

# Silicon Valley's Connection To Warsaw's Stunning New Museum Of Polish-Jewish History: Philanthropist Extraordinaire Tad Taube

Posted by Tom Foremski - May 24, 2013



I recently visited the just-opened [Museum of the History of Polish Jews](#) in Warsaw, a stunning \$200m project, largely financed by the Warsaw regional and national governments, but with very strong support from the Bay Area's most impressive philanthropist: Tad Taube.



*The museum from the back: still under construction but opened in April for the 71st Anniversary of the Uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto.*

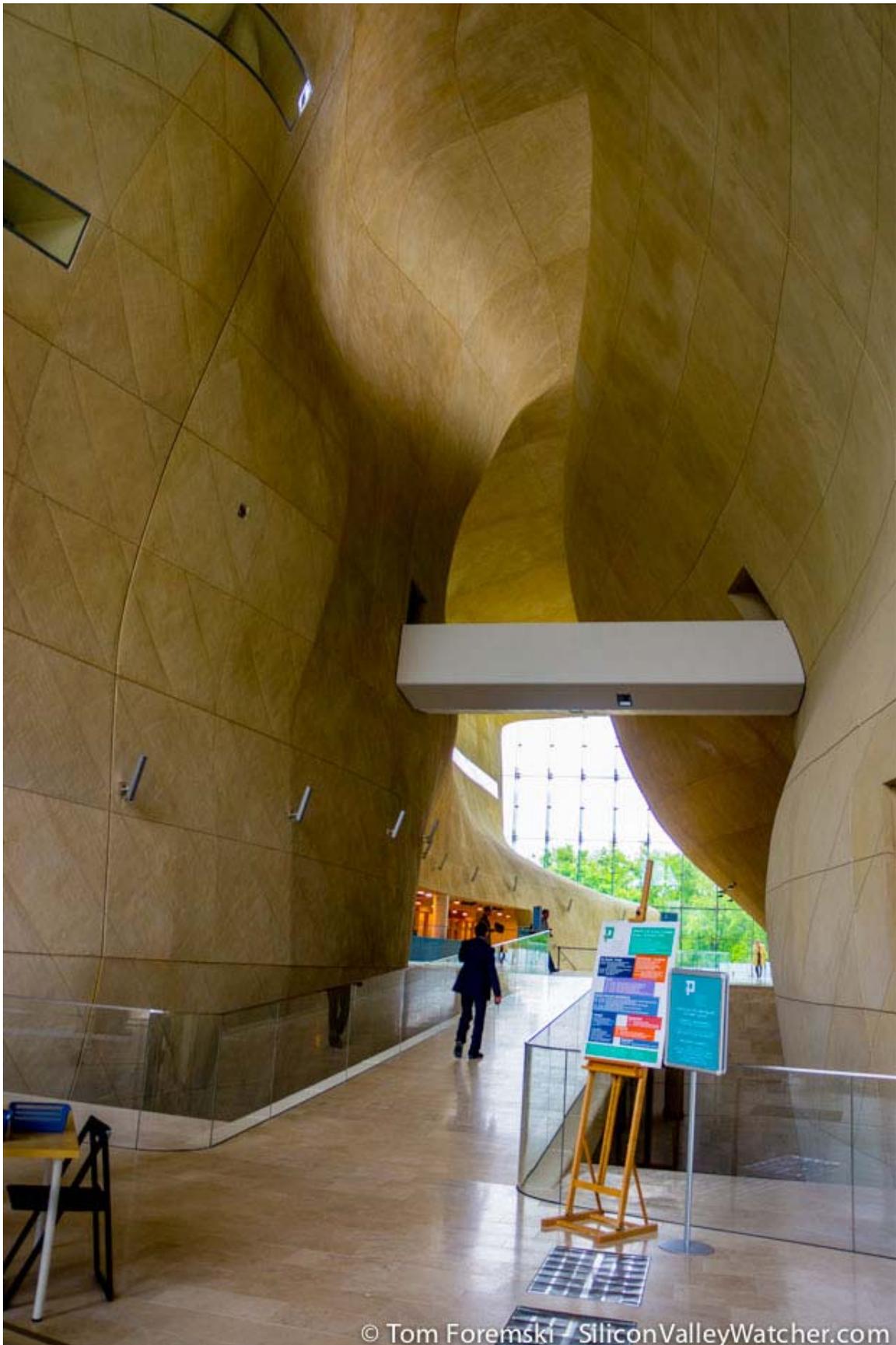
I first met [Mr Taube in 2009](#) during a ceremony at city hall celebrating the twinning of the cities of San Francisco, and Krakow, in Poland. I was extremely impressed with the work he and his foundations are doing in Poland, a series of extremely ambitious projects trying to bring back to life the 1,000 year old culture of Polish-Jews, destroyed by a five-year industrial-scale system of German premeditated murder.



