



Those the River Keeps, 2004-2010, oil on canvas, 78 x 137 inches

ISWASWILLBE THE HOLOCAUST SERIES

Paintings by Geoffrey Laurence

April 3 – August 4, 2016

Opening Reception: April 3, 2016 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Conversation with Curator Simon Zalkind and Geoffrey Laurence: Sunday, April 3 5:00 PM
“Art After the Holocaust: The Generation of Post-Memory”

Two related presentations by renowned bioethicist, Dr. Arthur Caplan, are scheduled for Monday, May 2, 2016.

- 12:00 noon in the Gossard Forum at the Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities.
- 7:00 PM at the Wolf Theatre, 350 S. Dahlia Street in Denver.

Both are free and open to the public. For more information, call Riley Bright at 303.724.8332.

The Art Gallery: Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities

University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus,
13080 East 19th Avenue, Aurora, Colorado 80045
303.724.3994

Map and directions at: www.coloradobioethics.org

Gallery Hours: 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday, free and open to the public

cover image: Geoffrey Laurence, *ISWASWILLBE*, 2000
oil on canvas, 76 x 50 inches

Co-sponsored by the Mizel Museum, Denver CO.



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Paintings by
Geoffrey Laurence

The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed onto us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history or, alternately, into myth. It is also the generation that can think about certain questions arising from the Shoah with a sense of living connection.

– Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge*.

Art can illuminate traumatic experience in ways that are non-narrative and not necessarily bound to historical veracity. It operates in ways that are polyvalent, metaphorical, ambiguous and elusive. With regard to the inconceivable enormity of the Holocaust and its effects on the children of survivors – the generation of “post-memory” – what role can art play in both the preservation of memory and the mediation of the trauma which they have inherited?

Like Geoffrey Laurence, both of my parents were Holocaust survivors. Both were the sole survivors of enormous families, and both had spouses and children whose only liberation were their deaths. For the children of survivors, the Holocaust was a haunting fixture of their households, a constant ache inherited by children hyper-aware of their parents’ irrational fears, phobias, and anxieties. In small, incremental ways, the children of survivors are imprinted by the terror that gripped their parents, adopting their parents’ experiences as their own and becoming in effect the repository of their parents’ memory. However, unlike Geoffrey Laurence’s parents who maintained a vigilant silence and secrecy regarding their identity and experience, my parents were very forthcoming in repeatedly telling the stories of their

traumatizing past. But are all their memories – or mine as well as Geoffrey’s – true? Does it matter? Is the Holocaust, within certain contexts, better served by art, poetry and literature than by documents or testimony?

Understandably, I have an interest and affinity for art related to the Holocaust that transcends my professional role as “curator.” At the same time, I’m somewhat critical of the claims – however well-intended – made for what seems like an unceasing glut of Holocaust-related cultural production. Atrocity can easily be trivialized and sentimentalized or numb us with horrific imagery. There is a continual risk in confronting the abyss in history through images or other artistic means. When I first saw the paintings in Geoffrey Laurence’s *Holocaust Series*, my response was marked by a gut-wrenching recognition of their “genuineness” – their capacity as art to tell the truth with consummate aesthetic and emotional restraint. His astonishing technical bravura did not overwhelm or “aestheticize” the profound impact of the work. They were in equal measure both dazzling and devastating.

Dr. Ori Soltes, an art historian with a particular interest in Holocaust related art production, has written the following about

ISWASWILLBE, the work from which this exhibition derives its title:

In this mind rattling work, two figures approach us on the front part of the stage, its curtains pushed back to facilitate our view of the action. One of the figures is a Nazi officer, attired in full uniform, with jack-boots and leather. He presents the second figure, arm around his shoulder, to us, the viewer – as if that second figure is being stage-managed by him. The second figure is a skeleton, and around its shoulders we easily recognize a *tallit* – a Jewish prayer shawl. The message is clear: Jew and Nazi are inextricably interconnected on the stage of history. The Nazis have, ironically, pushed Jews and Judaism to the front and center of that stage. But there is a price for such placement. Judaism is reduced to a skeletal aspect of itself if Jewish identity is limited to a Holocaust context, or even more broadly, a victim context, without engaging the richly positive cultural and spiritual heritage that defines so much of Judaism’s history. The flesh and blood of what Jews should wish to preserve from the Nazi’s dissipates.

Many of us are aware of the Nazi’s contempt for “degenerate art” and of their linkage of “degeneracy” to specifically Jewish racial traits and proclivities – this being the case even where the art in question was not produced by a Jew. However, prompted by the specifically bioethical thrust of the Fulginiti Center’s mission, I searched for references that would link Nazi racial theory to its contempt for modernist art. I was led to *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine’s Visual Culture* by Lisa Cartwright (1995):

In 1936, Dr. Henry Chartraine published an article in the official journal of the Nazi Physicians League claiming that Jews have problems with spatial and depth perception; this is why the Jews never developed X-ray stereoscopy, even though they dominate the science of radiology. Interestingly, for Chartraine technical thinking and (the Jews’) break...with nature are fundamentally linked to the aesthetic or conventions of flatness associated with modern art movements. Jewish art was always “two dimensional,” he stated...“only Nordic man could see and build in three dimensions.” Here...the modernist aesthetic emerges as a break with racist science and its organization of the body as a full, completely spatialized reality. (141)

To even consider a refutation of Chartraine’s quasi-scientific quackery would be ludicrous. Any response would only insinuate the fact that his assertions deserve to be taken seriously. But specifically, with regard to Laurence’s work, it not only demonstrates the extraordinary mastery of his ability to conjure through the two-dimensional flatness of a canvas an utterly convincing three-dimensional world of living characters but also thrusts us into a “fourth dimension” of felt experience, empathic responsiveness, and existential shudder that pierces through our habitual recourse to any platitudinous clichés about the Holocaust.

It was only during the 1960’s and 70’s that the enormity of the Jewish tragedy began to enter the awareness of the American public. This was due, in large part, to the emergence of films, books and theater productions – *Judgement at Nuremberg* (film), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (book, film, theater production), *The Holocaust*



Zyklon, 2010, oil on canvas, 42 x 116 inches

(television mini-series), *The Deputy* (film), Elie Wiesel’s *The Night Trilogy* (book), and *The Pawnbroker* (film) – that finally brought the Holocaust out of the silence in which it had been largely shrouded. The capture in Argentina of Adolf Eichmann by Mossad, Israel’s intelligence service in 1960 and his subsequent trial and execution was a pivotal event in raising awareness of the Holocaust. However, as I recall, in my own neighborhood of mixed religions and ethnicities it was primarily Jews who were riveted by the unfolding of those events. During the same era the pithy slogan, “Never Again!” emerged in the Jewish community as a rallying cry of defiance and grief. Unfortunately, there have been too many “Agains” in the 20th and 21st centuries – Stalin’s forced starvation of over 10,000,000 Ukrainians, the 50,000,000 – 70,000,000 Chinese murdered by Mao Zedong, the Cambodian genocide, the Rwandan genocide, the Sudanese genocide and the current catastrophe unfolding in Syria. Where

are the artists and other culture workers who will bear witness to those ruptures in history? Who will be their Geoffrey Laurence?

I am grateful to Geoffrey Laurence for agreeing to participate in this project and to the other lenders and supporters – Ron Collins, George Goldstein, Allison and Paul Alanis, Stephen and Elaine Mattson and The Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas. We are especially grateful to the Mizel Museum for their co-sponsorship of this exhibition. Partnering with that institution and working with its Curator Georgina Kolber has been a terrific and seamlessly flowing experience. As always I’m grateful to Dr. Therese Jones for her unerring judgement, her gentle prodding, and her unshakeable support for the Fulginiti Center’s exhibition programs.

Simon Zalkind, Curator