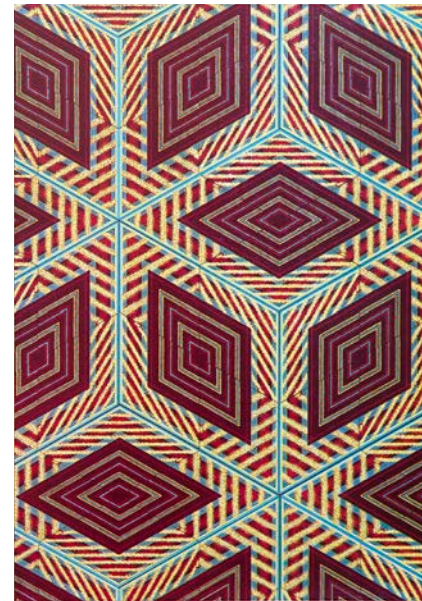


**CB&S Swatchbook 2018**

24-page artist book, 4 x 4 in.

Woodblock and polymer plate prints with foil-stamped cover and screw-post binding

Published by the San Francisco Center for the Book



*Opposite:*

**Broadsides for the CB&S Swatchbook 2018**

Laser-engraved, letterpress-printed woodcuts

22 x 16 in. each



**Handkerchief printed by CB&S**  
 Dvůr Králové, circa 1910  
 Product sample from Breuer archive  
 Courtesy of the Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague



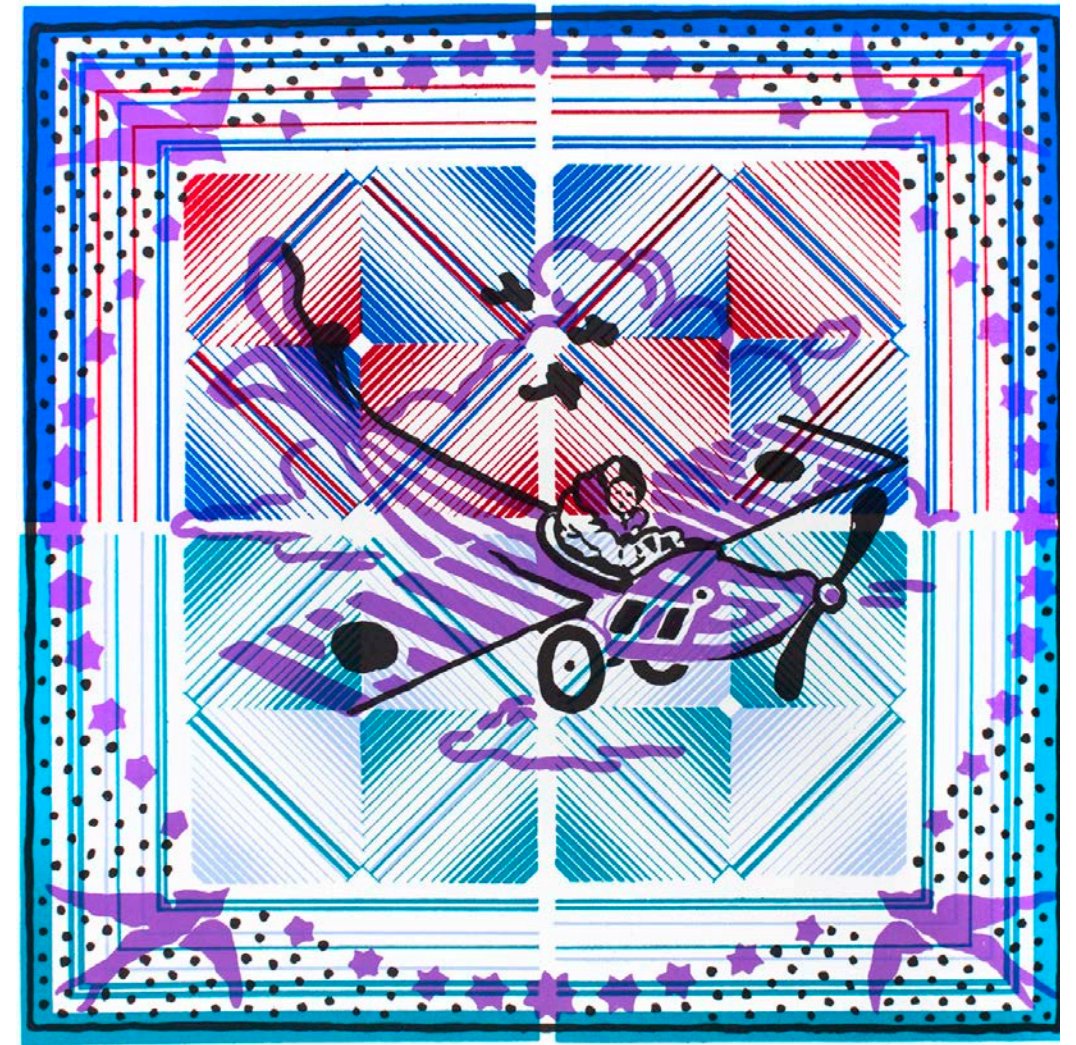
The *Judenstern*, literally “Jews’ star” in German, was a yellow cloth patch that all Jews in Nazi-controlled regimes were ordered to buy and sew onto the front left side of the breast and the back of their outer garments, in order to mark them in public as Jewish. The badge was the Star of David with the word *Jude* (German for Jew) inscribed in faux Hebrew letters. Similar printed signs were ordered posted on all Jewish owned or occupied property—homes, stores, businesses, etc. Official announcements proclaimed, “severe punishment is in store for Jews who do not wear the yellow badge on back and front.”

When the CB&S company was “Aryanized” under Nazi decree, and confiscated from the family in 1939, the seized factory soon began printing Nazi wartime textile materials, including uniform components. With astounding irony, in late 1941 the former CB&S factory began the production of innumerable Stars of David with the word “Jude” (Jew) printed in black onto bolts of yellow cloth.

**Jude Badge** 1941  
 Printed at the former CB&S factory. On display at the Czech Textile Museum in Ceská Skalice, Czech Republic. 2014



**Circus Folks & Badges** 2019  
 Screenprint, 37 x 30 in.  
 Printed in collaboration with Master Printer Thomas Wojak at W.O.R.K.S Printshop Vallejo, California.



**Pilot** 2016  
Screenprint  
22 x 22 in.

**Handkerchief product samples**

Printed by CB&S in Dvůr Králové, circa 1910  
Courtesy of the Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague



**Jockeys** 2020  
Screenprint  
22 x 22 in.



**Soccer Guys** 2016  
Screenprint  
22 x 22 in.



**Swing Girls Terrycloth** 2019

Kiln formed glass  
2 x 17 x 20 in.



**Forest Tablecloth** 2019

Kiln formed glass  
15 x 14 x 13 in.



**Screenprinting with glass frit and kiln forming**

Bullseye Projects Glass Residency  
Emeryville, California, 2019



**Yellow Tablecloth 2019**

Kiln formed glass  
16 x 13 x 13 in.

