



MEMORIA

MEMORY • HISTORY • EDUCATION

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„THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ“. FACT-CHECKING REVIEW OF THE TV SERIES

MUSEUM AND
MEMORIAL IN
SOBIBÓR WITH A
SPECIAL
COMMENDATION
IN THE EMYA 2024
CONTEST

79TH
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OF KL STUTTHOF

“(POST)JEWISH...
SHTETL OPATÓW
THROUGH THE
EYES OF MAYER
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INTERNATIONAL
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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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YAD VASHEM LAUNCHES "WHO IS YOUR HOLOCAUST HERO?"

A DIGITAL PROJECT FOR LEADERS, INFLUENCERS, AND ACTORS IN TIME FOR HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
2024

In time for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day, observed this year May 5-6th, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, announces the launch of its "Who Is Your Holocaust Hero?" campaign. The initiative encourages the public to delve into and forge personal connections with Holocaust narratives through short video clips, sharing who their Holocaust Hero is on social media platforms.

This digital project encapsulates Yad Vashem's core mission; its enduring commitment to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. At the heart of Yad Vashem's vision, lies the unwavering dedication to ensuring that the profound lessons learned from this harrowing chapter of human history can transcend generations, fostering a collective remembrance that endures eternally.

Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan emphasized:

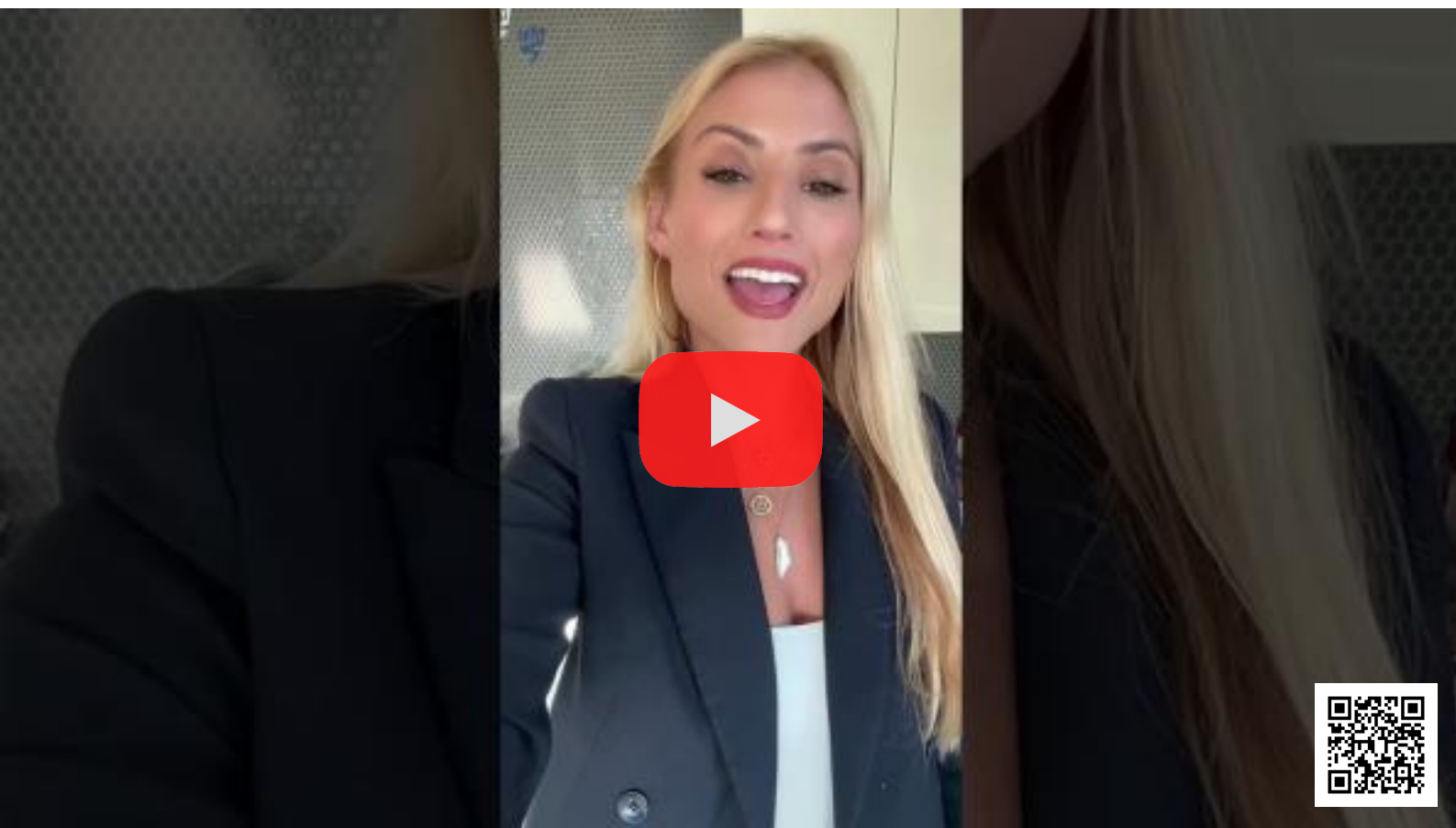
"This unique campaign comes at a particularly critical juncture. As the eyewitness generation fades away, we are left with an irreplaceable void. By sharing their stories, we are ensuring that they will never be forgotten. By sharing and creating a community of remembrance on social media we can amplify their voices, garnering global attention."

As part of the launch of this initiative, Yad Vashem has invited some distinguished individuals from various walks of life to become Ambassadors of Holocaust Memory and record their own 1-2-minute short video introducing their personal Holocaust hero. By sharing these stories and sharing them with a new audience, we can remember the Holocaust, one story at a time.

Teaming up with Hollywood liaison Lana Melman, author of "Artists Under Fire," Yad Vashem has garnered support from influential figures from entertainment and international leaders alike. Notable participants include producer Ben Silverman, director Jeff Melman, actors Patricia Heaton, James Maslow, Mark Pellegrino, and Gene Simmons, alongside political figures such as Lord Eric Pickles, Prof. Alan Dershowitz, President of the Claims Conference Gideon Taylor, Canadian MP Anthony Housefather, and British MP Bob Blackman. Furthermore, social media influencers like Montana Tucker, Dov Forman, BBC Broadcast Journalist John Ware and celebrity chef Eitan Bernath have lent their endorsement to this initiative.

Author and CEO of Liberate Art Lana Melman said:

"We are living in a time of anti-Jewish hate not seen since Nazi Germany. The phrase 'Never Again' is not a slogan, it is a vow – a promise humankind made to G-d and each other after the inhumanity and horrors of the Holocaust. By sharing the stories of



31ST MARCH OF THE LIVING

On 6 May 2024, the 31st March of the Living was held at the site of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz. It was led by a group of 55 Auschwitz and Holocaust Survivors. The group consisted of more than 20 survivors from Hungary. In addition to others, the participants included Yoav Kisch, the Education Minister of Israel, Izabela Ziętka, the Deputy Education Minister of Poland, and Andrzej Szejna, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland.

