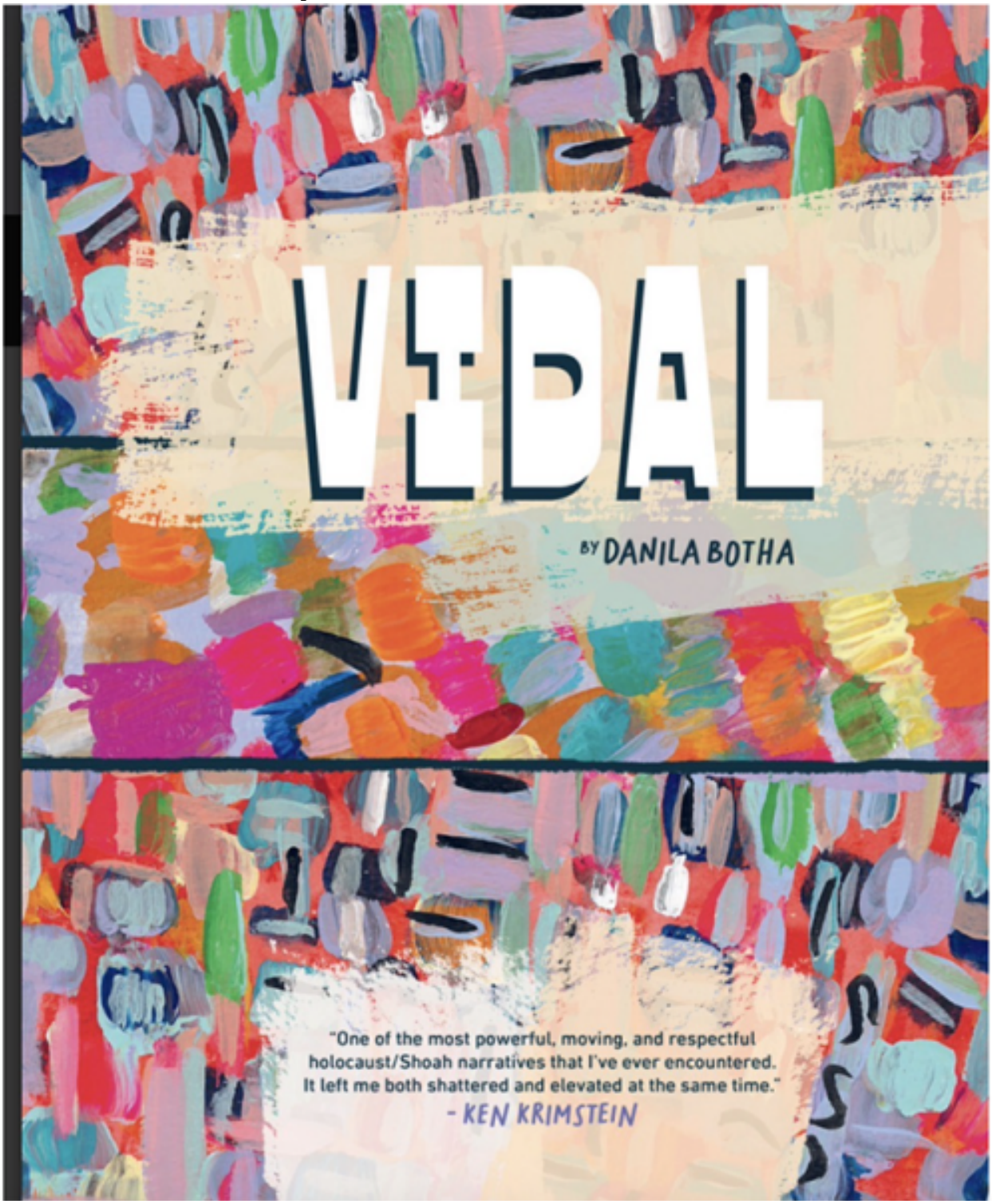
Vidal by Danila Botha book review



Vidal. Danila Botha. At Bay Press. 2026. 120pp. $30.
This is such a beautifully realized work in many ways. It is, no doubt, a grounded, thoughtful and graceful combining of words and pictures. It is one of those narratives that encompasses the

world-at-large with its immense joys and tragedy, all within the journey of one individual, one scrappy and dapper man, Vidal Ben Soussan. The creator of this work is Danila Botha, an exceptional writer, having proven herself many times over with an impressive body of prose fiction. This is her first work combining her prose with her own paintings. It is a work full of good sentiment that evokes the quality of an autobiographical work.



The greatest strength to Danila Botha's new book is in its prose narrative followed closely by her passionate paintings. The plot to this work is following the life struggle of our main character, one Vidal Ben Soussan. Young Vidal grows up in Tiberias (Ottoman Empire and then British Mandate Palestine) and moves to Paris to pursue his art and freedom and gets trapped there during World War II. Botha traces the steps of Vidal's life with a combination of her poetic prose laid over her paintings that evoke Chagall. The reader goes back and forth between the paintings and the prose that present the life of Vidal Ben Soussan, from his Sephardic upbringing in Tiberias to studies in the Technion in Haifa, his artistic life in Paris, his work with the underground resistance, and his ultimate arrest and time in Auschwitz.



Botha's family, like the one depicted in this book, are fifth generation Moroccan Jews who grew up speaking both Hebrew and Arabic and coexisting with their neighbors and friends in diverse harmony. There are numerous examples of these all-too-human exchanges. One culture blended into the other in everyday life. For instance, Vidal's mother, who hated having to go to the market, would curse it in Hebrew and then again in Arabic for good measure.



