

Click here to read why Standard Issue is now a podcast not an online magazine.

STANDARD ISSUE For all women

BE A PATRON

DONATE PODC

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR PO

SHOP EVE

Search here...



You are here: Home \ Arts \ Germany – Memories of a Nation Review



Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

Germany – Memories of a Nation Review

Featuring 200 objects tracing history over the last 600 years, *Germany: Memories of a Nation* is an insightful look into the country's past and present as Germanophile *Maureen Younger* discovered.

Posted on 07/11/2014



1953 Volkswagen Beetle Export Type 1. National Motor Museum.

Some objects featured in the new exhibition at The British Museum are unexpected, such as Napoleon's hat, discarded at Waterloo in his hurry to escape the clutches of his British and Prussian victors. Some are just utterly beautiful like the Gutenberg Bible. One of Europe's first printed books, its pages have nonetheless been lovingly adorned by scribes who added descriptive letters and designs to each page in accordance with the purchaser's personal taste.



The opening page of the second volume, *Parable or Proverbs of the Gutenberg Bible*. Mainz, 1455. © British Library Board.

The consequences of Nazi ideology and warmongering can be seen not only in the replica of the gate to Buchenwald Concentration Camp but in the stature of the Dresden Trümmerfrau (rubble woman), representing the thousands of women who helped clear up the piles of rubble most German cities had become by 1945. Last but not least the refugee cart from East Pomerania representing the 12 million Germans who, fleeing the Soviets, were forced to migrate from areas which for centuries had been German. With the evils of Nazism raw in people's memories, what was de facto the largest civilian exodus in history garnered very little sympathy or even notice outside Germany.

For many, the horrors of Nazism, the widespread death and destruction that it wrought, has understandably obfuscated their view of Germany. A similar fate has befallen the incalculable role that Germany has played both in the arts and sciences. Admittedly, the exhibition can only scratch the surface of some of these achievements. However, it makes some interesting points in the process, for example, that it was thanks to the Hanseatic League that Protestant books and ideas first made their way into England.

The exhibition is refreshing and gives a much-needed insight into the country, its history and achievements. Perhaps it's fitting that the last object on view is a model of the Reichstag (Parliament), which can be seen in Berlin both from the Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of a divided Germany and the Memorial of the Murdered Jews, an indelible symbol of its Nazi past. Built during the days of the German Empire, the 1933 Reichstag Fire was used by Hitler as an excuse to grab absolute power, and today

Some exhibits are truly jaw-dropping. The Grand Nef, an automaton, built in the form of a ship, is an amazing example of intricate craftsmanship. It would set sail over a grand banquet table, with its canon firing alongside numerous moving figures such as the 7 Electors of the Holy Roman Empire, passing in turn before their enthroned Emperor.

Then there is the ingenious three-way picture, where depending on what angle you're looking at it, seems to depict Bismarck, Wilhelm I or Friedrich III.

The exhibition deftly uses the objects to illustrate a rather complex history. Floating Frontiers underlines one of the central problems to German identity, famously stated in the quote by Goethe: "Germany? Where is it? I do not know where to find such a country." As the exhibition is at pains to point out, for most of the last 600 years Germany was more of an idea than a unified country with fixed borders. Panels detail its former outposts in cities and regions which are no longer part of the German-speaking world – Prague, the site of the first German-speaking university in 1348; Riga; Danzig (Gdansk); Königsberg (Kaliningrad); and Strasbourg. As an island nation, it's hard to appreciate the Germany of today only came into being as recently as 1990.



4 Max Lachnit (1900–1972), *Dresden Trümmerfrau*. Sculpture made of rubble, c. 1945. © Estate of Max Lachnit. Photo: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Given that German history is often reduced in this country to the 12 years of Nazi rule, the

represents yet another Germany, a new democratic Germany, whose painful and complex birth this excellent exhibition adeptly charts.

Germany: Memories of a Nation is at the British Museum until January 25, 2015. Adults £10/Children Free. More details at www.britishmuseum.org

Recommend This Article+3



WRITTEN BY MAUREEN YOUNGER

A London-Scottish, multi-lingual, much-travelled stand up comic working on the mainstream, urban and gay comedy circuits, actor and writer. www.maureenyounger.com @MaureenYounger

Other great articles...



Apr 28, 2017

7 Wonders: The final playlist

It's the last playlist from us, so *Standard Issue* staff are picking a song to say goodbye



Apr 28, 2017

Interview: Cathy Tyson

The powerhouse actor talks feminism, fear and women in authority with *Justine Brooks*, as they catch up between rehearsals for the



Apr 27, 2017

Celebrating the queen of punk

A film saluting punk pioneer Poly Styrene is in the making, and garnering shitloads of

Popular Articles

Sign up for our newsletter

* indicates required

Full Name *

Email Address *

SUBS



For women and children.
Against domestic violence.



**Women and children escaping
domestic violence need your
support **TODAY.****

**Donate now and you could help
women and children find safety in
one of our refuges, ensuring they
wake up each day free from
violence and fear.**

Photo: Julian Nieman
Registered charity number: 277424