

Holocaust survivor creates moving art exhibition

Several weeks ago, I attended an amazing art exhibit by a Holocaust survivor. I was so moved that I wrote this review in the *Jerusalem Post Lite* below. The artist's name is **Israella Hargil**, and the exhibit, *Cherries and Golden Butterflies*, is on display from now until January 1st at the Theater Art Gallery of Holon. It is about her experiences as a child during the Holocaust in Poland. (NOTE: the location has changed since the original publication.)

I urge anyone and everyone to see it. Beyond it being just a fantastic exhibit, this is one of the last opportunities we have to see powerful artwork by Holocaust survivors. Let us never forget.



Cherries and Golden Butterflies

A review of Israela Hargil's exhibition about being a child during the Holocaust.

By LAURA ROSBROW

I see an art piece that consists of candy wrappers piled one-meter high. Above the candy wrappers there are metal wires hanging from the ceiling with candy wrappers tied along them, as if butterflies were flying above. Next to the piece, there is a poetic text explaining the story. The text ends by saying, "And one of the kids found a real sweet there."

It is the story of an eight-year-old Jewish girl during the end of the Holocaust in Poland, remembering a candy factory being bombed. All the kids played with thousands of candy wrappers flying everywhere. Amidst this, one kid did find, "a real sweet there."

This eight-year-old girl is now 73-year-old Israeli conceptual artist Israela Hargil, and this piece is part of her new exhibition, *Cherries and Golden Butterflies*, which can be seen at the Theater Art Gallery of Holon until January 1st, 2012. It is the third and final exhibition in a series of autobiographical work about being a child during the Holocaust.

Focusing on the end of the war, the exhibit captures the unique memories that only a child who survived the Holocaust could have: longing for a doll; pretending to be a "cow girl" to fit into the Polish family that was hiding her; buying a bag of cherries for only a penny. These sweet and dark memories are expressed through mixed media, combining elements such as photographs, found objects, personal writings and sculpture, Hargil's specialty.

The exhibit has three large installations. The installations tell longer stories and have poetic text alongside them, such as the candy wrappers piece. These pieces are particularly strong. The size of the installations and the accuracy of the materials make you feel as if you are right there in her past.

The only other sculpture in the exhibit is also moving. It is a series of bronze bodies that express different stages of death. One particularly striking figure is crudely made, as if melted and without certain parts, lying like a body.

Most of the exhibit consists of what the artist calls "memory boxes," that hang along the walls. Each of these is a cupboard filled with photographs and found objects from the artist's past. Whereas the strength of her larger figures was in their sense of setting, the strongest memory boxes were more individually focused, all with photographs of the artist or her parents. These intimate views of her loneliness haunt the viewer.

Israella's tale is amazing: She was born in 1938 in Poland. Only three years later, in 1941, her mother was killed. Soon afterwards, her father was convinced to place Israella, then called Eva, in the care of a Polish Christian family. During the Holocaust, Eva stayed with several families, often hiding under beds for months at a time.

Eventually her father, who became a Russian soldier during the war, came back. They both immigrated to Israel in 1948. Sadly, in 1952 he died of a heart attack. Israella remained on a childrens' kibbutz.

For years this talented artist, who has exhibited at Yad Vashem and the Israel Museum, made abstract pieces. Only five years ago did she begin to do autobiographical work about the Holocaust.

After I saw the exhibit, which I was invited to through my friend (as well as her grandson), I wanted to interview her myself.

I asked her what inspired her to start doing work about the Holocaust. She explained that when she was around 12 years old she wrote a diary about this time. "I did it so I wouldn't forget what happened during the war because my father was no longer with me. I wrote it so he'd read it and know what I went through." She used these writings in her first two exhibitions, *Photoerosion I and II*.

She explained that when her father died (he had read some of her diary before), she inherited his papers: "From time to time, I would go to the attic and look at them," she said. This went on for years. Then, around five years ago, she created a piece that had three empty boxes. The next thing that happened, "I made a collage of my mother, father, and me as a little girl." And it just came out.

I asked why this is her last Holocaust exhibit?

She stated calmly, "I cleaned it out of my system. It made it easier. Now it's not weighing so heavily on me."

That's good to hear.

For more information, visit Israella Hargil's website: <http://www.israella-hargil.co.il>