



# MEMORIA

MEMORY • HISTORY • EDUCATION



## THE FIRST UNIVERSITY FACULTY CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AUSCHWITZ MEMORIAL OPENED IN BURGOS, SPAIN

INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA GIRS ABOUT A UNIQUE COPY OF "WE WERE IN AUSCHWITZ"

SITES CAN HELP SOCIETIES NAVIGATE DEAFENING SILENCES

WIENER HOLOCAUST LIBRARY

CONSERVATION OF 8,000 SHOES AT AUSCHWITZ MEMORIAL

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR

THE NEW

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We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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# INTERVIEW

## WITH BARBARA GIRS

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The Auschwitz Museum has received a special copy of the first edition of the book „Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu” from 1946, bound in a fragment of an original prisoner's striped uniform. The collection of memoirs by Auschwitz survivors Tadeusz Borowski, Janusz Nel Siedlecki and Krystyn Olszewski was first published in Munich by Oficyna Warszawska na Obczyźnie founded by Anatol Girs, who met the authors in one of the camps. A small part of the edition was bound in striped uniform cloth. In an interview with Paweł Sawicki, his daughter, Barbara Girs, talks about the history of the book's creation and about her father, Anatol Girs.

**The history of this particular book is personal on different levels. It contains memoirs, so these are personal experiences of three Auschwitz survivors. But the personal aspect is also reflected when we talk about the designer of the book, your father, Anatol Girs. I do believe that it is difficult to understand this story without learning about his life and his experiences, both as a book publisher and designer, but also as a person who survived the war.**

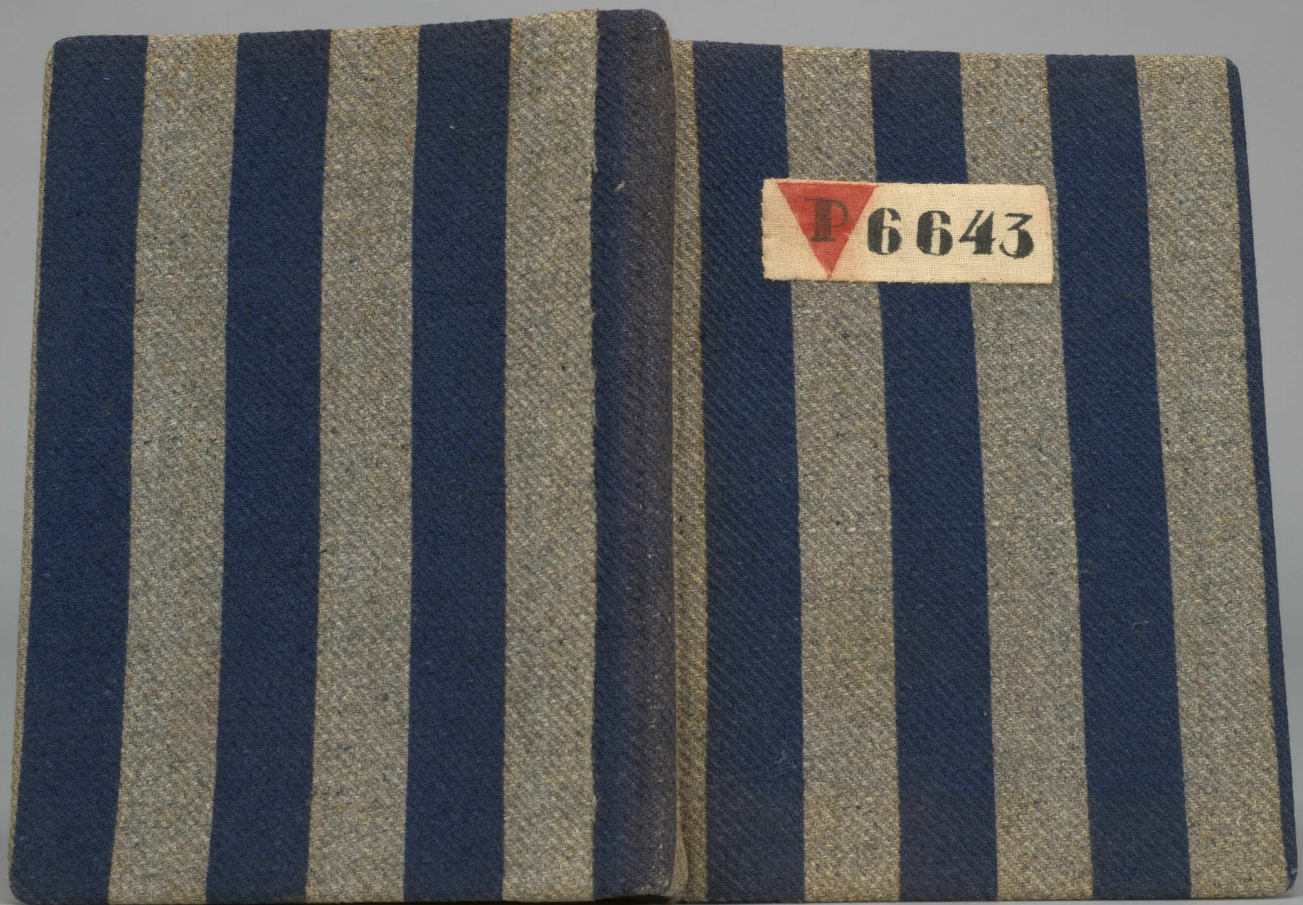
My father was born in Crimea in 1904 and only escaped to Poland with his mother after his father was arrested by the Bolsheviks and sent to Siberia where he later died. He finished his schooling in Warsaw, including at the School of Decorative Arts. He had what I think was a remarkably successful career as a book designer and graphic artist, and ultimately, along with his friend Boleslaw Barcz, created the design firm Atelier Girs-Barcz and eventually the publishing company Oficyna Warszawska. They designed numerous for Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, the official publishing house of the army. Pilsudski championed their work, they won many international prizes in book design – all in their early to mid 30's, When the war started and as it progressed, it was important to them to try and keep as many artists as possible working so that they could give them some kind of income instead of charity. During the Warsaw Uprising, Barcz, a wonderful portrait artist, was killed and shortly after my father, his first wife and his mother were rounded up and taken to Auschwitz. It would be the last my father

