



Ceija Stojka, a Roma artist of her century

**curators: Antoine de Galbert
and Xavier Marchand (Lanicolacheur)**

exhibition from February 23rd to May 20th 2018

PLEASE RETURN
TO THE FRONT DESK

We said Rom rather than Gypsy.

For the plural too.

Not Roma.

Rom, with the emphasis on the 'm'.

Almost like it had a double 'm'.

But don't worry, you can say Gypsy

I'm a Gypsy.

A dyed-in-the-wool Gypsy, in fact!*

*Ceija Stojka, in *Auschwitz ist mein Mantel*.

La maison rouge presents some of this Austrian Roma artist's paintings for the first time in Paris. Ceija Stojka was ten years old when she was deported, along with her mother, Sidonie, brothers and sisters. Over the course of the Second World War, she survived three concentration camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen). But it wasn't until forty years later, at the age of fifty-five, that she embarked on a major work of memory, firstly through writing then, soon after, through drawing and painting.

TESTIMONY, TESTIMONIES

Self-taught, she worked standing up in her kitchen, covering pages and pages of the sketchbooks she hid in cupboards in her apartment, on the outskirts of Vienna, tracing again and again the contours of her existence with her paintbrush, and as often as not her finger, her main concern being simply to express herself.

Only a few of her texts have been published, first in Austria, including *We Live in Seclusion: The Memories of a Romni* in 1988, *Travellers on This World* in 1992, *Meine Wahl zu schreiben - ich kann es nicht* in 2003, *Träume ich, dass ich lebe? Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen* in 2005 and *Auschwitz ist mein Mantel* in 2008 (in the catalogue of the same name). But many others could – and might – be published, such were the artist's plethoric writings, both in her notebooks and on the front and back of her paintings.

Ceija Stojka died in 2013, and her legacy also includes over a thousand drawings and paintings, more than one hundred and fifty of which have been assembled for the exhibition at La maison rouge: ink, gouache and acrylic on paper and canvas. Produced between 1988 and 2012, they have been grouped into themes that plot her life, although they were not made in such chronological order. Some scenes are played out over and over in the different galleries; motifs reappear, the same yet different. The many works shown here enable us to grasp the twists and turns of the memory process, with its constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions. Ceija's work reflects numerous standpoints; a ten-year-old girl's memories cohabiting with suddenly re-emerging, repressed images and their analysis by the creative adult. Not all her works are based on her own experiences; some refer to places or incidents which she found out about after the event. *Dachau, Concentration Camp (Dachau, camp de concentration)* and *Z.B. [Zyklon B] Gas Chamber, 02.08.1944 in Auschwitz. The final liquidation (Z. B. [Zyklon B] Chambre à gaz le 02.08.1944 à Auschwitz. La liquidation finale)* are two such works. They are shown together with her biography, at the end of the opening

corridor. Both are astonishingly abstract. The first refers to the arrest of her father, Wackar, in 1941 and his deportation to Dachau then Mauthausen, before he was killed at Hartheim Castle in Austria, in 1942.

KEY ENCOUNTERS

In 1986, Ceija met the Austrian researcher and documentarist Karin Berger. At the time, Berger was attempting to gather testimonies from people of the Roma community for a book about women in concentration camps – not without difficulty, given the symbolic taboos within the communities themselves. She was meant to interview a certain Kathi... but in fact met her sister, Ceija. Ceija's older brother Karl (1931-2003) had already begun to write and paint, and their cousin Mongo (1929-2014) was a writer and musician. While we do not know exactly when Ceija began to write, then draw and paint, we do know that Karin Berger played a crucial role in encouraging and revealing her work. Not only did she help her to transcribe some of her manuscripts, she also made two documentaries about her (*Portrait of a Romni* in 1999 and, in 2005, *The Green Green Grass Beneath*).

Ceija gained a certain recognition for his work, first in Austria, in the early 1990s, within a tense political climate that demanded acknowledgement of this first female voice to break the silence surrounding the *Samudaripen*, the Roma genocide that wiped out ninety per cent of the Roma population in the country. The Roma tradition was almost exclusively oral, hence the sparsity of texts at that time. Nonetheless, some writings began to emerge in the 1950s, including by women such as the writer Philomena Franz (b. 1922) or the poet Papoucha (1908-1987).

Ceija Stojka became the voice that took the twentieth century's vast dislocation, and Austria's pervasive anti-Roma racism, not just into the media but also into schools and clubs. Her work is still little-known in France, although some articles have been published, including several in the journal *Études tsiganes*.

“LIFE ON THE ROAD...”

