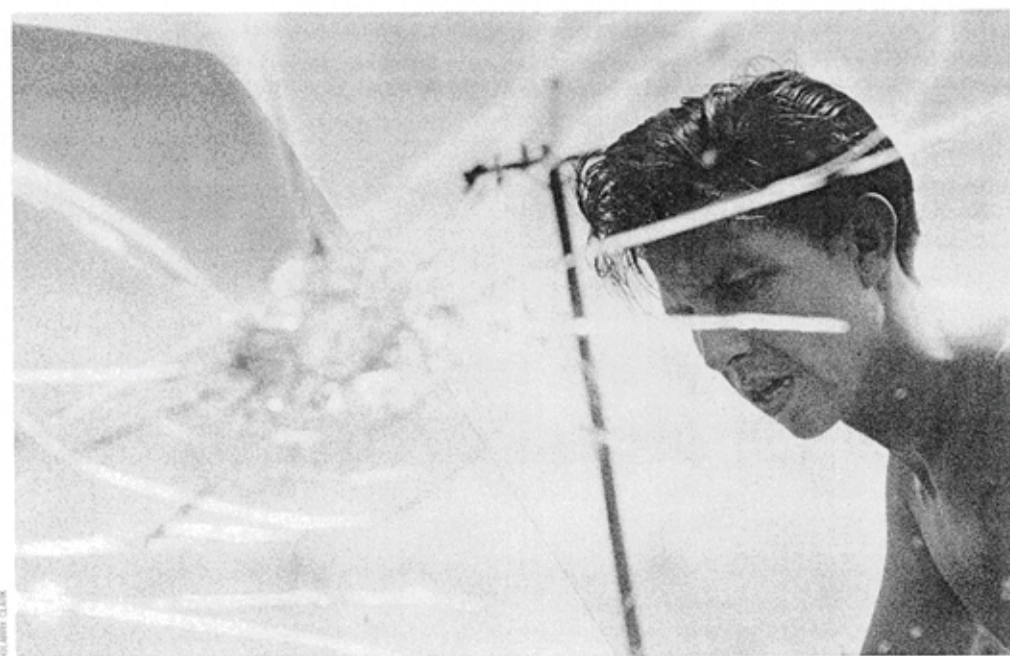


Newsletter

THE PRINT, DRAWING & PHOTOGRAPH SOCIETY OF THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART
VOLUME 29 • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2011



© LARRY CLARK



Seeing Now, an exhibition of post-1960 photographs culled from BMA holdings by Curator Kristen Hileman, is bold, sweeping, and thought provoking. **PAGE 3**

Larry Clark (American, born 1943)
Untitled, 1963, printed 1983
Gelatin silver print
Sheet: 277 x 355 mm, (10 7/8 x 14 in.)
Gift of Arthur and Carol Goldberg, New York, (BMA 1965.85.5)

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BALTIMORE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

AN EXHIBITION OF LISA SHIFREN'S PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO CREDIT: LEO HOWARD LIBROZ

BY AMY HUNTOON

"The Past lives only in us. It is our memory that gives it historical reality, making images and words from the past into an aspect of present day consciousness"

This quote by Rachel Salamander was chosen by local Holocaust survivor Martha Weiman to accompany her portrait in Lisa Shifren's photography exhibition, *Grace. Dignity. Humility. Compassion: Photographic Portraits: The Holocaust Survivors of Baltimore*. She offers these words of wisdom to future generations.

With this affecting and inspiring show, portrait photographer Lisa Shifren has created a mosaic



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Martha Weiman

of images and words about Baltimore Holocaust survivors that brings their experiences into sharp focus. Her passion to record this history so that "the stories live on after the survivors are no longer alive to tell them" and "the people are not forgotten" has motivated her to photograph 31 individuals and to spend many Sunday afternoons listening to their life stories. Shifren has assembled this body of work into an evolving exhibition, which will be on display at Roland Park Country School (March 1–28).

An active participant in Baltimore's creative community, Lisa Shifren has served on the PDPS board for three years. She sits on the Scholarship Committee and acts as the PDPS Ethel Novey liaison to the BMA education department. A native of the Philadelphia area, Lisa came to Baltimore in 1995 to study imaging and digital art at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Her interest in the survivor community began when she interned for a few months at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and met a survivor through the UMBC Hillel program. This sparked her interest in working with the survivor community. When she started her job seven years ago as Adult Life Director at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore (JCC), the Survivors Social Club consisted of four members. Since then she has found funding for this group, and it has swelled to 100 members who, she said, are "a very close-knit group." From 70 to 90 years old and from all over Europe, "they have become each other's families. So they really need to get together." Most of the survivors speak multiple languages and can communicate with each other in English, German, Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, or Czech.