saw of them. From Auschwitz he was transported to Dautmergen, which is where he first met Borowski. They talked, my father read his poetry and promised him that if they made it out alive - of course, not knowing when the end would be - that he would publish his poetry. Both of them were eventually transported to Dachau. And at the end of the war, they ended up in Freimann, a DP camp, where Siedlecki and Olszewski were also. I believe that Borowski knew them from before but I'm not sure. The four of them would sit around at night and tell stories of what they had lived through, what they had seen.

**Do we know how this meeting turned into a book? On one hand it seems to be very natural for him because of his profession and because of his own experiences. If they were sitting and telling the story the natural thought for a book publisher would be that this should be written down.**

I heard this when I was very young and then I would hear it repeated at various times with other people around. It was obvious to my father, because of his age and what he had gone through in his life that first-hand accounts are important for history. Yes, of course, the three of them would have had endless stories to tell. From Siedlecki's niece I learned that he had already started writing his own accounts before the book came up. It was natural for my father, as you said, to think about things in book form. He did suggest to them that the three of them write a book together. I know that he said that





Borowski was not enthusiastic about the idea. He considered himself a poet and not a prose writer and had to be talked into taking part in this. But they did eventually all write their own experiences stories.

**Your father was deported to Auschwitz relatively late. His experience of the war was different than those three men that had been in this camp for a much longer time. He was also learning about Auschwitz seen through their eyes.**

Of course, but he was there long enough to know how horrendous it was. I remember him telling me – I was very, very young, younger than I would think I would have told a child about experiences of seeing people being murdered with a shovel or with a pickaxe. He talked about the brutal, sometimes pointless labor of digging holes, filling them, and digging them again, that kind of thing. If you worked too slowly - you were hungry, you were tired or sick - you could be hit with a hoe or another implement until you fell, were injured or even died. So,

the horrors of the camps were very clear to him. But they the three had far more stories and he was a listener, so I'm sure their stories were interesting to him.

**The story of the book is also the story of an emigrant in a foreign country publishing those survivors accounts. So, how your father's work as a published continued after the liberation?**

"Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu" was his third publication. The first was "Imiona Nurtu" by Borowski, and the second was "Stanislaus Polonus, Ein polnischer Fruhdrucker in Spanien," by Aloys Ruppel from the Gutenberg Gesellschaft, a project my father had begun before the war. The 1600 copies of that edition were donated - half to the National Library in Warsaw and half to Gutenberg Gesellschaft to help pay for their reconstruction. Because he had had a lot of contacts in various countries before the war, he knew where to go, who to talk to and how to get things done. And obviously it was something that he needed to do to continue

with his life the way it had been. He also printed the "Poszukiwanie rodzin" (search for families) in Munich, These were booklets with lists of names of family members searching for loved ones. And he printed stamps that were used on inter-camp mail, which cost a few pennies but ended up raising quite a bit of money for the Polish Red Cross. He was a designer, artist, publisher and entrepreneur before the war and the war did not change that.

**The uniqueness of this particular copy of the book that was donated to the Auschwitz Memorial is the cover. It is in fact a piece of a striped uniform from a concentration camp. Where did this idea come from?**

A lot of mention of that fact has been made in the Polish media, some of which makes it sound—if I understood the reviews correctly-- as though the use of the fabric is almost sacrilege. I don't understand that suggestion at all. If the authors and my father could wear that fabric for months, if not years, it seems like an obvious choice of binding, from a design sense. It seems to me that it would have been a natural thing for him to illustrate what people became in the camps: no name, no title, just a number on a rough piece of cloth. So much of your personality is shown by how you dress, how you wear your hair. Those choices say something about you. The camps took all of that away. On the title page in the original, the numbers are larger and the names are smaller because you were a number. From a design perspective all those details have meaning. And he was a designer.

