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**Bearing Witness:
Roman Halter's memorial to the Holocaust through the
medium of stained glass**

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The Ben Uri Gallery and Museum in London was the institution that first inspired my interest in Roman Halter's life and work, during my period working with them as an intern. Without that opportunity, this thesis would never have come to fruition.

I am also indebted to Jewish heritage expert Sharman Kadish and stained glass art historian Caroline Swash for fruitful conversations and interviews about stained glass traditions and techniques, and to the British Society of Master Glass Painters for their insightful lectures, conferences and journal.

In the course of my research I received valuable input from numerous curators and representatives of the Jewish community at the synagogues, galleries and museums that I contacted about Halter's work. The staff at the Yad Vashem and Yad Layeled Holocaust memorial museums in Israel, the National Holocaust Centre in Nottingham and the Prague Jewish Museum were very helpful. As was the Wiener Holocaust Library in London, for affording me the opportunity to submit an exhibition proposal based around Roman Halter's artwork.

I also want to express my gratitude to Halter's friends and contemporaries, especially the indomitable survivor Ben Helfgott, for offering me the privilege of hearing their recollections first-hand. Above all, I wish to thank the Halter family, in particular Ardyn Halter and Aviva Halter-Hurn, for allowing me access to Roman Halter's archives and for their openness and positive encouragement. I hope that this thesis does justice to their late father's memory.

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Nina Hirshorn

Summary

My thesis centres on the stained glass artwork of the Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor Roman Halter. It analyses his contribution to post-Holocaust art within the framework of debates surrounding testimony and memorialisation.

Chapter 1 focuses on Halter's early life, as a Holocaust victim and survivor, and how this came to inform his art. It traces his artistic development, from his metalwork and architectural experience through to his choice of stained glass as a medium, and begins to situate Halter within wider stained glass art traditions.

Chapter 2 examines a number of Halter's stained glass memorial commissions and explores the layers of said and unsaid testimony within his artistic oeuvre. It also discusses contemporary debates around Holocaust memorialisation, and the development of a 'social aesthetic' appropriate to this subject matter.

Chapter 3 focuses on Halter's creation, at Yad LaYeled museum in Israel, of a stained glass memorial to the one and a half million children murdered in the Shoah. This is contextualised through a discussion of testimonial objects, post-memory and intergenerational remembrance.

My thesis has drawn on an extensive body of primary research material contained within the Halter family's archives, to which I have had privileged access, and on a wide range of interviews, field trips and secondary materials.

Introduction

Deep in the heart of the Dorset countryside, an elderly man paints a series of watercolour studies of the idyllic fields and hills that surround his youngest daughter's home. These are not merely pleasant, pastoral scenes. Into these paintings, the artist has inserted deeply troubling, discordant images - ones that have haunted him for most of his life. The images depict hundreds of tiny figures, marching through the verdant English countryside. They represent Jewish men, women and children, being driven to their certain death by SS guards during the Nazi Holocaust **[Fig 1]**.

The artist is Roman Halter (1927-2012), a Polish-born, Jewish Holocaust refugee. Many decades after surviving Auschwitz and Stutthof concentration camps and the 1945 death march from Dresden - and making a new life for himself in Britain as an architect - Halter began to use a variety of art-forms to reflect upon his past, horrific experiences.¹ Much of this art, whether realised in metalwork, painting or stained glass, is unsettling and disturbing in content. However, at its best, it is also monumental and aesthetically pleasing, beautiful even; displaying an extraordinary robustness of spirit in the face of unspeakable horror. As former National Gallery senior curator, Colin Wiggins, has written of Halter's artwork: 'this finding of beauty where there is horror is a tough statement. It cannot easily be explained or understood.'²

The search for an aesthetic form through which to memorialise the Holocaust was a dominant theme throughout much of Halter's life and is a central theoretical question that I interrogate in this thesis. Philosopher Theodor Adorno's famous dictum, that 'after Auschwitz' to write poetry is 'barbaric', expresses the profound difficulty at the heart of all cultural reflections on the Shoah.³ Although Adorno was subsequently to qualify this statement, the beauty/horror dichotomy remains a 'tough statement' to this day. As cultural historian Brett Ashley Kaplan explores in her analysis of literary and visual works connected to the Holocaust, the finding of 'unwanted beauty' in such subject-matter can be deeply discordant and troubling.⁴ Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander has posited that the dilemmas posed by aestheticising the Shoah are at 'the limits of representation.'⁵ Yet, as I seek to demonstrate, Halter repeatedly grappled

¹ R. Halter, *Roman's Journey* (London: Portobello Books Ltd, 2007).

² C. Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', in *Life and Art through Stained Glass*. (London: Ben Uri, 2014), pp. 40-46.

³ T. W. Adorno, *Cultural Criticism and Society, Prisms* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), p. 34.

⁴ B. A. Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty, Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁵ S. Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

with precisely this question and arrived at some degree of aesthetic resolution, in a highly distinctive way.

My focus in this thesis is on how this came about, and how Halter's work relates to the wider genre of post-Holocaust art. Much of his multi-faceted artistic practice drew stylistically on modernist and allegorical visual traditions; at times approaching what Kaplan refers to as an allusive, 'Holocaust-inflected' idiom.⁶ His strong structural, spatial and graphic awareness, honed by his architectural experience, contributed to his development of what cultural historian James E. Young has described as a 'social aesthetic' of memorialisation, most memorably expressed in his stained glass art.⁷

Halter's powerful post-Holocaust works gained public recognition in many museums and galleries, including Tate Britain and the Imperial War Museum in London, and the Yad Vashem and Ghetto Fighters' House memorial museums in Israel. He also made a distinctive contribution to contemporary stained glass art within Jewish faith and community settings, and more widely. An important retrospective exhibition of his work was mounted by the Ben Uri Gallery and Museum in 2014.⁸

However, as I have uncovered through my research, there are many layers within Halter's artistic oeuvre that have remained largely hidden from sight.⁹ My unrestricted access to an extensive family archive of Halter's preparatory drawings, stained glass designs and autobiographical writings has helped me gain insight into his Holocaust-related artwork - and into how much had to be left unsaid.¹⁰ Most strikingly, the tiny figures that run like a motif, symbolising pity and terror, throughout these archive materials, and which recur in a stylised form in some of his exhibited paintings, are notably absent from his stained glass artworks. However, it was Halter's clear intention to include this imagery, prompting important questions about the psychological and societal barriers confronting survivor-artists who seek to represent the Shoah; a factor that motivated me to study his work from a wider art historical perspective.¹¹

⁶ Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*, pp.108-109.

⁷ J. E. Young, Memory and counter memory: Towards the social aesthetic of Holocaust memorials. In *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art*. (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995), pp. 78-102.

⁸ D. Glasser (Ed), *Life and Art Through Stained Glass, Roman Halter 1927-2012*. (London: Ben Uri, 2014).

⁹ The Halter family archives (henceforth referred to as HFA) were originally held in London. They were subsequently moved to a storage facility in Yeovil, Somerset. They consist of a wide range of materials; paintings (oils, acrylic, watercolour); hundreds of stained glass cartoons for various projects, both realised and unrealised; drawings and sketches reflecting Halter's life experiences. It also includes photographs, slides, correspondence, commissions, cuttings from magazines and newspapers, collaborative works and tracery produced with the sculptor Henry Moore, architectural drawings, project records and plans, publicity, postcards, prints, small pieces of stained glass artwork, DVDs, manuscripts and journals.

¹⁰ HFA, Yeovil.

¹¹ In addition to repeated trips to document and photograph material from the family archives, my fieldwork has included visits to synagogues, museums and other sites containing Halter's artworks; a series of

This theme, of the said and the unsaid in Halter's works, and in Holocaust-related art more generally, is one that I interrogate in detail in the following chapters. I situate Halter's contribution to this genre within the context of past and present debates about Holocaust memorialisation, and the contested role of testimony, memory and post-memory in this process. This theoretical discourse is central to my method of inquiry, which seeks to contextualise Halter's artistic contribution within a broader historical and analytical framework. The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter one focuses on Halter's early life as a Holocaust victim and survivor, the impact of this traumatic experience on his future artistic development and the role of visual and written autobiography in the preservation of self. I explore how his artistic practice was informed by his profession as an architect, and discuss his distinctive, modernist use of metalwork and stained glass art to memorialise the Holocaust, in the UK and Israel. This chapter also begins to locate Halter's place within Jewish stained glass art and wider aesthetic traditions.

Chapter two explores the said and the unsaid in Halter's stained glass artwork, through an examination of his preparatory designs and realised commissions, and the inter-relationship between them. I interrogate the role of allegory and of Jewish cultural prohibitions in the context of one of Halter's most controversial commissions, a stained glass synagogue window representing *Jacob and the Angel*. This chapter also discusses other significant examples of Halter's stained glass practice and work in other mediums, and the aesthetic debates around memorialisation that inform my analysis of his work.

Chapter three focuses on the stained glass windows that Halter created in memory of the one and half million children murdered in the Shoah. Sited at Yad LaYeled museum in Israel, this memorial is based on drawings made by children interned in the Terezin death camp. I discuss the layers of memorialisation contained within this artwork, situating it within the framework of wider debates about testimony and testimonial objects. The role of resistance and redemption is also explored in this chapter, which suggests a central place for art in educating future generations about the warnings from history.

Many of the themes that I explore in my thesis are illustrated through the trajectory of Halter's life and artistic development. Much of his artwork, whilst deeply expressive, was stylistically 'distanced' from its horrific subject-matter, lending his public art an uncompromising yet ultimately humanising impact. This powerful visual

interviews with his contemporaries and with Halter family members; interviews and online discussions with stained glass art historians and curators. For further details see the thesis bibliography, p 109 .

vocabulary enabled him to negotiate many of the aesthetic challenges inherent in depicting the Holocaust, and convey a life-affirming message to future generations.

Nevertheless, as the years progressed, Halter's artwork became more directly autobiographical and disturbing in character. For many decades he had been privately documenting his traumatic memories and nightmares, symbolised by the tiny, tortured figures that populate many of his stained glass cartoons.¹² Late in life, in deteriorating health, this imagery finally breaks through, in a raw, unmediated fashion.

His Dorset watercolours, with their surreal juxtaposition of beauty and horror, are Halter's final searing testimony to the Nazi Holocaust. Embedded within the gentle, rolling English countryside – at times merging into the Polish landscape of his childhood – is the iconography that has haunted his entire adult life. As he wrote:

In my dreams, I am the invisible outsider, the onlooker, the one who sees and observes, and sometimes talks or shouts to those victims. As the onlooker, I feel deeply for them. They are part of me. I wake up, write down my dreams and then I paint them.¹³

And here they are, in these watercolours. The images that Halter was unable to exorcise from his consciousness, of countless minute, marching figures. On their way to, or already arrived in hell.

¹² I use the term 'cartoon' within my thesis to signify the designs that Halter created for his stained glass artworks. These ranged from small sketches through to detailed paintings and other miniature artworks, illustrating the preparatory work that was involved in their creation. They frequently contained measurements for windows and details of the colour palette to be used. Sometimes the cartoons included several designs on tracing paper, enabling layering up to create different effects.

¹³ R. Halter, *Dreams of the Holocaust, Paintings by Roman Halter* (No date), p. 78 HFA, Yeovil.

Chapter one

Beginnings

*In my private and silent communion with my grandfather,
I said grandfather, I will tell the world as you asked me,
but in time, in time, I am not yet ready.¹⁴*

Roman Halter

Introduction

The magnitude of the crimes committed against humanity in the Holocaust can at times appear unbearable to contemplate. Roman Halter's singular contribution was to create art that insisted no one should look away. This achievement was testimony to his ability to transcend his individual, horrific experience of the Holocaust and produce artworks that spoke to a universal audience of the unspeakable acts that had taken place. He succeeded in doing so in a visual language and a medium that was uniquely his own, and which has richly contributed to the genre of post-Holocaust artistic representation as well as to contemporary stained glass art.

This chapter explores the formative influences on Halter's artistic practice, from the earliest, darkest days of the Shoah in Poland, through to his survival as a young refugee in England and his development as an architect and stained glass practitioner. This biographical narrative is essential to an understanding of the art that was to come. Running throughout it is Halter's compulsion to tell the world of what he had witnessed, in order to memorialise those who had perished - and his search for the emotional strength and aesthetic means to do so.

Halter's life and significant artistic contribution is a surprisingly under-researched area. Little material, beyond his autobiography and a limited amount of secondary literature, exists on the subject.¹⁵ However, throughout my research I have

¹⁴ *Supporting documents for manuscript and speeches* (unpublished), Page 1, Folder 11, Box 31, HFA, Yeovil.

¹⁵ Halter, *Roman's Journey*.

C. Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', in *Life and Art through Stained Glass*. (London: Ben Uri, 2014), pp. 16-39.

C. Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist and Holocaust Survivor', *The Journal of Stained Glass*, vol. XXXVIII (2014), pp. 57-66.

Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

An important exception to this lack of research can be found in the two documentary films made by BBC foreign correspondent Fergal Keane, detailing Halter's early life experiences through a return visit to his hometown of Chodecz. The first film, *Roman's Journey* (2006), and a second, longer version, *The Promise* (2019) (co-produced with film-maker Fred Scott) have however had only very limited distribution. My attempts to interview Keane about the making of these films have so far been unfulfilled. *Roman's*

been in close contact with Halter family members who have allowed me access to an extensive archive of unpublished materials that illuminate many aspects of his artistic development. These archives contain numerous unpublished illustrated drafts of Halter's autobiography, a large collection of correspondence with artistic collaborators and commissioners, hundreds of cartoons for stained glass windows, sketches and designs for metal work and architectural projects, and extensive materials connected to Halter's Holocaust educational work.

I have also conducted detailed interviews with Halter's children, former work colleagues, fellow survivors and other Jewish community members to gain a deeper understanding of his life experiences and artistic influences. Methodologically, this body of primary source material has been of particular importance in the first, and most biographical, chapter of my thesis. However, it has also thrown significant light on the multi-layered character of Halter's artistic reflections on the Shoah, which are analysed in depth in chapters two and three.

In this chapter I interrogate how Halter's tragic but ultimately redemptive life journey informed his art, and would eventually come to frame the way that he viewed memorialisation and testimony. I also discuss the role of autobiographical art more widely, as a form of self-preservation for Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community at large. Finally, I explore some of the cultural and artistic traditions – in particular those connected to stained glass art - that helped shape Halter's practice, and influenced the aesthetic choices he made.

Journey, dir, Fergal Keane & Fred Scott (BBC, 2006). *The Promise*, dir, Fergal Keane & Fred Scott (JW3, 2019).

1. The Promise

Roman Halter was just twelve when, in 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland, occupying his hometown of Chodecz, in the central part of the country. Life before the war certainly had its hardships; antisemitism was endemic in Poland, and although Chodecz had a substantial Jewish population, of close to 800, its existence was precarious.¹⁶ However, Roman's family was relatively prosperous, thanks to his father's successful work as a timber merchant. From his child's perspective – Roman was the youngest of seven children – these early years were happy ones. All that was shattered by the Nazi invasion. Between 1939 and 1940, half the Jewish population of Chodecz was sent to forced labour camps or ghettos. Halter was forced to work for a German family, swilling out pigs. During that time he saw many of his friends being ritually humiliated, beaten and murdered.

Eventually he and several members of his family, including his father, mother and grandfather were sent to the infamous Lodz ghetto, in Poland, the second largest Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe. It was there that Halter was forced to make munitions and other materials for the Nazis in a metal work factory. And it was there that he made a fateful promise to his grandfather to tell the world of the Nazis' unspeakable crimes.¹⁷

As he would recall many decades later in his autobiography – and repeatedly throughout his life - his grandfather told him, before he perished in the Holocaust, that 'when' not 'if' he survived, Roman must tell the world about the horrors of the Shoah:

When you survive, speak of all you have witnessed. Speak it the best way you can. Do not philosophise about it, for murder is murder and we are being murdered today on the orders of evil leaders.¹⁸

In mid-1944, Halter was transported to Auschwitz concentration camp, in southern Poland. His metal work skills ultimately saved him from the gas chambers; he was one of 500 prisoners selected to work in the concentration camp factories.¹⁹ The rest of his family perished. His father and grandfather both starved to death in Lodz ghetto. Two years earlier, his mother and sister were transported to the Chelmno death camp, in Poland, where they were murdered.

¹⁶ D. Cesarani, *Final Solution, the fate of the Jews 1933-49* (London: Macmillan, 2016), pp. 246-247.

¹⁷ Halter, *Roman's Journey*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸ P. Vallely, 'The Holocaust – the last survivors', (Paul Vallely: 14th July 2000) <http://paulvallely.com/archive/?p=347> [Accessed: 14/03/2022]

¹⁹ Halter, *Roman's Journey*. pp. 139-140.

Halter survived the death camps and was transported to Dresden, to work in a munitions factory. When Dresden was bombed in February 1945 he, along with 500 other Jews in the factory, was sent on a death march a month after the bombing.²⁰ Somehow he managed to escape, and thanks to the kindness and bravery of strangers, was able to survive. He eventually made his way back to Dresden where a sympathetic factory overseer gave him clothes, false identity papers and the names of a German couple who would give him shelter.

Once the war ended and Poland was liberated, Halter managed to make his way back to Chodecz, in the hope that at least someone from his family might have survived. He found that no one was left **[Fig 2]**. All barring four of the town's pre-war Jewish population had been exterminated. Ultimately he arrived in Theresienstadt, the former death camp that, post liberation, had been turned into a holding camp for Jews awaiting transport to England.²¹ It was here that, as he records, a doctor gave him the sketchbook and pencils that would prove so important to him in his future life.²²

The significance of this gift would become apparent when, many decades later, Halter began to reflect upon his horrific experiences through the deeply affecting works that came to define his artistic career. Indeed, as stained glass art historian Caroline Swash has noted, it was Halter's early interest in drawing that led him in the direction of the architectural apprenticeship that shaped his artistic trajectory.²³ However, long before he reached this point, as he confessed in his 'private and silent communion' with his grandfather, Halter needed time.²⁴ Not just to process the unspeakable trauma that he had undergone, but also to find the means to express what for many was inexpressible.

Resistance to memorialising and talking publicly about the Holocaust was a common phenomenon after the war. For the survivors themselves, this was readily explicable; a psychologically protective reaction to what they had endured. As art historian Stephen C. Feinstein has noted, for post-Holocaust artists this internal conflict was particularly acute.²⁵ For society at large, the post-war resistance to speaking of the past was more ambiguous; suggestive of forms of guilt and denial that in turn often created a hostile climate for survivors to contend with. In more recent times, as

²⁰ Halter, *Roman's Journey*. p. 72.

²¹ Theresienstadt is also known by its Czech name of Terezin, and I will be referring to it as Terezin in later chapters. However, Roman Halter refers to the camp as Theresienstadt in his autobiography, so I will use this name in chapter one.

²² Halter, *Roman's Journey*, p. 321.

²³ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 59-62.

²⁴ *Supporting documents for manuscript and speeches*, (unpublished) Page 1, Folder 11, Box 31, HFA, Yeovil. See quote at beginning of chapter.

²⁵ S. C. Feinstein, 'Art After Auschwitz', in *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*. (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 152–168.

historians Alvin Rosenfeld and Manfred Gerstenfeld have discussed, the role of 'Holocaust consciousness' in public discourse has once again become a contested area.²⁶

At an individual level, as author Paul Vallely records in his interviews with Halter and other survivors, the psychological burden of memory on the second generation was something that many survivors grappled with:

For them deciding what their children should know has been an agonising process. Most waited a long time. 'We didn't tell them till they were in their teens,' says Roman Halter. 'They were growing up so well and happy I didn't want to block their conscious or unconscious with such horrendous stories. But at a certain point they began asking so I answered them truthfully.'²⁷

Sometimes, Halter confessed, he would 'mitigate the answers'. Nonetheless, the moral and psychological imperative to communicate what he had witnessed – to 'speak it the best way you can' – was one that would haunt Halter throughout his life, and eventually find powerful expression in both visual imagery and words.²⁸

It can be argued that this compulsion to communicate the truth about the Shoah, through autobiography and memoir, in different mediums, fulfils a vital role for both the survivor and wider society. As I explore in more depth in chapter three, the telling of an individual story is closely bound up with wider discussions around testimony, witnessing and memorialisation.²⁹ Art historian Leah White discusses some of the complexities of this issue in her analysis of Holocaust victim Charlotte Salomon's (1917-1943) autobiographical work, *Life? Or Theatre?*³⁰ (1941-1943). She argues that, along with their vital social role, such creative works may play a critical function in the 'preservation of self':

Perhaps one of the most powerful political statements that an autobiography can make is that such texts ultimately preserve lives. Although an

²⁶ A. H. Rosenfeld, 'The Assault on Holocaust Memory', *KulturPoetik*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2002), p. 82. M. Gerstenfeld, 'The multiple distortions of Holocaust memory', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No.3, (2007), pp. 35–55.

²⁷ Vallely, 'The Holocaust – the last survivors'.

²⁸ Vallely, 'The Holocaust – the last survivors'.

²⁹ See chapter three of my thesis.

³⁰ J. Jones, 'A spirit the Nazis couldn't erase: Charlotte Salomon: *Life? Or Theatre?* Review', (The Guardian, 06/11/2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/nov/06/charlotte-salomon-life-or-theatre-review-jewish-museum-london-graphic-autobiography> [Accessed: 20th April 2022].

autobiography may not be able to literally 'save' one's life, autobiographies do provide some sense of assurance that a life will not be forgotten.³¹

Salomon narrated her story through both words and paintings, detailing key moments within her life and the deeply disturbing memories that she wanted preserved. Although she was eventually murdered, aged 26, at Auschwitz, her visual and written autobiography preserves a vital sense of her as a person, affording an essential insight into her tragically short existence. This telling of an individual story also plays a critical collective as well as individual role. In addition to allowing those who have suffered a means through which to articulate their traumatic experiences, White explains, 'autobiography functions to inform the development of a larger collective memory'.³²

For Halter too, autobiography was to become a means of both powerfully telling his individual story and preserving it within collective consciousness, so fulfilling the pledge he had made to his grandfather. And given sufficient time, he would discover the visual as well as the written language with which to do so. But first, in the autumn of 1945, he had to focus on the business of survival. This was the point at which, as a boy of seventeen, he was brought to England by the Jewish Refugees Committee, which had arranged for a group of 732 child refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe to be flown to Carlisle, in Cumbria, in Lancaster Bomber planes.³³

The young people were dispersed in army trucks to various locations, including a camp near Lake Windermere in the Lake District, where committee members looked after their welfare. This was where Roman would spend approximately the first year and a half of his life in England.³⁴ Like many of 'The Boys', as this group came to be known, Halter's entire immediate family had perished in the camps.³⁵

Alone in a new country, with little knowledge of the language, the young refugees began to gravitate towards each other, some becoming lifelong friends. One was Ben Helfgott, a young Polish survivor of Buchenwald, Schlieben and Theresienstadt concentration camps, who describes himself and Halter as inseparable,

³¹ L. White, 'Autobiography, Visual Representations, and the Preservation of Self', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2004), pp. 107–125.

³² White, 'Autobiography, Visual Representations, and the Preservation of Self', p. 123.

³³ Halter, *Roman's Journey*, p. 325.

³⁴ The children were given art therapy sessions, under the tutelage of Austrian-born art teacher and refugee Marie Paneth, who allowed them to freely express their feelings and experiences through this medium. The children were not instructed as to what they should paint or draw; instead, they were given art supplies and told to express themselves as they saw fit. 45 Aid Society, *Marie Paneth*, (45 Aid Society: 2022) <https://45aid.org/carers/marie-paneth/> [Accessed: 30/11/2022]

³⁵ The Jewish Refugees Committee attempted to care for these displaced and traumatised children and teenagers by giving them a chance to experience some normality after the horrors that they had endured, including opportunities to catch up with the years of education they had missed. It was here that Halter, along with many of 'The Boys' (who included girls amongst their number) started to learn English and acquire life skills that they had been denied. Halter, *Roman's Journey*, pp. 326–338.

'like brothers'.³⁶ They both later became involved in the '45 Aid Society', a support network for Holocaust survivors and their children.³⁷

This then was the strange, surrogate family into which Halter was inducted during his early years in England. There are many parallels in his accounts of those desperate times with the testimonies of other refugees and Holocaust survivors, most of them Jewish, some of them artists.³⁸ Deprived of their own families, deeply traumatised, and with little or no formal education (Halter's stopped at the age of twelve), the refugee community offered a glimmer of hope to the young survivors of reconstructing their lives. It also offered some chance of a more normalised, teenage existence.

For the young Halter that meant seeking an education, a career, and in the years to come, a family. This involved a determined battle to fulfil an early ambition; to train and practice as an architect. He would eventually achieve this goal, running a successful architectural practice for seven years; a career that would ultimately inform his development as a stained glass artist.³⁹ But at the age of nineteen, he first had to stand up to the committee members who informed him that he did not have the educational requirements to pursue architectural studies.⁴⁰ Instead, they offered him a job in a metal work factory; work for which, perversely, he had gained considerable skills as a forced labourer in the Nazis' munitions factories.⁴¹

Halter angrily refused the committee's offer, choosing instead to determinedly gain as good an education as he could. Eventually the committee, impressed by his persistence and the drawing skills he had developed, found him a job in a structural engineering office in Berkshire; a move that proved the starting point for his architectural ambitions.⁴² Halter impressed his new employers sufficiently to be offered an apprenticeship, and earn enough to live in 'digs' in London and start saving up.

In this way, he was able to fund going to night school to study architecture, at the North London Polytechnic, where he made another lifelong friend, Stephen Adutt, who helped him with his English and mathematics.⁴³ Eventually he gained a place at the prestigious Architectural Association, and completed his formal training, qualifying

³⁶ Personal interview with Ben Helfgott, 20th June 2017

³⁷ The 45 Aid Society was set up in 1963 by 'The Boys' to raise money for charity and look after each other, and still exists today.

³⁸ Z. Amishai-Maisels, Art confronts the Holocaust, in, *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art*. (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995), pp. 49-77.

³⁹ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 59-62.

⁴⁰ *Early manuscripts for autobiography*, (unpublished), page unnumbered, Folder 15, box 31, HFA, Yeovil.

⁴¹ Halter, *Roman's Journey*, pp. 126-127.

⁴² In his unpublished autobiography Halter dates this ambition, very poignantly, back to 1944: 'When the SS led us in 1944 from the railway station in Dresden... I became entranced by the beauty of Dresden... I told myself then that when I survive I will become an architect and build beautiful buildings'. *Unpublished manuscripts*, no page number. HFA, Yeovil.

⁴³ Personal interview with Stephen Adutt, 26th June 2017.

as an architect in 1958, at the age of thirty-one. He subsequently worked for a number of different architectural firms before, in 1967, starting his own practice, Roman Halter and Associates.⁴⁴

By the time Halter graduated as an architect, he had also met his future wife Susie Nador, a Jewish Hungarian refugee, and former Olympic swimmer.⁴⁵ They married in 1951 and went on to have three children together; two daughters, Aloma and Aviva, and a son, Ardyn, all of whom became artists or writers.

Halter's resilience during this period of his life is reflected in both his published and unpublished personal memoirs.⁴⁶ Like many fellow-survivors, he talked very little about his horrific wartime experiences, at least outside of his immediate circle.⁴⁷ Instead, in the immediate post-war decades he focused on building a new, professional life as an architect, establishing successful practices in London and Cambridge that took on a wide range of projects.⁴⁸

Halter is widely recalled by his professional colleagues, family and friends as having a warm and generous character. One former employee, Richard Hazle, recollects the atmosphere of mutual support in Halter's practice.⁴⁹ His youngest daughter Aviva fondly remembers her father's insistence on regular family days out.⁵⁰ This life-affirming side to Halter, his desire to embrace normal daily pleasures despite the nihilism and darkness that he had lived through, is evident in the art he would go on to produce. The theme of *Chai* (life) in much of his commissioned stained glass work, with its saturated, jewel-like colours noted by Swash, reflects that impressive, resilient quality.⁵¹ Nevertheless, as Hazle also recalls, there was another side to Halter's personality; the shadow of 'a darkness inside of him that he never allowed to permeate out' - a darkness that he did not want his children to be touched by.⁵²

Like so many Holocaust survivors, Halter deliberately focused, out of material and psychological necessity, on the present, not the past. The human rights lawyer

⁴⁴ Halter and Adutt eventually went their own ways; Adutt to head up the architectural department at Brighton University, Halter to focus on his private practice. They remained close friends throughout Halter's life.

Personal interview with Stephen Adutt, 26th June 2017.

⁴⁵ They met in Israel, in 1950, where both were training for the Maccabiah multi-sport games.

⁴⁶ Unpublished manuscripts, Folder 15, Box 31, HFA, Yeovil.

⁴⁷ Personal interview with Stephen Adutt, 26th June 2017.

Personal interview with Aviva Halter Hurn, 09th July 2017.

⁴⁸ The architectural projects that Halter worked on included East Sussex County Hall, in Lewes; the original Alpine House in London's Kew Gardens; and a number of care homes. He also received commissions to design royal coats of arms for British courts, embassies and consulates.

Personal interview with Richard Hazle, 18th July 2017.

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Richard Hazle, 18th July 2017.

⁵⁰ 'He wasn't strict, he made sure that we had fun. He encouraged us to get the most out of every day.'

Personal interview with Aviva Halter Hurn, 9th July 2017.

⁵¹ Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', pp. 16-39

⁵² Personal interview with Richard Hazle, 18th July 2017.

Philippe Sands reflects on this subject in *East West Street*, his historical study and memoir centred on the Ukrainian city of Lviv and the Nuremberg trials. In it he describes how an elderly relative, a Holocaust survivor, told him, after he had tracked her down in Israel in search of details about extended family lost in the Shoah: 'I decided a very long time ago that this was a period that I did not wish to remember. I have not forgotten. I have chosen not to remember.'⁵³ What Sands describes as an 'explanation of her approach to the past, to silence and remembrance'⁵⁴ is one that would have been all too recognisable for countless survivors.

It would be decades before Halter 'chose to remember', and to express publicly his memories through his paintings, metal work, and stained glass art, as well as through his educational talks on the Holocaust and his autobiography. It was not until his late forties, his daughter Aviva recalls, that he began for the first time to speak to his children about the past:

The first time he talked to me, I was in the car with him and he just said, 'oh I wish that your grandmother and grandfather could have known you.' That must have been when I was about seven. And then, as he was approaching fifty, it kind of all erupted out of him and he started talking a lot more from then on.⁵⁵

For his part, his son Ardyn recollects seeing books about the Holocaust owned by his father, but only later being told about what had happened to him.⁵⁶

In the late 1960s and 70s, as Halter began increasingly to talk about the past, he started to revisit the experiences that had been too painful to reflect upon. Initially this was expressed through his private writings – often accompanied by drawings and etchings - and much later through his public art. The loss of his family, under the most brutal of circumstances, clearly weighed unbearably on his mind, later forming the subject matter for many of his paintings.⁵⁷ His grandfather, who played a pivotal role, both physically and emotionally, in helping him survive, figures centrally in this narrative; in particular, the sense of resilience and duty that he instilled in him as a young person. As the past intruded more and more forcefully upon the present, Halter began to search for ways to give creative expression to this tragic reality, principally through his visual art.

⁵³ P. Sands, *East West Street*. (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2016), p. 322.

⁵⁴ Sands, *East West Street*. p. 321.

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Aviva Halter-Hurn 10th July 2017.

⁵⁶ Personal interview with Ardyn Halter 17th August 2017.

⁵⁷ *Additional work for manuscript and educational talks*, folder 7, box 30, HFA, Yeovil.

2. Telling the world

The enormity of the Nazis' crimes against humanity, the impact of the Holocaust on its victims and survivors, has been expressed in art, literature and many other creative forms. Writing about the trajectory of contemporary Jewish art, art historian Avram Kampf observes that:

There was hardly an artist in Europe who was not affected by World War II. Jewish artists became refugees and went into hiding. Many were sent to the concentration camps, and more than 200 artists died there.⁵⁸

In the post-war period, many Holocaust survivors used art as a means of trying to make sense of what had happened to them. As art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels has suggested, their artworks became 'a means of freeing and purifying themselves from feelings and sights that haunted their dreams and were too difficult to bear.'⁵⁹

Some artists, not themselves concentration camp survivors, but part of the Jewish 'diaspora', were deeply affected by Europe's descent into barbarism. The image conjured by the American artist R.B. Kitaj (1932-2007), of a lost and wandering Jew, eloquently expressed this lament.⁶⁰ Other artists' works reflect the despair of that dark period in history. Nightmarish landscapes, many of them painted during or before the war, by Marc Chagall (1887-1985) and others, some utilising religious iconography in violent and shocking ways, convey the sense of horror engulfing Europe at the time.⁶¹ Other works do not directly reference the Holocaust, but use deeply unsettling, discordant, dreamlike images that clearly reflect the mass terror of the Shoah.⁶² As the art critic David Sylvester has noted, after the Second World War an 'Art of the Aftermath' emerged that did not necessarily directly depict the war or the Holocaust, but was rooted in those horrific events.⁶³

For Halter, the quest for a visual language through which to 'tell the world' of the Nazis' crimes – and so honour the promise made all those decades ago in the Lodz ghetto - would ultimately lead him to stained glass as a medium. In some respects, this

⁵⁸ A. Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj, Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art*. (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1990) p. 83.

⁵⁹ Z. Amishai-Maisels, *Art confronts the Holocaust*, p. 50.

⁶⁰ R. B. Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

Kitaj's painting 'If not, not.' (1975-76) is one such example, discussed further in chapter three.

⁶¹ Z. Amishai-Maisels, *Apocalypse, Unveiling a lost masterpiece by Marc Chagall*, (London: Purbrooks Print and Design, 2009).

⁶² Yosli Bergner's 'Flying spice box,' (1966) is one example. Seen in, Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj, Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art*, p. 88.

