

A Face To Remember

The Anne Frank Center, USA

How can the life of a lost child reverberate through time? The answer is found in a fascinating, multimedia art installation entitled *The Memory Project: Loss, Memory, History, Art* by New York-based artist Roz Jacobs and producer Laurie Weisman. Currently on view at The Anne Frank Center USA (AFC) located in SoHo, *The Memory Project* is a unique documentary art form that is both thought-provoking and visually enchanting.

The Memory Project weaves Holocaust survivor Anna Jacobs's riveting video testimony about life in the Warsaw ghetto and the brother she lost to the Nazis with time-lapsed images of her daughter Roz painting a series of haunting oil portraits of that very boy. "I'm using the creative process to connect to the life force rather than to the death and destruction that surrounded my family," says Roz Jacobs. "I'm trying to connect to a past that's there but hard to touch."

Jacobs is fortunate enough to have two photographs of her mother's brother Kalman that were taken in Poland prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. She used a detail of Kalman from one of the photographs as a subject, painting the image over and over again. Repeatedly painting this boy, who would have been her uncle, gave Jacobs the connection she was looking to forge.

"One thing I hadn't planned on was how much I would feel doing this piece and how much closer I would feel to Kalman. It was as if I were actually meeting him. I also felt this sense of defiance. The Nazis and all fascists for that matter try to destroy your identity—break you down little by little. They break up families, shave your head or take away your clothing... they make you feel less human by stripping away at your dignity. I felt that as I repeatedly painted my uncle he was becoming more and more tangible and that loss of identity was being recaptured. His story is known more to me and now to others. He is living on in some form."

Jacobs videotaped herself painting Kalman over and over again on canvases that would become the core of the installation. Together with Weisman, Jacobs edited the nine tapes of the painting process into a kaleidoscopic matrix that explores the painting process and integrates her mother Anna's story of Kalman.

"People only see the end result of a painting," says Jacobs. "I wanted to show those moments during the process when the painting falls apart or when it comes together so that the viewer can see the many layers of how a painting is made. It's

also about how the fragments of family stories come together over time."

"Looking beneath the surface is what *The Memory Project* is all about," says co-creator Weisman. "Memory and art have a lot in common—neither follows a linear way of thinking. We wanted to create a multi-screen format that would bring photos, videos, paintings as well as testimony of a Holocaust survivor to a contemporary audience."

The Memory Project has accomplished this goal by blurring the distinctions between traditional forms of artistic expression. The traveling exhibit features Jacobs's artworks with panels that provide supplementary background information. In the *Mobile Memory Project* version installed at the AFC, a single video monitor screens the twelve-minute video instead of the nine-screen installation that is better suited for larger museum venues. The exhibit made its debut in Boca Raton, Florida in 2007 and remains on view at the Manhasset Holocaust Center in Long Island. In November, the exhibit opened at the Holocaust Museum in Houston, Texas. Additionally, Jacobs and Weisman are in the process of completing a documentary entitled *Finding Kalman* which elaborates on the existing project and involves four generations of the Jacobs family.

Weisman, whose career in educational media at Sesame Workshop, *Time for Kids* and Scholastic spans 25 years, is especially excited about the installation's educational potential. "We are using it in classrooms as a springboard to many conversations—art, history, memory, cross-generational dialogue. Through art in the classrooms or in centers, we can teach ways of seeing and feeling that verbal language cannot access."

In particular, the exhibit may teach students how to approach the creative process more freely. Jacobs explains, "It opens up a whole new dialogue. When I use a black and white photo of Kalman to teach light and shade, an effect known as chiaroscuro, to students they learn that you can't see the form of the head if you only use light or if you only use shadow. It's through the movement of the light and the movement of the shadow that the form of the head emerges. It is a lesson in light and shade but also—and maybe more profoundly—illustrates that nothing is black and white or negative and positive and one really must observe all sides, move through the differences—the obscure, the clear, dark and light, in order to see the whole picture." Visitors who attend a special family program at the AFC may explore the nuances of chiaroscuro



under Jacobs's guidance after touring the exhibit.

The promise of "Never Again" that emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust needs continual vigilance if it is ever to be realized. As the generation of survivors grows older, the question of how to keep their memory alive becomes more urgent. How can we be sure their stories are told in the future? This is a burning question for Jacobs and Weisman. For them, the answer is found in *The Memory Project*. By focusing on one small child, a resourceful boy named Kalman, Jacobs and Weisman have created an art exhibit that makes personal and immediate the tragedy of the Holocaust in an entirely new way

By addressing the universal experience of loss in a unique manner, viewers from a variety of backgrounds may relate to the underlying messages of *The Memory Project*. The exhibit's ability to transcend boundaries makes it an ideal complement to the story of Anne Frank, which is highlighted in the exhibit *Anne Frank: A History for Today* concurrently on view at the AFC. Situated next to one another in the exhibit, the images of Anne Frank and Kalman present a haunting depiction of the millions of lives cut short by state-sponsored policies of hate and destruction. More than 60 years after the conclusion of WWII and the Holocaust, the memories of Anne Frank and Kalman burn bright—one preserved by a diary that has become famous the world over, the other by the eloquent brushstrokes of a niece he never knew. **M**

by Kacey Bayles

The exhibits are open to the public on Monday through Friday



(Clockwise from left) Jacobs painting a large-scale image of Kalman, *The Memory Project* exhibit, Artist Roz Jacobs leads a family workshop at the Anne Frank Center

from 10AM-5PM and on the first Sunday of each month from 11AM-4PM.

The Anne Frank Center, USA
38 Crosby Street, 5th Floor (between Grand St. and Broome St.)
New York, NY 10013
Tel: (212) 431-7993
www.annefrank.com