



I L L U S I O N S O F  
O M N I P O T E N C E

Architecture and Daily Life under German Occupation

# ILLUSIONS OF OMNIPOTENCE

## Architecture and daily life under German occupation

Display stand at the entrance of the exhibition hall

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..

The exhibition is divided into three sections.

Located in the Exhibition Hall, the first section places the *Warthegau* in the broader historical context of both occupied Poland and Nazi Germany. The remains of ravaged buildings and monuments, alongside a map in the background, serve as a symbolic introduction to the story of the citizens of the Second Polish Republic as the occupied and citizens of the so-called Third Reich as their occupiers.

The second section is displayed in the western wing of the Imperial Castle, its rooms preserved from the time of its remodelling into a residence for Adolf Hitler and Gauleiter Arthur Greiser, the Nazi territorial leader of the *Warthegau*. Three historic rooms, the Walnut Room, the Birch Room, and the Marble Room, provide the setting for an exhibition that highlights the everyday lives of both the occupiers and the occupied and showcases the cities, government offices, homes, and landscapes that shaped their existence.

The third and final part of the exhibition is an art installation by Iza Tarasewicz, located in the study originally designed for Hitler (the Fireplace Chamber). This work opens a dialogue between history and the present. In the Ash Room opposite, visitors are invited to explore publications that further delve into the themes of the exhibition.

→ The *Warthegau* was a territory which Nazi Germany annexed in violation of international law in 1939; it comprised Greater Poland, parts of Kuyavia, and the central region of Poland around Łódź.

The ZAMEK cultural centre in Poznań is based in the former German imperial castle, a stone witness and symbol of the chequered and tragic European history of the 20th century. Reflecting on the past and its significance for our present is therefore an important part of our activities. We tell the story of the past from the perspective of people whose world was destroyed by the Nazi plans for a new order. In our reality today, the lessons learnt from the tragic experiences of the Second World War seem to have been forgotten. Before our eyes, authoritarianism, imperial ambitions, divisions, extremism, radicalised ideological currents and intolerance are returning, raising worst fears and dark associations. Totalitarianism and illusions of omnipotence are phenomena that can occur in any country and at any time. Democracy dies when people no longer believe that their vote counts. To preserve freedom, we must be constantly vigilant.

The CK ZAMEK team

Das Team des Kulturzentrums ZAMEK

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Lenders:

State Archive, Kalisz | State Archive, Poznań | National Library, Warsaw | Public Library, Oborniki | University Library, Poznań | Bundesarchiv, Berlin | Institute of National Remembrance, Łódź | Zygmunt Wojciechowski Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań | Jewish Museum, Wien | Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen | Municipal Public Library, Chodzież | Municipal Monuments Conservator, Poznań | Archdiocesan Museum, Poznań | Muzeum Martyrologiczne, Żabikowo | Museum of the Martyrs of Greater Poland – Fort VII | Municipal Museum, Ostrów Wielkopolski | Municipal Museum, Pabianice | Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek | National Museum of Agriculture and Food Industry, Szreniawa | National Museum, Poznań | District Museum, Leszno | District Museum of the Kalisz Region, Kalisz | Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno | Henryk Ławniczak Regional Museum, Krotoszyn | Regional Museum, Pleszew | Regional Museum, Słupca | Museum of Art, Łódź | Museum of Ceramics Technology, Koło | Museum of Independence Traditions, Łódź | Museum of Kuyavia and Dobrzyń Regions, Włocławek | Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz | Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń | State Museum at Majdanek, Lublin | United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington | Kalisz City Council | Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

## RUBBLE (Anteroom to the Exhibition Hall)

### Display Case 1

**Marcin Rożek** (1885–1944)

Figure of Christ from the Gratitude Monument, which stood on today's Mickiewicz Square in Poznań from 1932 to 1939 (fragments)

bronze, c. 1930

collection of the Archdiocesan Museum, Poznań

**Marcin Rożek** (1885–1944)

Monument to Bolesław the Brave, which stood in front of Gniezno Cathedral from 1925 to 1939 (fragment)

stone, 1925

collection of the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno

The imposition of new authority often involves the destruction of what came before. The buildings and monuments, the fragments of which are displayed in this room, were demolished as a result of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 and through deliberate demolitions carried out by the occupying forces until the end of the war. This applied to both modern structures and historic landmarks.

In some cases, fragments of defaced sculptures were saved at great personal risk. One prisoner, assigned to dismantle the Gratitude Monument in Poznań, sawed off and preserved a toe from the statue of Christ, an act he performed while under Gestapo supervision.

The carved head of King Bolesław the Brave was discovered after the war during excavation work near Gniezno Cathedral. Originally part of a bas-relief from the base of a monument dedicated to the Polish ruler, it was found decades later. The monument was reconstructed after the war.

Marcin Rożek, the artist behind these monuments, was a veteran of the Greater Poland Rising and a professor at the Poznań State School

of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry. Arrested in 1941, he was imprisoned in Fort VII, Poznań. His refusal to sculpt a portrait of Hitler led to his deportation to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he died.

### Display Case 2

**Antoni Olek** (1887–1939)

Head of the statue of St. Nepomuk, which stood on the market place in Sulmierzyce.

stone, 18th century

Bestand des Muzeum Regionalne im. Hieronima Ławniczaka in Krotoszyn

**Antoni Olek** (1887–1939)

Head of a boy playing the flute, Sędziszew

stone, 20th century

collection of the Henryk Ławniczak Regional Museum, Krotoszyn

The heads of the figures of St John of Nepomuk and the boy and the stone fragments on the platform are artworks of high historical value. The obliteration of such monuments was a deliberate part of the Nazi programme aimed at erasing traces of Polish and Jewish cultures. This campaign was often accompanied by efforts to reframe many of these artefacts as products of German culture, and through various media such as newspapers, books, and postcards.

### Installation by the wall

#### Torso of the statue of General Tadeusz Kościuszko in Rawicz

stone, 1925

collection of the Henryk Ławniczak Regional Museum, Krotoszyn

#### Architectural stone fragments from demolished buildings in Wieluń

stone, 16th–18th centuries

collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

#### Bricks from the Rawicz synagogue

early 20th century

owned by the Municipality of Rawicz

### Photographs projected on the wall

#### Ravaged monuments and buildings in Wieluń, Gniezno, Krotoszyn, Leszno, Rawicz, Poznań, and Łódź

photographs, 1939–1944

collections of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń; Poznań University Library; National Museum, Poznań; Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno; Henryk Ławniczak Regional Museum, Krotoszyn; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

## Exhibition Hall

Display cases, clockwise, starting left

### Generalgouvernement / General Government

The *Generalgouvernement*, as a “March or borderland of the Reich,” operated under principles distinct from those governing other regions annexed by Nazi Germany. The administrative rules of the Reich were not fully applied here, which enabled the implementation of independent legal regulations that facilitated the large-scale exploitation and plundering of local resources. Hans Frank, the Generalgouverneur (Governor-General), presided over the area. His sweeping powers matched his role as the chief architect of Nazi order in the region.

The shortage of German human resources led the Nazis to employ Polish staff in their offices. Architects were among the most highly sought-after specialists, some of whom even reached senior positions in municipal authorities. Austrian experts and a small number of German architects were also employed. Many had already been active in various institutions in the Polish territories annexed by the Reich.

Hans Frank’s decision to make the Royal Castle on Wawel Hill his official residence was a deeply symbolic one. The Castle was remodelled according to designs by Austrian architects Franz Koettgen and Eugen Horstmann. Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, a long-serving supervisor of conservation work on Wawel Hill, was also employed in their studio. The most prominent alteration involved rebuilding the former Royal Kitchens Wing, which resulted in the creation of a monumental administrative building. In addition, Frank used the historic chambers of the Castle for official functions and as his residence. One of the wings was even earmarked for Hitler’s apartments. The Castle was further incorporated into comprehensive plans for the future of Kraków, including a grand administrative district, designed by a Leipzig-based architect, Hubert Ritter.

Another significant construction project was the palace built at Przegorzały, near Kraków, intended for Otto Wächter, the Governor of the Kraków District. However, before the building was completed, he had been appointed Governor of Galicia. As a result, Hans Frank transferred the residence to Heinrich Himmler. From that point onward, it served as a sanatorium for German soldiers.

Often mistakenly referred to as the “Pabst Plan,” the most drastic changes planned by the Germans were intended for Warsaw. The Polish capital was to be transformed into a medium-sized city. The architect behind the 1940 plans was Hubert Groß, a city planner from Würzburg. His proposal included a designated zone for Poles on the right bank of the River Vistula, with no provisions made for the Jewish population. Concurrently, Polish architects secretly developed their plans for Warsaw’s future. This effort was led by the Architectural and Urban Planning Studio under Szymon Syrkus, whose official capacity was limited to designing housing estates. Following his arrest, Helena Syrkus and Roman Piotrowski took over the leadership. The concepts developed by the team became an important reference point for the post-war reconstruction of the city.

Concentration camps, primarily composed of prefabricated barracks, were crucial to executing the occupation policy. The largest was at Majdanek in Lublin (*Konzentrationslager Lublin*). Its prisoners included Soviet prisoners of war, Jews from Poland and other European countries, Poles, who were incarcerated for various reasons, and also children. Majdanek exemplifies the comprehensive planning carried out by the SS (*Schutzstaffel*). The camp was intended to house extensive manufacturing facilities to fulfil orders for the military and the SS. The inmates were to be exploited as a workforce, with no regard for their chances of survival. Additionally, the SS generated income by leasing them to state offices and companies for forced labour. Plans for Majdanek were closely aligned with the vision of transforming Lublin into a German city for SS officers, their families, and public servants. Integral to German planning and occupation policies were also the extermination camps and sites of Jewish genocide at Bełżec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

## Governor-General Hans Frank delivering a speech

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
collection of the National Digital Archives

## Map of the *Generalgouvernement*

print, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the National Library of Poland, Warsaw

## Construction work in the new administrative wing of the Wawel Royal Castle

photograph, unknown author, May 1941  
collection of the National Digital Archives

## *Wehrmacht* soldiers marching with banners at Wawel Castle

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the National Digital Archives

## At the Majdanek concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager Lublin*), prisoners working near the SS workshops

photograph, unknown author, 1943  
collection of the State Museum at Majdanek in Lublin

“V” sign with the slogan “Germany victorious on all fronts” in front of Governor Hans Fischer’s headquarters at the Saxon Palace on Piłsudski Square in Warsaw. In the background, the monument of Prince Józef Poniatowski is veiled.

photograph, unknown author, 30 August 1940  
public domain

## German Propaganda Poster

The euthanasia programme, i.e. the murder of sick and disabled people, committed primarily on the mentally ill, was carried out under the code name Aktion T4 between 1939 and 1945 throughout the German Reich.

Poster, unknown author, c. 1939  
public domain

## WARTHEGAU

### Administrative Division

Following Germany's invasion of Poland, the region of Greater Poland, parts of Kuyavia and Masovia, along with Łódź and its surroundings, were merged into a separate territorial unit. Officially proclaimed as the Reichsgau Posen on 26 October 1939, this area was renamed the *Reichsgau Wartheland* on 29 January 1940. Shorter designations, *Warthegau* and *Wartheland*, were commonly used.

In the *Warthegau*, the illusion of the German Reich's omnipotent control over occupied Poland was particularly evident. It was the largest administrative district in Nazi Germany at that time and the only one composed entirely of territory that had belonged to Poland before 1939. As a result, the Germanisation of the region was of utmost priority to Nazi authorities and was pursued on a massive scale.

Neighbouring regions of Poland were also directly annexed by Germany and incorporated into other administrative districts. Kuyavia and Pomerania became part of the *Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen* (Danzig-West Prussia), while northern Masovia, as the *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau* (Polish: Ciechanów), was attached to the *Gau Ostpreußen* (East Prussia).

By contrast, Lesser Poland, Lublin, and southern Masovia were granted a different status, and they formed the *Generalgouvernement* (General Government), with its capital in Kraków. Designated as a "March or borderland of the Reich" (Nebenland des Reiches), the Generalgouvernement was initially intended to become a logistical base for the Germanisation of the annexed territories before undergoing complete Germanisation itself.

The eastern stretches of the Second Polish Republic, now part of modern Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, fell under Soviet occupation in 1939. Following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June

1941, these areas were incorporated into the *Reichskommissariate* (Reich Commissariats) of Ostland and Ukraine. Only Eastern Galicia, including Lwów (present-day Lviv), was annexed to the Generalgouvernement as the newly-designated *Distrikt Galizien* (District of Galicia).

German soldiers en route to occupied Poland. A drawing on the railway carriage depicts a Jewish man accompanied by the caption: *We will help them*

photograph, unknown author, 1939  
collection of the State Archives, Kalisz

Map of the *Großdeutsches Reich* from a school atlas. The areas marked in light red represent the successive territorial acquisitions of the Reich from 1939

*Deutscher Schulatlas*, 1942  
private collection

*Wartheland, deutsches Land* / Land of the Warta, German soil. Beneath the eagle with a swastika are a plough, sword, and shield: symbols of the new *Reichsgau*

postcard, unknown author, 1941  
collection of the Provincial Public Library, Opole

## Gauleiter Greiser

*Gauleiter* Arthur Greiser

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

Throughout the war, *Gauleiter* Arthur Greiser relentlessly worked to raise the *Warthegau's* standing in the German Reich. His vision for the region was that of an agricultural base intended to supply food for frontline soldiers and other parts of Germany. As such, the *Warthegau* would become a *Mustergau* (a model district). Accordingly, agricultural symbols frequently appeared in official ceremonies and the décor of German administrative offices.

As *Reichsstatthalter* (Reich Governor), Greiser acted as Hitler's representative in the annexed territory while advancing his vision of governance. His local origins, being born in Środa Wielkopolska to a German family, bolstered his authority among local Germans. His experience as President of the Senate in the Free City of Danzig enabled him to quickly and efficiently implement anti-Polish and anti-Jewish policies. As early as October 1939, German forces executed members of the Greater Polish intelligentsia and mentally-ill patients in Fort VII, Poznań. Brutal expulsions of Polish and Jewish populations followed soon after, beginning in November 1939. By autumn 1941, the first extermination camp in occupied Poland, located in Chełmno nad Nerem, had become operational. This marked the beginning of mass killings of Jews.

The enforcement of Greiser's policies was facilitated through a vast network of institutions, offices, and their leaders. In addition to the administrative, party, military, paramilitary, and police structures common throughout the Reich, the *Warthegau* had special offices dedicated to overseeing Germanisation, deportations, and the confiscation of property from displaced citizens.

The brutal impact of these policies is reflected in detailed statistical data compiled by the occupation authorities. By the end of 1943, the



Germans had forcibly displaced 534,384 citizens of the Second Polish Republic, with 280,743 relocated to the General Government, including between 43,000 and 65,000 Jews. The remaining 253,641 were resettled within the *Warthegau*. By the end of July 1944, 320,662 ethnic Germans had been settled in the region, with 84,203 placed in urban areas and 236,459 in rural settlements. These settlers took over 50,000 farms covering a total area of 758,600 hectares, which amounted to 25% of the region's agricultural land. As a result, by the war's end, more than half of the farmland was in the hands of ethnic Germans.

Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda for the German Reich, flanked by Gauleiter Arthur Greiser (on the left) and Gerhard Scheffler, Mayor of Poznań (on the right), in the Poznań Town Hall

photograph, unknown author, January 1940  
collection of the National Digital Archives

## Poznań Castle

The remodelling of the Imperial Castle was one of the most significant architectural undertakings in the *Warthegau*. As a result, Wilhelm II's early twentieth-century Neo-Romanesque residence was restored to its former glory as an outstanding symbol of German authority. This time, it was intended to serve as the residence of *Gauleiter* Arthur Greiser, and potentially for Adolf Hitler, though the latter would never visit the site.

The Castle functioned as the foremost official state building of the *Warthegau*. Its silhouette and official name, *Posener Schloss* (Poznań Castle), were showcased as a symbol of the district. Architects Franz Böhmer and Georg Petrich, under the supervision of Albert Speer, the Reich's chief architect, were commissioned for the remodelling. Heinrich Michaelis, previously involved in building Hitler's Alpine residence at Obersalzberg, was also responsible for part of the project.

The undertaking, which began in 1940 and continued almost until the final days of the war, heavily relied on the forced labour of enslaved workers. Despite the setbacks faced by the German army, the work persisted, which only demonstrates the vital role of this building for the Nazi propaganda. The western section of the project was completed, but work in the eastern part was left unfinished, and was halted when the building shell was completed.

Arthur Greiser took residence in the Castle in 1943. It became one of his several official residences, along with the early twentieth-century grand villa on what is now Berwińskiego Street in Poznań (currently the headquarters of Radio Poznań) and the palace at Jeziory by Lake Góreckie (now the seat of the Greater Poland National Park administration and the Nature Museum). Greiser also had access to palaces confiscated from the Greater Poland aristocracy at Lubostroń and Czerniejewo. All of these residences served as venues for meetings between the *Gauleiter* and high-ranking dignitaries of the Reich during their visits to the *Warthegau*.

Poznań Castle during reconstruction. Visible in the tower is a balcony for Hitler, replacing the apse of the former chapel. The photographer documented Poznań under occupation despite the official prohibition on Poles and Jews from owning cameras

photograph, Tadeusz Wojciechowski, c. 1941  
private collection

Model of the *Gauforum* in Poznań, designed by Walther Bangert. Poznań Castle adjoined an L-shaped square, with the Great Hall and the new theatre at its ends and the new railway station by the tracks

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
private collection

## Planning and Construction

The German occupation policies found their immediate expression in planning and construction efforts. Architectural plans and buildings are now tangible evidence of how the Germans envisioned their role in the newly-conquered territories and their perception of the occupied lands. These traces allow one to comprehend how the occupation authorities shaped the everyday lives of both the occupiers and the occupied. The expulsion of Poles and Jews from their homes and the confiscation of their property created a *tabula rasa*: a blank slate upon which the occupiers imposed their vision.

Designs were primarily based on models implemented in the Reich. These included monumental projects in major German cities that adhered to classical architectural principles, and modernist factories and housing estates distinguished by steeply-pitched roofs and sparse decorative details.

The formulation of plans was made possible through close collaboration between the occupying authorities and experts from various disciplines of design: architects, urban planners, landscape designers, and interior architects. Commissions in the newly-annexed Polish territories were particularly enticing due to the vast scope of tasks involved. Securing a commission was often contingent on architects' connections with Nazi officials or personal networks in the architectural community. In some German architectural studios, Polish specialists were employed, though their roles were restricted to drafting and they did not sign the designs.

These plans and construction initiatives were enormously expensive to execute. So long as Germany secured victories on the Eastern Front, funding for these ventures was largely assured. However, the situation changed with the Battle of Stalingrad. Due to escalating military costs and a shortage of human resources, only the most critical construction projects were completed. Despite this, planning for new ventures con-

tinued until 1944. Through these projects, which were widely promoted in the press, the Warthegau authorities aimed to create the impression that the domestic situation remained stable despite the defeats suffered by the German army on the front.

Among the completed projects were the headquarters of Gauleiter Arthur Greiser. Furthermore, in most cities throughout the , residential estates were built from the ground up, intended exclusively for Germans. Likewise, model villages such as Radliniec/Wilhelmswalde near Jarocin and Balczewo/Balzweiler near Inowrocław were established solely for German settlers.

Beyond these constructions, a significant portion of German investments focused on developments composed of standard wooden barracks. These included both slave labour camps and camps for various organisations where Germans lived and performed entirely different roles. In the *Warthegau*, such barrack complexes were primarily built to house the Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst). The existence of these barracks demonstrates how closely intertwined the realities of the occupiers and the occupied were in German planning.

German architects working for the occupation regime must have been aware of the burden imposed on the subjugated population by their projects. The dark side of their designs was that of the confiscation of property, the exploitation of prisoners, and the use of forced labour.

Model of a German farmstead, sized 20–25 hectares. Type A from the exhibition *Planning and Construction in the East*. The exhibition showcased the principles of the General Plan Ost, which envisioned the resettlement of large populations in occupied Poland and the eastern territories. The concept for the exhibition came from one of the primary creators of the plan, Konrad Meyer, an agronomist and Head of the Department of Planning and Land Use in the Reich Commissariat for the Consolidation of German Nationhood

illustration from the exhibition catalogue *Planung und Aufbau im Osten*, 1941  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

Arthur Greiser presents a spatial development model to Adolf Hühnlein, *Korpsführer* of the National Socialist Motor Corps (to the right), during his visit to Poznań

photograph, unknown author, October 1939  
Bundesarchiv collection

The construction of Lake Elsensee (now Lake Rusalka) in Poznań was carried out entirely by forced Polish labourers and Jewish prisoners. They worked beyond their physical capacity, in extreme conditions. In the surrounding forests, the Germans executed Poles, including prisoners from Fort VII. The lake was part of the planned green areas designated for the Germans. Local newspapers regularly reported on the progress of the project.

photograph, unknown author, 1942  
collection of the Poznań University Library

Employees of the Municipal Office in Łódź looking at the drawing of a model city block. The objective was to unify the architecture of the city centre, a process officially referred to as *Entschandelung* (literally, removal of disfigurement). In the black jacket stands Helmut Richter with his colleague Gerhard Waldmann (on the right)

photograph, unknown author, December 1940  
Niels Gutschow's collection

## Life under Occupation

The division of society became visible in the everyday lives of both the occupiers and the occupied. The Germans perpetuated the illusion of a German *Warthegau* and expanded their control through increasingly brutal measures. While their lives embodied the Nazi concept of the “master race” (*Herrenvolk*), the daily reality for the occupied was defined by mounting restrictions and escalating repression.

