

# Artist documents terror of Auschwitz in lithographs

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Some of the most powerful documents of the Holocaust have been sitting in an attic in Kyiv collecting dust.

On March 15, ARTEast will present selections from Zinovy Tolkachov's series "The Flowers of Auschwitz." Tolkachov (1903 - 1977) was a Red Army soldier who took part in the liberation of Auschwitz and documented the horrors of life in a concentration camp in a series of pencil drawings. These drawings then became the basis for a series of lithographs, 14 of which will be on display at ARTEast beginning March 15.

The exhibition came about at the instigation of ARTEast Marketing Director Iryna Tryhub and her staff. They noticed reprints of Tolkachov's work in Matthew Cullerne Bown's 1998 catalog "Socialist Realist Painting." Through the Kyiv Artists' Union, they tracked down Tolkachov's family and, according to Tryhub, persuaded them to release works that have been stored in his daughter's attic for years.

There have been several temporary exhibitions of Tolkachov's oils at the Israeli Cultural Center, but there are no works by Tolkachov on permanent display in Ukraine. Tolkachov's works can only be seen at the Auschwitz Museum in Poland and at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance museum, in Jerusalem.

"We persuaded them that this collection is of great historical value and therefore, it must be shown to the world," Tryhub said. "This collection should be saved in a museum."

While the goal of the exhibition is to reintroduce Tolkachov's work to the general public, they are also trying to find his work a permanent home. ARTEast, as a representative of Tolkachov's estate, is looking for serious collectors or organizations that will "value its artistic quality and promote it as a means of education."

According to Tryhub, the collection has yet to be appraised, but two pieces are available for sale at \$900



"Girls Sing," a lithograph by Zinovy Tolkachov. (Photo courtesy of ARTEast)

and \$1,500.

Born in 1903 to a poor Jewish family in Shchedrin, Belarus, Tolkachov's desire to attend art school was hampered due to lack of funds. He found work as an apprentice to a billboard maker and later established himself as a cinema poster designer. He quickly gained renown for his work. As an early proponent of the Soviet government, he used his skills to produce propaganda for the regime, creating posters, murals and other forms of public art.

After stints at Moscow's Institute of Fine Arts and the Communist University in Kharkiv, in 1928 he entered the Kyiv Institute of Fine Art, where he would later lecture. He continued producing publicly acclaimed works that were exhibited at the national level and in exhibitions of Soviet art-work abroad.

As a member of the Red Army, Tolkachov was present at the liberation of Majdanek in July 1944 and Auschwitz in January 1945. His experiences at Majdanek resulted in a

series of watercolors and oils that were exhibited across Poland after the war. At Auschwitz he documented the urgency of what he witnessed in a series of pencil drawings. Lacking proper paper, he used Auschwitz stationery and order forms from Farbenindustrie, the company that supplied the camp with toxic gas.

Jacek Nowakowski, Director of Collections for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), said of the drawings, "These works are significant not only because they are moving dramatic works of art, but because they were created at the scene of carnage and death."

The USHMM hosted an exhibition of the original drawings in 1992.

After the war, Tolkachov remained in Poland for two years, but then returned to Kyiv where he spent the remainder of his life.

As was the case with many Soviet artists, Tolkachov seemed to fall in and out of favor with the Stalinist regime. Initial works documenting the victims of the Holocaust gave way to portraits of those repressed by Stalin himself. As a result, he was forbidden to display his works publicly and a number were confiscated and destroyed.

*The exhibition featuring selections from Zinovy Tolkachov's "The Flowers of Auschwitz," will run from March 15 through April 2 at ARTEast gallery on 13 Reitarska (Tel: 229-6552).*

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The Kyiv Pectoral, an annual theater awards ceremony, will take place on March 27 at the Ivan Franko Theater. The ceremony will name the best theater actors, actresses, production and musical.

In honor of renowned contemporary musician Valeriy Petrenko, the National Guitarists Association will be holding the Valeriy Petrenko Guitar Competition from March 26 through April 1. Along with a concert by Petrenko on March 27 and a guitar competition on March 28, the festival will also hold an exhibit and auction of musical instruments and accessories made by Ukrainians.