

Museum featuring Lodz Ghetto photographs

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Excavating Henryk Ross's buried box of negatives and documents in the ghetto March 1945. Positive halftone on polyester film sheet. The print shows the excavation of the box containing documents and photographs of life in the Lodz Ghetto from 1940 to 1944. (Photographs courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario. Gift from Archive of Modern Conflict, 2007.)

Photographs that show the horrors and complexities of life in the Lodz Ghetto in 1940 — images that the Nazis banned and were buried for safekeeping and later retrieved by the photographer — will be exhibited at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in Manhattan. Organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, the exhibit, “Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross,” will be on display at the museum from February 25 to June 24.

“This extraordinary exhibition is a unique visual record of the barbarity of life in the Lodz Ghetto inflicted by the Nazis, and a testament to Henryk Ross’ heroic and defiant act to record these individual experiences that will forever be part of the historical record,” said Michael S. Glickman, the museum’s CEO and president. “As an institution committed to telling and preserving first-person accounts of the Holocaust, Ross’s photographs represent personal experiences of global significance.”



Ghetto police escorting residents for deportation 1942-1944. 35 mm cellulose nitrate negative.

When Polish Jewish photojournalist Henryk Ross was confined to the Lodz Ghetto in 1940, he was put to work by the Nazi regime as a bureaucratic photographer for the Jewish administration’s statistics department. For nearly four years, Ross used his official position as cover, endangering his

own life to covertly document the lives of others. More than 160,000 Jews were trapped in the Lodz Ghetto — it held the second largest Jewish ghetto population in German-occupied Europe — and thousands would be deported and murdered at Chelmno and Auschwitz. When the Red Army liberated the ghetto, 877 Jews remained.

Ross, sometimes hiding his camera in his coat, took photographs to record the horrors of life in the ghetto and to preserve evidence of Nazi crimes.

As liquidation began, Ross buried an astonishing 6,000 negatives near his home — committing to the ground, and perhaps to future generations, “some record of our tragedy.” Henryk Ross survived, and in 1945 he unearthed his work. Almost 3,000 negatives had survived the Polish winter, making his collection one of the largest visual records of its kind to survive the Holocaust.

Curated by Maia-Mari Sutnik, the exhibit has more than 200 of Ross’s photographs, supplemented by artifacts and testimony and presented in the context of Lodz Ghetto history. The exhibition offers a rare learning experience that is also an opportunity to remember and honor the victims of Nazi atrocities.

A soundscape of audio testimonies from ghetto survivors sets the stage at the entrance to the exhibition. More audio testimonies, all from the museum’s collection, are featured throughout the galleries.

The museum is at 36 Battery Place in lower Manhattan. For more information, call (646) 437-4202 or go to mjhnyc.org.