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# The rectors' plaque – put in perspective

Shedding light on the shadows of the past –  
the rectors' plaque of the University of Vienna  
appears in a new light



The rectors' plaque (Rektorenfasten) listing all former rectors of the University is located in the Main Building's Aula in the niche left to the main entrance. When a rector's term of office comes to an end, the rector's name is traditionally Latinised and engraved in gold lettering in the rectors' plaque, the marble commemorative plaque in the university foyer. The only exception were the years from 1936 to 1945, when this tradition was not preserved. The University continued the tradition in the post-war period. Initially, two lines representing the Nazi era were left blank symbolically, after which the list was continued. However, the resulting "gap" was "filled" later in 1958/59 by the Senate of the University of Vienna, chaired by the Rector. In the anniversary year 2015, the University of Vienna released the following statement:

*"In the academic year of 1958/59, the academic Senate, chaired by the Rector, decided to retrospectively list former rector Knoll and former rector Pernkopf from the National Socialist era. The University of Vienna distances itself explicitly from the rectors who have violated the spirit of a humane society motivated by anti-Semitism, racism, anti-democratic sentiments as well as discrimination of any kind. The University hereby acknowledges its shared responsibility for the injustice inflicted on its members by expulsions, dismissals and the rescission of academic degrees.*

*Issued in the anniversary year 2015"*

These words are the starting point and central element of the light installation "The rectors' plaque – put in perspective" by Bele Marx & Gilles Mussard.



## Casting a light on the world of shadows

Via a glass stele in front of the marble plaque, the text is projected onto the floor, thereby inviting the viewers to enter the niche. At the same time, viewers can also see the reflection of the stele in another room. As an additional part of the artistic intervention, the gold layer is removed from the names of the Nazi rectors that were added at a later time. Yellow light illuminates the cupola.

The artistic duo contrasts the heavy, hard marble with light and glass, symbolising enlightenment and transparency. The light and reflections of the ephemeral intervention force the viewers to reorient themselves – the marmoreal-manifested order is broken. With their light installation "Rectors' plaque – put in perspective", Marx and Mussard aim to encourage a debate that allows for a lively culture of remembrance.

The upper part of the stele remains transparent. This way, the period in question is more or less framed, indicating the lack of transparency. It also highlights the need for a transparent approach to addressing our history in the time of the First Republic, as well as before, during and after the Nazi era.

The gold engraving added to the names of the University's rectors of the Nazi era in 1959 was removed. It deprives the two rectors of retrospective glorification and honour. In addition, it is a reference to the retrospective manipulation in 1959.