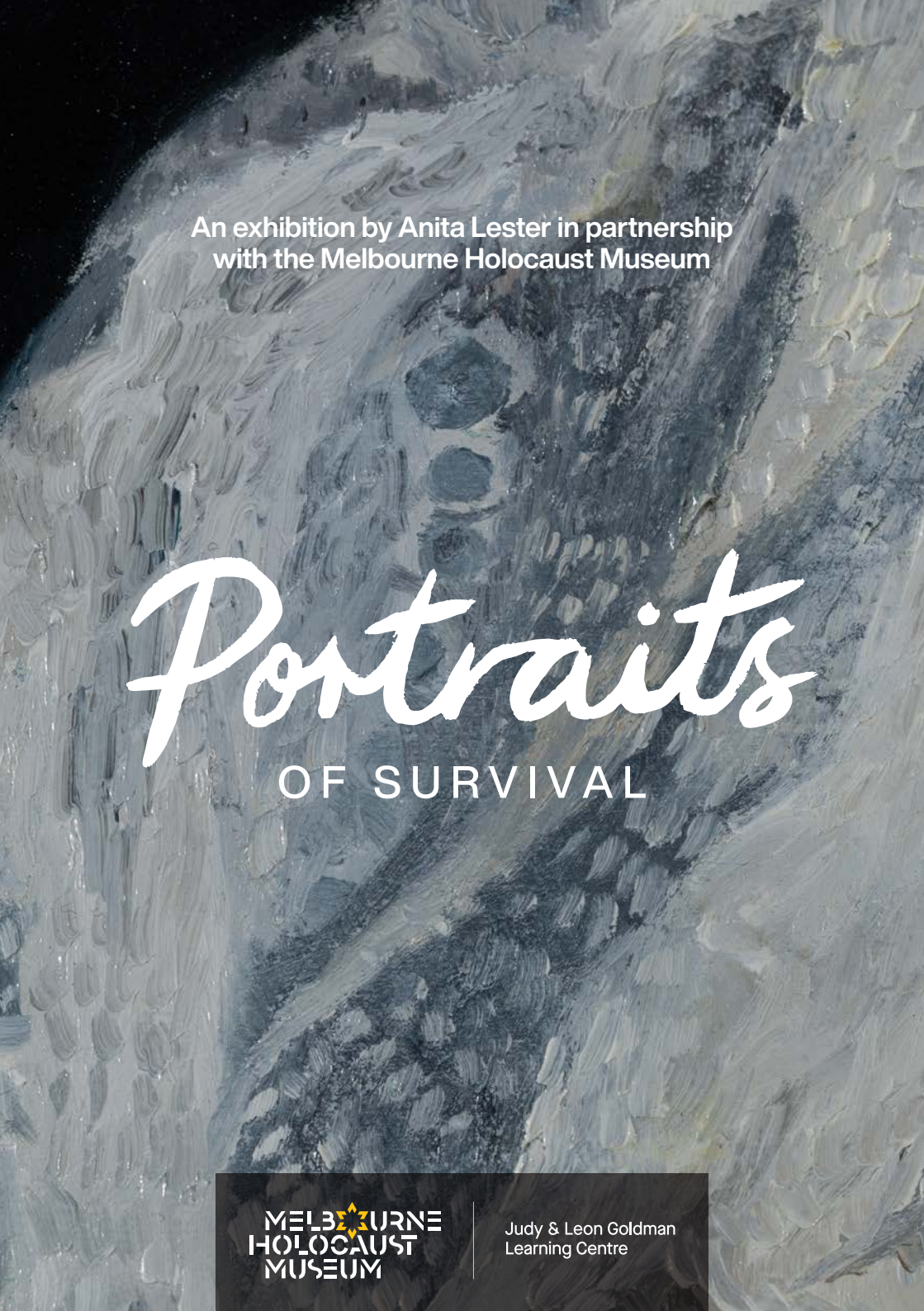


An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of grey, blue, and black. The texture is highly visible, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

An exhibition by Anita Lester in partnership
with the Melbourne Holocaust Museum

Portraits

OF SURVIVAL

MELBOURNE
HOLOCAUST
MUSEUM

Judy & Leon Goldman
Learning Centre

Anita Lester is a multidisciplinary artist based in Melbourne, Australia, who works across music, film, painting, poetry, and illustration.

Anita Lester

Her practice resists easy categorisation but is first and foremost grounded in storytelling. It is marked by both a technical precision and a deep emotional intelligence that connects across forms.

Anita began as the lead singer of indie rock act Lester the Fierce before releasing her debut solo EP *Erato* in 2020. Her cover of Leonard Cohen's *You Want It Darker* was praised by Cohen himself.

