

[MUSIC PLAYING] Sorry. That would come out of your net pricing. So what I'm going to do now-- I know that we sent you back a signed copy the other day. But you didn't have the official net pricing and all the writing. So I will send that up into you again, if you could just do the same thing, and sign it, and send it back.

But other than that, now, we just kind of have this. We sold five of them before now. And we'll see what happens.

[LAUGHTER]

The [? store was ?] very nice.

Yeah, me too. So I'll be in touch if there is any update. And I'll send that contract out in the mail.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[? Bye. ?]

All good.

OK. Good.

And the table.

Table?

Sit to a table.

[INAUDIBLE]

Good.

Oh, thanks. Oh.

Tell me when I can start.

We are recording.

OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Sam Bak. And we are talking now with his good friend and partner for over 50 years, Bernie Pucker of the Pucker Gallery, on Newbury Street, in Boston, where a number of Samuel Bak's works are here. And Mr. Pucker will explain to us the significance and the meaning behind many of these major pieces. Thank you very much for agreeing to do so.

My pleasure.

So tell us, what is this painting? This painting is entitled The Family. It was done in 1974 when Sam had been promised an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art by a dealer in New York, which turned out to be a fabrication. But Sam did not have large paintings. So he did this painting. It was taken by the dealer, put it in his gallery, and sold. And Sam repurchased it because he knew it was a painting he would never paint again.

And what is it of?

It is an imaginary real family and memory of his own family. So there are specific characters in this who are portraits of people who were in Sam's background-- the blind inventor, who was his grandfather for whom he was named, and apparently died just a couple of days before Sam was born; the women, both aunts from his memory in the '20s, wearing

these fox stoles with little, beady eyes. Really remarkable, my Aunt Rose had one of those. It used to terrify me.

[LAUGHS]

But they were memories both of people he had known, people whose stories he had learned about and heard about when he was in the DP camp after having survived. And you know the numbers, basically, that in Vilna, throughout the war, there were probably upwards of 80,000 Jews, most of whom were killed. And by the end, there were 200 survivors and another, maybe, 1,000 in the woods around.

So that Sam and his mother survived out of those numbers is almost impossible. And then layered upon that is the gift that he had as a prodigy. And so from age three on, he was making, really, very good drawings. And many of those drawings have survived. His mother was the perfect Jewish mother. She saved every scrap of paper he drew upon. And so these become memories of both Sam's acquaintances-- say, in the DP camp and the stories that they were told. But it also stands, in a very specific sense, for all those who were destroyed.

It's a very personal one. I mean, they all speak from him. They all are from him. But this one is truly personal, his family.

It is, and it's not. It's really the symphony of voices of millions of people who were destroyed. And so he basically gets you to look at the fact that many are blind. Many cannot hear. Most of them cannot speak. And at the same time, he introduces this very profound image of the egg. All of our skulls are the shape of an egg-- this with bullet holes, this was the target, this broken, the fragility of life as portrayed just in those few images within the painting.

And interestingly enough, in 1968, when Robert Kennedy was assassinated, Sam did a large single painting that is in his home.

We filmed it.

And so it's in memory of RK.

Yeah, RFK.

So again, the notion of the fragility of our existence. And in truth, Sam's work is about his own experience, about the Holocaust, about the 20th century. And it's exactly about what's going on every day in the world we're living. And that's why he raises the questions about the meaning of our ability to stand up and speak out or not.

When this painting is shown in classrooms-- we've done it as a poster-- the students see these people as looking up and out at us, saying, where were you? Were you a bystander or were you an upstander? Did you speak out? Did you do anything to make it possible for us to survive?

And interestingly enough, if you look at the painting, all the figures are not moving towards the destruction of the crematoria. They're all moving toward us. So it represents a kind of visual confrontation with our responsibility. And then he's using the device that surrealists use, particularly Magritte, of a painting within a painting. So you have this painting on an easel within a painting. And it suggests the notion that-- I remember the movie, the King of Hearts, where Alan Alda in an asylum. He escapes into a countryside where there's a war and eventually goes back in the asylum.

Exactly.

