

Susan May Tell, Artist Statement, in honor of *Never Forget*, Holocaust Memorial Exhibition, 2023  
Christopher Art Gallery, Prairie State College, Curated by Beth Shadur



*Requiem 10*, Photo © Susan May Tell

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.

Between 1.1 and 1.5 million people were intentionally murdered at this largest of Nazi Germany's premeditated killing camps. Gas chambers were constructed so that a poisonous gas, Zyklon B, would be pumped into them and kill thousands of people in one fell swoop.

Who were those people murdered at Auschwitz? A close look at photograph titled *Requiem 10* in this exhibition, the one with valises, gives us some clues. One valise has the name "Gertrude Neubauer" on it. It also has "1935" which is the year of her birth. And that she was "Waisenkind" meaning she was already an orphan. Since Auschwitz was liberated in 1945 we now know that Gertrude was less than ten years old and already an orphan when she was taken prisoner and killed.

Who were the other individuals murdered at Auschwitz? Babies, children, adolescents, the elderly, disabled and weak.

90% were Jewish. The other 10% percent included Roma and Sinti gypsies and regarded, like the Jews, as "racially alien and inferior;" Homosexuals; Poles; Jehovah Witnesses; and those who disagreed with the government.

At 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.

*Requiem 05* and *Requiem 10* are included in a traveling exhibition *A Requiem: Tribute to the Spiritual Space at Auschwitz*. There is a book of that same name, available to see at the gallery, that pairs photographs with lines of poetry by Stanley Kunitz, the 1995 Poet Laureate of the United States of America. It includes these lines: "When they shall paint our sockets gray/And light us like a stinking fuse/Remember that we once could say/Yesterday we had a world to lose."