

Shelomo Selinger

Wartime Experience: Concentration Camp Survivor

Text written by his wife Ruth Selinger

Born on May 31, 1928, in Szczkowa, Poland, Shelomo Selinger lived a peaceful life with his family, his parents and two sisters. In 1939, Poland is invaded by Germany. Jews' daily life worsened day by day. Communities disappeared. Families are dismantled and Jews are being tortured and deported to extermination camps.

In 1942, Shelomo is deported with his father to Germany where he will experience nine different camps. Here, he discovers another world, the world of death. After three months, his father is murdered. At thirteen and a half, Shelomo finds himself alone. Death pulls him towards it, but life calls him forward. Like a remote dream, the memory of his happy childhood is kept alive in his mind, watching over him. He feels his parents' love, still alive in him, and this strengthens him with the courage to fight and survive.

1945 He is found in a coma at the end of the war among a pile of cadavers in the camp of Theresienstadt. He is more dead than alive, after surviving nine camps and two forced marches. Under the care of a Jewish doctor from the soviet army, he is brought back to life. Shelomo was 17 years old. His life was saved, but his memory was lost and he suffered from complete amnesia.

After wandering in Europe, he came to Israel, as part of the "Aliyat Hanorar" project, on board of the ship "Tel-Hai". In March 1945, the British took control of the ship, and the passengers were transferred to Atlit gathering camp. Upon his liberation from Atlit, Shelomo starts a new life – or as he puts it, "I was reborn". He goes to live in kibbutz Beti-Haarava on the Dead Sea shore. Then he takes part in the Israeli War of Independence. His kibbutz is destroyed, and he moves to Galilee where he participates in the foundation of kibbutz Cabri.

1952 Shelomo meets his future wife, Ruth., a native of Haifa. At the same time, his memory begins to come back. He recalls that period as very painful one. Nightmares from the past haunt him. "Through the sculpture I find my way to freedom...just like a prisoner excavating a tunnel... the mere action of excavating is in itself a liberation". As he recovers his memory, he relives the horrors of the past. If he lives his daily life normally, his nights are haunted by morbid memories. Sculpturing brings him some relief by channeling his nightmares and anguish into creativity. He chisels in granite, the hardest stone on earth. This type of work is another way to show the fight of man against the superior forces of nature

1955. he receives the "Prix Norman" for sculpture (America-Israel) for his first chiseled sculpture in stone representing a cow feeding its calf.

1956 – The birth of his son Rami. is the victory of life, the renewal of the family lost, and the source for new inspiration. Sculptures of pregnant women, Rami as a baby, Rami as a child, lovers, young maids, maternities.... One of them is noticed and receives, in 1958, the “Prix Neumann”, destined to encourage Jewish artists from Europe and can be found in the “Musée d’Art Moderne” in Paris.

This theme of the family will come back at the birth of his two daughters: Vered in 1963, and Hanna in 1966. Later, this theme returns with the birth of his grandchildren.

life Metaphysical and mythological preoccupations are also expressions of his reflections on life.

Biblical themes, familiar to him since childhood and inspire other work such as a sculpture in wood showing a mother turning into a tree of

Previously, music had was associated to death to him recalling the orchestra in Auschwitz that played at the camp entrance and in front of the gas chamber and these memories were reflected in his sculptures. But surrounded with music in his family it has become a hymn to life, Rami plays clarinet and saxophone, Vered flute, and Hanna violin. With their mother, they form a musical ensemble giving Shelomo new inspiration for his sculptures and bas-reliefs.

Shelomo graduated from the Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he studied sculpture. Since 1956 he lived in Paris and his works are shown worldwide. They reflect his inner world, which is related to the history of the Jewish people, the Bible, and the Shoah

The following memorial works express the climax of pain, mourning and dignity in his sculpture:

- “The Memorial dedicated to the departed from the Drancy camp”: (granite, 1976)
- “The Monument to the Resistance” at La Courneuve (granite, 1987)
- “The Requiem to the German Jews”, located in Bosen, close to Saabruck in Germany (1980).
- “The Monument to the Jousts of the Nations”, at Yad-Vashem, Jerusalem (granite, 1982)

Other important works celebrate life:

- “The dance” – 35 sculptures located at the “Place Baste” at La Defense, (Paris, 1982).
- “The young maid with tamborine”(granite, 1972), installed in front of a school at Margny-les-Compiègne.
- “Raphael Archangel” (1974) located in front of the Clinique de la Roseraie” at Aubervilliers.
- “The five musicians” that can be seen at Hayange (granite, 1970)
- “Solidarity” (granite, 1982), installed in a school at Méru in the Oise.

In recognition for his contribution to art in France, Shelomo received “Médaille de Vermeil” from Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris in 1989. In 1993, he was elevated to “Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres” by Jack Lang, minister of culture. He received, in 1994, from the French President, Francois Mitterrand, the insignias of “Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur”.

Des dossiers du Mémorial de la Shoah–Paris

Shelmo Selinger

né en POLOGNE

Déporté depuis la POLOGNE à l’âge de 13 ans dans divers camps d’ALLEMAGNE.

J’ai connu 9 camps de concentration en Allemagne. Le 12 Mai 1945 un officier russe m’a retiré d’un tas de cadavres au camp de THERESIENSTADT. J’avais 17 ans. J’ai perdu la mémoire pendant 7 ans. Clandestinement j’ai rejoint LA CIOTAT (France) pour m’embarquer pour la PALESTINE. Le bateau TEL’HAI est rattrapé par la marine anglaise et je suis interné au camp d’ATLITH. Libéré, je m’installe au kibboutz BEIT-HAARAVA au bord de la mer morte. Sans mémoire, mon lieu de naissance est le désert de Judée. En 1952 je me lie d’amour avec RUTHY et retrouve la mémoire qui revient avec brutalité. Des cauchemars hantent mes nuits. La sculpture canalise mes angoisses. J’ai pris part au concours pour le mémorial de DRANCY que j’ai eu le privilège de le réaliser. Cette œuvre, en granit, a demandé 2 ans. J’ai sculpté d’autres monuments, à savoir : Monument à la Résistance à LA COURNEUVE, Monument aux Justes des Nations à YAD VASHEM (JERUSALEM) etc...