

centre de la mémoire
ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE
village martyr

ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE

ORADOUR : A LIVING MEMORY

■ PRESS KIT



« Those who cannot remember their past condemn themselves to relive it » G. Santayana, 1863/1952

The Centre de la mémoire : A cultural and scientific equipment as a research and memory tool

Carrying out a transmitting mission and a message of universal vigilance since its creation, the “Centre de la mémoire” keeps on developing tirelessly its continuing action, not only in memory of those who died in Oradour, but also of all civilian victims of armed conflicts. An humanity-centred role now more necessary than ever.

In these times of crisis and in facing the growing temptations to give in to the sirens of exclusion, violence and intransigence, the message of Oradour takes on a particular acuity. Past and alas ongoing conflicts illustrate its crucial importance.

From a tragic and emblematic event, which became the universal symbol of people’s suffering, confronted with terror and brutality of war atrocities, the Oradour site is permanently speaking. To carry the voices of the missing, and to raise awareness among present and future generations, the “Centre de la mémoire” accompanies the transmission and gets involved with all its symbolic weight in a polyvalent, international and trans-generational dynamic.

Either through its permanent and temporary exhibitions, prior to the discovery of the ruins, or through the “Faces Gallery”, bring-

ing back identity to the dead of Oradour, but also through an educational service and a centre for documentation and research, the “Centre de la mémoire” welcomes, informs, transmits and awakes.

Today, with the experience of more than 20 years of existence, the establishment is fully aware of the issues raised by its evolution, and increases its role in the international scientific research, continuing and strengthening its crucial work around a fundamental place of our heritage , to discover and rediscover constantly, by all and for all.



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The "Centre de la mémoire", an invitation to a universal reflection



Since July 1999, the "Centre de la mémoire" of Oradour has allowed access to the ruins of the martyred village of Oradour-sur-Glane, in Haute-Vienne, whose population was massacred on June 10 1944, by part of the second Waffen SS division "Das Reich". As a cultural facility, it proposes to the visitors of the site a documented approach aiming at the comprehension of the facts and of their historical context.

Historical reminder: The massacre of Oradour

The village of Oradour-sur-Glane, located at about twenty kilometers west of Limoges is known all over the world for bearing the traces of the tragic event that occurred on June 10 1944.

In one afternoon, the population is decimated, the village destroyed. 643 men, women and children are murdered by guns and fire; the destroyed village is looted and burnt. For the troops who served on the Eastern Front from where they returned decimated, the crime was methodically carried out, thus allowing it to initiate

its new recruits to the exercise of terror as a means of domination.

At the end of the afternoon, the only thing left of the peaceful Limousin town was smoking rubble and broken down buildings. Along with the few survivors of the killings, the ruins of Oradour, preserved in their original state, are today's witnesses of the violence of the massacre. They have been classified as historical monuments since the "Liberation" and welcome more than 300 000 visitors every year.

Oradour becomes the symbol of Nazi barbarism and still embodies today the archetype of collective massacre of civilian populations by armed troops.

A cultural facility for citizens

Time doing its work, and in view of the possible instrumentalization of the symbol of Oradour through political speeches and from quasi-mythological reconstructions, it was necessary to conceive a way to perpetuate the transmission of a memory in conformity with the reality of the facts, guaranteeing an universal and soothing message.

In 1992, the project initiated by the General Council of Haute-Vienne with the agreement of the national association of the families of the martyrs of Oradour-sur-Glane and the municipality, is launched. In 1999, it led to the opening of an interpretation Centre which through rigorous historical research, restores the memory of Oradour in the general context of its time. A necessary approach "in order to face the admitted or hidden negationits, to pass on to future generations the truth about the facts of this tragedy (...) to understand the reasons for it and to avoid justifying the unspeakable", according to Jean-Claude Peyronnet, then President of the General Council and of the Board of Directors of the "Centre de la mémoire".



A Permanent exhibition to understand the drama

The “Centre de la mémoire” offers visitors, prior to the visit of the ruins (which are devoid of explanatory elements) a five-stage tour placing the Oradour massacre in its historical background and illustrating a process of violence erected into an ideology.

Using archival documents, some of which have been uncovered for the first time, the centre’s permanent exhibition sheds new light on the massacre and destruction of the village, as well as providing many answers to the question “why Oradour?”. The 10th of June 1944 is reintegrated into the broad historical context of the roots and rise of Nazism, of the war and troop movements in the region from the spring of 1944 onwards, of the terror erected as an instrument of conquest and domination, from Eastern Europe to the Limousin region. Along the way the visitor gets closer to the event, and discovers the last hours be-

fore the massacre, then the story of 10th June through a film made by the “Centre de la mémoire” using images of the ruins and a commentary based on the testimonies of the survivors, as well as the statements of the Waffen SS. The film follows, hour by hour and step by step, the troop operating in the village.

Other massacres committed in the same period are then mentioned, prior to accessing the “aftermath”: the discovery of the ruins, the processes of commemoration and justice and finally the reconstruction of the new Oradour. A gallery of the victims’ faces, printed on porcelain plates, accompanies the visitor along the corridor leading to the ruins.

A significant scenography

The spaces within the building are deliberately bare, in their raw state, making way for images and texts. Built in contrasts of spaces presenting in black and red, on picture rails detached from the wall, Nazism and the advance of the Das Reich towards Oradour, and of light spaces presenting on materials the village before the tragedy, the exhibition’s scenography reinforces and accompanies the historic course proposed to the visitor.



A journey of interpretation

The “Centre de la mémoire” is part of the so-called interpretation facilities, of which the first to emerge in France in the early 1990’s were the “Historial de Péronne” and the “Mémorial de Caen”. In such a facility, there is no art collection, but a story that is told and through which the visitor walks, acquiring the keys to apprehend a complex process.

Videos to discover the exhibition from a distance

In order to prepare for a visit, or to discover the themes covered by the permanent exhibition, explanatory video modules, produced by the Limousin company Prêt-à-Diffuser as well as by the Centre’s team, can now be accessed on the “Centre de la mémoire”’s website, as well as on the Centre’s You Tube channel.



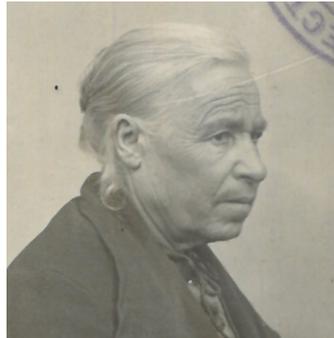
The tribute to the victims : a work of remembrance more necessary than ever

A 643rd victim

The tragic list of victims of the Oradour massacre, which until then contained 642 names, was completed in December 2019 with addition of Ramona Domínguez Gil, a Spanish woman in her 70'S who arrived in Oradour four years earlier with her son, her daughter-in-law and her three grandchildren.

The brutal annihilation of a family, among many others, and the oblivion of a person who disappeared in the meanders of a troubled period.

The atrocious conditions of execution and the contempt for the victims, many of whom could not be identified, as well as a context particularly conducive to administrative opacity are all factors that make the official count in 1945 a list subject to constant change. Hence the importance of a continuous and vigilant work of history, carried out thanks to the work of researchers. Among them, David Ferrer, a Spanish researcher, Revull has been able to identify inconsistencies, search for the truth and restore the identity of a forgotten victim within the community



Identity photograph of Ramona Domínguez Gil, the only remaining portrait of her.

Source : AD 87

of Spanish refugees present in Oradour.

A long investigation

It was while visiting Oradour in 2016 that David Ferrer Revull noticed inconsistencies in the names of the Spanish victims of the massacre on a stele in the village cemetery. He has previously been able to consult, in the departmental archives of the Haute-Vienne, a precious file relating to the Spanish refugees of Oradour, among whom 19 people, men, women and children had perished in the massacre.

These are correctly listed on the plaque placed by the supporters of the Anti-Franco Spanish Republic, but the official monument, which has only 18 names, does not mention that of Ramona. The documents mentioning her probably did not arrive on time to be taken into account in the official count made in the flabbergasted emergency of a traumatic period. This was the beginning of four years of meticulous and passionate research in the name of the memory of an entire community, which led to the judgment of the Limoges court, which on 24 December 2019, by declaring the death of Ramona Domínguez Gil, gave her back her lost civil status.

From across the Pyrenees to Oradour

David Ferrer Revull patiently traces the journey of refugee families, including Ramona's from the vicinity of Pamplona where she was born, to her passage to France in 1939 during the "Retirada" following the civil war, which saw hundreds of thousands of refugees flee Franco's regime.

He reconstructs the story that led Ramona and her family to Oradour, where they formed, with other refugees, the 643rd group of Foreign Workers installed by the Vichy regime in a camp on the outskirts of the village, where Ramona lived with her son Joan, her daughter-in-law Marina and their three children until the tragedy of June 10 1944. On that day, eleven-year-old Miguel, eight-year-old Harmonia and little Libert, not yet two years old, perished along with their parents and grandmother in the flames destroying Oradour.

The forgotten faces of Oradour

This is undoubtedly one of the key moments of the visit to the "Centre de la mémoire". At the end of the permanent exhibition and in the corridor leading to the ruins of the martyred village, a gallery of porcelain plaques gives back to the victims of Oradour a face, an identity, a story. Ramona's face was added in June 2021. This fresco is the result of a long process of joint work between the Centre's team, the victims' families and the local institutions. This research, carried out with the descendants of the victims, gave rise in 2014 to an exhibition, finalized by the creation of this fresco where ninety plaques are still white ; the memory of Oradour has not finished talking.



The gallery of the faces of the victims of Oradour :
a poignant and necessary discovery



Exposition en cours

Oradour-sur-Glane, a drama, a painter, a work by *Gabriel Godard*

This time, it is through the pictorial art that the “Centre de la mémoire” voices the evocative power of Oradour massacre in the collective imagination, and illustrates its tragic dimension by the strong expressiveness of an artist, distraught from childhood by the drama on June, 10th.

Gabriel Godard, today an internationally recognized painter, is only eleven when he hears of the massacre that has just happened. It would be 28 years, however, before he discovers the martyred village. Haunted by the facts, he realizes between 2009 and 2012 a cathartic and monumental work, expressing anger, incomprehension and indignation, using the strength of a talent at the crossroads of figurative and abstract approaches. Those enormous canvases, that haven't been painted to be sold, are naturally given to the “Centre de la mémoire” in 2020 and exposed to the public since April 14th, 2022.

Four paintings constitute this moving immersion in the sensitive and subjective interpretation of an historical fact by an artist emancipated from norms and pictorial

conventions, guided by the changing shapes that come to life under his eyes.

Some monumental canvases, of between 3,40 m/9 m and 3,70 m/9 m, suggesting the increasing horror of a pathway to anonymity of death for the tortured victims, in shades purposefully restricted to the grey of ashes, red of blood, black of death.

In the first movement, named *The Supplice*, where no women are portrayed, one can guess an evocation of the execution of men, particularly in the barns, through corpses and flames.

However, the second one, *The Horror*, clearly identifies the suffering of the martyred women trapped with children in the church, around a central female figure presented in a realistic way.

The third canvas, *The Death*, gathers all the inhabitants in death, by a representation of wasted, interlaced and stacked bodies which besides correspond more to East European mass graves and to the discovery of the camps, than to the reality of Oradour where corpses had been burnt before being found.



An abstract painting, *About human and ordinary ignominy*, completes the exhibition by its difference, the abstraction generalizing here the statements linked with violence.

One can also, during the visit, catch the multifaceted aspects of the artist's work, by a video interview produced by the “Centre de la mémoire”.

This exhibition is displayed in the temporary exhibition space of the “Centre de la mémoire”, and is presented in a specific and pedagogical way to schoolchildren of all levels, through workshops and worksheets suggested to teachers by the educational service of the “Centre de la mémoire”.

Outside the walls

The “Centre de la mémoire” has also produced travelling exhibitions which it makes available to museums, universities, cultural centres, schools and municipalities.

These include:

- “The Hitler Youth”: produced in partnership with the Nuremberg Documentation Centre on the theme of the indoctrination of youth by the Nazi regime, and its consequences in war violence.
- “Oradour, martyred village”: 52 photographs, framed in natural wood, bring out the history of the rural village that was Oradour, before, during, and after the massacre. Seven themes and accompanying texts structure the exhibition.

All travelling exhibitions:

[Oradour.org/expositions-itinerantes](https://www.oradour.org/expositions-itinerantes)

The Centre also regularly organizes conferences, round tables and meetings on the history and memories of the conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries, led by eminent academics and specialists.

The establishment's cultural action policy is also based on artistic creation, through theatrical performances and readings.

Some highlights in the history of the “Centre de la mémoire”



Presidents Gauck and Hollande on the forecourt of the “Centre de la mémoire” on 4 September 2013

Inaugurated on 16 July 1999

Officially inaugurated in the presence of Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, Catherine Trautmann, Minister of Culture, and Roland Ries, Mayor of Strasbourg, The “Centre de la mémoire” has been working for over 20 years now to transmit its universal message of peace and vigilance. At the heart of national and international news, many highlights have marked its history. A look back at some of the key moments in the news in recent years.

4 september 2013: a historic visit

While many French and foreign dignitaries and political representatives regularly honour Oradour and the “Centre de la mémoire” with their presence, the visit of President Hollande welcoming his German counterpart Joachim Gauck on that day was exceptional. An act of recognition, a gesture of peace that took the form of a simple and humble visit by the two men guided by Robert Hébras, a survivor of the tragedy, then aged 88.

International symposium on the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994: meetings of memories

Organized in Oradour and Limoges on 23 and 24 May 2019, this symposium linked to the hosting of the temporary exhibition brought together researchers, specialists and genocide survivors. It opened with a very emotional visit of the ruins, and a meeting with Robert Hébras, during which the survivors of events that were temporally distant could only note the similarity of their traumas and their common desire to transmit and inform, and raise awareness.

The speeches of this conference, entirely filmed, can be seen on the [website of the Centre de la mémoire](#) or on its [YouTube Channel](#)



Research and future perspectives

At the dawn of a deep change in the life of the Centre and in its contribution to a more than ever necessary memory, the “Centre de la mémoire” anchor its major role in the research, in order to prepare and ensure the right transmission of history, especially in anticipation of the gradual disappearance of the last direct witnesses.

This turning point in the dimension given to the activities of the Centre coincide with the arrival of a new Director, Mrs Babeth Robert, a former associated professor actively involved in the educational service of the “Centre de la mémoire”. An arrival which undoubtedly contributed to the increasing development of Oradour as a driving force, a vector, and a subject for the continuous reflexive work of historical research.

Fundamental and applied research : understanding, restoring, transmitting.

In history, as in all sciences, research, whether fundamental or applied, contributes to the improvement of knowledge and the conditions for its transmission.

Thus, within the framework of the RUINES project (see box), a working group has dedicated itself to the implementation of a survey of the public of Oradour-sur-Glane, and a mobile application for visiting the ruins of the martyred village, which are both currently being finalised.

At the same time, publications and scientific meetings deepen the knowledge of the facts for a transmission legitimised by the rigour of their analytical approach.

Oradour, a central and emblematic role in the heart of a multidisciplinary project

But the impact of Oradour on research is not the result of a single discipline. On the contrary, the tragedy of 10 June 1944 and its exegesis call upon notions touching on philosophy, sociology, geography, anthropology, history of arts, and many others, in addition to the multiple fields of historical approach mobilised. In short, to humanity, contributing, through study but also through art in all its forms, to the transmission of memory and vigilance, starting from an emblematic place and its historicity to

reach contemporary consciences, unfortunately still marked by dramas with sadly familiar resonances.

Seminars in martyred cities: the crossroads of memories and histories

Oradour is thus also placed at the heart of research on an international scale. Since February 2022 and until 2024, a series of seminars in various European sites is expanding the research project on European martyred villages of World War II. Beginning and ending in Oradour, this series of meetings will visit the localities of Marzabotto (Italy), Distomo (Greece) and Lidice (Czech Republic), in a comparative approach to the relationship between societies and the remains of traumatic pasts such as war ruins.

A resource centre

Explanatory videos are now available on the website of the “Centre de la mémoire”.

The videos show all the areas of the permanent exhibition, as well as the many themes covered by the areas of the Centre de la Mémoire. To be viewed on the website of the “Centre de la mémoire”, as well as on the You tube channel of the establishment.

The “Centre de la mémoire » also has a documentation centre, bringing together many archives, publications, photographs, and an

educational service where teachers find many helpful resources upstream and during their visit.

Downloading the pedagogical worksheets

oradour.org/ressources-pour-enseignants

The bookshop also offers more than a hundred references for all, on the Second World War as well as the conflicts of the XXth and XX^{1st} centuries .

View the catalogue

oradour.org/librairie

The RUINES project: Oradour in the heart of a transversal program

«The political and social uses of war ruins from the 16th century to the present day, between resilience, commemoration and heritage» is the theme of an ambitious multidisciplinary university project, which has received a funding from the French National Research Agency (ANR) of €292,000 over 48 months. Coordinated by Stéphane Michonneau, a professor of contemporary history at the university of Lille, and involving four university laboratories (IRHIS in Lille; HisTÉMÉ in Caen; LARHRA in Grenoble and CRIHAM in Poitiers and Limoges) as well as a vast network of European universities, this project brings together thirty-five experts from several disciplines around four experimental sites: Oradour, Falaise, Arras and Vassieux-en-Vercors, thanks to the active participation of the École du Louvre, the «Centre de la mémoire d’Oradour», the Caen Memorial, the Péronne Historial and the Vassieux Museum.

Around The "Centre de la mémoire"

The Oradour landscape is strongly marked by the different stages of its reconstruction and the development of the memorial process. In addition to the visit to the exhibitions of the "Centre de la mémoire", an outdoor discovery of the sites' elements completes the understanding provided by the Centre.

The exterior and interior architecture of the Centre was designed by a team led by Yves Devraïne, author of the scenography of the Caen Memorial and several archeoscopes in Europe. The choice was made for a discreet architecture, embracing the landscape and whose materials symbolize the violence suffered by Oradour. Embedded in the relief, the glass of the front of the building is torn by a rusty steel blade, symbol of destruction but also of memory.

The ruins of the martyred village

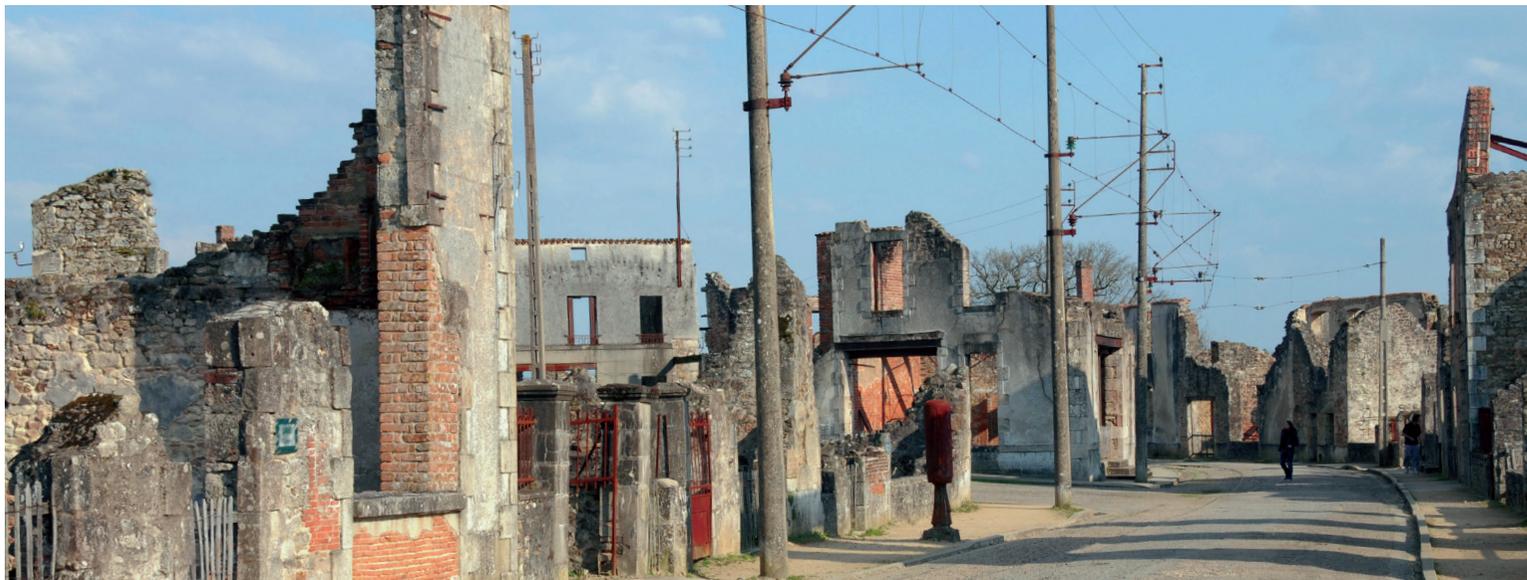
The ruins of the martyred village which can be seen from the entrance to the village and are accessible via a tunnel from the "Centre de la mémoire", cover 15 hectares and are under state protection as a listed historic monument. There are no explanations here, only a few signs that encourage meditation in front of the main places of execution and indicate the places of the village life. Walk-

ing through these desolate streets, with houses strewn with objects, kept in their state of destruction and bearing witness to the torment of the village for 78 years, is an essential step for all, remaining engraved in the memory throughout the existence of each visitor.

The new Oradour

In November 1944, the decision was made to rebuild the new village in order to rehouse the few survivors who had

been until then living in temporary buildings. The first stone was laid in 1947 by President Vincent Auriol. Walking through the town centre of the 1950's, one can observe a great homogeneity in the construction of the houses (uniform height, squared rubble base, raised ground floor), all sides of which are treated as façades. The public buildings bear witness to the architectural trends of the time. The new town was awarded the Heritage of the 20th century label in 2007.



The statue to the martyrs of Oradour

Located between the "Centre de la mémoire", the ruins and the new village, this work by the Spanish sculptor Apel. Les Fenosa, representing a woman in the middle of the flames, also bears a dedication by the poet Paul Éluard: *"Here men did their mothers and all women the gravest insult : they did not spare the children."*

Contacts and practical information

The “Centre de la mémoire” is a public establishment of a departmental administrative nature (EPAD). its team is composed of 20 to 30 agents, permanent, seasonal and trainees, under the presidency of Fabrice Escure, vice president of the Haute-Vienne departmental council.

OPENING DATES AND TIMES

The “Centre de la mémoire” is open every day from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. depending on the season (see oradour.org)

Annual closure from December 16 to January 14.

Access to the martyr village (free entrance) is via the “Centre de la mémoire”.

PRICES FOR THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION

Full prices : 7€80

Reduced rates: family (2 adults+ 2 children or more) : 22€.

Students, young people aged 10 to 18, veterans and victims of war, wards of the Nation : 5€20

Free admission: under 10 years old, blind and disabled persons, job-seekers, journalists, ICOM members, bus drivers.

The visit of the “Centre de la mémoire” is done in compliance with the prevailing health standards, for the safety of all



département
Haute-Vienne

centre de la mémoire
ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE
village martyr

Access to the site



The “Centre de la mémoire” of Oradour

L’Auze - 87520 Oradour-sur-Glane

Useful contacts : switchboard 05 55 430 430

All information on the website : www.oradour.org

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