And so the notion is, are we living in the crazy world? Are we really in an asylum? And it's not clear, even today. And so Sam's work, although it is time in terms of his own life experience, it also relates to all of human experience and how we respond to our responsibility as human beings.

Wow. Thank you. Let's see the next one.

This one-- so this is based upon the Albrecht Durer wood engraving from the 16th century.

A short-- we saw that just a little bit ago when we filmed before starting our segue here.

And so the Durer represents the beginning of enlightenment. So the angel is contemplating what could be the use of reason that will create a sense of order. The prism is perfect. The mill wheel is perfect. The rainbow is perfect.

And then Sam takes this single image and transforms it, through his own life experience and through his genius, into a massive set of questions about what we as human beings have done to one another. The angel in the Durer, in fact, is a woman. Here, it is a soldier with a helmet, with the same laurel wreath.

The calipers are in both paintings with the book. And then look at the angel in the Durer, which has the accumulation of fabric. Here, it's the tallis, the prayer shawl. And it is either that or the stripes of the prisoner's garment. So you need to sort of position where you are.

The sphere in the Durer is perfect. This is bullet-hole-ridden. In the background, in the Durer, you have the prism. And what Bak introduces here are broken Ten Commandments as gravestones. So this is the one, two, and three in the Hebrew. And then the vav is the Sixth Commandment, which appears dominant in so many of Sam's works, which is the commandment most desecrated, thou shalt not kill.

Even here, you begin to have the incipient, if you will, tablets to write the next set of Ten Commandments on. In the background, you have the niches, which are shaped like the Ten Commandments with the extinguished Sabbath candlesticks. And where the flame would have gone and the smoke would have gone, the plaster's pulled off. And what is revealed is the bricks of the crematoria ovens.

You have, on this side, a reminder or contextualisation of the smoke from the crematoria in the background, this desiccated tree, this broken ladder, this kind of broken drainpipe with the stagnant water. And then the other side introduces the deconstructed rainbow with the colors of the rainbow on the ground.

I was going to ask you about that.

The rainbow is the symbol at the end of the Noah story in the book of Genesis, which is a covenant between God and mankind that there will never, ever be such a disaster again. And there have been multiple disasters. So you find yourself realizing that the rainbow was only a symbol of a covenant which has been broken.

The angel itself is positioned under a tent-like form, which we'll come back to. Here, at the base, you have the yellow star, which Jews were made to wear. And above it, looming above it, is the crucifix.

Finally, this is unique in all of this series because Bak places the angel under a chuppah, a marriage canopy. So the constant contradictions of the reality that the war created and the world is living with, which is a world of brokenness, is raised on every level in this painting and contrasts exactly with the optimism the Durer actually did the Melencolia with. It was here, with all these tools, with all our intelligence, we're going to open the world with enlightenment.

How is it-- do you-- did he paint these during the time that you knew him?

Oh, yes. Yeah, I knew him. So we've-- yes.

You're so familiar with them. Were you speaking about the paintings with him as he was doing it, that you see it? Or you look at it right away, and you can tell the symbolism, and you can tell that this is this, and this is this. In other words, were you privy to the process? Or is it only at the end?

So that's a really terrific question. Because there really is no right answer to it. Sam does these images in such a profoundly mystifying way to me that these images almost appear in his mind's eye. I've always thought about him as

having a slide projector at the back of his head. The image, it appears here. And he has a facility simply to draw it. And then he paints it in.

But the conversations take place between the two of us after it's done. And it reveals itself to him as it does to me.

Oh, wow.

And the same thing is true in his relationship with Professor Larry Langer, where Larry will take a body of work that Sam has completed, will write about it. And then Sam will get so excited by what Larry sees in the paintings, he'll do a whole new body of work. So there is this kind of, really, pursuit of answers to questions. And as a result of that, Sam, of all the people, best understands the notion that these are actually Matryoshka dolls.

Inside one is four more dolls. And inside one painting are four more questions. So my favorite quote of Sam's, really, is all these paintings are knocking at my door. They're just waiting to be painted. If he has more time, he can paint until he's 150.

