



Dear friends of the Museum,

Having bid farewell to the old year, we kindly invite you to recall the most important and interesting moments in the Museum's life in the period from July to December 2017. We thank you for your friendship and hope that you will stay with us in the New Year 2018!

All the best,

Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum team

## OPENING OF THE SAMUEL BAK MUSEUM

On 16 November 2017, the official grand opening of a new branch of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum – the Samuel Bak Museum – took place. The new museum exhibits 37 paintings by the world-famous artist Samuel Bak, which the artist donated to Lithuania.

Samuel Bak was born in 1933 in Vilnius. At the age of just nine years he held his first exhibition of drawings. Samuel Bak miraculously survived the Nazi occupation and ended up at a displaced persons camp in Germany. Later the artist lived in Israel and Western Europe. In 1993 Samuel Bak settled down in the United States of America where he continues with his creative endeavours. The artist creates in an authentic style of allegoric realism and raises ever topical issues of the world's fragile nature, search for human identity and ability to recover from a catastrophe.



The opening ceremony of the Samuel Bak Museum was attended by over a hundred high-ranking state officials and public figures, foreign diplomats and guests, including the artist himself with his family. Director of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum Markas Zingeris, head of the Samuel Bak Museum Ieva Šadzevičienė, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania Liana Ruokytė-Jonsson, Mayor of Vilnius Remigijus Šimašius, Member of Parliament Emanuelis Zingeris, and Ambassador of the United States of America Anne Hall addressed the audience. Architect and designer Viktorija Sideraitė Alon introduced the concept of the museum's exposition, while Deividas Matulionis, advisor to Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, read a letter of thanks from the Prime Minister.

The final touch of the evening was the speech by Samuel Bak who was conferred with Honorary Citizenship of Vilnius this year on the initiative of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.



“I am at an age in which most of my future is behind my back. And I can happily smile because I was very lucky,” Samuel Bak said. “My art is appreciated. It provides me with a decent living and allows me to create in full liberty. It has granted me prizes, awards, and honorary doctorates, wonderful recognitions of achievement. But whenever it happened – I felt alone.

Not so today. Today <...> I have a keen feeling that a whole crowd surrounds me. My father, my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and a huge crowd of faceless Jews of old, old Vilnius, a multitude of people, a third of the city’s population, whose lives came to a most tragic end. And all are proud of their boy; all are delighted with the exceptionality of this event. It is for their sake that I have donated to the Lithuanian state a large collection of my artistic output. It is to their memory that I dedicate the Bak Museum.”

On the day of the opening of the museum the famous painter, represented by the Pucker Gallery, donated to Lithuania and the museum 54 of his works. In the foreseeable future, when the second part of the exposition space and the education centre opens, the museum’s collection will expand even further and as a result will host a total of 125 paintings by Samuel Bak.

The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum thanks its partners and sponsors who helped with the successful implementation of the first stage of the opening of the Samuel Bak Museum and hopes for further mutually beneficial cooperation in expanding the museum’s exposition space.

Samuel Bak Museum exposition coordinator – Ieva Šadzevičienė, designer – Viktorija Sideraitė Alon. ■



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## VILNA GAON STATE JEWISH MUSEUM TAKES PART IN EHRI-2 – A PROJECT THAT UNITES THE HOLOCAUST RESEARCH COMMUNITY

European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) started its work in 2010 with financial support from the European Union. More than twenty organisations – research institutions, libraries, archives, museums and memorial sites – form the core working group of the project. The aim of the project is to provide diverse support to the Holocaust research community. By developing a digital infrastructure and a human network, EHRI thereby seeks to overcome one of the hallmark challenges of Holocaust research: the wide dispersal of the archival source material. Institutions that are associated with the project and hold Holocaust-related collections are invited to integrate information about their collections in the EHRI Online Portal [www.ehri-project.eu](http://www.ehri-project.eu). EHRI also offers an extensive programme of research, training and education events, including workshops, conferences and seminars.



