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Press release

Tell me about ~~yesterday~~ tomorrow

An Exhibition by the
NS-Dokumentationszentrum
on the Future of the Past

28|11|2019–30|08|2020

The exhibition 'Tell me about ~~yesterday~~ tomorrow' creates a connection between contemporary art and the current approaches on institutional remembrance. Between November 28, 2019 and August 30, 2020, an exhibition of works of art devoted to the interpretation of the past and its relation to our present will be held at the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism and at associated locations in the city.

From May 21 to 31, the polyphonic program 'Assembly' offering a number of discussions and performances, will kickstart the exhibition. The program will be staged in front of the Munich Documentation Centre and in cooperation with other Munich institutions. An architectural construction designed by the architect Nikolaus Hirsch will serve as a platform for dialogue, theatre and film screenings.

'Tell me about ~~yesterday~~ tomorrow' displays different works of art to address the complex realities of historical and contemporary life. The exhibition highlights the shifting political hegemonies that have led to exclusion, devaluation and destruction and continue to do so today. The project explicitly chooses an international perspective in order to emphasize the fact that social polarization and radicalization do not stop at national borders but are universal social phenomena in a globally connected world.

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The works by more than thirty contemporary artists can be conceived as commentaries, critical footnotes or as a second level of the Documentation Centre's permanent historical exhibition, adding to it in an aesthetical and poetical way, but are also leaving room for various interpretations. New works of art, which enable us to reflect on history and its portrayal are created out of a close collaboration between the humanities and arts, raising questions such as: Who interprets the past and what is his/her range of experience?, What kind of stories are heard – or told?, How do we handle ambivalence and a multitude of opinions? In what ways do historical events influence how we understand our world today and how we envision the future?

Thematic diversity is one of the main features of the exhibition and highlights complex connections in the past and the present. The following aspects had an influence on the works of art: cultural, psychological and political consequences of war, repression and trauma, the portrayal of national myths, rhetorical and aesthetic markers in public discourse, and emotionalized politics that evoke longings and fears. Remembrance in the sense of interpreting the past is closely related to our experience of the present. This is why we are not able to draw a positive conclusion; instead, history must continually be questioned and contextualized – which is also important for the purpose of collective commemoration. Against the background of the current revisionist view of history in Europe and the world, and the appropriation of public discourse by a new, globally networked right-wing populist scene, the task of creating platforms for a present- and future-oriented discourse evolving out of historical experience increasingly lays in the responsibility of historical museums. It is a matter of scrutinizing shifts in the political discourse and offering alternative concepts to the supposedly attractive orientation towards an imaginary yesterday of homogenous communities and unchangeable cultural identity. In this respect, it is important for all public institutions to develop a progressive view of the future based on the principles of freedom and liberal democracy and to demonstrate that 'that which is, is not everything' (Theodor W. Adorno). Hannah Arendt's concept of 'natality', the human capacity to reconsider, to think in new ways and to create something that has not been there before has an important role to play – in particular in how we address the past and conceive of alternative realities.

As a 'mobilizing memory', 'Tell me about yesterday tomorrow' examines the specific forms of the German memory culture and puts it into a critical, international perspective. The broad variety of topics and the international line-up of participating artists offer an opportunity to consider German history in exchange with other historical and current realities. Taking the history of National Socialism as a starting point,

the exhibition has chosen the medium of art to address the characteristics, impact and consequences of racism, genocide and dictatorship in their significance for the present. Along with the project, which is funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, and during the 'Assembly' in May 2020, there will be a publication of theoretical and literary contributions adding to the exhibition and the public program.

Artists: Kader Attia, Michal Baror, Cana Bilir-Meier, Ayzit Bostan, Andrea Büttner, Keren Cytter, Willem de Rooij, Brenda Draney, Loretta Fahrenholz, Sirah Foighel Brutmann and Eitan Efrat, Aslan Gaisumov, Ydessa Hendeles, Sebastian Jung, Brian Jungen, Leon Kahane, Annette Kelm, Baseera Khan, Bouchra Khalili, Miki Kratsman, Jumana Manna, Kent Monkman, Olaf Nicolai, Marcel Odenbach, Emeka Ogboh, Joanna Piotrowska, Jon Rafman, Gregor Schneider, Rosemarie Trockel, Željimir Žilnik and others.

Director: Mirjam Zadoff

Artistic director: Nicolaus Schafhausen

Assistant curator: Juliane Bischoff