

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/ESTHER LURIE-SHAPIRO
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Interviewed (7-17-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854

TIMECODE NOTES:

WENTWORTH FILMS - KOVNO GHETTO - ISRAEL

Interview: Esther Lurie Sound rolls 44-53

Q: Take 15, could that be right.

(that's right, cassette camera roll 78, sound roll 40)

(We are speeding)

(15)

Q: Esther, tell me about the role of in the ghetto.

EL: Especially for me well we went in the, into the ghetto at, at a period in my life where I was already an artist who has had many exhibitions. And my day, day to day work was painting or drawing. Of course the arrival of the Germans and all those terrible, terrible things that happened around me made me stop everything.

The Germans marched into Kovno on the 21st June 1941.

And uh the no one expected them because there was a non aggression pact between Russia and Germany but uh probably it never was meant seriously. What I heard from time to time being said.

And then when the German armies were disenchanted from invading England they threw the armies to the, the in

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the direction of the breadbasket as they call it of the Ukraine. And the first on their way was Lithuania. Lithuania has a border with Germany. So that we had the first, Latvia got them a few days later and Estonia still a few days later.

But uh I lived alone then. It was after uh a year that the Russians uh were uh in Lithuania and I had a really flourishing artistic career.

(Change battery)

(Speeding)

(16)

Q: So

EL: So you probably heard from other sources what happened in Lithuania, how everywhere there were terrible happenings that Jews were slaughtered by Lithuanians, even before the Germans came in. And when they came in rules against Jews went worse and worse every day. But you are interested in the ghetto.

Q: Before you go on when the war started, did you hear things. I mean you personally, where were you

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EL: I was in Kovno. I was in Kovno where I went a year be, in, in 1939 I was in Belgium on a study tour.

Q: But what did you hear.

EL: When the war started the, the Lithuanians started to kill Jews in the provinces, in the, in the small, in the small towns. they accused the Jews of collaborating with the Soviets.

Q: How did you hear about that. Or what did you see.

EL: I was, I was uh with a friend. We liked to be together and some Lithuanians came to arrest us and took us to the Kovno uh prison. And uh said that now they are going to reven, take revenge on the Jews who had a big hand in what was done to the Lithuanian people by the Communists. There were many communists and many among the Jews in the, Baltic states and they really collaborated with the, with the Lithuanians. But uh I, I had friends communists, Lithuanian artists and intellectuals who said we had to choose between

Germany or Russia. We couldn't survive the war without taking sides. So the part of the, part of the Lithuanian people welcomed the Germans and the other part

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welcomed the Russians when they came in a year before. I even had a close friend uh uh a Lithuanian artist who was, who was very, very active in communist life. Her husband was a deputy in the same, this is their parliament. And uh this people most of them managed to flee Lithuania to Russia. When the Germans came in but all the nationalists, among them painters and intellectuals and even Jews who were Zionists were imprisoned during the, during the Russian occupation of Lithuania. So that the whole country was divided, very, very much divided.

But uh many Jews went on, went out from the city to reach the russian border to flee from the Germans but the Russians had uh had closed the border. So they

came back. To find in many cases that their flats were taken by Germans or by others.

Anyway there was a decision that the after what happened between the, the Jews and the Lithuanians, they would not tolerate that Jews would live in the city of Kovno. And uh part of Kovno that lay on the other side of the river Eleya was designated as a ghetto and all the Jews had to leave town by the 15th of August. And I very much wanted to, to do some drawings of that exodus. but it was really dangerous to, to be in the streets. I, I could have taken a view from, from the mountain yes, but we, we were afraid to go out into the street. I thought maybe I would reconstruct it in my memory. But as I

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told you I don't have the talent of drawing from memory.

So uh we philosophized that the war would, would be over and we would never have to leave our homes. But of course everything happened. This is where i learned that the most terrible things that you, you, you think may will not happen, they really happen in the most horrible form.

Uh I had the luck to be together with a neighbor with whom we became friendly during the time we had to, to be inside and uh we had to find living space uh. Eight, eight meters to each, eight quadrant meters to each yes. So that in a room there should be 3 to 4 people yes. And I was lucky to be with friends. And in our apartment of 3 rooms, I think there were 15 people or so.

The, my sister with her husband and child. They went to another place. I had an aunt yet here who lived and a cousin from the provinces who lived with her and I didn't room with them, I did room with my friends.

And uh the days in the ghetto started. We were encroached there, we were closed up by, by barbed wire. And there were seven entrances to the ghetto and during the first week we were completely isolated and then the Germans decided to lose, to use the working force of the, of the Jews yes. They, they took them to, to

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build the

Q: We have to put another roll of film in.

EL: It's very short.

Q: It's because it's not videotape, it's film.

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(This is camera roll 79, sound roll 45)

(Take 17)

EL: Yes the, the Germans demanded of the Jews to
choose representatives and to follow council of elders,
the Altestenrat. They choose the prominent lawyers and
physicians and uh when it came to choose the, the chief

representative, no one wanted the responsibility. So at last Dr. Elkis who was a, a famous physician in Kovno, very, very honored. He took the responsibility of being the head of the council of elders, the Altes-tenrat. He was a very proud tall person and he even he even knew how to talk with the Germans and the, and be respected. And uh I knew several of those people who were in the council of elders because I was a stranger in Kovno. Complete stranger. I came to visit my sister who had just had a baby, as I was in Europe. And it was summer and I, I was invited by uncles to, to be, to pass the summer in the, in the in the country so I was uh around.

And uh but uh I had stayed a year in Kovno and I couldn't go back to Belgium as I had planned. And I had an exhibition of, of Is, Palestine pictures with me that I planned to exhibit in Belgium where my professor had promised to help me but as I was planned it in Kovno I dis, and I, I wanted to work so I got myself inscribed in the, in the local academy so I had models and I could go and uh and continue my, my work and I had an

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exhibition at the Lithuanian artist's house of my Palestine pictures. And many of the Jews and the Jewish schools came to visit and these were my only contacts and it happened so that in the council of elders there were a few people that I knew from my exhibition.

So, so I confided in them that I was deeply fascinated by from what i saw in the ghetto and I would like to, to draw some scenes, if they could help me. If, if they knew people from, from whose windows you saw things that really some of these people uh for instance, Dr. Rabinovich is, is responsible for the raid on the potato field. He, he saw it from his window at the, at the, at the house of the council of elders and I had asked him to tell me about it because I wanted to draw that scene. And it was very the house of the elders was very nearby where I lived and then he came and he said Esther we have uh we have a on the potato field just from my window. So I went with him, with my paper. I still had my materials and I did it in a few hours. And people were uh going, going around there, were milling around there and they saw me drawing. So somebody took the, took the drawing from me

and went to show it in the during the conference of the council of elders and he brought it back to me and said that every, everybody was very much impressed and they asked me to go on with it.

