

Life Milestones of Artist Olga Horak OAM (1926-2024)

1926

- 11 August, Olga Rosenberger is born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, into a middle-class Jewish family.
- She grows up in a culturally rich, multi-generational household with her parents and sister Judith.
- From an early age, she shows a natural talent for art and is encouraged in drawing. Attending Art course with Professor Reichenthal in Bratislava.

1938–1944

- The rise of Nazism and antisemitic legislation in Slovakia severely affect Jewish life.
- Escalating Persecution and antisemitic laws restrict Jewish life and Olga is expelled from school; her father is banned from practicing his trade.
- The family is increasingly isolated and under threat.

August 1944

- After a short period in hiding, Olga and her family are arrested and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- Olga endures a death march and is transferred to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

April 1945

- Olga is liberated from Bergen-Belsen by British forces.
- She is emaciated and ill but begins a long recovery in postwar Europe.
- She later learns she is the sole survivor of her immediate family.

1947–1949

- In Bratislava, she meets Jan Hirshmann (John Horak), also a Holocaust survivor.
- The couple marries and makes plans to emigrate.

1949-1960s

- Olga and John arrive in Sydney, Australia, starting new life.
- They establish a successful blouse manufacturing business called Hibodress in Woollomoolloo and start rebuilding their lives in a new home in Dover Heights.
- Daughters Evelyn and Susie are born and Olga successfully balances her new role with the growing family business.

1960s–1990s

- Prolific period of creativity. Olga resumes her artistic interests, attending evening art classes at East Sydney Technical College, studying painting under John Ogburn and sculpture with Lyndon Dadswell.
- Outside her lessons, she completes dozens of oil paintings, sculptures, and drawings in her basement studio.
- Olga experiments with interplay of light and darkness, both literally and metaphorically, and with juxtaposition of symbols of trauma and pastel hues.
- Olga's still lifes draw on Cubist and Fauvist art, and modern masters including Picasso and Chagall.
- In sculpture, the artist's inspiration resonates with Moore's composition.
- Horak's sculptures "Exodus" (1965) and "The Family" (1966) receive first public recognition, however, the majority of her work remains unseen by the public, decorating the walls and garden spaces of her family home.

1992

- The Sydney Jewish Museum opens as an initiative of Holocaust survivors.
- Olga becomes one of its most respected volunteer guides and witnesses, sharing her Holocaust testimony with thousands of visitors, particularly students.
- Olga puts her palette aside, and it is her spoken testimony that becomes the central voice of Holocaust commemoration in Australia.

1994

- Olga creates the commemorative sculpture *Son of Men, Keep Not Silent*, reimagining the menorah as a Holocaust memorial.
- This becomes one of her last known sculptural works.

2008

- John Horak, 88, Olga's husband of 61 years dies in Sydney after a long illness and hospitalisation.

2015

- Evelyn Levin, née Horak, Olga's eldest daughter, 64, dies after long illness.

2000s–2020s

- Olga continues to speak publicly and educate about the Holocaust.
- Her memoir *From Auschwitz to Australia* is published, chronicling her journey and survival.
- Her artwork remains largely unknown beyond family and close friends.

2023

- Artist and curator Nina Sanadze discovers Olga's artistic legacy and begins preparation for her first solo exhibition.
- Art historian and friend Jana Vytrhlik interviews Olga and publishes the first critical text on Olga Horak's art in *The Jewish Independent*.

August 2024

- 15 August, Olga Horak dies peacefully in Sydney at the age 98, just days after her birthday.
- Her final public engagements include speaking to students at the Sydney Jewish Museum.

April 2025

- *Olga Horak: In Her Light*, the artist's first solo exhibition, opens at Goldstone Gallery in Melbourne on 29 April. Curated by the gallery's artistic director, Nina Sanadze, the exhibition unveils over 100 works and introduces the public to Horak's extraordinary, long-concealed artistic legacy.
- *Remembering an Artist: Olga Horak OAM (1926–2024)* An accompanying essay by Dr Jana Vytrhlik offers critical and personal insights into Horak's life and work, drawing on memories shared by her daughter, Susie Berk, and grandsons, Anthony Levin and Jonathan Sankey.