

What is Exilmuseum?

Ideas, Subject, Architecture

“Nobody ever asked me what exile means deep inside—and ultimately it’s something like losing your life’s core, your life context—nobody ever asked me about that, nobody ever apologized for it. Now finally a place will emerge to explore this question. How wonderful it would be if I could still be around to experience that!”

Georg Stefan Troller (b. 1921),
journalist und filmmaker,
lives in Paris, fled Germany in 1938.

Exilmuseum is being built at Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof

The focus: the years of exile from 1933–1945. Persecuted by the Nazis, around half a million people fled Germany during this period. Countless numbers of them started their journey in search of safe exile from Anhalter Bahnhof in the center of Berlin, all departing into an uncertainty that for some resulted in estrangement, fear, and homesickness for the rest of their lives.

Exilmuseum Berlin will tell of the people who suffered this fate and bridge the way to the present. How did flight and uprooting become key experiences of our time? What links exile then and now? And what can we learn from history today?

“I left Berlin very early in the morning on January 30, 1933, as if driven by a bad premonition. On the way to Anhalter Bahnhof, the streets were still virtually devoid of people ... I left Berlin without having said goodbye.”
Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point*, 1942

“Understanding What Exile Truly Means”

For many years, the flight from the Nazis remained a side issue overshadowed by commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. This museum is dedicated to commemorating exile after 1933. It will allow us to think about what was destroyed and lost due to the expulsion of these exiles, but also what was rescued by their survival. These stories of survival also bring us back to our world today, which is more than ever shaped by flight and migration. Exilmuseum is to become a place that makes us understand “what exile truly means,” in the words of Herta Müller, and thus takes a stand against inhumanity, promoting peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

Presenting History by Telling Stories

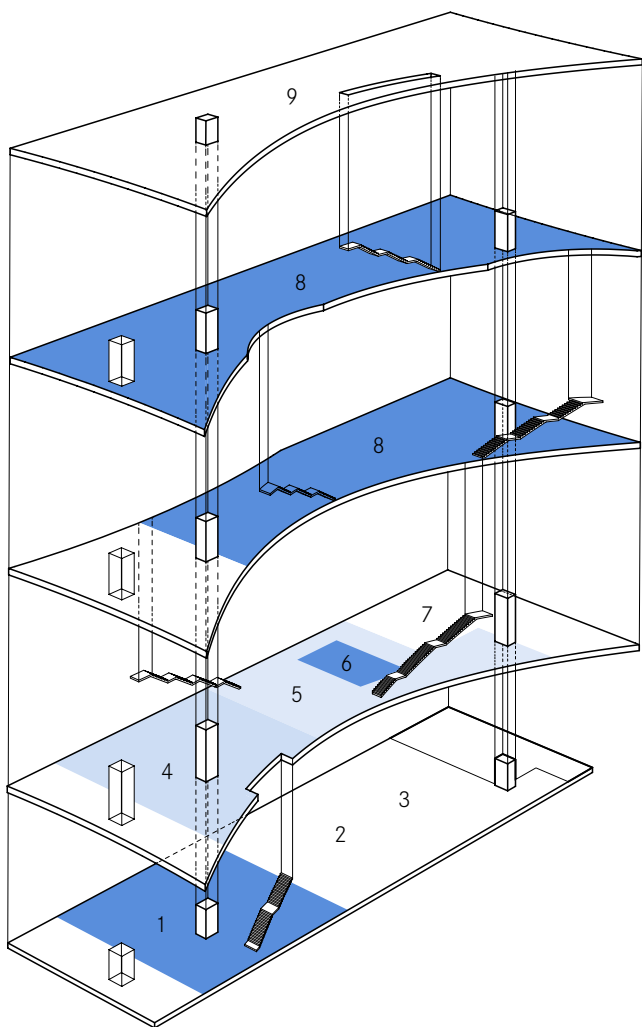
The museum will present the experience of exiles with the help of thematic spaces using a variety of media, presenting history by telling individual stories.

A Commitment from the Private Sector

Stiftung Exilmuseum was founded as a private initiative in 2018. It has already established a broad network that encompasses worldwide partnerships and collaborations with existing institutions and archives on the subject of exile. The project's patrons are Herta Müller, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Germany's former president Joachim Gauck.

Future Outlook

The museum opening is planned for 2026. The new building behind the ruins of Anhalter Bahnhof's former portico is being erected according to designs of the renowned Copenhagen architectural firm Dorte Mandrup.



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|---|-----------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Temporary exhibition space | 7 | Bistro |
| 2 | Area for cultural use | 8 | Permanent exhibition |
| 3 | Area for athletic use | 9 | Rooftop terrace |
| 4 | Events, museum education | | |
| 5 | Visitor services | | |
| 6 | Exhibit: About the Location | | |

Schematic Surface Plan

An Overview of the Museum Layout

CENTRAL SPACES AND RECURRING EXHIBITS

The Bioscope

The “Bioscope” will be the spatial and conceptual heart of the institution. In planning is a round cinema with a 180-degree screen. The Bioscope will focus exclusively on life stories, an emotional close up on individual fates in which the audience can immerse themselves in a cinema-like atmosphere.

Trail of Exile

The “Trail of Exile” will be a loose series of smaller exhibits featured in almost all spaces of the museum. Using leitmotifs like “rooting,” “waiting,” “passport/identity,” or “language,” it traces out the universal experience of exile, the overarching subject of the museum. Each small exhibit will explore a certain aspect with the help of a surprisingly new scenography and fitting quotes from the exile literature then and now.

About the Location

The free-admission exhibition in the museum’s foyer will explore the history of Anhalter Bahnhof in general as a monument. The station was not just a point of departure for exiles, but also for deportations to concentration camps. Here, we learn more about the people that once fled from Anhalter Bahnhof into exile, but also about the original station itself, the history of its construction and architecture.



© Architekten Petersen Berlin

Space for Temporary Exhibitions

The space for temporary exhibitions will allow a deeper look at certain aspects of the permanent exhibition and exile today using manifold formats: classical exhibitions with historical objects, participatory exhibitions, and multimedia presentations.

Century of Exile

This space with an introductory film will form the start of the permanent exhibition. It will pick up the visitors in their present and bring them back in history. Has there always been expulsion and exile? What are the main reasons for forced displacement? Why are flight and uprooting central experiences of the twentieth century and what role does exile during the Nazi period play here?

Snapshot, 1930

This space will be dedicated to the history before the mass expulsion of the Nazi period. The Weimar Republic as a promise with social and cultural advancement, but at the same time a young democracy threatened by crises and political violence. The focus will be placed on those who stood for Weimar's "promise," who briefly later were subject to immediate threat.

Expulsion

This part of the exhibition will depict the rapid escalation of the persecution of Jews and political dissidents after the Nazis came to power. Step by step, more and more people were driven out of the country until the violence turned into deportation and mass murder and made flight impossible. Political resistance went unheard.

In Transit

A time of transit followed expulsion, shaped by close escapes, provisional hiding places, endless waiting at offices, fear, uncertainty, and diffuse hopes. This room will explore this basic experience of existential insecurity with a film installation, creating a powerful scenography of an "interior" space of feeling.

Where To?

This section will show where the persecuted were able to go and how they fled from the expanding territory held by the Nazis to ever more distant countries. How did exiles prepare their escape, and where were the escape routes? How did individual countries receive the refugees? Where were the centers of exile? Who or what helped with leaving and arriving, and how did the networks operate?

In New Worlds

How did the refugees fare in the countries that accepted them? In this exhibit, visitors will be presented with objects and images that are surprising and awaken curiosity. Each of them will reveal an aspect of a life story, the typical experience of individuals in various professions, or everyday life in exile. The many individual narratives will thus result in a general sociology and a cultural history of exile.



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courtesy of Steven Pressman

Space of Debate

This space will combine interviews with eyewitnesses, historians, philosophers, and authors of the present who reflect on the experience of exile in the Nazi period and compare it to exile today. It will thus serve as a conceptual bridge from historical exile to exile today. What can we learn from historical exile for our present and future?

Exile Today

In this final room, the perspective will shift to today. What is life like for an exile in Germany? What experiences have refugees here had, and where are the links to historic exile? How can this knowledge contribute to an open, multicultural Germany that embraces difference?

