



FREDERIK MEIJER Gardens & Sculpture Park

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MEIJER GARDENS ANNOUNCES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL GIFT, SCULPTURE ACQUISITION

*'Ways to Say Goodbye' by Ariel Schlesinger to be added to
Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park's permanent sculpture collection in 2022*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — June 28, 2021 — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park is honored to announce a major gift from The Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids in order to establish the first Holocaust memorial in Grand Rapids, anchored by Ariel Schlesinger's *Ways to Say Goodbye*. This gift is made possible by a donation from the Pestka Family in memory of their father Henry, the survivors who settled in Western Michigan and the millions of Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

"Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park is highly honored and very pleased to receive this significant and meaningful gift to acquire Ariel Schlesinger's monumental sculpture *Ways to Say Goodbye*," said David Hooker, President & CEO of Meijer Gardens. "The sculpture will be installed in 2022 and dedicated in memory of Henry Pestka and the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. We are deeply grateful for this gift adding such an important work of art to our permanent collection. Our members and guests will forever benefit from this extraordinary gift which will serve to educate and promote peace." continued Hooker.

Ways to Say Goodbye is a twenty-foot-tall aluminum cast of a fig tree that has shards of glass inserted among the branches. It is an exceptional work of contemporary sculpture dealing with themes of profound loss and grief and will serve to memorialize the millions of people who perished in the Holocaust and the Holocaust survivors of Western Michigan.

Ariel Schlesinger takes an organic form that is a metaphor of both the Jewish people and their history. The aluminum cast sculpture is of a living fig tree that he found on a farm while traveling in northern Italy. This tree

was specifically chosen by Schlesinger for its character and as a symbol of the Jewish struggle for survival both during and after the Holocaust. The tree appears fragile and clinging to life, however it is also representative of great endurance. Schlesinger has commented that in conceptualizing the sculpture, he held pieces of broken glass in his hands that pressed into his fingers. This recalled the Kristallnacht, or *Night of Broken Glass*. The Kristallnacht was the symbolic beginning of the Holocaust, during which Nazi mobs murdered Jews and destroyed Jewish property and synagogues throughout Germany. Schlesinger transferred this concept to the sculpture by embedding the glass shards into the branches of the tree, representing the near annihilation of the Jewish people in a few short years.

Meijer Gardens and the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids envision *Ways to Say Goodbye* as a gathering place for the Jewish community of Grand Rapids. The sculpture will be an excellent teaching tool for educators both locally and nationally to address the Holocaust and its legacy.

"As time goes on and memories of the Holocaust fade, it is important to remember the barbarity human beings are capable of," said Steve Pestka. "It is equally important to contemplate the strength of the survivors and their ability to continue and rebuild their lives. It is our hope that this work of art will promote an appreciation of our shared humanity and a reminder that hatred and intolerance continue to this day and the consequences of the ultimate dehumanization of human beings."

"The memorial has important significance to my family because our father was a survivor," said Linda Pestka. "The numbers 73847 are numbers that we will never forget. They were tattooed to my father's forearm, as though he were an animal, as identification for his potential death. It is our duty to educate, respect and honor the victims and their families of the unthinkable acts against life and morality. The Holocaust did happen. Holocaust deniers are reporting false and harmful information. Anti-Semitism and other hate crimes are on the rise. The Meijer Gardens Memorial sculpture will allow hundreds of thousands of people each year to become educated and aware of the atrocities against humanity. May we never forget."

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About Ariel Schlesinger

Ariel Schlesinger (b. 1980, Jerusalem) reveals the poetry, poignancy and potential of everyday things. Through precise interventions, creative engineering and trompe l'oeil, his work challenges our perceptions and

encourages us to look at the familiar in new ways. Schlesinger has lived and worked in many parts of the world, including the United States, Great Britain, Mexico and Germany. He grew up in Israel and received his undergraduate degree at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, Israel's oldest and most prestigious art school. He graduated from Columbia University in New York with a Master's in Fine Arts degree. Schlesinger has had many notable exhibitions in Austria, Cuba, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Slovenia and Switzerland. In 2019 he received a prestigious commission for a public sculpture outside of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, Germany. Ariel Schlesinger and his work have been written about in many books and notable publications.

About the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids

The Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids serves to enrich the quality of life for Jews in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in Israel, and around the world. The Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids meets this goal through philanthropy, planning, education and wellness opportunities, community relations, and volunteer recruitment and training. The Federation convenes agencies, synagogues, and organizations to address issues of common concern. Together, we transform Jewish tradition and values into action. Whether caring for people in need or nurturing and sustaining Jewish identity for future generations, this is where our community comes together as one; where we, as a community, develop innovative responses to critical, often life-threatening issues; where anyone who needs help can get it; where an energized Jewish community grows and celebrates; and where everyone, including you, can make a difference right now.

About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

One of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park was recently listed in the top 100 most visited museums in the world and the top 30 most visited museums in the United States by *The Art Newspaper*, the leading publication in global art news. The 158-acre main campus features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the largest interactive children's gardens in the country; arid and Victorian gardens with bronze sculptures by Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin; a carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens; and a 1900-seat outdoor amphitheater, featuring an eclectic mix of world-renowned musicians every summer. The internationally acclaimed Sculpture Park features a permanent collection including works by Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Bruggen, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Richard Serra, Louise Bourgeois, Ai Weiwei and Jaume Plensa, among others. Indoor galleries host changing sculpture exhibitions that have included Ai Weiwei, Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Mark di Suvero, Jonathan Borofsky, Alexander Calder, Jim Dine and others. In June 2015, the eight-acre Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden at

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park opened. Created by renowned designer Hoichi Kurisu, the garden features sculpture by Anish Kapoor, Jenny Holzer, David Nash, George Rickey, Masayuki Koorida, Zhang Huan, and Guiseppe Penone.

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