

Press Kit
“Another Country:
Jewish in the GDR”

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JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

Press release
6 September 2023

Opening of the exhibition “Another Country: Jewish in the GDR”



Alice Zadek with her daughter Ruth and her nephew David Hopp on Stalinallee (today's Karl-Marx-Allee), Berlin, ca. 1956, photo: Gerhard Zadek. Jewish Museum Berlin, gift of Ruth Zadek

On 8 September 2023, the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) will open “Another Country: Jewish in the GDR”, a cultural and historical exhibition on Jewish experiences in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Objects owned by Jewish East Germans and their descendants, along with conversations in which Jewish interviewees recount their own history, reveal a range of individual Jewish perspectives.

The exhibition embarks on a documentary expedition, connecting it with visual art, film, literature, complex biographies, and very special exhibits. Thus, visitors can learn about the life of Jews who fled Nazi Germany but returned to the Soviet occupation zone after 1945, who survived concentration camps or lived through the period in hiding. After the experience of the Shoah, many of them hoped to build the GDR as a free, anti-fascist state – “another country.”

Hetty Berg, Director of the JMB, explains: “The exhibition explores the question of what it meant to be Jewish in the GDR – whether within or outside the official Jewish communities, for individual people, and for different generations. Jewish East Germans and their descendants recount what has become of their hopes and how they look back at the GDR today. Their narratives show a multiplicity of individual experiences in eastern Germany.”

Jewish life in eight communities – East Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Erfurt, Schwerin, Halle, and Chemnitz (otherwise known as Karl-Marx-Stadt) – is presented as a social history of everyday life. The wave of Jewish emigration in 1952/53, reactions to the Six-Day War of 1967, and other events

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feature in the exhibition as nodal points of Jewish history in East Germany. In this way, the exhibition adds a Jewish dimension to current debates on eastern and western Germany.

Collection focus at the JMB

The JMB already holds many important objects relating to Jewish life in the GDR, and the exhibition has enabled the museum to further expand this collection focus. At the beginning of 2022, the JMB issued a call for items to be contributed to the show. The reaction was enthusiastic, with numerous responses from people offering to donate objects to the JMB collection. In addition, filmmaker Yael Reuveny created an eight-part audio and film installation, “Neuland”, specially for the exhibition. This work and the video interviews on which it is based will also be added to the museum’s collection on the theme.

Accompanying program

The accompanying program covers a spectrum ranging from a rock concert by Stern-Combo Meissen to a scholarly conference on Jewish history in the GDR organized with the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies, University of Potsdam. The exhibition space itself will also be a venue for readings, artist interviews, and film screenings: in the series “GDR on Tuesdays,” almost every Tuesday from 5.30 to 6.30 pm the exhibition will welcome guests who give personal insights into their own experiences, their family history, and their interest in Jewish life in the GDR. Alena Fürnberg and Renate Aris are the first to be featured.

Curated by Tamar Lewinsky, Martina Lüdicke, and Theresia Ziehe, the exhibition was financially supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States (Kulturstiftung der Länder). The mixed-media installation “from i to we” by Leon Kahane was made possible by from the FRIENDS OF THE JMB.

A richly illustrated publication to accompany the exhibition, with 15 essays by different authors, is published by Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin, with an English and a German edition. 272 pages; price €28.

Cooperation partners: Stiftung Neue Synagoge – Centrum Judaicum, Berlin, Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Media partners: Wall, tipBerlin, radioeins by rbb

For the latest information on the exhibition and the accompanying program, visit:

<https://www.jmberlin.de/en/exhibition-another-country>. You will find the **digital press kit** available for download here: <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/press-release-6-september-2023>. Press images are available with full acknowledgment at: <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/press-images-exhibition-another-country>.

Exhibition dates: 8 September 2023 to 14 January 2024

Location: Jewish Museum Berlin, Old Building, Level 1

Admission: €8 / €3 reduced

Opening hours: daily from 10 am to 7 pm (timeslot ticket is required: <https://tickets.jmberlin.de/en/>)

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Factsheet

Exhibition “Another Country: Jewish in the GDR”

Exhibition dates	8 September 2023 to 14 January 2024
Opening hours	Daily from 10 am to 7 pm
Location	Jewish Museum Berlin, Old Building, Level I
Admission	8 €, reduced rate 3 €, children and young people under the age of 18 free of charge. Timeslot reservation required: https://tickets.jmberlin.de/en/tickets/
Website	https://www.jmberlin.de/en/exhibition-another-country
Social media	Twitter: www.twitter.com/jmberlin Facebook: www.facebook.com/jmberlin Instagram: www.instagram.com/juedischesmuseumberlin #JMBerlin
Exhibition space	800 sq. meters
Number of exhibition chapters	8 Prologue Times of Transition East Berlin Film and Television Communities Event Space Affairs of State Leon Kahane: “from i to we”
Exhibition team	Tamar Lewinsky, Martina Lüdicke, Theresia Ziehe (curators) Anna Reindl (research trainee)
Exhibition management	Gelia Eisert
Exhibition design (concept, architecture, graphics)	ARGE: Büro für Konstruktivismus and Rahel Melis, Büro für Gestaltung

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Promotion campaign design	buerominimal Berlin
Exhibits	approx. 220 items Photographs, films, ritual objects, paintings, graphic art, sculptures, audiovisual media, historical documents, everyday objects
Call for items	A call for contributions was issued in January 2022 and brought in a large number of items – on loan or donated to the museum – that can now be seen in the exhibition.
Jewish communities	A separate chapter presents the eight Jewish communities of the GDR: Berlin, Dresden, Erfurt, Halle, Magdeburg, Leipzig, Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), Schwerin
Compilation of DEFA film (research, concept, editing)	Lisa Schoß, literary and cultural scholar Length: approx. 30 minutes Source: 23 GDR feature and television films
Audio and video installation “Neuland”	Yael Reuveny Creative producer: Clemens Walter Interviewees: Chaim Adlerstein, Renate Aris, Cathy Gelbin, Wera Herzberg, Peter Kahane, Marion Kahnemann, Marianne Pincus, Martin Schreier, Ruth Zadek
Contemporary art	Photo series: Silvia Dzubas, “Stowaway Holdover”, photographs, Berlin, 2013 Painting: Barbara Honigmann, “A Friend from Back When (Thomas Brasch)”, oil on canvas, Strasbourg, 1997 Sculpture: Marion Kahnemann, “Henriette”, ceramic, glazed, Dresden 1985 Painting: Vera Singer, “Epilogue (Triptych)”, oil on particleboard, Berlin, 1990
Commissioned work	“from i to we” Leon Kahane Berlin 2023 Mixed-media installation commissioned by the JMB, made possible by the FRIENDS OF THE JMB
Lenders and donors	approx. 50: private individuals and institutions

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Podcast	<p>“Jüdisch in der DDR. Ein Roadtrip mit Marion und Lena Brasch” (in German). Appears 12 September 2023, all episodes Number of episodes: 6 In conversation with Marion and Lena Brasch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Alena Fürnberg, Weimar and Halle▪ Reinhard Schramm, Erfurt▪ Dmitrij Kapitelman, Leipzig▪ Peter Kahane, Uckermark▪ André Herzberg, Berlin▪ Marion Kahnemann, Dresden <p>Also involved: Christian Conradi (production); Alan Bern, Paul Brody, and Michael Rodach (music); Martin Hartwig, Lydia Heller, and Jana Wuttke (editors) LINK: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/juedisch-in-der-ddr-100.html A podcast of the public radio station Deutschlandfunk Kultur in cooperation with the Jewish Museum Berlin</p>
Fellow	<p>Yael Reuveny (W. Michael Blumenthal Fellow, 2022/23), supported by the Berthold Leibinger Foundation</p>
With funding from	<p>The exhibition was financially supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States (Kulturstiftung der Länder).</p> <p>The mixed-media installation “from i to we” by Leon Kahane was made possible by the FRIENDS OF THE JMB.</p>
Cooperation partners	<p>Deutschlandfunk Kultur Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies, Potsdam Stiftung Neue Synagoge – Centrum Judaicum, Berlin</p>
Catalog	<p>“Another Country: Jewish in the GDR” Edited by Tamar Lewinsky, Martina Lüdicke, and Theresia Ziehe, Jewish Museum Berlin Publisher: Ch. Links Verlag Design: Siyu Mao, Berlin Siyu Mao, Moritz Böhm, Jan Husstedt Language: German, English (two editions) Pages: 272 Price: 28 €</p>
Media partners	<p>wall, tipBerlin, radioeins</p>

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Press images for the exhibition „Another Country. Jewish in the GDR“

Runtime: 8 September 2023 to 14 January 2024

Current press photos and views of the exhibition can be downloaded at:

<https://www.jmberlin.de/presse>

Pictures can be used without requesting permission for current reporting only; we request you send a sample copy.

Object images

Bild



Quote to the image

Creditline

Alice Zadek with her daughter Ruth and her nephew David Hopp on Stalinallee (Karl-Marx-Allee), photographer: Gerhard Zadek, Berlin, ca. 1956; Jewish Museum Berlin, gift of Ruth Zadek



“As communist returnees, my grandparents were convinced that the GDR was the German state where antisemitism had no place. All the family’s possessions were kept in the trunk – the little they had left. My grandparents returned from exile in London to the Soviet Occupation Zone in 1946.”

Josef and Lizzi Zimmering’s traveling trunk, probably Britain, 1930s to 1940s; on loan from the Zimmering family, photo: Roman März

Esther Zimmering (b. 1977)

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Résistance armband belonging to Dora Benjamin née Davidsohn, France, ca. 1942-1945; Jewish Museum Berlin, gift of Peter Schaul, photo: Roman März



Lea Grundig, "Clenched hand", Palestine, 1940s, ink, pencil; Jewish Museum Berlin, photo: Roman März © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023

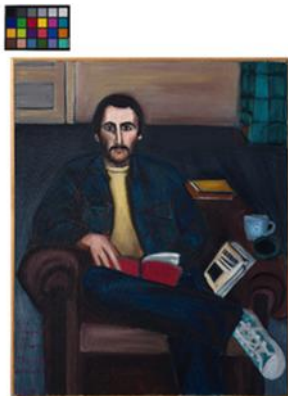
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“Passing through a back courtyard, I reached a quiet, secluded area. A long-neglected construction-site fence separated the site of the synagogue from the surrounding area. Having crossed that barrier, I stood in front of the tall, dilapidated building. Trespassing the ruins was something special each time—it was a place from another time. Over a pile of rubble and the remains of a bomb blast that had torn a hole in the ceiling of one of the rooms, I made my way inside the building. Faded patterns on the walls, smashed doors, and split-open ceilings and walls immersed me in a bygone world. With my camera, I attempted to document my inner experience.”

Mathias Brauner (b. 1964)

Photo series of the New Synagogue on Oranienburger Straße, photographer: Mathias Brauner, Berlin, September 1987; Jewish Museum Berlin



“How many of us are still around even? Us? Who exactly is “us”? The gang from the old days, from that long-gone time when we were mostly hanging around in tight groups, making do with life on the fringes even though we were itching to chase after big, important things. We all dreamed of being artists back then, and not just any artists, but great ones”.

Barbara Honigmann, „A Friend from Back When (Thomas Brasch)“, Strasbourg, 1997, Oil on canvas; Jewish Museum Berlin, photo: Roman März

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Barbara Honigmann (b. 1949),
Das Gesicht wiederfinden
(Finding one's face again), ©
2006 Carl Hanser Verlag
GmbH & Co. KG, München



Menorah from the Jewish
Cultural Association,
Manufacturer: VEB,
Wohnraumleuchten Berlin,
Berlin, ca. 1975–1989;
Jewish Museum Berlin,
gift of the Berlin Jewish
Cultural Association, photo:
Roman März



“In late November 1988, an
antique collector showed up at
our Community office and gave
a Torah curtain to our
chairman. We suspected that it
had once belonged to our
destroyed synagogue. We
consulted experts from the
Magdeburg Museum, who
determined, based on the
fabric and appliquéés, that the
Torah curtain had been made
around the year 1850. And
indeed, it was on September 19
of that year that the
cornerstone for the synagogue
in Magdeburg was laid, and it
was consecrated by the rabbi
Dr. Philippson on September
14, 1851.”

Torah curtain from the
destroyed Old Synagogue of
Magdeburg, Germany, 19th
century; Jewish Museum Berlin,
gift of the Jewish Community
of Magdeburg, photo: Roman
März

Association of Jewish
Communities in the GDR
Newsletter, June 1989

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“In the mid-eighties, Henriette Schmager, a member of Dresden’s Jewish Community, celebrated her ninetieth birthday. Henriette was a modest innkeeper; her family had survived the Shoah by hiding on a small ship near Potsdam. Because her ninetieth birthday fell during the period when Erich Honecker wanted to improve relations with the US and, to that end, needed to paint a positive picture of the Jewish presence in the GDR, her birthday was pronounced a state occasion and celebrated at the best hotel in the city. Even East German television made an appearance and broadcast a segment on the Current Camera program. I remember Henriette standing in the hotel lobby looking lonely and bewildered among the many officials. She was wearing a dazzling blue dress with a big Star of David.”

Marion Kahnemann (b. 1960)

Marion Kahnemann,
“Henriette”, Dresden, 1985,
Ceramic, glazed; on loan from
the artist, photo: Roman März



Silvia Dzubas, “Stowaway
Holdover”, photo series, 2013;
Jewish Museum Berlin

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Vera Singer, "Epilogue
(Triptych)", Berlin, 1990,
oil on particle board;
Berlinische Galerie –
Landesmuseum für Moderne
Kunst, Fotografie und
Architektur, photo: Kai-Annett
Becker

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Exhibition Views

Room views of the exhibition "Another Country. Jewish in the GDR" can be downloaded under [Image Material for Press Relations | Jewish Museum Berlin \(jemberlin.de\)](#).

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Bild	Bildunterschrift	Credits
	From the exhibition „Another Country. Jewish in the GDR“.	Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo: Jens Ziehe.
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	From the exhibition „Another Country. Jewish in the GDR“.	Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

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Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo:
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the GDR“.

Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo:
Jens Ziehe.



From the exhibition
„Another Country. Jewish in
the GDR“.

Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo:
Jens Ziehe.

Introduction of the exhibition catalogue

The history of Jews in the GDR did not begin with the country's founding on October 7, 1949. Rather, from May 1945 onward, the course was set for the East-West division, the Cold War, the Stalinist purges, and the conditions of Jewish life in East Germany. At the same time, this period contained the seeds of a different course of history and other, unrealized options.

After the End of War and Persecution

When the war and the anti-Jewish persecution ended, an extremely heterogeneous group of Jewish survivors found themselves in the Soviet and the other three occupation zones in the destroyed and dismembered "land of the perpetrators." The survivors had been liberated from the death camps, fought in Allied armies, or returned from exile. Others had survived in hiding or been protected by non-Jewish spouses. Some initially saw Germany as a way station on the road to Palestine or the United States. Others deliberately returned to Germany, hoping to help shape a new society there.

Berlin, which was governed by the four occupying powers, was an important destination and hub for survivors and returnees. The newly constituted Jewish Community of Berlin had its headquarters in Oranienburger Strasse in the Soviet sector. Its first acting chairman was Erich Nelhans, he belonged to the then dominant group in the Jewish community who did not consider Jewish life possible in Germany after the Shoah and advocated emigration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state there. Nelhans also looked after Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe, tens of thousands of whom had fled to the West to escape postwar antisemitism in Poland. Many showed up at the Jewish community in the Soviet sector of Berlin, which directed them to the American and French sectors, where Displaced Persons camps had been set up. Nelhans attracted the attention of the Soviet intelligence service after helping Jewish Red Army soldiers escape to the West. He was arrested in his East Berlin apartment in March 1948 and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison by a Soviet military court. He died in the Dubravlag camp in Mordovia in 1950.

In the summer and fall of 1945, Jewish communities were established in several cities in the Soviet occupation zone, mostly at the initiative of Jews who had been spared deportation due to their non-Jewish spouses. In the weeks and months that followed, these Jews were joined by survivors from the camps and ghettos, refugees from Eastern Europe, and those who had emerged from hiding. Membership in these first few communities in Leipzig, Zwickau, Dresden, Chemnitz, Erfurt, and Magdeburg initially grew rapidly but then, starting in 1949, declined just as quickly. The smaller communities in Plauen, Mühlhausen, Eisenach, Jena, and other towns were dissolved between 1948 and 1953.

Kleinere Gemeinden zum Beispiel in Plauen, Mühlhausen, Eisenach und Jena lösten sich zwischen 1948 und 1953 wieder auf.

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New Beginnings

The attempt to reestablish Jewish life took place under contradictory conditions. The Soviet Military Administration and most regional governments in East Germany supported the founding or reconstitution of the Jewish communities and ensured that the returnees and immigrants received the basic necessities of life (a roof over their heads, clothing, health care, and additional food rations). At the same time, antisemitism was still rampant at the local authorities and in the population.

To meet the challenges of securing the daily lives of their members, representatives of the Jewish communities worked closely with the local committees set up to help the victims of fascism, which later became the “OdF” (victims of fascism) and “VdN” (victims of the Nazi regime) offices. Earlier, in summer 1945, the OdF committees, most of which were founded by liberated political prisoners, had initially opposed recognizing Holocaust survivors as “victims of fascism.” Their reasoning: while they “had suffered hardship, they had not fought.”¹ Just a few months later, in October 1945, at the Leipzig meeting of the OdF committees from all parts of the Soviet occupation zone, this view was corrected. The reversal was primarily the doing of Julius Meyer and Heinz Galinski, who went on to establish the Department for the Victims of the Nuremberg Laws at the main OdF committee in Berlin.

Urgently needed support for the survivors also came from the Joint Distribution Committee (JOINT for short), a Jewish-American relief organization whose food donations and aid were distributed through the Jewish communities (from 1947 onwards, also through the Jewish communities in the Soviet occupation zone).

The Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime (VVN) was established in all four occupation zones in 1947/48. It initially defined itself as a nonpartisan interest group that represented all persecuted people. Jewish victims of Nazi persecution constituted a large group within the association and in Berlin even formed the majority. Although the distinction between “fighters” and “victims” remained contested in the VVN, cooperation between it and the Jewish communities initially went well, not least because many leading representatives of the Jewish communities held positions in the VVN.

The Cold War

With the separate currency reforms in 1948, it became clear that the four occupying powers in Germany would not act jointly to overcome the legacy of Nazism in Germany. The Cold War between the one-time allies and the founding of the two German states set new political priorities on both sides that led to the breakdown of the already fragile anti-fascist alliances.

In 1950, the West German branch of the VVN was classified as a “radical organization” and monitored by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. By contrast, the East German VVN continued to wield significant political and moral clout until it was dissolved in 1953. The eastern VVN provided representatives for parliaments, ran health spas, published several journals, and owned a publishing house. It influenced the drafting of a reparations law which included a special pension system and the preferential provision of health care, housing, commercial space, household products, and scarce consumer goods. However, it did not include a provision on the restitution of stolen property or on material compensation.

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But the VVN's initially postulated non-partisanship soon existed only on paper. Beginning in 1948, the SED gradually took control of the association's governing bodies and began to subordinate all its activities to the new friend-or-foe mentality of the Cold War.

The Slánský Trial and its Consequences

With the start of the clearly antisemitic Stalinist show trial of Rudolf Slánský in Prague in late 1952, Jews in the GDR faced pressure on two fronts: first, they needed to defend themselves against continued and growing hostility from broad segments of the population, and second, they were subject to Stalinist antisemitism from the Soviet Union.

In early January 1953, Julius Meyer, SED member and President of the Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR, was pressured to "confess" his intelligence ties in interrogations with both the Soviet and the SED Control Commissions. They demanded that he surrender the lists of recipients of JOINT packages and persuade his Association to publicly distance itself from JOINT and to condemn Zionism. After the interrogations, Meyer traveled to Leipzig, Dresden, and Erfurt to warn leading Jewish community representatives of the impending persecution. Günter Singer, Helmut Salo Looser, Leon Löwenkopf, Fritz Grunfeld, and Leo Eisenstädt fled to West Berlin that same day. Additional Jewish community members followed. Their exodus continued into the fall of 1953 amid antisemitic agitation in the media and under the influence of police searches of Jewish community offices and arbitrary measures taken by local authorities against recognized victims of persecution. The suspicions and persecution were also aimed at state and party functionaries of Jewish origin who had no ties to the Jewish community.

Disintegration of the Jewish Communities

The events of 1948–53 and their consequences shaped the lives of Jews in the GDR until 1989. Most of the Jewish communities no longer had board members and also lacked rabbis and cantors. Membership had declined dramatically, caused not only by Jews fleeing the country. Fearing reprisal, many members of the SED had also left the Jewish religious community. The Berlin community split into an eastern and a western part. After Stalin's death, targeted antisemitic persecution ended, but the accusations and suspicions were never officially withdrawn; they lived on beneath the surface in the form of fear and resentment.

With the forced dissolution of the Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime, which the SED Central Committee replaced with the Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters, the Jewish survivors—like many other persecuted groups—no longer had a voice in politics. The Jewish communities could not fill this gap because they were essentially restricted to religious practice.

Due not only to the small number of members, but mainly to failed reparation attempts, the Jewish communities were completely dependent on state funds.

Remembrance Policy in the GDR

Until the mid-1980s, the topic of Jewish persecution and genocide played only a minor role at official commemorative events. The state's remembrance policy focused on the communist resistance. Nevertheless, the crimes committed by the Nazis in the concentration and death camps were not taboo. School textbooks showed photographs of piled-up corpses in Bergen-Belsen and mentioned

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the mass killings in the gas chambers—though mostly without discussing their antisemitic background. The victims were described in general terms as “inmates from all European countries” or were sweepingly attributed to the resistance.ⁱⁱ

For many years, commemoration of the 1938 November pogroms was limited mainly to the events in the Jewish communities, mostly accompanied by a brief newspaper note with a greeting from the SED Central Committee. The early 1980s saw changes to this well-rehearsed ritual, culminating in the major official commemorative event in 1988 marking the pogroms’ fiftieth anniversary. Members of the SED Politburo, all wearing kippahs and surrounded by TV cameras and flashing lights, lay wreaths in the Jewish cemetery in the Weissensee district of Berlin. The next day they lay the symbolic cornerstone for the reconstruction of the destroyed New Synagogue in Oranienburger Strasse. These actions were clearly motivated by foreign policy and economic interests linked to the GDR’s relations with the United States; however, state and party leaders were also responding to the shifting situation at home, where committed representatives of a generation that had grown up in the GDR were taking seriously their anti-fascist education and were no longer willing to accept the ignorant, negligent treatment of the traces of former Jewish life in their surroundings. Their initiatives to restore destroyed and neglected burial sites and to study Jewish history in their cities and communities suddenly met with interest and were even promoted by the local authorities.

But beyond the narrow confines of the state’s remembrance policy and long before the policy shifts of the 1980s, the history of the Holocaust in the GDR could be accessed through many other channels, including novels, autobiographical accounts, plays, and films. *The Investigation* by Peter Weiss is one example, a documentary theatrical collage dealing with the first Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt am Main. On October 19, 1965, the play premiered simultaneously in fifteen cities in East and West Germany. The East Berlin event, which was broadcast on TV shortly afterward, took place in the assembly hall of the East German Volkskammer, and the parts were read by actors, writers, cultural policymakers, and people persecuted by the Nazi-regime.

Beyond the Jewish Communities

An essay such as this that discusses Jewish life in the GDR cannot limit itself to members of the Jewish communities, but must also examine the much larger group of Holocaust survivors who descended from Jewish families but distanced themselves from their ancestors’ religion and traditions. Many had joined the labor movement before 1933 and become members of the KPD. They were loyal to the Soviet occupation force and the Communist Party, in whose sphere of influence they hoped for favorable living and working conditions.

They consisted of writers, actors, directors, singers, composers, and visual artists. They assumed management of the newly founded publishing houses, broadcasting companies, and newspapers. They were appointed to university chairs, became factory directors, or performed functions in the party and state apparatus.

During the Stalinist purges, many faced accusations, suspicions, or—at the very least—professional discrimination. And perhaps it was precisely the persecution they suffered during the Nazi period and their grief over murdered relatives that unconsciously bound them to the socialist project. With their

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creativity, professional skills, and cosmopolitanism, these women and men made an important contribution to rebuilding cultural life and new political structures in East Germany. Among the best-known are Anna Seghers, Lea Grundig, Arnold Zweig, Alfred Kantorowicz, Stefan Hermlin, Ernst-Herrmann Meyer, Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden, and Hanns and Gerhart Eisler.

One exceptional figure among them was Jürgen Kuczynski, a party loyalist and scholar who never gave up his intellectual independence. In 1936, after three years of working illegally for the KPD in Germany, he emigrated to Great Britain, only to return to Berlin in 1945 in the uniform of a US Army colonel. A few years later, he co-founded the Academy of Sciences. Kuczynski also directed the Institute for Economic History, where research was conducted in relative freedom by GDR standards. An internationally respected scholar, he served as advisor to Erich Honecker and often stood out with his undogmatic ideas and unusual initiatives in the closely managed East German public sphere.

Another exceptional figure was the singer and dancer Lin Jaldati, who grew up in a poor Jewish family in Amsterdam and joined the Communist Party of the Netherlands in 1936. After the Wehrmacht invaded the country, she joined the resistance against the occupiers. She was arrested and deported to Auschwitz in 1944 and liberated from Bergen-Belsen in 1945. In 1952, she moved to the GDR with her husband, the pianist and former German émigré Eberhard Rebling. She was the only artist to have success as a singer of Yiddish songs well into the 1980s.

Die Haltung zu Israel

Die SED-Führung zählte eigentlich nur Mitglieder der Gemeinden als Jüdinnen*Juden. Aber zu bestimmten Anlässen bediente sie sich für ihre Propagandazwecke auch der jüdischen Herkunft der vielen „anderen“. Zum Beispiel 1961, als die aus jüdischen Familien stammenden Journalisten Max Kahane, Gerhard Leo und Kurt Goldstein als Sonderkorrespondenten zum Eichmann-Prozess nach Jerusalem entsandt wurden, mit dem speziellen Auftrag, auf die NS-Vergangenheit des Bonner Staatssekretärs Hans Globke aufmerksam zu machen. Im Juni 1967, einen Tag nach dem Beginn des Sechstagekrieges zwischen Israel und den arabischen Nachbarstaaten, beschloss das SED-Politbüro – vermutlich, um möglichen Antisemitismus-Vorwürfen vorzubeugen – „Stellungnahmen von jüdischen DDR-Bürgern zu veröffentlichen, in denen sie ihre Empörung über die Israel-Aggression und das Komplott Israel-Washington-Bonn zum Ausdruck bringen“ sollten.ⁱⁱⁱ Doch wie der damit beauftragte Albert Norden irritiert (oder empört?) an Walter Ulbricht berichtete, lehnten zahlreiche der Angesprochenen ein solches Ansinnen ab. Letztlich gehörte keiner der Unterzeichner der am 9. Juni 1967 im „Neuen Deutschland“ publizierte Erklärung einer jüdischen Gemeinde an. Allerdings wandten sich Gemeindefunktionäre vor allem im Verlauf der 1980er-Jahre zunehmend selbstbewusst gegen antisemitische Entgleisungen in der DDR-Berichterstattung über Israel und den Nahost-Konflikt.

Die israelfeindliche Politik der DDR hatte zur Folge, dass den jüdischen Gemeinden der Kontakt zu internationalen jüdischen Verbänden weitgehend versperrt blieb. Erst 1986 durften Abgesandte des Dachverbandes zum ersten Mal eine Tagung des Jüdischen Weltkongresses in Jerusalem besuchen. Schon zuvor hatten die jüdischen Gemeinden nach Jahren eines eher abgeschotteten Daseins begonnen, ihre Fühler ins „innere Außen“, das heißt, in die DDR-Gesellschaft zu strecken. In Berlin

JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

und Leipzig luden sie seit Beginn der 1980er-Jahre regelmäßig zu Konzerten, Lesungen und Vorträgen ein. Etwa zur gleichen Zeit gründeten sich in einigen größeren Städten Arbeitsgemeinschaften für christlich-jüdischen Dialog.

Community or Cultural Association?

In the 1980s, the Jewish communities in East Germany had a total of around four hundred members. Roughly two hundred belonged to the community in East Berlin. In 1986, the executive board in Berlin, under the leadership of Dr. Peter Kirchner, took an unusual step to stop the decline and aging of the community. It invited many of the adult children of secular Jewish communist families to a community event. The response was overwhelming. The initiative met with growing interest among a younger generation that wanted to learn more about their roots and rediscover the values, traditions, and practices their parents or grandparents had given up so long ago. They formed the group *Wir für uns* (“We for Us”) and took part in services, festivals, and Hebrew lessons—though few ultimately joined the Jewish community. Most preferred loose ties, discussions, lectures, and cultural events—in other words, membership in what was essentially a Jewish cultural association. This type of association was not founded until 1990, by which time the GDR’s existence had almost come to an end.

Annette Leo, historian and publicist

This text is a significantly abridged version of her contribution to the exhibition catalog Another Country Jewish in the GDR.

ⁱ *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, July 1, 1945, cited in Elke Reuter and Detlef Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953* (Berlin, 1997), 80–81. This is probably a quote from Ottomar Geschke, the first chairman of the main Odf committee in Berlin and later chairman of the VVN.

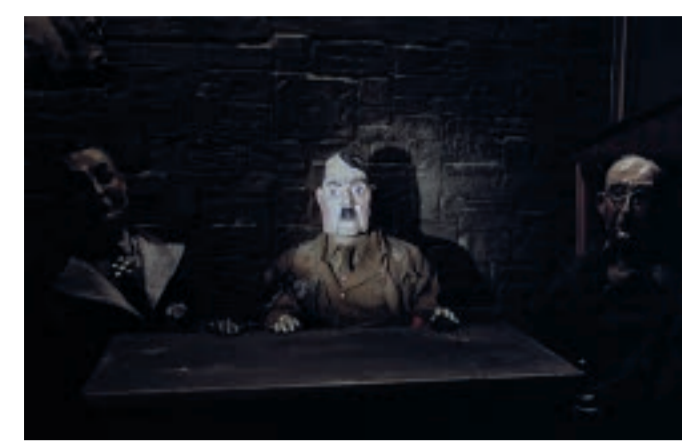
ⁱⁱ See Stefan Küchler, “DDR-Geschichtsbilder: Zur Interpretation des Nationalsozialismus im Geschichtsunterricht der DDR,” *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 1 (2000), vol. 22, 42–44.

ⁱⁱⁱ Protokoll Nr. 7/67 der Politbürositzung am 7.6.1967, Anlage 1; SAPMO, DY 30/J IV2/2/1 117, zit. nach Ulrike Offenberg: „Seid vorsichtig gegen die Machthaber“. *Die jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ und der DDR 1945 bis 1990*, Berlin 1998, S. 201.

Filmsequenzen / Film Clips



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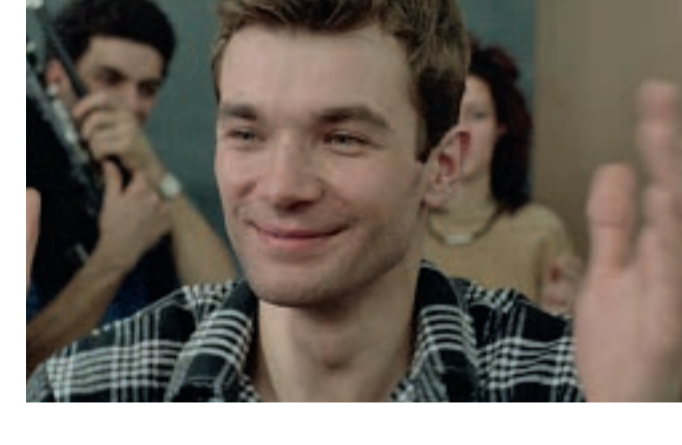
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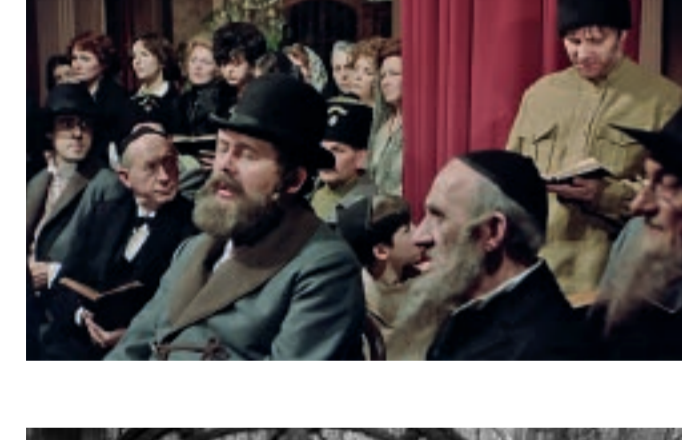
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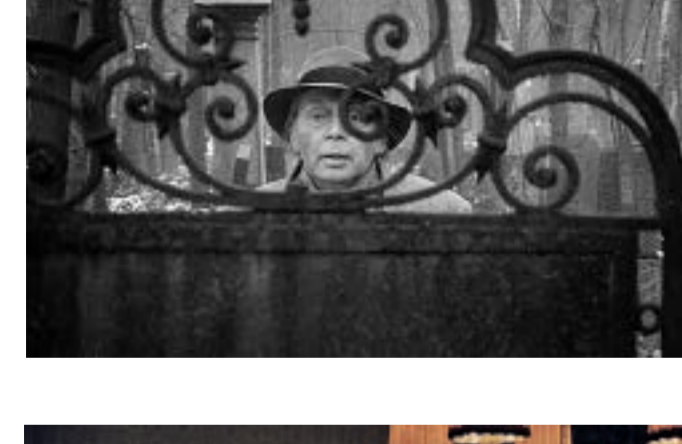
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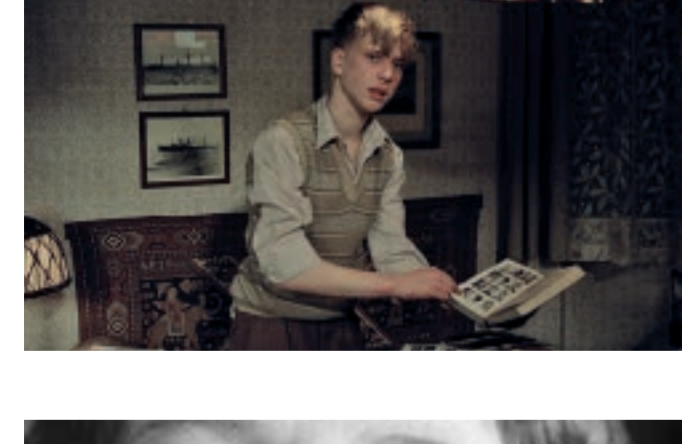
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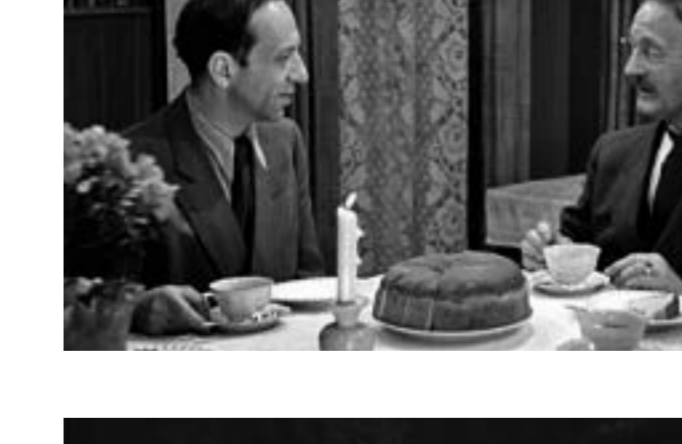
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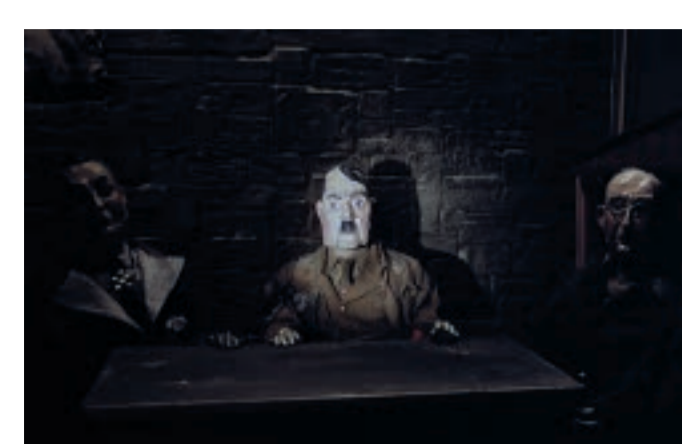


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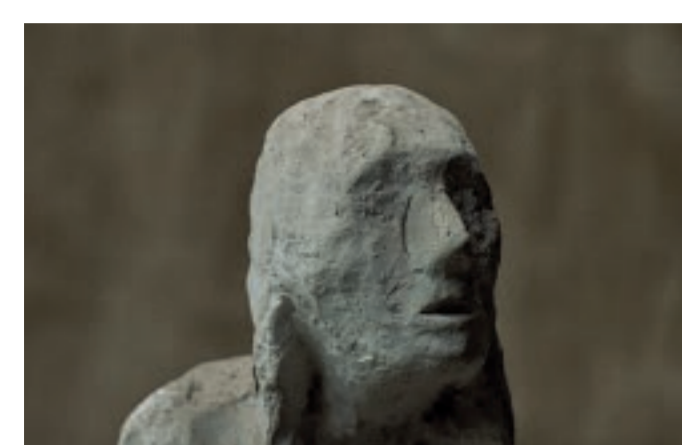
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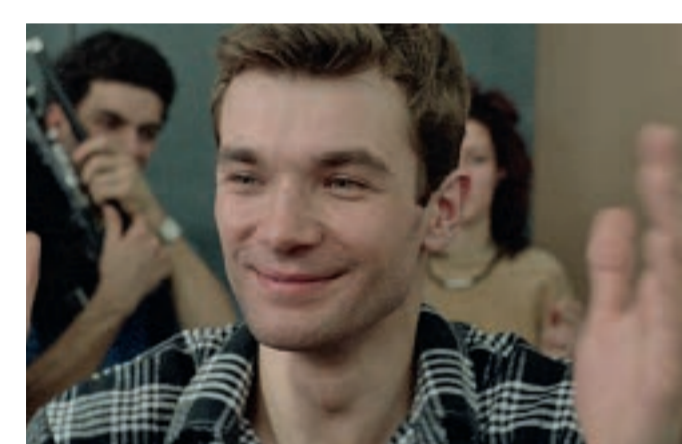
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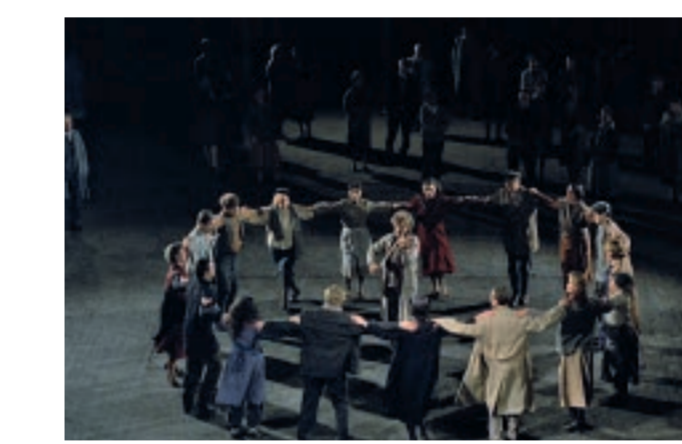
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JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

Exhibition texts

Times of Transition

After the Shoah, those returnees who made the journey back from their countries of exile to the Soviet Occupation Zone, which later became the German Democratic Republic (GDR), shared a common hope of a brighter future for Germany. Many of these returnees had been politically active before their escape from Nazi tyranny. They now made the conscious choice to be part of building a more equitable social-ist society in the new East Germany. In the years that followed, many Jews became prominent figures in the freshly founded state: in Jewish communal life, the arts, culture, academia, and politics.

After LIBERATION in 1945, Germany was divided into four occupation zones.

Approximately 3,500 Jews lived in the SOVIET OCCUPATION ZONE: survivors of concentration camps, people who had survived in hiding, and returnees.

The returnees came back from EXILE in countries such as France, Mexico, Palestine, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

The GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (GDR, better known as East Germany) was established on October 7, 1949.

ANTIFASCISM, the struggle against all forms of fascism, was a core tenet of both the GDR's self-definition and Jewish returnees' political outlooks.

East Berlin

A wide spectrum of Jewish identities intermingled in Berlin, including religious, secular, socialist, state-aligned, and dissident perspectives. Being Jewish did not necessarily mean membership in the official Jewish Community. Returnee families often shared their experiences of persecution, their political beliefs, and a value system that arose from these commonalities.

East Berlin's Jewish Community was the largest in the GDR, yet only had several hundred members. Its religious center was the Rykestrasse Synagogue, and its institutions included the kosher butcher shop in Prenzlauer Berg, the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, and the community library on Oranienburger Strasse.

From 1949 to 1990, East Berlin was the CAPITAL OF THE GDR.

Many returnees lived in neighborhoods called INTELLIGENTSIA DEVELOPMENTS that had been specifically built for academics and cultural workers and were located in the Berlin districts of Pankow and Grünau.

In 1953, the Berlin Jewish Community was divided into EASTERN and WESTERN counterparts.

Following the CONSTRUCTION OF THE BERLIN WALL in 1961, the city itself was divided.

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After the FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL in 1989 and the reunification of the two Germanies, Berlin became the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Film and Television

Numerous documentaries, feature films, and TV miniseries produced in the GDR and the Soviet Occupation Zone explored the themes of Jewish history and the Jewish experience in Germany. A major reason that anti-fascism was associated with Holocaust discourse within these genres was that key players in film and television—directors, writers, producers, and actors—were themselves returnees or the children of returnees. Their personal experiences shaped their artistic work. The compilation in this room assembles excerpts from feature films and TV series released between 1947 and 1989 into an associative collage.

Communities

In the cities of Dresden, Erfurt, Halle, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Leipzig, Magdeburg, and Schwerin, Jews made efforts to sustain their religious traditions in small Jewish Communities. These Communities suffered from attrition and aging membership. Kosher foods were imported from neighboring socialist countries. Likewise, rabbis and cantors traveled from abroad. Community leaders navigated a precarious balance between allegiance to the state and the risk of becoming its tool. The Communities served as second families for their members. Communal holiday celebrations and summer camps for the few children and adolescents reinforced their Jewish identities. The composition of the Jewish Communities was fundamentally reshaped by immigration from the Soviet Union after 1990.

The Communities were all represented by the ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE GDR.

The Communities were under the purview of the STATE SECRETARIAT FOR CHURCH AFFAIRS.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Community membership was in steep decline, seemingly on track toward DEMOGRAPHIC DOOM.

Beginning in 1991, the QUOTA REFUGEE ACT regulated immigration from the Soviet Union and post-Soviet states.

Affairs of State

Fear of antisemitic repression grew widespread among Jews in the early 1950s, leading to a mass emigration to the west in 1952 and 1953. The GDR leadership reacted to the Six-Day War of 1967 by intensifying its hostility toward Israel and pressuring Jews to take anti-Israel stances. The social upheavals of the 1980s, coupled with the looming end of the Cold War, led to an increased public interest in Jewish topics.

How did Jews view the professedly anti-fascist state? Given their often-transnational family backgrounds, what was their relationship to the state system altogether? What became of the returnees' socialist ideals in the next generation?

The SOCIALIST UNITY PARTY OF GERMANY (SED), founded in 1946, was the ruling party of state in the GDR until 1990.

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The MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY, better known as the Stasi, was the GDR's intelligence service and secret police, tasked with protecting the system through surveillance, observation, and repression.

Germany's division into two states came to symbolize the COLD WAR, the decades-long conflict between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

The influence of GLASNOST and PERESTROIKA, the Soviet Union's policy of reforms, bolstered the oppositional civil rights movement in the GDR starting in the mid-1980s.

Hetty Berg

Director of the Jewish Museum Berlin

Hetty Berg became the Director of the Jewish Museum Berlin on 1 April 2020. Originally from the Netherlands, she has held various positions at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

She began her work there as a curator in 1989. In the span of her 30-year career, she created over 30 original temporary exhibitions, and oversaw the creation and implementation of five permanent exhibitions. Since 2002 she worked as the manager and chief curator of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, which expanded in 2012 into the city's Jewish Cultural Quarter. Along with the Jewish Historical Museum, it includes a children's museum, the Portuguese Synagogue, the National Holocaust Museum, and the Hollandsche Schouwburg memorial site.

Hetty Berg was born in 1961 in The Hague. After studying dance for four years in London and Amsterdam, she studied theater studies in Amsterdam. While pursuing her career, she received a master's degree in management for non-profit organizations in Utrecht. Berg is proficient in six languages and is a member of several scholarly councils and committees; for example, since 2016, she has been a member of the Dutch National Committee for the Code of Ethics for Museums, and from 2007 to 2013, she was a member of the board of the Association of European Jewish Museums.

Her work and research focuses on cultural history, including Jewish performance, Jews in the Netherlands and museum studies. She has published numerous books and scholarly essays on these subjects; most recently in 2017 as coeditor of *Site of Deportation, Site of Memory: The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Holocaust*, in 2020 as editor of *Waterlooplein: De buurt binnenstebuiten*, and 2021 as coeditor of *Reappraising the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*.

In addition, she has organized many international symposia and scholarly conferences, for example, together with the American historian Georg Mosse (1918–1999), with the Israeli demographer and statistician Sergio Della Pergola, with the American Rabbi David Ellenson, as well as with the American author and educator Susannah Heschel.

Hetty Berg has been a member of the Liberal Jewish Community in Amsterdam for over 40 years. Together with her partner, the French photographer Frédéric Brenner, she travels regularly to Israel.

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Curatorial team

Tamar Lewinsky

Exhibition Curator, Jewish Museum Berlin

Tamar Lewinsky, PhD, has been Curator of Audiovisual Media at the Jewish Museum Berlin since 2021. She was also part of the team curating the epoch room “After 1945” in the new core exhibition (opened 2020). Previously, the historian taught Yiddish and Jewish history and culture in Munich, Basel, and Düsseldorf. Research stays took her to New York, Washington, D.C., and Leeds. For the Jewish Museum Munich, she curated “Jews 45/90: From Here and There – Survivors from Eastern Europe” (2011) about Jewish Displaced Persons, one of her main research interests. She has been a collection curator at the JMB since 2015.

Martina Lüdicke

Exhibition Curator, Jewish Museum Berlin

Martina Lüdicke has been an exhibition curator at the Jewish Museum Berlin since 2001. She curated the exhibitions “Golem” (2016), “Snip it! Stances on Ritual Circumcision” (2015), “The Whole Truth: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Jews” (2013), and “How German Is It? Thirty Artists' Notions of Home” (2011–2012). Martina Lüdicke studied literature and art history in Tübingen and Aix-en-Provence. After completing a traineeship at an academic press, she also worked as a freelance editor and journalist.

Theresia Ziehe

Exhibition Curator, Jewish Museum Berlin

Theresia Ziehe has been a curator of photography since 2006. She curated the exhibitions “ZERHEILT: Healed to Pieces” (2021), “In an Instant: Photographs by Fred Stein” (2013), “Russians Jews Germans: Photographs by Michael Kerstgens from 1992 to the Present” (2012), an “It must schwing: Blue Note – Photography by Francis Wolff and Jimmy Katz” (2009). She was also part of the curatorial team for the epoch room “After 1945” in the new core exhibition (opened 2020). Theresia Ziehe obtained her degree in religious studies and education in Bonn and Berlin. Since 1999, she has worked for the JMB in a number of different areas of the collection.