

(Continued from inside)

Toll believed strongly in emphasizing the positive values she took away from her experience to triumph over adversity. Up until the pandemic in 2020, Dr. Toll still visited middle schools, high schools, higher education institutions, and community centers across the country to share her story, making contemporary connections between the Holocaust and the dangers of bullying. Her watercolors reside in the collections of the United States Holocaust Memorial in Washington, D.C., the Illinois Holocaust Education Center and Museum, and Yad Vashem Museum in Israel. Toll passed away on January 30, 2021.

The Massillon Museum initiated a partnership with Nelly Toll in 2012 to help share her story through a traveling exhibition, which was produced with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Toll had already been working for many years prior with filmmaker Diane Estelle Vicari on interpreting her childhood experience and the powerful messaging of hope present in her paintings through a documentary film vehicle. The Museum and Vicari continue to work together to ensure that, in the absence of Toll's voice, her story continues to resonate.



Massillon Museum is a cultural hub where art and history come together.

Imagining a Better World: The Artwork of Nelly Toll is organized by the Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio, with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

VISIT THE EXHIBIT

Monday through Thursday

9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Friday and Saturday

9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Sunday

Closed

Main Library

15425 Detroit Avenue

Lakewood, Ohio 44107-3829

(216) 226-8275

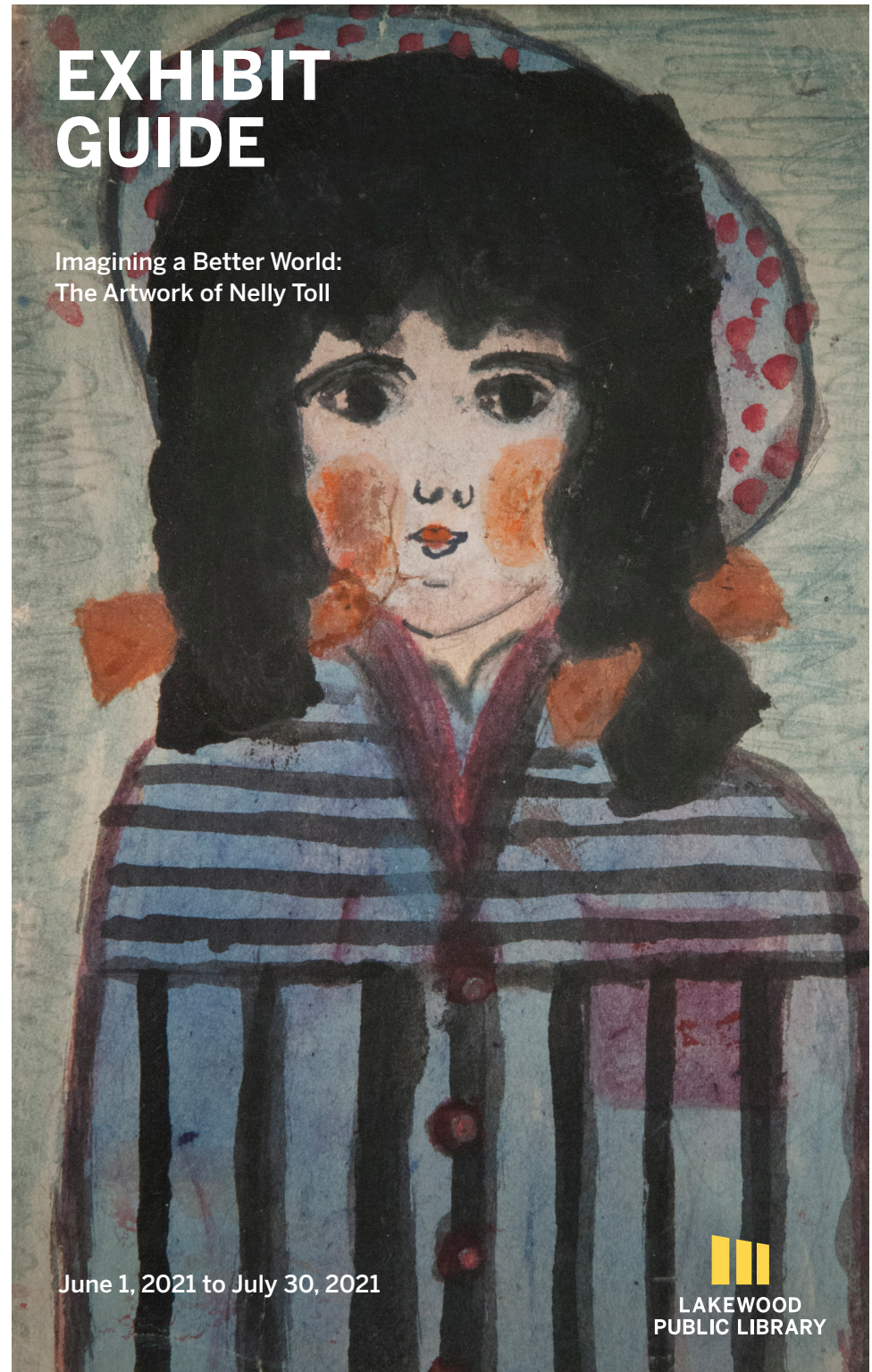
COVER:

