



A REQUIEM

tribute to the spiritual space at Auschwitz

SUSAN MAY TELL

S U S A N M A Y T E L L
Photographs of Space, Silence & Solitude

A Requiem: tribute to the spiritual space at Auschwitz

In Auschwitz, I felt the presence of its ghosts guiding me, guiding my camera, and was then, and continue to be now, moved to share the tragedy of this place through the images I saw through my lens.

I arrived there almost by happenstance. While planning a trip to Prague and Budapest, I learned that an overnight train goes from Prague to Krakow -- and from there it was a short local train ride to Auschwitz.

I walked the grounds in silence, in meditation, photographing the aesthetics, the mood, the sense of foreboding -- and tried to capture the energy that lives in that space.

Hopefully visitors will find these images reveal the presence of unspeakable horror, convey the ever present pathos of desolation, and give a real sense of the large scale of this death camp.

Equally important to my artistic vision is my commitment to Auschwitz as a meditation on decay and memory. Like others' sacred grounds that are decaying, Auschwitz today is disappearing and raises questions about whether places of this kind should be restored and the importance of memory and commemoration.

Susan May Tell

A Requiem:
tribute to the spiritual space at Auschwitz

photographs by Susan May Tell



A REQUIEM AT THE MUSEUM OF ART / FORT LAUDERDALE



A REQUIEM AT THE GRIFFIN MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Guests A Requiem

Comments

The Tribute to Auschwitz was very moving. I was brought to tears and felt the horror that occurred there through these photographs.

Comments

Probably the most moving photography I've ever seen. In simplicity and Black & White

Comments

Extremely moving
Perfect in starkness
Baqton, MA - Thank you for having this exhibit.

Thank you for this most
memorable experience

In memory of my father
an Auschwitz survivor -
very touching photo especially
of the lady with of barbie

ts

Thank You!

THANK you!!!

Wow
A great show.

Comments in the Griffin Museum of Photography's Guest Book by visitors to Susan May Tell's exhibition "A Requiem: tribute to the spiritual space at Auschwitz."

SELECTED ANECDOTES AND EMAILS:

which illustrate how *Requiem* touches a resonant chord in a diverse and wide group of nationalities, religions, cultures, and ages.

-A middle-aged Japanese woman was viewing the photographs inside the gallery while I was talking to the Director of the Griffin Museum of Photography, near the entranceway. When the woman left the gallery, the Director said "Here's the artist" and the woman burst into tears. All I could do was hug her. Later she approached me and in broken, accented English, said "very beautiful."

-An Iranian Muslim emailed: "I simply wanted to let you know how I felt about your very poignant exhibition... As I stood in the middle of it...the images took me there and I could hear the yelling, the screaming, the feeling of hopelessness of the victims...and I could not stop the tears..... For this very reason your exhibit reminds the viewer of the prejudice, injustice and the fact that it is still happening to many all over this world."

-A Latina high school student pointed to what looks like smudged eyes in one of the photographs and said that in her Puerto Rican culture, the smudges symbolize "ghost."

-An American architect attended the gallery talk where the discussion included what should be done with places of this kind and later emailed: "I will continue to puzzle over the issues related to preservation of tragic sites and how to ensure that we do not forget for sometime to come."

-A 14-year old pointed to the photograph with the valises and noted the date of birth, 1935, written on the one belonging to Gertrude Neubauer. "She must have been just a child."

-A Scottish woman emailed: "The images are overwhelming & so sad, so strong, so important. I had a strong physical reaction, feeling weak and stomach turning. I found the cutlery shot so moving having read Primo Levi recently, and so knowing how important these mundane items became to the prisoners. I'm in awe of your ability to convey the horror so brilliantly, and the world of course needs to have all this kept in consciousness."

-An administrator at a Holocaust museum emailed "Susan, your creativity and sensitivity make the photographs unique among holocaust-related artwork, as the images are sparse, stark, and intricate. The exhibit has the potential to greatly contribute to dialogue about genocide, while thoughtfully and powerfully commemorating the memory of all those who died in Auschwitz."

Nuts & Bolts

The exhibition contains up to 17 prints, of which one is printed twice, the second as a reverse.

The photographs are printed 6 x 4 feet on gelatin silver paper, full frame, with the sprocket marks visible. The prints are specifically left unframed. They are mounted on 1/8" black sintra and attached to wood strainers, with adjustable length cable on top to adjust to the ceiling height of a venue. They can be hung on the wall, suspended singly from the ceiling, or doubly when attached back-to-back with velcro on the strainers. Each photograph (mounted, strainer, cable) weighs about 15 lbs.

