CEIJA STOJKA

Abtransport in ein Vernichtungslager (Deportación a un campo de exterminio), 1994
Acrílico, tinta china, pintura, esmalte sobre cartón
70 x 100 cm
Wien Museum, Viena

ART OF CEIJA STOJKA, ROMA AUSCHWITZ SURVIVOR
IN MUSEO REINA SOFÍA IN MADRID

AROLSEN ARCHIVES. 17 MILLION DOCUMENTS ONLINE.

PORTRAIT, PHOTOS AND BOOKS OF JERZY KWIAŁKOWSKI IN THE COLLECTIONS OF MAJDANEK MUSEUM

GREAT SYNAGOGUE MEMORIAL PARK IN OŚWIĘCIM

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IHRA Special Summit
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Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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Polish diplomats based in Bern, Switzerland during World War II attempted to save between 8,000 and 10,000 Jews from Nazi deportation by providing them with fake Latin American documents, new research undertaken by the Warsaw-based Pilecki Institute has revealed.

The English version of The Ładoś List, a comprehensive publication presenting previously unrevealed details about the Ładoś Group (also known as the Bernese Group), as well as a full index of the names of the 3,253 Jews who received or were meant to receive these documents, was presented under the patronage of the World Jewish Congress on Thursday, at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, following its Polish-language premiere in December.

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A dress made for a Holocaust survivor Henryka Shaw so she had something to wear as she walked out of a concentration camp to freedom is one of several new items on display at the Australian War Memorial.

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Decades after they suffered unspeakable horrors at concentration camps, many Holocaust survivors in the US live in poverty & rely on donations because they struggle to pay their rent and even food. | 'Women Holocaust Survivors Find Joy in Fighting Poverty'
The Arolsen Archives are the world’s most comprehensive archive on National Socialist persecution of individuals, although this was not their original purpose. The institution, which until recently was known as the International Tracing Service, was founded by the Allies during the war. It was charged with the task of finding missing people. The archive as it is today, comprising more than 30 million original and copied documents, is a byproduct of that task.

As its name implies, the Arolsen Archives are located in the provincial town of Bad Arolsen in rural north Hesse, Germany. The location was chosen due to its centrality between the four occupation zones in Germany, and because it was not destroyed by Allied bombings as were other nearby towns.

During its long history, the institution has been governed by many institutions, including the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Today it is headed by an International Commission with representatives from many countries which suffered at the hands of the Nazis, or in which large victim groups reside. For a long period of the institution’s history, it was off limits for researchers and the public, mainly due to a very strict interpretation of the institution’s mandate by two ICRC Directors. This period ended in 2012, when the ICRC relinquished its directorship of the institution. The Berlin agreements were signed in 2011, and the institution came under the supervision of a new International Commission committed to openness. This process culminated in the change of the institution’s name to “Arolsen Archives” and the mass publication of a growing number of documents online.

Since the creation of the new Arolsen Archives online platform, more than 400,000 users from dozens of countries have used it to search for names and topics, in addition to the almost 25,000 annual requests for information submitted to the Arolsen Archives Tracing department.

**Documentation from Auschwitz at the Arolsen Archives**

The Arolsen Archives hold a multitude of documents concerning individuals incarcerated in the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. The documentation concerning these individuals is spread across the entire Arolsen Archives collection and includes original deportation lists from the German Reich to Auschwitz, individual documentation concerning prisoners transferred from Auschwitz to various concentrations camps, and innumerous tracing requests regarding the fate of victims and survivors of the camp.
Due to historic circumstances, most of the documentation captured on the liberation of the camp is not to be found at the Arolsen Archives but rather at the Archives of the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum and at other archives in Poland and Russia. Nevertheless, the Arolsen Archives received copies of these documents over the years and utilized these for their tracing and documentation efforts.

The excellent cooperation between the Arolsen Archives and the Archives of the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum is continuing – the institutions have recently signed a new cooperation agreement and are exchanging documentation and information, allowing the Arolsen Archives to replace many of the old low-quality copies from the Archives of the Auschwitz Birkenau state Museum with newer, indexed scans, which will be made available to the public in collection 1.1.2.6. “Documentation from the Archives of the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum”.

The Arolsen Archives archival holdings are vast, comprised of well over 95,000,000 pages. Early in its history, the Arolsen Archives understood that its mandate can only be fulfilled by acquiring relevant documents, a process which has continued relentlessly throughout most of the institution’s existence.

The holdings are divided into five main theme-based groups:

- Camps, Deportations and Prisons – this group contains 13 million documents from concentration camps, Jewish wartime organizations and more. Among the most important collections of original documentation are the Dachau and Buchenwald documentation captured almost intact by the Americans, as well as original lists of deportees sent from Berlin to the East.

What is to be found at the archives?
- Registration of Foreigners and German Persecutees by Public Institutions, Social Securities and Companies – this 7.5 million documents strong group of collections can be roughly divided into two: lists created on behest of the occupation authorities detailing foreigners as well as Jews who resided in Germany or were buried there during the war, and millions of documents concerning forced labor in German communes and firms.

- DP – this group contains many collations of lists and index cards, as well as requests for IRO assistance, immigration lists, and medical files of DP patients in the forties and fifties.

- The Arolsen Archives own case files and child tracing files – while this collection group does not contain “wartime documentation,” it does contain a multitude of requests for information on individuals and families, which often contain valuable information and first-hand testimonies concerning the fates of those who were never registered by the Germans.

- The Central Name Index – the analog name index containing more than 50,000,000 cards pertaining to some 17,000,000 individuals.

