



WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on
Resistance in Europe during
World War II

Edited by

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Art as Resistance and Representation in Museums and Memorials: A Case Study from France

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Introduction

Having trained as an artist, my approach as a curator is hardly academic; I rely on my intuition when I write to create a narrative that speaks to diverse audiences. My ten years of experience as the head of temporary exhibitions at the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris – a critical space for collective memory – taught me much about how to share information in ways that ensure it reaches audiences. That is the crux of my profession.

When I started to work in 2009 at the *Mémorial de la Shoah*, I did not know much about the institution or about the history of World War II. My knowledge of the extermination of Jews was limited to my school education, a few films and readings. Housed in a building of contemporary architecture in the heart of the capital and a stone's throw from the Marais – the Jewish quarter of Paris – the *Mémorial* is home to an extensive research and archive centre, a museum, rooms for temporary exhibitions, an auditorium for weekly events, and a bookshop. There is also a very active education department that deploys considerable resources to raise awareness of the Shoah among schoolchildren, teachers, policemen and even ex-convicts accused of racist crimes. What attracted me to work in this environment, which was totally new for me? I am not a historian, have no family history linked to the Shoah, and had never worked on this topic, which I found too difficult to confront. When I submitted my application to the *Mémorial* for the position of temporary exhibitions manager, I was one of 400 candidates and I never thought I would make it. And I was surprised that I was invited to successive interview rounds. I was very honest in these interviews. When, during the last one, the director of the *Mémorial* asked me “Do you know the history of the Shoah?”, I answered “Not at

all.” What I could bring was my sensitivity as an artist and my experiences with different artistic approaches, as well as good contacts in the cultural milieu. And it is probably this what the *Mémorial* was looking for: not to engage one more academic, but somebody with a look from outside, with a fresh approach.

Though the *Mémorial*'s mission is not to focus solely on resistance, it was a common theme or undercurrent in many of the projects I presented between 2009 and 2019. The aspect that interested me most was how men and women used art to resist and how this relates to the role of museums today.

Art and resistance

Resistance is not only armed revolt; it can take many forms. The Nazis understood the power of artistic expression and its influence on contemporary thought, so as early as 1933, they barbarically burned all books that could awaken consciences to revolt and removed so-called “impure” works from circulation to make way for what they saw as true German art – a purified expression of the Aryan race. By persecuting and seeking to deride artists and their “degenerate” art (*entartete Kunst*), they aimed to erase the work of men and women who, in their view, failed to contribute to Germany's greatness. In *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, Éric Michaud establishes that art was a central question for the Third Reich, since Nazi ideology held that art had the power to embody the ideal of the Aryan race.¹ For the Nazis, the mission of art (and propaganda) was to “render visible the protector God who would make it possible for the body of the German race to live eternally”.²

That did not prevent artists from creating, of course – quite the contrary, in fact. Producing art despite the prohibition was a defiant act of spiritual and intellectual resistance designed to denounce and condemn the law itself. It also helped artists escape their imprisonment, hold on to their humanity, and bear witness to Nazi oppression, which the regime took such care to disguise by controlling the image of reality under the Third Reich. In these darkest hours, creating was about surviving against all odds. Though

1 Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004).

2 Ibid., 24.

“Resistance Art” is a term reserved for illegal practices whose clearly affirmed goal was to hinder the efforts of the occupiers or collaborators, artistic production also provided an outlet for people to share their stories and bear witness via non-verbal media through which their whole bodies could speak. For example, the painter Charlotte Salomon (1917-1943), a German Jew who took refuge on the French Côte d’Azur before ultimately being murdered in Auschwitz in 1943, gave us the moving work that is part-picture, part-literary: *Leben? oder Theater?* (Life? Or theatre?). She handed the work over to someone she trusted when she was arrested after being denounced, in a clear attempt to survive and construct her identity in the face of persecution.³ Art is truly an “anti-destiny” as André Malraux explains in the conclusion to *The Voices of Silence*. This neologism reveals the essence of art; it is a human response to a world that seems meaningless or, at the very least, a world that completely escapes our comprehension.⁴

