

Press release

Chemnitz, 7 May 2026



**Kulturen entdecken
Geschichte verstehen**
www.smac.sachsen.de

Direktorin
Dr. Sabine Wolfram

**Presse- und
Öffentlichkeitsarbeit**
Jutta Boehme

Stefan-Heym-Platz 1
09111 Chemnitz

tel +49 371. 911 999 - 65
mobil +49 179. 91 77 098

e-mail
jutta.boehme@lfa.sachsen.de
presse@smac.sachsen.de

Threads

Biographies of Jewish families from Chemnitz

8 May – 26 July 2026 at smac

www.smac.sachsen.de/en/threads

CONTENTS OF THE PRESS KIT

- **FACTSHEET**
- **PRESS RELEASE**
 - Introduction to the exhibition with a quote from the curator
 - The exhibition in detail
 - Exhibition design
 - 4 venues – 4 exhibitions
With a quote from the museum director
- **PRESS IMAGES**
Overview & Download link

Das smac ist eine Einrichtung
des Staatsbetriebs Landesamt
für Archäologie Sachsen.
Zur Wetterwarte 7 | 01109 Dresden
www.lfa.sachsen.de

FACTSHEET

Exhibition title	Threads Biographies of jewish families from Chemnitz
Duration	8 May – 26 July 2026
Webpräsenz	www.smac.sachsen.de/en/threads
Opening hours	Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 9 am – 5 pm Thursday: 9am – 8 pm Saturday, Sunday, Public Holidays: 10 am – 6 pm Closed on Mondays (except Whit Monday)
Admission	5 € / reduced: 4 € / families: 8 € / groups: 4 € per person / free entry for those under 17 years old
Curatorial team	Dr Christina Michel, smac Daniel Dost, Buntmacher:innen e.V.
Exhibition space	500 m ²
Exhibition texts	German Booklet with English texts
Jewish families in the exhibition	Ader, Ascher, Becker, Benda, Federmann, Flieg, Frank, Friesel, Fröhlich, Goeritz, Guttmann, Jacoby, Carl Leder, David Leder, Lichtenstein, Magen, Margulies, Noskowitz, Rotstein, Sachs, Selver, Schendel, Solomonica, Sommerfeld, Spiro/Strauss
Book a tour	buchung@smac-shop.de

THREADS

Biographies of Jewish Families from Chemnitz

Special exhibition 8 May – 26 July 2026 at smac

On Friday, 8 May 2026, the exhibition “Threads” opens at smac – State Museum of Archaeology Chemnitz. The exhibition explores the networks and life stories of 25 Jewish families who once lived in Chemnitz. It connects their biographies and rediscovers their lost stories.

It is one of four related exhibitions being presented in Chemnitz as part of TACHELES 2026 – Year of Jewish Culture in Saxony.

At the heart of the exhibition at smac are the couple Karl and Irmi Goeritz. They owned a knitwear factory in Chemnitz and, together with other Jewish entrepreneurial families, formed a strong economic, social and cultural network.

The exhibition traces their history and fate, as well as that of 24 other Jewish families from Chemnitz selected as examples. It illustrates how, following the Nazis’ rise to power in 1933, more and more threads of the former network snapped, connections unravelled, holes appeared, and soon it was nothing more than a faint memory.



The descendants of these families have provided the exhibition with photographs and personal belongings. These objects bear witness to the families’ former happiness, their strong attachment to the city of Chemnitz, and the deep pain that continues to affect subsequent generations.

Dr Christina Michel, curator at smac:

“The particular appeal of putting together this exhibition lay in the personal contact with the Jewish families, who are scattered across the globe, from New Zealand to Argentina and from Israel to the UK. Today, they are primarily the first and second generations of their descendants. Through video conferences, countless emails and phone calls, not only did we get to know these people, but the former network that existed among the Jewish families in Chemnitz at the beginning of the 20th century was also re-established among them.”

The exhibition in detail

Prologue

A map of Chemnitz from 1930, showing where Jewish families lived and worked, introduces visitors to the exhibition. On the wall behind it, lines connecting the 25 family names illustrate the network of personal and business ties.

The starting point: the life story of Karl and Irmi Goeritz

At the end of 1926, Karl Goeritz and Irmgard Frank were married. Karl was the youngest son of Sigmund Goeritz, whose company, 'Venus-Werke', located on Zwickauer Straße in Chemnitz, manufactured swimwear and other knitwear.



Karl and Irmi share a passion for art. In 1930, they made their home at 52 Hoffmannstraße. They commissioned the versatile artist Victor Lurje to design and create much of their furniture. Lurje's marquetry work defines the atmosphere of the rooms and sets the scene for the couple's exquisite collection of paintings, prints and decorative arts. The twelve photographs taken of the interior offer a glimpse into the 'four walls' of Irmi and Karl Goeritz's home.



Their young happiness was crowned by the birth of their son, Frank Stefan, in February 1932. At the end of 1937, they decided to flee to the Netherlands. Their daughter, Irene Beatrice, was born there in February 1938.

The threat of occupation by Nazi Germany forced them to continue their journey. On the evening of 17 November 1939, the family left Europe aboard the SS Simon Bolivar. Among the 265 passengers were other Jewish families from Chemnitz. Just a few hours later, Karl Goeritz and his two children died after the ship struck two German mines. Irmi Goeritz is rescued and taken to London. She later emigrates to the USA, where she marries twice more and has two daughters. One of her daughters, Veronica Selver, produced the 2020 documentary "Irmi" about her mother, in which she recounts her mother's moving life story.

One of 25 biographies: The Benda family

The wool manufacturer Hugo Benda lived a comfortable life in Chemnitz with his wife Marie and daughter Ilse – until the Nazis seized power. He was arrested in 1933, and his business was forcibly sold in 1934. After refusing radiotherapy, he died of cancer in 1936.

In 1939, Marie and Ilse Benda attempt to flee to Belgium. Whilst the mother manages to cross the border, the eleven-year-old daughter falls into a trap and is detained for months. It is not until early 1940 that she is permitted to travel to join her mother. In

occupied Brussels, both survived in hiding. Marie Benda had taken the suitcase on display with her when she fled to Belgium. In it, she carried whatever valuables remained from the flat on Chemnitz's Kaßberg. How she managed to get the suitcase out of the country from Chemnitz remains a mystery.

After the war, her daughter Ilse settled in Germany with Walter Rau and started a



family, which grew to include nine children. Her mother, Marie Benda, followed her there in 1950, but never really settled in. She died of cancer in 1960. Of the 25 families featured in the exhibition, Marie Benda is the only one who returned to Germany after the Second World War.

One of 25 biographies: The Solomonica family

The Romanian merchant Jüsony Solomonica settled in Chemnitz in June 1890. He married into the Seidler family, a family of manufacturers in Chemnitz, and set up a hosiery agency. His two daughters, Ilse and Erna Solomonica, were born in 1903 and 1905.



Erna married Arthur Durlacher in Baden-Baden, who worked as a sales representative for the Chemnitz-based brand 'Venus' – the Goeritz family's company. His secret passion, however, was music. In July 1928, their son Gerhard was born in Baden-Baden. In 1937, the family emigrates to the Netherlands, where they are arrested during a raid in early

October 1942 and deported to Westerbork. In January 1944, they are transported on to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. There they are separated. Erna and Arthur die in the camps. Only their son Gerhard survives.

Erna Solomonica's granddaughter is the Dutch author Jessica Durlacher. Whilst her husband Leon de Winter's books are better known in Germany, Jessica Durlacher's novels are very successful in her home country. In her work, she often explores the lives of families in which the parents survived the Holocaust, and how that experience has traumatised and shaped them and their children.

Further biographies

Each of the 25 biographies presented here is unique and marked by loss. Loss of one's own life, loss of family, loss of citizenship, profession, business, home, wealth and valuables. And the loss of hope, dreams, life plans and the future.

Outlook



The exhibition concludes with photographs of a visit by Irmi Selver, formerly Irmi Goeritz, née Frank, to Chemnitz in 1984. From 1994 to 2002, the city of Chemnitz invited former Jewish residents of the city to annual reunions. With recent encounters involving the second and third generations of their families, this tradition has been revived since May 2024.

Exhibition design

From the introductory area, where the 25 families are situated geographically, socially and professionally in relation to one another and within the city of Chemnitz, visitors enter the central element of the exhibition: the 'flat' of Karl and Irmi Goeritz on Hoffmannstraße in Chemnitz. Partition walls display large-format interior photographs of the living room furnishings and are loosely arranged to form a room-within-a-room; in the centre, a table presents some of the objects that can be identified in the interior photographs as collectables and decorative items. Texts and photographs here depict the fate of the Goeritz family.

Through the open corners of the space, visitors reach modules where the biographies of the 24 other Jewish families are outlined and items on loan from their descendants are displayed. Some pillars also depict places in Chemnitz that were part of social life, such as the Jewish cemetery, the synagogue and the Tietz department store.

The modules appear raw and makeshift; they consist of fibreboard held in place by aluminium profiles. Their workshop-like character highlights the incompleteness of our knowledge regarding the fates of many Jewish people and their fragmentary biographies, presenting the exhibition as a work in progress.

A continuous black wall borders the exhibition space. Written on it in large letters are the sites of horror to which the majority of Chemnitz's Jewish men and women were deported and murdered.



4 venues – 4 exhibitions

Dr Sabine Wolfram, Director of smac –State Museum of Archaeology Chemnitz:

“Four museums in Chemnitz have joined forces to organise exhibitions in 2026, the Year of Jewish Culture in Saxony, which will showcase various aspects of the once-thriving Jewish life in Chemnitz. Each institution will highlight an aspect that aligns with its own thematic focus. This fact alone demonstrates that Jewish life 100 years ago was an integrated and significant part of society. Jews left a significant mark in all areas: industry, art, transport and society. Following ‘John Cage: Museum Circle’, this is the second joint project to emerge from the newly founded Chemnitz Museum Association, aksa e.V.”

Museum of Saxon Vehicles, Chemnitz

Threads: Mobile Memories – A Jewish Family Looks Back

8 May – 30 August 2026



Smiling faces, joyful outings and a passion for cars and motorbikes – looking at the Ascher family’s photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, one can really sense their zest for life. Yet within just a few years, everything changed for the Jewish family, who owned a thriving shoe shop on Chemnitz’s market square.

With the Nazis’ rise to power, they too felt the full force of repression. And so the subjects of the photographs changed: proud pictures of the shoe shop stand in stark contrast to images of Nazi parades and, eventually, the shop in ruins.

The Museum of Saxon Vehicles in Chemnitz takes a look inside the family’s ‘photo album’, which their descendants have kept in America. But it is not only the photos that bring back memories of the Ascher family. Also on display are vehicles which – though dearly loved – had to be left behind in Germany when the family emigrated to America.

OVERVIEW OF PRESS IMAGES

You can download the press photos at <https://www.smac.sachsen.de/presse.html>.

You are welcome to use the press photos in connection with reporting on the special exhibition "THREADS".



20260507_smac_Threads_01.JPG

Karl and Irmi Goeritz, early 1930ies

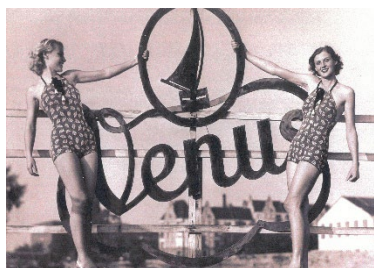
© Veronica Selver



20260507_smac_Threads_02.JPG

Karl Goeritz and his children died on November 17, 1939, on their way into exile.

© Veronica Selver



20260507_smac_Threads_03.JPG

The Chemnitz Venus factories of the Goeritz family produced swimwear and other knitwear.

© Museum Schloss Lützen



20260507_smac_Threads_04.JPG

Apartment furnishings of Karl and Irmi Goeritz at Hoffmannstrasse 52, Chemnitz. A striking feature is a flower petal clock on the secretary desk.

© Hans Finsler | Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg (Halle)



20260507_smac_Threads_05.JPG

The petal clock from the Goeritz apartment came into the possession of the actress Senta Berger. Her husband, Michael Verhoeven, inherited it from his mother, the actress Doris Kiesow, who was a friend of Karl Goeritz.

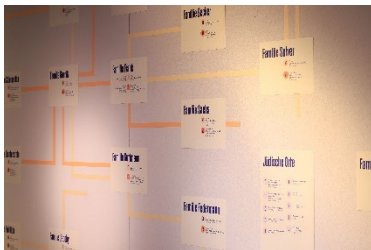
© Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_06.JPG

The Petal Clock in the exhibition “Threads - Interconnections.”

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_07.JPG

The exhibition’s entrance area depicts the private and professional networks of Jewish families in Chemnitz during the first third of the 20th century.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_08.JPG

Marie Bender’s overseas trunk. It is nothing short of a miracle that it was not confiscated during her flight to Belgium. The portrait on the left depicts David Godwin. The background of the painting is densely covered with scenes depicting the fate of his grandmother Annelis Magen.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_09.JPG

Each family is accompanied by a brief biographical sketch, an exhibit, photographs and a diagram illustrating the key stages of their lives.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_10.JPG

Erna Solomonica's violin, which is over 100 years old.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20260507_smac_Threads_11.JPG

The workshop-like nature of the exhibition highlights the gaps in our knowledge regarding the fates of many Jewish people and the fragmentary nature of their biographies; it presents the exhibition as a work in progress.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko
