

Artist@Mauthausen
2024

MAUTHAUSEN
MEMORIAL | KZ-GEDENKSTÄTTE



Paths to Freedom

Judy Mardnli



Contents

Barbara Glück: Foreword	4
Gudrun Blohberger: Encounter Introductory remarks on the special exhibition <i>Paths to Freedom</i>	5
Judy Mardnli: <i>Paths to Freedom</i>	6
Artworks	9
Judy Mardnli: Biography	34
Map of the places of inspiration	35

Credits:

Publisher: KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen / Mauthausen Memorial, Vienna 2024
Overall management: Barbara Glück
Curators: Judy Mardnli, Nathalie Soursos
Texts in this brochure: Judy Mardnli
Editor: Nathalie Soursos
English translation: Joanna White
Photographs: Markus Hechenberger
Layout & production: markushechenberger.net Werbeagentur

Barbara Glück

Foreword

There is perhaps no more fitting moment to engage with Judy Mardnli's pictures than the start of the Memorial Year 2025. Not only does the exhibition *Paths to Freedom* reflect his personal history and experiences of flight, it is at the same time the story of a historical crime scene, the Mauthausen concentration camp. Through his artistic exploration of this place, we can share in Judy Mardnli's reflections on the dehumanisation of the many, and the dignity of the individual.

Some time ago at the Mauthausen Memorial we took the decision to open up the site and ourselves, seeking new interdisciplinary approaches through which to convey the significance of the past for the future. Artistic engagement and the creative work made by invited artists at our locations opens us up to new and enriching forms of awareness. In recent years, the artists Marko Zink, Jeffrey Wolin and Stefan Hanke have exhibited their different photographic perspectives on the history of the Mauthausen concentration camp. Collaborating with artists has since become an indispensable part of our work.

It is for these reasons that we set up "Artist@Mauthausen", a new programme aimed explicitly at artists which invites them to apply for a grant and access to a dedicated studio space at the memorial. The aim of the programme is to promote ongoing artistic exchange and we will continue to put the results of this artistic engagement on display in exhibitions at the memorial site.

For us, there are many layers to the Mauthausen Memorial. It is a crime scene, a cemetery, a place of remembrance and, especially, a place of encounter. We hope that the "Artist@Mauthausen" programme brings a new sense of vitality, urging us all to greater depths of engagement with the place, its history and its significance for the present day.

Judy Mardnli also asked himself the question "What's it got to do with me?" Through his art, he shares his very personal response to this question with us. For this, we are deeply grateful.

Gudrun Blohberger

Encounter

Introductory remarks on the special exhibition *Paths to Freedom*

Around two years ago, Judy Mardnli knocked on my door and explained that for several months now, he had been coming to the memorial regularly to work, equipped with crayons and paper. The place and its history touched him deeply, he said, and he felt he had a duty to draw and to paint here. He saw the faces of people in the dried out, weathered wood, in the peeling paintwork. He captured these faces in his pictures, seeking to breathe life into them and to recall their shape and individuality.

Born in Syria as a member of the Kurdish minority, Judy fled the country in 2014. Having studied English in Syria, he actually wanted to go to Great Britain. But when the doors of the truck opened, he was looking out at a field of maize. Completely unexpectedly he found himself in Austria. Judy Mardnli underwent asylum proceedings and was granted indefinite leave to remain. He found work at a school in Linz – as the assistant to the janitor. He completed an art degree, choosing to focus in his final project on the experience of leaving his homeland and fleeing Syria. Now Judy Mardnli is an artist. And an Austrian citizen. He is a teacher at the school in Linz where he was once the assistant janitor.

Impressed by his work, his techniques, his exhibitions, his awards and his diligence, touched by his reflections and memories, the Mauthausen Memorial provided the artist with a space to work. The artworks created over the following months are brought together in the Memorial Year 2025 in a special exhibition, which runs from January to November. The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive outreach programme because aesthetic engagement with the past appeals to deeper emotional levels and thus supports individual approaches to how we view history.

