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Without a home. Kindertransports from Vienna

As of November 10, 2021, the Jewish Museum Vienna is dedicating an exhibition at the Museum Judenplatz to those Viennese children who were sent abroad without their parents from the winter of 1938 until the outbreak of the Second World War in autumn 1939.

Struggling for every single child

After the Nazis had seized power in Austria and the “Anschluss” followed in March 1938, Jewish women and men began to face brutal exclusion and persecution. Most countries closed their borders within a short period of time. This made the struggle for possibilities to leave the country even more intense. With the help of so-called Kindertransports, endangered children were to be brought to safety.

It was not until after the massive eruptions of violence against Jewish women and men during the November pogrom that various countries, above all Great Britain, agreed to accept unaccompanied children. Subsequently, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Sweden, the USA and Switzerland also became countries of refuge. Between December 1938 and September 1939, the beginning of the Second World War, more than 12,000 children were able to be saved, including more than 3,200 from Austria. Parents had to make the difficult decision of putting their children on a train alone. The plans of many parents to follow their children as soon as possible never succeeded; they were deported and murdered. The Kindertransport saved many lives, but resulted in a youth without a home and mostly without a family.

Journey to the end of childhood

The children who had fled to countries later invaded by the National Socialists experienced multiple persecutions, which not all of them survived. Great Britain, which took in the largest number of children, appeared to be a safe haven. But the arrival on the British Isles meant the abrupt end of childhood. Alone in a foreign land with constant worries about the survival

of their families, the children had to endure stressful and unsafe situations on their own. Some were passed from one foster family to the next, others were placed in homes or boarding schools, and girls often had to work as domestic help. Finding suitable accommodation immediately or even reuniting with parents who had also escaped turned out to be the exception. While the younger children often forgot their mother tongue, older boys were interned for several months when the war broke out. Quite a number of them later fought in the British Army to liberate Austria.

For a long time, little or no attention was paid to the “Kinder,” as they still call themselves today. Their trauma seemed less important in comparison with concentration camp survivors. Encouraged by the second generation, the children of the Kindertransports have been telling and documenting their stories since the 1980s. The president of the New York Kindertransport Association is also the daughter of a Viennese “Kind.” While the children’s further lives are highlighted, space in the exhibition is likewise devoted to the second generation.

“Without a home. Kindertransports from Vienna” can be seen from November 10, 2021 to May 15, 2022 at the Museum Judenplatz, a Wien Holding museum. Appearing along with the exhibition, which was curated by Sabine Apostolo and Caitlin Gura-Redl, and designed by GABU Heindl and Toledo i Dertschei, is a German/English catalog published by the Jewish Museum Vienna that costs € 24.90. The Museum Judenplatz (Judenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna) is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (wintertime), respectively 5 p.m. (summertime). The Jewish Museum Vienna at Dorotheergasse 11, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Further information can be found at www.jmw.at or info@jmw.at.

Queries

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Photos and press material for the current exhibitions are available on the Jewish Museum Vienna website at www.jmw.at/presse.



#KinderOfVienna

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