

Ars Electronica and the Jewish Museum Vienna present

The Old Linz Synagogue – A Virtual Walking Tour

Press Preview on November 15, 2016 with

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Stefan Giegler (Linz city councilman, vice-chairman of the Board of Directors of Ars Electronica Linz GmbH)

Danielle Spera (director of the Jewish Museum of Vienna)

Anna Mitgutsch (author, member of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community of Linz)

René Mathe (graduate of the College of Architecture and Design, Technical University of Vienna)

Lois Lammerhuber (photographer)

Gerfried Stocker (artistic director of Ars Electronica Linz GmbH)

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The Old Linz Synagogue – A Virtual Walking Tour

(Linz, November 15, 2016) Countless synagogues throughout Germany and Austria were plundered, wrecked and set ablaze on *Kristallnacht*, November 9-10, 1938. One of the Jewish houses of worship that went up in flames that night was the synagogue of the Linz Jewish Community. The beautiful classic structure at Bethlehemstraße 26 that had been dedicated on May 10, 1877 was torched by members of the Nazis' SA and SS units. The ruin remained a silent witness to history until 1967 when the Community commissioned architect Fritz Goffitzer to plan a new facility, which was dedicated in 1968. Now, thanks to René Mathe, we can envision what the old synagogue actually looked like. In conjunction with his masters' thesis at the Technical University of Vienna, he created a detailed digital reconstruction of the ruined building. The Ars Electronica Futurelab then used this data to create a virtual walking tour of the synagogue for Deep Space 8K.

The Old Linz Synagogue

On May 16, 1876, the Jewish Community of Linz laid the cornerstone for its first synagogue at Bethlehemstraße 26. It took about a year to construct the 25x17-meter structure with approximately 425 square meters on ground level. Its architectural design was oriented on the neo-Romanesque-style synagogue in Kassel, Germany with its characteristic arched windows and doors on both the front and sides. Although the structure had a markedly individual style, it was nevertheless a nice fit in the surrounding architectural ensemble. It sat on a pedestal which made it considerably higher than the adjacent structures; there were three flights of steps leading up to the main entrance. The synagogue's interior, on the other hand, took leave of the Kasseler model—instead of the round arches and barrel vault ceilings that would have been in keeping with Romanesque historicism, the architect went with cast iron columns to support the galleries and ceilings. In the sanctuary itself, seating for the men was on the ground floor and the women in the upper galleries. The seats of honor reserved for the rabbi and the cantor were at the back wall opposite the main entrance. Six large double windows on both sides provided natural lighting by day; 16 ceiling lamps, a chandelier and numerous candelabras illuminated the space after sundown. With approximately 255 square meters of space, the sanctuary offered seating for 300 on the ground floor and 200 in the galleries. In 1906, the synagogue was expanded in order to add an additional 500 square meters of usable space to accommodate a vestry and an organ.

Virtual Reconstruction of Destroyed Synagogues

The Technical University of Vienna has been utilizing computer-aided processes to reconstruct destroyed synagogues since 1998. Initially, the focus was on Jewish houses of worship built during the turn-of-the-century construction boom. Even if the respective urban planning context exerted a modicum of pressure to exercise stylistic reserve, these

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synagogues were nevertheless a significant enrichment of the cityscape. And those whose aim was to destroy these synagogues and to eliminate the Jewish cultural heritage they represented left nothing to chance!

Once work was completed on all synagogues in Austria's capital, TU Vienna turned its attention to Jewish houses of worship in the provinces and crown lands of the Hapsburg Monarchy, 50 of which have now been virtually reconstructed in various depiction formats. They make it possible to interactively encounter these ritual spaces and get a realistic impression of them.

