

"FOURTEEN STATIONS/HEY YUD DALET"

By Arie A. Galles

Under no condition can art express the Holocaust. To withdraw art from confronting this horror, however, is to assign victory to its perpetrators. Each survivor must individually affirm his or her humanity and existence.

The "Fourteen Stations" suite of drawings is my Kaddish for all those who perished in the Nazi concentration camps.

The images are based on aerial photographs of the camps, taken by Luftwaffe and Allied reconnaissance during the War. Within each drawing is embedded one fourteenth of the Kaddish divided into the natural breaks in its recitation. The Aramaic and Hebrew phrases are invisible, interwoven into the pattern and texture of each drawing. Thirteen stations, the death camps, built on or near railroad lines: the final stations for six million Jews, as well as other people from all over Europe. The fourteenth station, Babi Yar, a ravine outside Kiev, the final stop for tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews. The fifteenth drawing, "Khurbn Prologue," is a view of Belzec taken by the Luftwaffe on May 26, 1940. It is a record of the area before the camp was carved out from the forest.

The drawings are mounted and numbered from right to left according to the Hebrew Alphabet: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Babi Yar, Buchenwald, Belzec, Bergen-Belsen, Gross-Rosen, Dachau, Chelmno, Treblinka, Mauthausen, Maidanek, Sobibor, Ravensbruck and Stutthof. The full suite completes the Kaddish.

Through visual evidence recorded by their own aerial reconnaissance cameras, the perpetrators of the Holocaust have provided irrefutable confirmation of these extermination camps. This truth is reinforced by the reconnaissance photographs of the Allies. Here is the evidence of the massive industrial scale of the Nazis' "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem."

The emotional and technical aspects of this project's creative process has been the most intense endeavor I have ever undertaken. The act of drawing, solitary hours in which my thoughts, eyes and hands form a single circuit, demands that I concentrate on what things look like in the source photographs, rather than on what they represent.

I purposefully chose a distancing perspective from which to contemplate the dichotomy of fascinating aerial views and the concrete substance of the reconnaissance photographs. However, the two are difficult to separate. When my mind becomes conscious of the crematoria, freight trains, pits, barracks, and barbed wire fences that these black and white shapes represent, I am overwhelmed with pain, and must struggle to regain control.

Through these drawings I document the very locations of mass annihilation of millions of human beings. As an artist I accomplish this task with marks on paper produced by pieces of charcoal held by my hand. I literally draw with ashes.

Humanity must remain aware that the Holocaust was a calculated, systematic commitment to the eradication of an entire people.

I offer the "Fourteen Stations" as icons for compassion and remembrance.