**He did not only create a book, bound with a prisoner's striped uniform. There's another copy that he made using leather from an SS uniform and some barbed wire that fenced a camp.**

When he was a publisher in Poland, he would always make one copy or maybe two that was bound in leather as the "show copy" to send to exhibitions. The gold standard copy. He did the same with "Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu." And what better

material to use than the leather from the coat or jacket of the despised SS. And there was plenty of barbed wire around. You use what is available and what is relevant to the subject matter at hand.

**At that time, he was a man on crossroad. He finally emigrated to the US, but did he ever think about coming back to Poland?**

No, I don't believe he did. I know that he tried to talk Borowski out of going back to Poland because he felt that with the Russians there, the future did not look good for Poland. His wife and his mother had died, his friend and business partner had been killed, his business was destroyed; he felt he was better off going to the country that had liberated him. In addition, an American officer had given him a letter of introduction to a professor at Columbia University so he thought there might be the chance of employment when he got to the U.S.

**Did he continue to publish books in the US?**

He worked as an artist for a printing company for most of his career in the United States. He did not have a private publishing company, although he did print small editions for private clients over the years. When my father arrived he had no money, didn't speak the language, and there was a lot of suspicion about foreigners. Instead, he worked at his job and painted as a creative outlet.

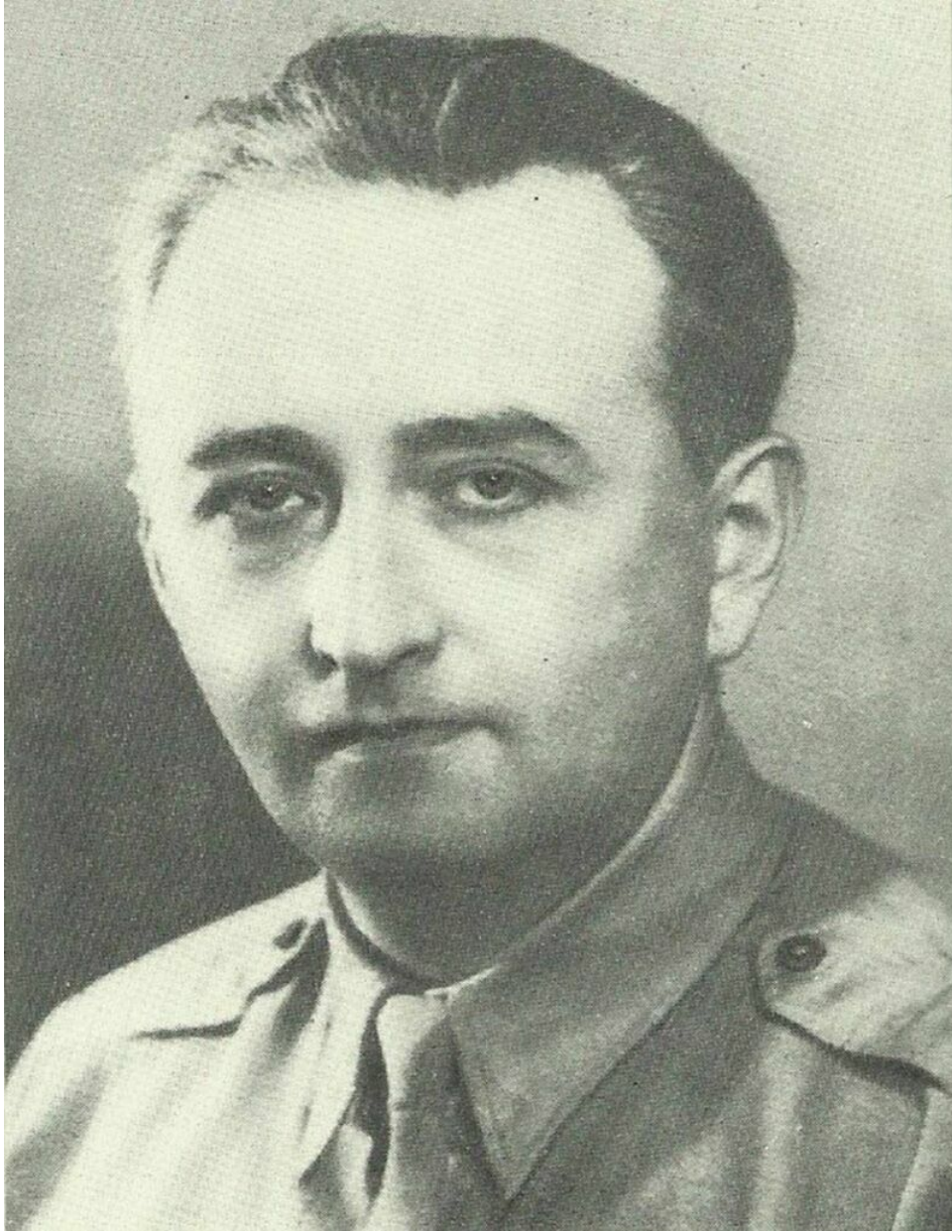
**But finally, he settled and he found his place.**

Yes, it wasn't anything like what it was in Poland, but I think he would have said that he had a good life here, not perhaps doing exactly what he would have liked to do, but I certainly hope it was a good life.

