On the morning of the march to Krasnik, Esther decided to part from her family and stay behind. It was decided that her younger sister Maria would remain behind with her although the youngest one charmed to be chosen. In a 1998 interview by filmmaker Lawrence Kasdan Krinitz recalls, “I can still hear her voice.”

Esther and Maria were able to survive by their ingenuity and courage. The rest of the family—parents, one sister, and two brothers—were never heard of again. Krinitz arrived in the U.S. in 1949. The vividness of Krinitz’s recollection is evident in her fabric collages. In the documentary, Through the Eye of the Needle: The Art of Esther Nisenhal Krinitz, one of her daughters explains, “Our mother was driven to tell the story. She wanted us to know, she wanted us to remember.” Krinitz’s images thus become a collective responsibility to keep memory alive.

“This exhibition speaks to the power and passion of pictorial narrative, and the ability of visual art to communicate both deeply personal and collective memories,” says the Memorial Art Gallery’s exhibition curator, Marlene Humann Whitman. “And as we are all well aware, geopolitical atrocities continue today, and this work may allow us to access events that seem otherwise implausible.”

The exhibition installation begins sizable enough with two images of village and family life executed in 1977, when Krinitz was 50 years old. Only once we step into the gallery proper does the imagery become haunting. These 34 works were created between 1988 and 1999 and are governed by a stark contrast between their pleasing appearance (and our traditional corruptions with fabric art) and their narrative content, which is explained in stitched captions, to harrowing effect. Technically speaking, the works combine machine and hand-sewn fabric collage, embroidery, crochet, fabric paint, and occasional additions of three-dimensional elements. This unorthodoxy of material and technique extends to shifts in scale and perspective as well as the incorporation of different moments in time within a single image.

While Krinitz trained as a dressmaker and owned a clothing store, this does not account entirely for her stunning use of color and texture. Color harmonies and rhythms may remind us of 19th-century painters Edouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard. The texture of stitching and appliqué adds realism to the compositions. Experiencing Krinitz’s works we know instinctively that the time spent creating, was also time spent reflecting. As the stitched caption to Road to Krasnik explains, the image is one of several dedicated to Oct. 15, the day all Jewish villagers were ordered to march toward Krasnik. Young and old alike, a long line of humanity marches through agricultural fields toward the horizon, toward imminent deportation and eventual death. Most wear a Nazi-enforced white armband with a blue star of David, the women are wrapped in colorful kalandas and shuvios all are carrying small bundles of belongings. In the foreground, Esther and Maria meet a crowd. The caption speaks of Krinitz’s terror at realizing how close they already were to Krasnik.

These captions merit closer scrutiny. Their content ranges from sweet to horrific, from factual to deeply personal, yet their tone remains emotionally distant and in a documentary sense fits. In words and images Krinitz tells of instances to which she received help from a Nazi soldier and a dentist, reflecting from demystifying the enemy on masse.

Whether such balance and distance is the product of time, of the process of recalling, we don’t know. We also don’t see FABRIC, Page 11C.
### Fabric

know whether her depiction of nature is
one of hindsight or reflects as she experi-
cenced it 50 years ago. It is evident,
however, that images which contain
natural elements are visually most
stunning and complex.

The sky in Road to Krasnik is dark
and brooding, filled with foreboding
black crows. In other works leaves
rustle in the wind, mushrooms thrive in
clusters, flowers bloom for no one to
notice. This vibrant nature, unperturbed
by violence and history, tells another
story of timelessness and beauty. One
wonders whether Krinitz felt able to
draw on this source of comfort back
then.

Fabric of Survival reflects one partic-
ular person’s experiences and memories
50 years later. As we too well know,
however, displacement, family separa-
tion, intolerance, religious persecution,
and genocide are still very much with us

### If You Go

What: Fabric of Survival: The Art of
Esther Nisenthal Krinitz.

When: through December 2, 2018

Where: Memorial Art Gallery, 500 Uni-
versity Ave., Rochester

Cost: $15; senior citizens, $12; college
students with ID and children 6–18, $6.
Always free to members, University of
Rochester faculty/staff and students,
and children 5 and under. Half-price
general admission Thursdays from 5–9
pm.

if not on the rise again.

If there is a message that we may take
away from Krinitz’s work it is the possi-
bility of courage, perseverance, and
success when the world seeks to harm
you and those close to you.

Britta Konau is a former curator and a
freelance writer living in the Rochester
area.