The first gallery presents depictions of a life 'before'. The life of a child born one May 23rd in Kraubath, in Styria, a descendant of the Lovara, a long line of horse traders who were originally from Hungary but had been living in Austria for centuries. Many Roma had already become sedentary; the Stojka family was forced to do so by the Nazi laws that came after the annexation of Austria (Anschluss) (1938-1939). And so the horse-drawn caravan became a wood cabin. It features in all the pictures here, some of which take us right inside the cosy interior.

We see here an idyllic life in harmony with nature - **Country Life (Vie à la campagne)** - and an entire slice of Roma culture. Ceija celebrates this nomadic, clan-based existence on the back of certain paintings. Throughout the exhibition, translations of Ceija's inscriptions on the back of some - indeed many - of her works are printed on the accompanying labels. Signs and words also feature on the drawings and canvases evoking life in the concentration camps - attempts to say what must be said, to point the finger, to name the unnameable, as well as expressions of violence (the shouting of the SS, place names, etc.)

Here, her quick, light touch creates a style that might be described as naive; sometimes the artist has thickened the paint with sand, emphasising her expressionistic materiality. Compositions recur from one painting to another, creating a dynamic that is characteristic of her work. But the threat already looms: **Travelling Through a Field of Sunflowers in Summer (Voyage d'été dans un champ de tournesols)** imposes a sense of distance, concealment, even. All around, pink, orange and violet skies suggest a metaphorical twilight preceding the cold snows of a winter that will last for long, long years.

HIDDEN, SCARED, DEPORTED

Following Wackar's arrest, Sidi and her children went into hiding for many long months, sometimes staying with friends, or friends of friends, sometimes hidden in a park in Vienna's 16th District, not far from their little house, now ringed with barbed wire. A series of ink drawings is from what the artist herself called her 'dark works' (as opposed to her 'light works'). The contrast of black and white, and a sharper stroke, give them a more overtly graphic style. "Where is your father?" one asks: "They took him away." Little Ceija's memories mix in with the artist's nightmares, just as the Nazis' shouted orders are mixed in with snatches from sentences uttered by friends and family, and her own thoughts: **Quiet! Mother, where are you? (Taisez-vous! Maman, où es-tu ?)** and **The trains are already full but they've still got to get in. Move on. Go on, go on! Go on, everyone to Auschwitz! I can't forget. (Les trains sont déjà pleins, mais il faut encore qu'ils y entrent. On avance. Allez, allez ! Allez, tout le monde à Auschwitz ! Je ne peux pas l'oublier.)**

In the centre stands a remarkable picture; we can just make out the frightened faces of shadows caught in the tangle of lines depicting the trees of Kongresspark that practically cover the entire canvas (**Untitled, 15.03.2003/Sans titre, 15.03.2003**). The upright presentation enables us to see an example of how Ceija covered the back of certain paintings with chalk drawings and clumsily spelt polyphonic phrases - the often-phonetic transcriptions made by someone who was never able to attend

school regularly, much to her regret and despite all her parents' efforts. On March 3rd, 1943, Ceija, her mother, brothers and sisters were locked away in Vienna's Rossauer Lände prison. However, these works do not portray this one arrest but all the arrests suffered by Roma people, which Ceija imagines in, for example, **Found (Trouvés)** or **"Where are our Roma?" Laaerberg, 1938 ("Où sont nos Roms?" Laaerberg, 1938)**, opposite.

The drawings in the adjacent small gallery bear witness to Ceija's incredible life force: her fierce humour, particularly in her caricature of Adolf Hitler (**Now you're done for. Heil – Here we come/Maintenant vous êtes fichus. Heil – nous arrivons**), and some expressions of a hope that survives and will continue to survive no matter what, such as the proud, green tree on the right of **Vienna-Auschwitz (Vienna-Auschwitz)**. It accompanies the unspeakable convoy (should we see a likeness with the caravans on previous paintings?) as it winds its way into a childlike yet apocalyptic landscape, where swastikas and machinery meld into one implacable mechanism.

