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'Degenerate Art': The Avant-Garde in the Face of Nazism

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‘Degenerate Art’
The Avant-Garde in the Face of Nazism

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For Mom and Dad.
Chapter 1: ‘They Had Four Years’

“In every really great world-shaking movement, propaganda will first have to spread the idea of this movement.”¹ These words, written by Adolf Hitler in 1923, illustrate his understanding of the vital role propaganda plays in advancing an ideology. Hitler and the Nazi party is notorious for the atrocities and crimes against humanity they committed during their twelve years in power. They slaughtered millions of innocent people, divided Europe, and brutally discriminated communities based on their race, religion, and sexual orientation. The elimination of modern art was an important component of their plan to have Nazi ideology dominate German culture. The Nazi program against the avant-garde culminated in the creation of the *Entartete Kunst*, which was a propagandist exhibition curated in 1937 that aimed to discredit this style of art. Surprisingly, the process of the extermination of so-called ‘degenerate’ art began even before the National Socialist Party was elected into power in 1933. The basis of their abhorrence of the avant-garde was rooted in a belief that ‘degenerate’ art polluted the pure mind of the Aryan race. Nazis believed that modern art was a result of the influence of Jews and Bolsheviks on their society. The Nazi policies gave no way for debate, as discrediting and eliminating avant-garde art became a central aspect of their propagandist plan.

The Nazi agenda against modern artists was vital to the party, who believed that modern art had to be discredited and destroyed rather than simply removed. Adolf Hitler was obsessed with art his entire life. In 1907, he was refused admission to the Vienna Academy Painting School and then later to their Architecture School because of a lack of talent. His early

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rejections stayed with him and likely influenced his desire to set a new standard for what was ‘good’ art.² Hitler viewed modern art as a vessel that Jews and Bolsheviks used to poison the good German mind. Consequently, the Nazis implemented restrictions to constrain Jewish influence on German culture. Nazis believed that Jews controlled the press and thus made the German people embrace unorthodox styles.³ They also believed that, as Jews dominated the art market, modern art was promoted not as a product of skill but as a devious way to make money.⁴ The ideals of anti-Semitism and anti-modernism in Germany grew from and relied on one another to persist. Hitler viewed an attack on modernism and avant-garde art as a way to manipulate Germans and further his political agenda against Jews, Communists, and all whom he deemed non-Aryan.⁵ Indeed, avant-garde art depicted images that conflicted with the Nazis’ strict ideals, especially in regards to visual representation. Thus, the Nazi Party made establishing ‘pure’ German cultural ideologies a focus of their plan. As a result of their belief that modernism corrupts and disrupts the German population, the Nazi Party worked tirelessly to denounce and exterminate art that they labeled ‘degenerate.’

The negative view of modern art in twentieth century Germany emerged from Max Nordau’s book Entartung (Degeneration) written in 1892. Ironically, Nordau was a Jewish philosopher. While Nordau himself did not equate anti-Semitism with anti-modernism, his writings were the basis of later theories of degeneration. His book vilified the works of

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⁴ Petropoulos, 54.
modernists such as Pre-Raphaelites, Symbolists, Henrik Ibsen, and Emile Zola, seeking to elevate traditional German culture in comparison.  

“He wrote, “Besides moral insanity and emotionalism, there is to be observed in the degeneration a condition of mental weakness and despondency, which, according to the circumstances of his life, assumes the form of pessimism, a vague fear of all men, and of the entire phenomenon of the universe, or self-abhorrence.”

For Nordau, ‘degeneracy’ represented a bad, weak, or depraved mind. The fundamental idea of ‘degeneracy’ was that modernist works were the product of sick or lesser intellects. Those who displayed these characteristics were hysterical or depraved. As Nazis hated people who operated outside of their conception of normality and the status quo, those who showed signs of ‘degeneracy’ were deemed dangerous.

The idea of degeneration was applied specifically to creative endeavors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nordau deemed modern artists, such as impressionists, as products of degeneration and hysteria. He claimed,

“The painters who assure us that they are sincere, and reproduce nature as they see it, speak the truth. The degenerate artist suffers from nystagmus, or trembling of the eyeball, will, in fact, perceive the phenomena of nature trembling, restless, devoid of firm outline, and, if he is a conscientious painter, will give us pictures reminding us of the mode practiced by the draughtsmen of the Fliegende Blatter when they represent a wet dog shaking himself vigorously.”

Nordau sought to define the difference between ‘good’ painters and Impressionist, ‘degenerate’ painters. He reasoned that because Impressionists were deformed, their unfinished and abstracted paintings were a result of their disability. By using a physical ‘fault’ as the distinction between ‘degenerate’ artists and ‘pure’ artists, Nordau emphasized that there is

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8 Nordau, 12.
something wrong with modern artists who paint in abstract styles as they do not represent healthy minds. The Nazis adopted these ideals and expanded upon them. They claimed that the works by ‘degenerate’ artists polluted their society as they spread ideas of the sick and disabled. By basing their ideology on a scholarly text, the Nazi program was legitimized. Nordau’s theory of degeneration became the basis of Nazi strategy against modern art, as they used ‘scientific’ findings to validate their conclusion.

Nordau’s praise of the conservative aesthetic and theory of degeneration had an impact in Germany long before the National Socialists came into power. In 1909, Kaiser Wilhelm fired the director of the Nationalgalerie, Hugo von Tschudi, for buying Impressionists paintings. In 1913, newspapers covering the Armory Show in New York referred to many of the works as the ‘degeneration of art’. In the same year, Kandinsky’s art was mocked by a Hamburg newspaper, calling his works a “shoddy tangle of lines” and the artist himself “this insane painter, who can no longer be held responsible for his actions”. While it was clear that Germans disagreed on modern art at the time, the disagreements were viewed as intelligent debate in the country. Indeed, it was a reaction to the growth of modernism and liberalism after World War I during the new Weimar Republic that motivated the Nazis’ later emphasis on destroying avant-garde works. In 1919, Berlin’s Nationalgalerie opened a new wing of modern art in the abandoned Kronprinz Palais, which used to be the home of the monarchy. While this museum did receive a great deal of criticism, it influenced other German museums to hang modern art. Soon, avant-

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garde works were prominently featured in most of Germany’s major museums.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, although modern art was heavily criticized before and after World War I, the liberal ideals of the new Weimar Republic legitimized and spread this art which made it a target for the Nazi Party.

Adolf Hitler’s personal distain for modern art was publically known years before he was elected Chancellor. Written in 1923, Mein Kampf, or ‘My Struggle,’ was composed by Hitler when he was under arrest for political crimes. The book was a detailed account of Hitler’s political ideologies and his journey to his anti-Semitic views. Hitler blamed Bolsheviks and Jews for Germany’s economic and cultural problems. He claimed that the influence of these groups, especially in regards to cultural endeavors, confused what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in German civilization and negatively impacted the populace.\textsuperscript{12} Hitler spoke of ‘good’ German minds as polluted by art, “In order to be considered lacking in artistic understanding, people stood for every mockery of art and ended up by becoming really uncertain in the judgment of good and bad. All in all, these were tokens of times that were getting very bad.”\textsuperscript{13} In Mein Kampf, Hitler asserted that it cannot be questioned whether these works of art were good or bad. He continued to mark praise of this art as a sign of the downfall of culture. As a true master of propaganda, Hitler left no room for interpretation about the specific styles of art to which he referred. He specifically cited Cubism and Dadaism as examples of “Art Bolshevism” that represented the degenerate and insane mind. He continued to glorify older and more traditional ‘Germanic’ styles, equating great German cathedrals to the Parthenon and the

\textsuperscript{11} Nicholas, 8.
\textsuperscript{12} Hitler, 261-2.
\textsuperscript{13} Hitler, 263.
Acropolis.\textsuperscript{14} Through the examination of Hitler’s \textit{Mein Kampf}, it becomes evident that even ten years before the National Socialists were elected into power, the defamation of modern art was a central pillar in Hitler’s ideals of his constructed Aryan society.

The anti-modernist perspective had a significant following during the early years of the twentieth century. \textit{Völkisch} groups emerged in Germany at the turn of the century as a response to modernism. These groups were founded on cultural beliefs that idealized the German peasant, discarded nontraditional aesthetic styles, and expressed racism based on a belief that artistic expression and ‘blood’ were inevitably related.\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Völkisch} groups were fiercely opposed to anything they considered ‘cultural bolshevism’ and had a significant influence in Germany. In the 1920s, the Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft, or German Art Association, was founded in German museums. This association aimed to fight against corruption within art, attacking the works of artists such as Max Beckmann and George Grosz as they were deemed Kulturbolschewismus or art-Bolshevism.\textsuperscript{16} The Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur (KfdK), or the Combat League for German Culture, was founded on the same ideals. While \textit{völkisch} groups certainly were a minority before 1933, their existence in the 1920s prove that anti-modernism had a noteworthy presence even during the liberal Weimar Republic.

At first an underground organization, the KfdK became prominent with the rise of National Socialism. In 1933, Alfred Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art at the time, witnessed the first public meeting of the Stuttgart chapter of the KfdK. He reported that the director of the Combat League declared, “It is a mistake to think that the national revolution is

\textsuperscript{14} Hitler, 258-265.
\textsuperscript{15} Petropoulos, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{16} Barron, “Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany,” 11.
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only political and economic. It is above all cultural... there is no freedom for those who weaken and destroy German art... there must be no remorse and no sentimentality in uprooting and crushing what was destroying our vitals.”¹⁷ This statement was followed by thunderous applause. These words represent the anti-modernist sentiment that had already dominated Stuttgart. As a result of a nasty review, a large retrospective of the modernist painter, Oskar Schlemmer, was closed 12 days after it was opened. The review mocked the works as unfinished and claimed they were better suited to rot on a pile of junk. Barr, who was admitted to the show only because he was a foreigner, was so upset by the review that he encouraged Philip Johnson to buy the best pictures “just to spite the sons-of-bitches”. Johnson did as he was advised and Schlemmer’s work, *Bauhaus Steps*, has been part of the collection at the Museum of Modern Art ever since.¹⁸ While the KdfK did not become a public organization until 1933, the swiftness of their actions once the National Socialists rose to power illustrates that anti-modernist beliefs were already quite prominent in Germany.

While anti-modern views against art clearly existed before 1933, it wasn’t until after the National Socialists came to power that outright attacks against modern art were publicly tolerated. The selection of the National Socialist Wilhelm Frick as Minister of the Interior for the Thuringia in 1929 illustrated the changes that German art institutions faced under Nazi influence. Frick appointed new department heads, announced new cultural policies, and eventually convinced Walter Gropius and the entire Bauhaus staff to relocate.¹⁹ He also removed around seventy works from the galleries of the Schloss Museum, including paintings

¹⁷ Nicholas, 6.
¹⁸ Nicholas, 6-7.
by Klee, Dix, Barlach, Kandinsky, Nolde, and Marc. Frick went to great lengths to try to eliminate all traces of ‘Judeo-Bolshevik’ depictions in Munich. Many Germans found this excessive and Frick was fired in April 1931, only to be elected the National Minister of Interior in less than two years.\(^{20}\) However, the firing of Frick in 1931 did not mean that German people supported avant-garde works. In 1926, an Expressionist show in Dresden was criticized for showing works that were viewed as insulting the German Army. In 1930, Dr. Hildebrand Gurlitt was fired from his post as the director of the Zwichau Museum for “pursuing an artistic policy affronting the healthy folk feeling of Germany.”\(^{21}\) Ironically, years later, Gurlitt became one of Hitler’s trusted art advisors. It is evident that before 1933 the art world in Germany was sensitive to extreme opinions, both pro-modern and anti-modern, especially in regards to those who held important positions.

In the early 1930s, scholarly works strongly influenced the views of the German population. In 1929, Wilhelm Frick replaced Walter Gropius as director of the Bauhaus with Paul Schultze-Naumburg, an architect and racial theorist. Schultze-Naumburg was known for publishing his attack on the Bauhaus in *DAS ABC des Bauens* and for his book on art and race, *Kunst und Rasse*. Consistent with Nordau’s theory of degeneracy, Schultze-Naumburg not only attacked modern art as *entartet* or ‘degenerate’, but he took his theories one step further from Nordau’s initial idea. Through the use of juxtaposed images, he developed the ideal visual judgment as to what was ‘beautiful, good, and practically useful’ in the process of furthering

\(^{20}\) Nicholas, 9.  
\(^{21}\) Nicholas, 9.
the German race. He compared portraits of modern art to photographs of diseased or deformed people. The photographs he chose echoed the oddly shaped portraits in paintings by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Amedeo Modigliani, and Otto Dix (fig. 1). In Kunst und Rasse, Schultz-Naumberg asserted that artists create images that are “formed in the likeness of the world to which he aspires.” By comparing modern portraits to photographs of the disabled, Schultz-Naumberg implied that modern artists aspire to be debilitated. The use of visuals in Schultz-Naumberg’s Kunst und Rasse intended to support his statements of the subordinate character of modern works.

Schultz-Naumberg sought to further legitimize his theories on art by citing those generally regarded as the most respected masters in the field. He quoted the great Renaissance genius and father of Western art, Leonardo Da Vinci, to support his thesis: “The particular features of a painting correspond to the particular features of the painter himself’ to such a degree that ‘most of the faces resemble their author’.” Schultz-Naumberg not only used strong visual images to disparage modern artists but supported his argument that modern portraits reflect the artists lesser mind by quoting one of the greatest and most revered artists of all time. In regards to art, Da Vinci’s word is considered law, which would make his assertion difficult to discredit. While Schultz-Naumberg never was one of Hitler’s favorites, his contribution to the Nazi agenda was significant. When he retired in 1940, he received a handwritten letter of appreciation from Hitler, and Wilhelm Frick declared that Schultz-

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24 Michaud, 129.
25 Michaud, 130.
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Naumberg’s name ‘encompassed a whole program’. The work of Paul Schultze-Naumburg, in particular Kunst und Rasse, was highly influential and legitimized the National Socialist view against art.

In the years leading up to the National Socialist Party coming into power, literary works by Nazi officials had a deep impact. Published in 1930, Alfred Rosenberg’s Der Mythus 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 or Mythus) was arguably one of the most influential books of the Nazi regime, second only to Hitler’s own Mein Kampf. The Myth of the Twentieth Century glows of Nordic pride while demonizing lesser races that seek to ‘corrupt’ Germans. The writing was aggressively critical of Jews, Catholics, Communists, democracy, high finance (as a mark of Jewry), and Protestant churches (because they were too accepting of Jews and Catholics). Rosenberg, a völkisch supporter, argued for acceptance of a new world view, one that reached all elements of society and disposes of individualism. As Rosenberg believed that art was the expression of the racial soul, he focused on art in Mythus. He equated German art and the Gothic Cathedral with Greek art and Renaissance masterpieces. He claimed that in great European art the hero is painted to look Aryan, with a high forehead, blue or gray eyes, and just enough muscles. Having praised Nordic art as revealing and glorifying the beauty of the German race, Rosenberg continued to address what he considered ‘Jewish Art’. He claimed that Jews have no ability in the visual arts and that their involvement in movements such as Futurism and Expressionism are proof of their

26 Michaud, 127.
28 Chandler, 86.
ineptitude. Rosenberg’s *Mythus* furthered the acceptance of Nazi art theory because it meticulously defined the Nordic style and its superiority while it simultaneously smeared Jewish art.

Rosenberg’s *Mythus* was vital to Nazi ideology because it went to great pains to elevate the Nordic race while vilifying those the Nazis believed threatened their society. Furthermore, as Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was meant to influence the masses, Rosenberg’s *Mythus* was penned to sway the educated. While Hitler did admit Rosenberg into his inner-circle, his private comments regarding Rosenberg’s work illuminate his true feelings toward the author. Architect Albert Speer reflected “Hitler in those teatime conversations bluntly called it ‘stuff nobody can understand,’ written by ‘a narrow-minded Baltic German who thinks in horribly complicated terms.” Still, Rosenberg’s work was very popular, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. Alfred Rosenberg’s *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* was one of the most influential works that established the ideals of the Nazi Party.

When Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933, anti-modernism slowly began to come out of the shadows. On June 30, 1933, Hitler promoted Joseph Goebbels to the Reichsminister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Goebbels’ new position gave him authority over all propaganda of the state, including cultural and economic propaganda as well as the enlightenment of the public at home and abroad. On

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29 Chandler, 90.
30 Chandler, 11.
32 Nicholas, 8.
33 Petropoulos, 22.
March 12, 1933, the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP) was established and in June Hitler assigned Goebbels to be responsible for the “spiritual direction of the nation.”34 When The Reich Chamber of Culture (RKK) was established on September 22, 1933, Goebbels was appointed President of the group. The RMVP and the RKK worked together to regulate German culture and propaganda. Immediately following his election, Hitler made the formation and promotion of a correct Nordic cultural identity an important priority under his rule.

Beginning as early as 1933, significant steps were made by the government to control the art world. Goebbels published the Deutscher Kunstbericht, or the German Art Report, which outlined “what German artists expect from the new government.”35 Written by artists who failed to achieve and be recognized by the modern art movement, the manifesto laid out five points that illustrated the new standards that artists had to conform to. It enforced: all cosmopolitan or Bolshevik works must be removed from German museums, but first they were to be exhibited to the public in mockery and then burned; museum directors who bought ‘un-German’ art be fired; artists with Marxist or Bolshevist connections were to no longer be mentioned; boxlike buildings no longer were allowed to be built; and public sculptures that were not approved by the German public must be immediately removed.36 The German Art Report was meant to limit the prominence and the future production of art that was deemed ‘degenerate’. Thus, as soon as the National Socialist party came into power in Germany, the restriction of modernism was well underway.

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The laws and constraints established in 1933 had an almost immediate effect on the lives and works of modern artists. The artist George Grosz, who luckily was visiting the United States at the time, lost his German citizenship. The Bauhaus was closed. Artists Käthe Kollwitz and Max Liebermann were thrown out of the Prussian Academy of Arts. Paul Klee, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and Oskar Schlemmer were fired from their jobs as teachers. Artists such as Heinrich Ehmsen were arrested, while Ernst Barlach’s sculpture, Magdeburg Memorial, was removed from the Magdeburg cathedral. While these early actions controlled the influence and prominence of avant-garde work, they did not have the impact of a large public spectacle. However, even before the establishment of the RKK, Goebbels went to significant lengths to publically restrict modernism in Germany. On May 10, 1933, a huge bonfire blazed in Franz Joseph Platz in Berlin. In the bonfire, books by authors deemed ‘undesirable and pernicious’ were burned. As the books burned, Goebbels spoke on German radio: “the age of intellectualism is over… the past is lying in flames.. the future will rise from the flames within our hearts… Brightened by these flames our vow shall be: the Reich and the Nation and our Führer Adolf Hitler: Heil! Heil! Heil!” Goebbels haunting words foreshadowed the future of modernism in National Socialist Germany. During their first year in power, the National Socialists wasted no time purging Germany of both modernist artists and their works. Soon after the National Socialists began passing laws that restricted modern works, they realized it was not enough to simply eliminate modern art but that it was necessary to also publically disrepute it in a manner that articulated the dangers that it presented. As early as

38 Welch, 28.
39 Welch, 28.
1933, the National Socialists began producing *Schandausstellung* (shame exhibitions) that continued throughout the decade. Although these exhibitions were relatively small and local, they aggressively mocked modern art which had a widespread and powerful impact (fig. 2).

Soon after the well regarded Dr. Lilli Fischel was fired from his post as director in Karlsruhe, the new director curated an exhibition that aimed to disgrace modern art. Called ‘Reigierungskunst von 1918 bis 1933’ (Government Art 1918 to 1933), the exhibition showed Impressionist and Expressionist paintings, including paintings by Max Liebermann and Edvard Munch. The works were accompanied by critical labels that displayed the highest prices paid for the paintings and adjusted them for the considerable inflation of the times. In doing so, they mocked the modern art community who placed such high value on the works the Nazis distained. The shame exhibitions became a trend. The exhibition ‘November Spirit, Art in the Service of Disintegration’ took place in Stuttgart, ‘Chamber of Horrors of Art’ took place in Nuremberg, ‘Reflections of Disintegration in Art’ took place in Dresden, and ‘Art Which Has Not Come From Our Soul’ took place in Chemnitz. The names of the exhibitions were chosen carefully to emphasize the connection between modern art and cultural decline. After Dr. Gustav F. Hartlaub was fired from his job as the director of the museum in Mannheim, ‘degenerate’ works were found hidden in his cellar. As a result, the National Socialists displayed the paintings on a wagon that toured the city. Marc Chagall’s painting of a Jewish rabbi was placed on one side of the wagon while on the other a photograph of Hartlaub was displayed with a caption that announced what the works cost the people (fig. 3). An additional exhibition,
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‘Kulturwellschewismus’, was notable as the paintings were hung poorly, even without frames (fig. 2).\[^{42}\] The early shame exhibitions were a powerful tool that the Nazis used to immediately persuade the general public against modern art.

National Socialist leaders understood that it was not enough to destroy and discredit cultural ideologies, they had to go further and establish new ideas, styles, and beliefs for the nation to uphold. Thus, shame exhibitions were accompanied by ‘positive’ exhibitions that praised the new style of German art. The travelling exhibition *Reine Deutsche Kunst* (Pure German Art) answered the question: if modern art is bad, then what is good art? The exhibition, which opened in Brunswick on April 30, 1933, displayed paintings that were figurative, used realist colors, and idealized subjects.\[^{43}\] There was absolutely no abstraction. This was the art that became Nazi approved. Interestingly, Rosenberg asserted that he and the KfdK were not involved organizing these exhibitions. This led allies of Rosenberg such as Hans Adolf Buhler, the director of the Karlsruhe Academy and the Karlsruhe Gallery, to take up the responsibility of organizing the exhibitions. In fact, Buhler not only curated the ‘positive’ exhibition ‘Pure German Art’, but he also curated the shame exhibition ‘Government Art 1918-1933’.\[^{44}\] The ‘positive’ German exhibitions illustrated to the public the ‘pure’ alternative to abstraction and Expressionism. Almost immediately after coming into power, the National Socialists set out to establish a new cultural ideology that would influence and guide the masses.

Although the National Socialists immediately made a significant effort to discredit and destroy modern works, not all party officials were in agreement regarding all modern art. In

\[^{42}\] Lehmann-Haupt, 74-75.
\[^{43}\] Petropoulos, 33.
\[^{44}\] Petropoulos, 33.
particular, Joseph Goebbels’ own personal beliefs restricted his progress in the party at first. Until 1935, Goebbels was known to have supported modern painting. Goebbels encouraged modernism in painting not only as a nationalist who praised German achievements but also because he genuinely admired the work. In December 1933, Goebbels sent Edvard Munch, the Norwegian Expressionist painter, this telegram on the artist’s seventieth birthday, “Munch’s work, which stems from the Nordic-Germanic earth, speaks to me of the deepest solemnity of life... A Powerful and independent spirit-heir to the Nordic nature, he has freed himself from any naturalism and has reclaimed the eternal foundations of the völkisch creators of art.”

Goebbels also served on Committees of Futurist exhibitions, endorsed pro-modernist and Expressionist groups, and even called New Objectivity “the German art of the next decade.” In his Memoirs, Albert Speer recounts redecorating Goebbels’s house in 1933,

“To decorate the Goebbels house I borrowed a few watercolors by Nolde from Eberhard Hanfstaengl, the director of the Berlin National Gallery. Goebbels and his wife were delighted with the paintings – until Hitler came to inspect and expressed his severe disapproval. Then the Minister summoned me immediately: ‘The pictures have to go at once; they’re simply impossible!’”

In the early years of the National Socialist regime, Joseph Goebbels supported German modern art; however, his appreciation of it was short lived as Nazi ideals became more concrete.

It is not surprising that Hitler would not tolerate his head of propaganda supporting modern art. On January 24, 1934, Hitler promoted Goebbels’ rival, the ultra-conservative Alfred Rosenberg, to Director of the Office for the Supervision of the Cultural and Ideological Education and Training of the Nazi Party (DBFU). Rosenberg’s promotion served Hitler as it

45 Petropoulos, 27.
46 Petropoulos, 24.
47 Speer, 27.
checked Goebbels’ power, while simultaneously having Rosenberg oversee school policy, youth programs, churches, and any other area where ideology needed monitoring. Thus, by promoting Rosenberg and establishing the DBFU, Hitler not only increased regulation of national ideologies but also confined Goebbels’ liberal leaning tendencies. Hitler used Rosenberg’s promotion to limit Goebbels until he realigned himself with the ‘proper’ National Socialist views on modernism.

In the early years of his rule, Hitler made significant efforts to ensure that all party leaders shared his cultural ideology. In September of 1934 at the party’s annual meeting, Hitler made a speech that not only established an unflinching opinion towards modernism, but also ensured that he had the final word in regards to culture. He described the modernists, such as Cubists, Dadaists, and Futurists, as ‘the spoilers of art’ and stated that there was no place in Germany for that kind of work. Hitler declared that as of that moment, German art would be ‘clear’ without contortion or abstraction and that he would not tolerate any “cultural auxiliary to political destruction.” The forceful nature of Hitler’s words not only illuminates the depth of Hitler’s hatred for modernism, but also his understanding of the complexity of the avant-garde and its expression, as well as its threat to the Nazi ideal. For Goebbels, it became evident that he must adapt to Hitler’s beliefs. Additionally, as Rosenberg pushed for anti-modernism and vied for Goebbels’ position, abandoning his liberal ideals helped secure his job. The assertive tone that characterized Hitler’s speeches on modernism guaranteed that all Nazi leaders understood and adopted the artistic preference he believed they should have.

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48 Petropoulos, 34-35.
49 Grosshans, 74.
50 Petropoulos, 47.
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Goebbels’ adaptation of anti-modern beliefs sent shockwaves through the modernist community. Soon after, in 1935, exhibitions that featured modern artists were closed, modern works were confiscated, and museums were inclined to sell ‘degenerate’ artworks as to not incriminate themselves. Director of the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Count Klaus von Baudissin, teamed up with the art dealer, Ferdinand Möller, to sell modern works. By July 1936, the market was so poor for avant-garde paintings that Baudissin agreed to sell Kandinsky’s Improvisation 28 for 9,000 Reichmarks. This work, along with others by Kandinsky, was sold to the Guggenheim Museum in New York.\(^5^1\) Additionally, the magazine, Kunst der Nation, which had tried to support modern art without offending Nazi leadership was censored.\(^5^2\) Goebbels’ sudden change of opinion was personal and real. He wrote in his diary on December 15, 1935, “With the Führer at midday. Göring also there. Questions about building. Questions about painting. It is still very upsetting. The crap must be cleaned from the Kronprinzenpalais.”\(^5^3\) Even though the Nazi ideology was solidified, activity took time. As Germany was hosting the summer Olympics in 1936, public action against modern art was hidden until after the games. Germany wanted to appear nationalistic yet tolerant to the foreigners who attended. Thus, aggressive and persistent public action against modern artists did not become notable until late 1936.

After the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, restrictions of and attacks against modernism became unrestricted and harsh. On November 26, 1936, Goebbels banned art criticism. He wrote:

\(^{5^2}\) Grosshans, 75.
\(^{5^3}\) Petropoulos, 48.
“I forbid once and for all the continuance of art criticism in its past form, effective as of today. From now on, the reporting of art will take the place of an art criticism which has set itself up as a judge of art... The reporting of art should not be concerned with values but should confine itself to description.”

Goebbels not only banned judgment on art but also stated that only art editors could discuss it, significantly limiting those who could simply write about art. On December 1, he named Adolf Ziegler the President of the Chamber for Visual Arts, as Zeigler was conservative and aggressive. Ziegler was also one of Hitler’s favorite painters, known for his idealized yet rigid paintings of nudes. At the end of 1936 it became clear that there was no room for interpretation in regards to modern art in Germany. With Joseph Goebbels, the former advocate of modern painting, stripping freedom of opinion from the public and placing conservatives in positions of power, the Nazi agenda against modern art had certainly begun with no turning back.

By 1937, the Nazi Party had already achieved a great deal in the restriction of modern art. They banned praise of it, fired those who promoted it, removed it from museums, and openly mocked it. For Hitler, this process was necessary in maintaining a pure German culture that was uninterrupted by Jews, Communists, and all other ‘lesser’ people. The Nazis hated abstraction, unrealistic color, or depictions of the underbelly of society. They believed that it was not enough to simply remove the works from the public. By attacking and discrediting modern works, the art became viewed as disgusting, laughable, and representative of everything that the German race was not. The Nazis wanted the population to see in German

54 Grosshans, 77.
55 Petropoulos, 53.
56 Petropoulos, 52.
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art what their ideals should be and the magnificence of the Aryan race. Thus, the years 1933 to 1937 proved vital in establishing this cultural ideology. After four years of harsh criticism and censorship against so-called ‘degenerate’ art, it seemed that this was only the beginning of what modernists would face under Nazi rule.
Chapter 2: Entartete Kunst

The apex of the Nazi program against avant-garde art was the exhibition, *Entartete Kunst*. A large propagandist spectacle that aimed to discredit modern art in every way possible, the *Entartete Kunst* included 730 works by 112 artists. Everything from the captions that accompanied the artworks to the set up and lighting in the galleries was meant to reinforce the notion that these works were examples of ‘degenerate’ art. The exhibition was a central part of the Nazi program, aiming to illustrate to the general German public what was ‘bad’ and threatening about avant-garde art. Through the preparation, curatorial set up, and magnitude of the exhibition, the *Entartete Kunst* was constructed as propaganda to sway the opinions of the German masses.

While the *Entartete Kunst* certainly was a continuation from the previous *Schandausstellungen* (shame exhibitions), it was not conceived and planned far in advance as political strategy. It is believed that the *Entartete Kunst* emerged as a result of an unsuccessful visit that Hitler paid to the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) in preparation for the *Gross Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (The Great German Art Exhibition).¹ On June 6, 1937, Goebbels wrote in his diary:

“We are looking at the selections of the jury. The sculptures are passable, but the paintings are in some cases outright catastrophic. They hung pieces that immediately produce horror. That’s what happens with a jury of artists. They all look at the school, at names and intention, and most of them lost any sense of the real art of painting. The Führer is wild with rage. Prof. Troost fights with the courage of a lion but he by no means succeeds with the Führer. All the others on the conservative jury withdraw in misery. Only Prof. Ziegler still has courage.”²

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¹ For more on the set up of the The Great German Art Exhibition, see chapter 3.
Goebbels account of this event illustrates how particular Hitler was about what types of art were shown and how seriously he took censuring ‘degenerate’ works. The magnitude of Hitler’s fury indicates the importance that he attached to establishing clear differences between National Socialist and ‘degenerate’ art.

Five days after the failure in Munich, Goebbels began reading Wolfgang Willrich’s *Säuberung des Kunsttempels* (Purging of the Temple of Art), which was published early in 1937. Willrich’s book spoke against art bolshevism and art anarchy, labeled art as contaminated, and criticized corruption within the modern art market. Willrich wrote, “The nation is served well only by simple, unselfconscious art from the hearts and hands of perfectly healthy masters without broken souls or crushed spirit.” Willrich did not limit himself to attacks on specific types of modernism; he slammed modern artists such as Ernst Barlach, Otto Dix, and George Grosz as well as expressionist poets such as Gottfried Benn. He also included collages of modern works and emphasized names of those who supported the modern movement. Willrich’s book inspired Goebbels, who immediately began to purge German museums of modern works. Although he initially was met with some resistance, the first stage of his plan was a clever career move for him. By having Hitler approve the idea for a Munich based ‘degenerate’ show instead of being instructed to create one, Goebbels showed great initiative.

Although Goebbels had previously displayed some support for modern art, this originality

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5 Peters, 112.
6 Peters, 116.
attempted to return his place in Hitler’s favor. The role that Goebbels played in the conception of the *Entartete Kunst* illustrates his understanding of how important the censure and restriction of art was to the Nazi program and to the Führer himself.

On June 30, 1937, Goebbels announced that he had given Professor Ziegler authority to select and confiscate all works of German degenerate art that had been created since 1910. He wrote,

“On express authority of the Führer I hereby empower the president of the Reichskammer der bildenden Kunste, Professor Ziegler of Munich, to select and secure for an exhibition 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.”

This decree not only stopped any resistance to taking the works but benefitted Goebbels political position as he demonstrated his independence by overstepping the authority of Bernhard Rust and the ministry of culture in writing the decree himself. Here, Goebbels classified degenerate art as works that either “insult German feeling, or destroy or confuse natural form, or simply reveal an absence of adequate manual and artistic skill.” Although there was no clear definition of ‘degenerate’ art, it was decreed that all drawings and paintings be condemned that were by Jewish artists, depicted Jewish subject matter, illustrated a pacifist ideology or were viewed as inconsistent with the Nazis’ view of heroism in war, had expressions of Marxists or Socialist doctrines, depicted ‘inferior racial types’ such as those with dark skin

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8 Peters, 111.
9 Barron, 19.
and Gypsies, were in any way connected to the Bauhaus movement or, more simply, any art that was deemed abstract.\textsuperscript{10} Goebbels certainly was not stingy in choosing which works he was to seize as ‘degenerate’; by ordering that any work that was viewed as threatening to the Reich be confiscated he ensured that he had purged museums of anything that could be considered objectionable.

To achieve his goal, Goebbels set up a committee that worked to find and appropriate examples of ‘degenerate’ art. Ziegler along with his five-man commission of modernist critics, Count Klaus von Baudissin, Wolfgang Willrich, Hans Schweitzer, Robert Scholz, and Walter Hansen, proved up to the task. Each man on the commission represented a different bureaucratic branch, which helped Goebbels secure political support across the party.\textsuperscript{11} Count Klaus von Baudissin was an SS officer who, as the director of the Museum of Polwang in Essen, purged the museum of examples of ‘degenerate’ art.\textsuperscript{12} Wolfgang Willrich was the author of the publication \textit{Säuberung des Kunstrumples} (Purging of the Temple of Art), which influenced the creation of the exhibition. Hans Schweitzer was a commissioner for artistic design, Robert Scholz was an art theoretician, and Walter Hansen was an art teacher and polemicist.\textsuperscript{13} Ziegler’s commission was a carefully calculated group of men that together purged art collections across Germany of their avant-garde works and simultaneously increased Goebbels’ control.

During the ten-day period in which Ziegler and his commission collected works and began preparing for the opening of the \textit{Entartete Kunst}, the men worked quickly and

\textsuperscript{11} Jonathan Petropoulos. \textit{Art as Politics in the Third Reich}. (Chapel Hill: Continuum, 1996), 56.  
\textsuperscript{12} For more on Count Klaus von Baudissin’s purging of ‘degenerate’ art, see chapter 1.  
\textsuperscript{13} Barron, 19.
effectively. In the beginning of July, seven hundred Expressionist, Futurist, Constructivist, Dada, or New Objectivity artworks were sent to Munich. The men purged thirty-two museums in twenty-eight cities of their art. Among these cities were Berlin, Bielefeld, Bremen, Breslau, Chemnitz, Cologne, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Erfurt, Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hannover, Jena, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Königsberg, Leipzig, Lübeck, Mannheim, Munich, Saarbrücken, Stettin, Stuttgart, Ulm, Weimar, Wiesbaden, and Wuppertal. At the Kunsthalle in Mannheim alone paintings, sculptures, and drawings by Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Franz Marc, Max Beckmann, Carl Hofer, George Grosz, Willi Baumeister, Andrew Derain, Edvard Munch, Alexander Archipenko and Mark Chagall were confiscated. The program continued past the opening of the Entartete Kunst. By October 1937, Ziegler’s commission had seized around 5,000 paintings and 12,000 graphic works from about 100 museums. Begun as simply preparation for the Entartete Kunst, the purging of avant-garde artworks from German museums had an immense effect that lasted beyond the opening of the exhibition to ensure that all modern works were seized.

The Entartete Kunst exhibition opened in Munich on July 19, 1937, barely three weeks after Zeigler and his commission began gathering works. On July 18, Hitler gave a speech at the opening of the House of German Art and the Great German Art Exhibition. While the purpose of his speech was to elevate the ‘pure’ German art that was being shown at the Great German Art Exhibition, he touched on degenerate art and its negative impact on society, “But these modern works we would preserve, as documents illustrating the depths of that decline into

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14 Barron, 19.
15 Lehmann-Haupt, Art Under Dictatorship, 78.
16 Petropoulos, Art as Politics in the Third Reich, 56.
17 For more on Hitler’s speech at the House of German Art, see chapter 3.
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which the people had fallen. The exhibition of ‘Degenerate Art’ is intended as a useful lesson.”  

Hitler overtly stated that the Entartete Kunst was meant to instruct the people and illustrate to them the cultural decay of which the modern works represent. The next day in his opening remarks at the Entartete Kunst, Zeigler ensured that the visitors understood the purpose of the exhibition:

“We now stand in an exhibition that contains only a fraction of what was bought with the hard-earned savings of the German people and exhibited as art by a large number of museums all over Germany. All around you see the monstrous offspring of insanity, impudence, ineptitude, and sheer degeneracy. What this exhibitions offers inspires horror and disgust in us all.”

Again, there was no room for tolerance regarding these pieces of art. By presenting the works as a waste of taxes paid for by hard working Germans, Ziegler not only depicted the works as bad but also gave the common viewer a personal reason to despise them. The speeches given at the opening days of the Entartete Kunst exhibition were meant to influence and instruct the German public to abhor the works.

As the Entartete Kunst was not planned well in advance, the hasty creation of the exhibition was reflected in the set up of the galleries. However, this served the National Socialist’s goal. When Ziegler and his commission selected works for the exhibition, they quickly chose which were to be confiscated and sent them directly to Munich. In the handful of days just before the opening of the Entartete Kunst, the men began hanging the art in the Hofgarten wing of the Residenz (at Galeriestrasse 4), which used to store the plaster-cast collection of the

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Archäologisches Institut. Inside two barrel-vaulted rooms on the ground floor of the space, books, prints, drawings, photographs, and even some paintings were either packed into glass cases or carelessly thumbtacked to the walls. One of these rooms was bigger than the other, but both were about thirteen feet wide. In the additional seven rooms on the second floor, temporary screens were installed to hide the plaster casts, windows, and surviving murals that inhabited the space. Then, paintings were hung on cords, often times without frames, crammed so tightly that the artworks did not have space to breath. The dark crammed nature of the galleries did much to emphasize that these works were not to be celebrated but instead to be disparaged. Zeigler’s set up of the galleries of the Entartete Kunst illustrated to the public the National Socialist belief that these works were junk that did not deserve the respect that a place in a proper museum would imply.

The use of labels within the Entartete Kunst aimed to control the public’s reaction to the contents of the exhibition. The works were accompanied by labels that displayed the artist’s name, the title, the museum that it was seized from, the year the work was bought, and often the price that was paid for it. In this regard, Ziegler was not a stickler for accuracy. Many of the works were labeled incorrectly, giving either wrong titles or crediting the wrong artist. Additionally, the dates that accompanied the works were deceiving. They did not reference the year the work was created (as is customary) but instead the year the work was acquired by the museum that bought it. Next to many of the works was a red sticker that read “Bezahlt von den Steuergroschen des arbeitenden deutschen Völkes” (paid for by the taxes of the German

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20 Lüttichau, 45.
21 Lüttichau, 45.
working people).\textsuperscript{22} It is almost superfluous to state that this sticker enraged the public as they were told that the money they paid in their hard-earned taxes was spent buying this ‘junk’.

