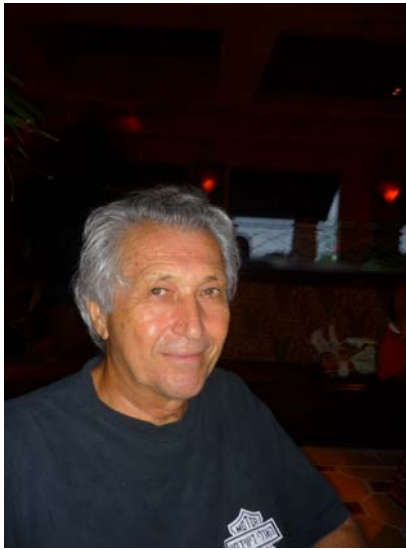


# The Bransk Project



The Bransk Project was the outcome of two men meeting in Washington DC in the summer of 2009.

**Chaim Shapiro** is an American citizen, who was born in 1946, just after the end of the Second World War, in a displaced persons camp in Linz, Austria. His parents originally came from the town of Bransk in Poland and immigrated to the USA in 1949.

**Harry Birkholz** always lived as if his soul was part of the American continent and a first trip to New York City in 1989 confirmed this feeling.

Harry loved the Jewish culture very much and was fascinated by the subject.

At the end of 2007, Harry began painting portraits of Jewish immigrants who lived in the Lower East side of Manhattan from 1880 to 1920.

With great joy we spent summer 2008 visiting New York City.

We had fun seeing the works of Edward Hopper, Jackson Pollock, Cy Twombly, Ellsworth Kelly, Hans Hoffmann, Ad Reinhardt, Eva Hesse and so many others.....

And Central Park!

On Ellis Island we bought a book on immigration which continued inspiring Harry after our return home.

Harry painted the mystery of buildings and their windows using the photos we took in NYC.

The following summer Fiona and Chaim Shapiro invited us to spend time with them in Washington DC, prior to visiting NYC again.

Together we visited the Holocaust Museum. This visit moved us deeply. Harry was overcome with emotion. Chaim comforted him.

Harry often spoke to me about the shock of seeing a film of Nazi war crimes as an adolescent.



Like many young Germans born after the war, Harry was not aware of his country's past.

Harry changed radically once he saw this impossible vision.

He became very conscious of the responsibility his generation would have to carry.

Harry was able to express this intense emotion linked to the past upon meeting Chaim Shapiro.

The following evening, Chaim and Harry had a long conversation. Chaim encouraged Harry to make a series of photos of the burnt Torah he had kept as a memory of the town, Bransk, from where his parents had escaped to finally end up in Baltimore.

These two men were of the Woodstock generation, freedom loving, passionate about rock and roll and deeply spiritual. Their sensitivities linked them: Harry was inhibited by the fear of expressing himself. Chaim encouraged Harry to express his feelings so that the memories of the Shapiro family's courage would be ultimately honored.

From September 2009, after the visit to the Holocaust Museum, Harry painted his innermost feelings, resulting in 7 paintings.

Harry also painted a collection of 27 images celebrating the Hymn of Solomon. This abstract, contemporary collection consists of three series of 7 paintings and one series of 6 paintings.

This is briefly the story of "The Bransk Project" - we are still searching for the right place to exhibit this powerful work.

The mystery of an encounter gives us the inspiration to act, to fight and to proclaim "never again".

Marianne Obozinski – February 2010