

All our Yesterdays

Exhibition of work by Ruth Taylor Jacobson at the Statische Galerie Haus Seel, Siegen, Germany



Local artist, Ruth Jacobson and her husband Uriah are friends of the concert pianist Norma Fisher who organises the London Master-Classes – inspiring events which attract musicians from all over the world. Over the years, they have offered accommodation to students attending the event and, five years ago, their guests were a wonderfully talented sixteen-year-old pianist, Sarah Hiller, with her mother, Rita. Rita admired Ruth's paintings and stained glass and, feeling that her work may be of interest in their home town of Siegen in Germany, she suggested that she make up a small album of photographs for her to take home with her.

Then, last August, Ruth received a phone call from Rita's husband Fritz, Director of Culture in Siegen, inviting her to exhibit there in March this year – each year, the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit, (Society for Christian-Jewish Co-operation) invites a Jewish artist to exhibit in the town's gallery in memory of the suffering of the Jews during the Third Reich.

At first she had misgivings about exhibiting in Germany. Her mother had lost

most of her family during the Shoah and her parents had never visited Germany or Austria after World War Two, neither had she. However, this is a very different Germany from that of seventy years ago. There is a feeling of shame and horror among younger Germans at the atrocities of the Nazi regime and a sincere wish for reconciliation. Children are taught about the Holocaust as part of their education and Survivors are invited to schools to describe their experiences. The Train of Memory travels around Germany, stopping at different towns, large and small – it is one of the trains formerly used for the deportation of Jews and on board is a photographic exhibition of those who once travelled on such trains, the emphasis being on the doomed children.

Jews were originally forbidden by the local Counts of Nassau to live in Siegen, though they could come there to trade. In the late nineteenth century, the flourishing steel industry attracted Jews to settle there and they founded a community which, in 1938, numbered 111 souls. Their synagogue was burnt down the day after Kristallnacht and no one raised a hand to defend

them. A bunker, built on the site, now houses a museum dedicated to their memory.

Ruth says, "In accepting this invitation to exhibit, I felt like an ambassador for my people. We have had many 'holocausts' during our long, tragic history but it moves me that, during our darkest eras of suffering, our ancestors have drawn spiritual strength from their beliefs and created things of beauty. This I try to show in my work. I was also asked to speak to classes of secondary school students. I showed etchings – a medium in which I explore literary themes and events in our history through a mesh of fine lines, luminous highlights and dense shadow and stained-glass panels which combine these qualities with jewel-like colour – also, drawings in charcoal and pastel, swift studies of musicians and factory workers.

"We were very warmly received by everyone we met, especially Rita and Fritz Hiller who welcomed us to stay at their lovely home. My work was beautifully displayed in a light, spacious gallery – I was there to supervise the arrangement. There was a hurricane the day before the Private View and I was afraid that no one would come, but there was a good-sized gathering. The show was opened by the Bürgermeister Steffen Mues and there were speeches by Paul Breuer, Patron of the event, Fritz Hiller, Cultural director in Siegen, and Alon Sander, the Jewish representative of the Society for Christian-Jewish Co-operation. Our hosts' daughter, Sarah, played works by Bela Bartok (an outspoken opponent of Nazism) and Rachmaninov.

"There was a lively interest in my work and in my family history. Several of the guests had visited Israel and some spoke a few words of Hebrew, wishing me shalom and kol hakavod. One lady apologised to me for what her people did to mine. What can one say? One cannot undo the unspeakable suffering of that nightmare era, or bring the dead back to life, but bridges of understanding must be built, and resolve that never again should such a murderous regime be allowed to seize power and to destroy untold millions."

Ruth and Uriah are leaving the Suburb to settle in Mill Hill. We will miss them and wish them a long and happy sojourn in their new home.



Moroccan adventure



HGSS members, Jean Guetta, Danny Dreyfuss, Shlomo Godsi and Craig Gottlieb (pictured above) recently spent four days trekking in the Atlas Mountains. Also on the trip, which was organised by Jean Guetta, were Isaac Jebreel and David Masri (not an HGSS member).

Jean, Shlomo, Danny and Craig climbed Mount Toubkal which, at 4300 metres, is the highest mountain in North Africa. They then spent two days visiting Jewish sites in the area.

Over Shabbat, Jean, Shlomo, Isaac and David stayed with a Jewish family in Marrakech. Today, about 5000 Jews live in Morocco; in some villages just one Jewish family remains. However, there is no problem travelling around the area as relations between Israel and Morocco are good.