Conveniently, in these labels it was left out that many of these works were bought during the high levels of inflation of the early 1920s and that these exorbitant prices were specifically computed to add to the viewer’s anger. The labels that accompanied specific paintings were based not on truth but instead on presenting viewers with titles, dates, artists, and prices that were most likely to illicit a negative response.

The text, headings, and words of explanation on the wall that appeared with paintings served to inform the German public how they were supposed to interpret the art. For example, Kirchner’s \textit{Peasants at Midday} was titled as “German peasants as seen by the yids”, Max Ernst’s \textit{The Creation of Eve or The Fair Gardener} was interpreted as “insult to German womanhood”, Dix’s works was labeled as “military sabotage”, Schlemmer’s \textit{The Passerby} was entitled “Bolshevism without a mast”, and Barlach’s statue \textit{The Reunion}, which showed the recognition of Christ by Saint Thomas, was explained as “two monkeys in nightshirts.”\textsuperscript{23} Some of these captions also aimed to unify themes of the works in particular rooms. Additionally, museum directors and their writings were occasionally included. For example, Paul F. Schmidt, the former director of the Stadt museum in Dresden, was discredited by his own writings being taken out of context. In one case, a book review of Schmidt’s was quoted. He wrote, “Merz drawings by Schwitters? Merz poems by Schwitters? Fifteen of each, always with a poem on the left and a drawing on the right! And both meaningless... Words stamped all over notepaper and

\textsuperscript{22} Lütichau, 45.
childish drawings of coffee grinders, houses, and wheels, and those are supposed to be drawings."24 Directly below this quote which slams Dadaism as ‘meaningless’, Schmidt is quoted again, this time praising modernism. He wrote, “This is a truly heroic generation, and its willpower verges on the sublime, for the outsider, who knows no better, it seems like eccentricity and madness and a vile assault upon the sanctity of tradition.”25 By being quoted side by side and asserting completely contradictory statements, Schmidt looked like a madman and a fool. Almost every case of pro-modern art directors’ writings being used out of context was taken from Willrich’s Sauberung des Kunstempels.26 The labels that accompanied the artworks of the Entartete Kunst were carefully calculated to influence the general public’s reaction to the works.

Much of what is known today about the precise construction of the galleries of the Entartete Kunst is the result of a combination of sources. First and foremost, documentary photographs published in literature about the exhibition reveal much about the feel and set up of the galleries. Additionally, press reviews serve as a source of information. In particular, Bruno E. Werner’s article in Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung from July 24, 1937 lists artists and works that were shown. Paul Ortwin Rave’s book from 1949 Kunstdikattur im Dritten Reich (Art Dictatorship in the Third Reich) is notable as it narrated a first hand account of the exhibition and the National Socialists movement against modern art. Rave even included in the appendix of his book an almost complete list of the artists and works displayed in Munich. Notes made by Carola Roth and letters written by Ernst Holzinger (curator at the Bayerische

24 Lüttichau, 71.
25 Lüttichau, 71.
26 Lüttichau, 46.
Maggie Alisberg

Staatsgemäldesammlungen) to Eberhard Hanfstaengl (the director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin) help fill in gaps.\textsuperscript{27} Peter Guenther’s paper \textit{Three Days in Munich, July 1937} additionally provides color as to what it felt like to visit the exhibition. Guenther, who was seventeen at the time but was educated in art and enjoyed modern art, remembered the \textit{Entartete Kunst} as history does; he was saddened by the organization and understood that the exhibition was meant to discredit the work. While the letters that Guenther wrote home about the exhibition were destroyed in bombings in Dresden during the war, he claims that he remembers his trip to Munich so well it was as if no time had passed.\textsuperscript{28} Together, these sources come together to allow an almost whole reconstruction of the \textit{Entartete Kunst}. While some information has been lost, undocumented, or hidden by the Nazis, the information that remains certainly paints the picture of what this exhibition was like.

When a viewer entered the \textit{Entartete Kunst}, they were immediately confronted with a display that aimed to show the negative influence of the avant-garde. Visitors reached Room 1 of the exhibition by means of a narrow staircase. The theme of Room 1 was religious subjects. The first image viewers saw was Ludwig Gies’s \textit{Kruzifixus (Crucified Christ)}, which was hung in front of a red curtain (fig. 4). The wooden sculpture depicted an un-naturalistic, emaciated, and long limbed image of Christ on the Cross. This work was accompanied by the caption “This horror hung as a war memorial in the cathedral of Lübeck” as well as a picture of the sculpture hanging in the cathedral.\textsuperscript{29} On the other walls of the room were modern paintings of the same

\textsuperscript{27} Lüttichau, 47.
\textsuperscript{29} Lüttichau, 51.
theme. On the north wall, Expressionist paintings flanked Emil Nolde’s large paintings Leben Christi (Life of Christ) (fig. 5). Underneath these works was the caption “Insolent mockery of the Divine under Centrist rule.” The central image of Nolde’s large painting Life of Christ is the crucifix, which echoes Gies’s sculpture. Again, Christ was depicted in an un-naturalistic manner, looking less than human in his sunken state. It was a clever choice to make the theme of the first room of the exhibition religious subjects. The subjects depicted were not only recognizable for the general public but also were areas where it was likely that many people would find abstraction offensive. People are generally conservative in regards to religion, which meant that the public would have presumably found religious themes depicted in such an un-naturalistic manner very inappropriate and sacrilegious. The inclusion of captions that stated that these works mocked Divinity aimed to solidify the publics opinion. The use of large, religious artworks in the first room of the Entartete Kunst set the tone for the rest of the exhibition by manipulating the presentation of images that would have been both recognizable and meaningful to the general public.

The contents of the Room 1 would have likely been quite shocking to most viewers, which immediately reveals how vital the use of captions and the organization of the exhibition was to the interpretation of the contents of the Entartete Kunst. As an educated viewer, Peter Guenther’s first impression was much more contemplative. He likened Gies’ Crucified Christ to Mathias Grünewald’s sixteenth century masterpiece the Isenheim Altar in Colmar (fig. 6). Guenther wrote,

“‘What had brought tears to my eyes in Colmar could have easily have caused a similar reaction here, but the way in which the work was displayed caused it to lose its impact.

30 Lüttichau, 49-51.
On the wall beside the sculpture was a very positive critique identifying it as an important document of modern religious expression; the text was partly obliterated, however, by a large question mark. There was also a shorter note explaining that the work had hung as a war memorial in the cathedral of Lübeck and condemning this defamation of the dead soldiers of the First World War. Did no one recognize, I wondered, that here war was likened to Christ’s Passion and the inhumanity of war was paralleled by the inhumanity of the Crucifixion?"\(^{31}\)

From his account it is evident that Guenther understood the profound nature of Gies’ work as well as its reference to what is commonly considered one of the greatest examples of German art. Yet, an important distinction is that the Nazis disliked Grünewald’s work, claiming the artist had the ‘psychosis of original sin’.\(^{32}\) Still, Guenther continued to concede that he understood why many people would have a negative reaction to these works as they could not accept unconventional images of Christ or because they felt that memorials of war should represent the valor of those who passed. Guenther’s interaction with Nolde’s work was very similar to his with Gies’. While he saw the expression within the work, he understood why those around him did not. He recalled, “I remember some very angry words by visitors in this room, the mildest of which was ‘blasphemy’.\(^{33}\) Guenther’s account not only illustrates the persuasive nature of the organization of the exhibition and the influence that it had on visitors uneducated in art, but also how clever the decision was to begin the exhibition with avant-garde depictions of religious themes because it established the ‘offensive’ tone.

While Room 2 of the exhibition was much smaller than Room 1, it contained works that the Nazis felt were important to denounce early and firmly. The artworks in Room 2 were

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\(^{31}\) Guenther, 36.  
\(^{33}\) Guenther, 36.
created only by Jewish artists, including Jankel Adler, Marc Chagall, and Lasar Segall. The general heading that encompassed all the works (regardless of subject) was “Revelation of the Jewish racial soul.” An expert from Hitler’s speech from the session on culture at the NSDAP rally in Nuremberg from September 2, 1933 was printed on the west wall. It read,

“In the field of culture, as elsewhere, the National Socialist movement and government must not permit incompetents and charlatans suddenly to change sides and enlist under the banner of the new state as if nothing had happened... One thing is certain: under no circumstances will we allow the representatives of the decadence that lies behind us suddenly emerge as the standard-bearers of the future.”

Opposite this, Alfred Rosenberg was quoted on the east wall,

“Artists who for fourteen years were duped by Jews and Marxists and accepted laurels from their hands are now being extolled as our revolutionaries by certain individuals lacking in instinct and by specific politically motivated backers. It is high time we stopped being too tolerant.”

The use of both of these quotes from Hitler and Rosenberg aimed to create a holistic view that Nazi leaders would not tolerate the influence of the ‘incompetents and charlatans’ (Jews) on their society. Facing the paintings on the south wall were quotes of famed people under the heading “The cultural Bolshevics’ order of battle”. Each quote was accompanied by a generalizing term to characterize the speaker. For example, Kurt Eisner’s quote “The artist as an artist must be an anarchist” was simply followed by the term ‘Jew’. Room 2 of the Entartete Kunst clearly utilized wall text to sway the public’s view of these works as contaminating society. However, there were still notable artworks on display. Chagall’s Rabbiner depicts a Jewish Rabbi reading with the star of David in the background. Most of the other works in the

34 Lüttichau, 52.
35 Lüttichau, 53.
36 Lüttichau, 54.
37 Lüttichau, 52-54.
Maggie Alisberg

room did not contain overt Jewish subject matter, but were simply by Jewish artists and rendered in avant-garde styles. In Room 2 of the exhibition, quotations and statements accompanied the works of Jewish artists to illustrate both the danger of the Jews and the protection that Hitler and the Nazis provide from them.

Room 3 of the Entartete Kunst was arguably the cornerstone of the exhibition. When Adolf Ziegler opened the exhibition on July 19, 1937, he addressed the public from the middle of Room 3 (fig. 7). The large room was broken up in the center by a protruding temporary wall, which is believed to have concealed a large plaster cast of the Nike of Samothrace. The partition allowed the room to be divided in regards to theme. When a visitor entered the room, they were presented with opposing subjects on the north and south walls. On the North wall were modern paintings of figures, mostly nude women (fig. 8). Works by Karl Hofer, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Kleinschmidt, and Otto Müller were displayed under the captions “An insult to German womanhood” and “the ideal-cretin and whore”. In Kirchner’s Gelbe Tänzerin (Yellow Dancer), a clothed yet sexualized woman confronts the viewer as she fills the entire composition. In Hofer’s Sitzender Akt (Sitting Act), a mysterious, nude woman reclines on a bed staring off into the distance. One of her hands rests on the empty space next to her, as if she is inviting the viewer to join her. A more detailed description of the paintings of nude women from the north wall is difficult as the location of all of them are unknown. While the Nazis did destroy a great deal of work, it is significant that almost all the works classified as “an insult to German womanhood” are missing and likely destroyed. This illustrates the emphasis that the Nazis placed on female propriety and their hatred of those who challenged it. When viewers

38 Lüttichau, 54.
Maggie Alisberg

entered Room 3 of the *Entartete Kunst*, they were immediately confronted with images that were meant to shock and horrify them.

It is because of the design and arrangement of the south west wall of Room 3 that the *Entartete Kunst* is so infamous. When a visitor entered the room, it is likely that their eyes would have immediately been drawn to the large quote that rolled over the top of a group of sculptures like a wave (fig. 9). It read, “They say it themselves: We act as if we were painters, poets, or whatever, but what we are is simply and ecstatically impudent. In our impudence we take the world for a ride and train snobs to lick our boots! – Manifesto, A. Udo, *Akiton*, 1915, Anarchist-Bolshevik.”

Once the viewer was situated inside the room, they would read Hitler’s quote on the south side of the west wall from the 1934 NSDAP conference. It read,

“All the artistic and cultural blather of Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists, and the like is neither sound in racial terms nor tolerable in national terms. It can be at best regarded as the expression of a worldview that freely admits that the dissolution of all existing ideas, all nations and all races, their mixing and adulteration, is the loftiest goal of their intellectual creators and clique of leaders. With innate, naïve effrontery this cultural equivalent to political destruction seeks to delight the new state with a Stone-Age culture, as if nothing has happened.”

Still, it was not the quotes but the organization of the western facing side of the protruding wall that made this room so unique. On the top of the wall, George Grosz was mocked as his words were graffitied as a heading (fig. 10). It read, “Take Dada Seriously! It’s worth it.” Below this, parts of compositions by Kandinsky (who is mislabeled as a Dadaist) were painted on the wall and Kandinsky’s name was even included on the bottom right corner acting as a signature. By copying Kandinsky’s work, it was implied that because anyone can copy his compositions, his

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39 Lüttichau, 57.
40 Lüttichau, 57.
Maggie Alisberg

paintings were valueless.\textsuperscript{41} Hanging on the wall was Merzbild (Merz picture) and Ringbild (Ring picture) by Kurt Schwitters, Sumpflegende (Swamp legend) by Paul Klee, two editions of the publication Der Dada, and an unidentified marble figure by Robert Haizmann.\textsuperscript{42} Guenther recalls confronting the Dada wall,

\begin{quote}
"I didn’t know anything about this movement, but the art looked to me like a lot of fun, and I wondered why it made the viewers so angry. Directly beside the Dada wall was a beautiful picture by Lyonel Feininger and a large abstraction by Kandinsky. I was upset because these two works simply did not go with the Dada group. Would the many people who were incensed by the Dada artists see the difference, or would they simply walk past, considering the paintings just two more abominations?"
\end{quote}

Guenther’s analysis reinforces the notion that curators were not concerned with accuracy but instead with eliciting the greatest response. Interestingly, a photograph of Hitler standing with the exhibition organizers on July 16 at a preview of the show reveals that paintings by Schwitters, Kandinsky, and Klee were originally hung crooked (fig. 11). However, in pictures taken at the end of the exhibition the works appear straight. It is assumed that this was changed because it felt obvious to hang the works askew.\textsuperscript{43} The Dada wall in Room 3 was a tasteless attempt to ridicule the movement, utilizing the power of the spectacle rather than honesty.

The middle of the north wall in Room 3 contained works of a theme that the Nazis particularly hated, negative depictions of war. Bridging the gap between portraits of nudes and this theme was Kirchner’s famous and provocative Self Portrait as a Soldier (fig. 12). The name of the work was changed in the exhibition to Soldier with whore and it was hung under the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[41]{Lüttichau, 54.}
\footnotetext[42]{Lüttichau, 54.}
\footnotetext[43]{Guenther, 38.}
\footnotetext[44]{Lüttichau, 54.}
\end{footnotes}
heading “An insult to the German heroes of the Great War”. The portrait, rich with color and intensity, was painted during the First World War and depicts the artist in his military uniform with his hand chopped off. His face appears hallow as a cigarette dangles from his lips. This striking self-portrait is regarded as Kirchner’s autobiographical statement about the irreversible damage that the war inflicted upon him and his art. Kirchner’s work was grouped with Otto Dix’s Kriegskrüppel (War cripples) and Der Schützengraben (The Trench), both of which continue to express biting criticism of the war (fig. 13). In The Trench, Dix was brutally honesty about the barbarity of trench warfare. Corpses and mutilated bodies occupy the entire canvas. The effect of War Cripples is quite different; a crowded, overly detailed composition is replaced with caricatures in a flat background. Four representations of soldiers in uniform move across the canvas, each having suffered significant injuries. The precise colors of these works is uncertain, as they both are missing and War Cripples is known to have been destroyed.

Guenther, who was a student of Dix and whose father was even painted by him, recalled the honesty he found in the paintings. He said,

“And yet I remember from my childhood men whose legs had been amputated or with other visible deformities sitting in the streets selling shoelaces and matches. My mother frequently gave me a coin to put into the caps they had placed in front of them. Regardless of the bitter distortions in Dix’s work, regardless of the exaggeration, the scene was truthful. Now, however, the picture was interpreted as an insult instead of an indictment of war.”

47 Guenther, 40.
Maggie Alisberg

As honesty about the horrors of war had no place in Nazi Germany, mockery of works that spoke the truth was necessary to uphold the veneration of battle. The inclusion of paintings which condemned war so earnestly early in the exhibition not only added to the shock value but also fueled rage against the art because they were labeled as slandering the memory of German war heroes.

The north wall of Room 3 concluded on the eastern side, displaying figurative paintings of a different theme, by artists such as Kirchner and Schmidt-Rottluff. The works were of farmers and peasants under the title “German farmers – a Yiddish view”. The abstracted renderings of the German farmers felt dark and gloomy. Many of the paintings depict the figures sitting around a table and drinking. The largest and most central painting, Kirchner’s *Bauernmahlzeit (Farmer’s Meal)*, uses rich colors and simplified forms to depict this everyday event (fig. 14). Every face, with the exception of the central figure who almost turns as if they are looking at the viewer, was painted in a sickly green tint. In the back window a black cat looks on, its beady yellow eyes glowing with omen. The farmers in these paintings look poor and hungry and their reality feels bleak. The wall text emphasizes that the downtrodden nature of the paintings is the Jewish reality, not that of good Germans. Instead of displaying paintings on the north side of the east wall, one of Hitler’s speeches from the 1935 NSDAP rally in Nuremberg was quoted. The wall text read, “It is not the mission of art to wallow in filth for filth’s sake, to paint the human being only in a state of putrefaction, to draw cretins as symbols of motherhood, or to present deformed idiots as representatives of manly strength.”

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48 Lüttichau, 54-57.
49 Lüttichau, 57.
Concluding the north wall of figurative works with this quote, Ziegler ensured that visitors interpreted the works in Room 3 as filth that was not art as it should be. The north east wall of Room 3 of the Entartete Kunst represented hardships as Jewish reality, further separating the Aryan life from that of the Jew.

The south eastern side of Room 3 aimed to incite visitors against the artists who produced the work. On the wall of the protrusion facing the east side of the room, Hitler was again quoted. In a speech made in 1937 on German Art Day, one day before the opening of the Entartete Kunst, Hitler asserted that it was necessary to wage war against the Bolshevik forces that caused the decay of German culture. The eastern side of the south wall continued to display exactly those who Hitler accused. The paintings were figurative works of those responsible for ‘corruption’ of German culture. In a heading underneath the works, Jews were ridiculed as well as blacks: “The Jewish longing for the wilderness reveals itself – in Germany the negro becomes the racial ideal of a degenerate art.” The paintings, by artists such as Nolde, Müller, and Pechstein, mostly were Expressionist works of young girls. Guenther recalled that he could not figure out why some of these works, Müller’s Gypsy Girl in particular, were deemed ‘degenerate’, claiming he found this work decent and lovely (fig. 15).\(^{50}\) It can be assumed that the works were included as they venerate gypsies who were classified with Jews as filth. On the south eastern wall at the close of Room 3 Goebbels was quoted, claiming that the artist himself was responsible for their sins and their own ideological deviations, and that they made a conscious decision to hold these beliefs.\(^{51}\) This final statement ensured that the

\(^{50}\) Guenther, 40.

\(^{51}\) Lüttichau, 57.
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visitor walked out of the room with a firm belief that the content of the work reflected the artists’ core values. The use of wall text Room 3 of the Entartete Kunst aimed to ensure that the visitor exited the space not only shocked by the ‘impropriety’ and ‘tasteless’ art displayed, but also with a firm belief that the artists were talentless miscreants against whom ‘good’ Germans must be protected.