⁶³ Cited in D. Herman, 'Post War, Jews, art and refugees 1944-1975', in *Ben Uri, 100 years in London Art Identity Migration*. (London: Ben Uri, 2015), pp. 108–119.

was an organic aesthetic choice, closely related to the course that his life had taken thus far. As Swash has observed, stained glass is an 'architectural art', dependent upon its ability to utilise form, structure and, above all, light to create the desired impact.⁶⁴ So it is perhaps no accident that Halter, with his architectural training and practice, and metal work skills, eventually chose this medium to make some of his most impactful and original artistic works. Swash has commented on the continuity between Halter's former professional life and his finely honed skills as a draughtsman, and the strong, linear, expressionist style of stained glass art that he subsequently developed, utilising the metal work within it in a distinctive sculptural fashion.⁶⁵

However, arriving at this point was a lengthy process. In his unpublished journals Halter describes how he had always enjoyed drawing and found comfort from this pastime during his early years as a refugee in the Lake District in the late 1940s.⁶⁶ Later, in his early twenties, he would travel into London, and go to galleries to study the works of the Old Masters. In his journals Halter describes being inspired by what he saw during these visits, at the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery in particular.⁶⁷ Former National Gallery senior curator Colin Wiggins has noted how, despite his lack of early formal education, Halter took a keen interest in art and culture, and went on to associate with many influential architects and artists.⁶⁸

According to his daughter Aviva, Rembrandt's work made a lasting impression on Halter from the earliest days of his visits to London galleries. Another artist whose work he studied intently was Francisco Goya (1746 -1828), whose famous portrait, *Dona Isabel de Porcel* (c.1805), would provide the inspiration for Halter's haunting painting based on an image of his late mother, *Woman Wearing Mantilla* (1974).⁶⁹ Between the years 1950-53, whilst still training to be an architect, Halter began to study fine art under the influential Jewish artist David Bomberg (1890 -1957), at his Borough Polytechnic evening classes.⁷⁰ Bomberg, a founder member of the London Group of avant-garde artists, and an important influence on Frank Auerbach (b.1931), Leon Kossoff (1926 - 2019) and other expressionistic figurative painters, had a discernible impact on Halter's strongly gestural early work.⁷¹ Throughout this period, Halter was

⁶⁴ Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', pp. 16-39.

⁶⁵ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 57-66.

⁶⁶ Unpublished manuscripts HFA, Yeovil.

⁶⁷ Unpublished manuscripts HFA, Yeovil.

⁶⁸ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-41.

They included the sculptor Henry Moore, the artist Marc Chagall, and the architect Sir Richard Rogers. Personal Interview with Ardyn Halter 17 August 2017.

⁶⁹ Personal interview with Aviva Halter Hurn, 09 July 2017.

⁷⁰ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 57-66.

⁷¹ R. Cork, *David Bomberg*, (London: The Tate Gallery, 1988) pp. 11-49.

Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 57-66. The London Group, which was created in 1914, and still exhibits to this day, should be distinguished from the School of London. This was founded in 1976, via an exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery, of thirty-five artists inspired by the

prolifically drawing and painting, mainly in gouache and watercolour; and producing commissioned portraits that he used to supplement his income.⁷²

Ardyn Halter recalls how, in the 1960s and early 1970s, during the evenings and weekends when he was not working on architectural drawings, his father would paint. At this stage, he was experimenting tonally with watercolours, and more generally with different techniques and palettes. An early influence, according to Ardyn, was the work of abstract artist Victor Pasmore (1908 -1998), whose rich and glowing use of colour Halter found very inspirational.⁷³

A pivotal moment in Halter's artistic journey came in 1972, when he travelled to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial centre in Israel, in search of information about his family.⁷⁴ Whilst he was there he got to know Yitzhak Arad, the retired general and Holocaust historian who ran the centre.⁷⁵ This resulted in Halter working as a consultant on the development of Yad Vashem, and designing its iconic gate, which depicts stylised figures, tragically beseeching the viewer to bear witness to their plight, graphically framed against barbed wire. **[Fig 3].**⁷⁶ Halter brought both his architectural and metal work knowledge to bear during his work on the Yad Vashem gate. This latter skill was developed still further during his time in Israel, through his contact with the Hungarian sculptor, Erno Szegedi (1933-87) who taught him the art of sand-casting in bronze, a technique that would become Halter's stylistic trademark throughout his stained glass career.⁷⁷

The gate can in many ways be seen as the bridge between Halter's architectural and metal working skills, and the nascent development of his stained glass art. Its rugged, brutalist style and texture is not only peculiarly suited to its subject matter, that of industrial-scale genocide. It also displays a command of structure, space

human figure. See A. Hicks, *The School of London: the resurgence of contemporary painting*, (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1989), p11.

⁷² *Unpublished manuscripts*, Box 31, folder 5, p. 228, HFA, Yeovil.

⁷³ Personal Interview with Ardyn Halter 17 August 2017.

⁷⁴ Yad Vashem literally translates as 'a memorial and a name,' reflecting its role as both Israel's official memorial to the Holocaust and as a national depository for the names of the Jewish victims of the Shoah. Yad Vashem was established in 1953, as the world centre for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. Yad Vashem, *Vision and Mission of Yad Vashem* (Jerusalem: 2022) <https://www.yadvashem.org/about/mission-statement.html> [Accessed 09/01/2023]

⁷⁵ It was through his work with Yad Vashem and his friendship with Arad that Halter was able to have Hertha Fuch (who sheltered him from the Nazis) named as a 'righteous gentile'. Righteous gentiles are non-Jews who rescued or protected Jews during the Holocaust.

⁷⁶ Halter had originally envisaged the gate being cast in bronze, however it was eventually cast in aluminium. Conservation work has recently been completed on the gate, to restore it to its original condition. It is the first thing that visitors see on arrival at Yad Vashem.

⁷⁷ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', p. 62.

Sand-casting involves a technique whereby sand is used to create a mould into which molten metal is subsequently poured and allowed to solidify. This enables the final stained glass artwork to achieve a rugged, textured appearance.

and materiality that reflects the fusion of Halter's architectural and metal working skills with his acute graphic awareness.

The gate's stylised motifs of barbed wire and crouching, despairing figures, framed within muscular, architectural lines, create a deeply affecting visual idiom **[Fig 4]**. Seen from a distance, it makes an eloquent statement about the contents displayed within Yad Vashem. Studied close up, the jagged edges of the barbed wire speak powerfully of the inhuman violence perpetrated upon the Shoah's victims. It is also surely fitting that Halter's first major public artwork should have been a metalwork memorial to the Holocaust; the very medium in which he was forced to labour for the Nazis as a boy.

Soon after completing his work on the memorial centre gate Halter returned to England, and embarked on a new stage in his artistic development. From 1972-73 he studied stained glass techniques at the Central School of Art and Design, and subsequently returned to Yad Vashem to work on the centre's memorial hall windows, his first stained glass commission.⁷⁸ By this time he had realised the potential of the skills that Szegedi had taught him for his stained glass work, and was employing these bronze casting techniques in a very original way in his practice.⁷⁹ As he transitioned from one medium to another, Halter was experimenting technically and stylistically in ways that would become evident in later works.

Experimentation with style and form was something that was integral to Halter's method. From his expressive use of metal work in his stained glass window frames, **[Fig 5]** through to the structured, architectural lines within many of his paintings **[Fig 6]**. Halter was constantly drawing on different genres, and reinventing his aesthetic approach. One thing that always remained central to his work was his architectural eye, providing the scaffolding and bold graphic lines that are characteristic of his work, whether in paint or glass. By 1974, aged 47, Halter had decided to retire from his architectural business, to practice art full time, using his Crown Courts metal work commissions to supplement his income.⁸⁰ The ceremonial coats of arms that he designed display a further example of his considerable metal working skills and the different ways in which he put them to use **[Fig 7]**.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Personal interview with Ardyn Halter 17th August 2017.

⁷⁹ Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist and Holocaust Survivor', pp. 57-66.

⁸⁰ The decision to leave the architectural practice seems to have been made abruptly. Halter handed over the business to Richard Hazle and another colleague, Jack Lowry, who formed their own practice, the RH Partnership. It still exists today, with offices in Brighton, Cambridge and London.

Personal interview with Richard Hazle, 18th July 2017.

⁸¹ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor'. p. 62.

As a result of this work, Halter was awarded the title 'Designer and Maker of Armorial to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.'

It was at this point that Halter began to focus on painting in oils, increasingly using imagery that depicted the atrocities committed in the Holocaust. He did so in an uncompromising fashion, often mediated through haunting representations of the family that he had lost.⁸² It is in these paintings that Halter appears to have truly committed himself to telling the world of the crimes the Nazis had committed against humanity. Not only in a generic way, as in the important, but more detached, memorial work that he had produced for Yad Vashem; but through more personal imagery, expressing his own pain and grief.

Four of these paintings would be displayed by Tate Britain in 2005, as part of an exhibition commemorating the Holocaust.⁸³ Seven have been exhibited by the Imperial War Museum in London, and are now held in their collections.⁸⁴ Religious, family and Holocaust imagery are juxtaposed in many of these paintings. I discuss the significance of these works in detail in chapters two and three.⁸⁵

The terrible poignancy of these images – including those of a man being electrified on barbed wire, and prisoners being transported to the camps – is somehow made bearable to look at by Halter's powerfully graphic and gestural style. The heavy black lines that frame them prefigure much of Halter's very sculptural stained glass work.⁸⁶ Traces of his metalwork skills can even be detected within the fine detail of the 'lacework' in his portrait of his mother. Compositionally, with a single figure often placed centre-stage, these works have a very forceful impact; even more so, thanks to the use of a sombre, largely monochrome palette [Fig 8].

The aesthetic challenges posed by representing the Holocaust, alluded to by art historian Brett Ashley Kaplan and others, are confronted with enormous confidence in these early works. Counterintuitively, their formally 'pleasing' qualities do not detract from the horror that Halter is clearly seeking to convey. On the contrary, as Kaplan has observed more generally, such works, '... insist that we continue to examine how the Holocaust resides in our thoughts; because they are beautiful these works entice our reflection, our attention and our questioning.'⁸⁷

⁸² Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

⁸³ Tate, *Tate Britain's special display to mark liberation anniversary*, (London: Tate Britain 2005) <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/tate-britains-special-display-mark-liberation-anniversary> [Accessed: 01/05/2022].

⁸⁴ R. Halter, *Exhibition of Roman Halter's paintings at the Imperial War Museum* (May 2007). Pamphlet from HFA, Yeovil.

⁸⁵ One of these images, 'Moses the prophet', a representation of Halter's grandfather, contains tortured, miniscule figures of camp inmates embedded within it. Another, 'Woman wearing Mantilla' (1974), is clearly a homage to the Goya painting that he had gazed at so often. It represents his mother at prayer with other women in the synagogue in Chodecz, but contained within the lacework of her 'mantilla' are huddled, naked, prisoners – tiny portraits of women holding small children.

Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

⁸⁶ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

⁸⁷ Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*, p. 1.

Throughout the late 1970s and 80s, Halter began to take on stained glass commissions for synagogues and other public buildings. These included several windows at The Central Synagogue in London, the Ark and windows at the Leo Baeck College for rabbinical training in London and all the windows in the New North London Synagogue.⁸⁸ In contrast to many of his paintings, Halter's stained glass art generally utilises a vibrant colour palette, even when it references deeply tragic subject matter. This is closely related to the nature of the medium, with its focus on translucency and light. Aviva Halter, who worked with her father on the windows at the Beit Shalom Holocaust memorial centre, in Nottinghamshire, and several other commissions, says that Halter always loved stained glass as an art form, principally because of its ability to use light to full effect.⁸⁹

However it also reflects the deliberately luminous, life-affirming quality of much of Halter's output, evidenced for example in the *Chai* (life) series in the North Western Reform Synagogue.⁹⁰ Many of his stained glass commissions do not directly depict the Holocaust, or were religious or allegorical in nature, expressing resilience and resistance in a more indirect fashion. It is significant however that many of the 'cartoons' that Halter prepared for them did graphically reference the Shoah, often via his trademark use of miniscule, detailed images of human suffering, drawn from memory and personal experience in the camps.⁹¹

The degree to which he could realise these preparatory studies appears to have been dependent upon the willingness, or otherwise, of synagogue congregations to commission them; something illustrated by the difficulties surrounding his more controversial pieces.⁹² However, even in his more traditional windows and other stained glass creations, Halter's rugged style stands out, with its distinctive method of moulding cast bronze or aluminium.⁹³ The sand-casting method that he had acquired is based on techniques for casting metal developed in ancient times, and is often used in engineering work. However it has rarely been used in the creation of frames for stained glass. Halter, with his knowledge of metal work, clearly saw the possibilities of this

⁸⁸ The *Chai* windows at the New North Western Reform Synagogue and the From Holocaust to Rebirth windows in the Mill Hill United Synagogue are also amongst Halter's commissions. Halter created windows for both Reform synagogues, and Orthodox United synagogues. Whilst it could be speculated that the particular denomination of the synagogues might have had a bearing on their willingness to commission Holocaust-related windows, this does not appear to have been the case at London's Mill Hill United Synagogue, for which Halter created explicitly Holocaust-related works. Meanwhile, as I discuss in chapter two of my thesis, there were a number of potential reasons for the controversial response elicited by Halter's allegorical 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' window at the Central United Synagogue, which may have included the more traditional views of its congregation.

⁸⁹ Personal interview with Aviva Halter Hurn, 09th July 2017.

⁹⁰ C. Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', pp. 19-27.

⁹¹ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-41.

⁹² For example, Halter's 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' window at London's Central Synagogue, discussed in detail in chapter two.

⁹³ C. Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', pp. 16-17.

technique and adapted it for his purposes, This innovative method allowed him to create a fluid form and sculptural texture in the tracery and frames for his windows, which were often cast in their entirety rather than in separate pieces, as is more traditional.⁹⁴

Halter's stained glass art is very distinct from that associated with many fellow Jewish practitioners, for example that of David Hillman (1895-1974), whose work is more traditional in both style and subject matter. Hillman's windows are often quite opaque, using a dark colour palette that allows little light to filter through. They are typically densely decorated with images that appear to have been painted onto the glass, a technical practice that has been in use since medieval times and is often found in cathedrals and churches **[Fig 9]**.⁹⁵ Halter's practice, on the other hand, according to David Glasser, chair of the Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, at times takes stained glass composition to 'a daring, near-abstract' level **[Fig 10]**.⁹⁶ His work owes much to modernist influences such as Marc Chagall, with whom he associated, John Piper (1903-1992), Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and other artists who utilised stained glass to very original aesthetic effect. Swash places Halter's contribution to contemporary stained glass art in the same league as some of these notable artistic figures:

He was an innovator and his work has added depth and meaning, not just to the visual atmosphere of interiors and places of worship across London and Israel, but also to the very rich body of stained glass created by a small group of distinguished artists, a contribution for which Halter deservedly will be remembered.⁹⁷

An important stained glass project which illustrates Halter's innovative approach, was the little-known collaboration that he forged with the sculptor Henry Moore (1898 -1986) in the 1980s. Together the two artists created designs for a series of stained glass windows, inspired by the famous *Reclining Figure* sculptures that Moore produced from 1929 onwards. Moore, who had a personal and professional relationship to Halter, was by this time in his eighties, and had never worked in stained glass as a medium. However he responded very positively to Halter's suggestion that they should jointly do so.

⁹⁴ C. H. Larson, Sand Cast Sculpture: Fine Art in Fine Sand, *Design*, Vol.66, No.4, (1965) pp. 6-9.

⁹⁵ S.Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', in *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*. 1st edn. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 268-274.

⁹⁶ D. Glasser, Life and art through stained glass, in, *Life and Art Through Stained Glass, Roman Halter 1927-2012*. (London: Ben Uri, 2014) p. 2.

⁹⁷ Swash, 'Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist', p. 19.

The project began with Moore selecting one of his watercolours, based on the reclining figure sculptures, as the starting point for a series of stained glass windows, two of which were eventually created by Halter.⁹⁸ One, until recently on loan to the Ely Cathedral stained glass museum, is cast in aluminium, whilst the other is believed to have been cast in bronze.⁹⁹ There is a powerful synergy between form and content in these works: Halter's muscular and 'painterly' stained glass style matches closely Moore's pared down, abstract interpretation of the human form.

Within the Halter family archives there are many cartoons for the windows that illustrate the different iterations they went through, based on various versions of the reclining figure and suggestions for colour palettes, including the design that Moore finally signed off for approval **[Figs 11&12]**. The windows were to be free-standing, moveable structures, designed to have a sculptural impact in keeping with Moore's work. Each window was intended to contain six large glass panels, in various hues of blue, with a light box to illuminate them **[Fig 13]**. Incorporated within the finished design is a subtle suggestion of the English landscape, symbolic of the settings within which so many of Moore's sculptures are displayed.

Halter and Moore discussed in detail which cartoons were preferred, as well as the technical details about size and casting methods. As this active collaboration illustrates, Halter's relationship to a number of contemporary artists was more than a formal one of comparison. His tactile aesthetic sensibilities – honed through his architectural and metal work - enabled him to interpret Moore's work in a sensitive and original way, successfully translating the work of a principally three dimensional artist into a two dimensional form.

There may also have been a meeting of minds at a further level. As museum curator and art historian, Richard Calvocoressi, has discussed, Moore was acutely aware of the horrors of war and of the Holocaust, and the difficulties involved in their artistic representation. As a veteran of the First World War, and a former judge on a panel set up in the late 1950s to create a Holocaust memorial at Auschwitz, Moore had declared the aesthetic challenge of such representation 'almost insoluble.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, as art historian and former Tate Britain curator Chris Stephens has suggested, there is

⁹⁸ The first window was exhibited by the Oxford Centre for Hebrew Studies, in Oxfordshire, in 1986. The second window was exhibited for two years at the Redfern Gallery in London in January 2008, and subsequently at an art fair in Palm Beach, Miami in 2010. The final place the *Reclining Figure* was exhibited, before being loaned to the Ely museum, was at London's Ben Uri Gallery and Museum in 2014, as part of an exhibition of Halter's work: *Life and Art through Stained Glass*. Designs exist for the remainder of the series of windows but, according to the Halter family, were never cast.

R. Halter and A. Halter-Hurn, *14 linocuts by Aviva Halter-Hurn, Painting and Watercolours by Roman Halter* (London: The Redfern Gallery, 2008).

⁹⁹ Personal interview with Ardyn Halter 5th November 2017.

¹⁰⁰ R. Calvocoressi, Moore, the Holocaust and cold war politics, in *Henry Moore*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) pp. 66-75.

'a darker, edgier and more complex' side to much of Moore's oeuvre than is generally supposed, quite possibly rooted in his nightmarish experiences in the trenches.¹⁰¹

Although the stained glass artwork that Halter created in conjunction with Moore is not Holocaust related, given its provenance it can be read as speaking profoundly to the human condition.

A very different, and more directly personal, example of Halter's facility at reimagining and reinterpreting the art of others was his stained glass artwork for the children's Holocaust memorial at Yad LaYeled, part of the Ghetto Fighters' House museum in Israel.¹⁰² Here, between 1988 to 1994, he and his son Ardyn, created seventeen stained glass windows, designed to commemorate the one and a half million children murdered during the Shoah, using imagery based on the drawings made by children incarcerated in Theresienstadt concentration camp.¹⁰³ Most of these children perished in the Holocaust, but their creativity is movingly commemorated in the windows on permanent display. I discuss this work in depth in chapter three. It is sufficient to note here that Halter's ability to empathetically interpret these children's works, at a site of such public significance, was not just further confirmation of his multi-layered artistic and technical skills. It was also a very personal statement about Theresienstadt – the former death camp turned holding camp where, post-liberation, he and his fellow child survivors were to await transportation to England.

¹⁰¹ C. Stephens, Anything but gentle: Henry Moore - Modern Sculptor, in *Henry Moore*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) p. 12.

¹⁰² Ghetto Fighters House, Yad Layeled, *Stained Glass Exhibit*, (Beit Lohamei Hagetaot: 2021), <http://gfh.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=95&ArticleID=119> [Accessed: 07/12/2021].

¹⁰³ H. Volavková, ed. *I never saw another butterfly: Children's drawings and poems from Terezin concentration camp 1942-1944* (New York: Schoken Books, 1978).

3. The prism

As an artistic medium, stained glass separates light into prisms of colour, which arguably redesign and reconfigure the space upon which they project. For Halter, stained glass represented the prism through which he would reflect on the deeply painful memory of the Holocaust. This was neither a linear, nor an uncontroversial artistic journey. Indeed, his transition towards this medium was a bold move given the relative rarity of stained glass art within Jewish aesthetic traditions, in particular within the context of post-Holocaust art.

As discussed, whilst more traditional Jewish stained glass windows tend to obscure the light, Halter's windows utilise techniques that deliberately let it in. As Swash notes, instead of painting images directly onto glass, Halter would frequently set pieces of brightly coloured glass into a cast metal frame. This technique is similar to that used in some of the earliest examples of Middle Eastern stained glass art, dating from around the eighth century AD. Few examples of these early windows exist today, but there is evidence that they were created by building wooden or plaster frames into which pieces of glass were set in decorative patterns.¹⁰⁴ In Halter's hands, modern materials were used to similar effect, allowing the maximum amount of light to shine through his windows; a further example of his ability to repurpose techniques in his work.¹⁰⁵

In this final section, I will look briefly at the context within which Halter was developing his innovative stained glass practice. This involves some discussion of the contrast between the use of stained glass art within Jewish and Christian communities, and also of Halter's distinctive contribution in relation to other well-known Jewish stained glass artists and practitioners, such as Marc Chagall, Nehemia Azaz (1923-2008) and David Hillman. My focus here is on exploring some of the reasons why Halter embraced stained glass as a modernist, rather than more traditional, medium of artistic expression.

Although it has clearly been used as a decorative medium by other faiths and cultures, in Britain stained glass is predominantly perceived as an art form inspired by the Christian faith. Examples have existed in England since at least the seventh century, and are still most commonly found in churches and cathedrals, typically depicting images of saints and scenes from the Bible.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to the Christian

¹⁰⁴ V. C. Raguin, Origins, Materials and the Glazier's Art, in *The History of Stained Glass, The art of light from Medieval to contemporary*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008) p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ Swash, Roman Halter: Stained glass artist, pp.16-17.

¹⁰⁶ V. C. Raguin, Symbol and story: the art of stained glass, in *The History of Stained Glass, The art of light from Medieval to contemporary*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008) pp. 6-31.

tradition, the use of stained glass has, until relatively recently, not been a common feature of Jewish places of worship in Britain, and few Jewish artists have made use of this 'gentile' medium. In fact, according to the Jewish heritage historian Sharman Kadish, this art form only started to appear widely within synagogues in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the rise of 'cathedral synagogues', as a signal of assimilation by the Jewish community into the host nation.¹⁰⁷

There is nevertheless some evidence of stained glass windows in synagogues elsewhere in Europe from around the twelfth century; including documentation of a complaint from a rabbi in Cologne who objected to the depiction of lions and snakes in a synagogue stained glass window, and requested that they be removed.¹⁰⁸ This is indicative of one of the main theological reasons why Judaism has only adopted stained glass art as a decorative medium in relatively modern times. A fundamental explanation is to be found in the wording of the Old Testament Second Commandment: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...' ¹⁰⁹

This doctrinal basis for the prohibition of graven images lies in the belief that God has no physical form: and that to worship a graven image is tantamount to worshipping a false idol. Whilst objections to stained glass art have also existed at key historical moments in the Christian and Muslim traditions, the prohibition is far more prescriptive within Judaism. Indeed, according to some interpretations, the very concept of 'the sublime' – as something holy and unrepresentable – is rooted in Jewish Talmudic law.¹¹⁰

A number of other reasons have been advanced for the very slow adoption of stained glass within synagogue settings, including the rarity of Jewish stained glass practitioners due to their exclusion from medieval craft guilds.¹¹¹ Another factor is the far greater reverence for 'the word' – both written and spoken - than for visual imagery within Judaic traditions.¹¹² Historian George Seddon has also suggested that colourful, decorative windows were viewed as an unwelcome distraction from congregants' prayers, whilst it was believed that the clear glass windows adopted in many synagogues across Europe would fill them with reverence at the sight of the sky.

¹⁰⁷ Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', pp. 265–286.

¹⁰⁸ G. Seddon, *The Quintessential Light*, in, *Stained Glass*. 2nd ed. (London: Spring books, 1986) p. 166.

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 20:4 (King James Version).

¹¹⁰ L. Lee, et al, *Stained Glass*. 2nd ed. (London: Spring books, 1986). Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹¹ It is important to recognise that in the Middle Ages, Jews were excluded from craft guilds and thus would not have learned how to make stained glass windows. Few early stained glass makers were Jewish, and many of the windows created for synagogues were, until recently, made by non-Jewish practitioners. Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', p. 266.

¹¹² 'The Word' forms a major part of Jewish aesthetic tradition. Sacred Torah scrolls are kept within ornate cases; Passover Haggadahs are often beautifully illuminated (notably, the famous Sarajevo Haggadah); and stained glass windows often contain Hebrew text. S. Schama, *Delving, Divining*, in *The story of the Jews, finding the words, 1000 BCE-1492CE* (London: the Bodley head, 20013), p. 87.

Counterintuitively, where stained glass windows in the traditional style were adopted in Jewish places of worship, their intricate painted designs often created a dark, gloomy atmosphere that was not conducive to letting in light, something that is core to Judaism.¹¹³

This concept of light, like that of ‘the word’, is central to Jewish prayer and culture. Hanukkah is a festival of light, the lighting of the Menorah symbolically representing the miracle of an oil lamp that burnt for eight days. Light symbolism is present everywhere in Jewish culture: lighting candles on the Sabbath and for memorial purposes; God appearing to Moses as a burning bush, and so forth.¹¹⁴ Even in his more traditional stained glass windows for synagogues, showing images, for instance, of the fruits and flowers of the Bible, or themes to do with *Chai* (life), Halter’s techniques were radical and modernist, with a strong emphasis on the aesthetic possibilities of light. This was particularly the case when it came to the sand-casting method used for his metal work tracery, lending it a rugged, textured appearance that framed the luminous coloured glass **[Fig 14]**. In this respect, Halter was something of an outlier, developing an aesthetic for his stained glass practice that drew on many different contemporary artistic sources, both within the stained glass field and more widely. These included some of the more radical trends seen within Christian stained glass art in the post-war period.

The relatively brief history of stained glass practice within Jewish places of worship, its disassociation from wider artistic trends – and the restrictive prohibitions placed upon its usage – have not generally militated in favour of the more avant-garde developments seen within Christian stained glass art, particularly in post-war Europe. There the church and state actively sponsored contemporary art installations in sacred settings, as part of the rebuilding of the ecclesiastical fabric, encouraging leading artists such as Fernand Léger (1881-1955) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) to create stunning stained glass artworks.¹¹⁵ In fact, Christian stained glass art has undergone something of a further renaissance in recent times, with contemporary artists such as Gerhard Richter (b. 1932), David Hockney (b. 1937) and others following in the tradition established by Henri Matisse in the 1950s, at the Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence, of creating secular, often highly abstract, stained glass art to adorn sacred places.¹¹⁶ Art historian Michael Barker describes how Chagall was commissioned to

¹¹³ G. Seddon. *The Quintessential Light*, in *Stained Glass*. 2nd edn. (London: Spring books. 1986) p. 166.

¹¹⁴ Seddon. *The Quintessential Light*, pp. 166-167.

¹¹⁵ M. Barker, “Stained glass in France in the 1950s.” *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 - the Present*, No. 15 (1991), pp. 5–13.

¹¹⁶ B. Luke, *Beyond Belief*, *Art Quarterly*, Vol. Winter (2015), pp. 46-50.

design stained glass windows for Christian places of worship whilst he was living in France and how these windows were often modernist in their design.¹¹⁷

By contrast, with some important exceptions, the trends within Jewish stained glass art practice, particularly in Britain, have been relatively conservative stylistically, reflecting both the preferences of congregations and local Jewish communities, and the influences on individual stained glass artists and practitioners.¹¹⁸ Whilst many synagogues still avoid the representation of human figures in their stained glass - preferring to utilise decorative patterns and symbolic imagery from nature - some artists and practitioners have clearly been influenced by traditional Christian 'cathedral' style windows, and have sought to reproduce the sense of awe that they create in their own work. Kadish has suggested that one of the most notable examples of this trend is the work of David Hillman, probably the most prolific Jewish stained glass practitioner, and one of the best known.¹¹⁹ His work can be found in numerous synagogues in London and elsewhere in the UK, many of them Orthodox in denomination.¹²⁰

Hillman's stained glass art is quite traditional stylistically, usually involving glass painted with intricate biblical scenes and narratives. His colour palette is relatively dark and muted, allowing little light to shine through. Whilst, as Kadish notes, Hillman did find ways to slightly circumvent the cultural prohibition on 'graven' imagery, his oeuvre sits firmly within the conservative 'cathedral synagogue' tradition, and remains popular with many congregations.¹²¹ By contrast, Halter's stained glass artwork – sometimes semi-abstract and experimental stylistically – did not always find favour with congregations, for instance in the case of his *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* window at the Central Synagogue in London (1977-78), discussed in detail in chapter two.

In this context, as Kadish points out, it is significant that Chagall, one of the most hugely original Jewish stained glass artists, was never to create glass artwork for synagogues in the UK.¹²² In fact, the most significant stained glass art that he produced for a Jewish place of worship is to be found in the series of twelve windows made for the Hadassah Medical Centre synagogue in Israel, in 1963, where intensely coloured,

¹¹⁷ M. Barker, "Stained glass in France in the 1950s." p. 8.

¹¹⁸ This is less true however of, for instance, the USA and Israel, where Jewish stained glass art is often more contemporary in design.

Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', pp. 265–286.

E. Mandelbaum, Ellen Mandelbaum, in *Contemporary Stained Glass Artists: A Selection of Artists Worldwide*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), pp.157-159.

¹¹⁹ Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', p. 268.

¹²⁰ Born in Lithuania, Hillman initially trained as a rabbi, before subsequently developing expertise in stained glass.

Personal interview with David Newman (David Hillman's great nephew), 17th April 2018.

L. Fertleman, *The splendours of the Central Synagogue London, A pictorial study of the stained glass windows by David Hillman*, (London: Central Synagogue, Photo box, 2010).

¹²¹ Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', pp. 268-274.

¹²² Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', p. 286.

symbolic imagery is used to illustrate the biblical narrative **[Fig 15]**. Of the Chagall glass in England, the most famous examples are in Christian settings, notably the window at Chichester cathedral in Sussex, illustrating Psalm 150 in extraordinary, jewel-coloured imagery; and at Tudeley church, in Kent, where Chagall created a series of blue tinted windows as a very moving memorial to the daughter of congregants.¹²³

A rare example of a Jewish stained glass artist whose contemporary style has found a home within Jewish community settings in Britain is the Israeli artist Nehemia Azaz. His stained glass windows adorn Carmel College in Oxfordshire, Marble Arch synagogue and other sites in the UK, where he lived and worked for many decades **[Fig 16]**.¹²⁴ Azaz's work is semi-abstract and conceptual, utilising a vibrant palette and radical techniques; more akin to the work of John Piper and other modernist stained glass artists.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, such examples are few and far between. Very few post-Holocaust artists have used stained glass in the way that Roman Halter attempted, to memorialise the past.¹²⁶ And there are relatively few synagogues and museums in the UK where the Shoah is represented in glass. The etched memorial window to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Birmingham Central Synagogue, and the stained glass windows at Brighton and Hove New Synagogue, which contain imagery that references the death camps, are rare examples.¹²⁷

Given the stylistic conservatism of much Jewish stained glass art in Britain - and the aesthetic difficulties involved in Holocaust representation - Halter was to face considerable constraints when it came to expressing his testimony through the prism of this medium. Why he nevertheless felt compelled to do so, and how he rose to that challenge, is the subject matter of the next chapter.

¹²³ M. Neervoort-Moore, The Reordering of 1966 and the Chagall windows, *The History of All Saints' Tudeley*. (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2014). pp. 31-41

P. Foster et al, Chichester, The commissioning, *Chagall Glass at Chichester and Tudeley*. (Chichester: University College Chichester, 2004). pp. 11-16.

¹²⁴ Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', pp. 282-286.

¹²⁵ V.C. Raguin, *The History of stained glass, The art of light medieval to contemporary*. pp. 276-277.

¹²⁶ A further example of a Jewish Holocaust survivor who used stained glass to memorialise the Shoah is the Hungarian born artist Moshe Galili (1930-2017). Although he worked predominantly in paint, he created several Holocaust-related stained glass windows, including for the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Nottinghamshire and the Holocaust Survivors Centre in Hendon. Galili survived the war thanks to his mother successfully managing to keep her children hidden from the Nazis. He then emigrated to Palestine and eventually moved to England. Moshe Galili, *Biography*, (Moshe Galili:2022) <http://www.moshegalili.com/profile.php> [accessed:30/11/2022]

¹²⁷ The windows at Brighton and Hove New Synagogue were created by stained glass practitioner John Petts (1914-1991), a Christian serviceman who helped liberate the Belsen concentration camp. His designs included images of barbed wire and chains. Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', p. 279

Conclusion

Confronted with the darkest of times, many Holocaust witnesses and survivors have turned to personal testimony as a means of preserving a sense of self. And as this chapter has illustrated, Roman Halter too felt duty-bound to record, document and tell his story. However, his extraordinary resilience and creativity also drove him to go a step further.

Given sufficient time and resources, he proved capable of making powerful art out of experiences that, in the truest sense, are beyond words. This chapter has begun to explore the relationship between Halter's deeply traumatic lived experiences and the forms of artistic expression that he developed to communicate their meaning to a wide public.

The fact that he chose to do so in an unusual medium, often utilised in a technically and stylistically innovative way, is significant. The clear influence of contemporary and modernist art on his practice expresses an aesthetic that, whilst powerfully memorialising the past, is firmly focused on the present and the future. The next chapter will examine the cultural and aesthetic challenges that he faced in moving into the realm of public art, in particular through the medium of stained glass, in order to commit his experiences to collective memory.

Chapter two

The Said and the Unsaid

*Perennial suffering has as much right to expression
as a tortured man has to scream.*¹²⁸

Theodor Adorno

Introduction

In the 1960s, when Halter began first to visually reflect on the Holocaust, he turned initially to painting and etching, creating many powerful works of art, including those now held in the collection of the Imperial War Museum.¹²⁹ By the 1970s however, stained glass had increasingly become his medium of choice, and he undertook a series of commissions for window installations in synagogues, museums and memorial centres in the UK and Israel. Amongst the earliest examples were the windows he created for the Central Synagogue in London, including one depicting *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* [Fig 10]. In this chapter I propose that this window can be read as allegorically referencing the Shoah and the Jewish people's subsequent struggle with faith.