In addition to these main collection groups, the Arolsen Archives hold many more documents which it acquired and inherited along the years – from German military court material proceedings, Soviet “Filtration Files” of repatriated eastern bloc citizens screened by the NKVD, Romanian applications for reparation, and many more collections.
Since making its holdings accessible to the public in 2007, the Arolsen Archives are committed to openness and transparency. Under the directorate of Rebecca Boehling and Floriane Azoulay, the institution has taken steps towards the mass online publication of its collections and accumulated metadata based on the understanding that the documents held at the Arolsen Archives are a treasure trove for researchers, as well as being the main source of information on personal and family history for many people of various nationalities and denominations around the world.

While in the past, the Arolsen Archives waited for people to request information, they now understand their role as being to supply this even to those who are not aware of its existence. The ultimate goal of the institution is to make publically available as much information as is legally and ethically possible, thus reducing the need for mediation between the Arolsen Archives and the public.

While the Arolsen Archives have already published 14 million documents from its holdings, there are still many challenges which stand in the way of our vision for full online accessibility:

- Digital indexing: Only a relatively small part of our collections is digitally indexed. While personal documents such as the CM/1 files are well indexed, list material is not. The CNI is analog and extremely complex and cannot be understood by casual users. The Arolsen Archives are striving to index more and more names using OCR as well as external cooperation with companies and institutions, such as Ancestry, The German Historic Institute in Moscow, and the JDC Archives.

- Ethics: The Arolsen Archives contain a multitude of extremely sensitive documentation, such as detailed medical files, detailed case files concerning the tracing of children, birth certificates, and information concerning criminal records. The Arolsen Archives have to identify the documentation it cannot publish as well as being flexible and capable of swiftly blocking documents at the request of relatives, while making the metadata available.

- Archival laws: The Arolsen Archives, similar to Yad Vashem and the USHHM, are a collecting archive – in addition to originals, they hold millions of copies from various archives. They have to identify these, clear the issue of usage rights, and strive to renegotiate restrictive agreements in order to publish as much documentation as possible.

**The Arolsen Archives Online**

The new Arolsen online archive was launched in May 2019. It dramatically expands the amount of documents and metadata available online. It was realized in cooperation with one of the Arolsen Archives’ most important partners, Yad Vashem, whose strong IT department adjusted the online platform for Yad Vashem’s own databases to meet the needs of the Arolsen Archives.

The online archive currently displays about 17 million documents and includes more than 13 million names, mainly of concentration camp prisoners and DPs. In addition, it also contains the complete archival descriptions of our collections. The online archive is modular and easy to expand.
The search in the online platform is intuitive – each search provides results in two categories:

- Names: This is the main place to find information on individuals – it is possible to search by family name or first name, but also by prisoner number and place of birth. We hope to allow more search options in the future. It is important to remember that the name search only searches digitally indexed collections and is not complete. Central parts of the archive have not been indexed yet.

- Topics: The “topic” search is the search within archival descriptions and it enables users to search for places, terms, and names. This search can be used to find information on broader issues – this search mode is the best way to access the parts of the archive which are not yet indexed as well as to explore the vast archival holdings on the basis of themes rather than names. We have added a theme-based index as well as some other filter options in order to make the search easier, these tools will be refined and augmented by geo-references in the future.
Archival tree view: This mode allows the user to explore our collections in a “classic” archival manner, understanding the complex structure of our theme-based archives.

**1.1.5 - Buchenwald Concentration Camp**

**1.1.5.0 - General Information on Buchenwald Concentration Camp**

**1.1.5.1 - List Material Buchenwald**

- Internment book (numbers) of Concentration Camp Buchenwald (men), Book-No. 1 - 82, Prisoner-No. 1 - 139538
- Internment book (numbers) of Concentration Camp Buchenwald (women), Book-No. 83 - 91, Prisoner-No. 1 - 40702
- Block books of Concentration Camp Buchenwald I (prisoner numbers: 1 - 12000, 13001 - 114980, 115001 - 140345)
- Block books of Concentration Camp Buchenwald II (prisoner numbers: 1 - 47500)
- Block books of Concentration Camp Buchenwald III (prisoner numbers: 1 - 13000; 40001 - 53000; 74001 - 86000)
- Work deployment books of Concentration Camp Buchenwald (prisoner numbers: 1 - 20740)

**The e-Guide:**

Many of the documents held in Arolsen are of an administrative nature and are not self-explanatory. In order to enable relatives and users to understand the meaning of the documents used in the camp system, an interactive e-Guide has been developed, which explains common documents types. The first part of the e-Guide supplied information on concentration camp documents. The second part, which is now online, focuses on documents about people who were looked after by the Allies as survivors of Nazi persecution during the period after 1945. The third and final part of the e-Guide will focus on the documents on Eastern and Western European forced laborers. This will be rolled out at the end of 2020. Documents described by the e-Guide link directly to it at: https://eguide.its-arolsen.org/en/
CEIJA STOJKA (1933-2013)

We said Rom rather than Gypsy.
For the plural too.
Not Roma.
Rom, with the emphasis on the ‘m’.
Almost like it had a double ‘m’.
But don’t worry, you can say Gypsy
I’m a Gypsy.
A dyed-in-the-wool Gypsy, in fact!*

*Ceija Stojka, in Auschwitz ist mein Mantel.

