CONCEPT FOR THE DESIGN
OF THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION WITHIN
THE MONUMENT TO VICTORY IN BOLZANO/BOZEN
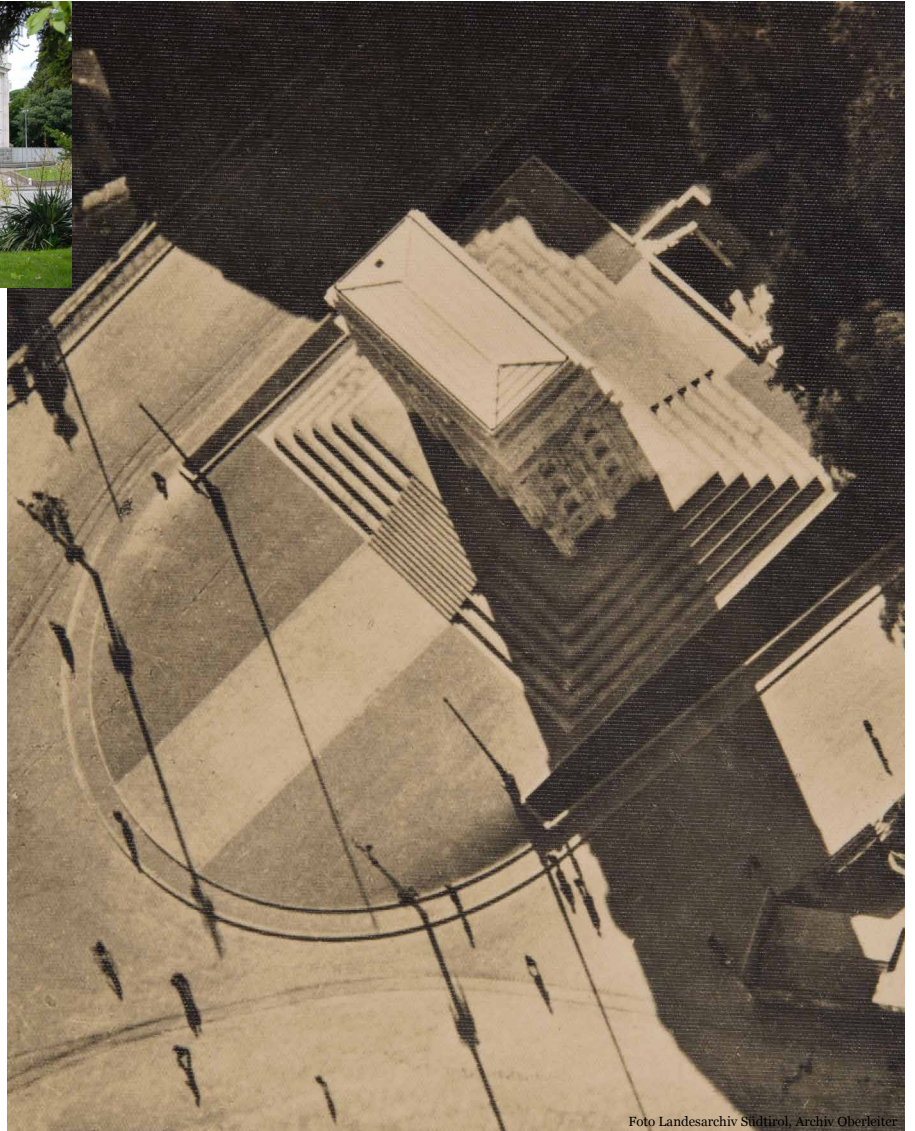