Judy Mardnli has given the exhibition the title "Paths to Freedom": An (artistic) encounter between the realities of the present and the crimes of the past.

Paths to Freedom

An exhibition by Judy Mardnli



"I feel a deep connection to this place and draw inspiration from the impressions that the walls and floors evoke in me. The images these create in my mind are surely shaped by my own experiences of war and are also a result of my emotional nature. They clearly illustrate my firm rejection of racism, antisemitism and war."

As a Kurd, I had to experience what it means to be excluded and oppressed. The past of my people is also a part of me, and everything I can express through my art is shaped by this fact. Today, I view every day as a miracle and a gift I have been given. A gift that I plan to use to bring about a small measure of positive change. My art is meant to be a message for peace and justice. A contribution to keeping the memory of yesterday alive and not letting it fade.



"People often forget that no one is able to freely choose their skin colour, religion, language or the country in which they were born."

The memory of my escape from my home country Syria is still present, even though it was more than 10 years ago now. The journey to Austria was long and often pushed me to my limits and into great danger.

I am driven to keep delving into the past and to use the history of my people to influence the present, too. My art is meant to be a message for peace and justice. It should connect not divide, at the same time reminding us not to suppress the past but to learn from it. I want to create something that goes beyond a mere artistic representation of impressions, dreams and ideas.

"Humans can be inhuman." This thought addresses a deep and very painful topic that sheds light on the dark sides of human nature.

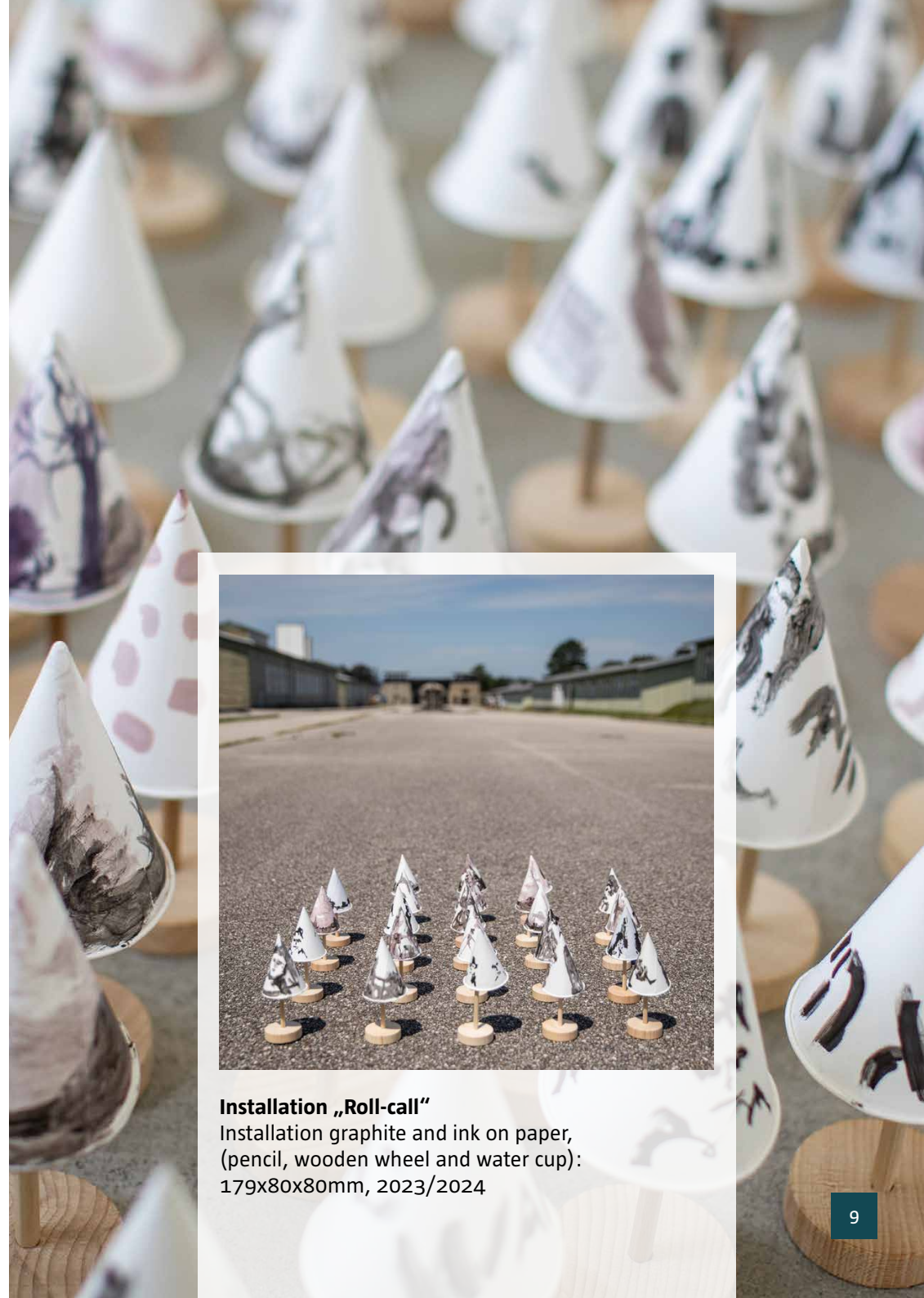
The Anfal campaign against the Kurds in Iraq took place between 1986 and 1989. In various phases, a vast genocide was launched against the Kurdish population. On 16 March 1988, Iraqi air forces attacked the Kurds in Halabja. Around 5,000 people were killed in this devastating poison gas attack. It was the largest deployment of poison gas since the First World War. The smell of sweet apples hung in the air, bringing death to thousands of people, including many children.

