



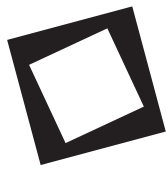
HUMBOLDT  
FORUM

# BLOWN AWAY

THE PALACE OF  
THE REPUBLIC

17.05.2024–16.02.2025

PRESS KIT



**HUMBOLDT  
FORUM**

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THE REPUBLIC**

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1 Palace of the Republic © Wikimedia Commons / Istvan, CC-BY-SA 3.0 2 View into the foyer of the Palace of the Republic with the Glass Flower and Palace Gallery © Glass Flower: Reginald Richter and Richard Wilhelm, bpk / Gerhard Kiesling 3 Demonstrators on 4 November 1989 in front of the Palace of the Republic © bpk / Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship / Klaus Mehner 4 Aerial photo, view of the dummy palace and the Palace of the Republic © picture-alliance / akq-images / Reimer Wulff 5 Excursion boat on the Spree in front of the remains of the lift shafts and staircases of the demolished Palace of the Republic © picture alliance / zb | Dieter Palm

# INTRODUCTION



## The Humboldt Forum and the Palace of the Republic

Loved and hated, admired and reviled, gone and yet not forgotten – the Palace of the Republic once stood where the Humboldt Forum is today. Built in 1973–76 in the centre of Berlin, in East Germany’s capital, the palace served as a governmental and cultural institution. It was the seat of the Volkskammer, or People’s Chamber (parliament), a venue for political and diplomatic events, and a social and cultural centre. It housed an art gallery, theatre, large auditorium, 13 restaurants and cafés, a disco, bowling alley, post office, and telephone booths. In March 1990, GDR’s first freely elected People’s Chamber opened what would be its final session, in which a resolution was passed calling for East Germany (GDR) to accede to the Federal Republic of Germany. This spelled the end of the East German era of the palace’s history. Just a few days later, the city of Berlin closed the building due to asbestos contamination. Following a long period in which it gradually deteriorated and was then completely gutted, it was reopened and briefly became a popular venue for cultural events. The 2003 Bundestag resolution to demolish the building was implemented in 2008. The palace has disappeared from the cityscape but is still present – as a retro tourist souvenir, as a “site for collective remembrance,” and as a symbol for feelings of loss, debasement, oppression, or appropriation.

The Humboldt Forum was erected between 2013 and 2020, partially over the foundations of older buildings. Transfers of power have taken place here for over 600 years, leaving their traces and provoking reactions of one kind or another. Citizens of these successive states have always questioned and at times challenged this use of architectural symbolism. That was true during the Middle Ages, when Berlin’s residents protested the prince elector’s construction of a palace there by flooding the excavation

pit with water; during the revolutions of 1848, 1918, and 1989; and during debates on plans for the site in the 1990s and 2000s.

As a result, certain realities surrounding the politics and culture of remembrance are an integral part of the Humboldt Forum. This is a place where every historical topic is connected to present-day questions about representation, interpretive sovereignty, diversity of voices, and participation. The Stiftung Humboldt Forum (SHF) sees it as its mission to navigate these issues together with the public. One issue still being debated is why the Palace of the Republic was torn down and the Humboldt Forum erected in its place, with much of its façade resembling the earlier Baroque palace.

The name of the Humboldt Forum reflects its mission: to be a forum for debate on historical and contemporary socio-political matters and in so doing to build connections between the world’s arts, cultures, and sciences. Its work on the Palace of the Republic is not directed at challenging the Bundestag’s decisions regarding demolition and reconstruction, but at placing the issue in its historical context, reflecting on it, and discussing it in light of contemporary social issues. In recent years, the SHF has dedicated significant time and resources to the subject of the palace. Exchanges with members of the public and other museum professionals have shown how strongly the political and social changes of 1989–90 continue to be felt today. The SHF thus sees the Palace of the Republic as relevant to all of Germany and views it in the context of changes in central and eastern Europe and across the globe since the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Eastern Bloc.

<sup>1</sup> “I have too much historical baggage”, Illustration of the Graphic Recordings at the „Palast-Treff“ at the themed weekend Palace of the Republic © graphicrecording.cool, Büro für Graphic Recording und Illustration / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss

## The Humboldt Forum's mission to study the history of the site

When the Humboldt Forum was founded, in 2009, the German federal government recognised the important role the site has played in Berlin, Brandenburg-Prussia, Germany, and in some respects internationally, and tasked it with the study and exploration of the site's history. In 2014, this work was given a permanent home in the new division *Geschichte des Ortes*, or History of the Site. Operating under the motto "History is being made," its staff critically reflect on their own work and continue to expand on it in collaboration with colleagues from museums, memorial sites, and academia.

In summer 2018, the SHF's executive board approved the History of the Site division's proposal to conduct a systematic assessment and create a collection plan. By 2019, the SHF had acquired around 750 objects. A selection was on display in the exhibition "Palast der Republik – Utopia, Inspiration, Controversy", held that same year at the Kunsthalle Rostock. The palace collection has grown considerably since then, in particular through private gifts. The SHF received around 70 items from the estate of Klaus Beetz, the last director of the Palace of the Republic. Targeted acquisitions and open calls for collection items have allowed the Humboldt Forum to take on an additional 100 objects. Following this rapid expansion, the division turned its attention to recording the objects in databases, and digitizing, cataloguing, and studying them. Numerous objects can be seen on the SHF website "Collections Online."

Objects and displays pertaining to the Palace of the Republic have been integrated into the Humboldt Forum's permanent exhibitions since the opening of the building, in 2020. The Video Panorama tells the 800-year history of the site through a series of images and film clips projected onto a 27-metre-wide screen, many of them dedicated to the palace. Another is a mural alluding to the palace façade created by Tim Trantenroth for the "Art in Architecture" project and mounted in the staircase over Portal 5. The permanent exhibition Berlin Global, organised by Berlin City Museum, and the collection of Flashbacks exhibits distributed throughout the Humboldt Forum feature artworks, historical objects, documents, media works, and graphics that show the site's past in new, present-day contexts. More exhibits related to the palace can be found in a display case in front of the Video Panorama, where objects temporarily lent by or on permanent loan from visitors appear at regular intervals.

