

Hidden Belgium: The Belgian woman who escaped from Auschwitz

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Not many tourists walk through Borgerhout district in Antwerp. This diverse neighbourhood behind Central Station has a bad reputation. But the area is changing fast. It's now sometimes called Boho. Like London's Soho, Borgerhout wants to be seen as a cool neighbourhood.

Back in 2019, the street art project Walls of Boho brought in artists to decorate five walls with large murals. The most impressive is a huge portrait of Mala Zimetbaum by street artist Joachim Lambrechts. It covers the side wall of a six-floor apartment building.

Mala Zimetbaum was a Belgian Jewish woman born in Poland. She was living in Antwerp at the outbreak of the Second World War and deported to Auschwitz in 1942. Known as Mala la Belge, she was useful to the Nazis because she spoke Polish, Dutch, German, French and English.

But she did everything she could to resist. In 1944 she escaped from Auschwitz when she fled the camp with her lover. She was quickly recaptured and brutally executed to deter others.

Now she is remembered in a stunning Borgerhout mural just a few blocks from her former home in Marinisstraat.

Derek Blyth's hidden secret of the day: *Derek Blyth is the author of the bestselling "The 500 Hidden Secrets of Belgium". He picks out one of his favourite hidden secrets for The Brussels Times every day.*