

Stephanie Barron, “Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany,”
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In 1937 the National Socialists staged the most virulent attack ever mounted against modern art with the opening on July 19 in Munich of the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art) exhibition, in which were brought together more than 650 important paintings, sculptures, prints, and books that had until a few weeks earlier been in the possession of thirty-two German public museum collections. The works were assembled for the purpose of clarifying for the German public by defamation and derision exactly what type of modern art was unacceptable to the Reich, and thus “un-German.” During the four months *Entartete Kunst* was on view in Munich it attracted more than two million visitors, over the next three years it traveled throughout Germany and Austria and was seen by nearly one million more. On most days twenty thousand visitors passed through the exhibition, which was free of charge; records state that on one Sunday August 2, 1937—thirty-six thousand people saw it.¹ The popularity of *Entartete Kunst* has never been matched by any other exhibition of modern art. According to newspaper accounts, five times as many people visited *Entartete Kunst* as saw the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German art exhibition), an equally large presentation of Nazi-approved art that had opened on the preceding day to inaugurate Munich's Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German art), the first official building erected by the National Socialists.

The thoroughness of the National Socialists' politicization of aesthetic issues remains unparalleled in modern history, as does the remarkable set of circumstances that led to the complete revocation of Germany's previous identification of its cultural heroes, not only in the visual arts but also in literature, music, and film. When the National Socialists assumed power in 1933, one of their first acts was an attack on contemporary authors; widespread book-burnings in which thousands of volumes were destroyed in public view announced the new policy toward the arts. The *Entartete Kunst* exhibition was only the tip of the iceberg: in 1937 more than sixteen thousand examples of modern art were confiscated as “degenerate” by a committee empowered by Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's second-in-command and since March of 1933 Reichsminister für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (Reich minister for public enlightenment and propaganda). While some of the impounded art was earmarked for *Entartete Kunst* in Munich, hundreds of works were sold for hard currency to foreign buyers. Many of the “dregs,” as Goebbels called them, were probably destroyed in a spectacular blaze in front of the central fire department in Berlin in 1939.²

The National Socialists rejected and censured virtually everything that had existed on the German modern art scene prior to 1933. Whether abstract or representational, the innocuously beautiful landscapes and portraits by August Macke, the expressionistically colored paintings by the popular Brücke artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, the biting social criticism of Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and George Grosz, or the efforts of the Bauhaus artists to forge a new link between art and industry—all were equally condemned. The Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums (Professional civil service restoration act) of April 7, 1933, enabled Nazi officials to dismiss non-Aryan government employees from their jobs. In that year alone more than twenty museum directors and curators, all of whom worked for state institutions, were fired.

Artists were forced to join official groups, and any "undesirables" were dismissed from teaching posts in the academies and artistic organizations. No matter what their political attitudes, artist who worked in abstract, Cubist, Expressionist, Surrealist, or other modern styles came under attack. Nolde, who was actually an early member of the National Socialist party, saw his own work declared "degenerate." Willi Baumeister and Beckmann were dismissed from their positions at the Frankfurt Stadelschule (Municipal school); Dix, Paul Klee, and Max Pechstein were fired from the academies in Dresden, Düsseldorf, and Berlin, respectively The Preussische Akademie (Prussian academy) in Berlin lost many important artists, including Ernst Barlach, Rudolf Belling, Dix, Ludwig Gies, Karl Hofer, Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, Kathe Kollwitz, Max Liebermann, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Pechstein, and Bruno Taut. Most of the artists who were persecuted were not Jewish; on the contrary—of those mentioned above only Liebermann was Jewish, and of the 112 artists included in *Entartete Kunst* only 6 were Jews. Any artists who were mentioned or whose work was illustrated in any of the well-publicized books on contemporary art by Ludwig Justi or Carl Einstein or in avant-garde periodicals such as *Das Kunstblatt* (The art paper), *Die Aktion* (Action), or *Der Sturm* (The storm) were easy targets for the National Socialists. In 1979 Berthold Hinz produced evidence that Einstein's *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The art of the twentieth century) was in fact used as a guide by many of the National Socialists in defining who and what was modern, and consequently "un-German" and to be vilified.³ With the swift imprint of the censors stamp they outlawed an entire generation of modernism.

While the focus of "*Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*" is on events in the visual arts, these can be seen as indicative of prohibitions in the wider spectrum of the cultural arena. It is worthwhile to look at the various areas that came under the jurisdiction of the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda. In November 1933 Goebbels established Reichskammern (Reich chambers) of film, music, radio broadcasting, press, theater, and writers, in addition to the fine arts. Each of the heads of these chambers had under him (there were no women) seven departments incorporating further subdivisions. The Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (Reich chamber of visual arts), for example, was divided into departments of 1) administration; 2) press and propaganda; 3) architecture, landscape architecture, and interior design; 4) painting, sculpture, and graphic arts; 5) commercial illustration and design; 6) art promotion, artists' associations, and craft associations; and 7) art publishing, sales, and auctioneering.

What becomes apparent is the microscopic attention the Nazi hierarchy accorded the observation and regulation of all aspects of cultural life in the Reich. The government established procedures whereby it decided what and who was acceptable or undesirable. Exclusion was tantamount to permanent disbarment. One can only wonder at the disproportionate amount of bureaucratic organization, paperwork, rules, and regulations that was aimed at an area of society that was economically, politically, and militaristically unthreatening. Obviously the National Socialists perceived the cultural life of the citizens of the Reich to be extremely important and worthy of such intensive concern. This elevation of art to such a major role in a totalitarian society was without historical precedent, other than in the Soviet Union. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt wrote in the early 1950s, "Such complete monopolization of the entire creative potential of a people, of every aesthetic instinct, such subjugation of every current of its productivity and its capacity for artistic experience to the purposes of the leaders of collective society does not exist before the present century."⁴ Although Hitler had a personal interest and involvement with art, due to his unsuccessful career as a painter in Vienna, Lehmann-Haupt argues convincingly

that the preoccupation of the National Socialists with culture far transcended Hitler's own frustrated flirtation with art.⁵

Degeneracy and Nazi ideology in the 1920s and 1930s

The Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung and *Entartete Kunst* did not occur as isolated incidents. The issues raised, the fusion of political and aesthetic themes, and the use of the term *entartet* to designate supposedly inferior racial, sexual, and moral types had been in the air for several years. (*Entartet*, which has traditionally been translated as "degenerate" or "decadent," is essentially a biological term, defining a plant or animal that has so changed that it no longer belongs to its species. By extension it refers to art that is unclassifiable or so far beyond the confines of what is accepted that it is in essence "non-art.")

