

CULTURE

This Little-Known German Jewish Refugee Made Stirring Art About Trauma

BY [ZACHARY SOLOMON](#)



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Imagine a box made of and filled with wire and string, frayed cloth, rotted paper, wood, stitching, netting, and mesh. Imagine that this box symbolizes the trauma and beauty of the world.



HANELLORE BARON : A COLLAGE AND ASSEMBLAGE EXHIBITION

from [ERIC MINH SWENSON](#)

Now imagine that this work was created by a German Jewish refugee named Hannelore Baron, whose experience watching her father beaten during Kristallnacht would haunt her and her art for all of her life.

Baron, who was born in southwestern Germany to fabric sellers, was 13 years old on November 9, 1938, the night anti-Jewish pogroms swept Germany. She witnessed her home being raided and her father being beaten.

Though her family’s story was a relatively happy one—they illegally crossed the border to Luxembourg the following year and made it to the Bronx in 1941—her experiences led to debilitating, lifelong anxiety and claustrophobia.

But Baron turned her trauma into art. She said she had always had a “fear of the unknown, whereas other people want to go out and explore the unknown.” Her work, which has been described as having the “gravity, discretion and understated wit of a survivor,” both exemplifies and contradicts her fear of the unknown.

Her boxes and collages are insular, guarded, and scared—nevertheless, there it is: in shows at the Guggenheim, MOMA, Israel Museum, the Jewish Museum, and many others.

Baron died in 1987 at the age of 61. Luckily for us, her work and her legacy endure.

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All Images:

Hannelore Baron (1926-1987)
© Estate of Hannelore Baron; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

In order:

Hannelore Baron in her studio, c.1985

Untitled, 1981

mixed media collage with fabric, paper and ink
9 3/8" x 7 1/2" / 23.8 x 19.1 cm
signed and dated

Untitled, 1981

box assemblage of wood, glass, ink, paper, fabric and monoprint
12" x 6 3/4" x 3 5/8" / 30.5 x 17.1 x 9.2 cm
signed and dated

Untitled, c.1976

mixed media collage with paper, ink, watercolor and monoprint
9 7/8" x 6 5/8" / 25.1 x 16.8 cm

Untitled, 1981

box assemblage of wood, paper, ink, monoprint, crayon and metal wire
12" x 6 7/8" x 5 1/8" / 30.5 x 17.5 x 13.0 cm
signed and dated