This glass object features an original CB&S songbird design from the 1910s meant for a circular tablecloth. In the transformation from table linen to fine art glass object, the form has become both more permanent and more fragile. This work is part of a series of glass objects created by screenprinting both original and modified CB&S designs on flat sheets of glass using powdered glass frit. After printing, the powder is fused in a hot kiln and the entire sheet is "slumped" into a self-supporting sculptural composition. In their new form, these works become more akin to spectral shrouds than elements of table settings.



**Rubber molds and pigmented cast cotton**

Dieu Donné  
Brooklyn, New York, 2021



**Cotton Swan** 2021  
Pigmented cast cotton  
18 x 24 x .75 in.

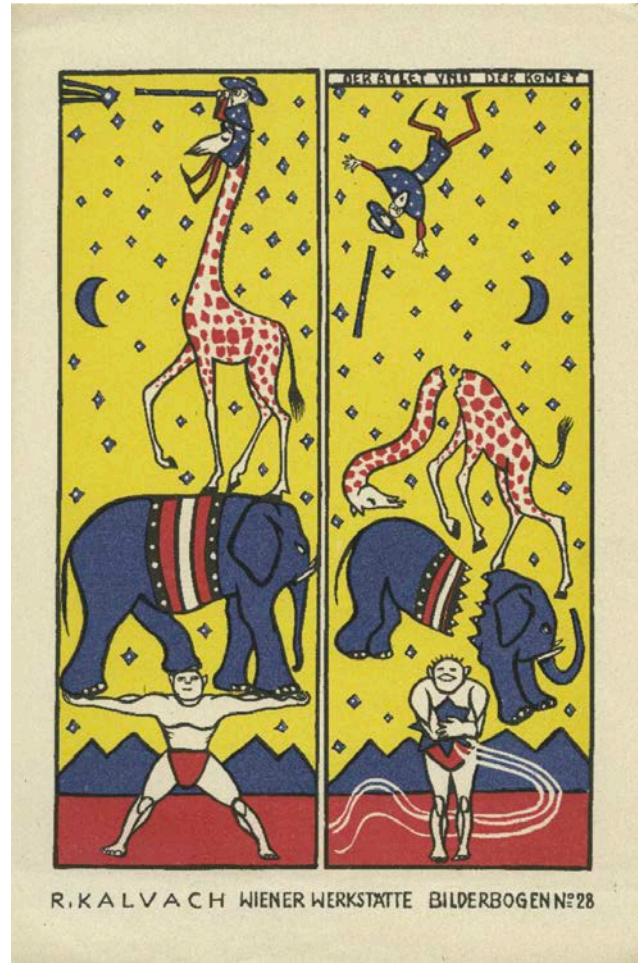


**Rust Rabbit** 2021  
Pigmented cast cotton  
24 x 18 x .75 in.



**Cotton Stag** 2021  
Cast cotton  
24 x 18 x .75 in.





## Regenerations: Noah Breuer on Central European Design

Sarah Kirk Hanley

Fig.1

Rudolf Kalvach (Austrian, 1883-1932), *Der Athlet und der Komet (The Muscleman and the Comet)*. Color lithograph, 1907, 5 1/2 x 3 9/16 (14 x 9 cm), published by Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna. The Leopold Museum, Vienna. Image: Open access, Creative Commons license, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en). Modern Art, Gift of Leonard Lauder. 671.1987.

Noted craft scholar Glenn Adamson recently observed: “Craft has an irreducible connection to human time, effort, and skill. For that reason alone, it will always retain political potential.”<sup>1</sup> Noah Breuer explores such potential in the political act of reclaiming his family’s history for a contemporary audience, which had been nearly effaced by the Nazis. He restores its original intention and cultural associations, honoring the family’s history and contributions to popular material culture of the period. Breuer laments, “The shroud of the Holocaust looms large over this work, but I want these pieces to be a celebration of the visual legacy of the factory ... of their hard work.”<sup>2</sup>

The original artifacts Breuer uncovered are, by his own description, “quite whimsical and sort of old-fashioned ... they are all very innocent”:<sup>3</sup> a goggled pilot in an early twentieth-century aircraft ringed with stars and birds; a young girl on a scooter surrounded by butterflies; pine trees of two sizes arranged in a circle; a monkey riding horseback on a dog; etc. Breuer emphasizes that CB&S produced secular items for widespread use, and there was no connection between these designs and Judaic material culture: “I believe that some of my family members probably thought of themselves as culturally Viennese or Czech first, and Jewish second.” He adds that his great-grandfather Felix Breuer, who lived in Vienna and operated the business and sales offices of CB&S, refused to enter a synagogue, even for important family occasions.<sup>4</sup>



Fig.2

Rhenish, 14th Century, Printed Textile block-printed dye on silk, 5 1/2 x 7 7/8 in. (14 x 20 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1909. Image: Open access.

Focusing on their simplicity and charming appeal, Breuer breathes new life into the images that once adorned CB&S’s handkerchiefs, tablecloths, and other decorative fabrics, recontextualizing these humble material objects through printmaking, blown glass, and paper pulp casting. His selection of techniques plays to the long history of textile manufacturing and glassworks in the region (figure 2).<sup>5</sup> The block prints relate to the way the textiles were manufactured, using block printing techniques based on historic precedents, while the paper pulp works hearken to the textile industry in their use of dyes and hand-beaten fibers. Although the glassworks were created with contemporary methods, the material itself is a source of Bohemian pride: Czech glass has long been unrivaled in its quality (figure 3). In this sense, his work can be understood in conversation with the Pattern and Decoration Movement (1972-1985), which challenged the contemporaneous notion that decorative art was lesser than so-called fine art.<sup>6</sup> The short-lived and previously overlooked movement has gained renewed attention by scholars in recent years as so-called “high” and “low” distinctions have further collapsed in the art world, and in response to its influence on subsequent generations of artists, including Breuer and his contemporaries (such as Alex Dodge, Glen Baldrige, Ruby Stiler, Ethan Greenbaum, and David Kennedy Cutler).



Fig.3

Alphonse Mucha, (Czech, 1860-1939), *Art Nouveau stained glass* in the Municipal House (Obecní dům) in Prague (detail), 1912. Image: Open access, Creative Commons License, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en)

Breuer has long been fascinated with vernacular applications of printmaking and pattern and how these intersect with cultural history. From a young age, the textile artist Miriam Nathan-Roberts—a nationally recognized studio art quilter and friend of the family—instilled in him a respect for textile and pattern. Andrew Raftery, his printmaking professor at the Rhode Island School of Design—a renowned engraver who also creates original design objects, including ceramic transferware plates and bespoke wallpaper—encouraged Breuer to further explore these interests as an undergraduate.

