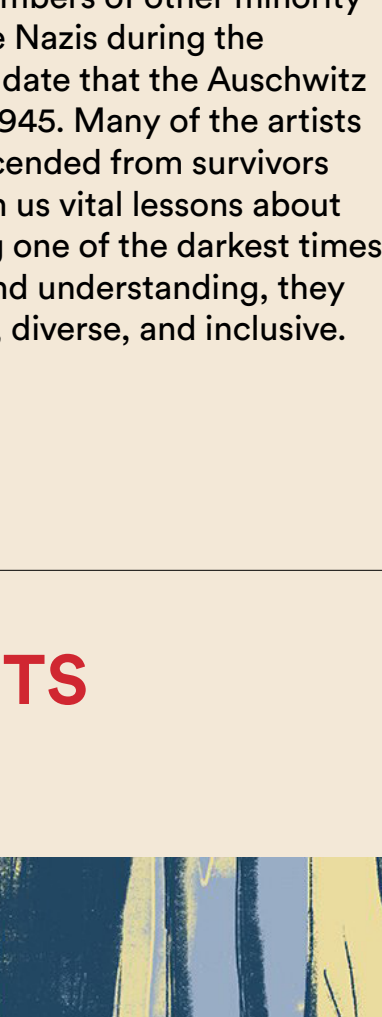
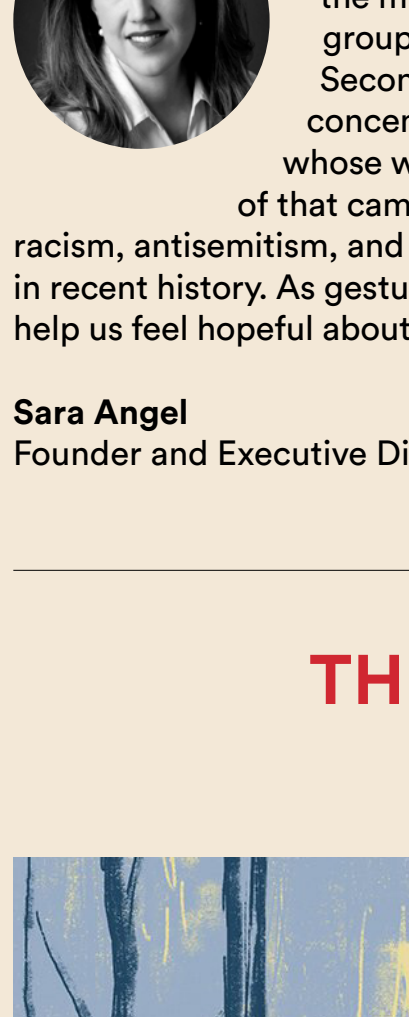


JANUARY 27, 2023

LOSS, SURVIVAL, AND HEALING REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we are sharing Canadian works that honour the resilience and stories of survivors and reflect on lessons from the past.



Today marks International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which commemorates the lost lives and lasting legacies of the millions of Jewish people and members of other minority groups tortured and murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War. January 27 is the date that the Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated in 1945. Many of the artists whose works are featured here are descended from survivors of that camp and others. Their works teach us vital lessons about racism, antisemitism, and human rights while illuminating one of the darkest times in recent history. As gestures of remembering, healing, and understanding, they help us feel hopeful about a future that is compassionate, diverse, and inclusive.

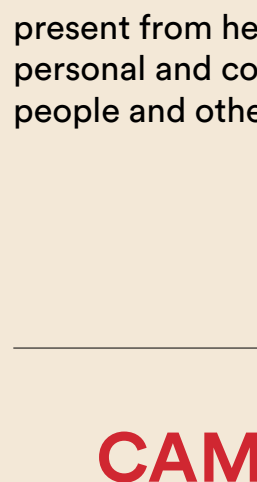
Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THIRTEEN SECRETS

by Gilad Seliktar



Illustration by Gilad Seliktar from Holocaust survivors Nico and Rolf Kamp's story, *Thirteen Secrets* (2022).