After the obviously aggressive attacks against the art in Room 3, Room 4 of the Entartete Kunst was less hostile. The works in this room were not organized by specific artists or themes (fig. 16). Additionally, the walls did not display any quotes, comments, or captions that were meant to sway the public. In this room, the paintings were simply accompanied by only the artist, title, museum, and purchase price.52 There also were no sculptures in this room.

Many of the works were by artists that worked in the Die Brücke (The bridge) group. Bridge painters used an abstract and primitive style, rendered in continuous color, a breaking of aerial perspective that was used by impressionists, and bold form.53 This distinctive Bridge style was seen in the works of Erich Heckel, Kirchner, Nolde, Pechstein, Schmidt-Rottluff. For example, Kirchner’s Der Meister der Brücke (The Masters of Die Brücke) depicted four men in conversation (fig. 17). They were so large in the frame and close to the foreground that it feels as though the frame acts as walls that cram them together. This work was surrounded by others by Kirchner, such as his street scenes of women dressed in black and lined with fur, all in the same abstracted and dynamic style. Additionally, artists such as Christian Rohlfs and Kokoschka were present in Room 4 as well as two significant paintings, Max Beckmann’s Der

52 Lüttichau, 59.
Strand (The Beach) and Oskar Kokoschka’s Die Winsbraut (The Tempest). Beckmann’s beach scene depicted distorted figures engaged in frivolous activity rendered in flat planes. The reason Room 4 was designed in a calmer manner indicates the reason for turning the Dada paintings in Room 3 straight. The aggressive attack on the works in Room 3 and the heavy use of wall text could have felt a bit overwhelming to a visitor. If the style of Room 3 characterized every room in the Entartete Kunst, the exhibition may have appeared excessively heavy-handed and propagandistic. Thus, the transition from Room 3 to Room 4 seems to say to the viewer “We have provided you with the information, now judge for yourself”. It helped that many of the artists displayed in Room 4 had already been displayed in Room 3, which would have provided continuity between the two rooms. It is in this room where the brilliance of Nazi propaganda came to fruition. Room 4 of the Entartete Kunst acted as a stabilizer in the exhibition, asking viewers to interact with only the works themselves.

In Room 5 of the Entartete Kunst, the works were once again organized by theme and text appeared on the walls. The north wall displayed seven abstract works by Johannes Molzahn that were captioned “Madness becomes Method.” His work Der Gott der Flieger (The God of the Aviators) contains absolutely no figural or naturalistic imagery (fig. 18). Molzahn created his composition by repeating and echoing shapes and color. On the eastern side of the north wall, watercolors by Kandinsky were hung in a disconcerting step sequence, with the caption “Crazy at any price” (fig. 19). These works by Kandinsky were also notable as they were the first works the visitor reached in the exhibition without titles and provenance.

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54 Lüttichau, 59.
55 Lüttichau, 61.
displayed. This was because the curators wanted to reinforce the notion that the abstract works were not individuals but a group.\textsuperscript{56} Information about Kandinsky was written on the wall alongside his works, reading “teacher at the Communist Bauhaus in Dessau until 1933” \textsuperscript{57}

Guenther provides context about how the works were received. He said,

“I recall vividly one room in which abstract work was displayed. There were no titles, but I knew that some were works by Wassily Kandinsky because my father had talked with me about the absence of recognizable objects in his and other modern paintings. I also recall the reactions of the people around me: they considered the works silly because there was nothing to be seen, and the remark, “The artists are making fun of us” was frequently heard.”\textsuperscript{58}

Guenther’s reaction displays the striking difference between how abstract works were received by those who knew art and by those who did not. The comment “The artists are making fun of us” clarifies that the Nazis had succeeded in pushing viewers to believe that the artists were malicious and villainous. In Room 5, the introduction of abstract works without any sort of explanation or caption reinforced the idea that these paintings lacked talent or thought; just as an uninformed modern viewer could walk into an empty room containing only a Jackson Pollock with no description or title and could dismiss it as simple splatter paint, visitors in Munich regarded the paintings of artists such as Molzahn and Kandinsky as meaningless color.

The south wall of Room 5 countered the abstract works on the north wall by displaying art with recognizable motifs. The paintings displayed were a selection of landscapes and still lifes by Schmidt-Rottluff and Kirchner. These were captioned “Nature as seen by sick minds”, a clear reference to Nordau and Schultze-Naumburg’s arguments that modern art reflects

\textsuperscript{56} Lüttichau, 61.  
\textsuperscript{57} Lüttichau, 61.  
\textsuperscript{58} Guenther, 38.
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unhealthy minds. Schmidt-Rottluff’s *Dorfstrasse m. Leuchtturm (Village Landscape with Lighthouse)* displayed a village street rendered in thick visible brushstrokes, deep distinctive colors that are not naturalistic, heavy outlines, and very flat perspective (fig. 20). As Hitler believed that the grass should be rendered green, the sky should be rendered blue, and the dirt should be rendered brown, it is no wonder that this painting that exuded expression and vigor would seem sick to him. Other abstract works were captioned, “Even museum bigwigs called this ‘art of the German people’.” While it is unknown what was displayed on the east walls which led to Room 6 because of a lack of photographic documentation and eyewitness accounts, it is assumed that the walls bore quotations from Hitler or Goebbels. Room 5 of *Entartete Kunst* introduced a new body of works to the visitor; the presentation of both abstract works and landscapes applied the attitude taught by the curators to the visitors in the previous rooms to different genres and subjects of painting.

As Room 6 of the *Entartete Kunst* endured changes throughout the period that the exhibition was open, it is difficult to construct a complete image of the organization of the room. Still, it is known that the artworks displayed in Room 6 did not bear titles or information about the works. However, sometimes paintings were accompanied by details of its seizure by Ziegler and his commission through captions such as, “removed from display, Staatsgalerie, Munich, 1937”. Interestingly, some works were also accompanied by titles such as “acquired Cologne 1934” or “acquired by exchange, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1935”, which illustrated that even after the National Socialists came to power museums continued to pursue and purchase

59 Lüttichau, 61.
60 Lüttichau, 61.
61 Lüttichau, 61.
modern works.\textsuperscript{62} Artworks that were obtained after 1933 were by a myriad of artists, including many by Nolde as well as Beckmann, Scholz, and Hofer.\textsuperscript{63} On the entire south wall of the room, paintings by Lovis Corinth were hung under the caption “Decadence exploited for literary and commercial purposes”. It is believed that Corinth’s name originally hung beside his works, but were later erased. A narrow glass case was installed on July 23 underneath Corinth’s Walchensee landscapes, which contained photographs of works by Corinth and Wilhelm Lehmbruck. Lehmbruck’s sculpture \textit{Gross Kniende (Large Kneeling Woman)} was installed in Room 6 on July 22 and was removed again one week later (fig. 21). The reasons for this change is unclear, but the work is known to have been badly damaged on the journey. The photograph that was displayed beneath \textit{Large Kneeling Woman} was of Lehmbruck’s \textit{Sitzender Jungling}, the sculpture that took the place of \textit{Large Kneeling Woman} in the room.\textsuperscript{64} The organizational changes that occurred in Room 6 after the exhibition opened illustrates the challenges that the Nazis faced while trying to find a cohesive definition for ‘degenerate’ art. It is in Room 6 that it becomes evident that one definition was impossible; works were praised and ridiculed and even today one cannot be sure why the curators made certain decisions. Room 6 of the \textit{Entartete Kunst} underwent many changes during the course of the exhibition, removing and replacing paintings and sculptures in an attempt to create a uniform definition for the ‘degenerate’ art.

One of the most controversial pieces of art in the entire \textit{Entartete Kunst} hung on the west wall of Room 6. Franz Marc’s \textit{Turm der blauen (Tower of Blue Horses)} hung with the note

\begin{footnotes}
\item[62] Lüttichau, 63.
\item[63] Lüttichau, 62.
\item[64] Lüttichau, 63.
\end{footnotes}
“removed from display, Kronprinzenplaais, Berlin, 1936.” Holzinger’s letters to Hanfstaegnl describe the changes that were centered around this work only a few days after the exhibition opened (fig. 22). Marc’s work was removed after the Deutscher Offiiiersbund (German officers’ federation) sent a note that objected to the hanging of the painting. They argued that Marc was an officer who served the Reich and the fatherland with distinction in the Great War, having won the Iron Cross, First Class, and who died during the siege of Verdun. Because of his distinction, Marc could not be linked to the disgrace of the exhibition. The Nazis saw that the general public viewed Marc as a hero and had sympathy for him; thus, they thought that keeping such a dynamic painting by Marc could risk compromising the strength of the exhibition’s message. The painting was removed but, at the same time, four other works by Marc were taken from Room 7 and moved into Room 6. The vacancy left by Tower of Blue Horses was filled with works by Corinth and Nolde. Ironically, it is now known that Marc’s style was pleasing to many National Socialists. It is even said that Ziegler believed that if Marc survived the war he would have become the greatest German painter of all time. The Nazis’ admiration for Marc’s work is indicated by the fate of the Tower of Blue Horses. After the painting was removed from the walls of the Entartete Kunst, it was seized by Hermann Göring in 1938. It is even said that Baldur von Schirach, the head of the Hitler Jugend and the Gauleiter and Recihsstatthalter in Vienna, felt confident enough in his view on Marc to defend the artist to Hitler himself in private conversations. Today, a search continues for the painting, which

65 Petropoulos, Art as Politics in the Third Reich, 57
66 Lüttichau, 63-64.
67 Barron et al, 295.
68 Petropoulos, Art as Politics in the Third Reich, 223.
disappeared after the Nazis defeat in 1945. Since then, there have been a few reported sightings of the work, yet it is still uncertain if it survived the war.\textsuperscript{69} Franz Marc’s *Tower of Blue Horses* illustrates the complexity that surrounded the choice to discredit certain artists, and that even though some artists were officially labeled as ‘degenerate’, the opinions that Nazi officials held privately were quite different.

Room 7, the last room of the upper floor in the long and narrow exhibition space of the *Entartete Kunst*, is one of the most curious rooms of the show. Above the door that lead from Room 6 to Room 7 were the words “They had four years’ time” (fig. 23). This referenced Hitler’s speech from 1933 in which he said, “Now, people of Germany, give us just four years, and then judge us”.\textsuperscript{70} In Room 7 were paintings completed by academy professors whose pro-modern leanings vexed the National Socialists, causing the professors to be fired. Only one photograph from Room 7 has been found (fig. 24). Still, it is known that the words “These are the masters who have been teaching German youth” accompanied paintings by artists such as Hans Purrmann, Karl Caspar, Maria Caspar-Filser, Paul Bindel, Werner Heuser, Heinrich Nauen, Edward Scharff, and Georg Schrimpf, as well as other notable artists such as Paula Modersohn-Becker and Edvard Munch. The room also contained paintings by August Macke, who like Marc, received the Iron Cross, First Class, having been killed in battle in Champagne in September of 1914. The works by Macke were removed after officers protested the inclusion of his works as

\textsuperscript{70} Lüttichau, 64.
they did with Marc’s.\textsuperscript{71} According to Rave, many of the labels and comments in this room were whitewashed over, but they were still visible and legible. He commented,

“The labels clearly show that the exhibition organizers are not concerned with art alone but with making war on the public art administration. They bear a particularly evident grudge against the Reichserziehungsministerium (Reich ministry of Education)... The numerous changes made in the inscriptions betray a degree of uncertainty on the part of the exhibition organizers.”\textsuperscript{72}

Rave’s comments about the indecisiveness of the exhibition organizers is reflected in the changes that occurred in both Room 6 and Room 7. After the \textit{Entartete Kunst} opened on Monday, July 19, Room 7 was closed on Monday, opened on Tuesday evening at around 6:45, closed on Wednesday, and both Room 6 and Room 7 were inaccessible on Thursday but were opened the next day. The two rooms were rehung during the closure on July 22-23. It is speculated that after the rearrangement, Room 6 was made to look more cramped and arrows were drawn on the walls to connect labels to their respective works. Room 7 of the exhibition was closed to the public after the second week the exhibition was open. Only journalists and holders of special permits could enter the room after that.\textsuperscript{73} The reason Room 7 was closed cannot be certain, but it is curious that it closed around the same time the ground floor galleries opened. The lack of documentation and the closure of Room 7 of the \textit{Entartete Kunst} is peculiar, indicating a deficiency of cohesion by the curators.

The ground floor of the \textit{Entartete Kunst}, which opened on July 22 three days after the rest of the exhibition, cultivated a different feel from the upper floors. The galleries on the ground floor were opened later simply because of the limited time that was given to put the

\textsuperscript{71} Lüttichau, 64.
\textsuperscript{72} Lüttichau, 64.
\textsuperscript{73} Lüttichau, 65.
show together. The walls on the ground floor were covered with paintings, prints, drawings, and written comments while unframed works on paper, photographs, and books were squeezed into crowded glass cases that were placed by the longer sides of the rooms. The ground floor was much narrower than the upper because the upper floor was supported by an arcade on the Hofgarten side. The ground floor was so crowded that visitors were instructed to walk to the right of the galleries. It was not organized by any iconographic classification. Still, the ground floor held more than half of the objects in the Entartete Kunst, although there is no existing inventory of all of the works, either by the press or officials. Even though no definite reconstruction of the ground galleries is possible, sources, such as notes made by Rave and Holzinger, provide modern viewers with significant information. Visitors would enter through a small lobby at the bottom of the staircase that led to the upper floor. The lobby was known to originally contain two works, Schmied von Hagen (Blacksmith of Hagen) by Kirchner and Der neue Mensch (The New Man), which was a plaster sculpture by Otto Freundlich (fig. 25). Freundlich’s sculpture, which was a large bust of a head in which the features are simplified to their most basic shapes, later was featured on the cover of the exhibition guide. The wall text above Freundlich’s sculpture read, “The face of the ‘new man’ of the ‘new world community,’ which is heralded by the ‘new art.’ The anarchist-Bolshevik Freundlich writes: ‘Today we stand outside all history; we are ripe for the essence of our world destiny.’ The text certainty continued the tone set by the upper galleries. Still, no inventory number is known for Freundlich’s sculpture which indicates that it was removed from the exhibition early, maybe

74 Lüttichau, 66.
75 For more on the exhibition guide, see chapter 4.
76 Lüttichau, 66.
even with Kirchner’s paintings which itself holds a low inventory number. The ground floor of the <i>Entartete Kunst</i> held a massive collection of works that continued the message of the upper galleries.

Room G1, the first of the downstairs rooms, was almost half as long as the second ground floor room and was crammed with content. Hanging on the west wall were paintings that were seized from Dresden and had taken part in their <i>Chamber of Horrors</i> exhibition. On the north wall and above the glass cases were a series of paintings by Oskar Schlemmer, and on the east wall hung two works by Grosz and two by Dix. More paintings, including three by Heinrich Campendonk, hung on the three piers between the windows on the south wall. Included in the glass case on the north wall were three portfolio’s of prints: Kandinsky’s <i>Kleine Welten</i> (<i>Small worlds</i>), Feininger’s portfolio of twelve woodcuts, and Kokoschka’s <i>Bachkantate</i>. The vitrines on the south wall also contained portfolios such as Dix’s <i>Der Krieg</i> (<i>War</i>) and Kandinsky’s <i>Klange</i> (<i>Sounds</i>). Mainly though, this space held books from the Junge Kunst (Young Art) series that was founded by Georg Biermann and books of drawings by Klee and Barlach that were published by Rienhard Piper Verlag. The south wall vitrines were accompanied by wall text that read “How Professor Biermann has disseminated art-Bolshevism in Germany” and “The State Secret Police intervene – a selection of books confiscated in recent years”. Room G1 of the <i>Entartete Kunst</i> displayed and discredited paintings and graphic works, creating a connection between the smaller and more accessible objects displayed in the vitrines and the larger and more intellectually complex works displayed upstairs.

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77 For more on the Champers of Horror exhibition, see chapter 1.
78 Lüttichau, 67.
79 Lüttichau, 71.
Although the documentation of Room G2, the final room of the Entartete Kunst, is not certain or conclusive, enough information survives to create a general idea (fig. 26). On the entrance wall of G2 and on the wall before the first window, works by Rohlfs and Klee were hung. These works were a combination of framed oil paintings and watercolors tacked on the wall, although there is no indication of this in the official records. Consistent with the upper galleries, insulting comments and texts accompanied paintings and the vitrines. Under Klee’s paintings, the artists own words were mocked, “I am not to be comprehended purely in this world’s terms: my home is with the dead as much as the unborn.”

Heading the works on the north wall, Wieland Herzfelde (publisher and founder of Malik Verlag) was quoted out of context, “We would rather exist unclean than perish clean; we leave it to stubborn individualists and old maids to be inept but respectable; reputation is not our worry.” The works displayed underneath the quote began with a series of prints from Bauhaus portfolios. Above the prints and the wall text three paintings by Dix, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Schmidt-Rottluff were each hung in a cross vault. Guenther recalled questioning why some of the works in Room G2 were included in the exhibition. He wrote,

“Among the graphic works displayed on the ground floor of the exhibition were prints from published portfolios – one of which my father owned – from the famous Bauhaus school in Weimar. Some of the artists who taught at the Bauhaus had made frequent trips to Dresden and sometimes visited our home. All of them were now declared to be ‘un-German’ as well as ‘degenerate.’ One was Gerhard Marcks, the sculptor, who I always thought was one of the truly ‘classical’ artists. His plaster model of the archangel Gabriel and a small bronze of a boy, both exhibited in the Entartete Kunst, were accessible and lovely forms lacking distortion that was so bitterly criticized in other works on view. Also in the exhibition were lithographs of a highly abstracted face by Alexej von Jawlensky.”

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80 Lüttichau, 80.
81 Lüttichau, 74.
82 Guenther, 40.
Guenther’s account not only reflects the totality of what was included in the bottom galleries but also just how ambiguous the label of ‘degenerate’ was. As the National Socialists hated the Bauhaus and abstraction, the inclusion of these works seem logical. Yet, one has to question why Marck’s more classical sculptures were shown (fig. 27). Marck’s was discriminated against simply because he was a follower of the Bauhaus. It is known that when Hitler walked through the Entartete Kunst he expressed specific disapproval for Marck’s works. Room G2 of the Entartete Kunst was crammed with works that the Nazis found deplorable, classifying them as such based on an association with a school, subject matter, or style.

The exhibition ended on the east wall of the Room G2, after which visitors had to circle back through the galleries to exit. It is believed that on the east and south walls of Room G2 were paintings, prints, and photographs of works by artists such as Gies, Cesar Klein, Scharff, and Georg Scholz. Other works on the south wall were taken from museums and collections in Dresden, Berlin, Essen, Düsseldorf, and Breslau. The lack of organization and grouping in the Room G2 indicates that the curators did not have time to create a convincing and truly propagandistic effect. It seems likely that as soon as the works were unpacked, they were immediately hung on the walls or put in a vitrine. This assertion is also supported by the fact that the G2 has a disproportionately high number of works without a known inventory number. The hasty organization of Room G2 illustrates the importance of graphic works to the exhibition. Rather than simply not showing these works, the curators included them because the defamation of books and prints was particularly important to the Nazi agenda. As these

83 Barron et al, 296.
84 Lüttichau, 74.
works were reproduced, widely distributed, and interacted the most with the common German people, it was necessary to make the obvious connection between the paintings shown and the graphic objects. Room G2, the final room of the *Entartete Kunst*, concluded by making one last final statement that connected the ‘horror’ and ‘degeneracy’ of the paintings and objects shown in every other room of the exhibition to the books and prints that were more recognizable or well known.

