



CEIJA STOJKA, A COLORIST WHO CONFRONTS HISTORY



Ceija Stojka, *What Fruit; I Need You in My Life*, 1995. Collection Lorely French

Ceija Stojka (1933-2013) survived three concentration camps to document the Nazis' Roma genocide in three memoirs. She was also a self-taught painter whose work has a growing following. A dazzling introduction to her art is now at the Wende Museum in "Ceija Stojka and Scenes of Roma Life."

Start with Stojka's audacious painting of a pumpkin, a visual exclamation point that will stop you dead in front of it. The artist grew up in Styria, an Austrian province famous for pumpkin cream soup.

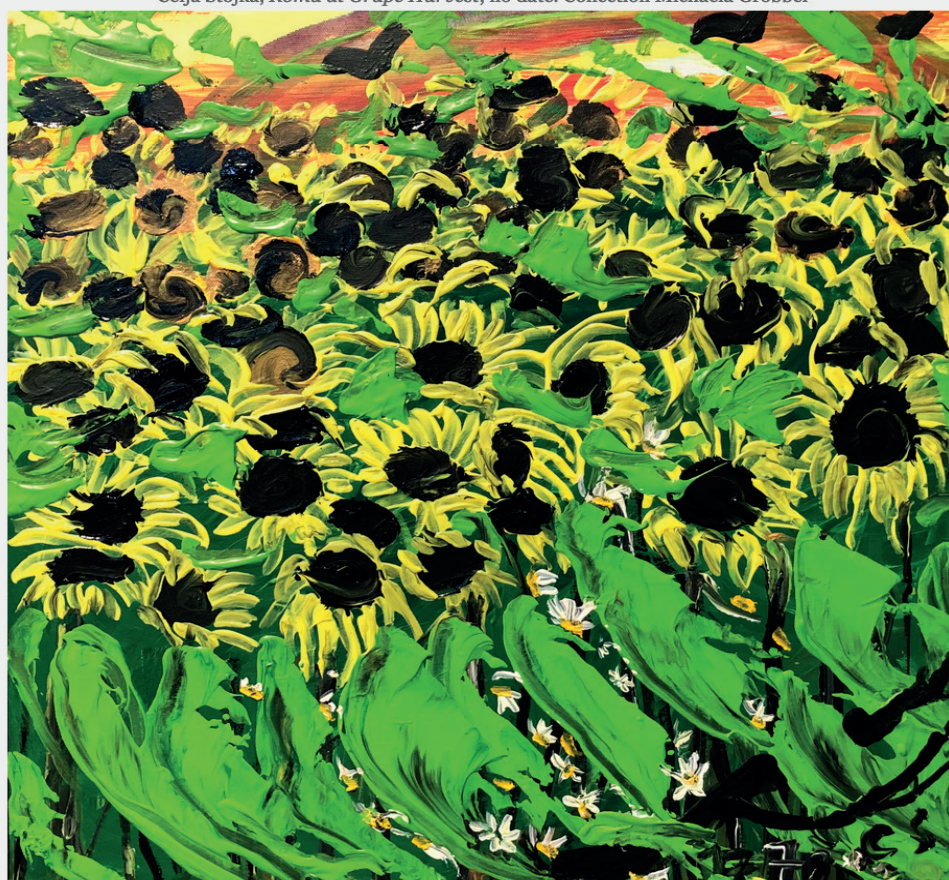
Stojka came to art late in life, from about 1990 (when she was 57) to her death in 2013. She produced over a thousand paintings and drawings. Almost all are retrospective, looking back at a pre-Holocaust idyll of Roma girlhood or grim scenes of a child's life in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Bergen-Belsen. It is the concentration camp pictures that are best known. The selection at the Wende skews towards lyrical scenes of nature, bittersweet with foreboding.

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Ceija Stojka, *Roma at Grape Harvest*, no date. Collection Michaela Grobbel



Ceija Stojka, *Summer Time*, no date. Collection Michaela Grobbel

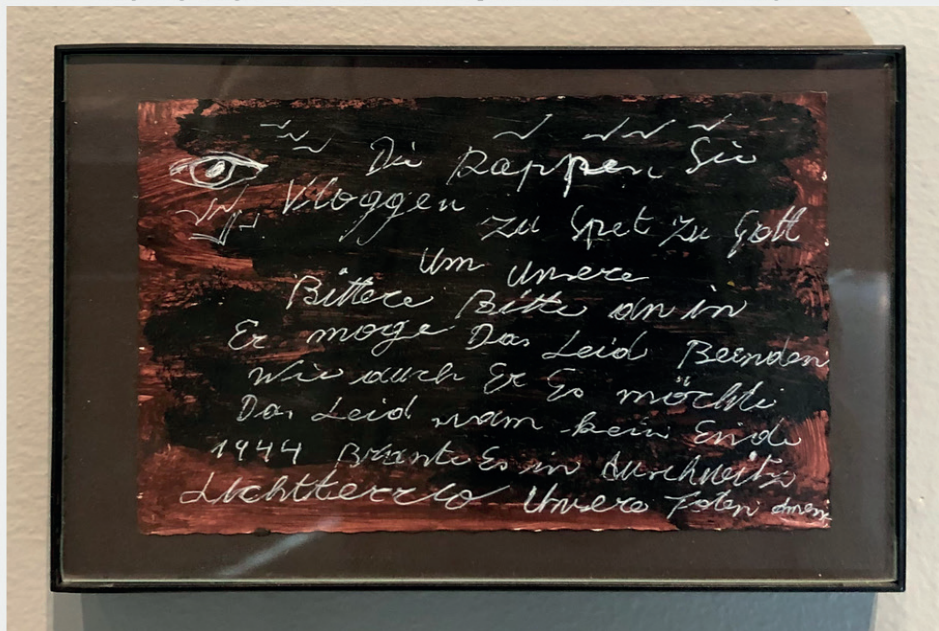
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Notwithstanding van Gogh and Nolde, Stojka staked out the sunflower as the "flower of the Roma." Her people ate the petals and the seeds. Stojka's father once made her a dress out of sunflowers.



Ceija Stojka, *Before the Concentration Camp Horses*, no date. Collection Lorely French



Ceija Stojka, *The Raven*, no date. Collection Michaela Grobbel

This diminutive poem-painting takes the flocks of ravens spiraling over the concentration camp as emblems of life and death.

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Ceija Stojka, *Heaven*, 2009. Collection James Draznin

That is a motif of *Heaven* as well. At lower right is a tree branch near the signature. At Bergen-Belsen, Stojka's mother told her to eat a tree's leaves and sap to escape starvation.

There's more on the artist at the [Ceija Stojka International Association](#). "Ceija Stojka and Scenes of Roma Life" also includes a selection of Cold War photographs of Roma life. It runs concurrently with a large, multi-culture survey of prison art, "Visions of Transcendence: Creating Space in East and West" (through Apr. 7, 2024).

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