

The dark metaphoric paintings Willy Fick created during a time when the Nazis stripped artists of employment, deemed them “degenerate”, drove them out of Germany and, in some cases, killed them, were destroyed during the bombings of Cologne in 1944. These symbolic works, created during the rise of Nazism, gave voice to feelings the Nazis wished to suppress. They spoke of dehumanization, victimization, despair, randomness and isolation.

As Willy Fick’s grandniece, I always wanted these paintings recognized in some way. I felt that even though the paintings were gone, the archival photographs of Willy Fick’s

works could still touch audiences today. To bring Fick’s works into today’s world, I worked first with Holocaust survivors in an intensive workshop. The discussions were far-ranging and the feelings were deep. The survivors’ responses added a powerful resonance to Fick’s art.

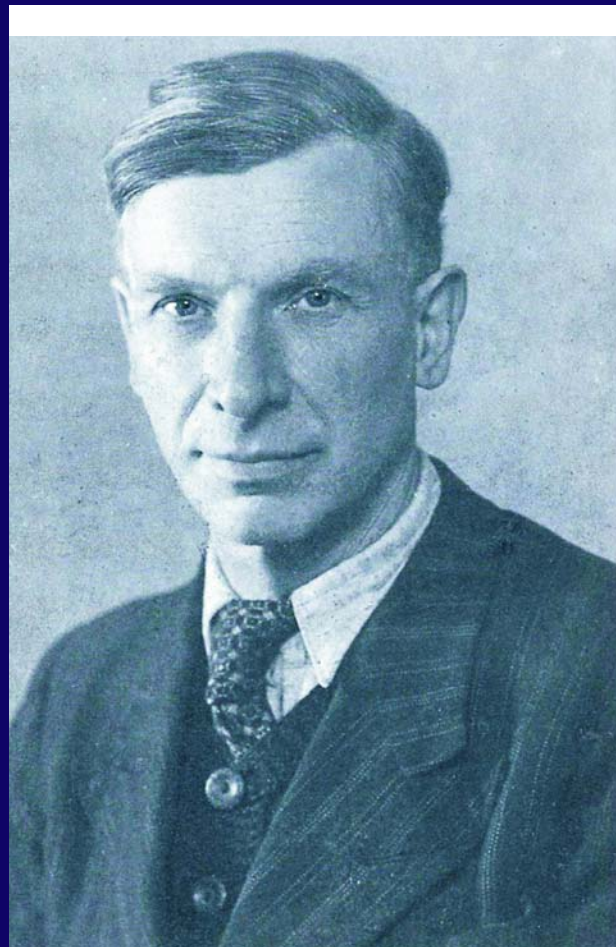
I next showed Fick’s photographs to young artists, working with them to ensure they felt free to express their own feelings. The only requirements were that they use dark tones and stay within the rough size of the archival photographs.

This multi-layered approach, embracing art and personal

reflection in response to Fick’s dissenting art, offered new opportunities for remembrance.

The resulting triads—archival photographs with young person and survivor responses—bound the past and present together. Along with some of Fick’s extant original paintings as a guide to his palette, the triads provide stepping stones for today’s reflections on the role the arts play in society.

I thank the Holocaust Centre of Toronto and our generous sponsors, Joseph Gottdenker and the Lonsdale Gallery, for making this exhibition possible.



W.P.H.Fick 1948



Willy, Angelika, Richard and Maria Fick 1912



Angelika Littlefield and Uncle Willy Fick, 1967

The Art of Dissent

Willy Fick

1893-1967

Born in Cologne, Germany, just before the turn of the century, the artist Wilhelm Peter Hubert “Willy” Fick buried his immediate family by the time he was 46 years old. By 1939, he had survived war, revolution and the oppressive rise of the Nazis,

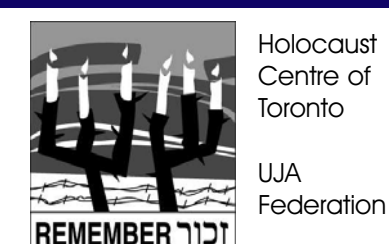
Having done so, he was not prepared to go to war again. He went underground, changed his name and never took up his art seriously again.

I was 20 years old when my grand uncle died in our home in Whitby, Ontario. During visits in Canada and Germany, I had known him as a man of immense humour. He was sarcastic, prankish and even Chaplinesque. The wry nuance in his face, voice and body gestures made up for his garbled English.

This funny man drew people to him and always left them laughing. He spoke of his past as an artist in the Nazi era only at the very end of his life. With emphysema choking off his last breaths, the clown took off his mask. When he did, I saw and felt the pain that you may see in his works—a pain that serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of protecting our democratic freedoms.

*Angelika Littlefield, Curator,
Willy Fick’s grandniece*

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