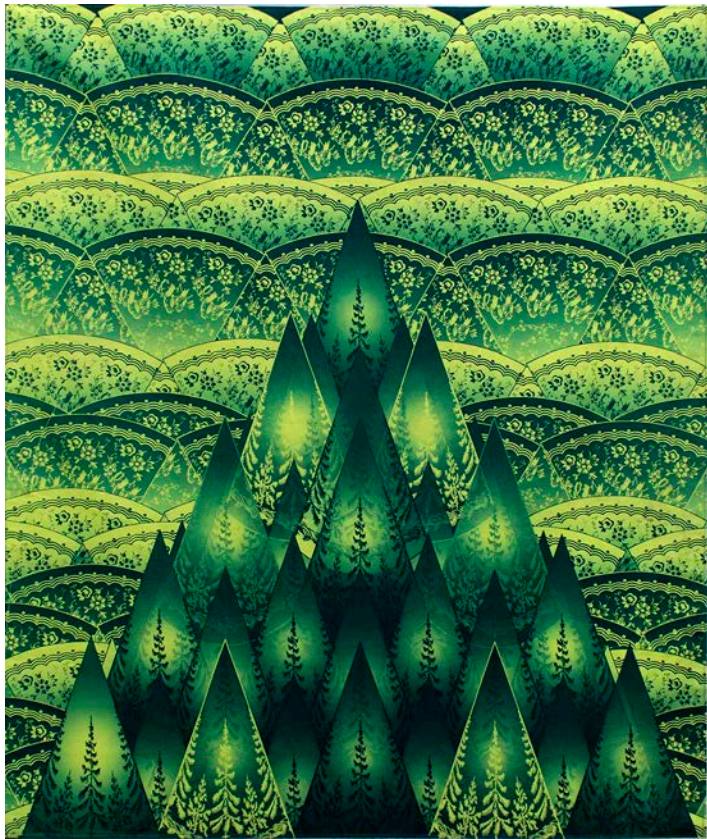


Fig. 4  
Noah Breuer, *Ariane Forest*, 2018  
Cyanotype and reactive dye on cotton, 54 x 45 in.



Fig. 5  
Ferdinand Andri (Austrian, 1871–1956)  
Poster for the Twenty-sixth Secession Exhibition,  
1906. Lithograph. 37 x 24 1/2" (94 x 62.2 cm).  
The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Leonard Lauder.  
671.1987.

Another major influence for Breuer is the artists' cooperative Wiener Werkstätte (Viennese Workshop), or WW, founded by Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser and Fritz Waerndorfer in 1903. Until it closed in 1932, artists who belonged to the WW created original utilitarian objects including ceramics, lighting, silver, fashion, leatherwork, furniture, and graphic design (postcards, books, and stationery). Their intention—to bring fine art design into everyday life—had a profound impact on twentieth century art history, a subject unto itself.<sup>7</sup> For current purposes, it is relevant that Breuer's paternal family hails from Vienna. Breuer has been visiting Vienna and soaking in its cultural history since childhood: aside from his own fascination with the WW, he suspects that his CB&S family members respected their work. He observes, "The Wiener Werkstätte was obviously a much more historically significant enterprise than CB&S. But the two operated at the same time and in the same city and I am quite certain that the WW influenced what CB&S made."

This assertion finds resonance upon examination of original postcards made by two WW artists, Moriz Jung and Rodolf Kalvach, where we see strong connections to CB&S themes of the same period: flight; animals; and circus characters. The designs from both firms share certain whimsical, humorous, cartoon-like qualities and were meant for wide circulation. In an exhibition of Jung's 1911 flight series postcards at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Theresa Ketterer explains, "Wiener Werkstätte postcards were meant to be shared, traded, and discussed. The fact that Moriz Jung anticipated that a large audience would find his satirical postcards of early flight amusing indicates that there must have been an enthusiastic and good-humored attitude (tinged with some skepticism)

toward the new technology of flight in pre-war Vienna." (She emphasizes that airplanes were not yet associated with warfare, as they were not used for that purpose until WWI.)<sup>8</sup> Jung's postcards were likely a response to the first demonstration of flight in Vienna by Louis Blériot on October 23, 1909, which drew over 300,000 onlookers (figure 6).<sup>9</sup> It is quite possible that CB&S's airplane-themed handkerchief, circa 1910 (see page 18), was similarly inspired.

Jung's flight series (figure 7) is indeed darkly comical and satirical, as were Kalvach's images in general. In one example illustrated here, *The Muscleman and the Comet*, (figure 1) we see at left a circus strongman holding up an elephant, giraffe, and citizen astronomer; at right, the latter three come tumbling to their demise when the strongman catches the celestial body—it is clever, fantastical, and entirely absurd. Though conceptually straightforward by comparison, CB&S's handkerchiefs featuring a monkey-cum-jockey on a dog (see page 20) and two circus clowns and an acrobat (see page 17), share a certain sensibility with Kalvach's imagery. For Breuer, the naiveté of CB&S's images has a bittersweet quality, representing a form of extinction, "there's a bit of a metaphor of an endangered species."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as many historians have observed, the World Wars irreversibly altered human consciousness; as a result, CB&S's pre-WWI images impress the twenty-first-century viewer as old fashioned and child-like.

These qualities are enhanced to varying degrees by Breuer—cultural history, a lost past, atrocities, and the paradoxical shattering and/or embrace of innocence—can be found throughout this body of work and are open to a range of responses. Through digital manipulation of his source imagery, Breuer explores the full spectrum: from the playfulness of their original historical context to the complications that attend modern-day reception of these images. The earliest works from 2016,

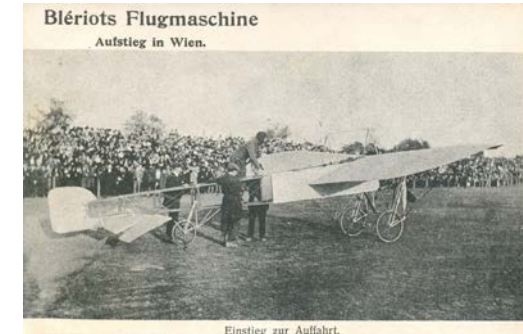


Fig. 6  
Blériots Flugmaschine. Aufstieg in Wien, Einstieg zur Auffahrt. (Blériot's Flying Machine: Flight in Vienna: Preparing for Takeoff), 1909. Image: Weinbibliothek im Rathaus.



