



A Virtual Memorial
Commemorative Interventions

RIGA
01-30 June 2012



Shoah Film Collection



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



The Floating Art Galleries NOASS & BETANOVUSS
[01-30 June 2012](#)

The Academy of Sciences Riga
1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums
[04-06 June 2012](#)

Riga Ghetto & Latvian Holocaust Museum
Culture & Arts Project NOASS Riga
artvideoKOELN international



**Riga Ghetto
and Latvian
Holocaust
MUSEUM**



A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 – Commemorative Interventions

featuring Shoah Film Collection –1-8 June 2012 (prolonged until 30 June)

A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 - a media art project context created by the Cologne based media artist and curator Wilfried Agricola de Cologne for presenting *SFC – Shoah Film Collection* in the context of complementary interventions – was realized in the framework of the European Cultural Program context “The A Team – Artists for Change” and the associated instances (Transeurope Halles, Engine Room Europe, European Culture program- Education & Culture DG, Ministry of Culture Latvia und project partners in Latvia, Sweden, Slovakia and Bulgaria) and in partnership between Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, the Jewish association SHAMIR Riga, Culture and Arts Project NOASS Riga and artvideoKOELN – the international curatorial initiative “art & moving images” , Cologne, directed by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne.

The presentation of *SFC - Shoah Film Collection* in Riga is standing under the *Patronage of the European Parliament*, which is honouring *SFC – Shoah Film Collection* as a worldwide unique initiative by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne addressed to young artists generations to deal with the topic of *Shoah* and related fields, like the collective trauma caused by totalitarianism, by using new technologies and contemporary approaches in art in order keep vivid the memory and sensitize and activate the artists, film- and videomakers.

NOASS – floating art galleries at Daugava River Riga (photo: Doron Polak)



For presenting *SFC – Shoah Film Collection* to an audience, Agricola de Cologne created a special event project - *A Virtual Memorial – Commemorative Interventions* - which is placing SFC in the context of complementary interventions like lectures, a symposium, workshops, courses, exhibitions, artists talks, discussions and much more, in order to sensitize and activate the audience, as well.

Presenting *SFC- Shoah Film Collection* in Riga under the *Patronage of the European Parliament* had four components, i.e. during the main intervention days 1-3 June 2012 - the screening of the entire collection, the artists presentations including artists talks and discussions on, on 4-6 June 2012 the presentation of SFC as an initiative on 1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums, organized by Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, and the exhibition of SFC installed on flat-screen monitors on the floating art gallery NOASS 1-30 June 2012 (after prolongation).

As a project, *A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012* had a kind of pioneer character in most different ways. It is the first of a series of events to take place during the coming months and years at many places around the globe.



Latvian Holocaust Museum – introduction by Rabbi Menachem Barkahan

(from the right to the left) Dzintars Zilgalvis and his wife, Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, Agricola de Cologne (photo Alise Vetrova)

Riga as a venue has a special conceptual relevance due to his history in Nazi times, the Riga Ghetto and above all, the fact, that Latvia is refurbishing its memory only these days, for instance by establishing the Latvian Holocaust Museum on initiative of Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, chairman of Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, who is one of the most influencing persons in the context of the project realisation, besides the NOASS chairman Dzintars Zilgalvis.

In this way, *A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012* has a strong supportive and encouraging character directed to the Latvian initiatives, as well as to the local and international audience.

Although in the beginning, the project realisation has some starting problems, in sequence it became evident how magnificent the project realisation has been.

Due to the support by the embassies of Israel, USA, Sweden and Austria, it was possible to invite in total 8 artists, representing SFC Shoah Film Collection via their personal film contributions, artists talks and discussions, i.e. Doron Polak & Eitan Vitkon (both Israel), Cristiano Berti (Italy), Doris Neidl (Austria), Felice Hapetzeder (Sweden) and Jay Needham, Ben Neufeld and Shelley Jordon (all USA),

It needs to be mentioned, that to the category “interventions” also the “private” reception at the apartment of the Cultural Attaché of Israeli Embassy in Riga was belonging, since not only staff members of the Israeli Embassy were present, but also cultural attachés from divers embassies in Riga, so that one can speak of an inofficial “private view” on 31 May 2012 before the official “private view” on 1 June 2012, 12h a.m.



*BETANOVUSS – private view on 1 June 2012 – (from the left to the right) – (photo Doron Polak)
ambassador of Israel Ms. Hamit Ben –Jaakov, Agricola de Cologne, cultural attaché at Israeli embassy, Dzintarz Zilgalvis*

So, all these circumstances made this “private view” on 1 June 2012, and this way also the entire project, really spectacular, which was taking place at one the most unique locations in Riga, the floating art galleries NOASS and BETANOVUSS situated at the Daugava river in front of the beautiful panorama of Riga.

After the official opening speech held by her Excellence, the Ambassador of Israel, Hamit Ben- Jaakov, the initiator and curator of A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 and SFC – Shoah Film Collection, Agricola de Cologne, was explaining in his introduction the concepts of both projects and the realization in Riga, while the ambassadors of Austria, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, representatives of Latvian Ministeries and Riga City Council, as well as local cultural institutions were forming the audience.

Agricola de Cologne had the honour to guide her Excellency the Israeli Ambassador through the exhibition “How Memories Survive”, consisting of three individual exhibitions located at different levels of the floating art galleries NOASS and BETANOVUSS., i.e “Mortale”, a selection from 10000 handmade drawings Paolo Bonfiglio (Italy) was creating for his animated film, entitled “Mortale”, which is part of Shoah Film Collection, exhibited at the lower level on NOASS, while the upper level was presenting experimental photographs by Eitan Vitkon, who was visualizing the performance, the invited Israeli artist Doron Polak was preparing for Riga, the city of his ancestors, and the third exhibition, presenting *Shoah Film Collection* as an installation. The final highlight of this private view was the performance by Doron Polak on BETANOVUSS. The conceptual background was his father’s diary from Riga Ghetto, which he survived. The main goal of the exhibitions is to give the visitors background information about the making of the films of *Shoah Film Collection* and dealing artistically with the Holocaust, and in this way, a better and deeper understanding about the subject matter, as such.



BETANOVUSS – performance by Doron Polak – 1 June 2012 (photo Felice Hapetzeder)

The next “private view” and intervention took place directly afterwards, at 15h, when Rabbi Menachem Barkahan was guiding himself the visiting artists through Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, which can currently considered to be a kind of open air museum, while the indoor museum is currently under construction, yet.

The opening day continued on 19h when the exhibitions, the artists’ presentations and talks and the screenings were opened to the public moderated by Agricola de Cologne.

Probably, the most influence taking happened, however, during the artists' talks and presentations on 1, 2 and 3 June, since there was such an substantial exchange, deep and far reaching discussion about how memory can be transported to the future via art, that all participants were surprised what actually was happening in this rather intimate circle of the project interventions. Each attending artist had sufficient time to present his/her work participating in Shoah Film Collection and talk about the motivations and goals to deal with Shoah as an artistic topic. The atmosphere of these talks and discussion was really unique and cannot described in words or visuals, and it became clear, this event in Riga could represent just a starting point of something really new in the discussions around how art can be a medium for dealing with the collective traumas of mankind.



BETANOVUSS – screenings, discussions and artists talks on 2 June 2012 (photo Dzintarz Zilgalvis)

A special site related intervention took place, when Doron Polak and Eitan Vitkon were realising during the morning of 2 June 2012 their particular contribution to A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 at the memorial site of Rumbula forest (near Riga), the filmic and photographic shooting of Doron Polak's tribute to his fathers roots in Riga which was including the attending artists in person, a symbolical action of an intense artistic power.

One of the next highlights was on 4 June 2012, when SFC – Shoah Film Collection was presented as an initiative on 1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums, organised by Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum.

It was the most spectacular of all conference sessions, consisting of the ambassadors of Austria, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Belarus and Agricola de Cologne, who started the session by introducing *SFC – Shoah Film Collection*, followed by a discussion with the ambassadors and their blunt confessions, how the respective nations deal nowadays with the memory of Holocaust.



Academy of Sciences Riga – 1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums –ambassadors' session – 4 June 2012 (from the left to the right) – ambassador of Belarus, ambassador of Czech Republic, ambassador of the Netherlands, ambassador of Austria, Agricola de Cologne – ambassador of the arts (photo Dzintarz Zilgalvis)

A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 can be considered as a really successful event in many ways including so many unexpected interventions, which cannot be mentioned all just in a few words. All aims connected to the initiatives and the project concept for Riga were much more than fulfilled, resulting even farreaching perspectives for the future, in terms of discussing art and Holocaust and finding new forms of commemoration via art, the continuation of collaborating in Latvia and, above all, future events, since Agricola de Cologne has been invited to present Shoah Film Collection in Phnom Penh in July 2012, dedicated to the victims of the Cambodian genocide, to Warsaw Jewish Film Festival in October 2012 and A Virtual Memorial Vilnius 2013 – a collaboration with the Jewish Cultural Center Vilnius, among others.



RIGA – attending SFC artists- (from the left to the right) – Felice Hapetzeder, Agricola de Cologne, Eitan Vitkon, Shelley Jordon, Jay Needham, Ben Neufeld, Doron Polak (photo: Shelley Jordon)

SFC – Artists

(attending artists in bold & blue characters)

Agricola de Cologne, Yochai Avrahami & Karin Eliyahu, Bebe Beard, Tova Beck-Friedman, **Christiano Berti**, Isobel Blank Brian Delevie, Paolo Bonfiglio, Sean Burn, David R. Burns, Dova Cahan, Marita Contreras, Alicia Felberbaum, Konstantinos-Antonios Goutos, Grace Graupe Pillard, **Felice Hapetzeder**, Holger Kiess, Anetta Kapon, Shon Kim, Tamy Mike Laufer, Dana Levy, Heike Liss & Thea Farhadian, Lukas Matejka, **Shelley Jordon**, Branko Miliskovic, **Jay Needham**, **Doris Neidl**, **Ben Neufeld**, Miri Nishri, Cezary Ostrowski, Joseph Rabie, **Doron Polak** & Uri Dushy, Jean-Michel Rolland, Nathania Rubin, Jens Salander, Antti Savela, Elana Schwadron-Minkow, Daveed Shwartz, Maja Schweizer, Boris Sribar, **Eitan Vitkon**, Anders Weberg, Yonathan Weinstein.



NOASS – exhibition at the lower gallery – drawings (photo Alise Vetrova)



NOASS – exhibition at the lower gallery - drawings

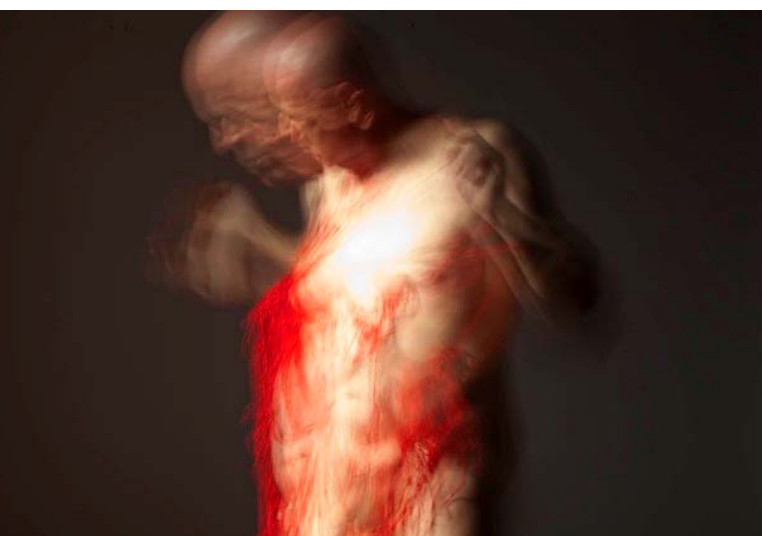
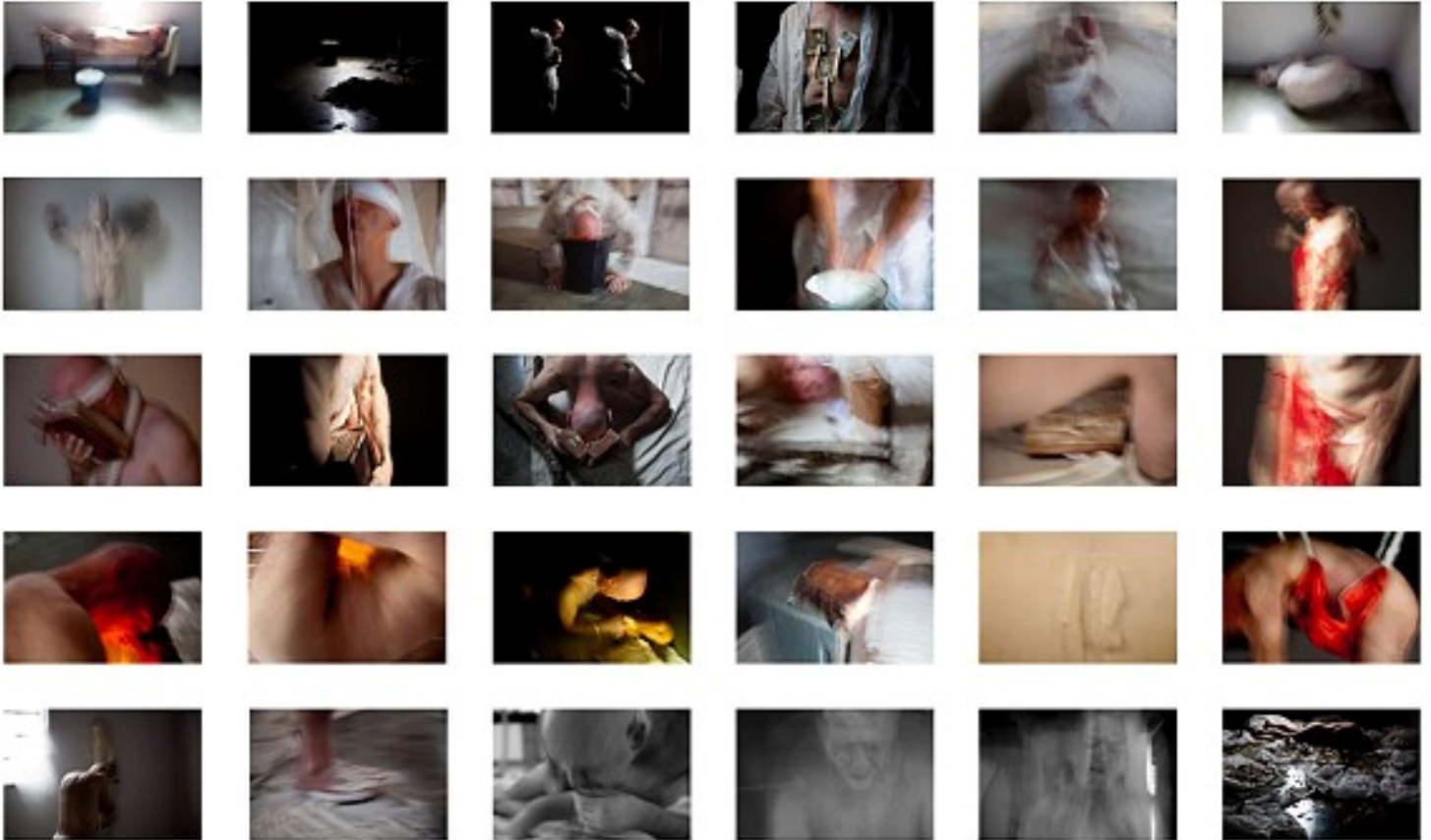


*NOASS – exhibition at the lower gallery – guided tour
Israeli ambassador Ms. Hamit Ben-Jaakov (left) –
Agricola de Cologne (right) (photo Doron Polak)*

Interventions

Exhibitions

Eitan Vitkon – photography - Doron Polak performing





NOASS - SFC installation at the lower gallery (photo Alise Vetrova)



NOASS: - SFC installation at the upper Gallery



NOASS – SFC installation at the upper gallery

Interventions

Exhibitions

Doron Polak - Riga performance (*photo Felice Hapetzeder*)



Interventions
Exhibitions
Artists presentations – talks and screenings



Cristiano Berti & Shelley Jordon (photos Alise Vetrova)



Ben Neufeld



Eitan Vitkon – all attending artists

Interventions
Exhibitions
Visiting Riga Ghetto & Latvian Holocaust Museum



Riga Ghetto Museum - Shelley Jordon & Agricola de Cologne (photos Alise Vetrova)



Riga Ghetto Museum - Doron Polak



Rabbi Menachem Barkahan

Impressions of a visit to Riga - June 2012 (1)

by Doron Polak

As a result of an invitation from the artist Wilfried Agricola de Cologne who initiated the Holocaust Film Festival, to come to Riga and attend a special conference on this topic, the photographer Eitan Vitkon and myself arrived in the city. For me, this was a unique chance to return to Riga, the city where my father was born and spent the war - the city where he lost part of his family.

