

LOOTIUS
ALASTIUS
COMP

***Exhibition
„Communism is prison“***



What we did?

When Estonian Institute of Memory invited us to create an opening exhibition to the International Museum of Communist Crimes, we first had to answer these two questions. How to design an exhibition, that would treat a 200 year old building complex with respect and keep the National Heritage Board happy? How to create imposing display in a space, that doesn't give mercy to the visitors and the exhibit itself with its dampness and cool temperatures?

We based the whole content and form of the exhibition on a concept „Communism is Prison“, drawing parallels between the ideology, regime and the physical prison environment.



Why this category?



"Communism is prison" showed everyone how you can die by doing the right thing. It gave voice to the people who we all knew about, but did not have a personal connection. It gave a mortifying face to the regime that tortured us for over 50 years, connected different generations and made us all say: "Never again."



Method and process

The exhibition is designed to be an emotional journey, with exact doses of hope and hopelessness, fear and light, freedom and distress. We decided to respect the building at its natural state and use only a subtle exhibition layer. The exhibition is built up on two contrasting shapes – red spikes symbolise communism and white fragile fabrics are the victims human soul. You can't find modern digital interactions in this exhibition. Visitors relate to the story by experiencing the room first-hand, by taking the roles of the prisoners, interrogators and people condemned to death.

Ever since we created this exhibition, we've held one precious memory closest to our hearts. In order to share it, we have to uncover a bit of history first. Every evening the political prisoners locked up in Patarei prison would lean against their windows and sing: "Good night, good night to everyone, night has fallen now, good night, good night..." Many prisoners in solitary confinement were awaiting execution and it was never certain which of your comrades would live to see another day. Not even the prison guards would forbid them from singing this.

In a fit of creative flurry we decided to recreate this song. We contacted Ageeda Paavel, a 89-year-old lady, who was imprisoned in Patarei as a 16-year-old girl, because she and her friend blew up a Soviet war monument. Ageeda remembered the lyrics, but not the tune. First we found an angel-voiced young lady, the same age as the prison-aged Ageeda, and asked her to improvise a tune. Then we recorded what happened during their meeting. A teary-eyed Ageeda recognised the recreated tune as the one she remembers from her youth. Obviously Ageeda wasn't the only one at that moment whose eyes were glistening with tears.

This tune, resurrected by a senior of VHK, Kättriin Helena Huttunen, can be heard playing in solitary confinement of Patarei prison. Curators say that Ageeda's story combined with the song is the emotional highlight of the exhibition for many visitors. Goosebumps guaranteed.



What changed?



We helped people understand what the crimes of the communist regimes were, and how can we as a nation must reinforce the notion that these crimes were timeless and that by remembering them we can prevent them from happening again.

There was no heart that was left untouched. The people of the Estonian Institute of Memory have heard heartfelt gratitude from the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, have received handshakes from former repressed ones, for whom it is very important that their lives do not fall into oblivion. And seen the tears flowing from visitors eyes and heard the words "It is incredible what you have gone through and what you have survived."

During the first 3 months after opening, nearly 25 000 people have visited it and over 2000 people decided to visit Patarei on Museum Night alone.