

Illinois Women Artists, Part 52

Ukrainian-born Artist Louise Dunn Yochim

By Kristan H. McKinsey

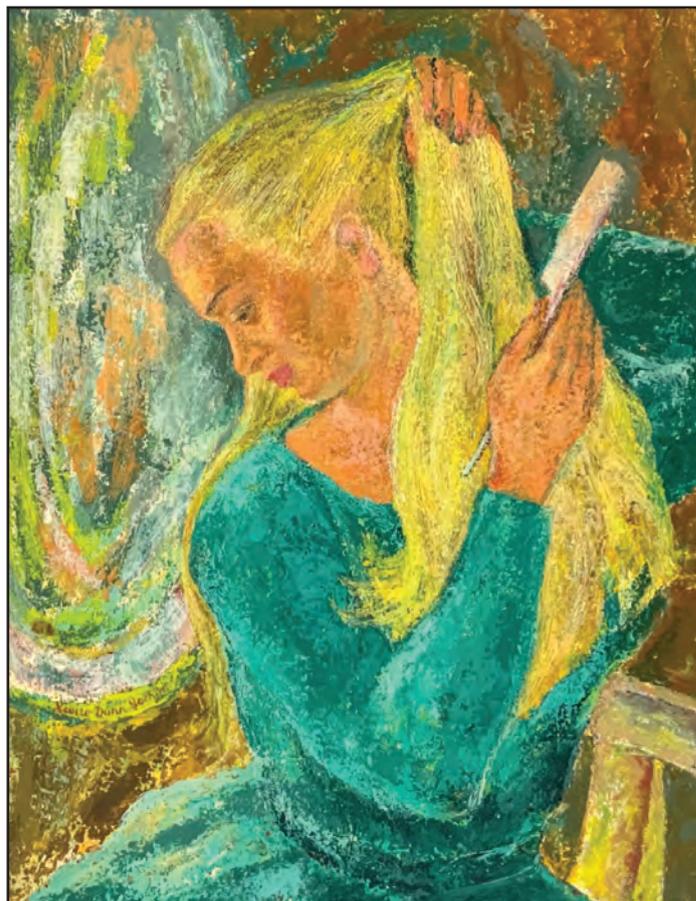
Louise Dunn Yochim (1909-2003) developed a love of drawing very early in her childhood that probably secured her family's immigration into the United States; making art, teaching how to create art, and writing about both art and artists dominated her adult life.



Born Liuba Dichne, she was the eldest of five children born to Rabbi Sohulim and Gitlia Dichne in Olevsk, Ukraine. Located about 150 miles northwest of Kyiv, Olevsk was first mentioned in 1488 as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1488-1569). The region was later part of the Russian Empire (1793-1917), the Republic of Poland (1919-1920), Soviet Ukraine (1920-1922), and the Soviet Union (1922-1991) until independence. Changing political systems challenged opportunities for economic advancement. For most residents, and especially for Jews, impoverishment increased through the 19th into the 20th centuries due to lack of land reform, overpopulation, and a near total absence of industry to absorb the excess labor force. Food shortages and religious persecution resulted in large-scale emigration to the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina from the 1880s until the outbreak of World War I and government-imposed immigration restrictions during the 1920s.

Jews first settled in Olevsk by 1704. In 1897, the Jewish population comprised 57% of the population. Their main spheres of economic activity were in the wholesale and transit trades, various crafts, and artisan production. The construction of the Kiev-Kovel railway through Olevsk in 1903 especially benefited timber traders, most of whom were Jewish.

Period descriptions and photographs demonstrate that Jews in Olevsk were not spared the difficulties faced by most early 20th century East European Jews. The town suffered a devastating fire in 1917. Between October that year and the end of 1919, 156,000 Jews from Ukraine were killed or wounded in 819 pogroms cross the country. World War I and



Self-Portrait, casein on board.

the independence wars that resulted in the division of Ukraine between the Bolshevik Ukrainian SSR, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia in late 1921 combined with an extreme drought caused a severe famine that further ravaged Ukraine through 1923.