She went on to collaborate on the album *Sun and Moon and Stars* with Husky and in 2023 she released her debut album *The Clown*, an intimate reflection on grief, change, and desire, produced by her composer husband Gideon Preiss.

Her 2017 short film *Noch Am Leben (I'm Still Alive)* screened at over fifty international festivals and is an intimate exploration of Holocaust trauma. It now resides in the permanent collections of institutions such as Yad Vashem and the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.



As a painter Anita's work moves between folklore, portraiture, and symbolism. Her Yiddish collection *Farmacopeia*, originally illustrated by Marc Chagall, was reimagined by Anita for its centenary and launched in conjunction with a Chagall retrospective at the Jewish Museum of Australia.

Her poetry is featured across over a dozen books and often accompanies her music and visual art. Her published collection *Ode to Oz*, released alongside her EP *Erato*, demonstrates her lyrical voice: tender, political, and deeply rooted in Jewish identity.

Anita is also one of Australia's few practicing courtroom artists, notably capturing Erin Patterson and Malka Leifer. Her sketches have appeared across major news platforms, capturing moments of national significance with a raw and immediate honesty. In 2024, she illustrated Arnold Zable's *The Glass Horse of Venice*, published by Text Publishing.

Whether through image, word, sound, or line, Anita's work continues to ask essential questions about memory, faith, and how we carry culture through rupture and reinvention.

This exhibition is dedicated to my
grandfather, Sam (Shmuel) Ginat z'l,
and to Abram (Abe) Goldberg OAM z'l.

My grandfather could never believe he had survived the ghetto, camps, and death marches long enough to see a grandchild born. Soft-spoken and private, he loved soccer and the Hakoah club, worked in the rag trade and smelled always of tobacco and mints. I was a little afraid of him as a child, never knowing the questions to ask before he left this world too soon.

In painting these portraits, I found myself in conversation with Abe Goldberg – a survivor whose courage and devotion to memory have guided so many. Abe and my grandfather were born in the same year, in the same place, and walked almost the same path to survival. Perhaps even days apart. Perhaps even side by side.

Abe often says his survival is his victory. In Auschwitz, torn from his mother, he promised her he would live – and that he would tell. He has kept that promise with stubborn devotion, speaking to tens of thousands of people over his lifetime, ensuring the world could not look away.

Together with his beloved Cesia, also a survivor, he built a life in Melbourne filled with love, music, and community. Their home was a gathering place, alive with conversation and celebration, even after so much loss.

For me, Abe was the seedling of this project. His boundless energy, humour, and warmth pushed this forward from the very beginning. Sitting with him, you felt the force of someone who had seen the worst of humanity and still chose life.

Now past a century, surrounded by four generations, Abe was unbending – a man who turned survival into testimony, and testimony into legacy.

To both men – one I knew briefly, one who helped me know him again – I offer this work in gratitude and memory.

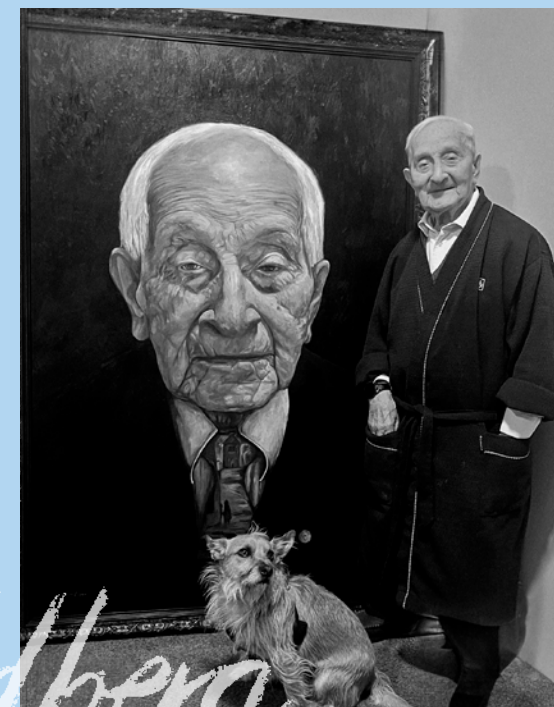
Abram (Abe) Goldberg OAM 1924-2025

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Mr Goldberg



Nina Bassat AM

Hidden under the identity of a farmer's niece, Nina survived through the courage of those who protected her mother and herself. Her testimony honours both the family she lost and those who risked everything to save them. Almost her entire extended family was murdered in Treblinka and Belzec. From that childhood of loss, she became a voice of strength - an advocate for justice and the Jewish people. Nina's life is both survival and inspiration.

Nina



Thomas (Tommy) Moses Beck 1929-2024

Tommy greeted me with a wink and subtle flirt. His life was vast and colourful, which was immediately clear. Born in Budapest, he survived the war, spoke eight languages, lived in more than a dozen cities, and married six times. He loved sun, music, and company, and chose to have his ashes scattered in open air.

