

# HOW IT IS BUT HOW IT SHOULD BE

An Imagined Life  
Outside of Gurs

A TRAVELING EXHIBITION FROM ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM & EDUCATION CENTER



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

A birthday present presented to a prisoner by her friend in honor of her sixty-fifth birthday. A seemingly simple gift, a book of hand drawn illustrations and poetic text reflecting the conditions inside the camp, and the wish for an imagined life of freedom, a dream of “how it should be.” The result is a beautiful and moving story and exhibition of not only the struggle for survival, but of one woman’s effort to preserve her humanity and comfort her friend under some of the worst circumstances imaginable.

***So ist es, aber, so soll's sein (How it is, but how it should be)* is a rare and powerful piece of Holocaust artwork and poetry from the permanent collection of Illinois Holocaust Museum.**

Trudl Besag was a young Jewish woman imprisoned in Gurs concentration camp in unoccupied France since 1940. In 1941, she made an illustrated book and gave it to a fellow prisoner, Rosa Hirschbruch, for her 65th birthday and titled *So ist es*. Sharing the excruciating daily life in Gurs concentration camp in France on the left-hand pages, while the right-hand pages describe a vision of life outside the camp.

*So ist es* vividly illuminates the daily life in Gurs, presents a portrait of resistance through beautiful and humorous response to imprisonment, and captures the will of prisoners to survive in the hopes of a new life. The exhibit contains translations by the artist herself and additional elements tell the broader story of Camp de Gurs, the Holocaust in France and the incredible story of survival of these two women.

The exhibition *How It Is, But How It Should Be* showcases the book’s strikingly colored pages alongside the English translation Trudl wrote in the 1990s, replica copies of *So ist es*, a moving audio recording of the original, rhyming German text, and a short film about the history of Gurs including survivor testimony. The exhibition also includes a gallery guide and a beautiful companion catalogue.





Es regnet meist ohn' Unterlass,  
der Boden wird davon recht nass,  
der Schlamm steht sehr bald meteräick,  
man kommrät nicht vor mehr, noch zurück.

It rains and rains, it gets so mucky,  
the sobby ground gets awful yucky;  
and if the goo gets three feet deep,  
you cannot walk, can't even creep.

So ist es - aber sooo soll's sein:  
es lacht der goldne Sonnenschein,  
man haut sich hin und lässt sich braten,  
statt durch den zähen Dreck zu waten.

That's how it is. How should it be?  
The golden sunshine we would see;  
we're flopping down, soak up the sun,  
that sticky mud, that ain't no fun.

## ABOUT CAMP DE GURS, THE ARTIST AND RECEIPIENT:

Camp de Gurs was located in the south of France. It was operated by the collaborationist government of unoccupied France, whose capital was Vichy. During its period of operation (1939-1944) the camp served as a prison for different peoples: Spaniards and foreign fighters fleeing the Spanish Civil War, anti-Nazi resistance members, and Jews. In 1940, the Vichy government took in approximately 7,000 Jews deported from southwestern Germany, including Trudl and her sisters, Rosa, and Rosa's husband, Samuel Hirschbruch. Conditions were harsh, with cramped quarters, scarce food and supplies, and rampant disease; approximately 1,100 prisoners died during their internment, including Samuel. By the time the camp temporarily closed in November, 1943, 22,000 men, women, and children had been interned in Gurs, 18,000 of them Jews.

Trudl Besag was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1916 and raised in Baden Baden. While studying art at the University of Munich, she became engaged to an American engineering student, George Healy. In October 1940, Trudl and her family were deported to Camp de Gurs, an internment camp in Unoccupied France. While there, Trudl continued making art to pass the time, document her experience, and entertain her fellow prisoners. George Healy was able to secure Trudl's release from Gurs and immigration to the United States, where the couple married in late 1941. Trudy, as she was then known, passed away in 2000. Rosa Hirschbruch, the recipient of Trudy's book, also survived the Holocaust and lived in Chicago until her death in 1962.



**ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM  
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### Exhibition Components:

- 22 oversized panels
- 5 replica copies of *So ist es*
- Audiovisual components (equipment must be provided by hosting institution)
- Exhibition catalog (available for purchase)
- Gallery guide (digital files provided to hosting institution)

### Accompanying Materials:

Press kit (including high resolution images and exhibition style-guide)

### Exhibition Size:

Approximately 75 running feet

### Security Requirements: Low

### Exhibition Fee:

\$500 rental fee + shipping

## ABOUT ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM & EDUCATION CENTER:

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is located in Skokie, Illinois. The mission of IHMEC is expressed in its founding principle: Remember the Past, Transform the Future. The Museum is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Holocaust by honoring the memories of those who were lost and by teaching universal lessons that combat hatred, prejudice, and indifference. The Museum fulfills its mission through the exhibition, preservation, and interpretation of its collections and through education programs and initiatives that foster the promotion of human rights and the elimination of genocide.

## PLEASE DIRECT ALL INQUIRIES TO:

Arielle Weinger  
Chief Curator of Collections and Exhibitions  
Illinois Holocaust Museum  
& Education Center  
9603 Woods Drive, Skokie, IL 60077  
847-967-4817  
Arielle.Weinger@ilhmecc.org