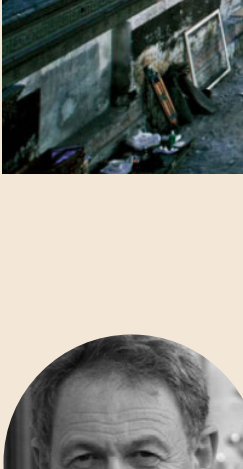


COMMEMORATING, REMEMBERING, AND BEARING WITNESS

*International Holocaust Remembrance Day
through the Work of Canada's Artists*



On January 27, the world marked the sombre occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. At the Art Canada Institute, the event reminds us of Canadian artists whose lives and works were directly impacted by the long shadow of National Socialism and why its atrocities must never be forgotten. Whether it is survivor Gershon Iskowitz recalling his time in Nazi concentration camps, Betty Goodwin tracing her family history back to war-torn Europe, or Alex Colville drawing on his experiences as an official war artist, we can learn from these artists, and pass on their experiences and wisdom.

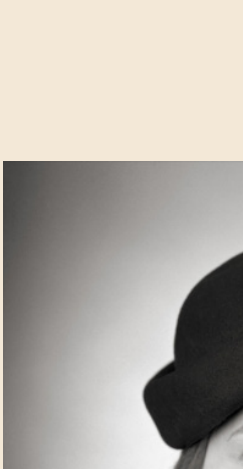
Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

