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# In Spite of You, We Live On: A Commemorative Painting

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In Spite of You, We Live On: A Commemorative Painting

Goldie Gross

JWS 5000H: Yiddish Language Independent Study

Professor Debra Caplan

May 9, 2019

*College Yiddish* is the primary book that I used in my Yiddish language independent study taken under Professor Debra Caplan. It was written in 1949 by Uriel Weinreich, a Polish-born Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1940. While regular textbooks have neutral practice reading passages, this book has practice texts such as "יידן אין אלע לענדער" ("Jews in All Countries"), an affirmation that Jews can be found in all countries and that many Jews around the world can speak Yiddish, and "אן אלטער בריוו" ("An Old Letter"), a letter from the narrator's cousin about his life before being killed in a ghetto. The pervasiveness of trauma in these texts influenced this painting.

*Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) are handmade 10cm x 10cm brass and concrete cubes placed in front of the former homes of those killed in the Holocaust. The project was conceived by Gunter Demnig, a German artist, in the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Stumbling stones typically begin with the words "here lived" in the local language, before detailing the former occupant's name, date of birth, date of deportation, and date and location of death (although this varies based on available information and mode of death).<sup>2</sup> To date, there are over 70,000 stones in over 1,200 cities.<sup>3</sup> These stones are Europe's largest decentralized Holocaust memorial and are inescapable in countries where Jews, gypsies, dissidents, and the disabled were killed in large numbers. These stones are in the fabric of Europe and are a testament to the eradicated presence of persecuted peoples.

This painting depicts a stumbling stone bearing the Yiddish translation of the words "in spite of you, we live on" over Hitler's face. The verb in the German "*Hier Wohnte*" ("here

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<sup>1</sup> "Biography," *Stolpersteine*.

<sup>2</sup> "Technical Aspects," *Stolpersteine*.

<sup>3</sup> Eliza Apperly, "Stumbling Stones': a Different Vision of Holocaust Remembrance," *The Guardian*.

lived”) in related to the Yiddish “וויינען” (*voynen*, “to live”). *Voynen* has a physical connotation, used to describe where someone resides. I decided to use the word “לעבן” (*leben*, “to live”) in my painting. The word can have a physical or intangible connotation, and is used to connote life as in the absence of death. I consciously decided not to use the place-based *voynen*, as we don’t merely “live on” in a place, we “live on” with spirit.

The Holocaust memorial implanted on a war portrait of the dictator who wanted to eradicate a number of populations is a sapling of poignant irony; the memorial exists, widespread, because he did not accomplish his mission. The Yiddish language that flourishes in religious and academic circles is set squarely in the center of his face. We are here to stay.



*In Spite of You, We Live On*

Oil on panel

20 x 16 inches

2019

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