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Visual Art as a Supplementary Source for Holocaust Studies: the Case of the Kaunas Ghetto

Abstract

This article sheds light on the artistic life in the Kaunas — or Kovno — Ghetto (Vilijampolė; Sloboda) from its establishment on August 15, 1941 to its liquidation between July 8 and 13, 1944. It presents the biographies and works of artists who were prisoners, direct witnesses and perpetuators in the Kaunas Ghetto. Art surviving from this period and place consequently led to focus on four main artists — Jacob Lipschitz, Esther Lurie, Ben Zion Schmidt and Josef Schlesinger. The author of the article questions how many artists were imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto, and how many of them continued to create; what were the main goals and reasons of the ghetto artists to create in such inhumane conditions; how many works of art from the Kaunas Ghetto have survived; what themes predominated in the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto; and how the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto changed and differed from earlier work created 'on the other side of the fence'.

Keywords: Holocaust art, Kaunas Ghetto, Jewish artists, Jacob Lipschitz, Esther Lurie, Ben Zion Schmidt, Josef Schlesinger

Holocaust studies include very different kinds of sources and Holocaust-related materials in all formats. Generally, research priority is given to an analysis of primary sources — original historical documents such as the Nazi records, prisoners' diaries

and letters, photographs and film footage. However, supplementary sources such as memoirs and oral history interviews of survivors or liberators, as well as poetry, music, posters and art created in the ghettos and concentration camps contain a lot of valuable information, and expand the boundaries of Holocaust studies.

This article sheds light on the artistic life in the Kaunas — or Kovno — Ghetto as well as the biographies and creative work of artists, who were prisoners, direct witnesses and perpetuators of the Kaunas Ghetto life. The author of the article questions how many artists were imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto, and how many of them continued to create; what were the main goals and reasons of the ghetto artists to create in such inhuman conditions; how many works of art from the Kaunas Ghetto have survived; what themes predominated in the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto; and how the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto changed and differed from earlier work created 'on the other side of the fence'.

To answer these questions, the author explored visual materials — watercolours, drawings and sketches—stored in the collections at the Yad Vashem Art Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), The Art Collection at the Ghetto Fighters' House (GFH) and the Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History (VGMJH).[1]

The analysis contains investigation of different types of written documents held at the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum, the Kaunas Regional State Archives (KRSA), the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA), the Lithuanian State Historical Archives (Lithuanian SHA), the Latvian State Historical Archives (Latvian SHA) and the Lithuanian National Museum of Art (LNMA). Special attention was drawn to the diaries written by Ilya Gerber, Chaim Jelin, Dr. Avraham Golub-Tory, Tamara Lazerson-Rostovsky, Esther Lurie and others. The author would like to express her gratitude and appreciation to Dusia Lan Kretchmer and Mirjam Lan Davidson, the nieces of the artist Ben Zion Josef (Nolik) Schmidt, for the photographs and rich biographical information.

Although the subject of this article is not entirely new, previously it has been presented in fragments; therefore, it calls for more in-depth research into the artistic life in the Kaunas Ghetto. Jewish artists in the Kaunas Ghetto were presented for the first time in 1997 at the exhibition and accompanying catalogue *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto* (ed. Dr. Walter Reich), where the USHMM researchers brought together unique materials from Lithuania, Israel and the United States to reveal a compelling and unforgettable view of Jewish life, loss, survival and defiance in the Kaunas Ghetto during the Holocaust. In Lithuania, artwork by artists from the Kaunas Ghetto was exhibited at the exhibition *The Lost World*, curated by Roza Bieliauskienė in 2004 at the VGMJH. The art historian at the VGMJH Irina Nikitina was the first in Lithuania to systematically

[1] If no storage location is specified in parentheses, the artwork is held at the Yad Vashem Art Museum. If no date is written in parentheses, the artwork is undated.

study the subject of Jewish artists killed at the Ninth Fort in Kaunas. In 2007, she wrote several short biographies of the artists in the exhibition catalogue entitled *Art and Fate of Jewish Painters from Kaunas*. Artwork by these artists was incorporated into a permanent exposition at the VGMJH.

Working at the VGMJH (2005—2020), the author of the article conducted research into art from the Vilnius — or Vilna — and the Kaunas Ghetto, and presented the results in a series of public lectures, *Artistic Life in the Kaunas Ghetto*, *Artistic Life in the Vilnius Ghetto* and *Samuel Bak and His Art in the Vilnius Ghetto* (in 2009, 2010 and 2012, respectively). Some results of the author's research were presented at the exhibition and album *Lithuania in Litvak Arts* (2018), as well as at the international conference *Art and the Holocaust* in 2019 in Riga.

Studies on Holocaust art by the art historians Dr. Ziva Amishai-Maisels and Dr. Pnina Rosenberg had an important impact on indicating the direction of research to be followed. In addition, this article would have been impossible to write without strong research foundation on the establishment, functioning and liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto as well as the statistics of the victims, the structure of the internal administration and anti-Nazi resistance conducted by Dr. Arūnas Bubnys in his fundamental study *The Kaunas Ghetto 1941–1944* (2014).

Discrimination and persecution of the Kaunas' Jews began during the first days of the German occupation of the city. Soon after German forces entered Kaunas, the Kaunas Ghetto was established, which was sealed several weeks later on August 15, 1941 in Vilijampolė (Sloboda). The first months in the ghetto were marked by a period of mass slaughter. Between November 1941 and September 1943, the ghetto was in a state of relative stability. About 17,000 Jews, or about half of the Jews who had lived in Kaunas before the war, remained in the ghetto during this second period. The ghetto became a kind of microstate, with its own government, economy and forms of spiritual and cultural life. In the autumn of 1943, the ghetto was transformed into an SS concentration camp. Between July 8 and 13, 1944 the Kaunas Ghetto was liquidated: buildings were burned, about 1,000 Jews were killed and about 6,000-7,000 Jews were transported to German concentration camps including Dachau and Stutthof. Approximately 500 Kaunas Ghetto prisoners managed to escape during the three years of the ghetto's existence (Bubnys 2014: 29–119).

Many famous cultural figures, including writers, musicians, actors and artists, were forced to move into ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Žagarė. Most brought their musical instruments and art equipment with them. From the first days in the ghettos, Jews were faced with a dilemma as to whether it would be appropriate to continue with their cultural activities under such inhumane conditions. Some were of the opinion that it would be wrong to amuse themselves in the context of the killings, and even boycotted the first cultural events in the ghettos. Others were of the opinion that any cultural activity would be good for the spirits and increase the desire to survive.