The events leading up to 1937 had their roots in German cultural history long before the National Socialist party was formed. The year 1871 marked both the emergence of the German empire and the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, a book later used to justify German racism. As a unified country Germany became prone to an intense nationalism that manifested itself quite often as a belief in the natural superiority of the Aryan people. The myth of the blond, blue-eyed Nordic hero as the embodiment of the future of Western civilization was promoted in the writings of several European authors of the early twentieth century, including Count Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Hans Günther, and Alfred Rosenberg. In the decade between 1910 and 1920 the concept of racism had achieved popularity in the middle class. By the 1920s certain authors argued that racial characteristics and art were linked and attempted to "prove" that the style of a work of art was determined by the race of the artist.⁶ This period in German history also saw the efflorescence of modern art, literature, film, and music created by individuals who would be labeled "degenerate" in the 1930s. German art virtually exploded in a series of events in Berlin, Dresden, and Munich. The emergence of the artists' groups Die Brücke (The bridge) and Der Blaue Reiter (The blue rider), the publication of important radical periodicals to which artists contributed, and the intense response by artists and writers to the cataclysmic events of the First World War characterized the first phase of German Expressionism. These artists and writers were also drawn to the exotic: the carvings and wall hangings of African and Oceanic peoples that the Brücke artists saw in the Dresden Volkerkunde-Museum (Ethnographic museum), for example, or the art of the insane that served as inspiration for the poetry and prose of such esteemed authors as Hugo Ball, Alfred Döblin, and Wieland Herzfelde. In the wake of the war avant-garde German art came increasingly into conflict with the nationalistic realism that was more easily understood by the average German. The country had experienced a humiliating defeat and had been assessed for huge war reparations that grievously taxed its already shaky economy. Movements such as Expressionism, Cubism, and Dada were often viewed as intellectual, elitist, and foreign by the demoralized nation and linked to the economic collapse, which was blamed on a supposed international conspiracy of Communists and Jews. Many avant-garde artists continued their involvement in Socialism during the turbulent Weimar era and made their sentiments known through their art. This identification of the more abstract art movements with internationalism and progressive politics created highly visible targets for the aggressive nationalism that gave birth to the National Socialist party, even as institutions such as the Bauhaus school moved into the cultural mainstream and German museums exhibited more and more avant-garde work.

Concurrent with important artistic developments, pseudoscientific treatises such as Max Nordau's *Entartung* (Degeneration) of 1892 were enjoying renewed popularity.⁷ Nordau, himself

a Jew, wrote a ponderous text vilifying the Pre-Raphaelites, Symbolism, Henrik Ibsen, and Emile Zola, among others, as he sought to prove the superiority of traditional German culture. In 1895 George Bernard Shaw had written a brilliant and scathing review of Nordau's book,⁸ one of several responses provoked internationally. Unfortunately, the criticism had little impact on the architects of Nazi ideology. *Entartung* and other racist works took the widely accepted view that nineteenth-century realistic genre painting represented the culmination of a long tradition of true Aryan art. Even before they obtained a majority in the Reichstag (Parliament), disgruntled theorists and polemicists had written and spoken of how "good German art" was being overrun by "degenerates, Jews, and other insidious influences." The avant-garde artist was equated to the insane, who in turn was synonymous with the Jew: the nineteenth-century founders of German psychiatry felt that the Jew was inherently degenerate and more susceptible than the non-Jew to insanity.⁹ As Sander Gilman has pointed out, the classifications of "degenerate" and "healthy" appeared for the first time in the late nineteenth century; by the late 1930s they were fairly standard in discussions about the avant-garde and the traditional.¹⁰

Opposition to the wave of avant-garde activities in German museums had begun in the 1920s; with the founding of the Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft (German art association), which had as its goals a "common action against the corruption of art" and the promotion of an "art that was pure German, with the German soul reflecting art." They attacked exhibitions of the works of Beckmann, Grosz, and other proponents of "Kulturbolschewismus" (art-Bolshevism). In 1927 Rosenberg, the chief architect of Nazi cultural policy, founded the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur (Combat league for German culture), which had the same goals as the Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft. It was at first an underground organization, but with the rise of National Socialism it worked openly with the party leadership. In 1930 Rosenberg wrote *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe* (The myth of the twentieth century: an evaluation of the spiritual-intellectual confrontations of our age), in which he denounced Expressionism and other modern art forms: "Creativity was broken because it had oriented itself, ideologically and artistically, toward a foreign standard and thus was no longer attuned to the demands of life."¹¹

In 1929 the state of Thuringia elected Wilhelm Frick, a member of the Nazi party, as representative to the Reichstag. Frick was named Innenminister (Minister of the interior) for Thuringia. His actions gave a foretaste of what the Nazi seizure of power would mean: he began by replacing most department heads, issuing new cultural policies, and even encouraging the dismissal of Walter Gropius and the entire twenty-nine-member faculty of the Bauhaus in Weimar, which was located within his jurisdiction.