Resisting through art is also about expressing a moral struggle. It embodies the artist’s commitments and convictions and, intimately or collectively, combats dehumanisation and prevents us from forgetting the victims. Whatever the medium (writing, photography, music, painting, etc.), art is a critical resource for those whose freedom has been severely curtailed. The diversity and sheer quantity of works produced under such terribly uncertain circumstances is remarkable proof of that. Moreover, by creating, artists also fostered a form of solidarity amongst victims, boldly thumbing their noses at methodical dehumanisation, totalitarianism and systematic genocide. For example, Germaine Tillion, who was deported to Ravensbrück for her participation in the French Resistance, wrote a light-hearted, carefree operetta entitled *Le Verfügbar aux enfers* (The Verfügbar in the Underworld) in the camp in 1944. “Laughter, even in the most tragic situations, is revitalising”, she later said.⁵

From the beginning of World War II, artist activists used their art to share their experiences of the war, deportation and life in the camps. They were the first to bear witness. Boris Taslitzky (1911-2005), for example, became a member of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (AEAR) in 1933; arrested and interned in the Buchenwald camp, he produced nearly two hundred sketches and drawings, as well as five watercolours, thanks

3 Charlotte Salomon, *Leben ? oder Theater?* (Köln: Taschen, 2017).

4 André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

5 Germaine Tillion, *Une opérette à Ravensbrück, 1942 – 1945* (Paris: Points, 2007).

to the solidarity and organisation of the underground resistance. The poet Aragon paid tribute to him by publishing his work in 1946.⁶ While Taslitzky survived life in the concentration camp, Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944), a German painter who initially took refuge in France, did not. He left behind a major body of work in which themes of fear, persecution and the curse of the Jewish people are clearly apparent in the paintings that followed his first imprisonment in the Saint-Cyprien camp in southern France reserved for foreign Jews in 1940. After these three months of internment and humiliation, all his work became denunciation. In the many self-portraits, the figure in the foreground questions the viewer, his hard gaze turning the viewer into a witness. He seems to be saying: “If I die, don’t let my paintings follow me, show them to men”. As early as 1939, he signed this premonitory work: *Le réfugié / Vision européenne* (The refugee / European vision). At the back of a room, a man sits with his head in his hands, finding neither shelter nor hope. The globe on the table in the foreground is a warning, and the outside world beyond the open door is threatening, with its grey landscape of bare trees over which birds flutter like scavengers. He and his wife, the Polish artist Felka Platek, were arrested again in July 1944 and exterminated at Auschwitz in the following months.⁷

For several decades, it was difficult for survivors to talk about their experiences in concentration camps. Were they to be believed? And how could the survivors pass on what happened to their children without feeling ashamed? Artistic expression has enabled the generation born after the war to express themselves on a subject that was still taboo for society as a whole, caught between guilt and the need to move on. Art Spiegelman is an emblematic figure of the underground American comic strip movement of the 1970s. Born in 1948 to Polish Jewish parents who had survived Auschwitz, he is best known for his masterpiece *Maus*, which was published in two volumes: the first in 1986 and the second in 1991.⁸ Art Spiegelman ended up handing a microphone to Vladek, his father, to break the silence that covered him like a leaden blanket. *Maus* tells the story of his father’s life, from the period when he met his wife Anja (who committed suicide in 1968)

6 Boris Taslitzky, *111 dessins faits à Buchenwald* (Paris: La Bibliothèque Française, 1946).

7 On Felix Nussbaum see for example: Karl G. Kaster, *Felix Nussbaum: Art Defamed, Art in Exile, Art in Resistance* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1997). For the painting “The refugee”, sometimes also called “European vision”, see: *Yad Vashem*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/nussbaum/refugee.asp>.

8 Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (New York: Pantheon Books, vol. 1: 1986, vol. 2: 1991).

until the period when they reunited after the war. In the middle, the Shoah, the war and the concentration camps. But *Maus* is also the story of the difficult relationship between a son and his father, full of unspoken words, denial, hatred and rejection. Spiegelman would say of his work: “I wanted to know where I came from and to make a distinction between the image I had of my father and his story.”⁹ This is the autobiographical graphic novel of a child of the Shoah, which does not seek to tell the truth about historical facts, but rather to express symbols and feelings, and to undeniably mourn. It is in this that this masterful and profoundly humanist work touches us.

