



The first six months of 2018 were generous in events and honourable guests. The Museum opened three exhibitions and received a visit from Samuel Bak, who was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order for Merits to Lithuania and held a meeting with the Museum's visitors. Please find a more exhaustive review of the most interesting moments from the recent six months of the Museum's activities and meet Danutė Selčinskaja, who for more than 10 recent years has been coordinating the Museum's work with information about the rescuers of Jews and those who were rescued during the Holocaust.

Yours,  
Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum team

## Review of Museum Events

### VISITORS of the MUSEUM LEARNED ABOUT JEWISH COMMUNITIES of INDIA and GHANA

On 18 January, professor Audrius Beinorius gave a lecture at the Museum 'Jews in India's History, Culture and Politics' and on 8 February Janice R. Levi, a PhD student from the University of California (USA), delivered a lecture 'The Curious Case of the Ghanaian Jews'. The lecturers shared a lot of interesting facts about the origin, development and traditions of Indian and Ghanaian Jews and abundantly illustrated their presentations with photographs. ■

### EXHIBITION 'RAFAEL CHWOLES: PORTRAITS of VILNIUS RESIDENTS BETWEEN 1945-1959' ALLOWED to TAKE a UNIQUE GLIMPSE at the CITY DWELLERS of mid-20th CENTURY

On 27 February, the exhibition 'Their Eyes Are On Us, We Too Are Looking at Them. Rafael Chwoles: Portraits of Vilnius Residents Between 1945-1959' was opened at the Tolerance Center of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum in cooperation with the French Institute of Lithuania. The exhibition will remain open for visitors until 31 August 2018. ■



## FRIENDSHIP MEMORANDUM SIGNED with HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE in JAPAN

On 16 April, a delegation from the Holocaust Education Center located in Fukuyama (Japan) visited the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. The delegation headed by the Center's Deputy Director Akio Yoshida held a meeting with the Museum's director Markas Zingeris to discuss future cooperation opportunities. During the meeting intensifying bilateral relations between Lithuania and Japan were discussed and a Friendship Memorandum was signed. ■

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## NIGHT of MUSEUMS

On 19 May, the Tolerance Centre and the Holocaust Exposition of the Museum held events devoted to the Night of Museums (lectures on Jewish art and history, guided tours, free museum visits), which attracted almost 500 visitors from among Vilnius residents and guests of the city. ■

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## SAMUEL BAK MET with ADMIRERS of HIS ARTWORK



On 22 May, prominent painter Samuel Bak held a meeting with admirers of his artwork in Vilnius, where last year the Samuel Bak Museum was opened as a branch of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. Bak shared stories from his childhood years in Vilnius and his later life elsewhere in the world, talked about his creative path and could not stop smiling at the Museum's visitors and signing autographs. Moreover, during the first six months of 2018 two teleconferencing events were held between the Samuel Bak Museum in Vilnius and the artist's studio in Boston. ■





## EXHIBITION 'MOMENTS. FROM the LITHUANIAN JEWISH HISTORY' OPENED in SÃO PAULO

On 26 May, exhibition 'Moments. From the Lithuanian Jewish History' featuring photographs from the collection of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum was opened at the Ema Klabin Museum in São Paulo, Brazil. The event was part of the festival 'Labas!' organized at the initiative of the Consulate General of Lithuania in São Paulo and Brazil's Lithuanian Community.



## GRAPHIC ART EXHIBITION 'JOURNEY' INVITED to TRAVEL in SPACE and TIME

On 30 May, exhibition 'Journey' presenting graphic art by Taibé Chait opened at the Tolerance Centre of the Museum. The exhibition will remain open for visitors until 23 September 2018.

## LITHUANIA in ARTISTIC CHILDHOOD MEMORIES of WORLD-FAMOUS ARTISTS: EXHIBITION 'LITHUANIA in LITVAK ARTS'

On 6 June, exhibition 'Lithuania in Litvak Arts' dedicated to the Centennial of the restored State of Lithuania was opened at the Tolerance Centre of the Museum. The exhibition presents over 40 pieces of artwork from Lithuanian and foreign museums, including private collections, and 30 information stands in English and Lithuanian, including two unique films. The exhibition is accompanied by an audio guide for the visually impaired. On 22 June, a simplified version of the exhibition was opened at the Southwest University of Chongqing in China. The exhibition 'Lithuania in Litvak Arts' will remain open for visitors until 16 November 2018.



