

The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism: From Institutionalized Memorial to Counter-Monument

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Abstract

It was not until the late 1980s that serious scholarship on the Holocaust and its memorial culture began to take shape. It was not until that same decade that the very existence of the Roma genocide was recognized. It is therefore little wonder that the study of the genocide and its commemoration did not emerge until much later. The inauguration of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism in 2012 in Berlin is a critical event in this process.

It represents the culmination of a complex set of political, scholarly, and aesthetic forces that have shaped awareness of the genocide. The choices embodied in the Sinti and Roma Memorial become clearer when it is compared with two other Roma genocide memorials (one in Poland and one in Berlin). National context, aesthetic sensibility, educational approach and community engagement are all key variables. Since its opening, the Memorial has been witness to many public as well as more personal and private engagements, which can be categorized as “anti-memorial” and/or “dialogical counter-monuments.” Although its primary purpose is to memorialize the Sinti and Roma victims of the genocide, the Memorial has become a symbol of many things, including recognition, respect, and dignity. The Sinti and Roma Memorial, in the end, is a static, physical installation whose symbolic themes are abstract and atmospheric. Since its inauguration it has been fascinating to observe its “afterlife.” The Memorial has become a site for the performance of identity and for the enactment of communal ritual of commemoration, some planned and officially sponsored and many spontaneous and unsanctioned.