Tourguide

33 — 45

The city and National Socialism

Historisches Museum Frankfurt

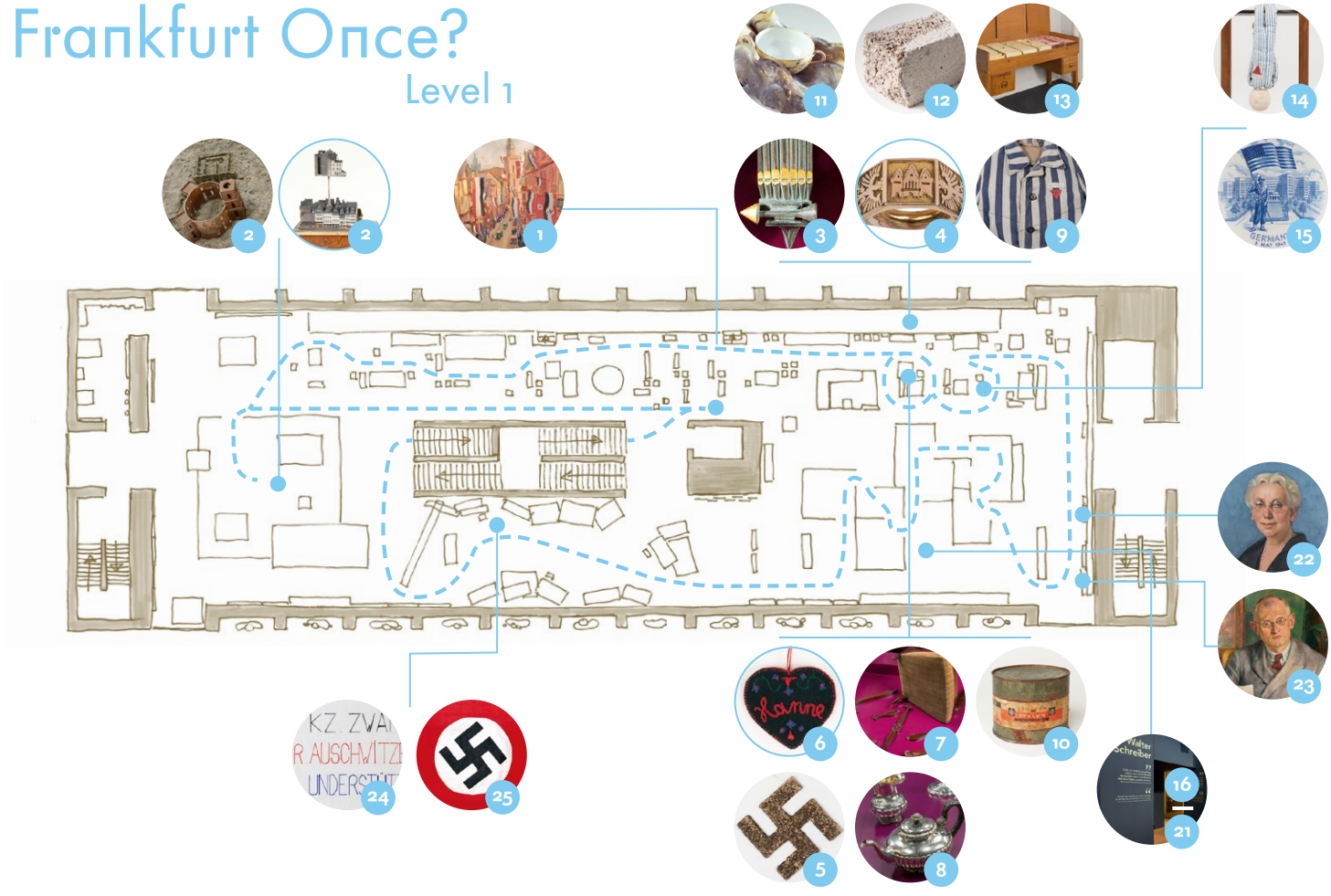
Welcome to the Historical Museum Frankfurt

