

# JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

18 August 2020

## **Jewish Life in Germany: Past and Present – The new core exhibition in the Jewish Museum Berlin Opening: August 23, 2020**



Yael Reuveny and Clemens Walter: „Mesubin“ at the end of the core exhibition, commissioned" by the Jewish Museum Berlin. Jewish Museum Berlin, Photo: Yves Sucksdorff

On Sunday, August 23, 2020, the Jewish Museum Berlin is opening its new core exhibition in the Libeskind building after more than two and a half years of reconstruction. On 3,500 sq.m. (almost 38,000 sq.ft.) of floor space, the museum will present the history of Jews in Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day, with new focuses and new scenography. The exhibition *Jewish Life in Germany: Past and Present* has been developed by a 20-person team at the Jewish Museum Berlin and designed and built by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft chezweitz GmbH/Hella Rolfes Architekten BDA. The previous core exhibition was on display from when the museum opened in 2001 until it closed in December 2017. It had more than 11 million visitors.

### **New Perspectives on Jewish-German History**

“The history of the Jews has not changed, but our perspectives on it have. The new exhibition is our response to changing viewing conventions and visitor expectations, as well as a new state of research,” said Hetty Berg, director of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

“The new core exhibition of the Jewish Museum Berlin marks the beginning of a new era. In this time of change, Germany’s federal government sees itself as a strong partner of the JMB. I am pleased and grateful that we can now open the museum back up to the public. The new core exhibition redeems a great promise: Jews can see their lifeworld presented here and other visitors can learn a lot about 1700 years of diversity of Jewish life in Germany,” said Monika Grütters, Minister of State for Culture and the Media.

# JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

“We are setting different accents than we did twenty years ago. We're focusing more on the interaction of Jews with their non-Jewish environment and taking up more themes of Jewish culture and religion,” said Cilly Kugelmann, chief curator of the exhibition.

## **Acceptance and Exclusion**

The exhibition relates the history of Jews in Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day. Jewish communities have always been closely connected to their surroundings. Acceptance and exclusion are examined in the exhibition in their varied historical forms, spanning from neighborly coexistence to violence.

One focus is on the history after 1945: This includes dealing with the catastrophic break of the Holocaust and the subsequent renewal of Jewish life in West and East Germany, as well as the immigration society in Germany today.

What distinguishes the Jewish community? How have Jews viewed the political, social, and cultural phenomena of their times? And how does the Jewish community define itself today? The exhibition presents numerous Jewish voices that reflect their diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives on historical challenges.

## **Insights into Jewish Culture and Religion**

In contrast to the previous exhibition, the 1700-year history of Jews in Germany will not be strictly chronological. The path through the new exhibition alternates between historical epochs and insights into Jewish themes that cannot be described in geographical or chronological categories. What is sacred in Judaism? What is the significance of Shabbat? What is the sound of Judaism? Eight thematic islands invite visitors to explore Jewish culture and religion with all their senses. They can hear liturgical chanting, Purim noisemakers, and pop music, or listen to interviews to learn if, how, and why Jews today keep the commandments. The room-filling work by artist Anselm Kiefer, *Shevirat ha-Kelim (Breaking of the Vessels)*, offers an interpretation of the myths of creation in the Lurianic Kabbalah.

The subject of antisemitism carries through all epochs and is also treated in a segment of its own. Four short films take up present-day case studies on antisemitism that are evaluated from various perspectives by historians and social scientists.

## **Focus on Today**

Five historical chapters make up the backbone of the exhibition. They span from the beginnings of Jewish life in Ashkenaz to the emancipation movement in the nineteenth century and its violent destruction through Nazism to the varied voices of Jewish life today.

The focus on the present day is not only evident in the extensive presentation of the period after 1945, but also in the contemporary interpretations of historical phenomena. Light is shed on how Jews have received Richard Wagner, for example, through commentaries on today's performance practice by Daniel Barenboim, musical director of Berlin's State Opera, and by Barrie Kosky, artistic director of the Komische Oper Berlin. And the themes of Torah and Prayer and Practice deal with tradition and religious practice today.

# JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

The Israeli artists Victoria Hanna, Hagit Hollander, and Gilad Ratman interpret different aspects of Jewish tradition in their works. Ratman's video installation *Drummerrsss* was created specifically for the exhibition. It marks the beginning of a tour through the exhibition, which ends with the video installation *Mesubin* (The Gathered), a final chorus that expresses the multivoiced Jewish presence in Germany today.

## **Treasures of the Collection**

The museum is focusing on the richness of its own collection much more than it did previously. Almost 70 percent of the more than 1000 objects on display have come from the JMB's own holdings. The interactive media installation Family Albums presents the heart of the collection: the historical legacy of German Jews from all over the world, which has been gathered over the past twenty years. Visitors can explore the life stories of several generations by delving into the more than 500 documents and photographs, everyday items, and works of art from the bequests of ten families.

## **Access in Many Forms**

In addition to original objects, there are also a variety of virtual reality and audio-visual media, art installations, interactive games, and hands-on stations.

Daniel Libeskind's architecture can be experienced anew and lets the characteristic "Libeskind moments" – the unusual window elements and the emptiness of the voids – impressively come to the fore.

The JMB app offers audio guides, information, games, and short films in German and English (coming soon also in Hebrew, Italian, French, and Spanish) – including interviews with Daniel Libeskind, artists, object donors, historical witnesses sharing first-hand experiences, and curators of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Hands-on models and tactile maps, accessible display cases with bottom clearance for wheelchairs, and a clear wayfinding system are of course offered to enable a barrier-free visit.

**For further information on the new core exhibition, go to the website:**

<https://www.jmberlin.de/en/core-exhibition>

**Picture material for reporting under consideration of the picture credits can be found at**

<https://www.jmberlin.de/en/press-images-jmb-core-exhibition>

## **Contact**

Press Office

Tel. +49(0)30- 25 993 -419

[presse@jmberlin.de](mailto:presse@jmberlin.de)

Follow us on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/jmberlin](https://www.twitter.com/jmberlin)