All Alone

Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper
Image courtesy of Sharon Segall

EXHIBIT GUIDE

Imagining a Better World: The Artwork of Nelly Toll



June 1, 2021 to July 30, 2021

THE ARTIST: Nelly Toll



As a young child, Toll lived with her mother in a room in the home of a Catholic family, and hid in a “secret window,” standing mutely on the sill of a window bricked-up from the outside when required to hide. As described by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the life of Nelly and children like her “was a life in shadows, where a careless remark, a denunciation, or the murmurings of inquisitive neighbors could lead to discovery and death.”

Given a watercolor set by her mother, she painted small pictures of what she imagined a normal life would resemble. The images are filled with friends playing outside, pretty new dresses, parties, dinners, pets, and family—things that young Nelly could not have in hiding. In stark contrast to the imaginary world of her paintings, Toll also kept a diary that chronicled a young child’s experience of life in occupied Poland.

After the war, Toll studied art in Amsterdam and immigrated to the United States in 1951. She then studied art at Rutgers University, Fleisher Art Memorial, and the Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia. She earned her doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania



Playing Dominoes with a Friend

Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, 1944
Image courtesy of Dr. Nelly and Ervin Toll

in literacy and education. Her adult artwork has been exhibited in Belgium and throughout the United States. Toll also published an award-winning book, *Behind the Secret Window* (1993), based on her childhood diary. She followed this up with a piece of fiction, *Behind the Hidden Walls*, and penned several volumes on art of the Holocaust. Additionally, she co-authored a play based on *Behind the Secret Window*, which received three professional productions.

Nelly Toll’s reception with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on January 25, 2016, in honor of an exhibition about Holocaust art, was not only a significant moment in Nelly’s life, but a historic world event. Of 50 artists represented in an exhibition organized by Yad Vashem and shown at the German Historical Museum, half perished at the hands of the Nazis. The other half survived the war; but in 2016, Nelly’s was the only voice present to represent this particular group of artists—their lone remaining witness to unconscionable acts of the Third Reich. Merkel’s meeting with Nelly Toll and presence at the exhibition symbolized a national acknowledgement of Germany’s growing anti-Semitism. And thus Nelly’s story remains more important now than ever before.



Two Friends - Mother, Governess, and Mother's Three Children

From “Vacation in the Country” series, 1944
Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper
Image courtesy of Dr. Nelly and Ervin Toll



After a Full Day, A Bath is Prepared by the Chambermaid

From “Vacation in the Country” series, 1944
Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper
Image courtesy of Dr. Nelly and Ervin Toll



On The Way to Church

From “Vacation in the Country” series, 1944
Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper
Image courtesy of Dr. Nelly and Ervin Toll