

## ARIE GALLES

*Fourteen Stations/Hey Yud Dalet suite*  
*Station 1-Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1998*  
Charcoal and white Conté, 47.5 X 75 in

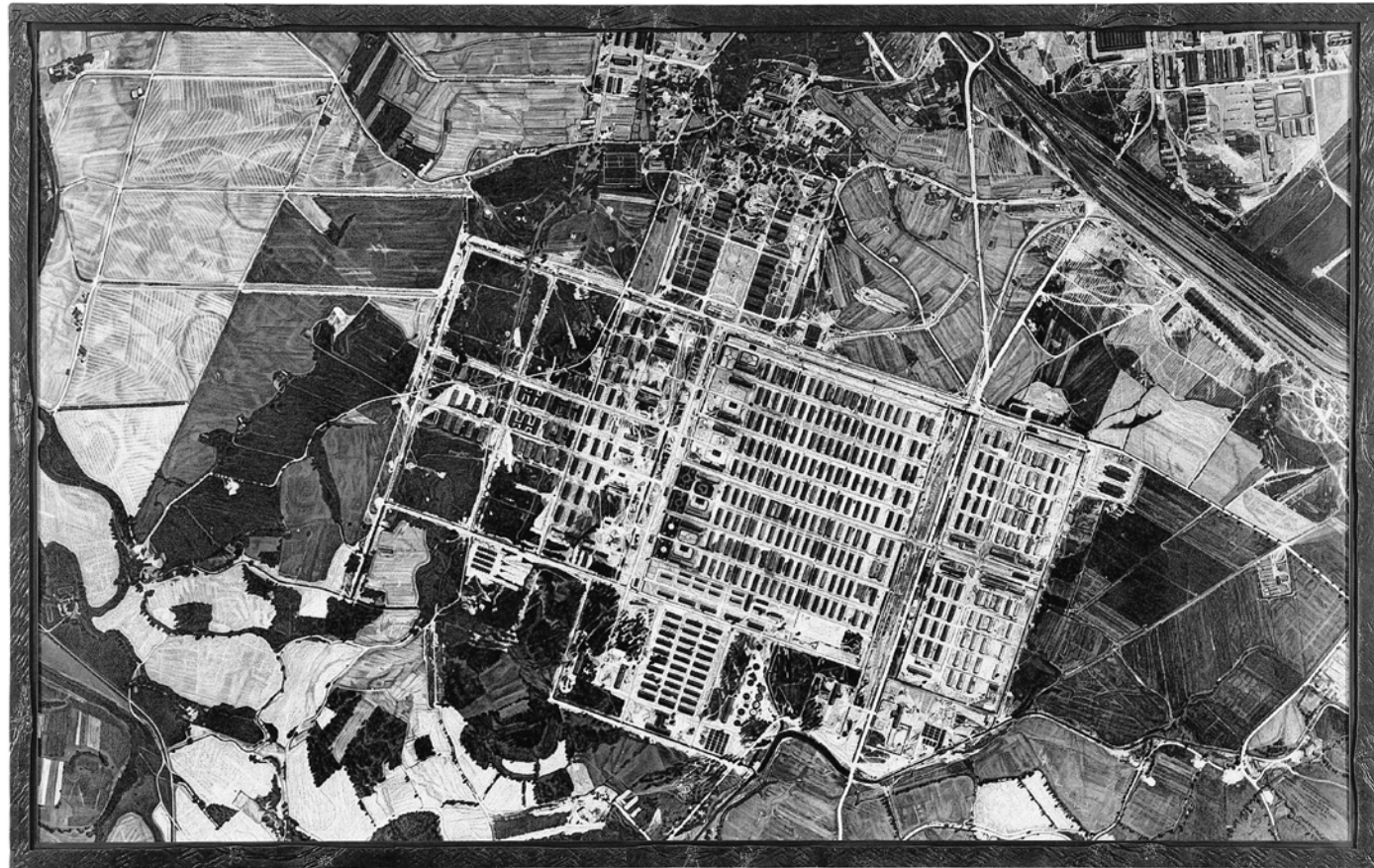


PHOTO: TIM VOLK

## CHERYL CHAFFIN

# Looking for Buna- Monowitz

## A Search for Primo Levi's History at Auschwitz

I had to understand Italian Jewish writer Primo Levi's experience to the point that I had to see, feel, and experience, granted in some removed, remote way, the ground that is Auschwitz. I also had to understand that this ground could in no way resemble anything Levi had experienced. But, I wanted to be there, to know what remained. I applied and was accepted to the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program and spent a week in New York City and three weeks in Poland in June and July 2014. The reason I had come to Auschwitz, even to Poland, was because of a passion for reading and teaching in my college English courses Levi's two-part memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Reawakening*, of his ten months in the camp, in particular Buna-Monowitz, a labor subcamp known also as Auschwitz III. The grounds that once housed the charnel grounds and forced labor camps of Nazi Germany have returned to Poland, to the ordinary and daily lives of Polish people, particularly those who live in and around the town of Oświęcim.

All around Auschwitz I and Birkenau (Auschwitz II) there were now modest houses with gardens. People had always lived here. Beginning in 1940, homes and farms were demolished to build the death and labor camps and their extensive network of subcamps. One of the first experimental gas chambers at Auschwitz II had been a Polish farmhouse—the little red house—from which the owners had been evicted. The space that became the camp grew as the Germans ravenously devoured the Polish country in and around Oświęcim for their killing purposes. Yet, life returns, even and especially after war, to cover the scarred and torn earth.

Eva Serfozo, my roommate, and I rode bikes through the hamlets around Oświęcim on a hot Saturday in July. We could have gone back to the camps for another day. It was a free day and the fellows, some of them, had returned to spend time in the national exhibits and halls at Auschwitz I. We had barely walked Birkenau's vast expanse, and it had poured rain there on Wednesday when we had visited. We had sheltered with our guide, part of a crowd of visitors, under the entry into the former camp, on the railroad tracks. How ironic, I thought in those moments of deluge, that we are seeking refuge where transports arrived. So, I could have gone back. But I was sick. I felt sick there. By the third day at the camps, sitting in a lecture room