His story is one not only of survival, but reinvention, and a generous spirit too large to be confined.

Tommy



Ester Braitberg

Buba Ester. A soft-spoken tiny woman with a major spark, who is clearly the most loved matriarch of a large and warm family. From Łódź to Auschwitz she carried her mother's last words - "Esther, run. Don't let them beat you."

She ran toward life: love in Belgium, a home in Australia, and generations who now carry her story.

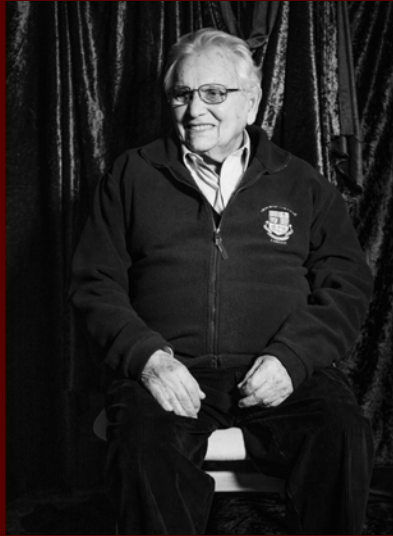
Buba Ester



Sonja Cowan

At sixteen, Sonja boarded a Kindertransport with only a suitcase and her mother's parting handshake - "I'll see you in Eretz." It was the last time they saw one another. That moment shaped her forever. She grew into adulthood in Britain, even serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, before meeting her husband Ralph and eventually building a new life in Melbourne. Their home became a place of welcome, filled with daughters, music, and the rhythms of community life. At her 100th birthday, Sonja was surrounded by children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Holding them close, she said she finally felt like somebody.

Sonja



Wolf Deane

Wolf grew up an only child in Łódź, his happy life shattered by ghetto walls and years of forced labour. Auschwitz took his mother; illness claimed his father. Liberation became his true birthday. From that beginning, Wolf built an extraordinary life: studies in Israel and London, a career in engineering, and a family with his beloved Asya of 64 years. Surrounded by children and grandchildren, he chose joy, challenge in many forms, and love as his answer to loss.

Wolf Deane



Elka Ekstein

(No. 74197)

Elka's life was marked by bravery and endurance. She and her sister Sonia leapt from a deportation train, survived bunkers, Auschwitz, and a death march. Liberation brought not just freedom but the chance to begin again. In Melbourne, she built a family with Yosl and raised daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Elka carries her number 74197, but she is defined by resilience and love.

Elka



Sally Felzen

Sally's presence is gentle but deeply strong. A survivor who faced profound loss, she created a life of family and continuity. Her quiet grace, passed down through generations, is proof that even after devastation, love remains possible. Wearing her wedding veil, Sally transports us to a moment of pure hope and heart.

Sally

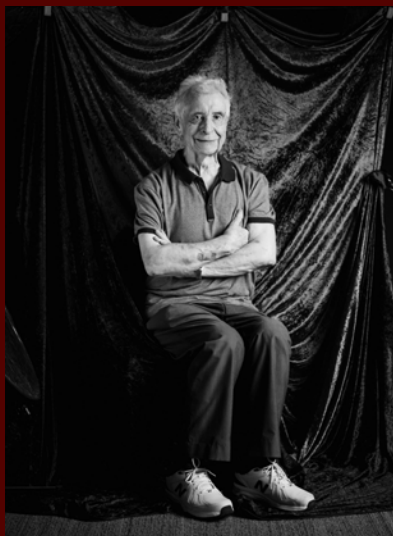


Dita Gould

Dita was just eleven when war overturned her childhood. Caring for her little sister, enduring starvation and separation, she survived with courage that never left her. After reunion with her parents, she came to Australia.

She often said her life was spared so she could give back – and she lived that promise fully.

Dita



Ken Hamer

Born in Łódź, Poland in 1937, Ken survived the war in hiding with his mother and sister, sheltering in forests and bunkers until liberation in 1944. Reunited with his father, the family left Poland and arrived in Australia just before his tenth birthday. Despite a lost childhood, Ken thrived – building lifelong friendships, marrying Gerry, and raising three children and two grandsons. Known for his humour, generosity, and community spirit, Ken's life is defined by resilience and love.

Ken



Berni Hamersfeld

Berni was born in Brzesko, Poland in 1936. When the bombings began, his family escaped by horse and carriage – a stroke of fortune that carried them through Lvov, into Russian work camps in Siberia, and finally to Uzbekistan. In 1950 he arrived in Australia aboard *The Napoli*, beginning again on new soil. Now 89, Berni carries the weight of a traumatic childhood, yet is best known for his *joie de vivre* – a spirit that refuses to be diminished.

