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Recollections of Auschwitz at BUCH WIEN 2021

27 Dec 2021

From 10–14 November 2021, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was an exhibitor at BUCH WIEN (“Vienna Book Fair”) for the third time, which, despite Covid 19 restrictions, still attracted more than 41,000 visitors from 32 countries.

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This year, the National Fund presented its new publication, the sixth volume of the book series *Erinnerungen. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus* ("Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism"). The two-volume work *Überleben in Auschwitz* tells of "Survival in Auschwitz" and was published to coincide with the opening of the new Austrian exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial in October 2021. The *Erinnerungen* book series is a unique collection of autobiographical life stories which has been preserving the memory of the victims of National Socialism since 2011.

"Survival in Auschwitz" contains 20 autobiographical texts by and interviews with Austrian Auschwitz survivors. It provides a deep insight into everyday life in the camp, death and survival at Auschwitz. In addition, the publication contains a comprehensive historical glossary, guest contributions by Albert Lichtblau and Hannes Sulzenbacher from the exhibition's curatorial-scientific team, by Herta Neiß, Board Member of the Austrian Camp Community Auschwitz and the International Auschwitz Committee, and by Claire Fritsch, the Head of the Coordination Office at the National Fund for the renewal of the Austrian exhibition.

Other new publications presented by the National Fund were the *Wegweiser zu den jüdischen Friedhöfen in Österreich* ("Visitors' Guide to the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria") and the booklet *Geschichte persönlich vermittelt* ("A Personal Telling of History"), which were presented on the stand and distributed free of charge. *Geschichte persönlich vermittelt* is intended to complement the book series *Erinnerungen* – it offers a glossary of historical terms and information on the victim groups persecuted by the Nazis, provides ideas for working with autobiographies in the classroom and gives an insight into the range of tasks carried out by the National Fund.

Of course, the first five volumes of the book series *Erinnerungen* with their different thematic and regional focuses were also on display, along with other publications by the Fund: these included the publication documenting the former Austrian exhibition at Auschwitz *Österreichische Gedenkstätte 1978–2013. Staatliches Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau* ("Austrian Memorial 1978–2013. State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau"), the postcard book published by the curatorial team of the new exhibition *Österreich | Auschwitz. Zeichnungen von Jan Kupiec 1945* ("Austria | Auschwitz. Drawings by Jan Kupiec 1945"), the book series *Entscheidungen der Schiedsinstanz für Naturalrestitution* ("Decisions of the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution") and the *Schlussbericht des Antragskomitees des Allgemeinen Entschädigungsfonds für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* ("Final Report of the Claims Committee of the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism").

Visitors also had the opportunity to learn about the extensive range of tasks carried out by the National Fund and the informative materials were met with great interest. There were also a number of giveaways for the visitors to the fair, such as pencils, notepads, bookmarks with selected short biographies from the book series, and the popular bags with the *Erinnerungen* logo.

Round table discussion with the editor of the book series and the curators of the new Austrian exhibition in Auschwitz

In a discussion with the Viennese journalist Alexia Weiss on Saturday, 13 November, the editor of the book series *Erinnerungen*, Renate S. Meissner, and Hannes Sulzenbacher and Albert Lichtblau from the curatorial-scientific team of the new Austrian exhibition in Auschwitz, forged a connection between the exhibition in Auschwitz and the individual fates in the book.

Hannes Sulzenbacher gave an insight into the new exhibition, in whose concept the portrayal of victims and perpetrators is intertwined – because "without perpetrators there would have been no victims," Sulzenbacher said. He also gave an insight into the challenge of finding a consensus during the preparations for the exhibition, for example on the relationship between victims and perpetrators. Albert Lichtblau illustrated this intertwined portrayal using the example of an exhibition object and emphasized that each object tells an individual story. The fact that it is always about individuals – even among the perpetrators – is underlined by Auschwitz survivor Rom Karl Stojka:

"And people did this, just like you, you and me. These people did not come from another planet. [...] They were human beings, just like us. And it was not Hitler who arrested me, not Goering, not Goebbels. The grocer, the janitor, the tailor, the shoemaker, the baker, they suddenly got a uniform, a swastika armband, and there they were, the master race..."

Renate Meissner presented three of the survivors' stories and explained the graphic concept of the new publication, which uses faded prisoner numbers against a white background to reflect the dehumanization caused by the camp system.

Book orders

The publications of the National Fund are available at cost price directly from the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism and from bookshops. If you are interested, please contact us by e-mail: buchbestellungen@nationalfonds.org.

The volumes of the book series *Erinnerungen* are available free of charge for classroom use and the school library up to the size of a class for the price of postage or they can be collected: schulversand@nationalfonds.org.