From the 1960s onwards, people began to speak more freely, and the generation of children of survivors allowed themselves to explore their feelings about their parents’ experiences. Every story has its own unique experience. Besides Art Spiegelman, Michel Kichka (born in 1954 in Liège) is another example. In his graphic novel *Second Generation – Things I never told to my father*, he also recounts his relationship with the past of his father, the only survivor of his family, over which the shadow of the Shoah hung to the point that the author, with this work, seeks to emancipate himself from it.¹⁰ But for this author, it is a calmer tale, taking readers on a journey through nightmares, funny memories, joyous moments and acts of deliverance. A very active member of the international “Cartooning for Peace” network, committed to promoting freedom of expression, human rights and mutual respect between people of different cultures and beliefs through the universal language of press cartoons, Kichka continues to explore his relationship with his Jewishness.

Even today, artists continue to explore this period from our past, trying to understand how the unthinkable came to be and to move beyond the “past that will not pass”, as Henry Rousso calls it in his book on France under the Vichy regime.¹¹ Today, for the generation of grandchildren of survivors, it is about preserving memory and accepting the past, which continues to echo through contemporary society at a time when challenges to peace are legion.

9 Olivier Delcroix, “Art Spiegelman, une œuvre à l’ombre de ses parents”, *Le Figaro*, 20 March 2008.

10 Michel Kichka, *Second Generation – Things I never told to my father* (Europe comics, 2016).

11 Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 1998).

Presenting resistance to Nazi persecution in museum

I will use three examples of exhibitions designed for the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris to showcase the positions we adopted in presenting the topic of resistance to persecution and Nazism through arts.

A. Point of view

The exhibition *Regards sur les ghettos* (Scenes from the Ghettos) opened in 2013 at the *Mémorial* with guidance from Professor Daniel Blatman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹²

Images are omnipresent in our societies, and those of ghettos are no exception. When the *Mémorial* suggested this topic, it raised some questions: what do we show and how do we show it? How do we tell the heartrending stories of the victims without crossing the line into voyeurism? What will a new exhibition bring to a topic that has already been addressed by many others?

Though we were advised against it, we organised the exhibition by category of photographer, focusing on the person behind the lens. We wanted to understand who each of them was, understand how they saw their contemporaries, and learn more about their stories and life experiences to better contextualise the images on display. By opting against a classification by theme (such as hunger, disease, death, children), we were able to present a comprehensive look at the work of each photographer and at the same time to bring so many nameless victims back to life by weaving their stories back together.

We chose to display the collections by sorting their photographers into three categories: Jews interned in ghettos, German soldiers, or Nazi propagandists. Once collected, these numerous testimonies handed down to posterity can be used to piece together a jigsaw puzzle, revealing both the staged propaganda and the frank, sincere faces photographed by friends and comrades in misfortune. Although many of these images were already known, they were not always contextualised, and this can distort our

12 *Regards sur les ghettos*, 13 November 2013 – 28 September 2014, exhibition designed by the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris under the direction of Daniel Blatman, Sophie Nagiscard and Marie-Édith Agostini, assisted by Anne Bernard. *Regards sur les ghettos*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2013). See also the website made by the *Mémorial* about the exhibition: <https://regards-ghettos.memorialdelashoah.org/>.



Fig. 1: Extract of the exhibition *Regards sur les ghettos*, here with a photo taken by Mendel Grossmann in the ghetto of Łódź, showing women and children at forced labour.
(© ÉricandMarie – *Mémorial de la Shoah*, 2013)

understanding of them. The exhibition's sophisticated scenography, which traced the career of each photographer to help us understand their point of view, shed interesting light on the subject. As for the Jewish photographers, they showed courage and resistance by providing invaluable documentation of life in the ghettos. Defying the ban on photography, which was meant to prevent people from describing the conditions imposed in the ghettos by the Nazi regime, and despite how difficult it was to get photographic equipment, many Jews documented life in the ghettos.