Fig. 7  
Moriz Jung (Czech, active Austria, 1885–1915)  
*Erstbesteigung des Monte Domapozza in den Dolomiten* (First Ascent of Monte Domapozza in the Dolomites). Color lithograph, 1911  
5 1/2 x 3 9/16 in. (14 x 9 cm), published by Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Open access.

including *Pilot*, *Scooter Girl*, *Soccer Guys* (see page 18), and the *CB&S Floral Swatch* (see page 12) series, are minimally altered reinterpretations of what he found in the archives. In more recent works, their darker implications have become more prevalent. In the 2018 exhibition “*Bohemian Showroom*,” one of Breuer’s cyanotype and dye on cotton works (figure 4) in the window was based on *Poster for the Twenty-sixth Secession Exhibition* (1906) by Ferdinand Andri (fig. 5). While Breuer is a fan of the poster, his research into Andri revealed that he was an avowed anti-Semite; in a clever reversal, Breuer re-imagines the poster *Ariane Forest* (fig. 4). Some of the most menacing examples, *Shattered* (see page 11) and *Circus Folks & Badges* (see page 17) (both 2019), directly reference Nazi atrocities. To create *Shattered*, Breuer transferred CB&S designs to glass, broke them, then melted the resulting shards back together—conjuring Kristallnacht and the subsequent attempts to piece back together the remnants of what was forever lost that day. *Circus Folks and Badges* is not only universally, but also personally significant—in a sickening twist, his family’s former factory was used to print the badges that Jews were forced to wear for identification. In juxtaposing the insouciant entertainers with this Nazi emblem, Breuer brings the viewer directly into the losses experienced by his own relatives and so many others. His miniature table-top glassworks from the same year evoke a ghost-like past or “death shroud.”<sup>11</sup> In a more positive vein, his stained-glass compositions based on the Star of David, 2020, highlight the Jewish heritage originally absent from CB&S’s textiles (see page 10).

Breuer’s current project can be understood as a progression, synthesis, and deepening of the interests that informed two earlier projects: *Searching Soldiers* (2005-10) (figure 8) and *Cards & Dots* (2013-15), (figure 9), which also explore lost innocence. *Searching Soldiers* first took form while the artist was in residence as a postgraduate fellow at the LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University. The project resulted from Breuer’s extended correspondence with two American soldiers his own age who were serving in the Iraq War. In response, he created paintings and prints with two distinct compositional approaches: roundels depicting ghostlike military figures, using an acid-green ink palette intended to mimic the color of imagery seen through night-vision goggles; and portraits or groups of soldiers in action, overlaid with (or in proximity to) powerful patterns derived from Islamic art and camouflage netting. Breuer also created a unique sculpture in the form of a windmill with fins in the shape of the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber; seen in motion, the movement resembles the hypnotic blades of a military helicopter in flight, though it is nearly silent.<sup>12</sup> In *Cards & Dots*, Breuer deconstructs the once common



baseball trading card, not only in terms of its commercial CMYK dot-pattern printing technique, but also in terms of the sports heroes’ fall from grace during the steroid scandals from 1985-2006. In all his work, pattern and design serve as strong compositional elements in which he explores cultural and personal history.

Breuer identifies himself as part of an “in between” generation in terms of how he relates to digital media, but the same could be said of his identity: he is the product of Jewish, Czech, Viennese, Californian, and American East Coast cultures spanning the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Each of these elements find their way into Breuer’s singular approach, a hybrid of Western art history that is utterly contemporary in its design and execution. In melding his multifarious past into his work and bringing it to the present, Breuer offers a fresh perspective on how we can continue to respect and remember the past while moving into the future. ♦

#### Notes

- 1 Craft: An American History (Bloomsbury, 2021), 296.
- 2 Noah Breuer, “Conversation avec Noah Breuer,” Atelier Circulaire (Montreal, Quebec), YouTube Channel, published 2022; [https://youtu.be/GFnF5y\\_2fr4?si=jVBsPy4WUNWLnO\\_1](https://youtu.be/GFnF5y_2fr4?si=jVBsPy4WUNWLnO_1), accessed September 6, 2023.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Email interview with the author, September 2, 2023.
- 5 See Jan Mergl. 2012. *From Neuwelt to the Whole World: 300 Years of Harrach Glass*. 1st ed. Revnice, Czech Republic, Prague: Arbor Vitae; Museum of Decorative Arts.
- 6 See Manuela Ammer and Esther Boehle. 2018. *Pattern and Decoration: Ornament as Promise*. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König; and Anna Rebecca Lowery Katz, et al. 2019. *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985*. Los Angeles and New Haven: Museum of Contemporary Art; Yale University Press.
- 7 See Gabriele Fahr-Becker and Angelika Taschen. 2008. *Wiener Werkstätte: 1903-1932 Special ed.* Köln: Taschen.
- 8 Theresa Ketterer, “A Satirical View of Early Flight: Wiener Werkstätte Postcards by Moritz Jung,” June 30, 2014.
- 9 See “Schwere als Luft. 100 Jahre Motorflug in Wien,” exhibition at the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, September 18, 2009 – February 26, 2010, [www.wienbibliothek.at/veranstaltungen-ausstellungen/ausstellungen/schwerer-luft-100-jahre-motorflug-wien](http://www.wienbibliothek.at/veranstaltungen-ausstellungen/ausstellungen/schwerer-luft-100-jahre-motorflug-wien) (accessed September 14, 2023).
- 10 “Conversation avec Noah Breuer”
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Video available at [noahbreuer.com](http://noahbreuer.com) (accessed September 1, 2023).



Opposite: Fig. 8

Noah Breuer, *Room Clearing Exercise*, 2007  
Ink and acrylic on mylar, installation at Rockefeller Center  
96 x 192 in.

Fig. 9

Noah Breuer, *Lenny and Darryl*, 2014  
Screenprint, Spray Paint, Pigment Print, Laser Etching,  
24 x 18 in.



## Carl Breuer & Sons

Robert Breuer



Textiles were an integral part of the Czech Bohemian economy as early as the 16th century, with the processing of cotton and jute, and the formation of cloth weaving and dyeing guilds. By the early 19th century, dyers in the town of *Dvůr Králové*, were printing on fabric. The town gradually became well known in the industry for that expertise. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Austrian territories became industrialized. In the Bohemia-based textile industry, fabrics that had been produced for years by traditional handloom weaving were now made by new mechanical looms and spinning machines, mostly imported from Great Britain. As a result, costs went down and production went up.

As a substantial and diversified textile industry emerged, newly-empowered Jewish businessmen were among the first in the Austrian Empire to realize that those technological innovations would make the industry far more efficient, productive and profitable. Soon purpose-built factories began to operate, powered at first by water, then steam and eventually electricity. They comprised the modern Bohemia textile industry that dominated sales within the Austrian Empire and even abroad when opportunities for increased international trade became evident and possible.

On July 10, 1897, Carl Breuer and his two sons, Felix and Ernst formed *Carl Breuer & Söhne*, their new trading company in the Vienna's first district, distributing woven fabric. They weren't starting from scratch because Carl had already worked for Stern and Company, another woven fabric business in Vienna. The families' experience and connections with textile manufacturing in the neighboring Czech lands contributed greatly to the new company's early success.

Carl Breuer's new textile fabrication/printing business, *CB&S*, was just such an enterprise. No longer trading in other factories' products, the Breuer firm established its own factory in 1902 in the Bohemian town *Bílá Třemesná* (ger: *Weiss Třemeschná*) near *Trutov* (ger: *Trautenau*) where his in-laws had a large textile enterprise.