## A programme for the Palace of the Republic, from 2021 onwards

The reconstruction of the Baroque palace façades made tensions between the building in this location and people's vivid memories of the Palace of the Republic all the more palpable. It became clear that there was a need for greater discussion. In 2020, the SHF began preparations for a multi-year programme whose title, "The Palace of the Republic is Present," takes the historical edifice as a jumping-off point to discuss current issues. Staff from different departments of the foundation formed a close-knit programme team committed to bringing different perspectives and experiences on board. Their work began with a four-month design thinking process led by Dark Horse Innovations. Here the team devel-

oped the first two basic questions: How can we incorporate living people's memories into the work of the Humboldt Forum? How can we lend visibility to the issue of the Palace of the Republic? The team discussed these questions with around 30 people from 8 countries; aged 13 to 65, they represented a broad range of social backgrounds and perspectives. Based on their feedback, we developed ideas for solutions that served as the starting point for further work.

In the years that followed, the team explored different questions and issues, sought new sources of inspiration, went on excursions, developed ideas, and reflected on methods and decisions. To create a factual framework for our studies, we commissioned researchers and collaborated with numerous museums, archives, memorial sites, research institutes, and universities. Communication with museum professionals in and from central and eastern Europe, where many Cold War-era "palaces of culture" still exist, further expanded our horizons.

To raise awareness of the Humboldt Forum as a place of dialogue and exchange and to acquire a broader range of perspectives, we set up two committees. Starting in February 2022, the Critical Companions – a group of Berlin residents ranging in age from pupils to pensioners – provided insight into the expectations and needs that visitors might have of our public-facing content. Then, starting in June 2022, the Sounding Board gave us feedback on a variety of exhibition-related ideas. Composed of people from the fields of art, culture, and science, this group provided vital criticism and critique. Certain people and voices were absent in these committees, in part because they chose not to join. Their reasons varied: disapproval of the Humboldt Forum, dislike of committees in general, or simply a lack of time and capacity. We continually tried to make ourselves aware of these "absent" voices.

We also started a blog in November 2022 to make our working method more transparent and to share our experiences, insight, and knowledge.

## Memory work

Memory is dynamic, tied to the present, and emotional. We humans are constantly changing, rewriting, and retelling our memories. Memories are not direct images of the past, because the moment we start talking about them, we reconstruct them. And we do this within the specific frame of reference of the present and in the context of our social environment – in other words, in a process of exchange with other people. The construction of memory is thus closely connected with group identity.

When we remember the lost Palace of the Republic today, we do so from the perspective of our present-day society, several decades after the fall of the Wall. For many people, the palace is directly associated with loss and the feeling that their own personal histories are not valued. Its demolition made it into a symbol of the way the new German state dealt with East Germany. The SHF therefore saw the palace as a jumping-off point for conversations about people's experiences of East Germany and a reunited Germany. Their memories were preserved in video and audio interviews. We hoped this plurality of voices would allow a fuller, more balanced picture of the palace to emerge and familiarise people with different perspectives. We also wanted to show how history is entangled with memory and how vital perspective is in the telling of history.

From 2017 to 2023, a film team conducted video interviews with 27 people. The subjects discussed were: the parade ground, construction of the palace, palace operations, the Peaceful Revolution, the debate on what to do with the site, interim use of the palace as a cultural venue, demolition of the palace, and the Humboldt Forum. The project "Memory Work at the Humboldt Forum" built and expanded on this basis. By issuing open calls for and approaching other possible interviewees directly, SHF staff contacted and interviewed another some 100 people. These included former employees and visitors as well as people outside Berlin who had never been to the palace. They focused on voices that had rarely been heard before and wanted to know how people had experienced the site as part of their everyday lives, what views they associated with it, what emotional ruptures they had experienced, and what the disappearance of the site meant to them.

From March 2022 to June 2023, a team of four freelancers conducted 44 audio interviews. They spoke to 47 people, selected with the goal of acquiring a diverse pool of data regarding the range of subjects people addressed, their personal connections to the palace, their views and opinions, age, socialisation, and gender. The interviewers were an interdisciplinary team of men and women born between 1967 and 1980, with urban and rural origins, from the East and the West. Their subjective perspectives as well as their personal networks informed the work.

The interviews provided a space where people could talk openly about their experiences and emotions and the contradictions and ambivalence these entailed. Whether with former "contract workers," senior palace employees, popular singers, or punks, the interviews provided knowledge about day-to-day operations and offered insight into people's feelings, views about life, and strategies for handling change. The Palace of the Republic functioned in the interviews as a kind of magnifying glass that could be trained on different social structures and cultures in East Germany and in a newly reunited Germany. In the GDR era, the palace brought together people with varying backgrounds and political views, from elite party functionaries to dissidents, as well as visitors and artists from around the world. The interviews thus draw a picture of East Germany that goes beyond the perpetrator-victim dichotomy and the view of East German society as closed and homogenous. Starting in 1989, the palace came to symbolise transformation and upheaval, and the interviews contain a kaleidoscopic range of personal experiences, reflections, and positions – about both the building itself and the unification process in general.

Portraits of the interviewees taken by Tobias Kruse (OSTKREUZ – Agentur der Fotografen GmbH) are shown in the exhibition at locations chosen by the interviewees themselves. A number of people donated objects like this to our collection or lent them for use in the special exhibition.

For us, memory work is foremost about relationships. It is a social process, two-sided and open-ended. Memory work means opening yourself up to emotion, building trust, and taking responsibility. Many people appreciated that we took time, regarded their histories as important – and above all, listened to them. For some, this experience made the Humboldt Forum more relevant. And in turn, the interviews changed our perspectives, broadened our view of the palace, and influenced our work.

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Karen Buttler, Hartmut Dorgerloh, Judith Prokasky, and Anke Schnabel, on behalf of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss

Edited extract from the book "Blown Away. The Palace of the Republic"  
Published by the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss  
E. A. Seemann Verlag

graphicrecording.cool have been accompanying the programme team since February 2022, creating live sketches and drawings to visually capture the content of the talks.  
© graphicrecording.cool (Johanna Benz, Tiziana Beck)

# THE EXHIBITION



The exhibition *Blown Away: The Palace of the Republic* explores the history of the Palace of the Republic – from its planning and construction, its use as a prestigious political and cultural venue for events in East Germany, its significance as one of the scenes of the peaceful revolution of 1989, its role as a conflicted object in the context of debates about the reconstruction of the Berlin Palace, and its creative temporary use as a “People’s Palace” to its demolition and replacement with a grassed area, which was completed in 2008.