The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum is the only institution in the Baltic countries taking part in the EHRI-2 project in the period 2015-2019. Participation in such an ambitious international project alongside such major and influential institutions as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (USHMM), Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, the Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) in Koblenz and many others is highly significant for such a small country as Lithuania. Moreover, it significantly increases the visibility of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum on the international arena of the Holocaust research.

In 2016, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum together with its partners – the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich – held a successful summer seminar in Vilnius “Languages, Culture and Perspective – How to Read Holocaust Sources” which was attended by over a dozen Holocaust researchers from a number of European countries and Israel. In summer 2017, the Museum together with the Memorial de la Shoah held a summer seminar in Trieste “The Nazi Occupation and the Extermination of the European Jews: Sources, Methods and Interpretations: A Focus on Italy and Lithuania”.

The annual meeting of the EHRI-2 project partners takes place in a different country every year. In 2018, on the occasion of the Centenary of the Restoration of the Lithuanian State, the annual meeting of the EHRI-2 project partners will take place in Vilnius. ■

## PLEASE MEET THE MUSEUM TEAM!

### *Viktorija Sideraitė Alon*

*- You have been working at the Museum as a project manager for seven years now. You created the design project for the exhibition "Samuel Bak. Stations in Life" and the design of the Samuel Bak Museum which opened in November. What makes the museum's design concept exceptional and unique?*

The first challenge in the field of exposition design when working at the VGSJM was Samuel Bak's exhibition "Stations in Life" back in 2011. Even then, seven years ago, I succeeded in plugging into and understanding the narrative painting of Samuel Bak which is so metaphoric and full of symbols. To tell the truth, I did not manage to do it all at once and only succeeded after I read the painter's memoirs. I realised that when taken out of the context of the painter's biography, his art loses a major share of its emotional charge. Samuel Bak excelled as a master of painting as a result of studying at various European art academies, but his art looks absolutely different in the context of his life. The experience with the first exhibition greatly contributed to the visual concept of the Samuel Bak Museum which has recently opened: lit paintings hanging in a dark space like symbolic windows leading to the light and to the world.

The success of the project can be explained by the fact that the symbolism of the paintings was further strengthened by the symbolic design of the exposition. The entire museum became one single piece of art radiating a strong and uniform aesthetic, philosophical and semantic message, which is individually perceived by every single museum visitor. It all has been achieved with minimum means: with the help of nothing else but walls, paintings and light, which are the three necessary features. The darkly painted walls vanish in a dimly lit space. It becomes difficult to assess the spacial dimensions of the museum and all your eyes can see are nothing else but the paintings.

*- What does the Samuel Bak Museum and friendship with the painter mean to you personally?*

I perceive my communication with Samuel Bak as a great gift in life.

The Samuel Bak Museum was one of the biggest challenges in my creative life in recent years. I felt an enormous responsibility for the project, because I knew how important this museum was for Samuel Bak himself and realised that I could not merely create yet another run-of-the-mill museum. The painter refused to comment on my solutions during the design stage by saying that he trusted me entirely. Certainly, I valued his trust very much, but this also meant that I was the only one responsible for the final outcome, for every single success or failure. This is why now I am ever happier that I was not mistaken. The greatest satisfaction and symbolic pay for this enormous work is the admiration of Samuel Bak himself for the project. I heard him say that no one ever managed to reveal the essence of his creative endeavours better than this exposition. Could there be any better assessment?

*- What are your wishes for the current and future visitors of the Samuel Bak Museum?*

I hope that visitors to the Samuel Bak Museum will view his paintings with open hearts, then all the



answers to all these questions will reveal themselves and, certainly, they will all get different answers... This is what makes the art of Samuel Bak so infinite. Every time you look at his paintings you perceive them differently as there are a countless interpretations of the symbols depicted in his works. I also honestly suggest that every single visitor should take their time watching the video material and listen to the wisdom of Samuel Bak recorded there. It is not that often that we have a chance in life to meet such an impressive, strong and unique personality.

