

Anubis of Ravensbrück

April 4, 2000

After eight years of searching the mail finally brought me the negative of Ravensbrück from JARIC, (Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Center of the RAF), in England. I ran with it to the studio. It is a 9"x9" negative. An incredible image. The proximity of the camp to the picturesque lakeside town of Fürstenberg is numbing.

Monday, April 10, 2000

I wound up having the image include most of Fürstenberg, with the lakes and the arc of the railroad that runs just north of the camp and branches out to backtrack towards it, in my composition. How could such a horrible place have gone unnoticed? The barbed wire fences, the guards, the crematorium belching out the stench of burning bodies.

Saturday, April 15, 2000

(Sara called from Chicago. She is going through an incredibly tough time. Her ailing dad is very weak and doesn't talk much).

Everything becomes obvious when I compare the site plans of the camp to the photograph, even the fuzzily focused area of the extermination site. The orientation of my composition makes the Schwedtsee lake look like the Egyptian jackal-god's snout. I study the image intensely. Anubis is staring at the camp, the tip of his black snout almost touching it. The photo image is oriented with the top pointing to the north-west. Anubis' body is delineated by the railroad tracks to the west-south-west. His ears are the splits in the tracks near Ravensbrück, one branch going north while the other curves widely to the east, past the camp. The Havel River between the Schwedtsee and Stolpsee is Anubis' chest. The town of Fürstenberg is his headdress, and the black trapezoid of the Schwedtsee his snout. I rush to the shelves to find the book on Egyptian art that Sara found for me a few weeks ago at a garage sale. There he is, the black faced god of the newly dead, leading them into the netherworld to have their souls weighed and judged. This Anubis, like a jackal waiting to bite a tasty morsel, stares at the camp in front of his nose.

It is true, that when looking at any image, the mind refuses to accept chaos. Thus a town, lake, a place of hell for its women prisoners; from the air, and viewed from a particular direction, is read as an image of an ancient god of Egypt. I am overwhelmed by this revelation.

Tuesday, May 16, 2000

The slides came back. When I placed the slide of Anubis on top of the image of Ravensbrück it was eerily almost a perfect match for both images. Something more is going on in my brain, or the circumstances, to make of it a simple serendipitous event. It feels as if I am living in a dream, or in some tale read by me to myself.

Friday, June 2, 2000

I fell of the ladder while cleaning the gutters over the garage. I have a compound fracture of the right Humerus. My hand is a useless bundle of pain hanging at my side in a cast and sling.

Monday, June 25, 2001

The drawing has been going very slowly, the more areas I complete "erasing-in", a process in which I work on the drawing after it is completely smudged out, and it resembles only a ghostly image of the previously detailed "laid-in" drawing, the more I have to discover. I have, at this point, "erased-in" the complete areas around the Röblinsee (on top of the right side of the drawings), the Baalensee (a small lake on the left center), and the areas around the Havel River. The left side of the Schwedtsee, (the face/snout of Anubis) and the lower part of the town of Fürstenberg. I haven't touched the area of Ravensbrück, on top, though the entire camp is now done.

As I draw with my eraser I'm listening to the Klezmatics, they are singing a song about a spirit of a dead mother coming to the wedding of her daughter. Other spirits, including Elijah the prophet, are dancing at the wedding also, but not with the living. To my surprise, I become choked up beyond obvious cause. I don't know exactly what it is, the image, or the words of the song, that made me sob. I'm looking upon a drawing of a camp full of dead daughters and mothers. Anubis welcomes them into the realm of the dead. There would probably be no weddings for most of those survivors, knowing of the medical experiments that took place there.

Maybe its because today I found an envelope, with a Rosh Hashanah card inside, that my mother sent to Sara's parents on September 5, 1980, nine months after our wedding. I was going to file it away, but for some reason I just left it up on the desk in my studio. I opened it, and there in Yiddish, my mother's handwriting reads:

" ?????? .? ?? ???? ,????? ?? ??? ?????? ?????? ???? ???? ??"
"Ain gliklich gezint nai yoor und naches fin di kinder, vinscht M. Galles."
" A joyful, healthy new year and Joy from the children; Wishes. M. Galles."

It is almost 21 years since she wrote this letter. She died four years ago, and its been 33 years since my father died. Sara's mother died 17 years ago, and almost a year ago her father passed away. I am again drawing, my arm is healed. I would like to know that my parents' spirits are near me now, encouraging their youngest child to complete this prayer of an undertaking. Maybe all the spirits, those who died and those who survived the war and have since passed away are hovering near. I don't know. All I know for certain is that I'm crying.



Arie A. Galles, Station Thirteen: Ravensbrück.



Tomb of Amennakht: The god Anubis concluding

the mummification of the dead man. Ramsesid
period, Nineteenth-Twentieth Dynasties. (detail)

Arie A. Galles