I mean, he has-- whereas most artists struggle so profoundly for visual ideas-- not all. In fact, the conversation I had, the one I had with Michael Grunberger was, in fact, that these are visual testimonies. So these are interactive in a very profound way. Whereas the videotape of Sam is fine. And you'll get to know him. But the invitation for you to interact with his artwork is even more important. Because that will endure long beyond the videotaping of some guy.

Well, that is great art, isn't it?

Yes, and that's what the work is about.

OK. Let's go to the next one.

It's going to take me a minute because we have to push and pull.

Oh, it's here already.

Start rolling again. And anytime.

OK. So what is this? This is called Pardes, which is the Hebrew word for orchard. It is remarkable because most of Jewish history is literary. It's not visual because of the second commandment, thou shall not create graven images. What Bak has succeeded in doing is taking two of the most fundamental forms within Jewish iconography, which Jews did not do a good job of marketing. Christianity did an excellent job. That cross is amazing.

And so one is the Ten Commandment's form. So he takes the shape of the tablets and divides them, essentially, into chambers. And above each of the four doors that you have is a Hebrew letter. Starting from the right as you're looking at it, the pe, the resh, the dalet, and the samekh So this is the symbol.

The rabbis, in the 13th century, devised this way of interpreting biblical text-- the simple, the allegorical, the legendary-- midrashic, and the mystical. And each of those had a Hebrew letter, which is Peshat, Remez, Derash, and Sod. And it translates or becomes the word "pardes." If you put vowels-- the P, and then put an A, and an R, it becomes paradise.

Oh, my goodness.

The P, the R, the D, and the S. But it's hell. And one of our clients came in looked at it and said, look at this amazing construction in this gorgeous setting.

Yeah.

And so look what mankind, again, has done. So in terms of the interpretation, it's brilliant. So this is just the facts. This

is use of allegory, the use of legend, and then the mystical, or the boarding up. Raul Hilberg approaches the Holocaust by using train tables and amounts charge for animals and for Jews. Give me the facts.

And so the door is wide open. You have a path directly to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, all good. The second door, the use of legend or allegory, the door is ajar. You walk in. And all the spaces are the replication of the shape of the tablets, which are in the back with the Hebrew letters on it.

The third door, Sam says, the Derash, the use of Midrash or legend, you just push the door, and it opens. And then you find yourself caught up in the labyrinth of Jewish reasoning, of Jewish storytelling. These two areas, after Elie Wiesel wrote the book *Night*, are exactly what he did. He relied upon legend and allegory in order to address the horrors.

The last is boarded up. And this becomes the deniers. It didn't even happen. But once you get into the space itself, what you have is an altar, with flames and smoke coming off of it, and the destruction. So they're denying that it exists. But visually, for Sam, it does exist.

Our grandson, when he was 15-- he's now 25-- his class came to the gallery, and I gave the same interpretation. And then afterwards-- he was nice enough not to embarrass me before his friends-- said, I see it totally differently. He said, this is an autobiography of Sam Bak. Born in '33, until '39, life was fantastic.

I was going to say, the first one looks pretty nice.

Life is good. He was a prodigy. Both sets of grandparents-- he had his parents and a maid, so there are seven adults tending this little, chubby kid. And a genius-- don't send him to school, give him pencil and paper.

In '39, the Russians come. But it's still not so bad because one of the Russian officers takes over the grandparents apartment. So they have more heat and more fuel than most of their friends.

Then in July of '41, the Nazis come and it really gets to be terrible. And they're running around, trying to survive, which they do. And at the very end, this becomes their escape. Virtually all the Jews are destroyed, except he and his mother escape on those ladders.

Well, you know, it's as legitimate an interpretation as yours, isn't it?

Yeah. I'm more than there with it. So this becomes another vehicle for representation. When I was growing up and going to summer camps, girls had little charm bracelets with a set of Ten Commandments and Jewish stars on them. And they were kind of trinkets. So it is risky to take such an acknowledged icon, and then transform it into an extraordinary work of art and an extraordinary work of the intellect, and asking questions, and then opening up the capacity for you, for me, for everyone to engage with it.