YURI DOJC

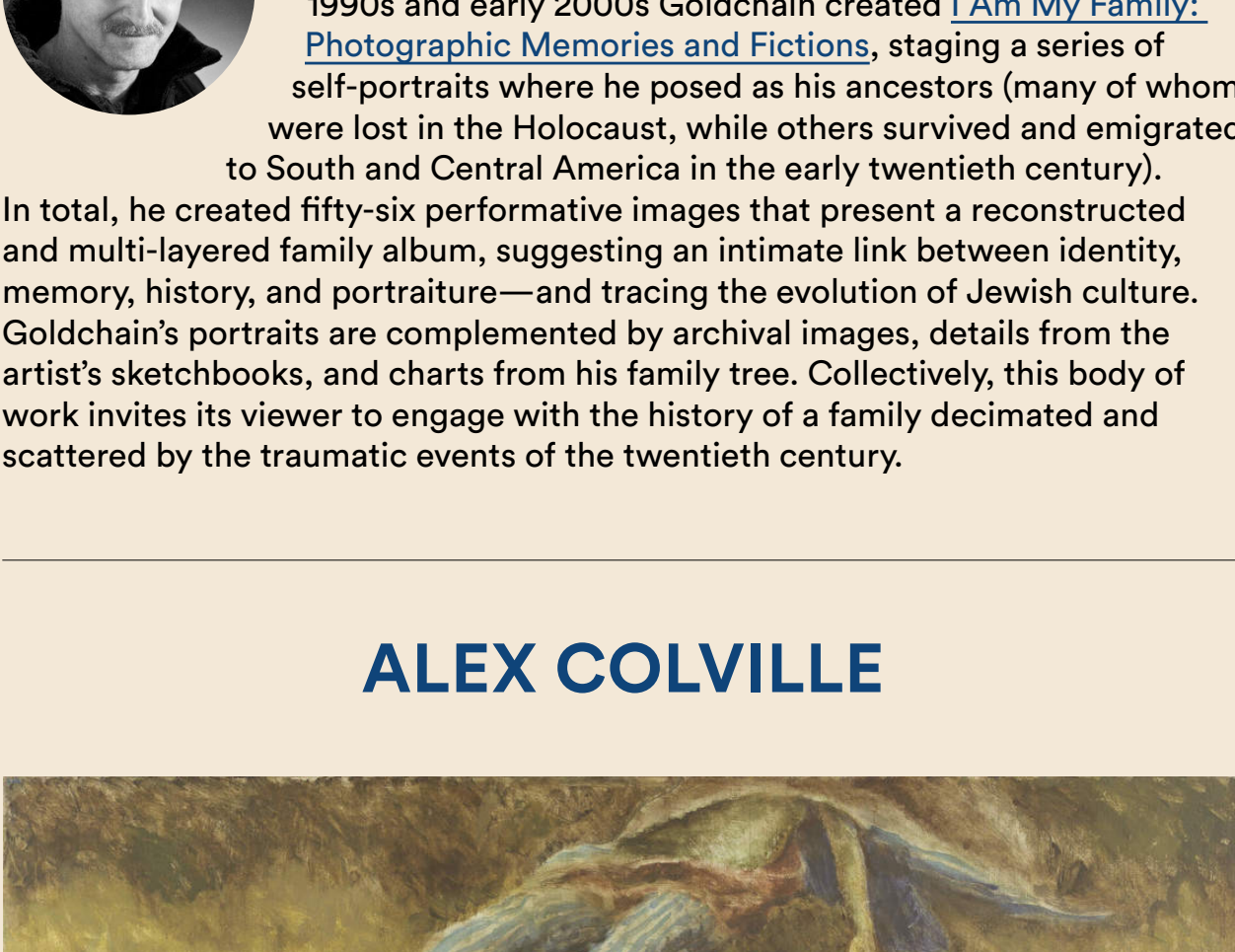


A synagogue in Kosice, Eastern Slovakia, 2006.



Born in Humenné, in eastern Slovakia, Canadian photographer Yuri Dojc (b.1946) journeyed from Toronto back to his hometown to create *Last Folio*, his project chronicling Slovakia's last living Holocaust survivors, as well as abandoned synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and other remains of the country's fractured community. Dojc is renowned for his observational approach to remnants of the past and infusing his compositions with empathy and intimacy. He has observed: "We all strive to leave something behind, a mark that remains after we've left. But there is almost nothing left of the people whose lives were cut short during the Holocaust. Photography allows me to build a private memorial to them."