After Paris, La maison rouge (2018), Nijmegen, Netherland, Het Valkhof (2019), Museo Reina Sofia presents a major retrospective of this Austrian Roma artist’s paintings for the first time in Spain. Ceija Stojka was ten years old when she was deported, along with her mother, brothers and sisters. Over the course of the Second World War, she survived three concentration camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen). But it wasn’t until forty years later, at the age of fifty-four, that she embarked on a great work of memory, firstly through writing then, soon after, through drawing and painting.
TESTIMONY, TESTIMONIES

Ceija Stojka died in 2013, and her legacy includes over a thousand drawings and paintings, more than one hundred and thirty of which have been assembled for the exhibition: ink, gouache and acrylic on paper and canvas. Produced between 1988 and 2012, they have been grouped into themes that plot her life, although they were not made in such chronological order. Some scenes are played out over and over in the different galleries of the museum; motifs reappear, the same yet different. The many works shown enable us to grasp the twists and turns of the memory process, with its constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions. Ceija’s work reflects numerous standpoints; a ten-year-old girl’s memories cohabiting with suddenly re-emerging, repressed images and their analysis by the creative adult. Not all her works are based on her own experiences; some refer to places or incidents which she found out about after the event. Dachau, Concentration Camp (Dachau, camp de concentration) and Z.B. [Zyklon B] Gas Chamber, 02.08.1944 in Auschwitz. The final liquidation (Z. B. [Zyklon B]) are two such works. Both are astonishingly abstract. The first refers to the arrest of her father, Wackar, in 1941 and his deportation to Dachau then Mauthausen, before he was killed at Hartheim Castle in Austria, in 1942.

KEY ENCOUNTERS

In 1986, Ceija met the Austrian documentarist Karin Berger. At the time, Berger was attempting to gather testimonies from people of the Roma community for a research about women in concentration camps – not without difficulty, given the symbolic taboos within the communities themselves. She was meant to interview a certain Kathi... but in fact met her sister, Ceija. Ceija’s older brother Karl (1931-2003) had already begun to write and paint, and their cousin Mongo (1929-2014) was a writer and musician. While we do not know exactly when Ceija began to write, then draw and paint, we do know that Karin Berger played a crucial role in encouraging and revealing her work. Ceija Stojka was totally self-taught. Not only did Karin Berger help her to transcribe some of her manuscripts, she also made two documentaries about her (Portrait of a Romni in 1999 and, in 2005, The Green Green Grass Beneath, a 30 minutes excerpt is presented at the end of the show).

Ceija gained a certain recognition for her writings, first in Austria, in the early 1990s, within a tense political climate that demanded acknowledgement of this first female voice to break the silence surrounding the Samudaripen, the Roma genocide that wiped out 90% of the Roma population in the country. The Roma tradition was almost exclusively oral, hence the sparsity of texts at that time. Nonetheless, some writings began to emerge in the 1950s, including by women such as the writer Philomena Franz (b. 1922) or the poet Papoucha (1908-1987). Ceija Stojka became the voice that took out the twentieth century’s vast dislocation, and Austria’s pervasive anti-Roma racism, not just into the media but also into schools and clubs. Her work is still little-known in Europe.

“LIFE ON THE ROAD...”

The first gallery of the exhibition presents depictions of a life ‘before’. The life of a child born one May 23rd in Kraubath, in Styria, a descendant of the Lovara, a long line of horse traders who were originally from Hungary but had been living in Austria for centuries. Many Roma had already become sedentary; the Stojka family was forced to do so by the Nazi laws that came after the annexation of Austria (Anschluss) (1938-1939). And so the horse-drawn caravan became a wood cabin. It features in all the pictures of this section, some of which take us right inside the cozy interior. We see there an idyllic life in harmony with nature - Country Life - and an entire slice of Roma culture. Ceija celebrates this nomadic, clan-based existence on the back of certain paintings. Signs and words also feature on the drawings and canvases evoking life in the concentration camps - attempts to say what must be said, to point the finger, to name the unnameable, as well as expressions of violence (the shouting of the SS, place names, etc.)
CEIJA STOJKA

Ohne Titel (Sin título), 1994
Acrílico sobre cartón
70 x 100 cm
Colección particular Patricia y Marcus Meier, Viena
Her quick, light touch creates a style that might be described as naive; sometimes the artist has thickened the paint with sand, emphasising her expressionistic materiality. Compositions recur from one painting to another, creating a dynamic that is characteristic of her work. But the threat already looms: Travelling Through a Field of Sunflowers in Summer imposes a sense of distance, concealment, even. All around, pink, orange and violet skies suggest a metaphorical twilight preceding the cold snows of a winter that will last for long, long years.

**HIDDEN, SCARED, DEPORTED**

Following her father’s, Wackar, arrest, Sidonie her mother and the children went into hiding for many long months, sometimes staying with friends, or friends of friends, sometimes hidden in a park in Vienna’s 16th District, not far from their little house, now ringed with barbed wire. A series of ink drawings is from what the artist herself called her ‘dark works’ (as opposed to her ‘light works’). The contrast of black and white, and a sharper stroke, give them a more overtly graphic style. “Where is your father?” one asks: “They took him away.” Little Ceija’s memories mix in with the artist’s nightmares, just as the Nazis’ shouted orders are mixed in with snatches from sentences uttered by friends and family, and her own thoughts: Quiet! Mother, where are you? and The trains are already full but they’ve still got to get in. Move on. Go on, go on! Go on, everyone to Auschwitz! I can’t forget. A remarkable picture; we can just make out the frightened faces of shadows caught in the tangle of lines depicting the trees of Kongresspark that practically cover the entire canvas (Untitled, 15.03.2003). The upright presentation enables us to see an example of how Ceija covered the back of certain paintings with chalk drawings and clumsily spelt polyphonic phrases - the often-phonetic transcriptions made by someone who was never able to attend school regularly, much to her regret and despite all her parents’ efforts. On March 3rd, 1943, Ceija, her mother, brothers and sisters were locked away in Vienna’s Rossauer Lände prison. However, these works do not portray this one arrest but all the arrests suffered by Roma people, which Ceija imagines in, for example, Found or “Where are our Roma?” Laaerberg, 1938.
Ceija's incredible life force: her fierce humour, particularly in her caricature of Adolf Hitler (Now you're done for. Heil – Here we come), and some expressions of a hope that survives and will continue to survive no matter what, such as the proud, green tree on the right of Vienna-Auschwitz. It accompanies the unspeakable convoy (should we see a likeness with the caravans on previous paintings?) as it winds its way into a childlike yet apocalyptic landscape, where swastikas and machinery meld into one implacable mechanism.

IN THE CAMPS

The Stojka family were deported to Auschwitz, where they were registered on March 31st, 1943 and held in section B-II-e, known as the "Gypsy family camp". We see through the eyes of the young Ceija, just ten years old Monstrous, oversized SS boots fill the foreground. She frames her pictures in such a way as to show only parts of her torturers, denying them the right to be whole. Unusual, arresting angles are a constant in Ceija's work: subjects are viewed at ground level, as if by a dead person, or instead from the sky, as though seen by a spirit floating above the camps, or indeed a bird – free, in either case. Many are shown from the other side of the barbed wire that bars the canvas, the viewpoint of an imaginary escapee, or a helpless witness. Further along we see more examples of her tremendous evocative force: Birkenau KZ, 1944 tells of a child standing on tiptoe, only to discover the chimneys through windows deliberately set too high. Z 6399, an astonishing, sharply modern composition featuring Ceija's roll number - the tattoo inflicted on her, and on every deportee, upon arrival at Auschwitz and something she never hid on any photograph. The Z stands for Zigeuner.
The Ravensbrück gallery chills to the bone: the pictures are drenched in white, the lines are like lashes of the whip. This room focuses on the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück, where Ceija, her mother Sidi and her sister Kathi were deported shortly before the terrible liquidation of the 'gypsy camp' at Auschwitz (August 2nd). This was in May or June 1944 - Mitzi had arrived just before them, in April. Someone is always watching you, at Ravensbrück. The views could be those from the guards' towers. A huge bloodshot eye watches over Ravensbrück 1944. This is more than just an 'evil eye': it is a sad sun, the eye of the dead who watch the living, the ever-open eye that must bear witness and imprint on its retina that which must never be forgotten. At Ravensbrück, as elsewhere in Ceija's work, strips and rectangles structure the composition: something martial, something highly inflexible has made its mark, even on the landscapes. Sinister figures reign over them, such as the Oberaufseherin Dorothea Binz who appears to be standing in the middle of the path in Untitled, 28.01.2001. Little Ceija was fascinated by this epitome of cruelty and perversity, with her impeccable turnout and perfect blond ringlets. Alongside these figures, the bodies of the deported are featureless brushstrokes, beginning their journey to a ghostly future. Yet life seems to reside with the deported in their colourful clothes, such as in the astonishing chorus of figures in Ravensbrück Women, 1944, in the borderland between figurative and abstract.

In January 1945, Sidonie and Ceija were taken by lorry, then on foot, to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; Kathi was deported to the Rechlin-Retzow forced labour camp and Mitzi to Büchenwald. Ceija survived among the dead whom she saw as her friends and allies. She kept warm by hiding under the piled-up bodies; she kept herself alive by eating leather from belts, scraps of fabric, shoelaces – it was a long time since the deported had been given food. In Untitled, I'm starving, the person sinking into the snow stares at us, calls out to us: we who are, yet again, on the other side of the barbed wire. Ceija would tell of finding a tiny branch and feasting on its sap. She believed it saved her life and, in recognition, went on to sign all her works with a branch. Just as the artist's creative process takes in both 'light works' and 'dark works', so hope lives on. And yet Untitled, 21.11.2009 tells us that "there was great fear behind the barbed wire". Two animals haunt Ceija's imagination. They are crows, present from the very start to the very end of the exhibition, and dogs - the torturers' ferocious companion. There are other, scarcely bearable images in this section as Bergen-Belsen, 1945, liberated by British troops on April 15th then set alight so as to prevent any further spread of the epidemics that were killing those who had managed to survive thus far. Yet even here, amidst this truly apocalyptic scene, stands a tree, magnificent and full of life.

BACK TO LIFE, WITH MARY

Following the liberation of the camps, it took Ceija and her mother almost four months to reach Vienna from Bergen-Belsen. In this last section, their exhaustion and their battle with the elements emerge in some of the landscapes. The composition and the movement of the trees in several paintings formally echo Vienna-Auschwitz (shown earlier). Pink, orange and violet skies recall landscapes in the first gallery, emphasising the extent to which past, present and future mix and mingle: for Ceija, time is cyclical – a happy time where life can begin again, and another unspoken time steeped in the fear that such horror might repeat itself. In its attempt to give meaning to the madness, Ceija's art is never unequivocal.

Having returned to Vienna, it took Ceija and her mother several months to trace the other family members who had survived, and years to find work and a place to live. Ceija sold fabrics door-to-door until 1959 when she was given a licence to sell rugs on a market stall – which she continued to do until 1984. She had three children: Hojda (born in 1949), Silvia (born in 1951) and Jano (1955-1979). Life began again and mother earth - along with fruit and vegetables - became the main subject of her paintings, after years of hunger in the camps. “Sunflowers are the flower of the Roma,” wrote Ceija and here they are, omnipresent in her work once again (Travels Through a Field of Sunflowers in Summer
CEIJA STOJKA
*Ohne Titel / Trasera: Unsere Wiege war der Wohnwagen*, 2003
*Sin título / Trasera: Nuestra cuna era el carromato*
Acrílico sobre tejido sobre cartón
100 x 70
Wien Museum, Viena.
These perennials turn to the sun and thus to hope, an essential Christian virtue for a woman who thanked her faith, and the Virgin Mary, for her survival. A statue of the Holy Virgin, with or without an altar, features in many compositions—compositions we could swear we have seen before. She is always standing at a crossroads.

Covering pages and pages of the sketchbooks she hid in cupboards in her apartment, on the outskirts of Vienna, tracing again and again the contours of her existence with her paintbrush, and as often as not her finger, her main concern being simply to express herself. Only four of her texts have been published, first in Austria, including We Live in Seclusion: The Memories of a Romni in 1988, Travellers on This World in 1992, Meine Wahl zu schreiben - ich kann es nicht in 2003, Träume ich, dass ich lebe? Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen in 2005 and Auschwitz ist mein Mantel in 2008 (in the catalogue of the same name). But many others could—and might—be published, such were the artist’s plethoric writings, both in her notebooks and on the front and back of her paintings.

CEIJA STOJKA
Acrílico, tinta china, esmalte y lentejuelas sobre cartón
70 x 100 cm
Wien Museum, Viena.
The exhibition ends amidst a swarm of crows (Corpses/Cadavres); those birds of ill omen that Ceija loved, for she saw them as the incarnation of ‘her’ dead, swirling around her in the camps. In Roma culture, birds can serve as messengers between the dead and the living; in the camps, they must have seemed the last remaining traces of life. They are a key element of the image-memories that Ceija recreated - complex and sometimes with a double meaning, such as this sly, bi-colour, double eye that tries to look back, and asks us not to close our eyes.

Text inspired by the guide written by Marie Cantos in La maison rouge (2018)
OPENING OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE MEMORIAL PARK IN OŚWIĘCIM

Before Oświęcim became Auschwitz, it was home to a Jewish community for 400 years. Today with no Jewish residents, the town just paid tribute to its Jewish past and honored the Great Synagogue of Oświęcim, destroyed by the Nazi Germans in November 1939.
Before the outbreak of World War II, the Jews constituted 60 percent of the local population. Called “Oshpitzin” by the local Jews, the town had over 20 synagogues and prayer houses. Among them was the Great Synagogue. It was built in 1588 on a plot of the Jewish community donated by Jan Piotraszewski, a townsman and Oświęcim elder. Over the centuries it was destroyed several times.

For decades the Great Synagogue was the place around which the life of the Jewish community in Oświęcim was concentrated, said Tomasz Kuncewicz, director of the Auschwitz Jewish Center, which runs the local Jewish Museum and maintains the only synagogue left in the town.

On the night of November 29-30, 1939, the Great Synagogue was burned to the ground by the Nazis. Its last traces were removed on the German order by a specially created commando consisting of Auschwitz prisoners, mainly Poles, who, as part of forced labor, were forced to complete the demolition of the building in the summer of 1941.
On November 28, that is exactly 80 years after the destruction, residents of Oświęcim and guests from around the world, including Holocaust survivors and their descendants, gathered at a special ceremony to inaugurate the Great Synagogue Memorial Park. This grassroots project came to life thanks to the involvement of many people and institutions, including the Town of Oświęcim, and the local residents.

In the park you will be able to rest on the benches with symbolic perforations depicting the signs of the zodiac - a reflection of the ornamentation from the Great Synagogue. The history of the temple will be presented through the installation with its historical photos and a 3D model of the building. The park contains 40 stone slabs arranged in a free composition, whose irregular arrangement symbolize the ruins. In addition the synagogue perimeter is marked and a copy of the synagogue chandelier is hanging over the site, added Tomasz Kuncewicz.

The park, designed by Kraków architects from the NArchitekTURA Design Studio and Imaginga Studio, will contain over 20 species of various shrubs and flowers. In addition to the already growing, decades-old trees, completely new plants will appear in it. These will include different types of ivy and ferns, but also sed, miscanthus, fescue gautier and others.

Our goal was to remember it by creating a site that will be meaningful for residents and the increasing number of tourists coming to Oświęcim in conjunction with their visit of the Auschwitz Memorial - said Tomasz Kuncewicz.
THE STORY OF ZYSLI TAJCH (SOPHIE KLISMAN)

Zysla Tajch was born on July 6th, 1929 in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland. Her parents were Liba, nee; Rozrazowska, and Berek Tajch. Zysla had two brothers Moszek and Srulek, and one sister Faiga. Another sister, Esteria, died at the age of 9, before my mother was born. The family moved to Łódź when Zysla was 3, and that is where she went to a Jewish school, for a few years, until the Germans invaded Poland and shut down the schools.

Her family was put in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. There her mother, father and Moszek died a slow painful death, before her eyes, from starvation and disease.

Somehow my mother, Faiga and Srulek kept going to work, while being starved and exhausted. After surviving in the ghetto for 4 long years it was liquidated. Zysla, Faiga and Srulek were transported, by freight trains, to Auschwitz. During the selection Zysla thought it was Dr. Mengele who raised his finger to direct people to the right or left. The ones that were too old, pregnant, too young or sick were sent to the gas chamber.

The testimony can be watched in: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B37tWdtBdr3aTEzVzdabDBeTA53

Faiga was in front of Zysla and was waved to the right. When Zysla approached Dr. Mengele, he shouted in German “STOP.” She was petrified that she did something wrong. He asked her how old she was. At the time she was only 14 but lied and said she was 18. Then he asked her what year she was born. She told him 1925 instead of 1929, and he waved her to the same direction as her sister. They hugged and cried. They did not know if that line was to live or die, but they were thrilled they were together. She felt this was a miracle that she survived the selection. Srulek was sent to another direction. He looked back at his sisters and they all cried. They never saw him again. The sisters were in Auschwitz approximately 15 days before transported (4 days and nights) to Bergen-Belsen. They were in Bergen-Belsen for 4-5 weeks, of October 1944. During that period the sisters slept in tents that were cold and wet. My mother got sick with strep throat and a fever. At that point my mother wanted to die. Her sister said to her “You cannot leave me alone. You are the only family I have.” One of the prisoners that used to be a nurse told my mother to gargle with her own urine. This is what saved her life. It was another miracle of her surviving. Zysla and Faiga were not aware that Srulek had also been sent to Bergen-Belsen, because the men and women were separated. Records indicate that Srulek presumably perished at Bergen-Belsen shortly before liberation.

Next, the two sisters had a 13 hours cattle train ride to Salzwedel camp, in Germany. They stayed there for 9 months. They worked an evening shift, in a munition factory. A piece of bread and watered down soup was provided for the day. My mother became extremely ill. She could not stand during roll call and her sister tried to lift her up. One SS Nazi woman had a heart and told her to go back to her barrack. She immediately fell asleep. Within a few minutes a terrible SS Nazi soldier started swearing at Zysla and beating her, to near death, along the forced walk to the munition factory. When Zysla arrived, she was almost dead.

Zysla (on the left) and Faiga after the War, 1945/6.
Zysla (on the left) and Faiga after the War, 1945/6.
Faiga cleaned her up and then figured that Zysla was not on the working list of that day. So, she hid her in a back room and put her in a box to sleep. At the end of the shift Faiga woke her up and they walked back to the barracks. That little amount of sleep helped her survive. Zysla and Faiga were liberated on April 14th, 1945 by the 9th U.S. Army, 84th Infantry Liberating Unit. Until 1949 they stayed in DP (Displaced Person) camps in Germany. They knew they could not go back to their home in Łódź, due to antisemitism. During that time, they searched for family survivors through the Red Cross, realizing that their whole family perished in the Holocaust. In the DP camp Faiga got married to Roman Shloss and they had a daughter, Loretta. Finally, they were heading, in a 2-week journey, by boat, to New York, and then to Detroit, Michigan.

Once in America Zysla, called from now: “Sophie”, went to night school and worked during the day. In that school she met her husband Bernard Klisman, also a Holocaust survivor. They fell in love and got married. They had Mark and Lori between 1956 and 1959. Sophie was a sales woman at a prestigious woman’s clothing store. She was a very dedicated wife to her husband Bernard, and very loving mother to her 2 children. Her children got married and had a family of their own.

Sophie and Bernard never talked with us about the Holocaust because they did not want us feeling sorry for them. They hid the pain from us but had survivor friends who soon became our family.

When our kids were in school, they had to do a project about the Holocaust and that was when my mom shared a little bit of information. Just 5 years ago she was interviewed for the Holocaust Memorial Center. After that the photographer Monnie Must (together with Sabrina Must) photographed her and included her, my father, and many other survivors in a book called: Living Witnesses Faces of the Holocaust.

After that I was on the internet and noticed a colleague of mine posted on Facebook: “The World Memory Project”
I was curious if I could find any information on my mother’s or father’s family. I put in the names and felt like I hit the jack pot. I was able to find out the dates her family perished. This is when my mother put up 4 beautiful plaques at Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, Mi. Finally my mother has a place she can go to say Kaddish, and the family will never be forgotten! Then I found a website called Jewishgen.org. This site had a wealth of information about people from Poland, and other locations. I found the exact spot where Liba and Moszek Tajch were buried. I contacted the staff at the New Łódź Jewish Cemetery and asked if there were any markers or tombstones on those spots. Staff emailed me the exact spots they were buried however there were no markers or tombstones, but empty land where they were buried. In their books the exact spot where they were buried was documented. I asked my mother if she would want to go back to Poland and she said “never”. I said “what if I told you I know the exact spot where your mom and brother were buried?” and she said “you have to be certain”. I told her I was. I asked if she would like a tombstone erected in memory of the Tajch family and she said “yes”. We had the stone made in Poland and it was put in the Ghetto Field of the cemetery. Our next goal was to book a trip to Poland.

Sophie, my brother Mark, his wife Anne, my husband Jeff and I decided we were going with my mom to Poland. On July 7, 2016, at the age of 86 my mom and all of us got to say Kaddish, at the New Łódź cemetery, in memory of her beautiful family that perished in the Holocaust. It was the most emotional and moving experience. After that we went to Radegast Museum https://muzeumtradycji.pl/oddzial-stacja-radegast to see the spot where she was transported to Auschwitz.

We also went to Piotrków and found her synagogue. It is now a library. When we arrived there something magical happened. We met a Rabbi and a group of young Jewish Professionals from New York on the J. Roots Mission. They asked my mother to speak to their group about her life story. We were amazed at her courage to do this. She is a brave survivor. The next day the group went to the Tajch grave at the New Łódź Jewish cemetery, said prayers and placed stones on the tombstone. It meant the world to my mom.

The New Łódź Cemetery in Lodz, Poland

Then our family visited my father’s home town on Sosnowiec. Next, we went to the resort town of Zakopane. As a young girl my mother dreamt of going there, so, I wanted to make her dream finally come true. We also visited Auschwitz-Birkenau and then Krakow.

A blog was also written about our journey in Poland: https://ellispoland2016.blogspot.com

Presently Sophie speaks at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, MI. She is still active, youthful and in good health. Sophie feels it was a miracle that she survived with her sister; while millions did not. When she speaks, she emphasizes how important it is not to be prejudice. She said millions died just because of antisemitism and hatred, just because they were not Aryan. If she can impart anything it would be to tolerate other religions. Learn to accept others. She is grateful to be alive. Don’t give up hope!
In May 2019 Sophie was selected to be the survivor to speak at the FIDF (Friends of Israel Defense Forces) in Poland and Israel. She spoke at the Auschwitz Memorial and was escorted into the site of the former camp with 50 Israeli soldiers. She shared her story of being imprisoned in the Litzmannstadt ghetto, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Salzwedel. She talked about the loss of most of her family, the starvation, disease, exhaustion and yet still having hope! This was such an honor to be selected. Her daughter in law, Anne Klisman accompanied her to Krakow, Auschwitz and then to Jerusalem in May 2019.

She went from the darkest period of her life, in occupied Poland, to the light in arriving to Israel. She celebrated the Holocaust Memorial Day at the Auschwitz Memorial and then celebrated Independence Day in Israel. In Jerusalem she danced with the Israeli soldiers, and they helped her to celebrate her life. Major General Klifi, from the FIDF, called her a hero. This mission helped her feel safe and experience closure from the war. The soldiers stated Sophie impacted their lives. They now have a clearer picture of why they need to fight for their country. They know what can happen when Jews don’t have a state of their own.

Upon her arrival back in Michigan, an Army Veteran, who served in the 84th infantry, read Sophie’s article in the Detroit News and contacted her. He stated he was one of the liberators of Salzwedel. They reunited for the first time since the liberation of Salzwedel camp in 1945. Doug Harvey, 95 years old, was one of the brave liberators who is still alive. He is an active, intelligent and independent man who helped to free 3,000 prisoners of war. He is a very humble and modest man. Sophie, a youthful 89-year-old, stated: “You gave me my life back. I can never thank you enough.” Sophie tells “It was like watching angels jump off the trucks and tanks when they came to open the gates of Salzwedel.” They hugged and embraced during this sentimental meeting. It was captured by the national and local news and several newspapers, as well as radio stations. View her story on the National Fox News with Martha MacCallum.

Sophie’s daughter, Lori Ellis wrote a book on her family’s life called: 4,456 Miles: A Survivors Search for Closure- A Daughter’s Search for Understanding the Holocaust. This book will be available on Amazon in December, 2019 or January, 2020.

On August 18, 2019 Sophie Tajch Klisman, age 90 and Lori Klisman Ellis, age 60 competed in the Senior Olympics, in Power Walking at Oakland University in Rochester, Mi. We both received a gold medal for the 1500 M for our age group. In addition, we both broke the record for the state of Michigan. Sophie walked at a speed of 18.03. Jeff, her son-in-law stated if she were to compete in the National Power Walking Olympics, with her speed at the age of 90 she would be the fastest in the nation! Way to go mom! She is unstoppable at the age of 90. Sophie continues to inspire people. We are so proud of our mother/grandmother!
At the end of December, we received from Mr. Erich Schiele from New York memorabilia belonging to Jerzy Kwiatkowski, the author of the most famous account of the German concentration camp KL Lublin entitled 485 Days at Majdanek. Mr. Schiele's family had been friends with Kwiatkowski, they lived in the neighborhood. Kwiatkowski emigrated to the USA in the late 1940s. He first performed various jobs in Chicago, in 1958 he was employed at Pekao Trading Corporation and moved to New York.

Erich Schiele contacted the State Museum at Majdanek in September 2019, after reading information about the preparation by the Museum together with Hoover Institution Library & Archives of the English version of 485 Days at Majdanek. The book will be published by the Hoover Institution Press in the fall of 2020.

Thanks to the correspondence we have learned a lot about the American chapter of Kwiatkowski's life. We found out, among other things, the dates of his death and funeral: Kwiatkowski died of heart failure on February 3, 1980, was buried on February 6, and lies in the Avenue of Merit of the American Częstochowa Cemetery in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

The donation comprises items to which the author of 485 Days at Majdanek was so attached that he did not decide to deposit them at the Hoover Institute in the 1970s. Instead, they remained in his New York apartment until his death.

The collection donated to the State Museum at Majdanek consists of:
– oil portrait of the author of the camp memories painted by Eduard Adrian Dussek during World War I, on whose back Jerzy stuck typewritten biograms of the painter in French and German. Eduard Dussek, a Hungarian national, studied at academies in Budapest, Vienna, Munich, as well as in Paris and Italy, worked in and around Budapest, he painted, among other things, portraits of Franz Joseph and also recreated scenes from the history of Hungary. The portrait presents Jerzy in a field uniform of dragoons of the Austro-Hungarian Army – with leutnant's distinctions and a silver Medal of Valor;
Drogiemu Panu dr. Jerzemu Kwiatkowskemu, dziękuję za ich uroczysty w N. Yorku - zawsze pełna poświęcenia, tę jego espiritualną i troszkę Brzechwa.
photographs of the Kwiatkowski family (some of them framed and signed): images of Jerzy’s grandparents: Tadeusz and Julia née Mielnicka; maiden photograph of Jerzy’s mother Julia née Ceglecka; two photographs of teenage Jerzy together with his parents, brothers and ministerial commission approving in 1913 the construction of a railway line connecting Bukovina with Lesser Poland and the construction of the Onuth stop, against the background of the Kwiatkowski family residence – the Onuth court in Chernivtsi; a post-war photograph of Kwiatkowski as captain and a photograph of his colleague Stanisław Strzetelski; 

