MAX MANNHEIMER AND HIS SILVER-GRAY TATRA 87

by Peter Becher

https://doi.org/10.25355/5b7h-cj34

Photo credit: Jewish concentration camp survivor, artist and educator Max Mannheimer in his Tatra in June 1996. Charlotte Zinkl / Adalbert Stifter Verein, Free access - no reuse

Citation recommendation
Peter Becher (2021-09-20): Max Mannheimer and his Silver-Gray Tatra 87. In: Copernico. History and Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe. URL: https://www.copernico.eu/en/link/60ae5dae5432e9.38998594 (2025-12-02)

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Max Mannheimer (1920-2016) was an institution, as a painter and storyteller, as a Holocaust survivor and chairman of the Dachau Camp Community.

Schools and streets have been named after him. He had such an emphatic storytelling style that school students and adults alike would hang on his every word. His wealth of anecdotes and jokes were renowned, and always underpinned by a deep sadness. He lost his first wife and almost all his family members in the Nazi death camps. Nevertheless, when he met people, he approached them not with hatred, but with thoughtfulness. You are not responsible for what happened, he would say to the students, but for ensuring that something like this never happens again.

One thing with which he could open even tightly closed hearts was his silver-gray Tatra, a relic of interwar Czechoslovakia, where he grew up. A sensation at the time, this was the world's first streamlined car and, today, is a first-class vintage car. Long and sleek as a rocket, it seemed to have raced into the present from another time and, with the steering wheel still on the right side, it told of a peaceful past. When the Tatra 87 was built, left-hand traffic prevailed; right-hand traffic was only introduced by the Nazis after the occupation of Prague in the spring of 1939.

Mannheimer received the car as a gift for his 70th birthday from his brother, who wanted to fulfill his childhood dream. As a 15-year-old, the young Max had seen a Tatra in the town square of Neutitschein (Nový Jičín), his Moravian birthplace in Kuhländchen. Years later, it was not only the 15-year-olds in Bavaria who would be transported at the sight of the car and would run behind it as Mannheimer drove along. People would listen attentively and were deeply affected by the stories he told about his life, about the crimes of the National Socialists and the admirable way people at that time learnt to cope.

English translation: William Connor ↗