This special display, based on the collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, features works created between 1945 and 1947 and attempts to investigate how survivors reacted to the liberation through art.

For most of these survivor-artists, the ability to paint again signified freedom and renewed independence. The choice of their art’s subject and the grip on the pencil or brush symbolically restored a feeling of control, after years of helplessness. The act of painting represented a process of psychological rehabilitation through which they could synthesize the trauma.

Some artists, like Thomas Geve document the very moment of liberation, only several weeks thereafter, while others give expression to the renewed feeling of freedom (Alfred Neumann, Jakob Zim). In contrast, Samuel Bak expresses anguish, solitude and distress via the self-portrait. Endre Bálint, on the other hand, develops a personal symbolic language in order to express the trauma, while Eliazer Neuburger re-interprets the myth of the Wandering Jew. Bordering the survivors’ artworks are those of a witness: Zinovii Tolkatchev, who as a soldier in the Soviet Army provides the viewpoint of the liberator.

When liberation finally arrived, the survivors found themselves torn between feelings of joy and suffering, between their desire to return to life and their need to face the devastation and mourn. The creative process enabled them to confront these conflicting feelings, as Jakob Zim declared: “I live with the shadow and create with the light.” His picturesque words exemplify that for the survivors their choice to paint epitomized their renewed embrace of life.
The Holocaust was an unprecedented genocide, total and systematic, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The primary motivation was the Nazis’ antisemitic racist ideology.

Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jews of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied and unoccupied Europe.

An overall comprehensive, systematic operation that the Nazis called “The Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe” began to be implemented from the latter part of 1941. Nazi Germany designated the Jews of Europe for total extermination. Alongside mass extermination by shooting, which killed more than two million Jews, millions of Jews from all over Europe were rounded up and deported on freight trains to extermination camps - industrial murder facilities in which the Jews were gassed to death. During the entire process, the Germans deceived the victims as to the real purpose of their journey.

By the end of the war in May, 1945, nearly six million Jews had been murdered.

Yad Vashem
The World Holocaust Remembrance Center

Yad Vashem was established in 1953, as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. As the Jewish people’s living memorial to the Holocaust, Yad Vashem safeguards the memory of the past and imparts its meanings for future generations.

The exhibition was produced by the Traveling Exhibitions Department, Museums Division, Yad Vashem
Curator: Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg | Associate Curator: Orly Nachmani-Ohana
Graphic Design: Einat Berlin, Limor Davidovich
This drawing depicts the moment of liberation from the point of view of the liberator: the excitement and happiness of the prisoners receiving the Red Army soldiers as saviors.

Zinovii Tolkatchev (1903–1977)
The Liberators Have Arrived
Auschwitz, 1945
Pencil and watercolor on paper
29.7x21 cm
Gift of Anel Tolkatcheva and Ilya Tolkatchev, Kiev

Born in the town of Shchedrin, Russian Empire. He was active in the Communist youth movement and later in the party. In 1928, Tolkatchev studied art in Kiev and in 1929, held an exhibition on the death of Lenin. In the thirties, he illustrated books, including works by Maxim Gorky and Sholem Aleichem, and exhibited the series "The Shtetl". From 1941–1945, he served as an official artist in the Red Army. In the summer of 1944, he was attached to the Soviet forces at the front after the liberation of Majdanek, and afterwards to the forces liberating Auschwitz. In these camps, he painted and drew series of artwork depicting the horrific scenes he witnessed in these camps. These series were exhibited throughout Poland at the close of the war. Died in Kiev.
Bak the youth, residing with his mother in a DP camp, finds empathy for the fate of orphan children left alone in an alienated world. The positioning of the boy and girl in the center, while behind them their footsteps in the snow and before them the distant mountains, alludes to the long way they have already travelled and to the many difficulties that still await them.

Born in Vilna. Following the German occupation in 1941, he hid with his mother in a Benedictine monastery. Two years later, when the Germans took over the building, they were forced into the Ghetto. His artistic talent was discovered, and when he was nine, an exhibition of his work was held in the Ghetto. In the summer of 1943, he was sent with his family to a labor camp, but his father managed to smuggle him out before being murdered himself. Bak and his mother returned to the monastery, where they hid until the end of the war. After many ordeals, they arrived at the displaced-persons camp in Landsberg, Germany. Despite all the hardships, his mother saw to his artistic education throughout this period. In 1948, he immigrated with his mother to Israel and studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. He moved to Paris, then Rome and Switzerland and became a renowned artist. Today, he is a flourishing artist living in the United States.
This painting is part of the series Thomas painted immediately upon liberation, in order to relate his wartime annals to his father. “This is how I then saw Weimar as a fifteen-year-old. I was impressed by the different games children played in the streets. Only after fifty years did I visit the town again, for an exhibition of my miniature pictures at the Buchenwald memorial site.” (Thomas Geve)

Born in Züllchow, in 1939, he moved with his family to Berlin. His father immigrated to England but Thomas and his mother were unable to join him. After the closure of the Jewish schools, he was forced to work in the Jewish cemetery at Weissensee. In June 1943, he and his mother were transported to Auschwitz, where they were separated, and his mother was murdered. Thomas was assigned to a bricklaying commando. With the approach of the Red Army in January 1945, he was evacuated on a death march to Gross-Rosen and then to Buchenwald. In April he was liberated by the American Army. Upon his liberation, he drew some 80 works depicting his personal annals during the war. He was transferred to an orphanage in Switzerland, and then to England, where he reunited with his father. He immigrated to Israel in 1950, and after army service as an engineer officer, studied and worked as a construction engineer. He published his memoirs in the book "Youth in Chains".
Nine-year-old Nelly, influenced by the stories of Greek mythology her mother told her while in hiding, relates to the liberation in a painting that merges the Goddesses of Victory and Liberty: a winged, becloaked figure raises her hand in triumph, grasping a ray of light. The girl’s somewhat naïve perspective finds expression in the figure of the glorious lady with a fashionable hairdo and magnificent golden dress.

Born in Lvov, Poland, to the Meises family. Following the German occupation of the city in 1941, her family was expelled to the Ghetto. Her younger brother was seized in an aktion and disappeared. With her mother, she joined a group that tried to cross the border into Hungary, but failed. In 1943, when she was eight, she and her mother found refuge in a small room belonging to a Christian family in the city. In that hideaway, she skillfully created a large collection of paintings, intertwining imagination and reality that reflect her pre-war annals. She also kept a diary in which she wrote about her life in hiding. In 1944, after the city was liberated, the mother and daughter realized that they were the sole survivors from their family. They remained in Europe for a few more years, while Nelly studied art. She immigrated to the United States, continued to paint and write articles and books. Today she is a retired professor of literature.
On 7 May 1945, one day before the entry of the Red Army to Terezin and two days after the departure of the German commandant Rahm from the ghetto, Neumann paints a view of his living quarters. This peaceful quotidian landscape reveals his longing to return to a serene normative life.

Born in Vienna and raised in Brno. Enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian Army and served in World War I. In 1922, he returned to Vienna, where he studied architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1925, he moved to Paris where he worked under the architect August Perret. In 1936, he returned to Brno and later moved to Prague. In 1943, he was arrested in Prague, and in February 1945, he was deported to the Terezin Ghetto. After the liberation, Neumann returned to Brno and in 1949 immigrated to Israel. He was appointed Assistant Professor and later Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion. In 1965, he moved to Quebec City, Canada, to teach at Laval University. He died there, of disease, a few years later.
This watercolor, created several days after the liberation, expresses the artist’s renewed feeling of freedom, asserted in his ability to view the surrounding beauty and to paint. “In one of the rooms I found a small box of watercolors and brushes... of one of the perpetrator’s kids... I sat, and painted the view outside of the grey camp. It was not a German landscape that I painted on that small piece of paper, but a Spring landscape, the landscape of my Spring... That landscape, cursed is it.” (Jakob Zim)

Born in Sosnowiec, his father was a sign painter. He joined a Zionist youth movement and studied art. Following the German occupation in 1939, he was deported with his family to the ghetto. There he and his brother Emmanuel were assigned to the applied arts workshop. In August 1943, his parents and brother Emmanuel were transported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. Jakob was transported to the Annaberg labor camp, and from there, in 1944, to Blechhammer. There, he was reunited with his brother, Nathan. In 1945, they were evacuated on a death march to Buchenwald, where they were later liberated. The OSE organized their removal to France as part of the “Buchenwald Children” group. They immigrated to the Land of Israel in 1945. Zim studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design with Jacob Steinhardt and Mordecai Ardon. In 1948, he fought in the War of Independence. He made his career as a graphic designer. Zim’s art has been displayed in numerous exhibitions in Israel and abroad.
Ilka Gedő (1921–1985)
Self-portrait
Budapest, 1947
Chalk on paper
50X35.2 cm
Gift of the artist’s estate

Shortly after the liberation, twenty-six year old Gedő depicts herself without a head, while focusing on her fragile upper body and hands deformed by pain. The portrait reveals the artist’s difficulty in returning to life following her undermined existential state and the disturbing questions about identity.

Born in Budapest. She studied art with private teachers, including Tibor Gally and Viktor Erdel. In 1940, her works were first displayed in an exhibition sponsored by the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association [OMIKE]. Between 1942-1943, she studied art at István Orkényi-Strasser’s private school. Following the German occupation of Hungary in June 1944, Gedő was interned in a house marked with a yellow star. The house became later part of the Budapest ghetto. When she was summoned for transport eastward, one of the elderly in the community reported in her place. Thus she managed to evade the transports, and found refuge in the ghetto. With the liberation of Budapest on January 18, 1945 by the Soviet Army, Gedő came out of hiding, and began to study at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts. In 1946, she married Endre Biro, a biochemist. The couple had two sons. After a long hiatus from art, in 1968 Gedő resumed painting. In 1969, she went to Paris, where she lived for a year. Her works were displayed in numerous exhibitions in Paris and Budapest.
Samuel Bak painted this self-portrait at the age of 12, at the Landsberg DP camp. The youth emphasizes his role as witness and survivor through the prominence of the eyes, his direct, serious gaze and the floating, disembodied head.

Born in Vilna. Following the German occupation in 1941, he hid with his mother in a Benedictine monastery. Two years later, when the Germans took over the building, they were forced into the Ghetto. His artistic talent was discovered, and when he was nine, an exhibition of his work was held in the Ghetto. In the summer of 1943, he was sent with his family to a labor camp, but his father managed to smuggle him out before being murdered himself. Bak and his mother returned to the monastery, where they hid until the end of the war. After many ordeals, they arrived at the displaced-persons camp in Landsberg, Germany. Despite all the hardships, his mother saw to his artistic education throughout this period. In 1948, he immigrated with his mother to Israel and studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. He moved to Paris, then Rome and Switzerland and became a renowned artist. Today, he is a flourishing artist living in the United States.
Alexander Bogen (Katzenbogen) (1916–2010)

Ruins of Vilna Ghetto
Vilna, 1944

Pencil and charcoal on paper
24.1x32.5 cm
Gift of the Artist

Alexander Bogen, who took part in the battles for the liberation of Vilna, returns to his devastated childhood city and depicts the ghetto ruins. Thus he grieves over the destruction of “Jerusalem of Lithuania”, that before the war was an important center of Jewish culture.

Born in Tartu, Estonia. Some two years later, after his father had been enlisted in the Red Army and killed in battle, the family moved to Vilna. In 1936, he started his studies at the city’s Academy of Art. With the launch of Operation Barbarossa, his studies were interrupted, and Bogen and his wife tried to escape. They were caught and deported to the Swieciany Ghetto, and later to the Vilna Ghetto. In July 1943, Bogen escaped from the Vilna Ghetto to the Narocz forests, where he joined the partisans. Bogen was sent by the partisans to secretly infiltrate the Vilna Ghetto in order to organize groups of youth and smuggle them out to augment the fighting force. His wife and his mother-in-law also fled with him. Additionally, he was given the task of depicting in his sketches the life and actions of the partisans. After the war, the couple returned to Vilna, where Bogen completed his studies, and was afterwards appointed professor at the Academy of Art in Lodz. The couple immigrated to Israel in 1951. Bogen taught art at the Hebrew University, and served as chairman of the Association of Painters and Sculptors in Israel. He passed away in Tel-Aviv.
Born in Budapest to an educated family. In 1934, he graduated in design from the School of Applied Arts and continued to study under János Vaszary and Vilmos Aba Novák. In 1944, he was deported to a forced labor battalion in Transylvania. With his mother’s help, he escaped and was hidden by a Catholic family for a few months, until liberation. After witnessing the ruins of Budapest, he burnt most of his pre-war artworks, and started in his art to depict his annals during the Holocaust. In 1945, he joined the “European School,” a group of avant-garde artists. He continued to live in Budapest where he remained active in artistic and cultural circles.

**Endre Bálint (1914–1986)**

Bergen Belsen
Hungary, 1946
Linocut
17.5x28.5 cm

Bálint chooses a symbolic language incorporating sharp shapes, cropped elements and split heads in order to depict his struggle with his personal trauma on the one hand, and the revelations of the magnitude of killing and destruction on the other. The inscription “Bergen Belsen” relates to the horrific images from the camp publicized around the world after the liberation.
A man, barefoot and exposed, wearing torn garments gazes at the viewer with a guilty countenance. Behind him an elderly, mysterious figure reminiscent of the prophet Elijah raises his hand as in blessing. The contrast between the figures is echoed in the background: next to a smoke-filled, burning sky, there appears a hint of an illuminated Star-of-David. Neuburger, who himself survived the Holocaust, paints the survivor in the figure of the wandering Jew, whether blessed or cursed unclear, who continues down the via dolorosa of the chosen people.

Born in Amsterdam, to a working-class family with six children. His father worked as a diamond cutter. He desired to be an artist already from a young age, and visited museums with his father. Yet his father did not encourage him to be an artist, and Eliazer was compelled to work, like his father, at a diamond-cutting factory. In the evenings, however, he studied painting in the studios of Hendrik Maarten Krabbé and Gerrit Willem Knip. In 1922, he married Johanna Petronella Maria Bijlard, and they had a daughter. During the Holocaust, with the help of neighbors, they remained hidden in his studio. After the war, he focused on portraiture of the cultural elite and landscapes of Amsterdam. Many of his paintings are in the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.