The Nazis sought to restrict cultural activities in the ghettos in order to break the spirits and the desire to live of those incarcerated. On August 18, 1941, three days after the Kaunas Ghetto gates were sealed, the Nazis carried out the so-called 'Intellectuals Action', during which a total of 534 men from various professional and cultural backgrounds were killed. Afterwards, most musicians, actors and painters were afraid to openly declare themselves as being members of the professional and cultural classes. Only during the summer of 1942, after the first major killing actions had stopped, the cultural life in the Kaunas Ghetto was revived with music concerts, poetry evenings, theatre performances and art exhibitions taking place inside the ghetto's Police House located in the former Slabodka Yeshiva. Daniel Pomerantz, Moshe Hofmekler and the brothers Alexander (Shmaya) and Boris Stupel organised an orchestra of 40 musicians, and a total of 80 concerts were given during the lifetime of the Kaunas Ghetto. During the so-called 'Police Action' of March 27, 1944, only the musicians were spared from being sent to the Ninth Fort. "Though the first concert, which began with a moment of silence followed by *Kol Nidre* (the opening hymn of the Yom Kippur service), featured only serious music, many in the ghetto felt it was indecent to hold concerts in a place of mourning. They considered these concerts to be solely for the ghetto elite and a desecration of the yeshiva. Despite this criticism, most felt that the concerts served a useful purpose in raising the morale in the ghetto" (*The Kovno Ghetto Orchestra*, USHMM).

In spite of all the prohibitions imposed by the Nazis and the different attitudes to cultural activities by the Jews, concerts, literary evenings and exhibitions were held, theatrical groups staged plays, orchestras gave concerts and choirs sang in the ghetto. As the Jewish librarian and writer Herman Kruk wrote in his ghetto diary: "Nonetheless, life is stronger than anything. Life in the Vilna Ghetto begins to recover. It creeps in from under the Paneriai curtain with a hope to live to see a better tomorrow… The previously boycotted concerts are very popular. Audiences crowd to see them" (Kruk 2002: 266).

At least 10 Jewish artists who were active during the interwar period were incarcerated in the Kaunas Ghetto, including the painter and art teacher Zale Beker, who was famous for his social subjects (1896, Leckava-1941, Kaunas), the promising young graphic artist Ana Gurvichiute (Gurvičiūtė, 1921, Kaunas-?, Kaunas), the graphic artist and book illustrator Meyer Chona Fainstein (Fainšteinas, 1911, Kaunas-1944, Kaunas), the great landscape painter Eliya Kivel Kaplan (1912, Marijampolė-1944, Kaunas), the young graphic artist David Kapulski (1921, Kaunas-?, Kaunas), the well-known painter, book illustrator and art teacher Jakov Lipschitz (Lipčicas, 1903, Kaunas-1945, Dachau), the artist Esther Lurie (1913, Liepaja-1998, Tel Aviv), her relative, the painter Gitel Lurie (1909, Biržai-?, Kaunas), the excellent expressionist painter Cherne Percikovichiute (Černė Percikovičiūtė, 1911, Kaunas-1942, Kaunas), the student Ben Zion Josef (Nolik) Schmidt (Šmidtas, 1926, Kaunas-1944, Kaunas), the flamboyant theatre designer Sholom Zelmanovich (Zelmanavičius, 1903, Vilnius-1944, Kaunas) and the young artist Josef Schlesinger (1919, Brno-1993, Prague), who moved to Kaunas following the Nazi oc-

cupation of his native Czechoslovakia during 1938 and 1939. Some of these artists were already mature professionals by the time they were imprisoned in the ghetto. They participated in the joint exhibitions alongside Lithuanian artists, and some of them had their own solo exhibitions — Beker in 1933, 1935 and 1937, Lipschitz in 1940, Esther Lurie in 1939 and 1940, Percikovichiute in 1934 and Zelmanovich in 1925 and 1928. The future creative careers of the other artists were all cut short by the events of 1941.

The years 1939—1945 brought drastic changes within the world of Jewish art and art heritage. With the exception of Esther Lurie and Josef Schlesinger, all of the other artists mentioned here were either murdered at the Ninth Fort or died from disease and starvation. The previously rich and multifarious Jewish art heritage of the interwar period was also lost. The paintings, sculptures, watercolours, drawings, and sketches left in the artists' studios and homes either burned or disappeared, and only a tiny part of their work survives to this day. Some of the above mentioned artists gave up their artistic activities in the Kaunas Ghetto, or the work that they created in the ghetto either did not survive or is yet to be discovered. The art created by others was more fortunate, surviving thanks to the collections of Dr. Avraham Golub-Tory and Jakov Lipschitz that were hidden in the ghetto.

A large part of the Kaunas Ghetto documents, photographs and art was collected and saved thanks to the wisdom and courage of the personnel of the *Ältestenrat* (the Jewish Council of Elders), especially that of its chairman Dr. Elchanan Elkes and secretary Dr. Avraham Golub-Tory. Dr. Elchanan Elkes (1879, Kalvarija-1944, Dachau) studied medicine in Konigsberg, and worked as a doctor and a physician. Following the liquidation of the ghetto he was killed by the Nazis at the Dachau concentration camp. Dr. Avraham Golub-Tory (1909, Lazdijai-2002, Tel Aviv; he added the Hebrew 'Tory' to his Russian surname Golub — meaning 'dove' — in 1950) completed a law degree in Kaunas, and worked as an assistant on civil law at the Vytautas Magnus University in the city. With the help of the priest Bronius Paukštys, Golub-Tory escaped the ghetto on March 23, 1944 and spent the final months of the war hiding on a farm belonging to the Jurkšaičiai family outside Kaunas (Bronius Paukštys was recognised as 'Righteous Among the Nations' in 1977, and Juozapas and Marijona Jurkšaičiai in 1990. All were awarded the 'Life Saving Cross').

The *Ältestenrat* was divided into different departments, including a graphics workshop called the *Paint and Sign Workshop* that was headed by Peter (Fritz) Gadiel. Gadiel was born in 1910 in Germany, and was imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto whilst visiting his wife Rene Silverman's relatives. Gadiel, who trained at the Bauhaus during the early 1930s, was well on his way to a promising career as a graphic artist. Both Gadiel and his wife survived the Holocaust. Their three-year-old son, Raanan, who was born in the ghetto, was killed (*Three Members…*, Yad Vashem; Reich 1997: 111–113).

The graphics workshop employed many who were considered 'unfit for hard labour', and thereby it saved many lives. Several cartographers, draftsmen, graph-

ic designers and fine artists worked here, among them Lipschitz, Lurie, Schmidt, and Schlesinger. Together with Gadiel, they created signs for the offices and police in the ghetto, including insignias, logos, armbands, posters, calendars, events programmes, ghetto currency, work cards, passes, coupons, and other documents. They also produced charts, graphs and an annual almanac capturing in excruciating detail the ghetto's demographics, health, work, bureaucracy and dwindling population. Gadiel assigned artists to projects ordered by the Germans, who demanded the copying of artistic masterpieces for their own private collections. In addition, Gadiel employed many Jews for other work that he did for the Germans, thus raising their chances of survival (Tory 1990: 432).