Two boys stand in a forest holding bunny rabbits in their arms in this illustration by Jerusalem-based graphic artist Gilad Seliktar (b.1977). The work is part of the recently published *But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust* (2022), an illustrated book edited by Dr. Charlotte Schallig that grew out of an international research project based at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. The book, a "co-creation" by three artists and four Holocaust survivors, has been called "the most powerful collection of non-fiction graphic novellas of the Holocaust since Art Spiegelman's *Maus*." This image is a visual interpretation of the memories of German-born brothers Nico and Rolf Kamp, who survived the Holocaust as children by hiding in thirteen different places in the Netherlands. The artist's pared-back, muted palette of pale yellow, teal, and slate blue evokes a sense of the children disappearing into the shadows.

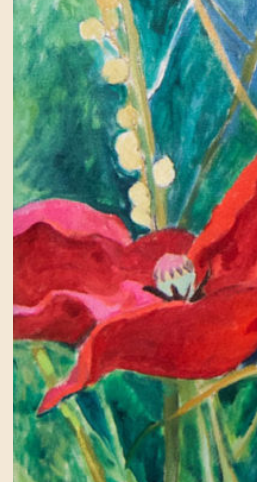
[Learn more about But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust](#)

BURNING SPOONS

by Marion Wagschal



Marion Wagschal, *Burning Spoons*, 1994, Hydro-Québec Collection.