The theme of the Holocaust was rarely overtly depicted in stained glass by Halter. Notable exceptions include the windows he produced for London's Mill Hill synagogue; for the Beth Shalom National Holocaust Centre in Nottingham; and for both the Yad Vashem and Yad LaYeled memorial museums in Israel. Whilst most of Halter's etchings and paintings speak directly to the tragic lived experience of the Holocaust, the same was not true of all his stained glass artworks, many of which were of a more generic religious and decorative character.

As a practitioner, Halter was clearly constrained by the wishes of his commissioners, and the sensibilities of synagogue congregations, as to what he could explicitly depict within his windows. Nevertheless, as is clear from the large body of cartoons for stained glass designs in the Halter family archives, many of them previously unpublished, it was always his intention to visually express his experience of

¹²⁸ Cited in: L. Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure. The Iconoclastic Proscription and its theoretical legacy*, in, *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*. (California: University of California press, 1999). p. 71.

¹²⁹ R. Halter, *Exhibition of Roman Halter's paintings at the Imperial War Museum* (May 2007). Pamphlet from HFA, Yeovil.

the Shoah through this medium.¹³⁰ Many of these cartoons contain the small figures that are ubiquitous in the haunting Dorset watercolours that he produced late in life, and in his Imperial War Museum paintings **[Figs 8, 17 and 18]**. The material in the archives speaks eloquently of his desire to create more windows that memorialised the Holocaust. So why were many of these stained glass designs not rendered as such?¹³¹

This chapter discusses both the objective and more subjective obstacles that stood in the way of realising that ambition, through a conversation about the said and the unsaid in Halter's stained glass art. I interrogate both the societal context within which he was developing his practice, and the historic prohibitions within Jewish religious traditions that may have influenced his aesthetic choices.¹³² Halter's use of symbolism and allegory as a lens through which to view the Holocaust is explored in this context, as is the relationship between different iterations of his artworks. This complex, fractured quality is surely the source of one of the highly original features of Halter's artwork, namely his ability to create arresting and disturbing, yet at times hauntingly beautiful, visual imagery out of unspeakable horror.¹³³

¹³⁰ HFA, Yeovil.

¹³¹ See Chapter 1 of my thesis for details of the Dorset watercolours.

¹³² Sharples and Jensen describe some of the factors that made explicit representations of the Holocaust 'unsayable' in the early post-war period.

C. Sharples & O. Jensen, 'Introduction', in, *Britain and the Holocaust, Remembering and Representing War and Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013), pp. 1-13

¹³³ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

1. A Visual Vocabulary

Stained glass art historian Caroline Swash has argued that over time Halter developed a very distinctive ‘visual vocabulary’ in many different mediums, culminating in his oeuvre of stained glass work.¹³⁴ Deeply rooted in expressionist artistic traditions, with a great love of both classical and modernist art, Halter was very familiar with both Marc Chagall and Henri Matisse’s stained glass artwork as well as with the Christian tradition in European churches and cathedrals. He had been a friend of Chagall’s during the artist’s later years, and when holidaying in France had greatly admired the stained glass windows that Matisse created for the Vence Chapel Du Rosaire.¹³⁵ Beginning with his numerous drawings and paintings – many of which would later form the basis for his stained glass cartoons – Halter began to reflect upon his own and his family’s horrific experiences in the Holocaust, but often chose to do so in a stylised and ‘detached’ way.¹³⁶

From the metalwork gates that he created for the Yad Vashem memorial museum in Israel, through to the stained glass windows for the Yad LaYeled children’s memorial at Ghetto Fighters’ House, Halter moved from one artistic medium to another, drawing continuously on his architectural background to provide the artistic structure and ‘scaffolding’ for his work. Materiality, texture and line were central to all aspects of his artistic output, whether directly through the creation of metalwork, or through the muscular use of line in his painting and stained glass cartoons and designs. The influence on Halter of the Hungarian sculptor Erno Szegedi from whom in Israel he learnt the technique of sand casting – a method that uses sand to create a mould into which molten metal is poured - is evident in his subsequent work. Having completed the Holocaust memorial gates at Yad Vashem, this new skill came into its own when he returned to Britain in the early seventies, where he utilised sand casting to develop his own distinctive artistic style in stained glass.¹³⁷

It would appear that there were a number of reasons why Halter wished to move into this medium. One, which he as an architect appreciated very well, was the permanent, impactful nature of stained glass art in public spaces such as synagogues and memorial settings: in itself an act of defiance in the face of the near-extermination of the Jewish people. Secondly, and this relates closely to the role of light in Jewish religion and culture, there were the psychological possibilities that stained glass offered up to express resilience and hope in the face of darkness. Light is present everywhere

¹³⁴ Swash, ‘Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist and Holocaust Survivor’, pp. 57-66.

¹³⁵ Personal Interviews with Ardyn Halter (2017, 2019, 2020 & 2021).

¹³⁶ Wiggins, ‘Roman Halter: the Eternal Light’, pp. 40-46.

¹³⁷ Swash, ‘Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor’, p. 62.

in Jewish culture, and Halter chose to work in a transcendent, intense colour palette that maximised its use to full effect.¹³⁸ Thirdly, and this is important in relation to Halter's more decorative stained glass work, it can be suggested that simply honouring Jewish religious tradition, and lighting up its places of worship, was in itself an act of resilience and remembrance after the Holocaust. This is expressed through the use in his windows of imagery from nature - notably the 'tree of life' - as well as the Hebrew word *Chai* (life) in text.¹³⁹

There is also a related discussion about how much the survivor artist wishes to directly reflect on the horror of the past. The well-known phenomenon of survivor guilt – and the necessity to get on with living, allowing time to take its course – may play a role in the balance between memorialisation, and simply celebrating the fact of survival. Perhaps, as Wiggins and others have suggested, stained glass provided Halter with a way of reflecting upon, but still further 'distancing' himself from, the horror of the past, whilst also serving his own community and future generations.¹⁴⁰ As an art form, it is more 'architectural' and less direct and immediate than many others, and as such grew organically out of his professional training.

In his memorialising artwork in Israel, discussed in chapter three, Halter's remembrance message is made explicit; elsewhere it is more indirectly implied. His expressive and disturbing paintings and etchings, exhibited at the Imperial War Museum and Tate Britain in the early 2000s, have much in common with his designs for stained glass, with the distinctive thick expressionist lines that are a key feature of his visual vocabulary. But whilst there is a stylistic synergy, they are far more clearly Holocaust-related in content than many of his realised stained glass works.¹⁴¹

Halter's three-dimensional Holocaust memorial work, the metalwork gates at Yad Vashem, can be seen as a direct link between some of his earlier output and the later development of his stained glass artwork. From a material point of view, the gate employs the sand-casting method, with the rough textured appearance that would go on to become an innovative and integral part his stained glass window designs.¹⁴² And from a formal and iconographic point of view, the gate's design bears a clear continuity

¹³⁸ D. Di Castro, *From Jerusalem to Rome and back: The journey of the Menorah from fact to myth* (Rome: Jewish Museum of Rome, Litograf S.R.L. Todi, 2008).

¹³⁹ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-47.

¹⁴⁰ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-47.

¹⁴¹ IWM, *The Holocaust Exhibition* (Imperial War Museum, 2008) <http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/the-holocaust-exhibition> [Accessed: 26 July 2017].

¹⁴² Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-47.

with the Holocaust imagery that is familiar to us from Halter's etchings and paintings **[Fig 3]**.¹⁴³

Yad Vashem is the leading centre for Holocaust research and memorialisation, so it was wholly appropriate that Halter created not only its sculptural memorial gates, but also, as I discuss below, one of his first ventures into commemorative stained glass art. Arguably though, Halter's most ambitious Holocaust-related work in stained glass is the children's memorial at Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel, discussed in detail in chapter three.¹⁴⁴ The windows there, based on drawings by child victims of the Shoah, are deliberately child-like in their use of imagery, rendered in bright primary colours.¹⁴⁵ As Halter made clear in interviews and discussion about the windows, this was a conscious attempt to create resilience and hope in the face of traumatic loss; artwork that could speak eloquently to future generations of children.¹⁴⁶

Evidence from Halter's stained glass cartoons, his correspondence and other documentation contained in the family's archives, demonstrate a close relationship between his drawings, cartoons and realised stained glass works of art – and his desire to create more explicitly Holocaust-related windows. Many of the designs for stained glass contain the tiny, tortured figures representing concentration camp and death march victims that recur throughout his Holocaust-related paintings, graphic works and prints, but which are absent from the final realisation of these cartoons in his stained glass windows **[Fig 19]**. We consider some of the multi-layered reasons for this below.

Many of the windows that Halter created in Britain, for example at the New North London and North Western Reform synagogues in London, are frequently religious and uplifting in their subject matter **[Fig 20]**. They contain traditional stained glass imagery such as the fruits and flowers of the bible and Hebrew text. These windows were commissioned to fit a religious setting and to tell biblical stories. Although very distinctive in their aesthetic style and manner of execution, they are closer to more conventional stained glass synagogue commissions.

On the other hand, windows such as those he created for the Beth Shalom Holocaust memorial centre in Nottingham are unambiguous in what they seek to convey; the horror of Nazi genocide. The colours employed are more muted than those Halter typically used, and little is done to detract from the horror that is central to their narrative **[Figs 21, 22, 23 and 24]**. Likewise, in the windows commissioned for the Mill

¹⁴³ Although on a much larger scale, the figures behind barbed wire that became a running motif in Halter's work are clearly visible in the Yad Vashem gate. The scale of the work allows the viewer to see graphically the desperate, hunched form of the figures and the despair that is etched in their faces.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

¹⁴⁵ Volavková, ed. *I never saw another butterfly: Children's drawings and poems from Terezin concentration camp 1942-1944*.

¹⁴⁶ Ghetto Fighters House, *Yad Layeled catalogue* (Western Galilee, Mendel B. Mitchell Fund. n.d).

Hill synagogue in London where, although the visual message is more redemptive, the relationship to the Shoah is clear. **[Figs 25 and 26]**.

In amongst this variety of windows, with messages that are relatively easy to read and interpret, are others where the meaning is more opaque, or where Halter turns to allegory and symbolism. The challenges and controversy surrounding these works echo historical disputes over the appropriateness of stained glass imagery – figurative or otherwise - in Jewish places of worship, and highlights the questioning, dissonant character of some of Halter’s more controversial creations. In the next section, I will focus on the iconography of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* to explain how even Halter’s most religious themes can be read in the light of the Holocaust-related art discussed above.

2. The Jacob window: allegory and controversy

One of Roman Halter's earliest stained glass commissions was for a set of three windows at the Central Synagogue, in London, created between 1977-78.¹⁴⁷ Originally conceived as a triptych, the three windows had at their core an arresting, modernist representation of the biblical parable of Jacob Wrestling with the Angel.¹⁴⁸ The subject-matter was apparently suggested to Halter by the Jewish philanthropist and United Synagogue president Sir Isaac Wolfson.¹⁴⁹ Wolfson had originally sought out the artist Marc Chagall for the commission, sending Halter, who knew Chagall personally, to France in an attempt to persuade him to take it on.¹⁵⁰ However, Chagall declined the offer, and Halter was engaged in his place.

The Jacob window [Fig 10] was to be accompanied by two others: *The Jerusalem Window* (1977-1978), [Fig 27] and *Fruits and Flowers of the Bible* (1977-1978), [Fig 28] with all three prominently displayed in an architectural style, on the landings above the synagogue's entrance staircase.¹⁵¹ The fruits and flowers and Jacob windows were to appear side by side, with the Jerusalem window located above them, forming a triptych that would tell the story of the ascent to Jerusalem. Whilst two of the windows were well received by the Central Synagogue's congregation, the one depicting the Jacob parable was not, and was eventually moved to a less favoured position, off to one side next to the entrance to the prayer hall, a decision lamented by Swash in her study of the work.¹⁵² In its place, another window was installed, believed to be by the stained glass practitioner David Hillman, depicting a traditional Biblical scene. Swash comments on the moving of the Jacob window: 'Sadly this powerful work did not appeal to every member of the congregation. Originally created for one of the large windows in the synagogue, it was later moved to its present site and set into a back-lit carved timber frame.'¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ The Central Synagogue (part of the United Synagogues) has been sited on Great Portland Street in central London for over 155 years. It was rebuilt in 1958 after the building was destroyed in a bombing raid in 1941. It has played an integral role in London's Jewish community. Sir Isaac Wolfson (1897-1991) set up the Wolfson foundation in 1955, dedicated to the advancement of health, education and youth activities. It has funded schools, colleges, medical services and synagogues, as well as the arts and humanities. He was also the United Synagogue President from the years 1962 to 1973. The Wolfson Foundation, *History*, (The Wolfson Foundation: London, 2022) <https://www.wolfson.org.uk/about/history/> [Accessed:30/11/2022]

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 32:28 (New International Version)

¹⁴⁹ C. Spencer, 'Roman Halter: From Despair to Joy', *Jewish Chronicle*, Friday 9th June (1978), pp. 44-45.

¹⁵⁰ Kadish, 'Stained Glass in the Synagogue', pp. 265-286.

¹⁵¹ This was verified by looking at the positioning of the other two Halter windows *in situ*, and observing where the Jacob window would have been installed.

¹⁵² Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', pp. 57-66.

¹⁵³ Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', p. 64.

Here I suggest that exploring the reasons why this window caused such controversy is useful to illuminate what Halter may have been trying to express visually through his use of religious allegory in this particular medium, and in a semi-abstract idiom. In many ways, the debate around the Jacob window prefigured many of the challenges that Halter would go on to experience as a stained glass artist; notably the difficulty in reconciling visual imagery that references the Holocaust with the sensibilities of Jewish communities and congregations.

The Jacob and the Angel parable has long provided fertile symbolic terrain for many artists, Jewish and not, dating as far back as Rembrandt (1606-1669) [Fig 29], Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) [Fig 30], through to Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) [Fig 31], Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) [Fig 32], and Marc Chagall [Fig 33].¹⁵⁴ The meaning of the well-known Genesis parable is open to wide interpretation within Judaic, philosophical and psychoanalytic thought, but in essence it is a narrative about struggle and redemption, specifically a struggle with faith.¹⁵⁵

The parable of Jacob Wrestling with the Angel is a key passage in the Tanakh, the Hebrew bible. In it, Jacob wrestles all night with an unnamed assailant who will not let him pass. Jacob refuses to back down, and at daybreak the man is revealed to be an angel who then blesses Jacob and renames him 'Israel', signifying that he has struggled and prevailed. According to some Talmudic interpretations, the commentaries in the Hebrew bible describe the fight as 'the opening act of a battle that continues to this day between the Jewish people (represented by Jacob) and the enemy nations that seek its destruction. Indeed, throughout history many regimes have tried but failed to eradicate the Jewish people physically or spiritually; they may indeed be successful in "dislocating the hip joint," damaging parts of Jewry, but the "body" as a whole remains intact.'¹⁵⁶

This interpretation of the Jacob myth, and its place in Genesis at the start of the Tanakh, can be seen as a metaphor for the struggles of the Jews as a people, culminating in the creation of the nation state of Israel. In the parable, Jacob is made lame when the angel touches him on the hip. He walks away from the fight having struggled and prevailed, but is not undamaged. The story is one about struggle and overcoming, in which Jacob is blessed for his perseverance, reflected in his new name of Israel, meaning one who has struggled with God and prevailed. As the biblical

¹⁵⁴ S. M. Singletary, 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3-4, (2004), pp. 298-315.

¹⁵⁵ M. Abramsky, 'Jacob wrestles the angel: A study in psychoanalytic Midrash', *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2010), p. 115.

¹⁵⁶ *Jacob Wrestles With the Angel*, (Jewish History, n.d.)

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2389625/jewish/Jacob-Wrestles-With-the-Angel.htm [Accessed: 21/05/2019].

narrative states: 'Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."¹⁵⁷

However, this reading of the Jacob parable is by no means an uncontested one. Its premise - the 'lachrymose' conception of Jewish history as one of unmitigated struggle and suffering - was most famously challenged by Jewish historian Salo Wittmayer Baron in 1928.¹⁵⁸ And, notwithstanding the near annihilation of the Jewish people in the Shoah, his analysis remains influential today. Meanwhile, the poststructuralist critic Roland Barthes, has highlighted the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of Jacob's 'victory'.¹⁵⁹ As Singletary notes, according to Barthes' interpretation, 'God – source of both the impediment and the blessing is defeated, yet loss is necessary for the ultimate victory. Boundaries are blurred as the protagonists take on characteristics of the other.'¹⁶⁰

The Jacob parable's motif of struggle in adversity has resonated down the centuries, and has been a source of inspiration for many Jewish artists throughout modern history, but it has taken on a heightened form in relation to the Holocaust. The theme of Jews having to struggle in the face of persecution is a central one within Jewish art and culture. As the artist R B Kitaj has highlighted, the idea of the diasporic and wandering Jew is a recurring concept, used many times within Jewish art and literature to represent the trauma and loss of being a persecuted people without a home.¹⁶¹ This theme would have had a specific resonance with émigré Jewish artists in Britain in the post-war period.¹⁶²

Throughout their real and mythic history, a constant trope concerns the Jews as a people who have been persecuted or displaced every time they have tried to settle, with its horrific genocidal culmination in the historic tragedy of the Holocaust.¹⁶³ It is therefore unsurprising that this theme has been reflected most acutely within post-Holocaust art.¹⁶⁴ There is no shortage of real as well as mythic examples of such

¹⁵⁷ Genesis 32:28 (New International Version)

¹⁵⁸ D. Engel, "Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron, Neobarbarism, and the Study of Modern European Jewish History' *Jewish History*, Vol. 20, No. 3-4, (2006), pp. 243-264.

¹⁵⁹ R. Barthes, 'The Struggle with the Angel', in, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp.125-141.

¹⁶⁰ Singletary, 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art'. A similar point is made by theologian James G Williams, who argues that the most striking result of Barthes' analysis is 'the observation that the personage delivering the supposedly "conclusive blow" (*coup décisif*) is not the winner... even though the weaker combatant stymies the divine adversary and wins a new name and blessing, he is "marked," that is, injured: "the weaker defeats the stronger, in exchange for which he is marked (on the thigh)'. J. G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence & the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 46-54.

¹⁶¹ Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*.

¹⁶² M. Bohm-Duchen, (eds) *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995).

¹⁶³ S. Schama, *The Story of the Jews, finding the words 1000 BCE -149CE* (London: The Bodley Head, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Bohm-Duchen, *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art*.

persecution cited by those who cleave towards the 'lachrymose' interpretation of Jewish history.¹⁶⁵ Biblical references have often been reinterpreted by Jewish artists to make sense of their own or their people's suffering, and their personal struggles with faith; Kitaj, Epstein and Halter, amongst others, have openly explored these themes in their work. Working in many different genres and media, including painting, sculpture, architecture, film and the novel, Jewish artists in Britain have created a veritable language to reflect upon and memorialise the Shoah.

Whilst many interpretations of the Jacob myth hark back to the idea that, whilst you can damage a part of the people, you cannot destroy the whole, the lived historical experience of Jewish suffering has unsurprisingly often given rise to a profound struggle with faith.¹⁶⁶ As the psychologist Michael Abramsky argues, this concept is central to the Jacob narrative. In his psychoanalytical and theological deconstruction of the parable, he maintains:

Jacob became one of the great patriarchs of the Bible. His twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel, the foundation of the Jewish state. His narrative eventually led the Jews to Egypt through his youngest son Joseph. This is where the central historical and religious motifs of Judaism — oppression and exodus — were born. These motifs have resonated throughout the life of that people. His path is exemplary of how God's chosen ones grow in understanding of the divine element in their lives.¹⁶⁷

Jacob though, according to Abramsky, only reached this point through an immense and troubled personal struggle with himself and his faith; an allegorical theme that still resonates with Jews across the world. The concept of – literally, in Jacob's case - wrestling with faith is something that many post-Holocaust Jewish artists have reflected in their work. Loss of faith, keeping faith, anger and despair at what happened to them

¹⁶⁵ Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt is one such narrative. As is the celebration of the resistance of the Maccabees, leading to the reestablishment of Judea and retaking of Jerusalem, marked by the annual festival of Hanukkah. Likewise, the story of Purim, in which Queen Esther leads the resistance to the plans of the Persian king's advisor Haman to kill all the nation's Jews (The Book of Esther (no date)). Other notable examples include the siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in CE 70; the siege of Masada between CE 72 and 73 during the 'Jewish War' against the Roman Empire that led to the Diaspora; the massacres in France in 1096; the massacres in York and Norwich in the 12th century and subsequent expulsion of Jews from England in 1290; the expulsion of Jews from France in 1306; the Spanish Inquisition in 1492; and the Russian pogroms of 1903-6 and subsequent rise of the Black Hundreds.

Schama, *The Story of the Jews*.

¹⁶⁶ S. Hornstein and F. Jacobowitz, eds, *Image and Remembrance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ Abramsky, 'Jacob wrestles the angel', pp. 106-117.

and their people; these themes are the subject matter of much Jewish art and critical thought from that era.

For the art historian and cultural theorist Richard Rubenstein, the Holocaust breaks forever the idea of God being involved in the life of Jews and their faith:

When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?¹⁶⁸

The philosopher and Rabbi Emil Fackenheim, on the other hand, argues for the importance of keeping faith after the Holocaust, and that for Jews to lose their faith in God would be to allow a posthumous victory for Hitler and the Nazis. He states that we have to believe 'God was in Auschwitz even if we do not understand what he was doing there'.¹⁶⁹

Chagall, Kitaj and many other artists have visually expressed these tortured themes in their work, often creating bleak images that express a deep sense of sorrow and alienation; in the case of Kitaj, who came late to his sense of Jewish identity, it was as a direct consequence of the Holocaust.¹⁷⁰ Much of Chagall's imagery is spiritual or religious in nature, often referring to and celebrating Jewish culture as it impacted on his own sense of identity.¹⁷¹ Halter, in common with many other Jewish artists, created artworks that explored themes such as wrestling with God, wrestling with faith, and wrestling with oneself. The Jacob window can arguably be seen as one of the ways in which – consciously or unconsciously - he expressed these tensions through his art. According to the art critic Charles Spencer, Halter consulted with rabbinical opinion on the significance of the Jacob parable, and took note of the interpretation that it represents the three conflicts that Jews must face in life, between 'the spirit, the body and the mind'.¹⁷² According to this reading, Jacob's eventual triumph demonstrates that God will always ensure that Jews overcome their struggles. This essentially positive message is reflected in Judaic thought, much of which emphasises how the Jacob story symbolises eventual triumph over adversity.

¹⁶⁸ R. L. Rubenstein & J. K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz, the Holocaust and its legacy* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), p. 343.

¹⁶⁹ Z. Garber, 'Reflections on Emil L. Fackenheim (1916-2003): The Man and His Holocaust Philosophy, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2004), pp. 25-26.

¹⁷⁰ Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*.

¹⁷¹ J. Wilson, *Marc Chagall*, (New York: Schocken, 2007).

¹⁷² Spencer, 'Roman Halter: From despair to joy', pp. 44-45.

A pre-war artistic interpretation of the Jacob myth that accords with this view was that of Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), a Jewish Cubist contemporary of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Fernand Legér, and friend of Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) in Paris. Lipchitz, a Lithuanian refugee from Nazi Europe who eventually settled in the USA after World War II, created the semi-abstract sculpture *La Lutte de Jacob avec L'ange* (1931) **[Fig 34]**. For him, the Jacob parable's significance was that:

[...] this meant that God wants us to fight with him. From these tentative ideas emerged many sketches and, finally, a complete sculpture made in 1932. Again, I realise that there is always the theme of the embrace, which is also a struggle, a tension of opposites that seems to occur continually in my sculpture.¹⁷³

This links back to the idea of wrestling with faith, and the ordeals of Jews facing antisemitic attacks as the Nazis gradually rose to power. However, it was created as a story about optimism, struggling but eventually winning and a belief in 'the indomitable spirit of man'. Lipchitz's work is not about loss of faith, but about struggle, fighting with God, and coming away with stronger faith: 'Man is wrestling with the angel; it is a tremendous struggle but he wins and is blessed'.¹⁷⁴

A darker meaning can be attached to the British Jewish artist Jacob Epstein's monumental sculpture of Jacob's struggle with the angel, created in 1940-41 **[Fig 32]** in the midst of the war and the Nazis' intensification of their persecution of Jews that would soon lead to the 'Final Solution'. It can be read at one level as a foreshadowing of what was to come, but also as an artist wrestling with his material, as well as with his faith, and as a fight with God.¹⁷⁵ Equally, it can be seen as referencing the struggles of European Jews during the Second World War, and the epic battle to overcome adversity. It is worth noting that like Halter's window, Epstein's sculpture was not well received at the time, perhaps due to the subject matter, but also to its visceral, 'primitivist', and for many at the time, uncomfortably homoerotic design. It is interesting that two artworks, based on the same parable, proved so challenging for the public to appreciate, albeit for differing reasons.

Another, explicitly allegorical version, of Jacob's struggle was sculpted by the Jewish artist Nathan Rapoport (1911-1987). A Polish émigré from Nazi Europe, he

¹⁷³Tate, 'Jacob and the Angel', Jacques Lipchitz, 1931, (London: Tate, n.d.) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lipchitz-jacob-and-the-angel-t03516> (Accessed: 21/05/2019).

¹⁷⁴Jacob and the Angel', Jacques Lipchitz.

¹⁷⁵ Tate, *Miracle or monstrosity?*, (London: Tate, n.d.) <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/miracle-or-monstrosity> [Accessed: 21 May 2019].

created many Holocaust memorial works, notably one dedicated to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising at the Yad Vashem museum in Israel.¹⁷⁶ In his Jacob sculpture, Rapoport has deliberately chosen not to depict both figures locked into a grounded struggle; instead the angel is represented as flying above Jacob with one hand reaching out in a benevolent gesture, perhaps symbolic of the blessing that will later be bestowed. Other exiled Jewish artists, amongst them the expressionist painter Ben-Zion (1897-1987) who created a highly abstract painting on the subject, and the sculptor Fred Kormis (1894-1986), whose interpretation of the parable is displayed outside a Jewish education centre, the Leo Baeck college in London, have created their own distinctive representations of the Jacob parable.¹⁷⁷

Chagall too, created at least two finished works in oils and pastel entitled *Jacob Wrestles The Angel* (1960-1966) [Fig 33]. These were used for his lifelong project, started in 1931, to illustrate the Bible, which he described as 'the greatest source of poetry of all time'.¹⁷⁸ His use of biblical imagery as a source of inspiration and allegory can be interpreted as representing the 'prevailing' of Judaism and the Jewish people after their suffering.

Whilst allegorical biblical imagery reflecting the Holocaust, and internal conflicts with faith, is evident in the works of many Jewish artists, the most troubling of them - notably that of Christ on the Cross as a metaphor for the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust - do not cross over easily between different faiths.¹⁷⁹ Despite his prodigious stained glass and other artworks, many of them for churches and cathedrals, Chagall – who repeatedly utilised crucifixion imagery in his work – rarely directly referenced the Holocaust.¹⁸⁰

As art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels has suggested, in her essay on Chagall's crucifixion paintings, there was a discord – and an internal psychological conflict - between what Chagall wanted to depict in his works and what he felt could be exhibited.¹⁸¹ Thus, he frequently turned to his well-trodden motif of East European

¹⁷⁶ 'Wrestling our way into the Jewish new year' (n.d.)

<https://www.cjnews.com/perspectives/opinions/wrestling-way-jewish-new-year> (Accessed: 22 November 2020).

¹⁷⁷ POBA, *Ben-Zion*, (POBA, Where the arts live, n.d.) https://poba.org/poba_artists/ben-zion/ [Accessed: 22 November 2020].

¹⁷⁸ *The Bible - Genesis, Exodus, The Song of Solomon*. illustrations by Marc Chagall. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007) pp. 144, 147, 148-9.

¹⁷⁹ Amishai-Maisels, *Apocalypse*,

A. Williams, *The church's reception of Jewish crucifixion imagery after the Holocaust* (AGON: Kingston University, 2015). <http://agon.fi/article/the-churchs-reception-of-jewish-crucifixion-imagery-after-the-holocaust/> [Accessed:08/06/2022].

¹⁸⁰ 'Although Halter was at one point approached to design a window for a church on the same theme as his painting of *Shlomo*, based on the crucifixion, the commission never materialised, perhaps indicating that such allegories do not always sit well with religious congregations, whether of Jewish or Christian denominations.

¹⁸¹ Amishai-Maisels, *Apocalypse*, p. 12.

pogrom imagery, rather than direct depiction of the death camps, to conceptualise Nazi mass murder.¹⁸² Where, as in his *White Crucifixion* (1938), he did use symbols of Nazi persecution on either side of Christ, he subsequently partially covered them over with white paint. Only very rarely, as in *Apocalypse in Lilac, Capriccio*, (1945/47), did Chagall use the symbolism of the crucifixion alongside overt imagery from the Shoah. As Amishai-Maisels notes:

Although he still used some of these symbols in *Apocalypse*, he combined them with the reality of the Holocaust in a manner that was very rare in his work. This and the way that he depicted the conflict between the Nazi and the naked Christ make this a unique work.¹⁸³

As Halter's stained glass cartoons and designs suggest, he too struggled with conflicted pressures, internal and external, when it came to depicting the Holocaust, turning at times to allegory and other mediated forms to visually express inexpressible horror. The Jacob window was not only one of Halter's first and most allegorical stained glass artworks; it was also one of his most experimental when it came to design, and potentially taboo-breaking in its bold - and in Talmudic terms, iconoclastic - use of the human form.

As Colin Wiggins points out, Halter's use of stained glass to express his message was a significant aesthetic choice:

There are surely cogent reasons why Roman was attracted to the medium of stained glass. Its clarity and boldness, with the black divisions of the leaded framework incorporated into its design, make it a medium that is highly appropriate for bold visual statements that present themselves immediately to the viewer. Indeed for Roman the need to communicate, to make statements loudly and clearly, overrode any other considerations.¹⁸⁴

The imagery in his Jacob window illustrates the urgency of this direct appeal to the viewer. The angel (the figure in white), clearly identified from the wings that are spread out beneath him, lies prone on the ground. He is held there by Jacob (the figure in red/violet). From the positions of the two figures it would appear that the struggle is reaching its culmination, daybreak has come and Jacob is victorious. However it could

¹⁸² Amishai-Maisels, *Apocalypse*, p. 11.

¹⁸³ Amishai-Maisels, *Apocalypse*, p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', p. 43.

also be viewed as if the pair are still in combat. The ambiguity reflects a parable that is about conflict and endurance and a constant 'struggle with the divine.'¹⁸⁵

Halter's window is cast in bronze filigree. The bronze that creates the outlines of the figures in the window is rough-hewn, creating a textured rather than a polished outline. Stylistically, it is a classic example of Halter's iconic metalwork, which utilises thick, expressive lines that form an intrinsic part of the work as they run throughout it.¹⁸⁶ This method stylistically unites all three of the Halter windows in the Central Synagogue. The Jacob window also utilises brightly coloured glass, dominated by Halter's trademark 'rich and saturated' colours of red, white and blue, designed to let the light pour through. The colour palette and imagery appear to be deeply symbolic.¹⁸⁷ The Star of David highlights the call to faith and may also be a reference to resistance and redemption through the creation of Israel, with two red rays of light emanating from the star reflecting God's anointment of a chosen one (Jacob). The green might signify a reference to Israel having been made fertile by the Jews, whilst the Hebrew writing, also in the red of the divine beams of light, translates as 'And thou shall not sit in His chair.'¹⁸⁸ This may suggest, on the one hand, the divinity of the being with which Jacob was wrestling or, on the other, that Jacob – now Israel – is being blessed by God.

However, the window was met with controversy by the Central Synagogue's congregation.¹⁸⁹ Swash speculates that this could have been because it was not in keeping with the other windows in the synagogue, mostly created by David Hillman, another Jewish stained glass practitioner.¹⁹⁰ Hillman's stained glass, as previously noted, was much more traditional stylistically, produced in the 'cathedral' style favoured by many conservative synagogue congregants.¹⁹¹ Whilst the Jacob window was originally going to be placed in a prominent position, creating a feeling of ascent to the Jerusalem window above it, it was eventually moved and mounted onto a light box off to one side. Unfortunately, as Wiggins indicates, this positioning does not allow the

¹⁸⁵ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', p. 44.

¹⁸⁶ Halter worked with the Hungarian sculptor Erno Szegedi on the *Fruits & Flowers of the Bible* window. Szegedi strongly influenced Halter's use of metalwork and sandcasting in his stained glass art.

¹⁸⁷ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', p. 43.

¹⁸⁸ This translation and some of the rabbinical interpretation is based on discussions with leading members of the congregation at the Central Synagogue.

¹⁸⁹ C. Swash, 'Roman Halter: stained glass artist and Holocaust survivor', p. 64.

¹⁹⁰ David Hillman (1894-1974) the son of a rabbi from Latvia is one of the most prolific and well known Jewish stained glass practitioners in Britain. Hillman's windows are very traditional, created in the 'Cathedral Synagogue' style, with much of the imagery painted onto the glass. The windows are highly detailed in their design, not allowing much light to permeate. However, as Sharman Kadish notes, in spite of his more traditional style, Hillman can be considered something of a radical because of his use of figurative imagery in his work, an innovation that was (and in some cases still is) taboo within Jewish religious culture. Hillman got around this restriction by showing the human form only from the back or side in his windows.

¹⁹¹ Kadish, *Stained Glass in the Synagogue*, pp. 265–286.

My discussions with Central Synagogue officials would appear to confirm this view (Personal interview with Craig Levison at the Central Synagogue, 10th April 2018).

viewer to fully appreciate the colours used and lessens the intended impact of all three works on the congregants.

As he comments: 'What a shame the congregants found the third window that Roman made for this venue, too "modern" and successfully agitated for its removal.' He argues that 'with a little bit of imagination' they might have seen that 'its message of struggle with the divine, to be considered whilst visitors are ascending the stairs towards the celestial city, is a universal one and to read it together with the Jerusalem window and the *Fruits and Flowers of the Bible* would give it an even deeper meaning'.¹⁹²

There could be several reasons for the Jacob window's poor reception. One reason, as suggested above, may be stylistic, reflecting the fact that this was perhaps the most experimental of Halter's windows in style, and not in keeping with the rest of the windows in the Central Synagogue. Another is arguably its figurative nature, given the prohibitions on the use of images of the human form within Jewish art. Although expressed in a semi-abstract style, the Jacob window, in fact, clearly references human and divine forms and, furthermore, in a state of brutal struggle. On the other hand, as already noted, Hillman's windows, whilst more conventional in style, do reference the human form in several places too.¹⁹³ So it is unclear how far this aspect of the Jacob window's content would in itself have offended the Central Synagogue's congregation.