The largest collections are those of George Kadish (1910-1997) and Mendel Grossmann (1913-1945). Kadish, who took over a thousand pictures in the Kovno ghetto, where he was imprisoned, said at the inauguration of a photo exhibition at the Russell Senate Office Building in 1987:¹³

I wanted to get revenge on the Nazis who murdered my people. The more photos I took, the less scared I felt. [...] I came to understand that millions of my fellow Jews executed and exterminated for their

13 *Days of remembrance: Family life in the Kovno ghetto, an exhibition of photographs by George Kadish*, Russell Senate Office Building, Rotunda, Exhibition catalogues, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council (Washington, 1987).

beliefs had given me a sacred order: to share the terrible events of my ghetto with the outside world, with our future children and new generations, to ensure they would know what happened during that time.¹⁴

As for Grossmann, he had studied painting in Łódź before the war. In the ghetto, he worked in the photography department at the Jewish Council, which gave him access to film, some of which he managed to put aside to capture life in the Łódź ghetto. Grossmann died in a death march, but his friends returned to save the pictures he had hidden.¹⁵

Henryk Ross also worked at the Jewish Council, in the statistics department. He too used his position as a photographer there to put aside film, which he used to secretly take thousands of photographs depicting the suffering and daily lives of Jews in Łódź. Not long before the liquidation of the ghetto, he buried the negatives and prints, which he and his wife were able to retrieve after the Soviets conquered the city. He moved to Israel in 1950 and stopped working as a photographer, but he testified about his experience at the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Today his collection is held by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada, which devoted an exhibition to him in 2015.¹⁶

Jewish photographs left behind a tangible memory of the genocide of European Jews during World War II in an international language that is readily understood worldwide. As fellow Jews, they were able to capture expressions and emotions and document the ways daily life continued more than the ways it had changed, all while bearing witness to the growing suffering that set in as the years of hunger and disease took their toll. Their pictures are full of empathy and compassion, unlike the Nazi photographs, which sought only to fuel prejudice and Aryan propaganda by showcasing the “Jewish traits” (*Judentypen*) in the distant looks the subjects gave them.

As Georges Didi-Huberman wrote after working on the Oneg Shabbat Archive, which was put together by Emanuel Ringelblum, who spent the last days of the Warsaw ghetto documenting everything he could:

14 As quoted by Judith Cohen in *Regards sur les ghettos* (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah, 2013), 23.

15 For more information about Mendel Grossman, see: Mendel Grossman, *With a Camera in the Ghetto* (New York City: Schocken Books, 1987).

16 For more information about Henryk Ross, see: Bernice Eisenstein et al. eds., *Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

You can only read what remains, of course, which is rather little compared to the scope of the extermination process as a whole. But at least you read it micrologically, as if through a magnifying glass, intimately exploring every situation that left a trace. You feel the emotions of each unique person, separate from the others and yet an integral part of their shared history.¹⁷

For this exhibition, we turned to exhibition designer Ramy Fischler and the graphic designers of the ÉricandMarie collective, who successfully created a contemporary aesthetic showcasing photographers' different attitudes towards Jews during this dark period of history. Swiss artist Anna Katharina Scheidegger created a video montage of shots by Jewish photographers. Using slow tracking shots, the video camera brought the men and women from the images to life, projecting them onto large wooden panels placed against the wall, where the passing historic figures blended into the crowd of museum visitors.

B. Scenography

The *Mémorial* put on the exhibition *August Sander – Persécutés/Persécuteurs des Hommes du XX^e siècle* (Persecuted/Persecutors in People of the 20th Century) in 2018.¹⁸

German photographer August Sander (1876–1964) was an indisputable pioneer of documentary photography. His best-known work, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (People of the 20th Century), which comprises seven volumes and 45 portfolios, was left unfinished upon his death. From the 1920s onwards, August Sander created an “instant physiognomy of his time”,¹⁹ depicting his contemporaries' professions and social classes by capturing the unique traits of anonymous subjects viewed as “types”. Aided by his serial approach, he produced a richly documented portrait of German society. Breaking with the blurred style of romantic photography, Sander's work

17 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Éparses, Voyage dans les papiers du ghetto de Varsovie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2020).

18 Exhibition *August Sander, Persécutés/persécuteurs, des Hommes du XX^e siècle*, 8 March – 15 November 2018, designed by the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris under the direction of Sophie Nagis-cardé and Marie-Édith Agostini assisted by Noémie Fillon and with the participation of Gerhard Sander and Kristina Engels of the August Sander Foundation. For more information about the exhibition. see: <https://expo-photo-sander.memorialdelashoah.org/en/exhibition.html>.

19 August Sander, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München: Schirmer/Mosel, 2010).



Fig. 2: Exhibition about August Sander: Entry of the exhibition space.
(© Mémorial de la Shoah, 2018)

stands in opposition to the Nazi regime's "blood and soil" ideology, which celebrated the glorification of the body, femininity and virility, myths and heroes, symbols, rurality and farmers, and allegories.

