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American Jewish Museum announces *May I Tell You of Private First Class Nathan Hilu?*
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General Douglas MacArthur, whom I served during the Korean War, said to Congress “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” But, I, private first class, cpl and SGT Nathan Hilu, say before I fade away I shall write my humble military memoirs. [sic]
–Nathan Hilu

May I Tell You of Private First Class Nathan Hilu? includes chromatic drawings by Hilu that depict his recollections of being a prison guard during the Nuremberg Trials in the aftermath of World War II, memories of growing up during the Depression in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, and his interpretations of Jewish stories and folklore.

A self-taught maker, Hilu fuses drawing with memoir-style writing similar to the graphic novel genre. He makes work with graphite, crayons and Sharpie pens and collages and tapes cardboard and paper together. His frenzied depictions, which resemble a stream of consciousness visual journal, are unpolished yet stunningly vibrant and compelling.

A long-nosed, big-eyed character peering over a wall with text affirming *Kilroy Was Here* appears in many drawings. *Kilroy Was Here* was a reference during World War II—a meme before memes existed in popular culture—that became a widespread image throughout the world. Soldiers, going to and from battle in the most remote places on earth, would be greeted by this cartoon/graffiti image of *Kilroy Was Here*. Kilroy’s cartoon face was so omnipresent there were contests in the Air Force to get to isolated and uninhabited places around the globe before Kilroy. Kilroy is a powerful image for Hilu, and it’s as if he incorporates Kilroy as a metaphor for himself. Like Kilroy, Hilu firmly attests he was here for some of twentieth century’s most epic moments.

Lending perceptive context and insight, the exhibition includes written interpretations of Hilu by students from University of Pittsburgh’s *Gender and Jewish History* and *Holocaust History and Memory* classes. Their writing, which accompanies Hilu’s artwork, enhances and challenges our understanding of Hilu.

Born in 1925 to Syrian Jewish parents, Nathan Hilu spent his childhood in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. He was in the United States Army from 1945 through the 1950s. Since retiring from the Army he has lived in Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

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