



**'TIME RECOVERED - MEMORY AND PARTICIPATION'**  
**DIALOGUE & THE ARTS FESTIVAL AT ORLA SYNAGOGUE, POLAND**  
**September 2021**

*"The truth of the work is in accordance with time", Włodzimierz Borowski*



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## Introduction

This September, a unique and innovative Arts Festival under the heading 'Time Recovered – Memory and Participation' is being held in the town of Orla in Poland, based at its historic 17<sup>th</sup> century synagogue.

The event reflects discussions on innovative uses of 'redundant' Jewish heritage spaces that involved The University of the Arts Poznań, the Orla community, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and the UK-based Foundation for Jewish Heritage which had suggested running an arts event out of the synagogue.

The outcome of these exchanges is this week-long Dialogue & the Arts Festival, with leading artists, and the local Orla community, developing a number of contemporary art works inspired by the setting of the town's historic synagogue.

## Orla Synagogue

Jews have lived and flourished in Orla since the 17th century, and constituted a majority of the town's population on the eve of World War II.

Orla synagogue was founded in the second half of the 17th century and was one of only a few stone buildings in the town until the mid-20th century. The synagogue's interior reflected baroque and Renaissance influences, and the most distinctive feature was the Great Ark (Aron Hakodesh). The walls were painted with colourful frescoes mainly of animal and plant motifs. The building was frequently remodelled and a striking classical façade was added.

In the spring of 1942, the community was forcibly moved into a ghetto and, later that year, transported to Treblinka extermination camp. The synagogue was used as a storehouse for property stolen by German soldiers from the Jewish population and the Ark was destroyed.

After World War II, the building was occasionally used as a storage facility, but frequently stood empty and neglected, its condition deteriorating. In 2010, the synagogue came under the ownership of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. Several local civil society organisations are involved in conserving the synagogue and they are receiving the full support of the local Mayor and Municipality.

## The Festival

The word synagogue in Hebrew is 'beit kneset', which means a house of assembly and therefore a place for meetings, exchanging ideas and the celebration of religious ceremonies. Indeed, there are various terms to denote a synagogue which reflects its very multi-functionality.

This diversity of synagogue function provides the context and inspiration for the programme of activities involving contemporary artists from the University of Arts in Poznań who are leading this special Arts Festival in Orla.

The synagogue is a route into engaging with the past, and the history and religious life of the once Jewish community of Orla, while the Festival programme will also reflect a contemporary perspective addressing society of today.

A synagogue devoid of Torah scrolls and a bimah constituting a key place of religious rites is no longer a sacred space but nevertheless, in its architectural character and memory, it evokes traces of both its

former splendour and its ultimate destruction. On the one hand, the programme will refer to the material potential of space while, on the other, to the living memory of the place and people.

The interior of the synagogue is an area to be respected. Hence the Festival will use elementary materials consistent with those found in Orla; materials and substances of basic and symbolic meaning such as stone, clay, wood, steel, but also sound and light, which are important elements connecting the works of several participating artists.

The approach will be workshop-like in the sense that the realization of the artistic works will be an open process involving the inhabitants of Orla in the widest possible sense, and especially reaching younger people.

### The Festival Artists

The artists and academics taking part in the Arts Festival are from the University of the Arts in Poznań and the Białystok University of Technology (BUoT), namely -

*Prof. Janusz Bałdyga*

*Prof. Rafał Górczyński*

*Prof. Wojciech Hora*

*Prof. Karolina Komasa*

*Dr. Daniel Koniusz*

*Prof. Wiesław Koronowski*

*Prof. Maciej Kurak*

*Dr. Piotr Mastalerz*

*Prof. Jarosław Perszko (BUoT)*

### The Programme

#### Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>

- arrival of Festival artist participants

#### Monday 20<sup>th</sup>

- final preparations and decisions relating to location of activities and exhibitions

#### Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> to Friday 24<sup>th</sup>

