



Not long ago. Not far away.

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New World Record for Largest Watercolor Painting Set at *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* Exhibition in Boston to Honor Holocaust Prisoners

In collaboration with third-generation Holocaust survivor and Boston artist Eli Portman, the 180-square-foot painting is inspired by priceless personal letters, postcards, and artwork sent by prisoners to their loved ones

Boston, MA – A new world record was set this week at the world-renowned traveling exhibition [Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.](#) for the World's Largest Watercolor Painting. This record-breaking watercolor was created in collaboration with local artist and third-generation Holocaust survivor Eli Portman, who put the final brush strokes on the piece on July 31st, 2024 in the exhibition, which is now in its final weeks at the Castle at Park Plaza. The watercolor uses 180-square-feet to recreate beautiful watercolor pieces made by prisoners in German Nazi concentration camps during WWII. This breaks the previous record of 160-square-feet, set in Craig, CO in 2020.

The imagery of this record-setting watercolor is of great significance as it draws inspiration from invaluable personal letters and postcards sent by concentration camp prisoners Friedrich Hoyer and Josef Matoušek. Very rarely, non-Jewish prisoners were allowed to correspond with family back home; when they did, all messages had to be written in German and be cheerful in nature. When the lucky few prisoners who met these requirements had access to watercolor paints and brushes, they would paint peaceful scenes or special images for their relatives. Hoyer, who was imprisoned for being a leading communist and socialist in Augsburg, painted a red rose for his wife's 50th birthday in 1934. Josef Matousek was a student in Veselí nad Lužnicí before he was incarcerated in the concentration camps in 1940. While in the camps, he was able to send at least three letters that we know of to his family, each of which contained various pieces of art. In one letter, he asked a friend to paint a watercolor depicting a pleasant, rolling field of lush greenery—a stark contrast to the conditions at the camps.

To commemorate Hoyer's and Matoušek's works, Boston's own watercolor artist, Eli Portman, stepped up to the task of recreating them on a massive scale. Portman, a grandson of Holocaust survivors, has worked in watercolor for many years. Upon finishing the piece, he expressed that, "It was an honor to be entrusted to create the World's Largest Watercolor in collaboration with the *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* exhibition." When asked about the design of the piece, Eli said, "I was inspired by the watercolors of prisoners for the imagery and decided to make the piece 180-square-feet to represent the significance of the number 18 in Judaism. Eighteen corresponds to the Hebrew word 'chai' (חַי), which translates to 'life'. This painting was created to remember the lives of all those who were lost during the Holocaust and keep their memories alive." His maternal grandfather, Abraham Eliezer, whom Eli is named after, was drafted into the Polish army in his early twenties and ended up a captive of Soviet soldiers during World War II. Eli's paternal grandmother, Marion Portman, emigrated to the US from Hamburg, Germany in 1941 with her parents and two sisters. They had been trying to leave Germany for many years prior as conditions for the Jewish community worsened and, finally, got passage on one of the last ships carrying Jews out of Europe. He has had even more time to reflect on his grandparents' struggles and resilience while completing this piece among artifacts from so many families like his.

Hoyer's card, among other watercolor works done by concentration camp prisoners, is just one of the over 700 artifacts featured in *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* The exhibition was created by Musealia in cooperation with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum and promoted locally by World Heritage

Exhibitions. It features authentic, original objects from one of the most devastating periods in history. "*Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* is an unprecedented exhibition filled with unique artifacts, including Hoyer's touching gift to his wife and vibrant watercolor paintings, that patrons across this region may never have the opportunity to see again," shared Luis Ferreiro, Director of Musealia. "Having this record-breaking watercolor created using the original art from concentration camp prisoners just adds to this exhibition's unparalleled content, which I implore everyone to see before we close on September 15th."

The artifacts in *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* range from concrete posts that were part of the fence of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp; large portions of an original prisoners' barrack from the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp; and a gas mask used by the SS garrison members who staffed the concentration camp system in Nazi Germany; to passports, prisoner entry forms, false identity cards used by Jews escaping persecution, handwritten notes, and more which tell the stories of lives cut short. The exhibition is in its final weeks at The Castle at Park Plaza and will close on September 15th. To purchase tickets and learn more about this exhibition, please visit TheAuschwitzExhibition.com.

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About Musealia:

Musealia is an independent Spanish company that creates and manages global touring exhibitions, which inspire us all to explore the past, understand the present and shape our collective future. With more than 20 years of international experience, their exhibitions are characterized by their strong narrative character, their historical rigor, educational value, and emotional impact. More than 70 museums and institutions in countries such as the United States, Mexico, Germany, and Spain have hosted their exhibitions.

About the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial:

Fulfilling the wish of survivors, on July 2, 1947, the Polish parliament created the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on the site of two preserved parts of the former German Nazi camp: Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The Memorial today includes an Archive and a Collections department, and undertakes research, conservation, and publishing activities. It is, above all, an education center that teaches visitors about the history of Auschwitz and the Shoah. More than 2 million people visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum every year.

About World Heritage Exhibitions:

World Heritage Exhibitions (WHE) is renowned for producing, promoting, and designing the finest quality museum content on the globe. Their exhibitions have captivated, educated, and inspired visitors in virtually every major market on the planet. With a combined 150 years of exhibition experience, the WHE executive team has been responsible for touring many of the world's most valuable treasures, including objects from King Tutankhamun's tomb, relics from Cleopatra's Royal Palace, artifacts from the Titanic, items from the discovery of Pompeii, and more.

Their exhibitions have now been enjoyed by over 30 million people spanning six continents, and their collective expertise has come together in one of the industry's most influential touring exhibition companies.

In 2021, World Heritage Exhibitions became a part of NEON, a global leader in immersive experiences that is responsible for the touring phenomena "Jurassic World: The Exhibition," "Harry Potter: Visions of Magic," "AVATAR: The Experience," and more. WHE and NEON have brought their expertise together to launch the awe-inspiring, artifact-based exhibitions "Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs" and "Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru." Coupled with some of the most successful artifact exhibitions on tour: "Mummies of the World: The Exhibition," "Pompeii: The Exhibition," "Victoria the T. rex," and "Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away," their collective exhibition and I.P. portfolio now highlight some of the most significant items and events in history with many of the most sought-after I.P. properties.

About Eli Portman:

Eli Portman was born and raised in the Greater Boston area. He graduated from the State University of New York at Binghamton with a Bachelor's Degree in 2014 and has been working and teaching in various mediums

ever since, though his specialty is watercolors. Portman has created murals and custom artwork for companies such as Starbucks, Walmart, and the City of Boston, to name a few. He has displayed his work in the Fountain Street Gallery, the Selfless Art Gallery, and more. He is a member of the Copley Society of Art and regularly has his illustrations published in various media. View Eli Portman's portfolio [HERE](#).