



Winning Proposal Chosen in Cologne Cathedral International Art Competition

Kölner Dom

Metropolitankapitel
der Hohen Domkirche Köln

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The competition jury has unanimously recommended the realization of the proposal submitted by the artist Andrea Büttner. By unanimous resolution, the cathedral chapter has adopted the jury's recommendation and commissioned a detailed plan for the realization of the work.

The Winning Proposal

Andrea Büttner's proposal envisions a mural on the end wall of the Chapel of St. Mary in Cologne Cathedral. It is to be painted above the Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne, which was created by Stefan Lochner in 1442. The proposed mural is to be a life-size depiction (approximately 211 cm long × 85 cm high) of the stone base of the Torah ark from Cologne's former medieval synagogue.

Lochner's altarpiece was originally created for the city council's chapel at Cologne's historic City Hall, called the Chapel of St. Mary in Jerusalem. The chapel was established in 1424, the year after the city's Jewish residents were expelled, on the site of the former synagogue of Cologne's medieval Jewish quarter. The altarpiece originally stood on an extension of the Torah ark's base, replacing the ark after it was damaged in a 1349 pogrom and the synagogue was turned into a chapel.

The proposed artwork links the Jewish quarter's history to the cathedral. It tells a story of foundation and superimposition. The Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne is a Christian artwork that directly touches Cologne's Jewish history. The proposed artwork counters the effacement and overwriting of Jewish life and Jewish history by portraying both the presence of Jewish life in Cologne and the replacement of the Jewish ark by a Christian altarpiece.

The conceptual connection between Annunciation painting and Torah, between folding altarpiece and ark, is both theologically and formally significant: In both cases, something sacred is hidden, placed behind curtains, opened and closed.

A detail on the workday side of the Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne shows a wood-paneled ceiling (in the room where the Annunciation is taking place). It is a depiction of wood in a painting on wood. The process of painting a stone on stone will be similar.

Painted a secco, the mural will create a direct connection to the cathedral's stone wall. The foundation stone is to be rendered realistically and should be clearly legible at a distance; its



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surroundings will be painted a deep black. The image should create the impression that the foundation on which the ark once stood is hovering above the altarpiece.

Artist's Statement

“Cologne Cathedral is one of Europe’s greatest cultural monuments, and it reflects many of the conflicts that that entails,” says Andrea Büttner. “Those include the history of the Christian-Jewish relationship, Christian anti-Judaism, and the closely related phenomenon of modern anti-Semitism. Adding a new artwork to this monument is a challenge. The artwork will draw attention to the previously hidden connection between a destroyed synagogue in Cologne and an altarpiece.”

The artwork will not attempt to make the cathedral’s many Christian-Jewish, anti-Semitic, or anti-Judaistic elements more tolerable by commenting on them, Büttner continues. “That cannot be accomplished by artistic means. What I want is to take something that has been hidden from the cathedral’s visitors up to now and have it openly displayed in a central location. I’m very happy that the jury has given me the opportunity to realize this piece.”

Voices from the Jury

Yilmaz Dziewior, director of Museum Ludwig in Cologne:

„With Andrea Buttner, we were able to engage an internationally renowned artist to develop a new work of art especially for the Cologne Cathedral. Her interest in religions and the ways of life associated with them is echoed in some of her earlier works. In her 2007 film Little Works and her 2012 film Little Sisters: Luna Park Ostia, which was created for documenta 13, she explores alternative modes of living found in different religious communities. She always places these questions in a broader social and cultural-historical context and has also reflected on them in publications, both theoretically and with artistic means. For example, in her book Shame, in which she describes art as an "arena of shame," or in a special illustrated edition of Immanuel Kant's famous work The Critique of Judgment, realized by Andrea Buttner in conjunction with her exhibition at the Museum Ludwig in 2014.

An important topic for Andrea Buttner is the examination of National Socialist and right-wing radical aesthetics, attitudes, and esotericism. For instance, she organized a workshop at the Gropius Bau in Berlin entitled "Against Healing" (2022) on right-wing radicalism and the ecology movement. This took place in an exhibition space in which she showed her photographic work regarding the remains of plant beds at the former Dachau concentration camp where biodynamic research had been conducted by the SS. Although she engages with diverse subjects and forms of expression, Andrea Büttner's work is united by a great deal of conceptual rigor combined with a high sensory presence.“



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Dr. Stefan Kraus, director of Kolumba Art Museum of the Archdiocese of Cologne:

“The proposed mural for the Chapel of St. Mary in Cologne Cathedral fits harmoniously into the church’s interior and merges organically with the architecture without taking up space as a freestanding object. The sculpturality of the piece is preserved and even emphasized by the way the picture is “run over” by the slender responds that articulate the Gothic wall surface, while at the same time, this overlapping also lends the mural a sense of spatial depth, presenting the viewer with a timeless space in which the very image of the stone fragment of the Torah ark is transported beyond this world.”

The Cologne Cathedral International Art Competition: Origins and Process

Cologne Cathedral is a masterpiece of Gothic architecture. In 1996, it was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The cathedral, which remains a working Roman Catholic church today, is home to a outstanding collection of art and artifacts.

A number of the cathedral’s artifacts reflect Christian views of Judaism over the ages. For several years now, the Cologne Cathedral Chapter has wrestled with the question of how to appropriately deal with the many artifacts in the cathedral that exhibit an appalling hostility toward Judaism. Initially these artifacts were researched and contextualized through publications, an exhibition, and thematic tours.

In August 2023, the Cologne Cathedral International Art Competition was launched to seek a new artwork for the cathedral, one that would focus attention on the present and future in full awareness of Christian-Jewish history. Fifteen artists were invited to participate.

In December 2023, the cathedral chapter announced the names of the fifteen invited artists who had confirmed their participation in the international art competition for the cathedral.

The artists were given until mid-August 2024 to develop their concepts. On September 19, 2024, the competition jury, led by the Saarbrücken-based architect Andrea Wandel, selected four particularly compelling project ideas from the fifteen proposals received. The finalists then had the opportunity to develop their ideas further in the competition’s “consolidation phase,” which ran until February 4, 2025. On March 20, 2025, the jurors chose the winning proposal and forwarded their recommendation to the cathedral chapter.