

A black and white photograph of a dense forest. The image features several large, gnarled tree trunks in the foreground and midground, with thick, tangled branches and dense undergrowth. The lighting is soft, creating a misty or ethereal atmosphere. The text "Buchenwald" is overlaid in the center in a white serif font.

Buchenwald



Frederik Stenger & Günter Jeschonnek

Buchenwald
“In the Thicket of the Ettersberg — Searching for Traces”
[7]

Making the Invisible Visible:
Reading Between the Lines of Photographs
[8]

Images of Power:
Karl Otto Koch in Buchenwald as Photographer and Commandant
[12]

The Dichotomy of the Visible
[15]

Reconciling Contradictions
The History of Buchenwald Concentration Camp
[41]

The Fascination of Terror
and the Desire to Understand the Incomprehensible
What Remains When Nothing Remains
[46]

The Sculpture *The Last Face*
by Bruno Apitz
[52]

Bleibtreustrasse
and its Jewish History
[55]

Authors and Bibliography
[64]

Legal
[66]

The diversity of Jewish culture is part of the DNA of Berlin's Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf District. Our District would have a very different look today if it were not for people of the Jewish faith being active in the community.

The reputation and international image of the District are still to this day associated with the 'Golden 20s', the years between 1924 and 1929. At that time, most of its shops and cultural institutions along the KuDamm and Tauentzien streets were owned or run by Jewish people. Jewish architects were responsible for many of the buildings that are still such an important part of the face of the District today. But our District was also home to a great many institutions of Jewish life. Many of these people and places have since been forgotten. "Stolpersteine" ("stumbling stones") in the pavements outside their houses are reminders of their suffering and murder, but the stories of their individual lives as well as of the cultural, scientific and economic communities they were part of are largely unknown. We as a District want to change that. We want to tell those stories of everyday lives. Our District Office is setting up a website to do just that, to tell the stories of the people and the places where they lived, searchable by address, using the various formats of text, video, music or literature. Everyone, whether school classes, student groups, neighbours or other interested people, can be a part of this and post their research on the site so that the stories can be constantly retold and continued. A QR Code at each location will link to the appropriate page on the site, so that a comprehensive city walk can be created bit by bit and visitors can always discover something new. In this way, the public space becomes a history workshop.

Bleibtreustrasse and 'Galerie Mond' located in this street are important locations for this project. The world-famous photographer Yva, after whom the Yva Arch in Charlottenburg is named, moved into a large studio in this building in 1930. This story, too, needs to be told. Or do you already know the story of Yva? Many prominent artists, including the writers Vicky Baum and Erich Kaestner, were guests of hers, and so it is only fitting that 'Galerie Mond' devoted an exhibition to Yva's early work in the Summer of 2025, highlighting

the connection between this location and the Jewish-influenced cultural history of the District of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf. This connection is being taken up again in the exhibition '*Buchenwald — In the Thicket of the Ettersberg*' marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald concentration camp on 11 April 1945, and this is why we as a Berlin District are supporting this project with this booklet.

Oliver Schruoffeneger
(Councillor for Public Order, Environment, Roads and
Green Areas of the District of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf
of Berlin)

Foreword

This booklet has been conceived to accompany the exhibition *Buchenwald — In the Thicket of the Ettersberg* and provide follow-up reading material and is available free of charge.

It is intended to aid visitors by giving them pointers to help them identify and interrogate the deeper levels of the photographic subjects carefully selected by Christian Rothe in the late 2010s and early 2020s by juxtaposing Rothe's present-day photos with rare historical photos of the Buchenwald site during the Nazi period. This interplay of images between the present and the events of the past at an actual site of horror, inhumanity and state-controlled terror is intended to give visitors to the exhibition a historical framework, while the short essays included here open up a context enabling light to penetrate the dark shadows "in the thicket of the Ettersberg".

Elke-Vera Kotowski
(Curator-in-Chief of the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation,
Berlin and Erlangen)

Buchenwald "In the Thicket of the Ettersberg — Searching for Traces"

Christian Rothe's photographs, published in the book *Buchenwald — In the Thicket of the Ettersberg* and now being shown from 30 October 2025 in the Berlin exhibition of the same name, offer a present-day perspective on how we engage with the past. These photographs were taken using the lens of a large-format camera and enter into a dialogue with the wood sculpture *Das letzte Gesicht* (The Last Face), made by Bruno Apitz in Buchenwald concentration camp in the Autumn of 1944. What can the arts contribute to a critical engagement with the Nazi dictatorship and beyond? Can we better understand a place like the former Buchenwald concentration camp through the lens of a camera or by looking at a work of art created by an actual inmate of the concentration camp and by using content to create context? Most importantly: can we pass on this understanding to the younger generation? That is what this booklet seeks to explore.

This artistic engagement with Buchenwald undoubtedly offers an opportunity for immersing ourselves in what is being depicted from our present-day point of view, for thinking critically about it and asking questions about the past of these places. Works of art, especially, in this case, these photographs, can trigger emotions which remain etched in our memories for all time. Christian Rothe's images show the stillness of a place where nature has overgrown the evidence of historical events, but they nevertheless make it possible for our imaginations to go from our present into the deep, dark places of the past. The artist's pictures are thus not merely documents, but can create through the richness of their content visual bridges between present and past. How meaningful it can be to place things in context and embed them in a historical timeline becomes clear if we bear in mind that photographs are snapshots of a moment in time which in themselves and in what they depict connect multiple levels of time. But there is a limit to how far a picture on its own can reproduce the complexity of historical contexts.

This is exactly what this booklet aims to do, focussing on these issues while providing a guide and introduction to the exhibition and inviting visitors to engage critically with historical events. In this way, it expands the concept of the exhibition and raises new questions. It

aims to do so by deliberately juxtaposing selected photographs by Christian Rothe with photographs taken during the actual period in history and providing texts for deeper understanding. Most of the pairs of images reproduced in the booklet engage with the same location without showing an identical perspective.

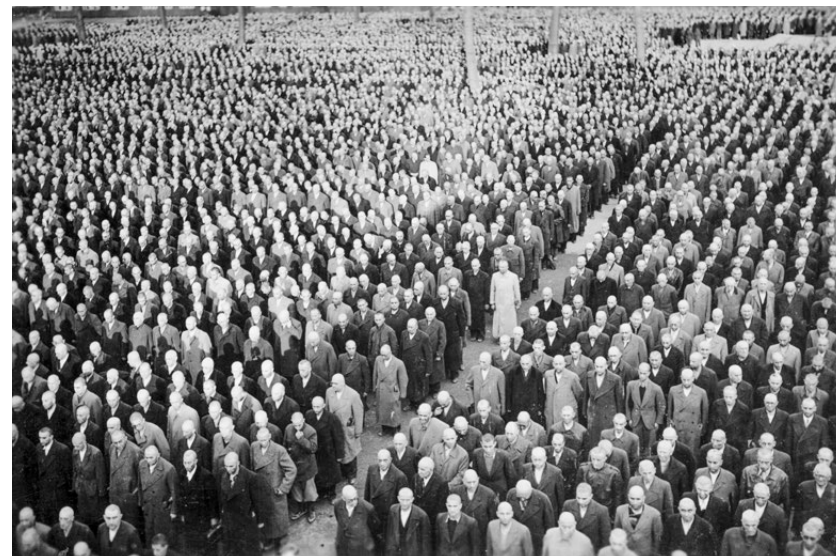
This means that a meaningful topographical context can be created, the limitations of which need, however, to be acknowledged. There are not only decades between Christian Rothe's photographs and the historical images; these photos from the past were also taken by very different groups of people for purposes defined by various different interests and ideological criteria as well as by their specific historical context.

This booklet aims to pick up the thread where the photograph as a work of art hits its limits, in terms of both place and content, and to expand the exhibition from a historical point of view and encourage reflection. Funded by the District Office of Berlin Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf and a private donation, the booklet is intended as an invitation to engage with and better understand the historical, social and political background needed to make better sense of the exhibition.

This can make visiting the exhibition more than just an aesthetic engagement with the former Buchenwald concentration camp, but can also open up a space for discussion within civil society and among individual people which must raise the question as to how "remembrance" and critical historical engagement can be shaped in the present using artistic approaches and developed further into the future.

Making the Invisible Visible Reading Between the Lines of Photographs

Thousands of Jewish inmates are assembled on the parade ground of Buchenwald concentration camp in martial rows, with shaved heads, standing stiff as pale statues, their faces seeming to vanish into anonymity. The photo is taken from a raised perspective. The picture's composition looks geometrically arranged and is an expression of sheer order and military power. So what at first sight seems to be an objective document is in reality a carefully staged image of dehumanisation – made by perpetrators for perpetrators.



[Signature: 489.072] Jewish inmates on the parade ground between 10 and 16 November 1938,
© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington

This photo is no objective representation. It was taken just after the November Pogrom in 1938, in which thousands of Jewish men were arrested and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. Anti-Semitism played a part in this not only as a political ideology but also as a central element of Nazi state doctrine and of German society, a deliberately constructed image of the "enemy", linking centuries of anti-Semitic prejudices with pseudo-scientific racial theories and propaganda intended to incite hatred. The aim was the complete eradication of Jewish life from society, the economy and culture – initially by pressuring Jews to emigrate, and culminating in the planned and industrially-organised extermination of Jewish women and men in the Holocaust. The photo reproduced above is an example of the way the SS used visual images: this photo is not meant to explain or document, but to demonstrate the arrogant self-assertion of a system that imposed order and exerted control by systematically depriving people of their rights and by isolating, exploiting and murdering them.

