

THE COLOR OF MEMORY:  
ART BY TWO DAUGHTERS OF THE HOLOCAUST

X gallery presents The Color of Memory, a collaboration by Julie Meetal and Veronique Jonas concerning the Holocaust, from x through x.

The x gallery presents a two-person collaboration, The Color of Memory, featuring distinct work by two Texas-based artists Julie Meetal and Veronique Jonas regarding a common theme: the Holocaust. Meetal's parents were in concentration camps, her mother at Auschwitz and her father, fighting with partisans of the Warsaw ghetto, was captured by the Germans. Jonas's parents escaped the island of Rhodes before the Germans sent Jews living there to the death camps. Meetal and Jonas's holocaust-themed work therefore reflects the experiences of the children of survivors who grew up in families that rarely talked about the Holocaust, and who came to understand that their family had survived an unspeakable trauma only in bits and pieces.

The artwork of this "second generation" of artists dealing with the Holocaust has a different psychological quality than the art or recollection of those who experienced the camps personally. While the mainstream of Holocaust studies continues to mandate that art reflects on the Holocaust by using minimalism to 'represent' the unspeakable or undecipherable character of the event, the art of 'second generation' survivors seeks out other ways of representation, to capture the reality of how the memory of the Holocaust has psychologically permeated their lives. In family life of survivors, the truth may only have come out indirectly, sporadically, to protect the teller from reliving the trauma. This indirect way of becoming aware of history results in a sense of being "haunted" by the past. Visually, Meetal expresses the indirect character of her personal 'experience' of the Holocaust by seeing her parents' experiences, while Jonas makes use of screen-memories, in which a traumatic past is made tolerable for awareness by seeing only reflections of it in the mirror of present events. Though making use of different visual-psychological devices, Meetal and Jonas's work both explore the problem of the long-term psychological impact of the Holocaust, while the events themselves have seem to be fading into history.

Julie Meetal uses multiple techniques to convey the manner in which the Holocaust continues to haunt her family life. In Papa tell me again... she tries to depict what her father went through, based on his memories, making use of Chagallian motifs to make his experiences in the Warsaw ghetto visual. More chilling still, in Death Walk, and again in Forest of Souls, Meetal, who paints late at night in her studio, saw figures emerge spontaneously from a treatment of pigment, as if she was being haunted by lost family members. She reports that "they came through the watercolor on the paper...I could see them and they could see me...reminding me not to forget." Technically, the ability to 'see things,' faces or figures, in highly factured surfaces, recommended by Leonardo de Vinci as a way to exercise the imagination, is now termed 'physiognomic perception,' and is known to be a common faculty among children and also survivors of trauma. Seeing such faces is also believed by neuroscientists to be hard wired into the human brain to protect us, as to see a bear in the bush rather than just a bush alerts us to and protects us from danger. Figures thus rise up as authentic 'ghosts' exemplifying that, sixty years after history's events, families still live with active, painful memories.

Veronique Jonas approaches the same theme from a different direction. Rather than see 'ghosts' at night in her studio, Jonas chose to revisit the Jewish Quarter on the Greek Island of Rhodes, where her parents lived until just before the Nazis evacuated all Jews living on the island. Though Jonas' parents "got out" before the Quarter was emptied of its traditional residents, this ancient 'home town' of her family is filled with shadows. With In the Shadows of Memory we see an image of an archway in the old Jewish Quarter, where the shadows hide a ghostly figure, representing lives lost, perhaps under that very archway, while a blooming bourganivillea helps her acknowledge that life goes on. In A Rainbow of Tears Jonas re-imagines the quaint fountain in the middle

of the main square of the Quarter, consisting of three seahorses, as an indirect memorial to the neighborhood's lost Jews: the fountain does not splash water but sheds tears. Nearby, café umbrellas morph into symbols of a present trying to shield itself against memories of past crimes. Again, in *The Wedding*, Jonas imaginatively welcomes Holocaust victims to her daughter's wedding, held in the same square with the same fountain. In addition to all the happy guests enjoying a day of new love, the ghosts of the square's former Jewish residents, represented by collage elements from black and white photos, join in the festivities, making it into a kind of memorial too. Generally, as in *Under the Bougainvillea of Time*, Jonas accepts the flowers of the present, but sadly meditates on the disappearing past. Overall, the visual devices employed in her work—using shadows, ghosts and resignified imagery—all suggest the aura of screen-memories, where indirection and allusion make memories bearable. In addition, verses from the *Mourners Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead, accompanies Jonas' paintings in the exhibition.

In the summer of 2003, Meetal visited the Treblinka death camp, where she was shown headstones from desecrated Jewish cemeteries which were used to pave local roads. Meetal viewed this act of desecration as an attempt to erase the history of the Jews from that part of the world. In response, Meetal has constructed a composite monument to restore these fallen stones as a memorial to the Holocaust dead. This monument will stand midway between Meetal and Jonas' works, to accentuate the common theme addressed by the artists. Encompassing ghosts, memories and fragments, *The Color of Memory* again exhorts a new generation to never forget the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust, and be reminded that these memories have become part of the fabric of the culture of America.

Julie Meetal and Veronique Jonas have each, individually, exhibited their work at a number of galleries and museums in Texas, throughout the U.S. and internationally. *The Color of Memory* is their first collaboration together.

the U.S. in 1964. Meetal studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, graduating in 1974, and worked in fashion design, while developing her painting. She has shown her work extensively, with solo exhibitions at Texas Christian University, Agora Gallery, New York, and the Dallas Center for Holocaust Studies. She lives and works in Mansfield, TX.

Veronique Jonas was born in 1952 in the Belgian Congo, her parents having emigrated from the Greek island of Rhodes. The family relocated to South Africa, where Jonas went to college. She moved to the U.S. in 1982. For the past 18 years, Jonas who lives in Dallas, has taught art, while pursuing her painting and designing ketubahs, Jewish marriage contracts. She has shown her work widely including a solo exhibition at Art in Encounter, Dallas, the Canton Museum of Art, and the International Yitzhak Exhibition, Akko, Israel.