Foto Landesarchiv Südtirol, Archiv Oberleiter
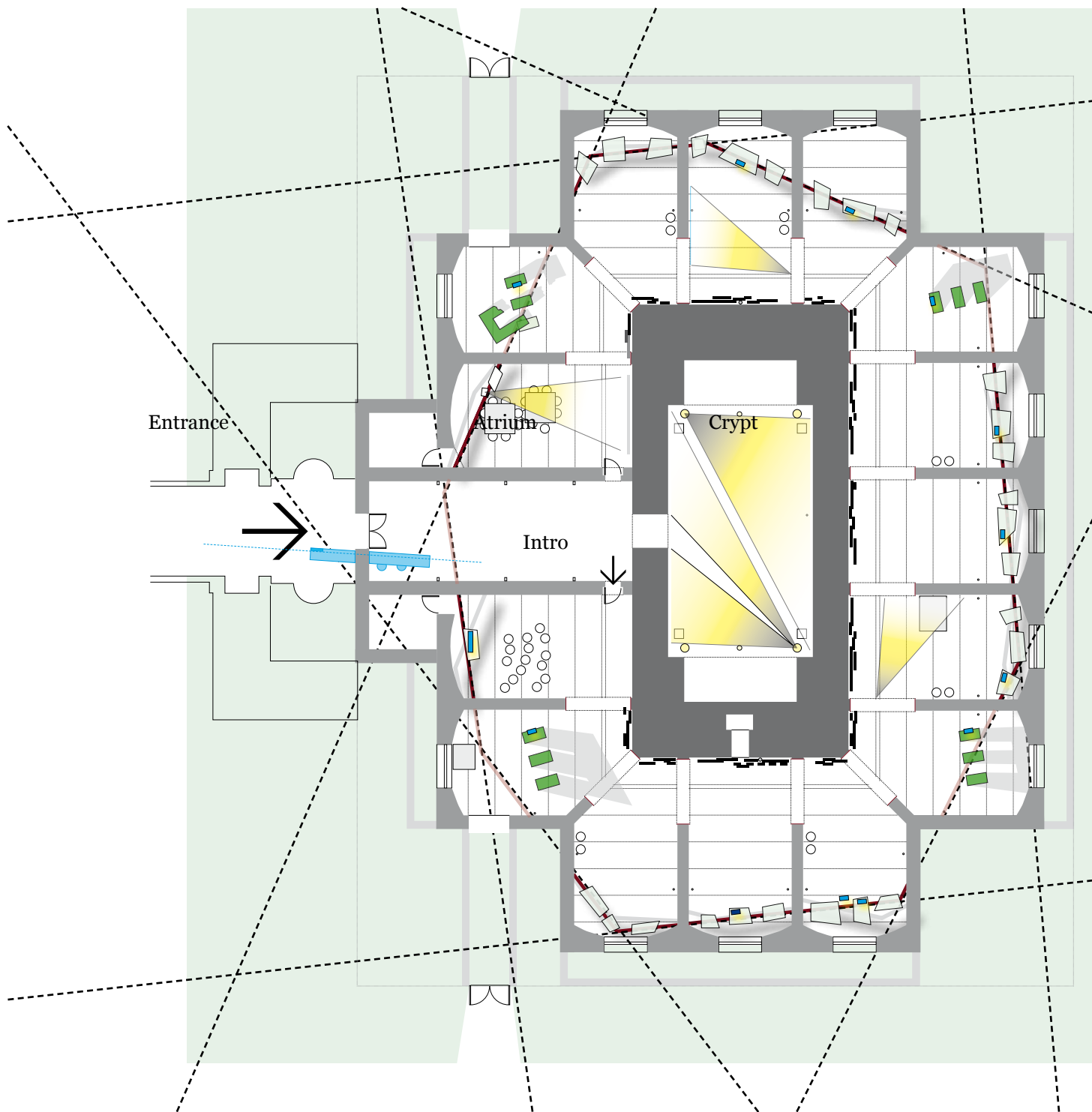
Fotos: Gruppe Gut, Alessandro Campaner

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BASIC CONCEPT

The exhibition design is based on the notion that the way history is presented and the resulting awareness and treatment of history in 21st century Europe can only provide insights through a profound knowledge and a neutral approach. Only by awakening a deeper interest and inquisitiveness can we create a bridge to history that enlightens visitors in a way they can experience.