In the Nazi era (1933–1945) Frankfurt was not one of the five “Führer cities” (Berlin, Munich, Nuremberg, Hamburg and Linz). Adolf Hitler and the Nazi elite visited Frankfurt am Main relatively infrequently. Nevertheless, few German cities fell in line with Nazi ideology as quickly and completely as this once so liberal and cosmopolitan city. Friedrich Krebs, the City’s Lord Mayor aimed to systematically transform Frankfurt into a model Nazi city. University institutes were involved in research connected to racial ideology and the implementation of the Nazi policy of extermination. The city followed the Nazi policy against its Jewish residents with particular vehemence in order to shake off its reputation as a “city of Jews and democrats”. Frankfurt’s industrial sites manufactured for the Nazi machinery of war and were embroiled in the mass murders that took place in the concentration camps. For Frankfurt, the Nazi era ended in ruins with the downtown area being almost entirely destroyed by the Allied air raids. And although the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials (1963–68) marked the national start of the process of coming to terms with and accepting the legal consequences of Nazi crimes after the War, at the same time Frankfurt’s city council and its legal administrative body displayed a particularly great continuity of staff.

This themed tour lasting approximately 90 minutes will take you through the entire museum. Many of the objects exhibited are linked with the Nazi era – some of them only at second glance. The tour focuses on the permanent exhibition “Frankfurt Once?” and in this section on the gallery “100 x Frankfurt”. In “Frankfurt Now!”, in the Library of the Generations you will find personal memories from contemporary witnesses of Nazism. Two sections of the Collectors’ Museum point out just how entwined the Historical Museum’s collecting history is with Nazi history.

Frankfurt Once?

Level 1



1 "Eschenheimer Gasse decked out with flags"

Even in the 1930 national elections every fifth Frankfurt citizen voted for the Nazi party – 2.5% more than the national average. At the local elections on March 12, 1933 the Nazi party received 47.9% of votes. One day earlier Lord Mayor Ludwig Landmann banned the Nazi party from using the balcony on the Römer or putting the swastika flag there. This liberal local politician was now subjected to anti-Semitic persecution and replaced by Friedrich Krebs, an embattled member of the national and anti-Semitic "völkisch" movement. As this painting by Hans Scheil shows, that very same day the streets were flagged with swastikas and German Imperial War Flags.

Continue to "The Old Town Drama" at the start of the "Town Scapes" gallery (dark red) ▷

2 Model of "The gutting of Frankfurt's Old Town in 1936"

This teaching model dating from 1936 illustrates the modernization of the historical town center which was sold to the citizens as "necessary to restore its health". It included not only measures relating to urban planning but also the resettlement of disagreeable citizens.

At the end of the war the Treuner brothers produced a "Model of Destruction" using rubble from the old town. The World War II air raids in 1944 almost completely destroyed Frankfurt's old town. The purpose of this model was to help win people over to putting up new buildings and sway them against reconstructing the old town.

Continue to the "100 x Frankfurt" gallery (violet), exhibits 70-90. Start with exhibit no. 74 ▷

3 Guild emblems for the "Brunnen des Deutschen Handwerks"

The Nazis wanted to give Frankfurt a new image as a "City of German Crafts". The relevant application was made and Hitler conferred the title in 1935. The purpose of this emphasis on skilled crafts was to supersede Frankfurt's existing self-image as a city of commerce and business with Jewish-liberal tendencies. An 11-meter fountain, "The fountain of the German Crafts", with 126 craft guild emblems was to be produced. However the fountain was never built. It was not aesthetically acceptable and, as it turned out, skilled crafts did not really fit in with Frankfurt.

Continue to exhibit no. 70 ▷

4 Römerbergring and Römerberg-festival

In 1932, theater director Alwin Kronacher and culture councilor Max Michel, two Jewish representatives of the liberal Landmann era, founded the Römerberg festival. As of 1933, the festival was marketed as the "Bayreuth of German classicism" and used for Nazi propaganda. Yet despite its great efforts, the city did not succeed in obtaining the title of "Reichsfestspiele" for the event. In July 1937 the Römerbergring was awarded to two actors who had replaced two of their dismissed Jewish colleagues.

Continue to exhibit no. 75 ▷

5 Swastikas as Christmas tree decorations

How much Nazi ideology dominated peoples' private lives is illustrated by the example of the Schreiber family. Wilhelm Schreiber was an enthusiastic Nazi. He was one of the first Frankfurt citizens to join the Nazi party as early as 1922. At the same time, Schreiber attended Frankfurt's St. Paul's Church congregation. For him, as of 1933 swastikas were part of Christmas and were hung on his Christmas trees.