**How do you remember him as a daughter? What kind of a father he was?**

He was wonderful to me, but he wasn't the father that would go outside and play ball with you. But he told great stories. He made





with you. But he told great stories. He made up stories to tell my sister and I me when we were little, you know, at night before going to bed. He was a creative person. He was funny, he liked to laugh. I always found it surprising to hear that survivors don't like to talk about their experiences because he didn't mind talking at all. He didn't feel the need to keep what he had experienced secret.

Besides the charming fairy tales, I grew up hearing vignettes from his childhood visits to Tartar encampments in Crimea, a child's recollection of the Russian Revolution, and ultimately, war stories. It was a very different background than most of my friends. The only negative was that he suffered from what we now know as PTSD: he was always afraid that something bad would befall his family. From what little I've said about him here, I think you can

understand why. Loss was a big part of his life.

**Your father's book is now at the Auschwitz Memorial. How do you feel about this?**

I think it's wonderful that it is there, that people will be able to see it. Obviously, it's very gratifying. Although my daughter has her own copy, I'm sure she will visit Auschwitz in the future and it will be exciting to see her grandfather's contribution to history there at the museum. Also for the historical record, that it's preserved in its place of origin, so to speak, where people can access it. And of course, now there's the new edition of "Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu" published by Słowne that just came out, which is also tremendously gratifying.

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# HOW HOLOCAUST SITES CAN HELP SOCIETIES NAVIGATE DEAFENING SILENCES

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How sites deal with the silences and taboos surrounding difficult history matters. On their trip to Lithuania, the IHRA Safeguarding Sites team learned more about this challenge, shared by so many Holocaust sites, and used this experience to inform their forthcoming heritage charter.

A series of nineteenth century forts surrounds the Lithuanian city of Kaunas. During the Second World War, several of these became sites of the Holocaust. In early July 1941, German Einsatzgruppen and their Lithuanian auxiliaries began systematic massacre of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children in the forts around Kovno, as it was known then, primarily in the Ninth Fort as well as in Forts Four and Seven. Estimates suggest that around 50,000 people were killed at the Ninth Fort during the Second World War – mostly Jews from the Kovno ghetto as well as Jews deported from Austria, Poland, France, the Soviet Union, and Germany. Among the victims were also numerous communists, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war.

Today, 80 years after the Holocaust, the forts represent complicated pasts that are difficult to come to terms with. And like all others, these Holocaust sites face a variety of challenges.

The Safeguarding Sites team recently visited three of these forts – Forts Nine, Four and Seven – to gather further input for their forthcoming heritage charter, which aims to provide holistic guidance on the preservation of sites of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma. The absences, silences, and taboos they observed made them reflect on how these can impact the way countries deal with difficult histories. Realizing that many, if not most, countries grapple with these issues, they updated their draft charter to include practical guidance in these areas.

## **The distortive potential of the unmarked and unsaid**

Towering 32 meters over a now grassy field, the memorial at the Ninth Fort, unveiled in 1984, commemorates the approximately 50,000 people who were murdered there by the Nazis and their collaborators. Despite a number of memorial plaques lining the grassed area, many visitors appear to be unaware that this field marks a killing site and mass grave.

This apparent ambiguity means that people have also used Fort Nine as a backdrop for selfies, or as a place to go for a jog, walk their dogs, or fly drones. During their visit, the team saw someone, likely unknowingly, pushing a baby's stroller over the location of the mass grave. Clearly marking areas of execution and burial at killing sites encourages respect for the dead – unclear markings can encourage quite the opposite. But markings are only one way sites can help present a fuller picture of this difficult history.

Insufficient information, like unclear markings, also contribute to silences, which provide opportunity to distort the history of the Holocaust. The director of the Ninth Fort, Marius Peculis, understands this all too well, and is spearheading the remodeling of the Ninth Fort's exhibitions, seeking to carefully address the gaps in information at the site.

One major concern relates to information on locals who collaborated with the Nazis in the killing of Jews, who also fought as partisans,





the killing of Jews, who also fought as partisans, and who have enjoyed a long history as known and named heroes, an issue not unique to Lithuania. Exposing their wartime crimes and reversing their hero status is not an easy task for those who manage museums. The Forts can help fill in important gaps, including on whether the Lithuanian perpetrators were from Kaunas or other cities, how many there were, their motive for killing Jews, and how the local population reacted to the massacres. Sites play an important role in helping societies broach difficult subjects such as these, and work against the temptation to distort this history.