Another consideration, I would suggest, is whether the symbolic content of the Jacob window may have been 'too much' for the Central Synagogue congregants, particularly in the context of Halter's forceful, expressionist style. Whilst other representations of the Jacob parable have been commissioned by synagogues in the past, for example the painter and sculptor Hans Feibusch's (1898 -1998) painting for the West London synagogue, few are so audacious in style as Halter's.¹⁹⁴ Halter's use of the Jacob allegory to express profound emotions about the Holocaust – and even his faith – is something that, consciously or not, may have discomfited the congregation. As Halter's son, the artist Ardyn Halter, has suggested, the parable is one that resonated with him deeply:

It is a story that would have spoken to Halter as a Jew who went through the Holocaust and lost most of his family and had to find the strength or

¹⁹²Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', p. 44.

¹⁹³ Kadish, *Stained Glass in the Synagogue*, pp. 265–286.

¹⁹⁴ Ben Uri collection, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (Ben Uri collection - Art Identity and Migration, n.d.) https://www.benuricollection.org.uk/search_result.php?item_id=3235 [Accessed: 11/22/2020].

enough belief to survive. And also, as somebody who lived through the period when the state of Israel came into being, that's also part of it.¹⁹⁵

As a post-Holocaust artist, Halter's work was always about defiant remembrance; the overcoming of immense hardship in order to forge a new life for himself and his people. Whilst his memories of the Shoah dominated his thoughts and his work throughout his life, for him culture was all-important. The need to remember and retell the story of what happened to him and to the Jewish people, dominated his life and art.¹⁹⁶

Notwithstanding its reception by the Central Synagogue congregation, the Jacob window is a unique and powerful work. Whether its purpose is to remind the viewer of the importance of keeping faith even in the worst of times, or represents the struggle to overcome the darkness of the Shoah, its vibrancy and directness offer up hope.¹⁹⁷ If the viewer accepts this interpretation – how, after experiencing such horror can one continue to have faith in God? – then it is inspired for Halter to have picked this parable of struggle as the subject matter for one of his first stained glass creations.

¹⁹⁵ Personal Interview with Ardyn Halter 19th April 2019.

¹⁹⁶ This was most poignantly expressed in some of his last works. See Manuscripts and Watercolours, c.2000s, HFA, Yeovil.

¹⁹⁷ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 44-45.

3. Iterations of the Unsaid

Halter's Jacob window can be read as a powerful allegory: one that is about loss and struggle with faith, reflecting the tragic narrative of the Shoah, but also about resistance, survival and redemption. However, the use of religious allegory is only one of the ways in which Halter's art reflects on these themes. Many of his paintings and cartoons for stained glass express the horror of the Shoah in a less mediated way, and in some instances quite explicitly, but always with a sensitivity to the aesthetic challenges of the subject matter.¹⁹⁸

Analysis of the large collection of stained glass cartoons in the Halter family archives, and of the paintings, etchings and other artworks that Halter produced over time, indicate that his search for ways to visually express his haunting memories of the Holocaust went through many different iterations.¹⁹⁹ In particular, the paintings that he exhibited at the Imperial War Museum's ground-breaking *Unspeakable* exhibition of Holocaust art (2008-2009) – and also at the Tate Britain exhibition, in 2005, to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps – demonstrate the many different forms that his artistic expression took, and the challenges he faced in translating the themes that run throughout his work into stained glass art.²⁰⁰

In common with other post-Holocaust survivor artists, Halter faced many barriers, both individual and societal, when it came to expressing his horrific experiences through his art. At an individual level, it took decades for Halter to feel able to speak publicly, let alone create art, about these experiences. As has been well-documented, the trauma of the Shoah, combined with, in some cases survivor guilt and the natural impulse to pursue some kind of normal life, acted as a psychological barrier to expressing these thoughts and feelings. For many, they were literally unsayable.²⁰¹

In Halter's case, it was not until the 1970s, that is after establishing his architectural practice and starting a family, that he was driven to begin expressing his darkest memories through his art.²⁰² As with many other survivor artists, he turned to art as a means to free himself from the 'feelings and sights that haunted their dreams and were too difficult to bear'.²⁰³ His paintings, etchings and stained glass art came from a place of needing finally to confront what had happened to him and his family, and being driven to tell his story over and over again, so that people could draw

¹⁹⁸ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

¹⁹⁹ HFA, Yeovil.

²⁰⁰ Halter, *Exhibition of Roman Halter's paintings at the Imperial War Museum*.

²⁰¹ Bohm-Duchen, *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary Art*.

²⁰² Personal interview with Ardyn Halter 17th August 2017.

²⁰³ Bohm-Duchen, *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary Art*, p. 50.

lessons from it. Images and motifs that recur in Halter's artwork, in particular the tiny figures symbolising the Holocaust's many millions of victims, reflect this urgent, obsessive need for representation, intended both as a translation of unsaid memories into imagery, and a way to narrate his memories for posterity **[Figs 8,18 and 35]**. Over and above the barriers that Halter faced at an individual level, there were also significant societal ones, reflecting public perceptions of the Holocaust in the post-war period. As the historians Tim Cole, Isabel Wollaston, James Young and others have argued, these perceptions differed markedly in different countries, and had a bearing on the ability of survivors' stories to be seen or heard.²⁰⁴

This 'nativisation' and 'nationalisation' of the Shoah narrative reflects different countries' post-war 'national stories', and is evident in their contrasting presentation in national museums.²⁰⁵ As Cole shows through his analysis of Holocaust museums and exhibitions in the US, Israel and the UK, the narrative that nations wished to tell themselves about their role in the Second World War had a direct influence on collective memory of the Shoah, and how it was publicly represented.²⁰⁶ In Israel, for example, the dominant theme at the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, founded in 1953, is one of Jews not merely as victims of Nazi genocide, but of resistance, and eventual redemption, through the foundation of their own state. As Cole comments, '[s]uch framing of the Holocaust in terms of heroism is entirely intentional, fitting with the early emphasis in Yad Vashem — and Israeli society more widely — upon the Holocaust as a period of heroism as well as martyrdom'.²⁰⁷

In the US, on the other hand, the focus at the Holocaust Memorial Museum is much more on victimhood, on the industrialised mass killing of European Jewry, but also on the role of US troops as liberators of the camps at the end of the war. Meanwhile, in the UK, at the Imperial War Museum, Cole notes that 'there is surely something deeply ironic about the Holocaust of all historical events being utilised as a tool of nationalism. Even more: there is also something disturbing about such instrumentalisation of this particular past'.²⁰⁸ For many decades the Holocaust narrative was subsumed and 'instrumentalised' into the national story of Britain's 'finest hour' in World War Two, and only belatedly foregrounded in its own right.

²⁰⁴ I. Wollaston, The absent, the partial and the iconic in archival photographs of the Holocaust. *Jewish Culture and History*, Vol.12, No. 3, (2015), pp. 265–293.

²⁰⁵ Young, 'Memory and Counter Memory: Towards the Social Aesthetic of Holocaust Memorials', pp. 78–103.

²⁰⁶ T. Cole, Nativisation and Nationalisation: A Comparative Landscape Study of Holocaust Museums in Israel, the US and the UK. *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2004), pp. 130–145.

²⁰⁷ Cole, Nativisation and Nationalisation, p.136.

²⁰⁸ Cole, Nativisation and Nationalisation, p. 143.

This view is confirmed by Suzanne Bardgett, the director of the IWM's Holocaust exhibition (opened in 2000), who notes candidly, on the depiction of the Holocaust at the museum, that it was marked by the 'absence not presence of material on display'.²⁰⁹ It would appear that in Britain, at a societal level, for many years after the Second World War, the public did not want to be reminded too much of the horrors of the Holocaust, except insofar as fed into the generic national story of the fight against fascism.²¹⁰ The reasons for this are complex and contested, born in part out of denial and a sense of guilt at being bystanders in the face of Nazi genocide, alongside the post war imperative to restore some sense of national normality and cohesion.²¹¹ The Jewish community in the UK was not immune from these sentiments. Whilst British Jewry was certainly collectively impacted by the trauma of the mass murder that it had largely escaped, amongst British Jewry there was a general desire after the war to focus on the more positive elements of their faith, and the promise of redemption through the creation of the state of Israel, rather than on the horrors that they as a people had experienced.²¹²

As I have already argued, this was reflected in the Central Synagogue congregation's response to Halter's Jacob Wrestling with the Angel window.²¹³ More generally, as has been noted, unlike in the USA, Holocaust-related stained glass art has only a very limited presence in British synagogues. This is something that has a bearing on Halter's difficulty in translating his post-Holocaust visual art into stained glass commissions for synagogue sites in Britain.²¹⁴ By way of contrast, as previously mentioned, Halter received high profile commissions for Holocaust memorial stained glass and metalwork in Israel, at Yad Vashem and the Yad LaYeled children's memorial at Ghetto Fighters' House. The intertwining of faith and culture in Israel

²⁰⁹ S. Bardgett, The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961, *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2004), pp.146–156.

As I discuss in chapter 3, the IWM's new Holocaust exhibition, which opened in October 2021, foregrounds the stories of survivors and victims of the Holocaust, focusing on testimonial objects and photographs, rather than subsuming their narrative under Britain's national story. J. Bulgin, *The Holocaust* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2021)

²¹⁰ A. Capet, *Holocaust art at the Imperial War Museum 1945-2009*. In Britain and the Holocaust, Remembering and Representing War and Genocide. (London Palgrave Macmillan 2013), pp. 129–141.

²¹¹ D. Cesarani, Introduction. *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 23, No.1, (2004), pp. 1–17.

²¹² E. Traverso, Memory, the Civil Religion of the Holocaust. In *The end of Jewish Modernity* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), pp.113–127. However, this sentiment should not be overstated. As Daniel Sonabend examines in his book, D. Sonabend, *We Fight Fascists: the 43 Group and the forgotten battle for post-war Britain*, (London: Verso, 2019), there was considerable physical resistance by East London Jews to a post-war resurgence of British fascism. This brought them into conflict with 'respectable' Jewish opinion, exemplified by the Jewish Board of Deputies.

I. Deutscher. *The Non-Jewish Jew*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2017).

²¹³ Personal interview with Craig Levison at the Central Synagogue, 10th April 2018.

²¹⁴ Kadish, *Stained Glass in the Synagogue*, pp. 265–286.

created a receptive audience for artistic memorialisation of the Holocaust, particularly as an expression of national resistance and redemption.²¹⁵

In Britain, however, until the Imperial War Museum's 2008 *Unspeakable* exhibition, the public was often, at best, presented with a 'sanitised' or 'palatable' visual version of the Holocaust, and much about this unprecedented historical tragedy remained hidden away and unsaid.²¹⁶ As Jensen and Sharples have argued, after the Second World War Britain tried to distance itself from the failings of the British government, and from its lack of earlier intervention in the crimes the Nazis had committed. As they put it: 'Here, Britain's physical remoteness from the Holocaust can be seen as facilitating a limited dialogue with the crimes: they happened in a different land, in a very different political climate; they could not possibly happen *here*.'²¹⁷

Before the IWM created the first permanent Holocaust exhibition in Britain in 2000, information about it was merged into the IWM's wider exhibition on the Second World War, thus placing the Holocaust in the context of the war effort, rather than standing alone as an unprecedented example of industrialised genocide. For many years after the war, British public opinion appeared to have been deeply conflicted about the Holocaust, with exhibitions and memorials almost a taboo subject.²¹⁸ Historian David Cesarani has referred to 'post-war denial' in this respect.²¹⁹ And although public perceptions began to shift significantly after the shocking evidence presented to the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, raising the profile and credibility of survivor testimony, it took at least a further two or three decades before publicly commemorating the Holocaust began to be given due recognition in Britain.²²⁰

As Cole caustically comments, insofar as the Holocaust was referenced, it was always in the context of the allies' wartime battle against the Nazis, with a veil drawn over their role as bystanders to atrocities committed long before the war began.²²¹ Nowhere was this more evident than in the fate of artworks about the Holocaust, much of it created by survivors, most of which was kept away from public view for decades. Artworks that explicitly depicted the horror of the Shoah were kept hidden in the IWM's archives for many years.²²² In this sense, the museum's *Unspeakable* exhibition, featuring raw, hard-hitting works by survivor artists, including Roman Halter and his daughter Aviva Halter-Hurn, was truly ground-breaking. It ran until August 2009, and

²¹⁵ Cole, *Nativisation and Nationalisation*.

²¹⁶ Sharples & Jensen, Introduction.

²¹⁷ Sharples & Jensen, Introduction. p. 3.

²¹⁸ Capet, *Holocaust art at the Imperial War Museum 1945-2009*.

²¹⁹ D, Cesarani, Introduction.

²²⁰ D, Cesarani, Introduction.

²²¹ Cole, *Nativisation and Nationalisation*.

²²² Bardgett, *The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961*.

was the first in the UK of its kind, giving a voice to survivor artists that had previously been denied.

The paintings exhibited by Halter were explicitly personal, often involving images of lost family members and the horrific events that he witnessed, refracted through religious and artistic symbolism, for instance in *Moses the Prophet* (1974) and *Shlomo 1* (1974). Halter's daughter Aviva exhibited a series of linocut prints, second generation memorials to the family members she had never known. Alongside the works by other artists including Morris Kestelman (1905 -1998) and Leslie Cole (1910 - 1976), they painted an unflinching picture of the brutality that the Nazis inflicted on the Jews. The exhibition was not sanitised, no attempt was made to make the images more palatable. On the contrary, it was designed to make the viewer uncomfortable, but also make them unable to look away. In this sense, for the first time the 'unspeakable' had been made speakable.²²³ As art historian Antoine Capet states in his essay on the subject, the *Unspeakable* exhibition was the first of the IWM's exhibitions to present a completely unsanitised version of the Holocaust. He argues that the title *Unspeakable* can be seen as both representing the difficulty that survivor artists had expressing their experiences through their art, but also the past desire of the British public to distance themselves from the atrocities of the Nazis. The exhibition confirmed that this was slowly beginning no longer to be the case as discussion and memorialisation of the Holocaust became more widespread.

Halter's IWM paintings (acquired by the museum in 2006) were created at the start of his artistic career. They are amongst the most striking of his works, drawing on his childhood memories; for instance his homage to Goya's *Dona Isabel de Porcel* (c.1805), *Woman Wearing a Mantilla* (1974), is based upon his memories of his mother wearing a mantilla at the synagogue in Chodecz, making explicit use of the tiny images of human figures that became such a poignant motif throughout his work [Fig 8].²²⁴

There are clear stylistic parallels between these powerful, evocative paintings, and his stained glass artworks. Halter's expressive linear black 'framing' of each section of his IWM paintings mirrors the distinctive thick aluminium or bronze lines that are a feature of his stained glass windows, and are technically indebted to his early metalwork. These paintings carry a universal message: they not only represent the family that Halter lost, but also make visible the unimaginable number of victims of the Shoah.²²⁵ The seven paintings that he produced in the 1970s linked to the IWM exhibits – consisting of *Moses the Prophet*, *Woman wearing Mantilla*, *Shlomo 1*, *Man on*

²²³ Capet, Holocaust art at the Imperial War Museum 1945-2009.

²²⁴ This painting, along with several other works at the National Gallery, was a source of inspiration for Halter.

²²⁵ Capet, Holocaust art at the Imperial War Museum 1945-2009.

Electrified Barbed Wire, *Mother with Babies*, *Transport* and *Starved Faces* – were clearly intended to form the template for further artistic development. Evidence from the family archives shows that Halter had the ambition to translate many of these images into stained glass, in order to create more permanent memorial artworks. Of particular interest here is a series of lithograph prints, demonstrating that Halter created designs for stained glass based upon the IWM paintings and other Holocaust imagery.

Most of these designs have never been made public, and none have been discussed in detail in other studies of Halter's work. These black and white prints, despite being blurred or faded, clearly indicate his intention to develop stained glass designs based upon his earlier artworks. For example, the stained glass cartoon that draws upon Halter's painting *Moses the Prophet* (1974) is filled with the same small figures and faces staring out at the viewer as in the original artwork, and is surrounded by a thick frame (apparently intended to be rendered in stained glass) containing similar imagery **[Fig 36]**. This is true of many of the cartoons in which the main images are very close to their original sources of inspiration in the IWM paintings, each print including a frame similar to those found on many of Halter's stained glass windows, their panels clearly marked out with tiny faces and figures, as in the original larger images.

It is clear from these designs where each panel of glass is intended to be placed, and one can potentially imagine the stained glass being created in the black, grey, white and blue colour palette that dominates the original paintings. In many ways, these prints provide a missing link between the IWM paintings and what Halter had clearly intended for his stained glass works. One of the images, a stained glass design based on his painting of *Man on Electrified Barbed Wire* (1974) **[Fig 37]**, contains Hebrew lettering within it, similar to that utilised in the Mill Hill synagogue windows **[Figs 25 and 26]**. The prints are undated, so it is hard to establish how soon after the paintings they were made. Nevertheless, it is evident that Halter had always envisaged using them as a basis for Holocaust memorial stained glass windows, thus establishing a connection between works intended for private contemplation and those designed for appreciation by synagogue congregations or the wider public.

Scattered throughout Halter's archive, amidst cartoons, letters, journals, newspaper articles and other ephemera, there are also a multitude of cartoons for stained glass windows that, at first glance, look very similar to those that he was commissioned to make for British synagogues.²²⁶ These cartoons, hitherto unexamined by other scholars, represent a vital source for understanding Halter's

²²⁶ For instance, the Fruits and Flowers of the Bible window at the Central Synagogue, or the two windows surrounding the Ark at New North London Synagogue.

public work. The presence of Hebrew text, images of birds, fruit and flowers and other biblical imagery establish a connection with his religious stained glass works. However, what has previously been overlooked is that hidden within each of these stained glass designs are, once again, the familiar tiny desperate figures, gazing out at the viewer from behind barbed wire, huddled together as if in cattle trucks, or bent double whilst carrying heavy burdens on death marches. They are ubiquitous, and once the viewer has found them, impossible to ignore.

Many of these designs are much more explicitly Holocaust-related than Halter's windows, indicating the many barriers he faced to realising them as such. The Ben Uri Gallery and Museum catalogue of his work includes fourteen stained glass cartoons, some of which were exhibited.²²⁷ But no substantial analysis has been made of these works, and few were rendered as originally conceived, as stained glass windows. Eight cartoons within the Halter archives, based upon the IWM paintings, have never been published before. In addition, several cartoons for other stained glass works in the archive – including a collection of designs for the Yad LaYeled children's memorial windows – have not as yet been made public.

The tiny faces that populate Halter's stained glass cartoons are not present in the majority of his windows, even some of those with a Holocaust memorial theme.²²⁸ Unlike many of his stained glass works, these cartoons are deeply autobiographical in character, reflecting Halter's terrible memories of the events that he had witnessed. The small figures featured within them are clearly seared upon his brain. Whether they are the tiny faces and bodies that make up the veil worn by Halter's mother in *Woman wearing Mantilla* [Fig 8] or in the face of his *Moses the Prophet* [Fig 18] painting – another work that utilises religious allegory in the service of depicting barbarism – these figures run throughout much of Halter's artistic oeuvre. They reappear again, hauntingly, in some of his final works, notably the Dorset watercolours, in the form of death march figures, set within bucolic English countryside [fig 1]. And, as the evidence from his designs suggests, he intended to bring this motif into his stained glass art.

A series of postcard-sized cartoons in the archives, described by Halter as 'Designs for Stained Glass,' is painted in gouache, each sitting within its own frame. Like many of his windows, they make use of bright, saturated colours, mostly reds, blues and greens. In one image, the colourful glass panels depict the shape of a butterfly's wing (perhaps echoing the *No butterflies in the ghetto* imagery at Yad

²²⁷ D. Glasser (Ed), *Life and Art Through Stained Glass, Roman Halter 1927-2012*, pp. 48-60.

²²⁸ The closest he came to representing them in stained glass was in the 'From Holocaust to Rebirth' windows at Mill Hill Synagogue, and in some of the windows at Nottingham's Beth Shalom Holocaust museum.

LaYeled) with a crowd of tiny figures peering out from the top left hand corner.²²⁹ These figures appear to be pleading with the viewer to see them, to look beyond the superficially pleasing image of the butterfly to the darkness beneath **[Fig 19]**. This juxtaposition of beauty and horror, of the quotidian and the deeply disturbing, was frequently a feature of Halter's visual art, lending it subtlety and emotional depth.²³⁰

According to his son Ardyn, Halter, with his architect's eye, had always wanted to work at a very large scale, and had the ambition to turn the IWM paintings into large-scale square shaped windows for a prestigious memorial institution.²³¹ It is not difficult to imagine how effective these bold and unapologetic images could have been, blending the beauty of stained glass and religious or cultural icons with the horrific imagery of starving faces, barbed wire and bodies crammed into cattle trucks. His designs suggest they were to have been realised in plain glass, in a muted, largely monochromatic palette; the images represented in cast aluminium or bronze filigree, or perhaps painted or etched onto the glass. So why were these windows never realised? Why did the haunting imagery that was used to such effect in much of Halter's artwork, and which recurs in many iterations in his archives, remain largely 'unsaid' in his most public and permanent creations, his stained glass art?

Is it possible to assume that the imagery, in particular Halter's recurring motif symbolising the many millions slaughtered, was not only too disturbing, but also too figurative and personal for public consumption? Not just for British Jewry, with its implicit or explicit biblical prohibition on iconoclastic imagery.²³² But also, as the historian Lisa Saltzman has suggested, in the context of post-Holocaust distaste for making art from unimaginable horror.²³³ There has been much discussion around post-war reactions to the Holocaust and to the art created by survivors and those affected by the Nazi atrocities. Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted maxim, that 'after Auschwitz' to write poetry is 'barbaric', reflects the way that, according to Saltzman, iconoclasm, and more generally, 'ambivalence towards mimesis', experienced a 'theoretical renaissance' in the aftermath of the Holocaust.²³⁴ According to this interpretation, the Talmudic second commandment prohibition against worshipping graven images gives rise, in this new incarnation, to viewing artistic representation of the Shoah as transgressive, whether in a visual, literary or other form. Elsewhere, historians

²²⁹ See chapter three.

²³⁰ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', pp. 40-46.

²³¹ Personal Interview with Ardyn Halter 15th May 2020.

²³² Kadish, *Stained Glass in the Synagogue*, pp. 265-286.

²³³ Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure*, pp. 67-84.

²³⁴ Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure*, p. 68.

Rubenstein and Roth comment that, at first sight, '[t]o represent the Holocaust beautifully seems to be an aesthetic oxymoron'.²³⁵

On the other hand, as Saltzman notes, to remain silent – *not* to make art about the Holocaust – can also be interpreted as transgressive, and a denial of the right of survivors to bear witness to what they have suffered. As she states, in an important passage, '[f]or if to make images or to worship images is to transgress the second commandment – to play Aaron rather than Moses – to remain silent transgresses the law of bearing witness, the law of Leviticus'.²³⁶ Saltzman explicitly links this observation to the deliberate enshrouding of Nazi crimes - through the 'Night and Fog' decree - and to the post-war silence of those 'who were unable or unwilling to mourn'.²³⁷

Indeed, as she notes, Adorno was subsequently to revise his views on artistic expression, writing in his *Negative Dialectics* (1966) that 'perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems'.²³⁸ For many survivors, not creating art would have been the transgression, because to remain silent, to forget and let the rest of the world forget would be to assign victory to the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In reality, as art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels has written, notwithstanding the prohibitions – ancient and modern - against creating post-Holocaust art, many artists did go on to do so, and in some cases there is even beauty to be found in this art.²³⁹ Feelings of beauty and horror do not have to be mutually exclusive.

These were some of the conundrums – the 'aesthetic oxymoron' – with which Halter wrestled as he began to search for adequate artistic genres and forms through which to express the experiences he had lived through. The extensive body of work that he created should be understood in this context, as part of the urgent desire to tell that was experienced by many survivors – often after many years and decades of silence – resulting in a raw outpouring of work.²⁴⁰ One solution to the aesthetic and moral challenges posed by those seeking to create post-Holocaust art was to adopt a form of 'distancing' and abstraction. As Saltzman and others have noted, the work of some of the US abstract expressionists, or of post-war German artists such as Anselm

²³⁵ Rubenstein & Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz the Holocaust and its legacy*, p.297.

²³⁶ Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure*, p. 71.

²³⁷ Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure*, p. 71.

²³⁸ Saltzman, *To Figure, or not to Figure*, p. 71.

²³⁹ Amishai-Maisels, *Art Confronts the Holocaust*.

²⁴⁰ HFA, Yeovil.

Kiefer (b.1945), speak of the unspeakable by presenting it in an elliptical, non-figurative way.²⁴¹

For Halter, one of his earliest and most significant ventures into stained glass artwork was entirely non-figurative. The windows that he created for the Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Centre in Israel (1976-78) focused not on imagery, but – appropriately for a memorial to Jews and Judaism – on ‘the word’.²⁴² Powerful in their simplicity, using a palette of muted greens and greys, they consisted of a series of names of Jews murdered during the Holocaust. The windows circumscribed the ceiling of the Hall of Names, whose design Halter worked on closely alongside the Yad Vashem staff.²⁴³

Stylistically the windows bear a close relationship to the gate for Yad Vashem, which Halter was commissioned to create in 1975. Pared down and semi-abstract in style, the metalwork depicts barbed wire and starved figures. As we have noted, artistically, the gate can be seen as transitional between Halter’s architectural and stained glass work, the latter bearing many of the hallmarks of his muscular metalwork style.²⁴⁴

A very different approach to the aesthetic challenges of reflecting the Shoah in stained glass art was adopted at the Mill Hill synagogue in north London, where in 1984 Halter created windows entitled *From Holocaust to Rebirth*. Unlike the more conceptual works at Yad Vashem, these are figurative and narrative in content, telling a story of the Jewish people’s journey from despair to hope. The Mill Hill windows were commissioned by the family of Harry Olmer, the synagogue’s warden and a former companion of Halter’s when both found refuge in Britain as ‘Windermere children’.²⁴⁵ Unusually for synagogues in the UK, the two narrow memorial windows explicitly reference the Holocaust. The lower panels of both windows are dark in tone, featuring barbed wire amongst their imagery. The upper panels are brighter in colour and contain images of Jerusalem. The change in palette is clearly intended to portray the theme of going from darkness to light **[Figs 25 and 26]**.

This is reflected not only within the coloured glass, but also in the filigree, with the lower half cast in dark aluminium (possibly oxidised) whilst the top half utilises a brighter bronze. The images of Jerusalem in the top halves of both windows are

²⁴¹ Amishai-Maisels, *Art Confronts the Holocaust*.

²⁴² Schama. *The Story of the Jews*.

²⁴³ Email correspondence with Yad Vashem curators, 2021.

²⁴⁴ The gate still stands to this day, having been recently renovated, whereas the windows were removed when the museum was redesigned.

²⁴⁵ See chapter one of my thesis, and also Halter’s autobiography, where he describes being taken to a camp at Lake Windermere as a young refugee. Halter, *Roman’s Journey*, pp. 326-338.

reminiscent of the Jerusalem window that Halter created for the Central London synagogue and uses many of the same bright, joyful colours.

Both windows feature a menorah, the traditional seven-branch lamp used by Jews to mark the festival of Hannukah. The left-hand window contains one in its lower half, with the flames depicted in dark red. This menorah is not intact; only six of its branches remain, each of them representing a million murdered Jews. The image of the damaged menorah is suggestive of the fear around any celebration of Jewish faith. The right-hand window on the other hand contains an intact menorah in its upper half, its flames in bright orange and a lighter red, symbolising rebirth and celebration. The lower halves of both windows are filled with despair and foreboding, not only because of the imagery within them of barbed wire and desperate faces, but also the Hebrew lettering spelling out the narrative '*Al eile ani bocheya*' ('For these I will weep'). In flames, next to a woman's face, are the words '*Shema Yisrael Adonai*' echoing, according to one reviewer of the artwork, the 'last cries of those who were sent to the gas chambers.'²⁴⁶

Halter explained that, notwithstanding the dark message they convey, he wanted the windows at Mill Hill to enrich and beautify the space they inhabited.²⁴⁷ So, whilst these are memorial windows, created to commemorate those murdered by the Nazis, they are also meant to express hope and a celebration of Jewish culture, represented by the city of Jerusalem in the upper panels. In this sense they are in keeping with the national story – or 'civil religion' - that dominates memorialisation of the Holocaust in Israel, and to a large extent within the Jewish diaspora.²⁴⁸

Arguably, one of the most powerful ways in which Halter represented the Shoah in stained glass within the UK was by deliberately drawing upon an utterly dehumanising Nazi image, and interpreting it to devastating effect. In his window *The Last Journey*, created in 1997 as part of a series for the Beth Shalom Holocaust memorial centre in Nottingham, he utilises an iconic photograph, taken by an SS guard, of a woman accompanied by small children, on their way to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. *The Last Journey* [Fig 23] was the first of four windows that Halter created for Beth Shalom, installed between 1997 and early 2000, each of them in a similar style, and commemorating different people and events. The other three windows were entitled *Yellow Star* [Fig 22], *Resistance* [Fig 21] and *Mother and Child* [Fig 24]. All four windows are circular in shape, and realised in a simplified style, with jewelled, mosaic-like colouring, typical of the aesthetic choices that Halter would often

²⁴⁶ S. Stone, Synagogue windows on two worlds. *Jewish Chronicle*, 11th May (1984).

²⁴⁷ Stone, Synagogue windows on two worlds.

²⁴⁸ Traverso, *Memory, the Civil Religion of the Holocaust*. pp. 113–127.

make to convey the darkest of messages to a wide public audience. However, it is the provenance and lasting impact of *The Last Journey* window, also known at Beth Shalom as the Victoria Vincent memorial window, that particularly concerns me here.

This window was based on a photograph from *The Auschwitz Album*, a collection of photos taken by an SS officer tasked with documenting the extermination of Jews at the death camp.²⁴⁹ The album was somehow secreted away, and eventually rediscovered, by a camp survivor. It documents in the most clinical way imaginable the brutal dehumanisation by the Nazis of their victims. The photograph on which the *The Last Journey* is based has become one of the iconic images of the Shoah. Meanwhile, Halter's window has been widely reproduced, for example, as the front cover of a keynote study of the Holocaust's legacy, *Approaches to Auschwitz*.²⁵⁰

What is it about this photograph, and Halter's interpretation of it in stained glass, that is so affecting? How do these images sum up the dehumanisation of the Jews by the Nazis with such pathos? As Isabel Wollaston has written, it is the 'plasticity' of the image of the anonymous woman and the children, what is left *unsaid*, that is so powerful.²⁵¹ On the face of it, this could be a family out on a walk to anywhere. There is no apparent violence, and there is evidence of tender comfort and care by the older woman for the youngsters in her charge:

It is not, therefore, that they are 'terrible pictures' in and of themselves. They only become 'terrible' if the viewer can go beyond what is in many cases a relatively benign surface meaning.²⁵²

They appear just to be '[a] Jewish grandmother walking with little children, including perhaps an infant cradled under her arm'²⁵³ And yet, as the historian Martin Gilbert has commented, this is a truly terrible image, terrible because we know that they are on their way to the gas chambers. We know where the journey ends.²⁵⁴ As with many of Halter's works, the window invites the viewer to look deeper, until the true horrific nature of what is taking place - that the woman and children are walking to their deaths - becomes clear. The image, by reminding us that the Jews were ordinary people whose lives were cut short, and that this could be any family travelling anywhere, rehumanises the 'other'. By recreating this image, Halter reappropriates that which the

²⁴⁹ B. Gutterman (ed), *The Auschwitz Album*, (Berghahn Books: Deluxe edition, 2003).

²⁵⁰ Rubenstein & Roth *Approaches to Auschwitz: the Holocaust and its legacy*.

²⁵¹ Wollaston, The absent, the partial and the iconic in archival photographs of the Holocaust, pp. 265-293.

²⁵² Wollaston, The absent, the partial and the iconic, p. 439.

²⁵³ Wollaston, The absent, the partial and the iconic, p. 454.

²⁵⁴ Wollaston, The absent, the partial and the iconic, p. 451.

perpetrators had dehumanised, and forces the viewer to bear witness to the true horror of the Shoah. Its power – and its terrible beauty – lies in what is left unsaid.

Conclusion

As I have indicated above, Halter's artistic trajectory took him on a journey from graphic expression, in a variety of mediums, of the horror that he had lived through in the Holocaust, through to more symbolic and allegorical forms of representation and, ultimately, towards memorialising the Shoah in the permanent, public medium of stained glass. At each stage he faced complex societal and cultural limitations, as well as personal and subjective ones, on how explicitly he could represent the Holocaust in his work: on how much had to remain unsaid. Nevertheless, his innate aesthetic sensibility, and determination to communicate the reality of what he had witnessed to future generations, enabled him to negotiate many of these obstacles, and create a truly original body of work.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the multi-layered connections between what it would appear Halter felt he could and could not say within his stained glass artwork. I have shown how the aesthetic choices he made need to be contextualised – and located within the framework of Jewish cultural traditions and prohibitions – in order to be fully understood. This discussion of the said and the unsaid has been developed through exploring the controversy surrounding his 'Jacob' window, analysing hitherto unpublished archive material, and examining some of his most significant ventures into Holocaust-related stained glass artwork.

In the next chapter, I will reflect upon the relationship between Halter's distinctive stained glass artwork and the wider debates and controversies surrounding post-Holocaust memorialisation and testimony, with particular reference to the windows he created for the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel, in honour of the one and a half million Jewish children who perished in the Shoah.

Chapter three

Layers of Testimony

*From the start, I intended to transmit the light of the children's creativity, rather than focus on the murderous ways in which the lives of a million and a half Jewish children were cut short. My hope is that these windows will serve as a bridge between the memory of those children and the children of future generations.*²⁵⁵

Roman Halter

Introduction

More than seventy five years after the end of World War Two, the form and content of Holocaust memorials remains a deeply contested subject. Recent controversies surrounding the location – and precise purpose – of the proposed new Holocaust memorial centre in Westminster are a case in point.²⁵⁶ Many of these debates centre on a perceived tension between, on the one hand, the monumental and symbolic role of such memorials, and on the other, the urgency of educating this and future generations about the crimes committed against humanity in the Shoah. However, as this chapter illustrates, these are not necessarily binary questions.