The exhibition features some three hundred objects from and relating to the Palace: designs, models, posters, and photographs, including fragments of the Glass Flower, Willi Sitte’s painting *The Red Flag*, and the lectern from the People’s Chamber. The exhibits come from our own collection, from a variety of private collections, and from other museums and institutions. The exhibition is centred around excerpts from around fifty audio and video interviews from the “Remembrance at the Humboldt Forum” project. These present many different personal memories and perspectives of people who worked in the Palace, visited it, or kept well away. We hear all sorts of voices, ranging from prominent figures to people whose stories have never been told. Interviews with former visitors, employees, artists, demonstrators, and politicians paint a diverse picture of this deeply ambiguous building, of East Germany, and of German unity. Private memorabilia also add a number of highly subjective

perspectives. The interviewees appear in the exhibition in the form of portrait photographs by Tobias Kruse of the Ostkreuz photo agency. Participatory media stations invite visitors to take an active role – they can share their own experiences and thoughts, and their input will be displayed in the exhibition.

The first room of the exhibition presents a large-scale installation. It views the site where the Palace once stood as an area that has been politically significant and contested for centuries. A video installation asks what memories can achieve, and how they can be over-written, peddled, or suppressed.

“What happened to the Palace?” “Why did people go the Palace?” “Why was the Palace torn down?” The exhibition uses seven key questions that invite dialogue about the Palace of the Republic, while also using it as a specific example to prompt discussion about places that have disappeared and processes of transformation in general.

1 © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker

# THE EXHIBITION



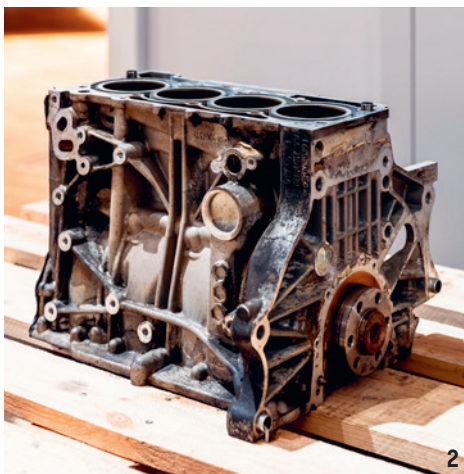
## Elements of Glass Flower / Glass Tree

Glass-steel-sculpture by Reginald Richter and Richard Wilhelm, Glasgestaltung Magdeburg (manufacture), 1976, stainless steel, float glass, cut glass  
On loan from the Federal Republic of Germany, pdr135

Alongside the spherical lamps and the glass facade, this sculpture of steel and glass soon becomes one of the Palace's signature features. An eye-catching sight in the foyer, it serves as a favourite meeting spot in the building. It is

famous well beyond Berlin thanks to television reports and images on postcards and souvenirs.

In 1999, during asbestos removal work, the sculpture is dismantled and becomes part of the holdings of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, on loan from the federal government. After the Palace's demolition, the seemingly unpolitical Glass Flower becomes a symbol of this lost site. In this exhibition, the sculpture is on show again for the first time since it was dismantled – presented now just the way it is in storage.



## Golf VI engine block

Volkswagen AG, 2008–2012, aluminium, steel  
Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Z-SHF-820

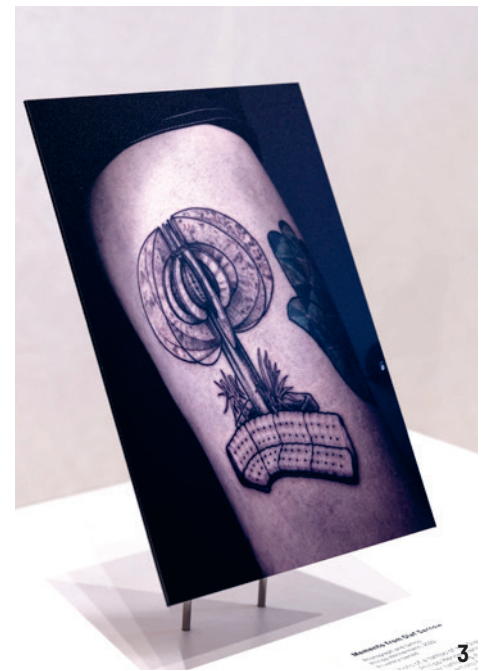
Around 19,300 tonnes of steel from the skeleton of the Palace building are melted down and reused. German carmaker Volkswagen AG acquires some of it to manufacture the crankshaft in the engine for its Golf VI model. Some engine blocks consist of up to 30 per cent of this historically significant steel, according to a spokesperson for the Wolfsburg company. The rest is used to build the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in Dubai.

## Memento from Olaf Sarnow

Photograph and tattoo  
Philipp Hennermann, 2022  
Privately owned

A photo of a tattoo of the Glass Flower on Instagram – Philipp Hennermann posted it on his profile after tattooing it on Olaf Sarnow's thigh. Other tattoo artists had refused to accommodate the 53-year-old's wishes, as it's a challenge to depict transparent material in a tattoo. Hennermann studied the sculpture and produced an image of it together with one of the legendary sofas and planters from the foyer. It was the 17th of Sarnow's 21 tattoos.

“Regardless of East German politics, people always had a positive relationship with the Palace of the Republic. Although as a teenager I was by no means a conformist. I'm not some kind of GDR freak pining for the old days. It's just a part of my history. Even if I didn't spend all my time in front of the Glass Flower, somehow it's still a part of me.” From an audio interview conducted by Christian Schmidt on 9 May 2023



1 © Reginald Richter and Richard Wilhelm / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker 2-3 © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker

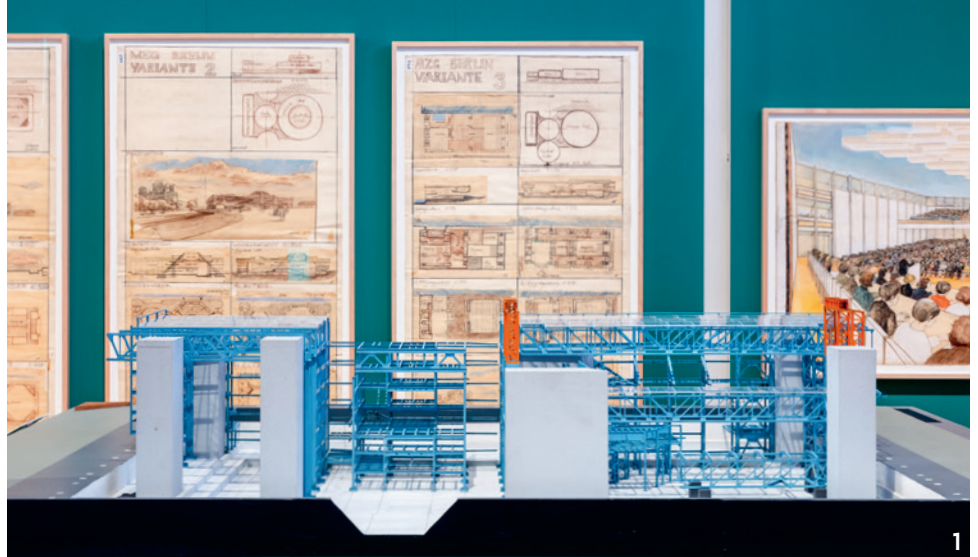


# THE EXHIBITION

## Model of the steel skeleton frame with concrete sliding cores

VEB Stahlbau Niesky (manufacture), 1974, scale: 1:100, aluminium, wood, plastic  
Custody of Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg, Saxony, Institut für Industriearchäologie, Wissenschafts- und Technikgeschichte, mod 0200

The detailed model built by state-owned VEB Metalleichtbaukombinat in Saxony, is probably used to advertise East German steel construction at international trade fairs. The university in Freiberg, Saxony, is now studying numerous surviving models to learn more about structural engineering in the GDR. For the first time, the model is on display in an exhibition.



## The lectern from the People's Chamber

Designer unknown, 1975, wood, metal, plastic  
Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1999/03/0172

Until 1989, the decisions which have already been made by the Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party's Central Committee and ratified pro forma in the People's Chamber are announced at the lectern. It was not until the 9th and then the first democratically elected 10th People's Chamber in 1990 that its members face the challenge of free and sometimes turbulent open debate.

## Paris from the wine parlour

VEB Lauchhammerwerk (manufacture), after Ridolfo Schadow, 1976, bronze  
On loan from the Federal Republic of Germany, pdr122

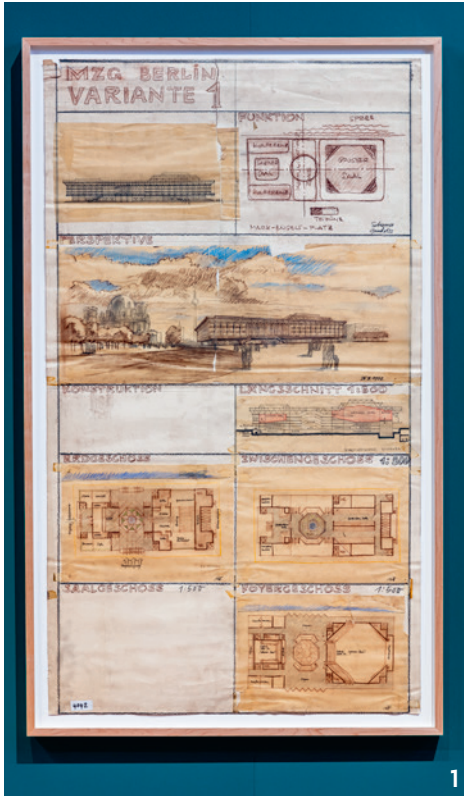
This recast of Ridolfo Schadow's bronze sculpture was once in the Palace of the Republic's wine parlour, which, along with the beer parlour, was one of the two "Spree restaurants" in the basement. Both these restaurants had historical decorations and fittings recalling important periods in the history of Berlin. The beer parlour referred to works by the Baroque sculptor and architect Andreas Schlüter, while the wine parlour, with its cast-iron chairs and tables, was designed to refer to Schinkel's classicist style. The conceptual design for these restaurants was the work of architect and sculptor Christa Sammler.

The original 1826 cast for Paris was purchased by Crown Prince Frederick Wilhelm of Prussia for the terrace of his Charlottenhof Palace in Sanssouci Park, where it still stands today.



1 Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg / Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung (IRS) / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker 2 Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker 3 Kunstverwaltung des Bundes / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker

# THE EXHIBITION



## Design for a multipurpose building on Marx-Engels-Platz (version 1)

Werner Rösler, 1972, wax crayon on tracing paper  
IRS Erkner, Scientific Collections, C\_17\_03-21

Werner Rösler's drawings reflect the ideas discussed by the architects' Kollektiv (work group). As the verticality of the TV Tower has dominated the city centre since 1969, the multipurpose building can now have a horizontal orientation. The drawing visualizes the three sections of the building – the People's Chamber, a ballroom, and a foyer as connecting element.

## Part of a floral wall design from the staff canteen

Margret Lüdtker, 1975, chamotte clay, bisque-fired, glazed, engobed, fritted  
Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Z-GdO-0104

In 2019 the Stiftung Humboldt Forum acquired around eight hundred objects from Germany's Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA). These objects had been kept in the Alexander Barracks in Spandau since 1988. They included two dismantled ceramic wall friezes with floral motifs that had come from the staff canteen in the non-public area on the fourth floor of the Palace of the Republic. The artist Margret Lüdtker was contacted, and with her help and the colour photos that she provided, it was possible to reassemble the approximately three hundred pieces of the friezes, and to ascertain whether they were complete. A portion of one of these is shown in the exhibition, making it possible to experience these artworks once again.



## Segment of a bar from the Jugendtreff (youth club)

Joachim Koenig (design), Dietmar Witteborn (glass mosaic), c.1975, wood, glass, Nirosta  
Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Z-SHF-928

Early plans for the Palace of the Republic envisaged a swimming pool and sauna beneath the People's Chamber. When this idea was rejected, the area was replanned as a youth club with a disco, a games area, and the Forum 60. The disco was dominated by two rotating marble dance floors and a curved bar counter over 9 metres in length with a glass mosaic in a modern style intended to be attractive to young people. This was all dismantled when the building was stripped, and in 2019 the Stiftung Humboldt Forum acquired these objects from the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA). For this exhibition, part of the bar has been restored and reconstructed.

1 Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung (IRS) / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker  
2 Margret Lüdtker, without title, 1975 / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024 / Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: David von Becker  
3 Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss / Photo: David von Becker

# VOICES REFLECTING ON THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC

## REMEMBRANCE WORK PROJECT AT THE HUMBOLDT FORUM



### Viola Borgwedel

worked from 1976 to 1986 as a waitress in the Palace's Spree venues, primarily the Jugendtreff (youth club)

I wanted to work my way up the ladder and become a restaurant manager, because I knew that at some point one might not be physically able anymore. I was denied the position, because I wasn't in the party. My supervisor, he was a member, and if he said: Today the knives go on the left of the plate, then they went on the left, true. He was quite a waste of space, professionally. Well, as someone trained in catering, you felt a little twitted by the fact that anyone who was a party member could suddenly tell you how to wait tables.

### Ritchie Barton

played keyboards with the band Silly at concerts in the Palace.

We weren't all that thrilled about the Rock for Peace festival, not because we weren't for peace but because it was all very, very ideological of course. And we were a very difficult band in that regard because our singer, Tamara Danz, kept pushing the limits and we didn't like to be co-opted. We couldn't refuse to participate, of course. That would have had undesirable consequences. So, we always arranged things a little, so we only had to take part every second or third year.

The atmosphere at the festival was quite alright. The palace at any rate had unparalleled stage conditions. It was definitely an experience to play there. From today's perspective, I can say that everything backstage had a totally international quality. The changing areas, for instance, and the little bistros in the corridors that were only for artists. You might have thought you were in New York or someplace.



### Hans-Jürgen Schreiber

worked in the Palace as assistant to the culinary director, and later as head of gastronomy, from the year it first opened until its closure

The staff, many of them were there from start to finish – they were committed, like a big family. And the same was also true to some extent for everyone who experienced it directly, not just the people who were there as guests – this sense of belonging. The building is just a shell. But it came into being on the back of good ideas and was kept alive by people who were young, who fell in love, who got married, who made something of their careers.

1 Portrait of Viola Borgwedel © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse 2 Portrait of Ritchie Barton © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: Tobias Kruse 3 Portrait of Hans-Jürgen Schreiber © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Photo: Tobias Kruse

# VOICES REFLECTING ON THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC REMEMBRANCE WORK PROJECT AT THE HUMBOLDT FORUM

## José Alfredo Cossa

visited the Palace after arriving in East Germany as a “contract worker” from Mozambique.

I was in the Palace of the Republic in 1986 and '87. It was great, all of it. Typically, as foreigners, we had to visit the major sites – a few museums, the TV Tower, etc. A lot of foreigners had to do this once a month to develop a feeling for socialism.

The first time I went to the GDR, it was quite foreign, I thought, what am I even doing here? What do you even want here in this country? Then I learned German in Wernigerode, at the language training centre there. After receiving six months of instruction, we had to move to Zeulenroda, in the Gera district, where there was a state-owned furniture manufacturing combine. My occupational training lasted from October '84 to February '87.

A lot of us didn't know that we would never receive the money here in Mozambique. So, we're still demonstrating today in Maputo, all the old contract workers or “returnees.” We block all the streets for about three or four hours and demand the money that we earned back in the GDR. This problem has persisted now for 33 years. If I had known that my money was going to be paid into Mozambique's state coffers, I would have stayed in Germany. Communication with José Alfredo Cossa in Mozambique was digital.



## Siegfried Wein

witnessed East Germany's 1990 political upheaval while working as artistic director of the Theater im Palast (Theatre in the Palace, TiP)

There wasn't just one large [Central] Round Table. People everywhere were establishing large round tables, inspired by the thought that “now we have real freedom and democracy.” There was this great spirit of optimism – among most people, at least – that came out of a conviction to reshape the society you lived in. One saw the hope that one had placed in socialism, a hope that had not been fulfilled, given a new chance. And of course, that entailed conflict, and sometimes a settling of accounts. Which is where people's personal histories came in. That got mixed into this great act of political liberation. Discussions were held here in this building, among other places, and the conflicts grew tremendously heated. It wasn't just about the issues – personal ambitions obviously played a larger role.

## Petra Schwarz

performed with Oktoberklub, East Germany's first political music group, in the Palace in 1976; later she presented a number of Palace events

Just as I've spoken about my life in the East with fondness while also viewing certain things critically, life after 1989 has been similarly varied. I count myself lucky to have experienced and lived in two such completely different social systems. But I was one of those people who happened to be just at the right age to pursue a professional career. For colleagues of mine who were 10 or 15 years older, the future was not so bright. I was in my early 30s, when things were still possible. There was still a chance to move forward.



1 Portrait of José Alfredo Cossa © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse 2 Portrait of Siegfried Wein © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse 3 Portrait of Petra Schwarz © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse (photo edited)

# VOICES REFLECTING ON THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC

## REMEMBRANCE WORK PROJECT AT THE HUMBOLDT FORUM



### Judith Kessler

visited the Palace as a teenager together with friends

From a personal point of view, it's not like I'm upset that I had to live in East Germany for a couple of years. Because I think ... it's not just that I learned a lot of things in the East or in Poland – there too – but I found out what life is really about. It was valuable and important. The fact that we learned how to improvise, that we learned to be ... not content with the little things, but to make something of them,

the fact that we were creative, even though we may not have had this or this or that. I don't think anyone can ever take that from you, but on the other hand it's something that people are lacking who grew up in a country where you had and have everything and you can do anything or travel wherever you want. Well, we developed different abilities or different ways of seeing things, ways that other people maybe don't have. In this respect I think it's good that I had both.

1 Portrait of Judith Kessler, from the 'Portraits' series of audio interviews on the history of the site © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse 2 Portrait of the painter Jonas Burgert and Holger Nawrocki, artistic director and project manager of the 'Fractals' exhibition series © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, photo: Tobias Kruse



### Jonas Burgert and Holger Nawrocki

were co-initiators of the 2005 *Fraktale IV: Tod* (*Fractals IV: Death*) exhibition in the gutted Palace

Holger Nawrocki: I was in the large hall once or twice as a kid, when I was still in school. But that was it. Everything I detested in the GDR, everything that went so completely against the grain – it was all symbolized there. Whether it was the ball-shaped lamps or the vile socialist realism in the paintings – it was just a pit. For me, at that time in the GDR, it was an unambiguous symbol of oppression. Which is why I went there only rarely, and when I did, I went downstairs to get drunk.

Jonas Burgert: For me, being from West Berlin, the Palace of the Republic was always a mystery. It was on the other side, in East Berlin, and of course it was the symbol of the domination of Berlin's Prussian city centre by the new architecture of the GDR. I always thought there was something cynical about it because it was supposed to have been built for the people, and yet the people weren't able to decide freely how they wanted to live their lives. So, there was that ambivalence. And I thought it was absolutely the right thing, both stylistically and symbolically, that it had to be entirely gutted, with just the bare bones left standing. In fact, that was the only reason we even went in there – to say, "Now it's honest."

