

Artist Manfred Bockelmann Donates Portraits of Area Holocaust Survivors' Siblings to Stockton

For Immediate Release; with photos on [flickr](#)

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Galloway, N.J. - In an act of generosity with impact for generations to come, internationally known artist Manfred Bockelmann today donated seven portraits of the murdered brothers and sisters of area Holocaust survivors to Stockton University.

The large-scale drawings, done in charcoal on burlap, are part of Bockelmann's "Drawing Against Oblivion" exhibition, being shown for the first time in the United States at Stockton's Art Gallery.

"I want to get these children back out of the darkness, and I will continue to draw my portraits as long as I can," Bockelmann has said. The artist, who was born in Austria in 1943, had asked himself what happened to all those children born the same year as he who, unlike him, suffered a terrible fate. To date, he has drawn over 120 portraits.

Overcome with emotion as he prepared to sign the gift agreement, he told the gathered Stockton students, faculty, staff and members of the community: "It is an honor for me to be here today. Thank you."

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Lori Vermeulen represented President Harvey Kesselman in the afternoon portion of the day's events related to "Drawing Against Oblivion."

"Stockton is all about community," she said, noting that being able to connect with Holocaust survivors in the area is one thing that "makes our Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center so special." She added, "Stockton is partnering with the community on something very meaningful to the world."

Philip Ellmore, chief development officer and executive director of the University Foundation, thanked Bockelmann for his "tremendous generosity to Stockton." **-more-**

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“Stockton University is deeply honored to receive the gift of these extraordinary portraits by Mr. Bockelmann of the brothers and sisters of Holocaust survivors who are members of our community,” said President Kesselman in remarks prior to the screening of a documentary about Bockelmann’s work later in the day. “These portraits speak to the unrelenting question of the artist, ‘What happened to the children who lay in the wrong cradle?’”

“Stockton is determined that future generations will learn about the Holocaust and other genocides, to ensure that they never happen again,” Kesselman said.

The portraits of local survivors’ siblings depict Erika Fisch, the sister of Ruth Fisch Kessler of Ventnor; David Dov Granek, the brother of Hanna Granek Ehrlich, of Margate; Tova and Yossel Altman, the sister and brother of the late Jadzia Altman Greenbaum, who resided in Margate; Zigmush and Ruth Berkowitz, the nephew and sister of the late Esther Berkowitz, who resided in Ventnor; Sy Zuchter, 16, the brother of the late Janet Moskowitz of Ventnor; and Ida Rebecca Kohn, sister of Murray Kohn of Vineland, rabbi emeritus of Beth Israel Congregation of Vineland, and Stockton professor emeritus of Holocaust Studies.

Survivors Kessler, Ehrlich and Kohn and extended family of all those portrayed were present and each survivor family received a large framed photo of their family member's portrait at a private reception.

Among those attending were adult children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the survivors, who are the second and third generation after the Holocaust: Michele Taroff of Margate, who is Kessler’s daughter; Aida Gurwicz of New York City, who is Esther Berkowitz’s daughter; Ida Margolis of Naples, Fla. and Jamibeth Margolis of New York City, who are Janet Moskowitz’s daughter and granddaughter; Abe Greenbaum of Egg Harbor Township, and his sister, Carol Greenbaum of Absecon, who are Jadzia Greenbaum’s children; and Hanna Ehrlich’s sons, Dr. Harold Ehrlich with his wife, Diane, of Bridgewater, N.J. and Isaac Ehrlich, Esq. of Sacramento, Calif., along with Hanna’s grandson, David Jeremy Ehrlich, his wife, Jill, and daughters Molly and Cookie, all of Delaware.

“The point is not to keep this here but for everyone to tell someone else about what the artist has done and what the message is,” said Ida Margolis, who heads the Children of Holocaust Survivors of Southwest Florida, which does programs in schools. “It’s an impetus for action. As they said at the panel discussion earlier, ‘it’s not enough to be compassionate, you have to act.’”