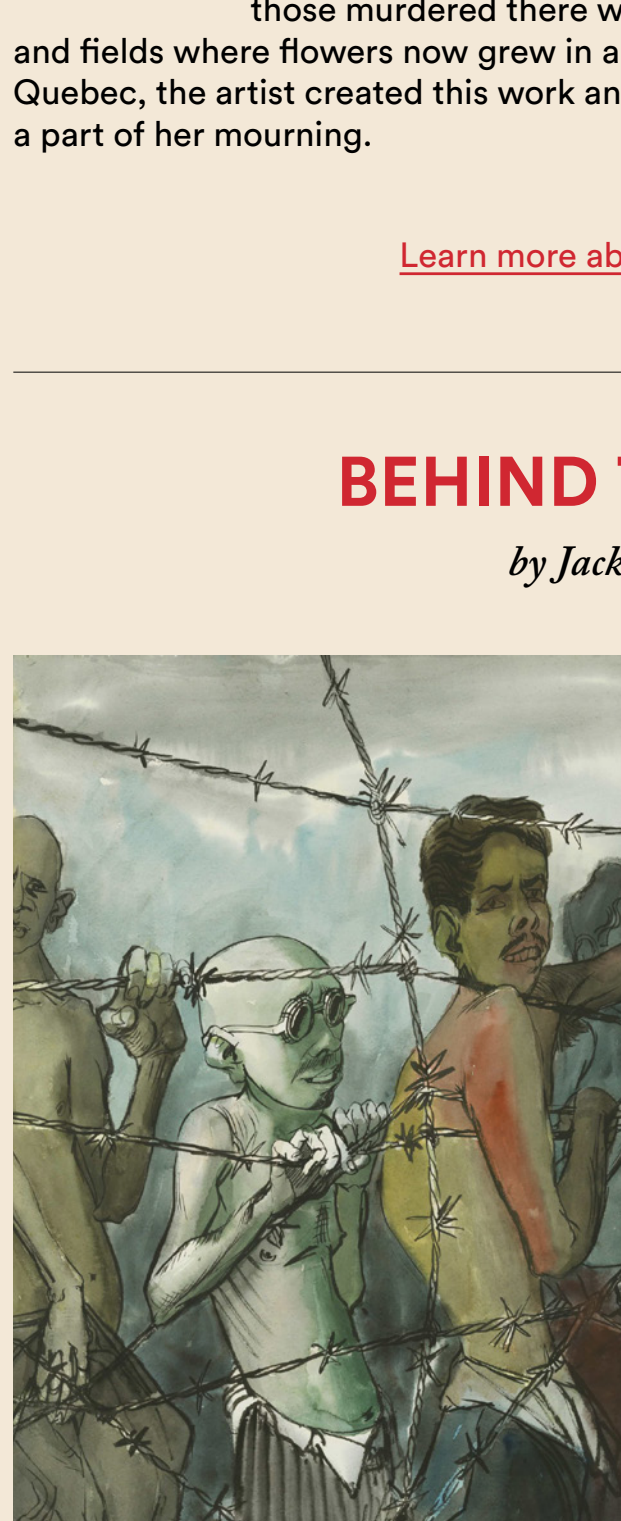


Mother and daughter lie beside each other in bed in this portrait by the feminist painter Marion Wagschal (b.1943). Between them, a box of spoons is burning, but the women don't react with alarm—in fact, they appear eerily sombre, as if they are so intimately accustomed to the presence of violence in their family that it has left them nonplussed. The spoons were the only personal belonging that Wagschal's mother brought with her from Germany; they had been a wedding present from her parents, who died at Auschwitz. They therefore represent both personal and collective history, recalling the incineration of millions of Jewish people and other minorities in concentration camps during the war.

[Learn more about Marion Wagschal](#)

CAMP (PERIPHERY) : THE FIELDS AND CAMP (PERIPHERY) : THE PONDS

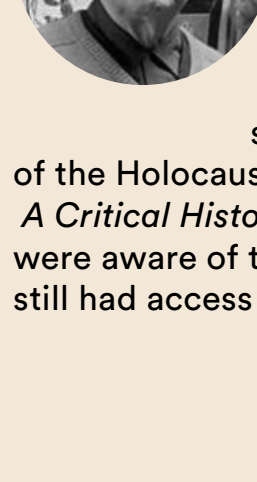
by Marie-Jeanne Musiol



Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Camp (periphery) : the fields*, Auschwitz-Birkenau, from the series *Silences*, 1994-2002, courtesy of Marie-Jeanne Musiol.



Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Camp (periphery) : the ponds*, Auschwitz-Birkenau, from the series *Silences*, 1994-2002, courtesy of Marie-Jeanne Musiol.

