



## MUSEUMSQUARTIER OSNABRÜCK

Kunst.  
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# FELIX NUSSBAUM

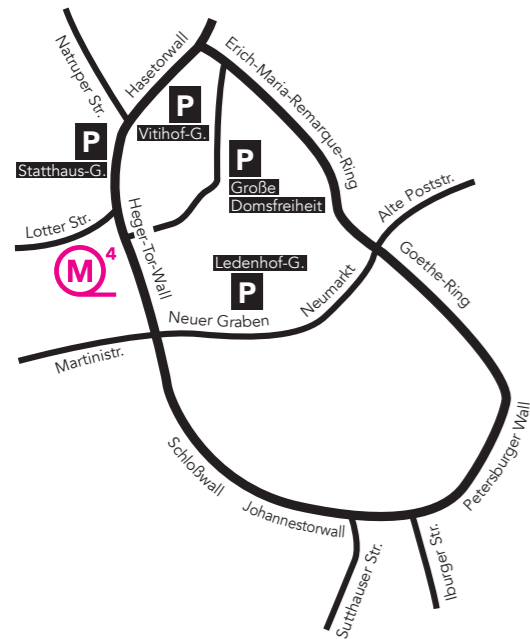
A GERMAN PAINTER

ENGLISH

## Rooms against Forgetting

### *A Place for Nussbaum – The Museum by Daniel Libeskind*

Architecture elevates art Daniel Libeskind, the architect of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, who has been commissioned to develop Ground Zero in New York, has created in Osnabrück a touching memorial to the artist's life and work. It is the Felix-Nussbaum-House, the "Museum without Exit". In the Felix-Nussbaum-House the architecture enters into a dialogue with the artist, his work and biography in a unique way. The architecture "carries" the art, it intensifies the paintings' themes and statements – and: It is art in itself.



## OPENING HOURS

### Tuesday – Friday:

11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### Saturday and Sunday/public holidays:

10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

1st Thu of the month

11 a.m. – 8 p.m.

School classes by special arrangement

### Guided tours and supplementary activities

More information about guided tours for school classes, workshop programmes and excursions can be obtained from Ralf Langer, Museum education services, under the telephone number +49 541 323-2064