“The silences and absences of crucial information for visitors mean that, while visitors can learn that something terrible happened here, they lack the full picture. Without this, they cannot fully learn from it,” Project Chair Dr. Gilly Carr said.

### **Taking a realistic approach to safeguarding history**

Holocaust sites are crucial to reversing the trend of rehabilitation and Holocaust distortion. Dealing openly and accurately with this difficult past is not an impossible task. The Safeguarding Sites team emphasizes taking a pragmatic and realistic approach to addressing silences and lack of information. Even seemingly small changes can make a big difference.

The team has, for example, recommended the development of a Holocaust heritage trail for Kaunas, linking all nearby sites in chronological order to help visitors get a fuller picture of this history. Other recommendations involve tackling the silences in forthcoming exhibitions at the Ninth Fort, providing visitors and the local community with greater context on how the Holocaust unfolded in Lithuania. Such steps



turn traces of the past into an important foundation for deeper and more honest engagement with history.

### **Learning from the silences**

Each visit provides invaluable input for the forthcoming Safeguarding Sites charter. “All sites face challenges. Our aim is to produce a truly holistic heritage charter for Holocaust sites to help them address these,” Dr. Carr explained. “And this means becoming

familiar with sites with a wide range of challenges, and in different geographical and political areas. It’s like weaving a huge tapestry. Each visit and each conversation we have with site managers, local tour guides, political representatives, and communities provides us with another colorful thread.”

The Lithuania visit signaled to the team that their draft heritage charter should





include guidance on addressing gaps and silences. It was, they came to realize, an issue they had come across before on a previous site visit. "Visiting one site improves our understanding of other sites," Dr. Carr said.

It also sharpened their understanding of the role sites will play in the future in countering distortion and safeguarding the record of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma. "In the future,"

Dr. Carr said, "when we can no longer depend on survivors to fill in the gaps, sites will bear a special responsibility to say what is left unsaid. Our duty today, as the guardians of these sites for our generation, is to make sure they are prepared to do so."

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# THE FIRST UNIVERSITY FACULTY CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AUSCHWITZ MEMORIAL OPENED IN BURGOS

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**The founding act of the Faculty of Human Rights and Democratic Culture created by the National Institute of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Spain was signed at the University of Burgos on 22 September. It is the world's first university faculty to be co-created in partnership with the Auschwitz Memorial.**

The agreement was signed in Burgos by: Dr. Manuel Pérez Mateos, v of the University of Burgos; Delfín Ortega Sánchez, Vice-Chancellor and Director of the new faculty; Eduardo de Ocampo, Secretary of the faculty; Enrique de Villamor y Soraluze, President of the National Institute of Auschwitz Birkenau in Spain and Honorary Consul of the Memorial in the country; and Auschwitz Museum Director Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, and the President of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Institute, Maria Ossolińska, head of the Diplomacy of Remembrance at the Auschwitz Museum.

Also present at the event were Magdalena Grabianowska, Counsellor-Minister of the Polish Embassy in Spain, and Ihor Ivachenko, First Secretary of the Ukrainian Embassy.

The Ministry of Universities of Spain supported the creation of the Department. Its mission is to provide comprehensive education and dialogue on the defence of human rights, prevention of genocide and all forms of hatred, anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance, and the promotion of democratic values.

'The final stage on the road towards genocide is the process of dehumanisation of the victims of a given ideology. Therefore, research work, as well as teaching about fundamental human rights,

is so important. It makes it possible to reveal and visualise the boundaries our communities must never cross,' said Auschwitz Museum Director Piotr Cywiński.

The University of Burgos sees the establishment of the chair as an opportunity to develop education in Spain and beyond. It is intended to be a bridge in the dialogue between Spain, European and Latin American countries.

'The rumblings of war, the peace that is breaking down in Europe, the barbarism that we are seeing again, justify even more intensely the creation of this Faculty of Human Rights. It is a great honour for the University of Burgos. The mission of the faculty is critical to raising students' awareness of the enormous importance of defending human and civil rights, broadly defined, in the contemporary world. The university partners with many other establishments in Europe and South America. Therefore, this initiative will undoubtedly be reflected in our international cooperation, said University Chancellor Manuel Pérez Mateos.