“When I enter the barracks, I have the feeling that I have lived here once before.”

When I visited the Mauthausen Memorial, I immediately saw parallels with the Anfal campaign. I could almost feel the suffering, sense the silenced laughter of the children and the shattered dreams of the people imprisoned here. The depths of the human soul that allowed this suffering, fuelled it even, choked me. On the one hand I felt helpless in the face of the terrible experiences that people had to go through here; on the other I was also overcome with pure despair at the thought of all the suffering that becomes tangible here.

I know, not least since this visit, that it is time to make my contribution. My contribution to keeping the memory of yesterday alive and not letting it fade. That is why I want to lay bare the inner discoveries I have made in Mauthausen on paper. It is a matter of profound personal concern that I make a contribution to this sensitive topic.

“The sacrifice of countless people paved the way for the freedom we enjoy today. May the next generation never forget how much suffering was endured for this precious state, and how much blood was spilled.”



Installation „Roll-call“

Installation graphite and ink on paper,
(pencil, wooden wheel and water cup):
179x80x80mm, 2023/2024



Landscape of the Mauthausen concentration camp,
Ink on photo paper,
100x150mm, 2023



Landscape in blue and yellow,
Granite ink and graphite on wooden cardboard,
700x1000mm, 2023

The picture from memory at Barrack 1,
Oil on canvas,
1400x1050mm, 2023



The image from memory at the Mauthausen concentration camp,
Oil on canvas,
210x297mm, 2024