Understanding the importance of documenting ghetto life for future generations, the *Ältestenrat* asked artists and photographers to devote some of their time to secretly document the ghetto life, its inhabitants and events. Among the artists who responded to the call were Lipschitz, Lurie, Schmidt, and Schlesinger as well as the photographer Zvi (Hirsh) Kadushin (1910–1997; after the war he changed his name to George Kadish). Dr. Golub-Tory also took clandestine photographs until his camera was confiscated. The *Ältestenrat* commissioned artists to immortalise street scenes, key events and important persons, and organised the guards while artists were drawing in the streets of the ghetto. As the secretary of the *Ältestenrat* and the ghetto's chief archivist, Dr. Golub-Tory was able to collect and hide hundreds of documents, photographs and drawings. Just before the liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto, he buried five wooden crates containing his diary and all the collected items. In August 1944, after the liberation of Kaunas, Dr. Golub-Tory returned to the ghetto in search of the five crates that he had hidden in a bunker beneath an unfinished apartment building. He only managed to retrieve three of the five crates, and took the contents to Poland, and afterwards to Tel Aviv in October 1947 (Tory 1990: xiv). His diary and saved archive materials, including several watercolours and drawings, were used as evidence by investigators against Lithuanian and German perpetrators and served as an extraordinary eyewitness account.

Only the work of four of the more than 10 Jewish artists who were imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto survived World War II and the Holocaust. Today the watercolours, drawings and sketches by Lipschitz, Lurie, Schmidt, and Schlesinger are held in collections at the Yad Vashem Art Museum, the USHMM, the GFH and the VGMJH. Some of the work is also in the possession of private collectors.

Jakov Lipschitz (Lifschitz) was born in 1903 in Vilijampolė. His father, Eizer (born in 1870 in Raseiniai), owned a fruit shop, and was one of the owners of *Trade Enterprises*. His mother, Chase (Kashe) Meer, was a housekeeper. Jakov had a sister, Chana and two bothers, Shloma and Gdaliya (1903, Lithuania Births, Lithuanian SHA; 1939–1940, Tax and Voter Lists, KRSA). Jakov attended cheder and a Russian school before World War I. During the war, the Lipschitz family, as with most other Lithuanian Jewish families living in what was then the Russian Empire, was deported to the Crimea. Later, the family

moved to the Ukrainian city of Melitopol, where the young Jakov saw an art exhibition for the first time. He later recalled: "One artist came and exhibited his works. His exhibition and the artist's own appearance impressed me deeply. [..] I decided to become an artist, and my first experience to paint was in an art studio established by the Bolsheviks in Melitopol" (1936, Lipschitz, LNMA). In 1922, the Lipschitz family returned to Kaunas, which served as the temporary capital of Lithuania during the interwar period.

Between 1923 and 1929, Lipschitz studied painting at the Kaunas Art School and was noticed for his watercolours, woodcuts and lithographs. After graduating, the artist joined the activities of the Lithuanian Artists' Association, and worked as an art teacher in Jewish high schools in Virbalis, Vilkaviškis and Kaunas. He frequently participated in exhibitions, and had his own solo show in 1940 (Jakovo Lipšico... 1940). Art critics praised his landscapes, portraits, still lifes and Jewish-themed work, highlighting its philosophical properties: "Lipschitz's decorative paintings require serious contemplation, and only after contemplation does his work become understandable and unambiguous, and show the ambitions of its creator" (Leikovičius 1940: 7).

During the mid-1930s, Lipschitz married Liza (Lea) Zachrozitzki (born in 1912 in Virbalis), with whom he had one daughter, Pepa (Pepa Sharon). The family lived in Vilijampolė on the territory where the Kaunas Ghetto was later established. The family was imprisoned in their home, and Lipschitz was able to continue to paint secretly in his attic studio. He was assigned to a forced labour brigade, and worked in the graphics workshop together with several other artists.

Just before the liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto, Lipschitz buried more than 75 watercolours and drawings, as well as a few photographs and his so-called 'Final Will and Testament', dated July 5 and 6, 1944, in ceramic pots. Among his final words were:

> "Life in the ghetto froke my spirit forever, and I am unable to return to myself. I paint a little, and I sketch what one finds here. I have not written anything until today, because I wanted to convey my thoughts in creativity and painting in the pictorial arts. [..] The knife of the beast lies at our throat already. Do not leave behind the few drawings of mine which you will find here" (1944, Lipschitz, LCSA).

Jakov Lipschitz was transported to the Dachau concentration camp, and from there to the Kaufering forced labour camp where he died of starvation in March 1945. His wife and daughter escaped from the ghetto thanks to their friends, the Zabielavičiai family, whom they knew from Jakov's teaching days in Virbalis (Juozas Zabielavičius was recognised as 'Righteous Among the Nations' in 2002; Juozas and Emilija Zabielavičiai were awarded the 'Life Saving Cross' in 1998). After the war, Liza discovered her husband's hidden items among the ghetto ruins, and donated all of the watercolours and drawings to the Yad Vashem Art Museum when she and her daughter emigrated to Israel in 1957.

Lipschitz's watercolours and ink drawings reflect the ghetto and its inhabitants. The artist often drew panoramas from the studio in his attic, presenting a bird's-eye view of his surroundings. Among these works are the watercolours *Kaunas Ghetto Scene* (1943) and *The Ghetto*. Lipschitz never sought to reflect reality in detail, and neither did he attempt to beautify it. The atmosphere and the internal feelings of the artist were already there. He generalised form by using coloured stains, and created a gloomy mood by using limited, muted colours and soft brush strokes. When analysing Lipschitz's work, the art critics of the interwar period in Kaunas noticed melancholy and sadness in his art, a quality that intensified in the ghetto: "The art by Lipschitz leads the viewer to a horrible melancholy and sorrow. Lipschitz mourns. He mourns for all those with him. The talented child mourns for everyone" (Tarabilda 1940: 6). This tragic note now sounds like a prophecy.

A different vision is presented in the artist's drawing *Mokyklos Street* (School Street), in which Lipschitz drew a cobbled street with rows of impoverished wooden houses on both sides and people going about their daily business. The drawing was executed from a low perspective, as if the artist was hiding in a basement. His drawing *At a Table in the City Brigades Office* (1941) shows a small crowded room, where men with the Star of David sewn on their clothing are waiting for work assignments in order to get through the ghetto gate in the hope of gaining an extra slice of bread. Two drawings, *The Little Market* and *The Market in the Street*, show a group of people, mostly women and youngsters, holding trade pallets with items to sell. These black market traders look around nervously, as trade and re-sale in the ghetto were strictly forbidden.

