For the Duration of a Prayer

Exhibition Concept for the Stommeln Synagogue
by the artist Belu-Simion Fainaru

The synagogue in Stommeln is one of the very few synagogues in Germany that survived **Kristallnacht** without being burned. After the destruction and deportation of the Jewish community during the Second World War, the building remained alone - silent testimony to a life that had been extinguished. Today it functions as a venue for contemporary art, yet its original identity endures as an inseparable layer of the place itself.

The exhibition proposes a temporary return of the synagogue to its original purpose. This is not a historical reconstruction, nor an attempt to restore the past as it once was. Rather, it is an artistic intervention that, for a limited period of time, re-establishes the conditions of the synagogue's existence as a house of prayer: its visual presence, its internal order, and the possibility of imagining once again the life that once unfolded within it.

The work does not seek to revive what has been lost, but to render absence itself perceptible. It creates a situation in which memory is experienced not as a museum object, but as a living event unfolding in the present. For a brief moment, the building ceases to be solely a memorial or an exhibition space and once again becomes a place of possible prayer, possible gathering, and the presence of an absent community.

In this sense, the work is concerned less with the past than with time itself. It asks how a place continues to carry its vocation after that vocation has ceased; how architecture continues to remember even when those who once embodied that memory are no longer there. The walls, the light, and the space itself are not merely a setting, but bear the traces of voices, rituals, and lived experience.

The temporality of the intervention is essential to its meaning. Precisely because it is fleeting, it resists the illusion of complete restoration. It does not seek to repair history, but to open a space in which past and present coexist. Within this interval, the synagogue becomes a liminal space where presence and absence, matter and spirit, memory and lived experience enter into dialogue.

For a limited time, the synagogue becomes a synagogue once again - not because the past returns, but because art allows time itself to fold for a moment, restoring to the place the possibility of being what it once was - not as historical fact, but as experience, resonance, and a living gesture of memory.

Proposal concept inspired by a traditional Ashkenazi synagogue