

AN INVITATION

To the Launch of Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month 2010

1 June 2010 at Arts Pavilion Gallery, Mile End Arts Park, London E3 4QX

Please join us in celebrating the third year of our important month.

There will be top class entertainment, speeches and refreshments for what promises to be an exciting afternoon and evening.

Don't miss the opportunity to be one of the first to view the exhibition "The Holocaust against the Roma Sinti and Present Day Racism in Europe," brought to London specially for GRTHM this year.

The Launch Agenda:

- 2:00pm** Meet in Mile End Park in front of Pavilion Gallery
- 3:00pm** Sandwiches, tea and cake at the gallery
- 3 - 4:00pm** Private View of exhibition
- 4 - 5:30pm** Speeches, poetry, music and song from the Gypsy Roma and Traveller community and friends
- 5 - 6:00pm** Drinks and snacks
- 6 - 7:00pm** Live music from the Romany Diamonds
- 8:00pm** Gallery closes

Nearest tube: Mile End (5 min walk), Zone 2 Hammersmith and City Line, District Line, Central Line
BUSES: 25, 277, D6, D7 & N25 to Mile End.



Each year GRTHM has a national competition for school children and young people. 'Merrylegs' is an illustration from last year's storytelling competition by Aysha Adams.



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In most European countries today the vast majority of people remain totally unaware of the National Socialist genocide of the Roma and Sinti minority which claimed some 500,000 victims during the Second World War. As a consequence of the failure to overcome this ignorance the racist clichés and stereotypes about the Roma and Sinti, which were heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda, persist until the present day. These prejudices, passed down the generations, are among the main reasons for the perpetual wave of racially motivated crimes of violence which are still being committed against the Roma and Sinti in Europe today. Roma and Sinti suffer discrimination and prejudice in all social strata: a disadvantaged minority numbering some 10 million.

Against this backdrop, the exhibition seeks to impart a greater appreciation of the past in an attempt to help dissolve current situations of conflict. In focussing on the Holocaust against the Roma and Sinti and its European dimension, the main aim is to expose a crime against humanity which to this day eludes all historical comparison and remains unimaginable in its enormity. Like the Jews, the Roma and Sinti were rounded up, disenfranchised, ghettoised and finally deported to the extermination camps, all in the name of National Socialist racial ideology. With no respect for persons and individuals, National Socialism subjected infants and the elderly alike to the same de-humanising treatment. The National Socialists denied these people the right to exist, collectively and definitively, merely because they had been born Sinti, Roma or Jews.

As regards content, the exhibition is subdivided into four areas. The first part documents the beginning disenfranchisement of the German Roma and Sinti following the National Socialist accession to power up to the outbreak of the Second World War and the first deportations to occupied Poland. The second part of the exhibition covers the genocide of the Roma and Sinti in Nazi-occupied Europe. The exhibition seeks to highlight the distinctive features of the persecution in the different occupied and allied states, against the backdrop of the overarching themes common to the National Socialist extermination policy. The third major area documents the systematic homicide of Sinti and Roma from virtually every European country in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

Finally, the fourth part of the exhibition picks out the main developments since 1945 in Europe, turning the spotlight on the public avoidance to confront and acknowledge the Nazi genocide against the Roma and Sinti and on the emergence of the civil rights movement in the Federal Republic. One particular emphasis is on current forms of discrimination against the national Roma and Sinti minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. Using selected examples, the exhibition demonstrates that Roma and Sinti are increasingly subject to open and violent racism and continued social prejudice.

The layout and design of the exhibition is meant to compare and contrast the terror and organised persecution of the Nazi regime with the normality of everyday life of the Roma and Sinti. Personal testimonies and family photographs take centre stage in the exhibition in a bid to unveil the victims and show the individuals behind each unique story. In putting faces to the victims, the exhibition seeks to dispel the myth of the "gypsy image" passed down through the centuries and used by the Nazis for their criminal ends.

The act of remembering the Sinti and Roma slain during the Second World War entails an implicit mandate that each European nation state ought to examine more closely its own role during the German occupation. In many cases the government agencies of the occupied countries or those allied with Hitler's Germany were party to the crimes of genocide against the Jews and the Roma and Sinti. Scheduled to tour various Eastern and South-East European countries after its opening in Strasbourg, the mobile exhibition is an attempt to initiate historical analysis and allow the societies in Eastern and South-East Europe to come to terms with this dark chapter in their own history.

The exhibition is lead-managed by the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in collaboration with numerous national Roma organisations. With an overall budget of almost € 150,000 the exhibition project was helped to fruition by the sponsorship of the DaimlerChrysler AG, the European Commission, German Federal Cultural Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Hermann Niermann Foundation. In terms of dimensions the mobile exhibition extends some 70 metres in length and comprises 84 boards measuring 2 metres in height and 0.6 to 1 metre in width.

After its official opening to the public at the European Parliament in Strasbourg the exhibition has been presented in various European countries, among them Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, and is going to be shown at further European destinations in the next few years.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ROMA AND SINTI

Roma and Sinti have been living in Europe for centuries. They form old-established and historically deep-rooted ethnic minorities in the individual countries. The way of life of the Roma and Sinti in their native countries is totally different from the popular ideas and clichés about "gypsies".

The Holocaust against the Roma and Sinti represents a fundamental break with history, as the ethnic minority had been integrated into the society of the majority for centuries. On the basis of the National Socialist racial ideology, Roma and Sinti were gradually deprived of their rights, their basis for the provision of their families and finally deported to the death camps.

The objective of the policy of mass murder organised by the National Socialist state was the extermination of the ethnic minority from its youngest to its oldest members. Hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti fell victim to the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Europe - a crime which is unique in history and which is still unimaginable in its extent.

The experience of the Holocaust has etched itself deeply into the collective remembrance of the Roma and Sinti minorities. The majority of the populations in their respective homelands, however, has no awareness of the dimension of this crime. To this day it has been banished from the public remembrance of the European nations. Failure to initiate an extensive historical assessment have, therefore, enabled the Nazi's propaganda's preconceptions about the minority to linger on, virtually unaltered, in its virulence. The prejudicial structures, which still define the image of the Roma and Sinti today, have been significantly influenced by the inhuman racial ideology of the National Socialists and their fascist allies. The exhibition strives to make the historical roots of present day racism against the Roma and Sinti visible.

ABOUT THE TERM "ROMA AND SINTI"

"Roma" and "Sinti" are terms from Romany, the minority language used by families as a second mother tongue in addition to the language of their native country. "Sinti" designates the members of the ethnic minority who have lived in Central Europe since the late middle ages and "Roma" those of southeast European origin. Outside the German linguistic area, Roma - or simply Rom (it means person) - is also used as a collective name for the entire ethnic minority. Romany is related to Sanskrit, the ancient Indian standard language, which shows that India is the country of origin of the Roma and Sinti. Over the centuries, individual Romany languages have developed in the European native countries of Roma and Sinti. The popular German term "Zigeuner", which could be translated as "gypsy", is an extraneous term originating from the majority. It is rejected by many Roma and Sinti as discriminatory, since this word is usually understood in a disparaging sense. If the term "gypsy" is used in a historical context, the clichés and preconceptions behind it also have to be considered.

Romani Rose - Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

Romani Rose was born in Heidelberg in 1946 and is a symbolic figure of the civil rights movement of the Sinti and Roma, which he has considerably influenced. As a member of a German Sinti family which lost 13 members in the National Socialist concentration and extermination camps – amongst others, his grandfather was murdered in Auschwitz and his grandmother in Ravensbrück Romani Rose has been engaged in political work for the minority since the 70s and has above all fought for the moral acknowledgement and material compensation of the wrong done to the victims. His most important political successes include the recognition of the German Sinti and Roma as a national minority in accordance with the »Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities« of the Council of Europe.

Romani Rose has been chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma since 1982. He took over the management of the Documentary and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in 1991. Together with representatives of the minority from the USA, Mexico, Argentina, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, France and the Netherlands, Romani Rose is a member of the directorate of the International Movement against Discrimination and Racism which was founded in Tokyo in 1988.

Romani Rose is the author and publisher of several books, amongst others *Civil Rights for Sinti and Roma*, *The book about racism in Germany* (1987) and »*Den Rauch hatten wir täglich vor Augen*« (We saw the smoke every day), *The National Socialist Genocide of the Sinti and Roma* (1999) and the catalogue of the permanent exhibition on the National Socialist genocide of the Sinti and Roma in the State Museum of Auschwitz (2003), which has been published in three languages. In addition, Romani Rose has penned numerous articles, including contributions for publications of the OSCE and the UNO Committee on Racism.