

Art in Extremis: Creative Resistance during the Holocaust

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Course Description:

This course surveys art produced in extremis during the Holocaust, by individuals in hiding, or in the camps and ghettos. We will explore how victims and witnesses used artistic expression as both a means of documentation and as a form of “creative resistance” to communicate their protest, despair or hope. Course readings couple secondary literature with primary sources and ego documents of the period, such as the artists’ own writings and diaries. Particular attention will be given to the social, political and cultural contexts of art production and reception. Throughout, we will examine the complex and varied responses artists had to their circumstances. What rhetorical or stylistic strategies did artists employ (satire, irony, etc.)? What themes and motifs did they gravitate towards? What genres (portraiture, still life, landscape) predominate and why? How is gender represented and how did gender impact artmaking? What is the relationship between aesthetics and atrocity? Our material ranges from now iconic works such as Charlotte Salomon’s *Life? Or Theater?* to unfamiliar works by little known or even anonymous artists; from “high” art to popular culture; and from the fine arts (sculpture, prints, painting) to visual culture more broadly defined, as evidenced in comic books, satirical cartoons, posters, illustrated stamps, board games, carved tools, jewelry, clothing, as well as the graffiti left on the walls of the camps.

Instead of writing a final paper, students will be curating their own digital art exhibition. After learning about artistic production during the Holocaust, students will think about how to curate and exhibit this material to the public in interesting, innovative and historically informed ways. Every exhibition tells a story; it crafts a narrative, using objects and images and text. What works of art and artifacts do you want to exhibit? How do you want to install them in the gallery? What kind of space do you think is most appropriate for your show? We will think about modes of presentation and installation as well as questions of ethics and point of view.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

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|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Class Participation | 20% |
| 2. | Oral presentation (formal analysis) | 20% |
| 3. | Digital Exhibition, including proposal and presentation | 60% |

Oral Presentation: Formal Analysis or Object Biography - Select one work of art and conduct a formal analysis, considering medium, size, scale, technique, content, style and composition. Present your work to the class in a recorded video (max. 10 min), offering reflections on the work's historical significance, the artist's background and possible meanings. Discussions on the presentations to follow in class.

Writing a curatorial statement:

After you have identified the basic idea or theme of your exhibition, you will submit a **proposal**, no later than mid-semester (**Week 8**). Your proposal should include:

- a title
- rationale or curatorial statement of intent
- a list of selected works
- annotated bibliography including at least 5 sources

A well-written curatorial statement is your chance to guide the way the audience perceives your exhibition. It represents an opportunity to communicate directly with viewers and help them recognize your intent and purpose in your body of work, understand your point of view, and generate intrigue and curiosity about the body of work they are about to experience.

Approaching the introduction to the exhibition is like tackling any typical research essay. First, grab the audience's attention and provide some sort of thesis statement concerning the exhibition. What is the main goal of the exhibition? To back up a thesis statement consider what piece of art to include. The pieces of work on display do not exist in a vacuum. Like providing textual quotes to argue a literary essay, art historians use 'art' as their evidence to argue their thesis as well as providing primary and secondary sources. It is best to introduce some of these major works of art

in the introduction. The introduction should provide historical and thematic context for the exhibit. The word limit is 400 - 600 words. Do not exceed this.

Once approved, you will upload the following documents to the template:

- selected works
- wall texts
- labels

At the end of the semester, you will present your exhibition to the class in an oral presentation and then submit it (**Week 13-14**). All submissions will be evaluated and peer reviewed. I am available throughout the semester to meet with you and guide you. I encourage you to email me to discuss your topic and plans.

Examples from previous years are in a shared Google folder: These should help you figure out my expectations and give you a sense of how you might approach your projects in terms of subject matter, structure and style. I offer them to you as a model of what you can do with the exhibition. You may also choose to use Prexi or Sketch up (3d modelling for those with deep pockets and technical know-how), but I find that the template I have provided offers enough flexibility without overburdening you with technical aspect.

Referats and Seminar Papers: If you choose to write a referat or a seminar paper for this course, please let me know as soon as possible. A referat or seminar paper is in addition to the above-mentioned requirements, projects, and the final project but it can (and I imagine should) expand upon it. Referats: 8-10 pages. Seminar Papers: 15+ pages.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (March 23) – **Introduction: What is “Holocaust Art”?**

Submit a letter of introduction

- Pnina Rosenberg, “Art During the Holocaust,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*
- Stephen Feinstein, “Art and the Holocaust”:
https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Holocaust/Art_and_the_Holocaust

Week 2 (March 30) – **Facing the Holocaust: Portraits in Peril**

- **Select a work of art for your formal analysis. Submit for approval**

Readings:

- Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “The Complexities of Witnessing,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 123-147.
- Sybil Milton, “Art of the Holocaust: A Summary,” in Randolph L. Braham (Ed.), *Reflections of the Holocaust in Art and Literature* (City University of New York, 1990), pp. 147-152.

Recommended:

- Agata Pietrasik, “Feats of Material Resistance: Portraiture in the Concentration Camps,” in *Art in a Displaced World: Poland 1939-1949*
- Roma Sendyka, “Holocaust by Bullets: Expanding the Field of Holocaust Art”
- Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War* (Princeton, 2014), Ch. 9.
- Stephanie Benzaquen, “Mediums of Resistance: When Art Historians Look at the Art of Ghettos and Camps,” in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945)*, pp. 257-273.

Week 3 (April 6) –

Submit your ORAL PRESENTATION/ Formal Analysis to the FLIPGRID, Review and evaluate those submitted by your peers

Passover Break: April 9-18, NO CLASS

Week 4 (April 20) – **Art in Exile I: Responses to Entartete Kunst**

Readings:

- Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s White Crucifixion,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1991), pp. 138-153, 180-181.
- Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “The Artist as Refugee,” in *Art and Its Uses: The Visual Image and Modern Jewish Society*, ed. Mendelsohn and Cohen, New York, 1990.
- Eunice Lipton on Felix Nussbaum, ZEEK magazine

Websites:

<http://www.osnabrueck.de/fnh/english/default.asp>

<https://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Web/DE/Home/home.html>

<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/London-1938>

<https://www.lbi.org/1938projekt/1/mutual-aid-for-the-dispossessed>

Week 5 (April 27) – **Art in Exile II: Artists on the Run (Charlotte Salomon)**

Readings:

- Mary Felstiner, “Charlotte Salomon’s Inward-turning Testimony,” *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Hartman (1994)
- Griselda Pollock, “Crimes, Confession and the Everyday: Challenges in Reading” Charlotte Salomon’s *Leben? oder Theater? 1941–1942*,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 13 (2014)

Watch film: Franz Weisz, *Charlotte Salomon*, 2012

Websites: <http://www.jhm.nl/collection/themes/charlotte-salomon>

Week 6 (May 4) – **Art in Internment Camps** (Gurs, Milles, Compiègne, Drancy)

Readings:

- Pnina Rosenberg, “Mickey Mouse in Gurs,” *Rethinking History* (2002).
- Glenn Sujo, “Art in Transit,” *Legacies of Silence*
- Rachel Perry, “Drawn Out of Horror: Early Holocaust Graphic Narratives by Jewish Women Witnesses” in *Drawing Memory in Jewish Women’s Graphic Novels*, ed. Victoria Aarons (Wayne State University Press, 2023).

Week 7 (May 11) – Class discussion on the final project and tools needed for digital exhibition

Submit Curatorial Statement

Week 8 (May 18) – **Art in the Ghettos: Theresienstadt**

Submit list of works and labels

Readings:

- Langer, L. L., “Painters of Terezin,” in *Art in the Ashes, A Holocaust Anthology*, New York, 1995, pp. 663-689.
- Leo Haas, “The Affair of the Artists” in *Seeing through “Paradise”: Artists and the Terezin Concentration Camp*, exh. cat., Mass. College of Art, Boston, 1991.

Websites:

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-videos/video-toolbox/hevt-terezin-haas.html>

<http://www.bterezin.org.il/>

<https://www.jmberlin.de/fritta/en/>

Week 9 (May 25) – **Art in the Ghettos: Warsaw, Bialystok, Kovno**

Readings:

- Renata Piątkowska, “Elzbieta Nadel’s *Images from Home*,” *Miejsce*, 6/2020.
- Piotr Rypson, “What Do Those Images Want from Us?” Jewish Historical Institute (2020 - 2021). <http://blokmagazine.com/what-do-those-images-want-from-us-where-art-thou-gen-39-at-jewish-historical-institute/#sdfootnote1sym>
- Glenn Sujo, “Art in Ghettos,” *Legacies of Silence*

SHAVUOT: Sunday, June 1, NO Class

Week 10 (June 8) - **Art in the Concentration and Extermination Camps**

Submit Wall Texts

Readings:

- Mary Costanza, *Living Witness* (Free Press, 1982).

- Sybil Milton, *Art and Auschwitz*. In Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton. *Art of the Holocaust* (Routledge, New York, 1981).