This year signifies the 80th anniversary of the extermination of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz. In the main deportation phase spanning from mid-May to early July 1944, approximately 420,000 Jews were transported to Auschwitz, followed by a few smaller deportations in the late summer and autumn of 1944. Taking into account the 3,800 individuals deported in April, the overall number of deportees amounts to 430,000.

It is also known from surviving documents that during the selection, the SS doctors sent 52,000 men and a comparable number of women to the camp. This indicates that approximately 330,000 people were murdered in the gas chambers immediately after the selection process.

For more information on the deportation of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz, see our online lesson.

This year's March of the Living event attracted approximately 6,000 individuals, predominantly young Jews from different countries worldwide, namely Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Israel, Canada, Lithuania, the United States, and the United Kingdom. A group of 500 Hungarians arrived at the Memorial via a designated "Train of the Living", which had departed from Budapest's Keleti railway station the day before. Polish students also participated in the event.

The March was also attended by a group of people affected by the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023. This group also included several Holocaust Survivors.

After passing through the "Arbeit macht frei" gate, the participants of the March of the Living walked from the site of the Auschwitz I camp to Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

During the main ceremony of the March, a commemoration was held for all those who lost their lives at Auschwitz. Six symbolic candles were lit to symbolise the six million victims of the Holocaust. Several speeches emphasised the dangers of antisemitism, both in the past and present. Those gathered at the site of the former camp, situated between the ruins of the two gas chambers and crematoria, recited the Kaddish - the Jewish prayer for the dead.

The March participants left many wooden plaques with the victims' names at



MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IN SOBIBÓR WITH A SPECIAL COMMENDATION IN THE EMYA 2024 CONTEST

Museum and Memorial in Sobibór received a special commendation in the European Museum of the Year Award 2024 (EMYA) prestigious contest. The award ceremony gala was held on 4 May in Portimao, Portugal. 50 European museum were nominated including 5 candidates from Poland.

The jury have recognised implementing the personal stories in the museum narrative, which remain in the visitors' memory and commemorate thousands of victims that were murdered at the Sobibór death camp. As we can read in the justification:

“Using personal belongings found in situ proves an especially effective curatorial strategy to restore the victims' identity and humanity.”

The Museum and Memorial in Sobibór was fully opened to the public on 13 October 2023. It is dedicated to the 180,000 Jewish women, children, and men that were murdered in the German Nazi extermination camp in the years 1942–1943. It secures the places connected with the camp's functioning, documents its history, sustains the memory of the victims deported to Sobibór from all over the German-occupied Europe.

The European Museum of the Year Award is a prestigious prize granted to museums by the European Museum Forum since 1977. Its goal is to distinguish the most valuable events within the museum sector and to promote innovations in museums. EMF is an independent NGO, which follows the mission to promote innovation in museums and fostering the exchange of experiences and good practices between the European museum network. EMF operates under the auspices of the Council of Europe and implements numerous projects within the broader cultural domain.



Special Commendation 2024

The European Museum of the Year Award Jury commends

Museum and Memorial in Sobibór. German Nazi Extermination Camp (1942-1943)

Department of the State Museum at Majdanek

Włodawa, Poland

MEMORY OF THE GENOCIDE OF ROMA AND SINTI. INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS AND MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

We have launched the recruitment process for the international program for educators and museum professionals dedicated to the memory of the Genocide of Roma and Sinti . The program is addressed to educators and museum professionals from Czech Republic, Germany and Poland.

Fill out the application form

Application deadline: May 30, 2024

The project will run from June to October 2024 and will include two study visits, one to Brno and one to Berlin, and a series of online meetings. Working in international groups, participants will develop educational ideas related to the commemoration of the Genocide of Roma and Sinti, which they will present to a wider audience at an online event towards the completion of the program (see: the preliminary program). 2 August 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the so-called "Gypsy camp" at Auschwitz-Birkenau; it is also the Roma and Sinti Genocide Memorial Day. However, Roma Genocide and history and culture are still not part of the mainstream historical discourse on World War II, nor is it represented enough in the media, pop culture, art and museum's practice.

One of the important barriers in addressing this topic by cultural institutions and museums is lack of competent knowledge about the Genocide of Roma and Sinti, as well as Roma and Sinti history and culture. In response to the need to boost the competences of employees of various museums and cultural institutions, we have planned long-term educational activities consisting of on-site and online meetings addressed to educators and museum professionals from Czechia, Germany and Poland, raising this topic in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

The program has been prepared by a cross-sector partnership of four entities representing the experience of working at a memorial, a historical museum, a contemporary art institution or a foundation operating in the field of supporting Roma communities in various areas. We hope that this interdisciplinary approach will allow participants to expand their knowledge both historically and in different areas of postwar memory and anti-discrimination education, as well as to understand contemporary processes of exclusion and discrimination.

Eligible applicants

Educators and museum professionals from the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland are invited to apply to participate in the program. The program is designed for a group of 18 people. In case there are more applicants than places, the organizers reserve the right to shortlist participants based on their applications. While the project mainly targets countries mentioned above, in exceptional cases candidates from other countries may also be considered.



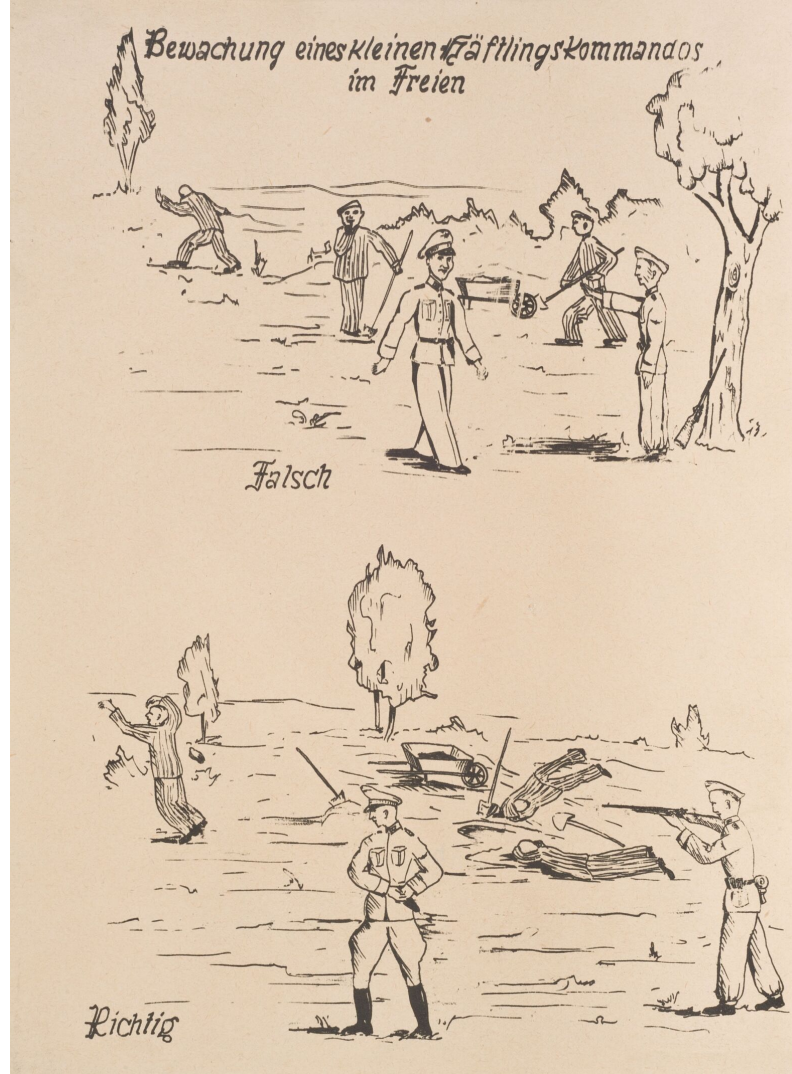
„THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ“. FACT-CHECKING REVIEW