And uh well I went to several places and then when,

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when things calmed down, Mr. Tory who was secretary of the, of the council of elders invited me for, for an interview and told me that uh the council of elders will help me to continue with this work as it is very important for the archives. And that the Germans had taken away all the, all the uh photographic equipment so that this was the only way to preserve some of the views. I accepted it of course because this is naturally what I did best, yes. It was not illustrations and it was not graphic work. It was what I did best, drawing from nature.

And I, I started to go to places and from time to time he called me to, to take my to places where by my own, by my own insheritance I couldn't have gotten because you needed a certain permit or places were closed out.

So the for instance the remains of the hospital. Uh the Germans burned it down with all the people in it because there were a few cases of typhus. So all the patients and all the doctors and all the nurses were burned down with the building.

And then after the ghetto was, uh was torn off from the, from the territory of the ghetto and a thousand Jews were marched off to the fort. The Germans told them that they had taken them to other working places but uh of course with time to believe. They believed because no one could, no one could understand that they took people and, and then just shot them in the hun-

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dreds and the thousands. Even that it happened a few kilometers from us.

It was inconceivable because after all we lived in Europe. After all, after the world war. Germany was uh conceived by us as one of the most cultured countries. We just couldn't believe it. yes, believed what the Germans told us, what we wanted to believe. And it went on through the, through the years and with, it goes on til today. Because it is inconceivable that such horrors are being, being done.

Q: When you went to the hospital....

EL: Yes, this was uh, uh as there were many abandoned houses. It was in winter and there was great shortage of uh firing wood. So the council of elders with Mr. Tory arranged for a permit to go and collect books and uh, and whatever could be burned in the abandoned houses. And they got the permit to go over the street, yes. It was just over the street, this was the bridge that was built yes. Over that street and that bridge stood on, on the, the stood there for two months and still I, I, I succeeded in drawing it yes. If I had waited I couldn't have drawn the bridge yes. And we came to the spot and he took me and he said Esther I want you to, to make a few drawings of the, of

the burned hospital. They went to the houses to col-

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lect and I stood in the street and started to sketch.
And a Lithuanian came over and said you stop it immedi-
ately. So Tory heard him and he came over and uh and I
stopped. But then when he went away I, I went up to a
house and I found some place from where that I did
two drawings and they are among the drawings reproduced
in my book.

And then there was the, another important thing. There
was a, a room in the ghetto where.

Q: Tell me about drawing the bridge first.

EL: About drawing the bridge all right. Uh well I, I
went around and asked people how can I get to draw the

bridge. And at that time uh I did some volunteer work for uh by collecting clothes and, and, and food for, for the, for the orphanage. And there was a young man working there who received what we brought yes. And then I met him at the house of Dr. Rabinovich because his wife had told me that she had friends living near the bridge. And there I met that young man and he said all right I take you. And tomorrow he took me to one place and I, I drew it from both sides. Yes. He was the, was the man uh who lived there, who had grown up there so he knew everybody and then I, I made an agreement with him that every day he would come and fetch me and bring me to a place where I can draw. And we did

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it for uh not very long because one day he came and said well today we are not going to draw. Why, why. Why not? Well uh all the Jews are ordered by the Germans to, to be on the, on the spot at a certain hour

and uh this was one of the, the small aktion when they separated the small ghetto from the large ghetto and then a few days later the bridge was torn down. I still, I already had it in my collection.

Q: We have to put another...

EL: You know everything, everything I have is a, is a wonder. (laughs)

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(rolling)

(Camera roll 80, sound roll 46)

(Take 18)

EL: Yes, a very important movement in my creative work in the ghetto began when after Mr. Tory had talked to me and he introduced me to Professor Hy Nachman Shapiro who was in charge of the education of the, the art of the ghetto. They had schools there. That it was not allowed by the Germans but still they had them. And uh told, told me that Professor Shapiro will advise me as what is important for the archives and I should bring everything I am drawing to him. And he will see to it that it goes to safety. And uh for, for a few years I did it. It was a, I couldn't do much of it because I was organized to forced labor like everybody else but from time to time they give me some piece of paper that I was employed by the, by the inside, the services of the ghetto. And then I could go and draw every day.

And I, I went to the social services and to the gates.

All those drawings that they did near the gates and all those, all those things that uh uh that are connected with uh with types from the ghetto is what uh Professor Shapiro tried to tell me. We want people, yes, how they look. How they lived. This, this uh scene where old people stay in line to receive their, their soup at the social kitchen was one of them. That I that he mostly appreciated and then that woman that sits at the

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table and, and has her cup of soup. And then uh this scene at the, at the gate when people come back from work or go out to work.

This I did from uh from a window that was opposite the gate. Where the, where the police uh department was. And uh they came from the council of elders to per, persuade the policeman to let me sit there. And they

bring, and they were bringing me up all sorts of people from downstairs that I had a big collection of, of those types but they, they were lost with my with my collection that was lost. What, what is, what has remained is what uh Mr. tory has photographed at an exhibition that was arranged in the ghetto of the work that by the time I had managed to do. So he chose about 20, 20 to 25 uh pictures that uh were most uh characteristical and they are what, what, what I later uh reconstructed from the photographs he did from my pictures.

Q: What about that house that you

EL: Yes, there was, there, there was a room where, where there was uh in the first in the first days of the ghetto there was a slaughter of, of a family. And uh people were so depressed by it that they shut it up and no one went into it. And even the living conditions were so difficult and so crowded in the ghetto, they

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didn't open that too. And Mr. Tory told me he wanted me
to do a drawing of the two. And it is along the col-
lection of the series
the living witness. Room after slaughter.

Q: What did it look like. How did you feel

EL: Look by that time, I tried to do a good drawing.
This, this is my concern til today. Doesn't matter what
it is. Make a good drawing. Of what you see, yes.
Don't think of anything. Only think of making a good
drawing.

Q: What did you see

EL: Well I can show, everything was up, upside down.
And there were, there were uh remains of blood and uh
and uh remains of, of human tissue on the walls. But
between them were pictures and uh arrangement of a nice
room of a nice Jewish family.

Q: Do you know why they were slaughtered.

EL: This was the, this was the, the reaction of uh the

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first reaction of the Lithuanians yes. They, they,
they were, they, when they heard that the Germans were
coming in, they were rounding up Jews wherever they
could find them or went into, to houses and slaughtered
them in the, in the hundreds and the thousands. There
were no Jews left in the little towns. Not at all.
This was the revenge for the collaboration with the,
with the Soviets.

Q: And you drew the democracy square...

EL: Yes, I did the, I, I did the things that, that were historically important and that appealed to me as a, as a subject for my painting. And uh these were mostly appreciated so they survived because they were photographed and that, that uh we up, up the mountain to the ninth fort. It was a most beautiful paysage, yes a most beautiful view. With big trees and uh you see it in the picture I did. of it.

