

Background information on
the “Haus im Mohren”, Bonngasse 18

This listed property is one of the oldest 18th-century buildings which still exist in Bonn. Among its inhabitants were Gertrud Baum, Ludwig van Beethoven’s godmother, and his boyhood friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler. After Beethoven’s time in Bonn the house was later occupied by a merchant of spices and colonial goods. The house mark figure with its tobacco barrel and pipe has been on the facade of the building since at least the middle of the 19th century and the inscription “Im Mohren” also dates back to that time. The man is depicted with dark brown skin and dark curly hair and is scantily clad with a loincloth and feathered headdress, uniting different stereotypes used at that time to depict Black people. The word “Mohr” (Moor), originally taken from the name and partly associated with positive attributes of the North African Moors, had since the late 18th century also come to be used to describe people from more southerly regions of Africa. In time the word took on an increasingly derogatory meaning and it therefore does have racist connotations. The figure and the inscription on the facade of the building serve thus to remind us of the ideologically-based conception of man as was prevalent in those days. Against this background and in the light of current discussions we see ourselves as being encouraged and compelled to contribute to a critical debate regarding the history of the building and all forms of discrimination and structural racism whether past or present.

Regarding the façade of the “Haus im Mohren” property and the current identity debates the board of the Beethoven-Haus association declared in September 2020 to actively contribute to the critical reflection on the building’s history and all kinds of discrimination and structural racism in past and present days. An explanatory text on the façade and the Bridgetower Project are among the first results of this endeavour.