Frick appointed Paul Schultze-Naumburg, an architect and racial theorist, to replace Gropius. In 1925 Schultze-Naumburg had published an attack on the Bauhaus, *Das ABC des Bauens* (The ABCs of building), and in 1928 he wrote *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and race), which would have a far-reaching influence in the Nazi scheme against modernism. Exploiting the popularity of Nordau's treatise, Schultze-Naumburg attacked modern art as "entartet." He juxtaposed examples of modern art and photographs of deformed or diseased people to suggest that they were the models for the elongated faces of Amedeo Modigliani, the angular physiognomies of Schmidt-Rottluff, and the florid faces of Dix. He railed particularly against the Expressionists, who he felt represented the inferior aspect of modern German culture.

Heidelberg had become a center for the study of art produced by schizophrenics as a means of access to the central problems of mental illness. In 1922 psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn had published his study *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (image-making by the mentally ill), which

was based on material he had assembled: he examined more than 5,000 works by 450 patients to demonstrate that the art of the insane exhibited certain specific qualities.¹² The study received serious attention far beyond the medical profession. Although we have no evidence that Hitler, the failed artist, read or even knew of Prinzhorn's book, the attention devoted to it was so widespread that it is more likely than not to have reached him. Thus, it is not surprising that Schultze-Naumburg's methodology of comparing the works of insane artists to avant-garde art was seized upon as a further way to "prove" the "degeneracy" of modern art. The technique of comparison for the purpose of denigration and condemnation thus became a basic tool of the Nazi campaign. In 1933 in Erlangen one of the many precursors of *Entartete Kunst* included thirty-two paintings by contemporary artists shown with works by children and the mentally ill.¹³ The same technique was used on several pages in

the illustrated brochure published to accompany *Entartete Kunst* as it traveled around Germany.

There emerged in 1934 some confusion about the "official" attitude toward the Expressionists, artists such as Barlach and Nolde in particular. Some factions saw this art as truly German and Nordic, with roots in the Gothic era. Goebbels initially sided with these proponents, in fact, he surrounded himself with examples of Barlach's sculpture and Nolde's painting; he saw the spirit and chaos of Expressionism as analogous to the spirit of Nazi youth. At extreme odds with him was Rosenberg, who sought to promote *völkisch* art (art of and for the German people) over any type of modern aesthetic. Goebbels and Rosenberg took opposing sides in their speeches and writings, neither yet sure of the Führer's opinion.¹⁴ When Hitler appointed Rosenberg early in 1934 to supervise all "intellectual and ideological training," he gave him a rank equal to Goebbels's in his role as president of the Reichskulturkammer (Reich chamber of culture). The ideological tug-of-war continued well into the year, until the controversy required Hitler's intervention. In September, at the party rally in Nuremberg, Hitler spoke of the dangers of artistic sabotage by the Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists, and others who were threatening artistic growth, but he also cautioned against excessively retrograde German art. Thus, neither Expressionism nor the conservative *völkisch* art received his blessing. Nazi-approved art would be based exclusively on German racial tradition. Henceforth, all forms of modernism, including art criticism, were outlawed.

The unusual methodology employed by the Nazis in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition entailed the gathering of works of art for the specific purpose of defamation. Never before had there been such an effort; perhaps only Soviet Russia in the years following the revolution of 1917 offers a parallel for the efflorescence of modernism and its immediate repudiation by the government in power. The late-nineteenth-century French *Salons des Refuses*, in which art outside the academic tradition could be seen, were state-sanctioned opportunities for the avant-garde to emerge. By contrast, the Nazis exhibited works contrary to their "approved" art in order to condemn them. There was no chance for an alternative voice to be heard.

As early as 1933 the seeds had been sown for the approach used in the Munich exhibition four years later. In that year the *Deutscher Kunstbericht* (German art report), under Goebbels's jurisdiction, published a five-point manifesto stating "what German artists expect from the new government." Much of the content of the manifesto was generated by artists outside the mainstream avant-garde who felt that the art world had passed them by. They sought revenge on a modern art that was becoming increasingly identified with Germany in the international art world. The manifesto laid the groundwork for the events in 1937:

- All works of a cosmopolitan or Bolshevik nature should be removed from German museums and collections, but first they should be exhibited to the public, who should be informed of the details of their acquisition, and then burned.
- All museum directors who "wasted" public monies by purchasing "un-German" art should be fired immediately.
- No artist with Marxist or Bolshevik connections should be mentioned henceforth
- No boxlike buildings should be built [an assault on Bauhaus architecture].
- All public sculptures not "approved" by the German public should be immediately removed [this applied especially to Barlach and Wilhelm Lehmbruck].

The attack on the museums

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, museums, art dealers, and periodicals in Germany were greatly attuned to avant-garde activities in Europe and were avid advocates for the most recent developments. Museum curators and directors had responded eagerly to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. In 1897 the Nationalgalerie in Berlin became the first museum in the world to acquire a painting by Paul Cezanne, and the Museum Folkwang in Essen was among the earliest public supporters of the work of Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh. Herwarth Walden, with his gallery and publication *Der Sturm*, was a staunch supporter of Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, and the Russian avant-garde.

In 1949 Paul Ortwin Rave, who had become a curator at the Berlin Nationalgalerie in the 1930s, wrote the first book describing the artistic situation under the Nazi regime, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (Art dictatorship in the Third Reich), which contained his eyewitness account of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition.¹⁵ What emerges from his description of the activities of German museums from 1919 through 1939 is a picture of a country filled with museums actively committed to modern art, to its acquisition and display. Alexander Doerner in Hannover, Gustav Hartlaub and Fritz Wichert in Mannheim, Carl Georg Heise in Lübeck, Ludwig Justi in Berlin, Alfred Lichtwark in Hamburg, Karl Ernst Osthaus in Hagen, Max Sauerlandt in Halle and later in Hamburg, Alois Schardt in Halle, Georg Swarzenski in Frankfurt, and Hugo von Tschudi in Berlin and later in Munich were among the museum directors who proselytized for contemporary art. They were responsible for acquiring, often directly from the artists, major works by Barlach, Beckmann, Lyonel Feininger, Erich Heckel, Kirchner, Lehmbruck, Macke, Franz Marc, Nolde, Pechstein, Christian Rohlf, and Schmidt-Rottluff, as well as artists of the earlier generation, Lovis Corinth, Liebermann, and Max Slevogt. They were not only committed to contemporary German art but also acquired in significant quantity important works by foreign Impressionists and Post-Impressionists Cezanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, and Paul Signac and the art of contemporary foreigners such as James Ensor, Wassily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, and Pablo Picasso.