JACQUELINE KOTT-WOLLE

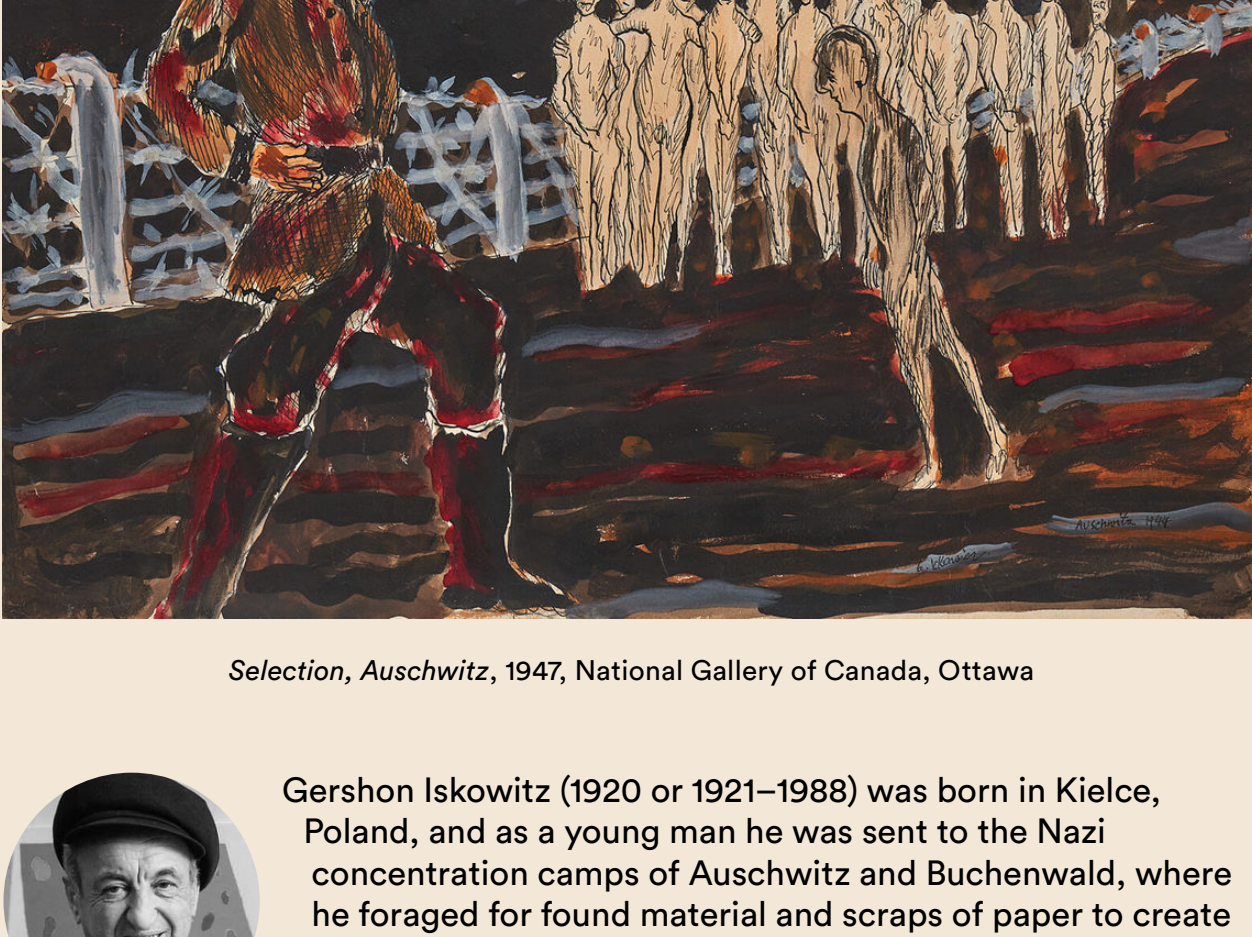


My Parents' Chuppah, 2020



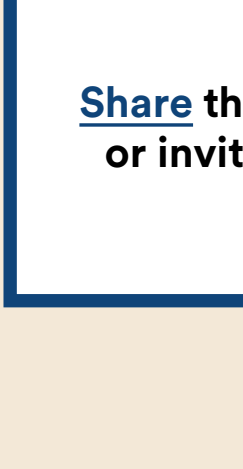
The grandchild of Holocaust survivors, Toronto-born, Chicago-based painter Jacqueline Kott-Wolle (b.1969) created her most recent project, "Growing Up Jewish – Art & Storytelling," with thirty-five contemporary oil paintings and personal narratives exploring her family's evolving Jewish identity in North America, over five generations—including images from ritual observances, Hebrew school, summer camps, and holiday gatherings. *My Parents' Chuppah*, 2020, is based on a photograph taken in 1956 that captures Kott-Wolle's parents at their wedding under the ceremonial canopy, the chuppah. The energy was joyful; older relatives and Holocaust survivors regarded these occasions as miraculous because younger generations were growing up freely participating in Jewish rituals, without the threat of persecution.