And it had a, a specially in rainy days it had such an atmosphere that really appealed to me as what it was. The, the via Dolorossa as we called it. The march to death. By many tens and hundreds of thousands of Jews because they brought, they brought all the Jews from Austria, from Czechoslovakia, from all over Europe to be shot at the Ninth fort because they, they wanted to con, to confound the population that they were going to

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other working places. So there, there were certain

concentration camps like Treblinka. And one of the, one of the places of destruction of uh of annihilation was the Ninth fort that now has a museum where my pictures stay up. I am in contact with them.

I, I sent, when uh after uh Gorbachev, there, there was a release of, of many many difficulties yes. And Jews started to come here and Jews from Vilna started to go, come here and uh Jews from here went to, went to Vilna and then and then they came to me and asked me for my pictures. And there are 3 or 4 museums in Vilna and Kovno who have my work on view yes. On permanent view. This is why I did the etchings.

Q: How did you get drawing materials.

EL: I had my own. At the ghetto I still had my own.

Q: Where did you get paper.

EL: I still had my own paper. And uh and paper you could get, at the, at the, at the offices, yes that worked for the Germans. Paper was no, was no problem. I had my uncle Dishenius, my uh did I even had my

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colors. I was an artist in, in full creative strength
just then and I took my, I took my things with me into
the ghetto.

Q: Did you make two copies of everything.

EL: Uh this was later, this was another enterprise.
This was the archives, what I did with Professor Shapi-
ro. By the way his fate was very tragic. If you want
to hear of it. Uh this was initiated by Mr. Tory. By
the, by the council of elders itself for their ar-
chives. I did several. I, I always when, when a subject
intrigues me, I always do stay with it for, for a few
drawings or paintings yes. Especially uh when it's
beautiful and appealing from, from the painterly point
of view. So I returned it like I did the Democratu

square and I did the way up to the, to the ninth fort
and uh.

Q: And people.

EL: And people, and people and, and the, the scenes at
the, at the entrance gate, I did it in color too. It is
on the, on the outside of, on the cover of my album
this is yes. And uh

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Q: So if you were going to paint.

EL: I had my paints. Uh I, I didn't use my oil
paints. Only in later when I was when the German
commanders discovered that there was an artist in the
ghetto and they, they built me a studio so I could

paint for them yes. For the obersturmbahn fuhrer. But
this was only the last few months of the ghetto.

(reload)

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(Roll sound, roll cassette)

(Camera roll 81, sound roll 47, speed)

(19)

EL: I would like to tell you about the tragic fate that befell Professor Hy Nachman Shapiro, the man to whom I was delivering my, my works. When I had finished them and uh who saw to it that they came to a hiding place. One uh one day they started to tell in the ghetto that the night before Germans had come to, to the flat where professor Shapiro lived with his old mother, his wife and his young son and took them all away. Professor Hy Nachman Shapiro was the son of the chief rabbi of Lithuania. Of whom I did a drawing at his request. Rabbis don't want to be, to be drawn but his son wanted a drawing of me of his father. And it is in, he and uh it came out that the whole family was burned alive. And why was it. Because other sons of the rabbi who lived

in the United States and in Switzerland had taken steps to the pope and to all the great of the world to take their family out of the ghetto. But to the Germans, a Jew was a Jew. And a Jew had no right to be treated differently from another Jew. So they burned the whole family.

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And uh he has his little, he had his little archives of his own, Professor Shapiro. From time to time when he liked one of my pictures he asked me to give it to him. And the colored, the colored uh picture in the, in the album a Living Witness of the big blocks, he asked me to give to him. Because he lived in one of those apartments and i gave it to him. And uh of course I gave him the portrait of his father and they were salvaged because Mr. Tory took the archives of Professor Shapiro and brought, brought part of it to Israel. So the original of that uh water color is uh in Yad

Vashem now. In the Yad Vashem museum.

Q: Tell me about drawing the Estonian deportation.

EL: When the, when the deportations began, I had a, a long period where I did, where i didn't work because Germans came to live in the ghetto. There, there was a, there was a period that they discovered that the Jewish committee was helping young people to go into the woods as partisans. So they dissolved the, the council of elders. And uh German officers came to live in the ghetto. Then somehow we, if, if I felt before it, it, it was somehow ours. Yes it, it was shameful. It was there was hunger, there was uh desolation. We were shut in but somehow it was a corner that was ours. Since the Germans came to live in the ghetto, I didn't have the feeling any more and they ere very, very uh

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pathetic with the order and with the cleanliness. The ghetto lost it's uh it's character.

But when I heard of the deportations I decided this I still have to do. And uh peace drawings remained in my hand after I had already, already put into the earth my, my collection. And then I got a message from uh from a Lithuanian painter, Veronica Shlebliter. Maybe I shouldn't say her name bcuase the, the they will ask her well wear are the pictures yes. And uh if I had something to, something I wanted to hide, she was ready to hide it for me and she hid it for me for more than 40 years. And after, after the peristroika, Jewish uh Jewish artists in Lithuania stated to collect what remained of Jewish artists from before the war and may exhibitions. And Veronica came with my pictures. Yes I learned from our press that my pictures were exhibited in a, in an exhibition in in Lithuania. And then they started to come in little by little. They brought them to . First I got, first I got the xerox copies and then I, I started to do the etchings and then I got the originals. And these originals the museum in Washington requested and I sent it to them, for the exhibition.

Q: How did you feel the Estonian deportations.

EL: Look uh drawing is something that demands of you

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full concentration. You don't think of what you drew. You think how you drew, how you compose it, how you, to make a good drawing. Doesn't, look I couldn't draw dur, during an aktion or doing something terribly that happened but after all the deportations, we knew that they were deported not to concentration camps. They were deported to other working places. The ghetto was split up in seven the, they they started to call it not, not the Kovno ghetto but the concentration, concentraciones Slager Coahene. They head seven satellites and these people came with their packs and with there children. And this is what you see of my drawing yes. And the Aktion on children came later. And was, was executed everywhere, In all the, in all the places in the ghetto and in th the, in the satellite.

Uh camps yes. We all tried to hide our children and some, some of us succeeded. we succeeded in hiding our little boy my sister and me and took him in a rucksack. And in our studio we had uh we had a (roof top?). Under it we built a hiding place and in the entrance we had our uh our arrangement of colors and so on. And we from a, from a, from a hole. And uh I sat there too in that hiding place and I couldn't, I couldn't sit in the hiding place so I, I just went out and made myself a drawing in Germans to , to check that there were not children there. And uh we say no, no there weren't. And he, he knocked at the, the place where behind the, behind the door there were children yes and, and children are not hiding there. Oh no, no, no way. And

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TIMECODE NOTES:

they left.

We, we see now little boy who was five then when they,

when the

ghetto was liquidated. I was taken to Stutthoff concentration camp and all those women who had little children they were after several days in Stutthoff they were sent to Auschwitz. But then when we were in Stutthoff there was the, the assault on Hitler's life. You remember in, in July 1944, from which he escaped alive.

And then there, there was some optimism in the camps that perhaps they, they, won't kill us anymore. They will, they will want to shoot and there are Jews around and so we believe that we will survive. But we were sent to working camps, and we were sent back here and back there and shlepping here and shlepping there. And, and we were working on fortifications and on trenches. They cut through all of Poland, yes, with trenches. They hoped that with tanks and with soldiers, they will, they will be able to win the war. They believed til the end, til Hitler's suicide they believed that Germany would win the war.

I have the opportunity now as I speak German and French to see many historical films. Yes. And I, I hear many debates yes. And uh thoughts about what happened, why it happened how it happened and so I, I express them too. Yesterday there was a film on, on Hitler's life

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TIMECODE NOTES:

yes. there is on, on cable 5, la cinquieme, the French
la cinquieme, has every, every Wednesday one hour of
historic. Yesterday it was about Hitler. And I learn
from it, and I specially before our interview happens.
I try to see as many of these films as possible so as
to get a clearer view of what happened and what the
world thinks of it.

Q: Ok we need to reload. We're going to take a break.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(Rolling cassette)

(Camera roll 82, sound roll 48)

(20)

(Second sticks 20)

EL: I'm looking at you yes.

Q: Your, your drawing did you have a sense that it was a record, a historical record, as well as art forms.

EL: Of course. I generally I draw more freely. But here I made a special effort to make it very realistic and i used all my academic training to make it as near to reality as possible, especially when I drew the bridge, I really went into the construction to, to draw it in a manner that if somebody wanted to construct a bridge in a model or something, he could use my drawing as, as a record.

I, I did my best you know in those circumstances you don't count any more. Yes. It's the whole that counts. And as little as there was hope to survive so at least I felt a compulsion to leave something that would serve a purpose. And especially since there were

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TIMECODE NOTES:

no photographs. Later they had, they had cameras. But at the beginning was told and retold, no there are no cameras. What you do is the only record we have. And uh as I had a, an academic training because uh I, I went to study in Belgium in a modern arts school that was, was founded by Juan de Veldha, who was one of the big German uh modern architects. He was already old and he was the director of the school and it was based on modern art.

I chose the theater but it didn't give me the training I hoped for, to learn. Drawing and painting. So at the same time everybody laughed at me yes. I went to the Antwerp Royal academy to the drawing classes where they were drawing for a whole week a statue of, of something yes and you had to go into every details, detail. And I stayed there for two years. And if I hadn't done it I could never have uh have done what I did in the ghetto. I wanted to know to draw like Leonardo DaVinci does. He was my ideal.

And uh at that time it was the time of the Bauhaus yes and at the time of everything. Burned the Louvre yes and they were laughing at me. But I once uh I visited

a lot of exhibitions when I was in Belgium. I really had a very good time. My, my brother was living there. I, I had planned to study art in Germany but then Hitler was already near his uh near his seat in, in German politics. So in 1931 instead of going to Germany, I had already prospects from German schools yes

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because they teacher who taught me and who discovered me he was a pupil of German, he was a Hungarian. A pupil of German modern art schools. He was one of the Dada movement and when I was 13, 14 he did discover that I had a talent yes. I didn't know it myself because I couldn't like, like my friends all sorts of silly things yes.

And I started already to take lessons at the age of 14, 15. I was very much encouraged by my teacher and he even uh told my parents that I should leave school and then make a career of uh of art but my parents said

first, first finish school, then we'll see.

Q: In the ghetto when you were drawing, what did other people in the ghetto think.

EL: They came around and they, they were very excited and they said how good you do it so and what can be done so that it is preserved so people will know how it was. This was their expression. Show them how it was. Of course there were people that said that you are doing very dangerous things and then they, there is no, no hope for it to survive and leave it alone and I must really say and say it again that thanks to Avraham Tory, I, I, I held out. I had my encouragement. I had, I had destination.

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Interview w/ESTHER LURIE-SHAPIRO

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TIMECODE NOTES:

But then I wanted to tell you about the other collections that were coming up in the ghetto. There was a, a man he was he was one of the workers at the, at the organization of Jewish labor. And so he was a collector and once he, he called me and he said that he had a plan. He wanted to create the album of the ghetto. Here, where he wanted to include all the documents that came from the Germans and all the signs and all the uh whatever was printed in the ghetto. And uh to, to, to give them some artistic value, he wanted me to do portraits of all the people who, who had some important jobs. Were about 40 people that I didn't have to worry. He would, he would make the arrangements. He would bring the people to me and 40 portraits.

And then one day he calls me look it won't be 40. It will be twice 40 because I, I went to Mr. Tory. He, his name was Golub then. And uh I had to have his help because he knew all the arrangements in the, in the building and, and the people who were working there and I asked him for help so he said well I'm ready to help you on one condition. Everything you do you do double. One for my archives and one for your archives. So he said all right (laughs) I'll do it. There, there were enough papers that, that were double and, and many fold yes but I said no, I won't make 80 portraits.

But there was another artist in the ghetto. Joseph Schlesinger. He was younger than me. He, you see the

difference in the drawing but he was very gifted and he

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TIMECODE NOTES:

was glad to accept it. So we shared it yes. And, and
Tory's book you see two styles yes.

Some, some are mine and some are his. By the way he
was from Czechoslovakia, he survived the war. And
lived in Czechoslovakia, he was, I was told that he was
the director of the Czech national museum.

And Tory even invited him on his account to come and
visit Israel. But he was already after a heart attack
and then he died. And we didn't know why he, why he
doesn't answer, well, why he doesn't come but about a
year ago, somebody calls me and says I am the nephew of
Joseph Schlesinger, the Washington Museum found me
because they were looking for uh Schlesinger had a
sister who had emigrated to the United States and he
lives in Canada. And he came here and he visited Tory
and he visited me and we spoke a lot about Joseph, yes.

Pity that he died. I hoped to see him again.

Q: Children in the ghetto, you drew some of the children. You said they

EL: Well they children had the job. They had to, they had to watch the guards because there was, there was a, hunger in the ghetto. So as they do it in all the countries, yes, that they, they plant vegetables. And Germans brought us seeds and they saw to it that every little bit of uh of earth was used for growing vegeta-

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TIMECODE NOTES:

bles. But you know the, the fences, they were

Q: Let's put another roll on.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(Camera roll 83, sound roll 49, Take)

(21)

EL: Yes, can I go on.

Q: About the children.

EL: Yes, when you watch my pictures I did in the
ghetto, so around all the houses there were fences.
During the years all the fences disappeared for, for,
for wood. For firewood. And so any patch of vegetables
stood open and who, whoever came by could, could take
what he wanted. So children were posted as watch men.
They had a, no how do you call it.

Q: Straw

EL: No, no something they could make noise with.

Q: A whistle

EL: They had a whistle yes, and then a policeman would

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TIMECODE NOTES:

come and help them yes. Because everybody was hungry
wherever he, he saw a tomato or something and he would
take it if, if it was not watched yes. So I say in my
text that one of the most uh agreeable sightings in the
ghetto were the, the little children watching the
gardens because they had Israel style little, little
caps on yes. And it was a nice sight.

Q: And tell me about the po...

EL: The what.

Q: The pottery. You went to the pottery.

EL: Ah, the pottery yes. I went to the pottery to, to draw people at their work and then I noticed that they were doing big uh containers and I decided that in a big container, my pictures would be well protected when I put them into the ground.

Q: Let's cut. (waiting for siren)
(Speeding)

(22, this is slate 22)

Video Tape No. ____ Camera Roll No. ____ Sound Roll No. ____

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Q: You went to the...

EL: I went to the pottery and uh this was already the time when there were German advisors and supervisors everywhere. So I, I had somehow to appease him yes so I gave him one of the drawings I did in Vilna yes and so he allowed me to come and, and go whenever I liked and he let me do some drawings of the pottery. And I asked the workers to make for me big containers. The size that I could put my pictures into them and bury them with a cover yes and they did it for me.

And even, yes, what I wanted to tell you, you are, you are talking about art in the ghetto. There was another artist who was a good friend of mine who had his exhibition at the artists', the artists' house in Kovno imm, immediately after me. My, my exhibition uh closed uh at the end of uh December and his started in, in January. And we became good friends and we, we went often to draw together in the ghetto. And there are some of his drawings in, in Garfunkel's book. I have it here, I will show it to you. And uh I gave him one of my pots, yes. And he buried his, his uh collection. Many times we went together to draw the same, the same subjects, the same people that we were finding and he

died in Dachau.

But his wife, who looked very Christian. They had a

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TIMECODE NOTES:

little blond girl that she managed to give uh for care
into a Christian family and she left the ghetto when
the ghetto was liquidated while Jacob went to, went to
the camps with all, with the whole transport. We were
in together in the on the, on the train. When we ar-
rived in, in Yerdanzig, women and men were separated
and the, there were I saw him for the last time. He
died in Dachau.

Q: What was his name.

EL: Uh Jacob Lipschitz. Jacob Lipschitz. And his
wife knew about the, the hiding place and she found his

collection and she brought it here when she came with her daughter and she, they came to me and I saw to it that Yad Vashem bough the collection and it is exhibited in the, in the art museum in Yad Vashem during the, the exhibition that was now they have changed the exhibition. They have something else. But uh we are in on the same on the same uh plate as the Luria and my biography and Jacob Lipshitz, his biography.

(Siren)

(Speeding)

(Take 23)

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EL: By the way Joseph Schlesinger was an energetic, a very nice young man. And hew as very much involved in

art so he assembled young people around him and he was lecturing them on art and uh telling them about artists and teaching them and, and uh to me came some young people who did something at all to show, to show me what they did. A little girl with uh with a name Ira Berman was bringing me little sculptures she, that she did in the ghetto. And later she, she did some little sculptures in the trenches that we were building and she brought them with her to Israel and uh she died very young and the family brought the little, the little things to me for me to decide what to do with them. And uh I and I told them to give it to Yad Vashem and they are at Yad Vashem. Little heads that she did in the trench during our uh labor days in the women camps.

Q: Do you remember burying your jars.

EL: Yes, sure.

Q: Tell me.

EL: We had, we had an argument with uh with Golub,

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TIMECODE NOTES:

with Tory. He had the hiding place for his, for his archives. And he said to me that uh that he would be ready to take my collection with the whole collection of the of the uh Altestenrat archives. But I said well there is no, not much chance that I will be alive, but maybe yes and then I want to know where they, where they are. So he said but this I can't disclose to you. So you can, you can have your collection back. And I decided to take the, the jars. They were in a hiding place. I went there and I took them and I buried them in the back yard of my sister's flat. Yes. They were never found and I think that Lithuanians who uh turned the ghetto upside down for, uh for gold and jewels and they found whole, whole uh big uh jar with papers, that they, they got angry and threw it away or tore it, tore it up and they, and maybe it's still there. So that there were about 200 drawings and water colors. So saved were really all, only those who, who were photographed by Mr. Tory during my exhibition.

And then the other collection that was initiated by Mr. Zundelivich that I told you that he uh he, he was persecuting me everywhere yes. If, if he hadn't done so I would probably not have done it yes. He was sending me people, the most important people in the ghetto yes. I had a broken leg yes and so I couldn't go out (laughs). I had a, an accident in a working place. So they came to me.

But I did it you know and when you put pressure on

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TIMECODE NOTES:

somebody he does it if he wants or if he doesn't want to. The, the landscapes and the, and the, the types like you showed me, the couple, these I'd do, I did willingly but having to do with people who are always busy yes and you don't know how to talk to them and how to uh sit with them yes. And, uh and once they, they give you an interview and then they have no time. Come

another time and that it was very difficult. But he, he, he was so dedicated to it yes.

The interesting thing is that most of what he collected survived. The whole collection that Sarah Milo has survived in its entirety yes. And Tory who was, who, who, who was on the, on the, on his flight from Kovno yes through, through Russian communist territory uh had many difficulties. He said that all the papers were taken away from him and uh the official was called out of the room for, for a few moments so he grabbed it and he ran away. (laughs) This is how my pictures were saved. This is what he tells me.

Q: We have to reload.

(end first tape)

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(second tape)

(Camera roll 84, sound roll 50, speed)

Q:: Let's jump how did later

EL: I didn't know that, that something was photographing. There is a big collection that a man called Kadushin did and it was exhibited at the Washington museum but uh I didn't know about it. All these things were very secretly done because it was very dangerous that the Germans should learn about it.

Q: So but then many years later you got copies of the photographs and you made a grid

EL: No, no, no. These photographs well you should understand it. The photographs are of my pictures, my pictures were photographed and this is what I did. I reconstructed them from the photographs that were taken

from my pictures at an exhibition that I had in the ghetto. I must always explain it again and again because don't understand it at first hearing yes. I what I did is from my own pictures. Not from other people's photographs or things.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Q: Tell me you divided it

EL: Yes, this is how the classic artists did it.

Q: Well tell me that as if

EL: Look, look whoever ha understands something in art and has seen an art book of, of, of uh uh making uh

working from a sketch to a big picture, this is what cause, this is what, how it was done. Rubens worked like that and Rembrandt worked like that and this was the way to enlarge pictures. Because you divided the small one into a grid and then you made one on a big grid and every little uh quadrangle had to have in it the same thing. This is how you a is pictured. Sometime I speak half French, half English, excuse me. (laughs)

Q: ...to tell

EL: I wanted to tell you about other artists yes. There was an excellent German uh graphic artist, Fritz Gadiel who came into the ghetto. He ran away from Hitler and came to Kovno.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Uh they came from Austria, they came from Germany, they came from be, because they knew there was a non aggression pact yes. They, they thought they were safe in Lith, in the Baltic states. And uh he was a great artist yes and when, when he came he wanted to work and he went to the, to the uh committee of the elders and he said look I will draw you your, your posters. In my manner and he was uh a great artist of the, of the letter. Of the written word. It was something fantastic. And he was, he was writing the, the announcements the Germans made in letters that from afar you could, you could know what the, what the, what it was saying yes. If it was something threatening or it was something uh uh something agreeable to the order of the, of the ghetto.

And before the aktions there were he gave the, the letters such a character that from afar people knew that uh a disaster is, is coming. And uh these people uh wanted to be employed more or less in their uh in their art. They opened at the, at the big uh werkstaten, there were, workshops yes, where they were working in repairing uh German uniforms and, and the big specialists made the, made the, made the woods for the Germans and uh and whatever they wanted yes. And they opened a department for toys. For which they used all sorts of, of pieces of wood and so, so the Germans, the Germans could send presents to their wives and children for the, for the holidays.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

And when the new commandant was to come, everybody was very, very excited because they heard that they would, should doubt the, the toys department. But when he came to see what they did it stayed on. But at that time, uh I had already given been given a job by, by the German uh by the second in command yes. He wanted, He wanted uh a copy of the picture that one of the officers had bought. The mother sitting uh sitting at a picnic with two children. He bought her a production while the bookshops in Kovno and uh his superior wanted one too. He couldn't get it so he looked for a painter in the ghetto yes. As in some uh officers there were some of my drawings so , so uh Obersharfuhrer Berger came, came to see, called me to, to come and see him.

Well yes, I am an artist, I can do it yes. I want to see your pictures. Well I said when I live with many

people together. It might not be easy. I want to see and he goes. Then we surprised somebody taking a bath of the anyway I found some, some of my pictures and I showed him. Well you know how to, how to do it and I will call you. Because I had no way of, no where to do here, to find a place for me.

And I waited for him to call me and then suddenly somebody told me yes but Schlesinger is already working on it. Schlesinger's wife was working at the at one of the offices and, and when it was told we needed they said well Mr. Schlesinger's husband is an artist let him do it. You already started and what about me.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

So I went , I, I said I was with waiting for you to calling me. Why didn't you come, you told me that, that I should

wait yes. So they decided well you will do one and he will do one. We will give one to the first Ober-

strum von fuhrer and one to the Hauptsten fuhrer for Christmas. Yes. He gave his private tour to us so we could put out, put up our easels and, and make it ready for Christmas. Yes. And since then uh Hauptsten fuhrer, Haupstein Fuhrer yes it was Rink, invited me once and he said I want to see some of your pictures because if you are an artist I don't want you to go to the, to the meat factory. Uh, uh the taking care of, of slaughtered hens. Yes this was, this was the work of the women of the ghetto yes. For their, for their yes. Taking the, preparing it for uh for canning yes. Yes uh, uh chicken meat yes, and but it was a good place. They could take home the, the heads and the heads and the, and the feet yes so they had something to eat yes, but I didn't go there because I had a, a broken leg.

I could go out of the ghetto. It was very important for me to get the job so eh said so you work for me and he went to the phone and phoned somewhere. Make a, make a studio for uh for the artist. And there was a studio yes. But uh the council of elders decided we won't have a single artist. We will build a whole workshop about it.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

So Gadiel started to do his graphics and Shlesinger was the second painter and with them worked a very talented you, young artist whose picture you saw at Tory's.

Bension Schmit. He was 17 years old. He was so gifted, so he, he had never studied. There are such natural talents. I am not one of them yes. I had to study hard and to work hard to get where I got. And he did the picture of uh of uh of uh no, deportation with the Jew. Do you know the picture. Probably Tory told, showed it to you yes.

So there were several, several of them yes. And I know of a young, of a young artist who she, when she went to work she did portraits of the German soldiers. They gave her some bread for it, that's all. I did many portraits for Germans and got a piece of bread for it, yes. Later in the, in the women's labor camp there was a, even a German, a German yes.

Q: We need to reload.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(Camera roll 85, sound roll 51)

(take 25)

Q: Now you left off, would you just say again you
painted many portraits of Germans.

EL: Yes, for a, one even bought me a whole bread. This

was such a, such an event yes. Yes, later in the camps when the Germans when they knew that I was an artist they brought me photographs of their children and their wives and uh once our commandant who was a very bad German. He, he, he caught me drawing and he came even beat me up. So the, the other the other soldiers said instead of a prize you get beaten up. And then he came to me later. Look, I am going on my leave. Please do my portrait and tell me what you need. I will bring you. And then he brought me paper and, and china ink and in my little, little book, the Jews in Slavery there are drawings done with the pen and ink, yes. Over done with a sliver of wood. With, with some ink that the Germans gave me to write the numbers on it, to write for our, uh for our numbering yes. So there were different ones yes. But they exchanged him later because he started the romance with, with uh with one of the women in the camp.

So the next one was better. And then uh they over-

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TIMECODE NOTES:

whelmed me with, with work yes. And then they started to bring me every day uh, uh a cup of soup from the German kitchen yes. (laughs) I share it with sick people because I could sit in the sick room for my drawings yes. The, the it was warm there yes and so once one of the Germans took me in, in, in the evening into town to draw his mistress yes. And she brought me a package of onions. She has heard that we were so desperate for onions because onions had vitamins. It helped to survive you know. I've always shared what I had.

Q: And this was all in

EL: No, this was in the, in the, in the, in the labor camp. In Stutthof I had my story too because the kapo there had a mistress and when she knew that I was doing portraits here and there she came and she wanted her portrait done. And she said to me if you don't make me beautiful, you will see what will happen to you. So well she was, she was satisfied and then she took me, gave me a whole bread.

We, we got a slice. I got a whole bread. Made a feast

with my friends.

Q: So the other things happened in the concentration

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TIMECODE NOTES:

camp

EL: This was yes, this was in the concen, concentra-
tion camp. This, this, this was, were the little,
little uh let's say the delights that got up here and
there. It never lasted yes, never lasted. Because
Germans were exchanging the personnel all the time.
They, they were afraid that we were fraternizing.

Q: Back in time.

EL: Back in the yes. What I wanted October.

Q: 1941

EL: All the great action yes. Well there was the announcement that everybody but everybody had to go with his whole family to the big Democratu square and there will be a count of the population, how do you call it. There is one word for it. And whoever will be found in his home will be shot on the spot. So everybody of course was very, very much afraid of it.

Everybody came but at that time there were already brigades. These were groups of people who were protected by the Germans yes. Who worked for them in town or somewhere. They came to fetch them. People with pro-

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TIMECODE NOTES:

fessions yes and they, they were separated not to touch them. And I went my, I went with my sister, my, my

brother in law was already away with the 500 intellectuals they had taken. In the beginning of the ghetto my, my sister with her two years old yes.

And the young man who had helped me with my drawings, he came with us. And he said that the, that we were his family. Because he was a brigadier in a, in a detachment that worked at the airfield and he had his privilege. And his uncle was in the, the council of elders. He had the jordan shein, the jordan paper. It was the, the paper that saved people. And on that day 10,000 people were separated and uh driven to the little ghetto first.

At the beginning no one knew what, maybe they wanted to, to renew the little ghetto because it was very crowded here. And uh they said no they had to send people to, to Germany for other work in, in other, other camps. But the next morning the we noticed that the big, big numbers of people went up to the ninth fort. That fort that we called the via Dolorossa and then it was told that they shot them all. And then no one, no one, no one wanted to believe. Til a woman who survived under the corpses and crawled out and she came and told the story. Still no one look you could, you couldn't take it. You just couldn't take it.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Q: A woman came back.

EL: A woman came back because they shot the people and sometimes they did, they didn't shoot them they only wounded them. So they crawled out back again yes. And somehow they found their, their way back to the ghetto and they were telling their stories.

Q: Did you talk to them.

EL: Yes, I talked to, talked to her. She was a young woman of 30. She looked like 50, 60. And I write about her. I just went through my material to remember. And then uh

Q: Did you see the next day you saw people coming back with the

EL: The, yes the next day from back from the, back from the, from the, from the mountain they came with uh with uh lorries, with trucks with full of clothing, and full of baby buggies, all they things they had robbed from the people they executed.

But from me you wanted to know about, about uh culturally in the ghetto. So I wanted to mention that there were musicians, there were many musicians. That at a

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TIMECODE NOTES:

certain time were organized in an orchestra. And there were orchestra performances when even the gestapo people came uh to listen to them. And uh there were writers and we had uh lectures. I even gave a lecture on art. There were doctors who lectured on uh on medicine and there was, there was some uh some uh quiet in the, in the middle of, of 43 and when I went for my

lecture they already talked about sending people from Kovno to Estonia. And I even thought of canceling my lecture but people were already assembled there and I de, I delivered.

But uh this time never came again. And then came the parcelation and the sending to the, to the satellite camps and the dissolution of the ghetto.

And then a new commandant came. A new commandant who had been in, in Mauthausen. He had been, he had orchestrated the, the gassing and the, and the, and the, the extermination of, of hundreds of thousands and he came to be our head in the ghetto. The Germans when they want, when yeah. Can I go on.

Q: We have to put one more roll on. Do we have one more .

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TIMECODE NOTES:

EL: Where did I stop.

Q: I was going to ask you

EL: Oh yes ask me questions yes.

(Camera roll 86, sound roll 52, take)

(This is mark number 26)

Q: Day to day life in the ghetto, aside from your art,
when it was at a peaceful time, what was it like.

EL: It was peaceful then I, I, I went out drawing.
Look I had my sister with, with her little, with her
little child and then sometimes my sister wanted to go
out to town and somebody had to stay with the child.
We had our hands full. Yes. And then they asked me
for all sorts of teaching people and showing people and

uh when I worked with, for the Germans I, I worked the whole day in the studio.

Q: When you

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TIMECODE NOTES:

EL: When you went out to work you came back at, at 7 at night yes. I was in the working brigades like anybody else. I was working at the airport. I was working at the at the agriculture. I was working. But then when, when, when somebody for instance we were, women were working at agriculture in a farm, in a big farm where they grew tobacco and was, it was in Lithuania it was still a, experimental yes. And there was a professor who saw me drawing so he asked me to, to, to paint a few plants for him and then the manager of the farm saw me painting so he asked if I can paint the

portrait of his wife and uh and then I was sitting there and painting portraits at, at, it was warm and they give me to eat. And then the neighbor wanted a portrait and til we, one winter they, they the women who were working there were stealing something. Of course they were stealing. They were hungry. So he sent them back before their time. And uh and I was at, at their flat. I didn't know about it. So somebody came and said uh the mother of that lady came and said well your, your brigade is out yes. You hurry to, to catch them. So I hurried and I fell in the snow and I had a broken leg. That took me months to heal and, and was an open wound. Yes and it and they took me, they took me on a wagon with a, with a horse to the hospital. It was quite a tragedy (laughs) and my sister came crying. But I did many drawings in the hospital.

Q: Let's cut for a second. (discussion of siren during last conversation)

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(Speed)

(twenty...?)

Q: The jewish police, were they a good police force.

EL: They were a good police force yes. And they, they were really the, the elite of youth in Kovno. They had very difficult jobs. There were many Zionists between them. There were many intell, intelligent people among them. But you know that on the, on the day of the children's action they arrested the whole Jewish police so it could not uh collaborate with uh with, with people in the ghetto in saving the children. And by the way they came to take the children when the, when the, when the people were out to work. So the people came back in the evening they didn't find the children. You can imagine what crying and shouting and, and uh what a noise rose up in the ghetto when the, the people didn't find the children at home. And the Jewish police they took them to the ninth fort and they demanded of them to disclose where there were hiding places for children. And those who went with them,

there were a few, stayed alive and the others were
shot. The bloom of youth. I knew many of them.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Q: The underground.

EL: I, I, I knew not many but I, I was not from the
place you know. But I, I knew that there was an under-
ground and I knew that uh that they were organizing
youth and looked among the youth there was the move-
ment. Anyway we will not survive so at least we will we
want to die as fighting people, not like sheep.
Many times when I lectured in uh in kibbutzim or uh I
have here a traveling exhibition and I have films and I
was invited twice a year on, on Yom Hashoah this is
Holocaust day and the tenth of tivet is the memorable
day of, of the dead whose burying place is not known.

So they, they have it as another, as another holocaust Day. That I was invited in kibbutzim in organizations, in museums to, to have an exhibition of my etchings and to come and, and lecture and I have even films made of that, videos made of that, that I showed one of my films and then there were questions and answers. Uh and what was the question I forgot.

Q: In the ghetto did you ever teach children drawing.

EL: No because uh because if I, if I had and they were very disappointed that I didn't help them with it. Because if I had done it I couldn't have found time for my collection, for my work.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Q: And when you were deported toward the end. You

were deported?

EL: Yes.

Q: Describe to me those last few days and describe to me how it was going there to be deported.