The Sander family worked together, with August's wife Anna (1878–1957) running the studio in Cologne. Their son Erich (1903–1944) also actively participated in the business. The family had close ties to progressive, artistic circles in Cologne, and political discussions between August and his rebellious son also played an important role. While August Sander was a pacifist, Erich was a member of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* – SAPD), and he presided over its section in Cologne starting in 1932. After the the Nazis banned the SAPD in 1933, he actively participated in illegal resistance activities, including carrying anti-Nazi leaflets and confidential information in his bike's innertubes. Arrested in 1934 and convicted of high treason, Erich was sentenced to ten years in the Siegburg Prison near Cologne, where he died in 1944 due to lack of medical care. During his years of incarceration, he worked as a prison photographer and, with the help of his parents, managed to smuggle photographic paper into the prison and photographs and letters out of it to document the prisoners' everyday lives.²⁰

20 For more information about Erich Sander, see: NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln, ed., *August Sanders unbeugsamer Sohn. Erich Sander als Häftling und Gefängnisfotograf im Zuchthaus Siegburg 1935–1944. Begleitband zur Ausstellung im NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2015).

After the war, August Sander incorporated portraits of Cologne Jews who had come to the studio to take identification photos for their new papers marked with a J for “Jew” into *People of the Twentieth Century*. He also added pictures of Nazi leaders in their uniforms. Another portfolio includes striking portraits of inmates that Erich took in prison and managed to smuggle out before he died, bearing witness to his life behind bars. “Although it is certain that a person’s life does not explain his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected. The truth is that that work to be done called for that life,”²¹ Merleau-Ponty wrote about Cézanne. This can also apply to the Sander family’s life’s work. August Sander concludes *People of the Twentieth Century* with a post-mortem photograph of his son. A final image which functions as both a memento mori and a political accusation, a poignant reminder of Sander’s commitment to preserving history and of his grief.

The exhibition focused on three portfolios, named and numbered as follows:

- portfolio IV/23a – *Classes and Professions, the National Socialist*
- portfolio VI/44 – *The Big City, Persecuted*
- portfolio VI/44a – *The Big City, Political Prisoners*

With help from the archivists at the National Socialist Documentation Center in Cologne, we were able to learn more about the lives of most of the Jews photographed by August and Erich Sander by cross-referencing them with photos from the archives. We spent quite a lot of time on the research – an opportunity to honour the people the Nazis tried to eradicate and erase from our memories by giving them back their names and stories.

For the scenography, entrusted to Éric Benqué and German graphic design collective Vier5, we worked hard to find the best way to arrange Sander’s images in the museum: in a big room, curved partitions which narrowed the space into a smaller oval placed oppressors and their victims across from one another. Accompanying texts in three languages (French, English and German) were mounted on wooden planks to symbolise the unstable and fragile nature of the period. Face to face, the subjects’ eyes seemed to meet, inviting visitors to introspect. The scenography of the exhibition encouraged viewers to engage personally.

21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt”, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 70.



Fig. 3: Exhibition about August Sander: on the right portraits of Nazis in their uniforms, in the middle of political prisoners, on the left of persecuted Jews.

(© *Mémorial de la Shoah*, 2018)

We also worked with the artist's grandson, Gerhard Sander, and great-grandson, Julian Sander. For them, the exhibition took on great meaning, positioning August Sander's work as a sort of antithesis to Nazi ideology. Gerhard would have liked to present the exhibition in Germany, but he unfortunately passed away before the project could come to fruition.

C. Medium

The exhibition *Shoah et bande dessinée* (*The Holocaust and Comics*), presented in 2017, showed visitors how the Holocaust has been represented in comics, especially in Europe and the United States, since the end of the war.²²

For much of their history, comics were viewed as a form of children's literature. In France, they were regulated by a 1949 law that was not updated until 2011. As such, they only began tackling "serious" subjects fairly

22 *Shoah et bande dessinée* (*The Holocaust and Comics*), exhibition 19 January 2017 – 7 January 2018 (extended date), *Mémorial de la Shoah*, Paris, curators: Marie-Édith Agostini, Joël Kotek and Didier Pasamonik, assisted by Géraldine Franchomme. See also: <https://expo-bd.memorialdelashoah.org/expositions.html>.

