

THE AUSCHWITZ EXPERIENCE

in the art of prisoners



On the ruins of the camp by Jerzy Potrzebowski, Poland 1961.

*I wanted the world to find out what
Auschwitz is.*

Elli Lieberman

Experiencing Auschwitz in Art by Former Prisoners Through the Image to History

**The International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust
The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum**

“The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners”

The Holocaust Education Center of the Champaign-Urbana Jewish Federation is pleased to host the exhibition entitled “The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners.” This exhibit presents the fate of the victims of the largest German concentration and extermination camp, KL Auschwitz, through the works of those who survived. Terrible living conditions, worrisome starvation, and continuous tiredness due to exhausting long-lasting work were the inherent elements of the camp's existence, accompanied by beating and constant humiliation. In their works, the former prisoners – artists – decided to make an attempt at presentation of this hell on earth prepared by the German Nazis.

The exhibit is comprised of artwork by twelve survivors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The 24-panel exhibit consists of 60 pieces that depict the experiences the survivors had during the Holocaust. This exhibit has never before been exhibited outside of Europe and is on loan from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim, Poland, and sponsored by the Holocaust Education Center of the Champaign-Urbana Jewish Federation.

One of the missions of the CU Jewish Federation (CUJF) is to teach about the Holocaust. This exhibit is a unique opportunity to educate people through art created by Holocaust survivors. The exhibit is especially meaningful to CUJF Executive Director Linda Bauer, as her mother was a survivor of Auschwitz.

Teachers and the general public will have the opportunity to learn about the history of the Holocaust and the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp through the exhibit. Teachers are welcome to bring their students to the exhibit to learn more about this significant event in human history.

For more information about the exhibit or if you are interested in hosting the exhibit contact:

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Historical Introduction

Appendix No. 1



In October 1939, after Poland lost the war, its western territory including Oświęcim was annexed into the Third Reich. The German occupation authorities changed the name of the city to Auschwitz. The same name was given to the concentration camp (Konzentrationslager – KL) that the SS founded in the spring of 1940 on the outskirts of town. June 14 of that year, when the Germans transported the first 728 Polish political prisoners from the penitentiary in Tarnów, is regarded as marking the opening of the camp.

At first, Auschwitz was a camp where the Germans sent Poles and a small number of Polish Jews. Beginning in mid-1941, citizens of other countries were also deported there. From the following spring, Jews were predominant. The conditions in KL Auschwitz contributed to a high mortality rate among the prisoners. They died of exhaustion caused by starvation and excessively hard labor. Another cause of death was disease that spread as a result of the woeful housing and sanitation. Furthermore, the SS beat prisoners ruthlessly and inflicted other harrowing punishments on them for the slightest violation of camp rules. The most debilitated were put to death by phenol injection to the heart or in the gas chambers. Many others were executed by shooting or hanging. The majority of the executions by shooting—these were mostly Poles—took place at the so-called Death Wall in Auschwitz I, the main camp. In addition to all of this, SS doctors subjected prisoners, particularly Jews, to various types of medical experiments that resulted in the death or permanent mutilation of many.

From 1942, KL Auschwitz and especially its second component, Birkenau, functioned as a center for the extermination of Jews deported by the German authorities out of racist motives. They were deported from the territories of Slovakia, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Yugoslavia of the time, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Norway, Greece, Italy, and Hungary. Over time, Auschwitz II-Birkenau became the largest extermination center. When transports arrived, SS doctors carried out selections that sent the majority of the deportees to their death. Only a small minority were classified as fit for labor and sent to the camp. The SS led those who had been selected to die to the gas chambers, where they were killed with the aid of Zyklon B. This preparation took the form of granules of diatomaceous earth saturated with hydrogen cyanide that when exposed to air caused death by asphyxiation.

When the chambers were opened, prisoners forced to labor in the Sonderkommando removed the corpses and incinerated them in crematory furnaces and also, at times of increased frequency of arriving transports, in burning pits. Before doing so, they cut the hair off the corpses, pulled off their jewelry, and ripped out their gold teeth.

During the whole period that KL Auschwitz existed, the Germans deported about 1.3 million people to the camp, comprising 1.1 million Jews, 140 - 150,000 Poles, 23,000 Roma, at least 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and about 25,000 prisoners of other ethnic origins, including Czech, Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, French, and Yugoslavian (Croatian, Serb, Slovene). A total of about 1.1 million people met their death in Auschwitz—almost a million Jews, 70 - 75,000 Poles, about 21,000 Roma, more than 14 thousand Soviet prisoners of war, and more than 10 thousand prisoners of other ethnic origins.

As a consequence of the extermination operations, Auschwitz became the scene of plundering on an enormous scale. Jews were usually informed before deportation that they were going to a new place of settlement and were given permission to take along baggage containing clothing, personal effects, items of everyday use, and specialist materials, equipment, and tools. After arriving at the camp, they had to leave their baggage on the ramp, and they left their clothes behind when they entered the gas chamber. The confiscated property was delivered to warehouses known as Kanada. Clothing, shoes, luxury items, domestic utensils, and various equipment, tools, and materials in good condition were transferred to German organizations, institutions, and various segments of the population.

