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DETROIT JEWISH NEWS



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Moments Of Humanity

Artist Esther Shalev-Gerz expresses
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Detroit's Wasserman Projects.

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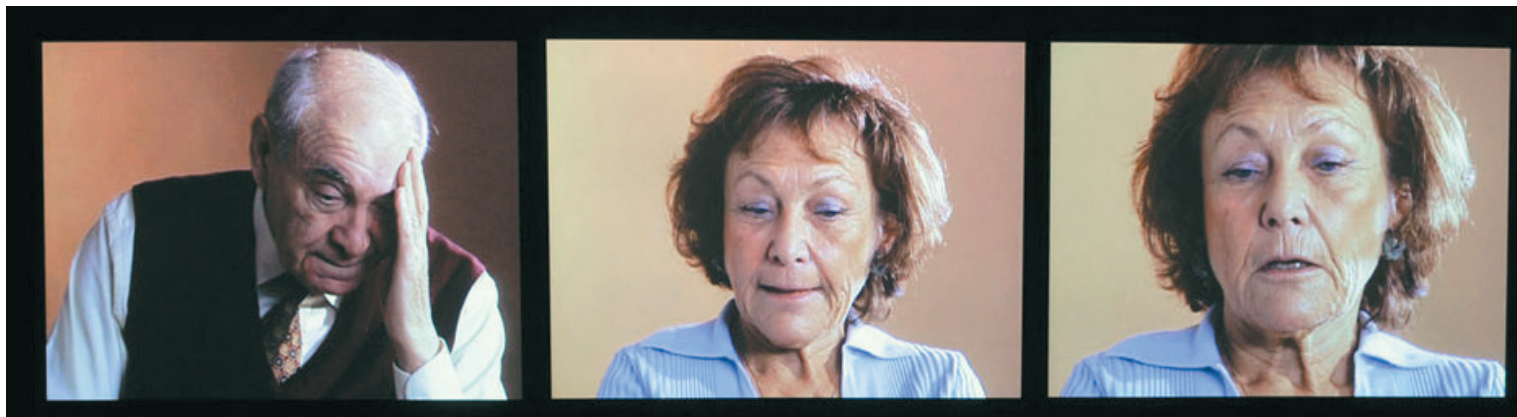


Out To Eat:

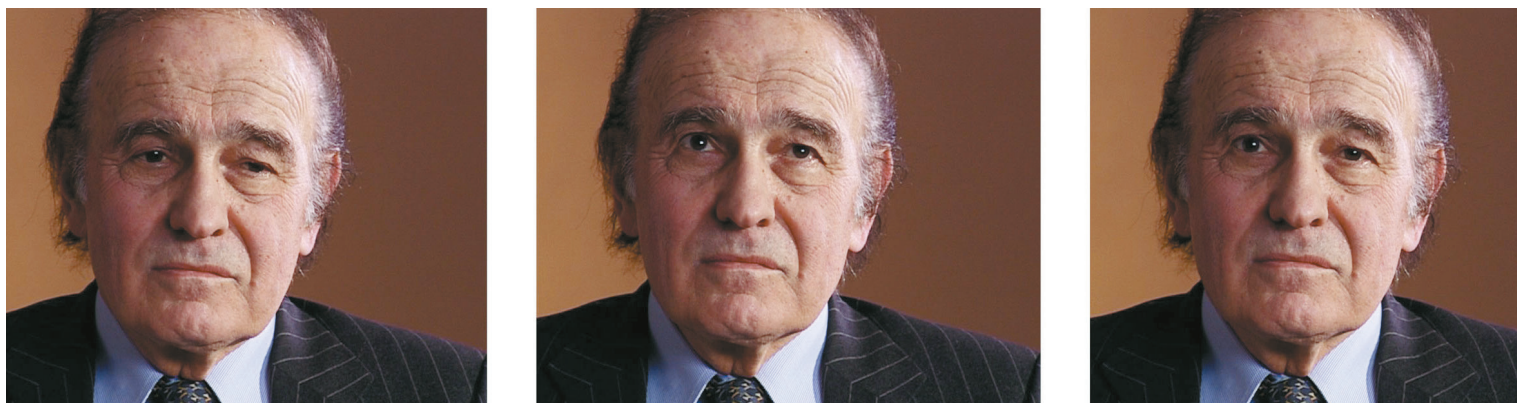
- Cold brew coffee and more.
- Hyde Park Prime Steakhouse.

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LEFT, TOP AND BOTTOM: *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz*, video, 2005. **BOTTOM, LEFT:** *The Open Page: Fragments of the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 2009, shows a “living archive” — a page from a 17th-century English botanical guide. **BOTTOM, CENTER:** *Potential Trust*, animated neon, 2012. **BOTTOM, RIGHT:** *Inseparable Angels: An Imaginary House for Walter Benjamin*; the clock with co-joined faces is one part of a pluralistic installation. Another part is installed in Weimar, Germany, and includes a video of the journey from Weimar to Buchenwald through the windows of a taxi.



Moments Of Humanity

Suzanne Chessler | Contributing Writer



Esther Shalev-Gerz

Esther Shalev-Gerz expresses cultural memory in an exhibit at Detroit's Wasserman Projects.

Esther Shalev-Gerz uses today's high-tech media for artistry that stirs cultural memory.

After developing ideas for installations, she taps experts to help structure the forms with evolving video, photo, lighting and audio equipment. She then often modifies pieces for different installations.

In “Space Between Time,” an exhibit on display through July 9 at Wasserman Projects in Detroit, she is showing eight separate groupings

holding 35 individual pieces.

Among them, the video installation *Last Witnesses* has been modified for viewing. Originally including testimony from French Holocaust survivors, the local presentation of *Last Witnesses* shows only facial expressions as 60 individuals answer questions about what they did before, during and after the war. The complete installation was commissioned by the city of Paris to mark the 60th anniversary of the Auschwitz liberation.

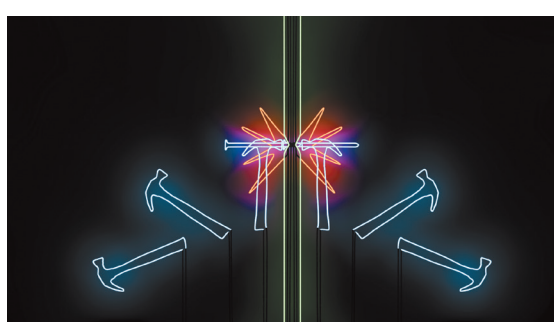
“There are three video projections in this installation,” Shalev-Gerz explains in a phone conversation from her Paris home. “It’s like a triptych, and we see the same film with seven-second intervals. Viewers see each person the moment before answering each question.”

“These were important questions because only survivors can tell us certain things about their lives. They can give this very important testimony, but they have

to look into their memories and decide what words will convey that.

“I wanted to show them going to those places of memory. When we’re watching TV or movies, moments of decision are taken out because they are silent. I used those moments to introduce something human. I think the nonverbal part opens our imagination to what is very gripping.”

Shalev-Gerz, raised and schooled in Israel after her family left Lithuania, also communicates per-



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spectives outside of Judaism. *Potential Trust* is a neon expression of universal sensitivity.

"Visitors see hammers pounding a nail into a central wall," explains the multi-media artist, 67, whose work is in permanent collections and shown internationally. "When the nail is in place, there are hammers on the other side that un-nail the nail.

"When we have an idea, there also is doubt. There always is the potential of constructing something and deconstructing. Every time we do something, we take into account that there are forces other than ours."

Very personal perspectives are communicated through a photographic piece, *The Open Page*, which has some disparate cultural content. Shot at a Vancouver public library, it shows books in the hands of people ranking them as favorites. The books, intricately crafted and in a restricted collection, are held by the workers who monitor them.

"I like to show hands because they hold the hands of others or hold the actions of our bodies that relate to others or objects," she says.

The Detroit exhibit represents a retrospective of Shalev-Gerz's projects over the past 20 years in an effort to open dialogue. Among the places her creativity has been displayed are the Jewish Museum in New York, Moderna Museet in Stockholm and Musee cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne.

"The central theme across my work is about how hard it is to say what we want to say," Shalev-Gerz says. "It's about the ways people see the world around them and communicate so that each viewer can make a voyage that becomes personal."

Shalev-Gerz visited the Motor City several times to plan the layout for the exhibit. While here, she appreciated the architectural finery in some of the older, iconic structures, such as the Fisher and Guardian buildings.

"It was hard to see areas where Detroit has been dissolving, but I also saw places that resisted," she says. "Through my visits, I saw how the city is slowly turning around.

"So many people came to the exhibit opening, and there was so much energy. It's exciting to have people wanting to talk to me about each piece and listen to the videos."

The artist, who will be returning to the gallery June 18 for another talk, created three pieces specifically for this display. One explores the ways video projects are altered by changes made in a cutting room; the other two describe a woman forced to sing at Auschwitz and probes the act of preparing oneself to die.

Shalev-Gerz's became interested in art while in high school in Jerusalem.

"We had to go to museums," she says. "I was flabbergasted that each hall would go through a complete refurbishing for every exhibition. I saw new art and contemporary ideas.

"I wanted to speak to the world through art. I went to the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and did an exhibition in Israel, where [a stone sculpture] is still standing."

As her projects expanded, Shalev-Gerz spent a year in New York and moved to Paris in 1984. She is married to her third husband, Dr. Christopher Fleischer. Her daughter, Ayelet Shalev, is an architect in Seattle.

Although the artist lived religiously for

years while in Israel, she now expresses religious commitments through the attention accorded in her work. A monument against fascism stands in Hamburg as a tall column inviting people to sign their names in support of the concept represented.

Shalev-Gerz, who taught for 12 years at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, travels to present workshops and give talks at art schools and museums.

"I just opened an exhibition in a London gallery," she discloses. "For Geneva, the city of watches, I am doing a double clock for a public space; it will be like the one shown in Detroit, where two clock faces are merged with one moving forward and the other moving backward." She also has recently been commissioned by the University of British Columbia to do a piece.

Shalev-Gerz divides her time between two studios, one next to her home in Paris and one near her summer cabin on Vancouver Island, where she can be close to nature while connecting with artists representing many disciplines. "There are lots of artists from every part of the world living there," she says. "There's a community that makes a lot of exchanges of ideas." *

details

"Space Between Time" runs through July 9 at Wasserman Projects in Detroit, where the artist will speak at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 18. (313) 818-3550; wassermanprojects.com.



THIS PHOTO: Shalev-Gerz's installations at Wasserman Projects



Gary Wasserman

Art Project

Suzanne Chessler | Contributing Writer

Gary Wasserman was visiting Paris when a long-known artist and a long-known art dealer separately urged him to see an exhibition featuring work by Esther Shalev-Gerz.

Wasserman, a lifelong art collector always looking for new viewing opportunities, immediately became impressed with Shalev-Gerz's multi-media pieces and decided to make his experiences accessible to Metro Detroiters.

That accessibility resides in his innovative interdisciplinary venue, Wasserman Projects, a 5,500-square foot space located in a former fire-

station maintenance building on the north side of Eastern Market, where the artist is scheduled to return for a presentation about her exhibit, "Space Between Time." (See adjoining article.)

"I was impressed by the sweeping intellectual insight, content and emotion [conveyed through] Esther's work and the idea of the 'space between time' as the thread that pulls all of these different works together," Wasserman explains, referring to intervals between hearing and listening, between seeing and comprehending and between comprehending and responding.

"The Jewish element especially con-

nected with me as a Jewish person. There are several works in the exhibit that are very steeped in awareness of the Holocaust and its aftermath."

Wasserman, a supporter of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, was particularly taken with *The Imaginary House for Walter Benjamin*, an installation showing viewers the short distance from the place that had been the pinnacle of German-Jewish intellectualism to a place that became the nadir of behavior as enacted at a concentration camp.

Wasserman, CEO of Troy-based Allied Metals Corp., also feels a tie to the exhibit subjects because of spending so much time in Germany, where the corporation has its European headquarters.

The decision to open an arts showplace developed in the summer of 2012, when he noticed an emerging artistic community in Detroit. The Detroit native had left the state for



ABOVE LEFT: *Describing Labor – Learning a Trade in a Garment Factory*, archival pigment print, 2012, is a print of a 1930 Lewis W. Hine photograph of the same name.
ABOVE RIGHT: *Describing Labor: Miners*, 1937, shows a woodcut by Chet La More.

about 15 years before returning, excited by the city's energetic renaissance. Starting out with a Birmingham locale allowed him to become acclimated to the initiative, which moved to Detroit last September.

"It was always the mission to be part of the growing, creative community in Detroit, but I went to Birmingham when we started because I needed to learn," explains Wasserman, who divides his time between Detroit, Miami and New York.

"I had never had a gallery so it was a very good set of logistics to be co-located with Arkitektura. The idea was never to be a conventional gallery; the idea was always to be an exhibition space, concert space and cultural venue with a gallery function — and to be part of the growing urban experience."

Wasserman had a hard time finding suitable quarters to meet his varied goals so was pleased when a large,

100-year-old building became available at Eastern Market. It had been used as a maintenance garage and warehouse and needed considerable refurbishing.

"Through all the vicissitudes of Detroit's existence, Eastern Market has been one place that has been loved, cherished and valued by people of all races, creeds and cultures," says Wasserman, who serves on the board of Eastern Market as well as musical organizations, including the Ojai Music Festival in California and the Knights Chamber Orchestra in New York state.

"Eastern Market is a truly urban experience where diversity of people meets diversity of commerce, and to be part of that neighborhood had so much to do with what was attractive about this entire project. The reward of being in Detroit — and part of the extraordinary excitement that gets larger by the day — became the reason to do this." *

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