The *CB&S* factory specialized in the production of custom-made ties, ladies pinafore dresses, scarves, napkins, tablecloths, aprons, and bedspreads. The business also owned a store in Croatia's capital city, Zagreb. *CB&S* products were exported to Yugoslavia, Romania, Sweden and England. The Breuer business even managed to thrive during the pre-war Depression years.

Five years later, in 1907, business sales had expanded so that *CB&S* decided to enlarge its production capacity. They sought a building permit for a textile block print and dye-house in the nearby town of *Dvůr Králové nad Labem* (ger: *Königinhof an der Elbe*) which itself had expanded rapidly, with fifteen textile mills operating there. Once he obtained his permit, Carl Breuer and his sons Ernst and Felix purchased lots from Gabriel Hasse near the center of town where an old smaller factory already existed.

The Breuer company immediately began remodeling the older buildings and expanding capacity with the construction of new facilities. Their newly established factory was registered under the lengthy German name *Carl Breuer und Söhne, Baumwollwaren-Weberei, Färberei und Druckerei Königinhof a/E*. In Czech that was *Karel Breuer a Synové, Textilní tiskárna, braverna a úpravna Dvůr Králové n/Laben* or translated to English: Carl Breuer and Sons, plain cotton goods weaving mill, fabricating and printing Königinhof on the Elbe. Throughout this document I refer to the business concisely as *CB&S*, as it was usually labeled for brevity and branding.

The two sons of the *Carl Breuer and Sons* business were Ernst (cz: Arnost) and Felix. On September 1, 1907, Carl Breuer passed away. His widow Pauline survived him for over twenty more years, living in *Königinhof*. Ernst and brother Felix were left to run the business. The Breuer brothers Ernst and Felix took distinct roles in their shared business. Felix oversaw most company sales and represented the *CB&S* business in Vienna, while Ernst ran the factory at *Königinhof* in Bohemia. Theirs was a company with dozens of employees, the payroll rising and falling with business cycles. An international enterprise such as theirs, with customers and suppliers inside the Empire and beyond, required representation in the Austrian capital, largely Felix's domain. The two brothers kept in daily contact by mail and telephone, visiting each other frequently either in Vienna or at *Königinhof*.

*Königinhof* or *Dvůr Králové* was primarily a Czech-speaking town next to a mainly German-speaking population, located slightly south of what the Germans called the *Sudetenland*. The entire Bohemia-based Breuer family spoke both languages. Felix, his wife Olga, and their son Hans, living in Vienna, of course spoke German. ♦



### CB&S sample swatches necktie design

Pencil and ink on paper, printed on silk  
Dvůr Králové, circa 1918  
Breuer factory archive  
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague

Opposite

CB&S Factory, Dvůr Králové, Bohemia, circa 1910

The First World War changed nearly everything in the old Austrian Empire. After the war ended in 1918 new smaller countries were carved from the former empire, becoming the mainly independent states of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. Far-flung business enterprises such as *CB&S* were forced to split apart among the new smaller countries. The newly emerged state entities imposed all sorts of customs, tariffs and other restrictions. Residents of the new, smaller countries who had all been 'Austro-Hungarians', now had to choose and declare a domicile of record. For our family that meant choosing between Austria and Czechoslovakia. The Bohemia Breuers, who had been living in *Königinhof* where the factory still stood, now found themselves living in the newly independent state of Czechoslovakia, where they chose to remain as Czech citizens. Felix Breuer and others of his family, who had been living in Vienna, chose to stay there, becoming citizens of the newly-separate state of Austria.

It became legally impractical for *CB&S* to maintain a Vienna office separate from its Bohemia factory. Consequently Ernst Breuer and Felix Breuer, the two owner-brothers, came to an amicable parting of the ways. Although both had been equal partners in the family business, they entered into an agreement whereby Ernst would buy Felix's interest in the company over time so that eventually Ernst would become the sole owner.

Also, with the end of World War I, Ernst Breuer, in compliance with the separation of Austria from Czechoslovakia and in accordance with the laws promulgated by a proud new Czech dominated government, *Carl Breuer und Söhne* now included the company's Czech name of *Karel Breuer a Synové*. Ernst Breuer appointed his only son Karl (cz. *Karel*) named after the elder Carl Breuer, and Karl's wife, Markéta, known to family as Ilsa or Ilse, as his own successors.

The Breuer company's pool of employees grew. In the 1920s, *CB&S* variously employed between thirty and sixty workers, along with four to seven plant managers, of both Czech and German nationalities. At that point, approximately a third of the *Dvůr Králové nad Labem* population was German-identified, families who had lived in Bohemia for generations, even centuries.

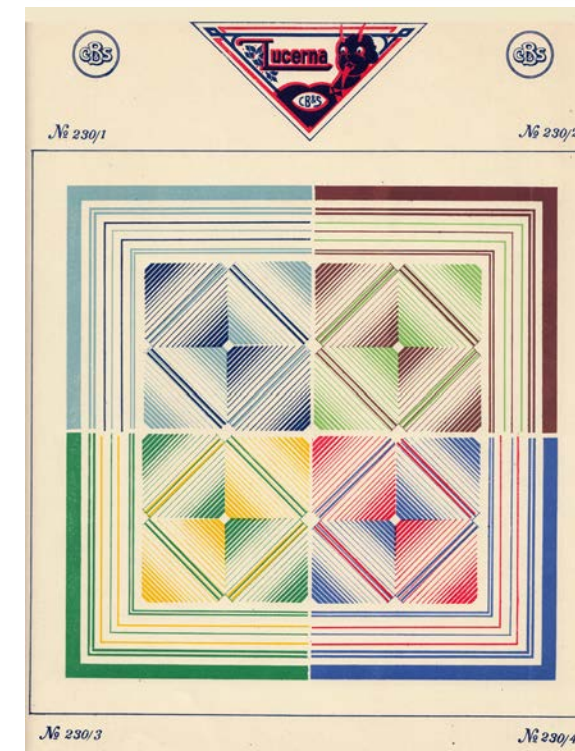
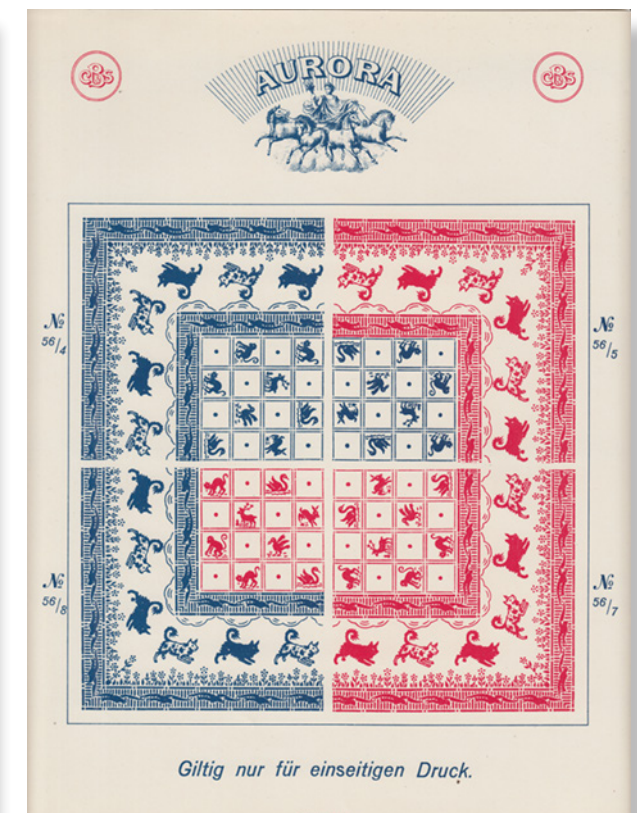
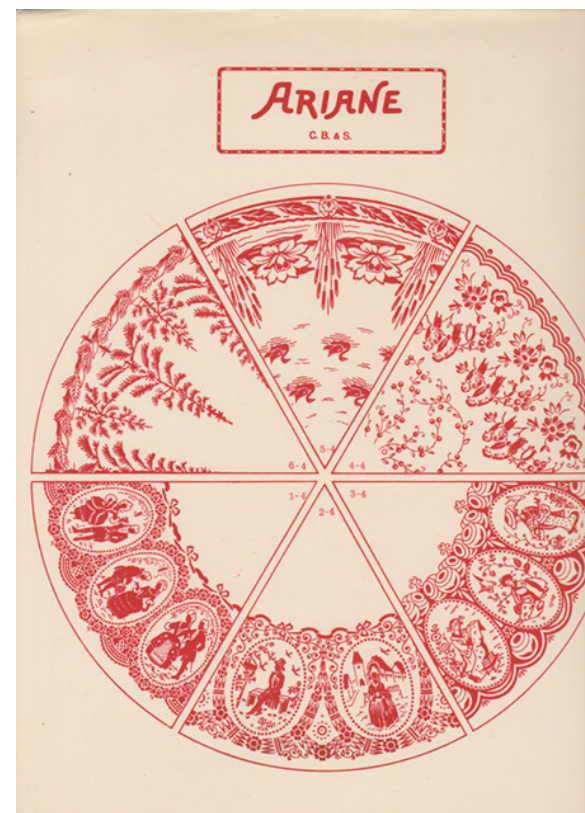


