

"Brushwork thick and easy" or a "beauty-parlor mask for murder"? Reckoning with the Great German Art Exhibitions in the Western Democracies

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Abstract

This analysis of the reception of the Great German Art Exhibitions in presses in the Western democracies identifies limits, oversights, and key assumptions in these texts. Over time these assumptions accrued the force of myths. Key myths exposed are that Nazi art was: bad art, all the same, propaganda, not art at all, and modernist art's opposite. Concern was also registered that Western audiences might like it. Until war's end, discourse hewed close to frameworks and terms set forth by National Socialist propaganda, whereas postwar discourse was often subsumed within the reeducation programs of Occupation forces. In both phases, frank analysis of the art in exhibition was deferred. Recognition of myths from this early phase of Nazi art's historiography aims to discourage their repetition in scholarship on Nazi art and these exhibitions.

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Introduction

[1] Coming to terms with the reception of the Great German Art Exhibitions ("*Große Deutsche Kunstausstellungen*") in the Western democracies entails addressing the lack of critical evaluations these exhibitions received between 1937 and the end of the war. Within the purportedly free public spheres of the democracies – and this essay examines responses from France, England, and the United States, where freedom of the press and art were touted to constitute public discourse in opposition to the state regulation and censorship of art and the press inside Nazi Germany – surprisingly few publications openly reckoned with the Great German Art Exhibitions. This initial inattention, followed by postwar scholarship's tendency to avoid these early responses,¹ raises basic questions. Why, for example, did these exhibitions receive such little consideration and discussion from abroad at the time they were contemporary? And when they were addressed, what did journalists or art critics claim and assume about them?

¹ A recent example is Ines Schlenker, *Hitler's Salon. The Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich 1937-1944*, Oxford 2007. This valuable, foundational study of the Great German Art Exhibitions neglects, however, contemporary responses from abroad. See also: Karl-Heinz Meißner, "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung," in: *Stationen der Moderne*, exh. cat., Berlin 1988, 276-287, that apart from citing one review from Prague, also omits responses from outside of Germany.

[2] The lack of attention paid in the media of these countries to the Great German Art Exhibitions and National Socialist art in general is partly explained by recalling contextual factors. Key was the isolationism of the United States, combined with the appeasement policies pursued by France, Britain and the United States through the Munich Accord of 30 September 1938. By war's outbreak, appeasement had given way to patriotism that transformed public opinion in these countries against Germans and their culture, vilifying the new Germany as the enemy (collaboration in France required different adjustments and perspectives). The war also restricted foreign journalists' access to the Great German Art Exhibitions, a wartime condition that limited access and warped even the pretense of objectivity.

[3] This essay identifies and elaborates four theses that begin to account for the tone and character of the limited commentary as well as the neglect of the Great German Art Exhibitions in the presses of the democracies. It has also been helpful to elaborate these theses in relationship to the immediate postwar discussions of the Great German Art Exhibitions (and to some extent Nazi art) to ask how writings from 1945 into the early 1950s continued or redirected prewar and wartime discussions. Particularly telling are the writings of Lincoln Kirstein and Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, especially as the latter's *Art under a Dictatorship* of 1954 resituated the discourse around National Socialist art and the Great German Art Exhibitions within academic publishing, at least in the English-speaking world.

[4] Before elaborating the critical readings that support these four theses on contemporary published responses to the Great German Art Exhibitions, each thesis merits stating succinctly.

[5] Firstly, one discovers the assumption that Nazi art was not worth anyone's attention, because it was either bad art, propaganda, or not art at all. Alone or in any combination with one another such conceptions encouraged silence about the Great German Art Exhibitions, and discouraged art writers to seriously review them, as they were predisposed to believe they would have nothing positive to write.

[6] Secondly, writers and cultural figures registered concern or fear that audiences, especially the "ordinary public" in the democracies, would be attracted to and appreciate the German art exhibited in the Great German Art Exhibitions. To publish texts about it, and especially to publish reproductions of the new art exhibited at the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst*, might well foster agreement with the Nazis. Ostensibly, the lack of publicity given to the art of the new Germany by critics and journalists in the democracies may well have rested upon their assumption that it was better to deprive Nazi art of further commentary or reproduction through mass distribution.

[7] Thirdly, the absence of insightful analysis of the exhibitions may partially be accounted for by writers' and cultural figures' preoccupation with the terms of the debates about art and art policy set forth by Hitler and National Socialist art propaganda.

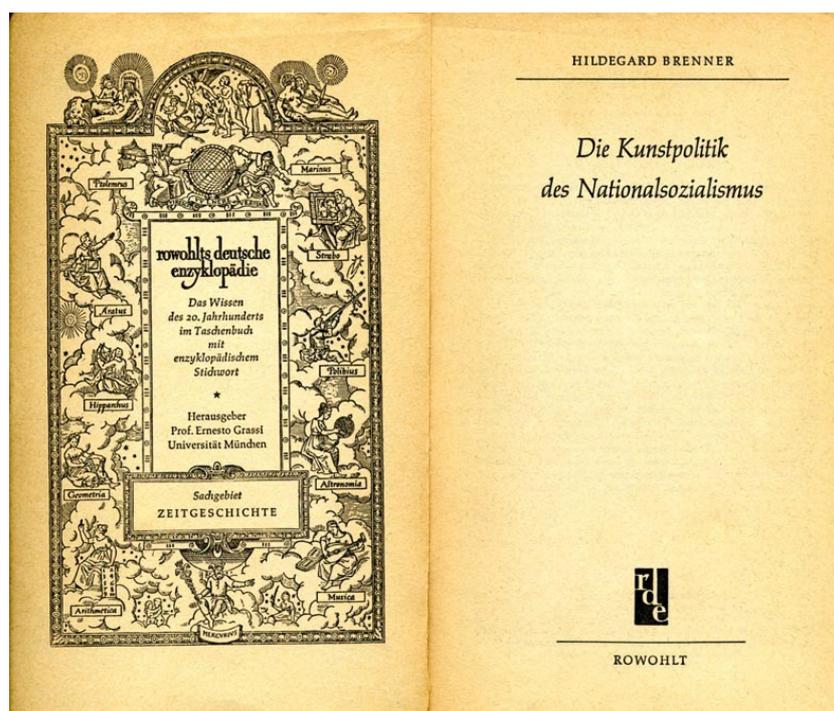
In short, Western art critics who addressed these exhibitions accepted the issues provided them by the Nazis; they fell into the trap National Socialist propaganda of the German government set for them. Buying into Nazi propaganda placed critics in the democracies on the defensive, responding to Hitler's intolerant invectives, rarely considering the art or the exhibitions outside of Nazi-defined terms. Put differently, writers in the democracies entered into debate with themselves over the *content* and *aesthetics* of the art as defined by Hitler and the National Socialist art leadership. In their absorption with content so defined, they seldom analyzed it in relationship to any point of reference, or asked questions of it, other than those suggested or prescribed by the Nazis.

[8] And finally, during the immediate and ongoing postwar years, particularly in the Western Occupation Zones, an art history of National Socialist art by American, British, or French art historians that reckoned analytically with the Great German Art Exhibitions never developed. Outside of Germany this situation persisted at least into the 1970s. Although publications that reflected upon art in the Third Reich saw more frequent publication in the immediate postwar period, nothing published by writers from the democratic countries ever approached a comprehensive or frank assessment of the Great German Art Exhibitions.²