## VIOLIN of DANIEL POMERANTZ, a VIOLIN VIRTUOSO and PIONEER of JAZZ MUSIC in LITHUANIA, BECAME PART of the MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

On 11 June, violinist, educator Prof Danutė Pomerantz-Mazurkevich, whose miraculous rescue story from the Kanas Ghetto during the Holocaust was presented in the documentary 'Sisters', visited the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. We extend our sincere gratitude to our guest for the valuable gifts: the violin manufactured in Paris in 1806, which belonged to the famous violin virtuoso and pioneer of Jazz music in Lithuania Daniel Pomerantz and which will definitely enrich the collection of the upcoming Museum of Litvak Culture and Identity as a long-term deposit, and the vinyl record 'Sukas Ratukus', which from now on belongs to the Museum. ■

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## EHRI PARTNERS HELD THEIR MEETING at the MUSEUM

On 27-28 June, the annual meeting of partners of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) was held at the Tolerance Centre of the Museum. EHRI is financed by the European Union and boasts 24 member organisations, such as research institutes, libraries, archives, museums and memorial sites.

Annual meetings of EHRI partners take place in a different country every year and are regularly attended by around 70 researchers of the Holocaust, archivists and museum specialists. This year, on the occasion of the Centennial of the restored State of Lithuania, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum invited the participants of the project to hold their meeting in Vilnius. Besides the regular programme of the annual meeting, which included discussions about the project, annual results and workshops, the attendees were offered guided tours around the former Vilna Ghetto, Tolerance Center and the Samuel Bak Museum, and got acquainted with the activities of the Museum.

EHRI regularly organizes research and study programs, educational activities, workshops, conferences and seminars. The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum is the only institution in the Baltic States 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. ■



## PLEASE MEET the MUSEUM TEAM!

### DANUTĖ SELČINSKAJA, HEAD of the DEPARTMENT for COMMEMORATION of RESCUERS of JEWS

*- How long have you been working at the Museum and coordinating the activities of the Righteous Gentiles and Commemoration Department?*

I have been working at the Museum since the end of 2003. Since 2004, I have been coordinating all activities related to information about the Jews who survived the Holocaust in Lithuania, including their rescuers.

*- Please tell us about your typical day at the Museum.*

My daily activities include the never ending revision of my department's archival database. On my desk you would always find several archival files of those who helped to rescue Jews. My daily goal when working on these files is always the same: to find out more about a particular case of rescuing Jews and to reconstruct the exact story of rescue, to establish who rescued whom and what were the exact circumstances of rescuing. This is not an easy task at all. It is not always that we have an exhaustive testimony of the rescued person. Most of the survivors are long gone by now and we need to search for the progeny of both the rescued and the rescuer. My colleagues from the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations in Yad Vashem, regional museum specialists and researchers interested in the topic, including the Jews who have been rescued during the Holocaust, for example Dr Jacob Silberg and others, have been really helpful in the process. The long-standing assistance of Icchok Mer in finding the rescued Jews in Israel and convincing them to send their testimonies to our Museum and to Yad Vashem was extremely valuable. I kept extensively communicating with members of the Union of Ghetto and Concentration Camp Prisoners of the Lithuanian Jewish Community who survived the occupation of Lithuania. Among them were such prominent individuals as Tobijas Jafetas, Irena Veisaitė, Gita Grinmanienė, Sulamita Lev, Fruma Kučinskienė, Judita Mackevičienė, including Israelis Jehoshua Shochot, Yakov Gurvich, Moshe Kukliansky, Moshe Rosenblum, Polia and Moisey Musel and many others. In addition, we have been looking for proof in the archives of Lithuania. Sometimes media comes in handy, especially when looking for the progeny of those who helped rescue Jews. As a result, every day I go through archival files of the rescuers of Jews and keep corresponding and communicating with many various people. Our department's archive keeps receiving new archival material about rescued Jews and their rescuers even though it requires major effort.



*- How many Lithuanian citizens received the title of the Righteous Among the Nations and how many of them were awarded the Life Saving Cross for rescuing Jews? How does the process of recognition and awarding of the titles look like?*

For many years the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations in Yad Vashem had a rule whereby a specific case of rescuing Jews would be looked into only if the rescued person themselves addressed Yad Vashem with a respective application. If the rescued person was a small child during the war, additional witnesses were required to confirm the fact of saving. Not every rescued person was able to meet such a requirement, because too many relatives had been lost. Yad Vashem started with the project of the Righteous Among the Nations back in 1963, which was almost 20 years after the end of World War II. Not all senior persons who survived the Nazi occupation of Lithuania applied with Yad Vashem regarding the recognition. For many it was too much to go back to the memories of the tragic period that was marked with major losses and torment. They had to start an entirely new life in



the land of Israel and every single repatriate had more than enough mundane concerns to take care of. Some of the rescued people thought that only someone like Oscar Schindler, who rescued thousands of Jews, could receive the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. The Iron Curtain became a major impediment during the Soviet times, too. Quite a number of Israeli citizens who survived the Nazi occupation of Lithuania were afraid to induce harm to their rescuers and decided that it would be best not to write letters to their rescuers and kept silent instead. As a result, many contacts have been lost. Thus, there were both objective and subjective reasons why the Righteous Among the Nations medal with the engraved famous quote from the Babylon Talmud *Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the whole universe* would not necessarily reach every single rescuer of Jews.

Yad Vashem as a commemoration institution of the Holocaust martyrs and heroes has the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous. The commission consists of volunteers who are researchers of the Holocaust and historians. Among them there is one person who survived the Holocaust in Lithuania, a justice of the Israeli Supreme Court. Nowadays the process of granting the title of the Righteous Among the Nations is very slow. Not many people address Yad Vashem these days in order to have their rescuers awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. Recently, my colleagues from Yad Vashem have been mainly working with archival materials and video testimonies of the survivors. As a result of this work and based on the video testimony of Dmitry Gelpert, which was recorded many years ago and addressed to the Spielberg Foundation, President of Lithuania Kazys Grinius was awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations, too. It happened back in 2015. Thus, the process of recognition of the Righteous is still ongoing in Yad Vashem. According to the official data published on the website of Yad Vashem on 1 January 2018, as many as 893 citizen of Lithuania had been awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations by now.

The Life Saving Cross – an award of the State of Lithuania – was first awarded to rescuers of Jews back in 1993 upon the initiative of the then head of the Jewish Museum Emanuelis Zingeris. Then the aim was to pay tribute to the rescuers of Jews who were still alive in Lithuania, to commemorate them and the act of bravery committed by these special people, and collect memories of the Jews who survived the Holocaust. The project had served its purpose to the full. As a result, the Righteous Gentiles and Commemoration Department has accrued a lot of valuable material. In 1997, we started working on a series of publications titled *Hands Bringing Life and Bread*. In 2009, the Museum opened a permanent exposition *Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells About the Shoah*, which turned into a real education centre. In 2011, the virtual version of the exposition was made accessible on the internet at [www.rescuedchild.lt](http://www.rescuedchild.lt). It is so much more than just a virtual exhibition. It is also an exhaustive database of the awarded rescuers of Jews which includes authentic testimonies of the survivors, a lot of visual material and documentaries.

From 1993 to 2017, as many as 1430 rescuers of Jews were awarded the Life Saving Cross based on the research performed by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and respective applications filed by the Museum. The main requirements to be met when applying for the award of the Lithuanian Life Saving Cross is the same as those applied by Yad Vashem, i.e. every single fact of rescuing has to be researched and confirmed. If there are no surviving Jews who were rescued, various written sources have to be analysed instead, such as memoirs, correspondence between the rescuers and the rescued, etc. In addition, respective historical research and archival documents are also taken into consideration. The final decision to award the Life Saving Cross is taken by the Award Council under the Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania and the President of the Republic of Lithuania who signs a respective decree on awarding rescuers of Jews.

- You have co-authored four documentaries about the rescuers of Jews and the rescued (*'I Leave My Child to You'*, *'Etude of Hope'*, *'The Pit of Life and Torment'*, and *'Sisters'*). How do such documentaries come into being?

Every single testimony of a Holocaust witness, every video recording bears both a lasting value and a huge emotional impact. It is extremely important to hear these testimonies at first hand, to see these people who witnessed the most horrible crimes against humanity themselves. It is a usual practice at other museums of the Holocaust, too. Testimonies of the Holocaust witnesses make you think it all over again, help you get a better understanding and feeling of the tragedy that our Jewish co-citizens went through, to realise the enormous scale of the Catastrophe which left numerous non-healing wounds in the hearts of Jews and Lithuanians.

All four documentaries of the Museum were co-created in cooperation with film director Liliya Kopač who was the first in Lithuania to start videotaping the rescuers of Jews and the rescued and those who survived the Holocaust. Her documentary 'The Tree of Life' was made in 1998. Almost all of the rescuers of Jews and the survivors are long gone by now, therefore, we are lucky to have such a valuable archival video material remaining.

