

Press Kit

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

24 May to 23 November 2025



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Erste Ausstellungen zur
NS-Besatzung in Europa,
1945–1948

On Displaying Violence:
First Exhibitions on the
Nazi Occupation in Europe,
1945–1948


**DEUTSCHES
HISTORISCHES
MUSEUM**

Pei-Bau
Hinter dem Gießhaus 3
10117 Berlin

In Zusammenarbeit mit / In cooperation with
Dokumentationszentrum
Zweiter Weltkrieg und
deutsche Besatzung in Europa

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On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German
Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Opening speech of Prof. Dr Raphael Gross, President of the Stiftung
Deutsches Historisches Museum

Exhibition opening on 23 May 2025, 4 pm

+++ The spoken word applies +++

On 1 May 1945, even before the war had ended, an exhibition called *The Horror Camps* opened in London. It showed pictures and documents from concentration and extermination camps together with symbols of National Socialist rule. Two weeks earlier, British troops had liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The film and photography units had recorded the horror that awaited the soldiers.

The Horror Camps is one of six historical exhibitions that we are focusing on: Almost simultaneously with the London exhibition, another exhibition under the name *Warsaw Accuses* opened in May 1945. It was followed in June 1945 by *Crimes hitlériens* in the Grand Palais in Paris. *The Memorial to Nazi Barbarism* in Liberec, Czechoslovakia, opened its first exhibition in September 1946. In June 1947, *Our Path to Freedom* was shown in the Jewish Displaced Persons camp in Bergen-Belsen. And in April 1948, a second exhibition opened in Warsaw, this time in the Jewish Historical Institute under the title *Martyrology and Struggle*.

The curator Agata Pietrasik chose these six exhibitions based on her research. They stand for a barely known postwar European phenomenon: Shortly after the war people in many different European cities began publicly displaying the horrors and crimes of the German occupation. These were the very first attempts to gather, document and interpret the atrocities. Hundreds of thousands of people in East and West visited these exhibitions.

Each one of the exhibitions was an attempt to understand what had happened. On the one hand, they were marked by national perspectives that were quickly becoming established. On the other hand, they also revealed a transnational understanding in Europe that was gradually emerging. In the Grand Palais in Paris, where flags flattered on the façade with SS symbols and swastikas, overwritten with "Crimes hitlériens", the dominant theme was

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the representation of French national suffering, for which the most significant symbol was the Massacre of Oradour-sur-Glane. The exhibition was advertised in public with a crucifix, whereby the classic Christian cross was replaced by a swastika. The show displayed a huge map of Europe at the entrance to underscore the dimension of the German occupation as a European experience. The exhibition, which was organised by French ministries together with prisoners-of-war and inmate associations, also alluded to the collaboration, represented primarily by the Vichy regime.

Warsaw Accuses in the National Museum of the Polish capital focused above all on the immense destruction of the national cultural heritage. Unsettling arrangements of demolished artworks, paintings, sculptures, and picture frames emptied of their content were presented in a city that had been virtually razed to the ground, whereby the show brought out the close connection between the destruction of material culture and the national identity. The conjunction of the two Warsaw exhibitions revealed the impact of Nazi racial ideology. While the Grand Palais in Paris had suffered almost no damage, hardly a stone of the National Museum in Warsaw had been left standing.

In Liberec, the former capital of the so-called Sudetengau, the exhibition makers displayed the instruments of the violent German rule in the private residence that had been occupied by Gauleiter Konrad Henlein. Gallows, torture instruments and prison cells were restaged in the garden and basement. All manner of Nazi devotionalia were displayed in the dining room, as if they wanted to say: the violence is now where it belongs, namely in the place of those who were responsible for it. The repercussions of the German occupation were also clearly manifest throughout Liberec, where, parallel to the exhibition, people were being forcibly expelled from the country who in the public perception were considered responsible for the massive crimes against the Czech population and the suppression of the country: namely the Sudeten Germans.

Traces of the persecution and murder of the respective Jewish populations and the destruction of Jewish culture were found in all the exhibitions. But these traces remained marginal. Often they were so blurred that they were no longer recognisable. In the London exhibition *The Horror Camps*, for example, there was no indication that the murdered people shown in the large photographs were Jews. None of the exhibitions shown in Warsaw, Liberec, Paris and London took account of a European interrelationship with respect to the dimension of the Europe-wide mass murder.

A different aspect is shown in two of the exhibitions we deal with, namely those in Warsaw and Bergen-Belsen, which were conceived by Jewish survivors. They are not concerned in any way with national history. What connected them was a transnational or Europe-wide catastrophe: the Holocaust. The exhibition *Martyrology and Struggle* represents a starting point, a beginning of the later Holocaust research. It was organised by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Here were found the first Holocaust researchers: Nacham Blumental and Rachel Auerbach – both survivors of the Holocaust. Rachel Auerbach had participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The exhibition was about how to account for the Jewish catastrophe. The title *Martyrology and Struggle* made it clear that this was not merely a Jewish victim narrative. It was not only about martyrdom – but also about the struggle, the fight. This was a view of the Jewish experience that was completely foreign to the national exhibitions.

The last early exhibition that we present exemplifies an area that represents a transition of Jewish history. It should be seen as a kind of interim. The exhibition *Our Path to Freedom* which took place in the Bergen-Belsen Jewish Displaced Persons camp, focused on three different time periods: first, the disastrous immediate past of the Holocaust experienced by the many Polish-Jewish DPs; secondly, the present interim period in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp; and thirdly, the path to freedom, which meant emigration to Palestine and the building of a Jewish state.

Agata Pietrasik and the exhibition team have brought out the special aspects of the six different exhibitions. They have attempted to understand the way the themes were presented, the selection of objects, the aesthetics of the presentations, and the messages they sent.

In closing I would like to focus on three aspects. First: All of these exhibitions were about displaying matters of violence. The consciousness of the fact that the public display of this violence can itself be problematical has perhaps even increased since that time. We know today that photographic representations of violence can themselves be acts of violence, that they can serve to spread the perspective of the perpetrators. But we also know that if you do not show murder and violence, it can have the effect that there is less compunction to carry out such crimes. We therefore had intensive and sometimes controversial discussions about whether and how we should now, 80 years later, show the scenarios of violence at that time. Much of what moved and motivated the exhibition makers then – as the war was still going on or immediately thereafter – is still relevant today.

Secondly: At the same time, we – three or four generations later – are faced with our own new difficulties: few of the contemporary witnesses are still alive. Many of the exhibitions at the time were shaped by historians who were also contemporary witnesses and for whom the things they had experienced were of historical significance – irrespective of whether they were Jewish or Catholic resistance fighters, whether their actions were marked by a Christian or a socialist world view, whether they had suffered in Eastern or Western Europe. All were united by their knowledge of the Nazi crimes and a mutual goal that resulted from it: never again to experience this violence, never again to allow it to happen. Since it had happened once, it could still possibly happen again. This had to be prevented.

Thirdly: The historical significance of the act of witnessing and the coming to grips with the experience mark the formation of a system of norms that has endured beyond the confrontation of the superpowers. There was an appeal to the shared (but not always practised) system of norms and to human rights – which were invoked by all. Political institutions were created which aimed to prevent what had happened between 1933 and 1945: Human rights. Refugee conventions. Not least of all the EU.

We are now experiencing a new situation. Clearly audible, for instance, in the speeches on May 8th of this year: Most of the speakers did, in fact, thank both the Russian and the American soldiers for their fight against National Socialism. But they also did not fail to mention the currently changed situation: Europe is being attacked by Russia and is no longer unconditionally protected by the USA. Moreover: The remembrance of the Nazi period, the Second World War, and the rule under the occupation no longer appears to have a binding force – just the opposite.

In this situation – as I believe – there is an even greater need to establish the Documentation Centre “German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War”, which the Bundestag called for on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of the war. The first great public project of this centre is the exhibition we are opening today.

In many European countries that were once occupied by German forces, the remembrance of the German occupation is still very much alive. In Germany, however, this knowledge is often incomplete – or sometimes non-existent. And this at a time when Europe can no longer count on the support of the former Allies – and instead is more and more dependent on itself. For Europe this means that it must seek a common future more than ever before: it is a future that can never be possible without the knowledge of its common –

often very bitter – history. The planned museum on the occupation aims to help understand the European interconnections – and often simply to convey basic knowledge of the past. This also involves learning to differentiate between the different kinds and different languages of violence. It is important to expand the way we see the different crimes and to deepen the memory of their history. This will show that we are still at the beginning of a process of understanding the political nature of the Europe-wide dimension of these events. At a time when the relationship with the Great Powers Russia and the United States is undergoing a fundamental change, our interest again focuses on a confrontation with the central catastrophe of the 20th century and requires a new form of treating and understanding this history.

The exhibition we are opening today is a starting point in this process. To this end we have selected exhibition projects that gave people throughout Europe during and immediately after the war what they needed to see and so to comprehend what had happened. These were projects that aimed to visualise the dimension of the violence and injustice and to raise awareness, and from this awareness to draw the necessary consequences.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German
Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Opening speech by Dr Agata Pietrasik, curator
Exhibition opening on 23 May 2025, 4 pm

+++ The spoken word prevails +++

The topic of our exhibition is perhaps extraordinary: we are exhibiting other exhibitions. Importantly, these were not regular museum shows but pioneering endeavors organized across Europe in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, conceived of in order to display recently experienced violence and destruction. This phenomenon might be met with surprise because it doesn't fit what we most readily associate with postwar Europe—a ruined continent still marked by the violence, including anti-Jewish violence, where millions of people were displaced. From our contemporary perspective it is hard to imagine such a situation of scarcity and social and political instability as conducive to exhibition making. Yet the projects we are presenting today in the German Historical Museum are testimony to the fact that addressing that recent violent history was in many ways as essential as material reconstruction.

Exhibitions became a pre-eminent mass medium of the early postwar period because they brought together and engaged in dialogue a broad variety of other mediums: film, photography, artworks and artifacts, together with historical documents such as records. These materials were often taken directly from sites of perpetration and performed the role of mute witnesses, bringing a sense of proximity to violence and suffering at the same time as grounding it in both objecthood and objectivity. Making such exhibitions went hand in hand with establishing the first institutions dedicated to preserving the history and memory of the Second World War and the German Occupation.

Some of the exhibitions we present here today were a runaway success—drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors—while others were made on a far smaller scale but were of no lesser significance in the long term. The goal of these quite diverse projects can be broadly described as the first attempt to articulate the very recent violent and genocidal history. An attempt to present a narrative based on evidence and a chronology that drew a clear line between past and present and gave space to the voices of those who survived and witnessed the atrocities of the time. A narrative with a beginning but also, crucially, an end—one most often imagined in justice being served to the perpetrators and the rebuilding of a new, just social and political life. The exhibitions had the ability to make these aspirations come to life with images and objects, to make them visible and palpable. They could contain and

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shape public emotion by creating spaces of mourning, and accusation, but also information.

Our exhibition takes a careful and critical look back at this multifaceted phenomenon—not in its totality, but by concentrating on an exemplary selection of pioneering and impactful postwar exhibitions and their social and political context, which often influenced the content of the displays and their modes of presentation. From a multitude of initiatives, we focus on six exhibitions organized in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec and in the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen.

All of these were staged between Spring 1945 and 1948, in an interim period before the onset of the Cold War, and at a time when many Holocaust survivors were still in Europe, albeit many awaiting immigration. These exhibitions were dynamic devices and, in many cases, travelled domestically and internationally, including between what would soon become East and West, separated by the Iron Curtain. These events drew enormous audiences in cities and towns throughout Europe: over 400 000 people visited the exhibition *Warszawa oskarża* at the National Museum in Warsaw, and 487 000 attendees were registered at the exhibition *Crimes hitlériens* at the Grand Palais in Paris. Organized by different actors ranging from state agencies and war crimes commissions to formal and informal groups of Holocaust survivors, these exhibitions bring together perspectives of both particular individuals and groups, as well as institutions.

