

UNPLUGGING ON SHABBAT | WORLD CENTRAL KITCHEN IN ISRAEL | A TEEN'S JEWISH JOY

Hadassah

Magazine

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

FINDING OUR COMMON ROOTS

Henry Louis
Gates Jr.
on Black and
Jewish America

MENOPAUSE'S CULTURAL MOMENT

The changing
conversation amid
new medical and
health trends

הדסה

ARTS



Paired For the exhibition, Michal Chelbin, whose photos have a dreamy quality (left), chose to be matched with Weimar-era photographer Yva, famed for her fashion shoots.

A Record of Beauty and Brutality

The Jewish women who pioneered photography as art

By Jessica Kasmer-Jacobs

IN 1940S JERUSALEM, GERMAN-born photographer Lou Landauer campaigned for funds to open a photography department at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. In archival notes, she writes about being dismissed because “photography is only for documenting art, not an art form itself.” The academy wouldn’t establish such a department until the 1980s.

Walking through the new exhibition, “20x20: A Lens of Her Own: Pioneering and Contemporary Women Photographers” at ANU-Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv, the dismissal feels absurd. Landauer—an influential artist and educator who taught at Bezalel and whose botanical photographs are on display—is one of 20 trailblazing female photographers from the early 20th century whose work is presented alongside that of 20 female

photographers active today. The exhibition brings to life a brief but astonishing chapter in the history of the medium, set between the two world wars.

The Jewish pioneers showcased at ANU include fashion and celebrity photographers like Yva, famed in Weimar Germany, and Madame d’Ora, who took pictures of Coco Chanel and Pablo Picasso; Claude Cahun, acclaimed for her staged self-portraits; and photojournalist Julia Pirotte. They all worked in a period of political turmoil, social upheaval and rapid technological change.

As photography professionalized, women’s leading role in the field faded, overtaken by some of the men who had been their students. The ANU exhibit, open through January 2027, aims to restore these historical figures to their rightful position as trailblazers.

THESE WOMEN TRAVELED WIDELY and exhibited internationally. Many had trained at the famed Bauhaus school in Germany, where Lucia Moholy, also in the exhibition, helped build a photography department with her then-husband, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Most worked in Western Europe—Berlin, Vienna, Paris.

With the rise of Nazism, the majority of these women fled Europe, some to the United States, some to Argentina and some to Mandatory Palestine, where a group of them founded the first photography studios in Tel Aviv.

These women made their way in the world through fortitude and sheer talent, often in the face of grim odds. Polish-born Julia Pirotte photographed the French Resistance while fighting alongside them in Marseille, then returned to Poland to capture the aftermath of the 1946 Kielce pogrom. Her images of the tragedy remain among the only visual records of its occurrence.

In the exhibit, Pirotte’s black-and-white photos of women and children in Marseille are placed next to Israeli photojournalist Avishag Shaar-Yashuv’s color photos of women and children evacuated from communities near the Gaza envelope after the

Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. On the same wall is Shaar-Yashuv’s portrait of Rachel Goldberg-Polin and her husband, Jon Polin, taken before their son, hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, was murdered in captivity.

Yva, whose real name was Else Neuländer-Simon, was among the most influential fashion photographers of the Weimar era and even trained legendary photographer Helmut Newton. Yva was deported in 1942 and murdered at Majdanek. Her images are paired with Israeli fashion photographer Michal Chelbin, whose photos of models and dancers have a similar dreamy look.

In addition to her glamorous portraits of models and fashion icons on display, the exhibition includes Yva’s bold experiments with photomontage in which she layered multiple images to create a sense of movement. In one example, three dancers caught mid-motion appear superimposed

over a saxophone player. Techniques now used in Photoshop trace their lineage to innovations like hers.

Then there is Austrian-born British photographer Edith Tudor-Hart, a Soviet agent who helped recruit the Cambridge Five, a ring of spies in the United Kingdom that passed information to the Soviet Union. She also documented impoverished working-class Britain between the wars. Her intimate snapshots of family life in 1930s Britain—a clothesline from a bird’s-eye view, a poor London family crowded onto one bed—are on display.