Through a close examination of a unique children's Holocaust memorial at Yad Layeled in Israel, located at Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot in Western Galilee, I explore how layers of testimony – based upon drawings created by children incarcerated in the Terezin (Theresienstadt) concentration camp - were incorporated in the form of stained glass windows by Roman Halter into a memorial setting.²⁵⁷ The resulting site both fittingly honours the one-and-a-half million child victims of the Shoah whilst also, to this day, serving a vital educational function for new generations.²⁵⁸

This function of the Yad Layeled memorial is enhanced by the fact that both Roman and Ardyn Halter – father and son – worked alongside each other in its creation. In this sense it is a physical embodiment of inter-generational remembrance

²⁵⁵ Ghetto Fighters House, Yad Layeled, *Stained Glass Exhibit*.

²⁵⁶ M. Davis, *Britain's Promise to Remember: The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report*. 27th January, (2015).

R. J. Evans, How should we remember the Holocaust? *New Statesman*, 20th January (2021).

Legal challenges over the siting of the Westminster memorial are still ongoing.

²⁵⁷ The Terezin concentration camp (located in Czechoslovakia,) was referred to as Theresienstadt by the Nazis. I will be referring to the camp as Terezin (its Czech name) throughout this chapter.

²⁵⁸ Ghetto Fighters House, Yad Layeled, *Stained Glass Exhibit*.

and layered testimony.

My exploration of the memorial's significance is located within a wider discussion about the forms that Holocaust memorialising can and have taken - from the most distanced and abstract to the most personal and concrete - and the specific role of testimonial objects within memory work. One of the many original features of the Yad Layeled windows is the way in which they incorporate memory and testimony whilst also leaving much open to interpretation. In this sense, it could be argued, they honour and give agency not only to the child victims who are commemorated there, but also to the children who are encouraged to interact with and participate in the memorial process today.

1. 'A living educational memorial'

Some of the most haunting visual imagery of the Holocaust concerns the one-and-a-half million Jewish children who perished in the camps. From the iconic photo of the Warsaw Ghetto boy, his arms raised as the liquidation of the 1943 ghetto uprising took place, to the ubiquitous imagery of Anne Frank – doomed to die in Auschwitz - writing her diary in an Amsterdam attic, we have come to associate these young people with the extermination of an entire generation.²⁵⁹ There is today a wealth of literature, exhibitions and historical documentation about the child victims and survivors of the Holocaust. From the multitude of testimonies from young victims of the Shoah in museum exhibits, through to the many semi-fictionalised accounts, such as the BBC Two docudrama, *The Windermere Children*, based on testimonies of child survivors who were brought to Lake Windermere by the Jewish Refugees Committee, we have become accustomed to profoundly moving narratives of horrific suffering, desperate loss and, very occasionally, hope.²⁶⁰

Roman Halter was himself just twelve when the Nazis invaded Poland, and just 17 when he arrived in England as a child refugee, having survived the ghettos and concentration camps where the rest of his family were murdered. He witnessed his father and grandfather being starved to death in the Lodz ghetto and his mother being deported, whilst his own life was spared only because of his metalworking skills. Of the three hundred Jews who had lived in Halter's childhood hometown of Chodecz, only four survived the war. Like many survivors, Halter's is a story of destroyed childhood.

His horrific experiences during his childhood years stayed with him for his entire life, and greatly influenced his work. In his artworks he returns over and over again to the theme of mothers, children and families. His own mother was the inspiration for his deeply expressive 1974 painting, *Woman Wearing Mantilla*, held in London's Imperial War Museum, whilst *Moses the Prophet* (1974), and *Shlomo 1* (1974), also held in the museum collection, were based upon his grandfather and brother. All three of these paintings bear witness to Halter's trauma at losing his entire family in the Holocaust. Each approaches their subject matter in a different way, including via religious allegory. *Woman Wearing Mantilla* was directly influenced by Francisco de Goya's painting of

²⁵⁹ D. Porat, *The Boy: A Holocaust Story* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011).

A. Frank, *The diary of a young girl, Anne Frank, The definitive edition* (London: Penguin books, 2001).

²⁶⁰ *The Windermere Children*, dir. by M Samuels, (BBC, 2020).

The recently opened Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum contains testimonies from survivors who were children during the Holocaust, including that of Eva Clarke who was one of only three babies born in a concentration camp. The Jewish Museum of London draws on child survivor testimonies in its permanent exhibition.

Dona Isabel de Porcel [Fig 38].²⁶¹ *Moses the Prophet* uses biblical imagery to represent Halter's grandfather as a patriarchal figure who had a profound influence on him. *Shlomo 1* depicts the hanging of his brother, portraying him as a Christ-like figure undergoing crucifixion: a symbolic motif used by other post-Holocaust artists, notably Marc Chagall [Figs 39 and 40]. All three relatives perished in the Holocaust.

Other harrowing paintings by Halter in the museum's collection include *Transport* (1974) [Fig 35] and *Mother with Babies* (1974) [Fig 41], representing women and children huddled together in a cattle truck en route to a concentration camp. In these paintings the figures stare out at the viewer, as if beseeching them to bear witness to the horror that is taking place. In all of these artworks, what is being expressed is a profound sense of loss.

It took Halter decades to feel capable of telling the unspeakable story of his past; initially through etchings and paintings that represented the family members, and myriad others, that he had lost. However once this process had started, it resulted in a series of works that memorialise both his own family's tragic experiences and the multitudes who endured the same fate. Just as these early paintings express loss of childhood and family, so the windows at Yad Layeled, based upon the children's drawings at Terezin, tell a deeply affecting story of innocence in the process of being brutally destroyed.

This common thread in Halter's work, of collective mourning for lost childhood, and for an entire orphaned generation, is a universal theme that recurs in many other post-Holocaust and émigré Jewish artists' work. It is there, for instance, in Polish artist Jankel Adler's (1895-1949) iconic painting *Orphans* (1942) [Fig 42], a work that expresses Adler's sense of desolation upon hearing that his whole family had been murdered in the camps. His work depicts two orphaned children, clinging together for comfort; an experience common to so many children who lived through the Holocaust. Adler gifted this painting to his fellow-artist Josef Herman (1911-2000) after they had both lost their families and their homes; the orphans in the painting represent Adler and Herman.²⁶²

Another artist who lost most of his family during the Holocaust is Samuel Bak (b.1933), a child survivor of the Vilnius ghetto. He too has expressed his feelings of despair through his art; for instance in his painting *The Family* [Fig 43] in which he symbolically paid homage to the people (both dead and alive) with whom he felt he had a familial connection. Another was the expressionist painter Maryan S. Maryan (1927-

²⁶¹ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the eternal light', pp. 41-43.

²⁶² A. Kampf. *The Holocaust, Chagall to Kitaj, Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art*. (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1990) p. 87.

1977), who spent his childhood in Auschwitz, and after the camp was liberated, endured the rest of his youth in German camps for displaced persons having lost most of his family. He vented his anger and desperate sense of loss by painting grotesque images of Nazi officers, often with animalistic features. Other artists, for instance Arik Brauer (1929-2021) and Yosli Bergner (1920-2017), who were children during the Holocaust, created artworks that were often fantastical and dreamlike in their themes.²⁶³ All these artists sought, through the creation of art, to comprehend the horror they had undergone.²⁶⁴ The themes of loss of childhood, loss of family and of becoming an orphan, are constantly referenced in post-Holocaust art and were ones that Halter himself repeatedly returned to. All of his Holocaust-related works are in some way linked to this tremendous sense of devastation.

Given the profound psychological impact of Halter's traumatic early experiences, it is not surprising that when he was approached in the early 1980s to help create a museum centre in Israel to commemorate the children killed in the Shoah, he readily agreed.²⁶⁵ The Yad Layeled children's memorial, at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel, is arguably the site of Halter's most ambitious stained glass testimonial to the Holocaust. When it was first conceived of in the early 1980's there was no memorial anywhere to the one and a half million children murdered by the Nazis. Halter was asked by the founders of Ghetto Fighters' House, at Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot, themselves survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, to create a living memorial to this historic tragedy.²⁶⁶

Yitzhak 'Antek' Zuckerman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and a founder of the kibbutz and museum, was determined to draw the world's attention to the scale of the loss that had been experienced; in particular, the loss of the children's creative potential. As he reportedly told Halter, 'You see, we and the world have lost one and half million musicians, rabbis, writers, farmers, doctors, painters, tailors and we are all the poorer for it.'²⁶⁷ In this sense, the memorial was intended to illustrate and pay homage to the fact that these children, if they had survived, could have gone on to do great things. Yad Layeled was intended to confront the viewer with this harsh yet ultimately life-affirming reality.

²⁶³ Kampf, *The Holocaust*, pp. 88-97.

²⁶⁴ Kampf, *The Holocaust*, pp. 86-97.

²⁶⁵ Personal interview with Ardyn Halter, 7th January 2020.

²⁶⁶ N. Heidecker, 'Yad Layeled at the Ghetto Fighters' House: A Museum about Children in the Holocaust or a Museum for Children about the Holocaust?', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, Vol. 30 No. 3, (2016), pp. 274-281.

²⁶⁷ Halter, letter to *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 May 1995. HFA, Yeovil.

Zuckerman had conceived of there eventually being a children's memorial attached to Ghetto Fighters' House, but the proposal for the Yad Layeled memorial was not formally put forward until after his death in 1981.

From the outset then, it was designed to be more than just a site of remembrance to the children who had perished, urgently needed though that was. As Halter makes clear in his correspondence with the *Jewish Chronicle* it was always conceived as a 'living educational memorial', a place that children over the age of fourteen could enter and interact with, in order to learn about the Holocaust for themselves. The members of Ghetto Fighters House had conceived Yad Layeled as a living memorial to the children murdered by the Nazis.²⁶⁸ And Halter aimed to create a centre that would respect their wishes. He did not want it to be merely a sombre reminder of the atrocities that had taken place, but also a celebration of the creativity of the children who had such brutality inflicted upon them. The space that was eventually created is both a memorial and an educational centre, and is one that to this day celebrates creativity and art.²⁶⁹

To achieve this ambition, Halter and his artist son Ardyn Halter drew inspiration from an extraordinary collection of drawings and poems, produced under the most inhumane conditions by children incarcerated in the Terezin camp, in what is now the Czech Republic.²⁷⁰ Terezin was a 'model ghetto' near Prague; the site of an elaborate Nazi hoax designed to fool the International Red Cross as to the conditions inside. In truth it was a place of terrible suffering and disease; a 'way station', to which over 140,000 Jews (many of them elderly or from more privileged and cultured backgrounds) were deported before being transferred on to the death camps.²⁷¹ Many Jewish artists ended up in Terezin, amongst them Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898-1944), a former Bauhaus art school student and teacher, who was eventually killed at Auschwitz.²⁷² Some of the artists, writers and thinkers interred at Terezin, including Dicker-Brandeis, as well as clandestinely producing their own work, attempted to teach the children incarcerated there.²⁷³

Even in the most desperate of circumstances, people there were driven to create a wealth of art, music and drama; literally, in the case of the grotesque mock concerts and shows that the inmates were forced to perform for international 'visitors'; but also, in secret, for their own dignity and temporary sense of survival.²⁷⁴ As art historian

²⁶⁸ R. Halter, Five sheets with plans for the design and layout of Yad Layeled, (Undated) HFA, Yeovil.

²⁶⁹ R. Halter, *Yad Layeled* catalogue (Winnipeg: Mendel B. Mitchell Fund. 1995), p. 48.

²⁷⁰ H. Volavková (eds), ... *I never saw another butterfly: children's drawings and poems from Terezin concentration camp 1942-1944*, (New York: Schoken Books, 1978).

²⁷¹ L. Wix, Aesthetic empathy in teaching art to children: The work of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Terezin. *Art Therapy*, Vol 26. No. 4, (2009). pp. 152–158.

²⁷² E. H. Spitz, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and her work in Terezin: Children, art, and hope. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol 46. No. 2, (2012), pp. 1–13.

²⁷³ S. K. Leshnoff, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, Art of Holocaust Children, and the Progressive Movement, in *Education, Visual Arts Research*, Vol 32. No 1, (2006), pp. 92-100.

²⁷⁴ Leshnoff, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, Art of Holocaust Children, and the Progressive Movement in *Education*, pp. 92-100.

Linny Wix has argued, Dicker-Brandeis' pedagogic approach was one that affirmed the children's humanity, even under the most dehumanising of conditions. 'In Terezin Dicker-Brandeis's care and attention allowed the children to see themselves reflected both in their images and in the eyes of their teacher, thus furthering attachment to their worlds and the vital reality of their lived experiences.'²⁷⁵

This philosophy, grounded in the theory and practice of the Bauhaus movement, connects closely to Halter's ambition at Yad Layeled of enabling contemporary children viewing the windows to make a connection, or 'bridge', to the lives of the children whose poignant works they witness there. Much of the creative material produced at Terezin is now lost, but some of it survived, including around 4500 drawings created by the children who were taught by Dicker-Brandeis.²⁷⁶ The drawings and poems that the children produced under her tutelage survived the war and formed the basis of the imagery that inspired Halter's windows for Yad Layeled. **[Fig 44]**

A total of 15,000 children under the age of 15 passed through Terezin; of those, only 100 survived.²⁷⁷ Yet after the war, two suitcases of the children's drawings that had been smuggled out of the camp were brought to Prague, where they were stored in the state Jewish Museum of Prague by the museum's curators. Some of them were published in the book ... *I never saw another butterfly*. According to Ardyn Halter, it was this remarkable publication, given to Halter by the wife of Zvi Shner, who ran the Ghetto Fighters' Museum for 15 years, that became the primary source material for the stained glass windows.²⁷⁸ As the Czech author and Holocaust survivor Jiri Weil wrote about the children's work, in a moving epilogue to the book:

[...] their drawings and their poems speak to us; these are their voices which have been preserved, voices of reminder, of truth and of hope. We are publishing them not as dry documents out of thousands of such witnesses in a sea of suffering, but in order to honour the memory of those who created these colours and these words. That's the way these children probably would have wanted it when death overtook them.²⁷⁹

It was in this spirit that Halter and his son Ardyn set about creating, as a centrepiece for

²⁷⁵ Wix, *Aesthetic empathy in teaching art to children*, p. 158.

²⁷⁶ Jewish Museum in Prague, *Children's drawings from the Terezin ghetto, 1942-1944*, (The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2013-2021) <https://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/explore/permanent-exhibitions/children-s-drawings-from-the-terezin-ghetto-1942-1944/> [Accessed: 06/12/2021].

²⁷⁷ Volavková, ... *I never saw another butterfly: children's drawings and poems from Terezin concentration camp 1942-1944*, p. 6.

²⁷⁸ Personal email communication with Ardyn Halter, 3rd February 2020.

²⁷⁹ J. Weil, 'Epilogue, a few words about this book', in, *I never saw another butterfly: children's drawings and poems from Terezin concentration camp 1942-1944* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 61-62.

Yad Layeled, a series of 17 stained glass windows, based on the drawings and poems produced by the children at Terezin. By utilising these drawings, and rendering them in stained glass, they sought to celebrate the children's creativity and hope, rather than solely the murderous way in which their lives had been cut short. Their aim was to remain true to the drawings, resulting in a series of windows that would be instantly recognisable as the work of children, whilst also containing an uncompromising message about the childhood that was being wrenched away from them. Butterflies, camp bunk beds, barbed wire, houses, flowers, children playing and other imagery are rendered within stained glass windows that attempt to stay as true as possible to the original drawings. **[Figs 45, 46 and 47]** They use bright primary colours, creating a poignant, affecting memorial that, despite its subject matter, conveys a transient sense of hope. Their focus, expressed through testimony and symbolism, is on the lived experience of the children themselves.

The deliberate use of simplified, childlike imagery in the windows allows the viewer to construct their own narrative; to imagine the life and suffering of the young person who created the drawings on which they are based. We feel that we are witnessing something very direct and intimate, which points to a therapeutic purpose for the children within the camps; one that gave them permission to express their memories, hopes and darkest fears through creativity, in which much of the impact lies in what is left unsaid.²⁸⁰ However, this was far less the case when it came to the poems that Dicker-Brandeis and others also encouraged the children to write, and from which the title ... *I never saw another butterfly* is drawn.²⁸¹ As Weil notes, the children in Terezin loved to paint and draw, but when it came to the written word their feelings were often made more explicit:

But when they wrote poems, it was something else again. Here one finds words about 'painful Terezin', about 'the little girl who got lost'... Yes, fear came to them and they could tell of it in their poems, knowing that they were condemned. Perhaps they knew it better than the adults.²⁸²

As the Prague Jewish Museum curator, Misha Sidenberg and art historian Marco Iulius argue, in their study of Dicker-Brandeis' art teaching methods, she was 'a

²⁸⁰ Leshnoff, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, *Art of Holocaust Children, and the Progressive Movement in Education*, pp. 92-100.

²⁸¹ The line 'I never saw another butterfly' comes from a poem written in 1942 by Pavel Friedman. Friedman was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.

²⁸² J. Weil, *Epilogue*, a few words about this book, p. 61.

pioneer in the field of art therapy.²⁸³ By offering her students, ‘a perfect outlet for processing their traumatic experience by the means of creativity and self-expression, she became a perfect example of what would today be described as a resilience tutor.’²⁸⁴ Not only did two of her students who survived the Terezin ghetto go on to pioneer art therapeutic methods for children.²⁸⁵ Dicker-Brandeis’ focus on creativity as a tool for survival became central to post-Holocaust therapeutics for child survivors.²⁸⁶ Such therapeutic methods were used in the immediate post-war period, in an attempt to rehabilitate young survivors, such as those who were taken by the Jewish Refugees Committee to Lake Windermere. In some cases, such interventions prompted the survivors to pursue an artistic career; for instance, in the case of the artist Shmeul Dresner (1928-2020), who first started painting during the art therapy classes at Windermere.²⁸⁷ Further examples of the way art was used by Jewish teachers both within the ghettos and in the attempted rehabilitation of Jewish child survivors after the war, are discussed by historian Marta Brunelli. She describes how these methods, many similar to those of Dicker-Brandeis, were used in the context of fascist Italy as a way to help forge resilience and provide a creative outlet through which the children could express their feelings of suffering and, after the war, process the horror that they had been forced to endure.²⁸⁸

Whether through visual or written mediums, Dicker-Brandeis focused on allowing the children to express their own creativity, even under the most brutal and desperate of conditions. According to art historian Ellen Handler Spitz, this reflected Dicker-Brandeis’ earlier Bauhaus training and her socialist leanings, shaping the methods she used to teach the children. She argues that the emphasis was always on ‘aesthetic empathy’; on allowing the children to express their own creativity and thereby empower them, enabling their individual personalities to shine through and give them agency. Dicker-Brandeis encouraged the children not only to draw still lifes, or make copies of famous paintings, but also to draw and paint images of life within the camps. So they painted the prison guards, the people starving, and the executions. Halter’s memorial reminds us of this, but also of the children’s humanity and individuality, and

²⁸³ M. Ius, & M. Sidenberg, *The All-Powerful Freedom: Creativity and Resilience in the Context of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis’ Art Teaching Experiment*. *Proceedings*, Vol. 1, No. 9, (2017), p. 10.

²⁸⁴ Ius, & Sidenberg, *The All-Powerful Freedom*, p. 1.

²⁸⁵ Ius, & Sidenberg, *The All-Powerful Freedom*, p. 9.

²⁸⁶ Jewish Museum in Prague, *Talent is desire - Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the art teaching experiment*, (The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2019) <https://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/program-and-education/temporary-exhibits/traveling-exhibitions/301/talent-is-desire-friedl-dicker-brandeis-and-the-art-teaching-experiment/> [Accessed: 16/02/2022].

²⁸⁷ Ben Uri collection, *Work by Shmuel Dresner*, (London: Ben Uri Museum, 2022) <https://www.benuricollection.org.uk/intermediate.php?artistid=258> [Accessed 16/02/2022].

²⁸⁸ M. Brunelli, “There are no children here “and “Back to school”. Two exhibitions about children, war and persecution. *History of Education & Children’s Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (2012), pp. 699-708.

their memories before they were interred at Terezin.²⁸⁹ This belief in the possibility of creativity and resilience, even under the most horrific circumstances, was core to Dicker-Brandeis' philosophy and practice, and one that I believe Halter sought to capture within the Yad Layeled memorial.²⁹⁰

The children's memorial was to be housed in a separate building from the main Ghetto Fighters' House museum site. Halter worked together with his son to produce several multilayered designs for its construction, including three floors that would potentially play different educational roles. One early idea involved creating two clasped hands with stained glass windows between them, but this was revised in favour of the circular three-storey structure that was eventually built.²⁹¹ Within the Halter family archives there are different plans for the layout, depicting the positioning of the entrance, exits and windows, and their impact on the way the light would fall. They show how carefully Halter was thinking through the different architectural possibilities for the building's structure. The circular structure and layout of the displays, for example, were proposed as a way to ensure that the children and other visitors would be encouraged to walk slowly and reflectively around the entire exhibition. **[Fig 48]**

Other innovations were suggested by Halter and his son. For example, before the memorial was opened in 1995, as a way to create 'a bridge between the memory of those children and the children of future generations,' they proposed that 20,000 tiles should be created, based on drawings produced by children throughout Israel and from around the world.²⁹² These tiles would be placed on the ramps leading to the upper levels of the building, enabling a connection to be made between the drawings created by the children who were murdered by the Nazis and the ones drawn by the children of today.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Spitz, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and her work in Terezín, pp. 1-13.

²⁹⁰ In the words of one of Dicker-Brandis's pupils who survived the Holocaust, Evelyn Landová Merová, "She wanted to increase a sense of something positive in us. Her presence made everything better – just like that, by itself."

Jewish Museum in Prague, Talent is desire - Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the art teaching experiment.

²⁹¹ Ultimately, because Roman did not have Israeli citizenship, an Israeli architect had to oversee the construction of the building. But its original design and the creation of the stained glass windows were Roman and Ardyn Halter's work.

Ghetto Fighters House, *25th Anniversary of Yad Layeled - Final session*, Ghetto Fighters house, 22nd June 2021, YouTube video, 1hr33:07 mins long, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5KY89xAt5U> & Ghetto Fighters House, *Yad Layeled "From idea to building"* 24th January 2017, YouTube video, 10:03 mins long, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdPLWyXmr1I>.

²⁹² Ghetto Fighters House, *Yad Layeled, Stained Glass Exhibit*.

²⁹³ The proposal for the tiles can be found in the Halter family archives. It was suggested that, although children from these two dramatically different eras would focus on different subject matter, they would all visibly be works by young people, sharing the same vibrancy of colour and imagination. Another proposal suggested that children visiting the memorial could try to find texts that translated the poems, diaries and letters of children in the ghetto, to promote the international educational purpose of Yad Layeled. These ideas were not implemented, but the intention behind them can be seen in the educational programmes run by Yad Layeled to this day.

Roman and Ardyn Halter were influenced in the design of the windows by the architect Le Corbusier's modernist chapel in Ronchamp in France, which used windows that were set into recesses that had been carved into the walls. Technically, the stained glass windows used an innovative method, involving cast bronze and alloy filigree, which enabled the images in the children's drawings to be rendered more sensitively and accurately than in more traditional lead casting.²⁹⁴ This was the same method that Halter used when creating coats of arms, and can be seen elsewhere in his stained glass work, for instance in his windows at London's Central Synagogue where he also uses bronze filigree, or in his windows at Leo Baeck college in north London where he employs the same method but utilises cast aluminum alloy. The bronze was highly polished and the coloured glass pieces set into the frame. The rugged materiality of this process and its painterly style were central to the act of testimony, helping Halter achieve the aesthetic effect that he was seeking.²⁹⁵

Within the Halter family archives there is a collection of designs and cartoons for the windows that were eventually created, containing images of children playing with skipping ropes; children holding hands whilst waiting in line; a house surrounded by a fence; all depicted in a bright primary palette. Each image has been painstakingly painted by Halter, the metalwork outlined in gold or bronze. Intricate designs for the large butterfly window that was installed as a centrepiece in the museum ceiling indicate where each panel would sit, and how they should fit together. Many of these designs were executed on tracing paper so that they could be layered on top of each other, some with more detail than others, to create different effects.

These designs help us understand how Halter envisaged each window being realised, **[Figs 49, 50 and 51]** and their relationship to the Terezin children's drawings upon which many of them are based. In this sense they materially express the several layers of testimony that are contained within the Yad Layeled memorial, and which can be traced back to the lived experience of Holocaust victims and survivors. Here I argue that Halter's memorial windows reflect three significant layers of testimony.

First, they bear witness to the drawings and poems of the children who perished between 1942 and 1944. Collectively, this material should itself be seen as a testimonial object; a deeply poignant expression of humanity and resilience in the face of unimaginable horror.²⁹⁶ By drawing on the children's artwork as a unique source,

²⁹⁴ Swash, Roman Halter: Stained Glass Artist, pp. 16-40.

²⁹⁵ Personal Interview with Ardyn Halter 19th October 2021.

²⁹⁶ The term 'testimonial object' is used here to describe an object that tells the viewer or reader a story about the person that it used to belong to. Such objects are often used in Holocaust memorial museums to tell the stories of those who were murdered by the Nazis. Testimonial objects include photograph albums, letters, diaries, drawings and a wealth of other personal artefacts.

Halter tapped into a medium with enormously powerful emotional impact. Second, the memorial is testimony to Dicker-Brandeis herself; a reflection of the heroism and creativity of the children's clandestine teachers in the camp. Halter's interpretation of the original artwork and poems are a direct line of connection to both the children and those who taught them. They are a window into their minds. Third, the artwork contains a yet further layer of testimony; that of Halter himself.

Whilst the windows themselves were created after the Holocaust, they carry the imprint of both Halter's own horrific experience as a child victim of the Shoah – including a period at Terezin himself, post-liberation - and the sense of hope that, as a survivor, he was determined to pass on to future generations. They are based upon the testimony of others, but their moral authority is entirely his own.

For Halter, who was passionate about Holocaust education, the creation of Yad Layeled as an educational space was highly significant. By creating memorials that are designed to educate as well as commemorate, a meaningful legacy is left for generations to come. In this sense, Yad Layeled was pioneering, and in keeping with much contemporary discussion on the purpose of memorialisation.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, as the art critic Anya Ulinich has noted, in her review of Holocaust drawings, most photographic images from this period were taken by Nazis and their collaborators, reducing the prisoners to a collective dehumanised mass. In conveying the perspectives of individuals, she argues, the drawings reassert their humanity.²⁹⁸ As with other testimonial objects, such as pre-war family photographs and memorabilia, the Terezin children's drawings and poems remind us that they were more than just victims, or statistics. Halter's stained glass windows convey a sense of them as live, creative individuals - rather than merely as images related to their suffering.

Throughout the three floors of the Yad Layeled memorial museum, the children's testimonies can be both seen and heard, whether in their stained glass form or through written and spoken testimonies in other parts of the museum. The coloured light that is funneled down through the inset stained glass windows to the visitors below helps to enhance this experience, and facilitates the use of the space for pedagogical purposes, as well as a site of memorialisation.²⁹⁹

In the next section, I interrogate the ways in which the windows Halter created at Yad Layeled relate to wider discussions about the aesthetics of memorialisation. In this context, I explore the thinking of James E. Young, Marianne Hirsch and other

²⁹⁷ Jacobowitz & Hornstein (eds). *Image and Remembrance*.

²⁹⁸ A, Ulinich, *What we talk about when we talk about Holocaust drawings*, (The Forward: 27/01/2020) <https://forward.com/culture/438760/museum-of-jewish-heritage-holocaust-drawings/> [Accessed 16/02/2022].

²⁹⁹ Swash, Roman Halter: stained glass artist, pp. 28-34.

cultural and art historians, referencing the use of absence in a 'social aesthetic' of memorialisation; the concept of intergenerational, post-memory traces; and debates surrounding testimony within post-Holocaust narratives of collective loss.³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ J. E. Young, *The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

M. Hirsch & S. R. Suleiman, Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust Art. In *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2003), pp. 79-96.

2. The aesthetics of memorialisation

The distinctive character of the Yad Layeled memorial needs to be contextualised within a wider discussion about the role of testimonial objects in post-Holocaust memorialisation. This in turn feeds into contemporary debates about how, or even whether, the Holocaust should be memorialised, what memorials should exist, and what aesthetic form they should take. Should they be anonymised and symbolic, or focus in a more visceral way on the individual lives lost, preserving a visual memoir for future generations?

These issues pose considerable aesthetic and philosophical challenges. As Isabel Wollaston argues, in *The War against Memory*, there is a continuous tension between attempting to memorialise and remember what took place, whilst trying, in some respects, to 'move on' from the past. As she notes, the latter path is strewn with dangers, since, 'To forget the dead is to have them die a second time.'³⁰¹ So how does one remember the horror of the Holocaust without letting that become the dominant narrative of Jewish history? And how does one do so without over-simplifying or trivialising the past?

The historian Stephen C. Feinstein explores the conundrum of how to remember the Holocaust through art without turning it into a spectacle, or worse, a form of so-called 'Holocaust kitsch.'³⁰² He critiques attempts by the media and some post-Holocaust artists to sentimentalise or even glamourise barbaric events, cautioning against trivialising memory or seeking an 'aesthetic frisson' from brutal tragedy.

A particularly grotesque example of Holocaust kitsch in contemporary culture can be found in historian Christine Berberich's discussion of 'Shoah on ice', a performance in a 2016 Russian reality TV show during which two contestants took part in a dance dressed as concentration camp inmates. This spectacle has understandably been greeted with disgust.³⁰³ But as Feinstein argues, other, far less crude examples of public art projects can also be problematic, insofar as they strip away the specificity of the Holocaust by trying to connect with contemporary audiences by making 'banal comparisons' to other forms of injustice.

At the other end of the aesthetic spectrum lie artistic works that reference and memorialise the Shoah in a much more opaque, often conceptual or symbolic fashion. This approach has been described by art historian Janet Wolff, as 'allusive realism'.

³⁰¹ I. Wollaston, *A War against Memory? The future of Holocaust Remembrance*. (Melksham: The Cromwell Press, 1996), p. 6.

³⁰² Feinstein, *Art After Auschwitz*, pp. 152–168.

³⁰³ C. Berberich, Introduction: the Holocaust in contemporary culture, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 25, No. 1-2, (2019), pp. 1-11.

She even makes a case for the possibility of beauty in post-Holocaust art via iconic symbolism: the use of subtle, yet effective concepts exemplified in, for example, the Holocaust-related artworks of artist R.B. Kitaj, in his dense and complex 1975 painting, *If Not, Not* [Fig 52], or the powerfully symbolic work of German artist Anselm Kiefer. The connection to the Holocaust in these artists' works is often indirect, and open to different interpretations. However, as Wolff contends, it is often the lack of 'simple and direct representation of the events of the Holocaust' in such artworks that makes them so powerful, given the inherent inadequacy of art to deal with such subject matter.³⁰⁴ As she argues:

I want to stress here the dual aspect of this 'aesthetics of uncertainty,' this recourse to an 'allusive realism.' The drive to indirection and complexity is both a response to the recognition of the inadequacy of art to comprehend (in both senses) the Holocaust and, at the same time, an insistence on the dialogic participation of the viewer, whose active engagement is thereby guaranteed.³⁰⁵

This 'dialogic participation' is core to Anselm Kiefer's (b.1945) avowed commitment to 'wage war against forgetfulness'. This is expressed, for example, in his monumental 2016 work, *Walhalla* [Fig 53] referencing Norse and National Socialist mythology and featuring blasted, bombed out landscapes from German history. As historian Simon Schama discusses, the imagery evokes another Walhalla that in the 1930's became a 'site of pilgrimage for all good Nazis'. Empty hospital beds in the exhibition of this work force the viewer to confront 'history's mortuary', and a past many would rather forget.³⁰⁶

Active engagement is also required to unpack the multi-layered meaning behind *If Not, Not*. As Kitaj explained in his *Definitive Monograph*, this painting draws on many different sources, including T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The images captured within the painting are pregnant with symbolic meaning; from the gates of Auschwitz representing an antechamber to hell, to the discarded objects and fleeing people, all contributing to the work's deeply unsettling, apocalyptic effect.³⁰⁷ Relevant to this discussion of dialogic, active engagement in memory work is what historian James E. Young refers to as the 'social aesthetic' of Holocaust memorialisation; a concept that he has played a seminal role in

³⁰⁴ J. Wolff, The Iconic and the Allusive: The case for beauty in post-Holocaust art, in, *Image and Remembrance. Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 162.

³⁰⁵ J. Wolff The Iconic and the Allusive: The case for beauty in post-Holocaust art, p. 163.

³⁰⁶ Simon Schama on Kiefer's work in his *Civilisations* TV series *Civilisations, The Vital Spark*, dir. by Simon Schama, series 1 episode 9 (BBC, 1 March 2018).

³⁰⁷ M. Livingstone, *Kitaj: the definitive monograph*, (London: Phaidon Press, 2010), pp. 241-242.

developing.³⁰⁸ For Young, it is not a question of whether a memorial is 'good' or 'bad' in some absolute sense, but its role in a particular social context and in the public eye. This raises further moral and philosophical questions about the role – or even appropriateness - of memorials to the Holocaust, more than 75 years on from the liberation of the camps, and that of art and artists in their creation. For Young, monuments and memorials serve a social purpose in that they exist within the public eye and influence the way in which people remember. As he explains:

I would like to explore a 'social-aesthetic' of Holocaust memorials that takes into account the monument's essentially social life in the public eye. For in fact, it may be precisely the public's interaction with the monument that finally constitutes its aesthetic life. This is to suggest that the 'art of public memory' encompasses not just these memorials' aesthetic contours, or their place in contemporary artistic discourse. It also includes the activity that brought them into being, the constant give and take between memorials and viewers, and finally, the responses of viewers to their own world in light of a memorialised past – the consequences of memory.³⁰⁹

This focus on public interaction determining a memorial's aesthetic life has a clear relevance to the Yad Layeled children's memorial. Here it can be argued that the 'social aesthetic' is determined by the multiple, inflected layers of testimony that are contained within the stained glass windows, the architectural design of the space – and the educational purpose of the memorial in creating narratives of remembrance through which to engage with future generations. However, within this context, specific questions can arise concerning the use and interpretation of the original testimonial source material – in this instance, the Terezin children's drawings – and their role in creating art that contributes to public memory of the Shoah.

