

# A reminder of the horrors of the past

## The UK Holocaust Memorial will in many ways improve upon the experience of the Victoria Tower Gardens explain Eric Pickles and Ed Balls

The UK Holocaust Memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens will be the focal point for national remembrance of the Holocaust. It will honour the six million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered in the Holocaust. The learning centre will also remember the other victims of Nazi persecution and the victims of subsequent genocides.

Following an international design competition won by Adjaye Associates, Ron Arad Architects and Gustafson, Porter + Bowman, we submitted our planning application in December 2018. The application is currently being considered by Westminster City Council. We expect to start work on site in 2020.

The Memorial will stand as a reminder of the horrors of the past and will encourage reflection on their implications for British government and society. The view of Parliament from the Memorial will serve as a permanent reminder that political decisions have far-reaching consequences.

The exhibition will confront the immense human calamity caused by the destruction of Europe's Jewish communities during the Holocaust, arousing a sincere commitment to mourn, remember and act. Victims will be remembered as individuals, not nameless sta-

tistics. It will focus on Britain. The narrative will be balanced, addressing the complexities of Britain's ambiguous responses to the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, avoiding simplistic judgements and encouraging visitors to critically reflect on whether more could have been done, both by policymakers and by society as a whole.

There can be no more powerful symbol of our commitment to remembering the Holocaust than placing the memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens in the shadow of Parliament. Victoria Tower Gardens was chosen as its historical, emotional and political significance substantially outweighed all other locations, and offered the greatest potential impact and visibility for the project. The existing memorials (the Buxton memorial, the Burghers of Calais and the Emmeline Pankhurst statue) in the gardens represent democratic struggles for equality and justice and this will fit well with the aims of the Holocaust Memorial. The Holocaust Memorial will give the existing memorials more visibility and relevance by reinforcing the concept of a Garden of Conscience next to Parliament.

The gardens are a much-loved asset for the local community and our plans will ensure that the



Rt Hon the Lord Eric Pickles [above] and Rt Hon Ed Balls co-chair the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation



Memorial and Learning Centre will not intrude – and in many ways improve – upon the experience of the gardens. Preserving the setting of Victoria Tower Gardens as a UNESCO World Heritage site has been in the forefront of our minds since the design brief and was part of the selection criteria in the architectural competition.

We plan to add a range of new features, including a gentle slope to improve views of the Thames, new seating and a boardwalk on the river side and improve the drainage of the green space, reducing problems of winter flooding and improving tree health. We will also consult with the local community when developing proposals for improving the children's playground. ■





# Controversy at the Palace of Westminster

David Adjaye says 'disrupting' the park is key to his thinking, reports *The Times*

David Adjaye has infuriated opponents of his controversial Holocaust Memorial in Westminster by arguing that 'disrupting' the pleasure of being in a park is key to his thinking

The project, designed by Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects, has faced criticism from local residents because it will involve building on Victoria Tower Gardens, a small park near the Houses of Parliament.

The planning application, which Westminster Council is considering, has already attracted a deluge of objections over fears the memorial and subterranean learning centre will involve the removal of mature plane trees\* and destroy the borough's 'green

lung'. But defending the project in *The Times*, Adjaye said he was 'excited' about the site, which he said had already been turned into a 'memorial garden' with monuments to the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage. 'We have the opportunity to activate the entire site and talk directly to parliament, hold it accountable,' he said. 'Disrupting the pleasure of being in a park is key to the thinking.'

Adjaye also said the Jewish community had not been 'keen on being seen' for the last 70 years. 'They've looked for invisibility and integration. So there's a real fear of being put front and centre. That's normal.

But this will use the Jewish experience as a lens –

it addresses the bigger issue of intolerance. We live in splintered times. It would be nice to think that architecture can help us understand the issues we're facing. Or at least make us think about them.'

The architect's comments have sparked a backlash from campaigners fighting the government-backed UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation's plans.