Except that when I do, I see it as powerful, and it moves me. I could never see all in it that you have described right now until you describe it, you know? It is-- you can't walk by these paintings without stopping and saying, oh, my god. But to have the words, to say, why is it, oh, my god? You know, that's--

Well, that was one of the-- I mean, so the melding of my background is both academics and working on a PhD in Jewish history, and Bible, and all this other stuff, and then having my life converge with Sam's. And being able to work alongside him and then be totally blown away by the extraordinary capacity both to create images, but to also be able to discuss them with him, and then know that out of this discussion would become even more fertile images. It just-- it's a blessed kind of friendship and relationship.

OK, thank you.

Sure.

Was there another one here in this series?

No.

Then we'll go to the other. OK.

Yeah.

Let's do that.

OK. And we are recording.

OK. Tell me about this painting.

Well, the background, as you know, is the very famous photograph in the Stroop diary, of the little boy with his hands up and the Nazi officers all around him.

In Warsaw.

In Warsaw, exactly. And the diary itself is one of the most depressing documents ever. Stroop decided to record the destruction of the vermin. And then he made an album for himself and then one for Himmler, I believe. And that was brought in evidence in his trial in 1951, where he died unrepentant.

In any event, there's this famous photograph that represents the vulnerability of all children-- and I think, in many ways, came out to be the most important photograph from the entire war. It was in Life magazine, it was redone and reinterpreted. And there's a very good book by a guy named Raskin, who teaches in Denmark of the history of that photograph.

In any event, Sam had a friend his own age named Samek, the same name as his. The Nazis had killed the boy and then left his body at the base of the courtyard for a day. And 60 years later, Sam did about 120 paintings of the little boy and vulnerability in children. So this one becomes the good and bad, if you will, the light and dark, the angel, and the sort of normal-- a warrior-like child. And they're all being manipulated by this force above them.

And I just love the painting every time I see it because it raises all these questions about the presence of God. Because for religious people, God somehow is still a good presence in the universe. For other people, they keep saying, well, we as human beings are responsible for our behavior.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, who I think is really an important thinker, basically has talked about the three areas. Now we're post-rabbinic. And during this time, all of it inures back to us. The covenant is broken, the presence of God in the world has withdrawn itself. And now we, as human beings, are responsible for what we do.

So we can't even blame him or her any longer with the piece. And the amazing thing is that the handles for the manipulation are both crucifixes.

Oh, my goodness.

So this whole notion of both religion, nonreligious, and angels, not-angels. And then he includes two really important elements. The one hanging on the side is the tallit or the prayer shawl. So it's a sense of kind of a circus but also a holy space. And the other, the young boy on the right of the painting, holding a piece of wood that looks like dynamite. And the string itself was manipulating him, is also burning.

So is it a fuse? Will it get back and destroy the force that's essentially manipulating them? They're just endless number of questions that evolve from a single image that Sam has created. And every time I look at it, I'm just re-inspired by his questions and the way that he forces the viewer to think about themselves in the context of, what if I was that kid at that age in that situation? Who do you trust? How do you survive any of these experiences?

And the reality of his capacity to make you believe in cloth, in metal, in string, in rope, in smoke makes it seem real. And going back to that notion of the reality of that film, what is real, the asylum or war?

Ah, King of Hearts, you mean.

Yes.

Alan Bates.

Exactly. So that notion of going back and forth from that reality to this reality. And Sam paints all of these as if they are real. When people say the works are surreal, they're not. They're real. And it's very hard to get people to accept that notion, that this is the reality that we all live with.

Oh, gosh.

So it is not a dream. If anything, it's a nightmare. But it's a nightmare filled with the potential questions of how we, as human beings, responded to even the innocence and vulnerability of children.

Thank you. OK. Let's go on.

And recording, and anytime.

OK. Tell us what this is about.

So in the most recent series of paintings that Sam is engaged with, there are about 120 to 140 images using candles. And the brains of Sam Bak is on many levels. One is his ability to hear words in many languages.