The faces,
Graphite on
wooden cardboard,
700x1000mm,
2023



Courage in chaos,
Oil on canvas,
700x800x20mm,
2024



Fight for survival 1
Oil on canvas,
1000x1000mm,
2024



Fight for survival 2,
Oil on canvas,
1000x1000mm,
2024



Witnesses of Time 1,
Oil on canvas,
1200x800mm, 2024



**Calm After
the Storm,**
Oil on canvas,
700x800mm,
2024



From the series
black and white,
Oil on Canvas,
700x800mm,
2021



**Judy in Exil Lost
Souls,**
Paraphrase
documenta,
Acrylic and toner on
canvas,
1000x1000mm,
2017



The Man,
Oil and graphite on wooden cardboard,
700x1000mm, 2023



THE Woman,
Graphite on wooden cardboard,
700x100mm, 2023



War spirits,
Graphite on cardboard;
300x400mm, 2021



Conversations 1,
Acrylic on cardboard,
420x600mm, 2020



Conversations 2,
Acrylic on cardboard,
420x600mm, 2021



From the serie **black and white**,
Acrylic and toner on paper, 297x420mm, 2017

From the series **Mauthausen concentration camp**,
Oil paint, 210x297mm, 2023



From the series *KZ Mauthausen*,
Oil paint,
1200x1430mm, 2023





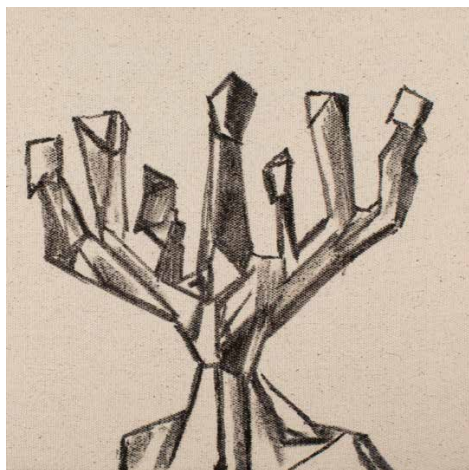
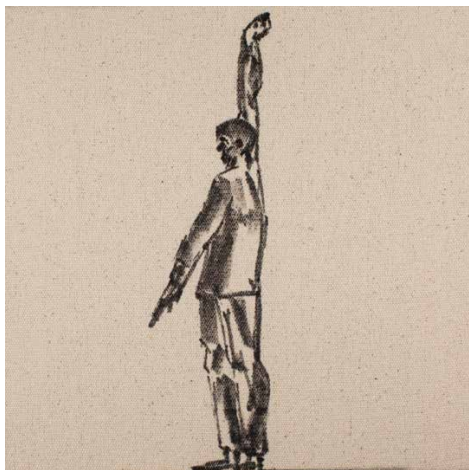
THE Woman,
Oil on canvas,
1200x650mm,
2023