Since its publication in early 2018, Heather Morris's novel *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* has garnered worldwide acclaim. Translations are available in 47 languages, and sales reached millions within two years by September 2019. The novel has become an undisputed bestseller despite controversies and scepticism regarding its factual value. The book's publicity led me to anticipate its imminent adaptation for the screen, especially considering that the author intended the story to serve as a screenplay rather than a novel. So, rather than wondering why, the focus should be on why it took so long, considering it has been over six years since the book's release.

Time creates an essential context for evaluating both the series and the book. It is of utmost importance to begin by stating that Heather Morris met Lali Sokolov (born Ludovit Eisenberg in 1916) during the early 2000s, close to his 90th birthday and six decades away from the events of the war. During this period, Eisenberg refrained from discussing his personal experiences and only divulged them in full to Heather Morris. Naturally, the mere passage of time, even a considerable duration, and the absence of prior verbalisation or written documentation of the memories do not undermine the credibility of the witness's testimony. Nonetheless, the writer (reporter, researcher...) who intends to tell a biographical story must consider this circumstance. If the writer aims to recreate the personal experience and memory of the witness and present their fate truthfully and factually, then it is crucial to conduct a thorough and detailed critical analysis of these memories. This analysis should involve comparing and contrasting them with other available sources to identify and correct any errors that may arise from the natural fallibility of memory. In Morris's book, he repeatedly stated his commitment to preserving historical truth and conducting meticulous factual verification. The book was promoted as a "true story". In practice, however, the text's relation to the realities of the camp was at least questionable, and the historical accuracy was not merely questionable but false, as demonstrated in the book review. The errors documented in that list (though only a portion of a much longer fragment) indicate the author's deficiency in historical knowledge and research skills - crucial, if not indispensable, for an accurate portrayal of the world depicted in a historical novel. The main reasons for the significant difference between the content of the book and the actual historical events were primarily due to the author's disregard for the physical evidence of the camp as historical sources. Instead, the author relied solely on personal accounts such as memoirs and contemporary sources like online resources rather than historical documents. While working on the book, the author never visited the site of the former camp. Therefore, she described a reality utterly unknown to her, even at a basic geographical and topographical level.

There are also doubts surrounding Ludovit Eisenberg's authorisation of the content. The book was published twelve years after his passing, thus casting doubt (or rather negating) the likelihood of his influence on the final editing and overall structure of the text that was eventually printed and distributed to readers. Taking this into account, it is essential to regard the book not as a factual account or a biographical narrative derived from authentic sources but rather as a piece of literary fiction that employs genuine settings and characters. Its purpose is not to depict the characters' stories but to convey the author's ideas about the





had to be laid out for the last roll call outside the barracks and taken to the crematorium after the number had been crossed off the register. It was strictly prohibited to dump bodies in disarray within the camp, as this could have led to chaos in the records and posed an epidemiological risk.

The portrayal of SS men shooting prisoners for any reason is exaggerated in both the book and the TV series. Although there may have been isolated incidents of such, they were not indicative of habitual conduct, contrary to what the series implies. In episode 2, an SS officer remorselessly shoots a female prisoner who falls from the truck and injures her leg. Similarly, in episode 4, he takes the life of a female prisoner who tries to bribe a female block leader into sharing information about the whereabouts of her sister. Not just the SS man's behavior, but the entire scene seems quite ridiculous. It is not only puzzling where the prisoner got the money from but also why she brazenly brandishes it in front of the block leader, seemingly oblivious to the presence of SS officers nearby. However, returning to the crux of the matter, the belief that SS officers shot prisoners incessantly for even the slightest or no apparent reason is a stereotype. This exaggeration originates from the popular perception of the camp's realities but deviates from historical accuracy.

Paradoxically, while the series depicts instances of the SS crew using weapons without justification, it also portrays a situation where they were obligated to shoot but ultimately failed to do so. In episode 2, we witness a group of prisoners marching to or from work when suddenly, one breaks away from the line and starts running towards an open field. Since he says a moment earlier that he has had enough ('I'm done'), the viewer guesses that, under the influence of a nervous breakdown, this prisoner wants to commit suicide in this way (he knows he will be shot). The escorting guard commando rapidly rushes to chase the fugitive, leaving the remaining prisoners virtually unattended. Upon apprehension, they clobber the fugitive

that the SS men carried out the prisoners in the camp in this way, it is also unlikely that this practice of escorting prisoners was the norm. It must be presumed that the guards still preferred to supervise the escorted prisoners and, in most cases, led them ahead. And they certainly had to keep a close eye on the ranks of prisoners when marching to and from work in the unfenced area (the commandos were escorted by several SS men walking in front, behind and on either side of the column). It was impossible, as we see in episode 3, that Lali with Leon could disengage from the ranks and remain far behind.

Two additional noteworthy irregularities capture one's attention in the scenes depicting Lali's movements around the camp. Firstly, the gates leading to the successive sections of Birkenau are usually wide opened and accessible, and Lali passes through them almost unchecked despite carrying a bag on his shoulder that could conceivably contain secret messages or other illicit objects. Indeed, the gates to the different sections of the camp were closed, and the guard on duty should search the prisoner. Especially if the prisoner was carrying some bundle, bag, or toolbox, they were more subject to a thorough inspection. Furthermore, the permits to move within the camp and access the various sectors were also checked (meanwhile, Lali enters the women's camp without showing them, e.g. in episode 2). Such a permit or pass was issued to prisoners whose entry into a specific section was related to their daily responsibilities or particular tasks performed in that area. It is, therefore, impossible for Lali to visit Gita in her barracks at his convenience. It is doubtful that he would have had the opportunity to enter the women's camp on a regular basis at all - the women's camp had its own Aufnahmekommando, which included female prisoners tattooing new arrivals (as did Auschwitz I, by the way, so it is unlikely that Lali would have had to tattoo prisoners in all the camps of the Auschwitz complex, as we see in the series).