MICHAL HOUMINER, CO-CURATOR of “20x20” with Assaf Galay, spent five years researching and assembling an

extensive list of early photographers for the exhibition. She then invited contemporary female Jewish photographers from around the world to identify one of their predecessors whose work most spoke to them.

The exhibition, Houminer said, is about “the resemblance between then and now. In the end, we all speak the same language.”

Some matches are eerily precise; others resonate in theme rather than content.

Canadian-born American digital photographer Jill Greenberg is one of



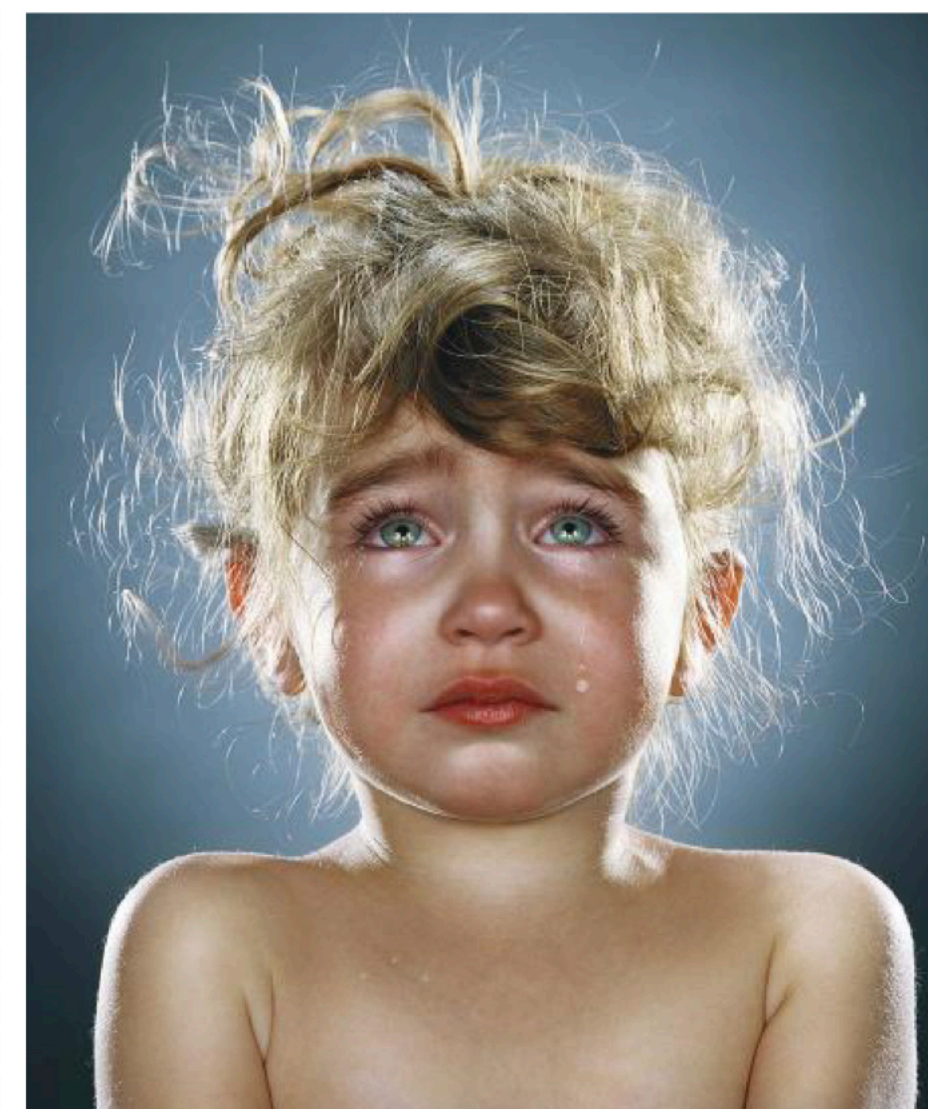
Pioneer Claude Cahun was famed for her carefully staged photographic self-portraits, such as this one from 1928.

the contemporary artists. “The exhibition is so important,” she said via email, “especially right now, when Jewish artists are facing similar challenges now as antisemitism is out in the open again, as evidenced by boycotts of Israel, Israeli artists, musicians and actors.”