### Tickets

Adults: 5€

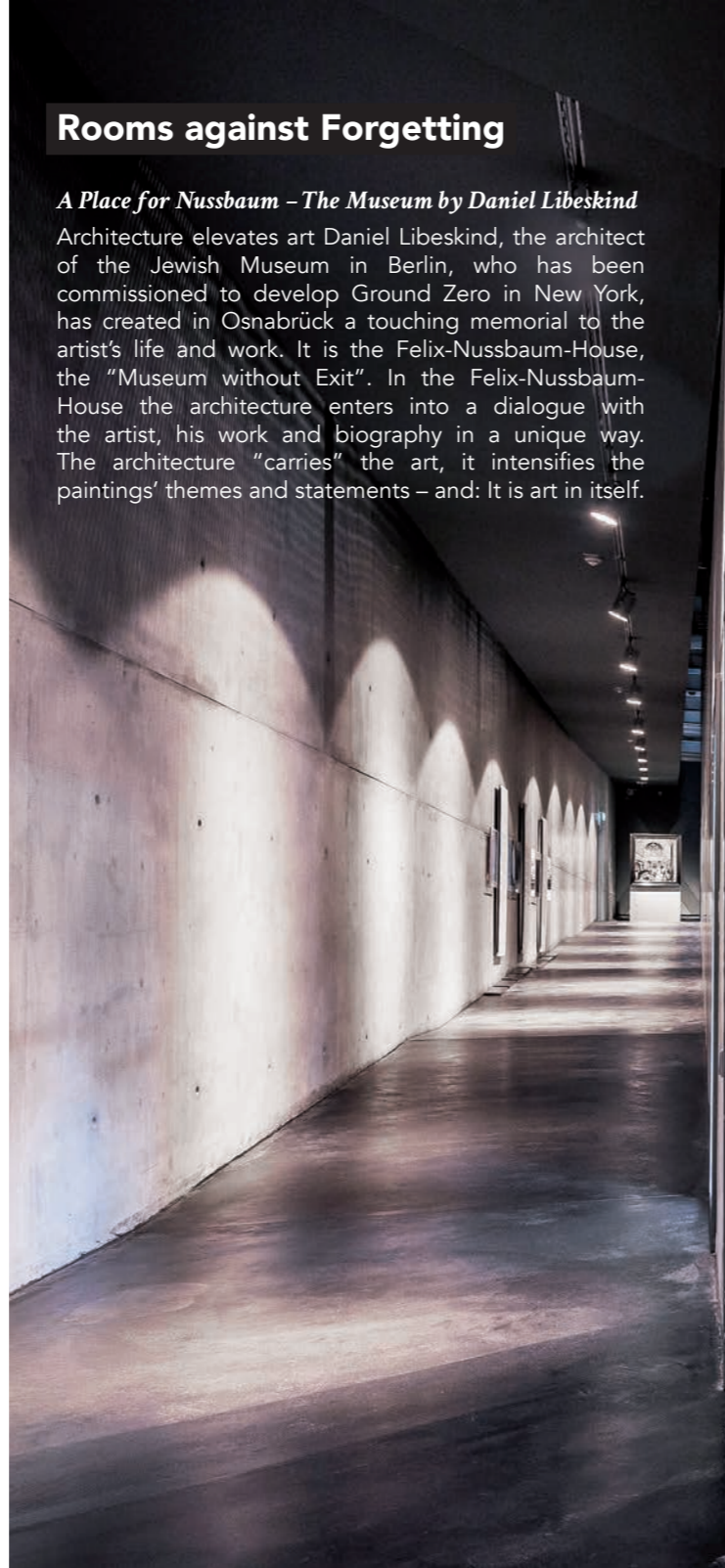
U18: Free

Concessions: 3€

Groups (minimum 12 persons):

4€ p.P.

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### *More than a visual experience*

Libeskind challenges the visitor with oblique-angled walls, sloping windows, structures dividing the rooms, angular niches, holes between the floors, covered only by gratings. The feeling of orientation lost, and hope gone, becomes physical to the visitor. Here art is not just a visual experience but a subtle communicator on other levels too.

### *A building baring a message*

The architecture of the Felix-Nussbaum-House reveals a lot about Nussbaum's life and fate through its use of materials and the layout of the interior. The museum consists of a narrow and high Nussbaum-corridor, the main-section and the so called Nussbaumbridge. The three parts are clearly distinct from each other by virtue of their colours and materials. The long, windowless Nussbaumcorridor is made of raw concrete. The main-section is covered with German oak, while the Nussbaum-bridge is faced with zinc. The growing coldness of these materials suggests Nussbaum's fate. The layout of the building, based on a system of lines pointing towards places of importance in Nussbaum's life, is also informative. The main-section looks towards the Alte Synagogenstraße where the old synagogue once stood; it was burnt down in 1938 during Kristall Nacht. The Nussbaum-corridor, symbolising the way into exile faces directly the place from which the NSDAP directed terror from 1933 until 1945.

On the occasion of the opening of the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester Libeskind wrote in 2002 in an article in "The New Statesman":

*"Architecture is a communicative art. All too often, however, architecture is seen as mute. Buildings are understood as disposable consumer items whose sole fate is to disappear with their use. [...] I am determined to get away from this over simplified view of architecture's tradition."*

Libeskind's idea was realised four years before this article appeared, for in 1998 the Felix-Nussbaum-House, his first building to be finished, was opened in Osnabrück.

## From Osnabrück to Berlin

### *From 11 Schloss Street, Osnabrück, to Berlin*

Born in 1904, Felix Nussbaum enjoyed a sheltered upbringing in Osnabrück. His father, a prosperous businessman, had a gift for music, was enthusiastic about the theatre and interested in art; he supported his son's attraction to painting. Conversations about art played a vital role in the Nussbaum household. His father especially admired Vincent van Gogh. When Felix Nussbaum left Osnabrück in 1922 he went to Hamburg, and then on to Berlin, to study art. In Berlin he had his first success, obtaining the "Rome-prize" and winning a coveted scholarship to the Villa Massimo in Rome.

