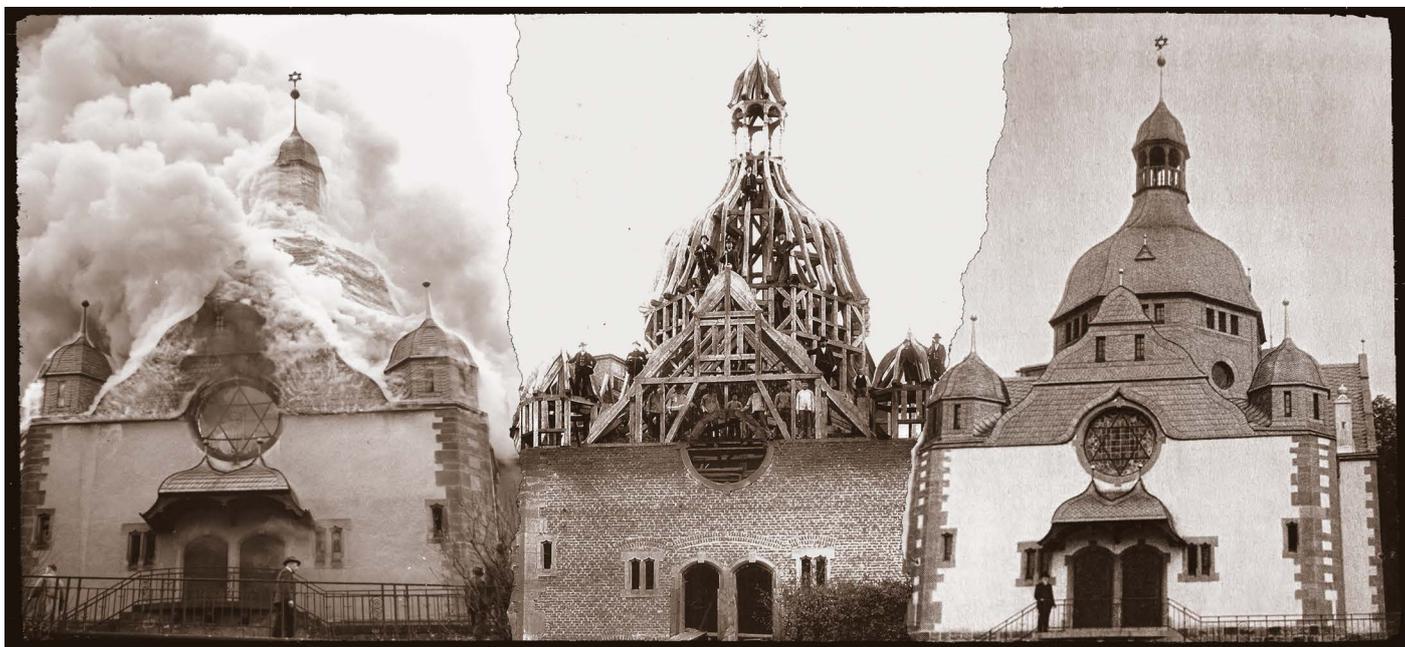


SYNAGOGE SIEGEN
1904 • 1938 • 2021



The collage shows images of the Siegen synagogue during its destruction on November 10, 1938, and earlier views at its Richtfest (topping-out ceremony) on October 15, 1903, and after its dedication on July 22, 1904.

The Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation Siegerland e.V. presents

Virtual reconstruction of the Siegen synagogue

November 9, 2021

within the framework of the anniversary year
„1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany“

Location: Exterior wall of the Bunker (Aktives Museum Südwestfalen),
Obergraben 10, Siegen

Time: Tuesday, November 9, 2021, 6:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN

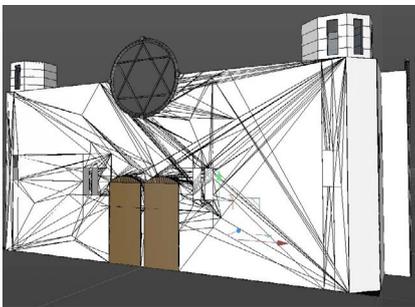
1904 • 1938 • 2021

Virtual reconstruction of the Siegen synagogue

To commemorate the ‚Reichspogromnacht‘ (the Night of Broken Glass), multimedia artist Gabriela von Seltmann and her international team virtually resurrect the Siegen synagogue. In an animated video and sound installation, the synagogue, which burned down on November 10, 1938, rises from the rubble and appears on the outer wall of the Hochbunker (Aktives Museum Südwestfalen) in its previous form. Thus, the center of the Siegerland Jewish community, inaugurated in 1904, returns to the collective memory of the city. Historical and contemporary recordings of synagogal chants accompany the two- and three-dimensional animation.

