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: FOR RESTORATION OF VIENNAS HISTORIC SYNAGOGUE: Artist Gottfried Helnwein to auction painting

## FOR RESTORATION OF VIENNA'S HISTORIC SYNAGOGUE:

# Artist Gottfried Helnwein to auction painting

• By HANNAH BROWN

A new painting by Austrian-Irish artist Gottfried Helnwein will be auctioned to support the restoration of the Vienna City Temple, the historic synagogue of Vienna's Jewish community and Austria's most significant synagogue.

The work, titled *The Child Dreams*, was created in 2025-2026 and is an oil and acrylic painting on canvas.

Measuring 174.5 cm. x 126 cm., the framed painting is mounted on former wooden panels from the Vienna City Temple, with a recessed-joint frame made from wooden elements of the former synagogue, according to Auction House im Kinsky.

The auction house is charging a reduced buyer's premium of 15% of the hammer price for this lot.

Helnwein donated the painting to IKG.Kultur, the cultural arm of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, Vienna's Jewish community, to raise funds for the restoration of the City Temple. The project was formal-

ly presented at a press event on October 17 at the Vienna City Temple, where the official start of restoration work was announced. In the presence of the secretary-general of the IKG, Benjamin Nägele, Helnwein introduced an art project dedicated to the children of the Jewish community and, symbolically, to the future of Jewish life in Austria.

Previously, Helnwein invited children from the community to a casting at the Zwi Perez Chajes School. Ten children were selected and photographed for the project, and their portraits were presented at the event. One of these children is the subject of the portrait, *The Child Dreams*.

The wooden panels removed from the City Temple during the initial phase of construction were symbolically handed over to Helnwein. He incorporated these panels into the artwork and its frame, giving the painting a direct physical connection to the synagogue whose restoration it is intended to support.

Helnwein is known for large, hyper-realistic works



ARTIST GOTTFRIED HELNWEIN and the president of the Jewish Community of Vienna, Oskar Deutsch, present the painting 'The Child Dreams' in Vienna, Austria, yesterday. (Lisa Leutner/Reuters)

that often focus on children, vulnerability, violence, and historical memory.

In a 2023 interview with AFP, published by eNCA, he said that war and the suf-

fering of children are recurring themes in his art and described the defenseless child as a "central figure" in his work.

He said in the interview

that "there is no limit to what people are capable of doing against someone who cannot defend themselves."

"When I see a child in the current wars, wounded, cry-

ing, or dying, it affects me," the artist continued. "The question [of] whether it is an Israeli or a Palestinian, a Ukrainian, or a Russian child becomes superfluous [because it is] a human being who certainly does not deserve this."

Born in Vienna in 1948, Helnwein grew up in the shadow of World War II, the Holocaust, and the Nazi era.

He has said that researching the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust led him to focus on violence against the defenseless, especially children and women, and that art became his way of approaching these subjects.

The Vienna City Temple, known as Stadttempel and called the Seitenstettengasse Temple, is located in the Innere Stadt 1st district of Vienna.

Founded in 1826, it was built in an apartment block set back from the street because of an edict by Emperor Joseph II that only Roman Catholic churches could have facades that were visible from the street.

During the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, it was the only synagogue out of

the 94 in Vienna that was not destroyed.

In 1950, the coffins of Zionist leader Theodore Herzl and his parents were displayed in the City Temple, before they were reinterred in Israel.

Two terrorist attacks have been carried out at or near the City Temple: one in 1981, when pro-Palestinian terrorists killed two people at a bar mitzvah and wounded 30; and the second in 2020, when a terrorist attack nearby killed four and wounded 23.

Today, the synagogue is the main place of worship for Vienna's Jews, with a membership of about 7,000.

At the press event marking the start of construction, Natalie Neubauer and Eric Tschaikner of the architectural firm KENH Architekten presented the restoration plans.

The work is intended to preserve the historical legacy of the building, designed by Josef Kornhäusl, while ensuring its structural future. The total cost of the project will be over 10 million euros. The Jewish Community of Vienna invites donations to help fund the restoration.