Between 1933 and 1945 a holocaust took place in Central Europe which began with the burning of books on May 10, 1933 and ended with the burning of people. A barbaric nationalism gave birth to a vandalism that annihilated or banished all of culture and its main representatives. This assault that laid waste to all of culture did not just result from the blindness inherent in the idea of Germanness, of the new German Volk, however. As the case of Austria exemplifies, it also resulted from the resistance of mediocrity against modernism, a resistance long prepared for, symbolizing the victory of restoration over liberty. The Austrian Hitler had already acquired all the prerequisites for this battle against modern culture on Austrian soil. Thus we must warn against only thinking of Germany when speaking of emigration and exile. In this respect, we must not allow a second cooperation through Germany, just as we must not allow for repression with the help of Germany. It was Austria itself that created a holocaust of the culture on an enormous scale. Scores of geniuses were driven away from Austria and killed for reasons that have to do with Austrian history. By the train load, sometimes in freight cars, the cultural and intellectual elite was transported either to Auschitz, Birkenau or London and Paris. This history of forced emigration and exile reveals the misanthropic side of the Austrian mentality, which found expression in, but certainly did not end with, the ideology of the First Republic. When Islamic fundamentalism threatens the life of the writer Salman Rushdie, representatives of western culture spoke in a first display of indignation of dark fundamentalism. Yet could this even stand as a comparison with what happened in so-called civilized nations such as Austria and Germany, where millions of Jews and others were banished and killed by an enormous machinery of annihilation? The anti-Semitic, anti-intellectual, anti-Semitic assault on culture, which viewed all art as "degenerated" and detected the "Jewish virus" in all analytic sciences, this veritable war was not the pogrom of a minority. This antimodernist pogrom was one in which the majority of the population participated with great enthusiasm. The middle classes had always felt uneasy about the "nomadic intellectual", but in the 1900's and 1930's, there emerged a racist, National Socialist ideology that legitimated their cruel behavior based on the exclusion of the Other. The Exodus of reason in Austria has its own historical roots in anti-Semitism and the ideology of Austro-Fascism. This exodus had already begun in 1933 and earlier and was not yet over in 1945. It continued in mitigated form. The Second Republic failed to invite back any of those who had been banished. The losses that resulted from such a holocaust of the intellect have been enormous. The Second Republic has been unable to fill the vacuum left behind. Only a few timid steps were taken to regret, or atone for, the crimes committed before 1938 and during World War II, to mourn the victims or attempt reconciliation. Indeed, immigration and reconciliation were deliberately prevented by the politicians during the period of the Cold War, a period marked by a remarkable historical continuity in the personal makeup of its elites. And if all else failed, they at least succeeded in "grabbing on matters", as Robert Knight documented with protocols of the National Council of Ministers, in his book bearing the same title.

In recent years, however, the process of democratization has been intensified in Austria. The thesis that Austria merely played the role of a victim has been called into question. A popular referendum against foreigners was rejected by the majority of the population. The overzealous participation by Austrians in the crimes of National Socialism (e.g., Adolf Eichmann was an Austrian) is no longer systematically denied. Since the Waldheim affair, Austrian history can no longer be as easily disposed of as before.

The purpose of this exhibition being held outside of Austria and its foreign-language catalogue is to commemorate those who were expelled, persecuted and killed in an international setting. There are many monuments throughout the world for soldiers fallen in battle, but there are no monuments for the fallen intellectual workers, for the cultural victims of the war and for those who succumbed in exile. The expulsion of culture and intellect from Austria was a scandal and a crime. A memorial should not only ensure that this expulsion of reason is never forgotten. It should, above all, confess guilt and admit destruction. Yet an artistic memorial for the cultural holocaust in Austria also should not just mourn the tragedy and recall past failures but also prevent future ones.

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Petr Weibel / Friedrich Stadler