It has been established that the curation of the galleries of the *Entartete Kunst* was pure subterfuge, but the question remains if the public was truly convinced. Guenther, who attended the Munich exhibition twice, chronicled not only where the propaganda succeeded but also where it did not suffice. He claimed that on his second visit to the exhibition he remembered a man who seemed educated in dress and demeanor loudly declaring that any abstraction or deviation from natural forms corrupted the viewer and that these works were created by treacherous foreigners and Jews.\(^{85}\) Guenther states that this opinion is practically forced on viewers, particularly the uninformed who are likely encountering modern art for the first time. Still, the change in atmosphere that characterized his second visit to the exhibition sheds an interesting perspective on the how effective the propaganda was. He wrote,

“"The people were rather quiet, as if attending a ‘real’ exhibition. There were only a few who talked, rather quietly, and it appeared that some of them had seen these works before or even liked them. They would stand in front of a work for longer periods of time than the other visitors, although they hardly ever spoke, even to those who accompanied them. I remember hearing a whispered ‘Aren’t they lovely?’ from a woman standing in front of some graphic works on the lower floor; she then walked quickly away. It was only at that point that I became fully aware of how the design of the exhibition had affected me, that only in some cases had I been able to disregard the

\(^{85}\) Guenther, 43.
‘didactic’ statements. How sad I was that works cherished by artists I admired were placed in the pillory.  

This account reveals that while the propaganda was strong and forceful, it did not entirely convince everyone. There could have been many reasons why that woman uttered words of praise for some prints. Maybe she was familiar with the works or the artist before, maybe they reminded her of some pleasant memory, or maybe she was simply looking past the slander and genuinely enjoyed the works for what they were. What is clear is that some visitors at the _Entartete Kunst_ could see talent in the art displayed.

While it cannot be certain how individual people responded to the work and why they did so, there can be no question as to why that woman scurried away or why no one spoke to their companions. The conclusion to Guenther’s essay reveals just that:

“How well I remember my feelings: while standing before certain works, I had wanted to say something to their defense to those who laughed and cursed and derided them, but I was too afraid to do so. I had become frightened watching the reactions of the people around me. What would they do to me – and would it create even greater trouble for my father – if they found out that I didn’t share their disgust? A seventeen-year-old in Germany in 1937 did not challenge the opinions of his elders, especially in the atmosphere of disdain, hostility, and latent anger created by the organizers of _Entartete Kunst._”

It is in this statement that the exhibition is best characterized. It did not matter what a viewer privately felt. The National Socialist opinion of modern art was pushed onto the visitor with such force that it was evident that challenging the characterization of these works as ‘degenerate’ was thought to be very dangerous. Intelligent debate or discussion simply was not

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86 Guenther, 43.
87 Guenther, 43.
an option. While the *Entartete Kunst* may not have swayed every visitor’s personal opinion, the aggressive conformist tone highlighted that disagreeing was not an option.

There is an element of the *Entartete Kunst* that time causes modern audiences to disregard, the notion of morality and respectability. Respectability was a core value for the National Socialists, but it certainly was not unique to them. The concept of integrity, behaving rightly, and adhering to social norms has always been a central pillar of modern civilizations. In the twenty-first century, the slander of works such as those by Beckmann, Chagall, Kirchner, Kandinsky, Nolde, as well as many others, is viewed as cruel ignorance to silence artistic masters. But in the early twentieth century these works were not universally praised and public opinion of them was certainly not cohesive. For example, a British left-wing journal, the London *New Statesman*, claimed that the exhibition was the best thing Mr. Hitler had done thus far. As the avant-garde threatened the norms of the middle-class it was viewed as dangerous, an attitude that the National Socialists took advantage of. Just as there were riots in French theaters when Jean Renoir screened his *Rules of the Game*, which unabashedly exposed the scandalous reality of bourgeois life in 1939, or as there were huge protests that surrounded the exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe’s homoerotic pictures in the United States in 1989, objection to modern art is not rare. In the *Entartete Kunst*, the National Socialists capitalized on the middle classes principle of respectability and used it silence the avant-garde.

The *Entartete Kunst* was a brilliant use of propaganda by the National Socialist Party to sway the German population into the Nazi ideal, particularly in regards to art. It aimed to show

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to the German people that there was something distinctively ‘bad’ and ‘un-German’ about modern art and modernism. That is not to say that the *Entartete Kunst* was unpopular. During the four months that it was on view in Munich, more than two million viewers came to see the exhibition. On most days around twenty thousand visitors attended the exhibition and on August 2, 1937 thirty-six thousand visitors passed through the cramped halls. The Nazis encouraged people to attend and admission was even free of charge. By the time the exhibition completed its tour of Germany and Austria, an additional one million viewers came to see the *Entartete Kunst*.\(^{89}\) No exhibition of modern art had ever before drawn such crowds.\(^{90}\) Powerful, haunting, and displaying an incredible collection of modern works, the *Entartete Kunst* was one of the defining moments of art and propaganda under the Third Reich, claiming once and for all the unwavering view that Germans must have towards art.

\(^{89}\) For explanation on the traveling exhibitions, see chapter 4.
Chapter 3: ‘Art as Art Should Be’

Opening in Munich one day before the Entartete Kunst, the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung (GDK), or The Great German Art Exhibition, aimed to be everything that the Entartete Kunst was not. Housed in a building erected solely to display what the Nazis deemed ‘German’ art, the exhibition was meant to illustrate to the German people what art should be. Unlike the Entartete Kunst, the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung was planned well in advance and was calculated specifically to meet Hitler’s demands. The artwork displayed echoed the ideals of Nazi ideology, setting a standard for beauty in both subject matter and style. The Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung was the Nazis response to the art that they labeled ‘degenerate’.

Almost immediately after he came to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler commissioned the building of a Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) in Munich (fig. 28). The museum replaced the Glaspalast, which burned down in 1931. Hitler placed the new building at the southern end of the Englishcher Garten on the Prinzregentenstraße. He commissioned his favorite architect, Paul Ludwig Troost, to design the new museum. Catering to Hitler’s taste, Troost designed a massive neo-classical building made of stone, that was to be 175 meters long, 80 meters deep, and 15.5 meters high. It was headed by a colonnade that was built to connate the majesty of the subject.¹ In October 1933, Hitler laid the cornerstone for the building, which was such a priority to him that it was his first major public building project during his term as Chancellor. Only in retrospect, does the breaking of the ceremonial hammer in Hitler’s hands

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become ironic foreshadowing.\(^2\) When the building was opened in 1937, its purpose was evident in the statement published in a National Socialist newspaper. It read, “May this house be devoted only to serious art that is in our blood, art that people can comprehend. Because only the art that the simple man can understand is true art.”\(^3\) The pristine galleries and spaces of the House of German Art were meant to echo the superiority of the art and the culture that was displayed within the walls.

Prior to its opening, the GDK was advertised as representative of all Germans in order to encourage all artists to submit their works to be displayed. By 1936, the original idea to display great German art of the past was replaced by the concept of an exhibition of contemporary German art. The GDK was first announced publically in the newsletter of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts in December 1936.\(^4\) By mid-January, newspapers across Germany asked artists to put forth their best works for display in the GDK. All living German artists were invited to submit works for the exhibition, which on the surface boasted wide acceptance of all types of art. This call for submissions of artwork published in 1936 echoes the sentiment, “It is therefore intended to neither favor specific art trends nor exclude others in the selection of the works; on the other hand, a high standard will be applied to the artistic value of the submitted works.”\(^5\) The advertisements in German papers resulted in the submission of 16,000 works, although the press insisted that 25,000 were entered.\(^6\) Hitler’s goal was for the GDK to set the tone for all


\(^4\) Schlenker, 93.

\(^5\) Schlenker, 93.

\(^6\) Schlenker, 93.
Maggie Alisberg

future exhibitions in Germany. German museums were to house German artists and proper German artwork. While the GDK was advertised as having no preference except that the artist be German, it soon became apparent that the pieces that were exhibited strictly represented certain styles.

Selecting the art that would appear in the GDK proved to be a difficult task. A committee of nine artists attempted to sift through the thousands of submitted works and choose those that were to be displayed. The team included the President of the Reich Culture Chamber, Adolf Zeigler, who supervised painting selection and the sculptors, Arno Breker and Josef Wackerle, who supervised sculpture selection. However, as they were given no clear guidelines as to what style of works they were to accept, their job was quite challenging. On June 6, 1937, Hitler became so angry after his visit to the galleries that he ordered many pictures to be taken down. He was particularly upset about the selection of 80 works that he deemed ‘unfinished’. He explained, “I won’t tolerate unfinished paintings.” This also caused Hitler to replace the jury in charge of selection with his trusted photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann. In order to efficiently select works, Hoffmann drove through the galleries in a motorized wheelchair yelling “Accepted!” or “Rejected!” at works as his assistants took notes. He was even known to have bragged to a colleague saying, “I drove by two thousand pictures only this morning. How else could I get ready in time?” After Hitler visited the gallery again on July 12, 1937, Hoffmann proved to have met the Führer’s needs. Goebbels recounted in his diary, “The Haus der Kunst. It is almost finished and wonderful. The selected pictures are now

7 Nicholas, 16.
very beautiful, even better than the sculptures. There are not many but they are carefully chosen. The Führer is very happy." The process of selecting works for the GDK was difficult as the main requirement was to cater to Hitler’s personal taste. Ultimately, the exhibition displayed less than 6% of the works submitted, featuring 884 artworks by 556 artists. By July 1937, the works hanging in the halls of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst conformed to Hitler’s opinion about what good German modern art should be.

In Munich July 18, 1937 was declared the “Day of German Art”, celebrating the opening of the GDK and the Haus der Deutschen Kunst. The opening was celebrated in Munich with huge pageantry and fanfare. Prior to July 18, Munich had experienced days filled with theater performances, public fairs, concerts, and operas. On July 18, the streets of the city were crowded with the pageant entitled Zweitausend Jahre deutsche Kulture (Two Thousand Years of German Culture) (fig. 29). The parade consisted of over 7,000 people, animals, and machines that boasted the strength of Germany and the Third Reich. The procession, which led to the new museum, celebrated what was considered eminently ‘German’; including golden Viking ships that were accompanied by ancient Germanic costumes, priests and seers in the sagas, and figures dressed as ‘Charlemagne’ marched in front of ‘Henry the Lion’ and ‘Frederick Barbarossa’. Those dressed as German artists from the Renaissance were escorted by a troop of armored soldiers and huge models of new Nazi architectural designs were displayed. The parade articulated the majesty of German culture and its timeless significance. The Nazi

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9 Schlenker, 93.
10 Schlenker, 94.
11 Schlenker, 90.
12 Nicholas, 18-19.
Maggie Alisberg

newspaper *Völkische Beobachter* raved, “In the shadow of their sword, Dürer, Holbein, and Cranach created their works of art for the German people. Are they not brothers, the artists and soldiers?” On the day that the GDK and the House of German Art was opened the National Socialists made every attempt to strengthen the connection between Hitler and the greatest leaders in German history; promoting the idea that the building and the art within it was a continuation of German culture at its finest.

The incredible spectacle that lined the streets of Munich on July 18 concluded with a speech given by Hitler, who delivered his impassioned remarks from the steps of his first completed public building (fig. 30). In his speech, Hitler not only criticized ‘degenerate’ art but also praised ‘German’ art as a symbol of a new era. He said,

> “Ability is the necessary qualification if an artist wishes his work to be exhibited here. People have attempted to recommend modern art by saying that it is the expression of a new age; but art does not create a new age, it is the general life of peoples which fashions itself anew and often looks for a new expression... A new epoch is created not by litterateurs but by fighters, those who really fashion and lead peoples, thus make history... It is either impudent effrontery or an almost inconceivable stupidity to exhibit to people of today works which perhaps ten or twenty thousand years ago might have been made by a man of the Stone Age.”

In his remarks, Hitler separated the work of the GDK with that of the Entartete Kunst. He compared the two by characterizing that of the Haus der Kunst as representative of ability and a new age. Paul Ortwin Rave, who was a curator at the Nationalgalerie of Berlin in the 1930s, attended the speech. Rave’s critical account, written years later in 1949, illustrates where

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13 Nicholas, 19.
Hitler veered off course. Rave noted that a tone of celebration and encouragement for the people would have benefitted Hitler, as well as omitting the long and highly academic comparison between modern and German art and ideals. Rave continued to describe Hitler’s demeanor as ‘power-mad’ as the Führer made it clear that anyone who produced art that didn’t simply display nature would be stopped.\(^16\) Rave wrote, “With every sentence, Hitler’s manner of speaking became more agitated. He seethed with rage... saliva flowed from his mouth... so that even his entourage stared at him with horror. Was it a madman who twisted convulsively, waved his hands in the air, and drummed his fists...?\(^17\) Rave’s account of Hitler’s speech reveals how an educated spectator reacted to Hitler’s strong words. For the general public, the opening of the GDK served as a set of instructions as to what opinions they were to hold and what art they should praise.

Upon entering the GDK at the House of German Art, it was immediately clear that the Nazis had a distinct vision for the specific style and subject matter of the art that they would exhibit and support. In July 1937, Dr. Hans Kiener wrote, “The Führer wants the German artist to leave his solitude and to speak to the people. This must start with the choice of subject. It has to be popular and comprehensible. It has to be heroic in line with the ideals of National Socialism. It has to declare its faith in the ideal of the Nordic and racially pure human being.”\(^18\) Thus, there was no question that the open-minded tone used in the solicitations for submission to the GDK was pure fiction. The subjects that were shown in the exhibition aligned with the National Socialist identity of the elevation of the Aryan race and the celebration of heroism. It

\(^{16}\) Paul Ortwin Rave, quoted in Nicholas, 20.
\(^{17}\) Nicholas, 20.
\(^{18}\) Adam, 95.
was imperative that the message of the GDK was clear and could only be interpreted consistent with Hitler’s intention. The success of this goal is recognized in an art critic from Cologne’s review. It read,

“A walk through the exhibition proved that the principles of clarity, truth, and professionalism determined the selection... The heroic element stands out. The worker, the farmer, the soldier are the themes... Heroic subjects dominate over sentimental ones... The experiences of the Great War, the German landscape, the German man at work, peasant life... The life of the state with its personalities and developments. These are the new subjects, they demand new expressions and styles... In accordance with the subject, the style of most of the works is clear, strong, and full of character... there is a whiff of greatness everywhere. Healthy, fresh, and optimistic artists are showing their work with manifold individuality. A new era of art has begun.”

This review not only illustrates the blatant support by the National Socialists for idealized images that depicted ‘noble’ Germans, but also the tone of the reviews that would be published. As Goebbels banned judgment of art in 1936 with the exception of certain National Socialist art editors, these types of subservient reviews were widespread and served to influence the opinion of the general public who did not attend the exhibition. Thus, the undisputed praise of the homogenous subject matter and style that was represented in the art of the GDK would have emphasized the superiority of the Nazi aesthetic.

The architecture of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst was meant to reflect the purity and the prominence of the art that was housed inside. As has been previously stated, Hitler commissioned the neo-classical building to resemble a new era of German greatness. Peter Guenther, who was seventeen years old at the time, reminisced:

“The entrance hall was impressive in size but disappointing. The marble, the abundance of red flags, the laurel trees in large pots, the bust and pictures of Hitler were not

19 Adam, 95-96.
20 For more on the ban of judgment of art, see chapter 1.
21 For more on Guenther, see chapter 2.
unique. Basically, the décor repeated on a slightly grander scale that used all Nazi festivals and special occasions in theaters, opera houses, museums, and even schools. I do remember that I was impressed by the silence: everybody whispered. It was obviously due to the semi-ecclesiastical atmosphere created by the size of the rooms, their décor, the impressive lighting, and the careful placement of the exhibits.”

Guenther arrived at the Haus der Deutchen Kunst expecting to see the best of modern German art as a result of the advertisements he had seen. His account illustrates his discontent that the décor of the GDK oozed Nazi imagery, instead of representing something new or modern. Furthermore, his description proves that every attempt was made to make the space feel grand and holy. Even years later, he remembered the silence that was a product of the ‘semi-ecclesiastical’ atmosphere of the space. The organization of the GDK provided a sharp contrast to the decoration of the Entartete Kunst, where works were crammed together in a small space, hung poorly with dim lighting. Guenther’s first hand account of entering the GDK reveals the lengths that the National Socialists went to to make the space and what was housed within it feel as sacred and high-quality as possible.

Like the Entartete Kunst, every aspect of the GDK was highly calculated and contrived to direct the viewers experience. Upon arrival, visitors were given an in-depth exhibition catalog that contained floor plans of both floors of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst. On the floor plan, a red line was drawn with arrows that outlined the route visitors should take through all forty rooms of the museum (fig. 31). The path began in the ‘Hall of Honor’, a central, three-story room made up of three naves and covered with marble (fig. 32). The Hall of Honor allowed access to the larger high-ceilinged exhibition rooms. Additionally, six sets of staircases were

erected evenly around the building, which provided access to the second floor. Room 1 of the exhibition aggressively articulated the message of the entire show (fig. 33). The central image of the room was Heinrich Knirr’s portrait of Adolf Hitler. Standing in the traditional pose of a statesmen, Hitler was rendered in a brown uniform, wearing his World War I military medals, and bearing a swastika on an armband. The work was flanked on both sides by paintings by Elk Eber, Die letzte Handgranate (The Last Hand Grenade) on the left and Appell am 23. Februar 1933 (Roll Call on 23 February 1933) on the right. Although both these works depicted soldiers, The Last Hand Grenade displayed a German soldier in World War I readying his last weapon to help Germany, while Roll Call on 23 February 1933 showed two soldiers preparing for a meeting in early 1933, a time period essential to securing National Socialist power. Together, these three works emphasized Hitler’s position as the father of the Third Reich and his role in restoring Germany’s strength.

After walking through the grandiose Hall of Honor and immediately being faced with this militaristic message, the tone of the exhibition was set. The organization of the GDK and the first images that the viewers were shown clearly demonstrated the propagandist nature of the exhibition created by the National Socialists.

Room 2 of the GDK, which was one of the grandest rooms in the exhibition and contained what was considered some of the best art, continued to assert the message set in room 1, albeit in a subtler manner (fig. 34). Along with room 15, on the equal and opposite side of the building, room 2 was a large and important main space of the exhibition. Arguably the most notable work in the room was Josef Thorak’s massive two figure sculpture Kameradschaft

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23 Schlenker, 94-95.
24 Schlenker, 95.
Maggie Alisberg

(Comradeship), which occupied its own wall (fig. 35). The work depicted two huge nude, overly muscular men holding hands with their heads held high as they strode forward. If the figures weren’t so austere, it would be difficult not to interpret the work as homoerotic. Much of the rest of the room was occupied by life-size sculptures by artists such as Arno Breker, Georg Kolbe, Fritz Klimsch, Richard Knecht, and Richard Scheibe. Bearing titles such as Junger Streiter (Young Fighter), Der Sämann (The Sower), Zehnkämpfer (Decathlete), and Der Sieger (The Victor), these sculptures echoed Thorak’s and celebrated the muscular male body in both form and subject. Scattered in-between these sculptures were portrait busts of Mussolini, Atatürk, and National Socialist leaders. Mussolini and Atatürk were both known to be sources of inspiration for Hitler, thus the inclusion of their busts in the GDK reflects the admiration that he had for them. The few paintings in the room aimed to emphasize the exquisiteness of the German countryside, while Karl Leipold’s Das neue Deutschland (The New Germany) depicted a huge ship emerging from a sea storm as a beam of light. Guenther remembered experiencing these sculptures by Arno Breker and Josef Thorak:

“I found them rather frightening. I thought they were intentionally attempting to imitate famous Greek sculptures I knew from books, but they lacked the grandeur and quiet balance that I considered to be the hallmarks of that art. They were simply large, primarily male, nudes. People around me marveled at the craftsmanship, technical achievement, and – what was repeatedly praised – realism of these figures (although certainly none of us looked like any of these giants). The visitors whom I overheard seemed not to recognize by the titles given to the statues – Kameradschaft (Comradeship), Sieg (Victory) – that they were meant to be symbols.”