The exhibitions they organized, which frequently traveled, helped to define artistic trends and were important signs to foreign museums and dealers of the healthy state of contemporary art in Germany. Important international exhibitions in Cologne in 1912, Dresden in 1919, and Dusseldorf and Hannover in 1928 exposed new German art to a wider public. Contemporary German art was shown in Florence, London, New York, Paris, Pittsburgh, and Stockholm. In 1931 Alfred Barr, Jr, traveled in Germany to prepare his *Modern German Painting and Sculpture* for the fledgling Museum of Modern Art in New York. He was so impressed by what he saw in the museums that he made a point in his catalogue of citing the contemporary collecting policies of German public institutions.

However much modern German art is admired or misunderstood abroad, it is certainly supported publicly and privately in Germany with extraordinary generosity. Museum directors have the courage, foresight and knowledge to buy works by the most advanced artists long before public opinion forces them to do so. Some fifty German Museums, as the lists in this catalogue suggest, are a most positive factor both in supporting artists and in educating the public to an understanding of their work.¹⁶

After visiting a New York gallery showing of works of modern German art in 1939 the reviewer for the *New York World-Telegram* wrote "One's first reaction on seeing them is of amazement that such early examples of work by men who were later to become world famous should have been purchased by museums in Germany so many years ago."¹⁷

The Nationalgalerie in Berlin housed the most representative collection of contemporary German art. On October 30, 1936, immediately following the close of the Summer Olympics, Goebbels ordered the gallery's contemporary rooms to be closed to the public. From Annegret Janda's essay in this volume we learn how this most visible forum for modern art was a battleground in which a succession of museum directors engaged in a struggle to reorganize and protect the collection, to preserve some aesthetic dignity, and even to continue to acquire contemporary art with dwindling funds. After coming to power the National Socialists began a systematic campaign to confiscate modernist works from public museum collections. Hitler saw an attack on modernism as an opportunity to use the average German's distrust of avant-garde art to further his political objectives against Jews, Communists, and non-Aryans. The charge of "degeneracy" was leveled at avant-garde practitioners of music, literature, film, and visual art, and their works were confiscated to "purify" German culture. In 1933 the earliest exhibitions of "degenerate" art were organized to show the German people the products of the "cultural collapse" of Germany that would be purged from the Third Reich. Confiscated works were assembled into *Schreckenskammern den Kunst* (chambers of horror of art) whose organizers decried the fact that public monies had been wasted on these modern "horrors" and implied that many of the works had been foisted on the museums by a cabal of Jewish art dealers. These precursors to the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich in 1937 sprang up throughout Germany, often featuring works from the local museums (see Christoph Zuschlag's essay in this catalogue). *Entartete Kunst* was not the only anti-modernist exhibition to occur in 1937. The Institut für Deutsche Kultur- und Wirtschaftspropaganda (Institute for German cultural and economic propaganda), a section of Goebbels's ministry, organized the *Grosse antibolschewistische Ausstellung* (Great anti-Bolshevist exhibition), which ran in Nuremberg from September 5 to September 29 and then traveled to several other venues, and orchestrated the tour of the NSDAP's exhibition *Der ewige Jude* (The eternal Jew) from Munich to Vienna, Berlin, Bremen, Dresden, and Magdeburg from late 1937 to mid-1939.

The Kunsthalle Mannheim: An example

The situation in Mannheim was typical of that of many other German museums out of the spotlight of Berlin; one could just as easily have chosen the Landesmuseum in Hannover, the Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, or the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg in Halle.¹⁸

Between 1909 and 1923 Fritz Wichert, the director of the Kunsthalle Mannheim, purchased several key examples of French and German Impressionism and German

Expressionism, including paintings by Alexander Archipenko, Beckmann, Corinth, Kirchner, and Liebermann Sally Falk's donations of works by Lehmbruck and Ernesto de Fiori provided the nucleus for a growing collection of sculpture.¹⁹

Wichert's successor was Gustav Hartlaub, whose tenure extended from 1923 until 1934, when he was forced to resign. He was responsible for most of the exhibitions and major acquisitions of Expressionist and modern art that made Mannheim a center for those who wanted to see current art in Germany. The files of the Kunsthalle yield an interesting picture of the volume and velocity of these purchases and exhibitions and of Hartlaub's voracious interest in contemporary art, including the Fauves, Die Brücke, Der Blaue Reiter, Neue Sachlichkeit (New objectivity), and other examples of German and non-German avant-garde art:

1924-25	Exhibition: Deutscher Werkbund 'Die Form' Acquisition: Grosz, Grosstadt
1925-26	Exhibitions: Edvard Munch; Neue Sachlichkeit Acquisitions: Marc Chagall, Blaues Haus; Dix, Die Witwe; Grosz, Max Hermann-Neisse; Kirchner, Stilleben
1927-28	Exhibitions James Ensor; Wege and Richtungen den Abstraktion Acquisitions: Baumeister, Tischgesellschaft; Robert Delaunay; St. Severin; Ensor, Masks and Death; Oskar Schlemmer, Frauentreppe
1928-29	Exhibition: Max Beckmann Acquisitions: Beckmann, Pierrette and Clown, Das Liebespaar, Chagall, Rabbiner; Andre Derain, Landscape
1929-30	Acquisition: Heinrich Hoerle, Melancholie
1930-31	Exhibitions: Bauhaus; Neues von Gestern Acquisition: Jankel Adler, Zwei Mädchen
1931-32	Exhibitions: Oskar Kokoschka; Georg Minne
1932-33	only graphics
1933-34	nothing major
1934-35	only graphics

As early as the mid-1920s museums had felt the cold wind of censorship. In 1925 Hartlaub's *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition traveled to the Chemnitz Kunsthütte, where the director, Dr Schreiber Wiegand, asked Hartlaub to make some changes in the catalogue.