Photographs are indispensable sources and testimonials; but they can also be manipulative and highly problematic. This is true more than ever today, when we bear in mind the possibilities promised by Artificial Intelligence. They challenge us to look carefully at what they are not showing. We are only able to understand them fully if we unlock the background to their creation, the purpose they were taken for, their context and the deliberately-chosen perspective from which they were taken. Who took this photo? When? For what purpose? What

is being shown — and what are we not seeing? These images gain their paradoxical effect from the fact that they are not only bearing necessary testimony but also running the risk of aestheticising or simplifying horror. The need to document events can result in the reduction of complex historical contexts to a visual “essence”. Photographs are by no means unambiguous and objective. They bring across a certain point of view — and mere reproduction of the perpetrators’ point of view can by no means be the aim. Accepting them as authentic would be problematic in the extreme.

The first transport of inmates had barely reached the Ettersberg hill when members of the Weimar criminal police took the first photo of the camp that was under construction. Apart from a very few exceptions, the SS and the criminal police had the monopoly of taking photos for the whole period of the camp’s existence (1937-1945). Photography was formally put in the hands of an internal camp photography department from 1939 onwards and renamed as the so-called registration service from 1942. On average, nine inmates were employed there under SS supervision. The perpetrators alone decided what was shown and what was not shown. The pictures are images of the order, construction, structure, functionality and self-projection of Buchenwald as a “model camp”. Everyday life in the camp, the individuality of the inmates and their suffering and death were for the most part deliberately left out. These were aspects that the perpetrators did not consider worth recording for posterity. Instead, these photos are a means of underpinning their own system of terror, depicting the everyday lives and society of the guards. They show the camp as a functioning unit of order, a supposedly disciplined community, a technical apparatus. Its horror is aesthetically brushed out and the violence is rendered invisible. The perpetrators are not documenting suffering but their own power. Photography is part of the dehumanisation and degradation inherent in the system of terror.

These pictures serve a function, and to this day they create a dangerous illusion of neutrality. If we were to view them without taking their context into account we could take them for dispassionate, even objective — documents. But they speak the language of perpetrator power — and systematically silence the voices of the victims.

Many more photographs were taken following the camp’s liberation in 1945. The US Army, liberated inmates and, shortly afterwards, journalists were now able to record the catastrophic conditions in Buchenwald. Mounds of corpses, starved, liberated inmates, the crematorium and other killing fields were now shown from a different perspective, so as to secure evidence and place the indescribable before the eyes of people around the world. But even while these photos were for the first time showing the extent of the horror, they, too, are not free of staging. They were taken in a state of shock and in some cases set up



[Signature: 007-01.006] Inmates on the camp road in the so-called “Small Camp” in June 1944
© Buchenwald Memorial

and arranged to make the crimes “visible”. Once again, it was mainly not the survivors themselves but outsiders deciding what should be shown, even if it was with different intentions.

The photos taken secretly by the French inmate Georges Angéli give a radical alternative view to this visual vocabulary. They are unique because they show the camp from the point of view of an inmate. Angéli was himself a concentration camp forced labourer in the photographic department and in June 1944 was able to steal a discarded camera from the attic of the Buchenwald photographic department, which he used to take eleven secret photos of the camp on his Sundays off.

These photos are fragmentary, and Angéli risked his very life to take them, as doing so was strictly forbidden. They are visual testimony from below, images of self-affirmation. They do not show the chill order and power of the perpetrators but snippets from the everyday life of the camp from the point of view of the incarcerated inmates. They provide a completely different perspective from that seen through the lens of the perpetrators.

Images of Power:
Karl Otto Koch in Buchenwald as Photographer and Commandant

Karl Otto Koch (1897-1945) was the first commandant of Buchenwald concentration camp and played a decisive role in its early development. From 1937 to 1941 he was responsible for the construction of one of the largest sites of Nazi terror. He was subsequently tried by the SS for murder, embezzlement and other economic crimes and corruption and sentenced to death. He was executed on 5 April 1945.

But Koch was not just an SS functionary. He was also a passionate amateur photographer. This apparently private hobby of his had a direct impact over time on the day-to-day life of the camp and even extended into his family life. His photographs and albums are to this day major sources of evidence of the connection between private idyll, the self-presentation of family, and the exercise of systematic violence and oppression.

While photography was part of the mass media of the “Third Reich”, it was still relatively expensive, making it available only to certain social classes. Within the context of the concentration camps it also remained subject to strict control. Koch himself issued orders in Buchenwald formally banning the taking of photographs of inmates and crimes as well as within the “Kommandatur”, or command area of the camp. Historical researchers are unanimous in regarding this measure as being evidence that even early on the perpetrators were aware that pictures could be used as evidence against them. Pictures were taken only under Koch’s supervision or on his direct orders, and were intended to be placed in private as well as service albums. In this way he combined physical rule with the prerogative of visual interpretation, deliberately using photography as an instrument of stage setting. Koch’s passion for photography was no longer merely a harmless hobby, but an instrument of power: power over images became part of power over people.

The photos reveal the overlap between official and private spheres; photos of the camp’s construction, parades and the SS area are next to pictures of Koch’s family taken in the garden or of walks with his son. Koch presented a picture of an apparently intact, cozy world in which happy families, order and strength of leadership seemed to



[Signature: 018.001] Camp commandant Karl Koch with a camera outside his house in the SS officers' quarters. Koch is wearing a white Summer uniform, which was only worn by the SS from early Autumn 1939 to late Summer 1940. Photographer unknown © National Archives, Washington



[Signature: 018.128] Karl and Ilse Koch with their son Artwin on the way to the camp zoo. In the background are the Carachoweg and the SS adjutant's office building. To the left is the signpost to the zoo, and on the left behind Ilse Koch is a container for donations for the zoo (sculpture of a monkey). Photographer unknown, © National Archives, Washington

belong naturally together, and in which suffering, death and violence are rendered invisible.

This connection is especially clear in the family album which Karl and Ilse Koch had made for their son Artwin. Inmates in the photographic department were forced to design it — a bitter expression of the dependency that had inmates themselves being forced to become complicit in the staged impression presented to the world by the perpetrators. The album was a showcase of Koch's career and his power, while at the same time abusing his son by visually implicating him in his biography as a perpetrator — we see Artwin holding his father's hand in SS uniform or going about the camp with a toy rifle.

Koch's photography makes Buchenwald stand out from other concentration camps. While photos were in most cases collected later by SS photographers or adjutants in camps like Auschwitz or Dachau, it was the camp commandant himself who played an active role in Buchenwald. He thus determined directly which subjects were documented, which were omitted and which were included in albums. For us today, the photos are ambiguous: they are evidence of self-presentation and denial of violence, while at the same time they give us an insight into the worlds the perpetrators lived in and the networks of which they were part.

Leipzig-based photographer Christian Rothe took a series of photographs on the site of the former Buchenwald concentration camp between 2017 and 2024. Only a small part of his extensive photo cycle can be displayed in the exhibition and reproduced in this booklet, but it follows the traces of where, after 80 years, nature has reclaimed its space and apparently consigned the relics of the Nazi past to oblivion, out of sight and out of mind. Ruins, barely recognisable foundations, stairways, fences and paths appear like marks of Cain, topographical scars and smudges in the impenetrable thicket inside and outside what is now the Buchenwald Memorial. This photographic search for traces is like a dialogue with the ravaged landscape about which there is something eerie and sinister as well as something Romantic. What associations are triggered as we look at these photographs by the ghostly distortions of the thicket or the tree trunks with their face-like scars? Unless they are placed in some kind of context can these areas, with trees that are sometimes more than a hundred years old, tell us anything about everyday terror and unending solitude or the simple desire to survive? Looking at Christian Rothe's photographs we are constantly being urged to wonder about the people who were once systematically treated with such contempt, tortured and murdered, their bodies incinerated like rubbish, and about their life stories. How did this inhuman SS camp system work. Who were the people who were prepared to demean the inmates in such cruel fashion without any sense of guilt?



Former production area, quarry, 2020



[Signature: 013-01.039] Inmates were forced to quarry limestone for building the camp and roadways under extreme conditions. Mistreatment, exhaustion and deliberate murder were part and parcel of everyday life in the quarry. Thousands did not survive this forced labour. The photo was taken after 11 April 1945. © Private collection



Former railway station, view looking up to the former Gustloff II works, 2020



[Signature: 007-02.021] From March 1943 onwards, inmates were exploited in the Gustloff-Werk II factory making weapons for the German munitions industry. They had to build the thirteen workshops in less than a year. 315 inmates died and 525 badly injured in the Allied air raid on 24 August 1944, during which the inmates were not allowed to leave the factory. The photo was taken on 12 April 1944.
© Buchenwald Memorial



Former inmate area, view (to the north) across the parade ground, 2020



[Signature: 173.001] The parade ground ("Appellplatz") was a central place in the concentration camp. Thousands of inmates had to march, fall in, form up in their blocks, take off their caps, stand still or sing for hours on end, and this happened twice a day. Many parades lasted up to 72 hours. Photograph of a parade in 1944. © Buchenwald Memorial



Former inmate area, remains of the walls of the barrack huts, 2021

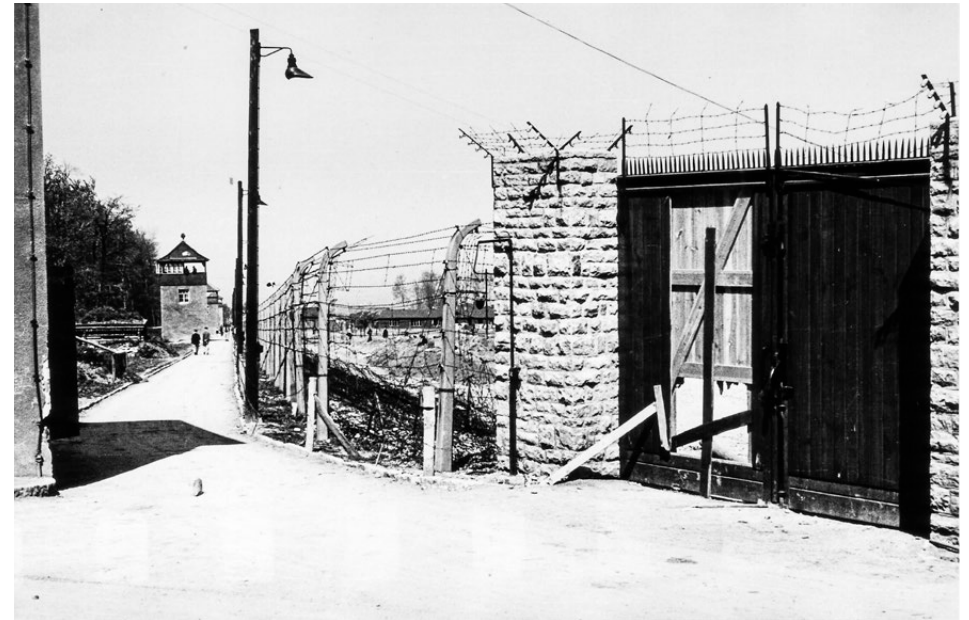


[Signature: 489.097] The first thing inmates had to do on their arrival from other concentration camps was to form up on the parade ground. This photo shows inmates from Dachau following their transfer to Buchenwald in 1939. Parades were an integral part of the terror perpetrated by the SS. Public humiliation, punishments and executions were everyday occurrences. © United States Holocaust memorial Museum, Washington



Former inmate area, view (to the north) across the parade ground. In the background and difficult to make out in the mist is the effects storeroom, 2020

24



[Signature: 013-01.009] The inmate camp was surrounded by a three kilometre long electric fence. 23 watchtowers with machine guns, around 100 metres apart, watched over the site. Patrols and tower crews shot without warning at any inmates who got too close to the fence. The photo was taken after 11 April 1945. © Buchenwald Memorial

25



Former SS area, in the inner courtyard of the dog kennel enclosure looking towards the camp gate, 2024

26



[Signature: 003-01.030] View of the gatehouse in late 1943. This served as the main watchtower and was only entrance and exit the inmates were allowed to use. The columns of inmates had to march through here every day on their way to work – frequently being beaten, kicked and whipped. Over the gate stood the cynical inscription “Each to his own”, which the prisoners were able to read from the inside. On the SS side was the slogan “My Fatherland right or wrong”. The detention cell block was immediately adjacent to the gate. © Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon

27



Former SS area, remains of the SS marching band building, 2020



[Signature: 003-01.131] SS marching band building 1943. © Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon



Former SS area, SS officers' quarters, remains of the Koch villa, 2020



[Signature: 013-01.001] The "SS officers' quarters", comprising ten villas, were located immediately adjacent to the camp. This is where the families (most with several children) of the SS officers lived in middle class affluence. Inmates were used as servants in the houses. The inhuman horror of the camp was a direct and accepted neighbour. This was the ultimate "banality of evil". Late 1943 © Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon



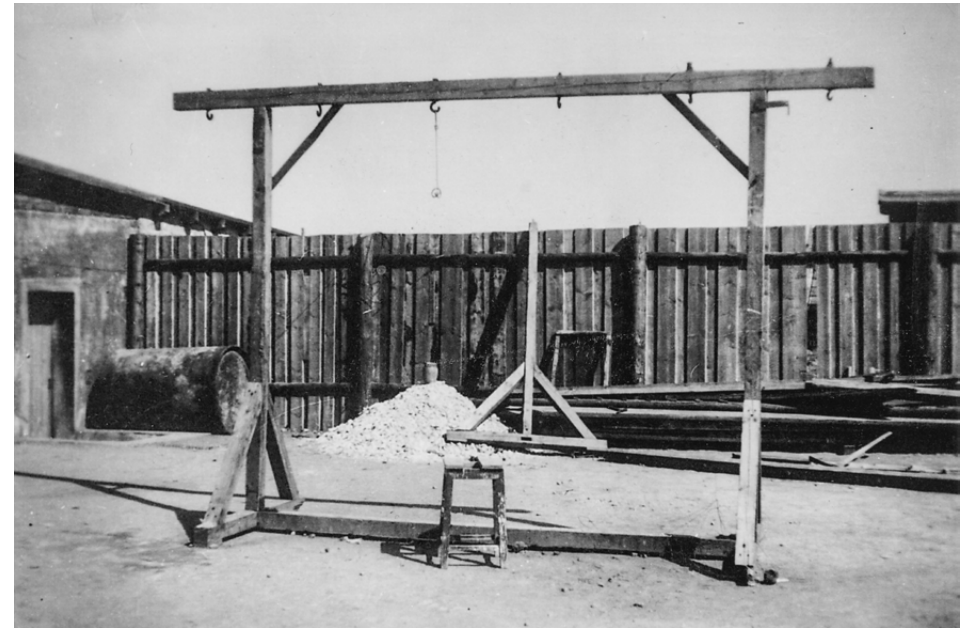
Former SS area, bear enclosure/zoological garden, 2020



[Signature: B.2-0001] Bears playing in the bear enclosure of Buchenwald, 1938. The zoo and the bear enclosure were within sight of the crematorium and were financed by "donations" extorted from inmates. Animals including monkeys, bears and deer were displayed there for the entertainment of SS men and civilian workers and their families. Two worlds collided here – the welfare of the animals was demonstratively given a higher priority than that of the inmates. © Weimar City Museum



Former inmate area, in the inner area of the crematorium looking towards the effects storeroom building, 2024



[Signature: 299.013] View of the inner courtyard of the “crematorium” after liberation in April 1945. This is where the SS men kept their mobile gallows used for public show executions © Jehovah's Witnesses Archive Central Europe



Former inmate area, crematorium, 2020



[Signature: 007-02.025] From 1940 onwards, the SS had their own crematorium. Until then, the bodies of dead inmates had been incinerated in the Weimar municipal crematorium. The ovens were supplied by the company Topf und Söhne from Erfurt and constructed along the lines of waste burning plants. The aim was to incinerate as many bodies as possible in the shortest time possible. Of course, the SS did not do this work themselves, but forced inmates to burn their dead fellow sufferers. There was also an execution chamber in the building's cellar. The photo was taken after 11 April 1945. © Private collection



Former railway station, remains of a sleeper, 2021



[Signature: 002.007] Starting in the Spring of 1943, inmates were forced to build a ten kilometre long railway line between Buchenwald and Weimar. Thousands were brought in mass transports to the Ettersberg on this railway, and the “death transports” to Auschwitz departed from here as well. The private railway company Bachstein GmbH earned money for every waggon. The line of the railway can today be walked as the “Buchenwald Railway Memorial Path”. The photo was taken between April and June 1943. © LATH – HstA Weimar



[Signature: 100-15.007] Swastika flags on the Weimer National Theatre © Buchenwald memorial



[Signature: 100-15.001] Crowds at the laying of the foundation stone of the Nazi "Gauforum" (district forum), May 1937. National Socialism was part of everyday life. The concentration camp on the Ettersberg hill was started barely two months later. The city and its people benefited in many ways, including the use of forced labour in Weimar, new infrastructure and excursions by Weimar families to the camp zoo — up close to the site of terror. © Buchenwald Memorial

Reconciling Contradictions The History of Buchenwald Concentration Camp

"[...] Buchenwald was quite different in 1938 from what it was in the Summer of 1939 and something else again after the outbreak of war. It changed its face several times more [...]" — Benedikt Kautsky

In July 1937, one of the central sites in the Nazi system of terror came into being just a few kilometres away from Weimar, the city of Classicism and Humanism. As the main city of the state and Nazi district ("Gau"), Weimar was the centre of the Nazi movement in Thuringia. The camp quickly became a centre of persecution, exploitation, systematic violence and death — the very opposite of Humanism. At first glance it may appear that this contradiction between Humanism and Nazi ideology is irreconcilable.

On 15 July 1937, the first 149 inmates arrived on the Ettersberg from Sachsenhausen concentration camp, the large, new concentration camp built to replace the small Lichtenburg, Sachsenburg and Bad Sulza camps and intended to function as the central concentration camp for the central German region. The first concentration camps were established shortly after the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933 with the aim of imprisoning political opponents and opposition members indefinitely without court sentences. Four years later, however, there was no widespread resistance to the regime to speak of within society. The Nazi dictatorship was thoroughly established; some 5.000 people were still imprisoned in the concentration camps in 1937.