EL: Well uh we knew that, that everything was uh that the, the Russian army was approaching. By the way I was then working for the commandant of the ghetto and we were copying for him uh landscapes and so on and he loved very much the, the landscape and he said to me that he wanted to send me to a Lithuanian farm to paint a few pictures from him, from the Lithuanian countryside. He didn't want the ghetto. He wanted to send, maybe he wanted to save me or so. I already made plans that I will take a little boy and, and I will save this one and save this. And when I brought him his last picture and I said well herr Obersterman fuhrer you said you wanted to, to send me to uh to a farm in Lithuania to paint for so, so he said oh please wait a few days til things calm down. And a few days later we had to march out of the ghetto. That was the end of my career with the oberman fuhrer. Yes.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

But we were, we were marched off in uh to Democratu
square and we were waiting to be led to the railway
station. And they take, came out there were no, no
there was no railway for us. There were no, no how do
they call it, there were not cars. And we, and we
stayed for 2 or 3 days under, under the, under the sky,
we slept outside. They didn't let, let us go back to
our homes, yes. Til there were cars and til we were
led to the station and we, we were, we were optimistic.
Maybe the Russians were already a week later the Rus-
sians came. They liberated the Kovno very soon after we
left. Yes.

Q: Was there burning.

EL: They burned the whole ghetto yes. They

Q: Was it started while you were still there.

EL: Yes, yes, they started Gadiel's, Gadiel's little boy and his sister's little girl, they, they were together with Bension Schmidt in, in a hiding place in our uh in our studio. And Gadiel with his family went out and, and Bension Schmidt he didn't come out. He, he was burned inside yes. And I met Mrs. Gadiel later in Stutthof and she said that they had taken the chil-

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TIMECODE NOTES:

dren away from them and Gadiel was in Dachau or something like that. They both survived, I, I heard from them. I wrote them a letter. I

Q: The burning, did you see the burning.

EL: From afar we, we saw here and there flames. Yes, they, they were looking for hiding places where they hid the children. There were hiding places under the houses yes and many people survived in those hiding places. But many people they, they, they took them out of that hiding places and brought them to the assembly point where we assembled. A friend of mine, they came it was so hot in those hiding places that they came nearly naked yes. Anyway in Stutthof they took everything away from us yes so it didn't matter that they had not . And then we were given pajamas yes and then we were only wondering that our showers had water and not gas in them.

Q: They did

EL: They did.

Q: We need to get a little bit of room tone.

EL: You think I can't be quiet.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(room tone)

Q: OK, end room tone.

(end first side of cassette)

EL: Want his first name

(wild sound)

EL: Yes, every ghetto had, had one witness to send for the Eichman trial and so they were very, very careful in choosing the, the man what was considered a great honor. But many people didn't want to appear as, as witnesses. Because uh the people itself was angry at the, at the people who stood at the head yes and somehow they didn't want to confront it. I don't know but Segalson, Mr. Segalson who in the ghetto was the manager of the great, of the big workshops, he wanted to do it very much. But his doctor told him that his heart was not in a condition that he could do it. So they were looking for somebody else.

And uh sometimes they are a little eccentric so they,

they decided to propose me and I was chosen and i was on the list of witnesses in the Eichman trial and, and uh newspapermen from all over the world came to, to interview me here what you see this is a woman from Sweden and there are, in my, in my album of, of uh journal, journalists' papers there are Americans and I,

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TIMECODE NOTES:

I don't know from several countries.

And then the, some of the important people who themselves didn't want to appear as witnesses they uh they uh didn't want to accept me as a witness. They said she doesn't belong to us. She, she's a stranger. What does she know of Lithuanian jewry and an artist yet. So they choose a, a doctor, Doctor Pertsekovich and uh then being a witness, I couldn't go to the trial.
was I lived in Tel Aviv but I, I would have gone. It interested me but there was no television then so I, I heard the, the sessions on the radio and once I heard

Dr. Pertsekovich uh was uh testifying so I understand, understood that I was off. So I wrote a letter to Yad Vashem that uh I would like to, to be out of it. So I wanted to be free. I wanted to go to the trial. So they an, answered me all right. We have somebody else.

And then I started to go to the trial and did these drawings. And uh one appeared in Dabar in the original was stolen. And the others, I don't know. Yad Vashem has it (hebrew) but it appeared in, in some of the newspapers and I have here copies. And generally the Jews of Kovno did not, did not really appreciate what I was doing. Only the intellectuals. The many thought what was in their heads when, when all this was happening. Art? They couldn't understand it. And some were angry at me.

And when I did the portraits for Mr. Sundalevich uh

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TIMECODE NOTES:

collection uh one of them even told, I don't want you to draw me for that collection. I don't appreciate all that effort. When uh Mr. Tory's book appeared and all those people were mentioned and the portraits were the, the same man who was a good friend here and his wife and his son. By the way his son survived with his father the Dachau concentration camp. And two other sons. They had said sent before the war to Israel. They met their mother, the mother and father in Italy when they were in the jewish brigade. It, it was some story from I don't know from uh from beyond. The tragic thing is that one of those sons who was in the, who was in they sent the boys to, to, to the mother's parents. He, who lived in already in, in Palestine. He fell in the war of independence and the other son died suddenly of a com... The eldest has some issue, yes, there are some. But Dr. Rabinovich and his wife died at the grand age of over 90, yes, his wife was 96.

They wanted to interview her for the museum and the one, the youngest son who was in the ghetto with her parents. He, he had his bar mitzvah in the ghetto and I promised him that I would do his portrait as a present to his bar mitzvah. But somehow he didn't come out. So I always when I met him here I always told him I, I owe him, I owe him something yes. And he came to collect (laughs) Yeah. And I saw to it that all the children and grandchildren had a copy of the , of the picture of the raid of the potato field that their

grandfather had helped me to create yes.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

When I met him here we were, we were good friends for all those years. He said you know after all I regret that you didn't draw me in the ghetto. So I said come I'll draw you on. What. But he died in the meantime.

But the son lived on and he, he was the he was in, in the, in the Washington Museum. I sent Naba to him because the many, many people, people don't know as much as I know yes. Because I was really friendly with those top people. Because they were the intelligentsia that was uh visiting my exhibition in Kovno before the war. The only ones I knew in Kovno. By the way Gafukin's son survived and Dr. Persekovich's son survived and Lipschitz' daughter survived.

And Rabinovich's sons survived. He was in Washington

lately. They interviewed him there and we are in contact. And I think he told me that he, that he inscribed himself for inter, for being interviewed by Stephen Spielberg. yes. I, I didn't do. I only respond when somebody comes to me. I don't, don't take any incentive any more because i am always in fear that I couldn't, couldn't do it. Couldn't fulfill what I am promising.

I am glad I did what I did today. And that you are content.

Q: Thank you very much. (end)

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