

英文虎報

The Standard

Student



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Thursday's Theme

Art & Culture



10 April 2014

Weather

Weather: 20-23°C Humidity: 70-95%
Mainly cloudy. One or two rain patches



Picture this

The Holocaust, which saw the extermination of about six million Jews, ended 69 years ago. But for survivor Sara Atzmon, the awful past is as fresh as the paint on her canvas

E.06-07



Masterpieces

The Palace at 4AM

Giacometti takes us into the void

E.05

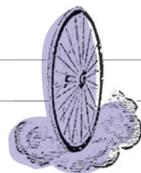


Editorial Room

Tastes like chicken

Food of the future

E.12



Text : Janice Wong Photos : Janice Wong, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong

Memories on canvas

Through her emotive paintings, Holocaust survivor Sara Atzmon hopes to remind the world of what evil is capable of doing if not stopped, and create messages of awareness and tolerance that can be passed on and on

“At the age of 12, I experienced a miracle – I was actually rescued from hell,” Sara Atzmon said during her address at the opening ceremony of the exhibition ‘Surviving Evil: The Pictorial Language of Sara Atzmon’. The painter, born Sara Gottdiener into a Hungarian family in 1933, was only a child aged 11 when the Nazi nightmare descended upon her.

The darkest days

WHEN the Nazi Party came into power in the 1930s, thousands of people were under threat. The leader, Adolf Hitler, ordered the rounding up and killing of millions of Jews, along with homosexuals, the disabled and other ‘undesirable’ citizens, in what was later termed the Holocaust. As a little girl, Atzmon went through tremendous fear, hardship and **humiliation**. Ghettos, factories, concentration camps, forced labour camps ... The 11-year-old was taken and transported from one hell to another. She was forced to work from day to night with barely enough food – if bread made from sawdust and soup from tomato skins could be considered food in the first place. She saw people die from hunger and disease, and **corpses** piled high in heaps.

When she was in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany (德國), she was made to stand in the snow for hours, with a child’s shoe on one foot and a woman’s high heel on the other. She recalled with bitter laughter, “I never knew which side I should stay on. High or low?”

Struggling for survival

DURING the dark days in the camp, Atzmon and the other children played a bitter death-guessing game. She explained, “We made a joke. Who will die tomorrow? Or the day after?” The game was the children’s way of fighting for survival. “Because you need

to have some energy to believe that you will survive,” she said.

And Atzmon did survive. In April 1945, she was freed by US troops, weighing only 17kg at the age of 12. The Holocaust took 60 members of her family, including three of her brothers, four nephews, her father, grandmother, uncles and cousins.

From words to pictures

AFTER the liberation, the Gottdiener family went to Palestine (巴勒斯坦). Atzmon began lecturing about the Holocaust at schools in the 1980s, but it was not until 1987 when she returned to Hungary, her country of birth, for the first time after the Holocaust that she decided to speak through paintings. Her home had been destroyed in the war and Atzmon asked Hungarians one question which led to astonishing answers.

“I asked all the people, ‘Where are the Jewish people from here?’ Nobody knew. They lived in our houses. They used our furniture, and everything. And they did not know what happened to the Jewish people.”

The infuriating experience **provoked** Atzmon to paint her memories of the horrible past. “Then I had a feeling that I had to do something, because words are too small. Words go in one side, go out the other side,” she said.

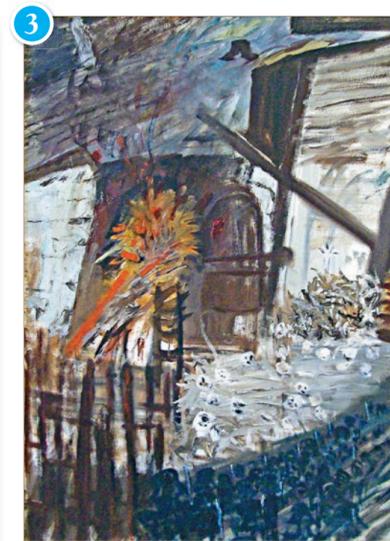
Don’t look back in anger

DESPITE the indescribable pain that Atzmon went through, the messages she strives to send through her paintings are not about rage or revenge. Instead, she hopes that her **pictorial** stories will serve as positive messages of awareness and tolerance.

“The message is ... they [people] need to keep the flame small and not let it grow,” Atzmon explains. “Hate is the flame ... As soon as it rises, it is too dangerous.”

A timeline of terror

1934 Following the death of German president Paul von Hindenburg, Adolf Hitler becomes president of Germany and leads the country into an age of dictatorship.	1939 World War II begins. Germany invades Poland (波蘭), the country with the largest Jewish population in Europe (歐洲). Jews are forced to reside in ghettos – sealed, overcrowded areas separated from the rest of the population. Many die from starvation and disease there.	1941-1945 The Nazis conduct a reign of terror in occupied Europe, sending increasing numbers of Jews and others to the death camps.	1945 Camp inmates are liberated as the Allied Forces advance across Europe. Germany surrenders to the Allies, bringing World War II in Europe to an official end.	Post-war Many Jews opt to move to countries instead of returning home because they are haunted by terrifying memories, and remain in fear of their neighbours. They go to countries like the United States (美國), Australia (澳洲) and the State of Israel (以色列), after it is created in 1948.
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Surviving Evil: The Pictorial Language of Sara Atzmon

Venue: University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Date: from now until 4 May

Remarks: A different collection of her paintings is also being exhibited at the Goethe-Institut Hong Kong from now until 3 May.

Guided tours and lectures

A guided visit of the exhibition at HKU is available tomorrow:

Time: 4pm, 11 April

Venue: 1/F, T.T. Tsui Building, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong

There will also be a lecture by Dr Matthew Boswell, namely “The Future of Holocaust Memory”:

Time: 5pm, 11 April

Venue: 1/F, Fung Ping Shan Building, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong

Both the guided visit and lecture are free admission.

A gallery on survival

1 And They Turned into Ashes

Atzmon’s first painting after her disturbing visit to Hungary, when she discovered that some Hungarians appeared to be unaware of the fact that many Jews ‘turned into ashes’ because of the Holocaust.

2 The Appell

A painting created out of Atzmon’s memory of her days in Bergen-Belsen, when she had to stand in the snow for roll call every morning. “I painted striped clothes, and ribs looking like shields, to make the prayer shawls (農溝披肩) and the phylacteries (經文匣) look like human figures,” the painter explains.

3 The Remains

“When I visited Buchenwald, some Jewish boys showed us the **crematorium** and in my imagination I saw fire coming out of the ovens,” Atzmon says. The Buchenwald concentration camp is one of the largest in Germany, imprisoning more than 200,000 captives during the Holocaust.

4 The Snake

A combination of Atzmon’s fears during two different wars: World War II and the Gulf War. While the train tracks on the cardboard refer to those that took her to the concentration camps, ‘Viper’, as illustrated in the painting, was the code word for chemical attacks during the Gulf War.