We are most grateful to you for your permission to use your introduction to the catalogue, but with regard to our special art-political conditions, I have one request. Since in the attacks on our collecting activities these [works] are regarded as "Bolshevism in art," might we change a few words in three paragraphs? On page t could we simply leave out the word "Katastrophenzeit" [catastrophic time], and maybe on the next page express the sentence a little less controversially) I would like to avoid any problems.... [I] ask for your friendly understanding of our local situation. You yourself know how everything now is affected by political conditions and [those who] want to kill everything that does not please them. This includes Expressionism, of course, especially my purchases of pictures by Schmidt-Rottluff, Kirchner, and Heckel.²⁰

Hartlaub obliged so that the exhibition and catalogue could proceed as planned. By the early 1930s, however, his own freedom was increasingly hampered. During the last year of his directorship Mannheim was the scene of public protests against some of his acquisitions, including Chagall's *Rabbiner* (Rabbi), which was the subject of a window display in the town incorporating the sign, "Taxpayer, you should know how your money was spent." In 1934 Hartlaub became the first museum director to be fired by the National Socialists. Other directors who soon joined the ranks of those dismissed by the Nazis included Heise in Ldbecki Justi in Berlini Sauerlandt, then director of the Hamburg Museum für Kunst and Gewerbe Schreiber-Wiegand in Chemnitz and Swarzenski in Frankfurt.

On two separate occasions, July 8 and August 28, 1937, the Kunsthalle Mannheim was visited by the special committee empowered by Goebbels to confiscate examples of "degenerate" art from German museums. Mannheim was one of their most successful stops: they seized over six hundred works by artists such as non-Germans Chagall, Delaunay, Derain, Ensor, and Edvard Munch and Germans Beckmann, Corinth, Grosz, Lehmbruck, Nolde, and Schlemmer. Most of these masterworks are lost; a few fortunately, have been reacquired by the Kunsthalle, and others are dispersed in public and private collections.

The "Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung," 1937

On October 15, 1933, at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Hitler said he was laying the "foundations for this new temple in honor of the goddess of art." The architect, Paul Troost, insisted from the beginning that the building was to be a representative structure for the new German art. Due to the expensive materials used and the monumental scale of the rooms the building attracted enormous attention. Hitler announced that it was the first new building worthy to take its place among the immortal achievements of the German artistic heritage.²¹ (It was also in this speech that he delivered the ultimatum that the National Socialists would give the people four years time to adjust to the cultural policies of the new government.)

The year 1937 represents both a nadir and zenith for the National Socialists in terms of their campaign against modern art. Hitler evidently concurred with Troost that the Haus der Deutschen Kunst should display contemporary art; in fact, he planned to use an exhibition of approved German art as a chance to further shape cultural policy.²² To find the art to fill the spacious new halls the National Socialists staged an open competition chaired by Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste. The competition was open to all German artists, and approximately fifteen thousand works were submitted. Much to the frustration of the organizers they were provided with no clear guidelines for the selection of works to be included in the exhibition. Goebbels and Hitler himself participated in the selection, and Goebbels noted in his diary, "The sculpture is going well, but the painting is a real catastrophe at the moment. They have hung works that make us shudder. The Führer is in a rage."²³ Hitler added some artists who had previously been rejected and threw out the work of several who had been judged acceptable. He abhorred "unfinished work," which subsequently became a criterion in the selection process. Eventually, nine hundred works were chosen from which the final selection would be made.

On July 18 in Munich, Hitler presided over the opening, held with great pomp and ceremony, of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst and its inaugural exhibition of approved art. The *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* brought together over six hundred paintings and sculptures that were intended to demonstrate the triumph of German art in the Third Reich. Hitler announced:

From now on we are going to wage a merciless war of destruction against the last remaining elements of cultural disintegration.... Should there be someone among [the artists] who still believes in his higher destiny—well now, he has had four years' time to prove himself. These four years are sufficient for us, too, to reach a definite judgment. From now on—of that you can be certain—all those mutually supporting and thereby sustaining cliques of chatterers, dilettantes, and art forgers will be picked up and liquidated. For all we care, those prehistoric Stone-Age culture-barbarians and art-stutterers can return to the caves of their ancestors and there can apply their primitive international scratchings.²⁴

The *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* was the first of eight annual exhibitions, from 1937 to 1944, mounted in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in the Nazis' attempt to present the best of German artistic creation, a continuation of the exhibitions that had formerly taken place in the Munich Glaspalast (Glass palace), which had burned to the ground in 1931. There was a tradition in several German cities of staging annual open competitive exhibitions for local artists in which all the works of art were for sale; they were characterized by the display of distinctly conservative and traditional art, which entertained a consistently loyal public. In this respect the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellungen* were no different, except that they were larger, less parochial, and actively sponsored by the government. Installation photos and film footage indicate that the art was arranged by category—landscapes, portraits, nudes, military subjects—in the way commodities would be sold in separate areas in a market. The sales opportunities were fairly promising, and this alone may have convinced some artists to embrace National Socialist policies, since without their approval it was virtually impossible to sell contemporary art in Germany. Many of the purchases were used to decorate public buildings and offices. Several of the buyers were among the Nazi elite, who purchased the works for their official residences.²⁵

