

Portraits of Holocaust survivors focus of Deerfield talk

By **RICHIE DAVIS**
For the Gazette

Dedicated to “memory and hope,” the “Abraham Project” by German artist Marlis Glaser is a series of more than 200 portrait drawings and paintings of German-speaking emigrants and Holocaust survivors and their children in Israel.

The work, begun in 2005, combines biblical, historical and biographical content as well as elements of art history. It has toured Germany, France and Israel and is the work of the daughter of a Nazi soldier who grew up knowing no Jews or anything about them.

Glaser will present a talk and slide presentation about the “Abraham Project” Sunday at 3 p.m. at the Deerfield Arts Bank, 3 Sugarloaf St. She will be joined by her artist son, Samuel Fischer-Glaser.

“What is the weight of a stone through the window of a Jewish home?” was the question Glaser posed with her 2008 exhibition marking the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht and the 60th anniversary of the founding of Israel.

An eye-opener

Glaser knew nothing about her father’s role in World War II when she was growing up in Swabia, in southern Germany, but began exploring the stories of Holocaust survivors after her painting the portraits of union workers, communists and social democrats led her at age 32 to paint the portrait of Hannah Erdmann, a Jewish survivor of Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in German-occupied Czechoslovakia, whose story fascinated her.

As Glaser learned more about Erdmann’s life, she said, “I started wanting to know about the Jewish people.”

Glaser last year received an Obermayer Award — presented to non-Jewish Germans who have made outstanding voluntary contributions to preserving the memory of German Jewish communities.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Marlis Glaser will speak Sunday at the Deerfield Arts Bank.

A tribute to survivors

“Her art is beautiful,” said Jane Trigere, director of the Arts Bank, which officially closed in January after two years of housing exhibits. Trigere’s husband, Kenneth Schoen, invited Glaser and her son to visit this country and speak about her work after finding it on the Internet and striking up a correspondence.

“I was very touched, moved and inspired by what

she was doing,” said Schoen, a bookseller who specializes in German Judaica and books on Jewish life and the Holocaust.

Glaser’s work reveals relationship between Jewish festivals, illuminations in antique Hebrew books and the poetry of “Song of Songs,” and is a tribute to survivors and their families.

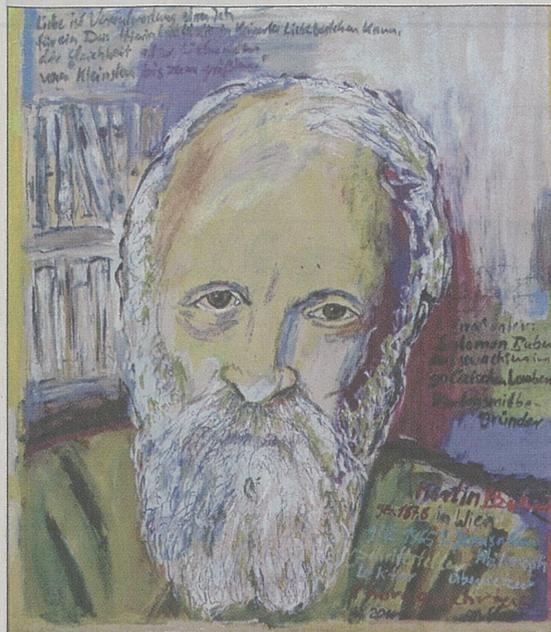
The artist, a prolific painter who focuses on visual narratives based on interviews with her subjects, has done wall installations dealing with the history of the labor movement, the history of the women’s liberation, women of the French Revolution and women of the Resistance during World War II. She has devoted much of her work over the past 20 years to themes related to Judaism, to which she recently converted after 20 years of study.

Among these is a project relating to Janus Korczak, a Warsaw, Poland, orphanage director who remained with his orphans rather than accepting freedom for himself, and was exterminated at Treblinka, an extermination camp built by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland during World War II.

Glaser, who studied at the Academy of Arts in Hamburg and the University of Bremen, began painting portraits of anti-Nazi resistance fighters and through them met Erdmann, who “opened the door to a world she had never known.” The Jerusalem Post reported in 2008.

