

"St. Buchenwald"

February 27, 2000

I don't know why I haven't noticed it before. It was here all the time, sitting on the surface of the half-finished drawing of Buchenwald. Perhaps only now, by getting my whole being into completing the drawing, this shape could be perceived. In some ways it is a great Rorschach pattern upon which I can hone my vision. Like the gigantic scratch drawing in Peru, carved into the living earth, this figure can only be seen from above. Without intent, and with no conscious design for its creation, it signals skyward.

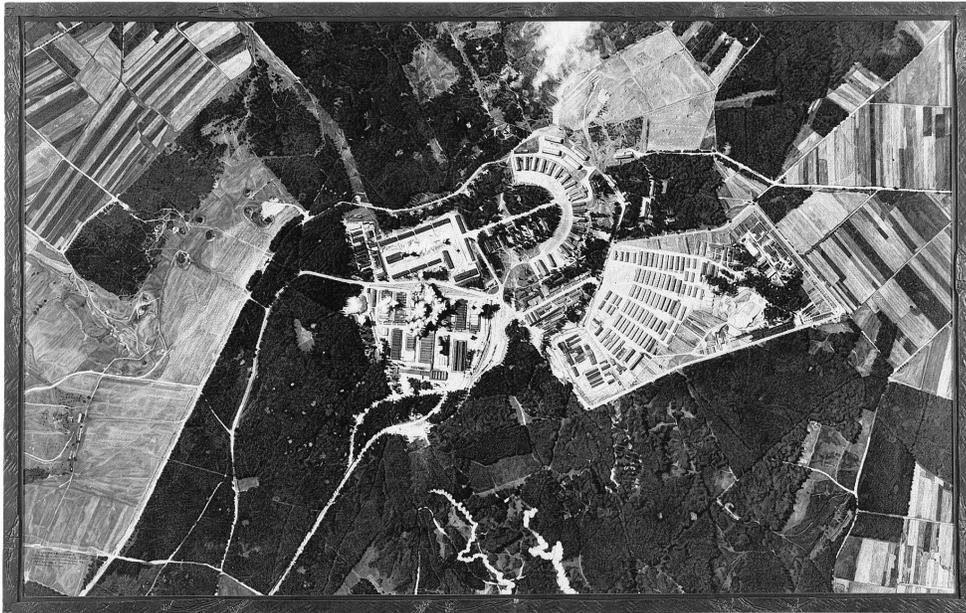
The photograph was taken during a bombing run on the Weimar armaments works on August 24, 1944 by the USAAC 8th Air Force. My cousin, Avram Tisser, was one of the inmates in the adjacent concentration camp. The human-like outline, slightly to the left of the camp, is clearly visible. It is delineated by the rail road tracks to its left and the periphery of the forest to its right. A road weaving slightly to his right side makes one half of the woods appear like a cloak held across the body.

The shape is almost Byzantine in form and posture. It is wearing an Ephod, its intricate embroidery are the various structures, sheds and alleys of the factory complex. Its head, a dark peninsula of woods and buildings, is tilted slightly to his left and crowned with the semi-circular halo of SS barracks, the rectangular jewels in this crown.

The left eye is wide open, glaring out with its tiny iris. The right eye is sutured shut. An ugly scar. Slightly left of the center of the body, where one would expect a heart, is a cluster of exploding bomb plumes. St. Buchenwald!

I can't help but see him now every time I glance at the drawing. The perversely zealous patron of the camp is having his heart blasted out. Unfortunately, the camp didn't cease to be his dominion after this raid. Much later, as the camp was liberated, no one bothered to look at it from above. Maybe no one from above saw the camp at all. His handiwork, right there on the ground, was all consuming in its vileness.

In drawing I hover above that slaughterhouse, forced to contemplate the costume he wore for this topographical masquerade.



Arie A. Galles, Station Three: Buchenwald. 47½" x 75", charcoal and white Conté.



"Nativity" Byzantine early 12th Century, Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy



"Nativity" Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, Italy