So the Hebrew word for candle is ner, N-E-R. And the plural is nerot. And frequently, the feminine in Hebrew becomes pluralized by OT, ot. If you separate the two words, ner and ot, it means candle as a symbol. And he just invents this. But it's true. It's based upon an understanding of English, an understanding of Hebrew, and then the capacity to realize that he has taken the candle, which represents celebration. It represents mourning. It's on birthday cakes. You light them when you go into churches.

And it also is an enormously important symbol for life. Because essentially, the phrase you burn your candle at both ends, that essentially, your life burns down. The memorial candle that we light in memory of people burns out within the 24-hour or 25-hour period on the day that you're remembering those people. And then flames and how they all somehow interact and represent aspects of destruction, the Holocaust, the chimneys.

And so here, he titles this Klooga, which was the concentration camp which Herman Kruk was taken to. Herman Kruk was the historian of the Vilna Ghetto. And Sam actually knew him well.

Oh, wow.

And near the end of the war, he was deported to Klooga, and he was killed there.

In Estonia.

In Estonia. And by that time-- and this particular camp did not have a crematoria. So what the Nazis were doing, and they were doing it elsewhere, was taking the dead bodies and putting them between logs in order to erase the traces of what they had destroyed and done.

And we've seen photographs of that.

Yeah, well, it's just horrific. And then you look at it, and then you realize that there are logs. And if you look at the cross-section of a log, you're also dealing with the timeline of the tree. You can tell how old it is. The logs are transformed into candles, which are burning, which could be celebratory. But they're also destructive. There are the Sabbath candles, the one in the sky floating away.

And then they're also like Torah scrolls. So you have all of this notion. And there is this phrase in Hebrew, [HEBREW] that "She is a tree of life," referring to the Torah. So here, you're dealing with, really, destruction and death. And at the same time, you're dealing with life, and memory, and hope.

Thank you.

Recording, and anytime.

OK. Well, this looks almost self-evident. But tell us more. Tell us what it's about. Tell us-- yeah.

So the truth is that it's not self-evident. And you should read that book, These Truths by Jill Lepore at Harvard, called These Truths Are Self-Evident. It's a history of the United States. And it is a perfect primer for understanding how Trump got to where he is. Because it's based upon hatred, violence, prejudice, repression, how this country was founded.

And those are the same questions Sam's dealing with. So it's not exactly irrelevant. We used to have the gallery, as you remember, down below street level. And people would walk by. And you're looking over a balcony into the space. And you feel like you're extending your ability to fall into a space.

Because it's even further.

Correct. But you also are far enough away that you can identify this opening as a six-pointed star.

Right.

If you're close up to it, it really becomes an abstraction of triangles, and rectangles, and kind of closed, more rectangles there. And it's somehow closed. So the discovery of this being the ghetto from the landscapes of Jewish experience is amazing. And then you find, once you're into that space, that you look at it and realize that there are no people. They're all gone. The windows are all filled up. There are bloodstains on the walls. And there are broken houses.

So this becomes an indication of what was. And at the same time, it raises the question, is it being excavated? Or is it about to be covered over?

Yeah.

And the whole issue of how we're relating to the past-- I'm a member of the Japan society of Boston. It's the oldest Japan society in the United States. And I keep trying to get them to get a conversation going about the Germans' response to what they did and the atrocities of the Japanese. And there's a total unwillingness in Japan to even engage around this subject. Whereas in Germany for, better or for worse-- and they're still neo-Nazis and so on. But there still is a recognition in a profoundly sincere way, I believe, to recognize it.

And even the Bak Museum in Vilnius represents a window to acknowledgment. Whereas in Japan, comfort women, the whole issue of-- when we were there 10 years ago with our grandson, we went to the Hiroshima Peace Museum. And the first thing you see in the Peace Museum is a replica of the "Little Boy," of the atom bomb.

And he looked at me, and he said, what's this? This is a peace museum. Why is this the major first exhibit you see? And I said, because the Japanese don't recognize responsibility for anything that they did. What they're saying is what we imposed on them. And then we had this discussion about all of this was led up to by all of the things that the Japanese did to others. And it is a profoundly interesting way to reinterpret history.



