

Report on the presentation of the exhibition concept and the book documenting the previous exhibition on 2 June 2015 at the Vienna Museum

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On 2 June 2015 at the Vienna Museum on Karlsplatz, the exhibition's team of curators and academics – Birgit Johler (curator), Albert Lichtblau (scientific director), Christiane Rothländer (historian), Barbara Staudinger (curator), Hannes Sulzenbacher (curator and project leader) – presented their concept for the new Austrian exhibition, "Far removed. Austria in Auschwitz", at the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum. The recently appointed architect Martin Kohlbauer also presented his ideas for the visual realization of the curators' plans to the public.

The event also provided a fitting setting to pay tribute to the curators of the original 1978 national exhibition at Auschwitz who were in attendance at the Vienna Museum. A comprehensive book documenting the exhibition (memorial) in a contemporary historical context and published by the National Fund was presented to the public for the first time on this evening.

Picture gallery of the event on 2 June 2015 at the Vienna Museum



In her words of introduction, Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria, the institution charged with coordinating the renewal, emphasized the remarkable work the team was doing, referring to the challenge of renewing the exhibition so that it portrayed a view of Austrian history that was in keeping with the times.

Lessing also pointed out the great importance of the previous exhibition, which was largely curated by Auschwitz survivors. This was why all of the bodies involved in the renewal had wanted to pay a fitting tribute to the original exhibition and preserve it for posterity as a contemporary historical document.

In the presence of the exhibition's original architect Robert Kanfer and the scientific project leader of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, Emeritus Professor Dr. Wolfgang Neugebauer, Hannah Lessing introduced the book documenting the former exhibition and personally presented it to those who had been involved in it at the time.

In a very emotional scene, Lessing recalled Norbert Lopper, Auschwitz survivor and honorary chairperson of the Societal Advisory Board for the renewal, who passed away in April this year and presented the book, which also contains an interview with Norbert Lopper, to his widow and son.

The Director of the Vienna Museum Matti Bunzl then led an animated discussion with the exhibition team and the exhibition architect Martin Kohlbauer.

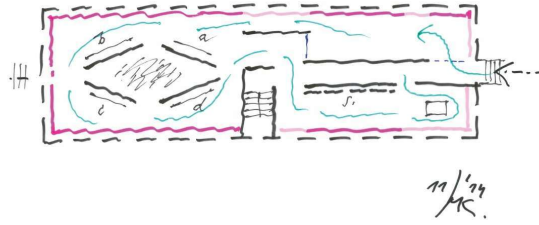
Martin Kohlbauer, der im März 2015 nach einer europaweiten Ausschreibung vom Nationalfonds mit der Gestaltung beauftragt wurde, stellte zunächst seinen Gestaltungsentwurf vor, der mit einem minimalistischen Gestaltungsansatz dem Thema gerecht werden soll: "Mit einem sehr klaren und einfachen Raum im Raum-Konzept habe ich versucht, sowohl den inhaltlichen Vorgaben und Ideen, als auch dem gänzlich unfassbaren Ort Rechnung zu tragen."

Martin Kohlbauer, who was appointed as architect in March 2015 following a Europe-wide call to tender presented his draft design, which took a minimalist approach in order to do justice to the subject-matter: "By developing this very distinct and spartan room-in-room concept I have attempted to do justice not only to the substantive requirements and ideas but also to Auschwitz, which as a place is entirely unfathomable.

Using Kohlbauer's drafts, the curators and historians explained their central ideas on the new exhibition and provided an insight into their current progress. The basic concept for the exhibition, "Far Removed. Austria in Auschwitz" refers to the physical removal of those who were deported to Auschwitz, from Austria and from the realm of the living. The exhibition places these removals at the focus of the exhibition and brings the historical origins in Austria and their fateful conclusion in Auschwitz closer to the visitors bringing the two locations into closer proximity. By

portraying the entangled history of Austria's victims and perpetrators, it is hoped to make a contribution towards adequately conveying Austria's role in the history of Nazism.

The draft by Martin Kohlbauer



Finally, Barbara Staudinger presented the postcard edition “Auschwitz/Austria. Drawings by Jan Kupiec (1945)”. During the course of the research for the new exhibition the curatorial and academic team stumbled upon a set of postcards in the collections of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. They depicted Austrian sights and scenery and on the reverse there were drawings by the Polish Auschwitz survivor Jan Kupiec depicting scenes from the extermination camps Auschwitz and Birkenau, drawn following his liberation from Mauthausen/Ebensee in 1945.

Staudinger closed with the words: “By publishing these postcards in Austria, we are making a contribution towards increasing the proximity of these two places in the collective memory.”