‘Feel at home’

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found it fascinating that 41 men, women and children had left Rexingen, Germany, in March 1938 for Palestine, as a group. Six months later, during Kristallnacht, the Rexingen synagogue was destroyed and many of its Jews deported to Dachau, a Nazi concentration camp built in a medieval town in Bavaria, Germany, of the same name.

Glaser had been anxious on her first visit to the collective village about how its German-Jewish residents would react, but on her first day in the home of community founder Jacob Frohlich, he told her, “Feel at home,” the Jerusalem

Post reported.

“At those words, Glaser almost burst into tears. ‘Nobody ever said that to me in Germany,’ she said ... ‘Here I was, the daughter of a Nazi soldier, arriving at the home of a Jew who escaped Nazi Germany ... and he told me to feel at home.’”

‘What we lost’

Glaser’s “Abraham Project” grew out of her work teaching art to children around 2000 at the time of the Second Intifadah Palestinian uprising in Israel, when she felt anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic sentiment began stir-

ring in her country. Her focus was Korczak and his orphans, leading to her own two-year project that resulted in 150 paintings and eventually to her first trip to Israel.

“I wanted to learn more about what we lost in Germany when the Jews were persecuted,” she said. She began to study and incorporate into her work biographical, religious and historical detail.

“I found that in Judaism, everything has a meaning ... For me, it was no question: this is my spiritual and moral world.”

For Fischer-Glaser, Glaser’s son, who has studied sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich since 2012, his drawings and sculptures have biblical and literary references such as Franz Kafka’s “The Castle,” Goethe’s poem, “Elf King,” King Belshazzar from the Book of Daniel, and a 1940 song from the Krakow ghetto by Mordechai Gebirtig.

The inspiration for the work that shows the close connection between religion, psychology, literature and language even includes comedic lines gleaned from nine seasons of “Seinfeld,” which he said, “are phrases to capture a brutal reality.”

It’s a brutal reality that Fischer-Glaser continues to find in daily life, in as seemingly mundane an act as taking the train from Munich, with its destination boldly spelled out at the central station: Dachau.

“It was the strangest thing to board that train to Dachau,” he said. “And the fact that hundreds of people board that train every day. And for the vast majority, it’s something they don’t even think about.”

Richie Davis can be reached at rdavis@recorder.com.

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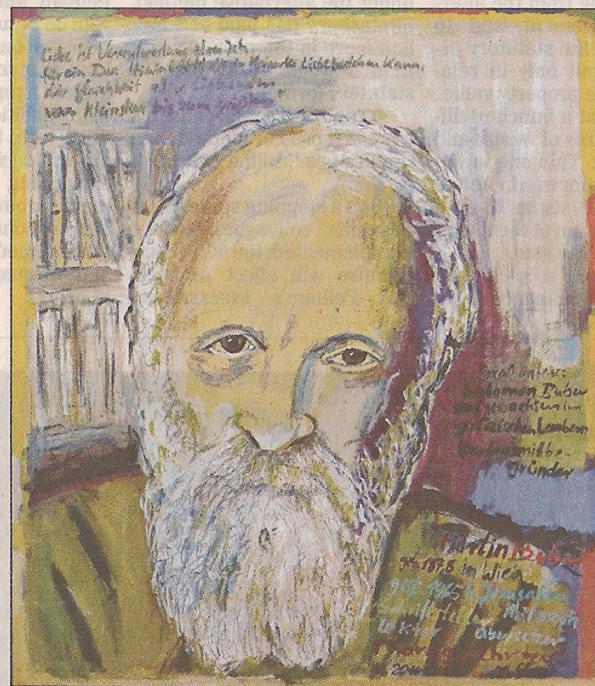
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THURSDAY

May 5, 2016

MEMORY AND HOPE

German artist's portraits of Holocaust survivors a focus of Deerfield talk



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By **RICHIE DAVIS**
Recorder Staff

SOUTH DEERFIELD — Dedicated to "memory and hope," the Abraham Project by German artist Marlis Glaser is a series of more than 200 portrait drawings and paintings of German-speaking emigrants and Holocaust survivors and their children in Israel.

The work, begun in 2005, combines Biblical, historical and biographical content as well as elements of art history. It has toured Germany, France and Israel and is the work of the daughter of a Nazi soldier who grew up knowing no Jews or anything about them.