The growth of KL Auschwitz reached its peak in 1944. In August, there were over 105,000 registered prisoners, mostly Jews, in its three principal components—the main camp, Birkenau, and Monowitz—and more than forty sub-camps. There were approximately thirty thousand more Jews in so-called transit camps who had not been entered in the records. This same year saw the high point of extermination at Auschwitz. The Germans deported over 600 thousand Jews to the camp, mainly from Hungary and occupied Poland. Until the moment when extermination ceased in late October, the decided majority of them were murdered in the gas chambers.

In the last months of 1944, with the success of the Red Army and the approach of the front lines to KL Auschwitz, the SS authorities transferred about sixty-five thousand prisoners into the depths of the Reich. They also began covering up the traces of the crimes they had committed. They burned records, above all the files and rosters of prisoners, and the lists of names of deported Jews. They liquidated pits containing human remains on the grounds of Birkenau. They dismantled the installations and equipment in gas chambers and crematoria II and III, and dispatched some items into the depths of the Reich. The crematorium IV building, damaged during the revolt of the Sonderkommando, was also pulled down. Only crematorium V, where the corpses of deceased prisoners continued to be burned, was left. Property plundered from murdered Jews and collected in the Kanada warehouses was shipped to Germany. The hastiness of these actions and the rapid progress of the Soviet offensive in January 1945 made it impossible for the Germans to remove all the evidence of crime and ship out all the property.

Faced with the approaching front, the SS authorities decided in mid-January 1945 to evacuate KL Auschwitz. SS men led about fifty-six thousand prisoners out of the camp and the sub-

camps, forcing them to walk several dozen kilometers in arduous winter conditions. The main routes of the march led to Wodzisław Śląski and Gliwice, from where the prisoners were carried onward by train. Some of them covered the whole way to their destination on foot, such as, for example, 3,200 prisoners from the Neu-Dachs sub-camp who were forced to walk 250 kilometers to the Gross-Rosen camp. Only about 2,200 prisoners from the Laurahütte and Eintrachthütte camps were carried directly to their destination by train, to Mauthausen on January 23 and 24.

In the course of the evacuation, the SS shot prisoners who became too fatigued to continue on the march, as well as those who tried to escape. About three thousand people perished in Upper Silesia and Opole Silesia, and it is estimated that, overall, between nine and fifteen thousand KL Auschwitz prisoners died during evacuation.

At the same time, SS men from the camp garrison also withdrew, taking with them some of the plundered property as well as some of the records, including those of the Political Department (the camp Gestapo). The majority of the documentation, however, was burned in the heating stoves in camp offices or in bonfires outside the blocks. Because of the haste accompanying these actions and the relaxation of discipline among members of the camp garrison, some documents were not destroyed. Prisoners contributed to the survival of some of them by sabotaging orders from the SS. For example, about thirty-nine thousand negatives of mugshots of camp inmates, taken for the files, were saved. The prisoners assigned to burn them smothered the fire in the stove and prevented their destruction. Next, they boarded up the door, assuming—correctly as it turned out—that the SS men would not have time to open it.

About nine thousand prisoners remained in the whole Auschwitz complex. A significant number of them were sick or physically debilitated and incapable of marching. Many of the inmates were convinced that the Germans intended to murder them all. It is not definitively known whether such an order was issued, but nevertheless it is a fact that the SS carried out a mass execution in Birkenau, killing about three hundred Jewish prisoners as well as several Soviet prisoners of war. The majority of those left behind in the camp survived, however. This was probably owing to the loosening of discipline among the SS and the hurry in which they left KL Auschwitz. On January 20, shortly after the completion of evacuation, the SS men remaining in the camp blew up the buildings of gas chambers and crematoria II and III. On that same day, they also made their final attempt at carrying off the property collected in the Birkenau warehouses known as Kanada. Unable to take away the loot, SS men set fire to the storage facilities the following day. They were almost totally destroyed by a fire that burned for several days and, for a time, endangered other parts of the camp as well. On January 26, SS men blew up the building of crematorium V, the last one in operating condition.

In addition to the sick and debilitated, a group of prisoners in relatively good condition remained in the camp. They had managed to hide at the time of evacuation. Some of them, mostly from among the medical personnel, enjoyed a certain degree of authority. They attempted to bring the prevailing chaos under control and organize the prisoners' lives. Special protection was extended to children, especially those who were in the camp without their parents. It is probable that several hundred prisoners attempted to escape in the last days before liberation, but the number who succeeded or failed, or died trying, is not known.

The Red Army, encountering resistance from withdrawing German units, entered the city of Oświęcim on January 27, 1945. More than 230 Soviet soldiers fell in the fighting for liberation. About seven thousand prisoners held out until they were liberated in Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and Auschwitz-III Monowitz. About five hundred others were liberated in the sub-camps before or shortly after January 27.

Medical care for the prisoners remaining on the grounds of the liberated camp was organized in the form of several Soviet field hospitals and a hospital run by Polish Red Cross volunteers who arrived mostly from Cracow and the vicinity. About 4,500 former prisoners, including four hundred children, received treatment. Prisoners in relatively good physical condition departed from KL Auschwitz immediately after liberation and headed home either on their own or in organized transports. The majority of the patients in the hospital also set out for their homes after several months of treatment.

Historians have established that 1.3 million people of more than twenty ethnicities were transported to KL Auschwitz while the camp was in operation. Four hundred thousand of them were registered and imprisoned in the concentration camp as prisoners. Persecuted on racial grounds, Jews accounted for 85 percent of all those deported. Of the total of 1.3 million people deported to KL Auschwitz, at least 1.1 million—90 percent of whom were Jews—perished.

A Description of Artistic Creativity by Prisoners

Appendix No. 2

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum holds the world's largest collection of art connected with the Auschwitz camp—unique on a global scale. The works of art, created in conditions of extreme peril, represent an extraordinary, moving document of time and history. By the same token, feelings and emotions that accompanied the prisoners every day, which are difficult to capture today, can be discovered in them. It is precisely because of this tremendous historical and emotional value that the camp art constitutes a universal message that is comprehensible to every beholder.

Many members of the Polish intelligentsia, regarded by the Germans as especially dangerous because they could organize and lead the resistance movement, were locked up behind the gates of the Auschwitz camp. Among them were a good many professional artists. The first transport that arrived in Auschwitz in 1940 already included the people who initiated art in the camp: Xawery Dunikowski, Jan Kowski, Franciszek Targosz, Adam Bowbelski, Jan Machnowski, Marian Kołodziej, Włodzimierz Sewerski, Tadeusz Myszkowski, Bronisław Czech, Izidor Łuszczek, and many others. More members of the Polish art world arrived later, and artists of other ethnicities, above all Jews, were present from 1942. The latter, of course, had far fewer opportunities for creative work. As long as the camp was in operation, the authorities treated Jews with all possible ruthlessness, and at times with refined cruelty. Their lives, for the SS, were the least valuable. To the greatest extent, they fell victim to hunger, cold, labor beyond their strength, unremitting harassment and mistreatment, and the constant resumption of various extermination campaigns. Nevertheless, there were also Jews who continued their creative work in the camp, and some of their work has survived until today.

Among the Museum collections there are works made officially in the camp (commissioned by the SS, at times for the Camp Museum—the Lagermuseum—that the Germans set up), works made illegally in secret, and postwar works by former prisoners that serve as a kind of account of events there and as an attempt at overcoming the trauma of the camp.

Work commissioned by the SS consisted above all of instructional drawings, models, and images presenting the expansion of the camp, illustrations of the course of diseases and medical experiments, and various artistic craft items made to meet the needs of the camp authorities. The SS men also exploited prisoners' talents for private purposes, demanding works from them that were unconnected to camp themes (mostly landscapes, scenes of everyday life, artistic craft-work, and small carvings) that they sent home through unofficial channels.

The majority of the artworks created inside the camp fence, however, were made illegally, using material “stolen” from SS offices or workshops. Portraits of prisoners were the most numerous. Works unconnected with camp themes (genre scenes, landscapes, and greeting cards) made up a large segment, along with small craft items.

We do not know how many works of art originated in the camp. Some were destroyed by SS men or by the prisoners themselves because they were afraid to hold onto them (especially in the case of drawings depicting the realities of the camp). Many works were lost during the

evacuation of the camp or in the first months after liberation. Those that survived and are now part of the Museum collections nevertheless demonstrate that their number was significant.

The motives for creating art varied, but were always deeply rooted in the reality of the camp. Some prisoners made art to distract themselves from the nightmare surrounding them, as a way of protecting their endangered psyches, or as a way of conveying on canvas or paper the things they saw. Still others painted or sculpted in order to win an additional chunk of bread.

Art played a very important role in rescuing human dignity. For artists, in the camp situation, art became the essence of their personhood. It helped maintain the intellectual acuity and mental equilibrium that were so vital in the struggle to survive in the most extreme situations. It was one of the ways of expressing powerful emotions and also an embodiment, dictated by normal human sensibility, of the need for the beautiful.

Art also manifested the profound human need to leave something of oneself behind. It was the prisoners' hope that, even if they died, there would remain a sketch or object that witnessed to their suffering.

Art could save the lives of prisoners, but it could also lead to their death. For a skillfully made birthday card or portrait of an SS man or capo, a prisoner might obtain an additional portion of soup or avoid backbreaking labor—or, for the very same thing, risk a beating, humiliation, the penal company, or even death.

The exhibition presents, for the most part, sketches and paintings done after the war by former prisoners. Drawing and painting in Auschwitz were associated with tremendous danger. Revealing what happened in the camp was forbidden. In one of his first orders, Commandant Rudolf Höss forbade SS men from taking photographs on the grounds of the camp. Those that were taken, mostly to meet the needs of the construction department, do not show the whole truth about the camp—the prisoners in them are well dressed and well treated. This makes the extant works by prisoner-artists, who show us history from the inside, from the perspective of the inmates, all the more valuable. Their drawings, sketched hastily and secretly, are in most cases records of shocking facts and incidents. Some of these drawings were surely made in the hope that they would endure as tangible proof of the crimes committed in KL Auschwitz, even if their creators themselves did not survive. The discovery of works of this kind by the SS inevitably incurred beating, jailing, the penal company, and even the death of the artists themselves.

Yet prisoners drew sketches of this kind almost from the first days of the camp. Aware of the danger hanging over them, the inmates who documented the reality of the camp sought ways of concealing their drawings. Some works, buried in the ground or stashed in the nooks and crannies of barracks and other buildings, were lost forever. The ones that survived in the greatest numbers were those smuggled out of the camp. Prisoners relied on the help of civilian workers or nearby residents. Drawings with dangerous subject matter were carried out inside the frames of bicycles, between wooden beams on wagons, or under layers of clothing. Some prisoners held on to their sketches, hiding

them under their straw mattresses at night and tying them with string under their striped uniforms during the day. Treated as the greatest of treasures, these drawings sometimes accompanied their owners on the long road through various concentration camps and death marches until the end of the war came at last.

Among the holdings of the Auschwitz Museum, there are three larger collections of drawings, depicting the reality of the camp, by Włodzimierz Siwierski, Mieczysław Kościelniak, and the unknown artist who used the initials MM. Other artists who represented the reality of Auschwitz in individual drawings are Franciszek Wiczorkowski, Wincenty Gawron, Janina Tollik, and Halina Ołomucka, as well as others whose works have not survived, like Eli Libermann-Schiber or Alfred Kantor (both of whom recreated from memory, after the war, sketches that they had drawn in the camp).

The artists who survived tried to convey on canvas or paper the magnitude of the tragedy and the horrifying reality of camp life. They produced works, and sometimes whole cycles, in which we can see the conditions under which the prisoners existed, standing at roll call, the appalling sanitation, the hunger, the punishments, the humiliation, and emotions like dread, despair, and helplessness. The full presentation in art of these themes will never be possible, but given the scantiness of the extant photographic material, artworks by former prisoners have fundamental importance.

List of Artists and Panel Location of their Work

Jerzy Adam Brandhuber – Panels: 2, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19, 20

Isaac Celnikier – Panel: 22

Wincenty Gawron – Panel: 9

Jan Kowski – Panels: 3, 4, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20

Mieczyslaw Koscielaniak – Panels: 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17

Ella Liberman-Shiber – Panel: 19

Halina Olomucka – Panels: 4, 19

Jerzy Potrzebowski – Panels: 1, 2, 6, 8, 16

Francis Reisz – Panels: 16, 17, 20

Wladyslaw Siwek – Panels: 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

Walter Spitzer – Panels: 5, 14, 17

Janina Tollik – Panels: 5, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16

JERZY ADAM BRANDHUBER



Born in Cracow on October 23, 1897. He studied at the Cracow Fine Arts Academy under Józef Mehoffer, one of the most renowned painters of the day. Brandhuber had to interrupt his studies when he was conscripted into the Austrian army, where he served for five years. After the end of the First World War, he returned to the Academy and graduated in 1924. Over the following years, he taught at the *gymnasium* in Jasło while continuing to paint and exhibit. His themes were highly varied, comprising portraits, female nudes, still life, landscapes, and cityscapes. He usually worked in oil paint, charcoal, or ink. During the occupation, he became an active member of a clandestine underground organization. He was working at the time as a cashier in a commercial co-operative, which enabled him to make a wide range of contacts. He was deported to KL Auschwitz from the prison in Tarnów on February 14, 1943. He was assigned to work in the prisoner clothing warehouse and in the small kommando known as the “painting shop,” where the things he painted included prisoner triangles, armbands for functionaries, and red stripes on civilian clothing. While he was in Auschwitz, he maintained contact with the camp resistance movement, which commissioned him to design a future monument commemorating the martyrdom of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoners. He also painted illegal portraits of his fellow prisoners. In late October 1944, he was transferred to KL Sachsenhausen. During an evacuation march, he was liberated by the U.S. Army on May 3, 1945. He spent his first months of freedom in the German city of Lübeck. He sketched the local architecture and exhibited his work for the first time after the war. He returned to Cracow in 1946 and continued his artistic career. His work made reference to his experiences in the concentration camps. His series of drawings titled *Oświęcim* depicts tragic incidents in a way that is fragmentary and symbolic rather than documenting the particular scenes, but that nevertheless captures them precisely. Here there are no individual faces or figures, but instead symbols: hands, caps, shoes. Brandhuber worked on the cycle for six months, painting without interruption, barely ever leaving home, living through the nightmare anew. He later returned to the subject repeatedly, creating about 80 paintings and drawings portraying the torments of the camp. Brandhuber perpetuated the truth about Auschwitz with his pen as well as his paintbrush, holding the position of curator at the State Museum in Oświęcim from 1947. For many long years, he concentrated on research and writing about the history of the camp, and lived on the grounds until his death. During the entire period of his career and after retirement he was deeply committed to the mission of the Museum. He was active as an artist until the end of his life, painting flowers, female nudes, and portraits of his friends. He died in Oświęcim on June 19, 1981.

Works presented on panels:

2. *Arrival of a transport at the ramp*, Poland, 1949
10. *Wheelbarrows*, Poland, 1946
a camp road built, Poland, 1946
11. *From work*, from the series, *Oświęcim*, Poland, 1950
13. *Roll call – July 1943*, Poland, 1946
18. *Separating families*, from the series *The ramp*, Poland, 1949
19. *The descent to the gas chamber*, Poland, 1949
20. *Pile of corpses*, Poland, 1949

IZZAK CELNIKIER - painter, draughtsman and graphic artist.

Born in 1923 in Warsaw to a poor Jewish family. He was raised in the orphanage run by Janusz Korczak. From 1941 till 1943 he was in the Bialystok ghetto, where most of his family perished. After the liquidation of the ghetto in 1943, he was sent to the prison in Łomża city, from where, after a few months, he was deported to the Stuthof Concentration, and then to KL Auschwitz. In January 1945, due to the evacuation of the camp, he was sent on a death march deep into the Reich. He was held in the biggest camps in Germany such as Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen, and Flossenburg. On his way to Dachau, he was wounded in the leg as a result of Allied aircraft firing on the train. At the end of April, American soldiers found him among dead and wounded prisoners.

On his way back to Poland, he was arrested at the Czech border, accused of treason, and imprisoned in the Soviet camp in Sumperk, from which he escaped to Prague two days before being sent to the camps.

In 1946-1951 he studied at the Prague School of Applied Arts. In 1952, he returned to Warsaw where he took an active part in the artistic life of the city. He contributed significantly to the organization of the National Exhibition of Young Visual Arts "Against War - Against Fascism", where he received an award for his painting "Ghetto". In 1957, he received a month-long scholarship in Paris, where he decided to stay permanently as a result of rising antisemitism in Poland. He lived in France until he died on November 11, 2011.

Isaac Celnikier's work is largely devoted to his experiences in the ghetto and concentration camps. He painted poignant, monumental paintings, speaking about the extermination of the Jewish nation. They are extremely authentic and suggestive because they were painted by an artist who was a participant of those events and saw everything with his own eyes. With a spot full of expression, Celnikier describes executions, burying of the bodies, and the drama of mothers separated from their children. His paintings, filled entirely with silhouettes of emaciated, frightened people, realize the enormity of the crime.

The Triptych: **Birkenau, Kaddish, Ashes** - these large-format works, held in the Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial, are among the artist's most famous works.

PANEL:

22 Triptych *Birkenau*, France, 1998-2002

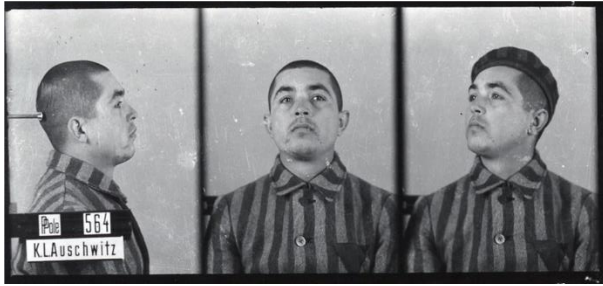
WINCENTY GAWRON

Born in Stara Wieś, near Limanowa, on January 28, 1908. He attended the State School of Decorative Arts in Lwów. After attending a school in Cracow, he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1935. The outbreak of the Second World War compelled him to break off his artistic education. He joined a clandestine military organization almost immediately. He was deported to KL Auschwitz from the prison in Tarnów on April 4, 1941. He first labored in the Abbruch kommando, demolishing houses in the vicinity, and then in the carpentry and woodworking kommandos. He designed decorations for various carved objects, handles for letter openers, jewelry boxes, and other items made by his fellow prisoners in the camp woodworking shop. He cooperated with the camp museum. His work had a wide range of subject matter. He painted and drew portraits, landscapes, and studies of animals. He worked to order for SS men but also made works on such strictly forbidden themes as Polish national symbols and depictions of the tragic reality of the camp, as well as caricatures mocking members of the camp garrison. While in Auschwitz, he took precise, detailed notes on the tribulations of everyday life. In connection with a planned escape in April 1942, he took shelter in the camp hospital and then volunteered for labor in the Harmęże sub-camp, where he made his getaway on May 16. He managed to take along his diary as well as portraits and caricatures sketched by himself and his fellow prisoners. He concealed these works in a specially hollowed-out piece of wood on which Izydor Łuszczek had carved the head of a Polish mountaineer. Even before the end of the occupation, Gawron worked up his notes in the form of a memoir. It numbers several hundred pages and is a unique document revealing the truth about Nazi crimes. After escaping from the camp, he went into hiding near his hometown of Limanowa, where he organized a unit of the Home Army. He became its commander and adopted the pseudonym of Kowalewski. He fought in the Warsaw Uprising. He was captured by the Germans, and only in the spring of 1945 was he liberated by the Allies at the Murnau prisoner-of-war camp. After the war, he emigrated to the United States. After employment as a maker of stained glass and a lettering artist, he worked at the Museum of the Polish Army in Chicago, which he founded himself and which had its headquarters in his home. There, he presented his own collection of several thousand exhibits—mementos connected with the Polish army that he had amassed over many years. His publications were prolific. He contributed short stories to Polish emigré periodicals and memoirs that, for the most part, he illustrated himself. Another of his books, *Volunteer for Oświęcim*, dedicated to Witold Pilecki, was published posthumously. He frequently returned to camp themes in his artistic output, as exemplified by a powerful painting, *Roll Call in the Concentration Camp*, based on a sketch made while he was in Auschwitz. Wincenty Gawron died in Nowy Sącz, where he holidayed each year, on August 25, 1991. He was buried in the soil of his homeland, in the military quarter of the cemetery in Limanowa.

Work Presented on panel:

9. *Roll call (painting sketch) After the escape from KL Auschwitz, 1942*

JAN KOMSKI



Born in Byrcza on February 3, 1915. He studied in the Painting Department of the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow. Before the war, he worked as a conservator of church art. He was arrested in Slovakia while attempting to reach Hungary and imprisoned by the Gestapo in Muszyna, Nowy Sącz, and Tarnów. He was deported to KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1940, under the name "Jan Baraś." He was employed first in camp construction, and then in the Bauleitung kommando where he worked on a map of the grounds of the camp. In addition, he was a member of the Union of Military Organization (ZOW) resistance group founded by the cavalry officer Witold Pilecki. On November 28, 1943, Komski and three of his fellow prisoners escaped from the camp, taking along with them some of the Arbeitseinsatz (labor assignment) records and a list of people murdered in the camp hospital. Copies of documents contained annotations touching on the fate of sixteen thousand prisoners. After obtaining an identity card in the name of Józef Nosek, Komski made his way to Cracow. He was arrested there during a roundup at the railway station. After seven months' confinement in the Montelupich prison, he was once again deported to KL Auschwitz on October 1, 1943. The SS failed to associate him with his previous identity of Jan Baraś, and as Józef Nosek he was given a new number. He volunteered for transfer to KL Buchenwald, where he again attempted to escape. He was imprisoned in Dresden, Leipzig, Halle and St. Michael's and Montelupich prisons in Cracow. In 1944, now under his real name, he was sent to KL Gross-Rosen. He was liberated in KL Dachau on April 29, 1945. He remained in Germany, living in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Bavaria, where he married in the fall of 1945. In that same year, he published an album of drawings titled *Behind the Barbed Wire*. He designed a series of postage stamps issued on the first anniversary of the liberation of KL Dachau. He was an active member of the German Artists' Union and the Association of Polish Artists in Munich. In 1946, he emigrated with his wife and daughter to the United States and went to work for *The Washington Post* as an advertising illustrator. Aside from the job, he followed his avocation of painting, creating landscapes and works connected with camp themes. He was a respected artist, and exhibitions of his works were opened in Munich, London, Chicago, Houston, New York, and Washington. He died in the United States on July 20, 2002.

Works presented on panels:

3. *Job for men in the women's camp*, USA, 1990-1997
Tattooing numbers in the women's camp, USA, 1970-1980
4. *Identification*, USA, 1990-1997
A face from the women's camp, USA, 1970-1980
12. *Post punishment (in the attic at block 11)*, USA, 1970-1980
13. *The last favor*, Germany, 1945
15. *Ecce homo*, USA, 1970-1980
17. *Mother's Tragedy*, Germany, 1945
18. *Train to Auschwitz*, USA, 1990-1997
Goodbye my dear, USA, 1990-1997
20. *The Cemetery*, Germany, 1945

MIECZYŚLAW KOŚCIELANIAK



Born in Klalisz on January 29, 1912. He studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow from 1931 to 1936. He was deported to KL Auschwitz from the prison in Kalisz on May 2, 1945. He labored in various kommandos demolishing houses, in the SS warehouses, and in the printing shop. He practiced graphics and painting both illegally and on commission from the SS Lagermuseum. Thanks to this, he produced a whole series of drawings in Auschwitz that documented the reality of the camp. They show us the return from work during which prisoners carried their dead friends to the barracks, the hours-long roll-call assemblies, and the heart-rending stages of human starvation. One of the ways the sketches were smuggled out of the camp was to hide them in sacks of dirty clothes that were taken under SS escort to a laundry, where they were retrieved by the staff. He was transferred to KL Mauthausen on January 18, 1945, and liberated in Ebensee on May 6 of that same year. He returned to Poland and settled in Warsaw, where as early as 1946 he created several series of works on such camp subjects as *The Male Prisoner's Day* and *The Female Prisoner's Day*, which were published in the *Catalog of Graphic Art by Mieczysław Kościelniak*. He was one of the curators of the museum that was being set up on the grounds of the former KL Auschwitz. Furthermore, as a graphic artist he created book illustrations, mosaics, stained glass, and drawings. He showed his work at numerous exhibitions in Poland and elsewhere. For his proactive artistic career, he was decorated with the Gold Cross of Merit. He died in Słupsk on March 5, 1993.

“In 1942, the desire arose in me to a certain degree to perpetuate events in the camp. At that time, I sketched the corpses of my fellow prisoners lying outside the camp kitchen. I am unable to say what became of those sketches.”

Works presented on panels:

7. *Inside a men's barracks – Birkenau*, Poland, 1972
- Night*, from the series *A female prisoner's day*, Poland, 1972
9. *The evening roll call*, Poland, 1950
10. *Work – wheel barrows*, Poland, 1950
11. *Returning from work*, from the series *A prisoner's day*, Poland, 1950
14. *Hunger*, Poland, 1972
15. *Deadly injections by SS man Klehr*, Poland, 1970
17. *A mother and a murdered child*, Poland, 1946

**Elli Shiber – Lieberman / Grünkraut in camp/
Camp no. 74349**

Elli Lieberman was born on July 27, 1923 in Berlin to a wealthy family; her father Joshua Lieberman was a fur seller and her mother Rosa Lieberman was a midwife. Elli finished primary school in Germany. In 1938, due to racial persecutions in the Third Reich, Elli and her family had to move to Będzin in Silesia, where relatives from her mother's side lived. After the outbreak of the war, the whole family was sent to the Będzin ghetto. In order to protect themselves from deportation to extermination camps, they hid in different places in the ghetto: in the attic, in the basement, in a hiding place behind the wardrobe, and also under the garbage heap - in a hole dug one meter underground. However, at the end of 1943, their hiding place was discovered by Germans.

In January 1944 Ella, along with her mother, father, and younger brother, was sent to KL Auschwitz (Ella's older sister and older brother had been deported from the ghetto before). Upon arrival at the ramp, as a result of selection, the family was separated. Her father and brother were sent to the men's camp, where they died, while Elli and her mother were placed in the women's camp in Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Her hair was cut and the number 74 349 was tattooed on her arm. After 9 months, she was transferred to the sewing room. On January 13, 1945, she was evacuated deep into the Reich to the Ravensbrück and later Neustadt Gleve where she was liberated on May 2, 1945 by the Soviet Army.

After the war, she returned to Poland with her mother and lived in Bydgoszcz from 1945 to 1946. There she met her husband, a soldier of the Polish army of Jewish origin.

She survived mainly thanks to her artistic skills, making portraits for the SS. This gave her the chance to improve her living conditions in the camp, receiving extra food and doing lighter work. She also saved her mother, who was thus able to stay with her and use her privileges. This work also gave her the opportunity to secretly create drawings depicting the reality of the camp. She made them so that the world would know what Auschwitz was, even if she was murdered. She hid her drawings under a straw mattress. These works have not survived, but the author made faithful copies of them immediately after liberation in 1945-1946.

PANEL:

19 *In the front of the crematorium*, Poland, 1946

HALINA OŁOMUCKA

Born in Warsaw on November 24, 1919. When she was 18, she and her whole family found themselves behind the walls of the Warsaw ghetto. She was deported to KL Auschwitz on July 8, 1943, from the concentration camp at Majdaniak, where she had been sent after the fall of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. She was placed in the Birkenau women's camp. She worked in the Union-Werke factory, which manufactured ammunition. She made decorations and wrote proclamations and inscriptions for her block supervisor, receiving painting materials and additional bread. The possession of the material enabled her to covertly draw scenes of life in the camp. She managed to conceal a dozen or so of her works in cracks in the wall of the wooden barracks or underneath a brick in the floor. On February 17, 1945, she was sent to KL Ravensbrück, and from there to Neustadt-Glewe, where she was liberated on May 2, 1945. Within a short time, she decided to return to Warsaw. She could find neither her home nor any of those dearest to her in the completely destroyed city. She decided to begin a new life in Łódź, where she studied at the Higher School of Art from 1945 to 1950. After graduation, she emigrated to France where she continued working and exhibiting. Aside from the subjects of the ghetto, the concentration camp, and the "Death March," Ołomucka created works expressing the joy of life and the triumph of survival. In 1972, she moved to Israel with her husband Bolesław Ołomucki and her daughter Miriam. She died in 2007.

The Artist on Her Work

"My paintings resemble me. I paint what my insides suggest to me! Mine! I try to express that. By my lights there never comes a moment when a picture is born directly, on the basis of things seen. I look, I observe, and my brain holds on by reflection to what moved me or struck me. Then, and only then does the vision coalesce that I express using the artistic means available to me. It is therefore unimportant what I see; the important thing is what I feel. My painting is based on my imagination. The results may vary, more or less abstract, and at times completely free of abstraction. Abstract painting is comprehensible to the beholder only at the times when it is capable of assimilating the artist's intention, or of producing its own vision of the observed image. The essence of painting, without regard to form, is the emotional bond that depends on external and internal factors. My painting has been connected lately with associations relating mainly to my past. If it has become, perhaps, less accessible to the beholders, it has given me absolute, emotion-filled freedom."

Works presented on panels:

4. *Before selection*, 1965
19. *Entrance to the camp*

JERZY POTRZEBOWSKI

Born in Sandomierz on September 5, 1921. Deported to KL Auschwitz from the prison in Tarnów on May 24, 1943. Assigned to the painters' kommando (labor detail). Thanks to the help of his friend Franciszek Targosz, he began cooperating with the camp museum, where he sketched in his free time. Horses were his favorite subject. After several months, he was transferred to KL Buchenwald and later to one of its sub-camps. In the spring of 1945, he managed to escape during evacuation.

After returning to Poland, he enrolled in the Painting Department at the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow and graduated in 1950. He was hired as an assistant there thanks to the reputation his works earned in the exhibition titled *Youth in the Struggle for Peace*. He is known above all for his paintings of battle scenes (his work can be found in the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw). Aside from historical subjects, he painted landscapes, scenes from everyday life, and portraits. As an artist and former prisoner, he was named in the early 1950s to the team working on the exhibition at the State Museum in Oświęcim. He died on May 28, 1974.

Works presented on panels:

1. *On the ruins of the camp*, Poland 1961.
 2. *A transport to Birkenau*, Poland, 1950
 6. *Going to sleep*, Poland, 1950
At Night, Poland, 1950
In the morning – Getting up, Poland, 1950
 8. *Cleaning one's self in the washroom*, Poland, 1950
Latrines in Auschwitz, Poland, 1950
 16. *Loading the sick onto a vehicle*, Poland, 1950
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FRANCIS REISZ

Born in Vienna on April 3, 1909. He was arrested in Paris in July 1941 for racial reasons. Initially held in the Pithiviers camp, he was deported to Auschwitz on June 27, 1942. He was employed in Birkenau as a scribe in the Arbeitseinsatz (slave labor assignment bureau). He produced artistic work on commission from the SS (several of his works hung on the walls of camp offices) and unofficial portraits and greeting cards for his fellow prisoners. In January 1945, he was evacuated to KL Mauthausen, and from there to Ebensee, where he was liberated by the U.S. Army. While convalescing in a Paris hospital, he produced a series of drawings as illustrations for the book *Reminiscences of Auschwitz*. Next, he moved to the United States. He lived in New York and was active in the fields of applied graphics and art. He died in 1984.

Works presented on panels:

16. *Transportation to the gas*, Paris, 1945
17. *Children's prams*, Paris, 1945
20. *Birkenau*, France, 1945

WLADYSŁAW SIWEK



Born in Niepołomice on April 14, 1907. He attended gymnasium in Cracow. After graduating in 1926, he did a year's military service in the Reserve Infantry Officer Cadet School. He was an employee of the State Railway District Directorate in Cracow. He was arrested in Niepołomice on February 14, 1940, on charges of resistance movement organizing and was deported to KL Auschwitz from Montelupich prison in Cracow on October 8, 1940. In the camp, he worked in the painting shop (Bauleitung) as a lettering artist, painting warning signs, notices on bulletin boards in warehouses and stables, signboards, armbands for capos and block supervisors, and so on. He was also employed painting walls, window frames, floors, and various equipment delivered to the painting shop. Taking advantage of his talent, various SS men ordered art works from him, such as scenes from daily life, portraits, or enlargements from photographs. Secretly, he used the occasion to also make portraits of his fellow prisoners. In 1943, he was transferred to the Baubüro kommando, where he and two other prisoners were assigned to make a plaster model of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. He also made illustrations of the expansion of the camp, which had an influence on his excellent familiarity with the topography. In late October 1944, he was transferred to Oranienburg. On May 3, 1945, he was liberated by U.S. Army troops during an evacuation march. After the war, he returned to Poland and took up residence in Warsaw, where from 1947 to 1950 he painted about a dozen pictures for exhibition in the newly formed Auschwitz Museum. They constitute a faithful characterization of life in the camp. In later years, he made illustrations of animals, mainly birds, for the Nature Protection League. These were used in encyclopedias, atlases, school textbooks, and publications for a general readership. He died in Warsaw on March 27, 1983.

Works presented on panels:

2. . Zugang, Poland, 1949
3. *Beginning of agony*, Poland, 1950
9. *Christmas Eve*, Poland, 1948
10. *Digging the foundation for block 15*, Poland, 1948
11. *The penal company returning from work*, Poland, 1949
12. *Flogging*, Poland, 1948
13. *The Death Wall*, Poland, 1948-1950
14. *Picking up of spilled soup*, Poland, 1950

WALTER SPITZER

Born to a Jewish family in Cieszyn on July 14, 1927. He was resettled in 1943 to Strzemieszyce, where he went to work for a photographer. Later, he was assigned to conscript labor in a factory, as a welder. He was deported to KL Auschwitz in 1943 and was sent directly to the Blechhammer sub-camp. He made use of his talent in order to survive, drawing numerous portraits and sketches that he traded for food. He also recorded the realities of the life of the prisoners. He was evacuated in the Death March to KL Gross Rosen, and subsequently to KL Buchenwald, where he escaped. He was liberated by the U.S. Army and served as a translator. In the last days of the war, he produced a series of twenty-three drawings that constituted a record of his camp experiences. He traveled to Paris, where he graduated from art school. His work was shown at numerous exhibitions in France, Israel, and the United States, among other countries. He won numerous prizes and distinctions for his art.

Works presented on panels:

- 5. *In the camp*, France, 1960
- 14. *Prisoners*, France, 1960
- 17. *Children*, France, 1960

JANINA TOLLIK



Born in Janów on September 4, 1910. She attended the three-year Fine Arts School in Grudziądz, graduating in 1930. She developed her talent further at the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow. She was active in clandestine work from the beginning of the occupation. She was deported to KL Auschwitz from Montelupich prison in Cracow on April 28, 1942. She was assigned to agricultural kommandos working in Babice, Pławy, and Harmęże, and to the penal company in Budy, where she worked at tasks including dredging fish ponds. She was involved in the camp resistance movement. Work in the parcel office enabled her to act as an intermediary in illegal correspondence and to allocate parcels to the neediest prisoners. She was transferred to KL Flossenbürg in October 1944. After escaping during a Death March on April 18, 1945, she was liberated by the French army and reached Belgium. She studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels from 1945 to 1947. It was there that she also began working on the *Oświęcim Cycle* to which she frequently returned later in life. She was active in the cultural and educational spheres and organized a school for Polish miners in Luxembourg and Belgium. She also worked as a teacher for a certain time. In late 1949, she decided to return to Poland. She took along paintings on camp themes, which she donated to the Museum in Oświęcim. She continued her work on paintings that supplemented the cycle dedicated to her experiences in the camp. She died in Warsaw on December 25, 1994.

The Artist on Her Work:

“I made my first sketch in Budy . . . I obtained paper and a pencil at that time, which was then my great treasure. I did not even have my own camp bowl at that time.”

“It was right here – in the penal company – that I began sketching certain scenes from camp life. I drew a range of landscapes of the gloomy surroundings of Oświęcim. I wanted to preserve those images in my memory. I drew – I kept studying those sketches and then secretly destroyed them.” She destroyed many of the sketches that she drew at that time because she had nowhere to keep them. Those that survived were concealed in the so-called “musical block” by her friends in the camp orchestra.

Works presented on panels:

5. *Mud everywhere*, Poland, 1946
7. *The only moment of rest*, Poland, 1949
8. *In the washroom in Brzezinka*, Poland, 1950
12. *Penal roll call*, 1945
15. *The first-class hospital*, 1945
16. *An antechamber to death*, Belgium, 1946



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