



The Austrian National Exhibition of 1978

In addition to the permanent exhibition on the history of the concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, the so-called national exhibitions tell the stories of the citizens of the countries from where people were deported to the complex of camps at Auschwitz. These also include the Austrian national exhibition, which was displayed in Block 17 and opened to the public on 19 March 1978. It has remained unchanged since this time.

The exhibition was created under the direction of the "Austrian Auschwitz Museum Working Group" which, for the most part, comprised members of the Auschwitz Camp Community. Numerous historians, led by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Neugebauer, the future Director of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, developed the contents of the exhibition. Dr. Robert Kanfer undertook the architectural work and the graphic designer Prof. Ernst Fuhrherr was in charge of its visual presentation. Auschwitz survivor Prof. Heinrich Sussmann designed the stained glass windows that formed the centerpiece of the area of remembrance. They depict his own fate and the loss of his son, who was murdered at Auschwitz. The stained glass windows were mounted in a black wall modeled on the wall against which shootings were held in the courtyard of block 11 in the main camp at Auschwitz.

Amidst increasingly loud criticism of the exhibition in the 2000s and the first efforts to have it renewed, the historians Dr. Brigitte Bailer, Dr. Heidemarie Uhl and Dr. Bertrand Perz subjected the exhibition to an academic appraisal. Commencing in 2006, their investigations and analyses led to the 2008 publication of a final project report financed by the National Fund. The findings presented in this report, among other things, form the basis for the renewal.

In order to ensure the preservation of the national exhibition of 1978 as a contemporary historical document and to pay tribute to the Auschwitz survivors who helped develop it, the exhibition was documented in detail in September 2011. With the kind support of the Army Photographic and Film Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Defense and Sport, the National Fund systematically photographed and inventoried the entire exhibition (placards, detailed views, exhibits, the stained glass windows by Heinrich Sussmann and the accompanying texts).

A selection of images can be viewed in the photo gallery:



The data collected – photos and transcriptions of the exhibition texts – are administered in a National Fund database.

In 2015, the National Fund published containing a detailed documentation of the 1978 exhibition. In addition to the many photos, contributions by guest authors describe the circumstances surrounding the exhibition's creation and its reception and provide an academic analysis of the exhibition. Interviews were also conducted with Auschwitz survivor Norman Lopper (late honorary Chairperson of the Societal Advisory Board for the renewal), with the exhibition's architect Robert Kanfer and the graphic designer Ernst Fuhrherr.

As part of the preparations for the renewal, in October 2013 the National Fund closed the exhibition, in consensus with the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. All placards and other objects were carefully dismantled and archived in Austria. Sussmann's stained glass windows will also feature in the new exhibition.