# THE PROGRAMME INSTALLATIONS



## Re-Set. The Palace of the Republic in Augmented Reality

*Exterior area and passage*

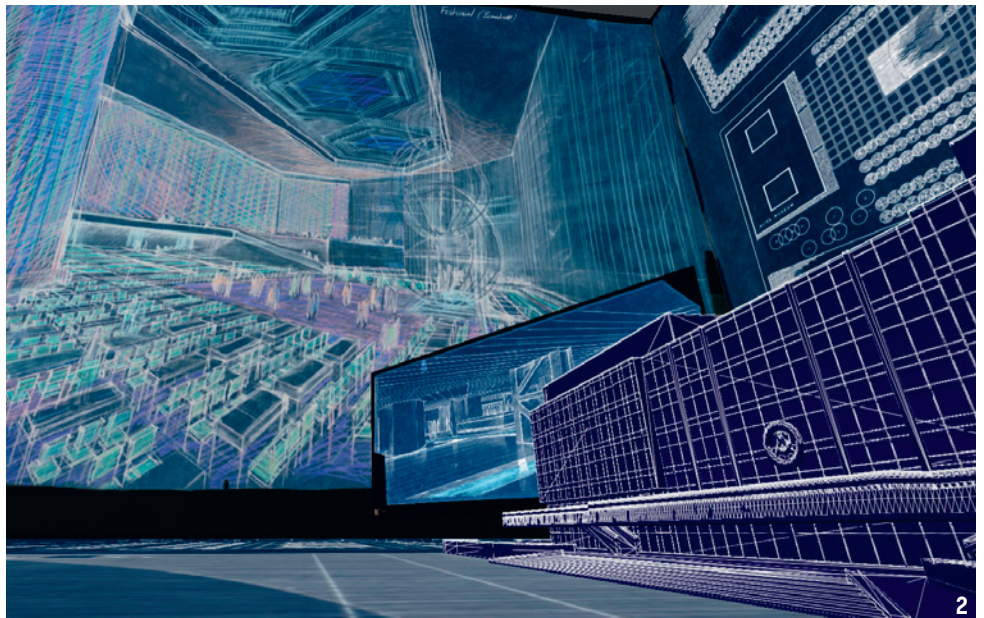
As you walk along the marked outline of the Palace, you can scan the QR codes and see views of the east and west facades, the foyer, the espresso bar, the People's Chamber, and the Great Hall on your smartphone.

**1** Besucherinnen visualisieren mit einer Web-AR-Anwendung das Hauptfoyer des Palastes der Republik im heutigen Schlüterhof des Humboldt Forums © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Foto: Andreas König **2** Ausschnitte aus dem virtuellen Modell zum Palast der Republik von den CyberRäubern © Visualisierung des Palastes der Republik: Cyberräuber

## Palace of Memory. The Power of Images

15 June 2024–16 February 2025

The artist duo CyberRäuber are showing the “Palace of Memory” as a mixed-reality experience in the Humboldt Forum. You are invited to explore their installation on several levels. A large video projection on three screens transports visitors into the world of the Palace presented in pictures, while a table of photographs provides insights into the individual images. And in a 20-minute mixed-reality experience, real and generated Palace objects enter into dialogue with one another. For this room, CyberRäuber are collecting people’s memories of the Palace of the Republic. Visitors write down scenes from their own memories, reminiscences, or short stories on pieces of paper or record them in spoken form using a telephone. These are then used as a stimulus for producing new images that will regularly update the Palace of Memory installation in the Humboldt Forum.



Details of the full programme can be found at [humboldtforum.org/en/pdr](https://humboldtforum.org/en/pdr)

# THE PROGRAMME

## EVENTS

### Theater spectacle *Build up! Tear down!*

Theater spectacle about the Palace of the Republic with Excerpts from *DER BAU* by Heiner Müller und *FRANZISKA LINKERHAND* by Brigitte Reimann

From 17 May 2024, 7–9:30 pm

The approximately 30 years of existence of this GDR prestige building are at the centre of a theatrical journey through time in which the history of the “Palace for the People” comes to life. An ensemble of citizens, contemporary witnesses and choirs in cooperation with the Ernst Busch University of the Performing Arts and the Hanns Eisler School of Music resurrect the building in a theatre happening and show the traces that this vanished place has left behind.



### A House for Everyone? The Palace of the Republic's Cultural Programme

Talk, 6 June 2024, 7–8:30 pm

Many people remember the Palace of the Republic as a place of pleasure and entertainment – from concerts, readings and theatre performances to fashion shows. What was the cultural and political function of the Palace of the Republic and what changes can be observed during its 13 years of operation in the GDR? Marion Brasch talks about these and other questions with the former chief director of the Palast der Republik Volker Büttner, the journalist and author Joachim Hentschel and the sociologist and author Katharina Warda.

### Palace Bar

14 June, 12 July, 4 October, 8 November,  
6 December 2024 and 17 January 2025

The Palace Bar combines debate and art around the theme of the Palace of the Republic. Academics meet writers, and musicians meet publicists and DJs. How do they see and tell the legacy of the GDR today? And how is Berlin changing – through displacement to the outskirts, the demolition of landmark buildings and the commercialization of public space? These and other questions will be posed in the PalastBar and circled around in conversations, poetry, songs and much more, washed down with drinks.

### Themed weekend: Endless Palace

15 and 16 June 2024, 11 am–10 pm

On this themed weekend, everything will revolve around stories, memories, and narratives concerning the Palace of the Republic. Visitors are asked about their personal memories, and the Humboldt Forum is organizing a collection point for private photographs and films and small objects. An hour of “History live” presented by the Deutschlandfunk Nova radio station will address the power of photographic images and collective memory. We are also presenting two artistic works that look at the legacy of East Germany: Isabelle Schäd's *Handwork*, a dance performance for ten women (premiere at the OSTEN festival) and Heiner Müller – Quartett: *Material* in a performative reading by and with Corinna Harfouch.

# THE PROGRAMME

## GUIDED TOURS AND WORKSHOPS



Guided tours and workshops present the history and significance of the Palace of the Republic and invite visitors to enter into dialogue and share their own thoughts. The focus is on the construction, function, and uses of the Palace at different junctures in its history, as well as all the diverse memories. Tandem and curator tours offer additional insights and new ways of viewing the building. In workshops for school classes and adults, the interviews are studied in detail and the Palace of the Republic becomes the inspiration for creative writing.

### Adored or avoided: the Palace of the Republic

Overview Tour  
Sundays, 11 am

The tour provides an overview of the exhibition's themes.

### Multi-perspectivity in dealing with the GDR

Training for educators  
30 May, 10 October 2024  
3–6 pm

<sup>1</sup> Video Panorama © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss,  
Photo: Harry Schnitger

### Blown Away – the Making of

Curator's tour  
23, 30 May, 6, 13, 20 June 2024  
4:30–5:30 pm

The guided tour provides insights into the approach to presenting the Palace of the Republic in the special exhibition. How can a place that has disappeared be made visible? Which themes were important? How were the voices from the remembrance work selected?

### One Palace – two views

Tandem tour  
Monthly, Saturday 4–5:30 pm

Two experts shed light on the transformation period from 1989 onwards from different perspectives, and discuss the impact of the palace to the present day.

### Writing Salon

Creative Writing Workshop

Inspired by the exhibits and installations in the exhibition, participants will put their thoughts on paper with the help of short exercises. The resulting written works can then become part of the exhibition and enrich it with literary contributions.

### The vanished Palace

Guided tour for school classes

In an interactive tour through the special exhibition, the pupils will explore the Palace of the Republic and its significance in the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany. They get to know different perspectives on it and discuss the relevance of historical places in the present.

### Voices on the Palace of the Republic

Interview analysis workshop for school classes

Using the example of the palace, which was demolished in 2008, the pupils will use audio and video interviews as sources of historical information.

### Colourful Palaces

Drop-in for families  
Every month, Saturday, 2–5 pm

In the workshop, the participants let their imagination run free. Using cardboard, wire and other materials, they design miniature palaces according to their own ideas.

Details of the full programme can be found at  
[humboldtforum.org/en/pdr](http://humboldtforum.org/en/pdr)



# THE BOOK PUBLICATION



## Blown Away. The Palace of the Republic

248 pages, Hardcover, 198 color illustrations, 72 b/w illustrations

ISBN 978-3-86502-533-3

E.A. Seemann Verlag, Leipzig

34,90 Euro (36,- Euro in bookshops)

The publication *Blown Away: The Palace of the Republic* positions the Palace within contemporary German debates on representation, diversity, and participation. It presents a diversity of approaches to the Palace, both in terms of the perspectives adopted and the methodologies used. The book deals with aspects such as asbestos, selling out, building sites, memory, the Glass Flower, cultural palaces, Marx & Engels, reconstruction, "solidarity bazaars", the

Soviet Union, the Stasi, the People's Chamber, "doubt", interim usage, and much more. It opens up new perspectives through artistic positions, research, and personal experience. All the contributors were already involved in the exhibition and events programme before planning for the publication began. This book thus comprises a network of relationships that has grown over several years and connects people with different backgrounds, professions, and mindsets. It offers a view of the current situation without any claims to being exhaustive.

With texts by Victoria Helene Bergemann, Aron Boks, Gesine Danckwart, Hanno Hochmuth, Dagmar Hovestädt, Zsófia Kelm, and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk among others. With photographic works by Tobias Kruse.

### Wandrelief aus dem Palastrestaurant



Das Wandrelief aus Porzellan und braunem Böttgersteingzeug schmückte zusammen mit einem Gegenstück die Stimmtribüne des Palastrestaurants. Die größte Gassatzene im Palast der Republik öffnete sich mit einer langen Fensterfront zum Dom und zur Museumsinsel. Das farolite Motiv und das kostbare Material der Wandmosaiken verliehen dem Raum einen festlichen Charakter. Auch die Milchbar und das Café Espresso waren mit Wanddekorationen aus Meißner Porzellan ausgestattet. Sie sollten die Leistungsfähigkeit der DDR-Volkswirtschaft bezeugen, die Erzeugnisse der Porzellanmanufaktur gewinnbringend exportierte.



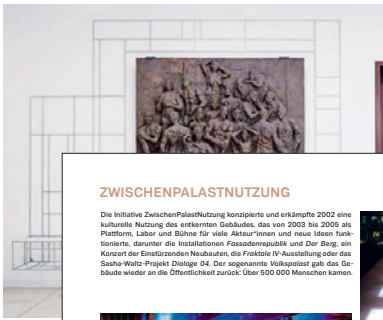
Kolkeitz Ludwig Zapner, Peter Strang, Rudi Stolle, Heinz Werner: VEB Staatliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Meissen, 1975  
Lithografie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

24 Seiten

### Relief aus dem Foyer der Volkskammer



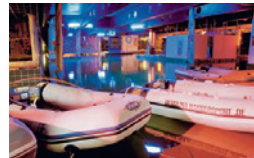
Dieses Segment gehörte zu einem über vierzehn Meter langen, vierseitigen Bronzerelief im Eingangsbereich des Parlaments. Das im Auftrag des Ministeriums für Kultur geschaffene Kunstwerk war verbunden mit einer klaren ideologischen Aussage. Es sollte die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit darstellen, die nach Ausbeutung, Unterdrückung und Klassenkämpfen einer kommunistischen Gesellschaft trotzte. Zu Jastrams Ausgangspunkt waren Bertolt Brechts Gedichte 'Lob des Kommunismus' und 'Lob des Lennins'. Bei seiner Demontage 1998 wurde das Relief in 43 Teile zerschnitten.



Jo Jastram (Gestaltung)  
Lithografie der Bundesrepublik

### ZWISCHENPALASTNUTZUNG

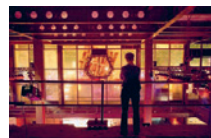
Die Initiative ZwischenPalastNutzung konzipierte und erlieferte 2003 eine kulturelle Nutzung des entkernten Gebäudes, das von 2003 bis 2006 als Plattform, Labor und Bühne für viele Akteur\*innen und neue Ideen funktionierte, darunter die Installationen Fassadenrepublik und Der Berg, ein Konzert der Einstürzenden Neubauten, die Fraktale IV-Ausstellung oder das Stahl-Walk-Projekt Dittlage 04. Der sogenannte Volkspalast gab das Gebäude wieder an die Öffentlichkeit zurück. Über 500.000 Menschen kamen.



Das gefüllte Untergeschoss des Palastes während des Projekts Fassadenrepublik von reumobilberlin im Volkspalast, 2004



Georgij Immedional Adabov  
Ein Projekt für Schauspieler und Sänger, 2004

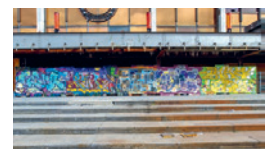


Kulturelle Zwischennutzung als Volkspalast, Fensterfront mit demontiertem Stahlwegweiser

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Volkspalast Zweri: Installation Der Berg, von dem Architekt\*innen-Kollektiv reumobilberlin, 2005



Mit Graffiti besprühte Wand am entkernten Palast der Republik

ZwischenPalastNutzung 1999 - 2010 197

# TIMELINE

<b>1950</b>	<i>7 Sept. – 0 Dec. 1950: Demolition of the Berlin Royal Palace at the instigation of Walter Ulbricht, East German head of state</i>
<b>1951</b>	<i>1 May 1951: Inauguration of the new parade ground "Marx-Engels-Platz" on the site of the Royal Palace</i>
<b>1973</b>	27 Mar. 1973: The Politburo of the Central Committee of the ruling Socialist Unity Party decides to build the Palace of the Republic.
<b>1973</b>	2 Nov. 1973: Laying of the foundation stone for the Palace of the Republic
<b>1974</b>	18 Nov. 1974: Topping-out ceremony with East Germany's party leaders and government representatives along with 4,000 construction workers
<b>1976</b>	23 Apr. 1976: The Palace of the Republic opens as "The People's Palace".
<b>1976</b>	18–22 May 1976: 9th Congress of the Socialist Unity Party and the first session in the Great Hall
<b>1983</b>	25 Oct. 1983: Udo Lindenberg concert
<b>1987</b>	5/6 Apr. 1987: Santana concert
<b>1987</b>	7 Oct. 1989: Celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the East German state in the Palace, with protests also staged outside the Palace
<b>1990</b>	10 Aug. 1990: The first freely elected People's Chamber passes a resolution making the Basic Law of the Federal Republic valid in East Germany.
<b>1990</b>	19 Sept. 1990: The Palace of the Republic is closed in line with a decision of the Council of Ministers, owing to the 5,000 tons of hazardous sprayed asbestos inside.
<b>1991</b>	May 1991: The federal financial administration orders the building's furnishings to be inventoried. What is now the Federal Arts Administration takes over all works of art, loaning some of them to museums and federal agencies.
<b>1991</b>	28 Nov. 1991: The northern section of Marx-Engels-Platz is renamed the Lustgarten.
<b>1993</b>	23 Mar. 1993: The Joint Committee decides to demolish the Palace of the Republic.
<b>1994</b>	15 Nov. 1994: The remaining section of Marx-Engels-Platz is renamed Schloßplatz.
<b>1995</b>	Dec. 1995: The Palace of the Republic is shut down. Electricity, heating, and water are switched off.
<b>1996</b>	4 June 1996: The Lower Monument Protection Authority of the Berlin-Mitte district applies for the building to be added to Berlin's list of monuments.
<b>1997–1998</b>	Cultural heritage documentation of selected areas of the Palace
<b>1997–1998</b>	The Institute for Federal Real Estate (BlmA) puts some of the furnishings into storage. These items are handed over to public institutions on request.
<b>1998</b>	16 Nov. 1998: Start of asbestos removal. Deconstruction of everything but the building's outer shell.
<b>2000</b>	<i>Nov. 2000: The Bundestag and Berlin Senate establish an international commission of experts "Historische Mitte Berlin".</i>
<b>2002</b>	4 July 2002: The German Bundestag approves the partial reconstruction of the Berlin Royal Palace as the Humboldt Forum.
<b>2003</b>	May 2003: Completion of asbestos removal.
<b>2003</b>	Nov. 2003: The German Bundestag passes a resolution to demolish the Palace.
<b>2003–2005</b>	The ZWISCHEN PALAST NUTZUNG initiative presents the concept "1000 Tage" (Hans Ulrich Obrist, Boris Ondreicka, Hannah Hurtzig), proposing that the Palace of the Republic be used for cultural purposes. 2003/04: Utilization of the Palace as the "People's Palace" under the direction of Amelie Deufhard, Matthias Lilienthal, and Philipp Oswalt. Until 2005: Interim use of the building for diverse cultural and artistic events.
<b>2006</b>	19 Jan. 2006: The German Bundestag reaffirms its decision to demolish the Palace by rejecting the moratorium on demolition plans pending resolution of issues relating to Schlossplatz.
<b>2006–2008</b>	Feb. 2006–Spring 2008: Demolition of the Palace
<b>2008</b>	<i>Italian architect Franco Stella wins the international architecture competition for the Humboldt Forum building.</i>
<b>2009</b>	<i>Founding of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss as commissioning client and owner</i>
<b>2012</b>	<i>Start of civil engineering works for the Humboldt Forum</i>
<b>2013</b>	<i>Laying of the foundation stone for the Humboldt Forum</i>
<b>2020</b>	<i>Completion of the Humboldt Forum</i>

Lines in italics refer to the palace debate and the construction of the Humboldt Forum

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## We extend our thanks to

everyone from the Stiftung Humboldt Forum who supported the programme work;

colleagues from the Humboldt Universität, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin who thought, spoke, and worked with us over the past several years in connection with programme work on the Palace of the Republic;

contributing members of our Sounding Board and Critical Companions advisory bodies;

the approximately seventy subjects of the video and audio interviews;

the experts who helped shape and develop the “Memory Work at the Humboldt Forum” project;

everyone involved in our Themed Days and numerous other events at the Palace of the Republic;

contributors to the Bau auf! Bau ab! theatre performance about the Palace of the Republic;

all of the participants, contributors, and dialogue partners in the design thinking process conducted together with the Dark Horse Innovation agency;

all the donors, agencies, and freelance partners who worked on Blown Away: The Palace of the Republic.

## We also thank

our colleagues from the following institutions for loans, talks, support, ideas, and collaboration

Akademie der Künste

Berlinische Galerie Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst,

Fotografie und Architektur

Bundesarchiv

Bundesarchiv, Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

DDR Museum Berlin GmbH

Degas-ATD

Kunstverwaltung des Bundes

Landesarchiv Berlin

Landesdenkmalamt Berlin

Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung e.V. (IRS)

Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam

Literarisches Colloquium Berlin e.V.

Stiftung Berliner Mauer

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bunderepublik Deutschland

Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin

Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur

Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg

Technische Universität Berlin

Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig

# **BLOWN AWAY THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC**

A PROGRAMME OF THE STIFTUNG HUMBOLDT FORUM IM BERLINER SCHLOSS

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Duration	<b>17 May 2024–16 February 2025</b>
Location	<b>Special Exhibition 1 + 2, Ground Floor</b>
Opening hours	<b>Wed–Mon: 10:30–18:30, last admission 17:30 Tuesdays closed</b>
Admission	<b>12 € / 6 €</b>
Address	<b>Humboldt Forum Schloßplatz 10178 Berlin T +49 30-99 211 89 89 humboldtforum.org</b>
Blog	<b><a href="https://pdr.humboldtforum.org/">pdr.humboldtforum.org/</a></b>
Press Images	<b><a href="https://humboldtforum.org/presse">humboldtforum.org/presse</a></b>
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