Continue to exhibit no. 78 ▷

6 Johanna Kirchner's fabric hearts

As of 1933, Johanna Kirchner fought in the resistance to the Nazi regime. This well-known Social Democrat fled to France via Saarland (then under French administration) in 1933, where she was arrested in 1942 as a resistance fighter and deported to Germany.
A citizen of Frankfurt, she was condemned to death in 1944 and executed at the Plötzensee prison of Berlin. She made the fabric hearts in prison for her daughters Lotte and Inge.

Back to exhibit no. 72 ▷

7 The looting of the Museum of Jewish Antiquities

On the so-called “Kristallnacht” (Night of Broken Glass, November 9, 1938) Frankfurt’s synagogues were in flames. The Museum of Jewish Antiquities in what used to be Bankhaus Rothschild on Fahrgasse was also stormed, ravaged and looted. The director of the “Stadtgeschichtliches Museum” (name of the Historical Museum from 1934–45) “saved” numerous objects from the debris. After 1945, a large number of these were given to the “Jewish Cultural Reconstruction” organization in New York – apart from a number of furniture items which were only “discovered” in the museum’s repository at the end of the 1950s.

Continue to exhibit no. 73 ▷

8 Looted silver at the museum

As of 1939 Jewish citizens were compelled to surrender all items of precious metal in their possession.
The Historical Museum benefited from this because it was able to purchase silver items from the municipal loan agency for no more than the value of the raw materials. After 1945, the museum only gave back two thirds of the silver that it had “acquired”. 143 objects were inventorized in 1952 with a note that they had been “discovered at the museum”. This masked their provenance and eradicated the memory of their owners who had either emigrated or been murdered.
The museum first reported on their actual provenance in 2006.

Continue to exhibit no. 77 ▷

9 Prisoners' clothes from the "Katzbach" concentration camp

During World War II many companies exploited slave labourers from the German occupied territories. 217 slave labour camps were to be found in Frankfurt. As of the 1940s the Adlerwerke in the Gallus district was the largest armament factory in Frankfurt. Between August 1944 and March 1945 the SS set up a satellite camp of the Alsatian Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. 1,600 prisoners were detained there, and most of them involved in a revolt by the Polish Home Army in Warsaw in 1944. Only very few of them survived these systematically miserable living conditions.

Continue to exhibit no. 76 ▷

10 Zyklon-B – made by "Degesch" Frankfurt-based company

The Holocaust itself – the systematic eradication of the European Jews – also has a direct connection with Frankfurt. The pesticide Zyklon B (B for Blausäure = prussic acid) was developed by a Frankfurt company, Degesch (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schädlingsbekämpfung m.b.H.; its owner was DEGUSSA and, as of 1936, I.G. Farben as well). As of 1941, the SS used this poison at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp for the mass extermination of human beings and then later at other concentration camps, as well.

Continue to exhibit no. 79 ▷

11 A chunk of glass calls to mind the air raids

There were Allied air raids on Frankfurt as of the 1940s; major attacks destroyed large parts of the city in 1943 and 1944, with more than 6,000 people losing their lives. The Old Town was hit in March 1944. A chunk of glass in which a sugar bowl and a china cup are enclosed is all that was left of one Frankfurt apartment after the air raids on 12 September 1944.

Continue to exhibit no. 83 ▷

12 The Old Town lies in ruins

In order to get hold of building materials and to clear the debris in the Old Town in 1945, the City of Frankfurt and three private companies established the nonprofit Trümmerverwertungsgesellschaft (Debris Salvage Company, TVG). This company cleared the debris and prepared it for use in rebuilding the city. A decree was issued on December 20, 1945 stating that all buildings of which more than 70 percent had been destroyed had been impounded. In 2009 this stone was discovered in the Toll Tower during renovation work at the Historical Museum.

Continue to exhibit no. 88 ▷

13 The witness and offender card index for the Auschwitz trial

From 1963 through 1968 and at the instigation of the Attorney General of the State of Hesse Fritz Bauer, the Frankfurt Office of Public Prosecution conducted three “Auschwitz trials”. For the first time since 1945, 22 defendants were charged with the severest of crimes in the concentration camp Auschwitz. In a card index the Office of Public Prosecution collected all the information about SS personnel and the witnesses heard.

