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**ARTIST BRUCE GENDELMAN DEPICTS SITES OF HOLOCAUST ATROCITIES IN**  
**SIFTING THROUGH ASHES, AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

**On view at the National Museum of American Jewish History**

**October 27, 2017 – January 7, 2018**

PHILADELPHIA—The **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) announces *Sifting Through Ashes*, an exhibition of works by artist **Bruce Gendelman**, who captures the unimaginable atrocities of the Holocaust through a series of nine large-scale, richly textural oil paintings and approximately twenty photographs. The exhibition—which will convey the unique and important role of contemporary art in educating new audiences about the Holocaust in the “post-witness” era—will make its national museum debut at NMAJH from **October 27, 2017 through January 7, 2018**, before the works continue traveling worldwide.



Bruce Gendelman, *Birkenau Barracks Memorial 3*, 2015. Oil painting on canvas, 8 x 5 feet.

Gendelman states, “In a world forever toying with repeating history, these works carry a warning to be vigilant, to speak out, and to insist that our morality be mindful. As memories of the Holocaust are replaced by history, post-witness contemporary art can serve as a powerful tool to awaken critical conversations. These artworks serve as my humble contribution to that effort.”

**Ivy Barsky**, NMAJH’s CEO and Gwen Goodman Director, adds, “It is essential to remember, discuss, and teach the tragedies of the Holocaust. Bruce Gendelman’s mesmerizing paintings

are a compelling reflection of an American Jewish artist's response to this period in our history. We are honored to share his deeply moving works with Museum visitors and school groups."

Gendelman's works were inspired by a trip he took to Poland and Ukraine with his sister and brother-in-law in August 2015, where they toured Holocaust sites. The trip was led by Hannah Rosenthal, the former U.S. State Department Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and Father Patrick Desbois, a Catholic priest who has devoted his life to investigating the mass murder of Jews. On the trip, they met Holocaust survivors, witnesses, and deniers, and visited the hometown of Gendelman's ancestors, many of whom perished in the Holocaust.

The artist wrestled with how to convey what he had experienced. He produced a series of photographs that were joined with poems by Robert Miller and compiled into the book *Sifting Through Ashes: Words & Images*. That was just the beginning of Gendelman's efforts to express the personal impact of his trip. The photographs, and the artist's memories and nightmares, inspired a series of large-scale oil paintings and sculptural installations.

The Museum will display nine of Gendelman's paintings, which he created using a trowel, the same tool prisoners would have used when forced to build the chimneys at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp.

- A series of four, eight-foot-tall oil paintings, the ***Birkenau Barracks Memorials***, portray Auschwitz-Birkenau's towering barrack chimneys that still punctuate the landscape today.
- ***Dom Katolicki***, another eight-foot tall oil painting, is a study of the remnants of a building in Bolekhiv, Ukraine where, in 1941, close to 1,000 Jews were rounded up by Nazi soldiers and Ukrainian locals, tortured, and then killed in a nearby forest. Each painted brick is, in itself, a landscape, representing the individual lives and lost futures of the people who were murdered.
- Three large-scale oil paintings comprise the ***Birkenau Deathscapes***. For these works, Gendelman drew on his own nightmares rather than photographs, plunging the viewer into a dark scene that is not clearly day or night.
- ***Aerial View of Birkenau***, a monumental 12-foot-wide mixed media work, depicts the precision of the industrial design of the death camp. The canvas supports more than 300 pounds of oil paint, as well as wood, string, and newsprint.

The paintings will be complemented by Gendelman's photographs depicting Krakow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Tuchów in Poland, as well as Bolekhiv and Lviv, Ukraine.

**About the Artist:**

Bruce Gendelman is an American artist based in Palm Beach, Florida. He was raised as a member of the generation of post-war children, absorbing the whispers and prayers of his parents and grandparents about the family members lost, the birth of the State of Israel, and the hope for a strong Jewish people. His father, Max, was an American GI in the Battle of the Bulge, who survived by escaping three German prisoner of war camps and becoming lifelong friends with a deserter from the German Luftwaffe. His great-grandparents, great-aunts, and countless ancestors who suffered or perished during the Holocaust weigh heavily on his thoughts. He paints to pay respect to those killed, and to convey a message about humanity to those who have not learned the lessons of history. He is the co-author of *Sifting Through Ashes: Words & Images* and *The Fishbowl Principle: Building the Ark for the 21st Century*.

**Educational Programming:**

Teachers can enhance their students' understanding of how the Holocaust is studied and remembered with a visit to *Sifting Through Ashes*. The exhibition supplements the Museum's existing educational program, *Unique Promise and Imperfect Freedom*, which immerses students in stories of the Jewish community throughout American history as they faced discrimination within the larger context of America's ongoing struggles with religious, ethnic, and racial freedom. For more information, contact NMAJH's Education Department at 215-923-3811 x 153 or [education@nmajh.org](mailto:education@nmajh.org).

**Meet the Artist:**

On **Friday, October 27 at 12 pm**, join artist Bruce Gendelman as he offers personal insights into his striking work and moving experiences in a 30-minute, in-gallery conversation. Included with Museum admission. Advance registration welcome. To register, visit [on.nmajh.org/GendelmanTalk](http://on.nmajh.org/GendelmanTalk).

For more exhibition information, visit [NMAJH.org/SiftingThroughAshes](http://NMAJH.org/SiftingThroughAshes).

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### About the National Museum of American Jewish History

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the more than 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Wednesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. Museum admission is \$15.00 for adults, \$13.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID; reduced prices available if purchased online. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#). For more information, visit [NMAJH.org](http://NMAJH.org) or call 215.923.3811.