René Mathe Reconstructs the Linz Synagogue

Most of the detailed reconstruction models were produced in conjunction with degree projects. In René Mathe's case, his work on the Linz Synagogue was to satisfy the requirements for a master's degree at the College of Architecture and Design, where his faculty advisors were Bob Martens and Herbert Peter. The project got off to a rocky start: The Nazi regime's endeavors to expunge all traces of Jewish life in Linz made it exceedingly difficult to find usable drawings of the old synagogue. René Mathe finally discovered what he needed in the archives of the City of Linz and the Linz Diocese as well as the Jewish Community of Vienna. The Jewish Museum of Vienna also provided him with access to text descriptions of the building and eyewitness accounts of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. Another valuable source of information was the War Archive, including, most importantly, old aerial photographs giving an impression of the synagogue's architectural context. Once René Mathe had assembled and evaluated all of these blueprints, photos and reports, he could begin generating an accurate reconstruction of Linz's destroyed synagogue. He ultimately succeeded in creating detailed depictions that get across a truly realistic impression of this magnificent building.

Ars Electronica Futurelab Enables Visitors to Take a Virtual Tour of the Old Linz Synagogue

With the extensive work done by René Mathes as their point of departure, Ars Electronica Futurelab staffers produced a 3-D visualization that makes it possible to take a virtual walking tour of the old synagogue in Deep Space 8K. Virtual visitors enter the house of worship through the main entrance on Bethlehemstraße. They can soak up the ambience of the main sanctuary, and get an additional perspective touring the galleries one flight up.

Gigapixel Images by Lois Lammerhuber and Florian Voggeneder

The reconstruction of the old Linz Synagogue is supplemented by ultra-high-definition photographs by Lois Lammerhuber and Florian Voggeneder. For his part, prizewinning Viennese photographer Lois Lammerhuber traveled to the Jewish Museum of Vienna to shoot ceremonial objects—a curtain covering the ark in which Torah scrolls are kept, a pointer used when reading a parchment scroll, and a decorative plaque that adorns it in the ark—as well as

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a Jewish marriage certificate. Linz-based photographer Florian Voggeneder visited the new Linz Synagogue to produce images of the *bima* (raised platform where the rabbi stands), a *shofar* (ram's horn trumpet) and items used to wrap and decorate Torah scrolls in the ark. Plus, he took a shot of an object that's been in safe keeping for a long time—the actual key to the old synagogue! The images captured by Lois Lammerhuber and Florian Voggeneder not only convey fascinating insights into Judaism's 3,000-year-old sacred rituals; thanks to the pictures' extremely high resolution, they also bring out the painstaking craftsmanship that went into these objects.

The Virtual Reconstruction of the Synagogue in Linz / Masters' Thesis by René Mathe:

http://publik.tuwien.ac.at/files/PubDat_229350.pdf

Interview with René Mathe: <http://www.aec.at/aeblog/en/2016/11/10/linz-synagogue/>

Jewish Museum Vienna: <http://www.jmw.at/en>

Lois Lammerhuber / Photography: <http://www.lammerhuber.at/>

Florian Voggeneder / Photography: <http://cargocollective.com/voggeneder/>

Ars Electronica Center Linz: <http://www.aec.at/center/en/>

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STATEMENTS

Bernhard Baier, Deputy Mayor of Linz, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ars Electronica Linz GmbH

“3-D visualizations have been among the specialties of the Ars Electronica Center in recent years. But this is something new—in this virtual reconstruction of the old synagogue, new information technologies are being utilized to materialize a cultural memory and to enable the general public to partake of it. René Mathe’s masters’ thesis provided the basis for a three-dimensional visualization of the old Linz Synagogue generated by the Ars Electronica Futurelab and presented in Deep Space 8K. The virtual walking tour that this makes possible is without a doubt a great cultural achievement. After all, this provides a rare opportunity—to enter a historical building that was wantonly destroyed long ago, to actually experience this religious architecture and to get a feel for the atmosphere inside it.”

Stefan Giegler, Linz City Councilman, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ars Electronica Linz GmbH

“Countless synagogues in Germany and Austria were destroyed approximately 80 years ago on *Kristallnacht*, the pogrom the Nazis staged on November 9-10, 1938. This was the beginning of the unfathomable persecution of the Jews that culminated in systematic annihilation in concentration camps.

