Women Visual Artists in the Ghettos

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Rational

The problematic and inhuman situations that people experienced in the Holocaust are incomprehensible. Our mandate is to deal with women's experiences during the Holocaust. This leads to conflict suppression of the issue and avoiding it, on the one hand, and recognizing the importance of teaching the subject and learning from the human social and cultural lessons of this period to prevent their recurrence, on the other. Our unit will provide a unique way of learning about women's fate during the Holocaust. We will focus on women's fate in the Ghettos during the Holocaust in the eyes of female artists.

Goals:

1. Exposing the students to the Jewish women's experience during the Holocaust through art.
2. Exposing the students to clothing as a means of identity and survival.
3. To provide students with tools to distinguish between historical truths and the artistic expression of the creator**.**
4. To develop the ability to "read" works of art.

Target Population:

High School

Academia (Undergraduate or Graduate)

Why Artworks?

Artworks play a vital role in history, in general, and in the Holocaust, in particular. Artworks are a human, authentic, and documentary expression, illuminating the stories of individuals and societies during the Holocaust. Artwork presents an important historical record and helps to deepen our understanding of historical events in a visual language. It is very interpretive, leading to profound and interesting discussion. The artworks are an interesting and unusual means of teaching about the Holocaust at all grade levels. Learners respond intensely to visual teaching and learning materials; as the saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." In addition, a visual learning style is suitable for learners of all age groups.[1]

[1] Batya Brutin. "Teaching About the Holocaust with the Aid of Visual Arts," in Nitza Davidovitch and Dan Soen, editors, *The Holocaust Ethos in the 21st Century: Dilemmas and Challenges,* Krakow: Austeria, Poland, 2012, pp. 70–92.

Jewish artists in the Ghettos often used their art to document and testify to the living conditions in the Ghetto. Despite the risk of being punished if the Nazis discovered their artworks, artists continued to paint or draw daily scenes. Many of them hid or smuggled their work outside, hoping that it would expose the reality inside the Ghetto. Art became a way to resist and defy the "official art" commanded by the Nazi regime for its propaganda. Nazi "official art" means presenting false visual presentations of the reality of life in the Ghettos

The Program's Structure

This program consists of an introduction to Ghettos, followed by reproduction of artworks, including basic information such as the artist's name, title, place, date, technique, dimensions (if available), and the collection. It also includes biographical details about the artist and didactic suggestions.
This information may be helpful in the process of mediating the artworks to the students.

Introduction

The Ghettos

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and thus began the Second World War. Poland's rapid occupation after 27 days of fighting resulted in its division into three areas:
1. The western region was annexed to the Third Reich.
2. The Russian army captured the eastern region following the Ribbentrop (German) - Molotov (Russian) Pact in August 1939. A contract was signed between Germany and Russia, outlining non-aggression between the two countries, in return for which the Russians received the eastern region of Poland.
3. The central region remained under German supervision, i.e., controlled by the SS and security services directly subordinate to Hitler. It was called the *Generalgouvernement* (General Government). General Hans Frank (1900–1946), the commander of the *Generalgouvernement*, had control of the army, the railways, the SS mechanism, and the police. This division had a decisive influence on the Jews. They expelled All Jews from the territory annexed to Germany to the *Generalgouvernement*, and they were added to the Jews of Central Poland and created overpopulation.
Reinhard Heydrich (1904-19420),[2] the head of the Security Police and Security Service, sent a special letter called "Schnellbrief" to the Special Forces commanders of the Security Police with instructions on how to handle the Jewish problem in the occupied territories.

[2] Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942) was chief of the Reich Security Main Office (including the Gestapo, Kriminalpolizei (Criminal Police), and the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service) SD. He was also Stellvertretender Reichsprotektor (Deputy/Acting Reich-Protector) of Bohemia and Moravia. He chaired the January 1942 Wannsee Conference, which formalized plans for the "Final Solution to the Jewish question"—the deportation and genocide of all Jews in German-occupied Europe. Heydrich was mortally wounded in Prague on May 27, 1942, because of an ambush by a team of Czech and Slovak soldiers. He died from his injuries on June 4, 1942.

Amongst other things, it stated: "Jews have to be concentrated at a few concentration points, cities that are railroads crosses, or at least located next to railroads, and send all the Jews living under German occupation there. First and foremost, the Third Reich Jews so it will be free of Jews".
Out of the demand to concentrate all the Jews in large cities on railroad crosses, the ghettos were established.

Ghetto – an acceptable name for a closed Jewish Quarter separating and isolating the Jews from the rest of the population. The origin of the word ghetto comes from Geto Nuovo, which means 'new foundry for metal' that was near the closed neighborhood the Jews in Venice were put in 1516. Later, Ghettos were also established in other European countries.

In the 20th century, the Nazis reestablished the Ghetto. It was a quarter where the Nazis concentrated the Jews, separated and isolated them from the rest of the city and the population. The Ghetto was a transitional stage in the "Final Solution"; from there, the Nazis transferred the Jews to the death camps. In Heydrich's instructions in the "Schnellbrief," there is no express provision for establishing Ghettos. Hans Frank, the commander of the *Generalgouvernement* (General government), has also not issued a general and mandatory order to establish Ghettos in the territories subject to his authority. However**,** he did give other instructions that led to the establishment of Ghettos, such as marking the Jews with a badge in the shape of a yellow Star of David with the word "Jew" in the center in the local language (In the Warsaw Ghetto, they wore a Star of David on their sleeve) and the establishment of a *Judenrat* (Jewish Council).