Immigration records indicate that Sohulim Dichne's congregation paid his family's third-class passage on the S.S. Estonia, which sailed from Libau (Liepaja), Latvia on December 26, 1923 across the Baltic Sea to the North Sea, then across the North Atlantic Ocean to arrive in New York City on January 11, 1924. The family brought \$100 and planned to join Sohulim's brother, William Dunn, in Chicago, Illinois; Congregation Anshe Zitomir-Volin at 1216 S. Sawyer Ave. near Douglas Park was expecting them.

But having a sponsor and destination did not guarantee the Dichne family entry into this country. The requisite medical examination upon arrival at Ellis Island revealed that the three youngest children—seven-year old Faivuah and five-year old twins Jacob and Sonja—had the measles; they were immediately hospitalized. By the time the children recovered, the legal quota for immigrants was filled. The Dichnes were told they must return to Europe immediately.

Fortunately, older sister Liuba had been busy drawing; she copied the official photographs hanging on the walls of the Great Hall on Ellis Island, and her perfect drawing of



Mexican Village, 1951. lithograph/

Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago



Escape Route, 1940, conté crayon.

Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

President Woodrow Wilson caught the eye of officials who decided her family could stay in America.

On December 16, 1926, the day that members of the Dichne family became naturalized citizens, they changed their surname to Dunn and took new first names: Sohulim became Solomon, Gitlia became Gitil, Liuba became Louise, Moise became Maurice, Faiuah became Philip, Jacob became Jack, and Sonja became Sonia.

For many years, the family rented an apartment at 1553 S. Ridgeway Ave. in Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood. According to the 1930 Federal census, the heads of the other five families renting in that building and most of the wives had immigrated from "Russia"—which could mean territory outside of the Soviet Union—earlier than the Duns, and their neighbors were all Jewish.

Louise was among a group of young Chicago painters and sculptors who organized Around the Palette in 1926, now known as the American Jewish Artists Club. She studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), exhibiting in the student exhibits of 1929 and 1930. A year or two later, she married fellow artist Maurice Yochim (1908-1986) who was 5 years old when he family emigrated from Russia; he graduated from the SAIC Teacher Training program. Their son Jerome was born in 1933.

Louise enjoyed a varied career over a very long life, producing landscapes, figurative work, and genre scenes in oil and watercolor, mixed media, and lithography. In later years she experimented with abstraction. She enjoyed traveling and painting throughout the Midwest and Mexico. Her award-winning work was exhibited in group and solo shows in Chicago at the Art Institute of Chicago, Associated Artists Gallery, Renaissance Society, the University Club, the Todros Geller Gallery, and the Mandel Brothers Store. Starting in the 1950s, Louise participated in exhibitions in New York City, Des Moines, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and in Springfield, Illinois. She belonged to the Chicago Society of Artists, serving as President from 1973 to 1979, when she published a history of the organization: "Role and Impact: The Chicago Society of Artists."

Louise authored several publications between 1967 and



Winter Scene Around Back, circa 1935, oil on canvas.

1999, including "Building Human Relationships Through Art" and "How to Understand and Appreciate Abstract and Non-Objective Works of Art." She started teaching art at the Junior School Art Institute of Chicago, then for 20 years in Chicago public schools, and finally teaching part-time at local colleges while serving as Supervisor of Art with the Chicago Board of Education.

The Dunn family's story of immigration, adventure, and the start of a new life in the United States is the basis for Marlene Targ Brill's 2018 book in the Becoming American Kids Series, *Picture Girl!* With black and white illustrations by Louise, a glossary, questions for discussion, and a suggested reading list, this is an excellent American Jewish history lesson. 

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Untitled (Rooftops), circa 1935, oil on canvas.

Courtesy of Richard Norton Gallery, Chicago