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*From death to life: A monument to the heroes of the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 - just outside of the new museum, which is a monument to the rich cultural life of Polish-Jews.*

Poland's Jewish population of 3.3 million Jews, 10% of the entire population, was almost completely wiped out, with only 300,000 surviving. Add another 3 million Polish citizens of other religious and secular backgrounds to the death toll, and the horrors of the Polish experience in the Second World War are pushed beyond anything we can imagine today -- even with Hollywood's best efforts.



*Inside: the entrance reminds visitors of rolling sand dunes, or the parting of the sea, a path to safety and the future.*

The museum is an attempt to resurrect, rediscover, and reconnect with Poland's rich Jewish history and the truly extraordinary contribution of its populations to global culture.

The goal of the museum is very clear: To understand Polish culture you have to understand Polish-Jewish culture -- a 1,000 year history that started at the same time as the Christian origins of the Polish nation itself, in 960 CE.

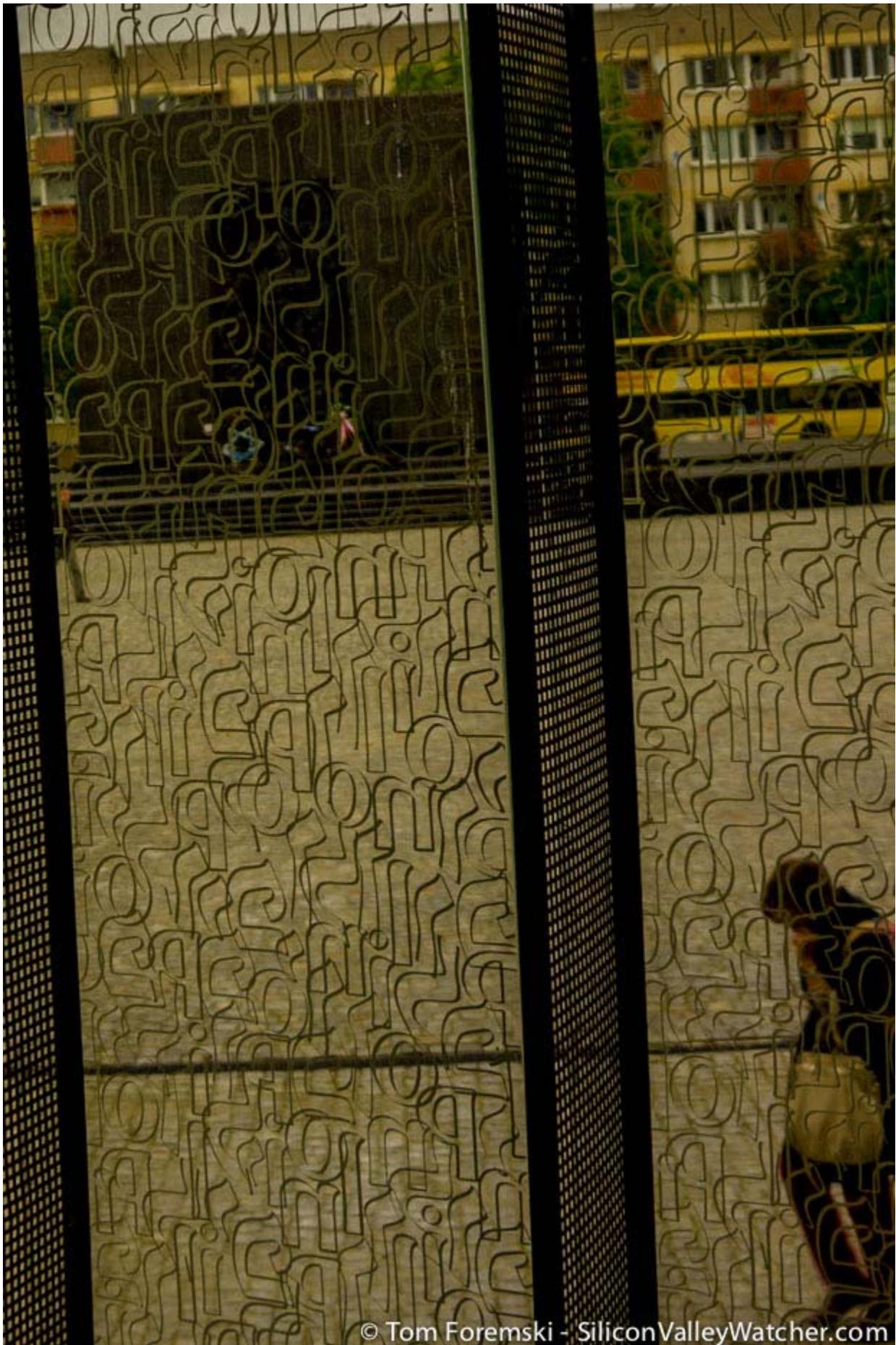
### **Similarities are stronger than differences...**