The wounds 1,
Oil on canvas,
200x200mm,
2024



The wounds 2,
Oil on canvas,
210x297mm,
2024

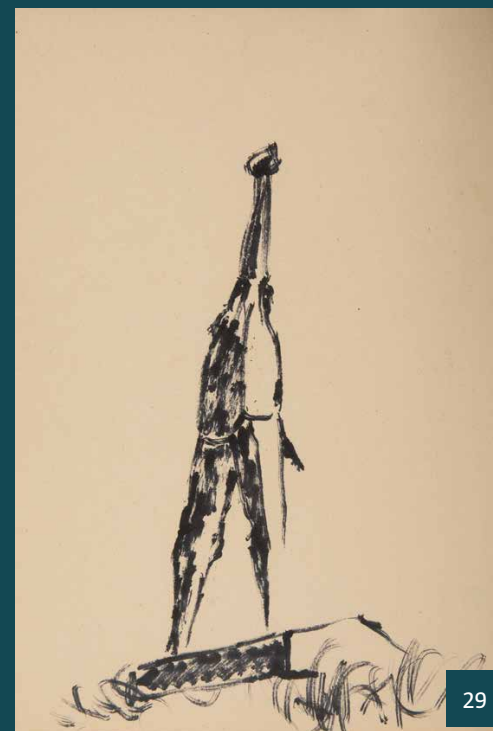


Milk jug and Headlights

From the permanent exhibition *The Mauthausen Concentration Camp*

Oil on canvas,
200x200mm, 2024

Objects and Memorials,
Oil on canvas, 100x150mm, 2023



Bulgarian memorial
(up and down),
Ink on paper, 200x297mm, 2023



Officer,
Graphite on wooden cardboard,
170x297mm, 2023





Officer 2
Graphite on wooden cardboard,
170x297mm, 2023

Artistic Education

2021
Diploma studies in painting & graphic art with Ursula Hübner, University of Arts Linz

2014
Bachelor's degree in English and American Studies, Cordoba Private University Syria

Solo Exhibitions

2025
Paths to Freedom (Wege in die Freiheit), Artist@Mauthausen, Mauthausen Memorial, Mauthausen

2018
Art in the Bath (Kunst im Bad), Catholic University Community, Linz

2024
Abstract Realities (Abstrakte Realitäten), Die Kunstschaaffenden, Ursulinenhof, Linz

2014
Bruckmühle, Pregarten
2014
Raiffeisenbank, Wartberg Ob der Aist

2018
Wohnzimmertgalerie S.I.X., Attersee

2009
State Cultural Centre Al-Hasakah

Collective Exhibitions

2024
"Dignity", Art Prize LENTOS Friends 2024, Linz

2021
"Relaxation" („Ent:spannung"), Kunstforum Salzkammergut, Gmunden

2024
Summer Exhibition of the OÖ Lands-Kultur GmbH, Castle Museum Linz

2021
"Abundance" („Fülle"), Kunstforum Salzkammergut, K-Hof, Museums, Gmunden

2023
BestOFF, University of Arts Linz

2020
"THAT'S NEW - AND NEEDED!", Kunst-sammlung, Art Collection of Upper Austria

2023
MIR International Art, Kulturinitiative Narrenschyff, Haslach

2019
Transform – Arte, Eisenstadt

2023
Talented and Established, OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH, Energie AG Oberösterreich

2019
TAXISPALAIS Kunsthalle Tirol, 36th Graphic Art Competition, Innsbruck

2022
"The New" („Die Neuen") Gallery in the OÖ Landesquartier, Linz

2018
BestOFF, University of Arts Linz

2022
"Black.White" („Schwarz.Weiß"), Bad Ischl Town Museum

2018
Kulturtankstelle, "Practically Shit" („Praktisch Scheiße"), Linz

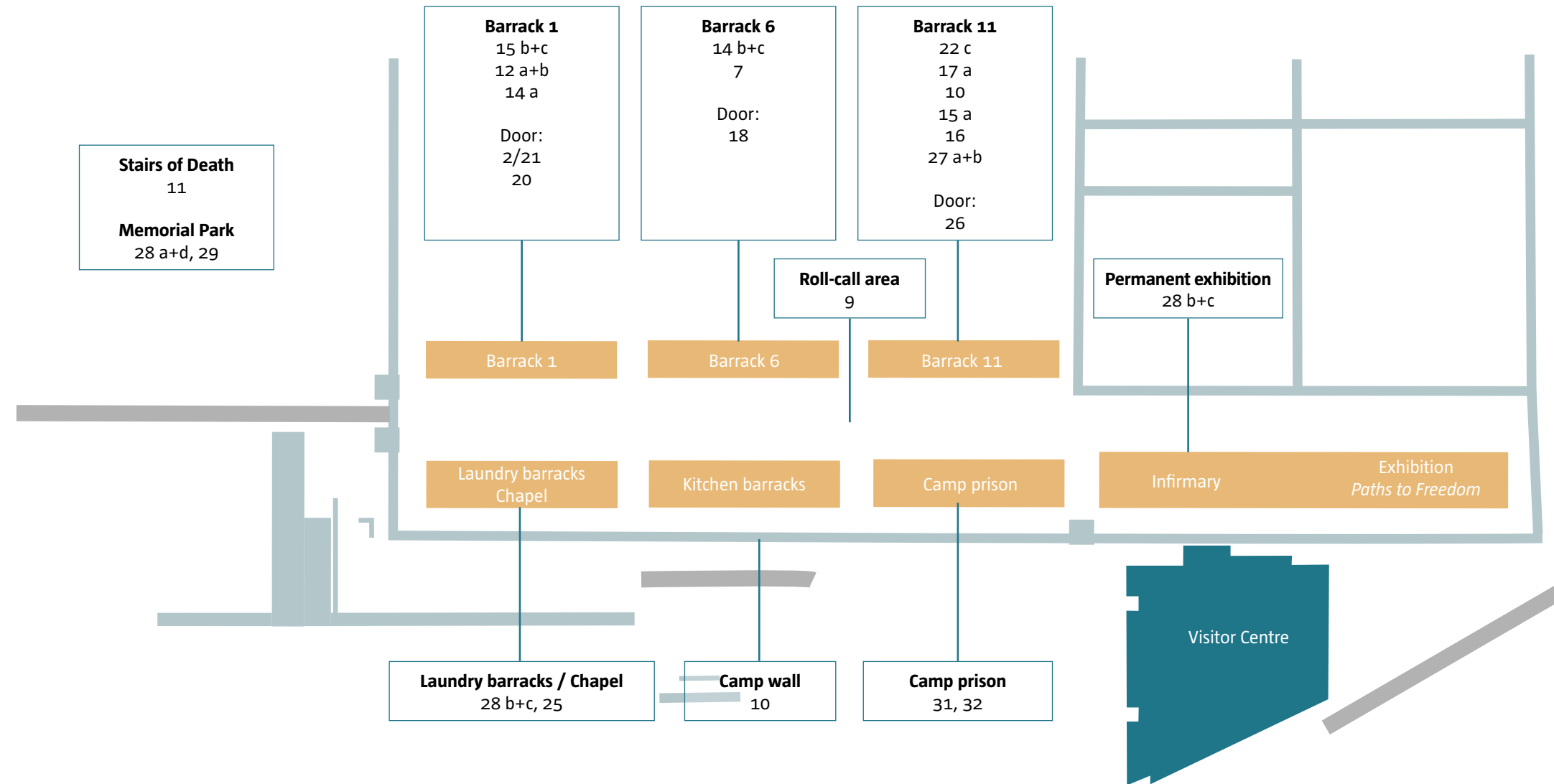
2021
"Solidarity" Art Prize LENTOS Friends 2021, Linz

