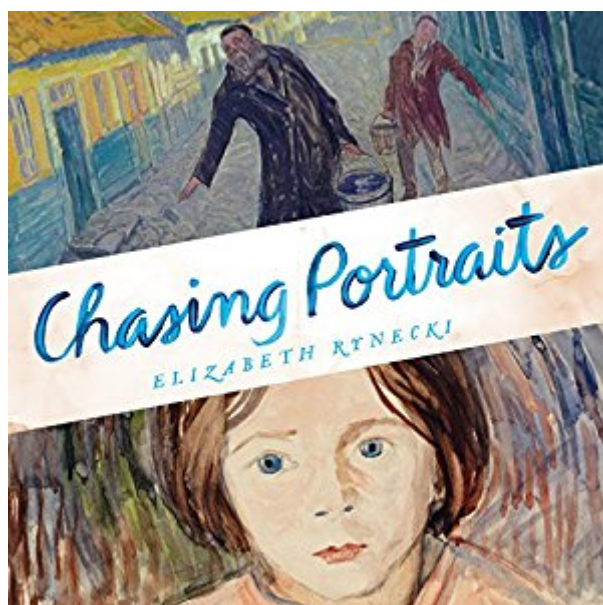


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# Chasing Portraits: A Great-Granddaughter's Quest For Her Lost Art Legacy



## Synopsis

The everyday lives of the Polish-Jewish community depicted in Moshe Rynecki's paintings simply blended into the background of Elizabeth Rynecki's life when she was growing up. But the art transformed from familiar to extraordinary in her eyes after her grandfather - Moshe's son, George - left behind journals detailing the loss her ancestors had endured during World War II, including Moshe's art. Knowing that her family had found only a small portion of Moshe's art and that many more pieces remained to be found, Elizabeth set out to find them. Before Moshe was deported to the ghetto, he entrusted his work to friends who would keep it safe. After he was killed in the Majdanek concentration camp, the art was dispersed all over the world. With the help of historians, curators, and admirers of Moshe's work, Elizabeth began the incredible and difficult task of rebuilding his collection. Spanning three decades of Elizabeth's life and three generations of her family, this touching memoir is a compelling narrative of the richness of one man's art, the devastation of war, and one woman's unexpected path to healing.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 41 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 6, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01L7YRMGC

Best Sellers Rank: #95 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Art #472

in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Artists, Writers & Musicians #958

in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Artists, Architects & Photographers

## Customer Reviews

When Elizabeth Rynecki reads her grandfather's journal of his escape from the Nazis after his funeral, she begins a decades long search for her great-grandfather's art around the world. The story of her transformation from claimant to historian makes this a distinctive and extraordinary account of reclamation. Instead of pursuing ownership, she seeks recognition of his artistic contributions and shares with the world images of his paintings which offer a visual ethnography of a

time and place destroyed during WWII. Because of the subject matter in the paintings, the artwork would not have been stolen by Nazis as they would have considered it "degenerate art" and destroyed it. The complicated world of Holocaust art restitution is explained clearly through the challenges she faced in tracking down Moshe Rynecki's paintings. Part detective story, part history, part personal transformation, it reads like fiction yet is based on solid research and thorough documentation. This is far more than a story about one family and what they lost in the war. It's a fresh approach to understanding history in shades of grey instead of black and white. Highly recommend.

The subtitle of the book is "A great-granddaughter's quest for her lost art legacy" but this book is so much more. It's the author's quest to find her own place in history. Elizabeth's great-grandfather Moshe was a Warsaw-based painter during the Interwar years, and focused on documenting Jewish religious life and Jewish culture. Before the war Moshe divided canvases and papers among friends for safe-keeping. After the war, only a fraction of the artwork was recovered. Where is the rest? Elizabeth has devoted years to that question, and, remarkably, has tracked down paintings across the globe. The search for the lost artwork was fascinating. But, I found her personal journey equally engaging. I appreciated the way she honestly "and sometimes with remarkable vulnerability" brought the reader along on her journey of coming to terms with her personal expectations for the art, meeting the current owners of the artwork, and learning the place in history of her great-grandfather's paintings. This book is different than other Holocaust literature in that it addresses not only what "and who" was lost, but the complex responsibilities of the generations that follow.

Elizabeth Rynecki's great-grandfather painted scenes of Jewish life in Poland, but most of his work disappeared during WWII. In a scene worthy of a novel "but it's true!" Elizabeth read her grandfather's diary after he died and discovered he'd written a mandate to her to investigate her family history. That mandate crystallized into a search for the lost paintings, a search that took Elizabeth around the world. The reader follows Elizabeth into museums and archives, into lawyers' offices, and the living rooms of those who now own some of the paintings. The discovery of each new painting feels like a personal triumph. What makes this book such an enjoyable read is how the author successfully weaves an art detective story with her personal family history. She not only taught me about the history of Polish Jews and the art world, she also pulled my heartstrings.

Elizabeth has written a story so moving and fascinating that I read it in just three sittings. It reads like a detective novel filled with valuable historical background and touching personal anecdotes. I think it is a must read for anyone interested in the reclamation of family art taken during the Holocaust and in the twists and turns that propel a detective in her search. A fine read!

Worth Getting in Bed For? Yes. This was a wonderful chronicle of the Author's quest to locate her great-grandfather's art work, lost in the holocaust. The charm of the story is that he was an ordinary artist where his artwork wasn't worth millions, but worth so much more. This has it all, mystery, intrigue, history, art references and family love. Rynecki is making a documentary while she is writing the book which I would love to see. The difference between searching as a claimant versus an historian is highlighted. The Book will appeal on many levels. Highly recommended. Copy provided by publisher and NetGalley.

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