

**Grußwort (englisch)
Ausstellungseröffnung
„ABSENCE AND LOSS“**

21. Januar 2018
11.30 Uhr, Ausstellungshaus Spiegelgasse 11

Herr Habs thank you so much for your kind words and your understanding of the ideas behind my exhibition, Absence and Loss. I am delighted to have been invited to exhibit here in the museum and in this beautiful town, once the home of my mother's family, particularly at this time close to Holocaust Memorial Day when we all reflect on the past.

I was introduced to the wonderful work of the Actives Museum two years ago when the historical researcher Wolfgang Fritzsche kindly took us to visit my family graves in the Jewish cemetery here. We also visited the museum and discussed the possibility that Absence and Loss might fit in well with the overall concept of the museum.

I learnt that this old building was used by the Jewish community since the 1700s and had been saved by local citizens. In some way, therefore, the lives of Wiesbaden's Jews have not been forgotten and a lasting testimony to their presence remains.

It has been exciting for me to learn more details about my ancestors who are first mentioned in records as living in Schierstein in the late 1700s. Maier Loewenthal who moved to Wiesbaden was born in 1832 in Schierstein and in 1858, having recently got engaged to be married, applied to become a citizen of Wiesbaden. Maier was a master butcher but claimed that as there were already five butchers in Schierstein, he would not be able to make a reasonable living. In Wiesbaden, he argued, there were better opportunities, as there were fewer butchers. As Kosher ritual laws prevent Jews from eating the hindquarters, he also argued that he would be benefitting the poor, as Kosher butchers sold these forbidden parts very cheaply. I found it amusing that a few years later, Maier was firmly established in Wiesbaden as a wine merchant and who knows if he ever really intended to work as a butcher.

My family seems to have taken advantage of the opening up of occupations and trades previously forbidden to Jews. Just like most of you, I imagine, my background and roots are purely German and my family lived in Hessen from at least the 1600s, if not earlier. They lived lives typical of their time. Hitler and the

Nazis disrupted that history forever, but with great fortune, unlike many of my wider family who were murdered, my closest family all survived and my refugee parents were forever grateful that they found safety in England. However, I still experienced the void that remained in Europe as a result of my parent's dislocation from their heritage that had been destroyed.

This exhibition is the culmination of many years of research and discovery into my ancestors' lives in Germany over the centuries. The void I just talked about seemed so palpable when we visited Berlin in February 2005. Walking the, to me, empty streets, everywhere we went seemed to resound with absent Jewish life and culture. I yearned to fill them again with the past.

In Germany today you are no longer responsible for the terror of the past. But how do descendants of both the bystanders and the perpetrators of this terror commemorate and mourn its victims; a destroyed people and vibrant culture that had been for centuries an integral part of German life? In answer, artists have created counter monuments that challenge the viewer. These monuments, many of which are to be found in Berlin, demand thought and reflection.

Inspired by the work of these creative artists, I decided to photograph the monuments, to both document them and also stimulate debate on Holocaust remembrance. In creating a personal documentary photo essay, I was able to approach the Germany of my heritage and my family's past.

That is my journey, but the exhibition is also here to remind you as inhabitants from this town that Jews were once very much part of local life.

Historical documents from the 14th century mention the presence of Jews in Wiesbaden and they had continued to live here throughout the centuries. From 1926, overt Nazi anti-Semitic activities began in the city and this worsened considerably after 1933 when there were some 2,700 Jews in Wiesbaden, amounting to just under 2% of the city's population. The 1938 Reichspogromnacht was particularly violent and after destroying the synagogues, the rioters turned their fury toward Jews themselves and their homes and businesses, looting and destroying hundreds of them. Many were arrested and sent to Buchenwald. As I am sure you know, 1,507 names of local Jews have been inscribed on the memorial walls on Michelsberg Hill. In other words just over half the 1933 Jewish population were deported and murdered.

It is clear from the installation being shown here alongside *Absence and Loss* of memorials in Wiesbaden that many efforts have been made to commemorate the victims. For example Gunter Demnig has laid 651 Stolpersteine for Jewish and non-Jewish victims

Herr Habs, you have indicated that these memorials are not part of the public consciousness. This may be so, I cannot judge, but what is clear to me is that the educational work undertaken by the Actives Museum is a very valuable addition to holocaust education and awareness.

As the daughter of Jewish refugees from Germany, I believe I have a responsibility to follow the central Jewish injunction *Zachor*, to remember, a command which has

followed Jews down the centuries. The survivors of the Holocaust have become fewer and fewer and I feel a responsibility to those who suffered and died by creating something that will hopefully stimulate debate and pass on the challenge of confronting both Holocaust remembrance and the dangers to which political extremism, nationalism and racial intolerance can lead.

I am extremely grateful to Herr Habs for inviting me to exhibit and I would also like to thank all those others whose names I do not know.

And finally a thank you to you, the audience, for coming here today

Wiesbaden 21.01. 2018

Marion Davies
Schöpferin der Ausstellung
„Absence and Loss“