

Shared Burden

Terezín Museum highlights Holocaust works

An exhibition of the work of the artist Anna Walinska (1906–1997), “Echoes of the Holocaust: 1940–1989,” in the Ghetto Museum at the Terezín Memorial, is unique both for the work it presents and as a tribute to a little-known artist with a captivating story.

The works on display — paintings, drawings and a few collages — represent a small selection of the Holocaust theme that engaged Walinska for more than 60 years. The artist was neither a victim nor a survivor of the Holocaust, but her childhood fostered critical thinking. Her parents — labor leader Ossip Walinsky and activist Rosa Newman Walinska (also a sculptor and writer) — were hosts to a constant flow of Russian and Jewish intelligentsia after the family moved to New York in 1914. In the '30s, her brother Louis experienced the increasing Nazi terror while studying in Berlin. Walinska would later say, “In a sense we are all survivors. We all share the burden and the memory.”

Despite her inclusion in numerous group shows and representation in major museum and private collections, Walinska remained an unassuming figure who was friend and support for many more acclaimed artists. She was trained at the Arts Student League and from 1926–1930 spent time in Paris, studying under Andre L’Hote. She then opened the Guild Art Gallery in New York in the mid '30s, where she showed a number of emerging artists, including Arshile Gorky, whom she gave his first one-man show.

The changing artistic tides of the time are apparent even in the limited number of works on display. A discerning attention to inner compositional structure gleaned from her Paris years later gave way to the drip and expressionism of the 1950s' New York School. In one, *Victim: Woman Reading* (1953) — a self-portrait — a free calligraphic line of ink is applied directly to the canvas. It seems to run out of control while also defining the bold volumes of the sitter.

Walinska's Holocaust works gained recognition only in 1979, when then-dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Reverend James Parks Morton, put on the first exhibition of her Holocaust works. He remarked at the time that Walinska's themes — the ghettos, victims, survivors and exodus — are icons of 20th-century existence itself.

Since Walinska's death in 1997, the artist's niece — and curator of the show — Rosina Rubin has embarked on the enormous task of ferreting through more than 2,000 works in Walinska's studio. This is the first show of Walinska's work in Central Europe, and the Terezín Memorial museum makes a fitting venue.



COURTESY ART

For Walinska, the monochrome palette carried specific symbolic import for her Holocaust subjects.



Anna Walinska: Echoes of the Holocaust

Ghetto Museum at the Terezín Memorial.
Through December.
Open daily 9–5