



PRESS RELEASE

4th April 2022

- **Jewish Museum London Celebrates its 90th anniversary**
- **Confirmation of position of Frances Jeens as Director**
- **Opening of The Eye As Witness Exhibition in partnership with the National Holocaust Centre and Museum.**

Jewish Museum London is celebrating its 90th anniversary by confirming Frances Jeens as their Director. Frances has been the Interim Director for two years and has successfully repositioned the Museum through the Covid pandemic. The focus on collections, partnerships and learning is being celebrated through the opening of the exhibition, *The Eye As Witness*, created by the National Holocaust Centre and Museum and supported by Arts Council England.

The interactive exhibition explores the political and moral motives for witnessing and recording the Holocaust, examining different forms of witnessing including photography, texts and testimony, and encourages critical thinking on racism and hatred today.

The exhibition is set out across the Jewish Museum London with core components including:

- Immersive VR experience: Walk into a Nazi-produced Holocaust photograph to see the photographer in action. Co-created by historian Professor Maiken Umbach and the University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Laboratory.
- Holocaust victim's own photographs: Explore the different perspectives of victim versus perpetrator photography.
- Interactive testimony from Holocaust Survivors: Via the National Holocaust Museum's acclaimed *The Forever Project* which preserves the ability to ask Holocaust survivors thousands of questions, using award-winning interactive Q&A technology.

The exhibition will open on Sunday 24th April, have a special candle lighting and curators talk for Yom HoShoah Thursday 28th April 2022, and will close on Sunday 18th September 2022.

The exhibition is a product of research conducted in the multi-disciplinary project 'Photography as Political Practice in National Socialism', funded by Arts Council England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council and led by Professor Maiken Umbach, which brought together historians, education experts, computer scientists and museum professionals to transform the use of images in understanding the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.

Quotes

Director, Jewish Museum London, Frances Jeens said:

"I'm delighted to share this partnership news that the Jewish Museum London will be hosting the National Holocaust Centre and Museum's Eye As Witness Exhibition. Working in strong partnerships across both the Jewish and cultural sectors is central to the way the Museum works and I'm so pleased this will be our first exhibition in my role as Director. The exhibition reflects the values of the Jewish Museum London in supporting academic research, creating space for discussion, and using technology to bring stories to our audiences."

Director, National Holocaust Centre & Museum, Marc Cave said:

"Whilst The Eye As Witness is an excitingly creative use of technology to reconsider the past, its purpose is chillingly contemporary. When you see an image or video posted on Twitter or Facebook today - of a victim of war or member of a particular minority group - ask yourself who recorded it and why. If pictures are worth a thousand words, then fake news is 1,000 times more sinister in photographic form. This exhibition invites critical thinking. It asks you to understand the visual cunning of the Nazis and how it helped permeate and legitimise anti-Jewish hate — and to think critically about the same propaganda techniques being used on social media today by Left and Right alike".

University of Nottingham, Professor Maiken Umbach said:

"The urgency of taking a fresh look at the darkest moment of human history cannot be underestimated. We have relied too much on Nazi propaganda photos to visualise the horrors of the Holocaust. Focusing on the photos and testimonies of victims helps us understand issues that are sadly becoming increasingly pressing in the modern world, such as antisemitism, racism, fake news, and prejudice."

Assistant Professor Paul Tennent, Mixed Reality Lab at Nottingham University's School of Computer Science said: *"The Eye as Witness is an exercise in technical and interactional creativity. The challenging context helps us to ask questions as researchers about the nature and ethics of reconstructing sensitive scenes. VR technology gives us a powerful tool to deliver these experiences in a deeply immersive and embodied way, but we have a responsibility to apply this with care. Everybody in that photograph was a real person with emotions and a story to tell. It is not our place to embellish their story, but to tell it as well as we can with the tools we have."*

Peter Knott, Area Director for Arts Council England said: *"Recognising significant events in history through art and culture is important for us all, and Eye as Witness is a powerful example of how technology can give future generations the opportunity to hear Holocaust survivors' testimonies in their own words. We're proud to support this national touring exhibition through National Lottery funding, as it helps us explore the lessons we learn from history, while creating new work and telling important stories."*

Notes to Editors

Interviews/Press View

For further information and images, to arrange an interview, or arrange an individual press view, please contact:

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Jewish Museum London

<https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/>

National Holocaust Centre and Museum

<https://witness.holocaust.org.uk>

University of Nottingham

The University of Nottingham is a research-intensive university with a proud heritage, consistently ranked among the world's top 100. Studying at the University of Nottingham is a life-changing experience and we pride ourselves on unlocking the potential of our 44,000 students - Nottingham was named both Sports and International University of the Year in the 2019 Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, was awarded gold in the TEF 2017 and features in the top 20 of all three major UK rankings. We have a pioneering spirit, expressed in the vision of our founder Sir Jesse Boot, which has seen us lead the way in establishing campuses in China and Malaysia - part of a globally connected network of education, research and industrial engagement. We are ranked eighth for research power in the UK according to REF 2014. We have six beacons of research excellence helping to transform lives and change the world; we are also a major employer, and industry partner - locally and globally.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves, and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

Further Information on the Exhibition

Few people today would not recognise a photograph of Hitler. Everyone has seen at least one image showing victims of Nazi racial persecution: men, women and children, and referencing the horrific events that took place throughout the Holocaust. But through whose eyes are we seeing this past?

It was not just the thousands of staged images of Hitler that were the work of professional Nazi propaganda photographers. So too were many photographs of Nazi ghettos and concentration camps - those images that we see in museums and on television today.

Viewed with modern eyes, photos designed to make Holocaust victims appear sub-human may today inspire pity rather than disgust. But they do little justice to the dignity of these victims; nor do they help us realise that the people persecuted and murdered by this regime had often lived perfectly 'everyday' lives only days before the Nazis came to power.

The exhibition "The Eye as Witness", co-produced by the National Holocaust Centre and Museum and a team of academics from the University of Nottingham led by Professor Maiken Umbach, takes a fresh look at this problem. Photographs, it suggests, are historical sources created with particular agendas in mind. We need to examine them critically if we are to learn any lessons from them.

To this end, the exhibition employs cutting-edge technologies. A Mixed Reality experience enables visitors to enter a virtual environment, and 'step into' a Nazi photograph taken in the Warsaw Ghetto. Inside the image, visitors can observe the photographer taking the shot, and study what was left outside the frame of the image.

The exhibition then turns our attention to photographs that are rarely seen today: secret photos taken by Jewish people and members of the anti-Nazi resistance, who, at great risk to themselves, used the camera to record the story as they saw it. Although these images would in no way change their fate, nor give them power over their situation, these photographs did give victims a degree of control over the way in which their horrific experiences were witnessed for future generations. The visual testimony and a rare example of a written note from the camps is combined with the words of survivors speaking to us today, through The Forever Project, the NHCM's digitally interactive Q&A experience – an NT100 Social Tech innovation backed by NESTA, Arts Council England and the Heritage Fund.

Finally, the exhibition invites us to contemplate lessons for today. Shocking images of victims of violence and those fleeing from it may alert us to many contemporary global injustices. But how much do they tell us about the perspective of the victims? Do they allow us to see real people, or do they obscure the very situations they claim to document? Visitors are invited to make their own decisions, and record their responses to such photos on an interactive screen.



[End]



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