IN THE CAMPS

The Stojka family were deported to Auschwitz, where they were registered on March 31st, 1943 and held in section B-II-e, known as the "Gypsy family camp". On the first canvases, on the right as we enter this gallery, we see through the eyes of the young Ceija, just ten years old. Monstrous, oversized SS boots fill the foreground. She frames her pictures in such a way as to show only parts of her torturers, denying them the right to be whole. Unusual, arresting angles are a constant in Ceija's work: subjects are viewed at ground level, as if by a dead person, or instead from the sky, as though seen by a spirit floating above the camps, or indeed a bird – free, in either case. Many are shown from the other side of the barbed wire that bars the canvas, the viewpoint of an imaginary escapee, or a helpless witness. Further along we see more examples of her tremendous evocative force: **Birkenau KZ, 1944** tells of a child standing on tiptoe, only to discover the chimneys through windows deliberately set too high. Next to it is **Z 6399**, an astonishing, sharply modern composition featuring Ceija's roll number - the tattoo inflicted on her, and on every deportee, upon arrival at Auschwitz and something she never hid on any photograph. The Z stands for *Zigeuner*, the German word for Gypsy; tainted by these horrific Nazi connotations, German-speakers today use the words Roma or Sinti instead. Opposite are some smaller works, painted with her finger (or hand), and some striking, dark drawings.

The next gallery chills to the bone: the pictures are drenched in white, the lines are like lashes of the whip. This room focuses on the women's concentration camp at

Ravensbrück, where Ceija, her mother Sidi and her sister Kathi were deported shortly before the terrible liquidation of the 'gypsy camp' at Auschwitz (August 2nd). This was in May or June 1944 - Mitzi had arrived just before them, in April. Someone is always watching you, at Ravensbrück. The views could be those from the guards' towers. A huge bloodshot eye watches over *Ravensbrück 1944*. We've seen this eye already, at the end of the first corridor. This is more than just an 'evil eye': it is a sad sun, the eye of the dead who watch the living, the ever-open eye that must bear witness and imprint on its retina that which must never be forgotten. At Ravensbrück, as elsewhere in Ceija's work, strips and rectangles structure the composition: something martial, something highly inflexible has made its mark, even on the landscapes. Sinister figures reign over them, such as the Oberaufseherin Dorothea Binz who appears to be standing in the middle of the path in **Untitled, 28.01.2001 (Sans titre, 28.01.2001)**. Little Ceija was fascinated by this epitome of cruelty and perversity, with her impeccable turnout and perfect blond ringlets. Alongside these figures, the bodies of the deported are featureless brushstrokes, beginning their journey to a ghostly future. Yet life seems to reside with the deported in their colourful clothes, such as in the astonishing chorus of figures in *Ravensbrück Women, 1944 (Les femmes de Ravensbrück, 1944)*, in the borderland between figurative and abstract.

In January 1945, Sidonie and Ceija were taken by lorry, then on foot, to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; Kathi was deported to the Rechlin-Retzow forced labour camp and Mitzi to Büchenwald. Ceija survived among the dead whom she saw as her friends and allies. She kept warm by hiding under the piled-up bodies; she kept herself alive by eating leather from belts, scraps of fabric, shoelaces – it was a long time since the deported had been given food. In *Untitled, I'm starving (Sans titre, Je meurs de faim)*, the person sinking into the snow stares at us, calls out to us: we who are, yet again, on the other side of the barbed wire. Ceija would tell of finding a tiny branch and feasting on its sap. She believed it saved her life and, in recognition, went on to sign all her works with a branch. Look carefully (you may want to go back to the start of the exhibition) and you'll see its regular, reassuring presence. Just as the artist's creative process takes in both 'light works' and 'dark works', so hope lives on. And yet **Untitled, 21.11.2009 (Sans titre, 21.11.2009)** tells us that "there was great fear behind the barbed wire". Two animals haunt Ceija's imagination. They are crows, present from the very start to the very end of the exhibition, and dogs - the torturers' ferocious companion. There are other, scarcely bearable images in this gallery: the nightmare vision of an "SS officer disguised in prisoners' clothes" with snarling mouth and blood-smeared face; a wild predator operating under the orders of Adolf Hitler, shown behind him; and *Bergen-Belsen, 1945*, liberated by British

troops on April 15th then set alight so as to prevent any further spread of the epidemics that were killing those who had managed to survive thus far. Yet even here, amidst this truly apocalyptic scene, stands a tree, magnificent and full of life.

BACK TO LIFE, WITH MARY

Following the liberation of the camps, it took Ceija and her mother three, almost four months to reach Vienna from Bergen-Belsen. In this last gallery, their exhaustion and their battle with the elements emerge in some of the landscapes. The composition and the movement of the trees in several paintings formally echo ***Vienna-Auschwitz*** (shown earlier). Pink, orange and violet skies recall landscapes in the first gallery, emphasising the extent to which past, present and future mix and mingle: for Ceija, time is cyclical – a happy time where life can begin again, and another unspoken time steeped in the fear that such horror might repeat itself. In its attempt to give meaning to the madness, Ceija's art is never unequivocal.

