

'We must never forget those lost in the Holocaust' say Suffolk artists

Danielle Lett finds out about the importance of using art to remember those we lost - nearly eight decades on

Today marks the annual International Holocaust Memorial Day.

It's been 78 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Nazi Germany's largest death camp - and, as Suffolk-based artist Monica Petzal of Printroom explains, it's important to remember those who have been affected by the horrors of genocide.

The daughter of German-Jewish refugees Harry and Laura Petzal, Monica says her family's generational trauma is the main influence in her art and what she does.

"My mother's family managed to get out quite early because they had resources and my grandmother spoke English," says Monica.

"She actually petitioned the Home Office to let my grandfather work as a dental surgeon. My father's family however weren't so lucky. They fled to Holland, and my father fled from there in 1939 on false papers and joined the British Army."

Monica's father lost his brother and sister-in-law, their three-year-old, one-year-old twins, and his mother in a concentration camp.

"My family barely ever talked about what happened but I think trauma is carried through generations. I never knew anything about my father's family who all died in Auschwitz."

"I think in particular I feel very strongly about it at the moment as I now have grandchildren who are similar ages to those babies who were killed, and I think about it a great deal."

Monica describes the genocide as 'absolutely central to her work', adding: "It's all very well for there to be films, books, and television shows, but making images in art galleries is another powerful way of conveying this story. Especially to an audience who may not be so immediately interested in a subject matter. It's all about making things visible."

While Monica hasn't had a chance to showcase her own works in Suffolk yet, she hopes to later this year. "My last major exhibition was at Leicester New Walk Museum, and was on show for around four weeks before Covid shut it down," says the printmaker.



Monica Petzal and Julia Neuberger in the Printroom studio

In her 'Dissent and Displacement' exhibition, she explores opposition, persecution, and persistence inspired by her German-Jewish refugee heritage.

Interweaving threads of family, politics, culture, and art, she features narratives that range from the rise of National Socialism in 1930s Germany, right the way through to the life of a Syrian refugee doctor today.

"But I will bring it to Suffolk eventually. Well, part of it, as it's big and it won't all fit in my gallery," she adds.

In the meantime, Monica has turned to another medium to help express her sorrow towards the atrocities of the Holocaust, releasing 'Here Lies' - a short film documenting her journey to Berlin to unveil the Stolpersteine for the six members of her family who died in the Shoah.

Stolpersteine are concrete cubes with brass plates inscribed with the names and life dates of those who passed away during the Holocaust. Established in 1992 by German artist Gunter Demnig, the project commemorates individuals at the last place they freely lived or worked before they fell victim to the Nazi regime.

As of December 2019, 75,000 Stolpersteine have been laid - making it the world's largest decentralised memorial.

Monica made the pilgrimage

last September. Filmed by Maria Aguilar, she also worked alongside local editor Eileen Haring Woods to put the film together.

"I go to Berlin a great deal because one of my elderly relatives who was born in Britain now lives there, and I thought it was important to lay these Stolpersteine. I've previously done it for my mother's family in Dresden, and it means these people now have a permanent memorial as there isn't one for them elsewhere."

The process of creating Stolpersteine takes around three years in total - from the initial application to finally getting them laid.

"I found it all incredibly moving, and I was very grateful that these five individuals of different ages now have a memorial that will be there forever. The Stolpersteine will be looked after by the people who now live in the house, and every year there is a ceremony where people go out and polish all the brass plaques so they remain visible."

Adding why it's so important we still commemorate those who lost their lives through genocide, Monica adds: "There's only been one Holocaust but we have refugee tragedy all over the world, all the time. And it's very important we remember that these people are



Suffolk-based artist Monica Petzal

individuals with individual lives and stories."

At Monica's Printroom studios, another local Jewish artist has been making use of the space, getting ready for a huge showcase later this year.