RAFAEL GOLDCHAIN



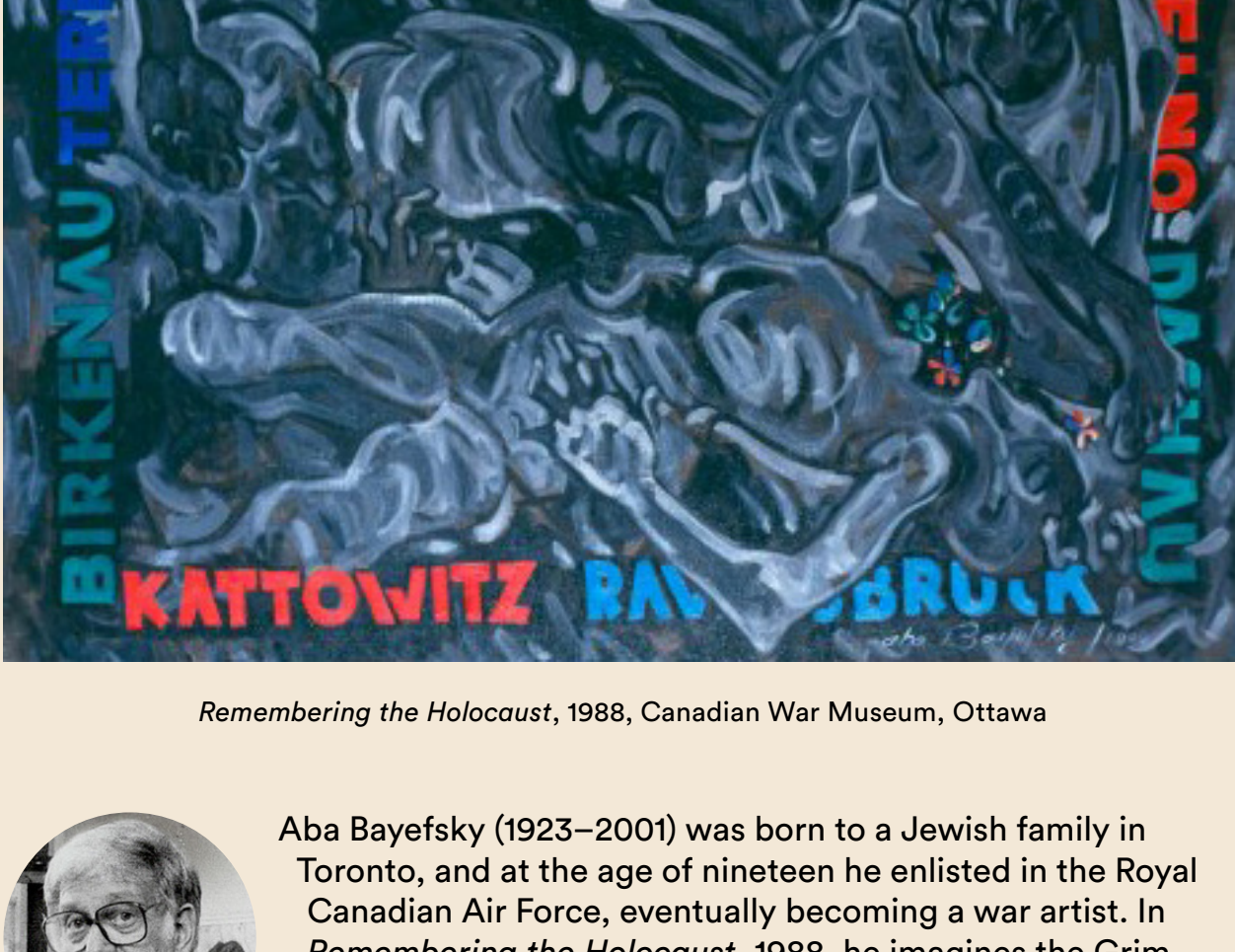
Self Portrait as Pola Baumfeld
b. Ostrowiec, Poland, 1910s; d. Poland,
early 1940s, 1999–2001

Self Portrait as Naftali Goldszajn b. Krasnik,
Poland, early 1800s; d. Krasnik, Poland,
late 1800, 1999–2001

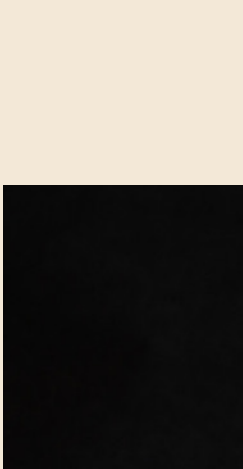


Rafael Goldchain (b.1953) is a Canadian photographer of Polish-Jewish descent, who was born in Santiago, Chile, and educated in Jerusalem before settling in Toronto. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Goldchain created *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions*, staging a series of self-portraits where he posed as his ancestors (many of whom were lost in the Holocaust, while others survived and emigrated to South and Central America in the early twentieth century). In total, he created fifty-six performative images that present a reconstructed and multi-layered family album, suggesting an intimate link between identity, memory, history, and portraiture—and tracing the evolution of Jewish culture. Goldchain's portraits are complemented by archival images, details from the artist's sketchbooks, and charts from his family tree. Collectively, this body of work invites its viewer to engage with the history of a family decimated and scattered by the traumatic events of the twentieth century.

