

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
January 1992

GAY BLOCK: RESCUERS OF THE HOLOCAUST

January 16 - April 14, 1992

GAY BLOCK: RESCUERS OF THE HOLOCAUST, on view at The Museum of Modern Art from January 16 through April 7, 1992, presents approximately twenty recent photographic portraits of people who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews. The exhibition, organized by Susan Kismaric, curator, Department of Photography, includes text about the experiences of the rescuers.

From 1986 to 1989 Gay Block traveled throughout the United States, Canada, Israel, and five European countries to complete this project. Accompanied by Malka Drucker, an author of books on Jewish culture, Ms. Block photographed and conducted interviews with rescuers. Although the portraits are straightforward, showing the subjects in everyday dress and surroundings, they are compelling, and their cumulative effect is extremely moving. As a body of work, they persuasively affirm the idea that ordinary people can be heroes.

Susan Kismaric says, "The success of these portraits lies in their psychological insight and in the photographer's ability to persuade us of these individuals' dignity, strength, stubbornness, and heroism. As a visual document, they are a contemporary link with a moment in history and a reminder that as individuals we bear responsibility for shaping our history." These people were not fearless; they simply faced their fears and honored their own consciences.

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Examples include Polish-born Irene Opdyke, who struck a bargain with a German general for whom she worked as a housekeeper: She became his mistress in exchange for his promise not to turn in one dozen Jewish men and women she had hidden in his villa. Another is Andrée Herscovici, who, beginning in 1941, saved 1,000 Jewish children by taking them from their families, placing them in non-Jewish homes and giving them non-Jewish identities. After the war she assisted in reuniting the children with their parents.

Gay Block was born in Houston in 1942. She began her career in photography in 1973, studying with Geoff Winningham, Garry Winogrand, and Anne Tucker. Her work has been shown in many solo and group exhibitions and is in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. She is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

A videotape accompanying the exhibition, *They Risked Their Lives: Rescuers of the Holocaust*, runs continuously in the Edward John Noble Education Center during the course of the exhibition.

GAY BLOCK: RESCUERS OF THE HOLOCAUST is made possible by the William H. Kearns Foundation.

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For further information or photographic materials contact Helen Bennett, Press Representative, the Department of Public Information, 212-708-9750.

For copies of the publication, **RESCUERS Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust** by Malka Drucker and Gay Block, contact Sharon Pearce, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 212-254-4100 or fax 212-254-4104.