Lipschitz's sketch *Schoolroom* shows a group of pupils sitting behind benches, with one of the boys standing and answering the teacher's questions. Education had always been a major priority in the ghetto, but it was only during the period of stabilisation that parents could think about educating their children. Two schools were established, with about 200 students in each, but the German authorities had the schools closed in August 1942. "This blow, though severe, did not quite mark the end of education in the ghetto. Illegal private education continued" (Reich 1997: 36).

Lipschitz also produced a number of hastily drawn pencil, crayon and ink portraits. His ghetto portraits gallery immortalised the teachers Eliya Taitz (1942) and Rivka Burstein (1942). Some of the portraits feature the exact date on which they were drawn, such as the portraits of the clerk Bella Berlowitz, drawn on August 15, 1941, the little girl Izia Rosenkranz, drawn on November 18, 1943, the artist's wife, drawn on January 9, 1944 and a self-portrait, drawn on August 14, 1943. Others are yet to be identified, such as *Profile of a Woman* (1942), *Portrait of a Man Wearing a Hat* (1942), *Man with a Tilted Head* (c. 1943) and *Portrait of a Woman* (January 22, 1944). Most of these portraits do not show the official style and formality of usual commissioned portraits, and are drawn using expressive soft lines from different angles. Some of them

are drawn from above, similar to the ghetto panoramic views painted by Lipschitz, and show the tops of people's heads.

Lipschitz's watercolour, *Beaten*, depicts the naked back of his younger brother Gdaliya, complete with scars acquired from a beating by Gestapo guards. Gdaliya's wounded back, with his head bowed, is depicted with an emotion that becomes a symbol of the pain and torture of all of the Jews in the Kaunas Ghetto.

Esther Lurie was born in 1913 in a Baltic seaport of Libau (now Liepaja, Latvia) to a religious intellectual Jewish family. Her parents, Josel Jankel Lurie (Lurje) and Bluma Gordon, married in 1905. Bluma gave birth to six girls and one boy (June 10, 1905, Latvia Marriages…, Latvian SHA). At the beginning of World War I, the Lurie family was forced to move to Riga, because Libau served as a military port.

From her childhood, Esther was interested in drawing and design. Upon graduating from the Riga Hebrew Gymnasium at the age of eighteen, Lurie joined her brother in Brussels. Between 1931 and 1934, she studied theatrical set design at the Institut des Arts Décoratifs in Brussels and drawing at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp. In 1934, Lurie emigrated to Palestine and joined several members of her family in Tel Aviv. She became active as an artist, worked as a theatre decorator and participated in group exhibitions in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa. In 1938, she had a solo exhibition, and was awarded the Dizengoff Prize for Drawing.

Shortly before the start of World War II, Lurie visited her relatives in Latvia and Lithuania. She lived in Kaunas during 1939 and 1940, enjoying the company of her sister, Muta Zarchin, and her cousin Gitel Lurie, who was also an artist. Esther improved her painting skills at the Kaunas Art School, where she was taught by Justinas Vienožinskis, one of the most famous Lithuanian artists and art educators. During this time, Lurie had two solo shows in Kaunas, one in 1939, where over 40 paintings and watercolours mostly depicting Palestinian life and nature were exhibited (Esther Lurie... 1939), and the other in 1940, where she exhibited about 30 works in which she portrayed the ballet dancers at the State Theatre in Kaunas (Baletas…1940: 2). Esther and Gitel had a plan to organise an exhibition together, but after the Nazi occupation the entire family was sent to the ghetto. Gitel Lurie was murdered at the Ninth Fort. Muta Zarchin and her family were sent to Auschwitz, where they were killed on arrival. Only Esther Lurie survived, having experienced the brutality and inhumane conditions of the Kaunas Ghetto, the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland and the Leibitsch forced labour camp in Germany.

Lurie returned to Palestine in July 1945, and continued her artistic career. In 1946, she was awarded the Dizengoff Prize for Drawing for the second time for her sketch *Young Woman with Yellow Star* (self-portrait; 1941, Esther Lurie Collection), which was drawn in the Kaunas Ghetto. Lurie married Joseph Shapiro, and they had two children. She exhibited her artwork in group and solo shows in Israel and abroad, and published several albums of her work, including *Kovno Ghetto Scenes and Types* (1958), *Sketch-*

es from A Women's Labour Camp (1962) and *Jerusalem: 12 Drawings and Paintings* (1970). Lurie lived in Tel Aviv until her death in 1998.

Lurie documented life in the Kaunas Ghetto for almost three years, and created a few hundred watercolours and drawings. As deportations from the ghetto to the concentration camps increased, Lurie asked the craftsmen in the pottery workshop to make several large ceramic jars in which she could hide her work, which she subsequently did. In July 1944, Lurie was transported to Stutthof, and in August was sent to the Leibitsch camp. She continued to draw in secret, focusing primarily on portraits of her fellow female prisoners and scenes of her daily life. The portraits that she was commissioned to draw during this time enabled her to barter for food, which ultimately prevented her from starving to death. Following the camp's liberation by the Red Army in January 1945, Lurie moved to a displaced persons camp in Italy. She stayed briefly in Italy, and worked as an interpreter for the Soviet authorities. Lurie met some Jewish soldiers from Palestine who were serving in the British Army, including the artist Menachem Shemi, who was born in Bobruisk in today's Belarus. He helped organise an exhibition for Lurie, and published a slim booklet entitled *Jewish Women in Subjugation: 15 Drawings from the Stutthof and Leibitsch camps* (1945).

After the war, Lurie returned to Kaunas and looked for her hidden work (1945, Lurie's Letter, USHMM), of which unfortunately the majority was never found. More than 200 of her watercolours and drawings were destroyed, probably burned during the ghetto liquidation. The small part that did survive includes 11 sketches and 8 watercolours, as well as 20 photographs of her work that Dr. Golub-Tory hid in secret crates and recovered after liberation. Although most of Lurie's watercolours and drawings disappeared, she never gave up telling the story of the Kaunas Ghetto. The artist spent much of her time reconstructing her ghetto work, drawing them again from memory, or old ghetto photographs. She also used the photographs that Dr. Golub-Tory had taken of her pictures during a clandestine exhibition in the ghetto. In the 1970s, five pen and ink deportation scenes were discovered by a Lithuanian family and returned to the artist (Holocaust Encyclopaedia 2020, USHMM).

A sizable amount of the work that Lurie produced in the Kaunas Ghetto as well as 35 portraits from the Stutthof and Leibitsch camps are kept at the Yad Vashem Art Museum. More of her work can be found among the collections at the USHMM, GFH and VGMJH. Some of the artwork is also in the possession of private collectors. Most of the artwork was donated to the museums by the artist herself. During Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961, Lurie's art served as testimony, thereby gaining official approval by the Supreme Court for the documentary value of her sketches and watercolours.