The National Institute of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Spain conducts educational activities for Spanish secondary school and university students. There are also plans for teachers' training, support for scientific research projects and organisation of trips to the





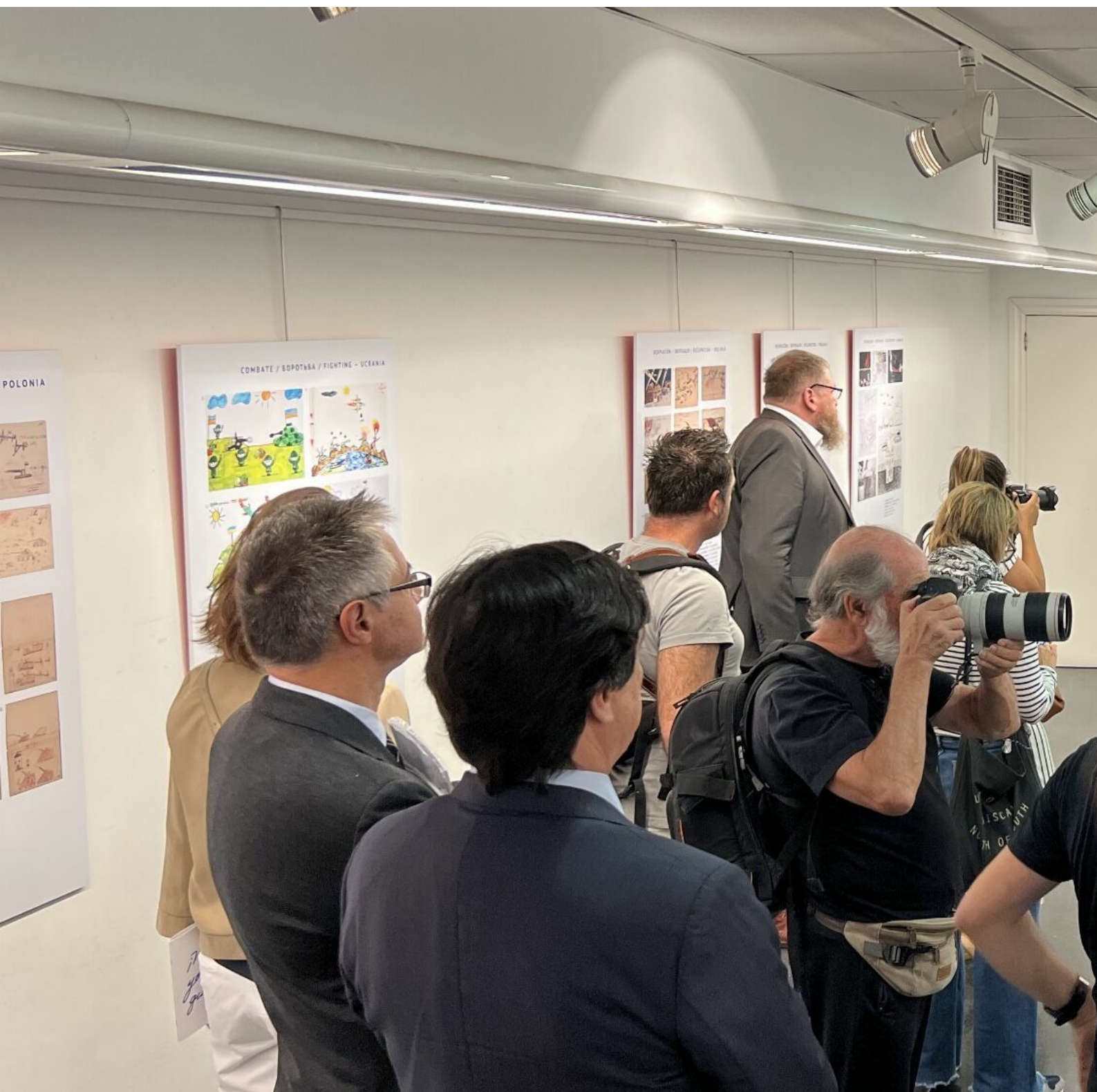
creation of the Burgos Chairs is an extremely valuable support for the Institute's activities in Spain.

'It is the beginning of the immense work we must undertake given the times we live. Russia's war with Ukraine is currently underway at the gates of Europe. Often, when we talk about human rights and values of education, it seems as though it is something unnecessary. However, many are now questioning if we are doing all that is required. The faculty in Burgos will be a

unique tool to educate ourselves about our universal values in a European context, for this dialogue must start from within. The building of the European spirit must begin with ourselves. Then, we will change the world for the better,' said Enrique de Villamor y Soralue.

One of the projects underway in Spain is the presentation of the exhibition 'German Nazi Death Camp Konzentrationslager Auschwitz'. The exhibition, prepared by the Museum and translated into Spanish,





presents all the crucial issues on the history of Auschwitz, including the genesis of the Nazi movement and the specific elements of the German terror system introduced in occupied Poland. To date, the exhibition has visited Guernica, Logroño, Oña, Burgos and Gijon.

During his visit to Spain, the Museum Director also took part - together with the Polish Ambassador Anna Sroka - in the opening of the exhibition "Mom. I don't want war" in Guernica. The exhibition

presents children's drawings depicting the tragedy of war: Polish children from the Second World War and Ukrainian children from Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Institute undertakes international cooperation and offers, in close collaboration with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, numerous cultural, social and educational projects. The Institute aims to build and continually expand the network of people involved in diplomacy of remembrance at





the Auschwitz Museum and to reach out to those who have never been to the Memorial. The Institute undertakes these activities in cooperation with institutions dealing with the Holocaust and extermination worldwide, educational and cultural institutions, associations, and individuals involved in the issue.