At the time of each opening there occurred an elaborate pageant on the "Tag der Deutschen Kunst" (German art day). Participants wore historical costumes and created floats featuring models of well-known works of art that were driven through the streets of Munich. The opening ceremonies attracted anywhere from 400,000 to 800,000 visitors. In his inaugural speech in 1937 Hitler announced that, "When we celebrated the laying of the cornerstone for this building four years ago, we were all aware that we had to lay not only the cornerstone for a new home but also the foundations for a new and genuine German art. We had to bring about a turning point in the evolution of all our German cultural activities." The 1937 pageant was centered around the theme, "Zweitausend Jahre Deutsche Kultur" (Two thousand years of German culture). Hundreds of thousands of spectators watched the spectacle of a parade of more than three thousand costumed participants and four hundred animals. Immediately following this overblown performance thousands of uniformed soldiers marched through the streets, as if to provide the ultimate marvel. The official National Socialist newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, described the events in glowing words: "Today we sat as spectators in the theater of our own time and saw greatness" (July 19, 1937).

In the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* the Nazis sought to promote mediocre genre painting as mainstream art, the most recent achievement in a continuum of centuries of German art. It was meant to wipe out any hint of the modernism, Expressionism, Dada, New Objectivity, Futurism, and Cubism that had permeated the museums, galleries, journals, and press since 1910.

The National Socialists sought to rewrite art history, to omit what we know as the avant-garde from the history of modern art.

The situation was slightly different for sculpture. Guidelines were more difficult to observe, artists' motives more difficult to judge. Sculptors were apt to discover that some examples of their work were championed by the National Socialists and others lumped with "degenerate" art. One artist's work was inadvertently included in both the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* and *Entartete Kunst*: Belling's *Boxer Max Schmeling* was on view in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, while his *Dreiklang* (Triad) and *Kopf* (Head) were branded "degenerate" next door. Georg Kolbe and Gerhard Marcks had some of their earlier Expressionist works confiscated from German museums, yet their contemporary images found favor with the Nazi elite, and they continued to work openly (although two of Marcks's works were in *Entartete Kunst*). Even Arno Breker, the Nazis' sculptor of choice, saw one of his early sculptures confiscated. More conservative sculpture in the tradition of Aristide Maillol and Auguste Rodin had a significant following before the Nazis came to power and continued to be appreciated under Hitler's regime.

The campaign against modern art museums

Goebbels issued a decree on June 30, 1937, giving Ziegler and a five-man commission the authority to visit all major German museums and select works for an exhibition of "degenerate" that was to open in Munich at the same time as the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*:

On the express authority of the Führer I hereby empower the president of the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, Professor Ziegler of Munich, to select and secure for an exhibition works of German degenerate art since 1910, both painting and sculpture, which are now in collections owned by the German Reich, individual regions, or local communities. You are requested to give Prof. Ziegler your full support during his examination and selection of these works.²⁶

The directive went on to define works of "degenerate" art as those that either "insult German feeling, or destroy or confuse natural form, or simply reveal an absence of adequate manual and artistic skill." To have the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* and *Entartete Kunst* on view simultaneously would underscore the triumph of official art over "degenerate" art. This was to be a far more ambitious action than any of the small exhibitions mounted since 1933. Ziegler's commission was made up of individuals who, as critics of modernism, were well suited to their task; among them were Count Klaus von Baudissin, an SS officer who during his brief tenure as director of the Museum Folkwang in Essen had already cleared the museum of "offensive" examples of modern art, and Wolfgang Willrich, author of *Säuberung des Kunsttempels* (Cleansing of the temple of art), a racist pamphlet whose methods of excoriation of modern art played an important role in the concept and content of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition. The other members were commissioner for artistic design Hans Schweitzer, art theoretician Robert Scholz, and art teacher and polemicist Walter Hansen.

According to Rave, in the first two weeks of July about seven hundred works were shipped to Munich from thirty-two museums in twenty-eight cities. Museums in Berlin, Bielefeld, Bremen, Breslau, Chemnitz, Cologne, Dresden, Ddsseldorf, Erfurt, Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hannover, Jena, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Königsberg, Leipzig, Lübeck, Mannheim, Munich, Saarbrücken, Stettin, Stuttgart, Ulm, Weimar, Wiesbaden, and Wuppertal were purged of their

holdings of Expressionism, Futurism, Constructivism, Dada, and New Objectivity. At the Kunsthalle Mannheim, for example, the commission selected eighteen paintings, five sculptures, and thirty-five graphic works, which were shipped immediately to Munich.

The commission revisited most of the museums later in the summer and selected additional works, so that a total of approximately sixteen thousand paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints by fourteen hundred artists were confiscated and shipped to Berlin to await final disposal. The commission overstepped its authority and seized works created prior to 1910, as well as those by non-German artists. The plundering continued until 1938 and was finally "legalized" retroactively under a law of May 31, 1938, that stated that "products of degenerate art that have been secured in museums or in collections open to the public before this law went in to effect . . . may be appropriated by the Reich without compensation."

The works not included in *Entartete Kunst* and those from the second round of confiscations were sent to Berlin and stored in a warehouse on Köpenicker Strasse where they were inventoried. Those of "international value" that could be sold outside Germany for substantial sums were later weeded out and sent to another storage facility at Schloss Niederschönhausen. Goebbels created another commission, for the "disposal of confiscated works of degenerate art," which was to decide which works were to be sold for foreign currency and at what prices. This group included Ziegler, Schweitzer, and Scholz, with the addition of Franz Hofmann, Carl Meder, Karl Haberstock, and Max Taeuber. The work of this commission and its effect are discussed later in this volume in essays by Andreas Hüneke and myself.

"Entartete Kunst"

On July 19, 1937, Ziegler opened the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition across the park from the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, in a building formerly occupied by the Institute of Archeology. The exhibition rooms had been cleared, and temporary partitions were erected on which the objects were crowded together in a chaotic arrangement, which is not surprising when one considers that the art was confiscated, shipped to Munich, and installed in less than two weeks. The paintings, some of which had had their frames removed, were vaguely organized into thematic groupings, the first time Expressionist works were presented in this way. While the first rooms were tightly grouped according to themes—religion, Jewish artists, the vilification of women—the rest of the exhibition was a composite of subjects and styles that were anathema to the National Socialists, including abstraction, antimilitarism, and art that seemed to be (or at least to be related to) the work of the mentally ill. (The specific organization of the works in Munich is discussed in this volume by Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, who has painstakingly recreated the installation and inventory of the exhibition.) Directly on the wall under many of the works were hand-lettered labels indicating how much money had been spent by each museum to acquire this "art." The fact that the radical postwar inflation of the 1920s had led to grossly exaggerated figures—in November 1920 a dollar was worth 4.2 billion marks!—was conveniently not mentioned.

Quotations and slogans by proscribed critics and museum directors and condemnatory statements by Hitler and other party members were scrawled across the walls. Since every work of art included in *Entartete Kunst* had been taken from a public collection, the event was meant not only to denigrate the artists but also to condemn the actions of the institutions, directors, curators, and dealers involved with the acquisition of modern art.

Entartete Kunst was to have been on view through the end of September, but the astonishing attendance prompted the organizers to extend the run until the end of November. Plans were also made to circulate the exhibition to other German cities, with Berlin as the first

stop. The leaders of the various *Gaus* (regions into which Germany had been divided by the National Socialists for administrative reasons) vied for the opportunity to present the exhibition, but only the most important were accorded the chance *Entartete Kunst* in varying configurations ultimately traveled to thirteen German and Austrian cities through April of 1941. (The tour is discussed and documented in Zuschlag's essay.) Shortly before the show closed in Munich, Zieglers office appointed Hartmut Pistauer as the exhibition coordinator. It was his job to make the arrangements for each venue, supervise the installation, and greet any important party visitors at the opening on behalf of the Propagandaministerium (Ministry of propaganda).²⁷

When *Entartete Kunst* opened in Munich, no catalogue was available. Shortly before the exhibition closed in November, a thirty-two page booklet was published to accompany the touring presentation. This *Austellungsführer* (exhibition guide) stated the aims of the exhibition and reproduced excerpts from Hitler's speeches condemning the art and the artists that produced it (a facsimile and translation by David Britt are presented in this volume). Some of the same quotations that were used on the walls in Munich found their way into the booklet, and Schultze-Naumburg's technique of juxtaposition was prominently featured: images of art by the mentally ill from the Prinzhorn Collection were placed next to photographs of works by Rudolf Haizmann, Eugen Hoffmann, Klee, and Kokoschka, with captions such as, "Which of these three drawings is the work of...an inmate of a lunatic asylum?" Although not all the works illustrated in the booklet were included in *Entartete Kunst*, all were by artists who were represented in the exhibition. The cover featured *Der neue Mensch* (The new man), a famous sculpture (later destroyed) by the Jewish artist Otto Freundlich, with the words *Entartete "Kunst"* partly obscuring the image. By printing "Kunst" to look as if it had been rudely scrawled in red crayon and by enclosing it in quotation marks, the National Socialists clearly made the point that although they considered this material degenerate, they certainly did not consider it art.

One of the inevitable questions about the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition concerns its purpose. Why did the National Socialists go to such an effort to mount, publicize, and circulate it? What did they hope to gain? One explanation at least offers itself. If the Nazis had merely confiscated and destroyed the art, it would have been the cultural equivalent of creating a martyr. By staging *Entartete Kunst* they were able to appeal to the majority of the German people who must have considered most modern art incomprehensible and elitist. To all modernists, not just those represented in *Entartete Kunst*, the Nazis sent the message that such art would no longer be tolerated in Germany, an official position that, thanks to the cleverly manipulated complicity of the German people, had the force of a popular mandate.

One thing that emerges from any examination of the cultural activities in Germany under the National Socialists is that, despite every attempt to provide rigorous definitions of "healthy" and "degenerate" art and to remove all traces of the latter from public view, the actions against modern visual arts (as well as those against literature, music, and film) were enormously problematic and contradictory. Ultimately, however, the brilliant flowering of modernism in Germany that had begun in the early years of the century came to a halt in 1937 with the opening of *Entartete Kunst* and the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Artists, writers, filmmakers, poets, musicians, critics, and intellectuals of all disciplines were forced to take drastic action, either to emigrate or to resort to a deadening "inner immigration." Much of the confiscated art was destroyed or has vanished, and many of the most powerfully creative artists of Germany's golden era were broken in spirit, forced to flee, or killed. But the art, the documents, and the memories that have survived enable us to reconstruct the era and ensure that, in the end, the National Socialists failed—the modern art of Germany was not and will never be eradicated.

Collectively, the works of art and the pieced-together fragments of history remind us that art may be enjoyed or abhorred but it is a force whose potency should never be underestimated.

It is ironic that some of the issues raised by an examination of these events should have such resonance today in America. Newspaper articles on public support for the arts and the situation facing the National Endowment for the Arts emphasize an uncomfortable parallel between these issues and those raised by the 1937 exhibition, between the enemies of artistic freedom today and those responsible for organizing the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition. Perhaps after a serious look at events that unfolded over half a century ago in Germany, we may apply what we learn to our own predicament, in which for the first time in the postwar era the arts and freedom of artistic expression in America are facing a serious challenge.

NOTES:

¹ Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Reinbek Rowohlt, 1963), 109.

