«Swiss Memorial for the Victims of National Socialism» : a place of remembrance in the city of Bern

Task

In April 2023, the Federal Council mandated the FDFA to initiate the creation in Bern of a memorial to the victims of National Socialism. The Bern City Council has provided the Casinoterrasse for this purpose – a historic, centrally located space where people like to linger. The memorial is intended to be Switzerland's first national site of remembrance dedicated to the victims of National Socialism, commemorating them and encouraging visitors to engage more deeply with the phenomena of National Socialism and fascism, as well as their relevance to the present day. Its four key themes are entanglement, persecution, responsibility and understanding. The site should speak to all of society, addressing in particular people belonging to communities that were victims of National Socialism, and those who helped them. A contemporary and aesthetically effective design was sought after that would open paths for people to reflect on and emotionally engage with the topic in a variety of ways.

Competition

To tackle this challenging task, an international selective project-based competition was organized.
It drew entries from numerous interdisciplinary teams bringing together expertise in the visual arts, history education / art mediation, and architecture / landscape architecture. From this wide range of entries, a 15-member jury made up of representatives of the federal government, the City of Bern and the initiators, as well as independent experts from the fields of art, architecture and history, selected 11 teams to produce a project. Following thorough scrutiny and discussion of the 11 expanded entries, the jury selected the winning project, "unfolded minute" which is now to be realised on the Casinoterrasse.

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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Winning project: «unfolded minute»

The «unfolded minute» project team

Project lead; history:	Franziska Schürch & Isabel Koellreuter
Arts, composition:	Jannik Giger
Visual arts:	Rahel Zaugg
Architecture:	Andrea Steegmüller & Salomé Gutscher (ASA + SAGA GmbH)

The «unfolded minute» project explores the place of remembrance as a combination of spatial intervention, sound and informational elements. The heart of the memorial will be a sound wall made of profiled black steel, situated along the retaining wall between the promenade and the Casinoterrasse itself. The wall will play a unique sequence of sounds for one minute, three times an hour. This installation will be complemented by a forum-style circular pavilion on the Casinoterrasse, with text displayed on its inside using a LED banner.

Its conceptual approach is of remembrance as an acoustic experience in a physical space, and it builds on this to connect its educational material clearly to the present day.

Some aspects stand out in particular: the additional dimension of sound, the broadened approach to mediation, which also allows for differing types of engagement, and the potential of speaking directly to multiple, distinct target audiences. Other laudable aspects are the multi-layered nature of the approach and how it dedicates individual 'minutes of sound' to specific, yet anonymous, victims of National Socialism. These brief compositions will create acoustic minutes of remembrance that commemorate the countless individual fates of those victims. An additional forte of the installation is its aim of creating a space in which to gather and to confront the past.

Within this conceptual framework, the forum takes on a core mediation role. The issues embedded within the forum – concerning human rights, the present, and responsibility – allow for mediation to move with the times and leave scope for developing various aspects at later stages. The memorial theme might be extended into everyday city life, for example by printing a thought-provoking question onrestaurant receipts.

The project is to be flanked by two screens bringing to life the history of Switzerland during the Second World War through the stories of individual lives and the historical context of National Socialism.

From an artistic perspective, «unfolded minute» comes across as a bold and contemporary work that stands out sharply. Particular emphasis is placed on the powerful statement of the sound wall, the physical and immediate impact of the sound, and the project's ability to make remembrance something that can be experienced sensually and atmospherically, rather than primarily through explanation. As a result, the project feels fresh and distinctive in its artistic approach. The project's artistic power is revealed above all in the interplay between its various components. Indeed, it is clear that the impact derives from the close combination of sound wall, forum and mediation elements. It is precisely this framework – which, whilst not yet finalised, is clearly defined – that offers great potential for development.

In terms of urban design, «unfolded minute» features two clearly defined design elements – the linear sound wall running along the perimeter and the forum-like component on the Casinoterrasse – which lend the site a sense of presence and redefine it as a public space for remembrance and discussion. Here, the forum is conceived more as a fitting or module with an as-yet undefined form. This reflects an effort not to overdevelop the terrace, but rather to reactivate its public dimension by means of a precise intervention.

Overall, the project stands out by making a statement that is both architecturally striking and artistically unique. The linear sound wall and the forum interact to strengthen the site as a public space for remembrance and discussion. The interplay of sound, space, and mediation adds a sensory and contemporary dimension to remembrance. The project shows its value in particular in its immediate accessibility, atmospheric impact, and potential to engage diverse audiences in a reflection on remembrance, responsibility, and the present.

Supporting association

The memorial site is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2027. Following its inauguration, a supporting association will take over operations. In addition to maintenance and upkeep, this includes updating the informational content that will be available at the memorial. The association will ensure that the site allows for different types of use – from quiet visits by individuals to guided and narrated tours for group visits, e.g. school trips.

The association was founded on 10 June 2025 by several established organisations active throughout Switzerland, namely the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG), the Society for Minorities in Switzerland (GMS) and the Archives of Contemporary History at ETH Zurich (AfZ). The admission of new members, the establishment of institutional partnerships and the arrangements for funding the activities are in progress. Additional members wishing to support the memorial are welcome.

Scan the following QR code for more information on the Swiss Memorial website:

Scan the following QR code to access the FDFA website and the full jury report:

Jury

Judges
(with voting rights)

Tim Enderlin
Carine Bachmann
Marieke Kruit
Alec von Graffenried
Ralph Friedländer
Gregor Spuhler
Nicolas de Torrenté (alt. member)

Subject matter
experts (without
voting rights)

Valérie Arato Salzer
Fabienne Meyer
Christophe Patthey
Ziu Bruckmann
Jean-Daniel Gross

Expert judges
(with voting rights)

Madeleine Schuppli (Chair)
Pascal Hufschmid
Peter Gautschi
Brigitte Sion
Christina Späti
Nicole Schweizer
Bernhard Aebi
Tobias Würsch
Melik Ohanian
Stefan Burger (alt. member)