recently. Moreover, Holocaust remembrance went through several stages in the decades after 1945, as Annette Wieviorka explains. At the end of the war, there was “the shock of discovering the camps [...] followed by minimization”. During the post-war period, the Holocaust was a marginal topic, since the consensus was that all French people were victims of the war; the important thing was to focus on rebuilding. Jewish victims only really began to emerge from the shadows with the Eichmann trial in 1961. In 1979, the American miniseries *Holocaust* aired in France, helping to speed up the process, as did Claude Lanzmann’s groundbreaking documentary *Shoah* in 1986. Since then, the Holocaust “has always been present, deeply integrated into the collective imagination”.²³

Comic strips and graphic novels were also part of this process and contributed to it. The French publication of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman in 1987 “sent an extraordinary shockwave through France and all of Europe, a real cultural revolution”, according to the exhibition’s expert curators Didier Pasamonik and Joël Kotek. Since the 1980s, the Shoah has become a subject in its own right, and a number of graphic novels and comic strips were published exploring this theme in France, other European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium or the Netherlands, and in the United States. The exhibition even showed some plates from *The Story of the 3 Adolfs*, by Osamu Tezuka, the inventor of the Manga genre and creator of the cartoon character *Astro Boy*, a rather exceptional depiction of the Shoah in Asian comics.²⁴

However, addressing persecution during the Nazi time with the help of comic strips is not only a recent phenomenon. The first artists to fix the narrative patterns of the events were the victims themselves, and did so during the war. The exhibition opened with the presentation of Horst Rosenthal’s notebook *Mickey au camp de Gurs* (Mickey Mouse in the Gurs Internment Camp) in which the artist humorously represents himself as the iconic Walt Disney character. The drawings in the short booklet depict his incomprehension, the role of the French police in arresting people and running the camp, the absurdity of his days, and the lack of food. Made

23 Annette Wieviorka, “Un objet de contrebande” in *Shoah et bande dessinée*, eds. Mémorial de la Shoah and Éditions Denoël Graphic (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah/Denoël Graphic, 2017).

24 Didier Pasamonik, “Les enfants d’Holocaust” in *Shoah et bande dessinée*, eds. Mémorial de la Shoah and Éditions Denoël Graphic (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah/Denoël Graphic, 2017), 101-105; Osamu Tezuka, *Adorifu ni Tsugu*, (magazine *Shukan Bunshun*, 1983 – 1984); Osamu Tezuka, *L’Histoire des 3 Adolfs* (Éditions Tonkam, 1998-1999).

during his internment in the Gurs camp in Southern France from 1940 to 1942, it shows how this prisoner used drawing as a form of spiritual resistance. Rosenthal was deported and murdered in Auschwitz in 1942, but his notebooks were rescued before by a Swiss nurse working in the camp and by other inmates. His work was finally published in an edited version with comments in 2014.²⁵ A similar allegory can be found in *La bête est morte! La guerre mondiale chez les animaux* (The beast is dead! World war of animals), an album published at the end of 1944, a few months after the liberation of Paris, in which the authors also use animal figures to anchor the narrative.²⁶ A mutilated old squirrel tells his grandchildren the detailed story of the ongoing war. Each nation is represented by an animal: wolves represent the Germans, polar bears the Russians, bulldogs the British, sheepskin hyenas the Italians, bison the Americans, monkeys the Japanese, elephants the Indians. The story demonstrates a good knowledge of current events, and the military phases are described in detail. Not only the consequences for civilians, but also deportation are dealt with extensively in the first volume. Several references are made to prison camps and concentration camps, as well as the persecution and extermination of the Jews, even if the dimensions of the Shoah do not seem to have been known by the authors in 1944. This beautifully drawn book, produced and published during the war, was a way of defying Nazism.

As Elie Wiesel said, “One could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak.”²⁷ Drawing likely provided an alternative means to break the silence for some. In the exhibition, we also included some of David Olère’s drawings made after 1945. Born in Warsaw in 1902, David Olère moved to Paris in 1920, where he obtained French nationality and worked as a painter, poster artist and film decorator. Arrested by the French police in February 1943, he was deported to Auschwitz where he was assigned to the “special commando”, the *Sonderkommando*, of prisoners forced to take the bodies of the murdered Jews out of the gas chambers. As the Red Army approached, the SS tried to remove all traces of the gas chambers and with them the members of the *Sonderkommando*.