2017
Paraphrase documenta, University of Arts Linz

2021
"Tears" („Tränen"), Kulturinitiative Narrenschyff, Haslach

2017
One More Gallery, "One To More", Vienna

Map of the places of inspiration



Some pictures were painted from memory and were not directly inspired by a location at the Mauthausen Memorial:
13, 17c, 19a+b, 22a+b+d, 23a-d



Study Trips

2022

Documenta 15, Kassel

2017

Documenta 14, Kassel, Düsseldorf, Münster, Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, Rome etc.

Projects

2024

Artist@Mauthausen, Mauthausen Memorial, Upper Austria

2019

"Publishing Shit", University of Arts Linz, collaborative project, exhibition: Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

2018

Stage design, set and costumes for the productions "Noah and the Great Flood and War of the Worlds" („Noah und der große Regen" und „Krieg der Welten"), Landestheater Linz, Young Theatre collaborative project, Landestheater Linz

2017

"Revolution of the Tumour" („Revolution des Krebsgeschwürs"), University of Arts Linz, collaborative project. One Work Gallery, Vienna

Scholarships / Other

2023/2025

Artist@Mauthausen at the Mauthausen Memorial

2024

Artist-in-Residence, Egon-Schiele Art Centre Český Krumlov, Czech Republic, Guest Studio Upper Austria

2023

Artist-in-Residence, Villa Rabl in Bad Hall, Guest Studio Upper Austria

Seit 2021

Artist-in-Residence, Egon Hofmann House, Land OÖ, Linz

2021

Diploma thesis "Involuntary Journey", Lentos Linz

2020

Purchase of paintings by the Upper Austrian Provincial Government

2019

Loan of paintings to the Upper Austrian Provincial Government Art workshops (children and young people)

