

Historical Responsibility

The Heidi Horten Collection was unveiled in June 2022, fulfilling the wish of its founder, Heidi Goëss-Horten (1941–2022), to make her internationally renowned art collection permanently accessible to the public. Following the death of her first husband, Helmut Horten, in 1987, Ms. Goëss-Horten inherited a portion of his estate, given they had been married since 1966. As a result, her collection and personal history are intricately connected with his.

Between 1936 and 1939, Helmut Horten acquired a number of department stores previously owned by Jewish individuals. It is believed that Horten consciously accepted or, as the case may be, deliberately exploited the difficult circumstances faced by these former owners. Additionally, he obtained shares in two companies in the armaments industry, where he held the position of managing director and authorized the use of forced labor. Helmut Horten took advantage of the specific circumstances of the unjust regime of the time and derived financial gain from it. The business ventures he pursued during those years laid the groundwork for the enormous wealth that the Horten Group would later amass in post-war Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.

Until recently, there was a lack of scholarly documentation shedding light on the origins of the Helmut Horten fortune during the Nazi era. In 2019, while planning the Heidi Horten Collection, Heidi Goëss-Horten commissioned Prof. Dr. Peter Hoeres, a German contemporary historian and Chair of Modern History at the University of Würzburg, to conduct a scholarly reappraisal of the

economic roots of her husband Helmut Horten. The assessment “Über den Vermögens- und Geschäftsaufbau von Helmut Horten im Kontext der ‘Arisierung’ in der Zeit der ‘Dritten Reiches’” (“On Helmut Horten’s asset and business development in the context of ‘Aryanization’ during the ‘Third Reich’”), by Prof. Dr. Peter Hoeres in collaboration with Dr. Maximilian Kutzner, was presented at several press conferences in 2022 and published on the website of the Helmut Horten Foundation (Agno, Switzerland). The above-mentioned report can serve as a foundational resource for a more in-depth and nuanced analysis of Helmut Horten as an individual.

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To date, there has been a noticeable lack of proactive, transparent, and open communication regarding the initial research findings on the accumulation of wealth by Helmut Horten.

The Heidi Horten Collection, which is legally and financially independent of the Helmut Horten Foundation in Agno, Switzerland, understands the weight of the historical responsibility that comes with the Horten name. As management and staff of the museum, we recognize the moral imperative to confront this aspect of history head-on and deeply regret not having done so earlier. Through our work at the museum, we seek to demonstrate this leadership.

A respectful approach to history involves a willingness to learn from the past and to take responsibility for the present and the future.

The Heidi Horten Collection's activities are responsive to current socio-political developments and aim to engage a broad public on issues such as freedom, democracy, tolerance, and diversity. Our inclusive outreach programs provide people from all walks of life with new opportunities for cultural participation and action. Additionally, the collection's extensive program for schoolchildren focuses on teaching relevant issues and democratic values to the younger generation.

Museums are vital pillars of an open society, serving as hubs for knowledge transfer and discourse. For the Heidi Horten Collection, given its unique history, this holds especially true.