Buchenwald was built during a phase in which the Nazi regime was expanding its strategies of persecution. Their plan was to reshape society along nationalist, ethnic, supposedly "Aryan" (i.e. racist) lines into their ideal kind of social system for the National Socialist dictatorship, which they called the "Volksgemeinschaft" ("Community of the People"). The "new type" of concentration camps were intended to be permanent, to hold several thousand people and be capable of expansion at any time. Buchenwald was planned for 8.000 male inmates in its initial phase. The first inmates included resistance fighters, so-called "career criminals", Jehovah's Witnesses and a few of those who were persecuted for being homosexual. The groups who fell victim to persecution also included Jews, Sinti, Roma and others who

were stigmatised as “not belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft”. The structure of the internee groups thus reflected the changing priorities of the Nazis’ policy of persecution, which was directed with varying rigour in successive phases at each of these groups from 1937 to 1945: 9,845 Jewish men were sent to Buchenwald in connection with the November pogrom in 1938 alone, while as a result of the start of the war in 1939 and then the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 the inmate structure changed fundamentally and only a small minority of prisoners by then were “Volksdeutsche”, or German nationals.

Everyday life in the camp was marked by a thoroughgoing system of organised terror. The SS ran the camp with military precision and a perfidious system of bureaucracy. Arbitrary acts of violence by guards and an inhuman hierarchy in the way different inmates and groups of inmates were treated was the order of the day. Daily life for the inmates meant submitting completely to the arbitrary regime of the SS: hard, physical forced labour — often in the subcamps for German industrial firms — permanent hunger, exhaustion, abusive treatment and death.

The terror was reinforced by a system of deliberate physical and mental degradation. Clothing, food and medical care were inadequate at best or entirely lacking, and diseases such as typhus and typhoid fever were rampant. Survival strategies frequently depended on membership of certain groups, who inmates knew in the camp and what jobs they did.

In the early years, most inmates were used to build the camp and work in the adjacent quarry. From 1942-43, the camp system was expanded with the addition of subcamps (by the end, Buchenwald had 141 of these) serving the armaments industry. This was part of the integration of the concentration camps into the German war economy and the economic exploitation of the inmates for the (“total”) war effort. Buchenwald became a central hub camp for a large number of construction activities and production works in which not only men, but also large numbers of women and children were forced to work under inhuman conditions.

The economic exploitation of the inmates was organised in co-operation with state and private firms and companies, including those in civil society, regardless of the risks to the lives of inmates, whose deaths were simply taken into account by all concerned as part of doing business.

By February 1945, the arrival of the inmates from the “cleared” Auschwitz and Gross Rosen concentration camps in January 1945 had made Buchenwald and its subcamps the largest concentration camp complex still in existence, with more than 110,000 registered inmates. The process of “clearances” and “death marches” was repeated in April 1945 with the approach of the US Army. The SS began clearing



[Signature: 001.013] There was resistance among the citizens of Weimar when the camp was founded, not to the concentration camp itself as such, but to its planned name. “Ettersberg concentration camp” seemed incompatible with Goethe and the city’s cultural heritage. Himmler gave way. The camp was given the name “Buchenwald”. © Buchenwald Memorial



[Signature: 119.001] “After all, everyone could hear the sound of the zebra-striped columns marching in step through the city ... every morning and every evening. Everybody must have had a look and will have seen the men with pale faces creeping along accompanied by heavily-armed SS men.”* Columns of inmates were a constant feature of everyday life, even in villages like Gaberndorf near Weimar. Forced labour and crimes were visible. In the background are a man and a child who are not looking away, but watching the spectacle. Summer 1939 © Buchenwald Memorial



[Signature: 003-01.201] Working in the quarry was one of the hardest kinds of forced labour. The heavy physical burden often led to rapid decline and death. Late 1943 © Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon



[Signature: 003-01.201] Inmates building the railway line between Weimar and Buchenwald. In the background is a group of SS officers. The construction of the line was originally supposed to take three months; to keep to this schedule, the inmates were ruthlessly driven on to work harder. Spring 1943 © LATH - HstA Weimar

the main camp on 7 April 1945. Some 28,000 inmates were forced to leave on foot or packed into cattle waggons. This cost the lives of more than 10,000 people. It was precisely in this final phase that the connection between the SS and mass murder with the connivance if not involvement of civil society become truly clear. In total, 249,570 men and 28,230 women from 50 countries, people of all ages from small children to octogenarians, passed through the Buchenwald main camp and its 141 subcamps.

More than 56,000 women, men, youths and children died of hunger, disease, mistreatment and medical experiments or were deliberately murdered. The conditions in the "Small Camp", originally intended as a quarantine area, were especially bad; overcrowding, catastrophic hygiene and insufficient food made it into a death camp from 1944 on.

On 11 April 1945, with the knowledge that the Americans were approaching, the international camp committee and the resistance groups that had been mobilised organised the occupation of the camp gate and watchtower. The first American troops entered the camp a short while later. This was the first main camp of a Nazi concentration camp to be liberated by a Western Allied army; images of Nazi crimes have been deeply etched to this day in the collective minds of the USA and Western European countries by the experience of what was witnessed in Buchenwald.



[Signature: 008.016] This photo shows three unknown liberated inmates going for a walk with the child inmate Janek Szlajfsztajn (prisoner number 116543) in the "Small Camp". A dead inmate is lying on the ground in the foreground on the left. © Buchenwald Memorial



[Signature: 013-01.005] The American flag over Buchenwald after 11 April 1945. The suffering did not end with liberation and the end of the war, and many questions remained: what has happened to my family? What do home and homeland mean? © Private collection

The Fascination of Terror and the Desire to Understand the Incomprehensible What Remains When Nothing Remains

Looking at Christian Rothe's cycle of photographs dealing with the former Buchenwald concentration camp, or visiting the Memorial that now stands there, one thing quickly becomes apparent, and that is that very little remains of the camp today. Most of the barrack huts and buildings have gone. After the liberation of the camp by the US Army in April 1945, the site was taken over under the terms of the Potsdam Conference by the Soviet occupying force, who set up Special Camp No. 2 there. This camp existed from August 1945 to 1950 and was used to incarcerate political opponents of the occupiers and former Nazis, but also innocent people. Large sections of the former camp were deliberately demolished and reshaped during and after this period, mainly due to political decisions by the GDR leadership, which was not concerned with critical historical education or working with actual sources but rather with instrumentalising Buchenwald for its own ideological narrative. What we can see on the Ettersberg today are incomplete fragments, foundations, ruins: traces, or rather the complete lack of them.

A recurring theme in conversations and discussions with school-children as well as adults visiting the Memorial is the desire for more "visibility": what did the inmates' barrack huts really look like back then? How and where did they have to stand on parade? Would it not be helpful to reconstruct parts of the camp, say, an accommodation hut to make the unimaginable more tangible?

As understandable as this desire may seem at first glance, fulfilling it would in fact be fraught with difficulties. Reconstructions can easily create an impression of authenticity, but this is deceptive. A newly-built barrack hut cannot truly give any idea of what the real experience was, and can actually reinforce wrong ideas. No reproduction can let us really experience the systematic violence, the claustrophobia, the smells, the fear, the hunger or the arbitrary climate. And even more, restaging the past or using, intentionally or not, strategies which emotionally overwhelm viewers can obstruct any critical engagement with the past. Powerful emotion replaces understanding and scrutiny, and a sense of personal involvement and identification replaces any reflective consideration. The aim

would then no longer be the gaining of knowledge but emotional involvement, which can, it is true, have a strong effect, but can also dissipate quickly leaving no resonance.

The empty spaces themselves, that which is no longer there, document history and are part of it. They point to what was and at the same time to what happened post 1945: suppression, reshaping, political instrumentalisation, and sometimes even simple or deliberate forgetting. A reconstruction would eradicate this “layering of time”. It would cover over historical processes, instead creating a stage set that appears complete but is artificial.

This is why a different approach is taken towards commemoration in Germany today. It is not about reconstructing the past but rather a matter of making the past visible and putting it into context. Foundations are exposed, sites are marked, traces are documented, and the original pieces that are still in existence need to be fitted into the context of known historical facts. In Buchenwald, for example, this allows the dimensions, position and structure of the camp to be made visible without adding anything new that was never there as such and would therefore be inauthentic. This involves linking the existing traces with historical information, maps, contemporary witness reports and educational materials. Where imagination ends, we can gain deeper understanding to help us place things in the historical past through information and discussion.

Christian Rothe’s photographs also graphically demonstrate how making the reshaping that took place after 1945 visible is part of this engagement. The site is not only the scene of Nazi crimes but is also a piece of German history, which following generations now have to deal with. The word Buchenwald is part of our collective history, which means that it is an object of, as well as testimony to, our collective memory and how we look at it and deal with it by way of various forms of intellectual, moral and emotional engagement.

Just as each intervention, each excavation and each uncovering has to be carefully considered, critical engagement needs to be achieved by way of education and knowledge. The questions that need to be asked cannot be answered if all we have is a reconstructed stage set presentation of the events at a historical site. There needs to be space for questions, for uncertainty, for what is beyond comprehension and what cannot be felt by empathy. It is not overwhelming with emotion that leads to a lasting resonance but critical engagement and discussion on the basis of historical facts, structures, contexts, scopes for action and responsibilities. It is not so much about making the historical backdrop visible as about the causes and consequences of human action — or failure to act.

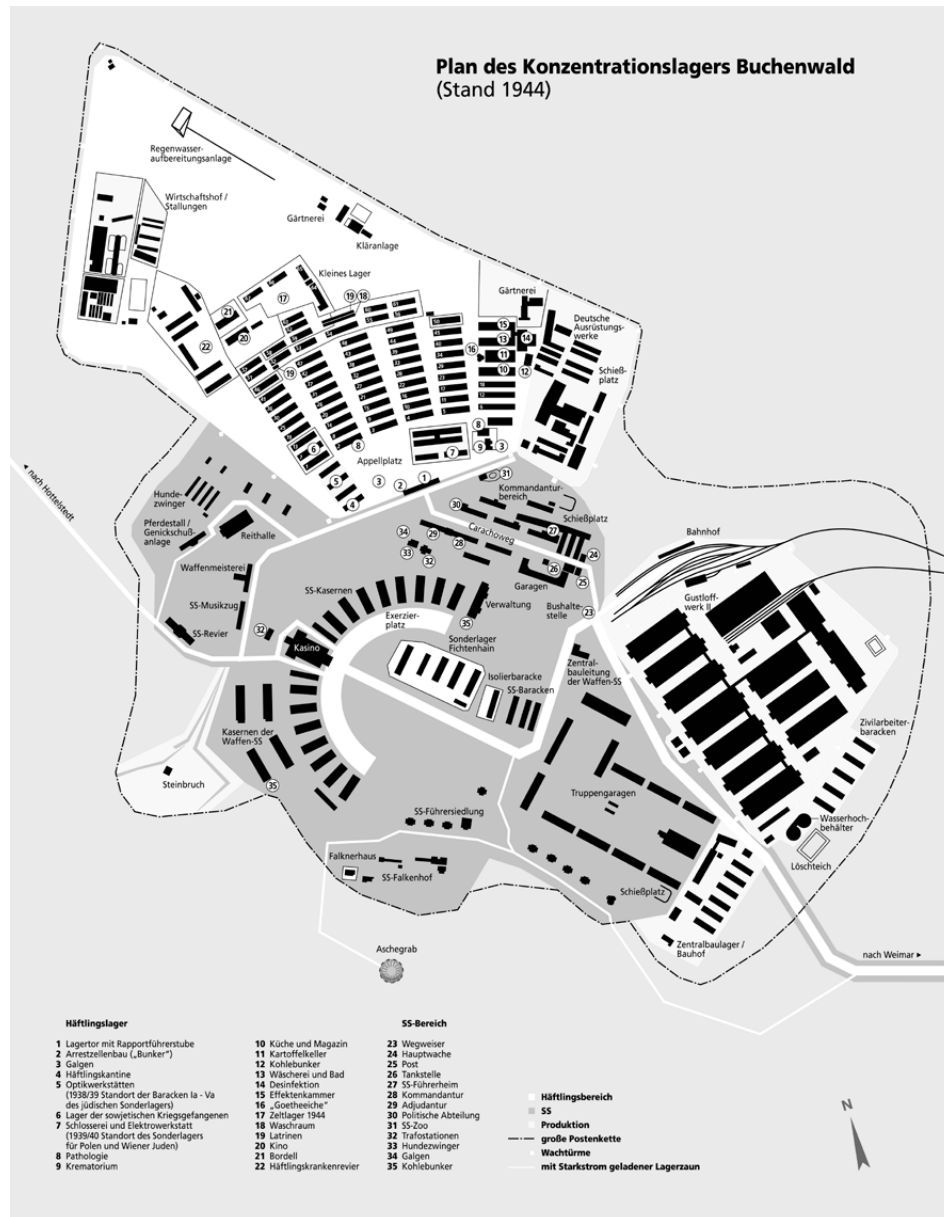
This means that a vacant space ultimately remains between the present and the past which cannot be completely closed.



[Signature: 277.031] View of the gatehouse from the north. When this picture was taken on 11 April 1952, building materials from the demolition of the wooden barrack huts were still stacked on the site, where they had been left by order of the ruling SED Politburo. © Buchenwald Memorial

This distance can never quite be bridged, either by the photo cycle by Christian Rothe on its own or by juxtaposing it as we have done with historical photographs, mostly taken from the viewpoint of the perpetrators. The exhibition, the accompanying booklet and the book of photographs and texts with its 121 reproductions should rather be seen as an invitation to engage in a dialogue. On the one hand they provide a way in to the former Buchenwald concentration camp, and, on the other hand, they leave room for open questions, reflections, uncertainties and that which is beyond comprehension. What they are able to offer is the possibility of approaching the past from the present and entering into a cautious, searching and inquisitive historically-based critical engagement with it.

Plan des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald (Stand 1944)



[→] Plan of Buchenwald concentration camp (per 1944)

The Sculpture *The Last Face* by Bruno Apitz

Thanks to a loan from the German Historical Museum Foundation, we are able to include in the exhibition of Christian Rothe's photographs Bruno Apitz's wood sculpture *Das Letzte Gesicht* (The Last Face). Apitz created this bas-relief in Buchenwald concentration camp in the late Summer of 1944 in memory of a dying inmate.

After liberation, Bruno Apitz said of the creation of his sculpture, “In August 1944, American bombers destroyed the armaments plants outside the camp. The fires spread to the camp and damaged the Goethe Oak, which was under nature conservancy protection. ... Its bark was burned on one side. The fascist camp leadership ordered the tree to be cut down and sawn up for firewood in the camp's woodyard. I stole a piece of the wood and hid it in the hut of the pathology work unit, where I was working at the time. Then, in a safe corner of the hut, I carved the death mask out of the wood. ... If I had been caught, I would have really been for it. It would have meant the bunker or death. Inmates in the work unit kept me shielded the whole time. Another inmate stood next to me and swept up the wood shavings I dropped, while other inmates were ready to hide the piece of wood and my tools straight away if there was any danger. The constant risk that it would be discovered meant that the sculpture had to be smuggled out of the camp.”

A privileged inmate whose job it was to buy food supplies for the SS outside the camp managed to smuggle the sculpture out with him. Then it was passed on via circuitous routes to friends in Apolda 18 km away, where it could be hidden until liberation.

“We were luxury slaves,” wrote Bruno Apitz after his liberation. “We did not just make wood sculptures, but we painted, made and composed music, and wrote in the camp as well, mostly illegally and in secret. It was nothing other than people's self-liberation, confirmation of their own humanity ...”

That old oak tree, also marked on maps as the “Fat Oak”, is supposed to have played a special role even in Goethe's time. Tradition has it that Goethe often used to visit the nearby Ettersberg hill and rest beneath the branches of this oak, where he is said to have dicta-



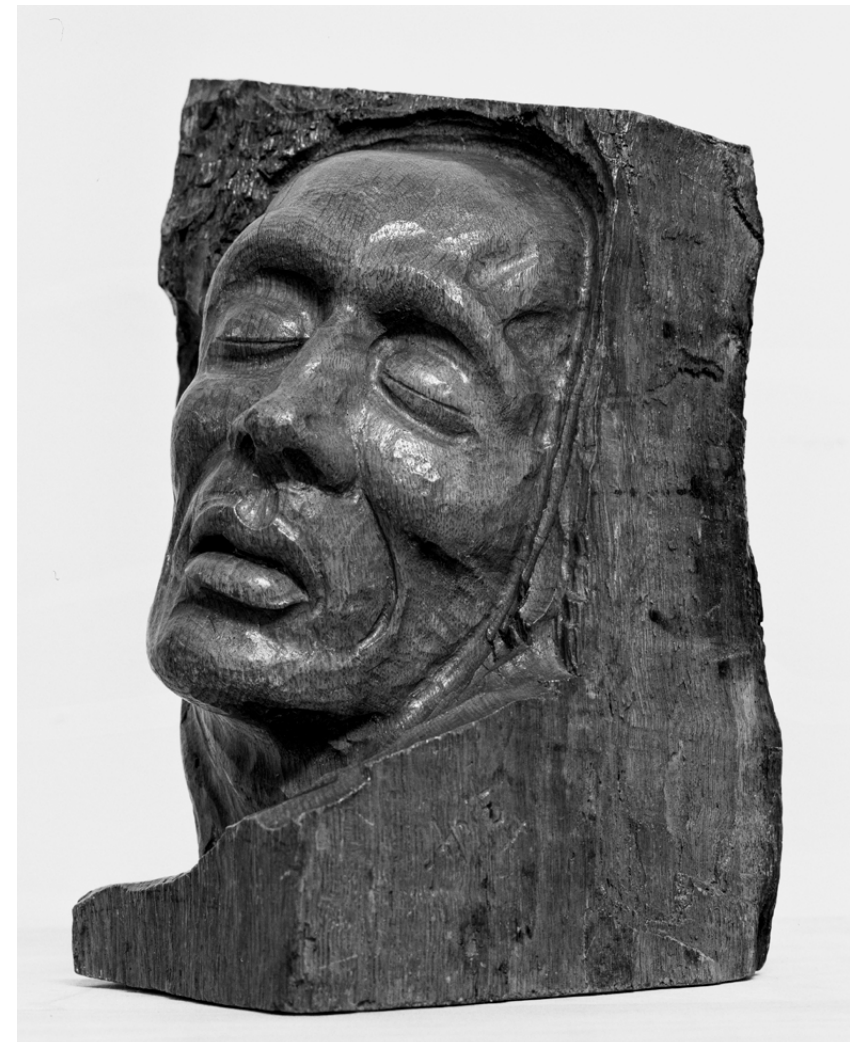
[Signature: 007-01.001] Inmates running on the camp road. View looking towards the Goethe Oak. In the background is the laundry, and behind that the effects storeroom. At the far right in the foreground is the inmates' kitchen building. June 1944. Photographer: Georges Angéli © Buchenwald Memorial

ted texts or poems to his secretary Eckermann and visited his close confidante Charlotte von Stein, who lived nearby.

The connection with Goethe gave this old oak in the middle of the camp a symbolic significance for the inmates, but it also triggered terrible memories of executions. The SS guards hanged inmates on the “Goethe Oak” as well as on the other nearby trees and left their bodies swaying there for several days as a warning. Bruno Apitz described this in his novel *Naked Among Wolves*.

Bruno Apitz was born in Leipzig in 1900. As a 17-year-old apprentice he was imprisoned for his political activities. The Gestapo detained him in 1933, initially in Colditz and Sachsenhausen concentration camps, before he was convicted of treason and sent to Waldheim prison from 1934 to 1937. After his release he was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp, where his inmate number was 2417, from 4 November 4 1937 until his liberation on 11 April 1945.

His fellow inmates in the camp held him in high esteem because of his many artistic talents as an actor, a poet, a musician and a sculptor in wood. These also gained him the respect of the SS officers, even including Koch, the camp commandant. As one of the chief witnesses of the crimes committed by the SS and a member of the inner circle of resistance in the concentration camp, Bruno Apitz was told in the first days of April that he was to be shot along with other inmates, and so he had to go into hiding in the final days before the advancing US Army liberated the camp.



Bruno Apitz, *Das letzte Gesicht* (The Last Face), 1944 in Buchenwald concentration camp: German Historical Museum (DHM) © Christian Rothe

Bruno Apitz's 1958 novel *Nackt Unter Wölfen* (Naked Among Wolves) made him world famous. It was translated into 30 languages and made into major films in 1963 and 2015 and reissued in 2014 by Aufbau Verlag in a new, uncut, annotated edition. Bruno Apitz died in East Berlin on 7 April 1979.



Bleibtreustrasse 17, "Galerie Mond", Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe



Bleibtreustrasse 17, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe

Bleibtreustrasse and its Jewish History

*... What do you want from me, Bleibtreu?
Yes, I know. No I have forgotten nothing.
My happiness made a home here. And my need.
My child was born here. And had to go.
My friends visited me here
and so did the Gestapo.
At night you could hear the railway trains
and the Horst Wessel Song from the bar next door.
What was left of all that?
The pink petunias on the balcony.
The small stationery shop.
And a wound that would not heal.*

— Mascha Kaléko (excerpt from *Bleibtreu heisst die Strasse*
(The Name of the Street is Bleibtreu), 1974

When I was looking for a suitable gallery in Berlin for the exhibition of photographs by Christian Rothe and the wood sculpture *The Last Face* by Bruno Apitz, I remembered visiting 'Galerie Mond' at Bleibtreustrasse 17. In this gallery not far from the Kurfürstendamm, the historian Kirstin Buchinger had presented black-and-white photographs by Yva, who was born Else Neuländer in Berlin in 1900.

When I first spoke to her, I found out that the historian had been involved with that photographer's work for many years and in 2019 founded the Yva Archive, which was named after her. Yva opened her photo studio at Bleibtreustrasse 17 in 1930 and was its tenant until 1934.

In the street outside today's 'Galerie Mond' I saw the great number, seventeen in total, of "stumbling stones" (Stolpersteine) commemorating the fate of former Jewish occupants of the house. The stark statement of date of birth, date of deportation and place and date of death on each "stumbling stone" was enough to give me an idea of what must have happened in this house more than eighty years ago. Would we be permitted to show our exhibition *Buchenwald — In the Thicket of the Ettersberg* in this gallery, given this historical background and its indirect association with the photographer Yva? A more fitting context could not have been found. The gallery owner Frieda Vogel agreed.

In spite of her huge success, Yva and her merchant husband Alfred Simon, whom she married in 1934, met the same terrible fate as the other Jewish women and men living at Bleibtreustrasse 17. The couple moved in 1934 to another, more ideal studio at nearby Schlüterstrasse 45, where this avantgarde artist who was so fond of experimentation was able to work as a photographer, but only until she was forbidden to carry on her profession in 1938. She was subsequently forced to work as an x-ray assistant. Like most Jews, this couple, too, constantly had to move into smaller and smaller flats, eventually as lodgers in a furnished room. The Nazis destroyed her studio. They had to live with the constant fear of being bullied, arrested or deported. In the end, on 13 June 1942, the SS deported the couple on the 15th “Osttransport” (east transport) to Sobibór via Lublin-Majdanek. They were both counted as having been murdered before 8 May 1945 and in 1946 were declared dead retroactively as of 31 December 1944.

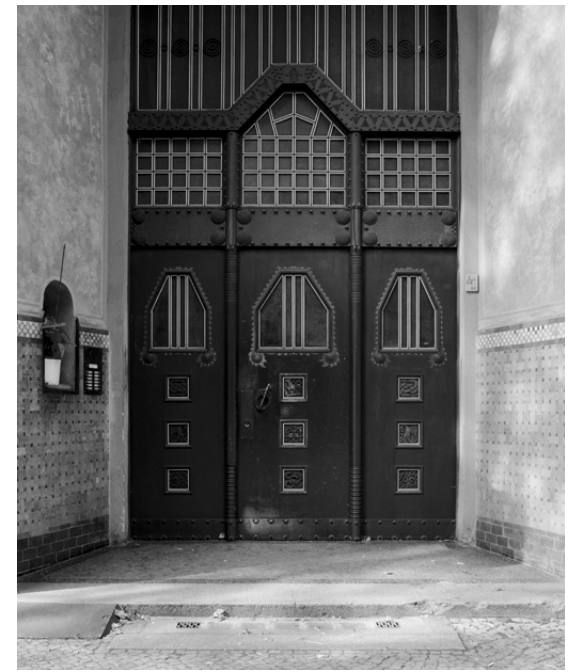
In November 2005, committed members of the public placed “stumbling stones” outside Schlüterstrasse 45 in memory of the couple Eva “Yva” Neuländer-Simon and Alfred Simon. In the introduction to this booklet, Oliver Schruoffeneger mentions the naming of the “Yva Arch” by the District Office to ensure that this stylistically influential avantgarde photographer is not forgotten. And in October 2025 Kirstin Buchinger published her book of photos and texts entitled *Yva & Her Time*, to preserve the photographer’s work for future generations.

Inhumanity and Terror

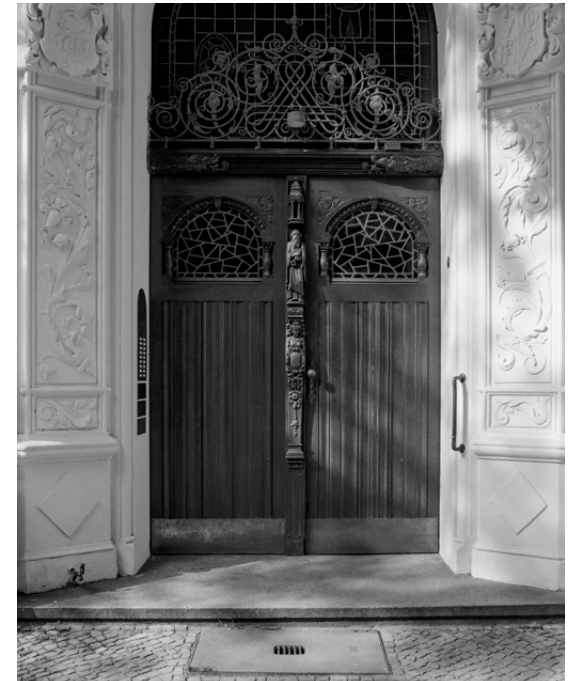
At the beginning of 1933, the Jewish population of Berlin was well over 160,000. This was roughly one third of all the Jewish people in the entire German Reich. Around 27,000 of those people classified by Nazi laws as Jews lived in Berlin-Charlottenburg, and around a quarter of these lived in and around Kurfürstendamm, the area which includes Bleibtreustrasse.

Even before Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933, Nazi gangs had been repeatedly rampaging and victimising people in the street, especially in the Kurfürstendamm area, whom they considered to look Jewish, and beating them bloody, women and men alike. Shouts of “Die, Jew!” and “Germany awake!” were routine day-to-day occurrences long before the November pogroms of 1938.

The book burning that took place on 10 May 1933 and known as the “Action Against the Ungerma Spirit”, was an early, fearful warning signal to Jews and intellectuals in Berlin. 70,000 eager onlookers, among them professors in their robes, students, and Nazi gangs, marched with brass bands to the Opernplatz to cheer on



Bleibtreustraße 17, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe



Bleibtreustraße 15/16, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe



Call by the SA in Leipziger Strasse to boycott Jewish businesses. The sign with a Nazi swastika emblem on top reads: "Attention Germans! These Jewish owners of the 5 P. S. shop are vermin and diggers of the graves of German handcrafts! They pay their German workers starvation wages! The main owner is the Jew Nathan Schmidt." 1 April 1935, Berlin © bpk/ Kunstbibliothek, SMB, Photothek Wulff Römer, photographer: Willy Römer



A Jewish family walking on a street among other passers-by and wearing the David's Star to mark them out as being of Jewish descent. A police regulation that came into force on 19 September 1941 made wearing the David's Star compulsory for all Jews in Germany over the age of six. The public stigma of having to wear the palm-sized yellow star signalled the start of the planned deportation of Jews to the death camps. Berlin, 29 September 1941 © picture alliance / SZ Photo / Scherl

the burning of around 25,000 books, including those of Heinrich Heine, the Jewish poet who, in 1823, prophetically anticipated what came to pass 110 years later: "Where they burn books they will end up burning people".

There was no longer any let-up in the brutal attacks on Jewish people, culture and institutions. Berlin's Kurfürstendamm and its side streets was a favourite "battle zone" for the Nazis because of their many Jewish residents and their businesses and many different institutions, as well as the vibrant cultural life.

The hope offered by the possibility of emigration vanished for many people in this life-threatening atmosphere, which reached its previously unimaginable climax, especially in Berlin, with the November pogroms. Systematic marginalisation, inhuman bans, persecution and murder committed against the Jewish population were now unashamedly the order of the day. The ugly face of anti-Semitism now revealed itself more openly than ever. It was during these days that the first large transports of Jewish men to the concentration camps were carried out nationwide. Those from Berlin were sent to Buchenwald concentration camp, in existence since 1937. A contemporary witness reported, "*I was arrested at 5 o'clock in the morning on 13 June 1938 in my flat in Berlin and taken to police headquarters, where I was told that as a Jew with a prior "criminal record" I was now being taken into protective custody and would in due course be sent to a concentration camp. I saw many acquaintances among the other prisoners in the overcrowded prison to which I was first sent, and most of them had been respected people — businessmen and university professors. ... Every prisoner was told at police headquarters that he could only expect to be released now if he obtained papers permitting him to leave the country. ... At around 6 o'clock in the morning on 15 June, we reached Weimar, where an SS "Death's Head" squad was waiting for us. We had hardly reached the platform when a hail of kicks and blows with fists and rifle butts drove us along the tunnel leading to the street, where we were greeted by Roedl, the chief overseer of the camp. He welcomed us saying, "Some of you have already been in prison. What you experienced there is nothing compared to what is going to happen to you here. You are going to a concentration camp, and that means hell. Make any attempt to disobey the orders of the guards and you will be shot at once. We only know two kinds of punishment in this camp: the whip and death."*

Remembrance and Commemoration

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the residents of Bleibtreustrasse 17, a house designated by the Nazis as a "Jew house". Such houses are now termed "Zwangshäuser" ("compulsory houses"), or

houses where Jewish people were forced to live. From April 1939 onwards, Jewish women and men were compelled to leave their homes and to move at their own expense as lodgers into the compulsory accommodation assigned to them. The 17 “stumbling stones” mounted into the pavement at the front door testify that, with just two exceptions, these Jewish residents of the house were deported to Auschwitz, Riga and Theresienstadt concentration camps between November 1941 and June 1943 and murdered there.

Ottillie Clara Hauck committed suicide on 27 November 1941 before her deportation. 1,600 Jewish women and men in Berlin did the same.

Arnold Ginsberg tried to evade deportation by hiding in various flats. But he was discovered by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz on a special transport. He was murdered there on 4 August 1943.

The oldest Jewish resident of the house was Margarete Margot Zacharias, who was deported to Theresienstadt on 3 October 1942 at the age of 78. She died there 8 weeks later.

Rita Bergwerk was the youngest victim from Bleibtreustrasse 17. She was 15 when she was sent with her parents to Riga on 27 November 1941 and shot a few days later in nearby woods.

The only survivor of her deportation to Auschwitz on 17 May 1943 was Dr. Lucie Adelsberger, who had been forced to move with her sick mother into Bleibtreustrasse 17 as a lodger in December 1941. The Gestapo forced her to leave on one of the “death marches” to Ravensbrück in January 1945. The women were completely exhausted when they were liberated by Soviet troops near Neustadt Glewe.

Lucie Adelsberger emigrated to the USA and worked as a doctor and cancer researcher in New York until her death in 1971.

She wrote a factual report on her time in Auschwitz, which was published in the Federal Republic in 1958 and published in English as ‘Auschwitz. A Doctor’s Story’ in 1995. Its legacy has lost none of its relevance. *“Misguided fanaticism led civilised people to become brutes who did not just kill, but took joy and pleasure in torture and murder. ... When hate and vilification quietly begin to germinate, that is the moment, especially then, when we must be alert and ready. That is the legacy of those who suffered Auschwitz.”*

The writer Benjamin Kuntz, director of the Robert Koch Institute Museum in Berlin, also remembered this impressive woman in his book ‘Lucie Adelsberger : Doctor – Scientist – Chronicler of Auschwitz’.

In all, there are 52 “stumbling stones” along Bleibtreustrasse, outside house numbers 7, 12, 15, 19, 25, 32, 33, 34, 35, 40, 44, 45 and 50. It is thanks to the worldwide “stumbling stones” initiative on behalf of all groups of victims of the Nazi terror and the associated research carried out by individuals that these people have been given back at least their names and some of their dignity. This exceptional initiative

is the world’s biggest decentral art monument (<https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de>).

If we go searching for more traces in Bleibtreustrasse, we will find commemorative plaques which also remind us of the painful loss of Jewish lives. The plaque at No. 1, for instance, stands in for the house at No. 2, which was set up as compulsory accommodation and subsequently destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. The site is now a children’s playground. On this plaque on the wall of the house at No. 1 are the names of the twenty Jewish women, men and children who were forcibly removed from Bleibtreustrasse 2 by the Gestapo and deported. Only two of them survived the Holocaust.

This commemoration of the house’s changing history is complemented by a stele, set up here in 2025 at the instigation of a public initiative. From 1927, the ground floor and cellar contained a mikveh, a ritual immersion bath visited by Jewish women and men for their spiritual cleansing. From 1934, the house was also home to the Jewish welfare and youth office and the editorial offices of the newspaper ‘Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung’. Until it was forcibly confiscated by the Nazis in 1942, the house belonged to the Jewish community. They were forced to sell it to the “Aryan” widow of the mayor of Berlin-Mitte.

And finally, only a walk of 350 metres away from this Jewish site of commemoration and remembrance is the famous synagogue at Pestalozzistrasse 14, built in 1911-12 as a private synagogue for Orthodox Jews with seating for 1,400 people. It was severely damaged during the night of pogroms on 9 November 1938, only surviving because its courtyard location prevented it from being burned down.

Immediately adjacent to ‘Galerie Mond’, at Bleibtreustrasse 15/16, two commemorative plaques made of white china (made in the Royal Porcelain Manufactory) commemorate the irretrievable loss of Jewish spiritual and cultural life in Berlin and its legacy. The internationally renowned art dealer Alfred Flechtheim lived in this magnificent house for ten years before emigrating in 1933 to London via Switzerland and Paris. In Berlin, his widow, Bertha Flechtheim, tried to rescue the gallery and the remaining items from the collection of 20th Century artists, but was unable to withstand the constant pressure from the Nazis and took her own life the day before she was due to be deported. There is a “stumbling stone” commemorating Bertha Flechtheim at her final address in Berlin, Düsseldorf Strasse 44/45.

The second commemorative plaque mounted at Bleibtreustrasse 15/16 commemorates the great theatrical and later film actress Tilla Durieux, who lived here with her Jewish husband, the entrepreneur Ludwig Katzenellenbogen, until she emigrated in 1933. This politically dauntless woman modelled for some of the famous painters and photographers of her time. She lost her husband as they fled right across Europe from Prague to Switzerland and on to Croatia; the Gestapo

arrested him in Zagreb and deported him to Berlin, where he died in the Jewish hospital. In Yugoslavia, Tilla Durieux joined Tito's partisans and did not return to Germany until 1955. At the age of 72 she tried to make a new start in Berlin as an actress, but failed to secure more than just occasional jobs. She died in Berlin at the age of 90.

Bleibtreustrasse 10/11, a few houses further on the same side of the street, is where the Polish emigrant and wonderful Jewish poet Mascha Kaléko lived between 1936 and 1938. She was spared the book burning, but then railed and campaigned against the media. The Nazis banned her books in 1935 because of her "harmful and undesirable writings". Mascha Kaléko and her Polish husband managed to escape to the USA with their son in 1938. Both in the USA and later in Israel, however, she was never able to recapture her earlier literary success. She died in 1975 on the way back from visiting Germany.

The house at Bleibtreustrasse 34/35 should also be mentioned. Six more "stumbling stones" can be found there, as well as another commemorative plaque made by the Royal Porcelain Manufactory commemorating the first international office of the ORT (Organisation for Rehabilitation and Training), which was founded in St. Petersburg in 1880 to promote handcrafts and agriculture among Jews. ORT moved into its European office in Berlin 1921 with the primary aim of helping with preparations for emigration to Palestine, and in 1937 established its own school in Berlin, some of which could be salvaged and moved to England in 1939.

Turning off from Bleibtreustrasse, the arches of the small Else-Ury-Bogen lead to the Savignyplatz suburban railway station, which was built in 1885-6. This street name commemorates Else Ury, the famous Jewish writer of children's books, whom the Nazis deported to Auschwitz on 6 January 1943 and forced into the gas chambers there a week later.

The historian Wolfgang Benz, the author of renowned standard works on 20th Century German history, spoke at the exhibition opening on 30 October 2025. We would like to thank him here for his decades of commitment with a quote from his latest book: *"Critical engagement with National Socialism is a task for the whole of society. It requires knowledge of what took place and its consequences. Reappraisal is the only way to gain that knowledge and deal with it. This can only be of benefit for democracy as a form of society and statehood and a way of life that guarantees peace, freedom and the rule of law."*



BleibtreustraÙe 2, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe



Bleibtreustrasse / Else Ury Arches, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2025 © Christian Rothe

Günter Jeschonnek has worked as a theatre director, university lecturer, television editor and, most recently, as managing director of the Performing Arts Fund. He has written and edited several books on the performing arts and on opposition to the SED party in the GDR. In 2021-22 he edited, in collaboration with Hartmann Books, the book of photos and texts *DIE HAUPTSTADT – Ost-Berlin in den Achtzigern* (*THE CAPITAL CITY – East Berlin in the Eighties*), for which he wrote the epilogue and curated exhibitions. In 2025 he edited and co-wrote *Buchenwald – Im Dickicht vom Ettersberg* (*Buchenwald – In the Thicket of the Ettersberg*), also with Hartmann Books. He curated the exhibition of the same name in the Berlin ‘Galerie Mond’.

Dr. Elke-Vera Kotowski has been a researcher and teacher since 1994 at the University of Potsdam, where she was involved in setting up the Jewish Studies course. Since 2005 she has been developing international exhibitions in the context of commemorative and remembrance work and has been responsible as author and editor for many publications. Since 2020 she has been head curator for the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation and managing director of the Moses Mendelssohn Institute in Berlin and Hamburg. Since 2023 she has been a member of the Scientific Board of the German Israeli Foundation and chair of the Board of Trustees of the Moses Mendelssohn Academy and member of the museum advisory board of the Berend Lehmann Museum in Halberstadt.

Christian Rothe studied Visual Communication at the Bauhaus University in Weimar and lives in Leipzig. His photographs have been shown since 2011 in group and solo exhibitions in Apolda, Berlin, Erfurt, Gera, Leipzig and Weimar. In 2018, Rothe was a prizewinner in the project *Born To Be Bauhaus* run by the Weimar Modernist Archive. His book project *Weil er er war, weil ich ich war* (Because he was he, because I was I) was selected by the Stiftung Buchkunst (Book Art Foundation) as one of the 25 most beautiful books of 2015. His book of photos *Zum Bungalowdorf 1* (At Bungalow Village 1) was published in 2021. His latest book of photographs and texts *Buchenwald – In the Thicket of the Ettersberg* was awarded the prize of the Stiftung Buchkunst as “Germany’s most beautiful book of 2025” on 5 September 2025.

Oliver Schruoffeneger is a political scientist and was a district deputy in Berlin-Reinickendorf while he was still a student at the Berlin Free University. He was a research assistant with the Alliance 90/the Greens parliamentary group in the Berlin Parliament from 1994 to 2001, subsequently serving as a Member of the Berlin State Parliament until 2011 and then again from 2013 to 2016. Since May 2016 he has been a city councillor in various departments responsible for administering the District of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, which has a population of 343,500.

Frederick Stenger became involved with the Mittelbau-Dora Concentration Camp Memorial during his stint with the Federal Volunteer Service, and has worked there as a freelancer and member of the Youth For Dora Association since 2022. In 2024 he did a foreign internship at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. In addition to studying History, Political Science and Sociology at the University of Potsdam, he works as a student assistant with the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation Berlin. He has been involved in several exhibition projects of the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation in the past few years.

Literaturverzeichnis

Adelsberger, Lucie: *Ausschwitz – Ein Tatsachenbericht*, Lettner Verlag, Berlin 1956, in English as *Auschwitz. A Doctor's Story*, 1995

Apitz, Bruno: *Nackt unter Wölfen*, Aufbau, Berlin 2012, in English as *Naked Among Wolves*, translated by Edith Anderson, Seven Seas Books, 1960

Benz, Wolfgang: *Zukunft der Erinnerung – Das deutsche Erbe und die kommende Generation*, dtv, Munich 2025

Bernhard, Henry: *Weimar und Buchenwald. Viele Verbindungen zwischen Stadt und KZ*, online at: <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/weimar-und-buchenwald-viele-verbindungen-zwischen-stadt-und-100.html>, 2015 [retrieved 03.06.2025].

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Civic Education): *Gedenkstätte Buchenwald*, online at: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/holocaust/erinnerungsorte/502990/gedenkstaette-buchenwald/>, [only in German; retrieved 03.06.2025]

Gedenkstätte Buchenwald: Chronologie, online at: <https://www.buchenwald.de/geschichte/chronologie>, [only in German; retrieved 03.06.2025]. More information (forthcoming in English) on the 141 subcamps of Buchenwald concentration camp online at: <https://ausnenlager.buchenwald.de/en/>

Geschichtslandschaft Berlin – Orte und Ereignisse, CHARLOTTENBURG – Der neue Westen, Historische Kommission zu Berlin, Nicolai, Berlin 1985

Gruner, Wolf: *Judenverfolgung in Berlin 1933–1945*, Stiftung Topografie des Terrors, Berlin 1996

Hammermann, Gabriele; Riedel, Dirk: *Sanierung Rekonstruktion Neugestaltung. Zum Umgang mit historischen Bauten in Gedenkstätten*, Göttingen 2014.

Hauptmann, Helmut: *Kunst im Widerstand*. Gespräch mit Bruno Apitz (Teil 1), in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (NDL), Heft 1 (1976), pp. 19–26

Hördler, Stefan: *Sichtbarmachen. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Analyse von NS-Täter-Fotografien*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* / 2017, Issue 2, pp. 259–271.

Jah, Akim: *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, be.bra wissenschaft verlag, Berlin-Brandenburg, 2013

Jeschonnek, Günter (ed.): *Buchenwald – Im Dickicht vom Ettersberg / Buchenwald – In the Thicket of the Ettersberg*, Hartmann Books, Stuttgart 2025.

Kaléko, Mascha: *Ich tat die Augen auf und sah das Helle*, Gedichte und Prosa, Ausgewählt und mit einem Vorwort von / poems and prose, selected and with a foreword by Daniel Kehlmann, dtv, Munich 2024; the only selection available in English appears to be: *No matter where I travel, I come to Nowhereland: The poetry of Mascha Kaléko*, translated by Andreas Nolte and published by the University of Vermont in 2010

Löffelsender, Michael: *Das KZ Buchenwald 1937 bis 1945*, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, Erfurt 2020.

Miltnerberger, Sonja: *Jüdische Leben am Kurfürstendamm*, Museum Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf von Berlin, text verlag edition berlin, Berlin 2011

Ruhland, Anna: *Schwarz auf Weiß – Fotografien vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald*. Die neue Sonderausstellung der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (Black on White: Photographs of Buchenwald Concentration Camp, the new special exhibition of the Buchenwald memorial) online at: https://www.gedenkstaettenforum.de/uploads/media/GedRund140_20-51.pdf, [only in German; retrieved 26.06.2025].

Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora: Fotoarchiv Buchenwald / Buchenwald Photo Archive, online at: <https://fotoarchiv.buchenwald.de/home>, [retrieved 26.06.2025].

Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora: Gedenkstätte Buchenwald. Geschichte, online at: <https://www.buchenwald.de/geschichte>, [retrieved 12.06.2025].

Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora (Hg.): *Sichtbar Machen. Zur Neugestaltung der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora*, Weimar/ Nordhausen 2016.

Stiftung Topographie des Terrors (Hg.): *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des NS-Regimes – Eine Übersicht*, Berlin 1996.

Wagner, Jens-Christian: *Produktion des Todes. Das KZ-Mittelbau-Dora*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2015.

This booklet is published to accompany the exhibition *Buchenwald — In the Thicket of the Ettersberg* in 'Galerie Mond' from 31 October to 28 November 2025.

Editor:

Elke-Vera Kotowski on behalf of the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation

Texts:

Günter Jeschonnek, Oliver Schruoffenegger und Frederik Stenger

Translation:

Catherine Hales

Design:

Copa-Ipa, Leipzig/Weimar

Printing and binding:

Buch- und Kunstdruckerei Kessler, Weimar

© 2025 for the reproduced pictures: Christian Rothe; International Court of Justice, The Hague; Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon; Sammlung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald; Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, bpk/Kunstbibliothek, SMB, Photothek Willy Römer, picture alliance / SZ Photo | Scherl

© 2025 Günter Jeschonnek (p. 15, pp. 52-62); Oliver Schruoffenegger und Frederik Stenger (pp. 7-14 and pp. 16-51) for their texts.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form (print, photocopy, microfilm or any other process) or copied or distributed with the use of electronic systems without the prior written permission of the authors.

With the kind financial assistance of:



Bezirksamt
Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf
von Berlin

Made possible by a donation by Mathias Döpfner

On behalf of the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation:



The booklet is available online in German and English using this link:

<https://www.berlin.de/ba-charlottenburg-wilmersdorf/verwaltung/aemter/strassen-und-gruenflaechen/oeffentlicher-raum/artikel.1575146.php>

The booklet is available as a German and English version at: www.moses-mendelssohn-stiftung.de



[DEUTSCH]



[ENGLISH]



