
Anna Sokolow's Dance, Kaddish, 1945

TYPE: Photograph
TIME: 1900-1949
LEVEL: Middle School and above

TOPICS: Arts & Recreation
Jewish Values & Practices



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dancer and choreographer Anna Sokolow was a key figure in the development of modern dance in the United States, Israel, Mexico and beyond. Believing that dance could be more than mere entertainment and should be used to explore pressing contemporary issues, she created compositions that challenged audiences to think deeply about themselves and their society. Sokolow used many Jewish historic, religious, and cultural themes in her work, applying them to illustrate general concepts of social justice as well as specific elements of the Bible and ritual practice.

Sokolow created the piece *Kaddish* in 1945 as the horrors of the Holocaust were coming to a close. She used a leather strap to represent *tefillin*, an object used in the traditional Jewish prayer ritual. She also beat her breast, a component of the Jewish confessional.

Although this piece was a dance of mourning, Sokolow emphasized Jewish strength and courage in addition to the profound sense of loss.

For more information on Jewish themes in the dance of Anna Sokolow, go to JWA's *Women of Valor* exhibit at <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/sokolow/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Sokolow entitled this piece *Kaddish*, the prayer a mourner says?
2. In 1945, women did not use tefillin as a religious object. Why did Sokolow use it in this piece, given the work's subject matter?
3. How do you think different segments of the Jewish community might have reacted to this work?
4. What makes dance and other art forms "Jewish"? Does a piece have to have specifically Jewish content to be considered "Jewish"?