



WOLF KIBEL  
(1903 - 1938)

ETCHINGS

Printed posthumously from the original plates  
South African Jewish Museum, 2025





This portfolio comprises a posthumous edition of etchings by Wolf Kibel (1903–1938), printed in 2025 from the artist's original etching plates held by the South African Jewish Museum. Produced in conjunction with the exhibition Palm Studios: Wolf Kibel & Lippy Lipshitz, which opened at the South African Jewish Museum in December 2025. The edition consists of ten portfolios, each containing five original etchings drawn from these historic plates.

The impressions were printed by Madelize van der Merwe, Technical Officer, Printmedia Section, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, and published by the South African Jewish Museum.



# ARTIST BIOGRAPHY AND NOTES ON THE ETCHINGS

Wolf Kibel was a Polish-born Jewish Modernist whose brief yet intensely lived life unfolded across Poland, Vienna, Mandatory Palestine and Cape Town. Born in Grodzisk Mazowiecki near Warsaw, he grew up in a musically gifted and culturally rich household. His father, a cantor and craftsman, filled the home with song, carving and devotional culture, instilling in Kibel a deep sensitivity to rhythm, structure and inward feeling that would later define his visual language. Early poverty, displacement and the death of his father shaped a temperament marked by introspection and resolve. Despite intermittent apprenticeships, his compulsion to draw persisted from childhood, becoming both refuge and vocation.

In the early 1920s Kibel left Poland, fleeing antisemitism and conscription. Vienna proved both brutal and formative. Arriving as a stateless refugee, he endured hunger, illness and periods of homelessness, but also encountered for the first time the European masters who would shape his future language. Though barred from formal study, he received informal instruction from sympathetic artists and refined an approach grounded in tonal subtlety and psychological depth. These years of hardship sharpened his discipline and deepened his sympathy for the vulnerable, qualities that later surfaced in the gravity and stillness of his figures.

After a further period in Mandatory Palestine, where exposure to Cézanne, Matisse, Soutine and the Paris School broadened his visual understanding, Kibel arrived in Cape Town in 1929. There he confronted a conservative art public largely unreceptive to the melancholic intensity of his work. He supported himself through odd jobs and occasional teaching, while producing portraits, interiors and works on paper shaped by exile, spiritual searching and profound attentiveness to the overlooked.

His decisive artistic home became Palm Studios at 18 Roeland Street, the shared workspace he established with the sculptor Lippy Lipshitz. Active in the early to mid-1930s, Palm Studios became a rare centre of serious Modernist experimentation in Cape Town. Their partnership fostered one of the most significant moments in early South African Modernism, marked by rigorous dialogue, shared inquiry and technical exploration.

Illness interrupted this final creative flourishing. Tuberculosis advanced rapidly, and Wolf Kibel died in 1938 at the age of 35, leaving behind a small yet extraordinary body of work.



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF KIBEL'S ETCHING PRACTICE

A key turning point occurred in 1931, when Kibel spent a formative period in Worcester with the painter Hugo Naudé, who introduced him to the discipline of etching. Kibel absorbed the technique with exceptional speed. The process of working directly into metal plates, building image through line, tone and controlled abrasion, suited his temperament. Etching demanded patience, restraint and structural thinking, qualities already central to his artistic nature.

This early grounding in printmaking informed the tonal sensitivity and architectural clarity that would characterise his later work in all media. Even when working in tempera, monotype or drawing, Kibel approached form with the discipline of a printmaker. His figures are built through subtle gradations of tone rather than theatrical gesture, and his compositions reveal a deep understanding of balance, interval and quiet tension.

At Palm Studios, technical exchange intensified. Alongside sustained experimentation in monotype with Lipshitz, Kibel continued refining his understanding of line, plate surface and tonal depth. Silence often marked his working process, though sometimes accompanied by the music of Bach or Mozart, and his images from this period show a language of emotional economy, muted tonalities and contemplative stillness. This phase of concentrated production represents the final full flowering of his work before illness overtook him.

## THE ETCHING PLATES AND THEIR REDISCOVERY

The etchings in this portfolio form part of this decisive period in Kibel's development. They are not later reproductions but impressions drawn from original plates associated with his early printmaking practice. These plates form part of the wider artistic legacy connected to the renowned art dealer and collector Joe Wolpe (1922-2020).

Following Wolpe's death, material within the Wolpe records and collection was examined and among these holdings were original etched plates linked to Kibel. Their survival is remarkable. Working plates are often lost, damaged or destroyed, and their preservation provides a rare, direct material link to the artist's hand, process and working method.

The recovery of these plates allows Kibel's graphic language to be re-encountered with renewed immediacy. They stand not only as images but as objects that bear the trace of incision, pressure and decision. In this sense, they extend his legacy beyond the finished print to the physical matrix from which the image emerged.

Their rediscovery was a direct result of the curatorial research undertaken for the exhibition *Wolf Kibel, Lippy Lipshitz: Palm Studios* at the South African Jewish Museum, on view from December 2025 to June 2026. Seen in conjunction with paintings, monotypes, drawings and sculptures from the Palm Studios years, these etchings deepen our understanding of Kibel's commitment to structural clarity, tonal subtlety and inward intensity.

Together, the biography, the technical development of the medium, and the rediscovered plates reveal an artist for whom printmaking was not secondary, but integral to a Modernist vision shaped by exile, discipline and a lifelong search for inner form.



## COLOPHON

This portfolio comprises five posthumous impressions printed from original plates created by Wolf Kibel (1903-1938). The edition consists of five numbered sets.

The etchings were printed by Madelize van der Merwe, Technical Officer in the Printmedia Section, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, in 2025, on Fabriano Rosaspina 285 gsm.

Published by the South African Jewish Museum.

Plate use and reproduction rights courtesy of the Kibel family.

There are no artist's signatures, as these impressions were printed posthumously.



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This portfolio contains the following five posthumous etchings:

1. Wolf Kibel (1903-1938), *Nude Group of Bathers*, etching from the original plate, printed 2025, plate 180 × 150 mm, sheet 360 × 330 mm.
2. Wolf Kibel (1903-1938), *Landscape*, etching from the original plate, printed 2025, plate 235 × 200 mm, sheet 360 × 330 mm.
3. Wolf Kibel (1903-1938), *Untitled (Interior with Figures)*, etching from the original plate, printed 2025, plate 178 × 120 mm, sheet 360 × 330 mm.
4. Wolf Kibel (1903-1938), *Untitled (Village Scene with Three Figures)*, etching from the original plate, printed 2025, plate 253 × 155 mm, sheet 360 × 330 mm.
5. Wolf Kibel (1903-1938), *Untitled (Interior with Figures at Tables)*, etching from the original plate, printed 2025, plate 250 × 110 mm, sheet 360 × 330 mm.





4/10 EV



Kubel

1/10 EV



1/10 EV



1/10 EV





1/10 EV





For further information or to enquire about purchasing this portfolio, please contact:

Jay van den Berg  
Associate Curator  
South African Jewish Museum  
Price: 25,000 (ZAR) per portfolio  
Tel: +27 (0)79 193 4308  
Email: [jay@sajewishmuseum.co.za](mailto:jay@sajewishmuseum.co.za)