The communities of the occupiers and the occupied were starkly different in status, yet both were internally diverse. A leading group of officials, military personnel, and professionals set the tone for the daily life of the occupiers. Primarily composed of Germans from the Reich and ethnic Germans from the Baltic states, they oversaw the distribution of confiscated Polish and Jewish property, delegated tasks, and enforced their implementation. In this landscape, the lives of the broader German community unfolded, which consisted mainly of farmers, workers, and artisans, all of whom were settlers relocated from the eastern territories. Citizens of the Second Polish Republic who had signed the German People’s List (*Deutsche Volksliste*) were also considered ethnic Germans; they were divided into four categories, with those in the highest category nearly on a par with Germans from the Reich.

It might seem as though the daily lives of the German occupiers were set in a completely different reality, even though their settlements were often situated right next to Polish residences, ghettos, prisons, and camps. As contemporary accounts reveal, a significant portion of the German community in the *Warthegau* subscribed to the propaganda and ideological narrative of National Socialism.

The subjugated status of Poles and Jews – the occupied population – was visibly reflected in the urban and rural landscapes of the *Warthegau*. The treatment of the occupied society by the German authorities became evident even before the large-scale expulsions began. Local Poles were subjected to terror policies as early as September and October 1939. Public executions in squares and marketplaces, the tak-

ing of hostages, and, later, arrests that even involved children became part of everyday life.

Cruelty towards young Poles found its unprecedented expression in the establishment of a labour camp in the Łódź ghetto (*Jugendverwahrlager Litzmannstadt*). Many young Polish nationals were sent to Germany as forced labourers, where they worked not only in agriculture and industry but also in German households as domestic servants. Poles who were neither deported nor imprisoned in camps were forcibly relocated to substandard housing and forced to undertake slave labour locally, particularly in road construction and land drainage projects.

However, the harshest persecution was targeted against the Jewish residents of towns and villages. Jews, who predominantly inhabited the central and eastern stretches of the *Warthegau*, were subjected to mass extermination following deportation to ghettos. Seldom would they be given a helping hand. German policies severed the long-standing Polish-Jewish ties, which made the two ethnic groups drift apart and become increasingly isolated from one another.

Beyond the terror and repression, the reality of occupation also involved elements of enforced collaboration. Various forms of compromise and concession emerged between the occupiers and the occupied. These ranged from bold actions, such as a German interceding with the authorities on behalf of a Pole, to seemingly small gestures that took on great significance under the occupation regime.

Nevertheless, the occupied were not merely passive subjects of the ruthless German authorities. They continued to function as active members of their local communities and sought, whenever possible, to exercise their limited rights and opportunities. Polish underground organisations also persisted in their activities. Even in ghettos and camps, pursuing some degree of self-determination became an essential aspect of everyday life.

The sorting of eggs is a symbolic representation of the status of the occupiers and the occupied. The larger eggs were meant for the Germans. This photograph is part of a series documenting daily life in the town of Turek and its surrounding area. The photographs were taken as part of a broad documentation

campaign coordinated by a special office. Today, the collection of negatives is known as the Iglą Archive, named after the *nom de guerre* of a resistance fighter, Józef Bakalarek, who stole it during the German evacuation in 1945

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz , winter 1941  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

Ceremonies marking the appointment of Arthur Greiser as Gauleiter in the presence of Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick. In the foreground stand the Posen (Poznań) Hitler Youth. The gathering was deliberately held outside the Bazar Hotel on Freedom Square, from which Ignacy Jan Paderewski addressed Polish crowds on 26 December 1918, which sparked the Greater Poland Rising

photograph, unknown author, 2 November 1940  
collection of the National Digital Archives

## Himmler's Speeches in Poznań

*Gauleiter* Greiser maintained direct contact with the highest-ranking figures of the Reich, most notably Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer* of the SS and police. Himmler's office, the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (RKFDV), was the central institution responsible for implementing racial policies throughout occupied Europe, including the forced displacement of the Polish population in favour of the Germans in occupied Poland. As the capital of a district central to the Germanisation efforts, Poznań became a key meeting place for Himmler and his associates.

Two such gatherings took place on 4 and 6 October 1943. The first, attended by SS commanders, was held at the Hotel Ostland (the present-day Hotel Rzymiski). The second, hosted in the Poznań Town Hall, was attended by *Reichsleiters*, *Gauleiters*, and other senior officials, including Joseph Goebbels and Albert Speer.

In these two secret speeches, Himmler made explicit references to the current and future plans of the German authorities concerning the Jewish and Slavic populations. His remarks on the Jews provide some of the few surviving pieces of evidence confirming that the Nazis had deliberately planned and executed the extermination of an entire people. Himmler openly glorified the mass murders and portrayed them to his select audience as a collective responsibility and a historical necessity. It is worth noting that by the time Himmler delivered these speeches, the majority of the Jews had already been annihilated. Regarding the Slavs, Himmler called them "slaves"; he stated that their fate concerned him only insofar as they fulfilled labour requirements for Germany, and showed no interest in their extreme exhaustion or starvation.

## Other Districts (Gau)

The Germanisation policy varied across the different administrative regions that covered Polish territories. Each Gauleiter pursued distinct ideological objectives and sought to fulfil their political ambitions. All of them believed that their governance model should serve as a model for future German expansion in the East.

After an initial wave of mass murders and deportations, Albert Forster, *Gauleiter von Danzig-Westpreußen*, channelled his efforts to Germanise as many local inhabitants as possible through the *Deutsche Volksliste* (German People's List). By contrast, Erich Koch planned to systematically Germanise the areas incorporated into his *Gau Ostpreußen* only after the war. He intended to settle them with descendants of East Prussian farmers and returning soldiers. Polish territories annexed to the *Gau Schlesien* were initially under the authority of *Gauleiter* Josef Wagner until May 1940, when Fritz Bracht took over. In early 1941, the *Gau Schlesien* was divided into the *Gau Oberschlesien* and *Gau Niederschlesien*. Bracht was appointed *Gauleiter von Oberschlesien*, which covered the annexed Polish territories. Under Bracht's leadership, the local war-critical industries took precedence in dictating policy, which resulted in fewer expulsions compared to those in the *Warthegau*.

After an initial wave of mass murders and deportations, Albert Forster, *Gauleiter von Danzig-Westpreußen*, channelled his efforts to Germanise as many local inhabitants as possible through the *Deutsche Volksliste* (German People's List). By contrast, Erich Koch planned to systematically Germanise the areas incorporated into his *Gau Ostpreußen* only after the war. He intended to settle them with sons of East Prussian farmers and returning soldiers. Under Bracht's leadership, the local war-critical industries of the *Gau Schlesien* took precedence in dictating policy, which resulted in fewer expulsions compared to those in the *Warthegau*.

In the *Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen*, Albert Forster's policies were informed by his earlier experiences as *Gauleiter* of the Free City of Danzig. In this sense, his career path closely paralleled that of Arthur Grei-

ser, with whom he maintained a rivalry. Like Greiser, Forster resided in a grand villa in the city and had a rural retreat. However, instead of an opulent palace, his countryside residence was a larch country house on Sobieszewo Island. Nearby, along the coast, the Stutthof concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager Stutthof*) was established; it became operational as early as 2 September 1939.

Among the most significant investments planned for the region was the development of Gdynia (Gdingen/Gotenhafen), a harbour city created by Poland in the late 1920s to compete with the neighbouring Free City of Danzig. Herbert Böhm was commissioned to oversee Gdynia's redevelopment. Notably, his approach did not merely replicate the standard residential models seen throughout the Reich. Instead, he adapted his designs to complement the city's existing modernist architecture from the 1930s; he only added gently sloping roofs to some buildings.

Böhm's legacy demonstrates that German architects in occupied Poland adapted Nazi architectural norms to varying degrees. In some cases, practical concerns or local conditions took precedence over ideological uniformity. This pragmatic approach was also evident in the work of Hans Döllgast, a Munich-based architect, who developed designs for buildings in Toruń to harmonise with the city's Gothic architecture. Döllgast's ideological rationale for this was rooted in the Teutonic, and implicitly German, heritage of the city.

Architectural designs that adhered closely to established models dominated most of the construction projects in the *Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen*. Among these were typical residential estates built in towns such as Tczew, Kartuzy, and Kościerzyna, which closely resemble those being developed simultaneously in various cities throughout the *Warthegau*.

*Danzig ist deutsch / Gdańsk is German.* In the background, beneath the eagle and swastika, St. Mary's Church is visible.

postcard, unknown author, 1939  
collection of the Provincial Public Library, Opole

## Gdynia: modernist houses adorned with Nazi flags

postcard, unknown author, 1939

private collection

## *Gauleiter* Albert Forster against the backdrop of the Gdańsk Town Hall

photograph, unknown author, c. 1939

public domain

The *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau* (Polish: Ciechanów) played a crucial role in the political plans of Erich Koch, who oversaw the *Gau Ostpreußen*. Within this territorial unit, in the village of Krasne, Koch built his grand residence, a reflection of his elevated status. Koch was not only a *Gauleiter*, but from 1941, he also led the Civil District of Białystok (*Bezirk Białystok*), and later became the Commissioner for the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*.

The most prominent planning and construction activities in the new district were centred on its capital, Ciechanów. The future design of the city, featuring expansive residential quarters and broad avenues, was created by Arthur Reck and Jan W. Prendel. Historic buildings, such as the town hall, castle, and Gothic church, were given little prominence in their vision. The Castle of the Dukes of Masovia was seen as a trace of German cultural influence. Only a small portion of this ambitious concept, namely, two residential blocks, materialised. However, these unfulfilled monumental plans aside, a large housing estate designed by Kurt Fiebelkorn – now known as *Bloki* – was completed.

Design for the reconstruction of Ciechanów by Arthur Reck and Jan W. Prendel. The uniform, monumental architecture was intended to replace the town's historic fabric

design, unknown author, 1941

*Die Baukunst* 1941, No. XI (4), p. 255

## *Gauleiter* Erich Koch

photograph, unknown author, 1938

public domain

In the *Gau Oberschlesien*, the annexed city of Katowice (*Kattowitz*) was designated the district capital. Constructed in the late 1920s in a monumental style with classical elements, the Silesian Parliament building was deemed useful for the German administration and repurposed accordingly. One of the most blatant propaganda acts carried out by the German authorities was the demolition of the Silesian Museum, located next to the former Silesian Parliament building, their new modernist headquarters. This museum was a critical institution that promoted the Polish identity and culture of Silesia. It was demolished by prisoners from the nearby Auschwitz concentration camp.

Auschwitz is a striking example of German planning in the *Gau Oberschlesien*. The camp was incorporated into Hans Stosberg's comprehensive Germanisation plan for Oświęcim. His master plan integrated the three main sections of the camp into the town's layout, with the camp and its satellite sub-camps intended to generate revenue for the municipality. From the very beginning, economic exploitation underpinned the camp's existence. The IG Farben industrial complex was situated on its grounds, and the continued use of forced labour was planned and implemented to benefit the German war economy.