With the elimination of the independent institutions of the Jewish communities in the occupied areas and the satellite countries, the German government applied to these areas and countries the principle of a single leadership (the *Judenrat*) of the Jewish community. This leadership must follow government instructions and is subject to police control. Ghettos in Poland had their own institutions. These were national organizations under German and local supervision in the satellite countries and Western occupation zones. At the same time, the Jewish councils have taken it upon themselves to oversee the economic welfare and education of the Jewish community. Moreover, taking the Jews to forced labor. Thus, without consistent and explicit instructions, the initiative to establish Ghettos was primarily left to the discretion and the decision of local authorities in the occupied territories in the East. As a result, the Ghettos were not established simultaneously, and their formation was an ongoing process.

The first Ghettos were established in the last months of 1939, and most were established between 1940 and 1941, including the two large Ghettos in Łódź and Warsaw, which are two central cities in Poland.

A lack of uniformity characterized not only the time the Ghettos were established but also their size and how closed and guarded they were. What all the ghettos had in common was their enforced segregation from the outside population and their subordination to the Nazi German authorities. In addition, standard features characterize the ghettos: expulsion to the Ghetto, overcrowding in the Ghetto, hunger, inadequate sanitation, disease and death, forced labor, and employment in the Ghetto; the family structure changed in general and

in terms of the individual within it. The Jewish community established public kitchens, kindergartens, and orphanages and provided medical and material assistance to the most vulnerable. Although such activities were banned by the Nazis, the Jewish community in the Ghettos continued to organize cultural events, clandestine schools, youth group meetings, religious services, and acts of resistance.

Some ghettos existed and lasted for only a short time, while others endured for months or even years. The Germans saw the ghettos as a stage for the removal of the Jewish population. With the implementation of the "Final Solution" (the plan to murder all European Jews) beginning in late 1941, the Germans systematically destroyed the ghettos. The Germans and their auxiliaries either shot ghetto residents in mass graves located nearby or deported them to killing camps.[3]

Women in the Ghetto

The role of a woman as a wife and a mother in the Jewish tradition is defined in the Book of Proverbs, chapter 31, 10-31, specifically in the phrase "Eshet Chail" ("Woman of Valor"). It is a Biblical ode, sung on Friday night, extolling a woman's virtues as a devoted wife and mother and helping the needy in the community. Under the Nazi rule, when the Jews were in the Ghettos, Women were constantly trying to 'create' a world of normality by carrying their traditional role as mothers and housewives. However, the conditions of life in the Ghetto made it difficult for Jewish women to fulfill their traditional roles. With the move to the Ghetto, the family went through a crisis and was in constant danger of falling apart due to the harsh conditions of living in the Ghetto. In this situation, Jewish women coped with their traditional roles in various ways.[4]

Women Artists in the Ghetto

When visual arts and the Holocaust are mentioned in the same breath, it is not clear for a moment how they connect. Seemingly, the Holocaust, in its atrocities, brutality, suffering, and anti-aesthetic, reaches beyond the limits of visual art's abilities to deal with it. However, it turns out that the artist's creative impulse overcomes any limitations: physical, mental, and aesthetic. No one can suppress this impulse.

The artistic activity itself in this time of destruction and struggle for survival is a unique phenomenon characterized by harsh conditions of scarcity, separation, and an atmosphere of suppression of both body and spirit. Under these circumstances, most artists worked in secret at the risk of exposure, which meant death, but the creative impulse was more potent than the fear of death.[5]

The circumstances in which artists created their works varied from artist to artist, and in fact, every artist is a unique phenomenon in their own right; still, it is possible to identify two prominent aims expressed in

[3] https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/ghettos; https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/ghettos-an-overview/.
[4] Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust, A Feminist History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 21-52.
[5] Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: the Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1993, p. xxxi.

the works of the period. That art will be a living testimony to the events of the period, as the artist Esther Lurie testified:

> All the events around me were so strange, so different from the concepts and practices we have experienced so far in our lives. A desire to draw from this new reality arose in me, to tell the things as I saw them. However, I could only devote myself to painting on relatively quiet days. For a while, I began to see this work as a duty[6].

The second objective was the mere act of creation is a struggle against the process of dehumanization on the one hand and maintaining sanity, self-identity, and purpose to life on the other, as denoted by artist Halina Olomucki:

> My need for observation was more substantial than my body. It was a need, a motivating need. It was the single most important thing. I never rationally thought I was going to die, but I had that same incredible need to draw and describe what was happening. I was in the same situation as everyone around me. I saw them close to death, but I never thought of myself that way. I was in the air. I was out of the existential experience. My job ply to describe and draw what was happening.[7]

Each Ghetto was very different, not just in terms of its geography and design but also in terms of Nazi policies and the Ghetto's internal leadership. What they had in common, however, was their enforced segregation from the outside non-Jewish population and their subordination to the Nazi German authorities.

Artists in the Ghettos, both male and female, depicted the challenging conditions of overcrowding, the oppression of body and mind, and the distress of hunger and death. However, differences between the sexes did exist in the Ghettos, as reflected in the artworks.

During the Holocaust, artists explored many common themes, utilizing similar symbols and images. Nevertheless, several themes have preoccupied only women artists as expressed in their artworks.

Most of the artists brought simple art materials when the Nazis sent them to the Ghetto. The artists who participated in commissioned work in ghettos had access to drawing materials, while others, who lacked art supplies, painted on every possible surface, using whatever was at hand: small pieces of paper, scraps of newspapers, packaging papers, scraps from cement bags, and even tin cans. They usually draw with simple means, such as a pencil, ink, charcoal, or an improvised engraving tool, and even with the remains of the chicory plant.

[6] Esther Lurie, *A Living Witness: Kovno Ghetto - Scenes & Types*, Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishers, 1958, p. 7
[7] Halina Ołomucki's testimony, Ghetto Fighters House, undated, in Pnina Rosenberg, *Portrait of a Woman in the Holocaust in the Mirror of Art: Works from the Collection of the Ghetto Fighters House*, Ghetto Fighters House, 2000, p. 23.

The Artworks

Sizes are given either in centimeters or in inches to conform to the conflicting desires of the museums and collectors, in the following order: height x width.

Teofila Reich-Ranicki, *Moving into the Ghetto*, from cycle *Bilder aus dem Warschauer Ghetto*. Warsaw Ghetto, 1942m inks and gouache paints on paper (?). Location unknown.

Depiction

The artwork depicts a young woman wrapped in a shawl, bearing a bundle on her back and an infant in her arms. Accompanying her are a daughter dressed in a coat and scarf and a son similarly clad in a coat, hat, and scarf, holding a bundle of his own. The mother also pulls a cart laden with household possessions. Their downcast gazes and forward movement evoke a sense of displacement, uncertainty, and silent resilience as they head toward an unknown destination. These plaid shawls were popular among traditional Eastern European Jewish women and were worn both for warmth and modesty.

Helga Weissová, *Arrival in Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp*, 1942, watercolors, pen, and ink on paper, 15x22 cm. Collection of the artist, Prague, Czech Republic.

Depiction

Against the backdrop of the Ghetto/Camp's buildings, a convoy of people is portrayed arriving at the Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp. Among them are women, men, and children of various ages. Each person wears a yellow patch in the shape of a Star of David sewn onto their clothing, and their belongings are marked with a letter and a series of numbers (the letter indicates the city the person was sent from to the Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp next to the consecutive registration serial numbers given on the transport list). The composition conveys a quiet gravity, capturing not only the physical movement of these individuals but also the emotional weight of arrival into a space defined by confinement and uncertainty.

Esther Lurie, *In the Kitchen for Social Assistance*, Ghetto Kovno, 1942, pencil on paper, 41.5X28.3. Collection of Ghetto Fighter's House, Israel.

Depiction

The artwork portrays a hunched woman, likely an elderly individual, seen from behind, seated on a bench. Her posture suggests a sense of withdrawal or isolation. In front of her, placed on a table, is a vessel containing food, which she holds with both hands. She is dressed in a headscarf and a coat bearing a yellow Star of David patch. The scene conveys a profound sense of sorrow and solitude, capturing the quiet weight of her existence.

Helga Wolfenstein King, *Beds at Theresienstadt*, Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp, 1942, Ink, pencil, and watercolors on paper, 13.8x11 cm. Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum. Acquisition, courtesy of Barbara and Lewis Shrensky, Washington DC.

Depiction

The artist depicted the room in Theresienstadt where she, her mother Hermine, and her aunt Julia "Ully" Fleischmann lived in. She is meticulous in depicting all the details. She emphasizes the way they organized their lives with the few objects they brought with them. She demonstrates the use of their suitcases to build a storage space, with one individual "681" belonging to her mother and the other labeled "682" belonging to her. Or a "table" next to a bed with her aunt's number 945. All beds are covered with colorful sheets; their clothes, with the yellow Star of David patch, hang in perfect order. The artist's use of colors is quite optimistic, as it was evident from their arrival at Theresienstadt.

Zdenka Eismannova, *Women's Dormitory in the Ghetto*, Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp, 1943, watercolor on paper 29.8 x. 21.7 cm. Collection of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, donated by Ron Neulinger.

Description

The artist depicts a group of women inmates in their barracks, in the foreground and middle ground, the inmates - either seated, dressed, and coiffed or lying on their bunks and covered with blankets – are separated by a row of carrying cases/tables between their bunks. The whole composition/atmosphere evolved through and arranged by fabric – that either covers the women's bodies – clothes and blankets – or serves as a décor - clothing hanging on walls on either side in the middle ground. The women are motionless and gazing at the intruder – the artist (and consequently the viewer). This contrasts with similar scenes, where the 'unseen' artist does not establish eye contact with his models, who are depicted as immersed in their mundane activities or resting or sleeping. The palette's colors, dominated by off-white and beige-

brown, are ‘balanced’ by two deep green patches (the blanket in the foreground and the one in the middle ground), enhancing the *Interior*’s enclosed, feminine, and sensual sphere.

Helga Wolfenstein King, *The Potato Peelers*, Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp, circa 1941-1945, watercolors on paper, 11½" x 8½". Collection of Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem.

Description

The artist depicted a room where the potato peelers worked in the Theresienstadt public kitchen. Blurred women sit along the walls, busy with their work. On some of their clothes, the yellow Star of David patch is visible, revealing their Jewish identity. Bright light enters through a large window with a bar, illuminating only part of the space. In the center of the room sits a woman covered in a headscarf, dark clothes, and eyeglasses. She focuses on the task of peeling potatoes. On the lower left side, a large woman's head with tormented facial features is depicted. The colors and gestures of the women convey a sense of sadness and anguish.

Sara Gliksman-Fajtlowicz, *Portrait of a Woman*, Łódź Ghetto, 1941, oil on canvas, 77.5x58.5 cm. Collection of Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem

Description

On a brown background with a light square, poorly dressed an older woman is sitting crouched, her shoulders hunched, and her hands crossed against her body. A visible yellow Star of David patched on her dress. She looks despondent, while the blurry, gloomy colors add to the atmosphere of depression.

Gela Seksztajn*, Beggar Girl,* Warsaw Ghetto, ca. 1942, watercolor on cardboard, 71.5 x 44 cm. Collection of *MŻIH* (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma).

Description

The artist portrayed a young girl dressed in tattered, worn, and soiled clothing, set against a neutral background of murky brushstrokes. One hand is crossed over the girl's body while the other is extended in a gesture of begging. Her expression is somber, her mouth closed, and her eyes reflect a deep sense of suffering. Her figure conveys a feeling of neglect and helplessness, capturing a poignant moment of vulnerability.

Halina Olomucki, *Portraits of Women in the Ghetto, Warsaw Ghetto*, 1943. Pencil on paper, 20.3 x 13.4 cm. Signed, lower left: Halina. Signed (initials) and dated, lower right: 1943, HO (Halina Olomucki), Collection of Beit Lohamei Haghetaot (Ghetti Fighters' House), Israel. Donated by the artist Halina Olomucki.

Description

Olomucki portrayed women imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto with expressions of suffering, agony, pain, and fear. The figures are emaciated, with a look of sadness and despair in their eyes, and their mouths are closed in silence. The description conveys a feeling of significant crowding, misery, and helplessness.

Ilka Gedő, *Self Portrait*, Budapest Ghetto, 1944, pencil on paper, 23.8 x 20.5 cm, marked lower right: “1944 őszén” (in the autumn of 1944). Collection of Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig, Germany

Description

Against a plain background, without any signs of place or time, the artist's self-portrait depicts her head resting on her hand. Her hair is unkempt, her eyes are sad, and her mouth is closed. The painting conveys a feeling of sadness, uncertainty, and helplessness.

Helga Weissová, *A Departing Transport*, 1944, watercolors, pen, and ink on paper, 16x24cm. Collection of the artist, Prague, Czech Republic.

Description

Against the backdrop of the Ghetto/Camp's buildings, a convoy of people depicted leaving the Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp. Among them are women, men, and children of various ages carrying their belongings, marked with a letter and a series of numbers assigned to them on the transport list upon arrival at Theresienstadt. In front of them, between the buildings and the trees, there is a freight train car, which will be loaded with these Jews and transported to the killing camps. The Ghetto/Camp population is watching them with curiosity, suspicion, and uncertainty from the windows and on the right side. About this drawing, the artist wrote: "Those who were not included in the transport were not allowed to go near those who were leaving".

About the Artists (In alphabetical order)

Gedő Ilka (1921 - 1985)

Gedő Ilka was born in Budapest, Hungary, to a family of intellectuals who were involved in a circle of writers and artists. She studied art with the best teachers. Following the Nazi occupation of Hungary in the spring of1944, Gedő was first deported to Yellow-Star marked houses and then to Budapest Ghetto. While in both places under extremely harsh conditions of water, food, and medication scarcity, she created numerous drawings of people in her surroundings. These drawings are evidence of the suffering of the Jewish population under Nazi rule. When she was summoned to be sent to the East, one of the community elders stood in her place; she hid in the Ghetto and thus survived. With the liberation of Budapest by the Red Army on January 18, 1945, she returned to her art studies at the Hungarian Academy of Arts. In 1946, she married the biochemist Endre Bíró, and they had two sons. Gedő passed away in Budapest in 1985.

Sources

Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg, *Last Portrait, Painting for Postering*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2012, p. 62
Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg and Walter Smerling, Art from the Holocaust, 100 works from the Yad Vashem Collection, Köln: Wienand, 2016, p. 304.

Gliksman-Fajtlowicz Sara (1915-2005)

Sara Gliksman-Fajtlowicz was born in Łódź and studied at the Academy of Arts in Warsaw. In 1933, she joined the Association of Polish Artists. In 1940, she was deported to the Łódź Ghetto, where she worked as a graphic artist. Her job provided her with access to basic art materials. Nevertheless, she traded food for oil paints. Gliksman-Fajtlowicz painted clandestine scenes and people in the ghetto during her imprisonment despite the danger of being caught. When the Ghetto was liquidated in 1944, she was assigned to a forced labor group to clean up the ghetto ruins. After liberation, she remained in Poland, where her works were exhibited in Warsaw, Kraków, and Łódź. In 1957, she immigrated to Israel.

Sources

https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/art/collection/landscapes/view-of-the-lodz-ghetto.html
Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg and Walter Smerling, Art from the Holocaust, 100 works from the Yad Vashem Collection, Köln: Wienand, 2016, p. 306.

Eismannová Zdenka (1897-1943)

Zdenka Eismannová, was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). She lived in Prague and worked as a portrait painter and designer. On September 12, 1942, she was deported to Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp, where she devoted herself to artistic activities in her free time. She mostly depicted daily life

in the Ghetto/camp and scenes from the women's dormitories with watercolors. On September 6, 1943, she was deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp, where she perished.

Sources

Blodig, Vojtech et al. (eds.), Art against Death: Permanent Exhibitions of the Terezin Memorial in the Former Magdeburg Barracks, Prague: Publishing House Helena Osvaldová for the Terezín Museum, 2002, p. 128.

https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/us-005578-irn42734-irn47181

Lurie Esther (1913–1998)

Esther Lurie was born in Liepaja, Latvia, which her family was forced to leave during World War I because the city served as a military port. In 1917, the family returned to Riga, where Lurie graduated from the *Ezra Gymnasium*. She developed her artistic talent from the age of fifteen by studying with various teachers. Between 1931 and 1934, she studied set design at the *Institut des Arts Décoratifs* (Institute of Decorative Arts) in Brussels and drawing at the *Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts* (Royal Academy of Fine Arts) in Antwerp.

In 1934, Lurie immigrated to Palestine with most of her family. She designed sets for the *Hebrew Theater* in Tel Aviv. When events limited theatrical activity in Palestine, she devoted herself to drawing, especially portraits. In 1938, she won the prestigious Dizengoff Prize for Drawing for her work, ″The Erez Israel Orchestra," which was exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum. In 1939, Lurie traveled to Europe to pursue her studies, visiting France and attending the *Académie Royal des Beaux-Arts* (Royal Academy of Fine Arts) in Antwerp. In Riga, she exhibited her works at an exhibition held in the Painters' Association House. World War II broke out while she was in Lithuania, and during the German occupation, she was imprisoned in the Kovno Ghetto (1941–1944), where she at once began to sketch the scenes of the new reality. The members of *Ältestenrat* (the Council of Elders), who learned of her talent after seeing one of her paintings, asked her to document everything that was happening in the Ghetto. Her works were displayed in an exhibition held in the Ghetto. She felt that she must record this new existence or at least make sketches of it. So, as far as she was able, Lurie recorded life in the Ghetto—men, women, children, older adults, scenes of nature, and scenes of human hardship. The Nazis also showed interest in Lurie's artistic talent, and she painted pictures commissioned by the Nazi commanders. Lurie, who drew everywhere in the Ghetto, received special permission from the German commander to draw in the pottery workshop. After the deportation on March 26, 1943, to the camps, the artist hid her collection of drawings — approximately two hundred drawings and watercolors — in the large jars prepared in advance. Some of the works were photographed for the Ghetto's clandestine archives.

In July 1944, as the Red Army approached Lithuania, the Ghetto was liquidated, and those remaining in it were transferred to concentration camps and forced labor camps in Germany. Esther Lurie was deported,

and her hidden works were left behind. Later, it was found that some of her drawings had survived along with the archives of the *Council of Elders*. Avraham Tory-Golob succeeded in rescuing and bringing to Israel eleven sketches and several watercolors, as well as twenty photographs of her works. She was unable to discover what happened to the rest of her works.

Up to the end of July 1944, Lurie, along with the other women from the Ghetto, was held in the Stutthof Concentration Camp in Northeastern Poland. In August 1944, she was transferred to Leibitsch camp, where she painted portraits of several inmates. After the liberation by the Red Army on January 21, 1945, Lurie reached Italy and then Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948). She donated most of her artworks to the art collection of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum while she was still alive

Sources

https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/art/exhibitions/spirit-of-creativity/deportation-to-the-camps.html

Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg, *Last Portrait, Painting for Postering*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2012, p. 82

Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg and Walter Smerling, Art from the Holocaust, 100 works from the Yad Vashem Collection, Köln: Wienand, 2016, p. 315.

Reich-Ranicki Teofila (1920-2011).

Teofila (Tosia) Reich-Ranicki (1920-2011) was born in Łódź, Poland, into a Jewish merchant family. Her mother was Emilia Langnas (1886-1942), and her father, Fajwel (Pawel) Langnas (1885-1940), was a Textile merchant and entrepreneur in Łódź. Teofila Studied at a German private school. Before World War II, she traveled to several European countries and intended to study art in Paris completing her education. With the invasion of the German soldiers in Poland, all her plans changed; first, she ran away to Warsaw with her parents. Her older brother Alexander had already immigrated to the United States in 1932. Following the loss of his property and the German invasion, her father committed suicide in January 1940 in the Warsaw Ghetto. Then Teofila met Marcel Reich, and the two fell in love, becoming a couple. Marcel Reich worked there as a translator, which meant that he and his wife were temporarily spared from deportation to the Treblinka extermination camp. Despite the horror and harsh conditions, there was an aspiration to sustain life and culture in the Warsaw ghetto, so Teofila continued her art studies as she had planned before the war. She stole colors from the German authorities – a capital offense and created one-of-a-kind ghetto drawings. At the request of the Judenrat, Teofila created numerous watercolors for the Ghetto Commissioner, Heinz Auerswald (1908 –1970). Marcel and Teofila escaped from the Ghetto, and from 1943 to1944 they were hidden by a Polish family of the unemployed typesetter Bolek Gawin, near Warsaw. On September 7, 1944, they were Liberation by Red Army. In 1948-1949 they are in London; Marcel served as a Polish diplomat. Between 1949- 1958 they leaved in Warsaw, and in 1958 they moved to Germany.

Teofila's cycle of Ghetto drawings survived the war. She kept them under wraps for 60 years until the Jewish Museum Frankfurt developed them into an exhibition in 1999, which she later published as a book volume. Her drawings served as evidence of the Ghetto horrors. She did not paint again after the war.

Sources

Tarnowska Magdalena, *Jewish Artists in Warsaw 1939–1945*, Warsaw 2017.

https://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/~v1ranick/surgery/bio.htm

https://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/~v1ranick/surgery/tosia.pdf

https://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/~v1ranick/ghetto.pdf

https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/holocaust-ueberlebende-teofila-reich-ranicki-ist-tot-a-759745.html

Seksztajn (Seksztein) Gela (1907-1943)

Gela Seksztajn was born in 1907 in Warsaw to a Jewish working-class family. Her father was a cobbler, and her mother came from a wealthy family. In 1924 she graduated from a Jewish school where she studied Polish and Yiddish. In 1938, she married Izrael Lichtensztejn and they had a daughter Margelit. Gela taught art at an underground school in the Warsaw Ghetto, and she painted her surroundings and portraits of people, especially children and young people. Her paintings were buried in the "Oneg Shabbat" archive (also known as the Ringelblum Archive, is one of the most impressive and unique projects initiated by the Jews during the Holocaust. This was an underground archive established and run by historian and community figure Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, with the express purpose of documenting the reality of life under Nazi occupation in the Warsaw Ghetto) and were thus preserved. Gela Zakstein died probably during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In her Last Will and Testament of August 1, 1942, Gela Seksztajn wrote among other things:

As I stand on the border between life and death, certain that I will not remain alive, I wish to take leave from my friends and my works…. My works I bequeath to the Jewish Museum to be built after the war. Farewell, my friends. Farewell, the Jewish people. Never again allow such a catastrophe.

The paintings were found after the end of World War II, and most of them are held in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, in Warsaw, Poland.

Sources

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Olomucki Halina (1919-2007)

Halina Olomucki was born in Warsaw to a non-observant Jewish family. She showed her artistic talent from an early age. She was Eighteen years old when World War II broke out and the Nazis occupied Poland. She was sent to Warsaw Ghetto, where she immediately began to draw and paint, as her main purpose. She managed to smuggle out her drawings from the ghetto. From the ghetto Olomucki and her mother were deported to Majdanek where they were separated, and the mother was sent immediately to her death. In the camp Olomucki was required to draw slogans on the walls and to decorate them. She used some of the material she received officially for her own use and began to do drawings clandestinely of the women who were imprisoned with her. She hid the drawings in as many hiding places as she could find. From Majdanek Olomucki was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau where she was asked to continue painting, receiving richer food as a reward for her work. Using the materials, she stole Olomucki portrayed the women inmates imprisoned with her. After the war she testified:

> My urge to observe was stronger than my body. It was a need, a motivating need. It was the most important thing for me. I never rationally thought that I was going to die, yet I had this need to paint and record what was happening. I was in the same situation as all people around me, I saw they were close to death, but I never thought of myself that way. I was up in the air. I was outside actual experience. My role was to draw, to record what was happening, my job was to observe.

From Auschwitz-Birkenau she was sent on the Death March, which began on January 18, 1945. Olomucki reached the Ravensbrück camp and from there was transferred to the Newschtadt-Glewe camp, where she was liberated on May 2, 1945, by the Allies military. After the war Olomucki returned to Warsaw, where she married the architect, Boleslaw Olomucki. Later they moved to Łódź, where she studied at the art academy. In 1957, she emigrated to France and lived in Paris, where their daughter Miriam was born. in 1972 the Olomucki family immigrated to Israel. Halina Olomucki passed away in 2007. Halina Olomucki left an important artistic legacy for future generations in the form of her drawings through which one can learn about the situation in the Nazi ghettos and camps.

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Helga Weissová (born in 1929)

Helga Weissová was born in Prague. Her father, Otto Weiss, worked at the government Bank in Prague and her mother, Irene Fuksova, was a seamstress. At the age of 12 she received a box of crayons as a gift from her father, and he told her: "Draw what you see." A month after the age of 12, in December 1941, she was sent to Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp with her parents and stayed there for three years. She was separated from her parents and sent to the girls' dormitory block L410. Helga documented in her drawings, daily life and special events, for example, the Red Cross delegation visit on July 23, 1944. In 1944 she was sent with her mother to Auschwitz - Birkenau. She left her work with her uncle, who was with them in the ghetto, and he kept it until the end of the war and that is how they survived. After three days in Auschwitz - Birkenau they were transported to Freiberg near Dresden where they worked for the Nazis at the aircraft factory. In April 1945 they were taken to the Mauthausen camp and in May 1945 they were liberated by the American Army. Her father was sent to Auschwitz three days ahead of them and perished there. After the war, Helga and her mother returned to Prague, she studied at the Art Academy in Prague and became a successful artist. She married musician Jiří Hošek, and they have a daughter, a son and grandchildren, and she now lives and works in Prague.

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Wolfenstein King Helga (1922-2003)

Helga Wolfenstein King was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia. When she was quite young her father left the family and got remarried. Her sister Renata and her husband managed to immigrate to London in 1939, before the outbreak of the war. Wolfenstein King was deported from Brno to the Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto on December 2, 1941, together with her mother Hermine and her aunt Julia Fleischer at the age of 19. She worked as a draftswoman in the ghetto's technical department's drafting office. There, she met Peter Kien, a 22-year-old artist and writer, and under his influence and encouragement, she developed her artistic style. Peter and Helga not only worked together in the drafting office most of the day but also spent time together after work sharing their art. When Helga, her mother and aunt were on the list for deportation to the east, Peter Kien used all his connections to get their names removed from the list, thus all three were saved. Just days after liberation her mother died from typhus. Helga Wolfenstein King arrived in Prague alone and found work as a graphic artist. Several years later, she immigrated to London to be with her older sister. There she met Eric Kolmer (he later changed his name to King), a childhood friend from Brno, they got married and started a new life in the USA. The couple had a daughter, Judy. In the USA Helga Wolfenstein King continued to work in graphics and art until she passed away in 2003.

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About the Ghettos (In alphabetical order)

The Budapest Ghetto

Hungary was allied with Nazi Germany. During this period, despite discriminatory legislation against the Jews and widespread antisemitism, the Jewish community of Budapest was relatively secure. The change began when Nazi Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944. Between April and July 1944, the Germans and Hungarians deported Jews from the Hungarian provinces. The Nazis ordered to establish a Jewish council -*Judenrat* - in Budapest. The ghetto was created on November 29, 1944. It was surrounded by a high fence reinforced with planks that was guarded so that contraband could not be sneaked in, and people could not get out. 70,000 Jews were moved into a 0.1 square mile (0,26 square kilometre) zone. The ghetto lasted for less than two months, until the liberation of Budapest on January 17, 1945, by the Soviet Army. More than half of Jewish population that were forced into the ghetto in 1944 were sent to concentration camps.

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The Kovno (Kaunas) Ghetto

On August 15, 1941, Nazi German officials established the Kovno Ghetto to provide forced labor for the German military. Jews were employed primarily as forced workers at various sites outside the ghetto, especially in construction of the military airbase in Aleksotas. Additionally, the Nazis formed a Jewish council of Elders (*Aeltestenrat*), headed by Dr. Elchanan Elkes. They also created workshops within the ghetto for those women, children, and older adults who could not participate in the labor brigades. Over time, these workshops employed almost 6,500 people. The Jewish council of Elders hoped the Germans would not kill Jews who were productive for them. In its first few months of existence, the ghetto consisted of two parts: the "small" ghetto and the "large" ghetto. Each part was enclosed by barbed wire and closely guarded. Both were overcrowded, with each person allocated less than ten square feet of living space. The Nazis gradually reduced the size of the ghetto, forcing the Jewish people to relocate several times.
On October 4, 1941, the "small" ghetto was liquidated, and the Nazis killed almost all its inhabitants at Fort IX (a place of mass murder during Nazi occupation).

Later that same month occupation officials selected close to 10,000 ghetto inhabitants

On October 29, 1941, the Nazi forces selected close to 10,000 ghetto inhabitants, Half of these were children, brought then to Fort IX and the Einsatzgruppen units shot them (Einsatzgruppen were Schutzstaffel (SS) paramilitary death squads of Nazi Germany that were responsible for mass murder, primarily by shooting, during World War II (1939–1945) in German-occupied Europe). It is important to mention that Kovno Ghetto had several underground Jewish resistance groups that acted against the Nazis with the support of the Jewish council of Elders in the ghetto.

On October 26, 1943, the SS deported more than 2,700 people from the main camp. Those deemed fit to work were sent to labor camps in Estonia, and children and the older adults were deported to Auschwitz. Only a few survived. In July 1944, as the war front drew closer to Lithuania, the Nazis destroyed the Ghetto and deported the remaining Jews mostly in direction to Germany to Stutthof Nazi concentration camp and to Stettin. From there, many Jews were sent to Dachau and Stutthof concentration camps in Nazi Germany, where most of them perished.

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The Łódź Ghetto

The Nazi Germans occupied Łódź on September 8, 1939, and renamed the city Litzmannstadt in honor of German general, Karl Litzmann, who had led German forces in the area in 1914. They immediately imposed restrictions on the Jews. Many Jews were arrested and taken to forced labor, and most of them suffered abuse and humiliation. A series of orders issued by the Nazi Germans eliminated the basis of the economic, social, and religious existence of the Jews.

On February 8, 1940, the Nazis established a ghetto in Bałuty, the city's poorest district. They forced the Jewish population into the ghetto with terror and violence. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed-wire fence and was isolated from the rest of the city and were forbidden to leave its grounds. The ghetto was heavily guarded by the Nazi Order Police forces who were ordered to shoot anyone who approached the fence from within the ghetto.

The ghetto area was divided into three parts by the intersection of two major roads. Bridges constructed over the two thoroughfares connected the three segments of the ghetto. Streetcars for the non-Jewish population of Łódź traversed the ghetto but were not permitted to stop within it.

The Nazis formed a Jewish council (Judenrat), headed by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. The Jewish council was responsible for managing the ghetto in terms of work in the ghetto, feeding the residents,

establishing a Jewish police force, preparing lists of deportations to the extermination camps, and more, and mainly for carrying out all the Nazis' instructions. The living conditions in the ghetto were unbearable, caused by overcrowding, a lack of food, and poor sanitary conditions, which led to a desperate struggle between survival and death from disease or starvation. Many of the ghetto houses were wooden, and most of them were dilapidated; they were not connected to a sewage system, had no running water, and were not connected to a gas supply. The Nazis did not provide fuel for heating, and in winter the residents suffered greatly from the intense cold. The Germans deliberately provided a minimal amount of supplies, so the greatest hardship was hunger. Occasionally, in exchange for grueling work in unbearable conditions, the Jews received a meager food ration. Since the city of Łódź was the center of the textile industry in prewar Poland, the Łódź ghetto thus became a major production center under the Nazi German occupation.
As early as May 1940, the Nazi Germans established factories in the ghetto and used Jewish residents for forced labor. By July 1942, there were 74 workshops within the ghetto. The major factories produced textiles, especially uniforms, for the German military.

In January 1942, German authorities began to deport Jews from Łódź ghetto to the Chelmno killing center and murdered them in mobile gas vans (trucks with a hermetically sealed compartment that served as a gas chamber). In August 1944 the remained Jews from the ghetto were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center.

The Theresienstadt Ghetto

The Germans invaded Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, and occupied the area of Bohemia and Moravia; they annexed those territories to the expanded Germany and established a protectorate. By July 1939, the Central Office for Jewish Emigration is established in the Protectorate, headed by Adolf Eichmann. The goals of the Bureau: forced migration, smuggling, and theft of property, humiliation, and isolation of Jews. In October 1939, Eichmann operates a deportation of about 5,000 Jews from Moravska Ostrava in the Czech Republic, from Vienna and Katowice to a camp near the Niseko village in the Lublin area. On October 10, 1939, there was a meeting of the leaders of the SS in the Protectorate about the “solution of the Jewish question” headed by Reinhard Heydrich. The participants included Eichmann. This meeting discussed the establishment of the Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto (Trezín in Czech) for the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia; Eichmann was appointed to deal with it. Hence, Eichmann was involved in the establishment of the Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto, monitored it closely and interfered in its affairs all through the period of its existence.

The Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto was established on November 24, 1941, and initially served as a concentration camp for Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. From mid-1942, Jews from Western European countries – Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and in 1943 also from Denmark – were sent to Theresienstadt. The Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto existed for three and a half years, until May 9, 1945.

The Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto served three purposes:

A. As a transit camp for Czech Jews whom the Germans deported to killing centers, concentration camps, and forced-labor camps in German-occupied Poland, Belorussia, and the Baltic States.
B. As a Ghetto-Labor camp for Czech, German, and Austrian Jews, based on their age, their physical condition or domestic cultural figures or from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark.
C. As a detention camp with harsh living conditions for Jews in the above-mentioned groups so that many of them will die until the SS and police could deport the survivors to killing centers in the East.