Esther Lurie was imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto in August 1941. After seeing one of her drawings, the *Ältestenrat* arranged for her to be temporarily released from her work assignments and commissioned her to draw everything that was happening

in the ghetto. Lurie understood the importance of her task, and immediately set about recording her experiences with the aid of drawn sketches and a written testimony:

> "Everything that was happening all around was so strange, so different from all the ideas and practices of our lives hitherto. I felt that I must report on this new existence, or at least make sketches. I must depict things as I saw them. I began to regard this work of mine as a duty" (Lurie 1958: 9).

The people at the *Ältestenrat* guarded her from the Gestapo soldiers as she drew in the streets, thus allowing her to create many drawings and watercolours of the daily life in the ghetto. The inhabitants of the ghetto asked her to draw their portraits with the intention of immortalising themselves and their families. The Gestapo officers also showed an interest in Lurie's artistic talent, because of her ability to portray people and to copy the paintings of the old masters for them. Her artistic talent came to her assistance, and the commissioned paintings that she produced helped her survive the ghetto.

Like Lipschitz, Lurie often drew the ghetto's panoramas from a bird's-eye perspective, as in her drawing *Ghetto Street Scene* (1943, USHMM), *The Main Gate* (1943, USHMM), *Demokratų Square* (USHMM), *The Jewish Council Building* (USHMM), *Ghetto Buildings* (USHMM) and others. The artist depicted the ghetto environment in detail, recording houses, streets, yards and squares. Most often, the main element of her compositions was the street — sometimes empty, and sometimes busy with people. Wooden houses, trees and electricity poles surround the street. Barbed wire fences dominate nearly every panoramic ghetto drawing that she created.

A few of Lurie's watercolours and drawings were devoted to Paneriai Street that separated the two parts of the Kaunas Ghetto, called the 'Large' and the 'Small' ghettos. Her drawing *Wooden Bridge of the Kaunas Ghetto* (1957 after the 1941 original, GFH) shows a wooden bridge built across the street and fenced in with barbed wire. A row of people cross the bridge. In his 1941 and 1942 ghetto writings, the Yiddish poet and leader of the resistance movement in the Kaunas Ghetto Chaim Jelin noted:

> "The bridge is six metres high, wooden, like an arch bent over the street. It leads upstairs, downstairs, connecting one part of Dvaro Street with the other, with Panerių Street beneath, over which wagons and cars travel. Under the bridge, Christian life goes on. Over the bridge walk the 'criminals'—the Jews" (Jelin 1975: 163; Hidden History…1997: 62).

Several of Lurie's drawings immortalise particularly brutal events in the ghetto. Although it is undated, her drawing *What Was Left of the Hospital* (GFH) probably features the fire at the ghetto's contagious diseases hospital on October 4, 1941. The hos-

pital was deliberately set on fire along with its patients and medical personnel by order of the Commander of the SD (Sicherheitsdienst). After this so-called 'Hospital Action', the remaining doctors and medical personnel tried to hide any connection that they had with the medical profession. A few weeks after this event, the 'Great Action' of October 28 and 29, 1941 took away the lives of almost 10,000 people. Nearly one-third of the ghetto's population was murdered in October 1941. Lurie sketched the ruins of the hospital, with the ghetto houses in the far background. Among the building's mangled carcass and metal bed frames stands a group of confused people. Only a gloomy, naked chimney survived the flames.

Constant hunger and cold were two main problems in the ghetto. Wood for heating and cooking was one of the most necessary and precious commodities. Lurie's *Children Carrying Branches* (1956 after the 1942 original) depicts two children in a field carrying large bundles of thin branches on their shoulders. Lurie drew people waiting in line for food, or searching the field along the River Neris in search of leftover potatoes. Her sketch *At the Communal Kitchen* (after the 1942 original) shows an elderly seated woman with a Star of David on her back eating soup in a kitchen that was opened by the ghetto's Welfare Office on April 8, 1942. The soup kitchen gave free hot meals to the poorest and loneliest people in the ghetto. "I sketched at the Communal Kitchen, where a little thin soup was distributed to old people and forsaken children. These people were quite indifferent to all that was going on around them, and paid no attention to me" (Lurie 1958: 13). To find a living space was also a big problem in the ghetto, especially at the beginning. Lurie drew displaced families trying desperately to set up living quarters. Families even sought space among heavy machinery and industrial equipment in a former school of handicrafts. A few of Lurie's drawings show a courtyard filled with furniture that won't fit into the extremely cramped apartments.

The selections and deportations of people to the Ninth Fort, where thousands of Jews were cruelly tortured and executed, were also recorded by Lurie. *Deportation Near the Main Gate* (1943, Esther Lurie Collection) shows a crowd of wandering people carrying large bags and boxes. In a series of watercolours and ink drawings, Lurie depicted queues of figures passing peaceful suburban houses on the way to their deaths. The watercolour *One Way to the Ninth Fort* (1960 after the 1941 original, GFH) shows the empty road that led to the Ninth Fort. She repeated the same scene several times at different times of the year — with a blue summer sky, with dark autumn clouds, with green spring grass and grey winter snowdrifts. The beautiful road stands in stark contrast to the torture and murder that it led to. Lurie wrote:

> "A subject which I painted many times at all seasons was the road that led from the 'Ghetto Valley' to the Ninth Fort on the hilltop. A row of lofty trees at the wayside gave the road a singular character. The highway to the hilltop remains etched deep in my memory as a Via Dolorosa, taken by tens of thousands of Jews from

> Lithuania and Western Europe on the way to their deaths. There were days when the grey clouds gave this place a peculiarly tragic aspect, which accorded with our feelings" (Lurie 1958: 13–14).

The simplicity of her compositions and palette is common to most of Lurie's ghetto watercolours, but the content that hides behind this external simplicity is heartbreaking.

Most of Lurie's portraits were commissioned by the *Ältestenrat* for its secret archives, as well as by the ghetto inmates and the Gestapo. Just a few of them survive to this day, among them the portraits of Dr. Avraham Golub-Tory (31.10.1942), the head of the Educational Department Dr. Chaim Nachman Shapiro (1942), the physician and deputy chief of the Ghetto Police Dr. Jakov Abramovitz (1943), the commander of the ghetto fire-fighting brigade Moshe Abramovitz (1943), the civil engineer and assistant chief of the Ghetto Police Yehuda Zupovitz (1943) and the director of the airfield department Wolf Lurie (1943). These commissioned portraits are characterised by a professional solid line, and perfectly reveal the facial features and characters of the people that they depict. Lurie's portraits of women inmates are particularly feminine, and are characterised by soft lines, fine-line shading and tender undertones.

Lurie drew a few self-portraits; the best known is *Young Woman with Yellow Star* (drawn in 1941, Esther Lurie Collection, repeated in 1946 and 1957, GFH, and 1958, private collection) in which artist depicted herself dressed in a checked dress with a Star of David patch on the front and back. Lurie was awarded her second Dizengoff Prize for Drawing in 1946 for this image.