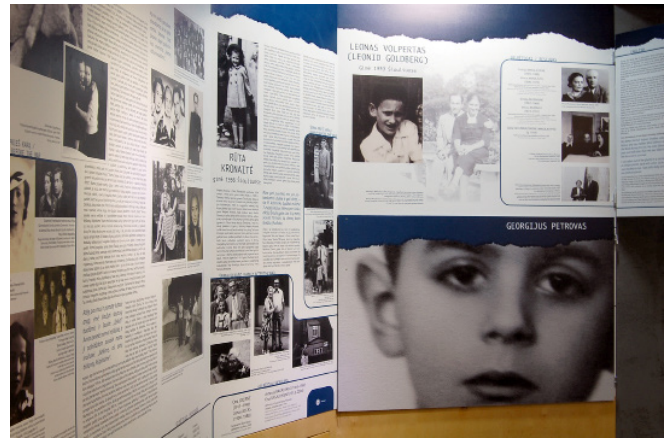
When I started working at the Righteous Gentiles and Commemoration Department, I met Telesforas Laucevičius who was born during the war. His uncle Yakov Gurvich lives in Israel. It was then that I heard the story about the way Telesforas was hidden and rescued from annihilation. Yakov Gurvich – witness to the annihilation camps and mass killings of Jews in Telšiai Region – learned about the tragic fate of his sister Rūta Gurvičiūtė and her Lithuanian husband Pranas Laucevičius when in his last hiding place in Kvėdarna. At the same time he learned that Telesforas, the little boy of Rūta and Pranas, was rescued by Pranas' sister Jadvyga Laucevičiūtė-Baužienė. I wanted to make this story known to Lithuanian people. Therefore, I contacted film director Liliya Kopač and in 2005 the first Museum's documentary 'I Leave My Child to You' was created. The first screening of the documentary was held in Telšiai, the native town of Telesforas, where memories about this tragic story were still alive. The documentary received a very warm welcome. Later it was released with voice-over in Lithuanian, English and Russian and was a great success in Israel. This encouraged us to continue working in the same direction.

I would like to emphasise that it was extremely important for me and for film director Liliya Kopač to convey the right historic context by showing all the horror and the anti-Semitic propaganda, including the threatening environment in which the rescuers of Jews had to act. For that purpose we used a lot of documentary material. The documentary 'Etude of Hope' is based on the authentic diary of Helene Holzman, her book 'This Child Must Live', which reveals the main events of the Nazi occupation of Kaunas. Certainly, this would not have been possible without Fruma Vitkinaitė-Kučinskienė, a girl from the Kaunas Ghetto rescued by Helene Holzman, and Helene's sister Margarita Holzman. I am extremely thankful to them.

The same can be said about other characters of our documentaries, for example Moshe Kukliansky (documentary 'The Pit of Life and Torment'), Danutė Pomerantz-Mazurkevich and Aušra Petrauskaitė (documentary 'Sisters'). These are all special people and it was an extremely great experience working with them. Their stories are very different, but all the characters of our documentaries are unique personalities who lived at the time of mass annihilation of the Jewish people. At that time it was close to impossible to save even one Jewish child not to mention the whole Jewish family. This should be remembered.

*- There must be a lot of various stories about the saving of Jews. How do you decide which story or personality to choose for your documentary?*

Certainly, we do hear a lot of stories of the kind, but the number of live witnesses who agree to tell the story and are able to do that, who remember almost every single person who extended help over the three and a half years of hiding, who miraculously escaped execution and became witnesses of mass killings is very small and they all are over 90 by now.



- Recently we see an upheaval of public interest in the rescuers of Jews and their stories. Doesn't the focus on the Righteous Among the Nations distort the overall picture? Doesn't it prevent from perceiving the overall scope of the Holocaust horrors?

Not a single survivor of the Holocaust ever said that they were surrounded by rescuers alone and that the things they were forced to go through were something normal. You have to listen well to what they have to say. These are painful memories of the people who went through a lot of hardship in their lives, memories about the peril of their family, humiliation, violence and life in continuous tension and fear. Despite all this, they never forgot those who gave hope, who risked their lives and their families in order to save a persecuted person. Those who were rescued never forgot their rescuers and we must not forget them either. We will not distort the face of the Holocaust by talking about such people.

Certainly I heard about all kinds of attempts to manipulate the numbers of the rescuers with the aim to portray Lithuania as a country of rescuers. There were even attempts to 'justify' the deeds of the perpetrators through the good deeds of the rescuers. I would say this is simply obscene and even despicable. Nonetheless, Lithuanian society is changing very fast and only very few believe such things nowadays. Historians did their job really well. Quite a number of books were published on the topic. Many people, especially the young ones, show interest in local history and there are wonderful teachers of history, too. I would like to believe that we too contributed and continue to contribute to all these changes.