25 Joël Kotek and Didier Pasamonik, *Mickey à Gurs. Les carnets de dessins de Horst Rosenthal* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2014).

26 Edmond-François Calvo (illustrations), Victor Dancette and Jacques Zimmermann (text), *La bête est morte ! La guerre mondiale des animaux* (Paris: Édition GP, vol. 1: *Quand la bête est déchainéé*, 1944, vol. 2: *Quand la bête est terrassée*, 1945).

27 Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006), 2.



Fig. 4: Exhibition *La Shoah et la bande dessinée*, on the right an enlarged figure of *La Bête est morte* (1944). (© Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, 2017)

David Olère managed to mingle with the other prisoners and took part in the death marches to camps in Austria, where he was liberated by the US Army on 6 May 1945. After his return to France, between 1945 and 1962, he produced a series of very precise drawings through which he documented what he saw and experienced in Auschwitz. As Didier Pasamonik, one of the exhibition curators, wrote: “In terms of representation, his narration is close to that of a comic strip, in which he describes each stage of this horror, from the selection of the arrivals to the gassing and cremation of the bodies. He manages to recreate things that no one has been able to photograph or film. [...] These drawings constitute a documentary source of prime importance.”²⁸

The second generation of authors who narrated the Shoah through comic strips and graphic novels – like the already mentioned Art Spiegelman and Michel Kichka – was born after the war. They addressed the events from a more distant but also personal point of view, talking about their parents’ ordinary and extraordinary destinies.

28 Aurélia Vertaldi, “Shoah: comment la bande dessinée représente l’indescriptible”, *Le Figaro*, 19 January 2027, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/bd/2017/01/19/03014-20170119ARTFIG00004-shoah-comment-la-bande-dessinee-represente-l-indescriptible.php>.

And then there is the third generation of authors, like Fanny Michaëlis, who talk about the fate of their grandparents. In *Le lait noir* (Black Milk), Michaëlis took her inspiration from the story of her grandfather who fled Berlin and was forced into exile at the beginning of the war.²⁹ Many of the soft, subdued pencil drawings are poetic and aesthetic masterpieces, though the style quickly becomes sharp and oppressive when the persecutors appear. The book beautifully expresses the emotional nature of fear and violence in a tribute that doubles as therapeutic. This is also the case for German author Barbara Yelin, who in *Irmina* (2014), an album with water-colour drawings, tells the story of her grandmother, who she discovers at the same time as the box containing her diaries; married to an SS man, the young woman was unable to fight Nazism other than by writing her dismay in her diary. The author brings this past to life with great sensitivity in a liberating narrative.³⁰

In parallel to the work of the children and grandchildren, there have been and are comic authors who do not tell their own family stories, but who have been inspired by survivors. Indeed, various accounts written and published by survivors have been turned into comic strips, sometimes with the active participation of the original author. When I worked at the *Mémorial*, I had the pleasure of meeting Joseph Joffo, who was 80 years old at the time. He presented me with a recently published comic strip retracing his memories, which he had originally published as a book in 1973. Seen through the eyes of the Jewish child he was during the German Occupation, the book and the comic, *Un sac de billes* (A Bag of Marbles), recount his escape and his experience as a hidden child. I felt his pride, his almost childlike joy and his relief. It was particularly moving. Published in three volumes, the comic strip has been translated in several languages and won several awards in the United States.³¹

Comics are particularly well-suited to educational settings, and this exhibition is the one that has attracted the most visitors over the past few years. Comics are a medium that facilitates intergenerational discussion. The images are enlightening, and their sequential nature encourages viewers to move from figurative intuition towards an exercise in reflection. The

29 Fanny Michaëlis, *Le lait noir* (Paris: Éditions Cornélius, 2016).

30 Barbara Yelin, *Irmina* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014).

31 Joseph Joffo, Kris and Vincent Bailly, *A Bag of Marbles* (Graphic Universe, 3 volumes, 2011-2013). For the US edition, see: <https://lernerbooks.com/shop/show/12887>.



Fig. 5: The reading corner within the exhibition *La Shoah et la bande dessinée*.
(© Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, 2017)

scenography (Gilles Belley) and graphic design (Cécilia Génard) created for the exhibition added a light, welcoming aesthetic. A reading corner provided visitors with an opportunity to flip through all of the albums whose pages – the original drawings, for the most part – were on display at the exhibition. Visitors could stay as long as they liked, reading and looking at the available books.