Continue to exhibit no. 90 ▷

14 Model of the “Boger-Schaukel”

It was more than anything else the survivors’ statements at the Auschwitz trial that raised awareness of the Nazi crimes and provoked a discussion on guilt and responsibility amongst the German public. In 1964, this model of the “Boger- Schaukel” by Paul Leo Scheidel demonstrated how one of the instruments of torture actually worked. The statements of survivors led to the conviction of Wilhelm Boger as a murderer and to the imposition of a life sentence.

Continue to exhibit no. 80 ▷

15 Commemorative plate for the US Headquarters

Frankfurt was liberated from the Nazi dictatorship and World War II was over when the American troops invaded on March 26, 1945. In 1952, the US Armed Forces set up their headquarters in Frankfurt, using what had once been I.G. Farben's administrative building in Frankfurt's Westend district for this purpose until 1995.
Far-reaching decisions regarding the future of Germany were made here in the days following World War II, particularly while Dwight D. Eisenhower was Military Governor of the American Occupation Zone. The plate shows I.G. Farben-Haus with an American soldier and the Star-Spangled Banner of the United States.
It commemorates the end of the war.

Continue to the Biographies cabinets (dark blue) ▷

16–21 Frankfurt biographies during the Nazi era

The "Frankfurt Biographies" focus on people whose lives were lastingly changed by Nazism. Hitler Youth member Walter Schreiber and Margot Frank, a Jewish girl of the same age, impressively demonstrate the environments in which the two young people lived during the Nazi era.
After being banned from exercising her profession in 1933, puppeteer Liesel Simon was only allowed to perform at Jüdischer Kulturbund events, until she managed to flee in 1941.
Many people in Germany know Marcel Reich-Ranicki as the "Pope of literature". As a young man the literary critic survived the Warsaw ghetto.
Peter Gingold was a resistance fighter against Nazism. Even after World War II had ended he was committed to peace and opposed fascism.

Continue to the end of the gallery and "Faces" section (blue-grey) ▷

22 Portrait of City Councilor Meta Quarck-Hammerschlag

In 1919, Meta Quarck-Hammerschlag (1864–1964) was the first woman employed by the municipal authorities. She was a volunteer Social Democrat city councillor and worked mainly in social welfare and the youth advisory and support service. She was a strong advocate of equal rights for women in society. But in 1933 Quarck-Hammerschlag was stripped of her office and was banned from work. She subsequently retired almost completely from political life and left Frankfurt during the war. In 1946 she was one of the new founders of the Workers' Welfare Association in Frankfurt. In 1952 she was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit for services to the community.

Proceed two paintings to the right ▷

23 Portrait of "race hygienist" Dr. Werner Fischer-Defoy

A doctor, employee of the municipal health authorities and Nazi party member as of 1929, Fischer-Defoy was appointed successor to the deposed city councillor for health and welfare in March 1933. He made sure that from then on the racist Nazi policies were implemented, cooperating with the "University Institute of Genetics and Race Hygiene" established in 1935 by Otmar von Verschuer.
The health authorities did the groundwork for "euthanasia" crimes and the persecution and murder of Romanies. After 1945 he lost his position with the municipal authorities. However in 1948, Robert Ritter, an equally biased advocate of race hygiene was appointed senior medical health officer. In 1936, Fischer-Defoy had his portrait painted by Emil Dielmann. The Nazi party branch on his left lapel was painted over after 1945.

Continue to the Flag gallery in the "Societies" section in the middle of the gallery (dark blue) ▷

24 Banner "Former French slave labourers"

The protests by Holocaust survivors, critical shareholders, unions and antifascist organizations in Frankfurt drew public attention to a scandal: I.G. Farben was still in existence in the 1980s despite its crimes in the Nazi era although the allies had passed a resolution calling for the closure of this chemicals company after 1945. The successor company "I.G. Farben in Abwicklung" should however accept any outstanding claims and pay out damages.