The leadership of Czech Jewry, led by Jakob Edelstein, supported the establishment of the ghetto in the Protectorate as an alternative to deportation to the East, in the hope that the ghetto would serve as a place of refuge until the fury passed. This illusion was shattered with the beginning of the deportations to the East in January 1942 and the executions by hanging of sixteen Jews, prisoners of the ghetto, for the crime of sending letters or buying a cake. The ghetto was in the fortress city of Theresienstadt, which was built in the 18th century. The barracks and residential buildings there were suitable for a population of 7,000 people. At its peak, 60,000 prisoners were crammed within the city walls.

Despite the difficulties and hardship, the Theresienstadt Camp-Ghetto was characterized by comprehensive organizational activity by the Jewish leadership, which was expressed in all areas of life – care and education of children and youth, health services, food distribution, work, and more. All these improved, but could not prevent the difficult living conditions, overcrowding, disease, hunger, and high mortality.

In preparation for a visit by a Red Cross delegation in June 1944, an operation was conducted to beautify the Camp-Ghetto, which lasted about four months. During that period, deportations to the east continued. The Camp-Ghetto remained intact until the day of liberation in May 1945.

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The Warsaw Ghetto

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest ghetto established by the Nazis in all of Europe. On November 16, 1939, Jews were forced into the ghetto. Although a third of the city's population was Jewish, the Ghetto covered just 2.4% of the city's surface area. In addition, a huge number of refugees had been transported to the ghetto, which increased the ghetto's population to 450,000. The ghetto area was surrounded by three-

meter-high walls that the Jews built with their own hands under strict and violent guard. The Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were cut off from the outside world. The Nazis formed a Jewish council (Judenrat), headed by Dr. Adam Czerniaków. The Jewish council was responsible for managing the ghetto in terms of work in the ghetto, feeding the residents, establishing a Jewish police force, preparing lists of deportations to the extermination camps, and more, and mainly for carrying out all the Nazis' instructions. The living conditions within the ghetto were unbearable, caused by overcrowding, a lack of food, and poor sanitary conditions, which led to a desperate struggle between survival and death from disease or starvation.

From July 22, 1942, with the beginning of the great deportation, which continued until the last transport on September 21, 1942, most of the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto were rounded up, taken to the Umschlagplatz (transshipment point) at the north of the ghetto, and pushed onto trains that took them to Treblinka (Treblinka became one of three killing centers created as part of Operation Reinhard (also known as *Aktion Reinhard* or *Einsatz Reinhard*). In response to these deportations two-armed self-defense units were created: the *Jewish Combat Organization* (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*; *ŻOB*), and the Revisionist Zionist youth movement *Beitar* established the *Jewish Military Union (Żydowski Związek Wojskowy; ŻZW)*. Although initially there was tension between the ŻOB and the ŻZW, both groups collaborated to oppose the Nazi German attempts to evacuate and destroy the ghetto.

The Nazi German forces intended to begin the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto on April 19, 1943, the eve of Passover. They were taken by surprise when not only the resistance fighters (ŻOB and the ŻZW) engaged in combat but also all the ghetto inhabitants participated alongside them in the fighting. The armed revolt was suppressed on May 16, after heavy fighting, during which time most of its fighters were killed. Up to the Warsaw ghetto uprising, there were no serious efforts at rebellion against the Nazis in all occupied Europe.

On May 16th, 1943, the Nazis destroyed the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie street in Warsaw, in an act which proclaimed the final suppression of the ghetto uprising. General Jürgen Stroop (the SS commander who led the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), presided over the demolition. He announced, "There is no longer a Jewish quarter in Warsaw".

Sources

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https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/ghettos/warsaw.html#narrative_info.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Learning in this program will be active, experiential, and multi-sensory, incorporating diverse pedagogical approaches to meet varied learning needs and encourage deep engagement from the students.

Guided Inquiry-Based Learning: Students will actively investigate artworks created by female artists during the Holocaust and historical documents related to women's experiences in the ghettos, drawing from the artists' biographies. Learning will be guided by leading questions, dilemmas, and activities that encourage analysis, comparison, and conclusion.

Facilitated Discussions: Classroom dialogue will be a central component of the learning experience. Discussions will enable students to express their emotions, thoughts, and insights, develop critical thinking skills, and navigate the complexity of the subject. Emphasis will be placed on mutual listening and respecting diverse opinions.

Art Analysis: We will learn to "read" art through in-depth observation of the artworks, identifying visual elements (composition, color, figures, objects, etc.), analyzing artistic techniques, and interpreting overt and subtle messages. We will compare between the artworks and examine their connection to the historical context.

Working with Primary and Secondary Sources: In addition to artworks, we recommend that students be exposed to testimonies, diaries, and photographs documenting life in the Ghetto, with a focus on the status and stories of women. This combination will enable information verification, deepen understanding, and distinguish between documentation and interpretation.

Life Stories and Testimonies: We will explore the life stories of female artists, both survivors and victims, and examine how their narratives are reflected in their artworks.

Comparison and Contrast: We will examine the relationship between art as a personal human expression and historical documentation. We will compare and contrast artworks by different female artists.

Creation and Expression (Optional): Consider incorporating a creative activity (such as writing, drawing, sculpting, or drama) to allow students to process emotional and intellectual content and express their understanding and interpretation of the material. It is crucial to ensure that this activity is conducted sensitively and respectfully.

Technology Integration (Optional): Consider incorporating digital resources such as museum websites, art databases, filmed and recorded testimonies, and relevant documentary films.

Questions to Ask:

- Why is it important to learn about women’s experiences during the Holocaust through their visual voices?
- Why did the Nazis forbid artistic, cultural, and educational activities, and how did Jews resist this?
- How might viewing artwork by female artists in the Ghettos affect your understanding of life, roles, and challenges Jewish women faced in the Ghettos?
- What can we learn from Holocaust-era artworks that written documents might not convey?

- How do the artists express suffering, identity, and resilience through composition, color, and materials?
- What differences do you notice in the themes and perspectives of women artists?