Covering a period of more than 70 years, the exhibition presented almost 100 authors of fanzines, newspapers and albums, in all genres and styles of comics and graphic novels. The albums often tell stories of women and men persecuted and deported to camps. Far from being passive victims, they are presented as human beings who fought to maintain their human dignity, even in the camps. This can be seen as spiritual resistance. The exhibition showed that comic book artists have also tackled other forms of resistance: *Varsovie, Varsovie* (Warsaw, Warsaw), by Didier Zuili,³² for example, deals with Jewish civil and armed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto, and *L'autre Doisneau* (The other Doisneau), by Raphaël Drommelschlager and Jean-Christophe Derrien³³ tells the story of photographer Robert

32 Didier Zuili, *Varsovie, Varsovie* (Vannes: Marabulles, 2017).

33 Raphaël Drommelschlager and Jean-Christophe Derrien, “L'autre Doisneau”, in *Vivre Libre ou Mourir! 9 Récits de Résistance* (Brussels: Editions Le Lombard, 2011).

Doisneau who helped Jewish fugitives by producing identity photos and false papers. *Kersten: Medecin d'Himmler* (Kersten: Himmler's Doctor) by Pat Perna and Fabrice Bedouel,³⁴ tells the story of how the doctor who treated the Reichsführer managed to obtain the release of prisoners in exchange for his care. Many of these albums shine a light on the bravery of those who placed the struggle to achieve a more just world before their own interests.

Comics appeal to younger and larger crowds, helping to circulate and share knowledge with a wider audience. In the years since this initial exhibition, the *Mémorial de la Shoah* has put on two more exhibitions focusing on comics: in 2016, *Femmes en Résistance* (Women in Resistance), based on four comic books published by Gallimard, and in 2022 *Spirou dans la tourmente de la Shoah* (Spirou in the Torment of the Shoah), which showcased Émile Bravo's comic about the life of German painter Felix Nussbaum. Each of them enjoyed the same success with both the public and the media.³⁵

Conclusion

For those persecuted by Nazi bans and ideologies, art carried major stakes. In the darkest hours of the Holocaust, it proved itself to be a formidable tool for political, psychological and spiritual resistance for those who wanted to reappropriate their identity and hand down their memories. Artistic creations – whether they were the work of professional artists or amateurs in need of a medium that could amplify their voices – countered the process of dehumanisation implemented by the oppressors. They made it possible for their authors to maintain ties to their pre-war lives or to bear witness and hand down memory in a unifying gesture. For many, art also helped them to survive the individual and collective psychological trauma – the countless works produced by Jews despite the risks is clear proof of that. For the victims, as well as their children and grandchildren, art was and is also an opportunity to process and ease the weight of painful memories and trauma. Art plays a crucial role in exploring and bringing to life collective memory, which is continually forged across generations.

34 Pat Perna and Fabrice Bedouel, *Kersten: Medecin d'Himmler* (Grenoble: Editions Glenat, 2015).

35 For more information about these two exhibitions, see: "Femmes en résistance, la nouvelle exposition du Mémorial", *Mémorial de la Shoah*, <https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/femmes-en-resistance-la-nouvelle-exposition-du-memorial.html>; "Spirou dans la tourmente de la Shoah", *Mémorial de la Shoah*, <https://expo-spirou-shoah.memorialdelashoah.org/>.

Art's presence at memorial sites plays a crucial role in conveying history in a sensitive way. Though not all protagonists share the same memory, their different takes on the same object or event can be confronted to create a more complex and comprehensive picture for visitors, who come away with a more nuanced understanding of the past. The role of scenography in the exhibitions presented at memorial sites is an important one. By showcasing each selection of works or documents depending on their unique characteristics and the story they tell, scenography kindles empathy and identification, helps reach a wide range of audiences, and provides new ways of looking at a pivotal topic for continued exploration by the contemporary world. As Georges Didi-Huberman wrote: "Works of art come to us. We can look at or listen to a piece and believe that it is addressed to us."³⁶ That is how art, whatever its form, touches our deepest emotions to precipitate both intimate, personal memories and collective memory.

36 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2018).

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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