Having returned to Vienna, it took Ceija and her mother several months to trace the other family members who had survived, and years to find work and a place to live. Ceija sold fabrics door-to-door until 1959 when she was given a licence to sell rugs on a market stall – which she continued to do until 1984. She had three children: Hojda (born in 1949), Silvia (born in 1951) and Jano (1955-1979). Life began again and mother earth - along with fruit and vegetables - became the main subject of her paintings, after years of hunger in the camps. "Sunflowers are the flower of the Roma," wrote Ceija and here they are, omnipresent in her work once again (***Travels Through a Field of Sunflowers in Summer*** among others). These perennials turn to the sun and thus to hope, an essential Christian virtue for a woman who thanked her faith, and the Virgin Mary, for her survival. A statue of the Holy Virgin, with or without an altar, features in many compositions – compositions we could swear we have seen before. She is always standing at a crossroads.

We leave the exhibition amidst a swarm of crows (***Corpses/Cadavres***); those birds of ill omen that Ceija loved, for she saw them as the incarnation of 'her' dead, swirling around her in the camps. In Roma culture, birds can serve as messengers between the dead and the living; in the camps, they must have seemed the last remaining traces of life. They are a key element of the image-memories that Ceija recreated - complex and sometimes with a double meaning, such as this sly, bi-colour, double eye that tries to look back, and asks us not to close our eyes.

**Chrysanthemum, when I see you,
my heart also aches so hard.
You were my father's flower,
he caressed you and loved your scent.
There is one thing I'll never know:
in Dachau did he see chrysanthemums too?
Who knows, who knows?
But there is one thing I know very well, that my father
sang for my mother in his mind:
I give you these white chrysanthemums
for our wedding anniversary...
Beautiful flower, you shine in autumn,
the time of All Saints draws near,
of the death of death.
You shine, white chrysanthemum,
I venerate you,
for you remind me of my father
and decorate his tomb.
That way he doesn't feel lonely,
and if your leaves fall on his tomb
they are also greetings from him to me.**

1

*Attention, attention. Rossauer Lände [Vienna].
Auschwitz, Blood is Flowing. 1943, 9.9.2005*

2

*Ravensbrück, 1944 ; Liberation, 15.4.1945,
1999*

3

*Z.B. [Zyklon B] gas chamber on 02. 08. 1944 in
Auschwitz. The final liquidation., 2006*

4

Dachau KZ, 1994

Back of the painting:

*The memorials should be entered carefully,
and in line, because everywhere [la...ub] the
dead.*

*27.11.1994: And I am standing with Lisa and all
the kind people in Dachau.*

*Lisa is a special person. She had to look for me
long and she found me. No, there weren't
many of us standing there at that memorial. It's
like that at sad occasions, only people with a
heart come. Unfortunately, most people don't
have this heart, well, it isn't a show. But a
young choir sang for the souls and Tibetans
from Japan prayed. A frail Jewish man told us
about his suffering and I sang, Lisa sang and
all the kind people who treated me gently. At
the crematorium we lit candles for the Rom,
Jews, the persecuted homosexuals, for the
Mother*

*of God, for all of those who suffered under
Hitler. I lit up a cigarette and laid it down for
the victims in the crematorium. For Lisa and
the others the journey continues even further,
first of all to Auschwitz with a six-day period of
fasting and then the march on foot to Vienna
and then to Japan. The journey will end in
Hiroshima.*

*Today is 19.12.1994 and my Lisa is still not
here. This Dachau memorial looks like a huge,
like the biggest book in the world. No,
dandelions, chicory or daisies haven't got a*

*chance in Dachau. It has to be clean, just like
the Germans. Not a blade is allowed to grow. A
woman told us that every day several workers
come and pick the weeds, even the
crematorium was painfully clean. I didn't see a
flag of any nation. I didn't see any flowers, but
a black raven crows during the prayer. A sign
of the exterminated souls [...]. May they never
again [...] be clothed, they should never again
be wakened by the Neonazis. I felt my blood
surge through my body like a volcano when I
heard the black raven crowing. Dachau in the
mist and the trees rustling as if they were
playing their greatest symphony on this day.
Oh yes, I smell the pain that prevailed in the
camp. My father's Pepita suit, his hat and shirt
came from this camp to Vienna. On his suit we
could see the terrible hardship that I and my
family were also to become acquainted with in
Auschwitz.*

When we travelled

**I love the rain, the wind and the lightning
when the clouds mask the sky,
and the wind dances with the leaves on the tree,
the rain gives life to the flower
and fills the glasses in our land.
Yet the clouds withdraw
and the sun laughs at the sky
and peace returns to the forests and the lakes.
The flowers stretch in the morning
and the sky rises again
it stripes the trees and the forests like silver thread
it dances in the sun, sometimes above, sometimes below
the wind bears it high and destroys it.
Soon there will be rain again, thunder and lightning
and so it must be for all eternities.**

5

Country Life, 1993

6

Summer journey in a field of sunflowers, 1996

Back of the painting:

Mama says [...] fields of sunflowers. Are for our children Wakkar (my father). A joyous occupation.

