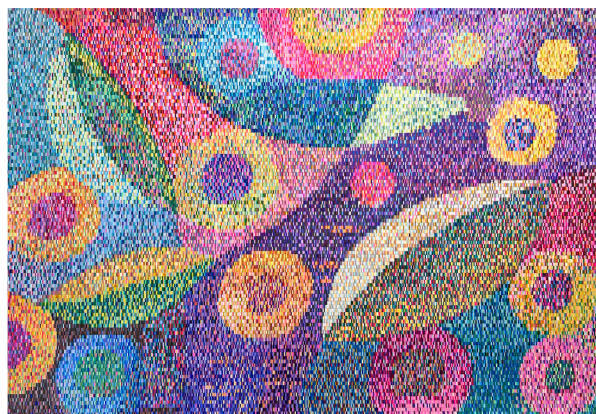




TURNING SIX MILLION INTO SOMETHING WE CAN SEE

Each one tells a story: 60,000 hand-painted rectangles.

By Marian Lebor

On a recent weekday evening, I joined a group of women at Shivtei Yisrael Shul in Ra'anana, who were participating in the Six Million Project. We all sat at tables and were given a page with 100 rectangles and a selection of acrylic pens with which to color in each one.

The Six Million Project is a global art initiative that is the brainchild of Liora Blum, an Israeli artist and graphic designer. The project aims to create one hundred large-scale artworks composed of six million hand-painted rectangles, each one representing a Jewish life lost in the Holocaust.

As a second-generation Holocaust survivor, Liora set out to transform the abstract number six million into something we can see and feel. Indeed, as I colored the rectangles on my page, I felt that each one somehow represented the members of my own family who perished in the Shoah.

Although the subject matter is weighty, the atmosphere during the evening was convivial, with refreshments and popular Israeli music playing in the background. Over a glass of wine and savory snacks, I chatted to Liora Blum about future plans, now that the project is well under way.



SIX MILLION PROJECT

You started The Six Million Project back in December 2022. What are the latest developments?

The project is moving from a powerful idea into a growing international movement. In the past year alone, workshops have taken place in remarkably different settings — and that range tells the story. At Herzlia School in Cape Town, the project became part of a staff development workshop. Educators didn't just discuss

Holocaust memory in theory; they experienced it physically, with each rectangle. The conversations that emerged weren't academic — they were personal and reflective. Teachers spoke about how to transmit memory in a world that feels increasingly detached from history.

At Beth El Jewish Community in New Jersey, families, seniors, and young adults sat side-by side. Some participants had direct family connections to survivors; others did not. Yet everyone leaned into the same quiet concentration. It created something rare: inter-generational memory in action.

In Detroit, the project became part of a *yahrzeit* commemoration for a Holocaust survivor. Instead of just lighting a candle, the community built something tangible in that survivor's memory. It shifted remembrance into a contribution.

Now there is interest from shuls in the UK, batmitzvah groups in South Africa, and multiple communities and schools across Israel, including gatherings of Holocaust survivors themselves. When survivors paint rectangles that represent those who were lost, the atmosphere becomes much deeper.

Why do you think communities abroad are responding so strongly?

Something is shifting globally. Anti-semitism is on the rise. There are lies, appropriation and distortion. Many Jews are asking: what can I do that is constructive, not reactive? Communities are looking for programming that isn't another lecture or ceremony people attend passively. They want engagement. They want to feel that they have contributed to something lasting. They want to socialize in a relaxing, safe space. The Six Million Project offers that.

When participants sit and paint, something subtle happens. After an hour of colouring, they look down and realize how small an area they've managed to fill. That

realization forces an honest question: if this is only a few hundred rectangles, what does six million truly mean? You cannot rush it. You cannot automate it. That is precisely why it matters.

You've worked with schools, synagogues, batmitzvah groups, and survivors. How does the project adapt to different audiences?

The structure remains consistent, but the focus shifts. With educators, as in Cape Town, the emphasis is on pedagogy. How do we teach memory in 2026 and beyond? How do we move beyond statistics and dates? With batmitzvah groups in South Africa, the conversation centers on responsibility. These young girls are stepping into Jewish adulthood. What does it mean to carry collective memory? What does contribution look like at the age of twelve?

In American and British synagogues, the sessions often become communal anchors. Members who might not usually attend the same events create unexpected connections inside the community. The project does not dictate emotion; it creates the conditions for it. In Israeli communities, particularly when survivors participate, there is often less talking and more intensity.



Mayor of Raanana, Chaim Broyde, participates in the Six Million Project with founder Liora Blum on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 2026.

Survivors do not need context. They bring lived memory. They are the last living witnesses.

In practical terms, what does hosting a workshop involve?

It's simpler than people expect — and that simplicity is part of its strength. As at this event at Shvtei, participants gather around tables where each person receives a page filled with 100 rectangles. They



Yahrzeit gathering — Detroit, February 2026. A mother and daughter honor the memory of a loved one, contributing to The Six Million Project in remembrance of his family's legacy.

choose colors and design their own page. No artistic skill is required. Every completed page becomes part of one of the one hundred large-scale works.

Communities host the workshops and contribute toward the materials, preparation, and development of the project, which allows the work to continue growing internationally.

What is the larger vision for the project?

The goal is to exhibit all 100 panels together in a single monumental space. Imagine walking into a vast hall and seeing six million hand-painted rectangles surrounding you. From a distance, you grasp the scale. Up close, you see the individuality of each mark. It must be large enough to confront, and honest enough not to soften the reality.

But the planned future exhibition is only part of the story. The journey toward it is equally important. Each workshop — in Israel and abroad — becomes another thread

in a growing fabric of collective action.

Communities are beginning to ask whether the project can become part of annual programming, anchor Holocaust education weeks, or serve as an ongoing hands-on experience for schools, synagogues, and youth groups. We've scheduled workshops throughout the month of Yom HaShoah in Israel. I'm thrilled that past participants reach out almost every day, asking to join again and continue contributing to the project. I'm continually inspired by messages from all over the world, from those wanting to bring the project to their own communities. That is how memory becomes sustained rather than symbolic.

What are the challenges that come with this expansion?

These days, there is always the temptation to digitize or automate. This project resists that by focusing on the human hand, eye and soul. Every rectangle is painted by hand.



At the end of the workshop, each community receives a poster created from their work to print and frame, featuring the participants' names and a *Yizkor* section. The page becomes part of the final exhibition of the project.

Growth requires coordination and hosts who understand the spirit of the work. There are also practical realities: materials, organization and consistency. If the project is to be exhibited in a major museum one day, it must be built strategically and sustainably.

I believe that we are at a turning point. The Six Million Project is no longer confined to my dining room table. It is being carried by communities across continents.

The number six million has always been spoken. Now it is being built. And here is the question we must face: in ten years, when fewer survivors remain, what physical evidence will stand to show that we did not allow memory to fade into abstraction? This project is one answer. Six million is overwhelming. Perhaps the only honest way to confront it is together — one deliberate rectangle at a time. ■



Yom HaShoah event with Telfed Raanana — participants in Raanana came together, colouring and sharing moments of connection through the *Six Million Project*.



Pick up a pen. Join the story!

For workshops or to bring the *Six Million Project* to your community:

Website: www.sixmillionproject.org

Email: info@sixmillionproject.org

Instagram: [@sixmillionproject](https://www.instagram.com/sixmillionproject)