



JENNIE MILNE

LAYERS OF PLACE



PLACING MYSELF IN THE NARRATIVE



14 WALICÓW STREET

■ My work focuses on a personal peregrination to unravel my families tangled history following my maternal grandparents' displacement during WW2, questioning what responsibility the acquisition of such knowledge presents. Whilst this has led me to document the stories of others, during the MA I hope to dig deeper, revealing layers of meaning, tracing connections and placing their relevance into a framework.

■ Symbolized here is an image I took on a trip I made to Warsaw in 2018, the first member of my family to return, of a former ghetto building. Drawing connections with my own childhood memories, research and former inhabitants of ul 14 Walicow, I am considering interrogating ways in which this building, a silent testament to the lives it represents, speaks to the present.

MY ABIDING CHILDHOOD MEMORY

- ...When the war ended all the other children were returned to their parents, but I was left behind like a left luggage parcel
- My abiding childhood memory is of feeling a total outsider wherever I was, I knew I was Polish although the tale I had been told was that my Father was a pilot who was shot down over France. I lived with 2 women, neither of whom had the same surname as me, both were a Miss, I simply felt I didn't belong anywhere. For the first years of my life I had NO significant adult anyway, I was just one of the babies, with no visible means of support, weakly, often gravely ill and failing in every way to thrive.
- Looking back nearly 70 years later I can see how that helped to shape me as a person, not that it helps, but just sheds some light in what turned out to be some very dark places.

Love

Mum xx





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‘A MANS WORK IS NOTHING BUT THIS SLOW TREK TO REDISCOVER, THROUGH THE DETOURS OF ART, THOSE TWO OR THREE GREAT AND SIMPLE IMAGES IN WHOSE PRESENCE HIS HEART FIRST OPENED.’ ALBERT CAMUS

- The image was discovered in a school textbook. The year, 1978, months after the sudden death of my father. I found myself transfixed, scrutinizing the black and white photograph of a small boy in a flat cap, his frail arms raised above his head in frightened surrender. Captured during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto his face has remained with me ever since, so powerful its influence. What had drawn a child such as I to examine the boy so intently? At the time I had identified with the child’s terror and vulnerability, silently reaching out to him in my heart.

I had wanted to rescue him.

Myself




“I HAD DISCOVERED THIS PHOTOGRAPH BY MOVING
BACK THROUGH TIME...ROLAND BARTHES

- 40 years later I was to discover, through my research, that my mothers first cousin, James (Wladyslaw) Russocki, had in fact rescued a small Jewish boy from the Warsaw ghetto.... my impossible dream, ignited by a heart-breaking photograph had been my 14-year-old cousin’s reality.




James Russocki


My Cousin




Irena Russocka



Helena Konopka



James Russocki



Elizabeth Lis



Sandra Russocka
USA



Renata Russocka
USA



Me

HOW DID IT ALL START?
I GUESS IT STARTED ON MAY 29,
1929, WHEN I WAS BORN TO
COUNT ZYGMUND RUSSOCKI
AND COUNTESS IRENA
RUSSOCKA...

- In the late summer or early fall of 1942 there appeared a small child on our street and I noticed that he slept in doorways. He was about six or seven, skin and bones, dressed in rags that obviously had not been washed in months. The poor boy turned out to have escaped from the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw and had been hiding. I took him home... There was no question in anyone's mind that this youngster had to be helped. ..His name was Moshe, if I knew his last name, I don't remember it now. In the end perhaps it was good that we did not know or remember his name.
- On March 7, 1943, my Jewish friend went out to get a pack of cigarettes for my mother, some four or five blocks away. Shortly after he left the GESTAPO, which were the dreaded German secret police appeared at our door. Someone reported to the Germans that we harbored a Jew in our home. We were arrested and taken to the GESTAPO Headquarter in Warsaw. that was the last time I saw my mother till after the war. We never found out what happened to Moshe. I wish I knew if he survived.- James Russocki





THE GROUND ON WHICH PAST AND PRESENT MEET.

- I paused at 14 Waliców Street, one of the few original buildings in Warsaw's former small ghetto still standing. The tenement previously housed popular poet Władysław Szlengel aptly christened "Chronicler of the Sinking" by the ghetto inhabitants. Szlengel had been killed in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, but his home remained, its rough red bricks towered above me reaching high into the summer sky. There is power in absence.
- My mind wandered a myriad of passages and I shut my eyes against the image they invoked. Blinking in the afternoon sunlight I returned to the present, and the broken building before me. No frightened child peered from its windows; no voices filled the quiet air. I remained caught between the vivid image of the past and the solid ground beneath me.
- I stood in 2018, yet my heart was inextricably drawn backward through time, and I bowed my head in remembrance. My late Polish Jewish Grandmother had unwittingly provided the cord which drew and bound me to this community, historically familiar with suffering and persecution. Now - and the question hung in my mind, what should I do with such knowledge?
- As I framed the image of the old ghetto building and my finger pressed the shutter, I brought my father, my mother, my grandparents, James Russocki and the boy in the flat cap, into the frame.