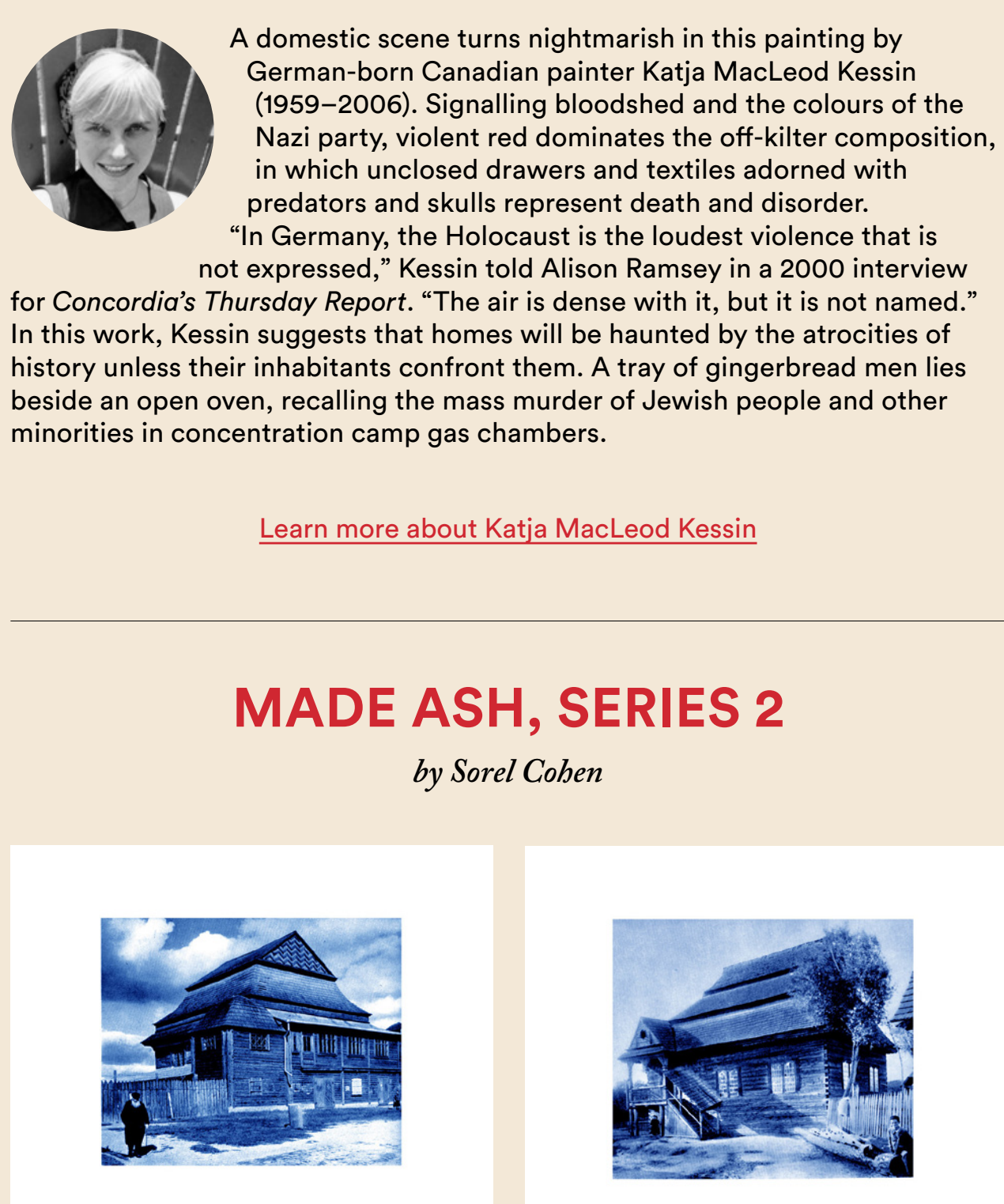


Beginning in 1994, Swiss Canadian photographer Marie-Jeanne Musiol (b.1950) undertook a succession of long walks at Auschwitz, a complex of over forty concentration and extermination camps operated by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland during the Second World War, where over 1.1 million people were killed. She was left with the strong conviction that "representational photography could not adequately express the experience of the site." Instead, Musiol found a new, oblique way of representing the area, starting at its periphery and focusing on the trees that witnessed the horrors that took place there, or that were grown from soil fertilized by the ashes of so many dead. The process of electrophotography, which the artist first investigated with this series as a way of harnessing the palpable energy of the camp's ruins, has been a hallmark of her work since.

[Learn more about Marie-Jeanne Musiol](#)

POPPY FIELD

by Rita Briansky



Rita Briansky, *Poppy Field*, n.d., from the *Kaddish Series* (Jewish Prayer for the Dead), courtesy of *Home in Canada*.



The serenity of this scene, in which vibrant red poppies pop against lush, tangled, blue-and-green foliage, belies the horrors that inspired its creation. In the 1990s, Montreal-based artist Rita Briansky, who was born in the Polish shtetl of Grajewo in 1925, returned to her roots. In Poland, she visited her hometown as well as the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, where she discovered that the ashes of those murdered there were scattered in the surrounding rivers and fields where flowers now grew in abundance. When she returned home to Quebec, the artist created this work and others, a series of paintings that were a part of her mourning.

[Learn more about Rita Briansky](#)

BEHIND THE WIRE

by Jack Shadbolt



Jack Shadbolt, *Behind the Wire*, 1947, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



In 1945, Canadian war artist Jack Shadbolt (1909-1998) travelled to England to sort and catalogue photographs taken at the Nazi concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald. Back in Canada, he based this ink and watercolour painting, part of a series, on what he saw. Sallow, skeletal figures, ghostly yet resolutely human, clutch barbed wire fences, their expressions pained and searching. It is a stark depiction of the brutality and horrors of the Holocaust. As ACI author Laura Brandon writes in *War Art in Canada: A Critical History*, "During the Second World War, few of the official artists were aware of the Holocaust taking place around them in Europe, and fewer still had access to the death camps after they were liberated."

