

Museums for Peace in Berlin 2005

*Contribution of Philipp Sonntag for MUSE, the global newsletter for Peace Museums, as edited by Yamane Kazuyo, Japan. She is lecturer of Peace Studies at Kochi University and also the editor of Muse: Newsletter of the Japanese Citizens' Network of MUSEums for Peace; see [MUSE](http://www.museumsforpeace.org/)
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More than 10 years ago Kazuyo Yamane came to Berlin with her family, and I was happy to arrange meetings at four institutions, which could be summarized under "museums for peace". Now I looked for an update, and at first sight just found one, so I checked further, and found a variety of initiatives, which are active in the overall context.

Anti-War-Museum

Still going strong, in new and larger rooms, is the "Anti-War-Museum" of Tommy Spree, who is ready for German as well as English speaking visitors, whether local school classes or foreigners from far, including Japan:

Anti-Kriegs-Museum e.V.

Bruesseler Str. 21
D-13353 Berlin
Fon: 0049 30 45 49 01 10
open daily 16.00 - 20.00 (also sundays and holidays)
For group visits call also 0049 30 402 86 91
Anti-Kriegs-Museum@gmx.de

The museum had its 80th anniversary recently! It is well marked on the official map of Berlin, and there is a monument about the hands cracking a gun, right across the street in a park named after the founder Ernst Friedrich. If you visit the URL www.anti-kriegs-museum.de you will find his text, which he wrote 10 years after foundation of his museum, harassment and destruction by the fascists, and escape to Switzerland:

Germany is a republic - I thought.

Germany wants peace - I thought.

There should be a Peace Museum in a peaceful republic, I thought.

But as the pacifistic republic did not have enough money for such a work of peace (an armoured cruiser being more important and more expensive), the silly idea came to my mind, to open an 'Anti-War Museum': In the centre of Germany, in the heart of Prussia, in the midst of Berlin (five minutes away from the police headquarters).

Ernst Friedrich, "Vom Friedensmuseum zur Hitlerkaserne", St. Gallen 1935

Then Ernst Friedrich went to Belgium and again established a museum for peace, but soon the fascists arrived also destroyed it there.

Since its opening in 1925 the Anti-War Museum was supposed to address the youth. Young people should learn from the mistakes and wars of older generations. As a cultural centre for meetings and mutual understanding, the museum had been and is concerned to promote the values and traditions of the peace movement, co-operating with peace and conflict researchers at the universities. The museum displays lots of pictures and documents about the impact of war, and the persecution of pacifists.

In the cellar, there is a real air-raid shelter, with a lot of equipment, which tells how the people tried to survive with primitive equipment, like a simple pharmacy for first aid, a fire fighting improvisation, and lots of governmental instructions, while in reality 15 people had sought shelter, found no place to lay down and sleep in the small room. There were holes to adjacent shelters, with bricks to take out in between, but often there was no escape. When you go down to this shelter, you find on the walls a lot of pictures from the impact of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, and visitors are instructed about the fate of people there as well.

Alltogether the AKM (Anti-Kriegs-Museum) is alive and flourishing due to the spirit of Tommy Spree, who is happy to succeed, with little financial means as in most cases for such institutions, but very impressive, and it does have its impact on school classes and other visitors. The heading of a recent

report is: "Ein Museum fuer den Frieden", a museum for peace, and it is networking with local groups and initiatives.

Other Museums and Initiatives

Looking for other museums I had to broaden the viewpoint somewhat. As soon as the issue is on peaceful solutions, and on the overall avoidance of violence, there are several institutions active in Berlin. Often in common institutions with broader tasks, there are at times exhibitions about the issue. Thus in my region, in Steglitz at southern part of Berlin, there has been an exhibition about the local impact of the war, and the fascist regime with its strict and criminal public regulations, especially against Jews. A lot of photos gave a vivid impression of the sufferings of people along the warfare.

Of course several Jewish institutions have loads of information displayed in many ways about their sufferings. At the Judaic Centre there was an exhibition about "Art in Auschwitz". Much like the pictures painted by Hibakusha, I found these paintings and drawings very impressive, revealing intimate details about the impact of violence on desperately suffering victims.

A major issue is the documentation "Topography of Terror", in a space adjacent to the Martin Gropius building in the city. It demonstrates the entire seizure of power, with reference to the administrative center of the SS-State, its regulations, buildings, responsibilities. It has a chapter including the "Bombs and Ruins", and then "The First Postwar Years". Another documentation "Berlin 1945" also does attract many visitors. It covers the entirety of warfare impact upon Berlin, and the political reorganisation after the end of war, with all its incomplete and often arbitrary attempts to punish the guilty persons.

There is a Kaethe Kollwitz Museum, where an exhibition "The war does accompany until the end" April to June 2005 did reveal the activities of this famous sculpture artist until 1945. She died a short time before the end of the war. She had early on contributed to the Anti War Museum of Ernst Friedrich. 16th of April 1945 she wrote an appeal to do the "hard work of pacifism".

There is a "Kreuzberg Museum", with a documentation about refugees who came to the districts Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, both within Berlin, during the last 300 years, "after war and before peace ...".

The Alliiertenmuseum May-Sept. 2005 had an exhibition displaying photographs of American, British and French soldiers, and former radio reports, revealing the tremendous destruction along warfare.

These are just a few examples, in view of the large number of mostly local and small, but altogether impressing exhibitions, lectures, discussions, events - like the "Long Night of Remembrance - 60 Years after the End of War in Berlin".

I am impressed by the public interest in the last war, and the precision regarding details of destruction presented. There is a kind of solemn silence, with a general impulse to avoid such catastrophes. Looking at contemporary politics, the impact is limited, but important. There is a bitter debate, whether German soldiers should "join warfare" worldwide like in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, or rather name the same thing "assist peace making forces". Without a broad public awareness about the war inflicted by Hitler, and a deliberate intention to avoid such misery, there would be less debate about the context of own "defence". It will be an ongoing task to inform the public about the weapons of the future, the risks of uncontrollable escalation, the ambivalence, to say the least, about current contributions of German soldiers worldwide. Until a few years ago, there had been a tabu - strictly defensive measures on the own ground only were considered as possible. The museum and exhibitions at Berlin do take up and discuss current events, and documentation of former sufferings are put in these vital contexts. Likewise important issues, for instance the impact of atomic weapons are clearly shown at the Anti Kriegs Museum, and even groups of soldiers come to visit the museum, and listen to Tommy Spree. Imagine, how Ernst Friedrich would have appreciated this fact.