



Magda Watts: Imagination and creativity as weapons against the terrors of the Holocaust



Magda after her liberation, 1946
(Photo: Magda Watts)

An email from Israel

In August 2000 *rijo* received an email from Israel. The sender was a lady who read our text *I had heard of Nuremberg never before* about female Hungarian inmates of Auschwitz at the *Siemens* plant in Nuremberg. She had been one of them. Our nutshell version of her almost incredible biography is a confession of love to a unique woman and artist at the same time.



Auschwitz
(Photo: Magda Watts)

The beginning in Nuremberg

In late fall of 1944 fifteen year old Magda laid in the *scabies hut* of the confinement established in Nuremberg by *Siemens* for the women and girls from Hungary, officially a branch of Flossenbürg concentration camp. During this year she had experienced atrocities exceeding even the capacity of an adult: Deportation, the murders of parents, brothers and sisters, agony, illness and hunger.

Her imagination showed her a way out of the inhumane reality: Her own dream world which not even the brutal SS guards could penetrate. In order not to be alone anymore in her hopeless situation she made herself a little friend, a doll from waste and ragged parts of her clothing.

During the distribution of food she showed the doll to the supervisor asking in her companions name for an additional ration. Perhaps it was the awareness of the near end of their reign what motivated the perpetrators to a gesture of humanity towards the child, and the miracle happened: Magda received an extra ladle, but in return she had to hand over her doll to the supervisor.



Details from an Auschwitz group of dolls

(Photo: Magda Watts)

Her *masters* liked the work of the teenage artist and paid her with food for her dolls and drawings. Once again imagination saved her life by finding a way not to starve.



David ben Gurion

(Photo: Magda Watts)

Self-therapy and art

In May 1945 Magda and others of the *Siemens'* slaves were freed in the Bohemian town of Holysov, where they were shipped to after the destruction of the Nuremberg factory in February. From now on the orphan had to take care of herself in the ruins of postwar Europe, devastated by the Nazis. Artistic ambitions had to step back, the hunger for life was stronger and the daily struggle for survival allowed no dreaming. In 1951, after an Odyssey through Hungary, Austria and Germany the then married young woman arrived in Israel with her husband, her son and a yet unborn daughter as the duty-free import good of the family. Also here the family and Magda's work in the field of tourism made her schedule too tight for arts.



Chassidim
(Photo: Magda Watts)

A journey in 1983 to Hungary was the turning point: The memory of the Holocaust flooded her mind like an unstoppable high tide. Even after returning to Israel Magda could not close the Pandora's box opened by the journey. As it had been forty years ago, again creativity and imagination offered her the loophole from the despair of her nightmares. Without intention she started to make dolls again, *my little people*, as she calls them tenderly.



At the gynecologist
(Photo: Magda Watts)

Since then works resulted from this *best therapy against the dark clouds of the past* and her creative talent, which not only are shaped by their creator, but also inspired. A magic difficult to describe surrounds the scenes arranged with love for the smallest detail. One may compare

it to the dolls of the Voodoo cult: Magda's *little people* also invoke spirits, though the good ones from the destroyed world of Eastern European Judaism and its humor.



Klezmorim
(Photo: Magda Watts)



Magda in her workshop
(Photo: Magda Watts)

Today Magda is an internationally recognized artist and lives by the sea with her husband, her *little people* and an illustrious company of dogs and cats. The ghosts of the past will never leave her alone, but the auxiliary troops of real and handmade friends will prevent memory from becoming overwhelming.

rijo

WORKS BY MAGDA WATTS
& MALCAH ZELDIS

January 12-February 25, 2011



Opening Reception
Wednesday, January 12, 2011
5:00-7:00pm

Gallery Hours
Tuesday-Friday 10:00am to 5:00pm

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Advertisement for an exhibition of Magda's dolls in Washington DC, January 2011
(Photo: Magda Watts)

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