Snapshot, 1955

With the end of the war, for many exile did not end. Only a fragment of those who left wanted or were able to return to one of the two German states after 1945. What role did they play in the reconstruction and political life of West and East Germany? How did people in Germany react to those returning? And what attitude did the newly founded German states take to their recent past after the end of occupation in 1955?

“Exilmuseum Berlin: a place of unforgettable stories, a place of reflection, a place of empathy. A place that fosters understanding of the word exile and thus takes a stand against totalitarianism and inhumanity.”

Christoph Stölzl

More information is available here:
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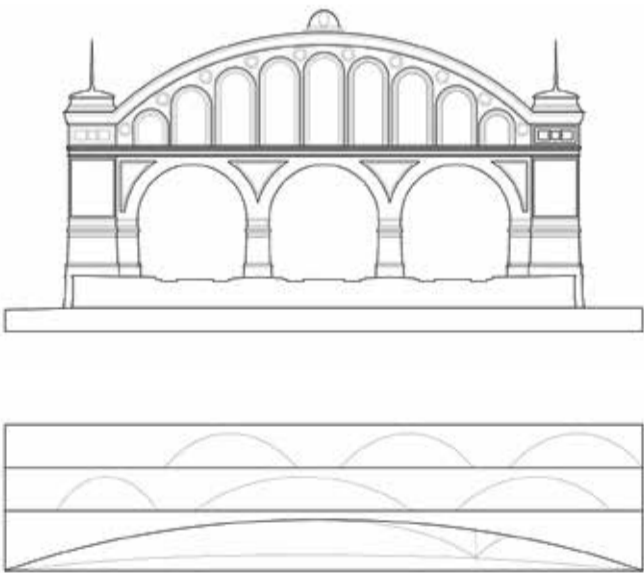
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The New Building for Exilmuseum Berlin



Illustrations: Dorte Mandrup/Mir
Concept: Cornelia Vossen, Dorothee Käser / Texts: Cornelia Vossen, Sarah Blendin / Design: Dorothee Käser / Translation: Brian Currid



The Location

All that is left of the once huge Anhalter Bahnhof, a railway station located in the middle of the city, are the ruins of the entrance portico. Countless exiles fled from here after the Nazis came to power, including Klaus and Heinrich Mann, Alfred Döblin, Max Reinhardt, and George Grosz. For many, the street in front of Anhalter Bahnhof was the last place where they felt the Berlin cobblestones beneath their feet and started out facing an uncertain future. The remaining ruins of the portico reflect symbolically this state of transit and new beginnings, the brutal disruption of so many lives. The central location in the midst of other museums with related subject matter and other cultural institutions can offer an opportunity for interesting interactions.

The Competition

For the realization of the museum building, Stiftung Exilmuseum held an architectural competition in cooperation with Berlin's Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing and the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. The planned building will include approx. 3,500 square meters of space for the museum and 700 square meters for leisure and cultural use by the district and third parties. Architectural firms invited to submit proposals: Bruno Fioretti Marquez (Berlin/Lugano), Diller Scofidio + Renfro (New York), Dorte Mandrup (Copenhagen), Kéré Architecture (Berlin),

Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos (Madrid/ Berlin), SANAA (Tokyo), Sauerbruch Hutton (Berlin), Staab Architekten (Berlin), URBANA (Dhaka), and ZAO/standardarchitecture (Beijing).

The Architect

Dorte Mandrup and her prizewinning firm from Copenhagen won the architectural competition. Her design convinced the jury with its dynamically curved façade that seems to embrace the remaining ruins of the portico as virtual historical "eyewitnesses." Dorte Mandrup founded her firm in 1999. It is internationally known for creating sculpturally influenced architecture with a unique sense of place and materiality: for example, the Wadden Sea Trilogy implemented in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, or the Norwegian exhibition center The Whale.



Dorte Mandrup took up the motifs of arches, bridges, and gates in the old station architecture, but interpreted them using a modern architectural language all her own.



Between the historic ruins of the portico and the new building, a wide space will bridge the past to now.



The three-story-high space of the expansive foyer allows for manifold views of the portico ruins from all levels.