

## **Illusions of Omnipotence: Architecture and Daily Life under German Occupation**

18.10.2024–9.02.2025

The exhibition explores the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War, with a focus on the region known as the Warthegau. In all spheres of life, the Nazi administrative apparatus created a façade of omnipotent control over the newly-conquered territories. This was particularly evident in architecture, which provided the backdrop for daily life. The realities of the time are reflected in various historical objects: architectural plans, buildings, paintings, sculptures, photographs, films, posters, newspapers, books, and even everyday items.

Architecture and daily life under German occupation in the Warthegau are presented against the backdrop of other occupied territories of Poland. The new order, imposed from 1939 by Gauleiter Arthur Greiser, was intended to achieve the total Germanisation of the region. The first step towards achieving this goal was the mass displacement of the local population.

Under these new conditions, society was divided into two groups: the occupied and the occupiers.

The occupied included Poles, Jews, and other minorities who had lived in the Second Polish Republic. Poles were deported to the *Generalgouvernement* / General Government, a “march or adjunct territory of the Reich” (*Nebenland des Reiches*). The small number who remained in the Warthegau were exploited as forced labour. Many were executed or perished in prisons and camps. Nazi policies towards the Jews were characterised by extreme brutality, as they were treated as a distinct group among the occupied. In the Warthegau, as throughout the Reich, they were denied their rightful place in society.

The occupiers were Germans from various regions. Among them were the so-called ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), who had lived outside the borders of Nazi Germany before the war. This group included German citizens of the Second Polish Republic and those relocated to replace expelled Poles and Jews, primarily from present-day Baltic states, Romania, Ukraine,

and Moldova. Additionally, Germans from within the pre-1939 borders of the Reich (*Reichsdeutsche*) were also brought in to take the place of displaced Polish citizens.

In the long-term plans of the Nazi regime, the Warthegau was to serve as a model for future German territories stretching far to the east. This vision was reflected in the plans for cities and villages, specific buildings and their interiors, and the landscapes. In this setting, it was intended that a society envisioned as an ethnically-homogeneous community should emerge. The ideas of Nazi officials and their architects were disseminated to the local population through the press, radio, and cinema, and they perpetuated the illusion of the omnipotent control of the Reich over the newly-conquered territories.

The exhibition illustrates the reality of occupation through historical objects representing the occupied and the occupiers, who lived side by side yet in segregation. Most of the exhibits are sourced from Polish museums and archives, with some from German and Austrian institutions and private collections. The Castle's interiors, which also serve as historical artefacts, were originally built for the German Emperor and King of Prussia, Wilhelm II, in the early twentieth century. During the interwar years, the Castle primarily housed the University of Poznań. During the Second World War, it was remodelled to serve as the headquarters of Hitler and Arthur Greiser.

The exhibition has been shaped by the conviction that the Second World War should be a stark warning to the contemporary world. This message resonates most strongly in Iza Tarasewicz's art installation. Her work offers a commentary on the distant past and the unfolding present.

Aleksandra Paradowska

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Partners: German Historical Institute in Warsaw, Max Weber Foundation

The exhibition was co-financed by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation.