

Unique collection of cards signed by Margret Boriss

By Tamarah Benima

Millions of children all over Europe were delighted before World War II with a postcard drawn by Margret Boriss. From 1925 onwards, this artist, of whom every trace is missing, drew all aspects of ordinary life and fairy tales with as many as two thousand different motifs and her own style. An intensive and lengthy search for the life of this probably Russian-Jewish woman by collector F.J.W. Frylink from Amsterdam has so far yielded nothing. Not even the appeal in Israeli newspapers. And in Israel, Mr Frylink believes, there must surely be someone who knew Margret Boriss. Five years ago, Mr Frylink started his collection of maps of Margret Boriss. His friend Louis Putman, owner of an antiquarian bookshop on Prinsengracht in Amsterdam, had noticed that Margret Boriss depicted the adult world as seen through a child's glasses. "She draws miniature images of everyday life and brings them back into the children's world," Mr Putman told us. "Yet they are not childish cards". Mr Putman was delighted to find the cards. "I also had them as a child". As did millions of children with him, as the cards were strewn across Europe in huge numbers.

Mr Frylink has been searching for data on Margret Boriss since he set up his collection. The leads are minimal. "Most of the cards were published by Amag, a printing company that had a business in Berlin and a branch in Munich. All buildings and archives in Berlin and Munich were bombed flat". Of the staff, only the foreman in the print shop could be traced, who was able to tell that Margret Boriss must have been about 40 years old in 1925. However, the foreman, who joined the Amag company only in 1936, had never met her in person. Even the International Children's Book Library in Munich had never heard of Margret Boriss. "It is very curious that she never illustrated children's books. Even though she created so many different illustrations for children," says Mr Frylink. "Only from details on the drawing can it be determined that she lived in what is now East Germany and Berlin. Probably she came from one of the Baltic states". Mr Frylink deduces the Jewishness of Margret Boriss from the fact, that no trace of Margret or her family can be found. Boriss is not a German name and one of the cards shows a little boy wearing a cap that looks something like a yarmulke. Moreover, some years ago, a Boriss family, in which the name Margret featured frequently, visited the Netherlands. A Russian Jewish family that stayed in The Hague at the time, but nothing has been heard of them since. What is special about Margret Boriss's cards is the great colour nuance. "The maps were printed using a 12-colour printing technique," Mr Frylink explains. "That is, a separate lithographic stone was made of each colour. An expensive technique it was. But technically, the maps are of a perfection that cannot be matched. Not even with modern colour photography. So many colour nuances cannot be reproduced". That the postcards were made with so much craftsmanship finds its cause in having to make profitable even in the 1920s and 1930s with old-fashioned machines. The recognition for children of this current and multi-coloured world is very high on Margret Boriss's cards. Zeppelins, cars, aeroplanes, play scenes with dogs, cats, birds, small chores around the house, games, romantic scenes, fairy tales, at the dentist, these are just some of the subjects Margret Boriss drew. Collector Frylink has some ten thousand cards. Among them is one depicting a maid and a cook with the flame raging. The card was sent from Loosdrecht to a girl in Almelo in 1929. By aunt To and uncle Ies. G. Shabbos is their wish.

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