These aesthetic challenges may present themselves acutely in the case of more directly representational post-Holocaust art, particularly that involving testimonial objects. For example, how important is it that they are viewed in their original form, and does anybody other than a survivor have the right to re-represent them? If narratives have an important part to play within memorialisation what is to stop the museum or artist from creating their own narrative around an object, one that instead of giving us insight into the person it once belonged to, instead feeds into the artist's own

³⁰⁸ Young, *Memory and counter memory: Towards the social aesthetic of Holocaust memorials*, p. 80.

³⁰⁹ Young, *Memory and counter memory: Towards the social aesthetic of Holocaust memorials*, p. 80.

metanarrative?³¹⁰ And is this philosophically or aesthetically objectionable?³¹¹ As Feinstein asks:

Can the artist, especially one who was not there, stumble upon some essential truth that even the survivor may have missed? Is it dangerous for art and artists to stimulate the imagination on a subject like the Holocaust because the limits have been surpassed by the event itself?³¹²

Whilst it is axiomatic that those who were not there cannot truly understand the unfathomable horror of the Holocaust, it does not lessen the imperative to try and comprehend. Furthermore, as the survivor generation dies out – and second and third generations struggle to understand what happened to their parents and grandparents – the impulse to find the aesthetic means through which to memorialise becomes if anything even more urgent. Nonetheless, the validity of such memorials, and the authenticity or otherwise of testimony, remains a hugely contested subject. As Young has argued, the metaphorical, abstract representation of the Shoah in many public monuments, such as Washington's Holocaust museum memorial, has at times provoked outrage on the part of survivors and their descendants, who feel that the full horror of what took place should be graphically and figuratively displayed, rather than elegantly elided over:

For survivors, the searing reality of their experiences demands as literal and figurative a memorial expression as possible. "We weren't tortured and our families weren't murdered in the abstract," survivors complain.³¹³

Parallel discussions in relation to other media – for example, the uncompromising realism of a film about the Holocaust such as the nine-hours long *Shoah* (1985), versus the ironic, darkly comic movie *Jo Jo Rabbit* (2019) - are still very much live debates that inform the aesthetic paradigm within which we choose to remember, and the importance or otherwise of historical veracity.³¹⁴

It is important to note here that the foregrounding of testimony as a vehicle for

³¹⁰ Feinstein, *Art After Auschwitz*. pp. 152–168.

³¹¹ This challenge for contemporary artists is discussed in:

J, E, Young *At Memory's Edge, After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

³¹² Feinstein, *Art After Auschwitz*, p. 152.

³¹³ Young, *Memory and counter memory: Towards the social aesthetic of Holocaust memorials*, p. 90.

³¹⁴ *Shoah*, dir. Claude Lanzmann, (New Yorker Films, 1985).

JoJo Rabbit, dir. Taika Waititi (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020).

Holocaust remembrance and memorialisation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The emotional import of witness testimony and the first-hand accounts of survivors – previously accorded secondary public importance - reached a watershed moment with the 1961 trial in Jerusalem of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann. As political theorist and historian Lyndsey Stonebridge has commented, in her critical discussion of some of the controversies surrounding the trial, it in many ways represented ‘the inauguration of the age of testimony’.³¹⁵ As she argues:

[...] the trial put the suffering of victims at its moral, legal and imaginative centre. Testimony became the driver for justice as, for the first time in legal history, juridical process was tied to the claims of collective memory.³¹⁶

Given the iconic importance of this moment for Israel’s ‘national story’, it is significant that the original glass booth within which Eichmann sat trial in 1961 is permanently on display at Ghetto Fighters’ House, on the same site as Yad Layeled, symbolising materially this shift in public discourse; a living memorial to the power of witness testimony.³¹⁷

However, as is well known, the focus on witness testimony at the Eichmann trial did not meet with universal approval; most famously so in the case of the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, whose reportage on the trial coined the memorable phrase, the ‘banality of evil’.³¹⁸ Arendt’s broader dismissal of ‘testimonial culture’ was widely criticised at the time within Israel and the wider Jewish diaspora.³¹⁹ But as Stonebridge and others have pointed out, her views need to be contextualised within Arendt’s over-arching universalist focus on achieving justice not just for the Nazis’ Jewish victims, but as retribution for their crimes against humanity at large.³²⁰

Notwithstanding these complex debates, the role of testimony and witnessing in countering what Holocaust survivor Primo Levi famously called ‘the war against memory’ retains a central place in memorialisation.³²¹ Commenting on Levi’s final work, *The drowned and the saved*, cultural historian, Antonio Ribiero, emphasises the empowering ethos behind his stance:

³¹⁵ L. Stonebridge, “The Man in the Glass Booth: Hannah Arendt’s Irony.” In *The Judicial Imagination: Writing After Nuremberg*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 56.

³¹⁶ Stonebridge, “The Man in the Glass Booth: Hannah Arendt’s Irony”, p.48.

³¹⁷ J.E. Young, *Israel’s Memorial Landscape: Forests, Monuments and Kibbutzim*, in *The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 240.

³¹⁸ H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

³¹⁹ See for example Holocaust historian David Cesarani’s critique of Arendt in: D. Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a “Desk Murderer”*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2007).

³²⁰ Stonebridge, “The Man in the Glass Booth: Hannah Arendt’s Irony.”, p. 68.

³²¹ P. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (London: Abacus, 1988).

[...] the value of testimony and its veracity should no doubt be assessed in the terrain of historical truth and sociological analysis, but its significance goes well beyond that: testimony, to begin with, provides the survivor with a reason to live; it allows him/her to build an authority that frees him/her from the mere status of victim while also allowing for him/her to claim an identity where trauma is overcome; in short, it gives him/her a winner status in the war against memory that we find inscribed in the Third Reich's entire system of extermination.³²²

Others, for example literary critic Shoshana Felman, have challenged the idea that there should be a juxtaposition between reliance upon individual testimony, and the universal moral and legal imperative to confront crimes against humanity.³²³ And it is indeed the case that the use of testimony within post-Holocaust memorialisation retains a widely accepted role. Not only as a form of therapy for survivors and their descendants, and a means for the Jews as a people to heal, but also, in the context of the resurgence of the far right and the disturbing trend towards Holocaust denial, as a way to keep the reality of what took place alive.³²⁴

Nevertheless, as previously examined in chapter two of this thesis, there is a school of thought that regards this focus on individual testimony as excessively 'lachrymose'; a view that converges to some extent with Arendt's rejection of the 'culture of expiation' and victimhood.³²⁵ And, as the debate around the siting and function of the proposed Westminster Holocaust memorial illustrates, there is little consensus on the contemporary form that memorialisation should take.³²⁶ Should it focus on the absence created by the murder of six million Jews, on the gaps created by this haunting negative space; by their erasure from history? Or should it focus on what remains, invested in significant objects, of the lives of those who perished?

Theodor Adorno's oft-cited declaration that to create art after Auschwitz is barbaric suggests that the enormity of the Shoah is such that it cannot and should not be aesthetically commemorated.³²⁷ However, as I discuss in chapter two, Adorno subsequently modified this statement, made in the immediate aftermath of the war.

³²² A. S. Ribeiro, *Memory, Identity, and Representation: The Limits of Theory and the Construction of Testimony*, *RCCS Annual Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (2011), p. 9

³²³ S. Felman, "Theaters of Justice: Arendt in Jerusalem, the Eichmann Trial, and the Redefinition of Legal Meaning in the Wake of the Holocaust," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2001), pp. 201–238.

³²⁴ B. Simms & C. Laderman, *The longest hatred*, *New Statesman*, 6th-12th May, (2016), pp. 23-29

³²⁵ Stonebridge, "The Man in the Glass Booth: Hannah Arendt's Irony." P. 59.

³²⁶ Evans, *How should we remember the Holocaust?*

³²⁷ Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 34.

And, as the Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor Elie Wiesel, pointedly asked, 'How is one to speak of it? How is one not to speak of it?'³²⁸ One answer to this conundrum is to consciously focus on the power of absence; on expressing the way that all individuality was erased by the Nazis. This aesthetic is visible in many contemporary Holocaust memorials. It is there in the blank stone pillars of the Berlin Jewish memorial, in the empty shelves of the memorial to burned books at Berlin University, and in the artist Rachel Whiteread's (b. 1963), 'sealed library' in Vienna.³²⁹ All of these memorials focus on the spaces in between; on the holes created by a life erased or an object that was destroyed. They serve as a powerful reminder that six million people were murdered and their lives were cut short.³³⁰ They do not focus on individuals, but instead are anonymous. All individuality has been taken from them; like the murdered Jews who were forced to have their own individuality erased. As cultural theorist Rebecca Comay observes, the use of absence in Holocaust memorials, such as that created by Rachel Whiteread, can be a powerful way of confronting the public with the memory of those who were murdered by the Nazis. We cannot get into the sealed library; the stories held within it are lost to us because the people they belonged to are no longer here.

Other artists have gone further still, creating monuments to the Holocaust that are designed to disappear over time, eventually being marked only by their absence and the memory of something that was once there, but is no more. Young discusses one such monument, created in a shopping centre in the German city of Hamburg. The monument took the form of a giant stone pillar on which people were encouraged to write messages. As the messages were written the pillar began to disappear into the ground, until after a few years it was conspicuous only by its absence. It can be suggested that here the artist was trying to symbolise the 'disappearing' of Jews from parts of Europe where there had once been many millions of them.³³¹

A further step along this performative route was taken by the conceptual artist Jochen Gerz (b. 1940) in his work *2146 Stones: A monument against racism* (1990-93) in Saarbrücken, which was literally designed to be invisible. Under the cover of

³²⁸ Young, *Memory and counter memory: Towards the social aesthetic of Holocaust memorials*, pp. 78-102.

³²⁹ J. Craven, *About the Berlin Holocaust memorial*, (ThoughtCo: 18th July 2019) <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-berlin-holocaust-memorial-by-peter-eisenman-177928> [Accessed: 16/02/2022].

R. Comay, 'Memory Block, Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust Memorial in Vienna', in *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 251-271.

³³⁰ D. Libeskind, *Trauma*, in *Image and Remembrance Representation and the Holocaust*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 43-58.

³³¹ J. E. Young, 'The countermonument: Memory against itself in Germany', in *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 27.

darkness a group of art students removed around seventy cobblestones from the square leading to a former Gestapo headquarters, and engraved them with the names and locations of over two thousand Jewish cemeteries that had been destroyed by the Nazis. The stones were then replaced facing downwards so that the engravings could not be seen. The public was subsequently invited to discover for themselves which stones had been replaced. By creating a monument that was invisible, Gerz hoped to 'return the burden of memory' to the public, instead of monuments and memorials doing the remembering for them.³³²

Such examples are often referred to as 'counter-monuments' or 'anti-monuments'. They are not designed to be there permanently. In some cases it might even be possible to walk past them without knowing there had ever been a monument in existence. This essentially conceptual approach to memorial art contrasts strongly with a focus on 'what remains'; on testimonies to the lives of individual people. Diaries, photograph albums and other mementos, paintings, drawings and familiar household items; all of these objects allow us to relate in a concrete way to people, individuals and families. They are an individual's personal testimony, their way of telling us what happened to them and drawing us into the act of witnessing. As we have seen in relation to the children's drawings at Yad Layeled, this can be a powerful memorial tool.

Artists who reference tangible, tactile objects and artefacts in their testimonial work on the Holocaust may, consciously or not, be drawing on a wider modern and contemporary art tradition of utilising 'found objects' in artworks.³³³ Found objects (or *objets trouvés*), whether books, photographs, toys, items of clothing and other memorabilia, or natural materials and industrial artefacts, have been used to create diverse works of art over many decades, notably within the Surrealist and Dadaist traditions (most famously by the French artist, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)). However, for post-Holocaust artists, a pile of shoes or suitcases, or iconic images of train tracks, take on a very different, tragic connotation. In the context of a Holocaust museum or memorial, such testimonial objects directly connect the viewer, in a tactile, visceral way, to the millions of lives that have been cut short.

Art historians such as Monica Bohm-Duchen and Avram Kampf have discussed the ways in which these iconic symbols have been utilised by artists, sometimes in a semi-abstract or subversive form, and in different mediums, not only to represent the Holocaust, but also to make an emotional connection with the viewer.³³⁴ Bohm-Duchen

³³²Young, *Memory and Counter-Memory: Towards a Social Aesthetic of Holocaust Memorials*, pp. 78-80.

³³³Tate, *Found Object, Art Term*, (London: Tate, 2022,) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/found-object> [Accessed: 16/02/2022].

³³⁴Kampf, *The Holocaust*.

M. Bohm-Duchen, *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art*.

provides powerful examples of the way artists such as Elsa Pollack (1910 - 2006), in her clay sculpture of victims' shoes, or Fabio Mauri (1926 - 2009) with his wall installation of discarded suitcases, have utilised commonplace artefacts to great effect. She notes that:

[...] apparently matter-of-fact representation of artefacts displayed in museums devoted to the Holocaust, provide an effective commentary on the way such objects are both unbearably vivid and impossibly distant.³³⁵

Some artists, such as photographer Susanna Pieratzki (b.1965), adopt a more conceptual but equally affecting approach by using mundane items, such as babies' shoes or coat-hangers, juxtaposed to human images. In a series of portraits of her parents, both Holocaust survivors, she reflects upon their suffering and loss from the point of view of the next generation.³³⁶

These kinds of images appear over and over again within the works of post-Holocaust artists, as a kind of visual shorthand for the barbarism experienced in the Shoah. Likewise, images of lost families are central to many artists' work. As Kampf notes, this reflects the fact that an entire generation of Jewish children were directly touched by the Holocaust, whether as victims themselves, or because they had lost family members, and were forced to find new lives in unfamiliar countries. In this sense, the use of symbolic visual imagery illustrates the way that the Holocaust weighed heavily on the psyche of those who survived, and still weighs heavily now after several generations.³³⁷

The emotional impact of testimonial objects is not just limited to those from before and during the Holocaust but also extends to the immediate post war period. As Marta Brunelli discusses, in this instance the objects may take the form of exercise books, photographs, drawings and teaching materials, such as those used in attempts made to reintegrate Jewish child survivors, which have subsequently been found in archives. These objects also speak to us of the children's horrific experiences and their search for some normality after all they had endured.³³⁸ The use of found objects and testimony may be symbolic or actual, and in the context of the Shoah often speak eloquently to the absence of humanity; for example, the piles of shoes that are found within many Holocaust museum displays. It is clear to the viewer that these shoes used

³³⁵M. Bohm-Duchen, *Fifty Years On, After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995), p. 137.

³³⁶ Bohm-Duchen, *Fifty years on*, pp. 142-143.

³³⁷ Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj, Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art*, pp. 88-99.

³³⁸ Brunelli, "There are no children here" and "Back to school", p. 706.

to belong to people who were murdered by the Nazis. In viewing them our attention is drawn to the sheer number of ordinary people whose lives were extinguished. Shoes, seemingly mundane items outside the context of a Holocaust display, tell an instantly familiar story of horror and loss within this framework.

A further example of an iconic symbol is the use of 'Stolpersteine' (literally stumble stones) in many German streets as a form of remembrance for the victims of Nazi persecution who could no longer walk there.³³⁹ These stones are designed to stop people short when walking over them; they are unexpected and we could literally stumble over them. When we read the names on the stones, we are reminded of the many hundreds, if not thousands of Jewish people who once lived in the town or city through which we are walking, who were brutalised and humiliated on those streets, and eventually deported to the camps. Other examples of frequently used symbols include rail tracks and train carriages, family photographs; and, most horrifically of all, fire or smoke; all of which are referenced throughout Holocaust-related visual media, sometimes allegorically, as in Ferenc Torok's 2017 film, *1945*, based on post-Second World War Hungary.³⁴⁰

The tension between Holocaust memorial art that bears witness to, and honours the victims, in a direct and personal way – and more abstract, conceptual artistic statements that speak to the magnitude of the horror perpetrated – is particularly acute in relation to children's memorials, especially those with a clear pedagogical vision and purpose such as at Yad Layeled. There are aesthetic as well as ethical challenges involved in creating testimonial art that is appropriate to the sensibilities of young people, but which does not over-simplify, distort or sentimentalise the Shoah. These concerns extend to literary as well as visual art forms. For example, the multitude of books about the Holocaust that have been written for and about children and young adults – such as 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' – can be seen as problematic in some respects.³⁴¹ Although such works can play a positive role by engaging with young people's viewpoints, recent research by the Centre for Holocaust Education at University College London has suggested they can also 'perpetuate a number of dangerous inaccuracies and fallacies.'³⁴²

Nevertheless, there is clearly a role for the imaginative use of oral, visual and

³³⁹ E. Apperly, 'Stumbling stones': a different vision of Holocaust remembrance, (The Guardian: 18th February 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/18/stumbling-stones-a-different-vision-of-holocaust-remembrance> [Accessed on: 16/02/2022].

³⁴⁰ *1945*, dir. by Ferenc Torok (UK Jewish Film Festival, 2017).

³⁴¹ J. Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas: A Fable*. (New York: David Fickling Books, 2006).

³⁴² Centre for Holocaust Education, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas in English secondary schools*, (London: UCL, 27/01/2022) <https://holocausteducation.org.uk/research/the-boy-in-the-striped-pyjamas-in-english-secondary-schools/> [Accessed; 16/02/2022].

written media – as at Yad Layeled – to engage with a younger audience, for whom more abstract and symbolic art forms may not resonate. As Marianne Hirsch has noted, in her discussion of post-Holocaust artistic works by second-generation children of survivors, many were created in innovative, experimental ways, often with a younger audience in mind, to draw them into their narratives.³⁴³ Hirsch discusses how these works allow those artists and writers to grapple with their own intergenerational, 'post-memory' trauma; a product of the knowledge of what their parents went through. The idea of intergenerational trauma infers that a parent who was a survivor could transmit the trauma of their own experiences to their children, who could then pass it on to their own families. The children of survivors are forced to try and comprehend the horror of what their parents went through and to reconcile that knowledge with the image that they may have had of their own parents.³⁴⁴

These experiences find expression in creative works such as cartoonist Art Spiegelman's controversial graphic novel *Maus*, (1986) based on his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor.³⁴⁵ Or in writer and illustrator Judith Kerr's semi-autobiographic work, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), written as a way to explain to children her own escape as a child refugee from Nazi Germany.³⁴⁶ As Hirsch discusses, *Maus* (and also *Fifty Years of Silence* (1992) by Tatana Kellner) reflect both the experiences of survivor parents, and their children's accounts of growing up in the shadow of their parents' lives.³⁴⁷ As she argues:

Post Holocaust artists are necessarily confronted with the raw power of 'the thing itself' as well as with the artistic imperative to transform, symbolise and mediate. Many of their works are expressions of this double confrontation.³⁴⁸

These artists create works that attempt to confront what happened to them, their families or those around them. They are trying to take something that is for many younger people today unimaginable, and make it into something tangible that they can understand; often by drawing them visually into the narrative they are telling. In Kerr's case, the narrative is deliberately compelling and even light-hearted and funny, but with very dark undertones that an older audience will detect. By creating it in a way that

³⁴³ Hirsch & Suleiman, 'Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust Art', pp. 79-96.

³⁴⁴ Hirsch & Suleiman, 'Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust Art', pp. 89-92.

³⁴⁵ A. Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*, (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

³⁴⁶ J. Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, (London: Collins, 1971).

³⁴⁷ Hirsch & Suleiman, 'Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust Art', pp. 79-96.

T. Kellner, 71125, *Fifty years of silence: Eva Kellner's Story*, (Rosendale, N.Y. Women's Studio, Workshop, 1992).

³⁴⁸ Hirsch & Suleiman. 'Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust Art', p. 80.

reaches children and adults differentially, art becomes something that can be accessed by all generations. The Yad Layeled memorial, for instance, was created principally for children to be able to visit and learn from. However adult visitors are also drawn in and emotionally affected by the child-like imagery in the windows; just as a parent reading Kerr's book to a child will relate to its content at a different level.

All these works engage us by allowing us to become witness to someone else's testimony. They allow the passing down of generational memory from one group of people to the next. As Bohm-Duchen notes in her discussion of post-Holocaust art, there are enormous aesthetic and moral challenges involved in art that takes this form. Sometimes, particularly in the case of witness art, the content can be so visually disturbing that the viewer can hardly bear to look at it. Other post-Holocaust works may be beautiful, colourful, even aesthetically pleasing, to the point where they draw the viewer in before they realise the true subject matter, and the brutality and horror of what is being depicted.³⁴⁹ As well as being passed down from parents to children, the concept of intergenerational trauma suggests that the trauma of the Holocaust can be passed down through entire generations and potentially shape the narrative of Jewish history. This in turn, feeds into much contemporary discussion of the role and function of Holocaust memorials, and whether they prevent whole generations from 'moving on' from the past, and forever being seen as victims of suffering.³⁵⁰ The search for appropriate forms of remembrance – and an effective visual language – through which to negotiate these problematic questions is the subject I explore next, with specific reference to the aesthetic choices made at Yad Layeled.

³⁴⁹ Bohm-Duchen, *Fifty Years On*, pp. 103-145.

³⁵⁰ Berberich, *Introduction: the Holocaust in contemporary culture*, pp. 1-11.

3. Testimony and visual language

Bearing the above considerations in mind, how then should we view the 'social aesthetic' of the windows created by Halter at Yad Layeled? In order to evaluate its role as both a memorial and an educational space, one needs to look at the ways in which memorialisation and testimony were specifically incorporated into the concept with young people in mind. Seen through this lens, we can comprehend why the windows at Yad Layeled were deliberately designed to be aesthetically accessible, affecting memorial works, based upon artistic and written testimonies that relate directly to a modern generation.

The aesthetic strength of Halter's contribution to post-Holocaust art is recognised by Bohm-Duchen, who argues that much of his oeuvre 'dwells on the suffering of women and children in order to highlight the tragic pathos of his subjects. Sentimentality, however, is averted by a strong graphic awareness.'³⁵¹ Halter's works are intended to be hard hitting as well as reflecting his sense of loss. Frequently, they are created in a fashion that draws in the viewer aesthetically, often via luminous, strongly expressionist imagery, which is juxtaposed to many smaller images within the larger one, each representing a single death. At Yad Layeled, by utilising this stylised, pared-down visual language, the windows translate the children's experience, expressed through his rendering of their drawings, into a living, visceral one.

Reflecting on a conversation with 'Antek' Zuckerman, about the impetus behind the creation of the Yad Layeled memorial, Halter gave some indication of the Warsaw Ghetto leaders' – and his own - aesthetic approach to remembrance.³⁵² Zuckerman related to Halter how a boy in the Warsaw Ghetto had asked him to find him a violin teacher. Even though he knew that it was unlikely the boy would survive, he did find him such a teacher; in order, as he put it, to 'feed his soul'. The boy was murdered by the Nazis, but the violin teacher told Zuckerman that the boy had been a brilliant violin player.³⁵³

The fact that people created art, wrote letters and played music, may seem unbelievable in the context of the Shoah. However, for the children of the Terezin camp it was a form of self-expression and a means of escaping the horrors of their everyday lives, if only for a short period of time. For artists who created works within the camps, it was a way of recording what they saw. For Zuckerman, the fact that the boy would be able to have a period of creativity and joy, however limited, due to learning to play the

³⁵¹ Bohm-Duchen. *Fifty Years On*, p. 136.

³⁵² Roman Halter, letter to *Jewish Chronicle*.

³⁵³ Roman Halter, letter to *Jewish Chronicle*.

violin, was the most important thing. In the same way, although it may have seemed futile to continue to teach children within the camps, by offering them art classes and allowing them to depict their lives and experiences, artist teachers, such as Dicker-Brandies and others like her, kept hope alive. They were giving these children agency, and a means of escaping their everyday reality.

Zuckerman's comments were entirely in keeping with the mission of Ghetto Fighters' House, and subsequently Yad Layeled. As Young has noted, its founders were determined that 'this "monument to the child" would represent not only the children of the Holocaust but, in its generic title, all children, both then and now.'³⁵⁴ Young also observes that the experiences of the ghetto fighters and partisans 'have left an unmistakable imprint on the very forms that remembrance takes here', including a dedication to commemorating and celebrating spiritual as well as other forms of resistance.³⁵⁵

Halter's memorial windows, dedicated to the child victims of the Shoah, contain that 'unmistakable imprint'. Whatever the level of horror, whatever the outcome, they express the life-affirming idea that it was and still is vital to embrace spiritual resistance and look to the future. For this reason, the memorial focuses on celebrating the children's creativity and engaging with the children of today. His challenge, as a survivor and as an artist, was to find a way of translating the testimonies of the children of Terezin into a contemporary visual idiom whilst staying true to their original spirit, thereby giving a voice to those whose lives had been so brutally cut short. His stained glass windows are the triumphant outcome.

As previously discussed, the multiple layers of testimony contained within the Yad Layeled memorial lend it a particularly powerful impact. But why should this be the case? Whether a testimonial object is a child's drawing or poem, a family photograph, letter or item of clothing, their materiality creates an emotional connection with the viewer or reader. It can be argued that by engaging with these objects the viewer is taking part in a mediated form of witnessing. Testimonial objects take us back to the point in time they originated from, and provide insight into the lives of those to whom they belonged. Holocaust memorials of this kind enable us to relate to the past, and to named individuals, in a way that more abstract and distanced monuments in general cannot.

The widespread use of testimonial objects within museum settings is not without its critics. For example, art historian Reesa Greenberg asks, in her study of Vienna's Jewish museum, whether the fact that virtually every Jewish museum

³⁵⁴ J.E. Young, *Israel's Memorial Landscape: Forests, Monuments and Kibbutzim*, p. 240.

³⁵⁵ J. E. Young, *Israel's Memorial Landscape: Forests, Monuments and Kibbutzim*, p. 240.

contains such exhibits risks turning them all into sites of remembrance, where the Holocaust is the dominant narrative overshadowing the entirety of Jewish history. She also questions whether there is a risk of romanticising and sentimentalising aspects of the Holocaust experience – for example in novels, films and art that focus on ‘human interest’ individual stories.³⁵⁶

Nevertheless, first-hand testimony – particularly via visual representation – remains a powerful form of memorialisation. For example, the scrapbooks created by Jewish artist and survivor Arnold Daghani (1909-1985), which he filled with sketches whilst incarcerated in a Ukrainian forced labour camp, tell us graphically what he himself witnessed. For Daghani, as for so many Holocaust artists, it was a way of bearing witness to and recording for posterity the indescribable events that they had seen. Some of the prisoners’ artworks were graffitied onto the walls of huts within the camps and can still be seen by visitors today.³⁵⁷ Even in the midst of such horror, people found ways to reproduce what they saw around them and create art.³⁵⁸ Other victims of the Shoah recorded scenes from their earlier lives, in anticipation of their likely fate. This was the case with the young German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon, who, whilst exiled in France, created hundreds of deeply expressive paintings and drawings, recording her entire existence in one artwork, enigmatically entitled *Life? Or Theatre?*. This extraordinary work chronicled her troubled life from before her birth all the way through to her eventual deportation to Auschwitz in 1943, leaving us a unique testimony to the ‘spiritual form of resistance’ displayed by so many of the Nazis’ eventual victims.³⁵⁹

These artworks were created by those who were there at the time; they are immediate and capable therefore of taking us back to that dark period in history. Testimony in this context focuses on the witness and on the intergenerational power of a testimonial object – sometimes described as ‘post-memory’ - that allows second and future generations to participate in witnessing the past. When we look at an artwork or photograph, or read the diaries or letters of victims and survivors, we are allowed a glimpse into their lives. As the historian Leo Spitzer has argued, by viewing a

³⁵⁶ R. Greenberg, ‘The Jewish Museum, Vienna: a Holographic Paradigm for History and the Holocaust’, in, *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) pp. 235-251.

³⁵⁷ *Works of art, Historical collection* (Memorial, and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau: 2022) <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/works-of-art/> [Accessed: 16/02/2022] A. Daghani, *Last Portrait: Painting for Posterity*, (Yad Vashem: 2009) https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/last_portrait/daghani.asp [Accessed: 16/02/2022].

³⁵⁸ Arnold Daghani was a Jewish artist in a forced labour camp in Ukraine who recorded in diaries and scrapbooks the events that he saw unfold around him, creating art from what he witnessed. Daghani survived the war and his scrapbooks were eventually donated to The Keep archives in Falmer, Brighton where they can still be viewed by the public today.

³⁵⁹ J. E. Young, *Israel's Memorial Landscape: Forests, Monuments and Kibbutzim*, p. 240.

testimonial object we are adding an individual identity to those who would otherwise have been lost from memory.³⁶⁰ It is easy to see why such a direct, personal approach would have felt particularly apposite to Halter - who himself repeatedly drew upon his childhood memories of the Shoah in his artworks - when considering how to create the first children's Holocaust memorial. Testimonial objects that date from the pre-Holocaust era have a particularly poignant significance: letters, diaries and family photographs tell us a great deal about people's daily lives. Many of these objects were secreted away when the Nazis first came to power, as was the case with Halter's own family.³⁶¹ Most were lost or stolen, but the handful he was eventually able to retrieve can be regarded as 'memory traces'; testimonial objects that speak powerfully to later generations.³⁶²

The powerful impact of such objects is still recognised today. For example, a focus on the 'buried' everyday lives of Jewish families in Europe, before the Nazis' rise to power, is very much the curatorial approach taken by the Imperial War Museum's new Holocaust exhibition, which opened in October 2021. Drawing on the museum's collection of over two thousand testimonial objects belonging to victims and survivors, the curators have created an exhibition that opens with personal stories and eye-witness accounts. Family photographs – of picnics, holidays, school gatherings - and other memorabilia, including sound recordings, illustrate the narrative, as the tragic events unfold.³⁶³

What makes these testimonial objects so powerful is the way, as at Yad Layeled, that they give us privileged access to the individual stories of a fraction of the Nazis' countless victims.³⁶⁴ In this sense, the IWM exhibition galleries have a clear educational purpose beyond that of memorialisation, helping contemporary audiences to engage meaningfully with these tragic historical events. Spitzer discusses more generally the way that artefacts, including those retrieved from within the camps, provide a powerful insight into the lives of Holocaust victims and survivors.³⁶⁵ Such objects carry memory traces from the past, argues Spitzer, and also embody the very

³⁶⁰ L. Spitzer, 'Testimonial Objects', in *The generation of postmemory. Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 177-199.

³⁶¹ When he returned to Chodecz after the war, Halter dug up the chest containing family memorabilia, but the contents were taken from him by a Russian soldier. However he was able to recover some of the objects hidden with non-Jewish friends, including a few childhood photos, currently held in the family's archives.

³⁶² M. Hirsch & Suleiman, 'Material Memory. Holocaust Testimony in Post-Holocaust art', pp. 79-96.

³⁶³ Bulgin, *The Holocaust*, pp. 4-12.

³⁶⁴ J. Freedland, 'Holocaust exhibit, A humane glimpse into the 'drops in an ocean of blood,' *The Guardian*, Monday 11th October 2021.

³⁶⁵ One particularly poignant example he cites is a cookbook - entitled *In Memory's Kitchen* - created by a group of women in the Terezin camp. Even as they starved, these women devoted themselves to writing down traditional Jewish recipes that they recalled from their recent past. These too are a form of testimony, providing a moving insight into the everyday lives that had been lost. Spitzer, 'Testimonial Objects', pp. 178-179.

process of their transmission. They testify to the historical context and daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced, and to the ways in which material objects leave an imprint from one generation to the next.³⁶⁶ This idea of memory traces is closely related to that of inter-generational memory; the suggestion that the second and third generations carry within them a degree of post-Holocaust memory, brought to the foreground through visual and written culture and testimony.

The Yad Layeled windows, by attempting to create a 'visual bridge' between generations of children, utilise testimonial objects in a very specific pedagogical way. As well as being a memorial space, Yad Layeled also has an educational purpose. From the start, the importance of the children of today being able to connect with the subject matter of the memorial was considered paramount. As Halter himself explained in the museum's catalogue, he chose to interpret the drawings of the children in the medium of stained glass for a particular purpose. It was so that, 'Through light and colour and brightness the memory of those children can be conveyed to today's generation of children and to those generations yet to come.'³⁶⁷

This concept of resilience, beauty, and human agency, even in the darkest of times, runs like a thread throughout the Yad Layeled project. Halter writes movingly of his own children and grandchildren coming to see him and his son Ardyn install the last of the stained glass windows, and of taking deep satisfaction in their having achieved their purpose: 'It was a moment of considerable emotion when we saw the children standing in the coloured beams of light in the Memorial Hall. They identified with the positive and the beautiful in what was lost.'³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Spitzer, 'Testimonial Objects', p. 177-199.

³⁶⁷ Halter, *Yad Layeled*, p. 48.

³⁶⁸ Halter, *Yad Layeled*, p. 48.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored what it means for artists to grapple with what James E. Young refers to as the 'social aesthetic' of Holocaust memorialisation. This is used here in the sense of the specific way that time, place, national history and social context impact upon what Young describes as the very 'texture of memory'.³⁶⁹ These are complex, multi-layered issues that, with each new generation, give rise to fresh debates over the purpose and usefulness of memorial art. With the passage of time since the Holocaust, the imperative to 'return the burden of memory' to the public – to engage it actively in remembering the crimes perpetrated in the Shoah – becomes arguably ever more urgent.

The focus of this chapter has been on deconstructing how this can best be achieved. By exploring Roman Halter's creative contribution to the Yad Layeled children's memorial in Israel, I suggest that his interpretation of the layers of testimony contained within it offers a powerful, mediated way to engage new generations in active remembering. This analysis is located within the specific context of that memorial's focus on resistance, creativity and redemption, reflecting its connection to the Ghetto Fighters' House museum at the same site. It is also situated within a wider interrogation of the role that testimonial objects, such as the Terezin drawings upon which Halter's windows are based, may play within post-Holocaust visual art.

I emphasise throughout this chapter that the relationship between such testimonial objects – between individual, concrete forms of artistic memorialisation, compared to those that are more symbolic, conceptual or abstract - is not a binary one. I further suggest in this chapter that the role of individual witness testimony need not be counterposed to more abstract concerns about human rights and retribution in the public sphere.³⁷⁰ On the contrary, remembrance and seeking justice, memorialising and moving forward, are not opposed but inter-related objectives. All have a critical role to play in ensuring that the crimes of the past are never repeated. These observations are relevant to the discussion of the aesthetics of memorialisation. They signify the many effective forms that Holocaust memorials can and have taken. These may include the tactile testimonial objects and memory traces of Holocaust victims and survivors, as well as more conceptual, performative and symbolic monumental works. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of remembering; all can contribute to foregrounding the lessons of the Shoah within the public realm.