In conjunction with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Institute, the Museum is building a network of honorary ambassadors and consuls of the Memorial in various countries. Establishing

local institutes is a further step that is extremely important for creating an ever more extensive network.

Spaniards have been among the most frequent visitors to the Memorial for years. Before the pandemic, over 100,000 people from Spain visited the Museum every year, and last year it was the second largest group of visitors after the Poles.

# THE NEW EXHIBITION IN THE WIENER HOLOCAUST LIBRARY

The Wiener Holocaust Library presents a new exhibition that brings together over 100 never-before-seen portraits and snapshots from twelve Jewish families in the 1890s through the 1930s.

Drawn from the Library's unique archives, first assembled in the 1930s by Dr Alfred Wiener to document and preserve evidence of the persecution of Jews in Europe, these private family photographs uncover a hidden history of pre-Nazi era Jewish life in Germany and Austria. Captions reveal the fates of some of the individuals depicted: persecution, deportation, annihilation, or escape. The images on display document everyday, intimate moments and expressions of culture and identity, creating a physical record of how the subjects wished to be seen and remembered. Today they appear as images of life and leisure on the brink of catastrophe.

Visitors are able to see poignant black and white photographs selected from the Wiener Holocaust Library archive, including photographs of many individuals who were later murdered in the Holocaust; homemade

photo albums charting the rise of accessible amateur photography; eccentric late 19th century studio portraits; and never-before seen negatives taken during a Jewish soldier's First World War service developed specially for this exhibition.

Curator of the exhibition, Helen Lewandowski, Assistant Curator, said: 'We are drawn to these beautiful photographs because they enshrine everyday moments from lives that were soon to change forever. You might recognise yourself and your own family in these warm and personal snapshots and portraits.' 'I hope that this exhibition will start a conversation about family photographs and the way they are shown and used today. The images have their own histories as documents created in a certain time and place and then returned to by others years later.'







Senior Curator and Head of Education Dr Barbara Warnock, said: 'The Wiener Holocaust Library holds the largest collection of pre Nazi-era Jewish family photographs in Britain. These precious materials document the lives of Jews in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, giving us a unique insight into this lost world. The Library has a vital role to play in collecting and preserving these important historical images, and we are so pleased to be able to be share with the public some of these powerful photographs. This exhibition focuses on often overlooked

photographs from our Jewish family papers collections and show the range and diversity of these documents: subjects are shown at home; on holiday; as professionals; as family members, and pursuing sporting and leisure activities. It is fascinating to see how people fashioned their own identities through the creation of these images.'

The Wiener Holocaust Library appreciates the generous support of Arts Council England towards the digitisation of family papers collections.

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# INTERNATIONAL HELP AND CAMPAIGN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF 8,000 SHOES OF CHILD VICTIMS OF AUSCHWITZ

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**The Auschwitz Museum, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the International March of the Living have signed a declaration to finance the conservation of some 8,000 children's shoes in the Memorial Collections, a moving symbol of the suffering of the youngest victims of the German Nazi camp.**

Two Auschwitz survivors incarcerated in the camp in 1944 were present at the signing of the declaration at the Museum Conservation Laboratories on 20 September: Arye Pinsker (born 1930), deported in transports of Jews from Hungary, and Bogdan Bartnikowski (born 1932), deported in transports of Poles during the Warsaw Uprising.

'It's so hard for me to look at these shoes. I see them and think how maybe my twin sisters' shoes are here too,' said Arye Pinsker.

'It is an extremely tragic sight, but I am glad that these shoes will be preserved for eternity as proof that thousands of children were murdered in Auschwitz,' said Bogdan Bartnikowski.

The director of the Auschwitz Museum Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński said that the murder of over 200,000 children at Auschwitz is impossible to comprehend: 'This cruelty and injustice cannot be explained by any politics, any ideology, any worldview. The contrast between the cruelty and callousness of the adult world is perhaps most vividly illustrated in Auschwitz precisely in the juxtaposition with the trusting, curious, innocent and defenseless children who were thrown into a world they could not understand. And this world is

preserved in every single shoe. Only these shoes remained after so many children. That is why we must do everything to preserve them for as long as possible.'

The first donation for the International March of the Living (IMOL) to the conservation project was received from Eitan Neishlos, grandson of Holocaust survivors and chairman of the Neishlos Foundation. The March also announced the launch of a fundraising campaign for the cause - "From Soul to Sole".

'When we received the request from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation to preserve the shoes of children murdered in the camp, it was clear that this is a moral obligation we would take upon ourselves. We see the conservation of the shoes of these innocent children as an eternal testimony to the brutality of the Nazi regime as well as a significant educational initiative,' said Phyllis Greenberg Heideman, President of March of the Living International.

