

plus

A BOY, AN ARTIST ... A HERO

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ STEVEN SHALOWITZ is on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. This week, the Chicago resident took an emotional visit to Jerusalem to remember Holocaust victim Petr Ginz

THE story of Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli to travel into space, is most touching.

Along with six other astronauts, Payload Specialist Ramon perished when the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated over Texas during its re-entry on Feb 1, 2003.

What struck me was not his distinguished career in the Israeli Air Force, but rather one of the items he took on his mission from earth.

He wanted to carry with him something to memorialise the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust — his own mother having survived the Auschwitz Death Camp. Ramon contacted the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, which presented him with a copy of a print entitled Moon Landscape, depicting a view of earth as seen from the moon.

It was drawn by a 14-year-old boy named Petr Ginz just two years before he was killed in an Auschwitz gas chamber.

I was so moved by this account — and wanted to learn more about Ginz and his contemporaries who created art during the 20th century's most ghastly period — that I set aside a day to tour Yad Vashem during my stay in Jerusalem.

A TRIBUTE TO HEROES

Located on the Mount of Remembrance, the museum was reopened in March after major renovations and additions.

My emotional visit began in the main building, where I viewed exhibits tracing the rise of European Anti-Semitism and Hitler's diabolical Final Solution.

I ultimately came to a special section on Petr Ginz.

I learned he was deported to the Terezin Ghetto from his nearby hometown of Prague in 1942 and lived there until 1944, when he was sent to his untimely death at Auschwitz.

Even before Ginz arrived in Terezin at age 14, he was already a gifted boy — he'd created

outofoffice
explore with attitude

art works and written eight novels and numerous short stories.

While in Terezin, Ginz retained his insatiable thirst for knowledge. With the limited

resources available, he studied history and English and worked on his own Czech-Esperanto dictionary. He was also instrumental in the publication of the Ghetto's newspaper *Vedem* (*We Are Leading*). And of course, he painted.

Although one leaves Yad Vashem's main building wondering how humans can hate so deeply and follow brutality so blindly, one walks into its new art museum wondering how such beauty could have been produced amid such horror.

The facility contains art created during the

Holocaust period — from the late 1930s to 1949. And while its walls contain pieces depicting the tragedies of the era, these works share space with cheerful pictures of girls frolicking in a grassy field, of boats and butterflies and gardens. I questioned how these artists could portray such serenity while their lives were almost literally going up in flames.

Truly, these coloured pieces offer a new perspective on the Holocaust, which tends to be seen only in black-and-white photos.

ART OUTLIVES THE HORROR

Of the 164 works on display — selected from the nearly 10,000 pieces in the collection — the Ginz narrative stood out for me. I marvelled at how he brought his canvases to life in such works as *Mountain Scene* and *Vase with Flowers*. And while *Moon Landscape* was not exhibited, I still wondered what sources he drew upon to render it — years before any astronaut had made it to the moon.

I couldn't help admiring the other paintings in the gallery, many ren-

dered by artists trained in Europe's finest art academies prior to World War II.

These included works by artists such as Charlotte Salomon, who studied at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin and was awarded its Academy Prize (only to have it revoked for "racial" reasons). Like Ginz, she was deported to Auschwitz and murdered. At the time of her death, Salomon was four months pregnant.

I wondered what kept these artists working, with the few resources they had, at such a tragic time. Was it their belief that art feeds the soul? Or that creating art restores dignity in the face of humiliation? Did art provide an outlet for self-expression or were the artists' pieces simply intended to chronicle their time? Was it a form of escape? Or a remembrance of happier days? Perhaps it was just art for art's sake?

Maybe it was all of that.

And had the murdered artists lived, would their names sit beside those of Picasso and Dali and other 20th Century masters?

Indeed, I can't forget the Holocaust artists. I think of them — particularly Petr Ginz — each time I look at the moon.



Vase with Flowers, Terezin Ghetto, 1942-1944 by Petr Ginz (1928-1944). Gouache on paper. Gifts of Otto Ginz, the Isrel Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum.



Self-Portrait 1939-1941 by Charlotte Salomon (1917-1943). Crayon on paper. Gift of Ullie Gobel Bourne, Washington State Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum.



STAR SCULPTURE: *Yad Vashem's Memorial to the Jewish Soldiers and Partisans* by Bernie Fink. The structure is made of granite and stainless steel.

STEVEN SHALOWITZ

IN ADDITION ...