The titles of these exhibitions speak for themselves: *Horror Camps*, *Crimes hitlériens* [*Hitlerian Crimes*], *Warszawa Oskarża* [*Warsaw Accuses*], *Martirologye un kamf/ Martyrologia i walka* [*Martyrology and Struggle*], *Památník nacistického barbarství* [*Memorial to Nazi Barbarism*], and *Undzer veg in der frayheyt* [*Our Path to Freedom*]. These very strong and evocative words channeled both outrage and accusation. They encapsulated not only the emotions but also the distinctive message of each exhibition. They stood for the distinct ways in which the history of German occupation was faced in each of the occupied countries.

Exhibitions are temporal in nature. They are opened and then closed leaving scattered traces in the archives and museum collections. It was our work to recover these traces and to make these exhibitions possible to re-imagine. Not to reconstruct, or relive them, but to create the possibility for a contemporary audience to envisage their spaces, their designs, be able to engage some of the objects exhibited, and recognize the narrative of each project. To see the people behind them and catch the voice of their historical audience. In each section of our exhibition, we have tried to create a space of careful and critical consideration of the content and to capture the specific context of each show.

Since these historical exhibitions, even if sometimes forgotten, worked beyond their duration—pointing to future ways of remembering and representing—it is important to understand from our contemporary perspective both their potential and their limitations, which often have long-lasting repercussions.

In the post-war social and political situation of the late 1940s, with strong desires to rebuild and consolidate nations, state-sponsored exhibition projects often focused on forging a collective identity based on suffering, while obscuring or minimizing difficult issues such as how the perpetration of violence, especially in the case of the Holocaust, was also enabled from within the formerly occupied societies. The question of what has been done to us has often eclipsed the question of how we have contributed to the suffering of others. These national perspectives obscured the voices of Jewish and Romani minorities who faced mass murder on an unprecedented scale. Survivors of the Holocaust immediately created their own exhibitions to narrate the history of the Holocaust from their perspective, rooted in their own experience, while in the case Romani survivors such exhibitions were initiated only decades after the war.

Therefore, at the core of our project is the recognition of these various voices, along with their inherent differences, and also a recognition of the silences and patterns of silencing, which in many cases have long continued to operate.

These historical endeavors very clearly demonstrate that exhibitions, and by extension museums, are places for presenting and holding conversations about the most difficult and painful pasts. The efforts of those who organized the first postwar exhibitions in the face of unprecedented destruction and in many cases despite personal suffering, should encourage us today to continue to engage in this process.

Press Information

21 May 2025



A joint European remembrance:

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948

From 24 May 2025 in the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Graphic: VISUAL SPACE AGENCY & STUDIO BENS

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At the height of its power, National Socialist Germany occupied almost all of Europe. Some 230 million people in what are now 30 countries lived under German occupation. How did the postwar societies process their experiences of violence and destruction resulting from the Second World War and the concurrent Nazi occupation? A previously overlooked but historically influential form of coming to terms with this desolation are the exhibitions that were organised throughout Europe immediately after the war. In times of social hardship, political instability, enduring violence, and uncertain future, they aimed to document and visualise the consequences of the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes. With **"On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948"**, the Deutsches Historisches Museum traces for the first time the history of this pan-European phenomenon, using the examples of early exhibitions in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec, and Bergen-Belsen. The DHM exhibition is presented in cooperation with the **Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"**. It is the view of the project that a joint European remembrance, and thus a joint European future, depends to a great degree on the shared knowledge of the history of the German occupation.

Raphael Gross, President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum: "The violence of the rule under German occupation has left deep traces in the European countries. Many of the crimes are hardly known in Germany. To remember these atrocities is part of Germany's historical responsibility and a prerequisite for mastering the present. In a world in which the falsification of history and new wars are challenging European and global order, it is necessary to communicate historical knowledge. A common access to history is of central importance to the shaping of a European present and future – it must be shaped actively, be oriented on sources and facts, and bring together different perspectives. It is precisely this aim which we want to promote with the present exhibition as our first joint project with the future Documentation Centre."

Agata Pietrasik, curator of the exhibition: "By their very nature, exhibitions are temporary events. They leave behind scattered traces in archives and museum collections. It was our job to secure these traces and to make the early exhibitions conceivable – not in order to reconstruct them or to relive them, but to give today's public the opportunity to imagine the rooms and presentations, to confront and grapple with the objects that were shown at the time, and to understand the respective narratives. For us, it was a matter of making visible the people behind these early exhibitions, of capturing the voices of the visitors and creating room for a critical confrontation with the contents and contexts which marked that time."

In the early postwar period, the medium of the exhibition offered an effective response to the urgent question of how the unprecedented German atrocities could be narrated and communicated to a broader public. Starting in 1945, exhibitions on the recent past attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors in Eastern and Western Europe. They were organised by state agencies and commissions for the investigation of war crimes as well as by formal or informal groups of Holocaust survivors and associations of former political prisoners. Using photographs, films, artworks, documents, and artefacts, the exhibition organisers in the different countries told their own story of war and occupation, creating rooms for information as well as spaces for remembrance and accusation. In this way the visitors had the opportunity to understand their experiences as part of a collective history of violence, to share their knowledge and feelings, but also to look to the future. As the Cold War began to escalate in 1948, the transnational reckoning with the crimes of the Nazi occupation came to an abrupt halt. The early exhibitions themselves were largely forgotten, but they nonetheless had a lasting influence on the remembrance and commemoration of the German occupation in the respective countries.

London – Paris – Warsaw – Liberec – Bergen-Belsen

The curator Agata Pietrasik focuses on **six exhibitions organised between 1945 and 1948** which illustrate the very different occupation histories in Poland, France and Czechoslovakia, the representation of wartime experience in Great Britain which remained unoccupied, and the persecution and mass murder experienced by Jewish communities some of whom found themselves interned in the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp. What united these pioneering exhibitions despite their difference and diversity was their unsparing confrontation with the brutal Nazi violence, but also the immediacy and directness with which they raised public awareness of the Europe-wide dimension of the German atrocities.

The London photographic exhibition **"The Horror Camps"**, which opened as early as 1 May 1945 in the reading room of the *Daily Express* under the motto "Seeing is Believing", showed drastic pictures from concentration camps that had been liberated shortly beforehand by the Allied forces, providing evidence of war crimes that was later used in European courts of justice. The French travelling exhibition **"Crimes hitlériens" (Hitlerian Crimes)**, which was first shown in the Grand Palais in Paris in June 1945, was the first attempt to deal with the collaboration of the Vichy regime. At the same time, the first attempts to create a European narrative of the German occupation emerged there. In 1945, in massively destroyed Warsaw, the National Museum presented the exhibition **"Warszawa oskarża" (Warsaw Accuses)** focusing on the destruction of the Polish national heritage and the future reconstruction of the Polish capital. Three years later, the Jewish Historical Institute presented the first permanent exhibition on the persecution and murder of Jews in Poland under the title **"Martirologye un kamf / Martyrologia i walka" (Martyrology and Struggle)**. While the expulsion of the German population was still ongoing, the memorial site **"Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism)** was inaugurated in 1946 in Liberec (Reichenberg), Czechoslovakia. In the very villa in which Nazi Gauleiter Konrad Henlein had taken up residence after it had been expropriated from the Jewish family Hersch, the organisers reconstructed central sites of Nazi crimes of violence. Finally, one of the largest exhibitions took place in 1947 in the displaced persons camp in Bergen-Belsen under the title **"Undzer veg in der frayhayt" (Our Path to Freedom)**. Here, Jewish survivors presented their view of the catastrophe they had endured, documented the revival of Jewish life, and also showed the persistent antisemitism in postwar Germany.

Ruptures and Continuities

The DHM exhibition explores various forms and presentations with which these impressive postwar exhibitions took up the themes of violence, resistance, and perpetration, as well as the loss of cultural heritage. The art historian and curator Agata Pietrasik analyses the different visual languages of the time and compares the sources of these displays within their respective local and national context. This throws light on the interpretive narratives of the immediate wartime past and the different ideas about the future that were reflected in the early exhibitions. The DHM exhibition also examines the motivation and specific perspectives of the participants of the time, as well as the impact of these exhibitions, some of which toured extensively across Europe. This reveals not only which topics the organisers of these exhibitions presented, but also what they omitted. Thus, continuities come to the fore that shape, and occasionally cloud, the presentation of the history of German violence in Europe, including how it is remembered and commemorated to this day.

The exhibition shows **around 360 objects from Germany, France, Great Britain, Israel, Poland, and the Czech Republic**, including 80 original objects, on a **surface area of ca. 400 square metres** on the ground floor of the Pei Building. The displays include charts and guestbooks from the former exhibitions, photos of these exhibitions shown here for the first time, films, books, documents, maps, artworks, and posters. Video and audio stations document the reactions of visitors to the early exhibitions. There are also interviews with museum experts, with descendants of the original exhibit organisers, and with representatives of communities, which were underrepresented in the early exhibitions. Accompanying the exhibition is **a richly illustrated publication with 15 essays** by international experts published by Ch. Links Verlag in German and English.

European event series, guided tours and film retrospective

An accompanying programme developed by the DHM and the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War" delves further into the immediate reactions to the German occupation and Nazi rule in Europe. The **European series "Facing Nazi Crimes: European Perspectives after 1945"**, taking place from **May to October at the respective sites of the early exhibitions**, deals with the social and historical contexts: How were the exhibitions received and what consequences did they have? Six evenings will be dedicated to discussions of the background of these transnational undertakings with experts from local institutions. The series will be streamed online and subsequently accessible on the DHM website.

While the exhibition is showing in Berlin, regular tours will be conducted with experts who have explored new ways to present Nazi crimes in museums and reflected on the relation of **"Displaying violence – past and present"**.

In collaboration with the ZWBE and the DFG long-term project "Images that have Consequences – An Archaeology of Iconic Film Footage from the Nazi Era", the Zeughauskino is presenting the retrospective **"Testify and Tell. Early Pictures from Liberated Camps"**.

Documentation Centre "Second World War and German Occupation in Europe"

Between 1939 and 1945, Germany brought disfranchisement, suffering, destruction and death to large parts of Europe. The methods of warfare and the treatment of the civilian population constituted major crimes. The Shoah and the genocide of Sinti and Roma were unique in history. In the formerly occupied areas, the violence is still felt today. To acknowledge this, the German Bundestag resolved the founding of a Documentation Centre in Berlin and entrusted the DHM with its realisation. The future centre will present the European dimension of the German occupation and provide room for commemoration. It will focus on the experience of the victims, particularly those groups that have received less attention.

Further information under: dhm.de/zwbe

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Exhibition texts

Prologue

After the Second World War, the countries that had been attacked and invaded by Germany set out to document and understand the unparalleled violence they had experienced during the war and under occupation. This was of great importance both to the survivors and to the states now engaged in repair and reconstruction, as well as to the institutions of justice, which were preparing for trials against war criminals.

In Europe, exhibitions became an essential medium for telling the stories of the violence. Between 1945 and 1948, exhibitions on German war crimes and the Holocaust became a transnational phenomenon. Organised by institutions and individuals, the shows attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Such exhibitions opened immediately after the war in London, Paris, Warsaw and Liberec, as well as in the Displaced Persons camp near the liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The violence had left different marks on each of these places. The exhibitions provided space for information, commemoration, mourning and accusation and attempted to create a narrative around the violent past.

The Horrors Camps – London, May 1945

On 1 May 1945, long queues formed in front of the Reading Room of the British newspaper *Daily Express*. The exhibition inside, *The Horror Camps*, displayed shocking photographs from the concentration camps that had recently been liberated by the Western Allies.