Glaser will present a special talk and slide presentation May 15 at the Deerfield Arts Bank, 3 Sugarloaf St., along with her artist son, Samuel Fis-

cher-Glaser at 3 p.m. Holocaust Remembrance Day at sundown on Wednesday.

"What is the weight of a stone through the window of a Jewish home?" was the question Glaser posed with her 2008 exhibition marking the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht and the 60th anniversary of the founding of Israel.

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As she began learning more about Erdmann's life, Glaser said, "I started wanting to know about the Jewish people."

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HOLOCAUST FROM A1

which officially closed in January after two years of housing exhibits. Trigere's husband, Kenneth Schoen, invited Glaser and her son to visit this country and speak about her works after finding her work on the Internet and striking up a correspondence.

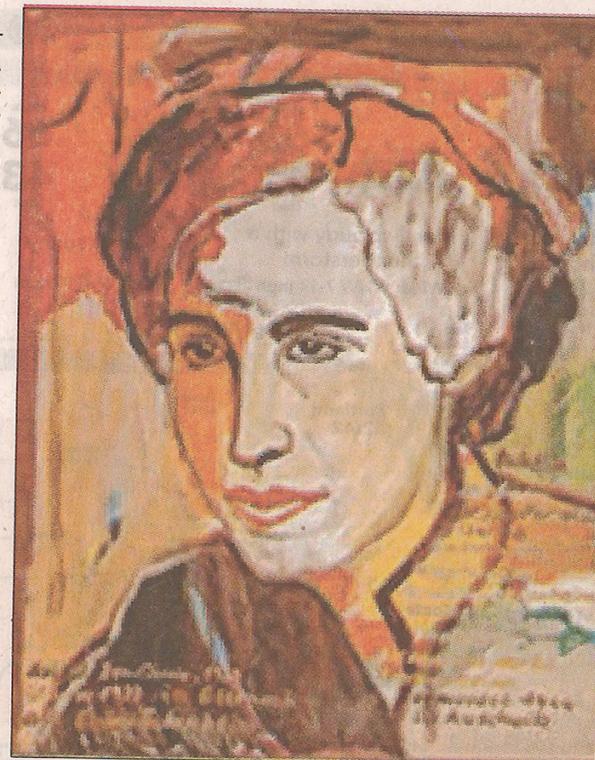
"I was very touched, moved and inspired by what she was doing," said Schoen, a bookseller who specializes in German Judaica and books on Jewish life and the Holocaust.

The South Deerfield talk is not directly tied to today's observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day, yet Glaser's Abraham Project work, revealing relationship between the Jewish festivals, illuminations in antique Hebrew books and the poetry of "Song of Songs," is a tribute to survivors and their families.

The artist, a prolific painter who focuses on visual narratives based on actual interviews with her subjects, has done wall installations dealing with the history of the labor movement, the history of the women's liberation, women of the French Revolution and women of the Resistance during World War II. She has devoted much of her work over the past 20 years to themes related to Judaism, to which she recently converted after 20 years of study.

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Her "Abraham Project" grew out of her work teaching



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You can reach Richie Davis at: rdavis@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 269

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Preserving memories

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For the Bulletin

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FROM B1

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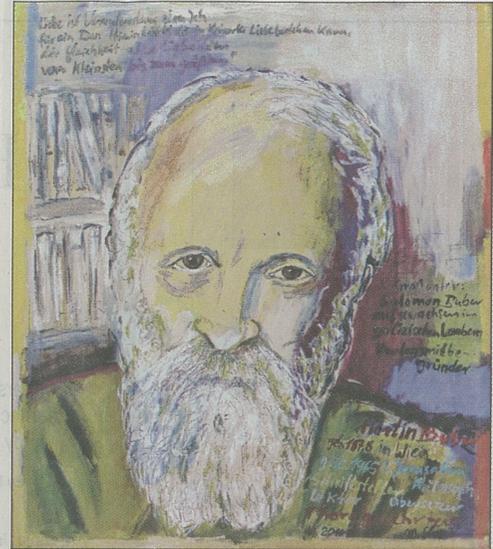
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