- You are the coordinator of the permanent exposition *Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells About the Shoah* which is on display at the Tolerance Centre of the Museum. What makes this exposition special? What would you draw the attention of its visitors to?

When working on this exposition we kept communicating with all the people – the children rescued during the war – whose stories were told as part of the exposition. They even wrote text for their personal stands themselves. Narrow and broken exposition paths lead from stand to stand revealing the topicalities of the time. The beautiful faces depicted there are the rescued Jewish children from towns of Lithuania, Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos, including their parents, brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, not all of them were lucky enough to survive. Nine in ten were annihilated. There is a memorial devoted to the Jewish children who were killed. Visitors may place small stones at the memorial in memory of those who perished. When they do so, lullaby 'Shtiler, Shtiler...' starts off. This lullaby is sung till nowadays. The music for the lullaby was written by an eleven-year-old inmate of the Vilna Ghetto Alexander Tamir (Alik Wolkowiski), who is now a famous composer and pianist.

Try and imagine the way Lithuania would look like if not for Ona Šimaitė, Sofija Binkienė, Elena Buivydaite-Kutorgienė, Bronislovas Paukštis, Petras Baublys or Jehoshua Shochot's babysitter Domicèle and many other Righteous? It would be really sad. The brightly lit exhibition stands telling



about these Righteous people are part of the exposition. They are there for visitors to stop and spend a few minutes at. These are all beautiful faces and wonderful people. Moreover, full content of the exposition Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells About the Shoah is available on the internet at [www.rescuedchild.lt](http://www.rescuedchild.lt).

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

I frequent the Philharmonic Concert Hall and I am a big fan of opera. I used to travel a lot, but it all requires quite a bit of time. Sometimes I simply prefer talking to my friends or spending time with my family.

- *Thank you for the interview!*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hereby extend our cordial thank you to everyone who supported the Museum during the first half of 2018 and contributed financially or by donating exhibits, providing services or consultations. Our sincere thank you goes to:



William Scherl / Michael Philip Davis / Alberto J. Bird / Ilya Goldovt / Joseph Mandelbraut /  
William Kentridge / Markas Atamukas / Bryan Shill / Thomas Irmer / Danutė Pomerantz-Mazurkevich

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## HELP US BRING SAMUEL BAK'S ARTWORK to VILNIUS

In 2017, the Samuel Bak Museum was opened in Vilnius. It is the first museum in the world devoted solely to the art of this prominent Litvak artist.

Samuel Bak was born in 1933. At the age of nine he had already held his first exhibition of drawings. Samuel Bak miraculously survived the Holocaust and ended up in a displaced persons camp in Germany. After living in Israel and Europe, the artist settled in the United States of America where he continues his creative work, which is so much valued by art lovers and critics worldwide.

The artist has already donated 54 of his works to Lithuania and to the Samuel Bak Museum (which functions as a branch of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum) and intends to donate dozens more. Upon receiving the rest of the artwork, we will open the second exhibition space of the Samuel Bak Museum and an education center.

Your donations will be used to transport the paintings from Boston, USA, to Vilnius, Lithuania. With your help, we could enrich the Museum's collections and display these paintings in a brand new exhibition space.

Read more or donate [here](#).

Thank you for helping us to tell the story of Samuel Bak through his paintings!

## CONTACTS AND WORKING HOURS OF THE EXPOSITION SITES



### **TOLERANCE CENTRE and SAMUEL BAK MUSEUM**

Naugarduko St. 10/2, Vilnius  
tel. +370 5 212 0112  
e-mail: muziejus@jmmuseum.lt

Working hours  
*I-IV: 10:00–18:00*  
*V: 10:00–16:00*  
*VI: closed*  
*VII: 10:00–16:00*



### **HOLOCAUST EXPOSITION**

Pamėnkalnio St. 12, Vilnius  
tel. +370 5 262 0730  
e-mail: jewishmuseum@jmmuseum.lt

Working hours  
*I-IV: 9:00–17:00*  
*V: 9:00–16:00*  
*VI: closed*  
*VII: 10:00–16:00*



### **PANERIAI MEMORIAL INFORMATION CENTER**

Agrastų St. 15, Vilnius  
tel. +370 699 90 384  
e-mail: mantas.siksnianas@jmmuseum.lt

Working hours  
*I Closed*  
*II-IV 9:00–17:00*  
*V 9:00–16:00*  
*VI Closed*  
*VII 9:00–16:00*  
*Since October until May the Center is opened by appointment only.*

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**LET'S KEEP in TOUCH!**  
Follow us on the museum's website [jmmuseum.lt](http://jmmuseum.lt) and [Facebook](#).

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