

Local

International Virtual Exhibition and Gallery Talk Features Local Artist

By Daniel Pearlman, Jewish Community Relations Council Director



When Deborah Orloff's father passed away in 2007, a trove of old family photographs was uncovered in his basement. Many of these photographs were moldy or faded, and most were severely damaged. Deborah recalls her reaction to examining these photographs as both very personal and universal. Just as a photograph is a snapshot of time and of memory, these damaged photographs became a metaphor for what we do and do not remember.

Deborah is a photo-based artist and Professor and Associate Chair of the Department of Art at the University of Toledo. A member of Congregation B'nai Israel, she teaches all levels of Photography at UT's Center for Visual Arts where she oversees the Photography and Digital Media Area. Her ongoing project is called "Elusive Memory," which "explores the significance of vernacular photographs as aesthetic objects and cultural artifacts." She takes severely damaged family photographs and enlarges them to emphasize their unique details.

Deborah was one of just three American artists – out of a

pool of candidates from sixteen different Central Consortium Partnership2Gether communities on this side of the Atlantic – who was accepted for a weeklong artist residency program in Budapest. Altogether, nine artists were chosen, split evenly between Israel's Western Galilee, Budapest, and the U.S.

The program was scheduled to take place in May 2020. Then the pandemic struck, postponing this in-person gathering. However, this also led to new opportunities for these artists and for our Partnership communities. The nine artists have been meeting regularly on Zoom together with Partnership community leaders and staff from the U.S., Western Galilee, and Budapest, to learn from and collaborate with one another. Each artist presented to the others, and a working relationship soon began to take shape. Just like that, the decision was made to have a virtual exhibition and gallery talk in January 2021 with "Home" chosen as their overarching theme. Deborah emphasizes that "Home" is loosely

defined and can be interpreted in different ways. There are also plans for a physical exhibition and residency in Budapest in the future, when circumstances allow for travel.

For the virtual exhibition, Deborah is collaborating with a

Budapest-based artist named Maria Chilf who is also interested in family photographs and the concept of "lost history." As American Jews, Deborah explains, "we typically can't trace our ancestry back that far... the history is lost, in that sense." For Jewish families in

Europe, their histories may have been lost for different reasons, such as through wars and the Holocaust. Deborah and Maria combine each other's family stories and photographs into one work of art, such as, for example, merging a German-language marriage document that Maria has from an older relative with an old photo of Deborah's family. The works featured in this virtual exhibition do not only include family photographs, but anything that relates to the theme of "Home." When asked why Deborah

chose the idea of lost histories for her collaboration, she explained that "home is where your family is, and also where you come from." Like an extended family reunion, it couldn't be more fitting of a theme to bring together Jewish artists from Israel, Europe, and the U.S.

The virtual exhibition and gallery talk will take place on Sunday, January 10 at 1 pm. All works featured have been created since the pandemic began. To learn more and RSVP for this program, visit www.westerngalilee.org.il. And to learn more about Deborah's work, visit <http://www.deborahorloff.com/>.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo is honored to be an active member of Partnership2Gether. Federation partners with the Jewish community of Budapest, Hungary; Akko and Matte Asher in Israel's Western Galilee; and fifteen other Jewish communities across the U.S. as part of Partnership's Central Consortium. CREATE2Gether, a program of Partnership's Community Engagement committee, is organizing this program, one of several Partnership programs that takes place every month. In addition to Deborah, participating artists hail from Dayton, Fort Worth, Budapest and across the Western Galilee.

For questions about this program and to learn more about how you can get involved in Partnership's activities, please contact JCRC Director Daniel Pearlman at daniel@jewishtoledo.org.



Deborah Orloff, "Lost Histories 1" (2020)