

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's "Do You Remember, When"

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Among the various modes of museum display, "online exhibits," are often disappointing. They are overwhelmingly purely visual, comprising two-dimensional representations of select artworks or artifacts. These are chosen without explanation by the museum and organized in a this-then-that sequence that has little to do with the personal idiosyncrasies of museum visitation – or the cross-institutional, hyper-textual possibilities afforded by the web. While some science and a few art museums offer important exceptions, history museums are particularly guilty of this tendency. It is heartening, therefore, to find a truly enlightening online history exhibit. [The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's 'Do You Remember, When' exhibition](#) went online in 2001. It is based entirely on a book given by one young man, Manfred Lewin, killed at Auschwitz, to his gay friend, Gad Beck, a half Jew who survived in the small Jewish underground of World War II Berlin. While the book is ostensibly comprised of notes about Friedrich Von Schiller's 18th century play Don Carlos, it is impossible to read without also detecting the subtext of a doomed friendship in 1940s Berlin.

This dual meaning makes the text especially well-suited to the USHMM's conceptual criss-crossing between two historical layers. The 17 easily-navigated (and translated) pages of the illustrated handmade book are filled with rollover links to further explanatory material, including audio songs, archival photographs, and recorded sections of interviews with Gad Beck (who entrusted the book to the museum). The well-chosen design and content makes the reading

experience near seamless, and allows one to choose their level of immersion in historical detail. (A technical review of the site can be found at <http://www.creativepro.com/story/feature/10686.html>). The exhibit verges on that most quality most elusive in online exhibits – being tactile. A diary, or any book, can work better online than in a museum (where pages usually can't be turned, and interpretive commentary in text-label or audio form is added only clumsily). In 'Do You Remember, When,' the viewer gains a real sense of both the intimacy of the primary material (the amateurish drawings, the occasionally disjointed narrative) and the research that went into producing the secondary interpretation. This research stimulated memories (particularly from Gad Beck) but also revealed some gaps that couldn't be filled in. The result is a rare online document that is not only moving and content-rich, but also provides readers with a vivid insight into both the alignments and disparities cleaving personal memory and archival artifact.