[9] The contemporaneous published responses that support these theses gain clarity by viewing them from the vantage point of a later publishing event. (Fig. 1) These pages introduce West German literary scholar Hildegard Brenner's groundbreaking *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* of 1963, a publication that burst through thickets of muted, sporadic discussion in effect shattering the silence within the German language discussion on Nazi art.³ Offering a trenchant institutional and documentary history of the "Kunstpolitik" [art policies] of the National Socialists based in archival and press records, this sober, academic study sidestepped the more inflammatory and still largely untouchable topic of Nazi art. Her book may be understood as laying art historical foundations in tune with methodologies of institutional critique then under development by the emerging New Left as it revisited the critical theory of Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, et al. Brenner's book presented itself to be a kind of objective or ideologically neutral reckoning with National Socialist cultural politics. Through her reconstruction of the National Socialist art administration and its various ministries and divisions, Brenner's soundly researched book sorted out crucial, and by 1960, politically pressing questions of who and what government art or propaganda agencies were responsible for what during the National Socialist regime. In this way, her study was cut of the same cloth as the mounting demands for accountability of Nazi era perpetrators and their ongoing role in late 1950s West German political life.

² Such neglect was not the case for retrospective accounts of the Degenerate Art exhibitions. Among early postwar assessments of that exhibition and campaign among Germans were Adolf Behne, *Entartete Kunst*, Berlin 1947, and Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich*, Hamburg 1949.

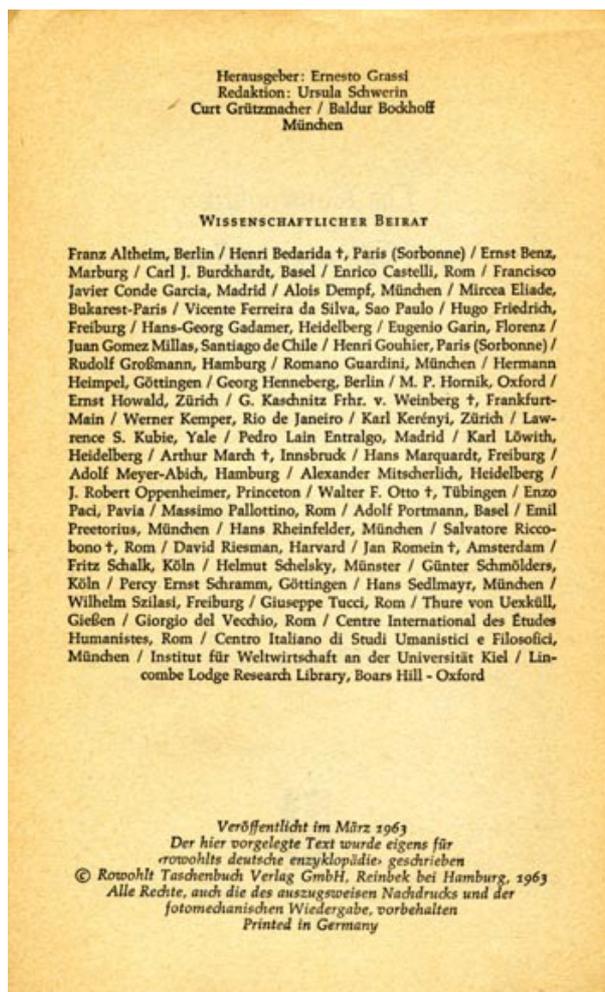
³ Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1963.
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1 Series frontispiece and title page, Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: rowohlts deutsche enzyklopädie, 1963, 2-3

[10] Significantly, as part of *rowohlts deutsche enzyklopädie*, this book from a solo, female scholar at Berlin's Freie Universität entered the public sphere brandishing over fifty high power academic endorsements on its frontispiece. (Fig. 2) Like other volumes in this prestigious series, the endorsement page listed the *Wissenschaftliche Beirat* [Academic advisory council] comprised of dozens of academics from leading universities and research institutes from within and outside the Federal Republic of Germany: from Argentina, the United States, Italy and other countries spanning the globe. The full-armed credentialing of Brenner's documentary study of National Socialist cultural politics would have served as an advance rebuff to anticipated critics of liberal, left, or Jewish persuasions, while also forestalling in advance any pro-Nazi embrace of its findings. The publication of Brenner's book within this illustrious series also speaks to the protracted continuation of the culture of suppression of Nazi culture in West Germany after 1960, even as the Spiegel Affair of autumn 1962 rocked Adenauer's administration and led to his resignation, and the Auschwitz guard trials were commenced in Frankfurt in late 1963.⁴ It would be difficult to find an art historical text on National Socialist art that better signaled the lifting of the silence on Nazi art and the regime's artists, than Brenner's book.

