**POLIN MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS BUILDING**

**POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews stands in what once was the heart of Jewish Warsaw. A place where streets that no longer exist were once bustling with life. It was the hub of city life, with cafés, theaters, cinemas, cabarets, shops and boutiques, schools, synagogues and markets crowded into every corner. One could hear laughter, shouting and conversations: in Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish. During World War II, the Germans turned this area into the Warsaw Ghetto. After the war, it became a place haunted by ruins. A gap in space and memory, crying to be filled.**

POLIN Museum building stands in a symbolic place. The edifice, facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, surrounded on all sides by grey apartment buildings raised after the war on the ruins of the Ghetto, illuminates a square once teeming with life and filled with the district’s Polish and Jewish inhabitants. The simple, cool, static mass, clad in copper and glass, is split by an undulating, living, dynamic fissure. A chasm, rift, symbolizing the traumatic break in the thousand-year history of Polish Jews – the Holocaust. A break, but not an end.

The monumental main hall will be where visitors begin and end their journey. A bridge suspended over it connects the two parts of the structure, as if binding the past with the future, bridging the rift.

Creating an architectural concept to reflect such a particular history and for such a particular institution was no easy task. The design – the work of a Finnish studio, Lahdelma and Mahlamäki was chosen in 2005 in an international architectural competition headed by Bohdan Paczowski. The organizers received over 100 submissions from all over the world. World renowned architectural studios and architects took part, including Zvi Hecker, Kengo Kuma and Daniel Libeskind.

The winning project was selected because of the architect’s reserved and balanced approach to what is a great and dramatic past. Mahlamäki proposed a building with a muted, geometric exterior, yet a remarkable, dynamic interior. A luminous museum-monument, covered with glass, split into two parts directly opposite the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. It is more than a static monument however. The Museum, as a cultural and educational center, projects its inner energy outwards, illuminating its surroundings.

In developing the concept, the architect not only accounted for the building, but also for its surroundings. The building was constructed on a square plan with an identical square formed by the adjoining area around the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. Both the Museum and the Monument are rational, geometric frames, enclosing a living, dynamic organism. In the monument, a plain stone frame surrounds a group of figures that seem to tear away from the stone. Meantime the Museum’s simple mass encloses a symbol of their dramatic lot – the fissure of the main hall. A space of ongoing dialogue is thus established between the two, with the Monument as a place of silent reflection and commemoration, and the Museum one of discovery and exploration.

In June 2009, two years after the design was selected, an official groundbreaking ceremony took place and the construction of POLIN Museum began. It was completed in 2012.

Poland and Warsaw are both undergoing dynamic changes. They need new museums, transforming people’s hearts and minds, as well as new architectural symbols, transforming public space. POLIN Museum responds to both of these needs.

The Museum comprises 12,8 thousand square meters of usable space, of which approximately one third will be occupied by the core exhibition, while the remainder will support various types of program activities: temporary exhibitions, a multifunctional auditorium that will also serve as a 450-seat cinema and concert hall, two screening rooms, an Educational Center complete with workshop rooms, a Resource Center, a children’s area, a restaurant and museum shop.

**Awards for POLIN Museum building**

**2008:** POLIN Museum building receives International Architecture Award from Chicago Athenaeum: Museum of Architecture and Design.

**2013:** First prize at the Eurobuild Awards, organized by Eurobuild Central & Eastern Europe magazine, in the Architectural Design of the Year category.

**2013:** SPB TORKRET Ltd, the company responsible for the construction of POLIN Museum’s organic walls, receives Outstanding Shotcrete Project of the Year Award from the American Shotcrete Assosiation.

**2014:** The Association of Polish Architects (SARP) gives SARP Award of the Year and the Award for the Best Architectural Object Built Using Public Funds under the Honorary Patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland to POLIN Museum.

**2014:** Readers of *Polityka* magazine award POLIN Museum building with Architectural Prize title.

**2014:** The Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA) has awarded first **Finlandia Prize for Architecture** to POLIN Museum.

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