[Learn more about Jack Shadbolt](#)

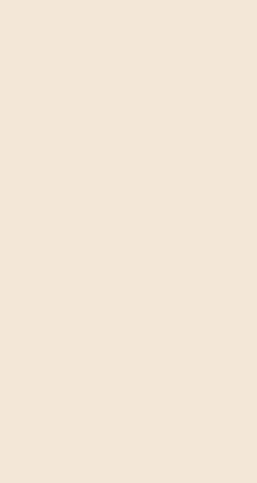
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BAKING LITTLE MEN

by Katja MacLeod Kessin



Katja MacLeod Kessin, *Baking Little Men*, 1991, courtesy of the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art Database.



A domestic scene turns nightmarish in this painting by German-born Canadian painter Katja MacLeod Kessin (1959-2006). Signalling bloodshed and the colours of the Nazi party, violent red dominates the off-kilter composition, in which unclothed drawers and textiles adorned with predators and skulls represent death and disorder. "In Germany, the Holocaust is the loudest violence that is not expressed," Kessin told Alison Ramsey in a 2000 interview for *Concordia's Thursday Report*. "The air is dense with it, but it is not named." In this work, Kessin suggests that homes will be haunted by the atrocities of history unless their inhabitants confront them. A tray of gingerbread men lies beside an open oven, recalling the mass murder of Jewish people and other minorities in concentration camp gas chambers.

[Learn more about Katja MacLeod Kessin](#)

MADE ASH, SERIES 2

by Sorel Cohen



Grodno



Lipsko

Sorel Cohen, *Made Ash, Series 2* (details), 1996, © Sorel Cohen / SOCAN (2023).

In this work, artist Sorel Cohen (b.1936) presents photographs of wooden synagogues that were reduced to ashes when they were intentionally burned to the ground in rural Poland during the Second World War. Many of Cohen's ancestors were Polish and murdered in the Holocaust. These two pictures are part of a twelve-image series that was inspired by the 1948 poem *Todesfuge* (*Death Fugue*) by Romanian Jewish poet Paul Celan (1920-1970), which contains the lines (in an English translation), "...death is a master from Deutschland / he calls scrape those fiddles more darkly then as smoke you'll rise in the air / then you'll have a grave in the clouds there you'll lie at ease."

[Learn more about Sorel Cohen](#)

BUT I LIVE

by Barbara Yelin

Illustration by Barbara Yelin from the first page of Holocaust survivor Emmie Arbel's story, *But I Live* (2022).

Deep in thought, a woman sits at a table with a cigarette idling in her hand, its plumes of smoke blending into the hazy walls around her. She is Holocaust survivor Emmie Arbel, depicted by Munich-based comics artist and illustrator Barbara Yelin (b.1977) for the book *But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust*. The book, which also includes the work of artists Gilad Seliktar (above) and Miriam Libicki, grew out of the [Narrative Art & Visual Storytelling in Holocaust & Human Rights Education project](#) at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Describing the importance of this unique collaboration between historians, artists, and Holocaust survivors, editor Dr. Charlotte Schallig suggests that the medium of the illustrated stories "encourage[s] the reader to experience stillness, silence and contemplation."

[Learn more about Barbara Yelin and But I Live](#)

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN HERE

by Wendy Oberlander

Video still from Wendy Oberlander's *Nothing to be written here*, 1996, showing winter in Camp B (Ripples, New Brunswick), c.1940-41, courtesy of Acadia Forest Experiment Station.

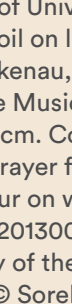
In her video work *Nothing to see here*, 1996, Vancouver-born multimedia artist Wendy Oberlander (b.1960) traces the internment of Jewish Austrian and German refugees in Eastern Canada during the Second World War. This still from the video shows an archival photograph of internees working at the Acadia Forest Experiment Station in New Brunswick, which the Department of National Defense used as an internment camp for Jewish civilians between 1940 and 1943. The men, many of whom had lost their families during the Shoah, were considered "enemy aliens" by the Canadian government and held as prisoners in the camp after escaping Nazi persecution in their home countries. Oberlander's father, Peter, was one of the internees, and his personal recollections are interwoven with history in the artist's complex account of another chapter of exile in the Jewish diaspora.

[Learn more about Wendy Oberlander](#)

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