

Stimmen der Teilnehmer:innen der Lehrveranstaltung zu den Exkursionen:

Mauthausen

“Beyond sadness, I felt a kind of disbelief and indignation. It seemed like a lie. I kept asking myself during the excursion how something like this was possible, and whenever I sought an answer within myself, I became indignant, irritated. The absurdity is so great that it seems impossible to explain how things reached this point.”

“Particularly significant was the journey leading to Mauthausen, which stands in sharp contrast to the atmosphere of the site itself. The peaceful and beautiful landscape offers no emotional preparation for the destination. The quiet roads and the gently rolling hills provide a deceptive sense of calm, as if nature itself were oblivious to the horrors that occurred just beyond the horizon. It is precisely this incompatibility that constitutes one of the strongest aspects of the Mauthausen experience. The calm of nature that accompanies the visitor during the journey is abruptly replaced by a space defined by human cruelty and darkness. The first glimpse of the camp, with its stark barracks, barbed wire, and watchtowers, cuts sharply through the serenity of the landscape.”

“From a Cultural Studies and Art history perspective, the architecture of Mauthausen raised important questions. The stone walls, towers, and elevated position created an image of strength, order, and permanence, almost resembling a medieval castle. Architecture here was not neutral; it functioned as an instrument of power, intimidation, and ideological display. The camp masked itself as something monumental and authoritative while concealing its true function. Violence was embedded not only in actions, but in space itself.”

“The visit to the Mauthausen concentration camp was enriching and allows us to put images on a reality with which I grew up. I thank the Catholic University of Linz which allowed us to discover this particular place, steeped in history and heavy with memory. I wish all students in the Humanities to address the thorny question of the horrors of Nazism since it is an important part of our history and heritage.”

“Amidst this landscape of industrial death, the most poignant object I encountered in the exhibition was a small, hand-made dress of a baby girl born in the camp. This object serves as a powerful, defiant symbol of resistance and hope. In a place designed specifically for the absolute negation of life, this dress represents the message that life continues to assert itself even in the face of total annihilation. [...] For me, this tiny garment symbolizes that the human desire to protect and the hope of being saved are ultimately stronger than the most sophisticated machinery of destruction. This knowledge shifted my entire perspective: Mauthausen is not only a story of death; it is a story of the incredible, almost incomprehensible resilience of the human spirit.”

“During my studies, and as a result of the French culture and History I have been immersed in since childhood, I have accumulated a certain amount of knowledge about the Second

World War and the Holocaust in general. I was well aware of the existence of concentration camps and learned about national-socialism. Thanks to what I studied before going to the place, I knew that this journey to Mauthausen would be difficult on different scales: emotionally, historically, and humanly. I indeed experienced all these difficulties, but it allowed me to become even more aware of things and to experience this unusual visit with greater presence.“

“The excursion to the Mauthausen Memorial was not, for me, merely an encounter with historical information or an expansion of factual knowledge. It constituted an experience that fundamentally altered my perception of space, the body, and historical memory as both an art historian and a practicing artist. Mauthausen did not present itself as a site belonging exclusively to a concluded past; rather, it emerged as a space that continues to carry the traces of violence and to exert an active, ongoing impact on the visitor. The experience revealed that history, in this context, does not remain confined to archival narratives or documented events, but persists materially and spatially in the present.”

“First of all, recounting the experience of being able to visit a concentration and extermination camp in Linz, Austria, just a few days after arriving in the city, and with little knowledge about the Nazi period in Austria, was truly impressive and impactful. The experience itself generates a range of feelings of various kinds: the first is to wonder how humanity reached this point of exterminating people serially, with so much hatred and without any reason that would justify any kind of condemnation? Eliminating people, entire groups, on a scale of millions over years, makes me reflect on how all this was possible? Where does so much hatred come from? And how can an ideology“

Hartheim

“The first thing that caught my attention about Hartheim Castle is that, unlike the Mauthausen camp – which is more remote from the urbanized area of the region – it is in a quite busy area. In this sense, the castle lacks that image of “what could be happening inside?” and often went unnoticed, without people suspecting what was happening within it. Hartheim seemed a very unsuspecting place for such cruel practices as those committed inside it.”

“Ultimately, Hartheim reinforced my conviction that the study of art history is inseparable from questions of memory, trauma, and moral responsibility. Encountering this site did not provide closure or consolation, but rather sharpened my awareness of the role art and memorial practices play in sustaining critical reflection. In confronting the past without attempting to neutralize its horror, Hartheim exemplifies how remembrance can become an active force in shaping cultural and ethical consciousness.”

„The visit to Hartheim Castle took place toward the end of our lecture series, at a point when I already possessed a broader knowledge about Nazi concentration camps, systems of violence, and forms of resistance. Despite this accumulated knowledge, the visit reopened fundamental and deeply troubling questions. I continued to ask myself how such a system

could function so efficiently, how large parts of the population allowed it to exist, and how it became possible to legitimize practices such as euthanasia, mass murder by gas, and the systematic killing of innocent people whose only “crime” was that they were born.”

“We visited the Hartheim Castle about a month after visiting Mauthausen. The information and memories of the visit to the concentration camp had therefore had time to settle and I was able to step back and address the issue of the concentration camp and the memorials of the Nazi period with a more historical and cooler eye. So I left less room for emotion during the visit to Hartheim. It is not for all that certain questions were not asked during the visit, that the discovery of such a place (one of the only euthanasia centers on the territory of annexed Austria) allows to understand and become aware of more events occurred during the war.”

“The spatial context of Hartheim is perhaps its most chilling and sociologically significant feature. Unlike the isolated extermination camps located in remote areas of occupied Poland, this facility was situated right in the center of a functioning village. My reflections on this site induce a deep anxiety regarding the “social blindness” of the era and the mechanics of local complicity.”

“The photograph that affected me most shows the Hartheim building with smoke rising from its chimney. At first glance, it is an entirely ordinary image. Without contextual knowledge, it could be interpreted as a neutral architectural photograph, perhaps even picturesque. There is nothing visually shocking or overtly violent about it. No bodies are visible, no explicit signs of suffering appear within the frame.

However, once one understands what the smoke represents, the image becomes almost unbearable. The smoke is not a neutral byproduct of industrial activity; it is the remains of murdered human beings. Realizing that the smoke emerging from the chimney is composed of burned bodies fundamentally alters the meaning of the image. What once appeared ordinary becomes horrifying—not because the image changes, but because the viewer’s knowledge does.

This moment marked a turning point in my experience of Hartheim. Standing in front of this photograph, I felt a heaviness that I had not experienced elsewhere in the exhibition. The realization of how much cruelty this seemingly calm building contained was overwhelming. The photograph condensed that realization into a single visual moment.”

“Architecturally, Hartheim Castle impresses with its external beauty, which still retains much of its original construction. But from the moment we entered and visited the spaces, gradually reading the information plaques and listening to the explanations given to us, we began to understand what had been done there, especially during the Nazi occupation. For me, it was another shock, and a feeling of sadness overwhelmed me. Knowing that there, during the years of the Nazi regime, it had become one of the six most important extermination sites executed by the Nazi regime”