

Vivienne Koorland

Izieu Paintings 1987 - 1989

Works in the Exhibition

Vive Maman, 1987
oil, book pages, newsprint, varnish, glue,
and charcoal on linen 108" x 85"
(illustrated at left)

13: Happy Birthday Jacques, 1987
oil, tar, lead on linen
108" x 85"

New Flowers of the Fields, 1988
oil, text, paper and glue on linen
66" x 55"

Panorama, 1989
oil, printed cards, book pages and glue
on linen 113" x 81"

Inside Us, Anguish Remains, 1989
oil, newsprint, charcoal, paper and glue
on linen 42" x 28"

Vivienne Koorland's *Izieu Paintings* were inspired by a drawing made by Jacques Benguigui, a French Jewish boy hidden from the Nazis with 44 other Jewish children during World War II at Izieu in central France. Eventually betrayed by a neighbor, these children with their guardians suffered deportation via Drancy and death in the Auschwitz camp.

Ms. Koorland's impetus for this series of paintings, based upon a hidden child's rendering of a pot of flowers as a birthday wish for his mother, was initially fortuitous. While working on the painting that would become *Vive Maman*, 1987, (Long Live Mother), she ran short of pages from a book that she was pasting onto her canvas. The book, found discarded, is a French World War I-era publication discussing ecclesiastical party politics in 12th-Century France, its purpose being to valorize Romanesque Churches in the northern region of Caen. Presenting these churches as a high point of civilization, the chauvinistic text equates the purity of Romanesque architecture with the notion of racial purity and "the genius of the race." It is worthwhile noting here that European nostalgia for the Middle Ages is a barely disguised longing for a world free of Jews. Koorland

intended to comment upon, if not parody the intentions of the book in her painting.

While searching through a book store for more pages to add to her painting, Koorland found the recently published *The Children of Izieu: A Human Tragedy* by Serge Klarsfeld. Among the documents Klarsfeld unearthed and published was the drawing by 13-year-old Jacques Benguigui that the artist uses for her *Izieu Paintings*.

Koorland appropriates Jacques' drawing and his signature in both her paintings *Vive Maman* and *13: Happy Birthday Jacques* (Jacques was deported on his 13th birthday). The paintings challenge Christian iconographic conventions of Western History painting by granting a powerful voice to "Outsider Art" in the form of Jacques' drawing. In Vivienne Koorland's words: "The tradition that glorifies also annihilates."

In her painting entitled *Panorama*, Koorland considers her South African background and ex-colonial education in Africa as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Tiny lithographed postcard images of a colonized British South Africa are attached to the giant stalks of Jacques' flowers, while in *Inside Us, Anguish Remains*, the flowers tell



different survivor stories from around the world. In *New Flowers of the Fields*, Koorland references the bombs that were dropped during World War I, borrowing the euphemism given to these new bombs for her title. Here she punctuates the stems of Jacques' flowers with thorns or bandages bearing the names of destroyed Belgian cities and villages combined with titles of her other paintings.

Striking aspects of Koorland's paintings are their large scale and the strength of their hand-made look. Her layering of content and materials and her combinations of coarse canvas, thick earthen colors and materials such as tar, and a patently crude form of montage imbue the works with meanings beyond their historic and narrative sources. A direct interpretation of the artist's method is not easily articulated, yet in the context of this combined exhibition -- the *Izium Paintings* and the 200 photographs of *French Children of the Holocaust* -- a different and more tactile reality is communicated by the rough-hewn nature of Koorland's work. In a voice both loud and soft, it speaks of our human capacities and frailties; the will to make as well as the will to mend.

W. Rod Faulds, Director
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