Although Great Britain had not been occupied during the war, German air raids had caused enormous damage and had killed thousands of people. On 15 April 1945, British troops opened the gates of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, entering

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what military reports described as a "horror camp". This shock was directly reflected in the exhibition.

Under the motto "Seeing is Believing", large-scale photographs showed murdered camp inmates, emaciated survivors, and individual Nazi perpetrators. The visitors reacted with anger and revulsion.

For the most part, the murdered people in the images were anonymous. There was no indication that the majority of these victims were Jewish.

First Confrontation

Initial reports and photographs of German atrocities and the mass murder of Jews in Nazi concentration and extermination camps had already reached the Allies in 1942. However, the governments in Great Britain and the United States decided not to publish them, partly from doubt as to their authenticity, partly because the crimes were simply inconceivable and partly due to the antisemitic atmosphere in their own countries.

In early 1945, the question of whether to show the drastic photographs in public was still controversial among journalists in London. There was concern that the images would be too upsetting to audiences.

A turning point came ten days before the opening of *The Horror Camps*. The Daily Express announced that "pictures of German atrocities" would be exhibited, first in London and shortly thereafter in all of Great Britain.

Public Reactions

Hundreds of people visited the London exhibition every day. Many saw it as their moral and civic duty to confront the truth about the German crimes, and the press also called upon the population to attend the exhibition.

The range of public reactions extended from shock to dismay and anger as well as grief. Some of the visitors had already heard about the concentration camps. Many declared that it was only through confrontation with the photographs that people could be convinced of the existence of the crimes.

But there were also critical voices who doubted the authenticity of the pictures. The exhibition was a first step on the way to creating an awareness of the magnitude of the atrocities in Europe.

The Scale of the Violence

The Horror Camps conveyed the atmosphere of the final days of the war. Only a few weeks before the exhibition opened, British and American troops had liberated the Buchenwald, Mittelbau-Dora and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. The exhibition presented the latest reports about the crimes that had come to light there.

The liberation of the concentration camps was documented in photographs taken by the Allied armies. These images were displayed in large-scale formats. Staged in this way, the show made an impression on the public that was very different from those experienced through press reports. The large photographs were intended to transport visitors to the immediate scene of the atrocities, creating a sense of proximity to the violence.

(In)Visibility

Not all of the pictures taken by the British Army Film and Photographie Unit (AFPU) at the liberated camps were shown in the exhibition. No photographs of individual survivors were on view. Unlike the pictures showing hundreds of anonymous corpses, such portraits stood for individual stories.

It was barely mentioned that most of the victims in the photographs were Jews. Although the AFPU photographers often noted the Jewish identity of the survivors they portrayed, this was not addressed in the exhibition.

This was due to a combination of antisemitism, lack of empathy and the political interests of Great Britain. Thus even after the victory over Germany, the British public learned little about the true extent of the Holocaust.

Object and Evidence

During the Second World War, London became a hub for information from the occupied countries. Numerous exile governments were located there. In October 1943, the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) was founded in London. It was the aim of this international consortium of 17 allied states to investigate and prosecute Nazi crimes.

In 1945, the UNWCC brought the French exhibition *Crimes hitleriens* to London. Like *The Horror Camps*, it showed pictures from Bergen-Belsen taken by British photographers. Many of the photographs later served as evidence in the indictments issued by the UNWCC.

However, the effort to establish a criminal tribunal under the UNWCC failed, and the international commission was dissolved at the end of March 1948.

Crimes hitleriens (Hitlerian Crimes) – Paris, June 1945

In June 1945, a gigantic monolith with a swastika and the SS symbol towered in front of the Grand Palais in Paris. These symbols, once associated with the Nazi occupation, now stood for German crimes – *Crimes hitleriens*.

The Wehrmacht had occupied France in 1940, and in the south the Vichy regime had collaborated with the Germans. After 1945, the country had to deal with the opposing experiences of suppression, persecution, collaboration and resistance.

The exhibition in Paris countered these conflicts in French society with a unifying narrative centred on the suffering of the French nation. However, this strategy marginalised the persecution, internment and murder of French Jews, who thus had to create their own spaces to speak of specifically Jewish suffering and resistance.

The Grand Palais: Past and Present

Built in 1900, the Grand Palais is a renowned exhibition venue. During the occupation, German forces had used the prominent building for Nazi propaganda shows. The organisers of *Crimes hitleriens* once again appropriated the site.

Planning for the exhibition began in August 1944, even before France was completely liberated. After the war, the Interior Ministry entrusted the War Crimes Information Service with the organisation of the show. Many of the exhibition organisers came from the Resistance or had experienced imprisonment and forced labour.

Most of the documents, photographs and objects on display came directly from research undertaken by the Information Service and documented Nazi crimes throughout France.

Modern Presentation

The exhibition was divided into 24 thematic sections. The organisers wanted to show that the Nazi crimes were "the result of a carefully devised system".

The ambitious exhibition architecture presented the objects in a modernist form. The designer Rene Herbst developed a structure of metal scaffolding to hold panels with photographs, maps and infographics documenting the history of the violence.

In the "Diorama" section of *Crimes hitleriens*, objects originally from the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp and other sites of violence in France were used to stage different forms of persecution experienced in the camps. This arrangement was intended to illustrate the suffering prisoners endured, from their transportation in cattle cars to their torture and murder.

Unity in Suffering

The exhibition organisers placed the suffering of the civilian population during the occupation at the centre of the show. German atrocities across France were strung together one after the other to illustrate a nationwide martyrdom, with the massacre in Oradour-sur-Glane as its primary example.

Bringing together the history of these crimes created an overarching national narrative that served to instil a feeling of unity among the French. Emphasis was also placed on the struggle for freedom and common values, culminating in the military and moral triumph of France.

The central storylines of the exhibition corresponded to the government policy of national unity pursued by General Charles de Gaulle.

Beyond the National Narrative

Crimes hitleriens also offered a European perspective. To this end, a "Foreign Section" was established with the cooperation of government representatives from the formerly occupied countries. This was devoted to portraying the Nazi crimes and the suffering of the civilian population in those countries.

The Europe-wide genocide of Jews was addressed in various sections of the exhibition. An individual chapter was devoted to the persecution of French Jews. Some of the Jewish survivors criticized the way in which the exhibition excluded the crimes committed against them from the national narrative. Moreover, it presented Jews not as active subjects and resisters, but exclusively as victims.

The "Collaboration" Section

During the time *Crimes hitleriens* was on display, the trial of Philippe Petain took place. As head of the Vichy regime, Marshal Petain had worked closely with Nazi Germany and was therefore indicted on charges of collaboration and high treason.

This section of the exhibition showed French posters with Nazi propaganda and photographs of collaborators, inscribed with incriminating slogans.

The staging of this section concentrated on condemning individuals. The question of the considerable support for the regime in many sectors of French society remained unaddressed.

This view largely corresponded to the politics of the de Gaulle government. While collaboration was to be disclosed and punished, it tended to be perceived as a marginal phenomenon. In this way the unifying narrative, centred on national victimhood, remained intact.

Warszawa oskaria (Warsaw Accuses) – Warsaw, May 1945

Warszawa oskaria was the first exhibition at the National Museum after the withdrawal of German forces from Warsaw in January 1945. With more than 400,000 visitors, the exhibition was a great success, given that it was put together under very challenging conditions.

In the aftermath of the war, Warsaw was in ruins with many people buried under the rubble and in mass graves. Following the Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the German occupation forces had retaliated with mass destruction of the city.

The exhibition was initiated by the staff of the museum with the participation of the newly founded Warsaw Reconstruction Office. The destruction of Poland's national heritage was the central theme of the exhibition, but it also aimed to show that the city could still be reconstructed.

The careful staging of damaged objects created a space in which the destruction of material culture was framed as an attack on Polish national identity.

A Museum amidst Ruins

The National Museum was one of the few buildings in the Warsaw city centre that was not lying in ruins. Even so, large parts of the collection had been completely destroyed and many valuable objects looted, in spite of efforts by the museum's workers to save the cultural heritage.

Like many historical sites in Poland, the museum was deliberately damaged by the Germans. This systematic destruction of cultural legacy was part of the National Socialist racial ideology, which considered Poland and its culture inferior.

Immediately after the retreat of the occupiers, Stanisław Lorentz, the director of the National Museum, sought to make the losses visible to the public eye and began organising *Warszawa oskaria*.

International Attention

By the time *Warszawa oskaria* opened on 3 May 1945, only a few days before the German capitulation, the Allies had already agreed upon a new world order. From now on, Poland was within the Soviet sphere of influence and its borders were moved westwards.

The accusatory title and anti-German messages of the exhibition corresponded to the position of the new Polish authorities. They saw the show as a means to spread information about Nazi crimes - at a crucial time when the trials of Nazi war criminals were being prepared internationally.

In the first postwar years, the prosecution of the German crimes of war and occupation was in the common interest of the allied states. The tension between West and East had not yet escalated into the Cold War. Official American and Soviet delegations travelled to Warsaw to see *Warszawa oskaria*.

Staging Destruction

The exhibition organisers themselves had experienced of the vandalism and plundering of the Germans first-hand. Now the public was to be made aware of the extent of the deliberate destruction.

The exhibition rooms were filled with slashed paintings, empty picture frames, broken furniture, singed books and cracked architectural elements. The objects came from the holdings of the National Museum as well as other Warsaw collections, and even straight from the city's ruins.

The jumbled arrangement aimed at restaging the chaos of destruction. The exhibition guide noted: "We are experiencing a peculiar coexistence ... between the martyrdom of living Poles and dead objects".

Artefacts from murdered Jews had also been excavated from the ruins of the city. In the exhibition as a whole, however, Jewish objects played only a marginal role.

Visions of the Future

When Stanisław Lorentz began working on *Warszawa oskaria*, the municipal authorities were at first reluctant. Their priority was to once again establish basic supply chains and infrastructure. Lorentz found allies in the Warsaw Reconstruction Office.

For those involved in the exhibition, it was important to document and display the destruction, but also to develop future visions of a modern city.

In this way, the exhibition expanded to include a focal point that lay in the future. Numerous plans heralded radical changes in architecture and urban design, as well as the reconstruction of historical buildings and landmarks of the city. All these plans contained an explicit message: Warsaw was determined to overcome the losses incurred in the war.

Martirologye un kamf / Martyrologia i walk (Martyrology and Struggle) – Warsaw, April 1948

In April 1948, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw opened with an exhibition on the persecution and murder of Polish Jews. It focused on suffering, grief, loss and Jewish resistance as well as German crimes.

The genocide of European Jews organised and carried out by the Germans and their helpers largely took place in occupied Poland. Half of the six million victims of the Holocaust were Polish Jews. They were disenfranchised, robbed of their possessions and imprisoned in ghettos. From 1942 onwards they were deported to their death in Nazi extermination camps. Those who escaped this plan were subjected, with few exceptions, to violence and hostility from the Polish population, leaving them with minimal chances of survival.

The bilingual exhibition, titled in Yiddish and Polish *Martiro/ogye un kamf / Martyrologia i walka*, showed documents and objects collected by survivors after the war in order to make this history both understandable and palpable.

The Jewish Historical Institute

The building of the Jewish Historical Institute was constructed in the 1930s next to the Great Synagogue in Warsaw. It housed the Institute for Jewish Studies and the Main Judaic Library. Until 1939, rabbis as well as numerous historians studied there.

In May 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was brutally crushed by the Germans. They systematically reduced the ghetto to rubble and blew up the Great Synagogue. The Institute building, however, survived the war.

In 1947, Holocaust survivors founded the Jewish Historical Institute in that building. Despite many political challenges in the years that followed, the Institute remained an important place for the study and preservation of the history of the Jews in Poland.

The Earliest Holocaust Research

In postwar Poland, Jews found themselves in a precarious position. More than 90 percent of Polish Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust, prewar Jewish life lay in ruins, and those who survived continued to face antisemitic attacks. Within a few years after 1945, over 100,000 Jews chose to leave the country, while a small number of those who stayed worked to rebuild a new Jewish life.

