

Holocaust Art & Remembrance



Their Last Embrace by Miriam Brysk

I chose this artwork because the image powerfully conveys how families were torn apart by the tragic events of the Holocaust.

As the artist explains, during Nazi roundups, Jews were selected for either immediate killing or deportation. Children were often separated from their families and targeted for special treatment. Separations of mothers from children were extremely painful. In "Their Last Embrace," a son has a lingering memory of the last time he saw and touched his mother whom recalls with a faint smile. Whereas the boy is composed of color (suggesting signs of life), his mother appears in tones of black and grey (implying a sense of death). Perhaps the brown leaves surrounding the boy further symbolize the destruction of his family. The figure of a Nazi soldier also appears in the background.

The first time I viewed Miriam Brysk's Their Last Embrace, I was immediately



This photograph was taken when our three children (Geoffrey, Benjamin and Ruth) were 13, 11 and 2 years old. The occasion was Geoffrey's Bar Mitzvah. This life cycle event at age thirteen in the Jewish religion marks a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Children traditionally receive a tallis (prayer shawl) from their parents. Ge-

offrey was given the tallis that had belonged to his grandfather, symbolizing the passing down of a treasured possession from one generation to the next. Bar Mitzvah literally translates as "son of commandment. A boy who becomes a Bar Mitzvah will lead prayers in Hebrew and be called upon to read from the Torah during a Sabbath service. He is now morally and ethically responsible for his decisions and actions. The Bar Mitzvah is a celebration of religion, family and learning in Judaism. The embrace among our children in this photograph is an affirmation of the survival of Jewish life years after the Holocaust.