Stosberg's plans also envisioned a uniform, low-rise development around the town's market square and surrounding districts. His proposals included architectural designs and detailed depictions of the future German community that would occupy these areas. Specific numbers were provided for various professions, including artisans of particular trades. Stosberg's vision did not conflict with the camp infrastructure, which was constructed according to plans developed by architects from the KL Auschwitz Construction Office. Instead, it formed an urban whole with it. His design encapsulated the breadth of German planning in occupied Poland; it also demonstrates how implicated the planners and their work were in the broader occupation policies, including the atrocities of the time.

Constructed between 1925 and 1929, the Silesian Parliament building in Katowice served as the seat of *Gauleiter* Fritz Bracht during the war.

postcard, unknown author, c. 1941

private collection

## Hans Stosberg's redevelopment plan for Oświęcim

design, 10 June 1941

Niels Gutschow's collection

### *Gauleiter* Fritz Bracht

photograph, unknown author, c. 1942

public domain

Hans Stosberg's urban development plan for Oświęcim. The Buna-Werke plant is visible to the right within the outlined town limits, with three settlement clusters to the left. The administrative area of the concentration camp is not marked in any way

design, January 1943

Niels Gutschow's collection

### Display case 1

#### Views of Poznań/*Posen*

postcards, 1939–1945

collection of the Poznań University Library

### Display case 2

#### Notices of death sentences on Polish citizens

printed notices, 1939–1942

collection of the Institute for Western Affairs in Poznań

Permit issued to Piotr Lenart, his wife, and children to approach the gate of the deportation camp in Główna Street, Poznań

printed document, 1939

collection of the National Museum, Poznań

### Display case 3

Views of *Warthegau* cities: Pleschen/Pleszew, Welungen/Wieluń, Rawitsch/Rawicz, Kalisch/Kalisz, Lissa/Leszno, Warthebrücken/Koło, Grenzhausen/Słupca, Gnesen/Gniezno, Krotoschin/Krotoszyn

postcards, 1939–1945

collections of the Regional Museum, Pleszew; Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń; Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz; District Museum of the Kalisz Region, Kalisz; Regional Museum, Słupca; Museum of Ceramics Technology, Koło; Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno; Henryk Ławniczak Regional Museum, Krotoszyn

### Fritz Nuss (1907–1999)

#### *Standing Male Nude*

1941

zinc

collection of the National Museum, Poznań

This piece is in storage. It has undergone minimal protective conservation and has been preserved with all surface layers and damages intact, as historical testimony.

This sculpture, representing the idealised Aryan male, is one of many similar works by German artists involved in promoting the ideology of National Socialism. Similar pieces were exhibited at the House of German Art in Munich, a venue specifically designed to showcase and spread Nazi art. This particular piece was acquired for the Poznań Museum [BS1] during the Great German Art Exhibition in 1941. Other works by Nuss were purchased by Adolf Hitler and Martin Bormann.



## Karte des Reichsgaus Wartheland

map, Ernst Modlich, c. 1940

collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

The map conveys an illusory vision of a new administrative district of the Reich in which only Germans live. The propagandistic message is emphasised by the words of two songs added to the frame: “Wisła i Warta. The March of the Germans in Poland” (*Weichsel und Warthe. Marsch der Deutschen in Polen*) by Heinrich Gutberlet and “Raise Your Flags in the East Wind” (*In den Ostwind hebt die Fahnen*) by Hans Baumann.

The emblems on the left include symbols of the occupations that allegedly characterise the district. These are: soldiering, agriculture, crafts, industry, science, carpentry and shipping. Next to it, the *Warthegau* is put into relation to the capitals of the neighbouring administrative districts: Berlin, Breslau/Wrocław, Kattowitz/Katowice, Krakau/Cracow, Königsberg/Królewiec and Danzig/Gdańsk. On the right side, we see the new coats of arms of the most important cities: Posen/Poznań, Lodz/Łódź, Hohensalza/Inowrocław, Kalisch/Kalisz, Gnesen/Gniezno, and Leslau/Włocławek.

The map shows the most important towns and their purportedly German monuments, as well as the people living in the area. The carriage on the right indicates that some of them are German settlers from the east. In contrast, Polish history and culture, as well as the everyday reality of the occupation – the displacement and extermination of the local Poles and Jews – are completely ignored. The map was also distributed in simplified postcard versions.

## ILLUSIONS OF OMNIPOTENCE

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 borderland 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, the lowest of the low in Nazi racial hierarchy. 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 Germans from within the pre-1939 borders of the Reich (*Reichsdeutsche*) and 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.

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.

#### Vitrine 4

##### Winter relief medallions with *Warthegau* German symbols

porcelain, 1943

collection of the Municipal Public Library, Chodzież

##### Primer for the *Reichsgau Wartheland*

*Die Fibel für den Reichsgau Wartheland*, book, 1939

collection of the Poznań University Library

##### Winter relief figurines

porcelain, 1944

private collection

##### Winter relief pins

canvas, metal, 1943

private collection

The imposition of a new order on the remnants of the old always begins with education. The primer for children in the Wartheland illustrates the pivotal role it played in Nazi occupation policy.

Numerous illustrations of cities and rural landscapes reinforce the propaganda message of the primer. The cover features an image of the Imperial Castle, which becomes an implicit representation of the new district of the Reich. Against this backdrop and resembling the designs of German architects, the inhabitants of the region are depicted. These are exclusively German citizens, many of whom are shown in uniforms of various Nazi organisations or bearing badges and flags emblazoned with swastikas.

The primer is printed in Sütterlin script (*Sütterlinschrift*), the official script taught in German schools since 1935. In 1941, the Nazi regime removed it from use along with Gothic script, which was declared a "Jewish script". Thus, the later edition of the primer, published in 1942, uses a different typeface.

The primer's message was further echoed by small gifts distributed to the German population in exchange for material donations to soldiers at the front. These gifts came in various forms, such as pins, figurines, or medallions, and were typically vehicles for propagandistic content. These annual campaigns were known as Winter Relief of the German People (*Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes*).

#### Vitrine 5

Illustrated letters from Antoni Kowalski to his son Jerzy

manuscript, 1940–1944  
private collection

The reality created by the occupying authorities for the German citizens resettled in the *Warthegau* stood in stark contrast to how the Polish population experienced it. This is evident in the letters of Antoni Kowalski, an engineer who worked at a German munitions factory (formerly the Cegielski factory). In his letters to his son Jerzy, who was living in the countryside with relatives, Kowalski replaced daily contact with these messages, as visits had become a rare privilege. Through affectionate words and illustrations, he sought to make the separation from his parents easier for the child to bear.

Kowalski highlighted aspects he thought would interest his son: trams, trains, and the zoo. Only a few captions hinted that this reality was shaped by the occupation. Instead of referring to their forced relocation to a poorer apartment, he spoke of a "move." When planning visits to the countryside, there was no mention of the required travel permits. These illustrated stories likely helped both the recipient and the writer navigate the difficulties of everyday life under occupation.

Wall to the right of the entrance, from right to left

## ART

Art was ubiquitous in daily life under occupation. Propagandistic images, sculptures, and photographs conveyed Nazi and nationalist values to the occupying community. The occupied created modest works of art as a testimony to their experiences and expression of inner freedom. Many were made in camps and ghettos.

**Marian Bogusz** (1920–1980)

untitled  
c. 1942

black crayon on paper  
collection of the Regional Museum, Pleszew

**Władysław Strzemiński** (1893–1952)

*Wojna domom* [War Against Homes]  
1941

pencil on paper  
collection of the Museum of Art, Łódź

Władysław Strzemiński's drawings offer a condensed and powerful depiction of the experience of war. The forms evoke both houses and human figures. These works stem from his profound observation of the realities of occupation, which he spent largely in Łódź. The drawing on display is part of a series of six works under the same title. During the war, Strzemiński created other series that aligned with his broader theoretical and artistic legacy, marking him as a leading figure of the Polish avant-garde. gehört zu einer Serie von insgesamt sechs Zeichnungen desselben Titels. Während des Krieges schuf der Künstler noch weitere Serien, die sich in das theoretische und künstlerische Werk dieses Hauptvertreters der polnischen Avantgarde einfügen.

**Marian Bogusz (1920–1980)**  
untitled  
1942

pencil on paper  
collection of the Regional Museum, Pleszew

**Marian Bogusz (1920–1980)**  
untitled  
1942

charcoal on paper  
collection of the Regional Museum, Pleszew

Marian Bogusz was only 19 years old when the war began. Throughout the conflict, he produced drawings, paintings, and architectural designs. As a prisoner in the Mauthausen concentration camp, he developed a vision for a modernist artist's settlement, which he hoped would one day rise from the ruins of the camp. Along with fellow prisoners, he organised hidden "exhibitions" in the corners of barracks, concealed on the upper bunks. The drawings on display are from that period. Executed in charcoal, the abstract composition was added on paper bearing a German watermark.

Unknown Artist, *People at Work with Poznań Landscapes in the Background*  
1940

lithograph on paper  
collection of the Poznań University Library

Images of towns set against the backdrop of people at work reflect the widespread Nazi propaganda promoting the establishment of a new order in the *Warthegau*. Works like this were frequently reproduced in German books and magazines.

**Jan Wroniecki (1890–1948)**  
*Transit Camp on Główna Street*  
1940

watercolour and black crayon on paper  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

The artist, a professor at the Poznań State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry, captured the scene of the transit camp on Główna Street in Poznań (*Lager Główna*). Wroniecki was among many Poznań residents forcibly deported to the Generalgouvernement. After spending the war years in Tarnobrzeg, he returned to Poznań, where he resumed his teaching career until his death in 1948.

**Hans Dornhoff (1879–1972)**  
*Poznań River Port II*  
c. 1940

watercolour on paper  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

Hans Dornhoff was involved in promoting Nazi art in the occupied territories of the German Reich. Alongside his work as a painter, he played a key role as an organiser in the art community. From 1942, he served as director of the House of Art in Luxembourg.

**Sara Gliksman (1909–2005)**  
*Bridge in the Łódź Ghetto*  
1943

oil paint on plywood  
collection of the Museum of Art, Łódź

Sara Gliksman depicted one of the bridges in the Łódź Ghetto in this painting. The streets of Zgierska and Limanowskiego, visible from the bridge, were part of a completely different world. For the Jews imprisoned in the ghetto, crossing these bridges offered a fleeting glimpse into that world but often ended in suicide. Gliksman documented her difficult daily life in numerous works. Employed as a graphic artist in the Statistical Department, she enjoyed access to painting materials.