I grew up in a Polish household in London, UK, and when I was younger, I was often puzzled and pleased to find Jewish culture so similar. The food, attitudes, words, music, and the shared nature of our mothers. A Jewish mother is a Polish mother and vice versa.

The familiarity I experienced was because the cultures have the same roots.

As many as 80% of US Jews have their ancestry in Poland and its former lands to the east. For centuries Poland was a thriving center of Jewish culture, mysticism, the arts, and more. Poland has a long history of tolerance, giving shelter to oppressed groups such as early Protestants, driven out of Germany by endless religious wars.

The word "Polin" is the Hebrew word for Poland and it has additional meaning of homeland.



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*Above, part of the museum building is covered in letters that spell the word "Polin"*

" The letters signify the word "Polin" (פּוֹלִין) -- the Hebrew word for Poland -- interpreted as "Po-lin": po ("here") lin ("[you should] dwell"). In the dramatic reach of the building's exterior, the medium is the message. The message of "Polin," reported to have come to Poland's first Jewish settlers from a divine voice, was interpreted as "a haven for Jews." Now, in this very place, a thousand years of Jewish history will shine in the light of the building's façade..."

## [The Museum of the History of Polish Jews | Taube Philanthropies](#)

### **A tale of two town squares...**

Polish-Jews in much of Poland led segregated and insular lives largely because of adherence to traditional values. In the brilliant book "[Konin](#)," British author Theo Richmond reconstructs pre-war life in his parents' town of Konin in west Poland. As he searches for his Polish-Jewish roots, his meticulous research brings back to life a vibrant community, rich in characters and pathos. He describes a town with two town squares, separate shops and separate schools. Daughters would be sent to the local public Grammar schools and knew secular Polish culture very well, but the boys would be segregated in Jewish religious schools from early age. It describes how the two peoples, sharing the same space but also living apart, might misunderstand each other, not understand the same things at times, and be prone to wild speculation about each other because they don't know enough about each other..

### **Telling stories about each other...to each other**

I've always believed that the role of journalists is to help tell the stories of people and their communities to each other, so that we won't seem so strange from each other. And today we have enormously powerful media technologies that help us see others, and see other communities, with great insight and humanity.

The best example of this is the incredible job that the British media have done in showcasing the many diverse communities that make up the United Kingdom. Success is measured in how little strife there is between very different peoples. It makes for an outstanding cosmopolitan culture that cannot be matched anywhere.

It's good to see Polish-Jewish culture coming out of its dark cave, where its ghostly martyrs have been telling its story, a vastly incomplete one, the prequels are far more interesting.

Warsaw's newest museum is a jewel and it's the start of Poland trying to reconstruct its cultural genetic code and rediscover its own stories - representing tens of millions of lives engaged across a thousand years of industry and the arts. It's a fabulous story but most of us have only known its killer ending.