Wakkar says to Sidi our mother look Sidi where are the little ones Ossi and Ceija we can't see them

Where are my children Sidi, call them then and already they are all calling Ossi Ceija where are you?

but Ossi and I are crawling under a big fat sunflower leaf and thinking the memory of my sweet little brother Ossi. I can see him crouching in front of me with just his shorts in black leather under the yellow sunflowers his brown little legs, his bare feet on the brown earth somewhere in Lower Austria near Vienna.

7

A Simple Rom Life, 1995

8

Untitled, 1995

Back of the painting:

There were browns and blondes among mama Sidi's brothers and sisters

Mama loved her Neusiedl am See

and looked proudly at her

brother Garli who had just

caught a fish

Sidi my mama was very fond

of her parents and sisters

Sidi my mama loved the Romano life

She was the wife of a Romani with all her heart and soul

in that place at that time mama

was 30 years old and all her [...] were still alive

She is more than happy this woman this Tzigani

Seeing her brothers and sisters

coming and going to Neusiedl am See

My grandfather Bedakk and the gran called Purri

yes they were proud of their daughters they were right

Mama the first born on 19.6 born

with the pride of the great Tzigani Bedakk

My gran gave him yet five more daughters

one sweeter than the others mama then came

Mala. Rossa. Gredi. Hili. and Schoffi. the boys

Peppi Garli

Garli was the elder Peppi the late one all born

in Jos near Neusiedl am See. And where are

their corpses? No one knows All gone into

Adolf Hitler's exterminating machine

9

Idyll With Farm, 9.9.2002

10

Sad Earth, 1995

Hunted

Before, when we travelled, the old folks would sing and tell stories and suddenly it all changed.... Nothing was allowed any more, we couldn't make fires any more and nobody gave us anything any more. We could feel that we had become undesirable.

That's why we went to Vienna, to the big city where my father had friends, *gadje*. It was easier for the Mama to find a churn of milk or eggs or flour.

So as not to be noticed, my father transformed the caravan into a wooden house. But soon barbed wire was put all around and we weren't allowed to leave. We lived in fear, loss, change. We had to be always on the lookout, in case there was a raid, be ready to grab everything and run away to hide under a tree or in a pile of leaves.

And then they arrested my father and sent him to Dachau.

11

Untitled, 15.03.2003

Back of the painting:

Auschwitz a place without fruit. Dear God where is the bread and sausage? I can only scribble down something like that, Wackar, Sidi, Mitzi, Kathi, Karli, Hansi, Ceija, Ossi. Bread and sausage, there was none of that Auschwitz. When my eyes close, mother with her Sidi children. We were so abandoned back then, so alone. Our mother often didn't know where to hide us from the brown ones. For as long as possible, she crept into the bushes of Vienna's Kongresspark with us. But nothing helped, Auschwitz brought [sucked?] us up. Why SS? What's different today? Hitler, also he wanted his war back then.

12

Shut Up! Mama, where Are You?, 2009

13

Dear God, What's Going On?, 19.7.2002

14

Where's Your Father? They've Taken Father Away, 1943, 17.7.2009

15

Untitled (RS: "The caravan was our cradle."), 15.02.2003

Back of the painting:

Our caravan was our cradle. We are Rom [called Gypsies]. Our, my parents, Sidi, Wackar and her six children, Mitzi, Kathi, Hansi, Karli, Ceija and little Ossi. Back then, in 1942 and before that, Mama slipped into the beautiful park with us, her six children, every bush was good enough for her, every pile of leaves. Our father was already dead then in Dachau. He didn't know what was happening to his small family. Otherwise he would have died twice. We were torn apart, but why, why? They hunted us until they had us all. Back then, sometime in March 1943. The difficult journey of our mother to Auschwitz. They tore us three

sisters apart in the final liquidation in Auschwitz. We lost Kathi in Ravensbrück. Mama and I landed in Bergen-Belsen until the Allied forces freed us. They gave us the light, God bless them. They didn't give up.