■ *\*NOTE: We are asked to point out that the Foundation has done extensive work on ensuring that the roots of the plane trees are not damaged. The memorial was also moved slightly to ensure that the tree roots are not damaged. They say they have gone to great lengths to protect the plane trees of Victoria Tower Gardens.*

# Making Memory

Architectural models are the stars of a compact show exploring monuments through seven projects by Adjaye Associates writes Rupert Bickersteth

The past few years have already seen a couple of retrospectives of David Adjaye's work. First came *Form, Heft, Material* in 2015 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, soon followed by *Making Place: The Architecture of David Adjaye* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2016.

London's Design Museum has a long relationship with Adjaye, having previously exhibited his 10-year study of the capital cities of Africa, *Urban Africa*, in 2010. Deyan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum, thought to bring the Munich show to the UK but, when the conversation with Adjaye began, a different focus arose and the show that has just opened at the museum's new home at the former Commonwealth Institute in Kensington, west London, instead poses a 'provocation or question' – a rumination on the possibilities and capabilities of 'monuments'.

David Adjaye: *Making Memory*, which opened on 2 February, showcases seven projects by Adjaye Associates, all on the theme of monuments.

In a text in the opening room, which surveys the idea, history and typology of the monument, Adjaye writes that the revisionary period we are in, one of 'rethinking ingrained histories, [...] makes us look more critically at the monuments we've made in the past and question the relevance of making monuments for the 21st century.

'Rather than the imperialist idea of enshrining a singular view,' he continues 'I am interested in exploring the democratisation of the monument. I find narratives that unfold and splinter are more representative of our collective consciousness. By including such narratives, the monument can be transformed to reflect a broader experience of time and place'

While at points ambiguous, his thoughts on monuments provide a lens through which to consider the following rooms, which chart the work of a decade. This helps to focus the show and makes it feel manageable (in a way that, perhaps, the 50 projects on show in Chicago did not). The result is a thematic retrospective that highlights the breadth and variety within the practice's work and the wider typology itself.

It might have been more interesting to see a show illuminating what monument design beyond



Sclera Pavilion from the 2008 London Design Festival

the work of one architectural practice currently looks like but, with his star ascending, this was always a David Adjaye show.

Unsurprisingly, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), arguably Adjaye's most significant building, is given top billing and the most space. But it's great also to see unbuilt projects exhibited, some not without controversy, such as the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre planned for Victoria Tower Gardens next to the Houses of Parliament in Westminster (designed in collaboration with Ron Arad Architects).

Thoughtful curation brings some aspect of each project to life – whether that is a full-scale section of the Sclera Pavilion from the 2008 London Design Festival, in collaboration with the American Hardwood Export Council, or a replica of part of the Gwangju River Reading Room from South Korea.

The real stars, however, are the beautiful models. It's worth going to see these alone – they are works of exquisite detail and delicacy and really give coherence to the varied array of projects. But they also convey a comprehensive sense of each monument in question, which is explored in more fractured glimpses on the surrounding walls.

Adjaye's work has a flavour that remains consistent across the different scales and contexts of his work. Whatever your taste buds make of that flavour, this exhibition gives a good chance for visitors to sample and judge for themselves.

David Adjaye's brother, Peter, is a DJ and has created soundscapes for the exhibition. It plays most loudly in the room dedicated to the forthcoming National Cathedral of Ghana. While the sound of African drums is apt, if obvious, for this project, it permeates the entire show and strikes one of only a few bum notes. Is it an appropriate soundtrack to the Holocaust monument? Does it contribute to a greater understanding of the Sclera pavilion or the Korean reading room (if any of the projects)?

I asked Sudjic what the thinking was behind the music and he mused that 'it is always interesting how sound is used in exhibitions' and went on to say how he thought the aural highlight was the spoken word for the, as yet unannounced, competition entry for the Coretta Scott King and Martin Luther King Jr Memorial in Boston – one of the simplest and most effective projects and displays.

Regardless of what you make of the music, or the limiting of the scope of the show to only Adjaye's work, it is worth going to see not only for those models, but also to view a prominent UK architectural practice's development in the past 10 years, and (protests not obstructing and competition wins pending) where it could be headed. ■

David Adjaye: *Making Memory* is at the Design Museum until 5 May 2019 – now extended.

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