



## The Memorial for Forced Laborers TRANSIT in Nuremberg: A Documentation



**Hermann Pitz: TRANSIT (2005-07). Site of remembrance. Memorial for the forced laborers in Nuremberg 1939-1945. Aluminum sculpture at Plärrer square**  
(photo: © 2007 Hermann Pitz)

On October 15, 2007 attended by a group of former forced laborers and many guests of honor, the sculpture TRANSIT by Prof. Hermann Pitz (Munich) was unveiled in one of Nuremberg's most frequented squares, the so-called *Plärrer*, to commemorate the fate of about 100,000 foreign civil workers in Nuremberg during World War 2, most of them recruited by force in their homelands and deported to Germany.

The municipality invested 50,000 EUR into the translation of Prof. Pitz' design of small human shapes made of aluminum symbolizing the individuals subdued to the Nazi's brutal exploitation.



**The part of TRANSIT visible on the surface of Plärrer**  
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

The sculpture is visible both on street level on the busy square where several bus and tramway lines meet, and from the underground subway platforms. The German inscription reads: *TRANSIT. Site of Remembrance. 1939 to 1945 human beings were deprived of their dignity. Nuremberg, the city of peace and human rights, commemorates the suffering of the foreign*

*workers who during World War 2 were employed in every sector of the economy and confesses the wrong inflicted on them.* The text is accompanied by the phrase *forced labor* in twelve languages. By the completion Nuremberg is the only German city reminding its citizens and foreign visitors of this particular group of Nazi victims by their own memorial in such a central location.



**TRANSIT sculpture with text (on the columns to the left and right) in the subway station of Plärrer**

(photo: Susanne Rieger)

This event marks the end of a process which took twenty years from the decision of the city council for erecting such a memorial site until its realization. It was the untiring engagement of Mr. Rob Zweerman (Netherlands) himself a former forced laborer from Rotterdam, acting as a spokesman for his fellow sufferers which molded the good will of the city fathers into action.

With his proposal in 2002 Mr. Zweerman reanimated the delayed plans of the municipality for erecting such a site of remembrance. Since then he participated constantly in the process of decision making on its realization.

On the occasion of the unveiling of the memorial, we asked Mr. Zweerman for his views about past, present and future aspects of the project.

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### **Interview with Mr. Rob Zweerman (September 11, 2007)**

*Mr. Zweerman, how would you summarize the process which led to the memorial for the forced laborers in Nuremberg?*

I would like to summarize the process as a stretch asking very much patience and perseverance by those who dedicated themselves to its realization. It has given reasons for annoyance. The lack of understanding and the repeated slowing-down, which were experienced, taxed our patience very often. If I may consider myself as one of the originators then I can go back in time to the year 2002: In June my wife and me were invited to attend a panel of witnesses of WW2 with the authorities and citizens of the city of Nuremberg. There I met with four other former forced laborers from Poland, France and the Netherlands. We were received very cordially.



**The visitors 2002 (from left to right): Cornelia Verbaan-Lisowska, Ryszard Kotlinski, Kirsten Kotlinski, Piotr Lisowski (Mrs. Verbaan-Lisowska's son), Barbara Jablonska, Mrs. Augusto, Jannie Zweerman, Rob Zweerman, Roger Augusto**

(photo: Susanne Rieger)

It was on the occasion of one of the excursions, a walk through the rebuilt inner city, that we strolled through the *Straße der Menschenrechte* (Alley of Human Rights), a fine work of art by Dani Karavan, comprising of 27 white concrete columns near the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* (Germanic National Museum). The columns display in short form the texts of the articles of the Declaration of Human Rights as a complaint against the crimes of National-Socialism and an exhortation in stone to mankind that Human Rights also today are violated wholesale on earth. I was impressed by this monument.



**Nuremberg's Alley of Human Rights**

(photo: Susanne Rieger)

At the panel each of us could say what one wanted to say. I stated that I was impressed by Karavan's artwork but there was not a single sign, neither in that street nor elsewhere in the rebuilt city, which referred to the great injustice inflicted upon tens of thousands of forced laborers in Nuremberg. I pleaded for a visible sign of remembrance. The authorities promised to respond to my appeal, certainly after Prof. Wolfgang Benz, a well-known historian, had emphasized the importance of such a sign.

During the following years 2003 and 2004 I wrote repeatedly to the municipal authorities asking for the progress made. The replies did not satisfy me. The only comment was that the decision for such a monument had already been made by the city council in 1987.

In Neumarkt, a small town southeast of Nuremberg I had been traced as a living witness and former inmate of the *Durchgangslager* (transit-camp), being there in WW2, where many thousands of deportees were detained before their transport to industrial areas.

Right on the spot of that camp a monument was placed. It was unveiled in April 2005. I was invited to attend. My wife accompanied me. This invitation offered me the opportunity to inform the Lord Mayor of Nuremberg. His reply followed immediately and I was invited to a meeting with members of the city council and other officials.