- artists work on their installations, open and presented to the public
- workshop activities for the public, including ceramics

#### Friday 24<sup>th</sup>

- presentation of workshop activities
- construction of Hungarian and bottle furnaces
- performance programme of the Pygmalion Brigade Sculpture Theatre held in front of the synagogue



### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> (Open Day)

- Opening of exhibition *Time Recovered* presenting the artists' works
- guided tours of the synagogue
- Conference  
The conference event will involve the Festival artists discussing their individual projects, the impact of being based at an historic synagogue, and the place of contemporary art in spaces outside the centre.
- Concluding Concert - Targanescu Trio



## The Art Works - Time Recovered

The proposals below are an outline to be refined and developed once being located in Orla.

**1. PENDULUM** - a mobile facility, an installation located in the vestibule of the synagogue, based on the mechanics of a pendulum, referring to the constant need for cleaning, hygiene, keeping the floor in the space leading to the synagogue clean. Keywords - hygiene, cleanliness, lock.

Author: Prof. Karolina Komasa

**2. AXIS** - an object installed in the main hall of the synagogue, suspended on a steel rope, consisting of a precise arrangement of stones which, with their mass, stabilize the shaky, metaphorical matter.

Keywords: tension, mass, totem, ritual.

Author: Prof. Wojciech Hora

**3. SOUND** - a sound installation involving the emission of sounds encoded in the walls of the synagogue.

Keywords: silence, murmur, memory, emission.

Author: Dr. Daniel Koniusz

**4. LIGHT** - lighting installation emitting white light from inside the synagogue. An architectural object treated as a source of unusual light. Keywords: light, flash, aura, glow.

Author: Prof. Rafał Górczyński

**5. PROCESS** - a sculptural object referring to the idea of an ancient academy installed in the space of the women's gallery, using a window opening towards the interior of the synagogue. Keywords: context, academy, antiquity.

Author: Prof. Maciej Kurak

**6. MULTIPLE TRACES** - a modular sculptural object referring to the function of a wall/partition dividing two realities, eg the sacred and the profane. The object is located in the location of the Ark (Aron Hakodesh).

Author: Prof. Jarosław Perszko

**7. SIGN** – a spatial object using the mobility of several dozen identical elements in creating new meanings.

Author: Prof. Janusz Bałdyga

**8. TILES** – this is a reference to the history of tiling factories, characteristic of Orla, which still operate on a limited scale until today. We will offer ceramic workshops and the related construction of bottle and Hungarian ovens in the open space next to the synagogue. The final stage is a dramatic evening firing, revealing the spectacular nature of the process, culminating in a material effect in the form of burnt ceramic objects.

Author: Dr. Piotr Mastalerz

**9. MONUMENT** – this is a reference to a historical sculpture in the public space, including the oldest secular monument in Poland - the monument to Hetman Stefan Czarniecki in Tykocin. The activity consists of creating a realistic monument on the synagogue axis in the space between non-existent cheder buildings. A sculpture will be formed from constructional basics in a public, open process. The action has the characteristics of a group show, a collective performance.

Author: Prof. Wiesław Koronowski (Pygmalion Brigades)

**10. ICONOSPHERE: SPATIAL DRAWINGS** – this will be open workshops dealing with the issue of signs in public space, becoming aware of the character of signs functioning in Orla. The workshop begins with their construction from simple geometric forms such as a square, circle, triangle to symbols such as the star of david, hourglass, pentagram. The signs created as part of the workshop are mostly ephemeral entities. The chosen one will be an exhibition element.

Author: Prof. Janusz Bałdyga

### In Conclusion

The Orla Dialogue & the Arts Festival is a unique event addressing the theme of ‘Time Recovered’ in the context of the town and its historic synagogue.

In so doing, the synagogue will once again play a meaningful role in the landscape providing the energy for a range of contemporary artistic works that will bring to the fore the memory of Orla’s past in a way that will also creatively engage the community of today.