25 Schlenker, 95.
26 Schlenker, 96.
28 Schlenker, 96.
29 Guenther, 34.
Guenther’s reflection illustrates his dissatisfaction with the work and understanding of its shortcomings, while revealing how his impression differed from the uneducated public. He understood that these colossal works were meant to be representations for the population of the ideals to which they should aspire. The huge sculptures that dominated room 2 of the GDK intended to express the values that were central to the National Socialists.

On the other side of the Hall of Honor, rooms 14 and 15 echoed the set up of rooms 1 and 2. Room 14 displayed Paul Roloff’s portrait of Paul Ludwig Troost, architect of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, flanked by two evergreen plants and two drawings by Christian Hacker (fig. 36). Hacker’s drawings of Troost’s two buildings designed for the party, the Köningsplatz and the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, honored the architect and his achievements developing the National Socialist style of architecture.  

Room 15 echoed room 2 in size and grandeur but displayed the paintings considered the best and most important (fig. 37). Like Comradeship in Room 2, Adolf Ziegler’s triptych Die vier Elemente (The Four Elements), which Guenther called “insipid and tasteless”, was placed in the most visible and important location (fig. 38). The work depicted four nude women in an incredibly stark setting on a blue background rendered in a style that was overwhelmingly academic. Zeigler’s bleak triptych was so loved by Hitler that it adorned his mantelpiece after the exhibition was over. Also in room 15 were paintings by Thomas Baumgartner, Constantin Gerhardinger, and Adolf Wissel who depicted subjects of peasant life, while Paul Jungshanns and Heinrich von Zügel painted animals such as cows, sheep, and goats on large canvases. Additionally, in the room were still-life’s and portraits, as

30 Schlenker, 96.
31 Guenther, 35.
32 Schlenker, 97.
well as portrait busts. Arguably the most unusual work in the room was Fritz Mackensen’s 
_Gottesdienst im Moor (Church Service on the Moor)_ (fig. 39). The National Socialist’s admired
the artist, particularly for his involvement in the Combat League for German Culture as well as
in the NSDAP. Yet, it was quite unique in the exhibition for its religious subject matter,
especially as an example of the new style of art. The work in fact was created in 1895, a detail
that was not included in the exhibition catalog. However, because Mackensen had trained at
the Munich Academy in the 1880s and the technique had persisted, the stylistic gap in time was
not noticeable.  

The paintings displayed in rooms 14 and 15 of the GDK continued to communicate the National Socialist ideals and elevate their superiority.

It was in rooms 2 and 15 that the nature of the exhibition was established, implying
strong National Socialist sentiments. The works in these rooms were most commonly illustrated
in the exhibition catalog and discussed in reviews. The propagandistic significance of certain
works was often so blatant because of the titles attached to them. By itself, Leipold’s painting
of a ship coming out of a storm basked in light was simply a rendering of a naval storm, which is
a popular subject in painting. The title given to the painting presumably for the GDK, _The New
Germany_ changed from _Segler (Sailing-ship)_ , overtly asserted the idea that the National Socialist Party was a god-like force guiding Germany out of a dark and dismal past. Because of
the precedent established in the earlier galleries, subsequent paintings that depicted Aryan
subjects had an air of superiority to them. Scenes of landscapes and peasants were to be interpreted in the _Blut und Boden (Blood and Soil)_ ideology of the Nazi Party.  

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33 Schlenker, 97-98.
34 Schlenker, 98.
majority of the works aimed to represent ‘timeless’ subject matter, several pieces that
publically supported the National Socialist Party were included.

To ensure that the GDK was not too obviously propagandistic, artwork that directly
addressed and elevated the Third Reich had to be limited. There were no fewer than twelve
works that depicted Hitler, while far fewer portrayed contemporary events, such as the
construction of the Autobahn, or openly displayed Party subject matter. Hitler played a large
role in carefully selecting the works exhibited that depicted political subjects. Hermann Otto
Hoyer’s *Am Anfang war das Wort (In the Beginning was the Word)* was submitted on Hitler’s
orders and Hoffmann later stated that he was forced to display the work (fig. 40).35 A member
of the NSDAP, Hoyer had his right arm was amputated after World War I, meaning he
completed the work with his left hand. His work depicted an early meeting of the Party where
Hitler spoke passionately to a group of the most devoted National Socialist followers. He stood
in front of an unmoving, lame Nazi flag bearing a swastika as the room listened closely to him.
The painting was featured in the exhibition catalogue in addition to many other forms of
reproduction, in particular on postcards. The title, *In the Beginning was the Word*, quoted a
famous passage from Genesis in which God begins to create the world. The image of Hitler as
the creator tied well into the theme of the exhibition, in particular to the images in room 1. It is
not surprising that in 1943 Hoyer was honored with the title of professor “due to his special
merits for the breakthrough of National Socialist ideas in German art”.36 Propagandist themes

36 Schlenker, 99-100.
in the GDK were everywhere, some obvious and others subtle, but all worked to elevate the art and ideology of the National Socialist Party, and Hitler himself, to a god-like status.

The troubles that the early committee faced defining a distinctive style of National Socialist art were not solved by Hoffmann’s appointment. Creating a clear propagandistic language that contrasted with that of ‘degenerate’ art was difficult. Many of Hitler’s favorite artists, including Arno Breker, Olaf Gulbransson, Fritz Koelle, Werner Peiner, Richard Scheibe, and Carl Schwalbach, had at some point had their work mocked, confiscated, or destroyed. However, all of them had been reinstated by the time the GDK opened.\(^{37}\) Otto Dix, a commonly regarded ‘degenerate’ artist, was even commissioned by Göring to paint portraits of his children in the early years of Hitler’s power.\(^{38}\) The biggest inconsistency in the exhibitions regarded the sculptor Rudolf Belling, who was shown both in the GDK and the Entartete Kunst in 1937. After Belling had been publically abused and had many of his works confiscated and destroyed, he decided to move to Istanbul for safety and to teach in early 1937. Nevertheless, his bronze \textit{Der Boxer Schmeling (The Boxer Schmeling)} from 1929 was displayed in the GDK, while his Cubist \textit{Dreikland (Triad)} from 1924 and his brass \textit{Kopf (Head)} from 1925 were shown at the Entartete Kunst (figs. 41-43). After a critic noticed the inconsistency, Belling’s two sculptures were removed from the Entartete Kunst.\(^{39}\) The subject of the GDK sculpture, Max Schmeling, was a German boxer who through willpower and endurance defeated the black American boxer Joe Louis in New York. Because of this Schmeling was regarded as an Aryan hero who personified the Third Reich, which resulted in Belling’s \textit{The Boxer Schmeling}

\(^{37}\) Schlenker, 100.  
\(^{38}\) Adam, 108.  
\(^{39}\) Schlenker, 100.
remaining exhibited in the *GDK*. National Socialists responded to the discrepancy by praising the ‘objectivity of the new jury’ and the state’s ‘willingness for reconciliation’ with a censured artist. Other condemned artists such as Christian Schad and Milly Steger also managed to be featured in the *GDK*, although the reason for this is believed to be a lack of quality art submitted to the exhibition.  

40 The inconsistencies that existed between the *GDK* and the *Entartete Kunst* reveal the obstacles that the National Socialists faced creating one cohesive language that would define their art.

Although the style of the works housed in the *GDK* reflected National Socialist ideology, this technique did not just pop up in 1933 when the Party came to power. Instead, the art of the Third Reich simply adopted a style of art that was not at the forefront of the art world at the time. 250 of the 556 artists that were exhibited in the *GDK* had exhibited their work in the Munich Academy shows before Hitler rose to power. 41 This is not to say that artists’ styles were not influenced by the National Socialists. Fritz Erler was an esteemed Art Nouveau painter who was over the age of sixty when the National Socialists came to power in 1933. Over time he adjusted his softer and more naturalistic style that was common in his early paintings of peasants to renderings of burly men of the SS and SA. 42 Paul Mathia Padua, born in 1903, was a traditionalist from the beginning of his career. His work reflected the French realist school and his paintings of German peasants were a favorite of Nazi elite. After the National Socialists came to power, Padua’s work did not change in technique or feeling. Early on, he simply had to add small details such as a picture of Hitler or a *Volks* radio to fit into the *GDK*. Later works such

40 Schlenker, 100.
41 Adam, 97.
42 Adam, 97-98.
as *The 10th of May*, completed in 1940 indicates how the artist became increasingly absorbed by the Nazi Party. The work, regarded as blatant propaganda celebrating the start of the invasion in France, depicted a German soldier gesturing others to follow him.\(^{43}\) Artists such as Conrad Hommel, Eduard Thöny, Leo Samberger, Paul Herrmann, Elk Eber, Adolf Wissel, Thomas Baumgartner, Constantin Gerhardinger, Oskar Martin-Amorbach, and Franz Xaver Stahl had similar stories. Most of the artists were older and continued to paint in the same style that they had before, but they altered their subject matter slightly to fit the demands of the Reich. For example, Hommel’s portraits changed from displaying the likes of Albert Einstein to capturing Hitler and Goebbels, among others (fig. 44).\(^{44}\) Over time, his work became much more pompous and banal. While it is commonly believed that the National Socialists invented their style of art, the myriad of older artists whose styles slightly changed after 1933 illustrates that the Nazis did not create a new style but instead embraced traditional artistic genres that were not commonly regarded as the leading of the time.

The organization of the GDK was meant to emphasize the superior nature of the art displayed. The galleries were huge, white, and stark. Although the exhibit felt carefully organized, in reality it was somewhat ambivalent in its placement. Most rooms did not have a theme, and when there was one it often was only the medium of the work. Even still, the few rooms that were organized by subject included additional works that were extraneous. Smaller sculptures fell into this category, as portrait busts were generally used to fill gaps on the huge walls. Busts were placed on limestone and either framed large pictures or were simply arranged

\(^{43}\) Adam, 98.
\(^{44}\) Adam, 99.
Maggie Alisberg

in repetitive rows on the walls.\textsuperscript{45} Still, compared to the tradition of using cloth-covered screens in exhibitions, the huge white walls felt modern and ordered. The walls were almost overwhelmingly bare with exception of the art. They were not adorned with any decoration and labels were only available in the catalog instead of on the side of the work. The curators attempted to create a sense of order by hanging all works one meter above the stone dado that ran along the wall. Because the works were of all different sizes, this created a strange feeling. Typically, artworks in museums are hung at eye level. Yet in the GDK as each work was hung the same distance from the ground, smaller works would be viewed below eye level and large works would tower above visitors. There was a plethora of benches inside the galleries that encouraged viewers to spend time looking at and contemplating the different works. Gerhard Marcks, a Bauhaus sculptor that who featured in the \textit{Entartete Kunst} attended the GDK. He commented, “All in all, the degenerate (exhibition) was better hung... than the ‘eternal’, which looked like a stamp or beetles collection in the much too large rooms.”\textsuperscript{46} It becomes clear that the aim of the Nazis was to create a space and an exhibition that was the antithesis of the dark, dim, graffitied, and crowded rooms of the \textit{Entartete Kunst}.

Guenther’s overall impression of the exhibition narrates the aura that he felt visiting the GDK. Guenther reminisced that what he most remembered from the GDK was rather small, unimportant works simply because they juxtaposed the numerous gigantic pieces that blended in and felt ‘bland’. He said that a favorite work was Max Esser’s small sculptural group of bronze ducks which he admired because it was modest as well as Hermann Geibel’s sculpture of a

\textsuperscript{45} Schlenker, 101.
\textsuperscript{46} Schlenker, 101.
Maggie Alisberg

young girl playing a recorder because it reminded him of a girl he once fancied. He continued to reflect that large works by artists such as George Kolbe and Fritz Klimsch, which he had admired from reproductions he had seen, felt very different in the space. Guenther liked Kolbe’s works in particular, having had an illustration of his Dancer hanging on his walls at home, but felt his Junger Streiter (Young Fighter) lacked all grace and individuality in the huge space.47 However, Guenther was much more critical of the paintings in the exhibition. He remembered the overwhelming number of nudes that felt to him like an amateur’s photograph in their idealized and sexual, yet, apathetic depictions. Having clarified that he was quite familiar with nude art and appreciated depictions of the healthy and natural, he described the painters as good craftsmen but certainly not artists. This sentiment is also reflected in the consistent attempt by artists of the GDK to make paintings look like photographs; there even was a painting of a famous photograph of Hitler and President Paul von Hindenburg entitled Der Tag von Potsdam (Potsdam Day). He remembered hearing others around him whispering about how realistic the works were, using accurate representations as the standard for quality in art. He also found the idealized paintings of farmers disconcerting, having visited farms and being fully aware that what was depicted was far from reality.48 Guenther wraps up his assessment of the GDK stating, “As for the other works of art, there were many landscapes, some still lifes and small bronze sculptures, and a large number of realistic watercolors and graphic works, most of which left little impression on me except for their quantity. In short, my walk through the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung was ultimately disappointing and tiring. Was this really the new German art that Hitler had welcomed in his speech?”49

47 Guenther, 34.
48 Guenther, 35.
49 Guenther, 35.
Maggie Alisberg

Guenther’s account illustrates just how underwhelming the contents of the GDK was. The work was uninteresting and unartistic and the subject matter was so repetitive that it made the entire exhibition feel monotonous.

The sales that were a product of the GDK elucidate the shortcomings of the exhibition. Although all works in the GDK were for sale, very few museums bought the works. This is regarded as a decision that was not political, but rather a result of the works failing to be good enough to be bought into museum collections. In all the exhibitions Hitler was the best patron, buying 202 works from the GDK of 1938. The GDK exhibition in 1941 contained 1,400 artworks; Hitler was said to have bought almost 1,000 of these works and to have given all these pieces to government buildings across the Reich. It is not surprising that it was an immense honor for an artist for their work to bear the description “Purchased by the Führer”.

The lack of museums and collectors buying the art of the GDK indicates a private understanding of the shortcomings of this type of work. Hitler’s personal uncertainty of the worth of National Socialist art is suggested by the fact that he maintained very few pieces from the GDK and gave them to public German institutions instead. In Hitler’s two main residences in Munich and in Berghof, the only contemporary German work displayed was known to be Ziegler’s *The Four Seasons*. His indifference to the new German works is exposed by what he wanted to save. Of the 3,423 pieces of art that Hitler hid in the Bad Aussee mines at the end of the war, only twenty four were contemporary works; included were two paintings by Troost and a portrait of

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50 Adam, 109.
51 Adam, 115.
52 Adam, 119.
Maggie Alisberg

Troost, which likely were kept for personal reasons rather than quality. The paucity of works purchased at the GDK, as well as Hitler’s own private disinterest uncovers just how inadequate the National Socialist art was.

The National Socialist Party pulled out every stop for the Gross Deutsche Kunstausstellung, marking it as the spectacle and iconographic ideal for the future of German art. However, the exhibition was not as successful as it was expected to be on the basis that the art displayed simply was not strong. In 1937, the New York Times reported that the Entartete Kunst received 396,000 visitors a day while the GDK received 120,000. While the reason for the huge gap in visitors is unclear, it is easy to assume the sameness of the exhibition did not help its viewership. However, over time there continued to be seven more GDK exhibitions in which both number of submitted works and number of visitors increased. By 1942, almost a million people attended that year’s GDK. As the Nazi Party expanded and gained prominence, so did German acceptance of its art. Still, the GDK was not entirely successful establishing a new cultural identity in contemporary art. Movements are born from deep emotion, commitment, and belief in an ideology. The banal art of the GDK simply could not do that. The lack of fervency that the German people had for this art is reflected in the miniscule sales figures from the exhibitions. The Gross Deutsche Kunstausstellung illustrates the Nazis relentless campaign to create and elevate an alternative to ‘degenerate’ art that embodied the central ideologies of the Nazi Party and the Aryan race; the conviction that National Socialist art had to be the

53 Adam, 119.
55 Adam, 114.
Maggie Alisberg

antithesis of ‘degenerate’ art likely was their downfall as it caused a lack of emotion or expression in their work.
Chapter 4: A Lasting Legacy

The impact that the *Entartete Kunst* and the *GDK* had on the future of art was striking and significant. These 1937 exhibitions laid the foundation for eight years of strict regulation, art policy, and looting. The Nazis viewed art as central to their campaign of establishing the hegemony of the Aryan ideology. The scope of the Nazi program was unlike anything seen before. From the sheer number of paintings confiscated and destroyed to the amount of money spent on art, the Nazis’ actions were unprecedented. The story of the Nazi crusade continues to play out today, as banned art is found and rightful owners receive restitution. Those who survived the War and their descendants keep the narrative alive. The high priority the Nazis placed on discrediting the avant-garde movement is a key part of their legacy.

The *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich closed on November 30, 1937. This corresponded with a telegram that was sent from the Reichspropagandaleitung (Reich propaganda directorate) from Berlin on November 23 to the heads of propaganda for each district. The telegram stated that the exhibition would travel around the Reich and open in the largest, most favorable cities for four weeks each. It asked towns that had the interest and the financial capacity to put on the exhibit to apply to do so. According to a report made in the *Thüringer Gauzeitung*, sixty-five towns and cities applied to house the exhibition.\(^1\) Goebbels instructed that a sub-section of his ministry that specialized in propagandistic exhibitions, The Institut für Deutsche Kultur-und Wirtschaftspropaganda (Institute for German cultural and economic propaganda), plan the upcoming shows.

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Austrian student and member of the SA, was assigned to organize these exhibitions after he made significant contributions to the organization of the *Entartete Kunst* in Munich. Beginning in Berlin in February of 1938, the *Entartete Kunst* travelled to twelve cities, Berlin, Leipzig, Düsseldorf, Salzburg, Hamburg, Stettin, Weimar, Vienna, Frankfurt, Chemnitz, Waldenburg in Silesia, and Halle. The last *Entartete Kunst* closed in Halle on April 20, 1941.  

By circulating the *Entartete Kunst* around the major cities of the Reich, the National Socialists aimed to demonstrate to the entire German population the ‘horrors’ of ‘degenerate’ art.

The Berlin *Entartete Kunst*, which opened in 1938 from February 26 to May 8, differed significantly from the original show in Munich. Not only were alterations made in the selection of the works but also in the way they were displayed. The changes were outlined in the handout “Informationsmaterial für die Schriftleitungen” (Information sheet for editors), which was created by the Propagandaministerium for the press preview. It read,

> “Only a section of the material shown in Munich is exhibited in Berlin. The exhibition has been enlarged and supplemented with paintings and sculptures that could be previously seen in the German capital. In planning the Berlin exhibition... the underlying motive... has been [decisive]. The material as a whole has therefore been structured around different groups, each of which is covered by an introductory essay in the... catalogue. In assembling the visual material special attention was paid to the various specific areas that show the connection between degenerate art and the cultural program of Bolshevism... A large part of the exhibition is taken up by a comparison between degenerate art and those works that... were placed at the organizers’ disposal by the Psychiatrische Klinik of Heidelberg.”

The emphasis on Bolshevism in the Berlin exhibition made the content of the show much more overtly political. While the focus of the Munich exhibition was on Expressionist artists, in Berlin it was on the political art created in the 1920s, particularly by the ASSO and the Dresdner

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2 Zuschlag, 90.
3 Zuschlag, 90-92.
Sezession Gruppe 1919. The Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919 was an artist group made up of artists such as Otto Dix, Conrad Felixmüller, and Otto Schubert. Their statement of purpose read,

“The founding of the Secession ‘Gruppe 1919’ is a natural consequence of a long-felt inner need to finally part with old ways and procedures and, expressions for this, our world. We did not just happen to meet; rather our organization was mandated by an overpowering recognition of value of such a bond for the future development of art, as we understand it.”

This statement reflects the group’s support of socialism and political progression. The focus on invalidating overtly political art like Gruppe’s rather than Expressionist styles made the connection of the creation of the Entartete Kunst by the Nazi Party much more obvious.

Captions and slogans that discredit the works were no longer painted directly on the walls nor were there quotations from Wolfgang Willrich. Instead, headings in Berlin were clearly political and the commentary on specific artists and works were written on black and white plaques that were reused in the later locations. Additionally, the habit of comparing ‘degenerate’ art to paintings created by psychiatric patients became customary in Berlin. This clearly was influenced by Schultze-Naumberg’s book Kunst und Rasse. As the first of the twelve travelling exhibitions, the Entartete Kunst in Berlin differed greatly from the Munich exhibition, emphasizing a much stronger and more obvious political tone.

A significant change that accompanied the opening of the Berlin exhibition was the publishing of the exhibition catalogue. The catalogue, which was created after the Berlin

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5 For more on Wolfgang Willrich, see chapter 2.
6 Zuschlag, 92.
7 For more on Schultze-Naumberg’s Kunst und Rasse, see chapter 1.
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exhibition was designed, divided ‘degenerate’ art into nine sections. Each section was determined by the content of the works. They were, ‘collapse of sensitivity to form and color’, religious subjects, ‘class-struggle’ propaganda, ‘draft-dodging’, ‘moral program of Bolshevism’, racial degeneration, mental degeneration, Jewish art, and ‘sheet insanity’. The catalogue opened on page two with the article “What the ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibition means to do” which consisted of nine statements that outlined the goals of the Entartete Kunst. The first of these statements read, “It means to give, at the onset of a new age for the German people, a firsthand survey of the gruesome last chapter of cultural decadence that preceded the great change.” This opening statement not only glorified the new Reich but also blatantly smeared the art displayed and the era it was from. The subsequent statements spoke of the art as foolish, as products of cultural and political anarchy, as lacking of artistic talent, and as created as a result of the influence of Jews and Bolsheviks. On page four, the guide continued to narrate what the exhibition did not mean to do. The essay insisted that the Entartete Kunst did not mean to exclude any natural born German artists from pursuing true art. The catalogue continued to read, “It is not the business of this exhibition, however, to gloss over the fact that in the years of the major Bolshevik-Jewish onslaught upon German art such men stood on the side of subversion.” By using a statement such as “gloss over”, it created the assumption that the Entartete Kunst portrayed nothing but the outright truth. The opening pages of the catalogue used duplicitous language to outline to the masses the Nazis’ opinion of the work,

8 Zuschlag, 92.
10 Britt, 362.
the moral and ideological shortcomings of the artists, and the ‘honesty’ associated with the way the paintings were shown.

The rest of the catalogue continued to describe each of the nine groups of the exhibition. On the even numbered pages, descriptive text of each section was printed, while the odd pages displayed examples of art from the corresponding group along with relevant quotations. On almost every even page Adolf Hitler was quoted. On the final few even pages of the brochure, a complete copy of Hitler’s speech from the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich was transcribed. The consistency of keeping National Socialist writings on the even side of the brochure and ‘degenerate’ examples on the odd side created a continuous sense of give and take. This also ensured that the National Socialist judgment of the work was read before viewers could form opinions of their own. The odd pages contained captions and quotations that echoed the walls of the Munich exhibition. For example, on the page opposite of the text explaining the ‘mental and moral degeneration’ of the art of Group 5, Otto Dix’s *Kriegskrüppel (War cripples)* and his *Schützengraben (The Trench)* were illustrated under the caption “Painted sabotage of national defense by the painter Otto Dix” (fig. 45). Accompanying the Group 7 text of racial degeneration, illustrations of sculptures by Christoph Voll, Eugen Hoffman, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Erich Heckel were displayed under the caption, “No comment is necessary here!” (fig. 46). The brochure of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition not only served as a guideline for the installation of the exhibition in later venues but also as a means to recreate the propagandistic effect of the Munich exhibition

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11 For more on Hitler’s speech, see chapter 3.
12 Britt, 372-373.
13 Britt, 376-377.
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in a more permanent platform. The use of both ‘degenerate’ and National Socialist quotations in the brochure made up for the lack of slander written on the walls. The brochure of the Entartete Kunst was a device that the National Socialists used to ensure that the impact and significance of the exhibition lasted far longer than the show itself.

After the Entartete Kunst in Berlin, the exhibition continued to adapt as it travelled across the Reich. It changed little in the next opening in Leipzig before it opened in Düsseldorf. It is evident from photographs of the Düsseldorf exhibition that the curators decided to omit banners that displayed statements of Art-Bolshevists, presumably a choice by the curators to defame the artists in a more subtle manner. Yet, the tablets with quotations by Hitler remained. The exhibition in Düsseldorf attempted to bring the content closer to home by adding a picture of Alfred Flechtheim, a well known Jewish art dealer who had a gallery in the city. Additionally in Düsseldorf, Pistauer held “educational courses” where he delivered “a comprehensive survey of the political and cultural background of this pseudoart from the previous system” and described “the links that existed between the degenerate art produced at the time and the Bolshevist program of subversion”. While the changes that occurred in Düsseldorf were rather minor, their conception suggests a continuing effort by the National Socialists to articulate the ‘degeneracy’ of avant-garde art in a concise and powerful manner.

The later versions of the Entartete Kunst were edited as the Reich’s priorities turned elsewhere. The opening of the fifth exhibition in Salzburg, six months after the annexation of Austria in September 1938, marked a turning point. Seventy-one paintings were removed from

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14 Zuschlag, 92.
15 Zuschlag, 92.
the exhibition and sent back to Berlin, including Max Beckmann’s *Self Portrait with Red Scarf*, Marc Chagall’s *Rabbi*, Otto Dix’s *The Trench*, Emil Nolde’s *the Life of Christ*, as well as others by Kandinsky, Kirchner, Klee, Heckel, and Schmidt-Rottluff. The works were taken to a warehouse at Schloss Niederschönhäusen as they were deemed ‘internationally exploitable’, meaning they were believed to be the most valuable in the foreign art market.\(^\text{16}\) As a result, over 115 works of a ‘lesser quality’ were sent to Hamburg for the *Entartete Kunst* to replace those that were to be sold. At the eighth show in Weimar, the *Entartete Kunst* was combined with the musical version, the *Entartete Musik* (*Degenerate Music*) exhibition (fig. 47). It aimed to reveal and discredit musicians as well as musical styles deemed ‘Bolshevik’, such as jazz and swing.\(^\text{17}\) The combined exhibition then travelled to Vienna, Frankfurt, and Chemnitz, where it was closed after two weeks because war broke out. In September 1939, the Werberat für Deutsche Wirtschaft (German economic publicity council) banned exhibitions because of a lack of finances.\(^\text{18}\) Before World War II began, the *Entartete Kunst* continued to be scaled down as a result of the sheer cost of production; alluding to the diminishing priority that the Nazis placed on slandering of avant-garde art as war approached.

As Germany experienced victories during the first years of the War and conquered considerable territories, the reemergence of propaganda was vital to education of regions not assimilated to Nazi ideology. The ban against exhibitions lasted until 1941 when seven traveling exhibitions were revived, including the *Entartete Kunst*. A smaller version of the *Entartete*
Kunst, displaying about two hundred works and no music, travelled to minor cities that the Nazis believed required higher levels of propaganda. An inventory taken after the final exhibition closed in Halle in November of 1941 reveals that the Halle exhibition contained seven sculptures, fifty paintings, and close to one hundred and eighty pieces of graphic art. At the close of the last Entartete Kunst there were only eight paintings, by Philipp Bauknecht, Herbert Bayer, Conrad Felixmüller, Otto Gleichmann, Oskar Schlemmer, Werner Scholz, and Friedrich Skade, one sculpture, Ludwig Gies’s Kruzifixus, and thirty-two graphic works that had been a part of the original Munich exhibition. The return of the exhibition after the War began illustrates that, while the Nazis originally closed the exhibition during the War due to the cost, they later realized its value. The revival of the Entartete Kunst two years after all exhibitions were banned reveals the Nazis’ recognition of the importance that the exhibition played in persuading the masses to accept their ideology.

The National Socialists quickly learned that they could benefit from the exploitation of ‘degenerate’ artworks in more ways than just propaganda. In late spring 1938, Goebbels created the Kommission zur Verwertung der Produkte entarteter Kunst (Commission for the disposal of products of degenerate art). The commission consisted of Goebbels (as the chairman), Franz Hofmann, Rolf Hetsch, Karl Haberstock, Heinrich Hoffmann, Carl Meder, Robert Scholz, Hans Schweitzer, Max Taeuber, and Adolf Zeigler. Shortly after its foundation, the commission ordered the four art dealers, Karl Buchholz, Ferdinand Möller, Bernhard Boehmer, and Hildebrand Gurlitt to sell ‘degenerate’ works for a profit. In August 1938, the ‘degenerate’ works seized by Zeigler in preparation for the Entartete Kunst were separated into

19 Zuschlag, 95.
two storage facilities in Berlin. The 780 paintings and sculptures that were deemed the most valuable were stored in the Schloss Niederschönhausen alongside 3,500 graphic works, watercolors, and drawings (fig. 48). The rest, 16,000 pieces of art, were packed into storage that the National Socialists rented in Berlin. The initial steps taken to plan a sale of ‘degenerate’ art illustrates that the National Socialists not only wanted to remove the works from view in Germany but also that they understood the value that the works had in an international market.

The Nazi realization that they could profit from selling ‘degenerate’ artwork led to the conception of one of the most significant public sales of modern art in the twentieth century. In October 1938, the National Socialists contacted Theodor Fischer to hold an international auction of over one hundred ‘degenerate’ works that were held in the Schloss Niederschönhausen. Fischer was chosen to orchestrate the exhibition because he was a Swiss non-Jewish art dealer who had significant experience holding large and significant international sales. On October 8, 1838, Fischer wrote to Hoffmann, agreeing to hold the sale and to deposit all proceeds received from the sales in a foreign-currency account. He also requested that he would receive fifteen percent commission on all works except the six most valuable (the Gauguin, the Van Gogh, and the four Picassos) for which his commission would be six percent.

Preparations for the exhibition continued through Spring 1939; a catalogue was created and works were framed and sent to Switzerland for preview. However, in January 1939, a

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21 Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 137.
prominent German-Jewish publisher of Expressionist art and poetry, Paul Westheim, published
an article from exile in France that severely questioned where the profits of the auction would
go. This question began to widely circulate which resulted in Theodor Fischer publishing his
statement in French “My Point of View” on June 19. Fischer accused a group of dealers in Paris
for conspiring to stop collectors from bidding at his auction. Fischer also sent apologies directly
to potential bidders. Still, museums and private collectors were hesitant about the auction.\(^\text{22}\)
Despite the negative speculation, the Galerie Fischer auction continued to work to maximize
the proceeds for Fischer and for the Reich.

To say that the auction was a success would be an overstatement. It took place in
Lucerne, Switzerland on June 20, 1939 (fig. 49). About 350 people were in attendance including
collectors (such as Pierre Matisse), representatives from museums around Europe, and many
bidders who were sent to conceal the identity of their clients.\(^\text{23}\) The profits from the sale
additionally were far below what was expected. For example, the highly anticipated Van Gogh’s
_Self Portrait_, which was estimated to sell for 250,000 Swiss francs at presale, was sold for
175,000 Swiss francs or $40,000 (about $700,000 today).\(^\text{24}\) To put this into perspective, the last
Van Gogh ‘self portrait’ that was sold at auction was sold in 1998 for $71.5 million.\(^\text{25}\) The total
revenue of the Galerie Fischer sale was about 500,000 Swiss francs and 38 of 125 lots did not
meet their reserve. In comparison to contemporary auctions at the time in New York, London,

\(^{22}\) Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 139.
\(^{23}\) Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 140.
\(^{24}\) Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 141.
\(^{25}\) Carol Vogel, “Van Gogh Self-Portrait Sells for $71.5 Million,” _New York Times_, November 20,
million.html.
or Paris, these results were not impressive. Fischer continued to try to sell the rest of the works after the auction until 1941, including Picasso’s *Absinthe Drinker* which sold that year for an unimpressive 42,000 Swiss francs, which was equivalent to $9,600.\(^{26}\) One must question what the results of the auction would have been if it were in no way affiliated with the Nazi Party. While many collectors and museums abstained from attending because they were worried (rightly) that the profits would fund the Nazis, others participated because the works offered were of a value and significance that hardly ever were publically sold. Some justify the buyers of these artworks because they saved modern masterpieces from destruction.\(^{27}\) The Galerie Fischer auction is notable in history not only for the quality of the works sold but also for the manipulation of the art market by the Nazi Party that allowed them to benefit from the works they deemed ‘degenerate’ and worthless. Indeed, it is ironic that the Nazis sought to enrich themselves by selling artworks they abhorred.

Hitler’s campaign against the avant-garde stemmed far beyond specific works and ideas; he viewed it as equally imperative to discredit and dispose of those responsible for producing the art. Beginning in the 1930s, artists, dealers, and intellectuals began to flee Germany. Max Beckmann left for Amsterdam, Rudolf Belling went to New York and then Turkey, Lyonel Feininger went to New York, Raoul Hausmann went to Ibiza, Kandinsky went to Paris, Kokoschka went to Prague and then London, and Schwitters went to Norway and then England. In 1939, the Jewish artist Ludwig Meider left Germany for England, two years after his work was displayed in the *Entartete Kunst.* Ernst Ludwig Kirchner committed suicide in 1938. Otto Dix,

\(^{26}\) Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 144-145.  
\(^{27}\) Barron, “Galerie Fischer,” 145.
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who along with Willi Baumeister, Conrad Felixmüller, and Oskar Schlemmer, chose to stay in
Germany and participated in a period known as inner emigration or exile. Artists who engaged
in inner emigration were deemed ‘degenerate’ but stayed in Germany and moved to small
towns. They attempted to continue to produce art in secret by living secluded lives. Paul Klee,
who was accused of being a Jew and had to produce proof of Aryan status, died in Germany in
1940, only one day before he was finally approved for Swiss Citizenship. While several artists
did stay in Germany and tried to live quiet lives, most chose to escape and several ended up in
places such as Paris and Prague that came under Nazi rule soon after they arrived.

As the Nazi threat in Europe continued to grow and France was conquered, there was
significant effort made to help artists escape to the United States. A young leftist journalist
named Varian Fry was sent to southern France to assist in the escape of prominent cultural
figures from the Nazi threat. Fry wrote,

“When it was learned that the armistice which France made with Germany in June, 1940
contained a clause providing for the ‘surrender on demand’ of German refugees, a
group of American citizens, who were deeply shocked by this violation of the right of
asylum and who believed that democrats should help democrats, regardless of
nationality, immediately formed the Emergency Rescue Committee. The sole purpose of
the Committee was to bring the political and intellectual refugees out of France before
the Gestapo and the Ovra and the Seguridad got them.”

28 Stephanie Barron, “European Artists in Exile: A Reading Between the Lines,” In Exiles +
Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler, ed Stephanie Barron, 11-30. (Los Angeles:
30 Elizabeth Kessin Berman, “Moral Triage or Cultural Salvage? The Agendas of Varian Fry and
the Emergency Rescue Committee,” In Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from
Hitler, ed Stephanie Barron, 99-113. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Harry
Stationed in Marseilles and often having to cross the Pyrenees on foot, Fry managed to help several hundred artists and intellectuals escape, including Breton, Chagall, and Ernst. While he was only sent for the purpose of helping two hundred artists, by the time he left France he had led around two thousand people (many of whom were Jewish) to safety. New York eventually became a safe haven for modern artists, dealers, and intellectuals during the War. The flight of ‘degenerate’ artists from Germany illustrates the totality of the German program against the avant-garde, as modernists were in danger simply living and working under Nazi rule.

An interesting case study of the influence of the *Entartete Kunst* and the fight against modernism on the lives of ‘degenerate’ artists is revealed in the story of the painter Emil Nolde. Nolde, born in Germany in 1867, was a famous Expressionist artist who was part of the Die Brücke (The bridge) group. Nolde was a German nationalist from the beginning of his life. He was forty-five years old at the start of the First World War and as a result did not serve. In 1920, Nolde joined the North Schleswig branch of the National Socialist Party. In his work Nolde utilized expressive strokes, deep colors, biblical themes, and the visible application of paint to communicate his belief in the superiority of the Nordic race. Nolde was quite successful in the early 1930s; Alois Schardt, a National Socialist appointed director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, organized a room of just Nolde’s work during his reinstallation of the galleries. It was from these works that Goebbels picked a few paintings for his own private collection. Even after Schardt was forced to step down in 1933 because of his pro-modernist actions, his successor Eberhard Hanfstaengl continued to obtain works by Nolde for the modern section of

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31 Barron, “European Artists in Exile: A Reading Between the Lines,” 19.  
32 For more on Nolde’s paintings in Goebbels’ home, see chapter 1.
the Nationalgalerie. In the summer of 1933, Nolde’s work was included in an exhibition organized by the Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (National Socialist league of German students) which aimed to display the relationship between modern art and National Socialism. Even Alfred Rosenberg at the time called some of Nolde’s seascapes ‘strong and powerful’, although he did criticize many of his other works housed in Berlin. In 1934, Nolde along with other artists such as Ernst Barlach, Erich Heckel, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, signed a statement of loyalty to Hitler. However, it soon became evident that the favor Nolde enjoyed during the first years of the National Socialist government would be short lived.

The second half of the 1930s confirmed that no artist could escape Hitler’s policies. In 1935, Nolde’s works were removed from an exhibition of contemporary art in Munich. The following year, he was prohibited from participation in any ‘activity, professional or amateur, in the realm of art’ as a result of his ‘cultural irresponsibility’. In 1937, 1,052 works by Nolde were confiscated by Zeigler and twenty-seven of them were displayed in the Entartete Kunst. His Das Leben Christi was a centerpiece of the first room of the exhibition and was captioned with the phrase “Insolent mockery of the Divine under Centrist rule”. It is said that when Nolde visited the Entartete Kunst and saw the way his paintings were displayed and defamed he was so upset that he cancelled his seventieth birthday celebration. The next year, Nolde wrote to Goebbels directly requesting that his paintings, including the nine work series The Life

34 Barron et al, 319
35 Paul Ortwin Rave, Kunstdiktatur, quoted in Barron et al, 319.
36 For more on Nolde’s paintings in the Entartete Kunst, see chapter 2.
37 Barron et al, 319.
of Christ, as well as Large Sunflowers, Blonde Girl, and Wet Day, be returned to him. He continued to implore Goebbels, writing:

“I also request, most honored Herr Minister, that the defamation raised against me cease. This I find especially cruel, particularly since even before the National Socialist movement I, virtually alone among German artists, fought publically against the foreign domination of German art, against the corruption of art dealers and against the intrigues of the Liebermann and Cassierer era. It was a battle against vastly superior forces which for decades hurt me financially and professionally. When National Socialism also labeled me and my art ‘degenerate’ and ‘decadent,’ I felt this to be a profound misunderstanding because it is just not so. My art is German, strong, austere, and sincere.”

In response to Nolde’s plea, only his works that had been on loan from him when they were taken from museums were returned. Throughout the War the Nazis forbid Nolde from working and removed him from any National Socialist organization, proving the lack of empathy the Nazis had for one of their own who was labeled as ‘degenerate’.

Nolde’s final years illustrates the lasting impact that his treatment during the War had on his personal views and his legacy. In 1945, Nolde commented on Germany’s defeat in the War, “Germany now lies prostrate, crushed, and shattered. Everything which made life worthwhile has vanished. Where in your desperation dare you look for help?... And what if we had won the war? Germany’s spirituality – her most beautiful attribute – would then have been utterly eradicated.” Nolde’s words expose his change of heart after his paintings and career was destroyed by the Nazis for ten years. After considerable time, he saw the National Socialist Party for what it was. Following the defeat of the Nazi Party, Nolde received honors, awards,

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40 Miesel, 210-211.
and was appointed a professor of art by the government in Schleswig-Holstein. Still, the end of Nolde’s life was marked by controversy which derived from his once pro-Nazi views. When he died in 1956, his works were celebrated although they will always be marked by the stain of his support for the National Socialist regime.\footnote{Petropoulos, Artists Under Hitler, 175.} Nolde’s story illustrates that no avant-garde artist could escape Nazi persecution. It did not matter what an artist believed or what they were trying to articulate in their works, if their style or subject matter was deemed ‘degenerate’, the creator would suffer. Emil Nolde certainty was a great painter, yet his legacy will always be tainted because he was an artist who supported the very regime which aimed to destroy his career.

There can be no question that the Nazi Party did everything in their power to discredit and destroy avant-garde art. Therefore, it must be asked why so many of the artists who were actively discriminated against are so highly esteemed today. Ironically, many consider the Nazis’ campaign against ‘degenerate’ art as the reason for their success in the contemporary market of the twenty-first century. The Galerie Fischer Auction, for example, was the first time collectors from around the world could purchase the best examples of German art from the early twentieth century. Additionally, in the post-war era most Germans aimed to distance themselves from the Nazi regime; branding oneself as a victim of Nazism allowed them to regain credibility.\footnote{Ruth Heftrig, “Narrowed Modernism: On the Rehabilitation of ‘Degenerate Art’ in Postwar Germany,” In Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany 1937, ed. Olaf Peters, 258-281. (New York: Prestel, 2014), 258.} In the German art world, the term ‘degeneracy’ became a ‘moral seal of approval’.\footnote{Heftrig, 259.} Still, acceptance of ‘degenerate’ art was not universal after the Second World War;
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as the Nazis did a thorough job portraying these works as worthless and individuals had their own opinion about what art that they preferred.

Still, in Germany the focus on rehabilitation was on those artists who were in ‘inner exile’, meaning they were persecuted yet remained in Germany. These artists included Dix, Heckel, Nolde, Schlemmer, and Schmidt-Rottluff. On both sides of the iron curtain, significant effort was made to find and display works by these artists.\(^{44}\) German museums also attempted to find or replace confiscated works, but were only successful in receiving the art that they owned and not those loaned. Unfortunately, about only fifteen works made it back to their original home, including Otto Dix’s print series *Der Krieg (War)*, which was returned to Stuttgart, and George Grosz’s *Porträt des Schriftstellers Max Herrmann-Neisse (Portrait of the Writer Max Herrmann-Neisse)*.\(^{45}\) While rehabilitation was a slow and difficult process, artists that the Nazis deemed ‘degenerate’ began to rebuild their reputations and prominence as a reaction to Nazi persecution.

Even though there was a significant effort after World War II to restore the reputations of ‘degenerate’ artists, the damage that the Nazis inflicted on the history of art can never be undone. While it was originally believed that the Nazis confiscated between 16,000 to 17,000 pieces of avant-garde art, a database created at the Freie Universität in Berlin revealed that the number of works is closer to 21,000; about 5,000 of these works were paintings and sculptures and the rest are believed to be graphic works.\(^{46}\) Of these 21,000 artworks, it is approximated

\(^{44}\) Heftrig, 261.
\(^{45}\) Heftrig, 265.
that a third of the works have unexplainably vanished, a third of the works were destroyed by the Nazis in the Berlin Main Fire Station on March 20, 1939, and the final third have been scattered as a result of sales to museums and private collections. While a great deal of these works were seized from museums, a significant number of them were also taken from Jewish private collections. Notably, paintings by artists such as Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, and Gustav Klimt were collected by Jewish patrons. Schiele in particular had so many Jewish collectors that died in the Holocaust that today any work by the artist without a simple and documented provenance is marked as a cause for research. \(^{47}\) While works that were seized from private collections are now subject to restitution, those taken from state collections do not have the same luxury. The “Law Concerning the Appropriate of Products of Degenerate Art”, passed by the National Socialists on May 31, 1938, made the confiscation of art from state collections legal.\(^{48}\) Indeed, of the close to 7,000 known works of degenerate art that exist today, each one has a complicated and unique narrative, telling where it came from, how it survived the war, and how it got to where it is today. It seems unlikely that those stories will ever be told. The Nazi confiscation of 21,000 works of degenerate art remains significant, as historians continue to look for the art and question provenance of those found.

It would be a mistake to think that the Nazis concerned themselves primarily with the avant-garde. In reality, their involvement with contemporary art, particularly during the war, was miniscule compared to their lust for master works that they believed were a reflection of the perfection of the Master Race. In 1938, Hitler began to develop the total reconstruction of

\(^{47}\) Petropoulos, “From Lucerne to Washington, DC,” 283.

\(^{48}\) Petropoulus, “From Lucerne to Washington, DC,” 284.
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his hometown of Linz. His vision was for Linz to become a newer, better Florence. The center of the city would be the Führermuseum, Hitler’s cultural masterpiece that would be the greatest art museum in the world. On June 26, 1939, Hitler commissioned Dr. Hans Posse to build the museum, ordering all party and state services to support the completion of the project.\(^4^9\) Hitler favored Austro-B Bavarian genre paintings from the nineteenth century. This art was the base of his collection. Still, Hitler was not one known for moderation. In May 1945, an inventory of the works destined for the Linz Museum listed 6,755 paintings and 5,350 of these works were marked as old master works. The massive collection would have fit well in the Linz Museum, as it was designed to be able to exhibit about four times the amount of art that the Louvre can show at any given time.\(^5^0\) As Hitler did pay for most of the work intended for Linz, he was known to have spent more on art than anyone else in history, specifically RM 163,975,000.\(^5^1\) Other works destined for Linz were stolen, such as Vermeer’s *The Astronomer*, which was taken from the esteemed collection of the Jewish Baron Edouard de Rothschild (fig. 50).\(^5^2\) After the war, Linz was marked as a criminal enterprise even though Hitler paid for a majority of the works. Lane Faison, from the OSS Art Looting Investigation Unit supported this claim by writing that Nazi looting was different from any previous war before it was “officially planned and expertly carried out... to enhance the cultural prestige of the Master Race”.\(^5^3\) Therefore, its


\(^{5^1}\) Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, 184.

\(^{5^2}\) Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, 186.

obvious that Hitler’s dream for Linz was to affirm the connection of Aryans to the greatest achievements of Western culture no matter the cost.

A desire for master works and grand collections was standard among Nazi elites. For Nazi officials, art became a means of reflecting social status. Hermann Göring, the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe and Hitler’s successor, was infamous for his art collection. On August 6, 1942, at a conference of Reich Commissioners for the Occupied Territories and the Military commanders Göring revealed the way he grew his collection. He said, “It used to be called plundering. But today things have become more humane. In spite of that, I intend to plunder, and to do it thoroughly.”  

Göring did exactly as he said. By the end of the war, Göring’s collection of artwork consisted of about 1,375 paintings, 250 sculptures, and 168 tapestries. This included works by masters such as Rembrandt, Hans Memling, and Fragonard. Göring’s collection of art seized during the war was significant for his incredible greed and his unabashed thievery.

When the allies finally made their way into Germany, a team of US soldiers set out to recover stolen Nazi art. The Nazis hid collections, both public and of the state, in various places including salt mines and castles. On the first visit to the Alt Aussee mine alone, the estimated number of items hidden was, “6,577 paintings, 2,300 drawings and watercolors, 954 prints, 137 pieces of sculpture, 129 pieces of arms and armor, 122 tapestries, 78 pieces of furniture, 79 baskets objects, 484 cases thought to be archives, 181 cases books, 1,200-1,700 cases apparently books or similar, 283 cases contents completely unknown.”

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54 Edsel, introduction.
55 Petropoulos, Art as Politics in the Third Reich, 188.
56 Nicholas, 348.
items the Nazis stole may never be known, but the impact that their operation had on the history of art is undeniable. Today, masterpieces by artists such as Raphael and Memling are still missing and are believed to have been destroyed by the Nazis. Hitler’s crusade for masterpieces aimed to portray the Nazi Party and Aryan Race as the originators of the superiority of western society; however, in actuality, his campaign was just one component that led to his reputation as an exterminator of culture.

Today, the restitution of stolen art, particularly from Jewish collectors, connects the past to the present. Many famous cases were litigated that aimed to bring the heirs of Jewish collectors the property that was stolen from them by the Nazis. The 2015 blockbuster Woman in Gold, starring Ryan Reynolds and Helen Mirren, told the story of how Gustav Klimt’s *Goldene Adele* returned to Adele Bloch-Bauer’s niece and heir (fig. 51). As a result of the Art Restitution Act of 1998 in Austria, Maria Altmann underwent a series of legal proceedings to bring her six Klimt’s back to her possession. In 2006, the Klimt’s were finally given back to her. Today, the most famous of all the works, *Goldene Adele*, hangs in the Neue Gallery in New York after it was purchased by Ronald S. Lauder for $135 million. However, the Bloch-Bauers are simply one example of restitution among the many thousand cases.

The Rothschild family, whose collection was filled with masterpieces by artists such as Frans Hals, Tintoretto, Hans Holbein the Younger, Teniers, and Watteau, suffered significant loses from the Nazis. The Rothschilds were robbed of all their possessions, many of which were destined for the Kunstmuseum in Linz. Inventory lists from museums reveal the magnitude of

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the theft (fig. 52). For example, 919 objects taken from Louis von Rothschild were soon in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, 262 of which were paintings and miniatures.\textsuperscript{58} After the war, Clarice and Louis von Rothschild attempted to get their collections back. But museums were not willing to give up these valuable artworks without a fight. Many Austrian museums, in particular the Kunsthistorisches Museum which had gained such a great deal of art from the Rothschild’s, asserted that these collections contained important symbols of Austria’s cultural heritage. It was insisted that traditional export laws in regards to significant objects of cultural heritage be followed to the letter. This meant that the Rothschild’s had to pay a ten percent tax on all objects that were to be exported. As the family had everything taken from them during the war, they of course could not pay such a significant tax and had no choice but to agree to ‘bequest’ their collection. After the war, the Rothschild’s were forced to make a total of 207 ‘dedications’ and seventy long term ‘loans’ to museums in Austria.\textsuperscript{59} It took more than fifty years for justice to finally occur. As a result of the Art Restitution Act of 1998, on February 11, 1999, all 225 artworks and objects that the Rothschild’s were forced to ‘donate’ were returned to their possession.\textsuperscript{60} The stories of the Bloch-Bauers and the Rothschilds are just two of the most famous art restitution cases of Jewish families whose rightful properties were taken from them by the Nazis. Many more stories exist and not all are successful. Unfortunately, many of the stolen items no longer exist. What is even more deplorable is that, in many cases, entire families were murdered so that even if the works did exist there was no one to return them to. Restitution of art stolen by Nazis, both examples of masterworks and

\textsuperscript{58} Müller and Tatzkow, 211.  
\textsuperscript{59} Müller and Tatzkow, 212.  
\textsuperscript{60} Müller and Tatzkow, 215.
those deemed ‘degenerate’, is an ongoing process that serves as a reminder of the atrocities that occurred in the not-so-distant past.

Today, in Germany the search for missing art continues. The art world was shocked in 2013 when it was announced that the German government discovered a collection of about 1,400 works in the home of Cornelius Gurlitt. Cornelius Gurlitt was the son of Hildebrand Gurlitt, who assisted Goebbels in selling confiscated art during the War. When Hildebrand was questioned by Americans in 1945, he claimed his collection perished during the bombing of his home in Dresden.\(^\text{61}\) Clearly, this was not the case. As a result in 2013 Germany formed a task force that investigated “as quickly and as transparently as possible” the provenance of Gurlitt’s collection which were suspected to be traded or looted under the Nazis. After two years and a two-million-dollar investigation only five paintings were returned to their original owners, while 231 works were found to have been taken from German museums as works of ‘degenerate’ art. Pieces that were returned include Max Liebermann’s *Two Riders on a Beach*, which sold at auction for $2.9 million, and Henri Matisse’s portrait *Seated Woman/Woman Sitting in an Armchair*.\(^\text{62}\) The museums Kunstmuseum Bern, to which Gurlitt bequeathed his collection, as well as the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, Switzerland, will hold two exhibitions in 2018, which will be the first time Gurlitt’s collection will be publically displayed. The Bern show is to be titled ‘Dossier Gurlitt: ‘Degenerate Art,’ Confiscated and Sold’, while the Bonn show will be titled,


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‘Dossier Gurlitt: Nazi Art Theft and Its Consequences’. One would hope that there will be some answers provided when Gurlitt’s collection goes public. In Barron’s detailed inventory of the art displayed in the Entartete Kunst, many works, such as those by Schmidt-Rottluff, bear the caption “Bought by Gurlitt, location unknown”. It would be remarkable if the question of the location of some of these paintings were solved when the exhibitions open. The incredible find of Gurlitt’s collection serves as reminder that the pursuit must continue not only for rightful owners, but also for the missing art itself.

Relics of the Nazi period still haunt Germany today. On a sunny summer afternoon, as carefree crowds gather around the mouth Eisbach river at the edge of the Englischer Garten in Munich, the Nazi built Haus der Deutschen Kunst looms in the background. Today, the Haus der Kunst looks only slightly different than it did when Adolf Hitler stood on its steps claiming the superiority of the German race when the building opened in 1937. There is great controversy over David Chipperfield’s proposed renovation for the building. Along with plans to regulate temperature, update the safety violations, and redesign the west wing to make it more useful in the modern era, Chipperfield also plans the removal of the post-war addition of a line of trees that cover the front of the building and as well as the refurbishment of the original facade. While Chipperfield wants to open up the portico to make the front visible and let in light, he has been met with great resistance. Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Israeliite Cultural Community in Germany, spoke out against the plans. She said, “To think about

64 Barron et al, 345.
reconstructing Nazi architecture is incomprehensible to me. I consider this backward-looking design based on the history of Nazi terror as history forgetting, it would be a devastating signal to recognize or even glorify old Nazi buildings." 65 There has been significant support for this statement. Chipperfield argues back that “The building no longer deserves ‘punishment’ for its past.” 66 At this point, one can only wait and see what the future has in store for the Haus der Kunst in Munich, but the ongoing debate reveals the complexity and sensitivity that still characterizes the harrowing legacy that the Nazis left behind.

The Nazi Party is arguably the most hated, evil, and destructive regime in the history of the western world. Its program not only took over 20 million lives, but also dehumanized people, destroyed towns and monuments, stole and purged individuals of their most prized possessions, and persecuted millions based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or simple unwillingness to obey. The totality of their program touched every corner of society, with art as a central element of their propaganda and narrative. Hitler not only wanted to reveal that the Aryan race and Nazi ideology were superior and connected to the greatest artistic masterpieces of all time, but he also aimed to ruthlessly discredit and condemn examples of modern art which threatened Nazi ideals. ‘Degenerate’ art was expressionistic, abstract, full of intense color and life, and displayed a level of modernism and truth that Hitler found threatening. Thus, the work was branded as without skill and the product of sick or weak minds, Jews, or Bolsheviks. In the 1937 exhibition, Entartete Kunst, Joseph Goebbels and his committee sought

to persuade the general masses that this art was a threat to the greatness of Germany. Hitler provided the people with examples of ‘good’ Nazi art in the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* which opened only one day before the *Entartete Kunst*. By the time the War was over, the Nazi’s had confiscated about 21,000 works of ‘degenerate’ art, many of which have disappeared completely. The Nazis use of art as propaganda changed the history of art forever.

While millions and millions of people perished under Nazi rule, so did countless artists, collectors, intellectuals, paintings, and legacies. Many equate the current popularity of persecuted artists and the post-war modern movement as a counteraction against the Nazi policy. Today, there is a modern fascination with Nazi art theft. Major blockbusters with star-studded casts such as “Monuments Men” and “Women in Gold” begin to publically reveal the totality and cruelty of Nazi art policy. Even so, it seems likely that most questions will never be answered, most stories will never be told, and most lost art will never be found. What remains is a desire to understand, to find, and to make amends. Still, there will be no way to rectify the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War. As of now, the only thing to be done is to return what was stolen and to never stop keeping the narrative alive.

The question remains if Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, and Adolf Ziegler achieved what they set out to do in the *Entartete Kunst* and the program against avant-garde art. Certainly their actions against and destruction of works deemed ‘degenerate’ can never be reversed or rectified. It is because of the Nazi program that the world has lost cultural treasures, both modern and old master. Yet, destroyed and missing art works are still searched for and mourned. It must be considered that if the Nazis were truly successful, would modern audiences look for or care about these pieces of art that were destroyed alongside millions of
lives? Almost certainly, the answer would be they would not. This is not to say that the *Entartete Kunst* did not convince the German masses in 1937 that the majority of these artworks were amateurish, poisoning, and ‘degenerate’; but as the Nazi Party began to crumble, so did its ideology. Over time, western society fought against Nazi beliefs. So, maybe the Nazis are to credit for a Kandinsky that sold for $23 million in 2012, a Beckmann self-portrait from 1938 that sold for $22.5 million in 2001, or the countless other works by ‘degenerate’ artists that have sold for millions over the years. Perhaps, many of these names would have been forgotten if it weren’t for Hitler himself. With time, it is evident that even the most severe propaganda could not silence the expression, honesty, and power of the avant-garde.

Figure 2. Example of early shame exhibition. Kulturbolschewistische Bilder (Images of cultural Bolshevism), Mannheim, Germany, 1933; identifiable work is by Beckmann and Delaunay. “Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 84.
Figure 4. Ludwig Gies, *Kruzifixus (Crucified Christ)*, c. 1921; wood; formerly in Lübeck Cathedral, probably destroyed; shown here on the landing in Room 1 of *Entartete Kunst*. “Degenerate Art”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 37.

Figure 7. Adolf Zeigler (at the podium) opens the exhibition Entartete Kunst at the Archäologisches Institut, Munich, July 19, 1937; in this view of Room 3 four paintings by Otto Mueller can be seen in the background. “Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 44.

Figure 8. Room 3 in Entartete Kunst, north west corner. Munich, July 19, 1937; in this view Kirchner’s Gelbe Tänzerin is hung to the far left and Hofer’s Sitzender Akt is seen center. “Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 56.


Figure 14. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Bauernmahlzeit (Farmers’ meal)*, 1920. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, Germany. “*Degenerate Art*: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany.” By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 277.


Figure 23. View in Room 6 of the *Entartete Kunst* with the door to Room 7 in the background. The door was closed to the public after the end of July. Lehbruck’s *Kneeling Woman*, is seen in the foreground. *“Degenerate Art”*: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 63.

Figure 24. The only known photograph from Room 7 of the *Entartete Kunst*. Displaying works by Purrmann and Caspar. *“Degenerate Art”*: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany. By Stephanie Barron. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991: 64.


Figure 44. Conrad Hommel, _The Führer and Commander-in-Chief of the Army_. 1940. For the 1940 GDK. _Art of the Third Reich_ By Peter Adam. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc, Publishers, 1992: 105.


Figure 49. Galerie Fischer Auction of Degenerate Art, Lucerne, Switzerland. Here, Vincent Van Gogh’s Self Portrait is being sold (Self Portrait was formerly at the Neue Staatsgalerie, Munich; purchased by a representative of the American art collector Maurice Wertheim for 175,000 francs. ArtStor. http://www.artstor.org/index.shtml.

Figure 52. Inventory list of the Louis von Rothschild collection. Taken in March 1939. A red “W” stands for Widmung – which was a forced donation to a museum after the war. *Lost Lives, Lost Art: Jewish Collectors, Nazi Art Theft, and the Quest for Justice* by Melissa Müller and Moika Tatzkow. New York: The Vendome Press, 2010: 211.
Bibliography