**Erwin Wohlfeil** (1900–1991)  
*Poznań Town Hall*  
1943

watercolour on paper  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

Born in Riga, Erwin Wohlfeil portrays the Poznań Town Hall against an idyllic backdrop of clear skies and serene landscapes. In the background, the façades of historic houses are depicted as complete, even though in 1943 they were still under reconstruction. Wohlfeil's painting was showcased at the 1943 Christmas Exhibition of *Warthegau* Artists in the Poznań Museum.

**Oskar Martin Amorbach** (1897–1987)  
*The Sower*  
1942

tempera and oil on canvas mounted on plywood  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

This piece is in storage. It has undergone minimal protective conservation and has been preserved with all surface layers and damages intact, as historical testimony.

**Oskar Martin Amorbach** (1897–1987)  
*The Carpenter*  
1942

tempera and oil on canvas mounted on plywood  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

This piece is in storage. It has undergone minimal protective conservation and has been preserved with all surface layers and damages intact, as historical testimony.

The two paintings were displayed in the newly renovated interiors of the Poznań Castle. *The Sower* highlights the essential role of agriculture in the *Warthegau*, while *The Carpenter* represents the development of a new order.

Oskar Martin Amorbach was a highly esteemed figure during the National Socialist era, holding professorships at art academies in Munich

and Berlin. His works were regularly featured in Great German Art Exhibitions in Munich, and one piece was even purchased by Hitler.

## FILM

Architecture and the daily life that unfolded within it were significant themes in Nazi propaganda films. In many scenes, imagined visions of the future shape of cities, villages, and landscapes are depicted as if already realised. Cinematic representations of the occupied territories predominantly portray the occupiers' reality. If Poles or Jews do appear, it is only as a labour force.

*Das Wort aus Stein / Word from Stone*, dir. Kurt Rupli, 1939

running time: 18'15"

collection of the Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau Stiftung

*Ostland, deutsches Land / Eastern Land, German Land*, 1940

running time: 23'1"

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

*Posen, Stadt im Aufbau / Poznań, City Under Construction*, 1941

running time: 13'40"

Bundesarchiv collection

*Himmler und Greiser in Posen / Himmler and Greiser in Poznań*, 1943

running time: 00'49"

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

*Aus Lodsch wird Litzmannstadt / How Łódź Became Litzmannstadt*, 1941/1942

running time: 20'36"

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

## Imperial Corridor

## CITY

Under the administration of the German authorities, cities became divided spaces, which reflected the unequal rights granted to the occupied and the occupiers. The architecture, in its broadest sense, provided the backdrop for their daily lives, including older buildings seized from the Poles and those newly constructed or planned to be built.

The most visible disruptions to urban space involved the establishment of ghettos for Jews and the construction of new settlements for Germans. Ghettos were typically set up in areas already inhabited by Jewish communities. In most cases, their boundaries were marked by fences and gates, which created artificial divisions in spaces that had previously been open and accessible.

The new settlements were built according to standardised plans previously implemented in many German cities. These developments imposed a distinctly Germanic imprint on Polish cities, which sent a symbolic message about the stability of Nazi rule over the newly-conquered territories.

Buildings that once served Polish citizens, especially places of worship, were repurposed for new functions. Churches were converted into warehouses, with some being demolished or transformed into concert halls. Synagogues were often turned into storage facilities or razed. A select few were remodelled for public use, and they functioned as swimming pools, meeting halls, or cinemas.

The historic spaces of old cities, with their buildings from various centuries, clashed with the Nazi vision of architectural order. A comprehensive unification of façades, referred to as *Entschandlung* (literally, removal of disfigurement), along with the infilling of urban areas, was intended to give these cities a distinctly German character.

In parallel with ongoing construction and adaptation, far-reaching plans for urban development were devised. These plans for the largest cities envisioned grand parade avenues integrated with expansive squares, which were given the distinct name of *Gauforum* and were to be sur-

rounded by monumental buildings housing German offices and institutions. Reproductions of these plans and photographs of architectural mock-ups were regularly disseminated through the daily press. As such, this imagined architecture played a significant role in Nazi propaganda as the buildings under construction.

## OFFICIAL AND RESIDENTIAL SPACES

The daily lives of the occupiers unfolded in buildings they had seized, among requisitioned belongings and furniture. Nevertheless, the interiors of homes and offices were swiftly transformed into German spaces by adding modest furnishings. Often, this transformation was achieved with just a single object: a piece of furniture, a painting, a map, a flag, a dish, or even a colourful magazine left on a table.

Decorating offices with symbols of power and portraits of Nazi leaders served to reinforce the memory of national and Nazi values. Custom furniture was commissioned for mayoral offices in some cities, while walls were decorated with murals. Compositions featuring the German eagle and swastika were reproduced all across Germany. However, painters active in the Warthegau would complement these with symbols of agriculture to express the distinct identity of the region. In other public spaces, such as hotels and guest houses, paintings or photographs depicting German landscapes served a similarly propagandistic role.

The furnishings intended for settlers' homes in the newly-occupied territories were designed to be modest and evocative of folk traditions. Showcased in exhibitions and publications, model residential interiors were described as typically German, even though such simple, contemporary furnishings were also standard in Polish homes. As a result, furniture requisitioned from the expelled inhabitants often seamlessly blended with Nazi-promoted interior designs. Only minor additions were needed, usually decorative elements such as German artworks and Nazi symbols.

Porcelain and faience were mass-produced in factories seized from Polish owners and were tasked with their manufacture. These sets were used both in government offices and German households, and some pieces were marked with names of institutions or Nazi emblems. Ornate porcelain items were prominently displayed and often used as

decorative pieces or official gifts. Meanwhile, the Polish population was left with worn-out pots and kitchenware.

Despite the grim and tragic realities of daily life, some Polish and Jewish architects continued to design buildings and interiors, even during their internment in camps. Their plans were created with the hope that they could be executed in a distant, post-war future.

## LANDSCAPE

In the broader context of Nazi ideology, the German landscape comprised the natural environment, which was then seamlessly integrated with human interventions. This included the development of towns and villages and their interconnecting roads. The stated goal of organising the landscape according to German models was to provide settlers with ideal conditions for everyday life.

At the Warthegau level, it was crucial to ensure the reorganisation of *Regierungsbezirke* (provinces) and *Kreise* (districts). This involved establishing a network of well-connected towns and villages, each with designated areas and populations, including specific trades and their representatives. These plans extended to stipulating the size of farms, the projected family sizes, and the allocation of agricultural workers.

The aesthetic dimension of these projects was reflected in the carefully-composed planting of trees and shrubbery. Roads, railways, and waterways integrated into the landscape were considered essential to the overall design. As with the picturesque routes of the Reich's autobahns, here, too, the goal was to allow travellers to appreciate the beauty of the unfolding landscape as they journeyed through the country.

Attention to the aesthetic quality of the landscape was closely tied to its functional use. Some of the plantings were intended to support potential defensive efforts against enemies. At the same time, specific farms were planned to take on defensive roles, which were to be carried out by specially-trained farmers in the event of a military threat.

In practice, the grand plans in the Warthegau were limited to constructing model villages, modernising roads and railways, and tree-planting schemes. The plans, painterly representations of the landscapes, and

propaganda photographs obscured the everyday reality: slave labour by the local population and prisoners of war, the labour and extermination camps hidden in the forests, and the mass graves.

## CITY (Walnutroom)

As part of the extensive renovation of the Castle during the German occupation, the first floor was redesigned for Hitler's use. The rooms, now referred to as the Walnut Room, Birch Room, and Marble Room, formed a cohesive suite. As respective dining, living, and reception rooms, these spaces were functionally linked to Hitler's study (now called the Fireplace Chamber). Although these interiors were ready for use and partially furnished by 1944, Hitler never occupied them. The furnishings in the Walnut Room are distinct from those in the other rooms. Built-in cabinets, designed for storing tableware, are fully integrated into the walnut wood panelling that lines the walls. The dark brown tone of the wood contrasts with the green marble tabletops, likely sourced from the Rhineland.

### Walnut Room / Dining Room

photograph, unknown author, 1944  
collection of the State Archives, Poznań

#### Table

Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Diary of Gertrud J. (1925–2012), a German woman living in Gostyń during the war

manuscript, 23 July 1941  
collection of the Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen

*Gostyń, even in the capital of our district with 1,200 inhabitants, we have a ghetto. People turn their heads away as they walk past the area.*



1  
Model of the reconstruction of Wieluń by Hermann Jansen and his associates: Alfred Cuda and Walter Moest

wood, plywood, 1940  
collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

The original model depicts the planned future appearance of Wieluń, which was razed during German air raids on 1 September 1939. Rebuilding the town from its ruins became a symbolic undertaking for the Germans. Hermann Jansen, renowned for his 1910 master plan for Greater Berlin, was commissioned to design the new town. The landscaping was overseen by Herta Hammerbacher, a landscape architect and the sister of the local Kreisleiter (district leader). This was one of her earliest projects.

The Germanisation of Polish cities manifested not only in architectural visions but also in everyday life. As early as 1939, street names were changed to German. Many new names referenced cities in the Reich, including those recently annexed. These signs reinforced the sense of the territorial unity of the Reich for its German residents.

Production of new street signs with German names, Poznań

photograph, unknown author, 1939  
Bundesarchiv collection, Berlin

2  
Street sign for *Walter-Flex-Straße* / Walter Flex Street, named after the writer who glorified German bravery during the First World War

metal, 1939  
collection of the Stefan Michalski Municipal Public Library, Chodzież

Hotel Ausstellungsdorf (the exhibition village) for Germans on the outskirts of Poznań. The model of the barracks shown in the photograph was also used for building labour camps.

photograph, unknown author, c. 1942  
private collection

3  
Street sign for *Tschenstochauerstraße* / Częstochowa Street

metal, 1939  
collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

4  
Street sign for *Richard-Wagner-Straße 5* / Richard Wagner Street, Koło

metal, 1939  
collection of the Museum of Ceramics Technology, Koło

German soldiers by the road signs near the Imperial Castle, Poznań

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
private collection

Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak (1924–1943), a resident of Łódź and prisoner of the Łódź Ghetto

manuscript, 1942  
collection of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

*My face is still swollen. Today, I went to bed without dinner because we had nothing to cook. We won't receive our ration until Saturday. [...] I felt dreadful today. I kept running out of breath and had to go outside several times for air. The young workers are already*

*getting their bread at the empty house next to the workshop. I've joined them again because it's more convenient.*

*But what does it matter when I'm just as hungry?*

5

Model of the Łódź Ghetto by Leon Jakubowicz

replica of the original model from 1940–1944, created by the Onimo workshop in 2024

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

The model of the Łódź Ghetto was crafted by one of its prisoners, Leon Jakubowicz. Alongside the three-dimensional depiction of streets and houses are stamped documents from institutions and workshops and practically worthless banknotes. Jakubowicz hid the suitcase containing the model in the basement of the building where he lived. It was recovered from the rubble after the war by his brother.