ALEX COLVILLE



Bodies in a Grave, Belsen, 1946, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art,
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa



One of Canada's most acclaimed artists, Alex Colville (1920–2013) is best known for his depictions of life in the Maritimes. *Bodies in a Grave, Belsen, 1946*, is drawn from his experience as an official war artist. Colville played a role in the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in May 1945, and he was witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust. This painting is perhaps one of the artist's most abstract works—the haunting depiction in this image belies the horror of seeing raw human depravity in the form of the more than 10,000 unburied bodies discovered at Bergen-Belsen. While Colville's role as a war artist was non-combative, he was exposed to the gruesome devastation the Nazis had wrought, which haunted him for the rest of his life.

To learn more about this artist's records of the Second World War, please read ACI's [Alex Colville: Life & Work](#) by Ray Cronin.

GERSHON ISKOWITZ



Selection, Auschwitz, 1947, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Gershon Iskowitz (1920 or 1921–1988) was born in Kielce, Poland, and as a young man he was sent to the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, where he foraged for found material and scraps of paper to create art, long before establishing himself as an artist in Canada. *Selection, Auschwitz, 1947*, is focused on his Holocaust experiences. Iskowitz believes that the ability to draw and create art allowed him to remain psychologically resilient during the horrors he witnessed, and it helped him survive the war. He was twenty-three years old when his camp was liberated, and within five years he had settled in Toronto to begin a new life.

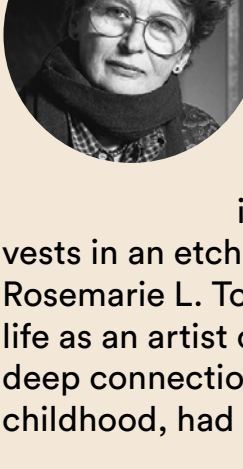
To learn more about this artist's journey, please read ACI's [Gershon Iskowitz: Life & Work](#) by Ihor Holubivsky.

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ABA BAYEFSKY



Remembering the Holocaust, 1988, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

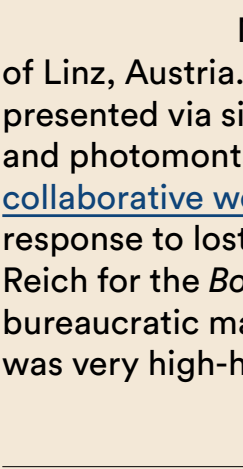


Aba Bayefsky (1923–2001) was born to a Jewish family in Toronto, and at the age of nineteen he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force, eventually becoming a war artist. In *Remembering the Holocaust*, 1988, he imagines the Grim Reaper surrounded by a crowd of mutilated bodies, with flame-like forms rising in the background. In creating this work, Bayefsky drew on his experience of touring the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and the war-ravaged cities of Hamburg, Niemünster, and Hanover, where he witnessed disturbing and traumatic scenes. As the Canadian War Museum has noted of this work, "The artist's anger is barely controlled and rooted in his personal reactions to anti-Semitism, to revisionist historians, and to the obliteration of the facts of the Holocaust. He feels a moral obligation to speak in paint, as it were, for those who cannot."

ORA MARKSTEIN

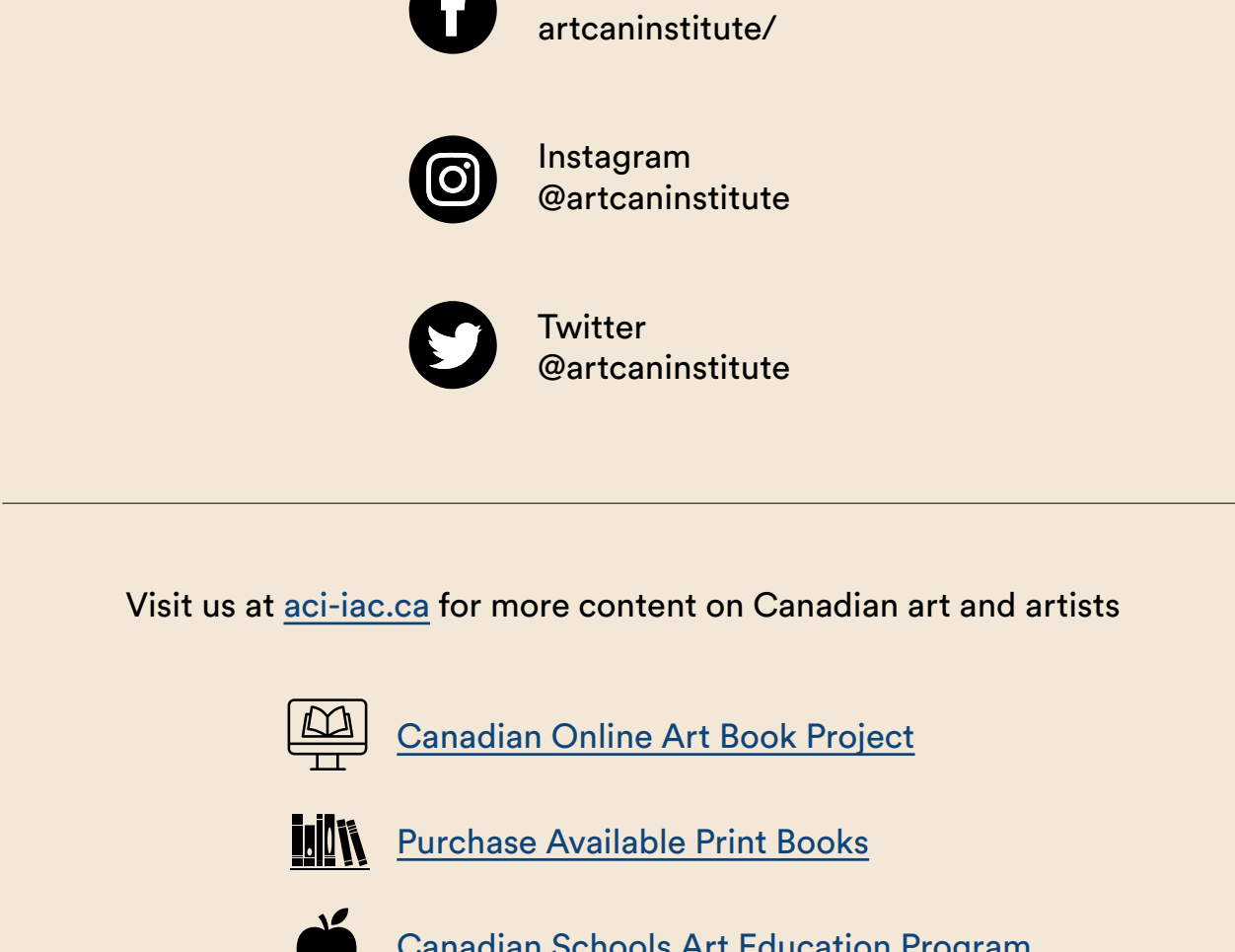


Ora's Hand, n.d.

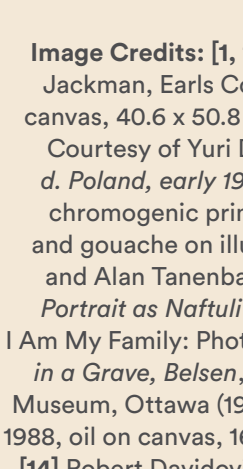


A survivor of both the Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, Hamilton-based sculptor Ora Markstein (b.1924) was born and raised in an Orthodox Jewish family in a town near Budapest, Hungary. This work, *Ora's Hand*, is one of a series of sculptures she made, carved from blocks of soapstone, marble, and alabaster, using only hand-held tools and her own body weight. Although consciously avoiding recreating the horrors she witnessed in youth, Markstein's work often focuses on the pain of loss counterbalanced with explorations of love and spiritual renewal. *Atelier: Ora Markstein*, the sculptor's first solo exhibition, took place when she was eighty-four, in 2008, at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

ROBERT DAVIDOVITZ



What Will Remain, 2020



For this work, Israeli-born, Toronto-based artist Robert Davidovitz was inspired by Synagogue in Vilna, The "Kloyz" of the Vilna Gaon. 1935, by the Russian-Jewish painter Marc Chagall (1887–1985). Here Davidovitz reinterprets the colourful windows depicted in Chagall's image of the synagogue, which was later destroyed during the Second World War. The meaning behind Davidovitz's stained-glass sculpture *What Will Remain* is an homage to his hereditary roots in Vilnius, Lithuania, but it also honours his father's practice of glassmaking. Davidovitz fashioned this artwork in his father's studio, using cracked panes of glass to remind us of how brokenness is a part of life, undeniable during a time when our existence feels shattered. The work also recalls Kristallnacht (German for "the Night of Broken Glass"), which took place on November 9–10, 1938, when Nazi forces throughout Germany smashed the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues, leaving broken glass strewn across the streets.