"Congresional Record" from 1969, a diary containing the speech of Senator Roman Puciński on 485 Days at Majdanek on the forum of the House of Representatives in the US Congress; 

28 books from the Kwiatkowski library, among them memories of concentration camps, such as: Kolczasty trakt [The Barbed Tract] by Stanisław Chwiejczak, Pole śmierci [The Field of Death] by Andrzej Stanisławski, Wspomnienia z Sachsenhausen [Memories of Sachsenhausen] by Jan Gwiazdomorski, Ravensbrück by Wanda Kiedrzyńska, Pięć lat kacetu [Five Years in Concentration Camps] by Stanisław Grzesiuk.

Some publications contain dedications. It is worth quoting several of them:


"To dear Jerzy Kwiatkowski as a proof of friendship, Juliusz Szygowski, December 20, 1972" (Tak się zaczynało [This Is How It Began], Chicago-Lwów 1972).

The dedications testify to the lively relations the author of 485 Days at Majdanek had with former prisoners, including KL Lublin. Kwiatkowski came to Poland in the 1960s and participated in the Majdanek Days several times. During the work on editing the camp memories, in the years 1961–1966, he maintained close contacts with the environment of the Society for the Protection of Majdanek. Many friendships lasted longer.

We are very grateful to our donor, Erich Schiele. The collection and obtained information will enrich our Department of Collections as well as Archives and will enable further detailed examination of the story of this prisoner. They will also be used in the exhibition "Jerzy Kwiatkowski. Gardener from field III," which we plan to open in July 2020.
On 19 January 2020, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), together with the Government of Luxembourg, welcomed ministers and high-ranking government representatives from 35 countries to Brussels, for a unique summit to declare their commitment to fighting Holocaust distortion, antisemitism, antigypsyism and other forms of discrimination.

The ministerial meeting, at the Residence Palace Press Centre in Brussels, saw IHRA Member Countries adopt the IHRA 2020 Ministerial Declaration, formed of 14 measures that underpin the ultimate objective of IHRA: to ensure the world remembers the Holocaust and work to contribute to a world without genocide.

In times when Jews are being attacked and murdered in the streets and in their places of worship, when Holocaust distortion, antisemitism, antigypsyism and other forms of discrimination are on the rise globally, the Declaration is a new set of measures and principles that each IHRA Member Country agreed to support, including fresh commitments to:

- Accept responsibility to counter Holocaust denial and distortion, antisemitism, and all forms of racism and discrimination that undermine fundamental democratic principles

- Lead efforts to promote education, remembrance and research on the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma to counter the influence of historical distortion, hate speech and incitement to violence and hatred

- Identify, safeguard and make available archival material, testimonies and authentic sites for education purposes, commemoration and research

Adoption of the IHRA 2020 Ministerial Declaration is timely, as January 2020 marks 20 years since the Stockholm Declaration, the founding document of IHRA. This Declaration centred on remembering the victims who perished during the Holocaust, respecting the survivors still alive, and reaffirming humanity’s common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice. It outlined that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization and pledged to remember the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma and educate future generations of these tragic events.

The IHRA 2020 Ministerial Declaration marks the beginning of a historic year, which also sees the 75th anniversaries of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other concentration and extermination camps, as well as the end of the Second World War in Europe (8 May 1945) and in Asia (2 September 1945).
Ambassador Georges Santer, the IHRA Chair said: “We are delighted that ministers from around the world have adopted the 2020 Declaration today so that current and future generations do not forget the tragic events of the past and the historical record of the Holocaust is safeguarded. Against the backdrop of rising antisemitism, today's declaration is absolutely crucial. As the IHRA Honorary Chairman, Yehuda Bauer, always says antisemitism is not a threat only to Jews but is a destructive force for our societies in general. IHRA Member Countries are obliged to fight these dangerous developments, safeguard the historical record of the past and honour Holocaust victims and survivors today and IHRA will support all Member Countries to do so.”

Foreign Affairs Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn said: “The Government of Luxembourg is proud that during our year long tenure chairing the IHRA, we have worked with all Member Countries to unite them and renew their commitment to tackling antisemitism, marked through the adoption of this ministerial declaration today. As we see the global rise of antisemitism taking new forms, it is more urgent than ever that national governments come together and confront this evil. The Government of Luxembourg has worked with IHRA to ensure our collective resolve will not fade and we urge all members to enact the principles of the declaration agreed today. The Declaration itself must be in the coming years a source of inspiration, exhortation and motivation for the work of the Alliance.”

Ms. Edith Bruck, Holocaust survivor and keynote speaker at the meeting said: “Holocaust distortion and denial is both deeply offensive to the memory of victims and to me as a survivor. I witnessed first-hand the horrors of what can happen when antisemitism and genocide are not challenged. I am incredibly grateful to IHRA and its members today for committing to this historic declaration to help societies remember the atrocities that I and millions of others went through and to take a further step towards a world without genocide.”

The high-ranking government representatives of the meeting were also addressed by Robert Badinter, former Minister of Justice for France and Professor Yehuda Bauer, IHRA Honorary Chairman.

IHRA is an intergovernmental body whose purpose is to unite governments and experts to strengthen, advance, and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research and uphold the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration. The IHRA is composed of 34 Member Countries, 1 Liaison Country, 7 Observer Country and 8 Permanent International Partner Organizations.