Additionally, as previously mentioned, Lali typically only moves around the camp with Baretzki and occasionally with another prisoner who does tattoos. He rarely walks in a straight line with the other prisoners, almost as if he doesn't belong to any commando.

The book review has already discussed the issue of presenting Lali as not connected to any particular working group. It should be recalled that Ludovit Eisenberg was a member of the commando in charge of registering newly arrived prisoners (Politische Abteilung Aufnahmekommando) of the men's camp in Birkenau, which numbered between a dozen and about 30 prisoners (in the summer of 1944) - but this is something the reader of the book will not learn. The series creators were aware of the inadequacies of Morris' portrayal of this aspect. Their commentary, published on the Onet.pl platform reads: Many of the inaccuracies highlighted in the novel have been corrected and, as this is a drama series for plot purposes, other elements have also been modified. An example is the allegation against the novel, in which Lali was supposed to be presented as the only tattooist in Auschwitz, disregarding the fact that there were other tattooists. In the televised narrative, we are presented with the opportunity to depict numerous tattoo artists tattooing the arms (sic!) of others.

Contrary to the above assertions, the series reproduces the same mistake, showing Lali somewhat isolated from the camp structure. Although the background scenes show other inmates tattooing the newcomers, there is no evidence of any association between Lali and them. He moves around the camp generally without companions and lives alone in an empty barrack in the BIIe section (later known as the Zigeunerlager, a family camp for Roma), another severe error copied directly from the book. Further misleading here is the information Baretzki gives to Lali after he has been designated as a tattooist, escorted to the BIIe section into a private room in an empty barracks. When Lali inquires about sleeping in his old barracks, Baretzki informs him that he is now under the SS employ and will require protection ("You are working for the SS now. You will need protection, trust me" (episode 1). The viewer's assumptions that Lali must be protected from other prisoners due to his role are confirmed in the scene where he comes to his assigned barracks. There, he encounters distrust and hostility from his former peers, one of whom even calls him a "Nazi dog" (It's the Nazis' new dog). This subplot suggests that prisoners assigned to work related to the camp's operations were

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POLITISCHER ABT. [AUFNAHME SCHREIBER]

Prdmienauszahlung vom 1.8.44

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100	Rath Salomon	J.	2.00	<i>[Signature]</i>

Männerlager Birkenau

aggression, especially from the Kapo and other functionary prisoners. Additionally, the SS men treated them more leniently. They also often had passes that allowed them to move around the camp as much as their duties warranted, and thus the chance to acquire extra food or other valuable items - although this did not mean the kind of freedom to move and stay in different sections of the camp, offices and barracks, as we see in the series. In light of the above, they were referred to as camp VIPs. However, they certainly did not have separate rooms - there were such rooms in every block and barracks, but they were intended only for the most important functionary prisoners who directly supervised their fellow inmates: block leaders and kapos. All the more so, no KL Auschwitz prisoner had the privilege of living alone in an empty barrack. Moreover, it is particularly unfeasible for Lali to have been placed in Sector B11e in 1942, as this sector was still under construction and not entirely fenced off. The series shows that there are no other prisoners in this part of the camp, but piles of bricks and planks are piled up along the roads - suggesting that work is still going on at the site. It is difficult to imagine that the camp authorities would have directed the guards to guard a single prisoner occupying an entire barrack alone in an unsecured and yet-to-be-commissioned part of the camp. Thus, contrary to what the series portrays, Lali may have found himself in the Zigeunerlager at the earliest after almost a year in Auschwitz and not shortly after his arrival (episode 1). It is also significant that the Roma were placed there first; only in the following days were prisoners sent there to work to sort out the records of the family camp. Thus, the appearance of Roma in the barracks long occupied by Lali is a misconception.

The series does not explain where the other tattooists are housed - do they each have an empty barracks with a separate room to themselves? Naturally, common sense dictates that such a notion should be rejected, considering the number of barracks that must have been allocated for them. So, where do the other inmates involved in tattooing live and sleep, including Leon, Lali's closest assistant and friend? And why was Lali singled out to receive private accommodation? The series viewer receives no answers to these questions.

The answer to the first of these can be found in the authentic accounts of former KL Auschwitz prisoners, including the statement of Tadeusz Joachimowski, who was sent to work in the Roma camp's office in the spring of 1943. This document verifies what was presented in the book and on screen.

It reads that non-Roma prisoners were sent to work in the office of the Zigeunerlager in April 1943. They were accommodated in block 2, which housed the camp offices (Schreibstube), the prisoners' employment office (Arbeitseinsatz) and the prisoners' canteen. In addition to the prisoners mentioned above, the rest of the block housed Roma prisoners working in the camp kitchen, among others. Thus, during the day, the block housed both male and female prisoners working in the chancellery offices and members of the SS staff, while at night, it housed prisoners (male) of various nationalities. Entire Roma families were not relocated there, and because of the office's location, Roma children did not have unrestricted access.

However, considering the camp documents, whether Ludovit Eisenberg was placed in sector B11e remains questionable. This was because it was inhabited exclusively by Roma, in addition to a very small number of Jewish and Polish prisoners who were permanently employed in the Zigeunerlager (in the office, hospital, etc.). Three arguments support the claim that Eisenberg did not belong to this group. Firstly, his name does not appear in accounts of prisoners sent there to work. Secondly, it was also not recorded in the surviving documents of the B11e camp. However, Eisenberg's name is present on the bonus lists of the Birkenau men's camp, indicating his confinement in that specific location.

Eisenberg was probably initially placed at Auschwitz I, then potentially in the men's camp located in sector B1b, and once the men's camp in sector B11d was established (which occurred in July 1943), it is likely that he was transferred there. Prisoners incarcerated in section B11d - directly adjacent to the Zigeunerlager - had the opportunity to observe the lives of the Roma



It is also implausible that the entire burden of mistreating and torturing prisoners during interrogations was placed on the shoulders of another prisoner by the SS men, as we see in the series. The interrogations were personally conducted by the SS men and involved sophisticated torture methods aimed at coercing confessions.

The series perpetuates the myth of the omnipotence, arbitrariness and impunity of everyone, even the ordinary SS man at KL Auschwitz. This is apparent in the previously mentioned sequences featuring Baretzky or the spontaneous executions of camp inmates, as well as in the scenes involving other officers. The series creators did not explicitly depict the hierarchical structure within the SS ranks, which determined the scope of their responsibilities and authority based on their military rank and position in the camp. As an example, it is worth noting that contrary to the portrayal in the series, the selection process in the camp was not conducted by SS privates (as depicted in episode 2) but always by SS doctors.

