

Sydney Jewish Museum launches Closer: Portraits of Survival Exhibition and catalogue

'The survivor and the object: both are witnesses to history and retainers of memory, vessels through which we can contemplate the profound impact of the Holocaust' – Dr Avril Alba

Closer: Portraits of Survival is a rich and powerful photographic exhibition exploring the artefacts and individuals that anchor us to the past.

Award winning photographer Katherine Griffiths has photographed 44 Holocaust survivors with the photographs, letters and objects that are emblematic of their survival.

Curator Roslyn Sugarman is excited to present an exhibition which honours the survivor community and deepens visitor engagement with the Museum collection.

"As the living witnesses to the Holocaust begin to pass away, we lose their unique ability to humanise and personalise the objects in our collection. It is our hope that these portraits will help visitors to engage more deeply and humanely with the lived experience of these times."

"The individuals in the exhibition were adults, teens and children who spoke different languages and whose subsequent suffering took different forms" adds Sugarman. "When taken as one, their combined experiences paint a vivid and haunting picture of the German war against the Jews of Europe and the resilience of the Jewish people despite all attempts to annihilate them."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue and visual compendium of survivor biographies and quotes, which have been diligently compiled by Museum volunteers, staff and survivors.

The catalogue includes essays by Dr Avril Alba, Senior Lecturer in Holocaust Studies and Jewish Civilisation at the University of Sydney and Dr Martyn Jolly, Head of Photography and Media Arts at the Australian National University School of Art.

Dr Jolly writes: "In Closer: Portraits of Survival, photographer Katherine Griffiths has melded the memory of cataclysmic events with the most ordinary, intimate and marvellous of the senses – touch.... When they are held in the birdlike hands of survivors, the yellowing passports, certificates, and identity papers from the past – the slips of paper that enabled the wheels of historical fate to turn – take on a higher charge."

Closer: Portraits of Survival will be launched on Sunday 26 March and will be open until August 2017. The exhibition is included in the general Museum admission fee - \$15 Adults and \$9 seniors and Concession. Tickets are available at the Admissions desk.

Note for Media:

This exhibit is curated by Roslyn Sugarman and Natalia Thomas and has been generously funded by the JCA Szlamek and Ester Lipman Memorial Endowment Fund.

Katherine Griffiths is an Australian artist and photojournalist. She is the recipient of the 2013 Youngblood Editions Award Queensland Centre for Photography, the 2013 National Artist Self Portrait Prize, 2014 Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award and 2016 National Photographic Portrait Prize. Katherine currently lives and works in Sydney.