The premiere of the first virtual reconstruction of a synagogue in Germany is intended to recall, on a representative basis, the more than 1400 synagogues and prayer houses that were destroyed during the so-called Reichskristallnacht in November 1938. This unique event intends to evoke a variety of emotions and possibly memories in viewers, both those on-site and those worldwide watching via live broadcast on the Internet. For some viewers, the event will be their first-ever encounter with Jewish culture and Judaism.

Since 1973, the district of Siegen-Wittgenstein has been closely connected with the district of Emek Hefer in Israel through an official partnership. The partnership was the first official district partnership between Germany and Israel. The university and industrial city of Siegen has about 100,000 inhabitants and is located approximately 130 kilometers north of Frankfurt/Main and 90 kilometers east of Cologne.



Brick by brick,
the Siegen synagogue
is reassembled
on the computer.

The project of the virtual reconstruction of the Siegen Synagogue is a German-Polish-Hungarian and Jewish-Christian co-production. The artists come from countries in which nationalist-autocratic governments are transforming democracy into authoritarian forms of government, as in Hungary and Poland; and from countries in which anti-Semitism permeates all strata of society, as in Germany. The project is thus also intended as a warning and reminder of growing hostility towards Jews.

This open-air program will also include the showing of the virtual reconstruction of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw, which premiered in Warsaw in 2018. This Great Synagogue reconstruction serves as a cross-border symbol of how death and destruction can be overcome through memory, reconciliation, and love. The Great Synagogue, a landmark of the once flourishing Jewish life in Warsaw, was built in 1878 and demolished in the Warsaw Ghetto by the SS on May 16, 1943. The Warsaw Ghetto stands – along with Auschwitz – as a symbol of the extermination of Eastern European Jewish life by the Germans. Before the Shoah, Warsaw was home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, with over 300,000 members.

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN

1904 • 1938 • 2021

Gabriela von Seltmann:

“Only an honest open engagement with the past can guarantee a process of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence in the present and the future. Death and destruction must not have the last word! Through memory, reconciliation, hope, and love, we can overcome death and destruction. If we don't work on our collective memory, we will pass on our problems to the next generations and their children.”

“But just remembering is not enough. Memory must always be combined with empathy. And empathy can be awakened most effectively through artistic projects because art evokes those feelings that are a prerequisite for empathy. I believe that art has the power to restore memory, to bring hope, to inspire, and to heal. When there is empathy, there is no fear.”

Frederick Whittaker, US Holocaust expert:

“This project shows that art has the power to compel us to Remember, to bring us into Hope, to inspire our Healing, and to call us into a Greater Love. “



The photo shows the virtual reconstruction of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw, which was demolished on May 16, 1943, on the orders of SS General Jürgen Stroop.

On its former site now stands a financial high-rise, on whose outer facade the video installation was projected.



The multimedia installations marking the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on April 19, 2018, and April 18, 2019, and – due to the pandemic – on September 26, 2020, were viewed by up to 7,000 visitors on-site and several thousand worldwide via live stream.

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN

1904 • 1938 • 2021

The Jews in Siegen and the Siegerland

The Siegerland region of southern Westphalia is one of the regions in Germany where for centuries, Jews were not allowed to settle. The oldest documented mention of Jews in Siegen dates back to 1253, but the medieval Jewish community was probably erased during the plague pogroms of 1349/50. Until the Napoleonic period (around 1800), the Princely House of Nassau denied Jews the right of residence in the Siegerland. Only when Jews were granted more rights and freedoms in the German provinces (under the influence of the French Revolution (1789) and the Enlightenment) was it possible for a Jewish family to settle in Siegen in 1815, for the first time since the Middle Ages. However, it took another three decades before the city granted them citizenship in 1843.

The beginning of significant Jewish life in Siegen can be traced back to 1867 when several Jewish families from the neighboring Sauerland and Wittgenstein moved to the growing industrial city. In 1884 they founded a congregation, which built a synagogue twenty years later (1904). However, the community, which usually numbered around a hundred members, did not last more than six decades; in February 1943, the last Siegen Jews were deported to National Socialist extermination camps. Before that, on November 10, 1938, Siegen SS and SA men had set fire to and destroyed the synagogue. Since 1945, only a few Jews have lived in Siegen.



The textile merchant Meier Leser Stern (center) was the central figure of the Siegerland Jewish community.

The photo was taken on October 6, 1920, at the golden wedding anniversary celebration of the couple Sara (1850–1933) and Meier Leser Stern (1834–1924). Meier Leser Stern was a co-founder of the Siegen synagogue congregation and its chairman from its founding until October 1921.

The couple had five children and 18 grandchildren, eight of whom were able to emigrate in time and survived the Shoah in Australia, England, Israel, and the USA.

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN 1904 • 1938 • 2021



The Siegen Synagogue

The Siegen synagogue was designed by the renowned Berlin architect Eduard Fürstenau (1862–1938). The space of worship had 90 seats for men downstairs and 70 for women in the gallery. A choir and a harmonium musically accompanied the services. The building also contained a schoolroom, a ritual bath, and a janitor's apartment.

The synagogue, inaugurated on July 22, 1904, was set on fire by Siegen SA and SS men around noon on November 10, 1938. The fire department concentrated on preventing the fire from spreading to the surrounding buildings. The numerous onlookers behaved quietly; neither applause nor protest could be heard. After the destruction, the Nazi authorities demanded that the community demolish the ruins at their own expense and sell the land. On July 20, 1940 – almost exactly 36 years to the day after the synagogue's dedication – the property was sold to the city of Siegen for far less than its value. In 1941, the city built an air raid shelter on the property. Nothing remained to remind anyone of the synagogue that once stood here.

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN

1904 • 1938 • 2021

Contributing artists

GABRIELA (GABI) VON SELTMANN (Hilchenbach/Warsaw) is one of the participants and proponents of Jewish culture in Poland (Foreign Policy/USA, 2020). Her portfolio includes animated videos, documentaries, avant-garde music theater, and large-scale visual projects. Von Seltmann's projects aim to preserve and revive the rich heritage of Jewish culture in Europe.

<https://gabivonselmann.com/>

The Polish-Hungarian artist couple ELWIRA WOJTUNIK and POPESZ CSABA LÁNG (Krakow) present their interactive multimedia installations, animations, and augmented reality art projects throughout the globe under the label Elektro Moon Vision.

<https://elektromoon.com/>

MARCIN LENARCZYK (Warsaw), aka DJ Lenar, is an internationally sought-after film composer, sound designer, sound engineer, and avant-garde musician.

Born in Chernobyl, Ukraine, and trained in Tel Aviv and Vienna, singer SVETA KUNDISH (Berlin) is as much at home in concert halls as she is in synagogues. Since 2018, she has led services in the Braunschweig Jewish Community as prayer leader and cantor.

<https://www.pattysounds.com/sveta-kundish--patrick-farrell-de.html>

Photographer and papercut artist MONIKA KRAJEWSKA (Warsaw) has dedicated herself to Jewish art for over 40 years. With her artworks, she has revived the craft of Eastern European Jewish papercuts, which was largely erased by the Nazi regime.

<https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/have-your-say/powerful-papercuts/>

MAREK GAJCZAK (Krakow) is one of the most important cinematographers and directors of photography in contemporary Polish cinema.

<http://www.gajczak.pl/>

For more than 30 years, UWE VON SELTMANN (Hilchenbach/Warsaw) has been concerned with documenting Jewish history and culture and the familial, social, and political effects of the Nazi era on the present. Most recently, his work *Wir sind da!* [We Are Here], the official book for the anniversary year „1700 years of Jewish life in Germany,“ was published in March 2021. (homunculus verlag Erlangen).

<https://uwe-von-seltmann.de>

SYNAGOGUE SIEGEN

1904 • 1938 • 2021

The virtual reconstruction of the Siegen synagogue takes place on the initiative of the SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN-JEWISH COOPERATION SIEGERLAND (CJZ). Founded in 1959, the CJZ began commemorating the Reichspogromnacht of 1938 every year since 1964 on the site of the destroyed synagogue. This year's commemoration on November 9, 2021, will be held as part of the anniversary year „1700 years of Jewish life in Germany“.

www.cjz-siegen.de

Contact:

Uwe von Seltmann

uvseltmann@gmail.com

Phone & WhatsApp: +49 172 3474445

<https://synagoge-siegen.de/presse>

Collage: Gabriela von Seltmann; Photos: Archiv Aktives Museum Südwestfalen, Berlinische Galerie, Elektro Moon Vision, Siegerländer Heimat- und Geschichtsverein, Uwe von Seltmann.

Text: Uwe von Seltmann. Translation: Katharina Joy Book