One scene that significantly lacks authenticity is the depiction of prisoners burning documents without any form of supervision in preparation for the camp's liquidation (episode 5). In reality, there was always an SS officer present to oversee the task and ensure that no documents were hidden or kept that could serve as evidence of the crimes committed in the camp.

Returning to the plot of Lali's imprisonment in Block 11, the series' creators have deviated



Furthermore, the events in Dr (Horst - the name is not mentioned in the series) Schumann's laboratory are inauthentic and utterly incomprehensible (episode 3). Based on the chronology, it should be 1943 (the event take place shortly after Roma prisoner arrive at the camp, and the Zigeunerlager was established in February 1943). We see naked women lying on beds as Lali enters the barracks. Some of them are tied (why?). There, Lali tattoos a group of female prisoners in striped uniforms, and from Baretzki's words it is clear that they are patients of the hospital. In this episode, it is already unrealistic that Lali comes to the barracks at night and that an SS doctor is present at the time.

In the scene, Lali is depicted attempting to request medication from a female inmate, acting as a nurse within the barracks, to treat the ailing Gita. A critical oversight in the costume design is evident here, as the woman can be observed wearing a red cross armband on her arm, contrary to the standard insignia worn by prison medical staff. Moreover, this particular prisoner possesses a camp number beginning with the letter A-numbering within this series, which began in 1944.

Nonetheless, the most doubtful motif revolves around a peculiar agreement between Lali and Schumann. The doctor promises to give Lali the necessary medicine, but only on the condition that he does him a favour. In the next scene, we see Lali carrying the weak and sick prisoners out in front of the barracks. In the morning, he discovers that they will be transported to the gas chambers, implying that the medicines he received were likely payment for assisting in the selection process, which leads to his profound feelings of guilt.

This scene, unquestionably evocative, is paradoxically lacking in authenticity and unfathomable for individuals well-versed in Auschwitz's history. Firstly, there was no justification or feasibility for Lali to be in this barrack. The experimental stations were strictly isolated, prohibiting female prisoners and inmates (excluding those assigned to work there, such as doctors and nurses) from entry. Secondly, considering that the selection process was consistently conducted by SS doctors rather than prisoners, it becomes initially challenging to comprehend Lali's actions and the reasons behind him carrying the barely alive victims of the experiments out in front of the barracks. Thirdly, prisoners designated for death were immediately directed either to block 25 (which served as the death block until the first half of 1943) or directly to the gas chambers and could not be left outside the barrack all night. Fourthly, it should be noted that the woman who attempted suicide by jumping over the fence in this particular scene ought to have been electrocuted. This is in stark contrast to the prisoner who successfully jumps over the fence in broad daylight (episode 3). Electric current flowed through the fence wires at night and was switched off during the day. Such a decision could not have been taken arbitrarily by an SS doctor.

It is equally implausible that during the liquidation of the Zigeunerlager, Lali (or any other non-Roma prisoners) could have freely roamed between the barracks of this camp, observing the unfolding events. Furthermore, it is highly improbable that, under those circumstances, any of the prisoners would have possessed the bravery to approach an SS officer and inquire about the true nature of the situation. Moreover, they still had the recollection of the liquidation of the Theresienstadt Jewish family camp just a few weeks prior. They were fully aware of the fact that all its occupants had met their demise in the gas chambers. Accordingly, Lali's behaviour depicted in the series during the liquidation of the Zigeunerlager should be deemed incredible.

Disregarding further detailed justification, I would like to point out some inaccuracies in the plot. For instance, in episode 1, Aron is sent to die instead of Lali, which is not historically accurate. In episode 5, Hoffmanova offers herself to death during the selection process in exchange for a young prisoner who had recently given birth, which is also not accurate. The show also depicts the re-tattooing of women with allegedly faded numbers in episode 1, which is not valid. Additionally, the show portrays Lali and Gita leaving their workplaces for their meetings in the barracks of the women's camp, which is also inaccurate, as depicted in episodes



next to the barracks - which suggests that they are newly arrived prisoners awaiting registration at the camp. However, if they were people who had been accepted into the camp, they should have been divided by gender, meanwhile both men and women can be seen in the row. Baretzki reassures one of the women by saying that she will soon be taken to the delivery ward ('Maternity'). When asked by Lali where such a ward is located, Baretzki replies that this is what they tell pregnant women, then adds "I don't see any babies here. Do you?" ("That's what we tell the pregnant ones. I don't see any babies around here. Do you?").

A viewer would surmise that a woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy would not have successfully passed the selection process and was sent to her death. So, are the individuals dressed in regular clothes meant to symbolise the Jews who were murdered in the gas chambers immediately upon their arrival at Auschwitz? If that's the case, how they have been portrayed is flawed because it is historically incorrect.

In the years 1942, 1943, and early 1944, transports coordinated by RSHA were delivered to the ramp situated within the freight station between the Auschwitz I and Birkenau camps. Subsequently, Jews condemned to death during the selection process were escorted or transported to the gas chambers using paths located beyond the confines of the designated camp zone, thus preventing any interaction with fellow prisoners in the camp.

Furthermore, starting from May 1944, the residential areas assigned for prisoners were off-limits to Jews sent to the gas chambers once the internal ramp within the Birkenau camp became operational. Meanwhile, during the reception of the transport, the prisoners in the camp were not permitted to approach the ramp unless they were designated to perform duties such as aiding in the relocation of people from the wagons, organising their formation, and cleaning up the belongings left by the victims. Thus, the inclusion of scenes featuring Jews in civilian attire standing in rows behind the tattooing Lali (episode 5), amidst barracks or

Auschwitz and the Holocaust, which has been recognised for a long time and continues to hold relevance in today's society. The crux of this issue is finding a middle ground between factual communication and emotional impact, ensuring empathy grows as knowledge deepens instead of fading away. The series *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* primarily aims to create a strong emotional impact, prioritising the emotional aspect rather than presenting factual information. The audience becomes emotionally invested in the destiny of the primary characters and profoundly engages with their experiences. I will leave the question of whether "experiencing" also entails "understanding", particularly in cases where the story deviates from historical truth, open for discussion.

The set design in the series is commendable and should be regarded as one of its strong points. The recreation of the Birkenau camp was done with great attention to detail, but even so, the creators made some mistakes, ranging from minor to more significant ones. To begin with, the screen mainly depicts the Auschwitz II - Birkenau camp, with a particular emphasis on the entirely wooden barracks of section BII. In the scene depicting Lali's arrival at the camp (episode 1), an SS officer informs the new prisoners that they will be sent to the Birkenau camp. However, in April 1942, the men's camp was located in Auschwitz I. Initially, Ludovít Eisenberg was sent to Auschwitz I, as Birkenau only housed Soviet prisoners of war and extremely exhausted prisoners transferred from the main camp's hospital. Understandably, the choice to swiftly relocate the action to Birkenau could be rationalised based on practical considerations, specifically the obstacles and expenses involved in recreating the main camp's scenery. This would be easily understandable if it weren't for the fact that the series still had scenes explicitly set in the Auschwitz I camp (e.g. episode 3).

