



# At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture

By James E. Young

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How should Germany commemorate the mass murder of Jews once committed in its name? In 1997, James E. Young was invited to join a German commission appointed to find an appropriate design for a national memorial in Berlin to the European Jews killed in World War II. As the only foreigner and only Jew on the panel, Young gained a unique perspective on Germany's fraught efforts to memorialize the Holocaust. In this book, he tells for the first time the inside story of Germany's national Holocaust memorial and his own role in it.

In exploring Germany's memorial crisis, Young also asks the more general question of how a generation of contemporary artists can remember an event like the Holocaust, which it never knew directly. Young examines the works of a number of vanguard artists in America and Europe—including Art Spiegelman, Shimon Attie, David Levinthal, and Rachel Whiteread—all born after the Holocaust but indelibly shaped by its memory as passed down through memoirs, film, photographs, and museums. In the context of the moral and aesthetic questions raised by these avant-garde projects, Young offers fascinating insights into the controversy surrounding Berlin's newly opened Jewish museum, designed by Daniel Libeskind, as well as Germany's soon-to-be-built national Holocaust memorial, designed by Peter Eisenman.

Illustrated with striking images in color and black-and-white, *At Memory's Edge* is the first book in any language to chronicle these projects and to show how we remember the Holocaust in the after-images of its history.

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**At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture** By James E. Young **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

*At Memory's Edge* is an ambitious and provocative collection of essays with topics ranging from Art Spiegelman's *Maus* books to, most notably, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. Author James E. Young, an American professor of English and Judaic Studies, was the only foreigner and the only Jew on the committee that selected the design for the German memorial. His behind-the-scenes account of this project's development offers sophisticated answers to some very difficult questions. Young doggedly asks how Berlin can remember a group of people who are no longer at home there, and how Germany can--or should--remember the extermination of Jews once committed in that nation's name. The author's answers to such questions may appear excessively dogmatic to some readers. Early in the book, for example, Young asserts that "memory-work about the Holocaust cannot, must not, be redemptive in any fashion." But his rationale for such sweeping pronouncements is very persuasive. The book is also lavishly illustrated with photographs and architectural drawings that will be a great value to readers who accept the challenge that Young has assumed: "the task of contemplating how to understand a formative historical tragedy of which first-hand memory is rapidly fading." --*Michael Joseph Gross*

#### From Publishers Weekly

While many critics and commentators point to attempts by the "new Germany" to reconcile itself with its genocidal past, most accounts that make it to these shores come from an outsider's perspective. Young, author of *The Texture of Memory* and a University of Massachusetts at Amherst professor of English and Judaic studies, was the only foreign and only Jewish member of the commission charged with raising a Holocaust memorial in Berlin. Here, he gives an insider's look at the process that got Daniel Libeskind's celebrated museum built, and also takes stock of the echoes of the Holocaust he finds in the work of other artists and architects. A chapter on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* comics, which intersperse autobiography with his parents' Holocaust experiences, finds an ingenious transmission of "the living memory of survivors." Shimon Attie's "hypermediated relationship to the past" translates movingly into his site-specific installations in Europe. Young British artist Rachel Whiteread is interestingly placed among fellow applicants for a German national "memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe." Chapters like "Germany's Holocaust Memorial ProblemAand Mine" (discussing the recent quest for a national monument) are full of wryly sensitive and firm observations. While the book leans more toward academic criticism than general interest nonfiction, those interested in the subject will find Young's treatment accessible and engaging. (June)

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#### From [Booklist](#)

Young, the author of *The Texture of Memory* (1993), here asks the question: How can a generation of contemporary artists, writers, architects, and composers remember an event like the Holocaust, which it never knew firsthand? To this end, Young explores the work of Art Spiegelman's so-called comic book of the Holocaust, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*; photographer and toy collector David Levinthal; artist-photographer Shimon Attie; and others. He discusses the controversy over Berlin's Jewish Museum, designed by Daniel Libeskind. And he tells the story of Germany's national Holocaust memorial to be opened in 2001. Young was the only foreigner and only Jew on the five-member panel charged with choosing the memorial's design. Complementing the insightful text are 47 color and 56 black-and-white photographs. *George Cohen*

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