Ben Zion Josef (Nolik) Schmidt was born on September 5, 1926 in Kaunas. His father, Dr. Jacob Schmidt (Jankelis Efraimas Šmidtas, 1885, Balninkai-1949, Feldafingen, Germany), was a doctor and a specialist in chemistry and bacteriology who owned the largest laboratory in Kaunas at 28 Gardino Street that carried out medical, agricultural, industrial and even early pregnancy tests. His mother, Mirjam Elkes (1887, Kaunas-1945, Prauste) was a French teacher who later worked with her husband at the laboratory, where she was in charge of its financial and administrative duties. Ben Zion graduated from the Schwabe Hebrew Gymnasium in Kaunas. His older sister, Thea (Thea Schmidt Lan, 1920, Kaunas-2014, Kiryat Ono, Israel), studied at the Kaunas German Upper Exact Sciences Gymnasium, but after Hitler came to power in 1933 she was forced to leave and continue her studies at the Aušra Girls Gymnasium. In 1937, Thea began her medical studies at the Vytautas Magnus University, but the Nazi occupation interrupted it. She was not able to resume her studies after the war, because the occupying Soviets considered her as a hostile element (Kretchmer 30 January 2020).

The Schmidt family was imprisoned in the Kaunas Ghetto on August 15, 1941 (1941, The List of Kaunas Ghetto Prisoners…, LCSA). His mother died of hunger and typhus in 1945 at Prauste, a sub-branch of Stutthof concentration camp. His father and

sister both survived the Holocaust. On July 13, 1944, the last day of liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto, Schmidt was shot and his body burned. He was just 19 years old. Thea's twin daughters, Dusia Lan Kretchmer and Mirjam Lan Davidson, continue to commemorate and keep the Ben Zion Schmidt name alive to this day.

We can only guess as to whether Schmidt, who was 14 when he entered the ghetto, would have chosen a career as an artist, as the war deprived him of the opportunity of a university education. However, Schmidt worked in the ghetto graphics workshop, and drew scenes of ghetto life. "Nolik was the first artist to join graphic workshop, a very gifted young artist, whose paintings and sketches had surprised even Peter (Gadiel – V.G.)" (Mishell 1999: 79). Although only one of his ghetto drawings has survived, it confirms him as a highly competent and expressive artist. The solitary watercolour entitled *The Expulsion* (1942) which was saved thanks to the collection hidden by Dr. Golub-Tory, now belongs to the Yad Vashem Art Museum. This eloquent and emotional piece of art depicts the tragic day on Sunday January 11, 1942, when the inhabitants living in the Demokratų Square were forced to leave their houses in order to make room for transports of German and Austrian Jews. People had to move their belongings in temperatures of minus 30 degrees. Some found a place to live with friends and relatives. Others had nowhere to go, and stayed on the streets. "At 12 o'clock noon, the chairman of the *Ältestenrat* was given an order to vacate the Demokratų Square by 4 o'clock p.m. for German Jews who were to arrive. The *Ältestenrat* chairman Dr. Elchanan Elkes and representatives of the Women's Committee waited for the deportees all day at the ghetto gate… We made hot coffee, and prepared the words of consolation for the deportees, but they never came". This note was written on January 11, 1942 in the yearbook *Slobodka Ghetto 1942*, which was compiled by Dr. Golub-Tory and contains an almost daily record of events in the Kaunas Ghetto during that year (Reich 1997: 151, 167).

In his drawing, Schmidt perfectly captured the atmosphere of panic and fear spreading across the ghetto. Dr. Golub-Tory remembers:

> "I was looking and thinking how to immortalise this moment for future generations. Suddenly I remembered the young artist Ben Zion Schmidt. I pulled him out of the house and ordered him to draw. Nolik (as we called him lovingly) warmed his frozen fingers with his breath and continued to draw. I was on guard and kept rushing him because a 'grey' (the colour of the Gestapo uniform) might appear any second. Every second could be the last for him and for me… That day the German and Austrian Jews were sent directly to the Ninth Fort and executed" (Голуб-Тори 1990: 4).

The historian Dr. Arūnas Bubnys and the head of the Archive at the Ninth Fort Dr. Kęstutis Bartkevičius confirmed that no official documents have been found recording

the deportation and execution of German and Austrian Jews on this date. The massacres of German and Austrian Jews in Lithuania took place in November 1941, approximately two month earlier. It is more likely that by giving this false order to the *Ältestenrat*, the Gestapo wanted to sow panic and fear in the ghetto. According to official deportation documents, a train with 1,000 Jews left Vienna on January 11, 1942, and just 31 of them reached the Jungfernhof concentration camp in Latvia four days later (Wolfgang 2003: 409). There is a possibility that initially there was a plan to send these Jews to the Kaunas Ghetto, as trains full of German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jews ran regularly to Latvia between November 27, 1941 and October 26, 1942.

Josef Schlesinger was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia in 1919 to Louis and Elsa Schlesinger. He grew up in a wealthy family, received a good secondary education and studied at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts. Following the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Schlesinger moved to Kaunas, where he married Sara Siegel. Soon after the occupation of the city in June 1941, the Schlesingers were deported to the Kaunas Ghetto. Together with Ben Zion Schmidt, Josef Schlesinger worked in the ghetto's toy-making workshop, which produced dolls. He painted wooden toys and stuffed animals for German children (Reich 1997: 168–171; Mishell 1999: 103). Schlesinger was transported to the Dachau concentration camp during the ghetto's liquidation. After the liberation of the camp in April 1945, Schlesinger returned to Prague, where he was active in the city's art scene. His artwork was shown in numerous exhibitions. He served as the Director of the Central-Bohemian Galleries in Prague, and died in the city in 1993.

A few drawings of events in the Kaunas Ghetto and 26 portraits of its prisoners by Schlesinger have survived thanks to Dr. Golub-Tory's buried containers. After the war, this whole collection was donated to the Yad Vashem Art Museum. Some drawings by Schlesinger are held at the USHMM and the GFH. Several other works of art are in the possession of private collectors.

At the request of the *Ältestenrat*, Schlesinger was asked to concentrate on producing portraits. He created a unique gallery of the ghetto police officers, administrators, doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professionals, although only the portraits that he created in 1943 have survived. As if sensing the further fate and eventual liquidation of the ghetto, Schlesinger drew a set of pen and ink portraits on paper in 1943 in which he immortalised the chairman of the *Ältestenrat* Dr. Elchanan Elkes (USHMM), the commander of the Ghetto Police Michael Kopelman, the deputy commander of the Ghetto Police Moshe Levin, the Ghetto Police officer Yehoshua (Ika) Greenberg, the head of the Sanitation service Dr. Moshe Brauns, the head of the Health office Benjamin Zacharin, the head of graphics workshop Peter (Fritz) Gadiel, the head of the interior workshop and leader of the underground communist organisation in the ghetto Dr. Rudolf Volsonok, the jurist and teacher Zvi Hirsh Brik, the chief physician for the Labour Office Dr. Jakov Nochimovski and the administrators of the *Ältestenrat* workshops Moshe Potroch

and Herman Fraenkel. For most of them, it was their last portrait. Schlesinger also added a self-portrait to the gallery. Most of the images were commissioned, and were formal in style with those depicted sitting at an angle to the artist. Schlesinger's portraits serve as a testament to his effort to document the ghetto's inhabitants in a way that would allow the easy identification of the subjects. The artist paid great attention to detail. It was important for him to depict suits, ties and hats as well as signs and armbands, which showed the individual status of each sitter. He also drew commissioned portraits of Gestapo officers, and the food that he received from them in return helped him to overcome his constant hunger.