We (Gruppe Gut Gestaltung OHG, Bolzano – Uli Prugger & Alfons Demetz, with exhibition consultant Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Harvard University, Boston) intend to make the creation of this bridge easier by subdividing the topic of the "History of the Monument to Victory, the City of Bolzano and the Province of South Tyrol" into three narrative strands: the "Inside Path", the "Outside Path" and "What is a monument?". Each of these narratives is assigned a clear spatial location in the basement of the Monument to Victory.

At the same time account is taken of the dramaturgy of the existing architecture, with the required amount of sensitivity. This is particularly relevant in the first two spaces that visitors enter, the atrium and the crypt. These areas were specifically created at the time of construction for representative and ceremonial purposes.

Out of the scenographic and didactic necessity not to cause any break in the transitional entry from the martial, dictatorial architecture of the triumphal arch and the park entrance with its central perspective, these two first rooms ostensibly function as images that stage actuality using a didactic narrative. Only on closer inspection, following an intensive examination of the aura in the rooms, is a subtle time-shift apparent: overlapping contemporary elements interpret, question and reveal. Who wishes to see, hear and understand will recognise the power of democracy.
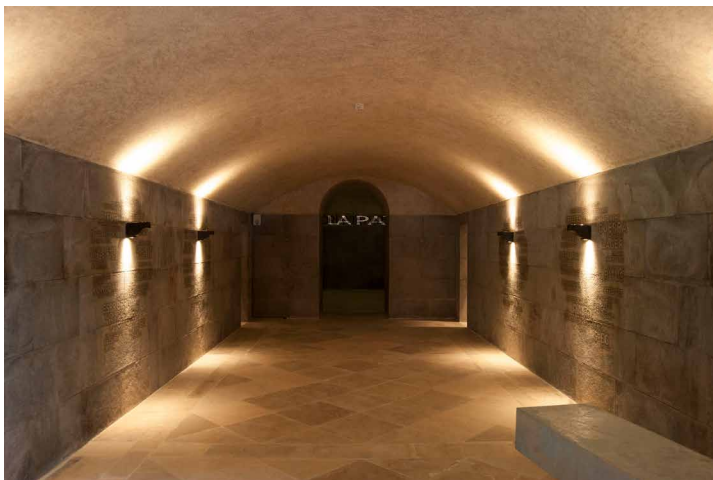
Entrance

Atrium

Intro

Crypt

This script relies on the scientific concept, written
by the scholarly team (Andrea Di Michele,
Hannes Obermair, Christine Roilo, Ugo Soragni
and Silvia Spada) and to which it is referring
closely.

Ground-plan of the subterranean area

THE ATRIUM

The low, barrel-vaulted and empty entrance hall, constructed of roughly hewn porphyry ashlars up to the base of the vault, is overpowering in nature. Both longitudinal sides feature three bronze hooks, whose function is the ritual hanging of laurel wreaths.

Our minimalist intervention in this space is limited to two items: a projection onto the six wreath holders that develops the idea of transience, and an acoustic backdrop. Instead of the wreaths that previously hung there, there are now word fragments, exclamations and
words typical of the time of the dictatorship, projected as circular shadow images, as it were hollow word wreaths. Here visitors can read terms that today have no weight, obsolete slogans and meaningless words that can only be recognised on closer inspection: what remains are simply the shadows of their former selves.

The staging is backed by a soundscape that, like the shadow words on the wall, blurs and layers typical Nazi-Fascist anthems, rhythms, slogans, chants and melodies in the space into an acoustic parallel to the overpowering dominance of the Fascist architecture.

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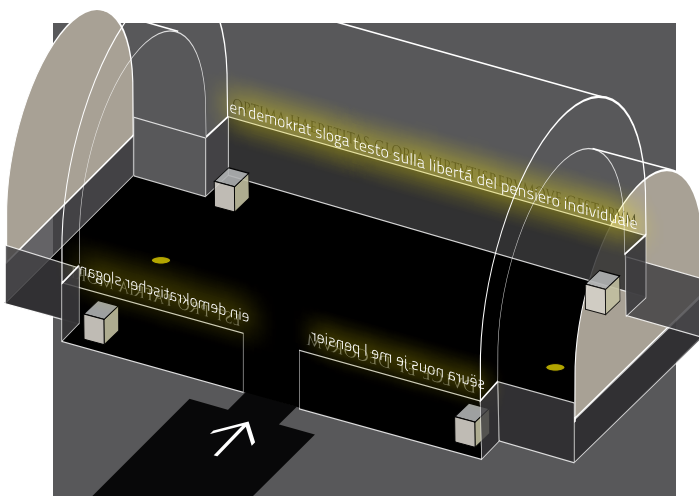
THE CRYPT

The very term "crypt" evokes a distinctive and sacred place, usually associated with church buildings: the deepest and holiest place for relics, directly below the altar space, in this case below the triumphal arch. Indeed the 6-metre high barrel-vaulted rectangular hall, which is also bordered y ashlar-like porphyry blocks, shows the scenographic ability of dictatorship to transform spaces into places for the celebration of power. The great hall is flanked on both sides by two disproportionately large painted figures (the female guardians of history and homeland, respectively) who once, in the torch light of four bronze candelabras, looked down intimidatingly upon the "servants of the state".
Above the stonework, around the base of the vault, the crypt is surrounded by a commanding text frieze which, in monumental Roman script, pays homage to glory, virtue, dying for the fatherland and honour.

As the room is itself already a memorial, we limit ourselves here (as in the atrium) to a minimum of artistic intervention: only the hero-worshipping text frieze is to be "neutralised" by means of laser light technology.
As a contrast to the definitive, static frieze, intended to last for eternity, the dimly-lit crypt is darkened at intervals, with "illuminated writing" projected directly above the text frieze. This bright scrolling text runs anticlockwise and consists of quotations/statements for democracy and against dictatorship by three selected personalities (Hannah Arendtt, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Paine).
This "clear, moving light" outshines the "heavy, static darkness", but is also something fragile, constantly in motion. The enlightening luminosity is superimposed upon the reverently flickering fire.

The atrium and the crypt serve as a transitional space leading from the impressive exterior of the Monument to Victory and into the underground showrooms.

Following these rooms, which are presented as purely in dialogue with the existing architecture, comes the actual documentation centre.

The tour begins with a vestibule (Intro) where a short introductory film explains the three narrative strands: the "Inner Path", the "Outer Path" and "What is a Monument?".

There are two ways to explore the narrative strands: all three simultaneously and in one go, or each path separately. This allows the scholarly team to divide up the complex facts and heavily interwoven histories and present them in a more comprehensible, chronological and structured manner.

Specifically, the two main issues – the history of the Monument to Victory, and the history of the City of Bolzano and the Province of South Tyrol – cannot be spatially presented in parallel on account of the different historical periods involved.

We have thus decided to add a third level as an umbrella theme, addressing the fundamental question of "What is a monument?" in the latter part of the second millennium.

