



# Andrea Peyser

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**T**HIS epic art project was made possible by Borat.

In 2005, serious feminist artist Linda Stein was punked by British comic actor Sacha Baron Cohen. While in character as the bumbling, misogynistic, anti-Semitic, homophobic journalist from Kazakhstan named Borat Sagdiyev, he visited Stein's New York City art studio, ostensibly to film a documentary that was to help the plight of women in Third World countries.

She fell for the gag.

In footage that appears in the Jewish actor's wacky 2006 movie, "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan," Borat/Baron Cohen spoke to three members of the Veteran Feminists of America, including Stein, who is on the organization's board of directors.

He called Condoleezza Rice, then US secretary of state, "chocolate baby." "Is it not a problem that a woman have a smaller brain than a man?" he asked.

"That's it! I've had it!" Stein yelled as she marched out of camera range. She struck back after the "Borat" movie was released, creating a sculpture on which she drew a tiny penis on the crotch of an image of Borat/Baron Cohen in a thong mankini. Now, she has turned the experience into an exhibition — depicting heroic females who saved lives during the Holocaust while risking, or losing, their own.

"I call this whole episode 'the four B's,'" Stein told me. "There's the bully, the bullied, the bystander and the brave upstander. Borat was a bully claiming to be an upstander" — one who stands up for the oppressed. "Bull[bleep]!"

"He had the boys laughing with him, not at him. He had the anti-Semites laughing against the Jews, not with them." And Stein says she's his fan.

Stein was inspired to right a historical injustice. The stories of fe-



male bravery during the reign of Adolf Hitler and the rest of the World War II-era Jew-killers have not won the attention given to those of men. The tale of Oskar Schindler, the Nazi party member who saved the lives of 1,200 Jewish prisoners of war, has been enshrined in popular culture in the Oscar-winning 1993 movie "Schindler's List," directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg.

Determined to honor the heroines of the Holocaust, Stein cre-

ated 10 eye-popping tapestries collectively titled "Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females, the Tapestries of Linda Stein."

One of the fierce females, Anne Frank, is well known for her "Diary of a Young Girl," published around the world, in which she described her teen years spent hiding in Nazi-occupied Holland, before she was arrested and died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Less well-known is Yukiko Sugi-

hara, the wife of Japan's wartime consul to Lithuania, who helped persuade her husband to rescue 6,000 Jews, granting them visas allowing them to enter Japan.

Noor Inayat Khan, a Muslim, sent radio signals to allies in Nazi-occupied France for four months at a time when the life expectancies of radio operators was six weeks, said Stein. Executed at the Dachau concentration camp at age 30, she made one last, defiant utterance before being shot to death — the French word "liberté."

Only one, Ruth Gruber, is still alive today, at age 103. A journalist and US government official during World War II, she helped displaced postwar Jewish refugees by writing their stories and photographing them while on assignment for the New York Post.

The artworks, each of which measures 5 feet by 5 feet, incorporate leather and metal to give them a three-dimensional look, photographs, plus pictures taken from 1940s comic books of the superhero Wonder Woman. The tapestries, which will set you back \$25,000 apiece, or \$12,000 each for limited-edition copies, are set to be unveiled Dec. 11 at the Flomenhaft Gallery in Manhattan. (Stein plans to donate a third of the profits to Have Art: Will Travel! Inc., a nonprofit group for which she's founder and president and which promotes women's "empowerment.") After Feb. 21, 2015, plans are under way to exhibit the works around the country and the world.

Stein has made peace with Sacha Baron Cohen. "I enjoy his work as an actor very much. He definitely inspired my art. He also inspired me to think about the ways that people can address bigotry."

He's also wickedly funny. His influence has led to the creation of fabulous tapestries.

As Borat would say, "Very nice!"

Steven Hirsch