'The tiny shoes of the youngest victims of Auschwitz are a special symbol of the crimes perpetrated there. They require preservation, like all other personal items saved by the Museum's conservators, but they evoke a sense of even greater responsibility on the part of our generation to preserve them for the future. That is why

the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation has decided to initiate this unique campaign to secure funding for the conservation process of all the children's shoes that the Museum takes care of. I would like to thank the Foundation donors and in particular the International March of the Living for their partnership – they have been marching for over 30 years to remember the victims that were murdered in the concentration camps,' said Wojciech Soczewica, director general of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.

The project to conserve the children's shoes at the Auschwitz Museum Conservation Laboratories is planned to last approximately two years.

'The conservation of the entire collection of children's shoes will be a multi-stage undertaking. Each object of this large group will be treated on a case-by-case basis. Although they belong to the same group of

objects and share a common part of history, they each have individual characteristics, constructed from similar materials but with distinct details that are significant in the conservation process. Each of these objects is unique because it contains traces of another person's life. Therefore, the conservation of these objects cannot be approached collectively, repetitively and mechanically,' said Nel Jastrzębowska of the Museum's Conservation Laboratories.

It is estimated, basing on the approximate data, that over 232,000 children and young people were deported to the German Nazi camp Auschwitz, of whom 216,000 were Jews, 11,000 Roma, about 3,000 Poles, more than 1,000 Belarusians, and several hundred Russians, Ukrainians, and others. A total of about 23,000 children and young people were registered in the camp. Slightly more than 700 were liberated on the territory of Auschwitz in January 1945.

Photographs: Marek Laco





# JEWISH COUNTRY HOUSES AND THE HOLOCAUST IN HISTORY AND MEMORY

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**Call for papers. The Brno conference on May 10-12, 2023 will investigate the fate in the Holocaust of Jewish country houses and the people who inhabited them. Deadline for sending your abstracts is October 20.**

In the UK and continental Europe, the country house has become a powerful symbol of national identity, evoking the glamorous world of the landowning aristocracy. The history of these properties is centrally connected to the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust because the families who built, shaped and lived in them formed a group for whom the myths about Jewish wealth, solidarity and power that fed antisemitic conspiracy theories had a particular salience. This did not hinder the numerous acquisitions of such properties by Jewish economic elites, testifying to the prevalence of the model of the aristocratic landlord among a population in search of integration. The Jewish Country Houses Project has held several international conferences to explore various facets of this subject, including the Jewish Bourgeoisie in the Countryside, Jewish Dealers and the European Art Market, Jewish Collectors and Patterns of Taste, and Jewish Business Dynasties.

This conference will explore memory cultures that emerged afterwards and the Cold War context that shaped them. The conference will address and support curatorial, artistic, and narrative practices telling the difficult stories of genocide linked to these properties. As it does so, it will bring together academic historians, heritage professionals, and artists over three days at the Methodological Centre of Modern

Architecture at the Villa Stiassni in Brno, Czech Republic, on May 10-12 (Wednesday-Friday), 2023. The built heritage of the Villa Stiassni, visits to the nearby villas Tugendhat and Löw-Beer, and an exploration of the experiences and memories of the Czech Jewish industrialist families who inhabited and fled from them will be an integral part of the conference.

We are now inviting abstracts for 20-minute individual research papers to be presented within panels. Panels will explore themes of plunder, refuge, memory, art, heritage, and Cold War afterlives, all in relation to the Jewish Country House. Gender perspectives are welcome within any panel, as are comparative and transnational angles, and mention of the Stiassni, Tugendhat, Lo w-Beer, and other elite Jewish Moravian families and their transnational links.

In a panel on spoliation and plunder we hope to address different processes of dispossession, requisition of houses, and the question of restitution. We are looking for papers that look at these issues transnationally or in places in Europe other than France.

A panel on houses of refuge will look at the transformation of the Jewish country house from home of elite Jews to sites of refugeedom, refuge, ingathering, and rehabilitation of persecuted Jews in the





Holocaust. Another panel will feature artists, broadly defined, speaking about their work engaging memory through art; we are looking for authors, filmmakers, musicians, or visual artists who would like to present their art in this context.

We will also hear from a panel of heritage professionals and public historians who work at former Jewish country houses from across Europe with Holocaust and Cold War histories. A final panel will focus on ruptures created by the Holocaust and the afterlives of Jewish country houses and their families as they played out differently on both

sides of the Iron Curtain and since the end of the Cold War.

Researchers, please submit your proposal with title, panel(s) of interest, abstract of no more than 300 words, and a short bio/ CV in one pdf or doc to [jewishcountryhouses@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jewishcountryhouses@history.ox.ac.uk) by 20 October, 2022. Heritage professionals, curators, and artists—if you are interested in participating please send a brief statement of interest to [jewishcountryhouses@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jewishcountryhouses@history.ox.ac.uk) by 20 October, 2022.



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