Each of the three narrative strands is designed according to its content.
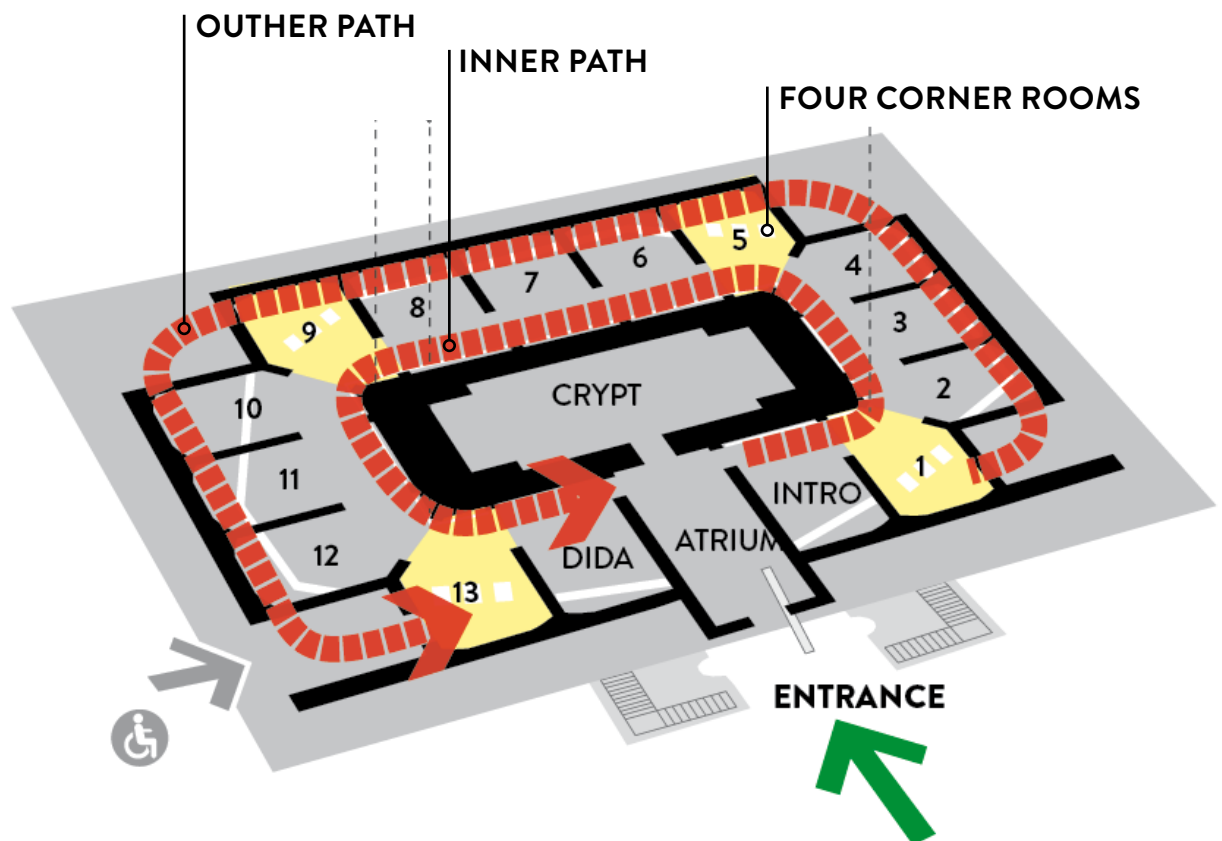
THE INNER PATH

The theme here is the history of the Monument to Victory, from its construction in 1926-28 to the present day. As this addresses a specific, fact-based narrative strand, we intervene directly along the imposing, 5-metre high foundation wall with thirteen sections, on which images and text are arranged in chronological order (see plan on previous page).

As in an old-fashioned art gallery, the narrative sections are presented hanging side by side or above one another. The images are hung in solid, alternating convex and concave black untreated steel frames that cast dark, angular shadows on the grey rear wall.

These are cold, harsh, lapidary images, monumental in their effect, that appear as something ultimate in character to visitors.

THE OUTER PATH

Here the history of Bolzano and its province is illustrated from the end of the First World War in 1918 and the two periods of dictatorship, Fascism and Nazism, to the end of the Second World War in 1945, with a subsequent relating of events to the present day.