³⁶⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*.

³⁷⁰ See discussion on this issue, in relation to Hannah Arendt and her critics, in, Traverso, *The End of Jewish Modernity*, pp. 75-76

Roman Halter's achievement was to create an empathetic aesthetic form through which he could re-represent, and keep alive, the testimony of others – the child victims of Terezin and their teacher – whilst also reflecting his own horrific lived experience as a child in the camps. His Yad Layeled windows negotiate the difficult tension between never forgetting the horror of the past whilst also trying to offer hope for the future. They do this both metaphorically and figuratively, by providing us with a window into the children's creativity – by, in the haunting words of 'Antek' Zuckerman, feeding the soul.

Conclusion

A core question interrogated in my thesis is the role that art can play in countering the dehumanising legacy of Nazi policies. As I have shown, artistic reflections on the Holocaust take many forms, from the most directly representational, to the most abstract and allusive. All may contribute to restoring a sense of humanity, even in response to the darkest of times. Running throughout this discourse is the search for an aesthetic that is capable of expressing what for many – particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Shoah – appeared inexpressible; indeed, an ‘aesthetic oxymoron’.³⁷¹ It also involves the quest for a form of post-Holocaust art that not only memorialises the victims and survivors, but serves a broader public purpose.

This pursuit of a ‘social aesthetic’ through which to reflect upon unfathomable horror, and engage in a dialogic process of remembering, is one that I discuss at length. For many post-Holocaust artists, countering what Primo Levi termed ‘the war against memory’ was paramount; a means of keeping alive that which the Nazis had sought to erase.³⁷² Whether figuratively, for example through visual renderings of testimonial objects, or in a more conceptual, distanced fashion, as in installations that convey the power of absence, many of the artworks that I have surveyed represent attempts to engage the public in an active dialogue with the past. For Halter, this societal dimension was a key element of his art. He chose stained glass - a public, permanent and ‘architectural’ art form – in which to create some his most significant Holocaust-related works. And many of his aesthetic decisions were predicated on their ability to engage with and educate contemporary audiences in the universal significance of the Shoah.

This rehumanising role of art was central to his purpose, and is evidenced throughout his artistic oeuvre. Where the Third Reich’s system of extermination reduced its victims to a dehumanised mass, Halter deliberately placed them centre stage. Whether in the Imperial War Museum paintings of his own family members, or the stained glass windows memorialising the child victims of the Terezin death camp, Halter’s art speaks across generations of individual lives lost. However, his artwork – notably, in the multiple iterations of his drawings and paintings – also repeatedly references the Nazi regime’s debased view of its victims, through the motif of tiny figures symbolising an anonymised faceless mass. By embedding this stylised imagery within works that compositionally focus on the individual, Halter’s work makes a powerful visual statement about human existence, and its destruction.

³⁷¹ Rubenstein & Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz the Holocaust and its legacy*, p.297.

³⁷² Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.

This theme of defiant remembrance runs like a thread throughout Halter's artistic practice. Sometimes it is there allegorically, for example in the use of biblical imagery in the *Jacob wrestling with the Angel* window analysed in chapter two, to represent struggle and redemption. Elsewhere, as in *The Last Journey* memorial window at the UK Holocaust Centre, Halter rehumanises the imagery contained in a brutally clinical SS photograph, of a grandmother and children on their way to the Auschwitz gas chambers.³⁷³ One of the most potent symbols of the redemptive power of art, analysed in chapter three, is the stained glass children's memorial at the Yad LaYeled museum in Israel. Here, through multiple layers of testimony, based on the Terezin children's drawings, Halter paid homage to their creativity and that of their art teacher, creating a 'monument to the child' that connects to future generations.

As I have emphasised, Halter's choice of stained glass as a medium was in itself a significant aesthetic statement about resilience and remembrance. Its numinous quality, its use of jewel-like colour and, above all, light, makes stained glass a particularly appropriate medium in which to both visually reflect on the Shoah and celebrate life. In this sense, Halter's non-Holocaust related stained glass artwork can also be seen to have a humanising, life-affirming purpose. By reasserting Jewish culture, religion and identity, in places of worship and other community centres, they too defiantly celebrate survival.

Halter's uncompromising war against forgetfulness, his commitment – in the words of his grandfather - to 'not philosophise' about the evil done to his people, was always front and centre in his work. His ability to fulfil that commitment, in a rugged, modernist aesthetic, has left a powerful legacy of memorial art that sends a warning from history. And it has achieved something else. By confronting that tough challenge, by 'finding beauty where there is horror,' Halter's artwork speaks to the future. It is the voice of defiance, of the human condition.³⁷⁴ Of a man in time **[Fig 54]**.

³⁷³Guterman (ed), *The Auschwitz Album*.

³⁷⁴ Wiggins, 'Roman Halter: the Eternal Light', p. 44.

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Illustrations

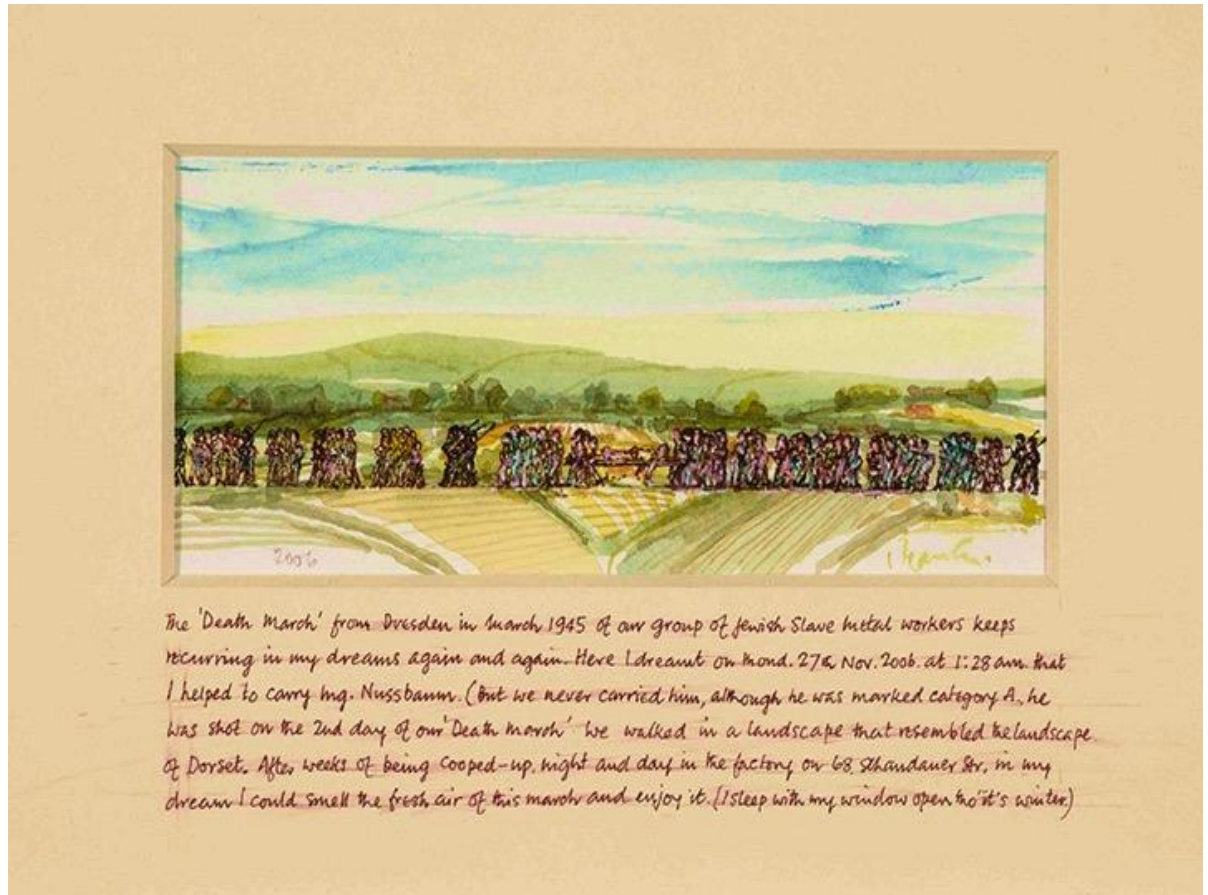


Fig 1

Roman Halter, *Death March from Dresden*, 1.10am, Tuesday 26 March 2002
2002, watercolour and ink on paper, 20.5 x 28.5 cm, The Ben Uri Gallery and Museum,
London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

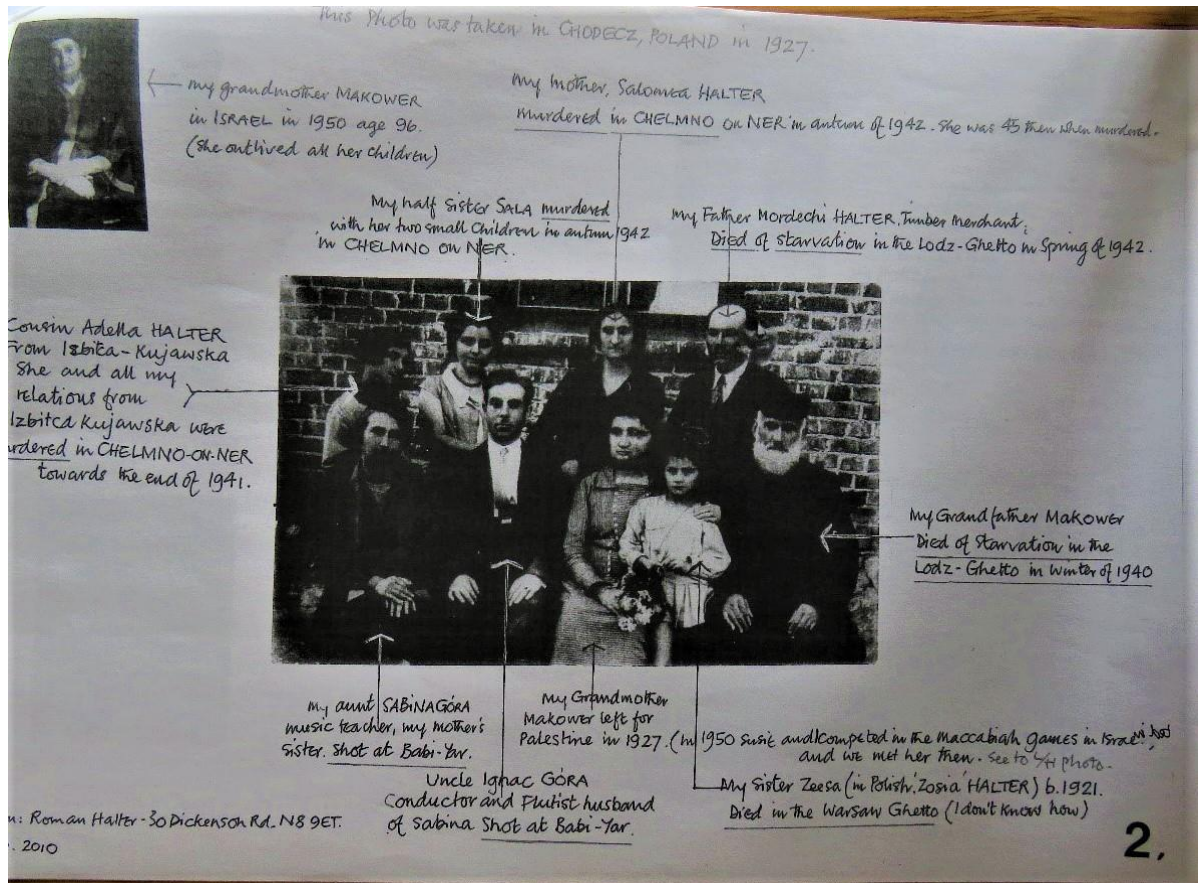


Fig 2

Copy of Halter family photograph, with annotations by Roman Halter, photo taken in Chodecz, Poland 1927, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 3

Roman Halter, *The Yad Vashem gate*, 1975, concrete and cast aluminium alloy, Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial centre, Photo taken by Anna Lopuska after conservation work on the gate in 2020. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 4

Roman Halter, *The Yad Vashem gate, close up of metalwork details*, 1975, concrete and cast aluminium alloy, Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial centre. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

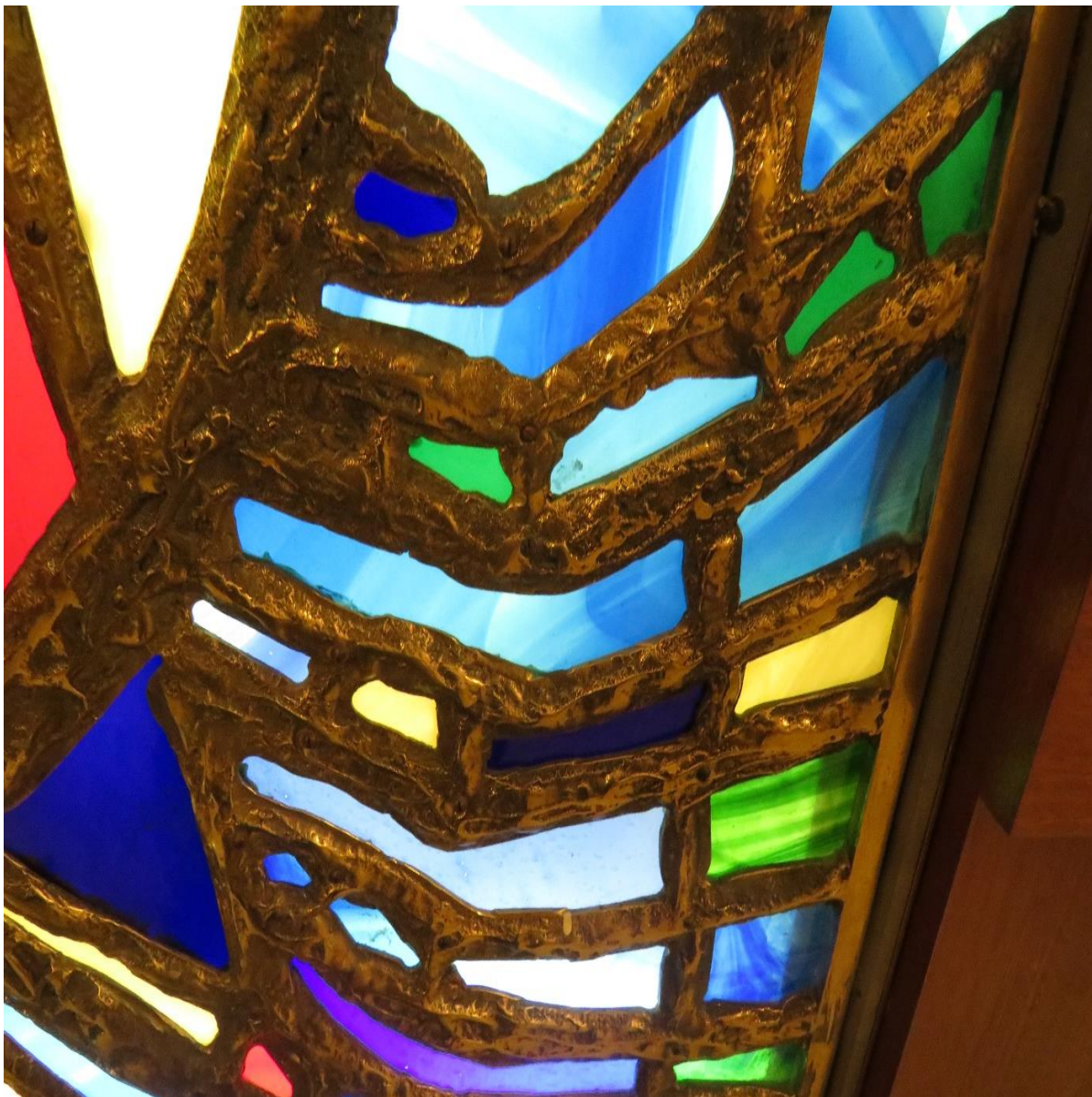


Fig 5

Roman Halter, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, close up of metal work detail, 1977-78, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 92.5 X 170.5 cm, The Central Synagogue, London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 6

Roman Halter, *Starved Faces*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91 x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17257.

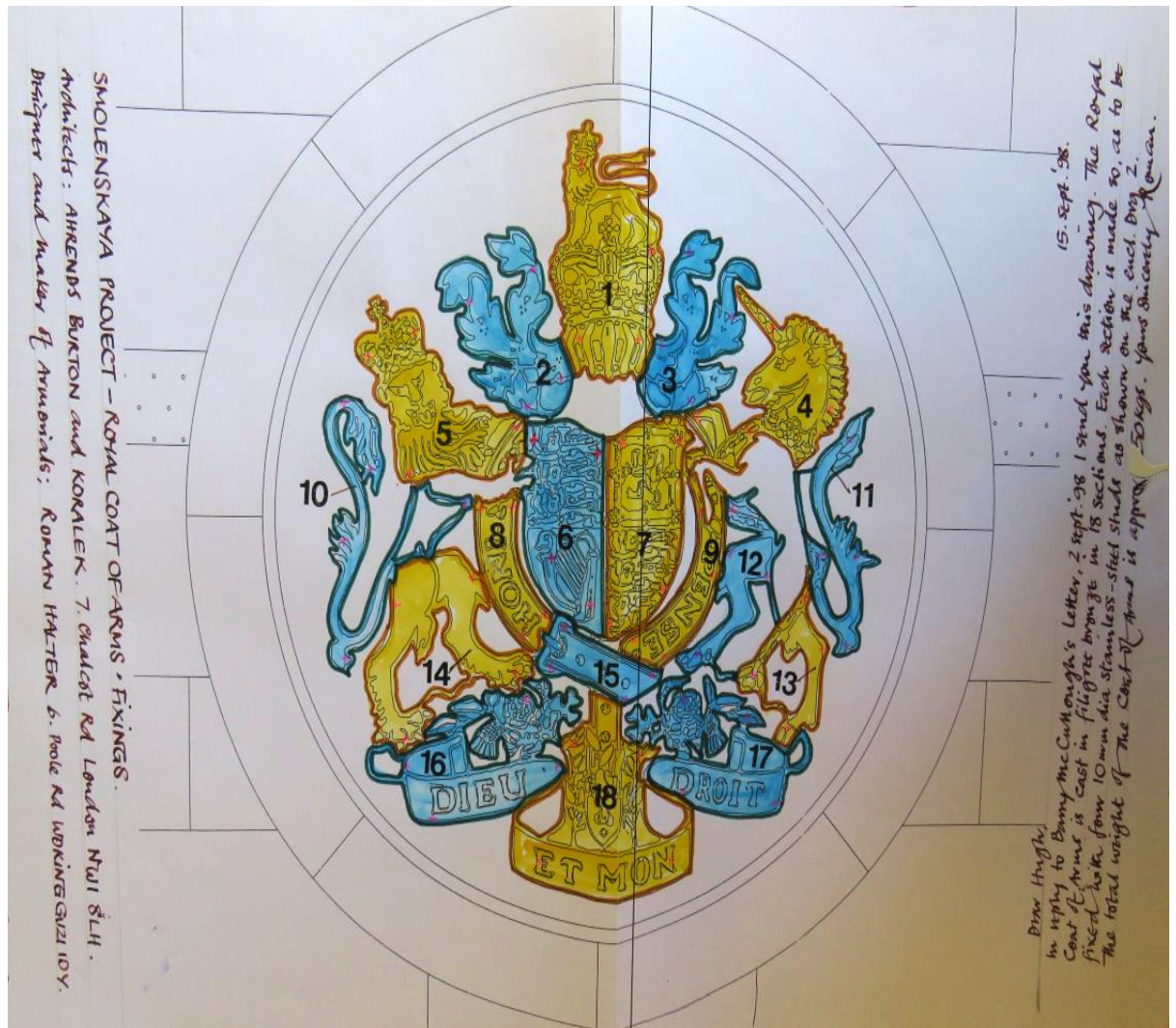


Fig 7

Roman Halter, *Design for coat of arms*, 1998, pen and ink on paper, HFA, Yeovil.
Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 8

Roman Halter, *Woman Wearing Mantilla*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17256.



Fig 9

David Hillman, *Chanukah window*, c.1958, stained glass with lead frame, 300 x 175 cm, The Central Synagogue, London. Photo Credit Sonia Halliday photo library.

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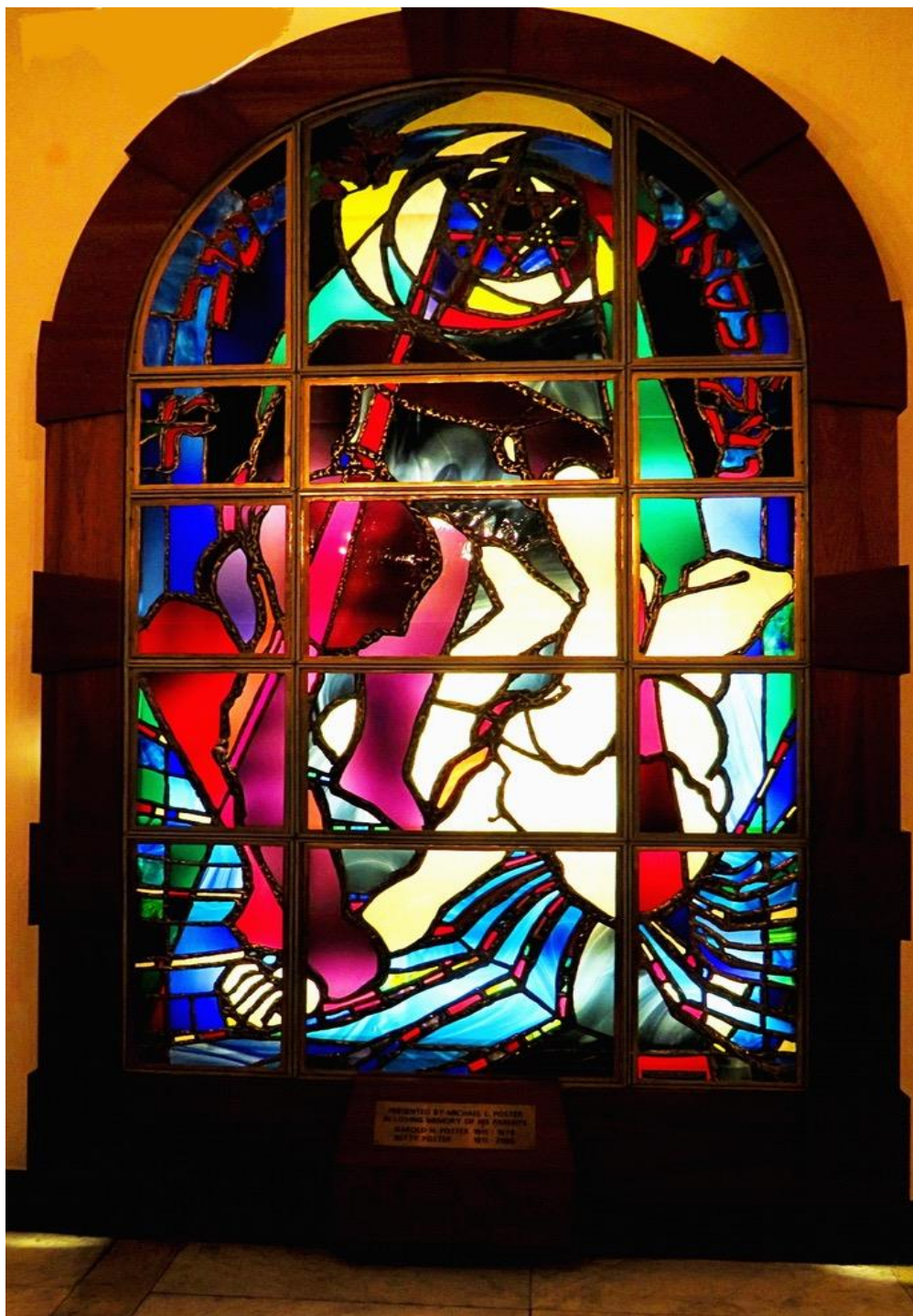


Fig 10

Roman Halter, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1977-78, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 292.5 X 170.5 cm. The Central Synagogue, London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

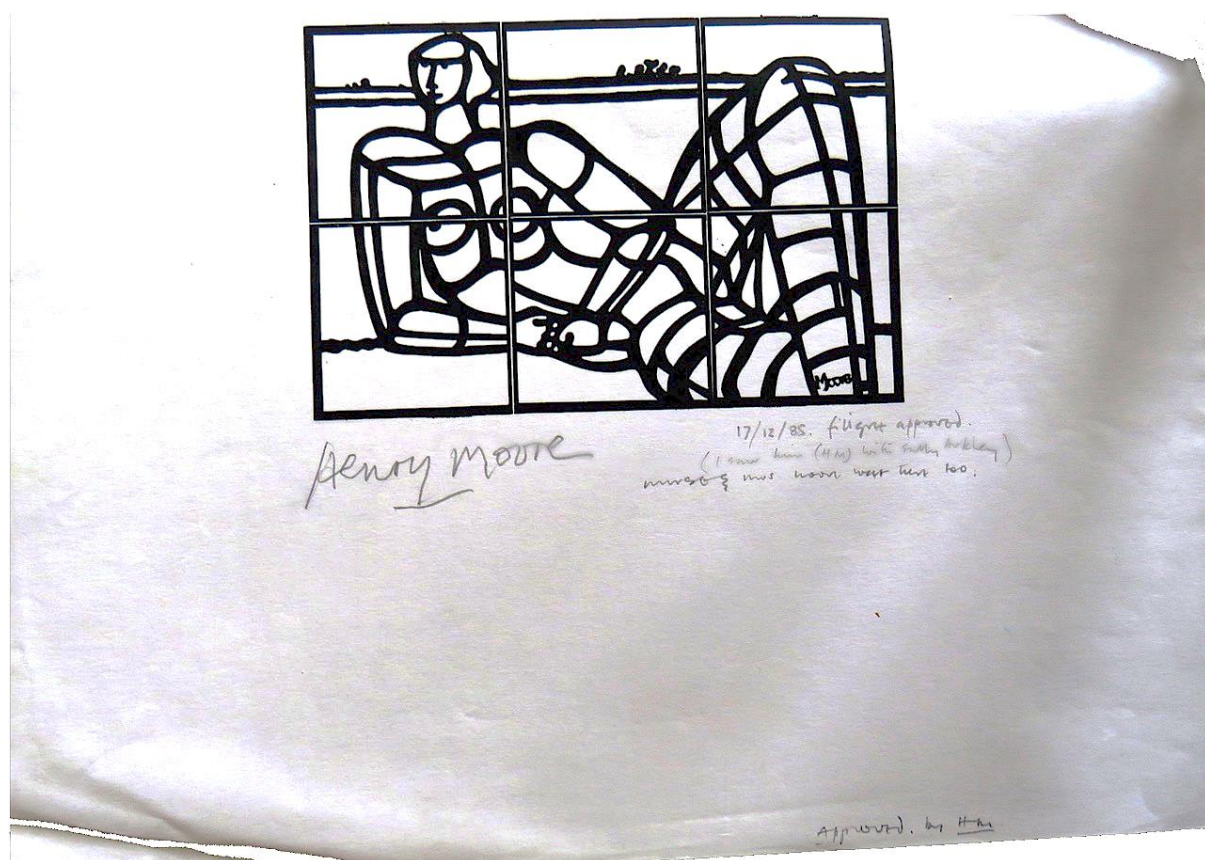


Fig 11

Roman Halter, cartoon for *Reclining Figure* window, 1985, final design, signed and approved by Henry Moore, ink and pencil on paper, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 12

Roman Halter, Cartoon for *Reclining Figure*, c.1985, window, detailing alternative colour scheme, watercolour and ink, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 13

Roman Halter & Henry Moore, *Reclining figure*, 1986, stained glass and cast aluminium alloy, 121 x 182 x 16.5 cm, until recently on loan to Ely Stained Glass Museum, Cambridge. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 14

Roman Halter, *The Jerusalem Window*, close up of metal work detail, 1977-78, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, The Central Synagogue, London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 15

Marc Chagall, *Levi*, stained glass with lead frame, 1962, Hadassah Hospital, Jerusalem, Israel, Musee National, Marc Chagall. copyright: ©ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2022. Photo Credit Sonia Halliday photo library.



Fig 16

Nehemia Azaz, *Six days of creation*, stained glass window, 1964-5, Carmel College, Wallingford. Copyright: ©The Nehemia Azaz Archive



Fig 17

Roman Halter, *Shlomo 1*, 1974, oil on Canvas, 91 x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17262.



Fig 18

Roman Halter, *Moses The Prophet*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91 x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17261.



Fig 19

Roman Halter, *Cartoon for stained glass window, with butterfly and panel of small figures*, 2011, gouache, acrylic and ink on mounted paper, Roman Halter Family Archive, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 20

Roman Halter, *Stained glass windows, framing the Ark New North London synagogue*, 2011, in cast and polished aluminium alloy, 272.25 x 46.5 cm, New North London synagogue, London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 21

Roman Halter, *Resistance: depicting resistance by the Jews*, 1997-2002, stained glass, Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Nottingham. Copyright: ©National Holocaust Centre and Museum.



Fig 22

Roman Halter, *Yellow Star*, 1997-2002, stained glass,
Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Nottingham. Copyright: ©National Holocaust Centre
and Museum.



Fig 23

Roman Halter, *The Last Journey: Victoria Vincent Memorial window*, 1997-2002, stained glass, Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Nottingham. Copyright: ©National Holocaust Centre and Museum.

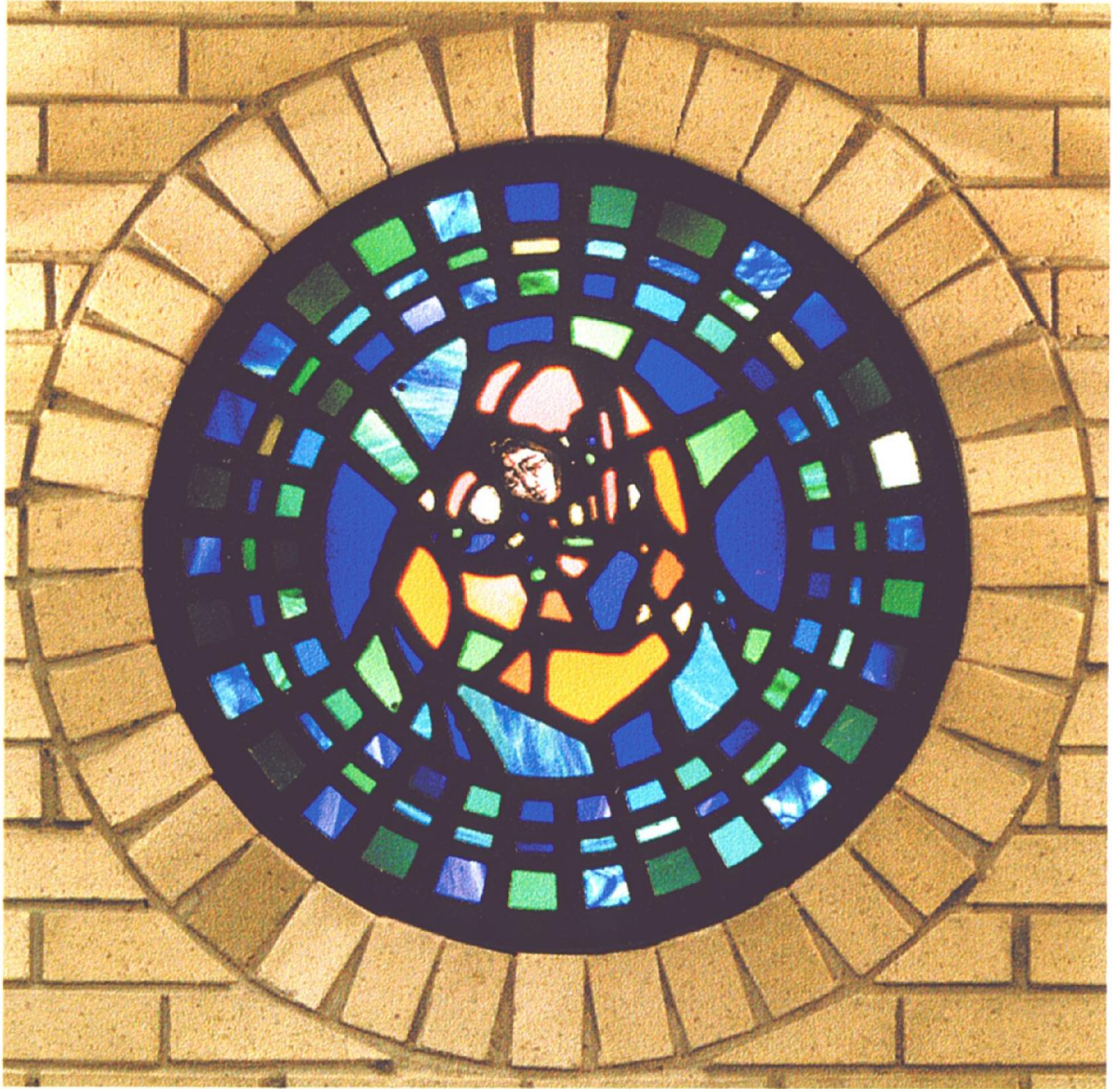


Fig 24

Roman Halter, *Mother and child*, 1997-2002, stained glass, Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Nottingham. Copyright: ©National Holocaust Centre and Museum.

