

Media Release
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Sydney Jewish Museum Celebrates 25 Years

The Museum challenges visitors' perception of democracy, morality, social justice and human rights
www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au



The Sydney Jewish Museum in Darlinghurst, is proud to celebrate its 25th Anniversary on 18 November 2017. Founded by the late John Saunders AO and members of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors & Descendants in 1992, the Museum has become an integral part of the cultural life of Sydney and second home to many Holocaust survivors who volunteer at the Museum. This year the new permanent Holocaust exhibition re-opened with its world class technology and the Museum has educated over 27,000 New South Wales school students, with numbers expected to increase in 2018.

“The SJM intends to become the major hub for cultural interchange between the Jewish and the wider Australian community; to expand its educational activities ... and to become a major educational resource on matters pertaining to the Holocaust, ethical issues and human rights,” says Prof Gus Lehrer AM FAA, President of the Sydney Jewish Museum.

This year alone, the Sydney Jewish Museum has hosted over 90 innovative, thought-provoking events including public lectures, functions in support of temporary exhibitions, book launches, movie screenings, cultural events, community functions and Holocaust Commemorative events.

“As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, it is important to remember the driving forces that gave rise to our creation. One such force was a desire by the generation of Holocaust survivors who came to Australia. They were determined to remember and honour those who were murdered during the Holocaust. Even before the Museum opened in 1992, they had been meeting, telling their stories and gathering artefacts,” says Norman Seligman, CEO of the Sydney Jewish Museum.

The Sydney Jewish Museum is also home to some amazing artefacts and over the years have collected a diverse array of objects, documents, photographs, memorabilia and testimony. Rosyln Sugarman, Head Curator says their current holdings number around 9,000 items and increase annually by 600-800 items, each carefully documented, researched and preserved, safeguarding the community’s heritage. She says there is a diminishing window of opportunity to collect from those closely associated with the Holocaust and the imperative is to collect now.

“We believe that there is still an abundance of material in community hands at risk of remaining undiscovered. With this in mind, we have embarked on a pro-active collecting campaign to gather as much material from survivors and their descendants while it is still possible. Envisaging that this would vastly increase our collection, I successfully applied for a grant from the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) to investigate how best to manage this process. This gave me the opportunity to do research at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The USHMM has recently expanded their facilities, implicitly suggesting that there is a huge amount out there to be collected, and I gained this invaluable direction in how to proceed with this project,” says Sugarman.

In April 2018, in honour of the Sydney Jewish Museum’s 25th anniversary, the Curators will delve into the archive to find 25 interesting and unexpected objects with stories that have never been told in an exhibition, **Behind-the-Scenes**.

Entering its 25th year, the Sydney Jewish Museum continues to explore the history and ongoing relevance of the Holocaust and the rich contribution the survivors have made to contemporary Australian life. The visitors meet and interact with their volunteer guides and there is often an opportunity to meet Holocaust survivors who have powerful stories to share. The Museums' timeline invites visitors to explore Jewish history from its Biblical origin in the Ancient Near East to the thriving community in Australia today.

Jackie French, AM and author writes, "Each time I have visited, it has given me a profound gift that I did not expect. On one visit, I met with Holocaust survivor Olga Horak, who has suffered enormous personal tragedy. Yet she was still giving unconditionally to thousands of young students. "Doing this keeps me going," she said. From Olga I learned that when tragedy strikes, doing good for others, with no thought of praise or reward, does give you strength to keep on going. On my last visit, I had the extraordinary privilege of speaking to Holocaust survivors who told me that forgiveness is necessary, otherwise hate consumes too much of your life. I knew the necessity of forgiveness in theory, but felt unable to forgive what had been done to me when I was young. But that morning they taught me that sometimes, perhaps every day, one should wake up and forgive again, year after year. If these extraordinary people who survive possibly the greatest and most sustained hatred the world has ever seen can forgive, surely I should be able to do that too ... and now I do."

The Sydney Jewish Museum also wishes to thank the generosity of its donors over the past 25 years.

"The first 25 years have brought the Sydney Jewish Museum far further than its founders would have dreamed. It is well placed to realise bold ambitions for the next 25 years. "

Prof Gus Lehrer AM FAA, President of the Sydney Jewish Museum.

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