In August 1944, when the Red Army reached eastern Poland and a new government was established, Jewish survivors began to organise and founded the Jewish Historical Commission in Lublin. The many members of the commission recorded statements from witnesses in various regions and collected evidence of mass crimes.

The exhibition, which opened in April 1948, was made possible by these efforts. It was inaugurated during major commemorations of the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The revolt was a significant event for the Polish-Jewish postwar community and for Jewish history.

Material Evidence

The exhibition brought together a broad range of objects: works of art made in the ghettos, items made from desecrated Torah scrolls, remaining documents of Jews who had been murdered, as well as commemorative urns with ashes from various Nazi extermination camps.

Photographs and documents made by the German perpetrators were displayed to provide evidence of their intention to organise and implement the genocide. As material witnesses, the objects told of the struggle for survival, resistance and the murder of the Jews in Poland.

In the exhibition, the Jewish Historical Commission presented the findings of their pioneering research on the Holocaust in Poland. Specially made maps, plans and models illustrated the scale and different stages of the Holocaust.

Jewish Resistance

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April and May 1943 was the first urban revolt against the Germans in occupied Europe.

Together with his group Oyneg Shabes, Emanuel Ringelblum created an underground archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. "In case none of us survives, at least that will remain", wrote Ringelblum shortly before his death in March 1944. Parts of the archive were displayed in the exhibition.

A central object in the exhibition was a large-scale model of a bunker. It had been the headquarters of the commanders of the Jewish Combat Organisation, which organised the uprising under the leadership of Mordechai Anielewicz and others.

The display of medals for Jewish resistance fighters pointed to official state recognition of their struggle. Yet after the consolidation of communist power at the end of 1948, public remembrance was increasingly dominated by the communist antifascist struggle.

Pamatnfk nacistickeho barbarstv (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism) – Liberec, September 1946

In September 1946, the first exhibition on the German occupation of Czechoslovakia opened in Liberec: *Pamatnfk nacistickeho barbarstv*. During the six-year occupation, Liberec, known in German as Reichenberg, was designated capital of the Nazi Reich District of Sudetenland.

Historically, the Sudeten region in the western part of the country had been largely inhabited by a German-speaking population. In October 1938, Nazi Germany annexed the region. Millions of so-called Sudeten Germans cheered as the Wehrmacht marched in. A few months later, German troops occupied the rest of Bohemia and Moravia, and Slovakia became a satellite state of Germany.

The memorial exhibition was located in the former residence of Nazi Gauleiter Konrad Henlein, which was extensively refurbished with reconstructions of real sites of Nazi crimes installed in the villa and garden. Concurrently with the opening of the memorial, the German population was being forcibly expelled from Czechoslovakia.

From Hersch Villa to Memorial Site

The villa in which the memorial was installed was located in a suburb of Liberec. Until 1938, it belonged to the Jewish entrepreneur Julius Hersch and his wife Paula. Shortly before the German annexation of the region in October 1938, Hersch and his wife fled to escape the growing threat of antisemitic persecution. A short time later, the Germans confiscated the house and Nazi Gauleiter Konrad Henlein took it as his residence.

After the war, Julius and Paula Hersch did not return to Liberec, but died in South America sometime after 1945.

After the defeat of Germany in the spring of 1945, the Czechoslovak state took over the villa, which in the eyes of the Czech population was still associated with the German occupation. The site of Nazi perpetration thus became a memorial. The previous Jewish history of the building and forced flight of Julius and Paula Hersch were largely forgotten.

Exhibition Visitors

The memorial soon developed into an important destination for tourists and for organised groups from all parts of the country. The Ministry of Education encouraged school classes to visit the site.

The exhibition made a strong impression on visitors. Their shock is documented in the guestbooks, along with anger and a desire for revenge. For many people, the "Nazi barbarism" shown in the exhibition justified the expulsion of the German-speaking population from Czechoslovakia.

That expulsion began immediately after the war. The authorities required all Germans still living in Liberec to visit the memorial in order to confront them with the Nazi crimes against the Czech population.

Forms of National Remembrance

The organisers of the exhibition were local administrators and members of the Association of Liberated Political Prisoners. The emblem of the Czechoslovak Republic was displayed at the entrance. An inscription in the first room announced *Nezapomeneme* (We will not forget).

The exhibition primarily presented objects associated with the perpetrators as evidence of "Nazi barbarism". In the cellar and garden, sites of violence located in the Czech lands were reconstructed.

The main model for these stagings was the Small Fortress in Theresienstadt - a site that stood for the suppression and political persecution of the Czech people. The persecution and murder of Czech and Slovak Jews as well as Roma and Sinti were only marginally displayed.

The exhibition presented the history of violence during the German occupation mostly as the political persecution of Czechs. The sites that inspired reconstructions later became symbolic places of national remembrance for Czechoslovakia.

Undzer veg in der frayheyt (Our Path to Freedom) – Bergen-Belsen, July 1947

The exhibition, titled in Yiddish *Undzer veg in der frayheyt*, opened in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons (DP) camp in conjunction with the Second Congress of Liberated Jews in the British Zone of Germany.

The DP camp had been set up in the British Occupation Zone in 1945 near the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. It was the largest camp for Jewish displaced persons in postwar Germany, accommodating survivors of Bergen-Belsen as well as Jews who, after the Holocaust, fled from widespread antisemitic violence in Eastern Europe.

In the camp, Jewish DPs established a new social, cultural and religious life, introduced democratic self-governance structures and formed a nationwide group to represent their political interests.

The exhibition mirrored the interim situation of the Jewish DPs, for whom three time frames were significant: the devastation of the Holocaust in the immediate past, present life regained in the DP camp, and a possible future in a Jewish state.

The Roundhouse

The exhibition *Undzer veg in der frayheyt* was shown in the Roundhouse, part of a Wehrmacht barracks complex built in 1937. Accommodations and a casino for officers were located there. A prisoner of war camp set up near the Roundhouse in 1940 became the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1943.

When the British troops liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in mid-April 1945, they found at least 53,000 prisoners in terrible condition. The Roundhouse was used as a hospital for the survivors. Well over 10,000 of them died in the following months.

When the Jewish DP camp was established, the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone set up their headquarters in the Roundhouse.

Second Congress of Liberated Jews in the British Zone of Germany

In July 1947, the Second Congress of Liberated Jews in the British Zone of Germany convened in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. 150 delegates represented Jewish DPs

primarily from Poland and from communities from within the British Occupation Zone. Members of international Jewish organisations also attended the congress.

The congress dealt with three main topics: restitution for expropriation, forced labour and imprisonment in concentration camps; the protection of Jews from the widespread antisemitism in postwar Germany; and the global political situation, which made it almost impossible for the DPs to legally enter the British Mandatory Palestine.

After the war, almost no country was willing to take in Jewish DPs. The British government in particular had no interest in allowing a mass immigration of Jewish refugees to Mandatory Palestine. In 1947, therefore, few opportunities to emigrate were open to Jewish DPs.

Past and Present

Groups from the DP camp, local Jewish communities, historical commissions, and international Jewish organisations all participated in the exhibition. Different trajectories of Holocaust survival and various perspectives on life in Germany were thus reflected in the show.

Several sections were devoted to the experience of Jewish DPs in Eastern Europe: the events of the Holocaust, grief over the Jews murdered and remembrance of them. Another focus of the exhibition was the postwar situation of German Jews. Numerous displays provided insight into the centuries-old Jewish life in the German regions, its destruction during the Nazi period and the reestablishment of the communities.

The presentations aimed at enabling an understanding of the catastrophe the Jews had experienced. At the same time, the inclusion of present-day themes signalled that it was the task of the Jews themselves to preserve their history.

A Future after the Holocaust

The Jewish Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT), founded in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century, was active in the Jewish DP camps in Germany.

Many of the Jewish DPs were young adults who had survived the ghettos, concentration camps and labour camps and had lost their families. Most of them had been unable to complete school or occupational training. The ORT schools

offered a diverse programme of education and training. They specialised above all in crafts and manual skills, which were essential for a future in Mandatory Palestine.

One area of the exhibition showed the products made in the ORT classes: textiles, wood- and metalwork, mechanical devices and dentures. The past reappeared in the classes for handicrafts and graphic arts, where the experience of the Holocaust was processed artistically.

Press Kit

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

+++ Publication embargo: Wednesday, 21 May 2025, 11 a.m.+++

24 May to 23 November 2025

The poster features a yellow central text box overlaid on a black and white photograph of a bicycle frame lying on a wooden floor. The text in the yellow box is as follows:

Gewalt 24.05. – 23.11.2025
ausstellen:

Erste Ausstellungen zur
NS-Besatzung in Europa,
1945–1948

On Displaying Violence:
First Exhibitions on the
Nazi Occupation in Europe,
1945–1948


**DEUTSCHES
HISTORISCHES
MUSEUM**

Pei-Bau
Hinter dem Gießhaus 3
10117 Berlin

In Zusammenarbeit mit / In cooperation with
Dokumentationszentrum
Zweiter Weltkrieg und
deutsche Besatzung in Europa

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dhm.de

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Dr Agata Pietrasik, Curator



© Caroline Wimmer

Dr Agata Pietrasik is an art historian and Alfred Landecker Lecturer at the Freie Universität Berlin. Her research focuses on the representation and memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War in mid-20th-century European visual arts and culture.

She holds degrees from the University of Warsaw (2009) and the Freie Universität Berlin (2017). Her first book, *Art in a Disrupted World: Poland, 1939–1949*, was published by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 2021.

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She has published articles and co-edited academic volumes dedicated to the arts and visual culture of early postwar Europe.

Her work has been supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). She has held postdoctoral research positions at the German Center for Art History in Paris and was a visiting scholar at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris. Additionally, she was a Getty/ACLS Postdoctoral Fellow in Art History.

Currently, she is working on the project *How Exhibitions Rebuilt Europe: Exhibiting War Crimes in the 1940s* within the framework of the Alfred Landecker Lecturer Programme.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

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Dates and Facts

Place	Deutsches Historisches Museum Pei Building, ground floor
Running time	24 May to 23 November 2025
Opening hours	Monday to Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm Quite Hours (exhibition time with no group tours): Tues 4–6 pm, Sat 10 am–noon Closed on 25 December 2025
Admission	Single ticket: 7 € reduced 3,50 € free up to age 18 Combiticket (all exhibitions): 10 € reduced 5 € free up to age 18 Online-tickets: ticket.dhm.de
Information	Deutsches Historisches Museum Unter den Linden 2 10117 Berlin Tel. +49 30 20304-0 info@dhm.de
Internet	https://www.dhm.de/gewaltausstellen
Social media	#DHMGewalt ausstellen #DHMDisplayingViolence
Exhibition surface area	ca. 400 m ² , Pei Building, ground floor
Extent of the exhibition	Around 360 objects from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, France, Israel, Luxembourg, Poland and the USA, including 86 original objects 1 prologue, 6 rooms, 1 epilogue 7 audios, 10 videos at 9 video stations, 7 interviews at 1 video station (epilogue)

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Accompanying programme

European event series "Facing Nazi Crimes: European Perspectives after 1945" of the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War" (ZWBE); May to October 2025 in London, Paris, Liberec, Warsaw, Bergen-Belsen and Berlin

Expert tours through the exhibition:
On Displaying Violence – then and now

Film series: Witness and Relate: Early pictures from liberated camps

President

Raphael Gross

Director of Exhibitions

Ulrike Kretzschmar

Project head

Philipp Springer

Curator

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Project assistant

Tomoko Mamine

Volunteer

Niklas Krekeler

Inclusion and educational offers

Brigitte Vogel-Janotta

Exhibition design

Hans Hagemeister, Marie-Luise Uhle

Audio guide

Nathanael Kuck

Accompanying programme

Alfons Adam, Axel Bangert, Martin Borkowski-Saruhan, Annette Wolf

Film series

Jörg Frieß, Stephan Ahrens, Alfons Adam, Axel Bangert, Martin Borkowski-Saruhan, Annette Wolf, Thomas Tode, Chris Wahl, Lea Wohl von Haselberg

Accompanying publication

Edited by Raphael Gross and Agata
Pietrasik
264 pages, 115 illustrations
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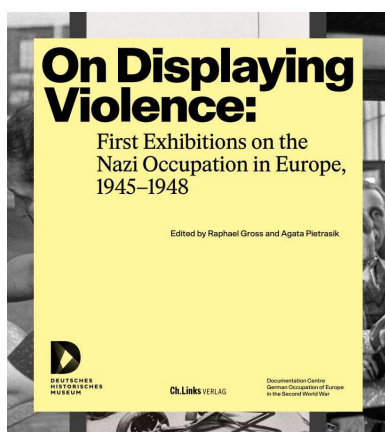
On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German
Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Publication



On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948

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With essays by Kata Bohus, Mary Fulbrook, Peter Hallama, Christoph Kreutzmüller, Rachel E. Perry, Adam Przywara and others

In the immediate postwar years, a previously overlooked but historically influential phenomenon came about: the violence and destruction caused by the Second World War and the occupation of large parts of Europe by National Socialist Germany became the subject of numerous exhibitions in the formerly occupied countries in Eastern and Western Europe. From 1945 to 1948, hundreds of thousands of visitors streamed into these first postwar exhibitions. The essays in this volume concentrate on how the shows in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen were realized, how they treated the stories of destruction, victims, resistance and collaboration, and how Jewish survivors, who were largely left out of the national conceptions of these countries, documented the Holocaust and brought it to the public.

The German and English editions will be available as of 14 May 2025 on the book market, in the DHM museum shop, and via online.

Historical Judgement 04 Magazine of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Title theme: Europe and Germany 1939–45.

Violence in the Museum

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The fourth issue of the magazine “Historical Judgement” deals with the German occupation in Europe during the Second World War. International experts such as Sabina Ferhadbegović, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Philippe Sands and Jens-Christian Wagner ask what stories objects can tell about the occupation and the violence associated with it.

Dan Diner writes about turning points in German history and the alternative histories that appeared in them. Dieter Gosewinkel speaks with Kyung-Ho Cha and Barbara John about citizenship and what it has to do with soccer and German hip-hop. Renowned graphic novel authors such as Sebastian Lörcher, Nicolas Mahler and Sophia Martineck present the examination of history in a different form.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Accompanying programme

European Event Series "Facing Nazi Crimes: European Perspectives after 1945"



Graphic: VISUAL SPACE AGENCY & STUDIO BENS

Deutsches Historisches Museum

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To accompany the upcoming exhibition **"On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948"**, the Deutsches Historisches Museum extends an invitation to attend the European event series **"Facing Nazi Crimes: European Perspectives after 1945"**, which takes place from **May to October 2025**. Developed jointly by the DHM and the **Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"**, the series is devoted to the social and historical circumstances surrounding the first post-war exhibitions about the Nazi occupation, which were held between 1945 and 1948 in Paris, Warsaw, London, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen. The series will be held at these locations and will conclude in Berlin.

At the events, international guests and members of the exhibition team will explore the relationship of the exhibitions to the early documentary, legal, political and historical deliberations about the German occupation and crimes committed at the time. How were the exhibitions received and what influence did they have on the

still ongoing culture of remembrance? On six evenings, central aspects of the early exhibitions, how they came about, and what effect they had will be discussed with experts on the topic. The **admission-free event series will be streamed online** and subsequently accessible on the DHM website.

London – Images as Evidence

Tuesday, 13 May 2025, 5.30 pm GMT, 6.30 pm CET, German Historical Institute London

With Janina Struk, Paul Betts and James Bulgin

In cooperation with the German Historical Institute London and the Institute of Historical Research, University of London

Starting in May 1945, the exhibition “The Horror Camps”, displayed in the Reading Room of the Daily Express in London, featured enlarged photographs from the liberated Nazi camps. It prompted questions about the relationship between image and evidence, as well as the public use of degrading images, which remain profoundly relevant to this day. These questions will be discussed against the backdrop of changing historical conditions and curatorial practices.

English with German interpretation

Paris – Scénographie et Narration | Scenography and Narration

Tuesday, 17 June 2025, 6.30 pm, German Center for Art History Paris

With Sylvie Lindeperg, Rachel E. Perry and Maciej Gugała

In cooperation with the German Center for Art History Paris and the German Historical Institute Paris

The travelling exhibition “Crimes hitlériens” was first presented on 10 June 1945 in the Grand Palais in Paris. It marked one of the first attempts to portray the suffering under German occupation from a European perspective, employing an elaborate scenography to tell this story. The discussion revolves around the genesis and impact of the narration and staging strategies used in “Crimes hitlériens”.

French with German interpretation

Liberec – Pachatelé a odplata | Perpetrators and Retribution
Tuesday, 24 June 2025, 5 pm, North Bohemian Museum in Liberec
With Kateřina Králová, Ivan Rous, Michal Stehlík and Jaromír Mrňka

In cooperation with the North Bohemian Museum in Liberec and the German Historical Institute Warsaw, Prague branch office

The memorial site “Památník nacistického barbarství” (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism) was inaugurated on 8 September 1946 in a villa in the northern Bohemian city of Liberec. The villa, which had belonged to a Jewish entrepreneur until 1938, served as the residence of Nazi Gauleiter Konrad Henlein until the end of the war. The opening of the exhibition coincided with the expulsion of the German minority from Czechoslovakia. How did the regional and national narratives about the German occupation change over time, and what challenges did this bring for exhibitions today?

Czech with German interpretation

Warsaw – Pokłosie zniszczeń | Aftermath of Destruction
Thursday, 4 September 2025, 6 pm, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews
With Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Zuzanna Schnepf-Kończak and Agata Pietrasik

In cooperation with the German Historical Institute Warsaw, the Jewish Historical Institute and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

In the politically unstable climate of the post-war period, two exhibitions – “Warszawa oskarża” (Warsaw Accuses) and “Martyrologie un kamf / Martyrologia i walka” (Martyrology and Struggle) – were organised that shed light on the conflicting motives of the curators. With respect to the distinct perspectives of a Central European country that was a major site of the Holocaust and other German mass crimes, the question arises as to how the early controversial positions have continued to affect current discussions.

Polish with German interpretation

Bergen-Belsen – Survivors and Remembrance

Monday, 15 September 2025, 5.30 pm, Bergen-Belsen Memorial

With Dan Michman, Elke Gryglewski and Katja Seybold

In cooperation with the Bergen-Belsen Memorial

In 1947, survivors in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons Camp organised the exhibition “Undzer veg in der frayhayt” (Our Path to Freedom). It provides remarkable insight into how the history of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust was told from the viewpoint of Jewish DPs. What importance did the perspectives of the victims have for historiography and the culture of remembrance then and now?

English with German interpretation

Berlin – European Memory?

Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 6.30 pm, Deutsches Historisches Museum

With Ljiljana Radonić and others

The first exhibitions about Nazi crimes were part of a Europe-wide phenomenon that came to a halt with the onset of the Cold War. To what extent can an examination of the discussions and confrontations of the post-war period be instructive for today's culture of remembrance? What opportunities and challenges are connected with a project of European remembrance for an understanding of past and present?

In German

The event series takes place in cooperation with the Max Weber Foundation.

Admission is free to all events

Information about registration and streaming links under dhm.de/programme

A video recording of the entire event series will subsequently be available on the [DHM website](#) and can also be heard on the [DHM-Soundcloud-Channel](#) and the [DHM-Spotify-Channel](#).

Tours with experts: "On displaying violence – past and present"



Graphic: VISUAL SPACE AGENCY & STUDIO BENS

Experts who have explored new ways to present the Second World War and National Socialist crimes in museums guide visitors through the exhibition and reflect on the background of their curatorial experience with the question "On displaying violence – then and now".

28 Mai 2025, 6.30 pm

English guided tour with James Bulgin (London)

James Bulgin is Head of Public History at the Imperial War Museum and Head of Content of the new Holocaust Galleries that were opened there in 2021.

11 June 2025, 6.30 pm

English guided tour with exhibition's curator Agata Pietrasik (Berlin)

Agata Pietrasik is an art historian at the Free University Berlin and curator of the current exhibition. In her work she concentrates on the remembrance of the Holocaust in the fine arts and culture.

2 July 2025, 6.30 pm

English guided tour with Natalia Romik (Warsaw)

Natalia Romik is an architect, artist and curator. She has studied places where Jews tried to hide during the Second World War and deals with forgotten places in Poland where Jews used to live.

10 September 2025, 6.30 pm

German guided tour with Peter Hallama (Paris)

Peter Hallama is Junior Professor at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and studies the contemporary history of Eastern Central Europe.

22 October 2025, 6.30 pm

English guided tour with Paweł Machcewicz (Warsaw)

Paweł Machcewicz is a historian and professor at the Institute for Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He was the founding director of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk.

29 October 2025, 6.30 Uhr

German guided tour with Katja Seybold (Hannover)

Katja Seybold is the curator of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and works on prisoner-of-war camps and the history of Displaced Persons.

5 November 2025, 6.30 pm

English guided tour with Michal Stehlík (Prague)

Michal Stehlik is Professor for Czech History at the Charles University in Prague, exhibition curator and director of the National Literature Museum in Prague (Památník národního písemství).

All guided tours take place in the Pei Building.

Free of charge, registration required: ticket.dhm.de

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945–1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Tours and educational offers

You can find the latest tour offers at the [DHM-Website](https://www.dhm.de). Registration, information and booking are under fuehrung@dhm.de or 030/20304-750/-751.

All of the inclusive offers can also be booked by individuals or groups independent of the official tour dates.

Offers for individual visitors

Public tours

60 minutes

3 € plus admission

A dialogical tour leads through all the exhibition rooms and presents various objects that have to do with European remembrance. Between 1945 and 1948, exhibitions were organised in Europe that documented the crimes of the National Socialist regime. Evidence of Nazi crimes was shown in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen, thus leading to the first ways of coming to terms with this history for a wider public.

The guided tour deals with the different approaches of these early exhibitions to their topic and discusses such questions as how the Jewish resistance was portrayed in Warsaw, which objects from the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were shown or not shown, or how the Nazi crime scenes in Paris were partially reconstructed using original objects from the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. In addition, the tour considers the influence of photographs, films and other visual representations on public remembrance.

In dialogue with the education staff members, there will be time for discussion and reflection on the mechanisms of historical education in the immediate post-war period in the three capital cities and the two other important sites of Nazi persecution.

Deutsches Historisches Museum

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T +49 30 20304-410
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www.dhm.de

German:

TU	3 pm
TH	3 pm
FR	4 pm
SA	4 pm
SU	12 noon

English:

MO	4 pm
FR	2 pm
SA	2 pm

Audio guide

German and English

90 minutes

3 € plus admission

How was the violent National Socialist rule during the war and occupation addressed in the first exhibitions after the war? The audio guide in German and English offers a one-and-a-half-hour tour of six different exhibition projects that were shown between 1945 and 1948 in various European cities – London, Paris, Warsaw, and the Czech city of Liberec as well as in the Displaced Persons camp in Bergen-Belsen –, giving an overview of the objects and presentations exhibited at the time. This provides insight into the respective historical contexts and diverse forms of remembrance. Interviews with members of the exhibition team also shed light on the concept and design of the current exhibition and provide further information about some of the key objects.

Free thematic tours

Tour in remembrance of the 20th of July 1944

"Tyranny has a limit"

English

So, 20.7.2025

12 noon, 2 pm, 4 pm

Tour in remembrance of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944

Struggle for freedom

English

Fr, 1.8.2025

12 noon, 2 pm, 4 pm

Poland on 1 September 1939

Occupation and resistance – Tour addressing the invasion of Poland by the German Wehrmacht

English

Mo, 1.9.2025

12 noon, 2 pm, 4 pm

Tour recalling the pogroms of 9 November 1938

History in flames: Remembrance of the victims of antisemitic violence

English

So, 9.11.2025

12 noon, 2 pm, 4 pm

Inclusive tours and educational offers

Tours in Plain Language

90 minutes

3 € (plus admission)

1st Saturday of the month: 7.6. / 5.7. / 2.8. / 6.9. / 4.10. / 1.11.2025 at 12 noon

This dialogical tour is aimed at all those seeking an understandable and accessible introduction to the exhibition. The tour offers room for questions and the exchange of opinions.

The tour focuses on selected objects that show how the Nazi crimes were exhibited in Europe between 1945 and 1948. Objects were also used to illustrate the different forms of resistance. Photographs, films and objects helped to form the public remembrance of the occupation. Which original locations bear witness to the National Socialist rule? Which pictures taken in the concentration camps were shown publicly in Europe for the first time? What was not shown through photographs?

The tour guides point out interrelationships and adapt their talk to the needs of the participants.

Tandem tour with translation into German Sign Language (DGS)

60 minutes

3 € (plus admission)

14.6. / 13.9.2025 at 12 noon

Public guided tours with interpretation in German Sign Language (DGS) will be offered on Saturday, 14 June 2025, and Saturday, 13 September 2025. Hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf people are cordially invited. The dialogical tour provides insight into the exhibition and shows how the crimes of the Nazi regime were presented to the public in five European cities immediately after the war. Historical photographs, films and objects are used to illustrate the first attempts to deal with National Socialist crimes. They showed original locations that bear witness to the National

Socialist atrocities and displayed pictures from the concentration camps in Europe for the first time in public. The examples of the Warsaw Uprising and the Ghetto Uprising stand for the different forms of resistance against the oppression.

Discussions with the participants are expressly encouraged. All contributions will be translated into DGS and spoken language to enable a barrier-free exchange. Registration is not required.

Telephone tour for blind, visually impaired, and sighted persons

90 minutes

5 € pro Person

2nd Wednesday of the month: 11.6. / 9.7. / 13.8. / 10.9. / 8.10. / 12.11.2025 at 6 pm

It's worth a listen! The telephone tour is aimed at blind, visually impaired, but also sighted people. Members of the DHM educational team will describe the concept, architecture and rooms of the exhibition by telephone. They will talk about selected objects and quote from original texts on the subject. During the telephone conference, it will be possible to ask questions and exchange ideas with the other participants. The telephone tour can also be used as preparation for or follow-up to an exhibition visit.

Participants in the telephone conference call from home with their own phone. It is necessary to book the tour in advance.

Bookable offers

Languages: German, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Portuguese

Tour for adults

60 minutes

75 € plus admission (max. 25 Persons)

30 € plus admission (for max. 10 Persons)

The dialogical tour leads through all the exhibition rooms and discusses various objects that recall the violent rule of the Germans in the different countries. Between 1945 and 1948, exhibitions were held in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen, presenting evidence of National Socialist crimes and thus the first forms of how the public came to terms with that chapter of history. In the tour, the different approaches of the exhibition organisers are discussed using such examples as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the selection of objects in Bergen-Belsen, and the partial reconstruction of the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. What were the goals of these productions? What role did visual representations of the crimes play in the formation of a collective memory?

In dialogue with the education team, the tour provides room for discussions and reflections on the mechanisms of conveying history in the immediate post-war period. Special topics can be treated, if desired.

Thematic tour:

"Tyranny has a limit" – Tour in remembrance of the 20th of July 1944

75 minutes

1 € School classes (per person and free admission as a class)

1€ Seminar group (per person)

30 € Group (up to 10 persons, plus admission)

75 € Group (max. 25 persons, plus admission)

On the anniversary of the assassination attempt against Hitler on 20 July 1944, the thematic tour focuses on forms of resistance against National Socialism. It discusses objects that reflect the ways in which different groups tried to visualize the violent Nazi crimes. The focus is on images and documents that show the Holocaust from different perspectives. These include pictures by the artist Ludwig Meidner, who, working from exile in London, based his harrowing depictions of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto Uprising on reports. Another example is the exhibition in Bergen-Belsen, which shows how Jewish survivors turned a former Wehrmacht building into a new, unique site of remembrance. The tour provides an opportunity to reflect on resistance in all its diversity and on the different ways in which violence can be documented, displayed and understood.

Thematic tour:**Struggle for freedom – Tour on the occasion of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944**

75 minutes

1 € School classes (per person and free admission as a class)

1€ Seminar group (per person)

30 € Group (up to 10 persons, plus admission)

75 € Group (max. 25 persons, plus admission)

In the Second World War, Poland in particular suffered enormously from desecration, death and violence. This is symbolized in the extensive destruction of Warsaw, the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto, and the resistance offered by the Polish and Jewish population. The thematic tour on the day marking the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising focuses on objects that were shown in early post-war Polish exhibitions, such as those in the National Museum in Warsaw and in the Jewish Historical Institute. Among them are a bronze head from the statue of the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz and a postcard picturing the destruction of the Great Synagogue. The tour invites you to reflect, on the one hand, on how national identity and heroic stories were staged in post-war Poland and, on the other, on their effect on today's culture of remembrance.

Thematic tour:

Occupation and resistance – Tour addressing the invasion of Poland by the German Wehrmacht

75 minutes

1 € School classes (per person and free admission as a class)

1€ Seminar group (per person)

30 € Group (up to 10 persons, plus admission)

75 € Group (max. 25 persons, plus admission)

On 1 September 1939, the German Wehrmacht invaded Poland, marking the beginning of the Second World War. The thematic tour focuses on the National Socialist occupation and the Polish resistance. Through selected objects, it tells the story of Warsaw's reconstruction after the destruction of the city and its cultural heritage. It also deals with the difficult question of how this reconstruction could be carried out in a country that exerted resistance against the German occupiers but largely failed to show opposition to the anti-Semitic ideology that accompanied the occupation. The tour invites you to reflect on memory, blind spots, and the politics of history in post-war Poland.

Thematic tour:

History in flames: Remembrance of the victims of antisemitic violence – Tour recalling the pogroms of 9 November 1938

75 minutes

1 € School classes (per person and free admission as a class)

1€ Seminar group (per person)

30 € Group (up to 10 persons, plus admission)

75 € Group (max. 25 persons, plus admission)

On 9 November, Germany commemorates the nationwide Jewish pogroms that took place on 9 November 1938. The thematic tour focuses on early representations of the Holocaust and shows how survivors visualised their own history. It discusses objects that reflect Jewish perspectives on National Socialist violence, such as an

early cinematic portrait of survivor Hela Goldstein that combines personal experience with collective history. The tour also discusses how the anti-Semitic dimension of Nazi crimes was often repressed in the immediate postwar period, and what influence this repression had on commemoration.

Dialogical thematic tour for students: "Seeing is Believing?"

90 minutes

1 € per person

How did the public commemoration of the Holocaust and the Nazi war crimes in Europe begin? Which images shaped the collective memory of those involved? What role did the first exhibitions play in coming to terms with the crimes and in remembering the victims? And in what ways do these presentations continue to have an impact today? Between 1945 and 1948, exhibitions were held in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen that showed photographs, films, works of art and historical objects to report on the atrocities.

A clock and a small Madonna statue bear witness to the massacre in Oradour-sur-Glane, while original newspaper articles and guestbook pages from the early exhibitions document the social debates of the time. The tour points out excerpts from documentary films that recorded the exhibitions of the time as well as the shocked reactions of many visitors. The presentation also addresses why a Jewish amulet for babies could not be displayed in Bergen-Belsen at the time and what objects were used to show the Jewish resistance. More than 280 objects and reproductions illustrate the concept of these early European exhibitions and tell the tragic story of the victims through testimonies of the perpetrators and personal belongings of the persecuted. In dialogue with the guide team, the tour reveals new research perspectives and takes up individual focal points and interests of the students.

Learning German in the museum

Tour for integration and orientation courses

German

90 minutes

1 € per person

The exhibition refers to the curriculum of the integration and orientation courses and is particularly suited to the section on "National Socialism and its Consequences". The dialogic tour deals with the first exhibitions on National Socialist rule and occupation that were shown in Paris, London, Warsaw, Liberec and Bergen-Belsen between 1945 and 1948. They presented photographs, film clips, models and other testimonies to the Nazi crimes, thus contributing to the formation of a collective memory of the occupation period in the postwar societies of the respective countries.

On the interactive tour, which is conducted on the B1 language level, the education team guides introduce all of the exhibition rooms. The main focus is on the continuities that shape the portrayal of Germany's history of violence in Europe and its remembrance and commemoration to this day.

After the tour, the participants work on their own descriptions of selected objects with the help of word modules and present them to the group, thereby further developing their language skills. There is time for the exchange of ideas, questions and one's own reflections.

Offers for school classes

Tours for school classes, grades 7-10

German

60 minutes

1€ per student

Based on original historical objects, the guided tour through all the exhibition rooms deals with the horrors of the National Socialist occupation and the Holocaust. Objects such as a carpet, photographs, newspaper articles and films illustrate the events of the Nazi rule. Numerous photos and drawings are also discussed, including those of the Jewish refugee Ludwig Meidner. In addition, the tour sheds light on forms of resistance and reconstruction in the occupied French and Polish territories and reflects on exile in London during and after the Second World War.

Participants will learn how a collective national memory began to form in Poland, Czechoslovakia and France after the war, and what social processes shaped the memory of those historical events. The topics discussed refer to the Berlin and Brandenburg framework curriculum and support the students in learning about the critical examination of historical sources and images. Focal points can be determined individually on request.

Tours for school classes, grades 11-13

German

60 minutes

1€ per student

A dialogical tour leads through all of the exhibition rooms and presents various objects that reflect the European culture of remembrance of the Second World War. While Jewish survivors like Hela Goldstein spoke in films about their experiences during the Holocaust, the anti-Semitic dimension of the Nazi crimes remained marginalized in many European post-war societies. Nevertheless, the first pictures from the concentration camps published and displayed after the war left a deep

impression on the population and shaped public awareness in the liberated countries.

The tour deals with the historic venues of the first exhibitions after the occupation: the Grand Palais in Paris, where Nazi propaganda had been displayed during the German occupation, a former Jewish villa in the Czech city of Liberec that was converted into a memorial site, and the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where survivors organized their own exhibition. The tour offers a critical examination of historical narratives in the time between 1945 and 1948. It examines the relation between visual sources such as photos, drawings and films and their value as evidence of the Nazi crimes. It asks: What was shown and what was not shown? The topics take the Berlin and Brandenburg framework curriculum into account. Focal points can be determined individually on request.

History workshop for school classes, grades 7-10

German

120 minutes

2 € per student

What were the first pictures from the German concentration and extermination camps that were shown to the public in London in May 1945? What material traces remained of the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane after the massacre of its inhabitants? How did an initial national myth emerge from the "Memorial of Nazi Barbarism" in Liberec, Czechoslovakia? Immediately after the war, exhibitions were organized in London, Paris, Bergen-Belsen, Warsaw and Liberec to inform the public about the Nazi crimes and the existence of the concentration and extermination camps.

In the history workshop, students work in small groups using worksheets, etc., to further develop their basic knowledge of how to analyse such things as photographs from the camps, newspaper articles and exhibition posters. The historical objects, the history of events in the Second World War, the German occupation period and the Holocaust will be examined and their different manifestations in the relevant countries compared. At the end of the history workshop, there will be a joint discussion about the relationship between history, memory and remembrance.