At first glance, the boy depicted in Schlesinger's drawing *Portrait of an Unidentified Boy* (1943, USHMM) appears to be dressed as a schoolchild. He wears a sports shirt and shorts to the knees. A peaked *kartuz* hat covers his head. The boy holds a folder containing drawings or other large pieces of paper, and looks calm. Just the Star of David sewn onto his clothes indicates his position. The portrait is informal, and looks much more alive and warm than Schlesinger's official ones.

The events after the reorganisation of the ghetto into a concentration camp in the autumn of 1943 seemed to indicate that its days were numbered, especially after new 'actions' against the ghetto's children and its elderly population were carried out. In October 1943, deportations to labour camps in Estonia began. A particularly chilling drawing by Schlesinger, *The Deportation* (1943), depicts a huddled family waiting to be deported, probably to Estonia. Men and women sit and lie on the ground. Their tormented faces, with big frightened eyes, sunken chests and exhausted bony bodies 'scream' that they no longer have the energy to move. In the background there is a crowd of people and a carriage loaded with dead bodies being dragged by two ghetto prisoners, who are guarded by a soldier. An atmosphere of prostration and apathy glides in the ghetto. People no longer have the strength to fight. Almost nobody bound for the Estonian labour camps survived.

The best known and most shocking of Schlesinger's drawing is *The Hanging of Meck* (1942), which dates from November 18, 1942 and that commemorates the execution of the ghetto inmate Nahum Meck. Meck was publicly executed after firing a gun into the air after he was caught trying to escape from the ghetto. Although no one was injured, the Nazis ordered the Ghetto Police to hang Meck in the public square next to the *Ältestenrat* building, and that his body should be left for 24 hours as a deterrence against future acts of resistance. The following day, Meck's mother and sister were taken to the Ninth Fort and killed (Reich 1997: 177). Schlesinger's drawing is particularly touching due to its symbolism. The artist drew the hanging Meck in contrast to the life continuing around him. Children stare curiously at the hanging body. Adults pass by, and a dog runs around. Life stands in stark contrast to death. Ilya Gerber also drew the scene in his diary, in which he depicted a human skeleton next to Meck, and a guillotine holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other. Above Meck's head, Gerber

drew a skull with two crossed bones, and wrote: "Today, coming back with the brigade through Varnių Street, we saw Meck hanging near the *Ältestenrat*" (Gerber 18 November 1942: 574, VGMJH). His simple pen drawing shakes the depths of one's heart.

When analysing ghetto art, we must bear in mind that the artists had different lives before they were imprisoned. "Each of the artists brought with him his own cultural background, previous knowledge and often even practice of art" (Amishai-Maisels 1993: 10). Despite the artists' different aesthetic values, they were united by a common idea and goals. Summarising the style, technique and themes of the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto, we can conclude that most of the paintings, drawings and sketches were small, realistic in style, simple in composition and obscure in colour. Artistic materials were very limited. The most common media were pencil, pen and ink, crayons and watercolours.

Themes were also limited. The Kaunas Ghetto artists had no desire to change or beautify the harsh reality around them. They drew common subjects reflecting their daily environment 'here' and 'now', and did not try to escape to the world of fantasy and imagination (as did, for example, the artists Samuel Bak in the Vilnius ghetto and Amalie Seckbach in Theresienstadt). Four main themes emerge in the art of the Kaunas Ghetto: panoramic views, portraits of inmates, depictions of daily activities and scenes of tragic events, such as killing and death.

The panoramic views of Lithuania changed dramatically in Jewish art after the establishment of the ghettos. Before World War II, Jewish artists loved to paint wide landscapes, historic cities and romantic views of their native *shtetls*. Starting in 1941, these open spaces were restricted to the confines of the ghetto territory. In addition, the panoramic views of the ghetto narrowed with each passing day due to the constant 'actions' and the subsequent reduction of the ghetto territory.

Lithuania was divided into two parts: one, which was 'here', and the other one, which was 'on the other side of the barbed wire fence'. Jewish artists could only see and depict the few streets, houses, barbed wire fences and watchtowers that together made up the ghetto. The barbed wire fences dominate nearly every panoramic ghetto drawing by Lurie and Lipschitz. "No painter in his artistic imagination could conjure up the combination of a fairy tale — a pastoral landscape with a barbed wire fence" (Tory [May 4, 1943] 1990: 318). The poet Chaim Jelin described it in his diary: "There are exactly 20 centimetres between one parallel wire and the other, and there is one metre between the vertical wires" (Jelin 1975: 162). Tamara Lazerson-Rostovsky sketched the barbed wire fences with the same measurements in her diary. She wrote in Lithuanian on the ghetto gate: "We are in captivity" (Lazerson-Rostovsky, August 15, 1942, USHMM). The barbed wire fences have become a major motif in ghetto art, and a symbol of the Holocaust, which symbolise captivity and being cut off from the outside world and society.

Portraits of inmates make up a great part of all of the art that was created in the ghettos. According to the art historian Dr. Pnina Rosenberg "portraits comprise

one quarter of all paintings and drawings produced in the camps" (Rosenberg 2009: non-paginated). In the case of the art produced in the Kaunas Ghetto, portraits compose about half of the total output. The Kaunas Ghetto portraits confirm a unique feature that unites all the ghetto and camp art, namely a close relationship between text and images. Many ghetto portraits include not only the names of the artist and the sitter, but also the exact day, month, year and place where an image was created, and, in some cases, a dedication as well. And not only these portraits betray the places in which they were created with the addition of a Star of David sewn onto the sitter's ragged clothes, but more information is given away by the expressions of sadness on the lean faces of the imprisoned. Ghetto artists turned portraits into reliable historical documents and Holocaust witnesses. Looking at them, we face terrible social and personal stories as we learn about identities of the victims and trace their various fates.