⁴ Many of this author's assumptions about this context derives from the nuanced account of the shifting politics of memory and amnesia during this period, and their impact upon key aspects of contemporary visual art set forth in Paul B. Jaskot, "Gerhard Richter and Adolf Eichmann," *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2005), 457-478, here 459-462, 468-472.



2 Verso of title page with list of Academic Advisory Council [*Wissenschaftlicher Beirat*], Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: rowohlt's deutsche enzyklopädie, 1963, 4

[11] But as much as we now easily recognize the achievement of Brenner's publication, a 6 December 1963 review in *Die Zeit* by Dietrich Strothmann raised the question of why her new paperback was being neglected in the press. Strothmann's appears to be one of few efforts to rescue Brenner's book from silence. He pointed out that hers was the best and most grounded analysis to date of the early years of National Socialist art and cultural administrations' struggle for power. He reviews the scope of the book's contents: visual arts, theater, *Thingspiel*, literature and book market, the range of anti-modernist campaigns, as well as her analyses of speeches and writings of National Socialist leaders. He also insisted that the term in the title "*Kunstpolitik*," was misleading, inasmuch as the book covered so much more.⁵

[12] Viewed today without the clouded lens of regulation and institutional legitimation that framed Brenner's 1963 book and other later writings on Nazi art, the critical responses to the Great German Art Exhibitions published between 1937 and the end of

⁵ Dietrich Strothmann, "Der Ruin der Kultur," *Die Zeit* (6 December 1963), <http://www.zeit.de/1963/49/der-ruin-der-kultur> (accessed 25 September 2012). License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

the war each assume a decidedly idiosyncratic freshness, if not innocence, yet to be refashioned and constrained by those postwar conditions.

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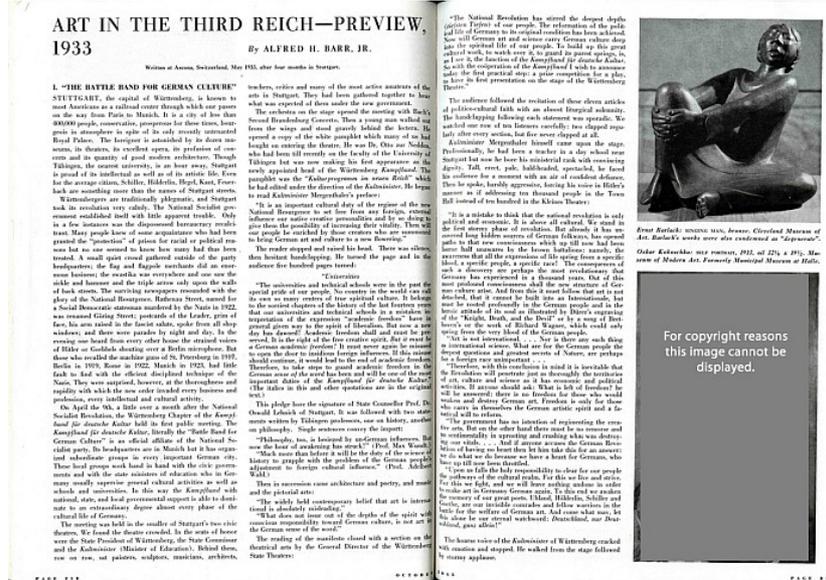
Bad art?

[13] The assumption that Nazi art was not worthy to regard as "art," that it was state-directed propaganda or bad art, informed the silence of many, particularly modernist critics and potential commentators. The elitism and modernist exclusivity inherent in this assumption was already established by 1933. Consider the four essays written in 1933 by Alfred H. Barr (1902-1981) on German painting, sculpture, architecture, and film. Written by Barr after living in Stuttgart, they impressively detail the *Gleichschaltung* of the visual arts there.⁶ Except for his essay on German film, these remained unpublished at that time – despite Barr's efforts to place them with leading periodicals in the United States. When eventually published in the *Magazine of Art* in August 1945 (Fig. 3), guest editor Jacques Barzun claimed that Barr's articles had been rejected for publication in 1933 due to the lack of interest in the new Germany's art, a polite way of implying American isolationism. The isolationism of the United States surely played a role to hinder Barr's articles from reaching a large readership, especially given the articles' positions that National Socialist art was propaganda, and that the new German government was replacing modernist arts with a much inferior state-controlled art.⁷ (Fig. 4) But it was not the only reason that Barr's submissions were returned by the editors at *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *Harper's Magazine*.⁸ In 1933-1936, the United States was roiled in debates concerning state-directed art, triggered by the ongoing implementation of the Works Progress Administration programs. Had they been published, it is likely that Barr's account of the German state's takeover and regulation of the arts would have invited conspicuous and unwanted comparisons with the government art programs of Roosevelt's New Deal.

⁶ Alfred H. Barr, "Art in the Third Reich – Preview 1933," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 212-222. Basing his assessment of the yet unknown art of the Nazi government upon paintings by Professor Waldschmidt, Professor of the Stuttgart Art Academy, and author of the Kampfbund's manifesto, Barr deemed Waldschmidt's plowing scenes void of any purported national characteristics, while also warning of state control of the arts. In 1933, neither of Barr's reports from Germany had been accepted for publication by any major U.S. magazine, so he had shelved them until 1945. The article he wrote at the same time on Nazi film, however, was published in the literary magazine Lincoln Kirstein edited with Varian Fry: Alfred H. Barr, "Nationalism in German Films," *Hound and Horn* (March 1934), 278-283. See Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. Missionary for the Modern*, Chicago 1989, 105-109, 378.

⁷ Jacques Barzun, "Editorial and a Memorandum from Jacques Barzun," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 21.

⁸ Irving Sandler and Amy Newman, eds., *Defining Modern Art. Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, New York 1986, 102; cited in: Gregor Langfeld, *Deutsche Kunst in New York. Vermittler – Kunstsammler – Ausstellungsmacher 1904-1957*, Berlin 2011, 106. Langfeld's dissertation came to the author's attention after completing this article. In "Kunstkritik 1937," Langfeld analyzes the New York reception of the paired Munich exhibitions based upon four reviews in the popular press that addressed the Degenerate Art exhibition, Nazi anti-modernism, or the reorganization of German artistic culture. These reviews included brief, negative evaluations of Nazi art in general, and deprecated it as either bad, sterile, uniform, academic or otherwise lacking. Langfeld concludes that although these reviews suffered from poor sources, their negative assessments of Nazi art positively effected the ongoing canonization of modernist German art, the primary subject of his valuable, overarching study. Langfeld, *Deutsche Kunst*, 108-110.



3 First page of Alfred H. Barr, "Art in the Third Reich - Preview 1933," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 212-213



4 "Editorial and a Memorandum from Jacques Barzun," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 210-211

[14] Another outburst of modernist condescension toward National Socialist art occurred in the publications of Christian Zervos (1889-1970) in Paris.⁹ Zervos' criticism of 'directed aesthetics' and his modernist promotion of Picasso beneath the banner of individualism and freedom are well known. Recently, Karen Fiss's most recommendable book *Grand Illusion. The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France*, has demonstrated that Zervos' repudiation of Nazi aesthetic in late 1936, early 1937, in issues of *Cahiers d'Art* centered largely upon the French editor's rejection of the Nazi

⁹ Christian Zervos, "Réflexions sur la tentative d'Esthétique dirigée du Troisième Reich," *Cahiers d'Art* I, nos. 8-10 (1936), 209-212; 2, nos. 1-3 (1937), 51-61. License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

emphasis upon the importance of the artist in the community.¹⁰ Zervos insisted that autonomous artworks were useless for political ends, and he also championed the individualism of artists like modernist high rollers Picasso, Matisse and Lèger. For Zervos and many others in France, the deprivation in Germany of modern artists' freedom was a burning issue repeatedly stressed and often juxtaposed to the longstanding French tradition of the freedom of art and the artist. In other words, with the principles of the freedom of art and the artist widely engrained among the French public and institutionalized in France since the French Revolution, the Great German Art Exhibitions prompted several critics in France to frame the issue in terms of how Germany's new state art program contrasted with the broadly held belief in artistic freedom in France.

[15] Another essay published for French readers was a short essay in *Marianne* by John Rewald (1912-1994), "Hitler et l'Art."¹¹ Best known for his pioneering scholarship on Impressionism, Rewald was an exiled German-Jewish art historian who had studied with Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl in Hamburg and had recently received his doctorate from the Sorbonne under Henri Focillon. In this essay, Rewald juxtaposed excerpts from several speeches by Hitler on art from 1934 to 1937 and pointed out contradictions in the speeches on art matters. He pinpointed Hitler's horror of today's freely creating artists, and the restrictive laws the National Socialist government placed upon their freedom. He underscored Hitler's warning to artists who "have created and who create, according to their personal visions and not according to those of their heads of state [. . .]."¹² Rewald concluded his essay stressing that Hitler offers artists the choice between exile, sterilization and prison.

[16] Responding to a laudatory letter from Paul Westheim in which Westheim asked Rewald to contribute to the exile press, Rewald declined.¹³ He also complained to Westheim about the editors at *Marianne* cutting his essay by more than half (e.g., removing extensive excerpts from Hitler's speeches). He further stressed that his identity as an art historian and a writer was French, stating that now would not be a good time to accent his Germanness (*Deutschtum*), as being a German writer today would undermine one's credibility. Rewald's choice not to publish more criticism of National Socialist art and art policy may also have been informed by concern for the safety of his relatives in Germany. Such reasoning was shared by many exiles from Germany when considering whether to publish negative commentary on National Socialist art and cultural affairs.

[17] Appearing during the first Great German Art Exhibition, in August 1937, as a two-part essay in the weekly *Beaux-Arts*, the art critic Waldemar George (1893-1970) queried why

¹⁰ Karen Fiss, *The Grand Illusion. The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France*, Chicago 2009, 120-121, 126-128, 242, nos. 81-85.

¹¹ John Rewald, "Hitler et l'Art," *Marianne*, no. 314 (26 October 1938), 9.

¹² "[...] ont créé et qui créent, selon leurs visions personnelles et non selon celles de leurs chefs d'Etat, [...]" Rewald, "Hitler et l'Art," 9.

¹³ 12 November 1938, Rewald to Westheim letter, Moscow, Russian State Military Archives, Teilnachlass Paul Westheim, no. 602, Akte 4, Bl. 86, 86r.

the French remained so silent about art in Germany?¹⁴ Well before 1937, George had developed a body of writing critical of the autonomy of art and of the incompatibility of democracies to support modern art. Also, George avidly championed authoritarian state art programs, especially those of the fascist Italian government of Mussolini, and he favored arts that privileged dignified human figuration. He embraced a wide range of modernist art and styles, while also contending that styles should be expressive of national characteristics.¹⁵ As Karen Fiss has demonstrated, in 1937, George joined other intellectuals to decry the lack of serious analysis Nazi Germany was receiving in the French press. For example, he attacked the arguments of one Louis Gillet (1876-1943), who had reviewed the Great German Art Exhibition in *Paris-Soir*. According to George, Gillet had fallen into the trap of becoming absorbed in his own descriptions of the spectacles in Munich without analyzing the two art exhibitions in relation to Hitler's speeches. George pointed out that the pomp and grand ceremony accompanying the inauguration of the House of German Art in Munich were discussed by Gillet and others, but without providing analysis of the *meaning* of these ceremonies.¹⁶

[18] Distinctive among writers in France, was George's defense of German modernism against Hitler's anti-modernism, paired with analysis of the aesthetics, content, and policies governing the Nazi art world. Singled out for particular disapproval were the purges of art and artists then underway in Germany. Like many in Germany around 1933 (e.g., National Socialist students in Berlin, Emil Nolde),¹⁷ George argued that Expressionism was the most genuine art of modern Germany, and that Expressionism was a German invention rooted in national traditions, and not as the Nazis would have it, foisted upon Germans by a Jewish art conspiracy. Although criticizing the classicizing tendencies in the new German art as too "uniform,"¹⁸ he likely blurred the distinction as to which "side" he was on, as he noted his admiration of Hitler speaking about art for about two hours, and challenged democratic leaders to do the same.¹⁹ Riddled as George's reckonings were with unexpected ambiguities, his public engagement with National Socialist art policy and Nazi claims may have animated Nazi views about art for

¹⁴ Waldemar George, "L'art et le national-socialisme," *Beaux-Arts*, 13 and 20 August 1937; cited in Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 264.

¹⁵ Matthew Affron, "Waldemar George: A Parisian Art Critic on Modernism and Fascism," in: *Fascist Visions. Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, Princeton 1997, 171-204, here 188-195.

¹⁶ George, "L'art et le national-socialisme," *Beaux-Arts*, 13 August 1937, 1, in: Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 119, 241, n. 73.

¹⁷ On debates in Germany over which styles and forms of art would gain the support of the National Socialists and their new government, see: Hildegard Brenner, "Art in the Political Power Struggle of 1933 and 1934," in: *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution*, ed. Hajo Holborn, New York 1972, 395-434; and Stefan Germer, "Kunst der Nation: Zu einem Versuch, die Avantgarde zu nationalisieren," in: *Kunst auf Befehl? Dreiunddreißig bis Fünfundvierzig*, München 1990, 9-20.

¹⁸ George, "L'art et le national-socialisme," *Beaux-Arts*, 20 August 1937, 2; in: Fiss, *The Grand Illusion*, 119, 241, n. 75

¹⁹ George, "L'art et le national-socialisme," *Beaux-Arts*, 20 August 1937, 2, in: Fiss, *The Grand Illusion*, 119, 241, n. 75.

audiences in France as much as they served to rebuff or discount them. George's non-formulaic commentary on Nazi art in 1937 France would have raised the question of whether the author was promoting or criticizing Nazi art just as it heightened readers' interests to attend to George's less than predictable views. Avoiding this potential ambivalence became an ongoing quandary for writers who wished to discuss Nazi art and art policy in analytical terms, yet not conform to an *a priori* schema of either complete rejection or endorsement.

[19] The silence in the French press about developments in the German artworld noted by George in August 1937 was soon broken. Among the more high-profile reviews of the first Great German Art Exhibition were those of [Father (*Pere*)] Louis Beirnaert's "Deux expositions d'art a Munich," appearing in *Etudes* in late 1937,²⁰ and Jacques Feschotte's "Art officiel et art 'dégénéré' a Munich," a few months later in *Mercure de France*.²¹ Readers would have found little ambivalence in either critic's negative assessments of the 1937 exhibition.

[20] Father Beirnaert (1906-1985) reports on his visit to both Munich exhibitions. After a generally favorable assessment of the degenerate art in its appalling exhibition spaces, he turns to the official art in its stunning new exhibition building. In spite of the impressive new galleries, he notes that the art is always a little bit the same. He reports that a student there said to him: "It is too uniformly beautiful. It looks like a woman with perfect characteristics, but without a soul."²² Stressing the conformism of the official art, Beirnaert also notes how the landscape paintings of southern Germany look like the views from his train window, and portraits of the Führer like the photographs of Hitler filling the shops of Munich. In short, this official art offers the world as seen through a camera. He also surveys the key themes of the 1937 exhibition, especially the dominant theme of the Party: i.e., the Führer painted in five guises (not including the sculpted busts), the regime's major personalities, the soldiers, young men marching toward an invisible goal, and the major dates of the Nazi movement. Additional themes singled out by Beirnaert included labor, the German landscape, peasants and the peasant life, sports with completely nude athletes, and the theme of youth, with adolescents and infants. Befitting a catholic clergyman, Beirnaert repeatedly pointed out the spiritual emptiness of the art works, a Germanness emptied of Christianity, and he criticized the thematically wide-ranging exhibition for not including a single religious work.²³

[21] Jacques Feschotte (1894-1966), reports the results of his trip to Munich and the two exhibitions as if he had taken up the German government's challenge "to judge for

²⁰ Louis Beirnaert, "Deux expositions d'art a Munich. Art dégénéré et art Allemand," *Etudes*, fasc. 20 (November 1937), 499-506.