The exhibition is housed and travels in one specially designed wood museum crate, 82 x 67 x 31 inches, currently in climate-controlled storage at The Exhibition Alliance (TEA.org).

Requiem is installed without object labels and wall copy to heighten the experience of the viewer.

The photographs were taken with a Leica M-6 and 35mm/f2 Summicron lens.



The crate, packed with the entire *Requiem* exhibition.

Catalogues and prints are available for sale.

Bio

[Susan May Tell](#) is an award-winning fine art photographer whose work has been showcased in solo exhibitions at the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale; the Griffin Museum of Photography; the University of California at San Francisco; and the Avenue B Gallery. Solo exhibitions include *A Requiem: tribute to the spiritual space at Auschwitz*; *Structured Moments*; and *Real / Unreal: urban landscapes of the 1980's*.

Tell's photographs are in the Samuel Wagstaff Collection at the Smithsonian Museum and have been featured in group exhibitions at the Monmouth Museum; Hudson River Museum; Phoenix Art Museum; the Center for Fine Art Photography; and the Barrett Art Center, where Malcolm Daniel, Curator in Charge of the Department of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, awarded her First Place. Nat Trotman, Associate Curator of Art, Guggenheim Museum of Art, included her work in *New Directions / Art* which he juried at that same venue.

Also a successful photojournalist, Tell spent four years based in Cairo and four years in Paris working for the *New York Times*, *LIFE*, *TIME*, and *Newsweek* Magazines. This was followed by ten years as a staff photographer and photo editor at the *New York Post*.

Tell's subjects have been diverse and include: a 9-month project with Egypt's drug enforcement agency; the women fighters of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front; Iraqi Kurdish refugees in Turkey; Islamic and Pharaonic Monuments in Egypt; the National Basketball Association Finals; lunch with Yasser Arafat and his entourage in Kuwait; murders; car accidents; perp walks; stake-outs; actors; hot air ballooning; 3-star restaurants and 5-star hotels.

Acknowledgments

My heartfelt appreciation of some wonderful individuals who believed in and encouraged this exhibition - and used their good names and reputations to help make it a reality: Helen Gee, Stephen Feinstein, Sherry Lansing, Barry Munitz, Christine Palamidessi and Sharon Waxman.

I am indebted to the wonderful staff at the Museum of Art / Fort Lauderdale who made this exhibition such a success. Its Executive Director Irvin Lippman - who not only selected it but also came up with its title - plus Anthony Lauro, Annegreth Nil, Michael Mills and Steve Cantrell.

Sam Mellon of [CATE](#) (Curatorial Assistance in Pasadena) who creatively solved how to mount the photos and who designed and built the custom museum crate.

Modernage Photo Lab in NYC for the exquisite job in making sure these large prints were perfect.

Most important, too, my poetic and photographic influences: poets Stanley Kunitz, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens; photographers André Kertész, Roy DeCarava, and Walker Evans.

View *A Requiem* on the web

- [Traveling exhibition](#) – Additional information about the traveling exhibition, including press reviews
- [Virtual Museum, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota](#)
- [SlideLuck Berlin](#) November 2011. Accompanied by contemporary composer [Sagardía's](#) *Blood- and gold soldiers, chapter 1 "seven pages" for string trio*, performed by members of the Helios Quartet
- [La Lettre de la Photographie](#) August 2011

"[Susan May Tell's] austere compositions ... dramatize the infrastructure of destruction. Concrete pillars and hooked posts loom like silent sentinels still guarding the concentration camp's secrets; rainwater snaking through a drainage ditch gets cast as a river of tears ... Tell counteracts these stark landscapes with close-ups of the victims' detritus ... homing in on the intimate details of impersonal accumulation, she highlights the individuals lost among the masses."

– *ARTnews*

"haunting photographs without words, titles or frames – they stand alone as silent witnesses to the events in Auschwitz."

– *Forward*

"Training her lens on relics and abandoned property, Tell plucks poetry out of decay."

– *Museums / South Florida*

"... a series of large-scale, starkly black-and-white images of the place where so many Holocaust victims suffered and died. Unidentified by title and absent any human presence, these pictures nevertheless tell a story about entrapment, desolation and loss."

– *Sun-Sentinel*

"The emptiness of the landscape belies the evil that took place there. The images are haunting because we know what we know, but the pictures would have an eerie sensation whether or not we could identify the location."

– *The Palm Beach Post*

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