

the science of human behavior, but not within the stylistic context of twentieth-century European art. Holocaust imagery is more than art. We need to listen to the words of those artists in the black days of Nazi Europe. "The written word was not enough," said Avraham Golub, a member of the underground and the Jewish Council of the Kovno ghetto. "Without graphic representations, the true sorrow of life struggling under the Nazi domination could not be fully documented." (Costanza, 1) They struggled to tell the world and they struggled to endure. We must not allow the medium of their message to be misunderstood. ●

### Reflections of a survivor/artist

#### *Frederick Terna*

Three and a half years in German concentration camps, the continued effort to set my experience on paper and canvas and over forty years of work that is frequently painful, occasionally soothing, and, at all times, unavoidable, are my only claims to expertise on Holocaust art.

In earlier years I would paint landscapes or abstractions avoiding my wartime experience, only to have the past suddenly assert itself in groups of violent paintings and drawings. Today, looking back at some of the landscapes, I notice the many walls, the enclosures, the hidden watchtowers. Eventually I came to understand that my work would reflect my past, like it or not.

I paint feelings, states of heart, mind, and soul, using some of the imagery of the past. It is not a record of past events. It is both questioning and answering my experience during the Holocaust.

#### **Making Art: An Act of Defiance**

I see two distinct categories of Holocaust art: work made in ghettos and concentration camps before liberation, and work made after that date. As for the first category, the fact that so few works made in ghettos and concentration camps have survived, and the very fact that they were made at all, give these works significance that should place them outside the usual concern of art criticism. Whether made as a deliberate visual record, a witness for posterity, or out of an inner need to set on paper what was before the eyes, whatever the reason, each drawing required difficult tasks, many of them frequently quite dangerous. Finding art material, or acquiring it in exchange for food, making one's own inks or

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colors, hiding finished work, etc., were conscious acts of defiance, and, regardless of artistic merit, actions vastly different from creating art after liberation.

Works in the second category, Holocaust art made after liberation, should be scrutinized like all other art. It includes the good and the bad, the kitsch, the sensational, the naive and the theatrical... . The validity of any work in this category rests on its ability to convey feelings, attitudes, and knowledge about those years, and to convey them to a large number of people for a long time.

Tradition has given us some models to approach this subject, e.g., the Akedah, Job, Tishah b'Av. I, as well as other artists, have filled sketchbooks and painted many versions of the Akedah, sketched and painted around the subject of the destroyed Temple, creating a visual counterpart to the liturgy of destruction and rebuilding. Yet I feel that these ancient models are wanting, that we need a new visual vocabulary, that we have to start painting parts of the *piyutim* (liturgical poetry) of our own era.

#### **Art As The Survivor's Testimony**

As a survivor and an artist I don't have the freedom of other artists. I cannot walk away from the subject. Even when ignoring it I'm quite aware of the deliberate exclusion. Yet I consider myself fortunate to have this form of catharsis available, and to be able to paint myself out of emotional straits. On the other hand: how can I show more than just a small fraction of what I know when there is so much to be observed and remembered? I know what it feels like to stand in a selection line in Auschwitz. I know how the fire of a crematorium chimney casts flickering light on a barrack wall. How does one paint the near certainty of violent personal annihilation? How does one paint it, and then make a viewer want to stop, to look at a canvas, react to it? I have no answers to these questions. In order to understand, to find answers, we must formulate the right questions. I would like my paintings to be seen as such questions.

Today Holocaust art is a part of the art world, a part of the merchandise on a complex art market. It is subject to the forces and powers of publicity, fashion, the hoopla and circus atmosphere of auction house strategies, the dealers' inside agreements. What will be accepted will run the entire gamut from excellence to the easy and the tawdry. In many communities it has become fashionable to erect memorials, symbolically or explicitly saying "Six Million." Many of these

make me vaguely uncomfortable. They feel inadequate, making sure above all that no viewer would be troubled or discomfited. They remind me of plaster saints.

The contribution I, as a survivor and as an artist, can make while painting or drawing or looking at Holocaust art made by others is the very personal discernment of what feels right. For this the mind is of little use, the heart of some help. It is the gut feeling that confirms truth.

As there are fewer and fewer of us I feel the increasing weight of the promise we made to each other in Auschwitz, in Dachau, and in so many other places: If I survive I will tell what it was like. I paint. ●

### Survivors reject art history

#### Hannah Grad Goodman

I am well acquainted with the exhibit Dr. Freudenheim arranged and with many of the books on Holocaust art (which I personally define as art by Holocaust victims). I cannot believe that the artists in the concentration camps recorded their experiences— under incredible difficulties and at fearful peril— only for the eyes and comments of other Holocaust victims. They were surely sending messages to the outside world, recording the unthinkable, in the hope that their work would survive them.

Inevitably, the Holocaust survivors will be gone, and it will come about that non-survivors will be the only ones to interpret these pitiful relics.

However, it is understandable that the survivors may resent a dispassionate, scientific view of the works of the martyred artists. They want viewers to empathize, to understand, to share their agony, and to remember. They may not feel that justice is done by a scientific dissection or detached analysis of a testimony that was rendered— almost literally— in blood and mud.

To those who are indelibly scarred and whose grief is without end, it does not matter whether the works are traditional or modern, "good art or bad art," or whether other genocides have occurred, but only that they speak to us and that we are attuned to their message. They are less concerned with art contexts than with human response.

These paintings and drawings are suffering incar-

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nate. To react to human agony in cold analytical terms may seem inadequate.

Certainly there is a role for historians, scientists, scholars and academicians in treating both the Holocaust and the art that came out of it. But that role does not meet the goals of those who had to endure an institutionalized sadism and depravity. There may indeed be many ways of looking at Holocaust art, but the academicians' way is not theirs. ●

### ...but others say about dialogue...

#### When Standards are Absolute, Deviation is Sin

I find Michael Chernick's article (*Sh'ma* 15/282) somewhat confusing. He begins with an attack on Orthodox insensitivity vis-a-vis Sharon Strassfeld— but ends with a ringing defense of "Modern Orthodoxy" against "*Gott's shammosim*." It is precisely this kind of sloppy thinking that has given "Modern Orthodoxy" a bad name!

First, yes, Orthodox Jews *are* insensitive— not just to the non-Orthodox but even to each other! Given that unfortunate fact, the non-Orthodox should NOT assume that they are the unique targets of Orthodox insensitivity.

Second, given the above, I fail to see "insensitivity" in the examples cited by Chernick. While it might be very nice to have some black coffee when dropping in on some casual friend— the same gesture can be very infuriating when done to someone who has just prepared (or wishes to prepare) a dinner for you! Given the complex rules of *Kashrut* in Israel (e.g., *T'rumah*, *Sh'viit*, *Orlah*, etc.), it may be the most sensitive thing to simply decline an invitation. To say that other alternatives could have been pursued is, at best, an exercise in 20/20 hindsight— and besides would probably not have satisfied Mrs. Strassfeld's feelings (based upon how I judge the tenor of the article— which implied that this cousin was still just following some goofy *chumrot*).

Further, I know of *no* knowledgeable Orthodox person who is "happy" or "derives *nachas*" when anybody— especially a close relative— decides to follow a non-Orthodox mode of observance. Ms. Strassfeld portrays her grandfather as a knowledgeable traditional Jew. Traditional Orthodoxy has *never* approved of mixed men/women services nor has it *ever* approved of women leading services for men. It is *not* "unfeeling" nor is it a "personal projection" to state that a