**Karl Breuer**  
3rd generation owner of *CB&S*, and grandson of firm's founder, Carl Breuer

After the death of his father Ernst in 1936, twenty-eight-year-old Karl Breuer took over and ably ran the factory as a flourishing enterprise. By the late 1930s, the young and gregarious Karl and Ilsa Breuer became the new center of the Bohemia family, owners of a very productive business within a thriving industry. Textile production accounted for 360,000 jobs by 1935 and it continued to dominate northern Bohemia through the entire first half of the twentieth century. *Carl Breuer & Söhne* company records indicate that in 1939 the factory printed about 660,000 meters (772,000 yards) of fabrics. ♦

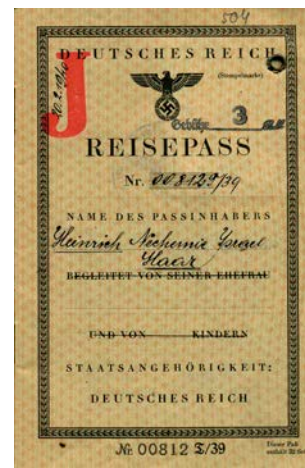


**1910 postcard view of Carl Breuer & Sons factory** in right foreground near center of *Dvůr Králové nad Labem*.



**CB&S product lines** allowed company sales representatives to offer customers printed combinations of color, size, and pattern over a wide range of sample designs. Yearly style collections were introduced, inspiring customer choice in adapting variations to their own merchandise. Product lines carried evocative names such as *Ariane*, *Aurora*, *Lucerna*, *Tatra*, *Kosmos*, *Alice*, *Ida*, and *Salome*.

## Nazi Confiscation of CB&S



**Dramatic changes came swiftly in late September 1938, when Germany annexed the Czech Sudetenland.** The Nazis incorporated Austria into the German Reich in March 1938 and the German-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia in the autumn of that same year. But, in March of 1939, only six months later, the German army marched into what was left of Czechoslovakia. The Czech-speaking areas now became the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.” *Dvůr Králové* which stood in Czechoslovakia on the very edge of the already-seized *Sudetenland* was suddenly in Nazi hands. The Czech Breuers and extended family were now trapped, their homes and factory, even their lives, completely at the mercy of the Nazis.

As German-occupied areas became “Aryanized”, the quality of life for non-German speaking Czechs, and for Czech Jews in particular, deteriorated very quickly. Most harmful initially was a methodical campaign, including new laws and regulations, to deprive Jews of their livelihoods. As a Jew, it didn’t matter what your previous community standing was or what connections you had. Everyone suffered the same fate, In fact, being well established virtually guaranteed that the Nazis would confiscate your property. That’s what happened to the Breuer family’s business.

One can imagine how earth-shattering and terrifying this Aryanization campaign must have seemed to the other Jews living in the mainly Czech town of *Königinhof*, which in that period entirely dropped its Czech name, *Dvůr Králové*. The fate of *Königinhof*’s small Jewish community, including every member of the family living there, exemplifies how historic enmity can build up over a long period into a thundering crescendo, and finally, with rapid and turbulent movement, take its awful toll. The Bohemia-based Breuer family was swept up into this whirlwind.

All Czech Jews became targets of a systematic Nazi ethnic cleansing campaign which included seizing their businesses, homes, possessions, and eventually their very lives. As the Nazi regime sought to completely “Aryanize” or ‘de-Jew’ the economy, one of its highest priorities became the transfer of Jewish property into Aryan hands. Since the Nazis had already refined their Aryanization process in Germany and Austria, they were able to pursue it even more quickly and efficiently in the Czech lands.

*Carl Breuer & Sons* fell into Nazi hands in a typically German, methodical way that spanned fifteen months, from September 1939 to January 1941. While smaller Jewish businesses were seized outright under German control, larger enterprises, such as *CB&S*, were taken over in a more complicated, two-step process. First, a temporary, Nazi-installed trustee was put in place to oversee the business until a Nazi approved buyer could be found. Then a forced sale to that buyer would be arranged. A temporary trustee assured that the business was no longer under Jewish control but might let the former owner continue to work there to keep things operating smoothly during the transition. Meanwhile, new German buyers were sought and selected under the cover of an implacable legal process. Finally, having located a vetted buyer, a compulsory transfer or forced sale contract was drawn up, signed and filed with the authorities in Prague. Invariably, the new Nazi approved owners would pay a mere fraction of the enterprise’s actual value.

The commandeering of *CB&S* was supported by a new set of laws that provided the framework to transfer ownership of all Jewish businesses to new Nazi-installed overseers, even if they knew little about the enterprises they were taking over. In late September of 1939, papers were signed installing a Nazi trustee to oversee *Carl Breuer & Söhne*, the first step that would later lead to a forced sale of the business. A German sequestrator or Trustee (ger: *Treuhänder*) was installed to supervise the factory business and operations. The property, its production resources, goods and effects were effectively confiscated and management of all company employees was officially turned over to the trustee, a man named Franz Reeh.

During the transition period, the Breuer factory name remained in place, the employees continued to do their jobs as usual, and Karl Breuer was kept on as factory supervisor to make sure that production continued smoothly. Archival company records indicate that in 1940 the company employed seventy-five workers and eleven managers, including Karl Breuer. Still, this seizure took the business ownership out of Breuer family hands forever.

By 1940, with Hitler’s domination of Europe spreading, Berlin required enormous amounts of money and resources to finance and implement its ongoing war effort. That spurred the pervasive economic exploitation of newly occupied territory which took various forms, including confiscation of property and forced payment of tributes. So, along with the plundering of Jewish businesses, former owners who were kept in place to keep things running had to make occasional donations or contributions to feed Berlin’s huge wartime resource requirements. A price was paid by each enterprise, including the Breuer company, which added a way for the Nazi regime to survive until even that would not be enough.

German troops had immediate needs for all sorts of products available in the conquered regions, such as food, shoes, uniforms, vehicle parts, and metal that could be turned into weapons and ammunition. Anticipating a major confrontation with the West that would result in the cutting off of their overseas supplies, the Nazis confiscated local production resources from countries like Austria, the Czech lands and the Balkans. Taking possession of Jewish businesses was accompanied by taking advantage of their former Jewish owners who paid from their own pockets. So, the Breuer family, along with other Jews, were forced to support the Reich’s war effort that would paradoxically lead to their own demise.

*Opposite*

**German issued passport** of Heinrich Haar, Robert Breuer’s maternal grandfather’s passport, newly issued for their emigration to the US, helps trace the route. Note the large red letter J and the mandatory added middle name Israel, both indicating Haar as a Jew.



**Letter sent to Gendarmerie command** (country police) dated September 27, 1939, informing them that the Carl Breuer & Söhne property was taken over by a German sequestrator named Franz Reeh, and that the company is now a non-Jewish operation. It is signed by F. Reeh. The final paragraph explains that, “this letter informs the community of important changes in company records and operation, complying with the instructions for establishing a new identity” Karl Breuer was kept on in the position of factory foreman to run operations until a final forced sale was arranged in 1941.



**Carl Breuer & Sons company letterhead** in Czech language, overprinted in red with names of newly installed Nazi owners, Kramer & Effenberger

In January 1941, after a fearful fifteen month period of personal pressures, new regulations and ruling decrees, a forced sale of *Carl Breuer & Söhne* was completed to what were called arisators—people who were politically trustworthy, ethnic Germans. Two Bohemian-born Germans, Hermann Kramer and Alfred Effenberger, became the new owners, took over the factory, and changed the name to *Kramer und Effenberger, Färberei und Appretur, Köninginhof a/E*. Each step of the seizure and sale process was accomplished according to the newly established legal code and all the paperwork was executed and filed correctly under the *Reichsprotektor's* order regarding Jewish property. The factory with all its assets sold for a tiny fraction of its true value. The property value set under the “purchase contract” was 4,450,000 CZK, a huge sum of money in pre-war Czechoslovakia. Little of that money ever was seen by Karl Breuer or family.

The forced sale of the Breuer factory was completed in early 1941. A multi-page sales agreement specifies the new Sudeten German owners who paid a tiny fraction for the factory and its contents. Karl Breuer signed the last page of the document, along with the new owners, Kramer and Effenberger. The final printed entry (9) on the last page reads: “The legal force of the present Treaty takes its form with the permission of the Reichsprotektor of Böhemia and Moravia’s regulation over the Jewish fortunes as of 21/6/1939.”

All Jewish property was seized in a similar way, with each Jewish business compelled to sell into new German Sudeten ownership. Soon thereafter all remaining homes and personal property of these business owners were also “legally” seized, and business owners themselves, along with their families were sent off to camps. This was done under a “legal” process with completed paperwork filed, all under the Nazi “protectorate” regime.

Throughout the war the factory continued to print decorated cotton, silk, faille, and synthetic silk fabrics. The new owners kept the factory operating at full capacity by harnessing all of its essential operating equipment, including twelve printing-tables for stencil printing and its lithographic workshop. In March 1941, Karl Breuer was finally denied any association with the company, managerial or otherwise.

Soon, in addition to their normal product line, the factory began filling government contracts to print Nazi wartime textile materials, including military uniform components. Most astoundingly, late in 1941, some months after Karl Breuer was removed, the former *CB&S* plant was assigned an order to produce innumerable Stars of David with the word *Jude* printed onto yellow cloth bolts. These iconic yellow patches, that Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe were forced to wear for identification, were symbols guaranteeing their intimidation, humiliation and in most cases, their eventual captivity and murder. It is an ironically tragic fact that the *CB&S* factory, fully under Nazi control, was among those textile-printing companies producing these star badges.

In time, the *CB&S* factory loss at Nazi hands set the scene for a far greater tragedy, the annihilation of the Breuer family.

With the factory seized and put under a German trustee, its ousted third generation family owner Karl Breuer was allowed to continue running the *Carl Breuer & Söhne* operation for two years. In March 1941, after a long period of ever changing rules, onerous taxes, arbitrary directives and other forms of pressure and intimidation, Karl Breuer, was forced to sell his factory to German-speaking Sudeten Czechs. Yet he still was kept on for a while longer as the foreman. Finally,

at some point in 1942 came the ultimate humiliation as Karl was dismissed entirely from his company. Thereafter, he and the rest of the family were reduced to being captives in their own homes, fully realizing their precarious predicament yet wondering what their exact fate would be.

In December 1942, the Czech Breuers were rounded up and deported to the *Terezín* concentration camp along with all Jewish citizens of *Dvůr Králové*. Forced to abandon their comfortable homes, on December 17, 1942, the entire remaining family was forcibly deported to the *Terezín* ghetto aboard a train transport labeled ‘Ch’ consisting of 650 Jews from *Dvůr Králové* and its surrounding towns and villages. *CB&S*’ deposed owner Karl Breuer, age 34, listed on the *Terezín* bound transport manifest as deportee #Ch 55, accompanied by his wife Ilse, just past her 28th birthday, along with their five year old daughter, Gitta (Gitty) and Karl’s mother Margareta Breuer, age 57. Fully twenty-one Breuer relatives, including eight children, were forcibly uprooted and sent off.

Upon the family’s arrival at the *Terezín* ghetto camp, a fortress town originally built for five to seven-thousand soldiers, it had reached a population eight times that size. Czech Jews made up the majority population at *Terezín*, unaware of what was in store for them.

The number of people who were held and processed through *Terezín* during the Nazi deportations is staggering. Four-hundred-and-seventy transports arrived at the *Terezín* concentration camp from November 1941 until April 3, 1945, together carrying 139,654 people to the ghetto fortress. Of those, 33,419 died there, mainly from typhus outbreaks directly related to overcrowding and contaminated water.