The phenomenon of commemoration through drawing and painting portraits was extremely common in the ghetto. Many inmates commissioned artists to draw their portraits, and those of their sons and daughters in particular, in the belief that this might be their last chance to leave the sign of their existence. The art historian and Holocaust art specialist Dr. Ziva Amishai-Maisels noticed: "The portrait affirmed that the individual human being depicted has existed, even though he died among a mass of nameless victims" (Amishai-Maisels 1993: 5). The art historian Dr. Pnina Rosenberg confirms: "Portraiture had almost magical powers, for it granted the subjects a feeling of permanency, in contrast to the extreme fragility of their actual existence" (Rosenberg 2009: non-paginated). The popularity of commissioned portraits also determined the fact that cameras were strictly prohibited in the ghetto. In some cases, artistic talent came to the artists' assistance, helping them make a living because food was a never-ending problem. Artists were able to exchange commissioned portraits for a slice of bread, but in most cases, it ultimately did not help them survive the Holocaust. The commissioned portraits created by Lipschitz, Lurie and Schlesinger are more official and less emotional than the private ones. They are more scenic and goodly. The main attention in commissioned portraits is given to external similarity and facial features, so that we could easily identify the person being depicted. The private portraits are more emotional and freer. These portraits are not embellished with ashy, skinny faces, big frightened eyes, cracked lips and shabby clothes adorned with a Star of David. Sometimes, the inmates look extremely melancholic as if lost in their own thoughts. The portraits of small children are especially heartbreaking, due to maturity beyond their years. Self-portraits were also popular, and played an important role in the artists' lives. Lipschitz, Lurie and Schlesinger immortalised themselves in the ghetto. All of their self-portraits are dated, and each one features a Star of David on their clothes. Self-portraits were a link with the artists' former identity, and a reconnection with their past.

The depiction of daily life allows us to understand the ghetto life, its problems and daily routines. Before World War II, Judaica subjects of praying Jews, Torah and Talmud

studies, Jewish holidays, synagogues, *shtetls*, marketplaces, klezmer bands, wedding and funeral motifs as well as Lithuanian landscapes and still-lifes dominated Lithuanian Jewish art. All of these topics disappeared from the art created in the Kaunas Ghetto, because the main goal for artists became to document reality for the future. A rare exception can be found in the diary of Ilya Gerber, in which he depicted Hanukkah with two lighted candles, a praying Jew and a performing klezmer band (Gerber 1942: 560, 569, VGMJH).

The imprisoned artists began to sketch the new reality. The lack of food, firewood and living space dictated the choice of subjects. Artists presented mundane activities, such as waiting in the line for food, eating in a communal kitchen, searching fields for leftover potatoes or selling small items on the black market, as well as children carrying branches for fire, and inmates burning fences and furniture in order to keep warm. Artists drew crowded rooms with people lying or sitting on beds, surrounded by bundles, suitcases, furniture and kitchen utensils. It was not easy to adapt to collective living without privacy. The concentration of people under appalling sanitary conditions also led to sickness, disease, epidemics and death. Artists pictured inmates engaged in cleaning and washing, as regular daily activities helped them not just to survive, but also kept their spirits alive.

The personal space of the past has been erased in these drawings. Artists depicted cluttered scenes of communal living, not only as a documentation of the daily reality of life in the ghetto, but also as a way of showing the complete desecration of the norms of human society. However, more private scenes such as body-washing or going to the toilet, which appear in the art of the concentration camps, are not typical for the art of the Kaunas Ghetto. Later however, after Esther Lurie was interned in a concentration camp, she depicted a scene featuring naked women washing their bodies and their hair outside, whilst Nazi soldiers stood ogling at the spectacle.

Scenes of tragic events, such as deportations and killings, were an integral part of the ghetto life. Every 'action', every tragic event was immortalised on an almost daily basis. "This series is the entire chronicle of their lives in ghetto, and a vision of the new upside-down world" (Nikitina 2007: 11). The deportation scenes depicted by artists show faceless masses rather than individuals being sent on their last journey, facing spiritual and physical death. Lurie transformed a deportation scene into a symbolic image of an empty road leading to the Ninth Fort with its barbed wire and watchtowers. Another drawing by her shows not the process of deportation, but the result of it. An empty room with scattered books and household items on the floor, family photos left behind and a portrait of a Jewish sage hanging on the wall. The chaos and emptiness of the room reveal the swiftness of the deportation and the devastating fate of its inhabitants.

The 'Great Action', the 'Intellectuals Action', the 'Hospital Action', the 'Children's Action', the 'Police Action' — every 'action', every crime, every massacre echoes

art, poetry and diaries of the Kaunas Ghetto. Each 'action' and tragic event was accompanied by art. Gerber drew a *maceva* to record the date, October 13, 1942, when 300 workers were taken to a labour camp in Riga (Gerber 1942: 514, 536, 574, VGMJH). One of the most resonant events was the public hanging of Nahum Meck on November 18, 1942. Schlesinger and Gerber both recorded this tragic event with a drawing.

A detailed scene of death was depicted by the labourer Anatoli Garnik-Gran at the Ninth Fort. His drawing entitled *Burning of the Corpses at the Ninth Fort* (1943, Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum), immortalises how the Nazis tried to eradicate all evidence of their past crimes. The drawing shows two prisoners with a wooden stretcher carrying two naked bodies to burn in a flaming bonfire. An armed soldier follows their every move. Garnik-Gran was one of two prisoners who took part in an escape from the Ninth Fort without being captured (Faitelson 2020: 38).

Documentation is a major element of ghetto art, but the means of visual expression and artists' emotions must also be taken into consideration. Ghetto art is important, not only in the documentary but also in the artistic sense. During a very short time, the ghetto artists found the means to express their individuality, emotions and viewpoints. "Pictures are both eye-witness documents and a memorial for the lost souls" (Lurie 1945, USHMM). The art of the Kaunas Ghetto is simple in composition and limited in colours, but rich in emotion and empathy. An atmosphere of horror, suffering, pain and desperation unites all of this work.

The act of painting and drawing provided an opportunity for the artists to keep their spirits high, to prove the fact of their own existence as individuals and to leave their personal stamp on the world, an illusion that connected them in some way to their past lives as artists. They sought to use their work as a means to make contact with the outside world, and to let people know what was happening 'on the other side of the fence'. Unfortunately, those still living 'on the other side of the fence' could no longer visit the exhibitions, concerts and plays previously painted, composed and written by Jews (Lithuanian and Jewish group exhibitions and concerts were very popular during interwar period in Lithuania).

Documenting ghetto life at high risk, the artists kept the hope alive that their watercolours, drawings and sketches might one day serve as evidence to bring the murderers to justice. Thus, ghetto art must be considered as the art of testimony, produced in order to record Nazi crimes for posterity. Ghetto art became an important tool of evidence, as for example Esther Lurie's drawings that were used during the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961. Sometimes, art can reveal more than words. Ghetto art is a valuable supplementary source for Holocaust studies. When studying ghetto art, we learn about the inhumane conditions in which thousands of people were held, of the killings and deaths, and of the optimistic plans of resistance and the courage to survive.

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