### *Artistic emancipation*

During his time in Berlin, Nussbaum formulated an artistic stance, one in conscious opposition to the artistic opinions of his academic "fathers". Nussbaum was relatively unimpressed by the established avant-garde. Instead he turned to van Gogh and Henri Rousseau as painter-models and studied the Pittura metafisica. Through this artistic debate, Nussbaum developed a personal style, in which allegorical representations were important. Nussbaum also started using his art to express his emotional – inner – reality.

*Portrait-group, 1930, Felix-Nussbaum-Haus Osnabrück, Donation, widow of Dr. Wassermann, Tel Aviv*



*The Refugee (European Version), 1939  
Felix-Nussbaum-Haus Osnabrück, on loan from Irmgard Schlenke*

## Uncertainty, Flight, Exile

### *The shuttered horizon*

In 1932 Nussbaum left Berlin to take up a scholarship in Italy. He never returned to Germany. After being expelled from the Villa Massimo in May 1933, he emigrated to Belgium in 1935 by way of Switzerland and France. He was still in possession of a tourist visa and was officially recognised as a refugee. However, Nussbaum had no fixed abode in Belgium. The fact that he was prohibited from working and was only given temporary residence status put a strain on the everyday life of the persecuted artist as regards his emigration plans. In 1937 he arrived in Brussels at long last and moved into an apartment in Rue Archimède 22. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the situation changed dramatically – for refugees too. National Socialist tyranny threatened to spread throughout Europe. Nussbaum put his bitter premonition of no longer being protected in the country to which he had fled into the painting "The Refugee".

### *Captivity*

Shortly after the war had begun and Belgium was occupied by German troops, Nussbaum was sent to an internment camp in the southern French town of St Cyprien from May to August 1940. He managed to escape from the camp and returned to Belgium as an illegal immigrant. Nussbaum went underground and lived a solitary life, constantly under threat. The years he spent in Belgium were increasingly characterised by a feeling of desperation and loneliness.

## Refugee in art

### *A German painter*

Felix Nussbaum is recognized for the most part as a painter of the "Jewish fate", and his paintings are seen as "Jewish art". Yet this view is too limited, because it loses sight of Nussbaum's paintings as paintings, and does not adequately measure the artistic value of his work. Above everything else Nussbaum is a painter, and a "German painter" at that. His famous "Self-portrait with Jewish Identity Card" (1943) should not be considered primarily as a declaration of his Jewishness but as a sharp observation of the situation in which he found himself. Nussbaum saw himself as an artist, as many of his works plainly show.

### *The internal dialogue*

This is especially clear from "Self-portrait at the Easel" (1943), painted shortly before his death. In this reflection Nussbaum the Painter presents himself as cool, self-conscious and relaxed, with all the attitudes and disguises removed. In spite of his melancholy he remains assertive. The large number of self-portraits indicate how indispensable they were to Nussbaum as reassurance and affirmations of his standpoint. In the "internal dialogues" with his mirror image Nussbaum renders an account of himself – and confronts the spectator with an open view into the artist's soul.



*Triumph of Death, 1944, Felix-Nussbaum-Haus Osnabrück, on loan from Niedersächsischen Sparkassenstiftung*



*Self-portrait at the Easel, 1943,  
Felix-Nussbaum-Haus Osnabrück,  
on loan from Niedersächsische  
Sparkassenstiftung*

## Camp, Hiding, Extermination

### *Mortal fear and certainty of death*

In the last years of his life mortal fear crystallizes into a certainty of death. He knows he will not survive and yet he resists by, with, and through his art. Nussbaum's most impressive works emerge while facing the inevitability of the waiting catastrophe – Auschwitz.

### *Painting as an act of liberation*

In the "Triumph of Death" – his last known painting – Nussbaum successfully freed himself from fear and eternal resignation by an artistic act of liberation. In this painting the 39 year-old Nussbaum describes the end of civilisation as an early-modern-age dance macabre. The world is depopulated and in ruins, but it has not reached the end – the dance of death goes on, redemption is not in sight. Painting alone comforts; it is the only tool capable of self-assertion amid all the barbarity. Nussbaum tries in his paintings to give the incomprehensible a form, a human form, and thus to accord it a dimension which is endurable.