

Representations of suffering, wartime atrocities, and genocide abound in folk art across the world. Whether in Jewish embroidery witnessing Holocaust survival, Afghan carpets depicting war, traditional South African tapestries addressing violence against women, or Peruvian clay figurines representing violence against civilians in Ayacucho - such folk art genres have a powerful appeal in their materiality and symbolism. But the histories and cultures of their creation, circulation, and public reception is also a rich, *yet completely underutilized* source for understanding the meaningful templates, transactions, and circulations of traumatic memory on a broad, vernacular, non-elite level – visual historical documents that offer a window onto a sector of society rarely understood via its own personal expression. Polish “folk art”, constructed as a genre and popularized after World War II in the Polish People’s Republic, is a particularly valuable discovery for the extent to which it depicts Jewish suffering in during World War II. This body of work offers a unique, untapped archive for understanding how the Holocaust was remembered in Poland among a broad public.

The breath and quantity of Polish folk art depictions of the Holocaust was recently revealed in a preliminary research of Polish collections (Sendyka, Lehrer, Wilczyk, Zych 2018). Such representations present a visible sub-genre of vernacular art in Poland, produced in notably large numbers during the so called “era of a witness” (1960s-70s). Holocaust folk art is, however, scarce in Polish museum collections. While there are various reasons for this state of affairs, a key factor is the dominant role played by East and West German collectors who ordered, bought, archived, curated, and even designed Holocaust scenes, which are today contained in German museums and private holdings. Polish Holocaust folk artworks may be therefore seen as objects of post-war memorial transactions between Germans and Poles, and on another level, between perpetrators and bystanders and their descendants. The emergence, circulation, function, and biographies of such objects can today offer much-needed insight into the dialogical processes of negotiating the *transnational Polish-German memory* of the Holocaust.

The proposed project seeks to trace the impacts and instrumentalizations of Holocaust-themed folk art from Poland in East, West, and reunited Germany from 1939 until today. Our guiding research questions include: What were the dynamics of German consumption of Polish Holocaust-related folk art? To what extent were these international interactions supported by institutions, whether governmental (including the secret service) or otherwise (like churches or the press)? What do discourses around Holocaust folk art tell us about the way Germans and Poles negotiated their respective statuses of perpetrator, victim, and witness? How did Germany’s “orientalist” gaze on Poland influence the way this art was received in Germany (e.g. ideas about Polish villagers as witness to wartime suffering, and the resulting aura of authenticity of the art that they produced)? What might the folk art market reveal about German stereotypes of Poland and the Polish experience of the Second World War more generally? To what extent did German collectors stimulate memory of the Holocaust among Polish artists?

The project, set at the intersection of Holocaust studies, memory studies, and visual culture, promises to make significant contributions to the interlinked fields of Holocaust memory, perpetrator, and bystander studies. By exploring the dynamics among these categories, by identifying new sources in the form of material and grassroots artistic culture, and by developing new research methods to analyse such vernacular arts as a response to a traumatic past, we will undertake the pioneering endeavour to map Holocaust-related memory in its multidirectional, transnational transfers among actors in Poland and Germany. By bringing to bear new sources, theories, and methodologies on studies of folk art in Poland, we will also contribute to the burgeoning literature on critical museology and difficult heritage.