Walter Genewein, a close associate of Hans Biebow, Chief of the German Civilian Administration in the area, also documented the daily life of the Łódź Ghetto. As an amateur photographer, Genewein captured life in the ghetto in colour photographs. Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, Chairman of the Jewish Council of Elders (Judenrat) in Łódź, frequently appears in these images. Rumkowski worked with the Germans in organising the deportations of ghetto prisoners to concentration camps.

However, Genewein's photographs do not show the deprivation and hunger described by contemporary witnesses, nor do they depict critical areas of the ghetto, such as the camp for Roma and Sinti from the Hungarian-Austrian border. Also missing from his documentation is the section of the ghetto designated for Polish children: orphans, children of resistance members, and those caught stealing.

Staff of the industrial building design office in the Łódź Ghetto

photograph, Walter Genewein, c. 1940–1944

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

Jewish workers in a tailoring workshop in the Łódź Ghetto

photograph, Walter Genewein, 1940–1944

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski being driven through the streets of the Łódź Ghetto in a horse-drawn cart

photograph, Walter Genewein, 1940–1944

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

Order Police unit (*Ordnungspolizei*)

photograph, Walter Genewein, c. 1942

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

Children from a ghetto school queuing at a soup kitchen

photograph, Walter Genewein, 1940–1944

collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

Announcement regarding distribution of food rations for workers, issued by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski

print, 28 January 1941

collection of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

Concentration camp for Polish children in Łódź (*Polen-Jugendverwahrlager Litzmannstadt*)

photograph, unknown author, c. 1942

collection of the Institute of National Remembrance, Łódź

**Wand (Stirnseite, vom Eingang links)**

Plan for the standardisation of façades on Piotrkowska Street / *Adolf Hitler Strasse* in Łódź

photocopy of the plan by Helmut Richter and Gerhard Waldmann, 1940

Niels Gutschow's collection

## Exhibition of architectural plans in Ostrów Wielkopolski

photograph, unknown author, c. 1942  
Ostrów Wielkopolski Municipal Museum

## Model for the redevelopment of the Old Market Square, Poznań

photograph, unknown author, c. 1942  
collection of the Historic Buildings Conservation Office, Poznań

## Colour scheme design for the Kalisz Town Hall façade, likely based on the designs of Gerhard Waldmann and Helmut Richter

oil on board, 1943  
collection of the Kalisz City Council

## Colour scheme design for the Market Square houses in Kalisz

oil on board, 1943  
collection of the Kalisz City Council

## Kalisz Town Hall

postcard, c. 1940  
collection of the District Museum of the Kalisz Region, Kalisz

The projects to standardise urban façades in the *Warthegau* were part of the broader *Entschandlung* (literally: removal of disfigurement) initiative launched throughout Germany in 1933. The aim was to give buildings a “national” character by levelling their heights, standardising their façades, and adding sloped roofs. These ideas aligned with the widely promoted Nazi vision of a uniform German society.

Helmut Richter, the architect behind the partially completed plans for Łódź, had previous experience with similar commissions. His concept for standardising façades in Stralsund had been showcased at architectural exhibitions as a model example.

Similar projects were developed for other cities in the *Warthegau*. Poznań’s façade standardisation plan was part of a larger redevelopment project for the Old Market Square, including nearby city blocks. A visible remnant of these transformations is the arcade in the house opposite the Archaeological Museum (Górka Palace).

### Table

#### Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Letter from Antoni Gruszczyński (1875–1940), a farmer from Powidz, a veteran of the Greater Poland Rising, and prisoner at Fort VII, to his wife

manuscript, March 1940  
collection of the Museum of the Martyrs of Greater Poland

### *My Dear Wife!*

*Dearest Janna, pray to God and manage as best you can. Raise the children in the way of God. Pray fervently to God for me, your unfortunate husband, who must leave you, and I hope our shared prayers will be answered.*

*Your always loving, Antoni*

Entrance to Fort VII with the sign *Konzentrationslager Posen / Concentration Camp, Poznań*

film still, 1940  
collection of the Martyrs’ Museum, Żabikowo

Main gate of Fort VII (*Konzentrationslager Posen*)

film still, 1940  
collection of the Martyrs’ Museum, Żabikowo

These film stills are the only known visual records of the camp. Erected in the 1870s as part of a former German fortification system, Fort VII

was repurposed as a site for the extermination of the Polish population. It became the first concentration camp within Poland's pre-1939 borders.

Prisoners included those considered enemies of Germany, primarily members of the Polish intelligentsia and veterans of the Greater Poland and Silesian risings. Arrests were based on proscription lists compiled before the war, part of the so-called *Intelligenzaktion*. Others imprisoned at Fort VII included members of the Polish underground, individuals evading forced labour for the Germans, and the mentally ill, the latter of whom were killed using experimental gas methods.

The camp operated from October 1939 to April 1944. In the final months of the war, Fort VII was converted into a factory producing radio equipment for the German military.

The designs created by German architects for the future development of Polish cities envisioned the construction of uniform city blocks along parade avenues and grand squares and the creation of residential estates. These projects were largely propagandistic and presented visions of the future that did not fully align with reality. Particularly striking is Walther Bangert's complete omission of the ghetto from his Łódź city plan.

The residential estates were the only component of these urban plans to be completed. The houses were constructed according to standardised designs widely implemented throughout the Reich. These typically comprised multi-storey buildings with sloping roofs and distinctive arched windows and doors. The size and layout of the apartments conformed to the prevailing model of a household with four children and an additional member (either a servant or an elderly relative).

The largest housing estates were built in Poznań, Łódź, and Kalisz between 1940 and 1942. Due to the ongoing war, all the houses were equipped with shelters. By 1944, smaller estates made up of single-storey houses had also been constructed; they were intended for Germans relocated from cities threatened by bombings.

### City plan of Inowrocław / *Hohensalza*

photocopy of Walther Bangert's city plan, 15 December 1942  
Niels Gutschow's collection

### Design of a residential building type

lan, Department of Construction under the *Reichsstatthalter* Office in Poznań, c. 1942  
*Bauwelt* 1943, No. 19/20 (34), p. 8

### Łódź / Lodsch / *Litzmannstadt* city plan

photocopy of Walther Bangert's city plan, 31 July 1941  
Niels Gutschow's collection

### German housing estate in Ostrów Wielkopolski

photograph, unknown author, c. 1943  
Ostrów Wielkopolski Municipal Museum

### Housing estate design for Germans from cities threatened by bombings

drawing, January 1944  
Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

### Pabianice city plan

photocopy of Walther Bangert's city plan, 23 October 1942  
Pabianice Municipal Museum

### Wieruszów / *Wieroschau* town plan

plan by Hermann Jansen, Alfred Cuda, and Walter Moest, 1940  
collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

The original plan outlines the buildings and streets of Wieruszów; it was created concurrently with plans for Wieluń by Hermann Jansen and his team.

**Wall to the right of the entrance, from left to right**

**Notice demanding that Polish men and women bow and give way to Germans in uniform**

printed by the occupying authorities in Kalisz, 1 October 1941  
collection of the District Museum of the Kalisz Region, Kalisz

**Conversion of Poznań's New Synagogue into a swimming pool for *Wehrmacht* soldiers**

photograph, unknown author, c. 1941  
collection of the Poznań University Library

**German resettlers inside the church in Turek, with decorations by Józef Mehoffer visible on the walls**

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, March 1942  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

**Church in Jarocin used as a warehouse**

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Regional Museum, Jarocin

**German soldiers staging a mock Mass wearing bishop's vestments from Gniezno Cathedral**

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
collection of the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno

**Door of the church in Pabianice with a German sign reading "No entry for Poles"**

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Pabianice Municipal Museum

**Model of the future Gniezno based on Georg Salzmann's design**

photograph, unknown author, 1941  
collection of the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno

The extensive use of religious buildings by the occupying authorities is a poignant testimony to the extreme pragmatism that drove their actions.

Catholic churches were repurposed for a variety of functions, including those of warehouses or even camps for German resettlers. One particularly drastic transformation occurred at Gniezno Cathedral. After its furnishings were removed, plans were made to convert it into a concert hall. In this new role, it was intended to dominate the standardised cityscape envisioned by architect Georg Salzmann.

Many synagogues were either converted into warehouses or demolished. The recovered materials and tombstones from Jewish cemeteries were repurposed for road construction. One unprecedented example of the extreme humiliation inflicted on the Jewish community was the conversion of Poznań's New Synagogue into a swimming pool for *Wehrmacht* soldiers. As part of these efforts, structural changes were made to the building, and its richly decorated interior was destroyed.

## OFFICIAL AND RESIDENTIAL SPACES (Birch Room)

The birch wood panelling lends the room a warm yet bright character. A striking feature is the fireplace, now purely decorative. It is crafted from two types of marble, likely sourced from Hesse or the Rhineland. As an ornamental element, the fireplace is also featured in other rooms of the Castle.

### Birch Room / Living Room

photograph, unknown author, 1944  
collection of the State Archives, Poznań

#### Table

Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Diary of Betty H. (1922–2009), a German woman living in Poznań during the war

manuscript, 17 July 1941  
collection of the Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen

I received a notice from the labour office, and it turns out I'm going to Poznań on Monday.  
I'm excited because now I can help with the war effort.  
Mother is crying.

1, 2  
Dinnerware for the German school in Pabianice

porcelite, 1939–1945  
collection of the Pabianice Municipal Museum

3  
Table knife with swastika

metal, 1939–1945  
collection of the Pabianice Municipal Museum

4  
Vase decorated with the coats of arms of Włocławek and the *Wartheland*

faience, produced by the German faience factory in Włocławek, 1939–1945  
collection of the Museum of Kuyavia and Dobrzyń Regions, Włocławek

5  
Wall plate with the coat of arms of Włocławek

faience, produced by the German faience factory in Włocławek, 1939–1945  
collection of the Museum of Kuyavia and Dobrzyń Regions, Włocławek

6  
Decorative vase with the inscription *Posen*

porcelain, 1939–1945  
collection of the Poznań University Library

7  
Plate and serving platter with oak leaf motifs

porcelain, produced by the German porcelain factory in Chodzież, 1939–1945  
private collection

Interior of a German home in Jarocin, SS runes visible in the wall décor

photograph, unknown author, c. 1941  
private collection

8  
Magazine *Wartheland*

*Wartheland*, No. 21, 1942  
collection of the Poznań University Library

## Entrance to the Pleszew Town Hall

photograph, unknown author, c. 1941  
collection of the Regional Museum, Pleszew

## 9 Local newspaper Rawitscher Heimatpost

*Rawitscher Heimatpost*, Winter 1944  
collection of the Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

## Public office interior

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, 1941  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

In 1939, German authorities took control of Polish porcelain and faience factories in the *Warthegau*. The takeover of the faience factory in Koło took a particularly ruthless turn. Its Polish owner of Austrian descent, Czesław Freudenreich, and his daughter were executed for refusing to collaborate with the occupying forces.