16

The SS Shouted: March! We Were Scared, 6.8.2003

17

1943. Ossi, Mum, 8.9.2009

18

The trains are already full, but we have to get in. Come on, come one, hurry up! Come on, everyone, off to Auschwitz! I can't forget it, 05.03.2005

19

"Where are our Roma?" Laaerberg, 1938, 1995

Back of the painting:

Laaerberg [Laaer Breg], 10th district, 1938 Vienna. Where are our Viennese Rom and their surroundings? Back then, most Rom were parked off to that empty, puddy place, treeless, barren, unprotected from the wind. The Rom had to get the water they needed from the nearby houses, something that didn't really suit the Viennese who were tamed by order at that time. Only their caravans are visible and the Rom. But what happened to their horses, the [!] what were taken away from them? And who? And what happened to their valuables, the Rom always had many gold ducats. And then there wasn't a caravan anymore, only a chapel with a Madonna. Decorated in Gothic or by Lurol [?]. Who is responsible for the 50 or more years after that? Is that our legacy? What has been left to us, those who survived the concentration camps, we Austrian Rom also have a right to it. Back then, in 1938, the Rom visited a Gadj in friendship, her name Loli Tschei [Eva Justin], she complimented the Rom and their children, she, Loli Tschei, brought them little gifts and thus, yes thus did

she win over our hearts. The Rom trusted her and told her everything. Later on she handed the Rom over to the Gestapo in Vienna. The SS made and had an easy time of it with their human prey, and also she knew all of the secret places where the Rom were hiding. Laaberg without trees, wind and weather and outlawed.

20

Arrest and Deportation, 1995

21

Untitled, 1995

Back of the painting:

Rounded up by the Gestapo in 1941–44 in Burgenland Neusiedl-See.

The Lovari Romani horse traders, they were about to conquer a young woman.

It was meant to be a Romani wedding in their country where they have the right to live.

A Romani wedding on the frozen lake of Neusiedl.

Christmas and New Year were long ago. And it was the end, too, for the Romani.

The Gestapo pushed onto a truck the innocent Lovari and went with them somewhere only the good God knows and these deportees: murdered The Romani horses didn't come to the K. Z.

But what happened to them? And also with their abandoned caravans the Neusiedl is silent

DITTEL. When the last smoke died in the caravan.

22

You've Had It Now. Heil! – We're Coming, 1993

23

Deportation to an extermination camp, 1994

24

The Last 3 Balloons. There Is Was bleibt? Nichts, Still Place In Auschwitz, 2008

Auschwitz

March 31st, 1943–June 1944

The kapo came in with the whip and said, “You, go and see all the pallets and if someone’s dead you get them out. And the ones on top, you throw them down and you drag them to the main door!” And so I rolled the body, I rolled it to the edge, then thud, down it fell. What was hard was when it was children I’d played and talked with. But in the end you get used to it, besides, you have no choice....

Building a chimney at Auschwitz! Not just one! Five! Night and day it burns. In the night, when the trains arrived, at three in the morning, that was the worst time for us. You hear the brakes screeching and you hear the people’s footsteps, and the kapos with the dogs pushing them forward. The dogs howl, it goes all the way up to the sky. Then you hear their clothes dragging along the ground, you hear them come to the crematoria ovens. And then, for a moment, you hear nothing. Then everything goes quiet, you understand? And then suddenly there’s wind, and the smell comes into the hut. And my mother always said, “I’m sure there must be Romani too among the Jews. Your grandmothers, are they there?”

Twice, I was outside the crematoria ovens, once for two days and two nights, and once for a whole day. The second time, we were ready. We just wanted it to go quickly. And my mother she put it so well: “Over there, your grandmother is waiting for you, and your father, all your people. They are already set to welcome us. Here, we’re alone. Your father is not with you.” She took away our fear. We were disappointed when they brought us back, because we were sure it was going to happen.

25

Untitled, 1994

Back of the painting:

*You think / that you / won't escape me / hee
hee hee / I have found you*

26

Untitled, 2.06.1993

Back of the painting:

*There wasn't a church in Birkenau. I and all of
us, we know that the SS were all-powerful over
us. And yet the SS were also human beings.
26. 05. 1993*

27

Huts In The Camp, Interior/Pallets, 1995

28

*Onwards, onwards, keep going! Back then in
1943-1944. Auschwitz is not a lie, 18.12.2006*

29

SS, 1995

Back of the painting:

*This I find difficult to describe. Forgive, Ceija. The
truth.*

30

To the crematorium, 08.09.2003

31

Dead, undated

32

The destitution

The suffering

I feel it still

19.1.2003

The corpses

near us

the living, undated

33

Auschwitz, 1944. Without Words, 14.2.2006

34

*Mama was our nest. The boys were ashamed
in front of the crematorium. 1944. Before the
final liquidation. The SS were at the end of
their tether. The waiting and the howling
Alsations whining terribly. They pulled at their
leads. The heat was also torture for them. The
sirens wailed so loudly that the animals,
despite their absolute obedience [?]. The
crematorium smoked terribly, 20.05.2004*

Back of the painting:

*Dachau, father died in 1943. March, march, on
you go! Woof, woof, woof / Mama, Sidi, Ossi,
Mongo, Kathi, Ceija, Karli. Mama, we're going
back to the barracks. Yes, children, be very
quiet.*

35

*Mama, The Water Is Cold As Ice. Na dara muri
[don't be scared my... (?)].*

*Get Undressed, Come One, Come On! The
Delousing Powder Was In Those Tin Boxes.
1943. Auschwitz. No 2, 24.2.2005*

36

*Delousing. 1944, Auschwitz. The Naked Truth.
The Caustic Powder in The Bucket, 6.3.2005*

37

*Z.B. Corpses, corpses, corpses, corpses,
corpses., 24.12.2001*

38

Untitled, 19.05.2004

Back of the painting:

*1943-1944 in Auschwitz. It smelled and
smelled of human flesh. The pregnant Jewish
mothers and no-one was there to help them.
The bloodless eyes of the Nazis were dread for
them. The SS only saw human beings in those
they saw fit to be human. The gas ovens
waited n the so unknowing people, back then
when I, we, Gypsies, breathed all cramped
together in the barracks. We saw everything*

through a slit. The SS used the cars as floodlights. It stank and stank.

39

How can you laugh, when you feel so much like crying? Karli, get up! There was nothing to dry ourselves off with in the winter of 1943. The summer days sometime in August 1943, they were nice and warm then. The bath, the caustic liquid, undated

40

Final liquidation in Auschwitz, August 1944. We fall through their nets, 16.01.2002

41

Barrack 10, 1944

42

1(9)44 Auschwitz. We were ashamed, 29.03.2003

43

Auschwitz 1943. We Stood and We Stood, Rigid And Silent. The Bellowing Came From the SS Unit, 22.8.2003

44

Mama, Mama, where are you? They're hitting us, 4.01.2004

45

I Saw This. To The Crematorium. Perished In The Barracks, 24.12.2001
Back of the painting:
The dance on the swastika.

46

1944 Auschwitz. We were ashamed, 01.11.2008

47

Is she dead Mama?, 16.11.2008

48

Barrack 10, 2009

49

When The Ravens Are Hungry They Come Down To The Earth. A Lot Of Unhappy People, 2001

Ravensbrück

June–December 1944

Everything was *verboden* for us in this society, except dying. And it was up to us to work out what we were going to do with this little bit of life, if we were going to die or to struggle.

49

*When The Ravens Are Hungry They Come
Down To The Earth. A Lot Of Unhappy People,*
2001

50

Sad Earth, 28.1.1998

51

The fear of the strength, 1993

Back of the painting

*The fear of the strength / Of the SS who are /
Receiving counting / The new arrivals / We
were paralysed the old / And the new
prisoners / While we all kept silent / The SS
were yelling so loud / That even Satan / Was
afraid of them*

52

Camp of women, Ravensbrück, 23.09.1993

53

The Women Of Ravensbrück, 1944, 18.12.2008

54

*Early In The Morning, 5 O'clock, 1944,
Christmas. Outside Duty With The Guard
Rappel [Rabe]. Kathi, My Sister, Had Swollen
Feet, 25.10.2001*

Bergen-Belsen

January- April 15th, 1945

Bergen-Belsen, my God! You can't imagine it, it's impossible to describe. Sometimes, when I get up in the morning, I say to myself: Ceija, are you in heaven and dreaming? Are you dreaming that you are on earth? You can't have escaped Bergen-Belsen! It can't be!

When we got there, behind that brand-new barbed wire, shining in the sun, the dead, that's the first thing we saw. They were open from top to bottom, gutted, there was only the ribs and the skin, all the guts were gone: that means they had torn them apart and eaten the insides. There were so many corpses, so many.

I was always outdoors, sitting between the dead. That was the only place that was really quiet. You were sheltered from the wind. The Mama knew very well where I was. When she was tired, she came and took me by the hand. To sleep, she would always gather up a little heap of fine dust that she placed under my hips. Or we curled up like crescent moons, with me on her feet and her on mine.

