

Rae Stern: In Fugue

STATEMENT

Part of a recent body of work by Stern, the porcelain objects light up from within upon touch and expose hidden lithophanes. Stern collected the pre-WWII images from both her personal archive and through community outreach to people who suffered persecution during the war. The images depicted in the lithophanes often portray daily scenes from life in communities across Europe that were later annihilated.

By creating an immersive experience and inviting the viewers to touch the ceramic objects, the work brings to life narratives and memories assigned to porcelain heirlooms and explores the potential and limitations of porcelain as a repository for fading memories.

On View in NATURE/NURTURE

Steve Sherry Vignette: Not old friends but good friends

STATEMENT

Sometime in the mid 1930's, an American couple, Essie and David Felberbaum were touring Vienna and walked into the store "Bruder Felberbaum" to inquire whether, by chance, they were related to the owners. Despite sharing the uncommon surname, they were unrelated and left after a friendly chat with the owner's son, Otto Serebrenik (later Sherry). On Kristallnacht, 11.9.1938, the store was destroyed like many other Jewish-owned shops. Otto, now married with a baby, was desperate to get his family out of Austria and reached out to the American couple (who had left a card). Despite the short and random acquaintance, Essie and David agreed to sponsor the request for immigration and in January '39, Otto, Lili and their son Steve fled Austria on board the Aquitania from Cherbourg, France, to NYC. Otto's mother stayed in Austria and later perished on the way to a concentration camp.

The touch sensitive photographic lithophanes portrays the pre-war images of Steve's parents, Otto and Lili Serebrenik. The three managed to escape Nazi Austria with the help of near strangers who sponsored their immigration to the United States. During one of our conversations, Steve described the American couple as "not old friends, but good friends". I often think of this statement and of how profoundly impactful we can be on each other's lives, even as strangers.

Additional Works in Rae Stern: In Fugue

Elinore Noyes Vignette: The underlying neural networks

STATEMENT

During one of my conversations with Elinore Noyes, a bright intern from KCAI, she mentioned that during WWII, her Dutch great grandparents, Walle and Ellie Nauta, harbored a teenage Jewish girl under the guise of a live-in nanny for their newborn daughter, Tjalda (Elinore's grandmother). The Jewish girl, Dina Dasberg Angress survived the war and later immigrated to the United States, where she started a family, worked as a social worker, and later adopted a child herself.

The war and the dangerous decision changed the lives of both families and affected the narratives of the following generations.

Elinore writes:

"My grandmother has mixed memories of this time: of fear, bombings, and hunger, yet also of normality, laughter, and happiness. She remembers playing outside on sunny days while she also remembers the bombing of their neighbor's house. Even during wartime, she and her family, including Dina, maintained familiar everyday routines. Yet the war impacted her long beyond its end in 1945. The experience of war shaped her directly for the time that she lived through it, but more so in the indirect effect that it had upon her through the experience of her parents, relatives, and Dina."

Irene Starr Vignette: Civility

STATEMENT

Irene's parents, Ruth and Sally Stiefel, married in July 1938. On Kristallnacht, November 9th 1938, Sally was arrested and taken to Buchenwald concentration camp. Appealing to the German and American officials, Ruth presented approved immigration papers and travel tickets to the USA, in hopes that her husband would be released. Fortunately, he was let go five weeks later, perhaps due to his former service in the German Army during WWI. The couple left Hamburg, Germany, for New York City on March 16, 1939 and settled in Kansas City in April 1939. Irene still has a few items that her parents managed to bring with them from Germany, including Bavarian china, drapery and a folding top hat.

Elia Stern Vignette: This may have been Suwalki

STATEMENT

For many years my family knew little about the Polish side of our family. My mother's grandparents fled Poland in the 1930's to then British Mandate Palestine. In the years that followed, many of their relatives were murdered and they spoke little of the devastating loss. The teapot they brought with them and passed down to my mother continues to serve as a reminder of the life left behind.

Growing up in the pre-internet world, I remember the awe and excitement that my mother, Elia, expressed when she first found a blurry photograph of what was possibly the village her grandparents came from. Regardless of the questionable authenticity of the picture, it was something to hold on to; like a blurred scene from a soon to be forgotten dream or an anchor to reclaim the past.

Grandma Stern meets Savta Miriam

STATEMENT

On both sides of my lineage, my great grandmothers had experienced substantial loss and hardship throughout their lives. Two of them, Miriam (Mascha) Brahmson and May (Manya) Stern left their hometowns and emigrated in search of safety. Manya escaped Russia to the United States in the years following the 1905 revolution, due to the repeated pogroms targeting Jews ignited by Cossacks.

Mascha escaped Poland during the 1930's with the rise of antisemitism there and raised her family in Israel. The two never crossed paths, but I imagine they would have had much to share had they met.

Susan Richter Vignette: Far from home

STATEMENT

Hedwig and Leon Liebenstein, the Oma and Opa of Susan Richter, lived in Mainz, where the Jewish community experienced prosperity alongside persecution for nearly a millennium. They fled Germany on 8/7/1940, fortunate enough to have the means and paperwork to escape. Their journey took them by air to Moscow, on the Trans-Siberian railway to Manchuria, then through Korea, on boat to Japan and eventually they sailed to Canada, finally arriving in Seattle on 9/11/1940. They packed a bit more than 40 lbs each and took a few photos and silver cutlery.