These factories produced a wide range of goods for homes and public offices. Common decorative motifs included city coats of arms, the names of public institutions, and plant designs. Oak leaves were frequently used, as the oak tree symbolised German culture. This symbol was widely embraced even before the National Socialists came to power.

In everyday life, German households were often filled with magazines featuring eye-catching reproductions. One such publication was *Wartheland*, which focused on local history and culture. Each issue featured articles on historic architecture as a German legacy and plans for future development.

## Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Letter from Zosia [surname unknown], a Polish woman living in Zgierze

manuscript, 5 August 1940  
collection of the Museum of Independence Traditions, Łódź

*We were also taken by the gendarmes during the raid, but we were released, and we registered and received yellow IDs from the *arbeitsamt* [labour office], so for now, we will be safe from the roundups.*

*But all our possessions and furnishings have been catalogued so that they might evict us.*

*Anything is possible these days.*

## 10 Old worn pots

cast iron, enamel, 1930s  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

The expulsions carried out from 1939 onwards were part of a broader policy of terror targeting the occupied population: even those who remained lived in constant fear for their lives. A particularly symbolic image reflecting the status of Poles and Jews during the occupation is the photograph of a recycling depot in Turek. The individuals shown are Polish citizens selecting utensils that could still be used, most of which came from the liquidated ghetto.

Despite the repression and other dangers, resistance networks emerged throughout the *Warthegau*. These included the Poznań Union of Armed Struggle, the Home Army, the National Military Organisation, and the Scout organisation *Szare Szeregi* (Grey Ranks). Although these groups were not as extensive as those in the *Generalgouvernement*,

they played a crucial role in the struggle against the occupiers and in maintaining Polish identity under the occupation.

### Radio surveillance conducted by members of the *Szare Szeregi* (Grey Ranks) in Oborniki

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
collection of the Public Library, Opole

### Keys to the homes of evicted Poles, prepared for distribution among German settlers

photograph, 1939  
private collection

### Recycling depot in Turek, used by the remaining Polish population

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, August 1942  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

### Polish citizens being evicted from Oborniki

photograph, unknown author, 1939  
collection of the Public Library, Oborniki

**Wall, right to the fireplace, left to right**

### Boy at a desk

photograph, unknown author, 1939–1945  
collection of the State Archives, Kalisz

### Decorative eagle with a swastika

metal, 1939–1945  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

### Coat of arms of the *Warthegau*

glass, wood, 1939–1945  
collection of the Museum of the Wieluń Region, Wieluń

### Sign reading “No entry for Poles”

printed on cardboard, c. 1940  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

### Civil air defence members at a meeting

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, 1942  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

### Design of chairs in the office of the German mayor of Rawicz

design, unknown author, 1941  
collection of the Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

Interiors played a crucial role in reinforcing the authority of German officials. Their photographic portraits, displayed in their offices, were disseminated among the German public through official photographs circulated in the press and featured in albums. The broad impact of visual propaganda is highlighted in a photo of a young German, likely a member of the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth), posing at a desk. However, the background is somewhat unremarkable: the flag bearing a swastika is crumpled, and the map behind him is torn.

Custom-made furniture and portraits of leading Nazi officials were central to the image of German offices and public institutions. Significant investment went into furnishing these interiors. One notable example is the set of furniture made during the war in Wrocław for the mayor of Rawicz, which has been preserved along with the original design drawings.

In addition to furniture and artworks, photographs of office interiors show various modern office tools and lamps. Their designs reflect a combination of classical influences and modernist aesthetics that shaped the look of Nazi-era interiors.



## Female clerk at a desk

design, unknown author, 1939–1945  
collection of the Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

## Interior of the office of the German mayor of Pleszew

photograph, unknown author, 1939–1945  
collection of the Regional Museum, Pleszew

### Platform

## Table and chairs from the office of the German mayor of Rawicz

wood, leather, 1941  
collection of the Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

### Podest

## Tisch und Stühle aus dem Büro des deutschen Bürgermeisters in Rawicz

Holz, Leder, 1941  
Bestand des Muzeum Ziemi Rawickiej in Rawicz

### Window wall

## Designs for As Café by Simon Wiesenthal

crayon drawing, 1945  
collection of the Jüdisches Museum Wien

Simon Wiesenthal, known for his post-war efforts as a Nazi hunter, was an architect by training. While imprisoned in the Mauthausen concentration camp, he sketched designs of a café and entertainment venue for a Polish fellow prisoner, Edmund Staniszewski, who supported him during their time in the camp. Wiesenthal completed these sketches shortly after his liberation.

The planned venue, As Café, was to be established in Poznań. Wiesenthal envisioned detailed interiors with furniture, wall decorations, and even advertising slogans. His vibrant drawings reflect his remarkable will to survive and his belief in a brighter future despite the horrific odds.

### Wall, left to the fireplace, left to right

The war effort was not conducive to mass furniture production. Nevertheless, the German authorities commissioned designers to create model interiors and furnishings for German settlers in newly-occupied territories and territories intended to become Germany. These designs featured prominently in the propaganda exhibition *Planning and Building in the East in 1941*. The decision to commission Hermann Gretsch, a renowned German designer, for the project testifies to the importance the Nazi regime placed on interior design in its propaganda. Gretsch's concepts drew on national traditions and aligned with the widespread vision of the typical German home: simple, functional, yet cosy.

## Workers' canteen in the porcelain factory in Chodzież

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

## Model of a German settler's apartment, designed by Hermann Gretsch

Abbildung aus dem Katalog der Ausstellung „Planung und Aufbau im Osten“, 1941  
Bestand des Instytut Zachodni in Poznań

## Glasurabteilung der Porzellanfabrik in Chodzież

illustration from the exhibition catalogue *Planung und Aufbau im Osten*, 1941  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

Porcelain designs by Hermann Gretsch from 1940 were emulated in some of the sets produced in German factories in Chodzież and Włocławek. Notably, the Włocławek factory not only produced tableware but also manufactured porcelain components used in electrical devices and missile warheads.

## Glazing process at the porcelain factory in Chodzież

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

## Fired forms being decorated at the porcelain factory in Chodzież

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

## Finished products at the porcelain factory in Chodzież

photograph, unknown author, 1940  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

### Platform

## Model of a kitchen in a German settler's apartment, designed by Hermann Gretsch

illustration from the exhibition catalogue *Planung und Aufbau im Osten*, 1941  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

## Kitchen table with chairs

wood, plywood, c. 1940  
private collection

## LANDSCAPE (Marble Room)

This room differs from the others in that it lacks wooden panelling and features stucco decorations instead. Each wall is divided into sections, which lends the space a clear and structured appearance. The marble floor corresponds with the adjoining corridor and the Fireplace Chamber. As in the other rooms, the stone was sourced from either Hesse or the Rhineland. Much of the stone used for construction projects in Nazi Germany was quarried by concentration camp prisoners and forced labourers. A notable example is the Flossenbürg concentration camp in Bavaria, where prisoners were forced to work in granite quarries.

## Marble Room / Reception Room

photograph, unknown author, 1944  
collection of the State Archives, Poznań

### Table

## Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Diary of Hermann Voss (1894–1987), an anatomist and German scholar, lecturer at the Reich University, Poznań

typescript, 1932–1942  
collection of the Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań

*Our housekeeper has left. She was the second German woman from Bessarabia to work for us, very capable and hardworking. She and her parents are leaving for the Warthegau on Wednesday, where they will take over a Polish farm. I've already heard that many Poles have recently been evacuated from the villages. The Poles have become quite insolent lately. (...) I think we must view the Polish question without emotion, purely from a biological perspective. We must destroy them, or they*

*will destroy us. That's why I am pleased with every Pole who is no longer alive.*

1

*Landscape Primer* by Heinrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann

book, *Landschaftsfibel*, 1942  
private collection

Dotted with German signposts, the landscape of the Warthegau was ultimately intended to be filled with monumental symbols of German glory. One of the architects behind these monuments was Wilhelm Kreis, a renowned German designer known for his grand memorial commemorating the Battle of Leipzig.

However, the reality that played out in the Warthegau diverged sharply from these lofty visions. This contrast is vividly captured in a dictionary with a telling title, *How to Speak to My Polish Workers?* This question was initially addressed to German settlers who had moved to Greater Poland in the early twentieth century when the first edition of the book was published.

Many similar publications emerged during the war, which fomented hostility towards the occupied population. The authors of these works were often scholars from German institutions, including the Reich University of Poznań. One such figure was Professor Hermann Voss, an anatomist from this university, who recorded his extreme hatred for Poles and racist views in his diary. Despite his deep involvement in Nazi atrocities, Voss was able to continue his academic career unhindered after the war.

2

Map of the Reich's motorways from a school atlas

book, *Deutscher Schulatlas*, 1942  
private collection

3

Polish-German picture dictionary

book, *Bilder-Wörterbuch*, 1940  
collection of the Museum of the Origins of the Polish State, Gniezno

Opening of the bridge over the River Warta

photograph, unknown author, 1941  
collection of the National Digital Archives

Glory Memorial near Kutno by Wilhelm Kreis

design, 1942  
*Das Bauen im neuen Reich* 1942, Vol. 2, p. 10

4

Dictionary *How to Speak to My Polish Workers?*

book, *Wie spreche ich mit meinen polnischen Landarbeitern?*, 1940  
collection of the Martyrs' Museum, Żabikowo

5

German farmers' almanac for the *Wartheland*

print, *Wartheländischer Bauernkalender*, 1944  
collection of the Poznań University Library

6

Magazine *The Street*

newspaper, *Die Strasse*, No. 17/18, 1941  
collection of the Poznań University Library

7

Postcards with reproductions of landscape paintings of the *Warthegau*

postcards, Paul Bürck, 1942  
collection of the Poznań University Library

## Wooden signs with town names in the Turek district

photograph, unknown author, c. 1940  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

## Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Diary of Hanna Andryczówna (1918–2009), daughter of landowners from Greater Poland

manuscript, 1939–1940  
collection of the National Library of Poland, Warsaw

*War trivialises human life, and I, who value it above all else, cannot accept the terrible realisation that war reduces people to “cannon fodder.” Perhaps if I had seen an entire battlefield or even a larger number of the dead, it would not have left such an impression on me as those few who looked as though they were merely sleeping.*

8  
Patch for Jews in the shape of the Star of David

cotton fabric, 1939–1945  
collection of the Museum of Independence Traditions, Łódź

The real landscape of the *Warthegau* was a far cry from the idyllic images portrayed in propaganda, which depicted nothing but pristine nature. Forced labour was an everyday reality, particularly for the Jewish population, who were condemned to appalling conditions, especially in road construction. The local Polish population was also exploited without mercy.