It is also a mistake to place all scenes exclusively in wooden barracks. In contrast to the series, the camp in April 1942 did not include the BII sector. It consisted only of the BI section, which comprised brick barracks. Also, Block 25, where Cilka was incarcerated, was built of brick, not wood.

Regarding the visual aspect of the series' wooden barracks, it is incorrect to suggest that their doors and some walls are almost openwork. The gaps between the boards are wide enough to let in light. If the gaps between the planks of the barrack walls were truly as wide as shown in the series, the prisoners would have frozen to death in winter. In reality, the planks of the barrack doors and walls were tightly bound together. Additionally, it is incorrect to claim that the prisoners slept on bare planks (episode 1), as they were provided with mattresses.

In the scene where Lali is depicted assisting civilians with the construction of the barracks (episode 1) - which is still the spring of 1942 - smoke can be seen in the distance billowing out of the Birkenau camp (in a place where crematoria were built only in the next year). To the viewer, it evokes thoughts of smoke emanating from the crematorium chimneys. However, at that time, the corpses were burned in Crematorium I at the main camp, whereas, at Birkenau, the bodies were buried in mass graves. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the prisoners solely constructed the barracks in Birkenau, with no assistance from civilian workers.

A striking detail is the camp's consistent untidiness, with barrels haphazardly placed under the fence, rubbish accumulated under the barracks, and scattered tools, stools, wooden boxes, and unspecified objects strewn about in multiple areas. This is perhaps consistent with the casual depiction of the camp as a location characterised by dirt. As we know from prisoners' accounts, such a mess was unacceptable.

A further issue is that there should be no guards on duty at the women's camp. The responsibility was typically carried out by female SS supervisors, who made occasional and individual appearances throughout the series. Moreover, the camp did not have any SS officers patrolling with dogs within its premises, as there was no requirement for such measures. The dogs' primary purpose was to prevent any potential escape by prisoners working outside, thus

mislabelling a nurse at Dr Schumann's experimental station) but also entails the accusation of manipulating someone's identity and misrepresenting their story. The creators of the series *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* devised a unique solution to this problem, perhaps unprecedented thus far, namely replacing single digits with letters in the visible numbers of the prisoners. It is essential to acknowledge their sensitive and respectful approach to this issue, which is highly commendable. However, it is crucial that the viewer receives sufficient information from them before airing the episode. Without an explanation, using letters in prisoner numbers becomes a perplexing and intriguing enigma.

One noticeable and attention-grabbing mistake in the costumes is the improper colouring of the armbands worn by the functionary prisoners. All of them are white, whereas the capos should have yellow armbands, and the block leaders should have red ones (this applies to both men and women).

Despite its many factual weaknesses, the series also boasts some notable strengths. Attention is undoubtedly drawn to the fantastic photographs. The combination of well-designed sets and costumes produces a plethora of compelling and profoundly moving portrayals of camp life. The series has the undeniable merit of removing some of the book's more fanciful and imaginative plots (such as Cilka's overt affair with Schwarzhuber or the murders in the bus converted into a gas chamber). Additionally, the series moves away from the overly erotic portrayal of the relationship between Lali and Gita, reduces the number of erotic scenes, and eliminates the highly inauthentic scenes of the lovers holding hands, strolling around the camp, or sitting on the grass having long conversations and making plans for the future.

Finally, the series' greatest strength lies in the authentic portrayal of its contemporary characters, Heather Morris and Lali Sokolov (a.k.a. Ludovit Eisenberg). The plot excels in showcasing their dynamics and personal struggles in coming to terms with the Holocaust's memory (Lali) and its impact on their consciousness (Heather).

Heather Morris, who, in the prologue, acknowledges and a few words "From the author" included in her book, presents herself as an expert doing her best to learn, understand and verify Lali's story (although she had never had any previous connection with the history of the Holocaust), is portrayed in the series as a well-intentioned, simple-minded and sensitive amateur, utterly unaware of the kind of history she will have to deal with. The character played by Melanie Linskey effectively evokes empathy, especially in her portrayal of the vulnerability one experiences when facing a Holocaust survivor and their narrative for the first time. Conversely, the scene of her experiencing a panic attack (episode 4) elicits conflicting emotions - the viewer begins to feel sympathy and sorrow for her, understanding the difficulty she faces while listening to Lali's memories. Simultaneously, it fails to recognise the individuals who truly deserve our focus and compassion in this scenario: the victims and survivors, who did not simply hear about Auschwitz from others but experienced it firsthand.

The series highlights the theme of camp trauma much more than the book. Harvey Keitel plays his role so convincingly that the viewer can indeed see an old man who is lonely after the death of his wife. He is not only struggling with his grief but also with his past and, most importantly, with a genuine and deep sense of guilt, which is one of the most common symptoms of KZ syndrome. It also shows - although it is a pity that it is only a snapshot - Lali and Gita's post-war relationship strongly marked by a past that is sometimes the cause of conflict and problems. In an interview with Heather Morrin, the serial Lali states: "The past followed us like a sick dog" Part of the series' objective is to dispel the belief, depicted in the book, that Auschwitz and the Holocaust were followed by a 'happy ending' and that Lali and Gita lived happily ever after. It is a pity that more space was not devoted to this topic. The final impression may vary depending on the sensitivity of each viewer and the scenes that capture their attention the most.

Watching snippets of the series that show Heather's initial and subsequent visits to Lali, a person with memories of their encounters with former inmates in their homes may discern