History workshop for school classes, grades 11-13

German

150 minutes

2 € per student

Why was the British public confronted with the crimes of the National Socialists immediately after the war, but at the same time the anti-Semitic dimension was marginalized? How could the reuse of Nazi symbols contribute to denazification in liberated Paris? How did the destruction of Warsaw become a symbol of anti-fascist resistance? Based on these and other questions, the students will deal with early exhibitions about the Second World War and the Nazi regime of occupation which were shown to a broad international public between 1945 and 1948. In small groups, the participants will deepen their knowledge of historical source criticism using objects that were shown in the exhibitions in London, Paris, Warsaw, Bergen-Belsen and Liberec. They will deal with photographs of survivors, posters, newspaper articles, artifacts from the massacre in Oradour-sur-Glane, and a model of the Warsaw Ghetto, which had been completely destroyed. By comparing interpretations of history related to time and location, the students come to understand how the past is constructed from the present. In accordance with the framework curriculum of the state of Berlin, current manifestations of historical culture are taken into consideration and controversially discussed at the end of the history workshop.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

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Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



Zeughauskino Programme

Testify and Tell. Early pictures from liberated camps

16 May to 30 June 2025

Although film clips were rarely shown in the first exhibitions about the Nazi occupation of Europe, films showing the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps played an important role in the subsequent reckoning with the Holocaust. They served to document, provide evidence for prosecution and narrate Nazi crimes. The places where they were shown – film theatres, courtrooms, schools and museums – became "exhibition rooms" of the violence suffered in the recent past.

In cooperation with DFG long-term project "Images that Have Consequences - An Archaeology of Iconic Film Footage from the Nazi Era"

Further information and tickets: <https://www.dhm.de/zeughauskino/en/>

Deutsches Historisches Museum

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- 1 Visitors at the entrance of the exhibition "The Horror Camps", London, May 1945
© Daily Express/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Every day, thousands of people queued in Regent Street in front of the Daily Express reading room to see the exhibition "The Horror Camps". The motto "Seeing is Believing" at the entrance implied that a visit to the exhibition was almost a duty.

Expiry of the fee-free license period: 1 Nov. 2025



- 2 Ludwig Meidner, Trek of People, from the cycle Massacres in Poland, 1942-45, charcoal drawing, Jewish Museum Frankfurt
© Ludwig Meidner-Archiv, Jewish Museum of the city of Frankfurt, photo: Herbert Fischer

The German-Jewish artist Ludwig Meidner, who lived as an emigrant in England, based his depiction of the Holocaust on reports and on his own personal imagination. It was his visit to "The Horror Camps" that showed him the true character of the genocide.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

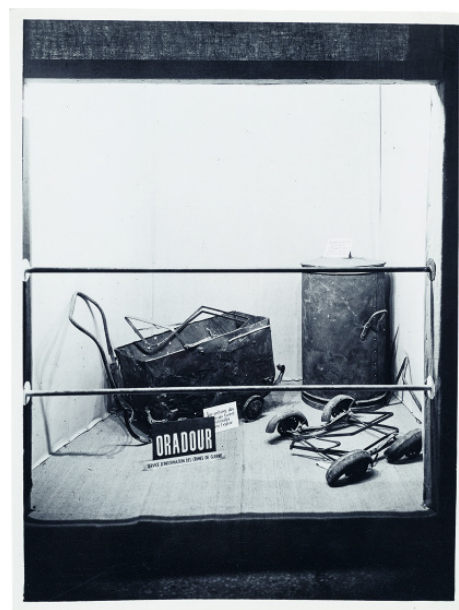
An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



- 3 Visitors at the entrance of the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens" (Hitlerian Crimes) in the Grand Palais, Paris, 1945, © Service historique de la Défense

In June 1945, only a month after the war ended, National Socialist symbols could again be seen in Paris. In front of the Grand Palais, where the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens" took place, and on posters throughout the city, swastikas and SS symbols were depicted. They no longer stood for the rule of the German occupiers, but for their crimes, which were displayed in the exhibition.



- 4 Objects from victims of the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens", Grand Palais, Paris, 1945 © Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, Centre des Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve

Numerous objects that were found in the ruins of the decimated village of Oradour-sur-Glane after the SS massacre were displayed in the showcases of the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens", including a baby carriage riddled with bullets and a kitchen steamer in which a person had been murdered. Oradour-sur-Glane became a key national memorial site in France.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

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- 5 Pocket watch of a victim of the Oradour-sur-Glane Massacre, Association Nationale des Familles des Martyrs d'Oradour-sur-Glane © Association Nationale des Familles des Martyrs d'Oradour-sur-Glane, photo: Benoît Sadry

The exhibition "Crimes hitlériens" displayed personal belongings such as pocket watches – similar to the one shown here –, razors, toys, etc., that were found in the ruins of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, which had been decimated during the SS massacre. Oradour-sur-Glane became a central national memorial site in France.



- 6 Exhibition organiser Jacques Billiet (1st from left) and guests at the opening of the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens" in front of collaborationist propaganda posters, Paris, June 1945, reproduction © Keystone-France/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

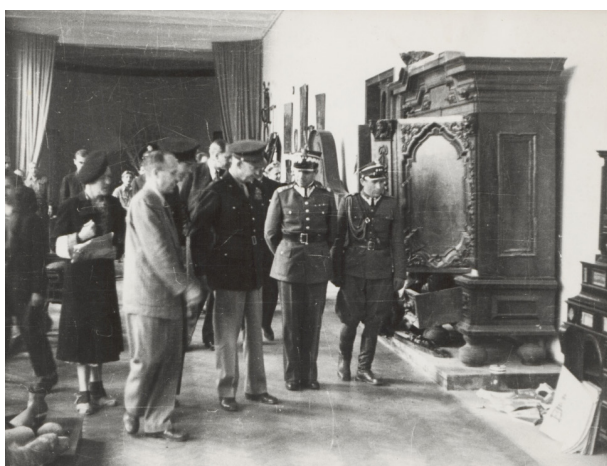
Photographs of protagonists of the Vichy regime in the exhibition "Crimes hitlériens" were labelled by name in order to call them out. The trial against Marshal Philippe Pétain, head of state of the Vichy regime which had collaborated with Germany, took place parallel to the exhibition. Pétain and his adherents were the subject of a special chapter of the exhibition where accusative slogans and collaborationist propaganda were displayed. These included posters that attest to the support of the Vichy regime for the German expansion into Eastern Europe and the exploitation of these areas.

Expiry of the fee-free license period: 1 Nov. 2025

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

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- 7 Museum director Stanisław Lorentz (4th from right) accompanies General Dwight D. Eisenhower (3rd from right), supreme commander of the US occupation troops in Germany, through the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża" (Warsaw Accuses), Warsaw, 21 September 1945, reproduction © Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

The new Polish government, now backed by the Soviet Union, saw "Warszawa oskarża" as a means to raise international awareness of the German war crimes. Museum director Stanisław Lorentz accompanied both American and Soviet delegations through the exhibition. Such visits were remarkable in the light of the increasingly aggressive geopolitical division between West and East.



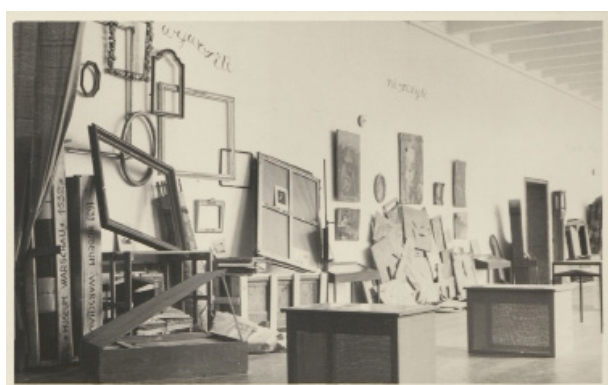
- 8 Artworks in the National Museum in Warsaw that were damaged during the German occupation, 1945 © Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

Photographs from the years 1939 to 1945 show the destruction of the museum, which was later staged in the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża". Throughout the entire period of occupation, the Germans had stolen works from the museum collections and taken them to the German Reich. Many objects had also been damaged during the war. In order to save the remaining works, museum staff members had to track them down in the chaos of the destruction.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

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- 9 View of the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża" (Warsaw Accuses), Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (National Museum in Warsaw), 1945, photo: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

Anti-German inscriptions and pictures hung on the walls of the "Room of Destructions" in the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża". Below them were damaged artworks and objects stacked in a surrealistic disarray that recalled the destruction of the Polish museum collections during the occupation. The Germans had stolen countless works. As a reminder of the plundering, the exhibition showed wooden cases with which the booty was spirited out of the country.



- 10 Henryk Kuna, *Three Marys*, 1934, bronze, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (National Museum in Warsaw), Warsaw © Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

The sculpture "Three Marys" was displayed in the "Documentation Room" of the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża", which according to the list of objects was the first acquisition of the museum after the war. The depiction of the biblical scene of mourning and hope of resurrection symbolised the situation of the museum at the time.

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- 11 Fragment of the Adam Mickiewicz Monument made by Cyprian Godebski in 1898, bronze, Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza (Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature), Warsaw
© Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza, photo: Maciek Bociański

The monument honouring Adam Mickiewicz, which had been inaugurated in 1898, stood in the city centre of Warsaw until it was destroyed by the Germans. The poet of Romanticism was considered Poland's most important man of letters. German soldiers demolished the monument after crushing the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, but the head survived the war in the rubble of the city. In the "Room of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office" in the exhibition "Warszawa oskarża" the head as well as related objects were presented alongside plans for the reconstruction of Warsaw.



- 12 Henryk Hechtkopf, Poster on the 5th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, 1948, Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce (Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland), Warsaw (on permanent loan from Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute) © Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland

The exhibition "Martirologie un kamf / Martyrologia i walka" opened on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For the celebration the Central Committee of Jews in Poland tendered a poster competition. The winning poster was designed by Henryk Hechtkopf. It showed two Jewish insurgents. The text in Yiddish and Polish reads: "They fought for our honour and freedom".

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- 13 Kilim from the Łódź Ghetto, 1942, Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce (Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland), Warsaw (Permanent loan from Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute)
© Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland

The kilim (carpet), which was made in the Łódź Ghetto, depicts Jewish forced labourers who are sorting out plunder taken from murder victims in the extermination camps. The kilim was meant to demonstrate the productivity of the ghetto to the German functionaries. At first, it appeared as if the ghetto inhabitants could temporarily avoid deportation to the extermination camps if assigned to forced labour. The Yiddish title "Ghetto Happiness" is an ironic reference to their situation and took up a theme from prewar Jewish literature.



- 14 Visitors in front of a showcase in the exhibition "Martirologye un kamf / Martyrologia i walka" (Martyrology and Struggle), Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Museum of the Jewish Historical Institute), Warsaw, 1948 © PAP/Archive

The objects in the showcase within the exhibition "Martirologye un kamf / Martyrologia i walka" stood for the irreplaceable loss of the cultural and religious heritage of the Polish Jews. During the Holocaust, synagogues were destroyed and religious objects stolen. Torah scrolls were desecrated and misused by German soldiers, but also by the local Polish population, to make everyday objects.

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In cooperation with the Documentation Centre "German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War"



- 15 **Słowo Młodych magazine, No. 5, July 1941, Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce (Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland), Warsaw (Permanent loan from Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute) © Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland**

The Oyneg Shabes Archive is among the most important sources of material about the Holocaust. Part of the archive, which is listed on the memory of the World Register by UNESCO consists of Jewish underground newspapers from Warsaw. 44 underground newspapers of resistance groups of various political persuasions were preserved in the secret archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. They spread ghetto news about underground activities, the course of the war, and, from autumn 1941 on, the mass murder of Jews.



- 16 **Photo of the exhibition "Martirologie un kamf / Martyrologia i walka", Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute) © Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute**

View of the room of the exhibition "Martirologie un kamf / Martyrologia i walka". On the wall is a map of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, below it in the showcase a model of the bunker at 18 Miła Street.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

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- 17 Poster on the opening of "Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism), Liberec, 1946, Moravská galerie v Brně (Moravian Gallery in Brno) © Moravian Gallery in Brno

The Council of the Magistrate for Education in Liberec and the Association of Liberated Political Prisoners were listed as organisers of the exhibition "Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism). The venue was called "Konrad Henlein House" after the previous resident of the villa, the Nazi Gauleiter of the so-called Reichsgau Sudetenland.



- 18 Reconstruction of a cell from the Theresienstadt Gestapo prison in "Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism), Liberec, 1946 © Státní okresní archiv Liberec

The photograph shows the reconstruction of a communal cell of the Gestapo prison in the Theresienstadt Small Fortress on the lower floor of the memorial, around 1946. In addition to the usual displays in a museum the organisers staged the sites of Nazi terror. Visitors to the memorial were to get the impression of personally witnessing the atrocities, causing a feeling of shock.

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- 19 Germans visiting the exhibition "Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism), Liberec, 1946 © ČTK / Alamy Stock Photo

At the time the memorial "Památník nacistického barbarství" was inaugurated, the Czechoslovak authorities had already expelled most of the Germans from the country. Those who were waiting in Liberec for orders to leave were marked as Germans by an armband and required to view the exhibition and thus confront them with the Nazi atrocities. The photo shows Germans in the courtyard of the memorial where there was an arched gate with the inscription "Arbeit macht frei", a reconstruction of the gate of the Theresienstadt Gestapo prison. The prison became the most important symbol of suffering under the German occupation in the Czech collective memory.

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file, please contact: anita@alamy.com*



- 20 Postcard with a view of the memorial "Památník nacistického barbarství" in Liberec, ca. 1946, privately owned, Berlin, photo: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin / Sebastian Ahlers

The memorial "Památník nacistického barbarství" (Memorial to Nazi Barbarism) in Liberec was installed in 1946 in a villa that was originally owned by the Jewish textile entrepreneur Julius Hersch and his wife Paula. They fled in 1938 to escape the antisemitic persecution and settled in Uruguay, never returning to Czechoslovakia. Konrad Henlein, Gauleiter and Reichsstatthalter of the Sudetengau, had the villa confiscated and lived there until the end of the war in May 1945.

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- 21 Visitors in the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt" (Our Path to Freedom), DP Camp Bergen-Belsen, 1945 © Yad Vashem Photo Collection

On 20 July 1947, the day the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt" was opened, it was attended by around 150 delegates from the 2nd Congress of Liberated Jews in the British Zone of Germany.



- 22 Postcard with a view of the Roundhouse, which was used in 1947 for the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt" (Our Path to Freedom), private collection, Berlin, photo: Deutsches Historisches Museum / Sebastian Ahlers

The former Wehrmacht officers' mess was used in 1947 for the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt" by the Jewish Displaced Persons. The building was renamed "Roundhouse" by the British owing to its partially round floor plan.

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

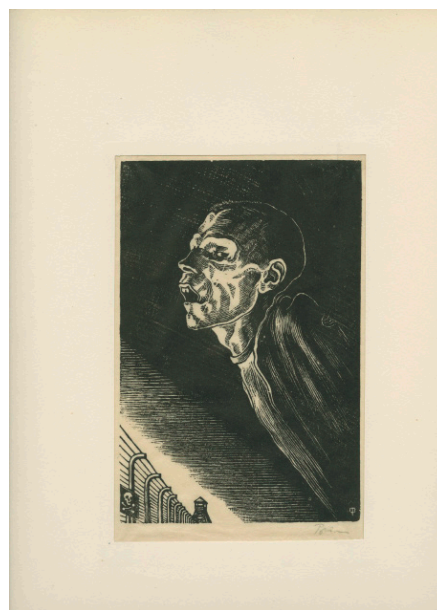
An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

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- 23 Admonition at the entrance of the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheytt", DP Camp Bergen-Belsen, 1947 © Massuah – International Institute for Holocaust Studies

Inscribed between trees at the entrance of the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheytt" was the admonition in Hebrew to remember the six million murdered Jews. For the survivors, damaged trees were a symbol of the Holocaust.



- 24 Walter Preisser, Print from a 12-part woodcut series, 1947, Mahn- und Gedenkstätte der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf (Places of remembrance and memorial Düsseldorf) © Mahn- und Gedenkstätte der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf

The Jewish artist Walter Preisser survived six years of imprisonment in various concentration camps. After the war he made twelve woodcuts that were shown in the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheytt". The motifs are based on his memories of custody in the Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz-Monowitz, and Gross-Rosen concentration camps. They deal with everyday violence, torture and murder. The print shows an emaciated inmate in a camp.

PRESS IMAGES

On Displaying Violence: First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948

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25 Photo of the exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt", DP Camp Bergen-Belsen, 1945
© Yad Vashem Photo Collection

The exhibition "Undzer veg in der frayheyt" was held in the auditorium of the main building of the former Wehrmacht barracks. By means of photographs, documents, artworks, publications, objects, and spacious installations, it created a varied image of the daily life, cultural activities, early forms of remembrance and political struggles of the DPs.

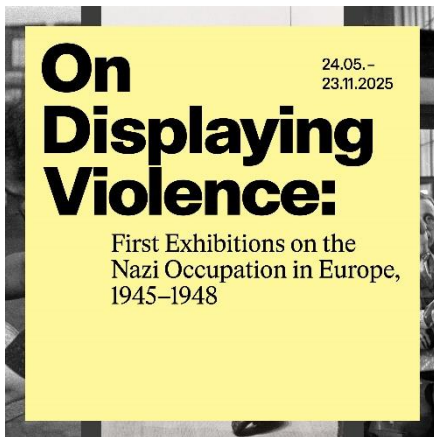
DHM Exhibition Preview 2025

As of: 20 May 2025, additions and alterations are subject to change



Until 11 January 2026

Roads not Taken.
Or: Things could have
turned out differently



24 May 2025 to 23 November 2025

On Displaying Violence:
First Exhibitions on the Nazi Occupation
in Europe, 1945-1948



14 November 2025 to 7 June 2026

Nature and German History.
Faith – Biology – Power

DHM Exhibition Preview 2025

As of: 20 May 2025, additions and alterations are subject to change



**Es hätte
auch
anders
kommen
können.**

**9 December 2022 to
11 January 2026**

**Roads not Taken.
Or: Things could have turned out
differently**

Starting from key dates in German history, the museum presents a look back(wards) at decisive historical events of the 19th and 20th centuries. It brings actual turning points face to face with what might have happened if it were not for various factors. Along 14 distinctive caesurae in the German history the probabilities of unrealised history – prevented by accidents, averted by misfires or other kinds of shortcomings – are explored: it is that which is known in the philosophy of history as contingency.

The course of these caesurae begins in 1989 with the Peaceful Revolution in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and ends in the year 1848, when Germany first tried to attempt a democratic awakening. The exhibition takes up retrospectively such topics as „Ostpolitik“, the building of the Wall, the Cold War, the assumption of power by the National Socialists, as well as revolution and democratisation at decisive points – and illustrates that history by no means had to end as it actually happened. In this way, milestones such as the Stalin Note of 1952, the Korean War in combination with the Berlin Airlift of 1948/49, the failed blasting of the bridge at Remagen in 1945, the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler in 1945, the deposal of Chancellor Brüning in 1932, the revolution of 1918, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, or the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, appear in a new light.

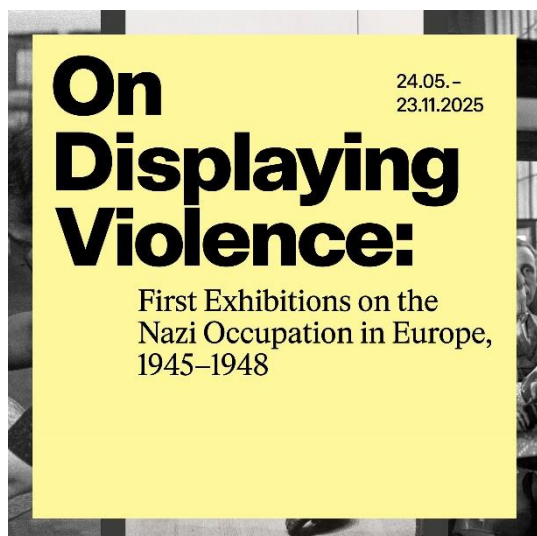
This perspective, unusual for a history museum, should make it possible to see well-known facts in a new light and to encourage an understanding of the principal open-endedness of history as a result of constellations and decisions, actions and omissions.

The project manager is Fritz Backhaus; the curatorial team consists of Julia Franke, Stefan Paul-Jacobs, and Dr. Lili Reyels.

An exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum in cooperation with



Pei building, basement



**24 May 2025 to
23 November 2025**

**On Displaying Violence:
First Exhibitions on the Nazi
Occupation in Europe, 1945-1948**

How did post-war societies process their experiences of violence and destruction caused by the Second World War and the concurrent occupation of large parts of Europe by National Socialist Germany? A previously overlooked but historically influential form of coming to terms with this desolation are the exhibitions that were organised in post-war Europe between 1945-48 by institutions, groups, and individuals from diverse backgrounds. In these times of social hardship, political insecurity, enduring violence, and uncertain future, these exhibitions aimed to document and visualise the consequences of the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes.

For the first time, the Deutsches Historisches Museum presents the history of this pan-European phenomenon through early exhibitions in London, Paris, Warsaw, Liberec, and Bergen-Belsen. Our focus is on the different forms and content with which the exhibition organizers – most of whom were victims of Nazi persecution and Holocaust survivors – addressed acts of violence, resistance, loss of cultural heritage, and identification of perpetrators. The different notions of the future that found expression in these exhibitions are also illustrated.

Analysing the visual language of the time within its respective local and national context, the exhibition compares historical sources and traces the motivations of those involved, as well as the impact of the exhibitions, many of which travelled across Europe. Original artefacts, photographs, films, documents, artworks, and multimedia presentations provide insights into the challenges and background of this “first look back.”

“The exhibition is being realised in cooperation with the [Project Group for the documentation centre “German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War” \(ZWBE\)](#). An accompanying programme conceived by the DHM and the ZWBE will explore the topic of German occupation and tyranny in Europe in greater depth.

The curator of the exhibition is Dr Agata Pietrasik.

Pei building, ground floor



© Laura J. Padgett

**14 November 2025 to
7 June 2026**

Nature and German History Faith – Biology – Power

The Deutsches Historisches Museum is currently planning the exhibition “Nature and German History. Faith – Biology – Power”, to open in November 2025. Nine-hundred years of German history will be displayed across 1,000 square metres of exhibition space. The spectrum ranges from Hildegard of Bingen’s concept of “viriditas”, the greening power of creation, in the 12th century to the early anti-nuclear movement in Wyhl and the different concepts of nature in the two Germanys towards the end of the 20th century. Moreover, the co-option of what was considered “natural” was one of the ideological tenets of the Nazi dictatorship, which attempted to bring both “external” and “internal” nature under their power of definition and rule by decreeing innumerable laws. The “Nuremberg Laws” and the “Reich Conservation Act” were both enacted in the same year: 1935.

The time periods are presented in five chronologically arranged rooms with different stations. These stations are intended to present events or developments in the form of “vignettes” in which the concept of nature is changed or characterised in a striking way. The large-scale project focuses on the changing significance and conceptuality of “Nature” and examines it as a political factor in German history. The exhibition traces the historical stages of these developments as well as the politicisation and instrumentation of the concept of nature as it unfolded in German history. Who defines what is considered nature? Who can influence it? How does the understanding of internal and external nature vary? And what happens to nature when unforeseen events occur that lead to political actions?

The exhibition will be curated by Prof. Dr Julia Voss.

Pei building, first floor