

Proposal of a pan-European memorial to the victims of totalitarianism in Brussels

No. 1

The victim of totalitarianism is humanity itself.

The number of victims of totalitarianism cannot be counted conclusively, because totalitarianism keeps affecting society uninterruptedly. It affected us in the past, and this past which we have not come to terms with is casting a shadow on us in the present, a shadow which is inconspicuous, but intensive in its depth. A resurrection of totalitarian tendencies and the fear of a return to a time of non-freedom are also influencing us. This fear alone, however justified it may be, makes us less free. Besides, we are also touched by the existence of current totalitarian regimes which are creating many victims in the form of lives lost, holes made in the souls or abysses created between people.

Totalitarianism itself is not responsible for the victims it creates - it is merely the embodiment of the unseizable destructive force which lies dormant in the human being. In reality it is the human being succumbing to this own force who is the true culprit. Totalitarianism is merely a space created for action, the responsibility for which is borne by individual persons (be it through direct perpetration, or through a passive approach).

This memorial does not want to be a memento of the fact that we all are victims and perpetrators at the same time. Rather, it wants to say that every single person should assume individual responsibility toward himself or herself and toward others, because only such a form of freedom will be functional.

This memorial captures the little that humanity can do about totalitarianism for these victims and for humankind itself:

An effort to document and remind of the destructiveness of the force which lies dormant in the human being and which manifests itself in totalitarianism.

An effort to study and penetrate below the surface of things.

The awareness that it is not possible to directly see the true essence of totalitarianism, even if we might try to guess, the awareness of the unseizability and inconceivability of totalitarianism, of the numbers of its victims and of all its forms.

The road away from the influence of totalitarianism and totalitarian tendencies leads through self-realisation which stems from the willingness not to close one's eyes and to look at facts which are not always pleasant to us. That is why it is important to commemorate and to visualise what affects society.

The memorial is to be a block with a square base and with the height and width of an average human being. From above there should be a depression similar to a crater reaching down to about one-third of the block. At the bottom of this pit, a ball made of non-transparent black material should be placed: I propose stone or metal. As I have never worked with glass, I am not able to estimate whether the crater would not create a lensing effect under the Sun which could lead to a fire. Should this be a problem, I suggest to place the memorial indoors without direct illumination from the Sun or to coarsen the inner sides of the pit for example by the sanding technique. Placing the memorial indoors would also prevent a possible natural soiling of its upper side. Although this soiling would be non-esthetic and the maintenance would be unpleasant, it would be a part of the work of art. However, the soiled sanded surface might let too little light through, which would prevent the full view of the black core.

The artist realising the memorial could produce various fluid inclusions in the glass, cracks and irregularities, and the outer sides of the block themselves need not be geometrically exact.

I propose to place a plaque next to the memorial at ground level with the inscription "The victim of totalitarianism is humanity itself."

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