

November 27, 2017

Dear Melissa:

Please accept my sincere thanks for giving me the truly incredible opportunity to be a part of the 2017 CAJM Poland Fellowship. I was curious about my ability to compartmentalize my personal Jewish-Polish heritage and inherited Holocaust trauma with my professional experience while traveling in an unfamiliar country. Our group coordinator from Taube Heritage Tours put us at ease and kept us well-informed throughout the trip. The diversity of other Fellowship attendees' backgrounds and specialties led to countless lively and fruitful conversations during the week of programming. Though the schedule was packed, I cannot think of any visits I would have done without.

As we traveled from location to location, Jewish Poland opened its arms to welcome us as friends and colleagues. Our discussions and tours ran the gamut, speaking with executive directors, exhibition managers, and highly specialized and knowledgeable tour guides, we covered topics as varied as budget costs and staffing, local outreach and education events, pre- and post-war political and military history of Warsaw and Krakow, as well as architectural and art history. The leaders we met took significant time out of their busy work-days to explain process and development of such extraordinary Museums as POLIN and the Galicia Jewish Museum. Though we could not actually see the new Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute exhibition, our group was able to interview the head of research and the head of the art department, only two weeks before their exhibition opened—during what I imagine was an incredibly busy time. We explored cities and former shtetls on foot, where we would discuss the background readings and explore our thoughts on who should be telling the story of the Jewish communities in Poland. We learned from our Taube coordinators about their personal experiences and how they came to be involved in the local Jewish communities. Extreme care was taken with the schedule and timing of our emotionally exhausting day-long trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ending that difficult day with a visit to the Auschwitz Jewish Center and lengthy discussion with Director Tomasz Kuncewicz over dinner turned it into one of healing, versus solely a day of pain.

As a designer and museum professional I benefited from dissecting the visual themes of current and future museum exhibitions and memorial sites. The other attendees' perspectives coming from their diverse backgrounds enriched the conversation further, bringing in Holocaust education, family programming, and curatorial-specific points of view.

I left Poland at the end of the Fellowship feeling immeasurably changed on a personal level and incredibly enriched on a professional one. I sincerely hope that CAJM will continue to offer this opportunity to additional Jewish Museum professionals in the future.

I look forward to continuing to be a part of the CAJM community and sharing my experiences at this year's conference.

Sincerely,



Alisa Kraut, Assistant Curator