

# Israeli artist's lost work found in Schindler's suitcase

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**WINNIPEG** — Several original works of art by Israeli artist Joseph Bau, hidden for over 20 years in a suitcase in Germany are now, along with the suitcase, at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem.

The story, which has a Canadian connection, has only recently been made public.

Joseph Bau's daughters, Hadasa Bau Rosenblatt and Chila Bau Cohen, first heard about the suitcase when a German newspaper reporter, Claudia Keller, left a message in English on their



Joseph Bau, 1962, Lino-cut on paper. Courtesy of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Jerusalem, Israel.

father's answering machine in his studio in Tel Aviv last February.

"She said, 'You need to know there are seven beautiful paintings in the suitcase, and one is of a violin player and another is of a peace dove,'" recalled Bau Rosenblatt, who lives in Winnipeg with her husband, a local high school teacher, several months each year.

The suitcase, which was given to Yad Vashem a year ago by the family that found it, belonged to German industrialist Oskar

Schindler, whose story was immortalized in director Steven Spielberg's 1993 movie, *Schindler's List*, and in an earlier book of the same name by Australian author Thomas Keneally. Schindler died in poverty in Germany in 1974 at age 66.

Mr. Bau, now 80 and in poor health, was one of some 1,200 Jews who survived the last months of World War II in relative safety at Schindler's factory in Brinnlitz, in the former Czechoslovakia. An exhibit of over 20 of his drawings and paintings, which were the subject of an article in the *Globe and Mail* last August, were on display at the Jewish Heritage Centre at the Asper Jewish Community Campus for three months last spring and summer, and later at the Calgary Jewish Centre.

How the suitcase came to be found reads like a plot from a spy story.

Stored in the attic of a home in Hildesheim, Germany, for over 20 years, the suitcase was re-discovered three years ago after the death of the home's owner, Dr. Heine Staehr.

David Crowe, a history professor at Elon College in Greensboro, North Carolina, who has examined the suitcase's contents and is currently writing a biography of Oskar Schindler, notes that Dr. Staehr's wife, Ami, who died in 1988, was Oskar Schindler's last lover.

"After he [Dr. Staehr] died, his kids were going to give up the apartment and the two sons and a daughter-in-law went to clean out the personal stuff and in the attic they found a huge wooden box and inside it was a grey Samonsite suitcase," he explained during a recent telephone interview.

"It said 'O. Schindler.' So they took it home and left it there for a few months and then went through it."

Later, one of the brothers who had befriended Keller some years before, loaned her the suitcase and its contents. When Keller received a telephone call from Staehr asking her if she wanted "to have a look" inside the suitcase, she jumped at the opportunity.

In October 1999, Keller and fellow journalist Stefan Braun wrote a series of articles on Schindler and the suitcase for the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*.

"Schindler would come and stay there [in the Staehr house] for three or four weeks. One day Schindler came with his suitcase and asked her [Ami Staehr] to take care of it," commented Keller, who now works for the Berlin daily newspaper, *Tagesspiegel*.

Besides Bau's paintings, she also found correspondence between Schindler and many of the Jews he had saved.

Keller, who noted that there were also some personal, or "love," letters between Schindler and Ami Staehr in the suitcase, said, "It was so amazing to have these letters in my hand."

After sifting through the material, she called Joseph Bau and other Schindler Jews to, as Keller mused, find out "what it was like" to be one of those fortunate few on his famous list.

"My father gave the paintings to Oskar Schindler more than 30 years ago as a gift because he knew how much he [Schindler]

loved his work," Bau Rosenblatt said.

"He always called my father 'my little son.' Whenever Schindler came to Israel, he was always at the opening of my father's art exhibitions."

Bau Rosenblatt added that some of her father's original art work from the war, which was exhibited in Krakow, Poland in 1945, was taken to the U.S. by an unscrupulous dealer and has never been seen since.

Joseph Bau's work can be viewed on the Internet at [www.josephbau.com](http://www.josephbau.com).