

## War exhibition confronts Holocaust

Guelph Mercury

The last inglorious century was the bloodiest in recorded history.

The event that most symbolizes the depravity and brutality of humanity pitted against itself is the Holocaust.

Based on the evidence of the genocide that followed throughout the world, it is clear humanity has not learned from the lessons of history.

As a result, we have borne witness to atrocity after atrocity — Bosnia, Cambodia, Laos, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Congo and Rwanda, among other places.

It's debatable whether art has the power to either change the course of history or modify the violent impulses that reside in humanity's heart of darkness.

Nonetheless, artists must fight heroically to help humanity understand itself before weapons of mass destruction pulverize the planet, transforming it into a barren wasteland.

On view through Jan. 5 at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, *WAR: Light Within/After the Darkness* is an exhibition of contemporary art projects that confront the horrors of the Holocaust, as well as similar crimes against humanity committed in the wake of the Second World War.

*WAR* is organized by gallery curator Christian Bernard Singer, who has invited seven Canadian artists, including a couple, to contribute. Some of the projects are inspired by family stories of survivors of the Holocaust.

"The exhibition is distinct in its approach to the theme of the Holocaust," Singer accurately asserts in a release.

"These powerful and inspiring works explore the spirit of resistance, survival, hope and beauty that endured through the darkness," he adds — again, accurately.

Some of the works are based on particular narratives; nonetheless, all can be interpreted metaphorically or symbolically. For, while they are all based on a specific historical event, they evoke associations that, sadly, transcend time and place.

Hélèn Brunet-Neumann's *Caucus: Emergence II* is a site-specific installation consisting of five stylized, life-size sculptural figures placed in the gallery's outdoor courtyard.

Representing the failure of such international peace councils as the League of Nations and United Nations, the figures, made from straw, wood, metal and unfired clay, are designed to disintegrate as they are exposed to the elements over the duration of the exhibition.

Chari Cohen's multimedia installation *Hanging Forest* is emblematic of forests that hid Jewish partisans and other resistance fighters who conducted guerrilla warfare against Nazis occupiers.

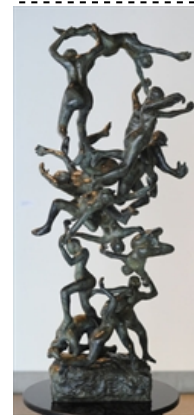
The installation, painted a uniform white, features a parcel of parched earth. Suspended above the parcel of earth are white tree trunks hanging from a metal grid suspended from the ceiling.

A shocking slice of green grass sprouts from a crack in the Earth, a visual metaphor of renewal and regeneration in an otherwise barren wasteland. Seedlings have been planted in the earth intended to grow throughout the exhibition, emphasizing the installation's message of hope.

Laura Donefer's multimedia installation *Todesmarche Revisited: In Honour of Those Perished During the Death Marches* commemorates those who were forced to march to their deaths as a means of erasing evidence of systematic, state-sanctioned racial



*Todesmarche Revisited: In Honour of Those Perished During the Death Marches*, 2013.



*Totem 1993 (Ed. 3/10)* by Claire Weissman Wilks.



*Hanging Forest*, 2013 by Chari Cohen.



*Sleep, pretty darling do not cry (Mother)*, 2013 by Tina Poplawski.

cleansing. Some of the footprints cast in black glass are taken from Holocaust survivors.

Mary McKenzie's found-object installation *Departed* is based on a narrative involving a family that goes missing after a bomb strikes.

It is unclear from contemplating the before-and-after image of a living room whether the family went into hiding or was forcibly evacuated. The separation and displacement of families is a common thread in the tragic concentration and death camp tapestry.

Tina Poplawski's companion wall sculptures, *Sleep, pretty darling do not cry (Mother)* and *Sleep, pretty darling do not cry (Child)* and hanging sculpture *Dreaming Tree* deal with the pain, sorrow and grief caused by enforced displacement of people from their homes and families through brutal military intervention.

Claire Weissman-Wilks' clay and glass sculpture, *Timeless Upon a Time*, and large-scale crayon drawings, *They Open Up Before Me*, depict the love and compassion, care and protection inspired by the personal journals of ETTY HILLESUM.

Oded and Pamela Ravek's multiple-glass sculpture *The Miracle of the Three Sisters* commemorates the power of love over war, life over death.

*War* is an emotionally resonant exhibition that offers viewers much to consider with our heads and our hearts.

By turns meditative and poignant, it attempts to waken us from cultural and racial amnesia by transforming the nightmares of yesteryear into the dreams of tomorrow.

Complementing *War* is an exhibition based on works from the permanent collection, recalling an ignoble period in the history of art.

Including works by such celebrated artists as Judy Chicago, Jack Sures and the late Marilyn Levine, *What If? from the Permanent Collection* features work that would have been condemned by the Nazi propaganda machine as degenerate.

A lecture and panel discussion related to the exhibition is being planned for Oct. 10. More information is available on the gallery website.

[rreid@therecord.com](mailto:rreid@therecord.com)

Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery

WAR: Light Within/After the Darkness

What If? from the Permanent Collection

On view through Jan. 5

Information and gallery hours are available at 519-746-1882 or online at [www.theclayandglass.ca](http://www.theclayandglass.ca)



*Departed*, 2013-09-21 by Mary McKenzie.