It is incumbent upon subsequent generations to recall these horrible events to prevent what French director Louis Malle alludes to in the quotation he placed at the beginning of his film “Lacombe Lucien”: One must not forget the past; otherwise, one risks letting it become reality again.

Linz has made a concerted, objective, detailed and comprehensive effort in recent years to come to terms with the city’s National Socialist past.

In this project, Ars Electronica Linz as well shoulders this responsibility by bringing the past into the present and using state-of-the-art technology to preserve it for the future. This assumes ever-growing importance as the number of eyewitness who can give personal accounts of these horrifying times becomes fewer and fewer.

The Ars Electronica Center and especially Deep Space 8K are very popular attractions, especially for young people. This lives up to an extremely important educational mission, in that this project lets youngsters virtually behold the human, social, cultural and religious loss for which the Nazi’s criminal regime was responsible.

May we now live up to our responsibility to the future by nurturing solidarity and coexistence in our society, and may this project make a contribution to this.

I’d like to express my sincere thanks to all who have contributed to the effort.”

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INTERVIEW

René Mathe: “[...] Deep Space allows visitors to enter the sanctuary of the old temple and soak up the atmosphere”

In conjunction with the work on his master’s thesis at the Technical University of Vienna, René Mathe created a virtual reconstruction of the Linz Synagogue. His aim was to enable people today to experience that center of Jewish religious life. Now, his work has made it possible for the Ars Electronica Futurelab to produce a 3-D visualization that lets visitors to Deep Space 8K take a virtual tour of the Linz Synagogue.

Interview with René Mathe (conducted by Magdalena Sick-Leitner)

Why did you decide to do a virtual reconstruction of the Linz Synagogue for your master’s thesis?

René Mathe: Back in 1995 in Darmstadt, Germany, there had already been a project designed to virtually reconstruct destroyed synagogues. In 1998, this idea was taken up in Vienna, and I was fascinated by the thought of making a contribution to this collection. Although the Jewish Community of Linz was never particularly large, it was able to build an architecturally and culturally impressive synagogue. This is why I’m especially delighted that my reconstruction makes it possible to at least partially resurrect this building.

How difficult was it to find material for the reconstruction? And where did you find it?

René Mathe: The Nazi regime made a concerted effort to permanently eradicate from history the Jewish Community’s entire cultural heritage, so it was very difficult to find drawings of the former synagogue that I could use for this project. The most important basic material—renovation blueprints and photographs—were provided by the archives of the City of Linz, the Diocese and the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG). But for the reconstruction, I also used text descriptions and *Kristallnacht* eyewitness accounts in the archives of Jewish Museum of Vienna and the IKG. Another source of information was the War Archive, where I found old aerial photographs that give insights into the urban architectural context in those days and the integration of Jewish culture into the Linz cityscape.

On the basis of your master’s thesis, the Ars Electronica Futurelab produced a 3-D visualization that lets visitors to Deep Space 8K take a virtual walking tour through the Linz Synagogue.

René Mathe: With most master’s theses, it’s all too often the case that no one besides the author and the advisor ever even gets a look at the finished work. So, as you can imagine, I’m delighted that my project hasn’t been condemned to gathering dust in some electronic archive and is instead being screened in such a famous museum! Deep Space 8K is now making this project just that much more real and giving the general public a chance to behold it. This will definitely make a fascinating impression when people see the methods that are now being used to bring to life cultural treasures that were thought to have been irretrievably lost!

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What can visitors look forward to during the one-hour Deep Space LIVE Special spotlighting the virtual reconstruction of the Linz Synagogue?

René Mathe: The destruction of the old Linz Synagogue took place almost 80 years ago. And even if the new synagogue, despite its modest size, is one of the most significant postwar synagogues in Austria, it will nevertheless be a very special experience to take a trip back in history to the old synagogue. The visualization in Deep Space allows visitors to enter the sanctuary of the old temple and soak up the atmosphere in this extraordinary setting. One can only hope that this project will be followed by many more, and that it engenders sustainable interest in our historical heritage.

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