Intimate, humorous, and refreshingly candid, this extraordinary work is a remarkable record--in both words and images--of Jewish life in a Polish town before World War II as seen through the eyes of an inquisitive boy. Mayer Kirshenblatt, who was born in 1916 and left Poland for Canada in 1934, taught himself to paint at age 73. Since then, he has made it his mission to remember the world of his childhood in living color, lest future generations know more about how Jews died than how they lived. This volume presents his lively paintings woven together with a marvelous narrative created from interviews that took place over forty years between Mayer and his daughter, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Together, father and daughter draw readers into a lost world--we roam the streets and courtyards of the town of Apt, witness details of daily life, and meet those who lived and worked there: the pregnant hunchback, who stood under the wedding canopy just hours before giving birth; the khayder teacher caught in bed with the drummers wife; the cobbler's son, who was dressed in white pajamas all his life to fool the angel of death; and the couple who held a black wedding in the cemetery during a cholera epidemic. This moving collaboration--a unique blend of memoir, oral history, and artistic interpretation--is at once a labor of love, a tribute to a distinctive imagination, and a brilliant portrait of life in one Jewish home town.

Copub: The Judah L. Magnes Museum

My Personal Review:
Having recently returned from a trip to the Polish town of my mother's childhood, I was eager to see Mayer Kirshenblatt's paintings of Jewish life in prewar Poland on exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York. I
immediately recognized buildings and landscapes I had seen on the trip—
the small, square houses surrounding the town square, ruins of once
impressive, multi-tiered synagogues—but the exhibition instantly filled me
with joy because Mayer Kirshenblatt’s paintings put the people back in a
panoramic view of life before the Holocaust.

At once naive and sophisticated, Kirshenblatt's art captures the energy and
diversity of life as it was lived in prewar Apt (Opatów in Polish), a shtetl in
southern Poland. Shunning nostalgia for accuracy, the paintings are rich in
ethnographic detail and show every area of activity, some with the artist as
a blue-clad schoolboy looking on. The 93-year-old Toronto artist, who
started painting in his seventies, is becoming internationally known; his
work was recently exhibited at the Galician Jewish Museum in Kraków.

The text of this book, which includes 200 full color reproductions,
represents another kind of achievement. Each painting tells a story,
evoking memories of people, trades, and events. Mayer Kirshenblatt
collaborated with his daughter, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a scholar of
Eastern European Jewish culture and folklore, on a captivating text
recording his almost encyclopedic range of memories of the town up to
1934, the year he departed for Canada.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who co-authored Image Before My Eyes: A
Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland with Lucjan Dobroszychi, a
book based on the photographic collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish
Research, comments on her father's art: "Until Mayer's paintings, all my
images of Jewish life in Poland were black and white because all of them
were from photographs," she writes. "That world, thanks to Mayer's
paintings, was now emerging in vibrant color." Kirshenblatt's extraordinary
visual memory, humor, and love can revivify this world for us all.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before
the Holocaust by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest
Price!