Lfd.	Pos. Nr.	Häftlings Nr.	Vor- und Nachname	Geb. Datum	Strafnummer	1944		
						von	bis	
16.6.1944								
2325		1068	Schabenbeck Stefan	11. 4. 13				entf. 22.7.44
2326		11036	Perski Marian	4. 4. 21				entf. 22.7.44
2327		29867	Neumann Josef	29. 5. 16				
2328		32407	Eisenberg Lubomir	28. 10. 16	b. a. w.	16.6.		entf. 10.7.44
2329		121404	Dagielski Johann	4. 7. 24				entf. 15.10.44
2330		125509	Traskula Adalbert	20. 3. 01				verl. 4. Mai.
2331	R-10425		Balijew Nikolau	... - 21				
2332	R-10449		Kapyschew Eruich	4.4. 20				
2333	R-10471		Ischyra Piotr	19. 8. 15				
17.6.1944								
2334		138131	Mandakiewicz Eugen.	6. 9. 18				verl. 4. Mai.
2335		150171	Przybka Boleslaw	28. 4. 19				verl. 4. Mai.
2336		150542	Wolfram Leopold	6. 8. 09				verl. 4. Mai.
2337		167960	Drapiosz Wladyslaw	27. 3. 20				verl. 4. Mai.
2338	R-11411		Dorochow Michal	8.10.22				
18.6.1944								
2339		167169	Hydzubor Jozef	... - 89				
19.6.1944								
2340		127723	Borowy Czeslaw	5. 6. 10	b. a. w.			verl. 4. Mai.
2341		153555	Czwarno Stanislaw	29.10.10	b. a. w.	19.6.		
2342		153585	Gorzyński Josef	8. 9. 11	b. a. w.	19.6.		verl. 4. Mai.
2343		153608	Kalinowski Stanislaw	1. 1. 18	b. a. w.	19.6.		verl. 4. Mai.
2344		153766	Swiatek Josef	28. 4. 14	b. a. w.	19.6.		
2345		153777	Szybinski Witold	17. 9. 22	b. a. w.	19.6.		mit Mauth. 17. 11. 44
2346		153794	Witkowski Antoni	3. 6. 12	b. a. w.	19.6.		gestorben
2347		153826	Zorawski Jan	29.10.08	b. a. w.	19.6.		verl. 4. Mai.

if we adopt the viewpoint of the book's author and series creators and assume this is what truly transpired, we face the perplexing question: why did more than a million people die in KL Auschwitz? Was it because they lacked love or were not loved enough or genuinely enough?

Humans want to believe in a just world where goodness, beauty and love prevail because it makes us feel safe. As viewers (readers) of Lali's story, we want him and Gita to survive and for them to be happy. Reflecting on the individuals who were killed in the context of this narrative prompts one to question the reasons behind their failure to survive. On the contrary, we believe that genuine, untainted love can rescue us from all evil, and the series perpetuates this pop culture myth.

So, did Lali and Gita survive because they loved each other? Undoubtedly, affection could have

79TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF KL STUTTHOF

9 May 1945 marked the end of the 2,077-day ordeal endured by the inmates of the Stutthof camp. This year, we commemorate the 70th anniversary of those occurrences.

The first soldiers of the 48th Army of the 3rd Byelorussian Front arrived at the Stutthof concentration camp in the early hours of 9 May 1945. Belarusian Front. Then, the Stutthof Concentration Camp housed a relatively small group of prisoners, totalling approximately 150. The Germans had already "evacuated" the others in two stages. In January 1945, nearly 30,000 inmates of Stutthof Concentration Camp were sent on a murderous Death March. A few months later, in April, the evacuation by sea begins. A significant number of prisoners are killed or murdered.

Teofil Białowąs was one of the individuals fortunate enough to witness the liberation. This is how he recalled the morning of 9 May 1945: "Describing the precise moment of liberation is challenging for me, as it transpired so swiftly and without any indication. The moment of liberation occurred during our regular morning routine, just like any other day. This was on 9 May 1945. Not a single gunshot was audible, yet the camp had experienced several more bomb attacks the day before. The Germans did not defend the camp; instead, they focused on fighting at sea and in the forest. Unfortunately, the camp was also hit by accidental shells, resulting in the death of numerous inmates. On that day, we observed Germans who were unarmed, and a disorderly group of Germans also emerged from the forest, surrendering their weapons to the commandant. Within a few minutes, a Russian military jeep speeds through the gate, carrying a small, stocky lieutenant. I do not recall the name. The Germans were already lined up in front of the building. The Russians immediately greeted us and began shouting. The lieutenant said: "You are free; you can now go each to your various homes...".

Like every year, the anniversary festivities at the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo were attended by many government officials from both the central and local levels, students from schools in the Pomeranian region, representatives from various museum and cultural organisations, and individuals for whom this day holds significance. We are referring to former prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp, along with their respective families. Attendees this year included Ms Maria Kowalska, Ms Helena Majkowska and Mr Jan Brodziński.

However, they did not address those gathered at the Monument to Struggle and Martyrdom. This was done by Mr Tadeusz Rydzewski, who died in October 2022. We recorded an interview with him a few months before his death.

Subsequently, Piotr Tarnowski, the Director of the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo, delivered the following statement during his speech: "As we stand here, on the hallowed grounds of the Stutthof concentration camp, a place that bears the indelible scars of history, I employ you to engage in a moment of reflection. Here, we find ourselves amidst a memory that extends beyond our individual encounters, within a space that bears witness to truths more



“(POST)JEWISH... SHTETL OPATÓW THROUGH THE EYES OF MAYER KIRSHENBLATT”

In our new temporary exhibition, we will present the less-known history of Opatów, one of the many Polish towns which prior to World War Two were inhabited by Poles and Jews. Painter Mayer Kirshenblatt will be our guide through this no longer existing world. With the example of Opatów, we will have a chance to realize how many stories of our former neighbours from small Polish towns are still waiting to be rediscovered.

There were over a thousand shtetls in today's territories of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. Shtetls are towns where Jews and Christians used to live side by side. The Second World War and the Holocaust obliterated the world of shtetls completely. Today, in Opatów—as well as in tens of other Polish towns—there are no more Jews left.

Our new temporary exhibition titled “(post) JEWISH...Shtetl Opatów Through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt” demonstrates that Polish towns hide two parallel histories. The history of their Polish inhabitants is well known and remembered. The one of their Jewish neighbours who are no more is forgotten or left unsaid.

Our guide in the exhibition will be Mayer Kirshenblatt, a painter who emigrated to Canada with his mother and brothers as a teenager, in 1934. Mayer recalls the shtetl of his youth, restoring vivid memories of the people, events, daily life and customs. His paintings—full of color, imagination and humor—show us a world that is no more. Looking at them, we learn about our shared Polish-Jewish history.

The exhibition also features a documentation of artistic interventions carried out in today's Opatów, aimed at discovering and restoring the vestiges of the pre-war Jewish life.

A painter, chronicler, guide

The “(post)JEWISH...” exhibition is inspired by the paintings by Mayer Kirshenblatt, a Jew born in Opatów in 1916, from where he emigrated to Canada in 1934. In the 1990s, encouraged by his daughter Barbara, Mayer began to paint what he remembered from his childhood. Thanks to his phenomenal memory, he recreated the non-existent world of Opatów Jews in great detail. His paintings testify to a close relationship with the place where he grew up.

Mayer Kirshenblatt is the exhibition's main protagonist and our guide. His paintings allow us to discover the world of a Jewish boy from a pre-war shtetl, but also to face the difficult history of the entire community. The seemingly joyful paintings are not free from criticism of the social relations and economic reality in which the painter grew up. They also provoke questions about what happened to the “post-Jewish” world.

Mayer Kirshenblatt was an amateur artist and his work is regarded as non-professional or folk art. In the exhibition, however, we refer to him as a vernacular artist and historian of his community—familiar and local, recalling the past of a community with which he himself identified.