ICON OF LOSS - THE PHOTO OF THE WARSAW BOY

SAMUEL BAK ART



- “The over exposure of his image made me reluctant... But there was a personal bond between him and me and it was of consequence. In the Vilna ghetto I was his age, and I looked like thousands of other children destined to the same fate as him, who look exactly like him. Same cap, same outgrown coat, same short pants. I always consider this picture as a kind of portrait of myself in those times.
- For a long time, I studied this sacred image, lived in its presence but was afraid to make it part of my pictorial world. Its authenticity had an incredible power. I dared not challenge it, besides I have always found insufferable those books, movies and paintings that sentimentalize the Holocaust and I feared this boy as if he were a trap....
- I painted impossible memorials, tombstones of swords, humble and perishable relics made of rubble, cut outs and throwaways... of which called up his ghost like presence. Such were the only tangible markings of memory that I could produce. Thus boy from Warsaw, my new friend, this alter ego of mine began emerging in my canvases and suddenly I painted him again and again..
- They dragged him to the courtyard and shot him. His body was left for hours in a puddle of blood as a warning to any other Jew who tried to remain outside the ghetto. It is vain of me to hope that through my art I can somehow live now for the two of us and in this way, his obliterated future may not be totally lost...”

Samuel Bak

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svKSWDZX4To>



"I know that what I have been painting comes from a compulsive need to give meaning to the miraculous fact of my survival. It tries to appease a sad sense of bewilderment. It comes from the fear that in a world of unparalleled upheavals, things are never what they seem. My work reveals a reality observed through the eyes of a child who had suddenly aged. Some might call it elaboration of Trauma; I hope that my art is more than that."

- Samuel Bak



WŁADYSŁAW SZLENDEL

OCCUPANT OF UL 14 WALICÓW . DIED MAY 8TH 1943 IN THE GHETTO UPRISING

WŁADYSŁAW SZLENGEL : A SMALL STATION CALLED TREBLINKA

On the line between Tluszcz and Warsaw
From the railway station Warsaw - East
You get out of the station
and travel straight...

The journey lasts
sometimes 5 hours and 45 minutes more
and sometimes the same journey lasts
a whole life until your death ...

And the station is very small
three fir trees grow there
and a regular signboard saying
here is the small station of Treblinka...
here is the small station of Treblinka...

And not even a cashier
gone is the cargo man
and for a million zloty
you will not get a return ticket

And nobody waits for you in the station
and nobody waves a handkerchief towards you
to welcome you in the blind wilderness.
And silent are the three fir trees
and silent is the black board
because here is the small station of Treblinka...
here is the small station of Treblinka...

And only a commercial board
stands still:

"Cook only by gas" Władysław Szlengel



TENEMENT HOUSE AT UL. WALICÓW 14, WARSAW



Menachem Kipnis
DEATH
May 1942 (aged 63-64)
Poland
Warsaw Ghetto Burial
Ground
Warsaw, Miasto Warszawa,
Mazowieckie, Poland

- At this address a telephone book from 1938/1939 listed.. journalist Menachem Kipnis, a known person, opera singer, photographer, journalist and Jewish ethnographer.. Menachem died in Warsaw Ghetto of starvation.





THROUGH THE LENS OF MENACHEM KIPNIS

<http://www.jhi.pl/en/blog/2014-01-09-city-and-eyes-menachem-kipnis-s-photographs>


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- I first referenced ul 14 Walec6w in a dissertation in 2019; yet perceived a trace of something greater under the surface; a kind of palimpsest. I often find that; an indistinct shape, a shadow just below the water line suggesting something more, waiting for me to sit with it for a while before drawing it out.
 - My fascination with the place and all it represents has continued during the MA, becoming a focus for the December assessment in 2019. The tall broken tenement building, once filled with diverse individuals, has become a kind of metaphor, a bijouterie of forgotten lives, a place to situate and showcase the living stories I have gathered.
 - I think of Holocaust survivor Adam Adams in particular, a former prisoner of the Warsaw ghetto, featuring often in my work. Sacramento and Bloom in their book 'Deep Mapping' observed;
 - *"Maps tell you more about yourself, the narratives you construct, and the values you explicitly or implicitly hold, than they do about an actual place."* Ultimately Walec6w 14 became an introduction to hidden layers of myself.





‘I ONLY REMEMBER TWO THINGS ABOUT THE
WARSAW GHETTO. STEPPING OVER BODIES
COVERED IN NEWSPAPER AND CROSSING THE
GHETTO BRIDGE.’ - ADAM ADAMS





“At night, I think about these things. I'm pleased with what I know, but now I think much more about everything I could have known, which was so much more than anything I can learn now and which now is gone forever.”

— Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*