Glenn Sujo, *right*, splits his time between Ardleigh and London, but is currently working from the Sweffling studio on his upcoming exhibition, Ghetto Suite.

"Ghetto Suite is a reflection on the extraordinary resilience of those communities and field enclosures during the Second

World War, and how the Jews supported one another in the face of the absolute lack of all elementary means of support and sustenance," he says.

"They created institutions, such as soup kitchens, nurseries, care centres, and libraries as a more informal way of mutual support. It was an attempt to continue to support each other in those dire circumstances in the ghettos."

Glenn is creating a group of large, wall-sized drawings reflecting those experiences.





Monica's family's Stolpersteine in Berlin



Some of Monica's work spread out on her studio floor



One of Glenn Sujo's work as part of his 'Ghetto Suite' exhibition, Large Ghetto: To the Bridge (in progress), 2017

His body of work will go on tour in European cities in 2024 but will soft launch in Suffolk first.

As well as being an artist, Glenn has dedicated the last 30 years of his life to Holocaust studies, and has not only exhibited his art in galleries and museums across the world, but has had his academic work published in a number of books.

Like Monica, his family's experiences have shaped who he is today. "My family lived in Berlin until 1933. But luckily they established homes before then in Latin America and fortunately had somewhere to go, which sadly wasn't the case for everyone," he explains.

He too believes that art is one of the best ways to commemorate what happened nearly 80 years ago.

"Visual arts are important for the second and third generations who didn't directly experience it, as it's an unalloyed way of entering imaginatively into that historical event. And that's what I'm doing with these immersive drawings, placing myself inside those communities.

"The difference between this work and the photography we have is that those photos were taken by the persecutors of the ghetto, and are a humiliating record of what happened. According to their propaganda,

the Jews who were in those ghettos were vermin – and those ghettos became the staging posts to the killing centres. And you can't describe them as camps but rather sites of extermination.

"It's important we keep talking about what happened, as it sharpens our understanding of events in the world we live in today. It teaches us vigilance, and is a huge moral lesson. We're at a time where we have to think about where our society is moving, and how easily some democracies could turn into something else."

To find out more about Monica and Glenn's works, visit monicapetzal.com and glennsujo.com



Arnold Daghani, self portrait (1964)

Exploring the life and times of artist Arnold Daghani

This weekend, Aldeburgh Beach Lookout gallery hosts a special exhibition (with a film screening and talks), showcasing the works of artist Arnold Daghani (1909-1985). On Saturday (11.30am to 5pm) and Sunday (11am to 1pm), visitors will be able to explore artist Arnold's commitment to documenting war crimes, and find out more about his remarkable escape with his wife from a Nazi death camp in Mikhailowka as documented in his diary (which will be on sale). Arnold was born into a Jewish family in Suczawa (now part of modern-day Romania), and grew up to study fine art in Munich and Paris during the 1920s. A gifted linguist, he moved to Bucharest and found work as an export clerk. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Arnold and his wife Anisoara moved to Czernowitz where they were deported to Czernowtiz Ghetto before being transferred to Mihailowka labour camp and later Gaisin. With their artwork in tow, the couple managed to escape and were liberated from the Bershad Ghetto in 1943, eventually settling in

Britain in 1977. The prolific artist continued to document his life and what he saw during the Holocaust through a body of work which includes images of everyday life, still life drawings, self portraits, collages, lithographs and paintings until his death in 1985.

"My late uncle Arnold was a prolific artist," explains his niece Nadia Lasserson. "We were surrounded by his works, self portraits, and pictorial diaries - sometimes filled with humour, sometimes morbid, often introspective. He was continually working through the experience he and my aunt went through in Ukraine, as forced labour under the SS. He never stopped creating. He enhanced knowledge about the Holocaust through his diaries, testimony and the collection of his work at Sussex University. It's important to our family to be able to share a selection of these works, many of which have never been exhibited, along with films and talks in this short exhibition at Aldeburgh Beach Lookout and Arthouse."



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