Greenberg uses Photoshop and digital manipulation in her oversized portraiture. An image from her “End Times” series of crying children—a commentary on environmental and political turmoil—is included in the ANU exhibition. As her pioneer, she selected Lucia Moholy, who documented Bauhaus buildings, products and workshops so meticulously that her images became the school’s visual identity, although many went uncredited for decades or were misattributed to male colleagues.

Moholy “was a polymath and a trailblazer who used a pseudonym occasionally,” said Greenberg, noting that she herself also has used a male pseudonym in her work to engage “with the perception of art-making from a man’s point of view.” She added, “At this point, my gender is not the biggest threat to my career. My Jewishness is.”

Each of the 20 contemporary pho-



Turmoil Contemporary photographer Jill Greenberg uses digital manipulation in her portrait series ‘End Times.’

CLAUDE CAHUN/COURTESY OF JERSEY HERITAGE COLLECTION (TOP); © 2025 JILL GREENBERG, COURTESY OF CLAMP GALLERY N.Y.



ARTS

Photo of artist Pablo Picasso by Madame D'Ora

DRAWING IN THE SHOAH'S AFTERMATH

A SHOWCASE OF POSTWAR ILLUSTRATED BOOKS AND DIARIES BY FEMALE ARTISTS | BY JUDY BOLTON-FASMAN

The 20-foot-long accordion book of 19 watercolor and pen-and-ink drawings is titled *Auschwitz Death Camp*. Its illustrations tell a damning story of the experiences of Jewish women in the infamous camp. Among the chilling images is one of women being beaten by soldiers. Another depicts the crowded bunks, and a third, a naked woman having her head shaved while an SS soldier looks on and leers.

Made of one long piece of paper folded into smaller sheets in a zigzag pattern, the oversized book was created in 1945 by Zofia Rozenstrauch, after the Warsaw-born architecture student was liberated from Auschwitz. The renderings of the camp's buildings, fences and watchtowers are crisp and detailed—architectural precision serving as the backdrop to horrors. Indeed, the illustrations were detailed enough to be used to help convict Adolf Eichmann in his trial in Israel.

The book is one of the highlights of a new exhibition, "Who Will Draw Our History? Women's Graphic Narratives of the Holocaust, 1944-1949," at the Kniznick Gallery for Feminist Art at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute in Waltham, Mass. Rozenstrauch is among the 10 female

survivors whose artwork—drawings and illustrations from handmade albums, pictorial diaries and other works on paper—is featured in the exhibition, which opens on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and runs through April 30.

Curated by art historian and Holocaust researcher Rachel E. Perry and based on her forthcoming book of the same title, "Who Will Draw Our History?" presents new scholarship on the Jewish female artists who survived the Holocaust and responded creatively in the immediate aftermath. Many displayed or published their creations, only to have their work disappear into scattered archives and largely fall into obscurity—until now.

Perry, who teaches Holocaust studies at the University of Haifa and at Gratz College in Philadelphia, describes the works in the exhibition as "image albums," wordless narratives that function as eyewitness accounts no less than written diaries and oral testimonies. The show includes both specially crafted facsimiles and original pieces, most created between the end of World War II and the found-

tographers recorded a three-minute clip describing how she approached the exhibition. Visitors can listen to these stories as they move through the gallery. Amy Touchette, a street photographer in New York City, speaks about the pioneer she selected: Eva Besnyo, a Budapest-born street photographer and prominent member of the Nieuwe Fotografie (New Photography) movement, which championed photography as an independent art form. She took pictures of the women's labor movement, immigrant communities and work-

ing-class life in Berlin and Amsterdam.

In her clip, Touchette explains that she connected to Besnyo's sense of "quiet observation." Their images align almost seamlessly in gesture and mood—from Touchette's images of women in head coverings walking with children along a Brooklyn street to elderly men sitting on stoops, their legs draped over the steps. A century apart, both women were drawn to nearly identical subjects.

