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The Joy and Beauty of Memorials at the Moscow Jewish Museum

By The Moscow Times

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On Tuesday, the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center opened an exhibition that is unusual even for Moscow, a city that seems to specialize in out-of-the-ordinary shows. In "Between Two Worlds: Personal, Memory, and Eternal Souls" visitors enter an art space commemorating the Jewish burial and the history behind the spiritual beliefs.

The exhibition was divided into photographs of ancient headstones, death certificates, antiques collection boxes to support the Chevra Kadisha society, and an old horse-drawn hearse as the centerpiece — all adorned in timeless iconography and engravings. Visitors move through each step of the funeral process: the body's cleansing, the funeral arrangement and procession, record keeping, to the withered headstones. The artifacts and photography were supplied by the Museum of Jewish History in Russia and private collections.

Despite the solemn feeling of a cemetery, the atmosphere is reminiscent of the Hebrew spiritual belief that death is joyful for the righteous soul. As chief curator, Maria Kaspina told The Moscow Times, "The theme is the idea of the eternal soul, the memory, the life, the idea

of resurrection." She further explained that each object was an instrument of purification and why there was only one date on the tombstones: "Your death anniversary is more important than your birth date."

These burial artifacts and headstones are lasting memorials of material culture, place and artistic change, which profoundly influenced modernist artists such as El Lissitzky, Natan Altman, Marc Chagall, and others.

The exhibition runs July 15-Aug. 23. Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center. 11 Ulitsa Obraztsova. 495-645-0550. Metro Marina Roshcha, Savyolovskaya.

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