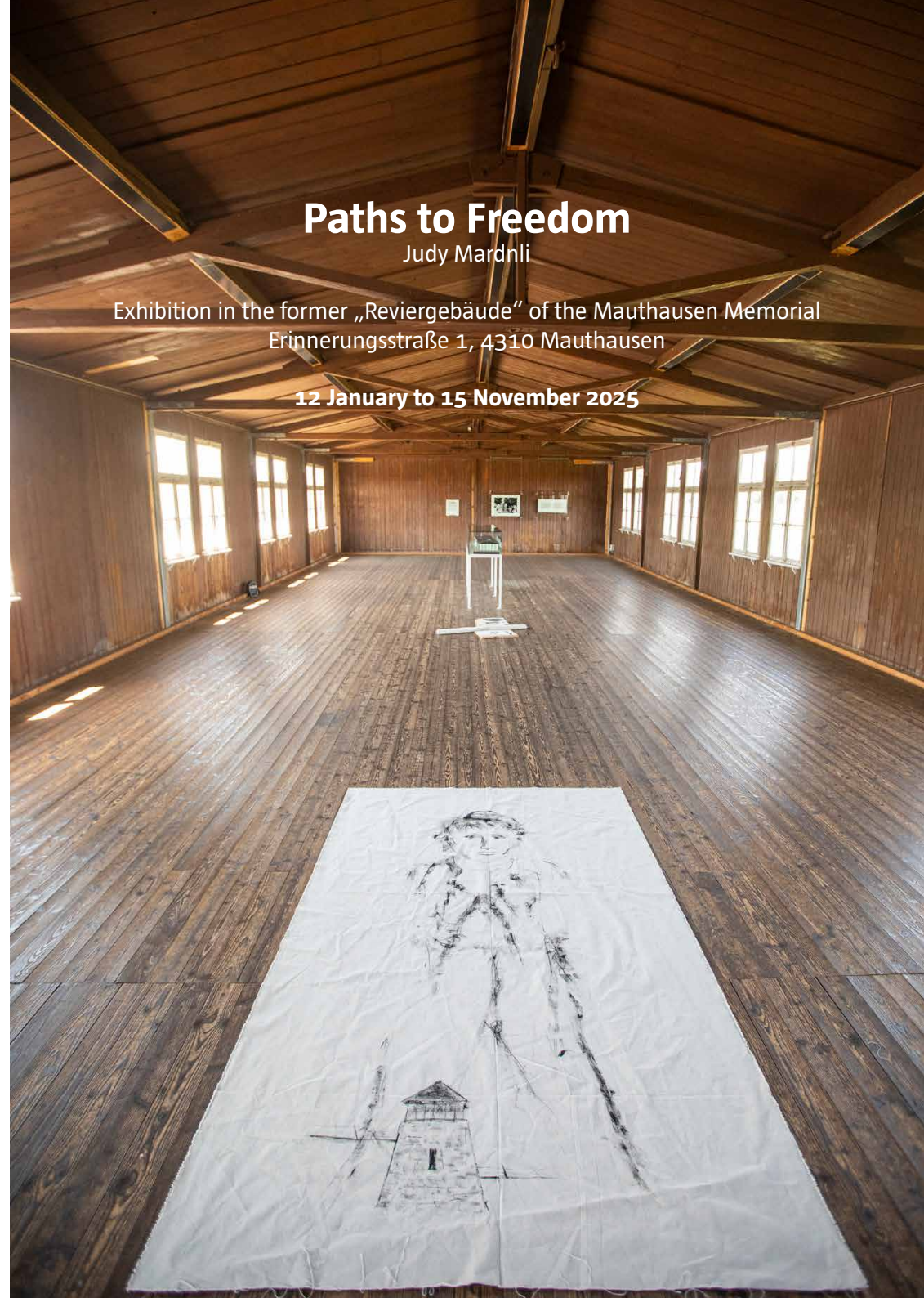
Awards

2022

OK FRIEND and ENERGIE AG Dream Scholarship and Energie AG "Walking Backwards"

2022

15th Integration Research Award of the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)



Paths to Freedom

Judy Mardnli

Exhibition in the former „Reviergebäude" of the Mauthausen Memorial
Erinnerungsstraße 1, 4310 Mauthausen

12 January to 15 November 2025