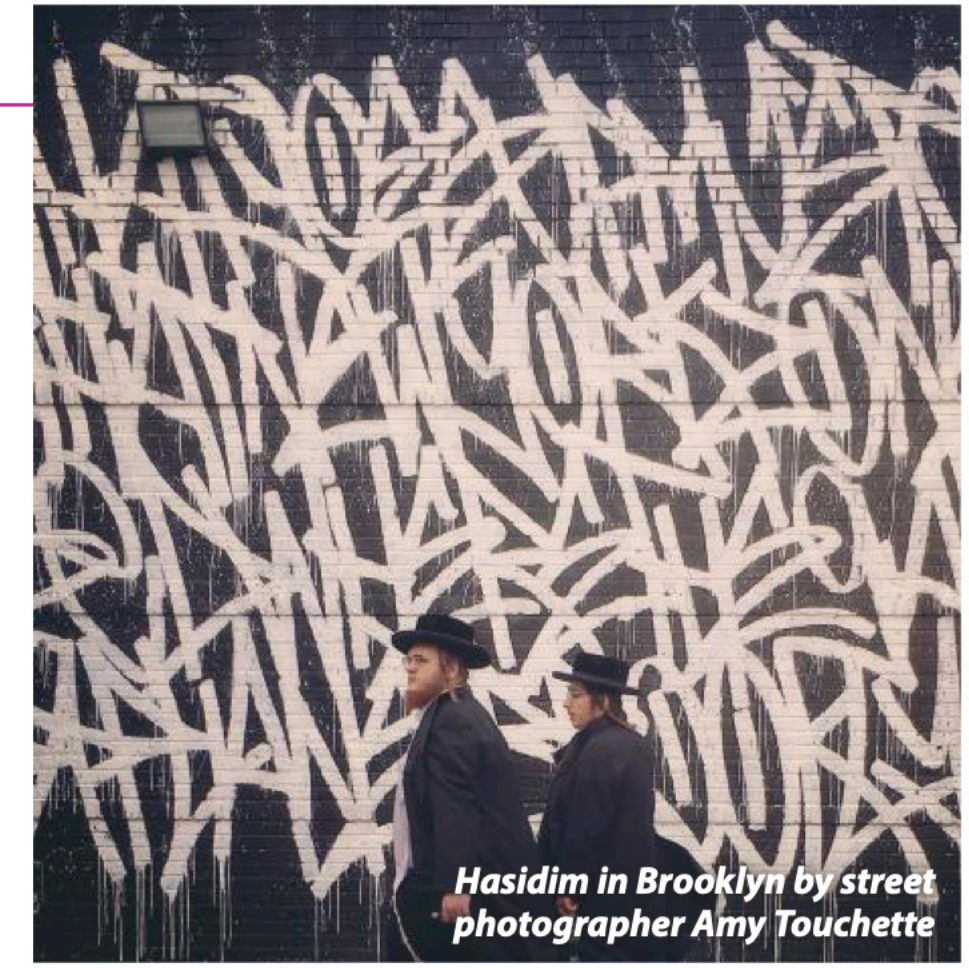
"Many times, we think we're doing something new," said Houminer, the ANU exhibition's co-curator, "but

someone preceded us." Looking at the incredible female photographers of the past is a reminder to the creators of today that "we're always standing on the shoulders of those who came before."

Jessica Kasmer-Jacobs

is a former books editor at *The Wall Street Journal* and literary agent. She has published essays and criticisms in *The New York Times*, *The*

Washington Post, *The Boston Globe* and *The Wall Street Journal*. She lives in Tel Aviv.



Rozenstrauch's book from 1945 is a focus of the exhibition. The original was too fragile to travel from its home in Yad Vashem, so a facsimile of the book is displayed in the center of the exhibition room. Rozenstrauch married and changed her name to Naomi Judkowski after the war and became an architect in Israel. The display also includes an explanation of the book's role in the Eichmann trial. Submitted as legal evidence, illustrations from the book were used as visual proof accompanied by survivor testimony.

"This book is one of the more interesting elements of the show," said Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute. "As a lawyer by training, I found it to be an amazing intersection of the struggle for justice and these women's creativity."

Eichmann's 1961 trial, televised and broadcast around the world, ushered in an era of public interest in and access to survivor testimony, Perry said. The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute exhibition demonstrates an even earlier era of public access: in the early postwar years, with survivor-led exhibitions in Hungary, Germany and Italy—many of them organized by women.

