In 1941 Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) published *Brazil, Land of the Future*. The book expresses the author’s fascination with the tropics during his time of exile, when World War II was going on. A few years before the publishing of the book, in 1935, the Danzigers had arrived at Rio de Janeiro, also in search for refuge from Nazi anti-Semitism. A decade earlier, in 1923, the artist Lasar Segall had established his residency in São Paulo.

Seventy years after Zweig’s words, Brazil still awaits for the moment to arrive at its dreamed future; south of Europe (and Eurocentrism), we have learned that to live the present may be the best answer to the futuristic aspiration of Modernism – especially in the young Brazilian democracy. What Leila Danziger proposes in her research as a visual artist and a poet is to invite
one’s skeptical look, the result of historical traumas that have brought us to
the present. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to have one foot in now
(present) and the other in then (past).

The narratives about the migration process, not only of her family, but of
thousands of German-Jews, who then saw Brazil as the territory for a new
beginning, are central in this art exposition. Graphic pieces are the material
and theme of the gathered works – appointment books, didactic and fiction
books – and they make us reflect on the affective sphere once attached to
them. The stains on the papers are essential for us to remember of the
temporal accumulation and to perceive its contaminations by bodily fluids
and places of packing. The furniture of the living room and the office of a
family might become the drawers of a historic archive.

Bildung (“cultural formation” in German), the installation in the first room, is
constituted by German books brought by her paternal grandparents. Goethe,
Lessing, among other authors, were transported to the south of the globe
both as study objects and as souvenirs from a north to which returning was
uncertain. The arrival at the country placed the immigrants between the
attempt to preserve a language and the encounter with Portuguese. To such
transatlantic library didactic books on the “history of Brazil” were added, a
result from the artist's mother and maternal grandmother’s profession, both
teachers. Many were printed during the military dictatorship of the Estado
Novo, and it is not uncommon to find an appeal to the abstract notion of
“homeland” on their covers. Just a little after running away from radical
German nationalism and too soon these bodies were colliding with waves of
repression from tropical nationalisms.

The juxtaposition of images is a recurrent method in the artist’s production
and can be seen not only in these images with an informative imprint, but
also in the series in which blank appointment books are sewn or sustained by
magnets. Books collected during the remodeling of the library at the
Association Scholem Aleichem (Rio de Janeiro) are also sewn, allowing a
glimpse of the Yiddish on their surfaces. To sew up these papers is to give
them weight and to invite us to reflect both on the emptiness of the blank
spaces reserved for annotations, and to the silencing of the Yiddish, a
language composed by the sewing from the appropriation of a number of
languages.
A careful look at these works will reveal the presence of stamps which make
reference to some emblematic images. At the entrance a stamp is
reproduced, which was used in the series of works that name the exposition;
it is a quote from The Sea of Ice (1823-1824), painted by the German Caspar
David Friedrich (1774-1840). In the original image two ships are wrecked in
the middle of blocks of ice. In the course of the immigrations that had Brazil
as their point of arrival, many lives were wrecked, both physically and
existentially. The blocks of ice melted due to the solar power of the South,
but the uncertain yearning for those who remained at the freezing North
installed in some of the new Brazilians the same possibility of action of
Friedrich’s ships. Some call that phenomenon melancholy.

Leila Danziger’s research touches on some issues very dear to Lasar Segall,
once a resident in the house which is now this Museum. It makes sense to
establish these relations from the standpoint of Judaism, and that sets it up
as a safer dialogue. We like, however, to observe her images and reflect on
her interest in representing scenes of teaching moments, letters from the
Hebrew alphabet. And, of course, to appreciate her complacent gaze at
human figures in the situation of emigration – as her own biography is that of
an immigrant.

If today Lasar Segall is an essential reference for the history of art in Brazil,
let us not forget that in his youth he was the name of a passenger in a boat to
the south of the future – as it yet happens to so many people whose names
keep disappearing in the Atlantic.