

## Metz Mausoleum

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The Metz mausoleum, located in Woodlawn Cemetery, is a rich example of craftsmanship in New York City during the Great Depression following the Stock Market crash of 1929. Despite its unassuming size and siting, the memorial is the result of a complex collaborative effort and an illustrative example of German-Jewish tradition in the United States during the early 20th century.

The Metz family interred in the mausoleum immigrated from Cologne and Sondershausen, Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were wealthy, urban Jews most likely part of a generation influenced by the ideas of the Reform movement within Judaism that began in Germany during the 19th century. As Jewish law traditionally does not permit Jewish individuals to be cremated, it is important to note that the presence of cremated remains in a memorial built for a Jewish family is evidence of the increased assimilation of German Jews to Christian practices, in this particular case, burial practices. Falk Wiesemann in his 1992 study of Jewish burials in Germany underscores that the “pace at which different groups within the Jewish community became assimilated was manifest in the way different Jewish communities responded to the cremation issue.”<sup>1</sup> The lack of overt Jewish iconography in their burial site can thereby be understood as an affirmation of their station in their new home in America.

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<sup>1</sup> Falk Wiesemann; Jewish Burials in Germany – Between Tradition, the Enlightenment and the Authorities, *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Volume 37, Issue 1, 1 January 1992, Pages 17–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/leobaeck/37.1.17>

Rudolf Sigismund Metz was born to Hirsch Metz and Johanna Michaelis in Cologne, Germany, on November 1, 1871. In 1900, at the age of 28, Rudolf emigrated to New York City (some sources also indicate his arrival as 1899) to work as a broker for Ladenburg, Thalmann & Co. -- an investment bank located at 25 Broad Street in the Financial District.<sup>2</sup> He lived as a boarder in the home of Samuel and Rebecca Marder at 116 West 111th Street.<sup>3</sup> In 1914, after 14 years living in the United States, Rudolf's older brother Otto Joseph Metz died during World War I, leaving his wife, Alma Metz, widowed with a twelve-year-old child, Heinz Edgar Otto Metz (born December 13, 1902).<sup>4</sup>

Alma Metz was born to Sabina Landauer and Bruno Heidenheim in Sondershausen, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, on August 26, 1876. Alma married for the first time in 1893 at the age of seventeen; the marriage produced two children Ellen, born in 1894, and Hans born 1896. Ellen is the only one of Alma's children buried today in the family's memorial. Alma divorced in 1901 and married Otto Joseph Metz with whom she had one son. Eight years following Otto's death in 1922,<sup>5</sup> Rudolf and Alma's narratives converge: Alma and her children

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<sup>2</sup> "Rudolph A. Metz." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 10, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> "1900 United States Federal Census," database, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2 October 201), entry for Rudolf Sigismund Metz.

<sup>4</sup> "Germany, World War I Casualty Lists, 1914-1919," database, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2 October 2017), entry for Otto Joseph Metz.

<sup>5</sup> "Germany, Select Births and Baptisms, 1558-1898," database, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : 2 October 2017), entry for Otto Joseph Metz.

move to New York, coinciding with Rudolf's return from a one-year trip through Europe.<sup>6</sup> It can be inferred that Rudolf and Alma may have married in Germany that year.



Figure 1

The rest of Alma's family remained in Germany (*Fig.1*). Alma's brother Richard Heidenheim died in 1935, and when World War II broke out in Europe, her sister Martha Leffman (née Heidenheim) and her brother Arthur Heidenheim became victims of the Holocaust. However, her brother Thilo and his

wife, Frandes, followed her to New York on October 9, 1938. Thilo Heidenheim (1878-1964) was a physician in New York City with a home practice at 138 East 78th Street and Frandes, like her sister-in-law, was a homemaker.<sup>7</sup> Of the five individuals interred at Woodlawn, all are Alma's relatives, possibly indicating that Rudolf never had any immediate family in the United States and making the lone immigration of this young banker the more curious.

Rudolf and Alma Metz were part of New York City's wealthy elite, participating in philanthropic efforts and other similar social engagements. In 1925, the New York Times gave an account of a dinner organized by Mr. Metz's friends at the St. Regis Hotel to commemorate

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<sup>6</sup> "U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925," database, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2 October 2017), entry for Rudolf Sigismond Metz.

<sup>7</sup> "U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942," database, Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2 October 2017), entry for Thilo (Dr.) S. Heidenheim.



Figure 2

were still seen as slightly more necessary and became a substantial source of income for Zimmermann.<sup>10</sup>

Zimmermann served as the designer and general contractor for the Metz project, preparing the architectural drawings, and collaborating with Woodlawn's engineers to integrate their

the twenty-fifth anniversary of his landing in New York City.<sup>8</sup> Rudolf was a director of multiple enterprises such as the Broad-Alliance Corporation, Standard Utilities and Associated Metals and Minerals Corporation. Rudolf died in their Park Avenue apartment in 1933 at the age of 60, after a short illness. He left \$1,869,620 in inheritance to his wife, which in 2017 would be close to \$36 million dollars. An important portion was donated to charities in the United States and abroad, including Lenox Hill Hospital, a Jewish hospital, and an orphanage in Cologne.<sup>9</sup>

In 1934, one year after Rudolf Metz's death, Alma commissioned acclaimed metalsmith, Marie Zimmermann to design the family's memorial shrine at Woodlawn Cemetery. Although known primarily for her jewelry and decorative objects, during these years of economic depression, jewelry became a luxury and displays of wealth were avoided. Memorials, however,

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<sup>8</sup> "The Screen." *New York Times*, Jan 27, 1925.

<sup>9</sup> "R.A. Metz Willed \$50,000 to Charity." *New York Times*, Jun 14, 1933.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Dendahl Waters, *The Jewelry and Metalwork of Marie Zimmermann* (Yale University Press, 2011), 131.

recommendations into the final design.<sup>11</sup> The result was discrete in scale yet rich in detail and symbolism. Zimmermann retired from her studio in 1938, and as such, the Metz shrine stands as one of Zimmermann's last larger-scale works making it an example of her skill as an artist and designer at the culmination of her career.

The plot purchased for the construction of the memorial is located in the Myosotis section of Woodlawn Cemetery. The memorial is unassumingly situated among other mausoleums of similar scale. Tucked against a slight ivy-covered slope and shaded by a large oak tree, the shrine

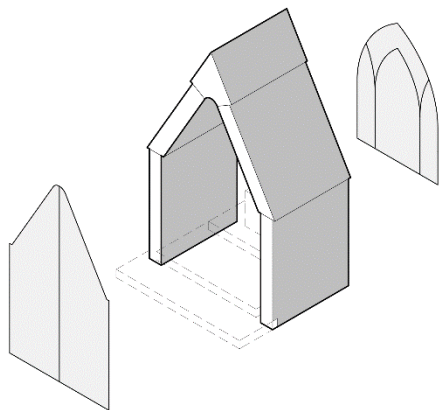


Figure 3

evokes the image of a Gothic tabernacle (*Fig. 2*). The oak tree appears in Zimmermann's original architectural plans for the project, and most likely, was a pre-existing feature of the plot that was used to the design's advantage. The idea of the tabernacle can be interpreted as a subtle call to the Jewish heritage of the Metz family; although in this case, in its Gothic reincarnation, also harkens to the family's European roots. The discreteness in scale and the large amount of glazing in the front and back elevations emphasizes the architecture of the stone as a tent-like covering (*Fig.3*).

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<sup>11</sup> Marie Zimmermann to R. Storms. July 12, 1934. 15 Gramercy Park, New York, New York.



Upon opening the hefty glazed bronze doors, ornamented with unique “curving and jutting sequences of flowers and swirling leaves,” one encounters an ornate mosaic ceiling depicting a starry sky. At the back, is a pointed-arch window with a central “River of Life” painted-glass scene bordered by stained-glass in floral *rincaux* within lancet windows that echo the tracery, or

Figure 4

decorative relief, of the glass entry doors.<sup>12</sup> The floral stained-glass designs and painted-glass window were produced by Otto W. Heinigke and Oliver P. Smith (*Fig. 4*).<sup>13</sup> Otto trained under his father, who was a co-founder of Heinigke & Bowen, the Brooklyn-based firm founded in 1890, known for its works in the Library of Congress, the sporting window of St. John the Divine, and the homes of Andrew Carnegie and Daniel Guggenheim. The core principle of Heinigke’s training under his father upheld that “windows...should be pieces of architecture as much as the stone, copper or wood.”<sup>14</sup> After his father’s death in 1915, he headed the business alongside his partner Oliver Phelps Smith. He was a specialist in painted and fused glass and had learned his craft as a pupil of John LaFarge.<sup>15</sup> Most notably, the new partnership completed the

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah Dependahl Waters, *The Jewelry and Metalwork of Marie Zimmermann* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 314.

<sup>13</sup> Dependahl Waters, *The Jewelry and Metalwork of Marie Zimmermann*, 133.

<sup>14</sup> Tannler, Albert M. 2004. “‘We only have one window’: Stained Glass and the Arts & Crafts Movement in the United States.” *Journal Of Stained Glass* 28, 61-78. *Art & Architecture Source*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 27, 2017). 65.

<sup>15</sup> Special. 1953. “O. P. Smith Dies at 85 in Haddam.” *The Hartford Courant (1923-1991)*, Jul 12, 1. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/562374056?accountid=10226>.

mosaic and skylight in the entrance ceiling of the Woolworth building. The mosaic ceiling in the Metz memorial can also be attributed to him.

In addition to the painted and stained-glass elements of the design, the shrine has a cast-in-place concrete foundation and its primary structure is comprised of pink Georgia, or Etowah, marble.<sup>16</sup> In the interior, there is a two-foot-high wainscot of green scagliola imitating a deep green granite<sup>17</sup> Above the wainscot are three pointed-arch niches, where the urns rest, cut into the Georgia marble and finished with the same glass mosaic tiles found in the ceiling. Of all the materials present in the design, the scagliola shows the greatest deterioration as a result of water infiltration in the space. This process of replicating of marble or granite was widely used from the mid-1800s to the 1930s in the United States, primarily in elaborate religious or institutional buildings.<sup>18</sup> Given the nature of natural stone, scagliola artisans required great historical knowledge and technical skill to adequately work with colored plasters to achieve a realistic effect. Hence, making this aspect of the structure one of the more unusual details in Zimmermann's design, not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also as an exemplary result of traditional techniques.

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<sup>16</sup> Zimmermann, Marie. *Foundation plan for "Metz" Shrine, Woodlawn Cemetery*. 1934. Drawings & Archives Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University. 27 September 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Zimmermann, Marie. *Proposed "Metz" Shrine*. 1934. Drawings & Archives Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University. 27 September 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Gruenke, B. G. 2007. "Beautiful Faker: SCAGLIOLA." *Painting & Wallcovering Contractor* 69 (6): 22-24, 26. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/236613474?accountid=10226>.

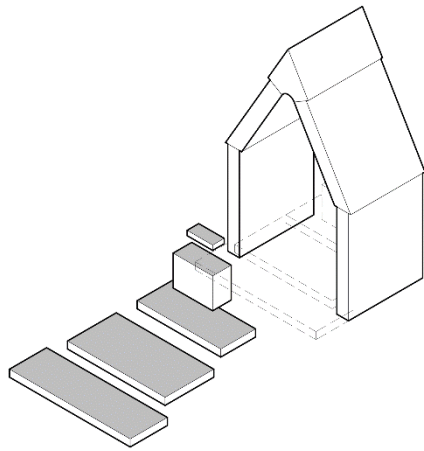


Figure 5

Despite the compressed interior space, there is a clear ascending rhythm into the main platform of the shrine, reminiscent of walking up to an altar (*fig. 5*). The contemplative nature, as well as the analogy of the tabernacle, is reinforced by the furnishing of the space with a bronze chair, designed by Zimmermann, which invites the visitor to remain in reflection within the space. The attention to, not only details of construction, but also, furniture, evoke the detailed instructions found in the Jewish Bible for the construction and furnishings required for that original tabernacle.<sup>19</sup>

For more than eighty years the Metz mausoleum has sat modestly in the landscape of Woodlawn Cemetery. No passerby would suspect the richness of its interior by observing the structure's shell, nor does the shrine beckon us to approach it at a first glance. Only after the intricate bronze doors are opened are we compensated with a burst of color, light and material textures; a result of a complex collaborative effort of construction and craftsmanship.

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<sup>19</sup> Grant, Robert M., and Robert L. Faherty. "Exodus." Encyclopaedia Britannica. September 28, 2015. Accessed October 02, 2017. <https://www.brittanica.com/topic/biblical-literature/Exodus>. 10.



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Zimmermann, Marie. *Proposed "Metz" Shrine*. 1934. Drawings & Archives Collection, Avery  
Library, Columbia University. 27 September 2017.

## Figures

**Figure 1:** Left to right: Martha Heidenheim, Arthur Heidenheim, Alma Heidenheim Metz, Thilo  
S. Heidenheim, and Richard Heidenheim. Source: database, *Ancestry.com*

(<https://www.ancestry.com> : 2 October 2017), entry for Alma Metz.

**Figure 2:** Front Elevation of Metz mausoleum.

**Figure 3:** Diagram of mausoleum architecture as a tabernacle.

**Figure 4:** Detail view of stained-glass floral motif.

**Figure 5:** Diagram of ascending levels within the mausoleum.