This narrative is based on the notion that history can only be presented in relation to a specific time, as each epoch develops its past on the basis of its own present.
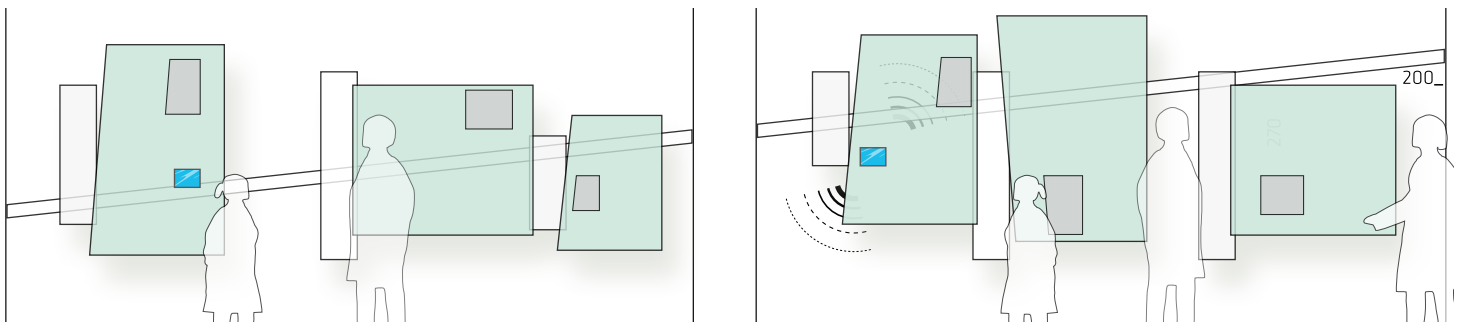
Our room design quite deliberately avoids following the perpendicular, rational structure of the architecture. It rather bursts through the rooms in asymmetrical fashion, penetrating the thick retaining walls easily and at an angle.
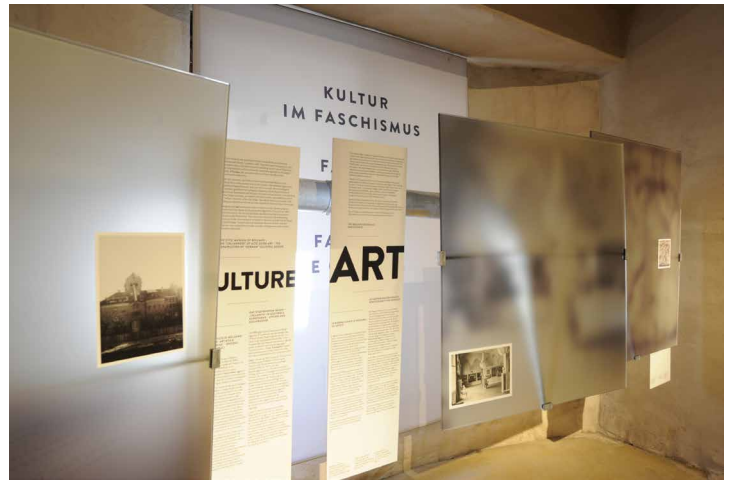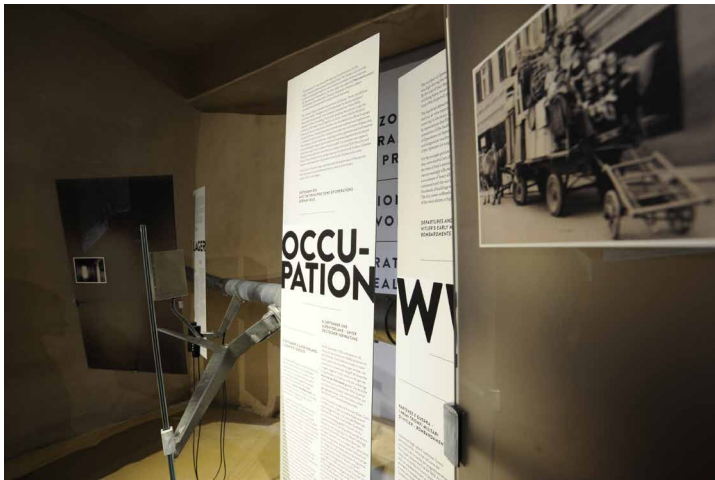
The material used for the panel axes is galvanised steel, a low-cost and thus "democratic" mass product, with no costly finishing. Irregularly rectangular glass panels, hanging off-centre and supported by filigree cantilever arms, are reminiscent of huge splinters that capture moments in time in photos. Information on historical events is suspended in the room, semi-transparent and broken. The semi-transparency of the glass evokes flexibility and the vulnerability and openness of democracy: fragile glass as a contrast to the
stoniness of dictatorship.