Bockelmann drew the survivors’ siblings from photographs, to give faces to some of the 1.5 million children murdered during the Holocaust. His niece, Marion Hussong, professor of Literature and the Carol Rittner Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, initiated the project after seeing her uncle’s portraits in Austria. She worked for over five years to bring this project to fruition, along with faculty, staff and students from the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center and the Art Gallery.

Under Hussong’s guidance, Andrea Heymann, a graduate of the Master of Holocaust and Genocide Studies program and Ashlee Ciccone, a student in the same master’s program, researched and identified the source photos for the portraits Stockton received as a gift today.

Over 4,000 schoolchildren and their teachers, along with hundreds of Stockton students, faculty and staff and members of the public are visiting the exhibition of 34 portraits, which is open through Nov. 13.

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This week, Bockelmann drew an even larger portrait of Anatol Samujlowicz Vanukevich, age 13, on the gallery wall, using birch branches tipped in charcoal and a ladder to reach up more than 20 feet. Anatol is the only person Bockelmann has drawn who survived the Holocaust

The artist met with students from the Woodbine Elementary School today, and told them: "It's wonderful to see you. You are our future."

Jeremiah Camacho, an eighth grader, said, "It was a wow feeling seeing these kids, who are the same age and younger. It hurts because that could have been me, or someone I know or a loved one."

Funding for transportation of the students in grades 5-12 from Atlantic, Cape May, Ocean and Monmouth counties is being provided by the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center.

Many wrote letters to the murdered children in the portraits.

"She must have been very sad and scared. I think she was very lonely. Friedel must have been a problem child because she yearned for a parent's love. I wish I could have met her to try and become friends with her," wrote a student. Friedel Franke was deliberately starved and given fatal injections by the Nazis at a children's clinic in Vienna and died at age 9.

Another student wrote to Friedel: "I'm so sorry you had to die that way and I think you are very brave. I'm happy you are in a better place. You are very pretty."

To Herbert, age 2, Giana N. wrote: "You are so adorable. I am just so upset about what you went through. What they did to you was wrong It makes me even more upset because I have a one-year-old nephew, so it just brings tears to my eyes. R.I.P."

To Janina, age 17, one young boy wrote:

"Hi I'm Tommy and I was wondering what would you do if you saw the Nazis today?"

Ashlee P. also wrote about Janina, saying: "I know I will remember Janina Wachowicz. She was born on my friend Mia's birthday and she died on mine. I feel very upset the poor girl died this way and I hope to remember her on my birthday, to honor and remember the hundreds and thousands of children who died in the Holocaust."

The sixth grade class of Arthur Rann School in Galloway wrote a thank-you letter for the field trip and said: "We hope to be strong, more caring people as a result of this experience."

Hundreds of Stockton students also have visited the exhibit, as part of a class or as individuals, and some were trained as docents, or guides.

"Docents are Stockton students from all different majors," said Gail Rosenthal, director of the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center. "It's helping them with public speaking and giving them self confidence in learning about a history that they didn't realize paralleled some of today's issues."

"Drawing Against Oblivion" was first exhibited in Vienna in 2013, and seen by over 88,000 visitors. Final Frame, an international film crew based in Munich, Germany, has been shadowing Bockelmann over time as he works on his historic project. The crew came to

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Stockton to film Bockelmann in 2014, when he presented Kohn with his sister's portrait. They are here now, making an eight-minute film about this week's events to be shown in classrooms.

Their documentary, "[Drawing Against Oblivion](#)," which has won numerous state, national and international awards, was screened in the Campus Center tonight. That was followed by a panel discussion of the film with Bockelmann, Producer David Kunac, Director Bärbel Jacks, Hussong and Adrienne Parvin, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies program.

Earlier in the day, there was a panel discussion about the art works with Bockelmann, Hussong, Heymann, Carol Rittner, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, associate professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Maryann McLoughlin, director of the Writing as Witness program which publishes the memoirs of Holocaust survivors. The discussion was moderated by Kate Ogden, professor of Art History.

"This is the most rewarding thing I have ever done," said Hussong. She said she is proud and happy that Stockton is the first site in the United States, and first academic institution, to display the exhibition. "I couldn't think of a better place."

_ Susan Allen of Stockton University contributed to this article.

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