Traces of the Jewish past in today's Opatów

Today's Opatów is on many levels very far



former Jewish mikveh—today a fudge factory—is yet another important element of the exposition.

We also present artworks that enter into a dialogue with Mayer Kirshenblatt's paintings. These include graphics printed on fabric by Justyna Sokołowska. On the obverse of each work, the artist placed a selected scene inspired by Mayer's paintings; on the reverse, a wartime or contemporary equivalent of the stories that occurred later in the same place. Israeli artist Varda Meidar, daughter of Mayer Lustman, a Jew from Opatów who had survived the Holocaust, recreated the map of Opatów in the form of embroidery. Her inspiration came from the town plan with a legend in Yiddish published in the Memorial Book of Opatów.

(post)JEWISH, meaning?

The term "post-Jewish" almost automatically brings to mind a connotation with "property". This is an important, albeit not the most important theme of the exhibition's narrative. Above all, we want the term to be understood by visitors in the context of restoring memory. We want to remind them that the places or objects presented in the exhibition served specific functions and were once someone's property. A property orphaned, abandoned, without legitimate heirs turns into a void left by its former owner, deprived of the memory stored in objects and spaces.

In the exhibition, we are also restoring the names of people whose memory has been in some way obliterated by giving the label "post-Jewish" to everything that was left of them. We fill the "post-Jewish" void with individuals whose lives were cut short by the Holocaust. We restore the memory of the former residents of Opatów.

Putting the prefix "post-" into brackets allows us to move beyond political disputes about the past and retrieve the most important element out of the term "post-Jewish" spins a tale about JEWISH places and their inhabitants. A title that is formulated in this way restores their identity, respect and memory.

Paint what you remember

There will be a place for the visitors to rest within the exhibition space. Tish-table installation refers to the Jewish tradition of spending joyous time at a table eating, drinking, talking and singing together. Here, the visitors will get more closely acquainted with the figure of Mayer Kirshenblatt and learn about his special relationship with his daughter. They will listen to excerpts from the recorded conversations Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett held with her father over the period of more than 40 years. They will also find Mayer's personal keepsakes at the table—photographs and documents from the painter's school years.

Inspired by the idea of painting from memory, we will place a screen not far from the table so that each visitor is able to paint their own memories from childhood on it. To be able to do that, we will use a special app which mimics the process of painting on canvas. Ready-made sketches of fragments of Mayer's paintings will help our guests adopt the role of painters.

An audio guide for families

We also encourage you to view the exhibition with a family audio guide. Justyna Bednarek, a renowned author of children's literature, wrote a text for a special walk—a tour of a pre-war Jewish town if you will. Little Mayer, an inquisitive and witty boy in a sky-blue coat, will be our guide. With his help, visitors will learn about elements of Jewish holidays, family customs, and old games. They will venture into a world of memories, images, and sounds. Some features in the exposition will also encourage the youngest visitors to engage: assembling pictures from



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IN BEŁŻEC

Nearly 15 speakers were invited to participate in the on-line conference "Museum exhibitions in the Holocaust memorials: from Bełżec to Sobibór" organized on June 4–5, 2024. It is dedicated to a broader context of influence and perception of exhibitions in the museums established on the former camp grounds. Register and take part in our event. It will be held in English, under honorary patronage of the National Institute of Museums.

Museum narratives in the former concentration camps and extermination centres pursue two essential goals: commemorating the victims and documenting the history of the camps. Across the source literature it is often emphasised that the power of such sites lies in their aura and the tangibility of the preserved historical traces. Less frequently, however, is the attention paid to the features of the museum exhibitions: the manner of constructing their narrative or the educational potential that lies in their core.

Yet another matter concerns the "recognisability" of the memorial museums as genuine and symbolical forms of representing the past. Many questions arise in this context: How are they perceived by their visitors, the general public, media, or the museum community both in Poland and internationally? What role, therefore, do the memorials have in promoting education about the Holocaust history as well as in shaping the regional and global culture of memory? What is their actual importance for organisations that deal with researching, documenting, and commemorating the annihilation of Jews, including the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)?

The primary aim of the jubilee conference organized at the Museum and Memorial in Bełżec is to inspire reflection on the perception of museums established in the Holocaust-related sites in terms of their exhibitions. The debates will focus on the issues of the exhibition creation aspects (narrative form and content; interinfluence of the exhibitions, post-camp landscapes, and monuments). Additionally, we will concentrate on the reception of their implementation in the social domain (public history, remembrance, education). We wish to analyse these topics through the scope of the last two decades, over the course of which museum and their expositions underwent significant transformations. The impulse for this has been sparked by the 20th inauguration anniversary of the Museum and Memorial in Bełżec and its de facto the first narrative exhibition in Poland, as well as by the recent opening of the new Museum and Memorial in Sobibór nearly twenty years later where an exhibition of a documentary character is presented.

Both these memorials and simultaneously branches of the State Museum at Majdanek shall serve as case study samples. The conference, however, is dedicated to a broader context of influence and perception of exhibitions in the museums established on the former camp grounds. That is why we extend our invitation to reflect on the exhibitions documenting the persecution and extermination of Jews during World War II not only to museum experts, but



4 czerwca (wtorek):

14.00–15.00 – Otwarcie konferencji i powitania: Tomasz Kranz (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku), Sara Bloomfield (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), Eric Pickles (przewodniczący brytyjskiej delegacji w IHRA), Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.

15.00–15.30 – Andrew Baker (American Jewish Committee), "Betzec 20 Years ago. About the Creation of the Museum and Memorial"

15.30–16.30 – Zofia Wóycicka (Uniwersytet Warszawski), Key lecture: "Exhibitions at Holocaust Sites – an Overview Attempt"

16.30–17.00 – Pytania i dyskusja

17.00–17.30 – Przerwa

17.30–19.00 – Debata panelowa "Exhibitions at Memorial Sites and their Impact on the Holocaust Memory and Education – an International Perspective". Uczestnicy: Christian Dürr (Mauthausen Memorial), Jacek Nowakowski (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), Adelina Hetnar (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau), James Bulgin (Imperial War Museum), prowadzenie: Łukasz Mroziak (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku)

5 czerwca (środa):

12.00–12.40 – Annemiek Gringold (Jewish Culture Quarter in Amsterdam), "The Holocaust Museums from the Dutch Perspective"

12.40–13.20 – Piotr Trojański (Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny w Krakowie), "Betzec and Sobibór Museums and Memorial Sites in the Holocaust Education"

13.20–13.40 – Pytania i dyskusja

13.40–15.00 – Przerwa

15.00–15.40 – Jolanta Laskowska, Paulina Pętał (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku), "The Sobibór Permanent Exhibition and the Holocaust Education"

15.40–16.20 – Aleksandra Skrabek (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku), "The Betzec and Sobibór Monuments as Spaces of the Holocaust Memory"

16.20–16.40 – Pytania i dyskusja



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