During their captivity at *Terezín*, the family tried to make the best of an atrocious situation, supporting one another with sheer resolve, determined to survive the *Terezín* ghetto’s horrid conditions. A tenacious bond helped them persevere. Three Breuer family members did not survive, while the remaining others continued to live a terribly limited life until they met their dismal fate elsewhere.

*Terezín* functioned as a reception and transit camp, a way station before being deported onwards to *Auschwitz-Birkenau* or other labor and death camps. Ultimately, all but one of the Breuer relatives were murdered in the deadly process. The *Carl Breuer & Sons* factory itself, without any remaining Breuers, continued production throughout the Nazi era, continuing into the post-war years once the Germans were routed. Even after the war, over a tumultuous and confusing few years in the newly restored democratic Czechoslovakia, some original *CB&S* workers, particularly the Czech shop foreman and the company bookkeeper, Jan Seps, remained as loyal as they could be to the Breuers. In postwar attempts to reclaim the business, the longtime bookkeeper gave sworn testimony that the Breuers rightfully owned the enterprise. ♦

**After Nazi Germany’s defeat, post-war Czechoslovakia** went through significant changes. The country’s 3,500,000 ethnic German citizens were forcibly expelled, contributing to a steep decline in the population of the former *Sudetenland* areas of Bohemia. Many floundering Czech businesses struggled to survive. *Dvůr Králové* (no longer called *Köninginhof*) was by no means exempt from those trends. In fact, after the war the town lost nearly half of its population and many of its businesses. Retributive expulsions of the ethnic Germans, a lack of skilled labor and the eradication of *Dvůr Králové’s* Jewish population, left the town’s material recovery in serious doubt.

By mid-1945 Bohemia was a shambles not only because of population loss and business failures but also because of mounting property ownership disputes, involving claims and counter-claims that overwhelmed the newly re-established democratic Czechoslovak regime as it worked to rearrange and regain control of war-torn territory.

The precarious status and dubious prospects of many Czech companies hampered industrial revival. This was especially true for businesses that had been deprived of their pre-war owners. Even though none of the Breuers who had started and run the family business was left to run it again, the original name, Carl Breuer & Sons, was promptly reinstated.

As the communist regime in Czechoslovakia consolidated its grip on the country, it began to implement its core philosophy, especially the confiscation of private property across the country. All business operations of over twenty-five employees were “collectivized.” In the state control process, smaller enterprises were merged with like companies into far larger ones for supposed efficiency. The fate of Carl Breuer & Sons was sorted out in just that way. Its factory, along with fourteen other textile factories located in the *Dvůr Králové* region, was taken over by the national government and merged into a single administrative unit.

In May, 1948, *CB&S* was taken into national corporation status and melded into a collective enterprise—*Textilní tiskárny, úpravny a barevny, Dvůr Králové and Labem n.p.* By means of a governmentally imposed consolidation process, once and for all, on July 12, 1949, the former Breuer factory was no more, as the factory was fused into the nationalized *TIBATEX* plant operation. After September 1, 1949, the *CB&S* factory ceased production. Its plant premises and structures were converted into head offices for *TIBA*, as it was then being called, with some buildings turned into flats. ♦



## Selected CV and Bibliography

Born 1981, Oakland, California

Assistant Professor, Print Media Area Head, University at Buffalo SUNY

### Education

- 2007 MFA Visual Art, Columbia University, New York, New York
- 2005 Certificate, Woodblock Printmaking/Paper-making, Kyoto Seika University, Kyoto, Japan
- 2004 BFA Printmaking, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 Reclamation, National Czech and Slovak Museum, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 2023 Table Settings, Urban Glass Window Gallery, Brooklyn, New York
- 2022 Something Stolen/Something New, Atelier Circulaire, Montreal, Québec, Canada
- 2021 Cabbage, VisArts, Rockville, Maryland
- 2020 Heirloom, Sheetz Gallery, Penn State, Altoona, Pennsylvania
- 2020 Something Borrowed, Something Broken, Spring Hill College, Mobile, Alabama
- 2019 Seams, Hoover Public Library, Hoover, Alabama
- 2019 CB&S Werkstätte, Spudnik Press Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- 2018 Bohemian Showroom, Space Gallery, Portland, Maine
- 2018 Lucerna, Left Field Gallery, San Luis Obispo, California
- 2018 The Tatra Tassels, Kala Art Institute Windows Gallery, Berkeley, California
- 2017 Factory Recall, Zughaus Gallery, Berkeley, California
- 2005 In Japan, Kyoten Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

### Two & Three-Person Exhibitions

- 2022 Postscript, Noah Breuer & Golnar Adili, Kent State University Downtown Gallery, Kent, Ohio
- 2022 Good on Paper, Noah Breuer & Liz Chalfin, Samford University Art Gallery, Birmingham, Alabama
- 2021 Iteration Multiplier, Noah Breuer & Charlene Liu, IMPACT 11, Hong Kong, China
- 2021 Means of Production, Firehouse Art Center, Longmont, Colorado
- 2021 A Social Practice, Moon Gallery at Berry College, Athens, Georgia
- 2019 California Society of Printmakers AiR Exhibition, In Cahoots, Petaluma, California
- 2018 Small Plates Exhibition, San Francisco Center for the Book, San Francisco, California
- 2014 Unseemly Creases, Gowanus Studio Space, Brooklyn, New York
- 2014 Radical Perception A Love Triangle, Small Editions, Brooklyn, New York
- 2007 RISD Alumni Selective, Caelum Gallery, New York, New York



## Residencies, Fellowships & Awards

- 2021 Community Studio Fellowship, Dieu Donn , Brooklyn, New York
- 2020 Material Exploration Award, Surface Design Association
- 2019 Artist in Residence, Bullseye Projects, Emeryville, California
- 2019 Artist in Residence, California Society of Printmakers, The WORKS, Vallejo, California
- 2018 Small Plates Program, San Francisco Center for the Book, California
- 2016 Artist in Residence, Summer Craft Forum, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon
- 2016 Artist in Residence, Kala Art Institute, Berkeley, California
- 2014 Artist in Residence, Hotel Pupik, Scheffing, Austria
- 2013 Artist in Residence, Grin City Collective, Grinnell, Iowa
- 2011 Artist in Residence + Fellowship Award, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont
- 2010 Artist in Residence, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont
- 2009 Artist in Residence, Ox-Bow School of Art, Saugatuck, Michigan
- 2009 Artist in Residence, Kala Art Institute, Berkeley, California
- 2007 Morton Frank Memorial Traveling Fellowship, Columbia University, New York, New York
- 2005 LeRoy Neiman Printmaking Fellowship, Columbia University, New York, New York
- 2001 John Chironna Memorial Scholarship Award, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

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- Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, Oregon
- Zuckerman Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia
- Fleet Library at RISD, Providence, Rhode Island
- Alfred R. Goldstein Library, Ringling College, Sarasota, Florida



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Noah Breuer  
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