

**ARTS 310: The Holocaust and the Arts**  
**Fall 2008**

**Instructor: Dr. Richard Chess**

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**Office Hours: M, W, F 10:30 – 11:30, F 2:00 – 3:30, and by appointment**

**Required Texts:**

*The Inextinguishable Symphony*, Martin Goldsmith

*The Book of Joseph*, Yoel Hoffmann

*A Wall of Two*, Henia Karmel and Ilona Karmel

*Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, Zvi Kolitz

*Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi

*Friedl Dicker-Brandeis*, Elena Makarova

*The Shawl*, Cynthia Ozick

*Maus I and II*, Art Spiegelman

**Films:**

“We Want the Light”

“Max”

“The Rape of Europa”

**Course Introduction/Overview**

When I first taught this class a few years ago, I had only a limited sense of what one would study in a course called “The Holocaust and the Arts.” I figured we’d look at survivor testimonies, poems, novels, and paintings, listen to music composed by prisoners in Theresienstadt, and study works by children of survivors and others who felt compelled to create something in response to the Holocaust. Having spent a bit more time with the subject, I now see many more facets to the broad topic of the Holocaust and the Arts. For one thing, I know that Hitler was interested in promoting and authorizing an aesthetic suited to representing his notion of the Aryan nation. I know, too, that he aggressively criticized works of art, literature, music, etc. that he considered a threat to the purity of the nation, works he labeled as degenerate, charging that they corrupt the society. I also have become more aware of the experiences of artists themselves—prior to the Holocaust and during the Holocaust itself—artists who wanted and needed to keep creating despite severe restrictions placed on them and the risks they took to continue

doing their work. All of this leads me to say this about our class: we will consider works of art “about” the Holocaust. We will also consider the experiences of artists during and after the Holocaust as well as the use and value of art during the Holocaust. And we’ll talk about competing aesthetic views and the role art can play in shaping as well as reflecting culture.

To do this, we’ll read a number of texts, view a few films, examine some slides of works of visual art, and listen to and discuss some pieces of music. We’ll also write (this is a writing intensive course) and create an original work of art in response to what we encounter in the class.

## **Coursework**

### ***Reading and Film Viewing***

You are expected to keep up with all assigned readings. Also, you are expected to view all the assigned films.

### ***Writing***

We will do several kinds of writing in this class, informal and formal. First, the informal. I’d like you to keep a journal in which you respond to everything we read, view, and listen to in class this semester. This journal shouldn’t merely be a place in which you record your feelings in response to the course texts. In the journal, I’d like you to look more closely at something specific in the text (whether it’s a poem, a short story, a testimony, a film, a piece of music, a work of visual art) and explore and respond to it. One question you can almost always ask is what insight into the Holocaust does this text offer you? I will give you some specific prompts as well as time to write in your journal in class. However, you will also need to do some writing in it outside of class. I will collect your journals twice during the semester. The journals themselves may be handwritten—the entries written in class will necessarily be so—or they may be a combination of typed and handwritten entries. However, I will require you to type a few entries (I’ll tell you how many) that I will read more carefully when I collect your journals.

Additionally, every week I may ask a few of you to post one of your journal entries on the wiki found on our course Moodle page. I may then ask others in the class to respond to one or more of these journal entries. We’ll see how this goes.

I would also like you to write one formal essay (based on research) on a topic of your choosing, so long as that topic fits within the broader context of the course, The Holocaust and the Arts.

## ***Project***

Each of you will have the opportunity to respond to one or more of the works we study in the form of your own original work of art. We'll talk about some of the project possibilities in class. I would like you to be thinking about your project throughout the semester. I'd also like you to document the entire process of considering, conceiving, developing, refining, and completing your project. This documentation should be done in your journal. In the journal, you should include the following:

- a) discussion of what you are planning to do for your project, why you want to do it, how you are planning to do it, and why it's significant.
- b) descriptions and reflections on each stage of the work.

The journal can also include photos (or, if it's a poem, short story, or non-fiction essay) drafts of the work as it progresses. Of course, the journal can include other things—favorite quotes, descriptions of scenes from a film, etc. I will be looking for growth and development of your ideas throughout the semester in response to what we are studying.

In addition to presenting to the class the finished product itself, you will submit a paper giving an overview of your process as well as discussing your work in relation to one or more works we studied in class.

## **Guest Speakers**

We have the opportunity to hear two remarkable speakers this semester, Art Spiegelman and Walter Ziffer. Spiegelman will be appearing at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium on Sept. 11, a Thursday night. This is a ticketed event. I'd like to require you to go, but since it falls on a Thursday and since it is a ticketed event, I won't require attendance. However, I **strongly** encourage you to attend this event. Walter Ziffer's talk is on a Wednesday night on campus, so we'll go to that together. Walter is a remarkable man, a Holocaust survivor, a powerful speaker and educator, and a great guy with an amazing personal story.

## **Grading Weights and Scale**

Journal	=	200
Research Essay	=	500
Project Paper	=	150
Project	=	50
Participation	=	100

95 and above = A  
92 – 94.5 = A-  
87.5 – 91.5 = B+  
85 – 87 = B  
82 – 84.5 = B-  
77.5 – 81.5 = C+  
75 – 77 = C  
72 – 74.5 = C-  
67.5 – 71.5 = D+  
65 – 67 = D  
62 – 64.5 = D-

## **The Holocaust and the Arts Work Schedule**

### **Schedule**

#### **Week 1**

Aug 20      Intro

#### **Week 2**

Aug. 27      *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi, Chapters 1 - 9

#### **Week 3**

Sept. 3      *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi, Chapters 10 - 17  
journal due

#### **Week 4**

Sept. 10      *Maus I and II*

**SEPT. 11, 7 p.m., Thomas Wolfe Auditorium:  
Art Spiegelman**

**Week 5**

Sept. 17 *A Wall of Two*

**Week 6**

Sept. 24 *Friedl Dicker Brandeis*, pp. 9 – 46, 189 – 194, 199 - 235

**Week 7**

Oct. 1 “The Rape of Europa” [117 minutes]

**Week 8**

Oct. 8 Yom Kippur: No Class  
research paper proposals due

**Week 9**

Oct. 15 “Max” [106 minutes]  
art project proposal due

**Week 10**

Oct. 22 *The Book of Joseph*, Yoel Hoffmann

**Week 11**

Oct. 29 “The Shawl” and “Rosa,” Cynthia Ozick

**Week 12**

Nov. 5 research paper due

lecture by Walter Ziffer, “*Kristallnacht* – Night of Broken Glass:  
Beginning of a Nightmare Tales of Shame and Tales of Heroism”

**Week 13**

Nov. 12 *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*

**Week 14**

Nov. 19      *The Inextinguishable Symphony*, Chapters 1 – 12  
“We Want the Light”  
journal due

**Week 15**

Nov. 26      Thanksgiving Break

**Week 16**

Dec. 3        *The Inextinguishable Symphony*, Chapters 13 – 25  
art project paper due  
art project presentations begin

**Week 17****Final**

Dec. 10      art project presentations