NEW COSMIC FRIGHT FILM FOR SPIELBERG

After reviving *War of the Worlds*, director Steven Spielberg will remake the 1951 sci-fi thriller *When Worlds Collide*. In the film, which won an Oscar for special effects in 1952, a dead star speeding toward Earth forces humans to choose a group of survivors to flee in a spaceship for another planet. Spielberg will produce the remake and has recruited as director Stephen Sommers, who helmed *The Mummy* and *Van Helsing*. — AFP

O, WHAT A JOURNEY

Practice Performing Arts School proudly presents *2105 Planet O* — an original sci-fi dance drama performed by its students. Audiences will journey to the year 2015, where earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and catastrophic climate changes have devastated the world. Aided by a cockroach, survivor Olivia sets out to find the Rainbow Seed to restore the planet. The play is at the Kallang Theatre tonight and tomorrow at 8pm. Call 63772525 for tickets.

Top Malay poet Masuri dies at 78

REGARDED as one of Singapore's greatest poets, Dr Masuri Saikun died on Tuesday at the age of 78. He was being interviewed for a museum-related project when he experienced breathing problems at about 2pm and fainted suddenly.

His wife, Hajjah Fatimah Hussin, called an ambulance, which rushed him to Changi General Hospital. He was pronounced dead at 3pm.

Dr Masuri was a well-known figure on the literary scene, obtaining a Public Service Medal (Bintang Bakti Masyarakat) in 1962 for his contributions to creative writing in Singapore.

He also garnered prestigious awards such as the Asean Cultural Award (Literature, 1990) and the Meritorious Service Medal in 2000 for exemplary service to Singapore.

His book, *Suasana Senja* (*Situation at Dawn*), was shortlisted for the Singapore Literary Prize last year.

Said Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Dr Lee Boon Yang in a condolence letter to Dr Masuri's family: "His passing is a great loss to Singapore, especially to the Malay literary community." — DAVID CHEW

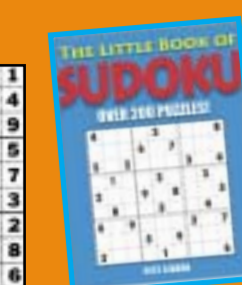
SUDOKU plus

HOW TO PLAY: The rules are easy. Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

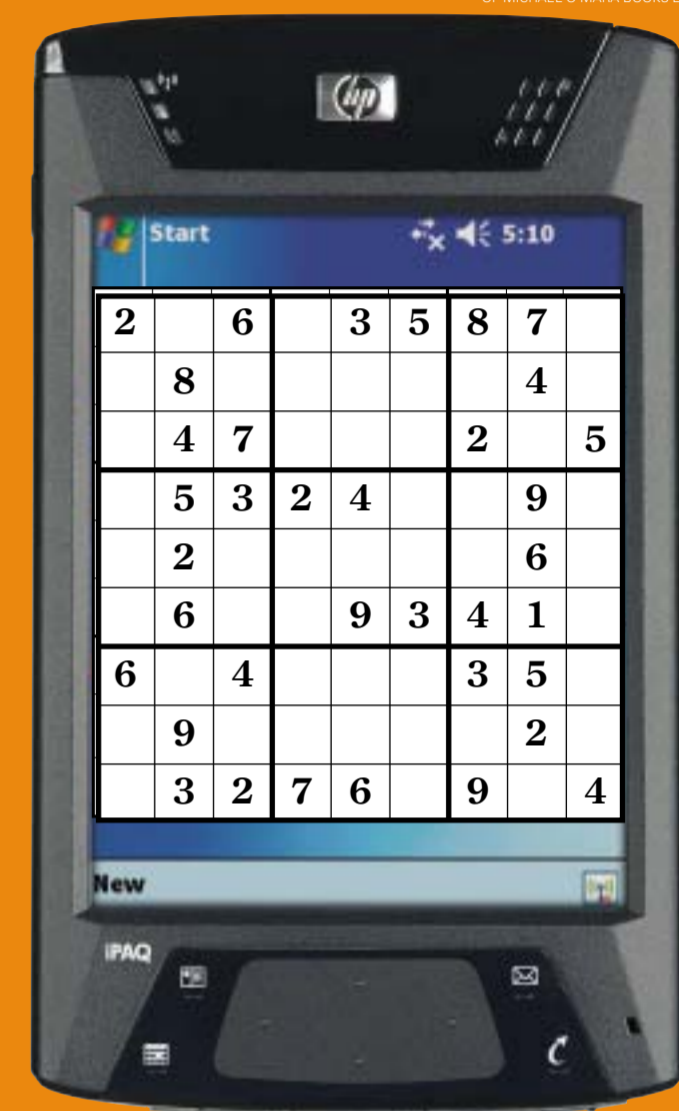
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION:

2	5	9	4	7	6	3	8	1
6	3	7	9	5	1	2	6	4
4	1	6	3	8	2	7	5	9
9	2	8	7	1	3	6	4	5
5	4	3	2	6	9	8	1	7
6	7	1	5	4	8	9	2	3
1	6	5	8	3	7	4	9	2
3	9	4	6	2	5	1	7	8
7	8	2	1	9	4	5	3	6

What are you views on Sudoku Plus? Email us at plus@newstoday.com.sg



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