Bernie



Luba Olenski

Luba trained as a dressmaker – a skill that would save her life more than once. After losing her family, she escaped the Sokoly ghetto and survived alone in the forests, cold and starving, before joining the partisans. With courage beyond her years, she carried a rifle, detonated bridges, and was decorated for bravery.

In her seventies she began to write, and in her nineties, she painted – hundreds of works depicting memory, resilience, and faith. Luba has never seen herself as a victim. She carries both the danger and the laughter of the forest inside her and turns it into blessing for everyone who crossed her path.

little luba



Alex (Sany) Heimler

Born in Beled, Hungary in 1924, Alex (Sany) survived the Holocaust before reuniting with his beloved Leah (Puci). They married in 1946, welcomed their daughter Judy in 1948, and began a new life in Australia in 1957. A mechanic by trade, Alex built not only work but a rich circle of family and friends. His greatest joy was their holiday home near Yarrawonga, where waterskiing, boating, and laughter filled the days. Now in his later years, still active and curious, he carries one message above all: never forget. His life is testament to survival, love, and the enduring light of memory.

Alex



Vivienne Spiegel

Vivienne wore polka dots for our portrait - a tribute to the last image of a loved one. At six she read aloud the letter that sent her father away forever. She escaped the Velodrome roundup that claimed thousands of children, and was hidden by Catholic farmers until the war ended.

Orphaned and displaced, she built her life again in Australia. In her nineties, she still speaks for those who never could.

Vivienne



Magda Steiner

1923-2025

Magda's presence was luminous. A survivor of Auschwitz and Allendorf, she carried herself with knowing strength and extraordinary dignity. When I first met her, I was struck by her beauty - ageless and utterly disarming. After the war she began again in Melbourne with her husband Erno, raising daughters and building a family rooted in resilience and love. Beyond her own home, Magda gave herself to the Jewish community, remaining a passionate advocate and a cherished matriarch until the very end of her long life.

Magda



Celina Widawski

Celina's childhood was uprooted by war. Her family fled ghettos, hid under false identities, and lived with constant fear of betrayal. Her father perished, but she, her mother, and sister survived.

Later in Melbourne, she wrote her story with detail and care - giving future generations a way to understand her journey.

Celina

Anita Lester would like
to extend her thanks to:

To **James McPherson**, for his video and photographic work, and for his unwavering help throughout.

To **Melbourne Holocaust Museum** for supporting, facilitating and championing this work from the very beginning.

To **Ben Gipson** for the framing at Gallery Jones, alongside **Skye Jeffers**.

To **Allan Preiss and Sandra Cowan** for their endless hands and hearts.

To **Bendigo Bank** for their financial support.

To the **Goldberg Family**, for nurturing the seedling stages of this concept.

To the families and carers of the sitters, who kindly facilitated the sessions.

To the **Melbourne Studio of Art**, for housing and gathering the materials.

To **Dena Lester**, for helping me develop the concept at its heart.

Finally, to **Gideon Preiss** - who not only gave his unwavering support to this project, but who also carried me through my pregnancy and the first year of our twins' lives, all while these works were being completed.

Continue your experience through our public programs: hear from a Holocaust survivor, join an expert talk or take part in our Holocaust education course. For more information scan the QR code.



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EXHIBITION PRODUCED BY



Judy & Leon Goldman Learning Centre

THIS EXHIBITION WAS MADE
POSSIBLE WITH SINCERE
APPRECIATION TO OUR PARTNERS



Community Bank
Caulfield Park



WITH HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE SURVIVORS AND THEIR FAMILIES FOR SHARING THEIR STORIES

Nina Bassat AM	Wolf Deane	Dita Gould	Vivienne Spiegel
Thomas (Tommy)	Elka Ekstein	Ken Hamer	Magda Steiner z'l
Moses Beck z'l	Sally Felzen	Berni Hamersfeld	Celina Widawski
Ester Braitberg	Abram Goldberg	Luba Olenski	
Sonja Cowan	OAM z'l	Alex (Sany) Heimler	

MELBOURNE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM TEAM

Ellen Bradley	Tegan Thompson
Dr Steve Cooke	CompNow
Dr Breann Fallon	Space Arrangers
Dr Daniel Haumschild	Studio Tweed
Alice McInnes	Synthesis Design+Build

ANITA LESTER TEAM

Ben Gibson and Skye Jefferys at Gallery Jones	Melbourne Studio of Art
Goldberg Family	Gideon Preiss
Dena Lester	Allan Preiss and Sandra Cowan
James McPherson	



29 October – 18 January

Melbourne Holocaust Museum
Alter Family Special Exhibitions Gallery

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