Recommended:

- Glenn Sujo, “Muselmann: A Distilled Image of the Lager?” *Concentrationary Memories: Totalitarian Terror and Cultural Resistance*
- Dora Appel, “The Auschwitz Memorial Museum and the Gypsy Portraits” *Other Voices*, 2002.

Web sites:

<http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/works-of-art/>

<https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/museum-complex/art/collection.html>

Week 11 (June 15) – **Postwar Witnessing**

Readings:

- Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, *Judenmord: Art and the Holocaust in Postwar Germany* (Reaktion, 2018), ch. 1 and 2.
- Mirjam Rayner, “Zinovii Tolkachev’s Jesus in Majdanek” and “Flowers of Auschwitz”
- Rachel Perry, “A ‘Minor Art’: Early Holocaust Graphic Narratives,” *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* (December 2023): 131–157.
- “Survivor Artists and Artmaking in the late 1940s: Zofia Rozenstrauch” in *Survivors’ Toil: The First Decade of Documenting and Studying the Holocaust*, eds. Natalia Aleksion and Éva Kovács, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Vienna and University of Toronto Press (Fall 2024).

Week 12 (June 22) – **Digital Exhibition Student Presentations**

Students present their exhibitions to the class

Week 13 (June 29) – **Digital Exhibition Student Presentations**

Students present their exhibitions to the class

Students submit self-evaluations and peer-evaluations on the projects of their peers, due within a week after the last class.

Websites:

<https://www.buchenwald.de/815/>

<http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/works-of-art/>

http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/en_18_sztuka/

http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/museum/art_museum.asp

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/art/index.asp>

<http://www.ecoledeparis.org>

<http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/arts/art.htm>

<http://art.holocaust-education.net/>

<http://www.gfh.org.il/Eng/>

<http://www.bterezin.org.il/>

Agnieszka Sieradzka: The Art Collection of the Auschwitz Museum

<https://youtu.be/D0OIWjs7kak>. Begin at 12:12

Yehudit Shendar: The Holocaust: A perspective of an Art curator

<https://youtu.be/qTR6X9Ju0l4>

Yehudit Shendar exhibition at Yad Vashem POSTWAR:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB15XZrToNc>

Survey Books and Other Suggestions:

Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1993).

Stephanie Benzaquen, "Mediums of Resistance: When Art Historians Look at the Art of Ghettos and Camps," in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten* eds., Schoeps, Bingen and Botsch (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), pp. 257-273.

Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War*. Princeton, 2014. Chapter 9

Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton. *Art of the Holocaust*. Routledge, New York, 1981.

Mary S. Costanza, *The Living Witness: Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos*. The Free

Press, 1982.

Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg, “Curatorial Strategies in Yad Vashem Art Exhibitions,” *MOCAK Magazine*, 2018.

Luiza Nader, Piotr Słodkowski, “The History of Art in Poland and the Holocaust. Introduction,” *MIEJSCE* 2020, NR 6, 1/ 13: <http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/english-the-history-of-art-in-poland-and-the-holocaust-introduction/>

Miriam Novitch and Lucy Dawidowicz. *Art from the Concentration Camps, 1940-1945*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981.

Kyra Schuster, “The Art Collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.” Unpublished paper.

Yehudit Shendar, “Power and Fragility: The History of the Art Collection at Yad Vashem,” in *The Last Expression: Art and Auschwitz*. Edited by David Mickenberg, Corinne Granof, Peter Hayes. Glenn Sujo, *Legacies of Silence: The Visual Arts and Holocaust Memory*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2001.

James E. Young, “Regarding the Pain of Women Gender and the Arts of Holocaust Memory” in *PMLA* Vol. 124, No. 5 (Oct. 2009): pp. 1778-1786.

Art from the Holocaust, ex.cat. (Yad Vashem, Jewish Museum Berlin, 2016).
<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/art/index.asp>

Some examples of digital exhibitions students made:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1M2fKo2HRREpkXc7DeqSIcr1FDplav43K/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=112940052148378624075&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Marking

Time

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1gC9OfZBgQjCeObaFt4mvz_6QW48W8Wcpr0h1Bv9lITU/edit?usp=sharing

Gaming Fate

<https://prezi.com/view/Em94yxY73uAoNyISVOrw/>

Made im Landle

<https://prezi.com/view/FWDER59QcdSDxSMagMxY/>

Barbed Wire –

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CoutnP5X988wbGaaVC3zqDXY6RsMRorU5CwcTsw_C0Q/edit?usp=sharing

Forced Art and Silent Reality in Terezin

<https://prezi.com/view/fIOxikRX2MuRXdWHKuZP/>