² While all accounts from the immediate postwar era confirm this event, first reported by Paul Ortwin Rave in 1949 (*Kunstdekatation im Dritten Reich* [Hamburg Gebrüder Mann]), more recent works by authors including Georg Bussmann and Eckhardt Klessmann have questioned whether there was in fact such a wholesale destruction of works of art, see Bussmann, "Degenerate Art A Look at a Useful Myth," in *German Art in the 20th Century Painting and Sculpture 1905-1985* (exh cat, London Royal Academy Of Arts, 1985), 113-24, and Klessmann, "Barlach in der Barbarei," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 13, 1983, literary supplement. In Sofie Fohn's recently published account of her and her husband's art exchanges with Berlin in the late 1930s she challenged the Nazis' contention that approximately five thousand works were burned on March 20, 1939, and suggested that only the frames may have been destroyed in the fire, see Carla Schultz-Hoffmann, ed., *Die Sammlung Sofie and Emanuel Fohn Eine Dokumentation* (Munich Hirmer, 1990), 27

³ Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhunderts* (Berlin Propyläen, 1926, 2d ed 1928, 3d ed 1931, Leipzig Reclam, 1988), Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich* (New York Random House, 1979), 24.

⁴ Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship* (New York Oxford University Press, 1954), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁶ In 1909 Julius Langbehn published *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as teacher) and in 1928 his *Dürer als Fibrer* (Dürer as leader), completed by Momme Nissen, was issued posthumously; these two immensely popular books made strong appeals to German nationalism in art.

⁷ For a particularly helpful analysis of Nordau's book see George L Mosse's introduction to the 1968 English edition (Max Nordau, *Degeneration* [New York: Howard Fertig, 1968]).

⁸ George Bernard Shaw, "The Sanity of Art: An Exposure of the Current Nonsense about Artists Being Degenerate," in *Major Critical Essays* (London Constable and Company, 1932: St Clair Shores, Mich. Scholarly Press, 1976), 281-332.

⁹ See Theodor Kirchhoff, *Handbook of Insanity for Practitioners and Students* (New York: William Wood, 1893), and Richard M Goodman, *Genetic Disorders among the Jewish People* (Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 421-31. The term *corruzione* (corruption) had been used by the seventeenth-century Italian critic Giovanni Pietro Bellori in an attack on Vasari and Michelangelo.

¹⁰ Sander Gilman, "Madness and Representation Hans Prinzhorn's Study of Madness and Art in Its Historical Context," in *The Prinzhorn Collection* (exh cat., Champaign, Ill.: Krannert Art Museum, 1984), 7-14, *idem*, "The Mad Man as Artist: Medicine, History, and Degenerate Art," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985) 575-97.

¹¹ Alfred Rosenberg, *"Race and Race History" and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Pois (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 154.

¹² Hans Prinzhorn, *Beldneri der Geisteskranken Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Grstaltung* (Berlin Julius Springer, 1922), published in English as *Artistry of the Mentally Ill A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*, trans Eric von Brockdorff (New York Springer, 1972)

¹³ See Table 1 in Christoph Zuschlag's essay in this volume.

¹⁴ Hildegard Brenner, Barbara Miller Lane, and George L Mosse have described the conflict and power struggle between Rosenberg and Goebbels over modern art, particularly German Expressionism and Italian Futurism, see Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-15* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1968), Brenner, "Art in

the Political Struggle of 1933-34," in Hajo Holborn, ed., *From Republic to Reich The Making of the Nazi Revolution* (New York Pantheon, 1972), 395-434, and Mosse, *Nazi Culture Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York Schocken Books, 1981).

¹⁵ Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich*, rev ed., ed. Uwe M Schneede (Berlin Argon, 1987), 103-4.

¹⁶ Alfred Barr, Jr, *Modern German Painting and Sculpture* (exh cat, New York Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 7-8. Barr also indicated which German museums collected examples by each artist.

¹⁷ "European Works at Buchholz," *New York World-Telegram*, September 30, 1939.

¹⁸ Hans-Jürgen Buderer, "Entartete Kunst" *Beschlagnahme-Aktionen in do Sladtische Kunstballe Mannheim 1937, Kunst Documentation*, n0 10 (exh cat, Mannheim Stadtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1987). I am grateful to Dr Manfred Fath, director Of the Kunsthalle Mannheim, for permission to examine museum files related to the "degenerate" art action.

For recent publication on the special situation in other museums mentioned see the following Essen Paul Vogt, ed., *Dokumente zur Geschichte des Museum Folkwang 1917-1915* (Essen Museum Folkwang, 1983); Halle. Andreas Huncke, *Die faschistische Aktion "Entartete Kunst" 1937 in Halle* (Halle- Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg, 1987); *Hannover Beschlagnahme-Aktion em Landrsmuseum Hannover 1937* (exh cat, Hannover Landesmuseum Hannover, 1983)

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¹⁹ Buderer, "Entartete Kunst," 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II.

²¹ Hinz, *Art of the Third Reich*, 163

²² Rave, *Kunstdiktatur*, 54

²³ *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Samtlicbr Fragmente*, ed. Elke Fröhlich (Munich G K Saur, 1987), pt 1, vol 3, 166.

²⁴ Adolf Hitler, speech at the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Munich, July 18, 1937; cited and translated in Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship*, 76-77.

²⁵ Jonathan Petropoulos, "Art as Politics The Nazi Elite's Quest for the Political and Material Control of Art" (Ph D diss., Harvard University, 1990).

²⁶ Joseph Goebbels, decree sent to all major museums, June 30, 1937; a copy is preserved in the archives of the Bayerische Staatsgemildesammlungen, Munich, Akt 712a, 12.71937, Nr 1983, cited in Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, "'Deutsche Kunst and 'Entartete Kunst' Die Münchner Aussellungen 1937,'" in Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed., *Die "Kunststadt" München 1937 Nationalsozialismus and "Entartete Kunst"* (Munich Prestel, 1987), 92.

²⁷ I am indebted to Christoph Zuschlag who first brought Pistauer and his role in *Entartete Kunst* to my attention.