Perry, who specializes in the visual culture of the Holocaust, asserts that these works can be seen as precursors to the modern graphic novel, and its sibling the graphic memoir. That genre is perhaps employed most effectively and famously to explore Holocaust

themes in Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*.

There is a "recognition that this is a medium that allows for greater accessibility and larger audiences," she said. "Spiegelman himself dubbed this evolving genre as 'a way to sweeten a bitter pill.'"

The exhibition's poster shows a photo-graph of artist Lea Grundig's hands drawing a woman's face distorted by pain, an emblem of these women's attempts to convey the unthinkable. Grundig, who protested the

Nazi occupation of Dresden through art, was imprisoned by the Gestapo for two years before escaping to Mandatory Palestine in 1940.

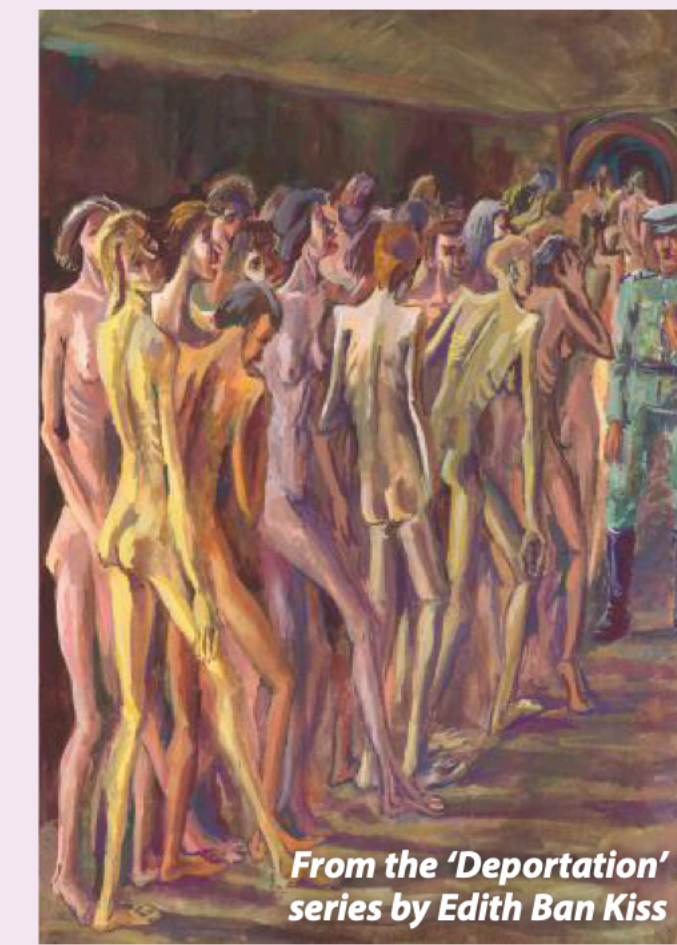
On view are expressionistic ink drawings from Grundig's 1944 booklet *In the Valley of the Slaughter*. One depicts a mass of women who appear to support one another as they flee German soldiers. The booklet was published in Tel Aviv and copies of the original publication are at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and The Weiner Library in London as well as other archives.

Indeed, Perry uncovered "image albums" in major Holocaust archives, such as Yad Vashem and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and also in smaller collections, such as the Hungarian National Museum, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and the Ravensbrück museum, as well as in private holdings.

The rediscovery of these female artists and their artwork, she said, broadens "our cultural imagination of the camps, which mostly has been created by two distinct groups: perpetrators and liberators." It also challenges the assumption that photographs were the only immediate visual records of what had happened.

Haunting and powerful, the show's graphic narratives speak to the urgency of self-representation and the importance of showcasing women's accounts of the Holocaust.

Judy Bolton-Fasman is the author of *Asylum: A Memoir of Family Secrets*.



AMY TOUCHETTE, LORIMER STREET, WILLAMSBURG, BROOKLYN, N.Y., PART OF THE 'STREET DIARIES' SERIES (TOP); EDITH BAN KISS, 'DEPORTATION,' 1945, #29 OF 30 GOUACHES, COURTESY OF THE RAVENSBRÜCK MEMORIAL MUSEUM/BRANDEIS FOUNDATION