Sam keeps saying, are we going to excavate this? Are we going to acknowledge it? Or are we going to cover it up and ignore it? And lovely-- in the corner's a suggestion of the yellow star. And since he was the artist in the family. His mother let him cut out the yellow triangles. And then she sewed them on their clothing.

Oh, my goodness.

So it's both a very powerful symbol but at the same time a very important acknowledgment of what was.

Well, you know, also in a very, again, small world kind of way, the one Japanese diplomat who was helping--

Sugihara.

Sugihara. Some of the people who were in Sam's life who came as refugees from other parts of Poland--

Right.

--were trying to get out and going to--

Through Kaunas.

To Kaunas, to Sugihara. And when to went back to Japan, he was dishonored and thrown out. Now he's a big deal. Every Japanese consul general that comes here-- oh, I'm going to the Sugihara Memorial in Chestnut Hill. So yeah, there's a kind of long-term redemption because he did a lot of good things.

But immediately, he had really-- he was a traitor. Because he had ignored the orders that he was given. And he was one of the few traders around in that business.

So I need to find the price book.

OK. Is this is? No.

And cut, ready. And any time.

OK.

So this is a photograph taken in 2001 in Ponary which is the killing field--

Oh, yeah, I see it. I can read it.

--outside of Vilna, where Sam's both sets of grandparents and his father were killed. And this memorializes the remaining few Jews who were killed on the 5th of July, 1944. So it's a single headstone with little bits in front of it and some flowers.

I can read it in Lithuanian, I think.

Oh, yeah.

It says, [LITHUANIAN]

So it says in this pit, from-- the workers from--

HKP, the labor camp.

--HKP, and the fur factory, Kailis, was-- they were killed. And on the seventh-- oh, no, excuse me, on July 5, 1944. And their remains are resting here.

I'm not sure that's true, but that's OK.

But that's what it says.

At least-- it exactly memorializes it.

Yeah.

So I was with Sam in 2001. Right after 9/11, there was an exhibit of his at the National Museum. And then he came back and painted this painting in 2002 called Personal Corner.

Oh, wow.

So the photograph is important on many levels to understand that there is a tombstone and a space in front of it. Sam's eldest daughter had had a stillborn child, had the remains cremated and mixed up with the sand of the Sahara. So the ashes were mixed with the sand.

When we came to this site, which included a memorial to his father, because he was the last of the Jews who were killed there, he then poured the sand and the ashes of the great grandson on the gravesite that would have been the great grandfather's.

Oh, my goodness.

So the mound of sand, our earth there, represents it. And then he becomes-- I guess it's not really a word-- Bak-izes it. So you have the tombstone with the bullet holes. You have the braces. Then you have, in the upper corner, a bird and the Hebrew word for-- this is a dove. Yonah was his father's name, Jonas.

That's right.

And it's been X-ed out, so it means he's been killed, and part of the yellow star. So that's as if it makes it his father buried here with the great grandson. On this side, you have the family name, Bak, with the Lion of Judah in Hebrew.

And on this side, you have one of these other combinations of Hebrew. This is the Hebrew letter P. And in Hebrew, there's a word, po, which means hear, H-E-A-R. And this is the word we now know in Hebrew from the other paintings, ner. So if you put po and ner together, you have the name of the forest.

Ponary, yeah.

And they're both shaped as part of the Ten Commandments.

Po-ner.

Then you have the cut off tree, which is the cut off life of his father.

Oh, my goodness.

So it becomes, as the painting says, a personal corner. So it's an interesting way to think about how his mind does work, to take a very personal situation, the loss of what would have been his grandson and then the great grandson, to bring those two generations, great grandfather and great grandson, together to memorialize his father, still deal with a sense of loss. And what's interesting is that at Jewish cemeteries, you don't take flowers. They do here in Lithuania, but you put stones because they're permanent reminders. And the bird itself is made of stone.

Well, you know, this also reminds me of the very first-- well, not the first one, but the second or the third painting where we had the four rolls of-- you had the factual, which is the photograph.

Mm-hm.

And then you have the interpretation--

Right.

--which is here.

In addition to that, that factual is from the 13th century. It's rabbis creating a literary device. And Sam then creates it into a visual.

That's right.

I mean, which is amazing-- even to have the genius to do that transformation is, to me-- still, I'm in awe of his intellectual capacity. Plus all the talent, plus the painting, plus all the other things that make him an artist, there is this powerful intellect that is essentially driving every image.

And it has those connections.

Yep.

He sees those connections that the rest of us have to go, oh, my god.

Yeah.

Yeah.

The sense of discovery with them.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Is there any final painting that you would like to show us today?

Oh, you can choose. I mean, there's this--

And any time.

OK. Tell us about this painting. The Stroop diary, which was done by a Nazi Lieutenant Colonel, Jurgen Stroop, in April of 1943 as he recorded the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, included the seminal photograph of a little child with his hands up and Nazi officers around him with a pure sense that, obviously, this child and so many other hundreds of thousands, if not 1.5 million children, would be killed in the Holocaust.

For Sam, it is a very personal memorial to a friend of his by the same name, Samek, who the Nazis killed and left his body at the bottom of the courtyard for a full day. And 60 years later, Sam refers to this photograph and refers to all of those children in the context of war and destruction. And it's a combination of fundamental-- what we call religious orientations. The form itself is a powerful crucifix.

And then the opening is also suggestive of the six-pointed star. So these two, if you will, competing visual structures

also represented different aspects of the destroyed and the destroyer, in this case. And certainly, within central and Eastern Europe, the church-- aspects of the church, both in Poland, Lithuania, and throughout, prepared the ground for the destruction of the Jews who were in their community.

And here you have the extraordinary, almost Durer-like representation of the hands, which in Durer are so important. But they're also the stigmata, the symbol of the crucifixion of Christ, of this resurrection notion that is in Christianity, and the destruction of anything that had to do with respect for other human beings. The boy is so, in a way, beautifully rendered, and yet at the same time, heartbreaking.

Absolutely.

Because we all know, as we look at the painting, that this is over. And it was over for another million and a half young people. And it becomes-- when Sam began that series in 1997, I looked at him and said, they're among the most important paintings you've ever done. And we will never sell one because they're too demanding.

It turns out that on a percentage basis, these images of the little boy have sold more, percentage-wise, than any other subject outside of chess that he's done.

Wow.

So that shows you how much I know about the art business.

[LAUGHS] Well, I want to thank you.

You're welcome.

There's so many more paintings we could look at.

Yeah. Well, you have to go sometime.

Yeah. And you have an event.

And anytime.

OK. Well, thank you, Mr. Pucker. Thank you very, very much for sharing so much of your knowledge and your passion for Sam's work, and for what it means, and for what we can see into it and keep asking more questions, and the questions that it raises. And there are so many paintings here, so many that he's produced. We could go on and on. But the paintings will stay. And people will see them. And we have had the privilege to have a glimpse into both his life and his work.

Great.

And for your help in that, thank you very, very much. And that concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Sam Bak and Mr. Bernie Pucker. Thanks.

Thank you.

OK.

Yeah.

And now we can--

Isn't that extraordinary to have brought them together?

Yeah.

At the very last minute, he had to get more money from his publisher, who was going to do it in color, and blah, blah, blah. So this is with Sam.

There's Sam?

Yeah.

OK. And the photograph was taken by Cary Wolinsky, whose exhibition is now in the gallery. And Sam was here for the opening because he and Cary are friends.

Can we get the cover of the book?

Sure.

Just quickly. And that's a famous, famous--

Photograph.

Yeah.

And it's been tampered with, as well. They frequently will put the Jewish star here.

Yeah.

I mean, there are all sorts of perversions.

And there are also boys who have said, I'm that boy.

In this book, he has, like, six or eight of them.

Did you get the cover? Are you good on the cover?

Yeah, we got it.

OK.

OK.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's rather fascinating, the whole idea of-- this was before fake news. [CHUCKLES] Or fake Jews.

[LAUGHS]

Oh, good. OK.

OK.