Continue to the left of this ▷

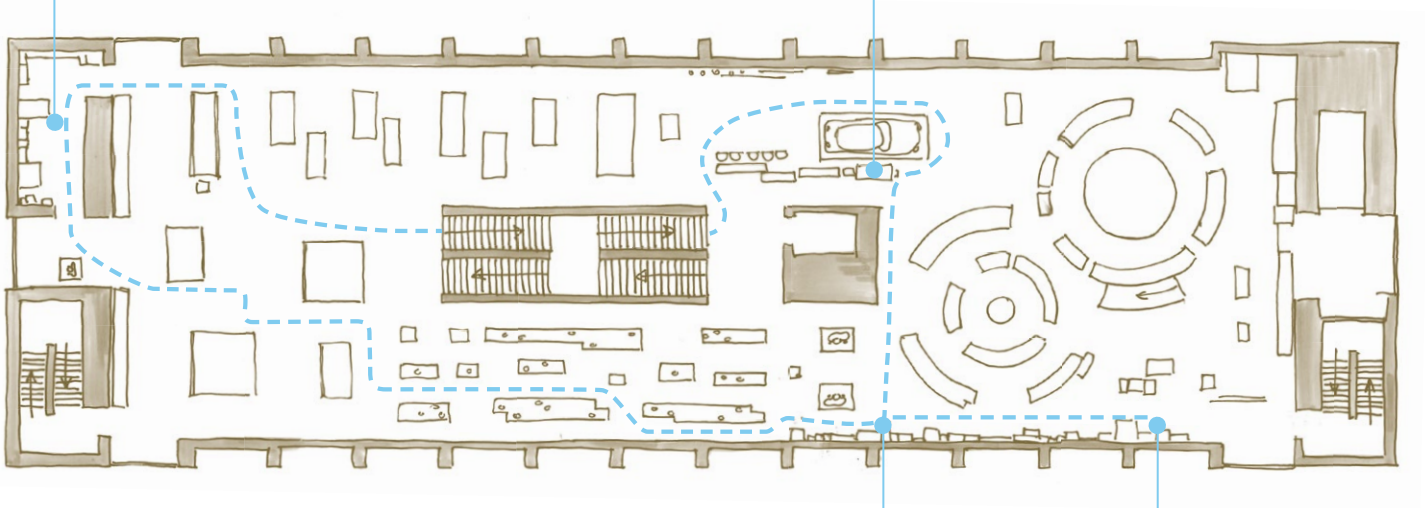
25 Swastika flag of the fencing club Hermannia e.V.

In 1933, many Frankfurt sports clubs freely accepted the Nazi ideology with the Nazi flag soon been flown next to the club flags although there was no statutory requirement for this. Hermannia e.V., a fencing club established in 1873, fell in with this and, as of 1933, asked its Jewish members to leave the club "voluntarily".

Continue via the central staircase to Level 2, to the "Crossings" section in the "Global City" gallery (yellow) ▷

Frankfurt Once?

Level 2

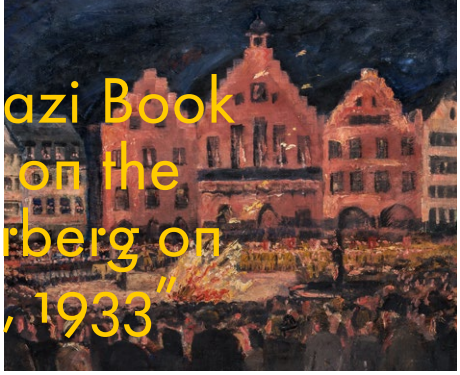


26 The myth about the invention of the "Autobahn"

Propaganda positioned Adolf Hitler as the inventor of the freeway ("Autobahn") and its "masterbuilder"; this myth persists even today in people's collective memory.
The plan was to put in place a continuous network of roads for motor traffic starting in Frankfurt. But the development plans dated back to 1926 and the Nazis simply took them over. Hitler staged the ground-breaking ceremony to coincide with the Nazi party's party conference for the region of Hesse on September 23, 1933. He presented himself as the boss of the construction project and in charge of an army of those who had previously been unemployed. The Nazis wanted to bask in the glory of this project, however it was by no means the case that as many people found work there as officially stated.

Continue to the right to the "Communication" section (brown), letter "B" ▷

27 "Nazi Book Burning on the Römerberg on May 10, 1933"



Frankfurt University joined in with the "action against the un-German spirit" organized and staged by the "German Student Union". Even the city of books embarked on a systematic persecution of those authors whose writings did not conform with Nazi ideology.
The "cleansing" process began on May 6, 1933 in the University library. Four days later, the books were loaded up onto a dung cart pulled by two oxen and processed to the Römerberg accompanied by students, lecturers and members of the party and of the SS, along with other people. Speeches and music accompanied the bonfire which was lit after nightfall. There has been a commemorative plaque in memory of these events on the Römerberg since 2001 with a quotation from Heine: "Where books are burnt eventually people will be burnt as well."

Continue to the right in the "Communication" section (brown), letter "F" ▷

28 "Model Frankfurt" telephone

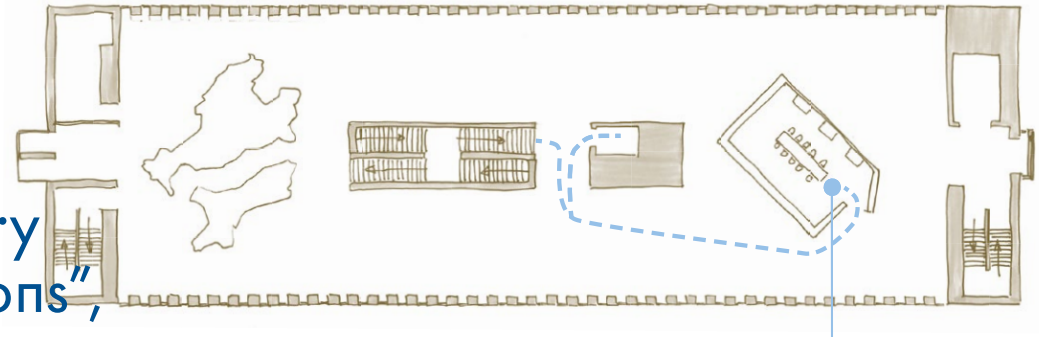
This telephone is a design object from "Neues Frankfurt". Its "inventor" was Harry Fuld, the founder of a telephone company named after him. When he died in 1932, the company boasted more than 100 subsidiaries with a total of 5,000 employees. In 1933 people started boycotting the company and gradually dispossessing Fuld's heirs for specious reasons, considering this family business to be "Jewish". After protracted negotiations limited partner's interest in Telefonbau und Normalzeit GmbH was returned to his son Peter Harry Fuld in 1951. The fate of Harry Fuld's art collection is one of the most spectacular cases of Nazi stolen art.

Continue to the Study Rooms at the end of the gallery ▷

29 Research further in the Study Rooms

In the study rooms on the two exhibition levels in "Frankfurt Once?" there are objects and stories for you to look at and which provide more in-depth information. In this section, you can conduct your own research on the topics in the permanent exhibition and expand your knowledge – at the media stations or in the "glossaries" where, amongst other things, important terms relating to Nazi history are explained. These refer to Frankfurt and to the exhibits at the exhibition. On Level 1 there is a large wall of objects. This includes objects for you to touch. The objects in the museum's possession include for example a collection of shell splinters from the period between 1940 and 1945, and the sign from the dental practice of a Nazi dentist. One special piece is a cup showing a portrait of Adolf Hitler. It is easy to see that it has been painted over – presumably after the end of the Nazi era. But the paint has not lasted, revealing the picture of the "Führer" once again.

Continue via central stairwell or by elevator to Level 3 ▷



30 The "Library of the Generations", 2000 – 2105

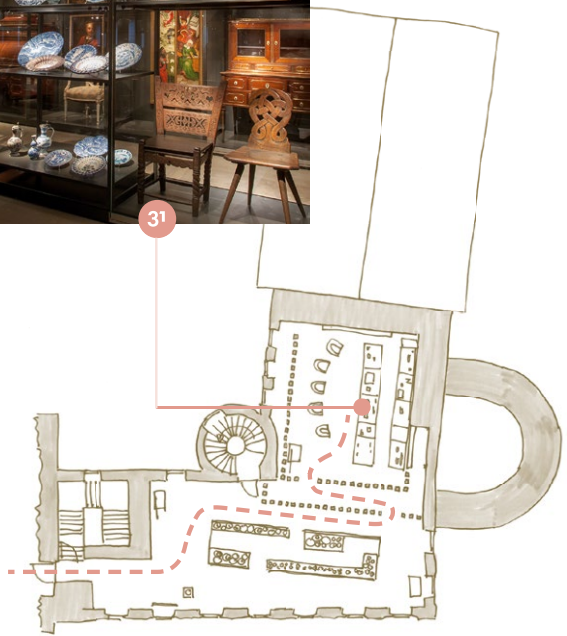
The Library of the Generations is an artistic remembrance project by Sigrid Sigurdsson, to which over 100 authors are contributing. The project is intended to be cross-generational, spanning 105 years (2000 - 2105). Lots of the articles focus on the Nazis. Lots of the older authors talk about persecution and murder, exile and resistance – for example Trude Simonsohn, Irmgard Heydorn, and Hans Schwert. Others, like Silvia Tennenbaum and Edgar Sarton-Saretzki describe, how their childhoods were influenced by the Nazis. In their articles, authors of the "1968 generation" also address National Socialism, in particular the role their parents and teachers played.
Use of the library is possible with advance booking, please ask a staff member!

Continue via the central staircase or the elevator to Level 0, back to the lobby, then to the Collectors' Museum, Level 4, through the portico. ▷

31 The disbanding of Julius Heyman's collection

Julius Heyman (1863–1925) came from a Jewish family of bankers and invested his money in a private collection, which he presented to the public every day in his villa in the Nordend district: in period rooms with furniture and items from German Late Gothic to Baroque. His collection featured over 3,000 objects and after his death in 1925 he bequeathed it to the city. He intended his villa to serve as a branch of the Historical Museum for 100 years, but as early as 1940, contravening the contract, the museum's director Ernstotto zu Solms-Laubach decided to disband and sell the collection. The exhibition reconstructs the whereabouts of items in Frankfurt museums.

Collectors' Museum
Level 4

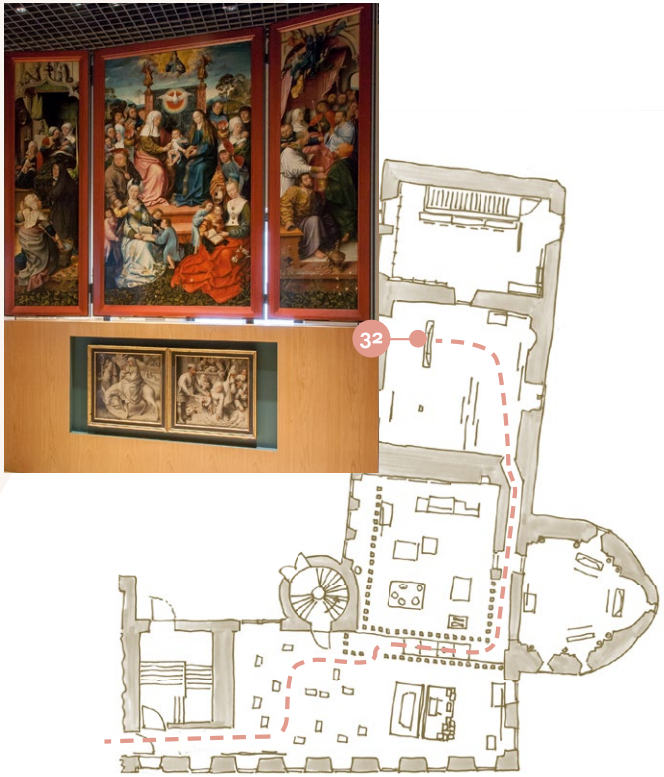


Continue via the historical spiral staircase or the elevator down to the Collectors' Museum, Level 1 ▷

32 The Altarpiece of St. Anne: Restitution leads to reunification

Since its founding in 1878 the Historical Museum has permanently exhibited the Altarpiece of St. Anne, but only since 2012 on the scale that the Master of Frankfurt painted it in 1515 for the Dominican monastery. One of the gray painitings with the Saints Ottilia and Cecilia on the outside of the altar was among the works which Hermann Göring stole in 1940 from a Jewish art dealer in the Netherlands to display them in his private museum. In 2006, following a spectacular restitution process by the Dutch state it was handed over to the heiress of the Dutch art dealer, who today lives in New York. She agreed to sell the panel to the museum to complete the Frankfurt altar.

Back to the lobby: So why not visit the museum cafe and enjoy some refreshing snacks and beverages. ▷



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Blog