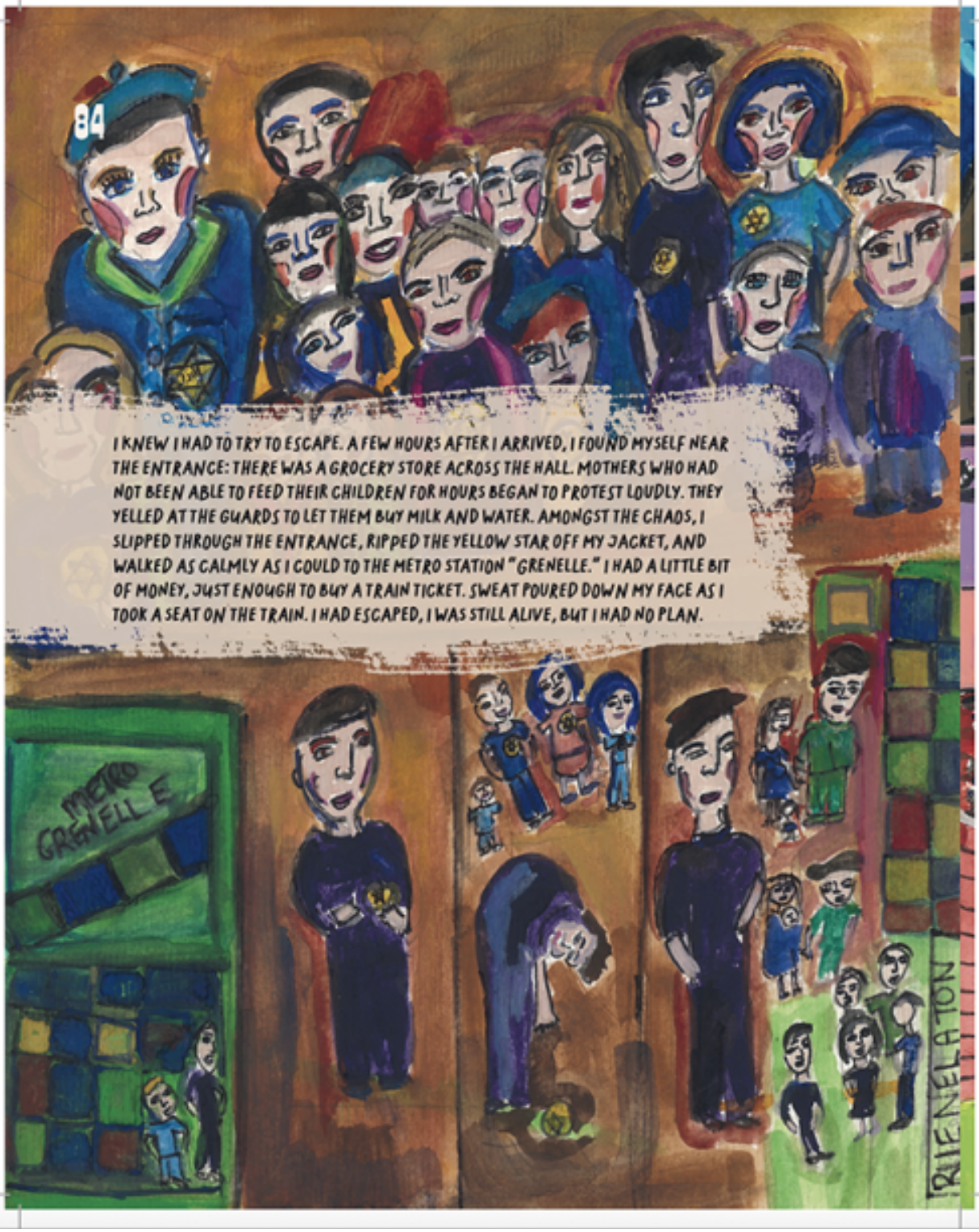
Vidal undoubtedly offers the reader a wonderful window into history and a rich cultural experience. The question as to where it falls within comics is interesting and worth consideration. I see this work falling within the world of picture books, given that it is a series of paintings with text, while also laying claim to a spot within the world of graphic novels. The spirit of comics and graphic novels is such that all forms, including wordless comics, are welcome while some are going to be more closely related to the traditional sequential comics art

form than others: works following the use of panels, word balloons, and various techniques that link words and pictures together. The important thing here is that Botha's work is very special in its own way. I just offer an observation. She could certainly continue to create other works just like this and blaze a new trail. That's exciting. The main point is that Botha is creating very compelling work, providing that valuable window of accessibility. It brings to life such subjects as Sephardic Jewish life and the Shoah in ways beyond words and, for that, it is essential. This is an important work any way you look at it.


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"This is an important work any way you look at it."
--- Henry Chamberlain
Comics Grinder


I KNEW I HAD TO TRY TO ESCAPE. A FEW HOURS AFTER I ARRIVED, I FOUND MYSELF NEAR THE ENTRANCE: THERE WAS A GROCERY STORE ACROSS THE HALL. MOTHERS WHO HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO FEED THEIR CHILDREN FOR HOURS BEGAN TO PROTEST LOUDLY. THEY YELLED AT THE GUARDS TO LET THEM BUY MILK AND WATER. AMONGST THE CHAOS, I SLIPPED THROUGH THE ENTRANCE, RIPPED THE YELLOW STAR OFF MY JACKET, AND WALKED AS CALMLY AS I COULD TO THE METRO STATION "GRENELLE." I HAD A LITTLE BIT OF MONEY, JUST ENOUGH TO BUY A TRAIN TICKET. SWEAT POURED DOWN MY FACE AS I TOOK A SEAT ON THE TRAIN. I HAD ESCAPED, I WAS STILL ALIVE, BUT I HAD NO PLAN.
METRO GRENELLE
IRIENELATON