Shifren's photographic project began when she enrolled in a Continuing Studies photography program at MICA in 2006. She decided to take her camera to her workplace to focus on portraiture since Shifren's favorite job responsibility is her work with the social group of survivors. She explained, "I cherish the time I have with them [and] I adore them. ... It makes me so happy to see them socializing and laughing after what they went through. It is my favorite part of my job." She mentioned that of the many seniors with whom she works, she can pick out the survivors by just

talking to them. "Their stories are all different, but the common thread they share is a sense of gentleness," as well as the qualities that she highlights in the title of her exhibit. "They don't forget what happened, but many have moved on." Time is running out for this community. Lisa has a list of 20 more subjects who have asked to be photographed and included in the project. Two of her subjects have already died. "I wanted people to see what I saw in them. ... They are full of life."

Her commercial portrait work from her Mount Washington studio and personal fundraising has supported this project, which she has taken on as a personal mission. She hopes to obtain foundation funding so she can photograph the additional survivors she has located and eventually publish a book.

Shifren has exhibited this work in many local venues, starting with the Baltimore City Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) Commemoration in 2007. Initially she exhibited the portraits by listing the individual's name, date of birth, and date of arrival in Baltimore. She also included a short quotation: words of wisdom from the subject or from a favorite author. As she worked on the project, she found that many of her subjects were "eager to talk" and "they started telling me their stories" that she found "so important and fascinating" as first-hand history. She chose to photograph many of the survivors in their homes in Pikesville, Lutherville, Baltimore, and Owings Mills. Her black-and-white portraits show her subjects in a favorite room or spot in their home, addressing the camera in an open, engaged manner. The soft lighting emphasizes each subject's personality and vitality. After the photography session, "they would offer to feed me, give me tea, and talk about their lives." She appreciates the generosity of her subjects and always gives a photo to each one.

Shifren decided recently to expand the wall text to include short biographies of her subjects, as well as old family photographs that some have managed to save. The biographies focus on the survivors' experiences before and after the war, the changes in their towns of origin, their loss of rights and freedoms, and their camp experiences, and they

conclude with the story of how they each picked up the pieces, came to Baltimore, and established themselves and their families here.

For example, Halina Silber from Krackow, Poland, was number 16 on Schindler's list. Shown today in Shifren's portrait, Silber beams a friendly smile and wears a crisp jacket and an elegant string of pearls; she radiates confidence and poise. It is poignant to read her short biography: "In Schindler's factory Halina's job was to carry very heavy pots and pans over to the ovens to bake the enamel, very hard work for a young girl. In the fall of 1944, the factory was closing, and the workers were being transferred to Slovakia. It was then that the famous list was created. Halina had to go back to camp Bashlavia for a few weeks. From there she was supposed to go to Schindler's new factory in Slovakia but was taken instead to Auschwitz, where she was treated like all of the other inmates there. She thought she was to stay in Auschwitz; however, Schindler intervened. The list with their names—everyone else was called by a number—was produced, and Halina was given additional bread and put on a train to Schindler's factory in Slovakia. Schindler

was waiting for them and assured them that they would be safe." More of Silber's story is included in the exhibition text.

Although Shifren has shot this body of work with her Nikon digital SLR camera, she said, "It never even occurred to me to do the project in color." She explained that "I am a black-and-white photographer at heart," and she immediately converts the color images to black and white. She shows her 16" x 20" digital prints with a 3" matt in black frames. She does not choose to sell this work since she views its primary purpose as educational. She believes the work communicates most powerfully when hung as a series with the biographical texts, and not broken down into individual portraits. Once she publishes a book, then visitors can take all the stories and biographical messages away with them.

Grace. Dignity. Humility. Compassion. captures what Shifren's subjects have imparted to her. "I'm inspired by their faith in God and in humanity," she says, and working with the monthly meetings of the Survivors Social Club at the JCC has helped her prize values she might ordinarily have taken for granted: family and freedom. To see more of these powerful portraits and read a selection of the biographies of these impressive individuals, go to lisashifren.com, where there is a link to contact the photographer if you would like to learn more about her work. Finally, take time during this spring to visit Lisa Shifren's respectful exhibition of homage to local Baltimore survivors of the Holocaust.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Halina Silber



Isidor Mayer



Ulrich Cohn