*- How do design concepts of various exhibitions or museums come to life?*

Most often it's the content that gives birth to an exhibition or a museum concept. A good concept lays the foundation for a museum's success. When working on the design concept of an exhibition I often rely on the emotional perception of its content, the semantics that lie in details and, certainly, my own experience and knowledge.

*- The majority of the VGSJM staff have pets. Do you also have one? If yes, could you please say a few words about your pet (how it came to live with you, its ultimate trick, etc.)?*

We are a non-traditional family: we are Israelis living in Vilnius. At home we all speak Hebrew, even though we all also speak Lithuanian. We have four daughters: two of them walk on two legs and the other two walk on four legs. Our Dachshund Zylè and a Cornwall princess cat Puma are the true nurturers of my spiritual serenity, they are the source of my calmness and positivity.

*- What do you most like to do when you are not working? What do you do to relax after a hard day's work?*

I really love Vilnius. In my free time, I like walking along the streets of the Old Town or I drive to the outskirts of Vilnius for walks with my dog Zylè. I read a lot and like browsing for quality content on the internet, which I can then listen to or read in various languages. Creating is what I enjoy most, I am never tired of creating...

*- What inspires you most in your daily work? What are the challenges?*

I like creating with a team of like-minded people, which, by the way, allows achieving the best possible result. I am so happy that I have several different outstanding teams of like-minded creative friends to work with on various projects (in several different design areas). Together we experience the true inspiration and joy of creating. ■

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Follow us on the Museum's website [jmuseum.lt](http://jmuseum.lt) and [Facebook](#).

PLEASE SUPPORT THE VILNA GAON STATE JEWISH MUSEUM  
AND ITS ON-GOING EXPANSION PROJECTS –

establishment of the Museum of Litvak Culture and Identity,  
stage II of the Samuel Bak Museum and  
the renovation of Jacques Lipchitz Memorial Museum – via [PAYPAL](#).

Your donations are of utmost importance for us!

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## INTERESTING FACTS

### Museum activities over the second half of 2017:

Number of exhibitions opened	3 (total in 2017: 7)
Number of events held	11 (total: 25)
Number of educational events held	58 (total: 114)
Number of visitors received	16161 (total: 28282)
Guests received at the Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speaker of the Parliament Viktoras Pranckietis</li><li>• Chairman of the Supreme Council (Reconstituent Seimas) Vytautas Landsbergis</li><li>• First Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans</li><li>• Writer and actress Reglindis Rauca, granddaughter of the Nazi war criminal Helmut Rauca</li><li>• Famous US composer of Litvak origin, Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award winner David Lang</li><li>• Special US Envoy on Holocaust Issues Thomas K. Yazgerdi</li><li>• Director of Vaclav Havel Library in Prague Michael Zantovsky</li></ul>

## CONTACTS AND WORKING HOURS OF THE EXPOSITION SITES

### TOLERANCE CENTRE and SAMUEL BAK MUSEUM

Naugarduko St. 10/2, Vilnius  
tel. 00370 5 212 0112  
e-mail: muziejus@jmmuseum.lt

#### Working hours

*I-IV: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.*

*V: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

*VI: closed*

*VII: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

### HOLOCAUST EXPOSITION

Pamėnkalnio St. 12, Vilnius  
tel. 00370 5 262 0730  
e-mail: jewishmuseum@jmmuseum.lt

#### Working hours

*I-IV: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.*

*V: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

*VI: closed*

*VII: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

### MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF PANERIAI

Agrasty St. 15, Vilnius  
tel. +370 699 90 384, +370 662 89 575  
e-mail: neringa@jmmuseum.lt,  
mantas.siksnianas@jmmuseum.lt

#### Working hours

*I: closed*

*II-VII: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.*

*Since October until May the museum is opened by appointment only.*

Photo credit: Paulius Račiūnas, Artūras Morozovas.