BETTY GOODWIN

Vest, April 1972, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

With her innovative, mysterious depictions of vests, starting in 1970 the Montreal artist Betty Goodwin (1923–2008) gained acclaim for her creations that drew attention to her father, a maker of vests, whom she lost in childhood. The work traces a line from Goodwin's own life in Canada to the events of the Holocaust, conjuring images of the dead. As if worn by a ghostly figure, Goodwin's vest appears to be floating in space; it was created through Goodwin's innovative process of placing vests in an etching press. the book *The Prints of Betty Goodwin*, curator Rosemarie L. Tourell states, "A moment of profound consequence in Goodwin's life as an artist occurred in January 1970... she suddenly realized that there was a deep connection between her Vest print and herself; her father, whom she lost in childhood, had earned his living as a maker of vests."

VERA FRENKEL

Body Missing, 1994 and ongoing

When she was only a few months old, multidisciplinary artist Vera Frenkel (b.1938) and her parents—who would lose seventeen siblings in the Holocaust—fled their hometown of Czechoslovakia, eventually settling in Montreal eleven years later. Frenkel's edgely-exhibited multimedia installation *Body Missing, 1994*—ongoing, explores the confiscation and theft of thousands of artworks by the Nazis for a proposed art museum in Adolf Hitler's hometown of Linz, Austria. The installation revolves around a semi-fictional narrative, presented via six video stations, that is supplemented by archival materials and photomontages. Since 1996, the project has also taken the form of a [collaborative website](#), in which other artists have contributed artworks in response to lost pieces of art. Frenkel says, "When I was studying the Third Reich for the *Body Missing* project, I became more and more aware of the bureaucratic masking of evil with an elaborate program, the rhetoric of which was very high-handed and full of *Kultur* but was, in fact, a form of murder."

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Image Credits: [1, 15] Ora Markstein, *Ora's Hand*, n.d., plaster, 20.32 x 20.32 x 12 cm. Photo credit: Andreea Jackman, Earls Court Gallery, Hamilton. [2, 7] Jacqueline Kott-Wolle, *My Parents' Chuppah*, 2020, oil on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy the artist. [3, 6] Yuri Dojc, *A synagogue in Kosice, Eastern Slovakia, 2006*. Courtesy of Yuri Dojc. [4, 9] Rafael Goldchain, *Self Portrait as Pola Baumfeld b. Ostrowiec, Poland 1910s d. Poland, early 1940s*, from the series *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions*, 1999–2001, chromogenic print. [5, 11] Gershon Iskowitz, *Selection, Auschwitz, 1947*, pen and black ink, watercolour, and gouache on illustration board, 40.8 x 50.3 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Joey, Toby, and Alan Tannenbaum, Toronto, 1998 (1990s). © Gershon Iskowitz Foundation. [8] Rafael Goldchain, *Self Portrait as Naftali Goldszajn b. Krasnik, Poland, early 1800s d. Krasnik, Poland, late 1800*, from the series *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions*, 1999–2001, chromogenic print. [10] Alex Colville, *Bodies in a Grave, Belsen, 1946*, oil on canvas, 76.3 x 101.6 cm. Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa (1970201–2033). © Canadian War Museum. [12] Aba Bayefsky, *Remembering the Holocaust, 1988*, oil on canvas, 167.7 x 121.7 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa (1997012–001). © Canadian War Museum. [14] Robert Davidovitz, *What Will Remain, 2020*, stained-glass. Courtesy the artist. [15] Betty Goodwin, *Vest, April 1972*, graphite, watercolour, and oil paint with collage of cloth, feathers, leaves, flowers, and hair on wove paper, 44.4 x 35.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [16] Vera Frenkel, *Body Missing, 1994 and ongoing*, six-channel video-photo-web installation, variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist.