

by Elliot Nidam-Orvieto

The International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem has begun preparations for a groundbreaking chronicle on the deportations of Jews to ghettos and camps across Europe during the Second World War. The finished account is expected to be used as an important aid in historical, educational and personal research, especially for relatives to discover more about the fates of their loved ones.

“This research has never been undertaken before on such a comprehensive scale,” explains Prof. David Bankier, Head of the Research Institute. “The results will be vital to historians aiming to understand more completely the machinery of destruction employed against the Jews, the different agencies involved, and the level of collaboration by local train companies. More importantly, we hope eventually to set up a database of information, accessible to the general public, that can trace the date and destination of individual victims who were deported to the East.”

On 22 April, the Institute was honored to welcome Dr. Alfred Gottwaldt, guest researcher from Germany, who lectured on the topic of deportation trains in the Third Reich. Co-author of a book with Dr. Diana Schulle of the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives of Germany) that contains a full list of the different deportation patterns, destinations and trains used during World War II in the “Greater German Reich,” Gottwaldt was the first person to organize the display of a box car in the German Technical Museum (1988). Originally intended to explain the role of German Reichsbahn services in the mass murder of Jews after 1941, the display has served as a model for more than 20 other museums and memorial sites worldwide.

New Research Project:

The Chronicle of Deportations



Lodz, Poland, 1942: Jews being deported

In his lecture, Gottwaldt explained how his research led him to conclude that the mass murder of German Jews was conducted in many small steps to enable SS and police to implement such a massive “program” in addition to their warfare and other commitments.

“About half of the Jews killed in WWII were murdered near their hometowns, in particular in Russia. However, the killing squads used in those countries would not have been feasible in Germany and West European countries and so, by the end of 1941, German authorities decided to change their techniques,” he says. “Instead of bringing the killing squads to the Jews, the victims were to be transported to killing sites in Eastern Europe (and within Poland). Thus transportation became an integral part of the annihilation process and needs thorough understanding.”

Many elements of the deportation process were tested first of all in Germany, and the roles of both the railwaymen and policemen planned step by step. Deportation trains for families, elderly Jews and workers were planned one after the other and were originally sent from the Greater German Reich to different destinations such as Lodz, Minsk, Kowno, Riga, the Lublin District with Warsaw and Treblinka, and Maly Trostinez. Eventually all transports from Germany were sent to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz.

“Trains were the most common means; only very few deportations were conducted by car or by boat,” continues Gottwaldt. “The main function of our research is to produce more accurate information so people can know where the trains with their family members were sent. Precise transport data will also enable us to achieve a better understanding of Himmler’s and Heydrich’s decision-making processes.”

Gottwaldt praised the staff at the Institute for the assistance and hospitality he received during his visit: “I was deeply impressed by the vast amount of documents from Eastern Europe and Russia in the YV archives that I could use in my research,” he said. “I eagerly await feedback from other research students that will enrich the discussions we conducted during my stay.”

The author is Academic Advisor to the Head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research.

Art

by Yehudit Shendar and Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg

“I was in Juan-Les-Pins, near Villefranche, on holiday with my mother, in 1939. We happened to meet Mrs. Moore (who was my godmother) in the street the day after war was declared. Mrs. Moore said she was returning to the U.S. and would be glad to take me with her, to which my mother gratefully agreed, for my safety. I was handed over there and then, in my bathing suit (and no clothes!)”

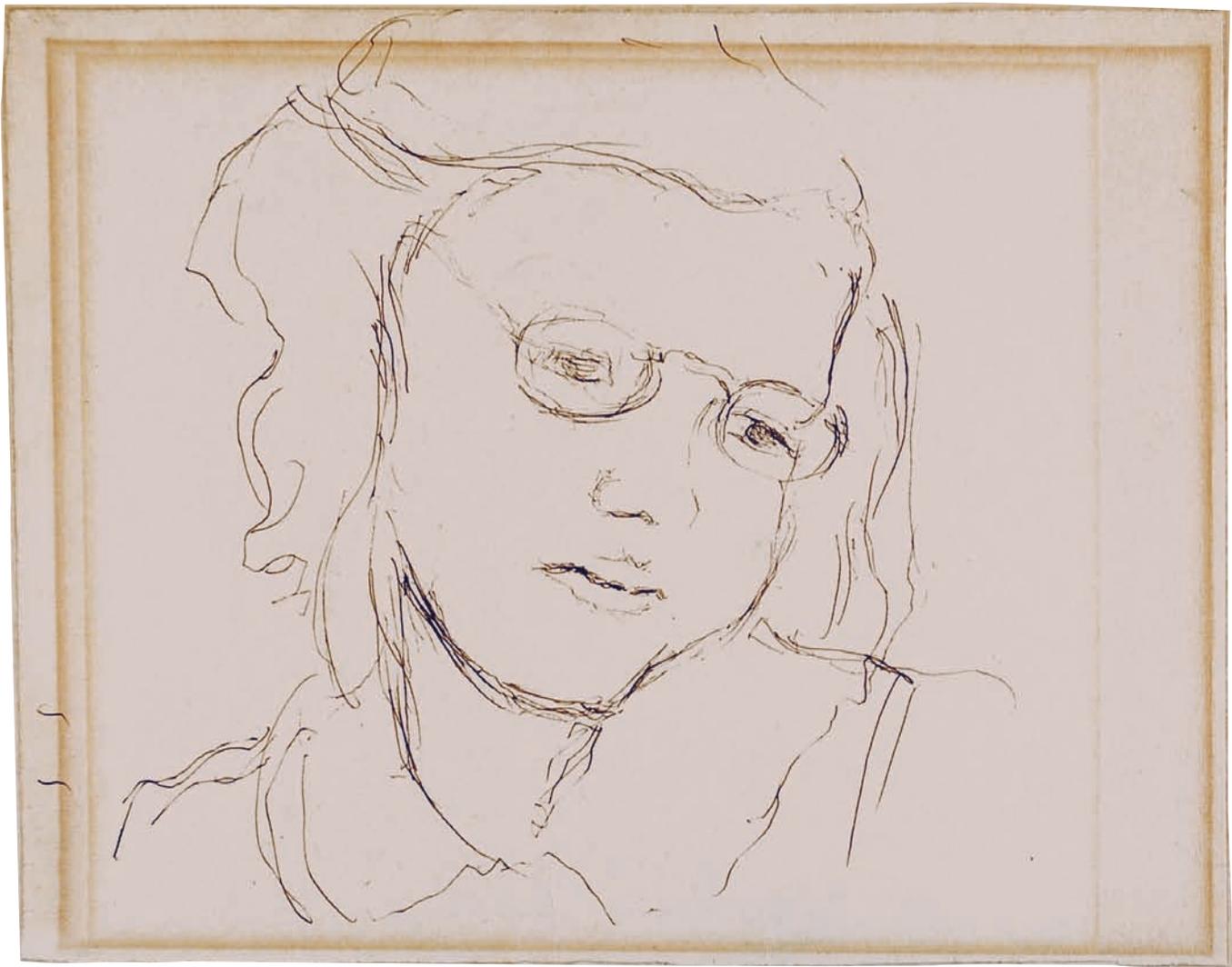
So related Valerie Kampf (*née* Page), in a letter to Yad Vashem that recollects her placement, aged seven, with Otilie Moore. Valerie was a British citizen, while Otilie was a colorful American millionaire of German origin who resided in Villefranche. Otilie’s offer was accepted with alacrity by Valerie’s mother, who was deeply concerned about her daughter’s safety. She then returned to England, where she became an officer in the WRENS (women’s naval corps).

Valerie was the first child to find asylum on Moore’s French estate, which soon became a haven for many other refugees. Among them were Jewish orphans, pregnant Jewish women, and the Grunwalds of Berlin—grandparents of the young artist Charlotte Salomon—who had met Mrs. Moore on one of their vacations and had moved to the estate after Hitler’s rise to power. The Grunwalds had been in Villefranche for some time when, in January of 1939, and under the pretext of visiting her sick grandmother, Charlotte left Berlin and joined her grandparents.

After the German occupation of France, Otilie Moore became increasingly worried about the children’s safety. Despite immense difficulties, she succeeded in obtaining visas to the U.S. for most of the youngsters under her protection. In late September 1941, she packed 10 of her charges into her luxury Ford station wagon—her daughter, her nephew, Valerie Page, seven other children (six of whom were Jewish), and her poodle, Martini. The older children crowded together on the seats, with two babies lying in cradles hung from the car ceiling, while towing the huge load of suitcases behind. The trip took 10 days, during which the travelers crossed the Spanish border and continued on to Portugal. Mrs. Moore and the children then set sail on the *Excalibur*, bound for the safe shores of New York City.

In the period before the German occupation, and enchanted with Otilie’s estate, Charlotte had painted the villa and its fruit trees against a Mediterranean background. Among the works that have survived from that period is a portrait of eight-year-old Valerie, a stylistically austere drawing that nevertheless conveys the tenderness and affection that Charlotte felt for the child. A fine pictorial line binds the young, withdrawn painter to the bespectacled, lonely girl, in temporary exile from home and family.

Charlotte and Valerie were fated never to meet again, for Charlotte stayed behind in France. In 1943, she was deported to Auschwitz, where she was murdered at the age of 26. The girl captured for posterity by Charlotte Salomon is now one of the last witnesses able to tell us



*Charlotte Salomon (1917-1943),
Portrait of
Valerie, aged 8,
Villefranche,
ca. 1940
Ink on paper,
Gift of Barbara
and Lewis Shrensky,
Washington D.C.*

The Portrait and the Maiden

New Charlotte Salomon acquisition for the Art collection



Ottillie Moore (center) with Valerie Page (sitting, third from right) and the other children she rescued, New York, 1943-1944

first hand about the young Jewish painter who lived, for a time, in Villefranche. All that remains from this intimate encounter is a modest but sensitive portrait.

During a meeting in New York with Yehudit Inbar, Director of Yad Vashem's Museums Division, Valerie talked about her special acquaintance with Charlotte. This resulted in the initiative to acquire Charlotte's works for Yad Vashem's collection, a process finalized with the arrival of this portrait at the Museum of Holocaust Art. The art works that Charlotte produced while residing at Ottillie Moore's villa—most of which are now part of the Yad Vashem collection and can be viewed in its permanent art exhibition—provide a rare glimpse into life at an estate that became a sanctuary for destitute refugees. They also tell the wonderful story of the eccentric, impulsive, resourceful and courageous American woman who opened her doors—and her heart—to those in need.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Barbara and Lewis Shrensky, whose generosity made this acquisition possible.

Yehudit Shendar is Senior Art Curator and Deputy Director of Yad Vashem's Museums Division, and Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg is a curator in the Museums Division.