The large-format photos printed on the glass cannot be made out by visitors from a distance as they are deliberately blurred. But each motif also appears quite small and crisply in focus on the glass surface, like a post card. What is shown becomes apparent only when you approach the smaller image. The explanatory text panels hang, somewhat hidden, behind or between the glass shards.

Visitors therefore have to come closer to the blurred image before they can see, recognise and unravel the historical context. The basic thrust of our overall concept is reflected in this design element: history is only revealed through inquisitiveness and conscious engagement, a desire to get closer to the issues!

This part of the tour is transformed into a multimedia and (in part) interactive experience with statements from contemporary witnesses, original film reports, projections and documentary audio stations.

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Details from the outher path.

THE THIRD PATH: WHAT IS A MONUMENT?

This newly developed umbrella theme for the other two issues, which are strictly determined in terms of space and time, is developed in the four corner rooms of the underground documentation centre.
The first corner room begins with the monument to the Kaiserjäger (Austrian mountain troops) and presents and queries comparisons of contemporary avant-garde ideas of memorial architecture. Individual aspects of the Monument to Victory are analysed in the second corner room, where the ABC of the monument is declined. The third corner room concentrates on the life and work of Marcello Piacentini, the architect and a personal friend of the Duce. The fourth room addresses the present of the Monument to Victory and prompts visitors to participate in the debate surrounding the monument itself.

The four corner rooms are characterised by a specially designed object in the form of the letter M. While this large M confronts visitors in the first room powerfully and full-on, it is slightly turned away from visitors entering the second room. In the third room the M has lost its architrave: only the three pillars still stand in the room. Finally, in the fourth room, the monumental M has fallen into ruin: just two column stumps still stand, with the rest of the object lying on the floor, turned from an information medium into a bench.

The M-element thus illustrates the change in status of the monument: the closer it comes to the present, the more the term "monument" (i.e. the letter "M") disintegrates. Its deconstruction is a synonym for the changing significance of monuments.

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OUTER PERIMETER

For financial reasons, only pointers to the existence of the new documentation centre are possible from the outer perimeter.

A LED scrolling text running around one of the lictorial columns on the front of the Monument to Victory lends it an artistic production with a symbolic statement: the clear yet subtle intervention causes the fall of monumentality. It is a ring representing an espousal with democracy, neutralising the impression of power.

At the entrance to the documentation centre at the back of the structure, a 6-metre high steel pillar with scrolling text is installed to mark the entrance, which is somewhat hidden in the shadow of a huge chestnut tree. This steel pillar is a counterpoint to the marble pillar of the same height erected in the centre of the park in 1938 in commemoration of those soldiers from South Tyrol who fell in the colonial wars.
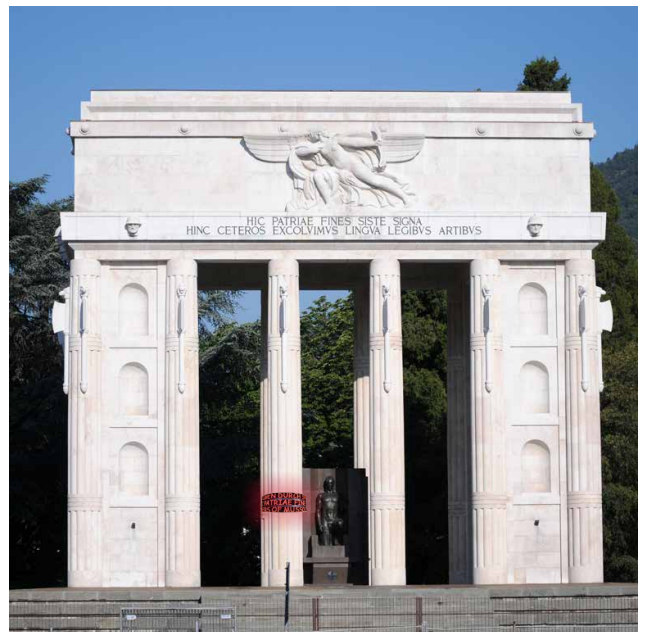
TEACHING AND LEARNING