But what was good – it was already spring and nature was hard at work – was that under the huts, on the edge of the planks, the grass was growing. Bright green! So tall! Like milk, with white feet! And I said, “*Mama, dik so barilas kate!* Look what's there!” “*Nevi tschar! Gadi schai chas!* Fresh grass! It's for us!” Burli and I we ate it like it was sugar. We also ate leather laces. When there's nothing left, you eat anything – old rags too! And when we found a belt or a shoe, it was good times!”

Come the liberation, you can't imagine the cries of the Allied soldiers when they saw the camp. So many corpses! The soldiers touching us

to see if we were real, if we were alive! They couldn't understand how we managed to live there, between corpses, that there were still people alive among the dead. How they wept and cried! *We* had to console *them*!

Deep down, we missed them after the Liberation, the dead. They were our protectors and they were human beings. People we had known. And we weren't alone because there were so many souls fluttering around us.

Every time I come back to Bergen-Belsen, it's like a party! The dead fly up in a rustling of wings. They come out, they stir, I can feel them, they are singing, and the sky is full of birds.

55

Come On, 2009

56

9, 1, 4. Allies. Liberation Of Bergen-Belsen, 1945, 16.7.2009

57

Where Is Death? She Escaped Us. 1945, Bergen-Belsen, undated

58

Liberation Of Bergen-Belsen, 1993

Back of the painting:

The liberation at Bergen-Belsen in 1945 by the Allies is and was magnificent.

A true miracle yes when you think that in those days there were no televisions and there was no information for the outside world. Also I think of Bosnia What is happening Why Do the powerful in 1993 Do nothing but watch.

59

1945, Bergen-Belsen, 1994

Back of the painting:

An SS most / cunning / was camouflaged / in the clothes / of a prisoner /94 CS

61

Where Is My Family. Bergen-Belsen 1945, 14.2.2006

62

Untitled, 6.2.2003

Back of the painting:

Back then, when I was invited to Bergen-Belsen after more than 54 years.

The day before dreamed this: the pile of corpses got together and formed to become a giant human bird. One mass grave after the other rose up to become its body. Together they managed to become a human grave bird. It was a dream and the dreams don't let go of me, of us victims.

63

The 15th Of April 1945. We Didn't Yet Know That This Day Was To Be Our Liberation Day. That's The Way It Was, 20.2.2004

Back of the painting:

THEN = 1945 / I WAS / THEN / IN THE MIDDLE / UNDER THEM / PROTECTED BY MY / MAMA / FROM THE OUTSIDE / THERE CAME / NO HELP WHY

64

Dying Of Starvation, 1995

65

Mama, Mamooo. We Are Free. We Didn't Have Any Faces Yet, 20.2.2004

Back to life

When you are alone, it enfolds you. Sometimes, the sorrow turns to melancholy. First there is the sorrow, and then it gets so sad that I want to cry. But afterwards, I feel the union with my people, even if we have been separated so much.

You have to imagine, we were a people that were always, are still thought of as evil. Migrants, Tzigani who steal, who lie, who smell bad, they are witches who cast spells, and I've no idea what else they say about us. But the reality was that we had a family life and any little thing could make us happy. When they saw that, my God, it was four days that we'd been there, then life grew. When we arrived, it was a bud, and now the flower was blooming! And we talked about normal things, everyone was happy, simply, to be making something beautiful with so little, and we raised our children in dignity and respect. And even if it was a caravan or a little room or a bedroom, it didn't matter, honouring the mother or the father and the grandparents, it was done with such respect that the children would have been unhappy if they hadn't been able to live that.

Anyone who survived Bergen-Belsen succeeded only because God gave them the strength to hold on. Because Mary gave them warmth and took away the hunger. That's how we could bear it, without complaining. And where were you going to complain, anyway?

66

*The War is over. Bergen-Belsen, 1945, April.
Auschwitz, Ravensbrück. The wind is blowing
over the concentration camps, 1945, 2005*

67

*Ceija Stojka's Virgin Mary Polychrome Statue,
undated*

68

Untitled, 1995

Back of the painting:

*The Roma's / Sunflower, / it brings grace /
and beauty. / My flower, / my sister Kati, / she
implores the / mother of God to grant her
mercy*

69

Untitled, 11.10.1996

Back of the painting:

*11.10.1996 A life that we, Roms, feared then.
Free and unrestricted, without fear of letter
bomb. And we still live yet.*

70

Corpse, 2007

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