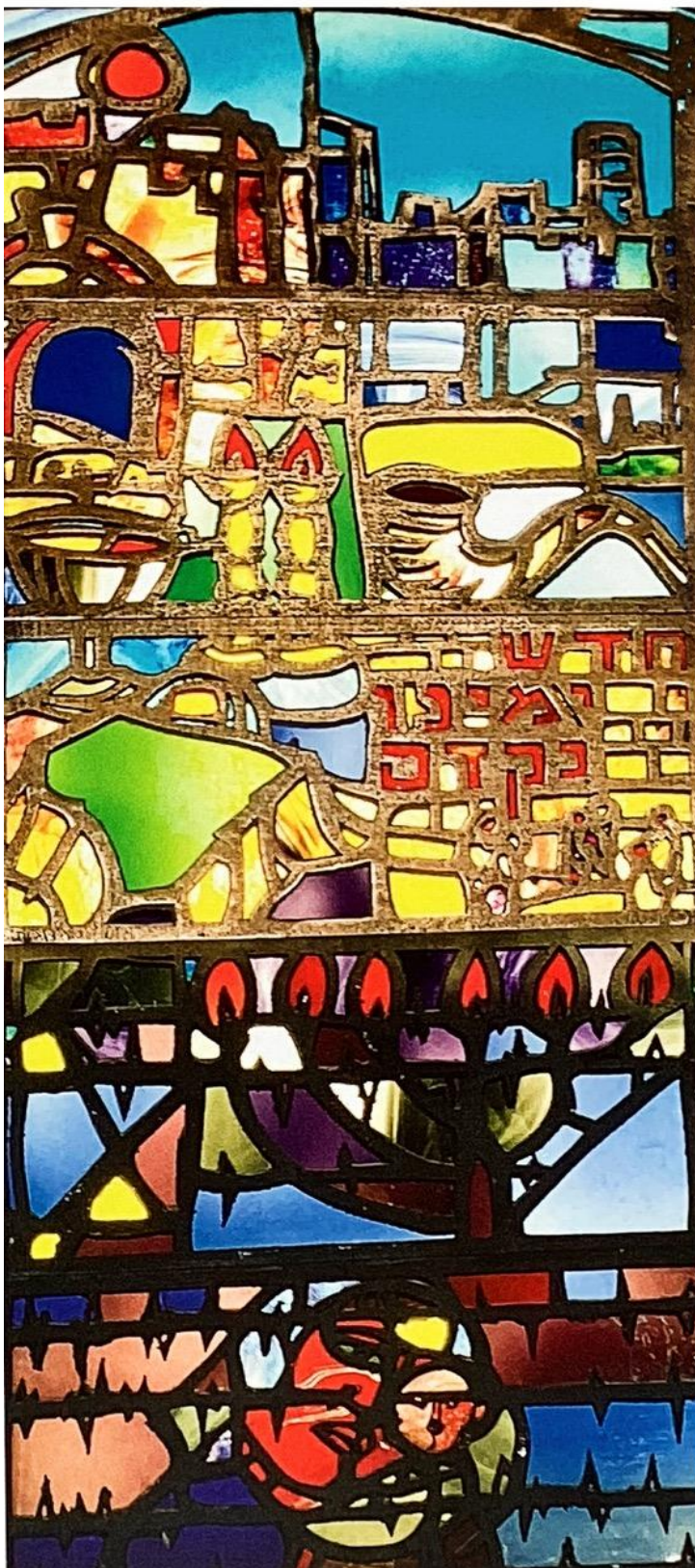


Fig 25

Roman Halter, *From Holocaust to Rebirth 1*, 1984, stained glass and cast aluminium alloy, 130X60 cm, Mill Hill United Synagogue, London. Source: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum *Roman Halter: Life and art through stained glass*. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 26

Roman Halter, *From Holocaust to Rebirth 2*, 1984, stained glass and cast aluminium alloy, 130X60 cm, Mill Hill United Synagogue, London. Source: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum *Roman Halter: Life and art through stained glass*. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 27

Roman Halter, *The Jerusalem Window*, 1977-78, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 113.5 x 147 cm, (each pane), The Central Synagogue, London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 28

Roman Halter, *Fruits and Flowers of the Bible*, 1977-78, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 249 x 143cm (entire window), 60 x 24 cm (each pane of 16), The Central Synagogue London. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

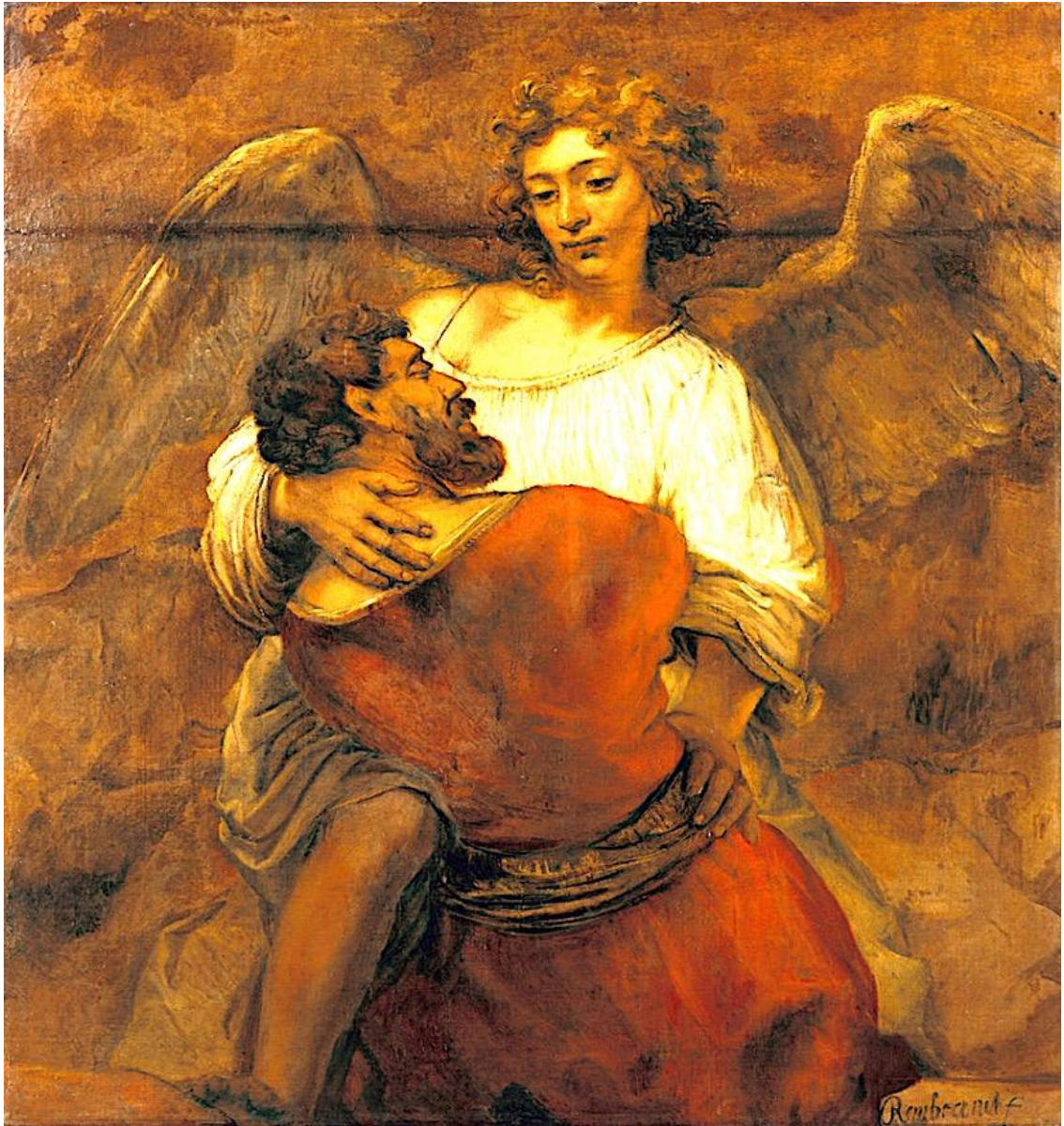


Fig 29

Rembrandt, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1659, oil on canvas, 137 x 116 cm
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany. Photo credits: National Museums in Berlin. Picture
Gallery/Christoph Schmidt CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

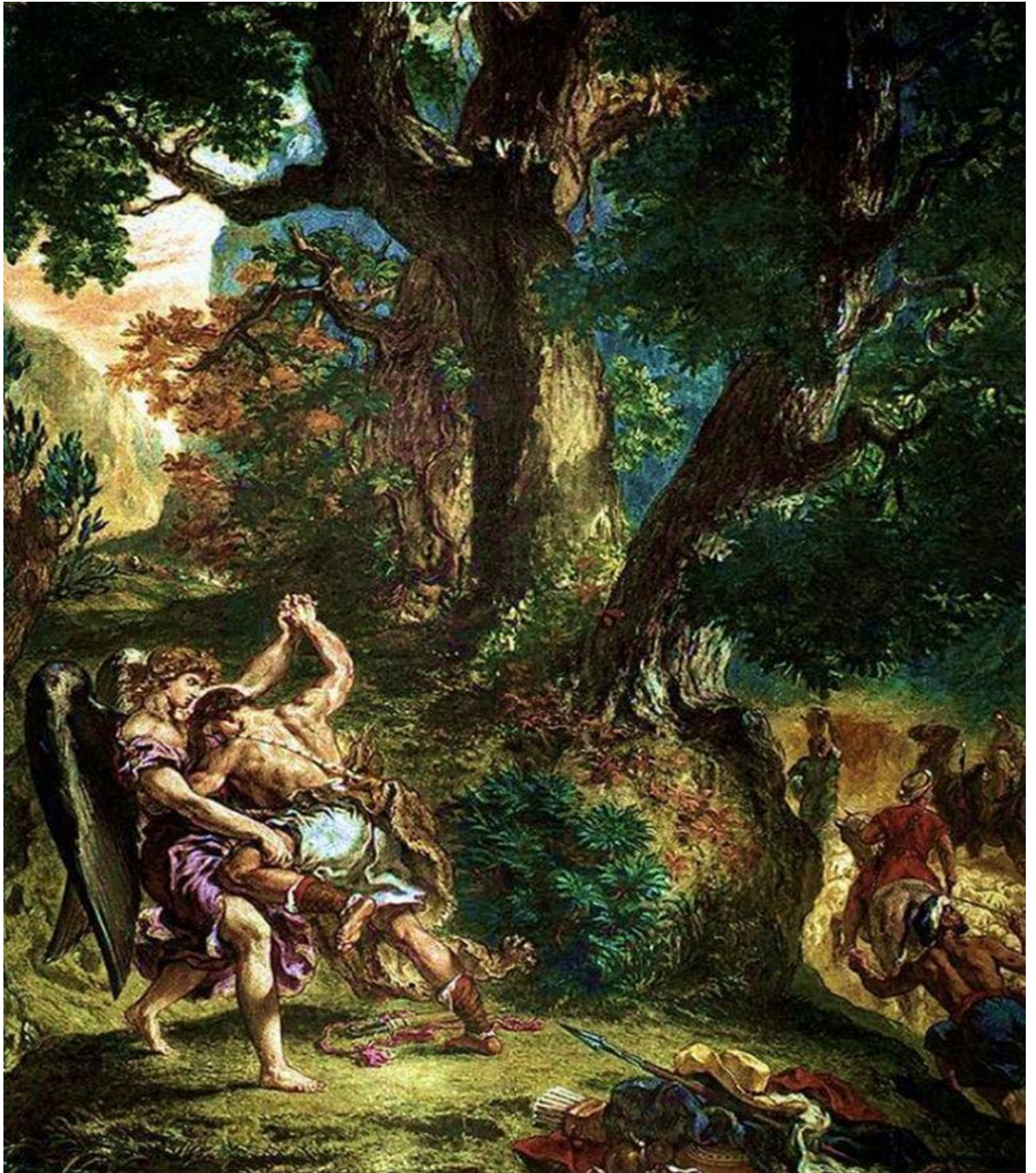


Fig 30

Eugène Delacroix, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1857-61, oil on plaster, 758 x 491 cm, Saint-Sulpice Church, Paris. In the public Domain



Fig 31

Paul Gauguin, *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888, oil on canvas, 72.2 x 91cm, National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh. Copyright: ©National Galleries Scotland.



Fig 32

Jacob Epstein, *Jacob and the Angel*, 1940-1941, alabaster, 2140 × 1100 × 920 mm, Tate, London. Copyright: ©The estate of Sir Jacob Epstein, photo: Tate.

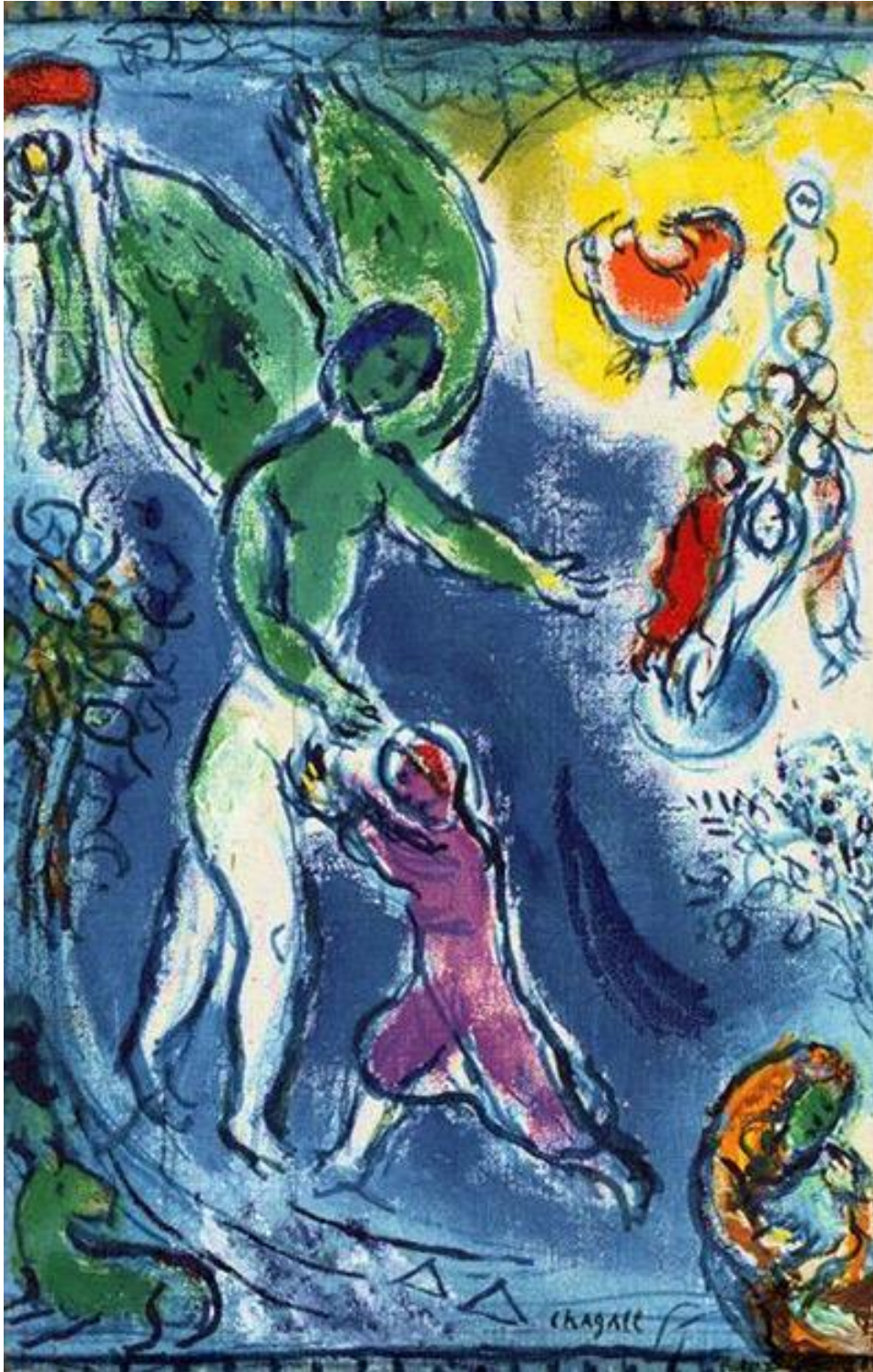


Fig 33

Marc Chagall, *La lutte de Jacob et de l'Ange*, 1960-1966, oil on canvas, 251 x 205 cm, Musée National, Marc Chagall. Copyright: ©ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2022.



Fig 34

Jacques Lipchitz, *La Lutte de Jacob avec l'ange*, 1931, plaster, 247 x 349 x 184 mm
Tate, London, Copyright: ©The estate of Jacques Lipchitz, courtesy, Marlborough
Gallery, New York, Photo: Tate



Fig 35

Roman Halter, *Transport*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91 x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17259.



Fig 36

Roman Halter, *Cartoon for Stained Glass*, No Date, ink print, Roman Halter archives, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 37

Roman Halter, *Man on Electrified barbed wire*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91 X 91 cm, Imperial War Museum. Copyright: ©Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 17258,



Fig 38

Francisco de Goya, *Doña Isabel de Porcel*, before 1805, oil on canvas, 82 x 54.6 cm, The National Gallery, London. Copyright: © The National Gallery, London.

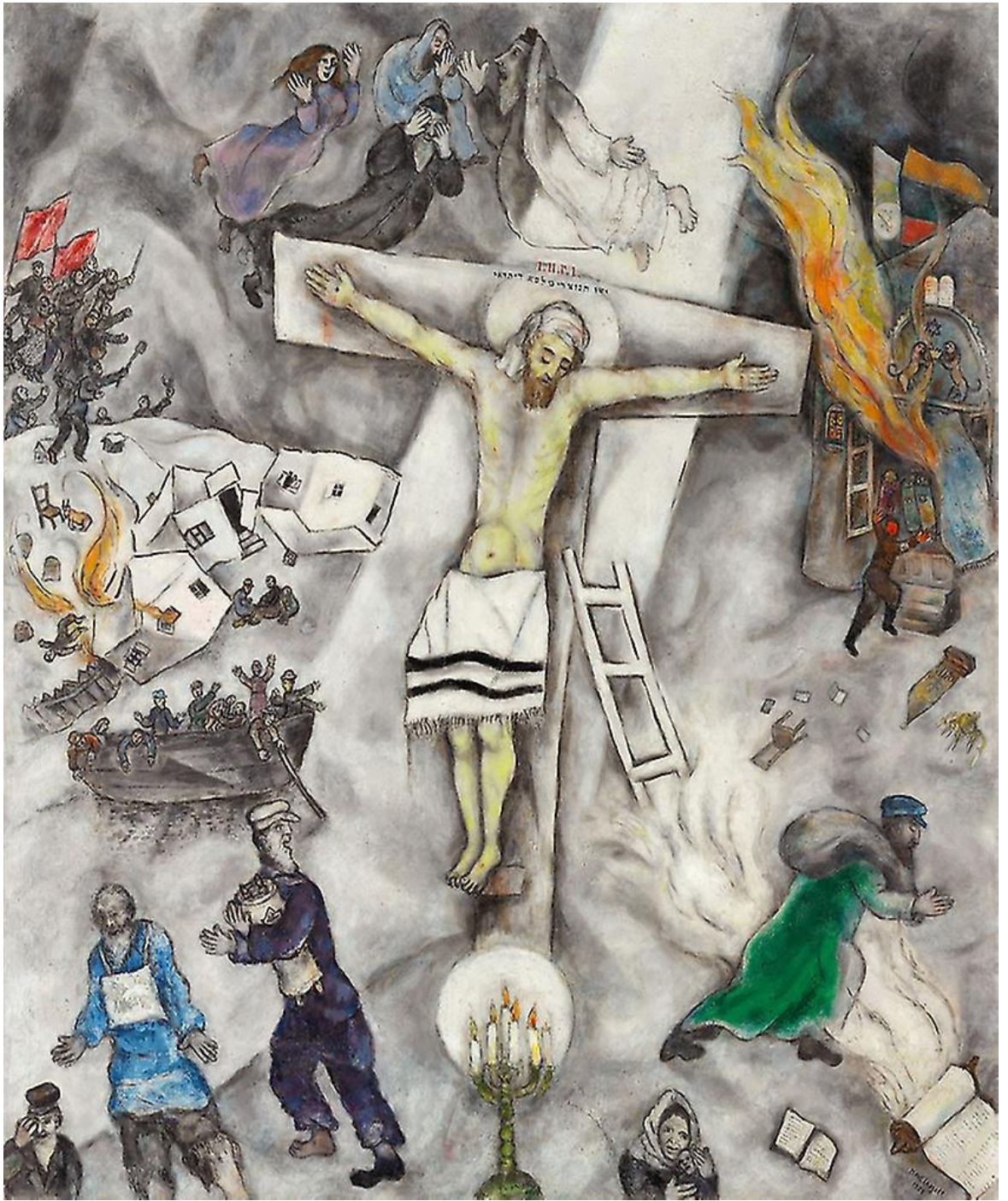


Fig 39

Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*, 1938, oil on canvas, 154.6 × 140 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. Copyright: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2022.



Fig 40

Marc Chagall, *Apocalypse en Lilas, Capriccio*, 1945, gouache, pencil, Indian wash ink and Indian ink on paper, 51 x 35.5 cm, The Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, London
 Copyright: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2022.



Fig 41

Roman Halter, *Mother with Babies*, 1974, oil on canvas, 91 x 91 cm, Imperial War Museum, London. Copyright ©Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM ART 17260.

**Fig 42**

Jankel Adler, *Orphans*, 1942, oil paint and gesso on paper on plywood, Support: 57.3 x 78.8 cm, frame: 814 x 1024 x 60 mm, Tate, London, Provenance: Accepted by HM Government in Lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estate of Eleonore Marie Herman and allocated to Tate 2017. Copyright: ©Tate. Photo: Tate.



Fig 43

Samuel Bak, *The Family*, 1974, oil on canvas, 200 x 160, Pucker Gallery, Boston.
Copyright: ©Pucker Gallery.

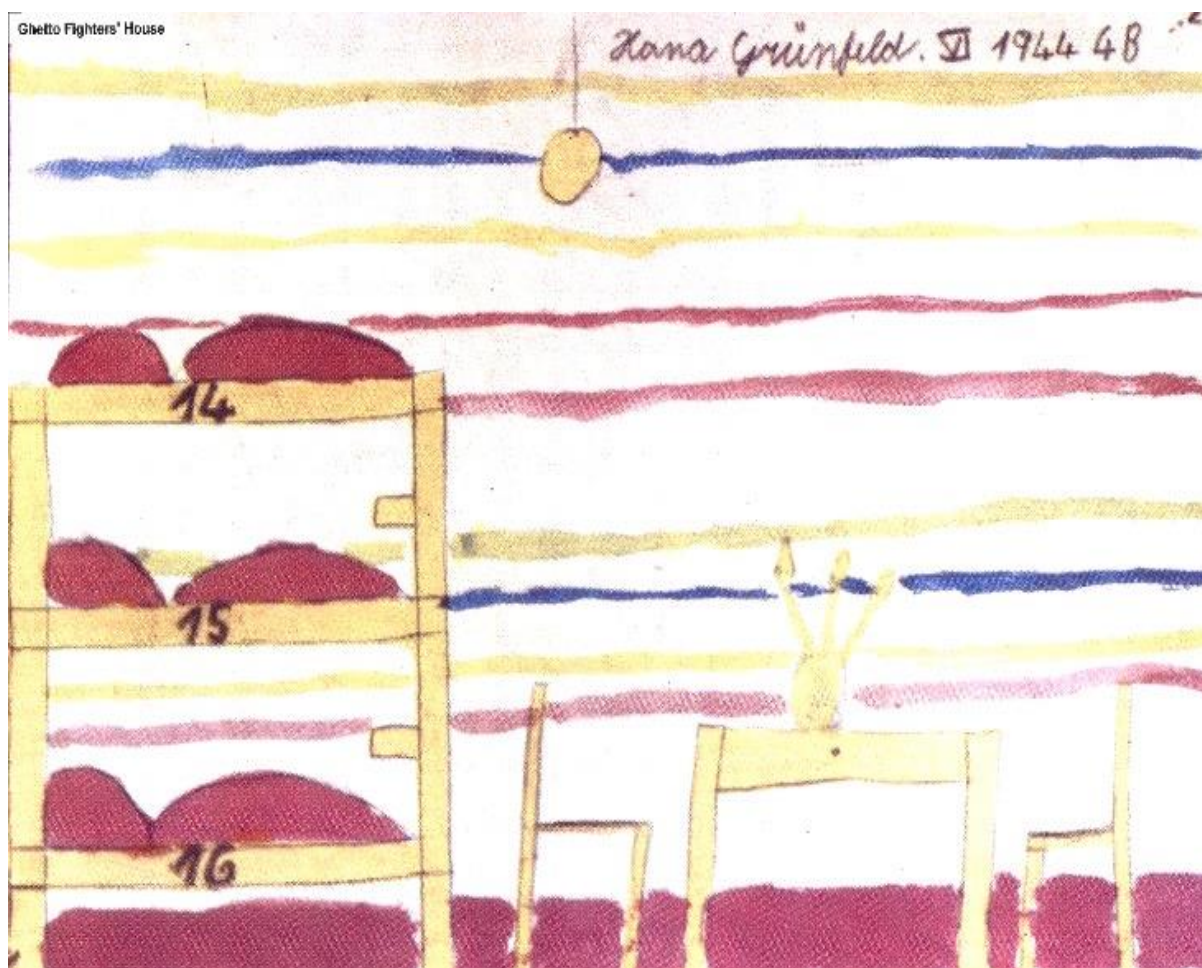


Fig 44

Hana Grünfeld, *A residential room in one of the "children's houses" in the Terezin (Theresienstadt) camp*, 1944, watercolour, The Jewish Museum in Prague. Copyright © Jewish Museum in Prague



Fig 45

Roman Halter, *Chair and table window*, 1988-1995, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 50 x 50 cm, Yad Layeled, The Ghetto Fighters' Museum, Israel, Source: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum *Roman Halter: Life and art through stained glass*. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 46

Roman Halter, *Bunkbed window* 1988-1995, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 50 x 50 cm, Yad Layeled, The Ghetto Fighters' Museum, Israel, Source: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum *Roman Halter: Life and art through stained glass*. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

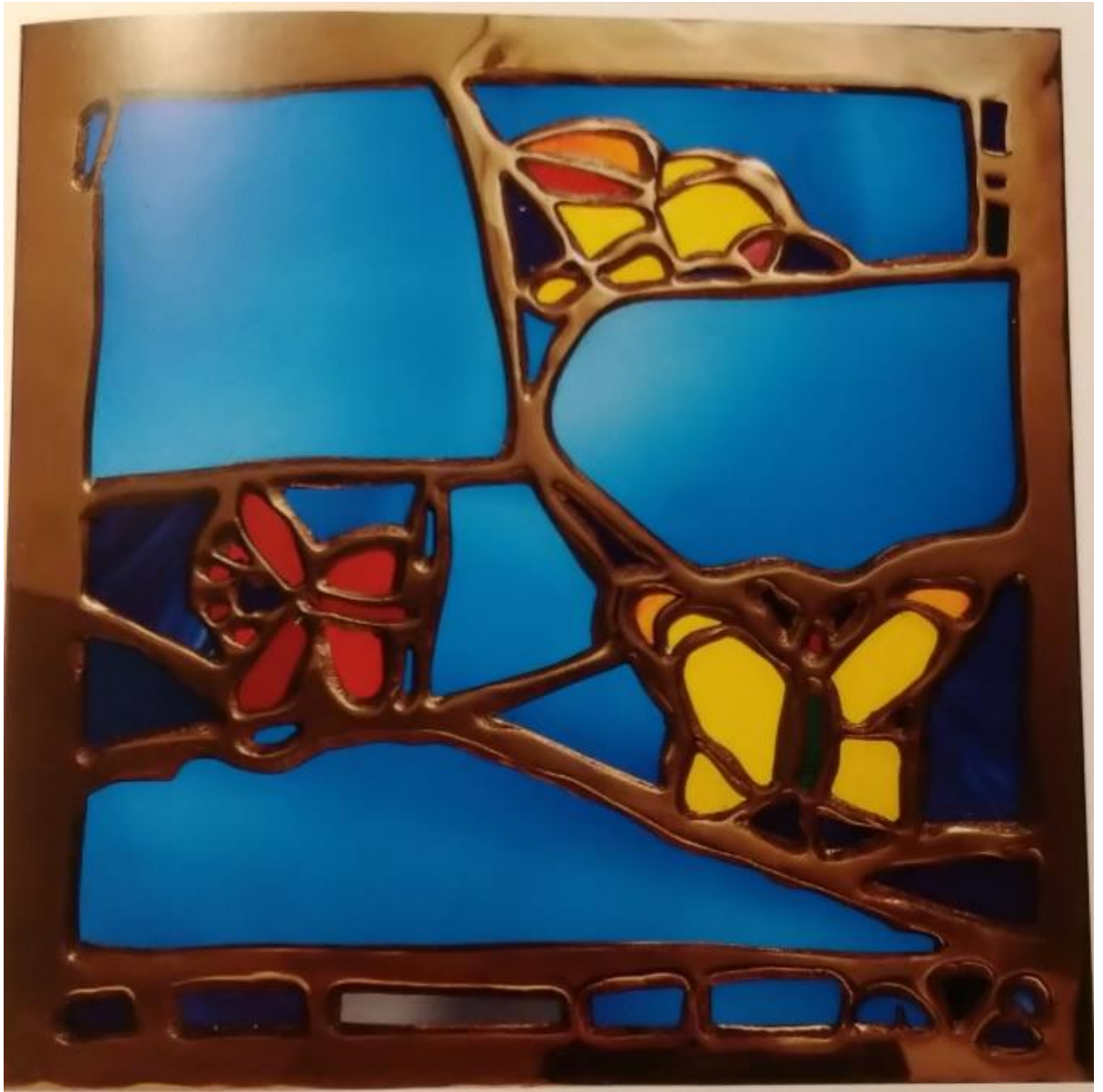


Fig 47

Roman Halter, *Butterfly window* 1988-1995, stained glass and cast bronze filigree, 50 x 50 cm, Yad Layeled, The Ghetto Fighters' Museum, Israel, Source: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum *Roman Halter: Life and art through stained glass*. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.

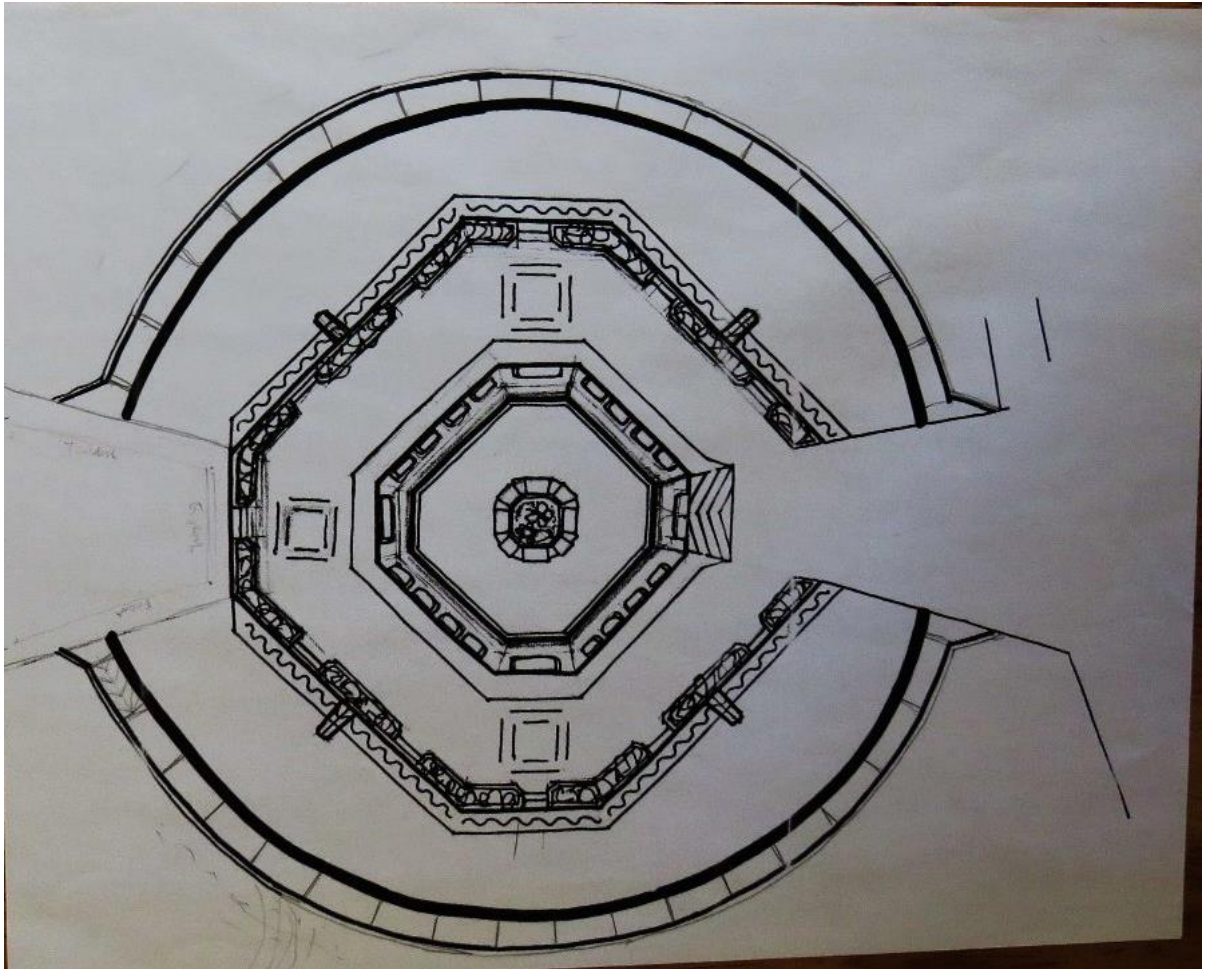


Fig 48

Roman Halter, *Architectural design for Yad Layeled*, no date, pen and pencil on paper, Roman Halter archives, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 49

Roman Halter, *Cartoon for stained glass, with gold figure*, no date, ink and watercolour, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 50

Roman Halter, *Cartoon for stained glass, with vase of flowers*, no date, ink and watercolour, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 51

Roman Halter, *Cartoon for stained glass, with children holding hands*, no date, ink and watercolour, HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.



Fig 52

RB Kitaj, *If Not, Not*, 1976, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm, National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh. Copyright: ©National Galleries Scotland.



Fig 53

Anselm Kiefer, *Walhalla*, 2016, Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac and clay on canvas, 380 x 570 cm 149 5/8 x 224 3/8 in. Copyright: © Anselm Kiefer Photo : Georges Poncet



Fig 54

Photograph of Roman Halter, c.2003. HFA, Yeovil. Copyright: ©The artistic estate of Roman Halter.