The final room at the end of the tour is dedicated to teaching and instruction, with tables and stools, a video projector and a large pin board available for project work. There is space for children and young people to work on history projects.
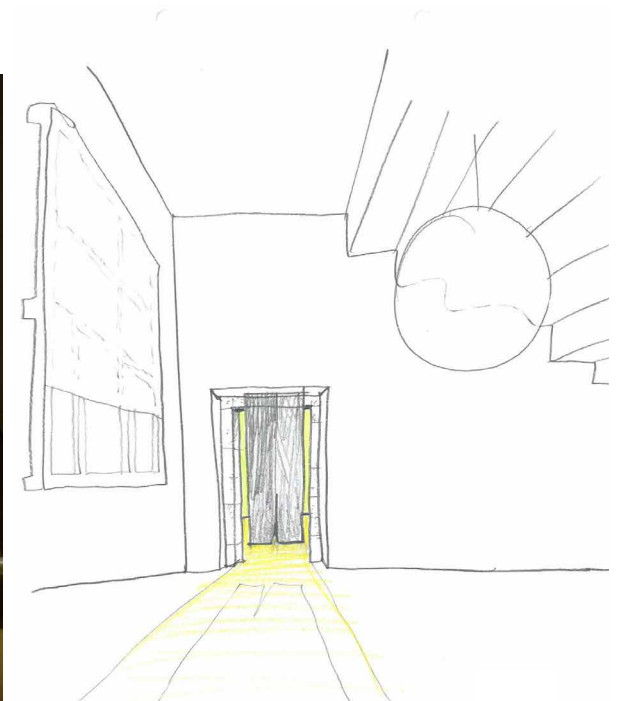
CORPORATE DESIGN

LOGO

For the "Permanent Exhibition within the Monument to Victory" brand we suggest a sign that does not follow the outline of the monument and thus does not now celebrate its monumentality (there are examples of this from the 1920s and 1930s).

We have opted for an explanatory typographical solution that includes the specific location of Bolzano with the province's abbreviation "BZ" and the end dates of the two world wars in 1918 and 1945. The result is: BZ '18–'45. The terms "one monument", "one city", "two dictatorships" appear as subtitles on three lines, in six different language versions, in order to underline the multiethnicity of South Tyrol: English/Italiano/Deutsch/Ladin/ and in a trilingual mixture.

The word mark appears on red bars. The white typeface on a red background reflects the colours of the Bolzano coat of arms as well as the national colours of South Tyrol.

BZ '18-'45
one monument
una città
zwei Diktaturen

BZ '18-'45
un monumento
eine Stadt
doi ditatures

BZ '18-'45
one monument
one city
two dictatorships

BZ '18-'45
un monumento
una città
due dittature

BZ '18-'45
ein Denkmal
eine Stadt
zwei Diktaturen

BZ '18-'45
un monument
una zità
doi ditatures

FONT

We have chosen two font families. One is a title font, **BRANDON** Grotesque, that offers a contemporary version of the typical capital typefaces of the futuristic Italy of the 1920s: the second is a serif text font, **Atma** *serif*, for the English-language text (or the trilingual text blocks) with the aim of making the grey tones more easily distinguishable.

BRANDON Grotesque Light & **Black** — **Atma** & Atma Book Roman *Serif*

GRAPHICS

We have decided to pursue the concept of "fuzzy/focused" thinking for the iconographic model.
Out-of-focus historical images, adverts, posters, flyers, etc. cover the entire surface.

WEBSITE

In-depth searches on the website are also rewarded by ever-sharper screen images.