During and after this conversation the project got into an acceleration. Artists were notified and invited to participate in a competition in September 2005. Their drafts were judged by a jury in following December. Professor Wolfgang Benz and I joined the jury.

The design TRANSIT by Prof. Hermann Pitz of Munich was selected. A paltry amount of EUR 50,000 was made available for it. Compared to the number of more than 100,000 foreign laborers, only an amount of EUR 0.50 is spent per man, woman or child. In a press conference the unveiling was promised for spring 2006.

Time crept by. In July 2006 the newspaper *Bildzeitung* reported that the project was at a standstill. Shortly after, this was confirmed to me by the authorities, without a clear reason. My embarrassed reply contained remarks that any further delay of the project might result in the unveiling of the monument after the death of the last survivor. The newspaper *Nürnberger Nachrichten* reported in an article *The failure goes on*.



Article from *Bildzeitung Nuremberg* newspaper, April 28, 2005, issue. The headline reads: *Rob Zweerman awakens the city counselors: Remember finally the suffering of the forced laborers*

I learned from information by the artist Hermann Pitz that one should endeavor spring 2007, but extra security precautions were also necessary on the spot of the monument near the subway entrance of *Plärrer* square.



**Mr. Rob Zweerman and the creator of TRANSIT, Prof. Hermann Pitz, at the unveiling on Oct. 15, 2007**  
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

In August 2007 the date of the unveiling was fixed on October 15. Due to a lack of information by the municipality it is not clear to me who can or will be present at the ceremony. In any case about 50 living witnesses received an invitation. Whether they are able to travel and willing to come, that's the question. Of those people invited in June 2002, meanwhile Roger Augusto from France has already deceased. For reasons of her health Barbara Jablonska is unable to travel. I have expressed my wish that the children of those who deceased should receive an invitation to come to Nuremberg. My proposal was rejected.

I do not know how the ceremony will be organized nor who will belong to the *official guests* besides the former forced laborers. It is only for sure that the former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Dr. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski will deliver a speech and that I was asked to do the same in the name of all former forced laborers.

*What do you expect from the invitation and the ceremony on October 15?*

I expect a dignified unveiling ceremony which will not underline the progress so far. I hope that many will respond to the invitation and will come. I also hope that many citizens and especially youngsters will attend. I hope that the media will pay adequate attention. I would appreciate if representatives of the industrial companies who exploited the victims would be present. It is a welcome idea that Prof. Bartoszewski will say something, but this should not distract the attention from the local facts and put the offered reconciliation with the victims to a second place. It must offer an entrance to the future. We could also ask the attendance to read the books *Die steinerne Rose* by Barbara Ostyn (pseudonym for Barbara Jablonska) and *So lange ich lebe, hoffe ich* by Ágnes Rózsa or the magazine *transit nürnberg*.

*In your opinion, should there be any continuing activities connected to the memorial?*

In connection with the monument I think of at least an annual commemoration, for instance in form of a silent march starting at the monument to the exhibition *Faszination und Gewalt* at Congress Hall or to the *Südfriedhof* cemetery, with a motto taken from the Human Rights' catalogue which is elucidating a certain situation on the planet. Those interested take part in it, especially children from primary schools who can make drawings or handiworks related to the subject. It could be as part of a history lesson in combination with a visit to the monument. The local press could also mention it as local news.

*Thank you very much.*



**Mr. Rob Zweerman (left) and Lord Mayor Dr. Ulrich Maly  
unveiling the inscription of TRANSIT at Plärrer square**  
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

### Update 2019

Only twelve years later the sculpture is dilapidated: During reconstruction works in the subway station, the information panels were dismantled so that its meaning is no longer comprehensible. The lettering in the area of the tram stop is barely legible, the surrounding lawn trampled and littered with rubbish. For this reason, in the run-up to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unleashing of World War II by Nazi Germany in August 2019, historian Dr. Eckart Dietzfelbinger, the suburban association *Bunter Tisch Gartenstadt und Siedlungen Süd*, the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds, *Verlag testimon* and VVN-BdA (Association of Victims of the NS-Regime / Anti-Fascists) Nuremberg appealed to the Lord Mayor to take the necessary steps to restore a dignified state. In his reply of September 7, his deputy promised more frequent cleaning, but at the same time spoke of a *planning process for the restructuring of the entire square*, which was only to begin and would also affect the memorial without endangering its existence.

The history of the Nuremberg memorial for forced laborers since the first, initially inconsequential city council resolution more than thirty years ago must not be continued with a chapter in which further neglect is mocking the victims. In order to prevent this, it is not enough to regularly remind the administration of its duties if the citizens are no longer interested in the subject. If so, it would be better and more honest to dismantle the memorial altogether.

Rob had hoped that it would develop into a meeting spot for locals and their guests who want to get to grips with the issue. His wish has not yet come true, so we have to keep working on it.



**The condition of the memorial in October 2019**  
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

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