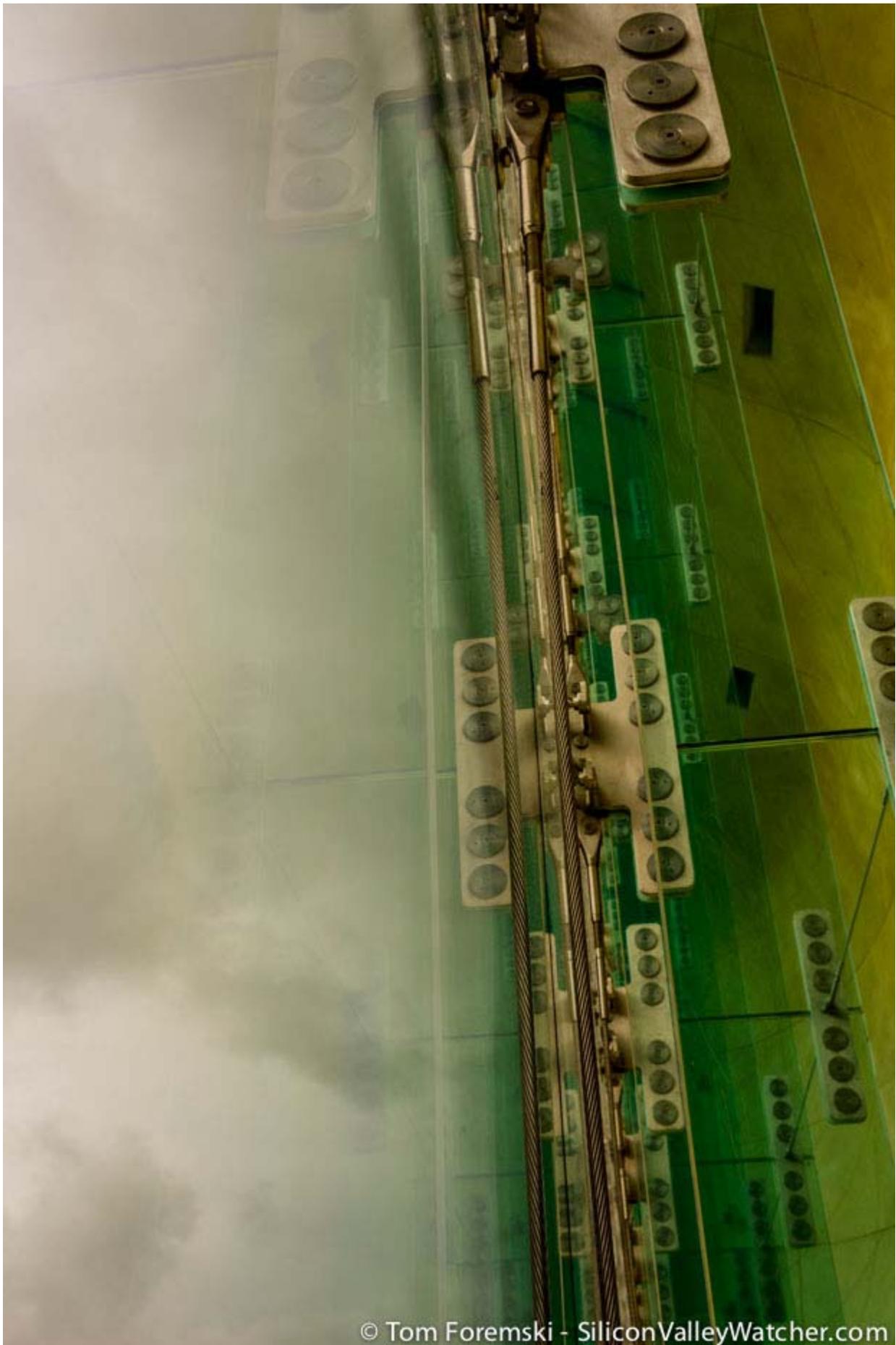
It's truly inspiring to see the start of this process of rediscovery, and by that very process - to deny the remaining victory of the Nazis - the eradication of a millennium of Polish-Jewish culture.

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**Please return for a profile of Tad Taube** - Silicon Valley's top philanthropist with more than \$550m in funds managed through his Taube foundations and the Koret Foundation. He escaped from Poland in 1939 just two months before war broke out, aged eight. He has made several fortunes in the chip equipment industry and in real estate. He has worked long and hard to make this museum a reality. His philanthropic ventures must rank way beyond those of any other Bay Area philanthropist, both in amounts of money and the metric of making a real change, over a multi-decade time span. No one comes close to [Thaddeus Taube](#).

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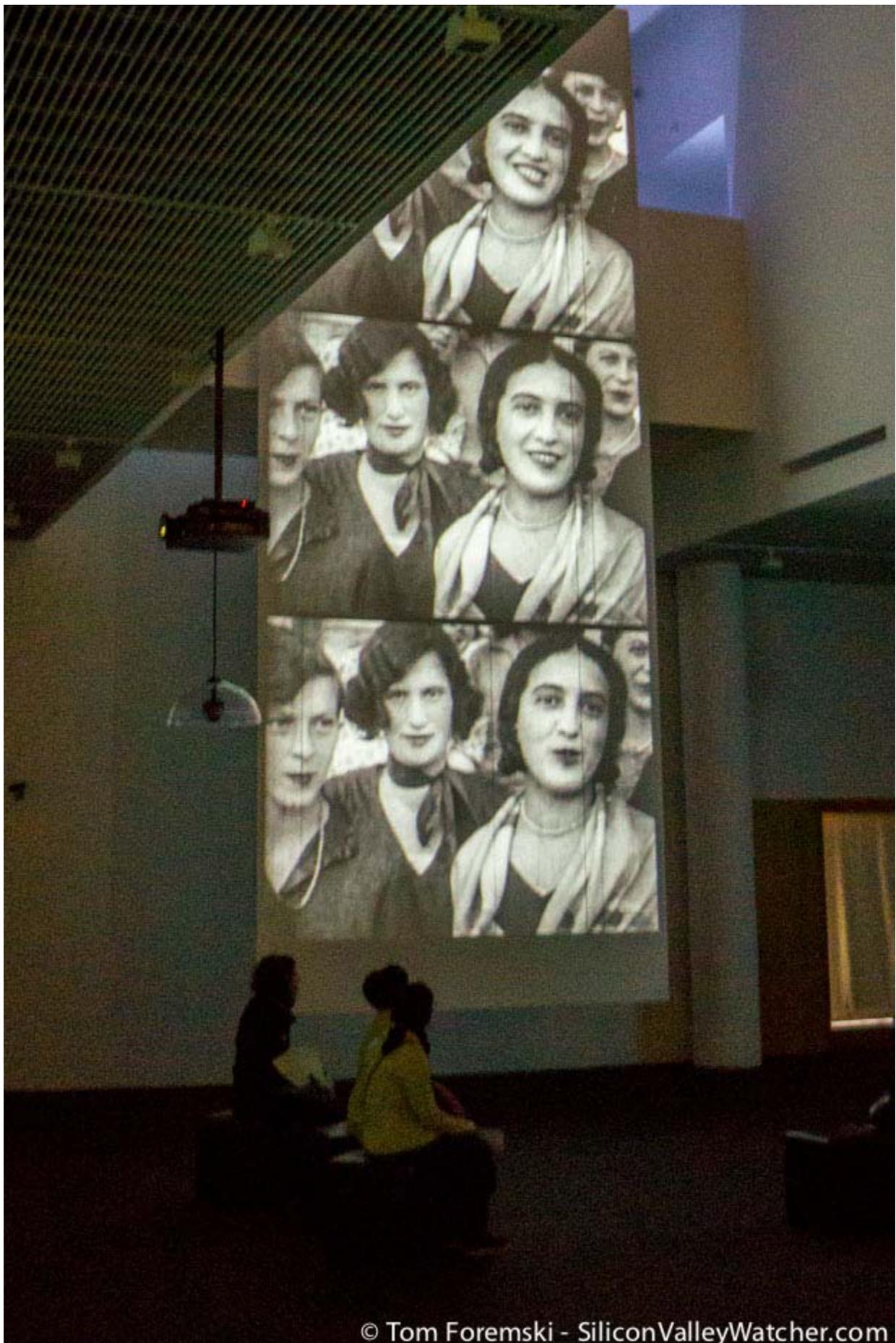
Here is a visual essay of a truly extraordinary museum:





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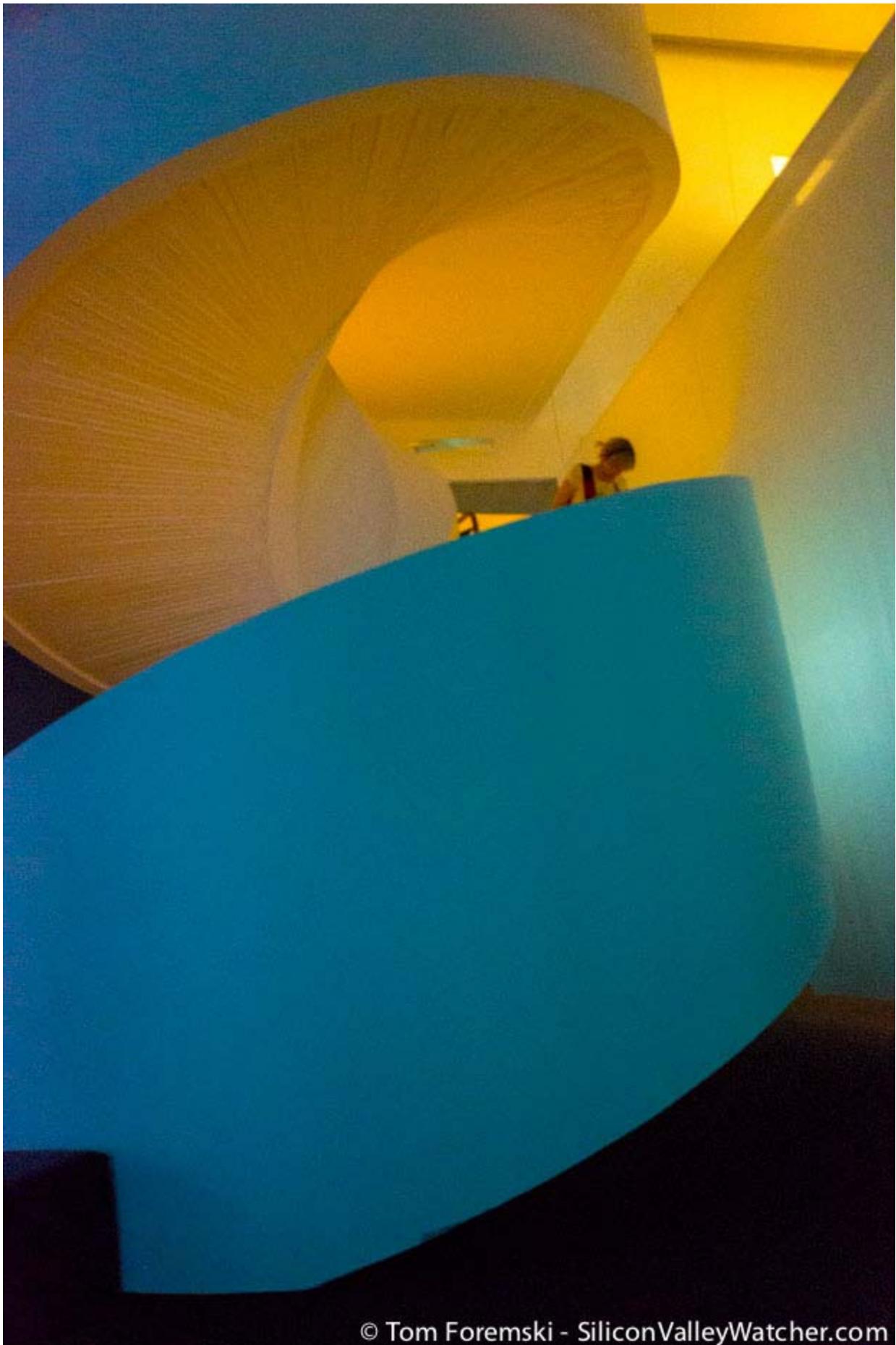
*A multi-sensory exhibit: "Letters from afar" - home movies made by US relatives of Polish-Jews before the Second World War.*



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*The moving images are projected onto multiple billowing screens of fabric, with the many layers seemingly symbolizing layers of time and understanding.*



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