## Women building the road

photograph, unknown author, c. 1941  
collection of the Regional Museum, Jarocin

## Potato digging under the supervision of a German manager

photograph, unknown author, 1942  
Bundesarchiv collection

## Polish women working in the fields at the Landrat's Office in Turek

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, May 1942  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

## Ego-document as a testimony to life under occupation:

Letter from Jakub Szulman, Rabbi of Grabów

manuscript, 21 January 1942  
collection of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

*Four weeks have now passed since all the Jews from Koło were taken: men, women and children without exception. They were all loaded into vehicles and driven away, destination unknown. Later, the same thing happened in Dąbie, Kłodawa, Izbica and other towns in the district. (...) Some fugitives who managed to escape arrived among us this week. They tell us that everyone – may this fate not befall you – is being killed, gassed and buried in groups of 50–60 in a single grave.*

## Prisoners from the Łódź Ghetto en route to the Kulmhof Camp

photography, author unknown, 1942  
collection of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

The Chełmno/*Kulmhof* extermination camp operated from autumn 1941 until April 1943, with a brief reactivation in 1944. Its victims were primarily Jews from the Warthegau, particularly prisoners from the Łódź Ghetto. At the turn of 1941 and 1942, a group of Roma and Sinti brought from the same ghetto were also murdered here.

The camp was centred around a manor house, where arriving Jews were forced to surrender their belongings. They were then killed in specially adapted trucks, the rear compartments of which had been converted into gas chambers, and their bodies were buried in a nearby forest.

**Wall, long side, from left to right**

### Harvest festival in Oborniki

photograph, Wilhelm Brauer, c. 1940  
collection of the Public Library, Oborniki

Harvest festivals played a crucial role in the propagandistic portrayal of the *Warthegau*. The special wreaths and even the stages built for the occasion evoke a sense of religious ceremony. The vibrant photographs taken by Wilhelm Brauer, a Lutheran reverend in Oborniki, capture the vivid character of these gatherings in striking colour. His collection documents the town's daily life from the late 1930s onwards.

In addition to the harvest festival documentation, the structures of two model villages are vital historical evidence of the *Warthegau*'s agricultural identity. The house designs in these two villages differed significantly. While the new development in Radliniec (*Wilhelmswalde*) near Jarocin was uniform and based on a few standardised plans, the Balczewo (*Balzweiler*) buildings near Inowrocław followed a more complex design. Each house embodied the architectural traditions of different regions of the Reich. The designer, Hermann Henselmann, moved to the *Warthegau* partly due to his Jewish heritage. Securing employment in the newly-annexed territories of the Reich was far easier for him than in other regions.

### Harvest festival in Jarocin

photograph, unknown author, 1941  
collection of the Regional Museum, Jarocin

### Village of Balczewo near Inowrocław

photograph, unknown author, 1943  
*Bauwelt* 1943, No. 19/20 (34)

### Village of Radliniec near Jarocin

photograph, unknown author, 1942  
Wartheländischer Bauernkalender, 1942

### Urban development plan for Krotoszyn and its surroundings

design, Alfred Mensebach, May 1941  
collection of the Henryk Ławniczak Museum, Krotoszyn

Labour camps provided the primary workforce for the intended reshaping of the landscape and the construction of roads and bridges. The prisoners in these camps were primarily Jews who worked in appalling conditions. One such camp was located in Luboń, near Poznań, and was part of the Reichsautobahnlager network of motorway camps, tasked with preparing the construction of the Berlin–Warsaw motorway. The camp carried out preparatory work for the road's construction. Another example is the Gemeinschaftslager der DAF, a camp run by the German Labour Front in Nekla, which focused on railway construction.

Photographs of these projects fail to convey the harsh realities faced by the prisoners in these camps.

### Barracks for the Jewish labour camp prisoners building the motorway in Luboń

photograph, unknown author, c. 1941–1942  
collection of the Martyrs' Museum, Żabikowo

## Map of the Oborniki district

printed on paper, early 20th century, with coloured annotations from c. 1940  
collection of the National Museum of Agriculture and Food Industry, Szreniawa

## Repair of a damaged railway bridge near Sieradz

photograph, unknown author, 1939  
Miron Urbaniak's collection

## Landscape with a view of Gniezno

photograph from the album *Das schöne Wartheland*, Ernst Stewner, 1941  
collection of the Poznań University Library

German artists were deeply involved in supporting the propaganda efforts of the occupying authorities. Painters participated in special outdoor sessions, where landscapes were the primary subject. These works were displayed in annual exhibitions at the Poznań Museum and reproduced on postcards. Among the artists working in the *Warthegau* were professors from Nazi art academies, such as Engelbert Schoner, and younger painters at the start of their careers.

A key figure in promoting the German identity of the *Warthegau* was photographer Ernst Stewner, who had already been living in Poznań before the war. His photographs of the landscapes of the Second Polish Republic and its inhabitants were published in the album *Germanhood in Poland (Das Deutschtum in Polen, 1939)*. His images were widely circulated on postcards and in various publications during the war. Interestingly, despite his involvement in the Germanisation policy, Stewner still offered support to his Polish employees in his photography studio.

## River Warta: a landscape near Pyzdry

photograph by Ernst Stewner, 1940  
collection of the Poznań University Library

## Greater Poland: a landscape with a country road

photograph by Ernst Stewner, 1940  
collection of the Poznań University Library

## Hans Bauer, *Panorama of Rawicz*

oil on canvas, 1942  
collection of the Museum of the Rawicz Region, Rawicz

## Wolf Röhricht, *Landscape with Cattle and Tall Trees*

oil on canvas, c. 1942  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

This piece is in storage. It has undergone minimal protective conservation and has been preserved with all surface layers and damages intact, as historical testimony.

## Engelbert Schoner, *Landscape near the River Noteć*

oil on canvas, 1943  
collection of the National Museum, Poznań

This piece is in storage. It has undergone minimal protective conservation and has been preserved with all surface layers and damages intact, as historical testimony.

## Forced labourers during earthworks

photograph, Wilhelm Brauer, c. 1940  
collection of the Public Library, Oborniki

Alongside forced labour, the requisitioning of property was a significant part of life under occupation. These seizures were linked both to expulsions and military needs. Particularly devastating was the requisitioning of livestock. The omnipresent German military units heightened the sense of fear among the occupied population, making any form of civilian resistance impossible.

## Requisition of geese by a German official

photograph by [first name unknown] Schultz, winter 1942  
collection of the Józef Mehoffer Museum, Turek

## Baltic Germans touring a farm seized from expelled Poles

photograph, unknown author, 1939  
Bundesarchiv collection, Berlin

## Drill of German soldiers in Oborniki

photograph, Wilhelm Brauer, c. 1940  
collection of the Public Library, Oborniki

## Treppenabsatz

# YELLOW COAL

Illusions of omnipotence have surfaced in different places and periods throughout history. Therefore, this narrative is not limited to Nazi Germany and the Second World War but extends to the present day. Here, the exhibition's final part begins, opening the space for personal reflection on the themes it explores.

The art installation presented in the Fireplace Chamber was created by Iza Tarasewicz specifically for this exhibition. The history of this room is linked to wartime plans to transform it into Hitler's study. Although these plans were never fully executed, the efforts made at the time continue to cast a historical shadow, and even today, the gleaming marble floors and walls still reflect the visions of the Reich's omnipotence.

Iza Tarasewicz disrupts this ostensibly unambiguous narrative by introducing foreign elements into the monumental interior and breaking its rigid symmetry. She employs a unique material: "yellow coal," a metaphorical substance formed from the accumulation of evil circulating through the world.

The idea of harvesting this coal and using it as an alternative source of energy was introduced in 1939 in the short story "Żółty Węgiel" [Yellow Coal] by Zygmunt Krzyżanowski, a writer of Polish descent who grew up in Kyiv and wrote in Russian. One of the characters in his story says:

*The outline of my project is straightforward: I propose harnessing the energy of anger dispersed among countless individuals. You see, on the vast keyboard of human emotions, the blackened keys of anger have their own distinct, sharply defined tones. While other emotions, let's say tenderness, sympathy and the like, are accompanied by a relaxation of muscle tension, a certain loosening of the body's movements, anger is charged with*

*muscle, filled with tension, clenched fists and gritted teeth. But this feeling is futile, stifled by dampers and mufflers, and socially repressed like a lamp that gives off smoke instead of light. Yet if we were to remove these dampers, if we allowed the bile to flow freely through the social barriers, this “yellow coal,” as I might call it, would set the halted wheels of our factories turning and light millions of lamps with electric bile and...*

The artist used construction pigment and clay for her project. Initially, wet and soft, yellow mud will gradually change form, hardening and cracking over time. It will transform into a crust, resembling the surface of a battlefield: the enduring residue of every war. Along with the mound of rubble that opens the exhibition, a powerful reminder of a long-past conflict, it forms a narrative arc that spans the various exhibition rooms.

The publications related to this project were an important source of reflection for the curators of this exhibition. Explore them in the Ash Room, opposite the Fireplace Chamber.

### **Floorplan of the exhibition**

- 1 – You are here
- 2 – Part 1
- 3 – Part 2
- 4 – Part 3

### **Text in Leichter Sprache**

Es hat viele Kriege auf der Welt gegeben. An vielen Orten werden immer noch Kriege geführt. Im Kamin-Zimmer befindet sich ein Werk der Künstlerin Iza Tarasewicz. Es heißt „Gelbe Kohle“. Das Kunstwerk ist aus gelbem Schlamm gemacht. Wenn der Schlamm trocknet, verändert er sein Aussehen. Wenn der Schlamm ganz trocken ist, wird er so ähnlich aussehen wie ein Schlachtfeld nach einem Krieg.

Die Künstlerin hat eine kurze Geschichte gelesen. Ein Mann hat die Geschichte vor fast 100 Jahren geschrieben. Der Mann hatte einen polnischen Namen: Zygmunt Krzyżanowski. In der Geschichte erklärte er, wie gelbe Kohle hergestellt wird. Diese Kohle sollte das Böse aller Kriege in der Welt aufnehmen. Dieses Böse verschwindet nie. Vor dem Kamin-Zimmer kann man sich Teile der Geschichte anhören.

Das Werk der Künstlerin ist anders als der Rest des Schlosses. Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs wurde das Schloss umgebaut. Es sollte zu einer Wohnung von Adolf Hitler werden. Hitler kam nie in das Schloss. Bis heute sieht das Schloss fast genauso aus wie während des Kriegs.

„Gelbe Kohle“ ist der letzte Teil der Ausstellung. Jeder Mensch kann das Kunstwerk auf seine eigene Weise betrachten.

In dem Raum auf der anderen Seite kann man sich hinsetzen. Dort gibt es Bücher über die Themen der Ausstellung.



Site-specific installation: **Iza Tarasewicz**

Translation of the short story from the Russian to Polish: **Jerzy Czech**

Radio play: **FONORAMA**

Script, direction, objects: **Kuba Kapral**

Sound, montage: **Hubert Wińczyk**

Mixing, postprodukcja: **mooryc**

Speakers: **Julia Rybakowska-Kruszczyńska, Tadeusz Falana**

Electric: **Jacek Nowaczyk**

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**POZnań\***

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