First, I must say that the initiative to continue to work towards an artistic presence that commemorates this darkest period in human history, is of utmost importance. It is significant that the Holocaust Museum, the Shamir Organization, the NOASS Gallery and the embassies, enabled the Holocaust Film Festival to combine forces with the conference and that they found it suitable to support artists and creators from around the world in exhibiting their work dealing with this topic.

The inclusion of young contemporary artists contributed to finding a visual creative expression in photography, painting and video art - a representation of real, honest, intensive and current work dealing with the Holocaust. Each participant presented in his or her own artistic language, painful and personal interpretations of this topic. In addition, this was an exciting meeting between artists, each with their own real and personal story that influenced them - until deciding to deal with the subject of the Holocaust. It is important to remember that actually creating around the subject of the Holocaust has aspects that are relevant for today, in addition to those that focus again and again on what happened. Regrettably, the topic of control, the journeys of death and humiliation, the destruction of nations and oppression of peoples, are still day to day topics that can be found in different parts of the world. The advancement and development of culture has not been able to stop the inherent catastrophe in man's behaviour towards fellow man.

The meeting of artist in the NOASS Gallery in Riga around the topic of art dealing with the Holocaust, presented a series of formidable achievements that are an enlightened example of high-quality creativity connected to every-day realities whose educational goals are no less important or evident than their artistic ones. The mere holding of such a meeting in the place where the Riga Ghetto used to stand while allowing to visit the sites, especially the Holocaust Museum - the place that is today reconstructing that period - this alone created a unique and stunning experience. For me personally, as I said, it was the experience of a lifetime to recognise the names of my grandmother, uncle and most of his family that perished here, on the plaque of names of the Holocaust victims of Riga.

Impressions of a visit to Riga - June 2012 (2)

During the meeting, the artist Eitan Vitkon and myself had the chance to participate in three creative areas. The first was to present a very emotional exhibition of photographs in the NOASS Gallery that summarized an ongoing process of examining and coming to terms with memories of the Holocaust. My project is concerned with real feelings towards memories and the reaction of the body itself to these memories. I have been lucky to be able to work with such a special and talented artist as Eitan Vitkon, who was able to translate our intimate and border-less meetings from the studio in Israel, to such an empathetic and emotional series of photographs. The project did not deal with the image of the Holocaust survivor. It was aimed at showing the day-to-day ways that a second-generation, son of a survivor, actually deals with this topic - an artistic creation that is inspired and is related to the horrible trauma of life every moment of the day. It was especially emotional to see the reaction of the crowd to the exhibition that was shown together with artistic videos dealing with this topic playing continuously in a loop.

The second project was a piece of live performance art that took place in the gallery space during the opening of the conference. It was important for me to bring the the daily, current moments of life and so I used local newspapers in combination with some I brought from Israel. In addition, I used a real prayer shawl - a Talit - on which I attached family photographs. At the beginning of the performance I asked the audience to write their ID number on white sterile shirts, which I combined into the performance itself. Each member of the audience personally participated with his or her ID number - which hinted at the fact that this colossal tragedy can happen to each and everyone of us today. The warm response and tears in the audience's eyes was for me the most suitable reaction I could ever hope for.

The third work allowed me to conduct a live performance in the Rumbula forest where tens of thousands of people were buried alive, which was photographed and documented by the attending artists. This stunning piece of work allowed for the live physical collaboration with some of the artists participating in the meeting and was an experience I will never forget. Creating here and now, in a place of real feelings towards what happened, turned into a single, photographed moment that managed to take the deep spiritual power of the creative process to other places.

The journey and meeting that was initiated by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne in Riga was for me an example of a unique project whose artistic qualities are connected to and accompany life itself, and are an example of a project with meaningful educational and historical achievements. The personal experience becomes a model for dealing with the Holocaust among second and third generation survivors and its cultural power is used as a tool for expressing memories of this terrible traumatic event in a strong, dramatic visual way that will never be forgotten.

Doron Polak, artist
Israel, 2012

Patronage



Project partners



Support



**Riga Ghetto
and Latvian
Holocaust
MUSEUM**



State of Israel
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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Riga

A-Team partners



Culture Programme



Education and Culture DG

Engine Room Europe is a three-year programme (April 2011-May 2014) of activities dedicated to independent cultural workers and their creative processes. It is initiated by Trans Europe Halles (TEH) and co-ordinated by Melkweg (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) in association with 10 co-organizing TEH members. Engine Room Europe has been funded with the support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein".



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