²¹ Jacques Feschotte, "Art officiel et art 'dégénéré' a Munich," *Mercure de France* (15 February 1938, Serie Moderne), 94-110.

²² "C'est trop uniformément beau. On dirait une femme aux traits parfaits, mais sans âme." Beirnaert, "Deux expositions," 503.

²³ Beirnaert, "Deux expositions," 502-505.

yourself," a cynical invitation posted on an placard inside the Degenerate Art exhibition. Claiming not to have prejudged, Feschotte offers himself like a willing guinea pig in a Nazi laboratory experiment, only to reach the conclusion that he strongly favors the so-called "Degenerate Art." Feschotte also describes both exhibitions. His guiding question of the art in the Great German Art Exhibition is whether it is possible to have a government aesthetic?²⁴ Feschotte accents the non-revolutionary character of the art as well as its place in the lives of the German people. He also compares it to the art of the pre-World War I Salons of the *Artistes Français*, classifying it as realism and deeming it bland like the French Salons. But unlike those Salons, he claims, this exhibition lacks exceptional pieces. More bluntly, Feschotte informs readers that the art is very ugly. He also underscored the anonymity of the artworks, finding himself unable to single out an artist's name, or even one masterpiece.²⁵ He more or less dismisses the art at the House of German Art as an art stripped of all originality, "systematically trivialized."²⁶

[22] In spite of the differing worldviews underpinning their analyses of the Great German Art Exhibition, and their different lines of argumentation, both French authors convey highly negative and value-charged assessments of the new German art on view in Munich, placing their views in proximity to those of Barr, Zervos and other unabashed modernists who rejected the new official art of Nazi Germany. Feschotte emphasized the lack of individually distinctive contributions, while Beirnaert criticized the exhibited art more directly. He identified the dominance of formulaic and clichéd themes, the mimetic or photographic character of most of the art, the absence of religious art, and the spiritual void created by the exhibition. Taking up a different, and more complicated line, Waldemar George offered barely veiled praise of Hitler in noting his ability to speak on art at such great length. George advanced the proposition that dogged the Nazi cultural establishment in the thirties, just as it would haunt modernist art historians after the war, that German Expressionism was the most national and truly Germanic of recent art movements. Indicative of his broader perspective, George also noted the silence of French critics toward Nazi art, and in particular their lack of a critical analysis of the new German art and what the art and its contemporary exhibition might mean if examined in relation to the content of Hitler and other leader's speeches.

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Anxiety about the "ordinary public"

[23] My second thesis proposes that the lack of serious analysis of the Great German Art Exhibitions in the democratic press obtained from anxiety that audiences of ordinary people would appreciate it; that publications about the art in the Great German Art Exhibitions would fail to cause citizens of the democracies to reject Nazi art, and instead stimulate its admiration. One indeed finds, surveying indexes of the major presses from

²⁴ Feschotte, "Art officiel et art 'dégénéré' a Munich," 95-96.

²⁵ Feschotte, "Art officiel et art 'dégénéré' a Munich," 99-100.

²⁶ "systématiquement banalisé", Feschotte, "Art officiel et art 'dégénéré' a Munich," 99.

1937 to 1944, that near silence reigned in the Western press in the face of these exhibitions. So where was the discussion, robust or otherwise? Was it – like Barr's 1933 reports – tossed into a bottom drawer due to isolationism, undesired comparison with the state-directed art programs of a writer's own democracy, or pre-war appeasement, only to be sequestered throughout the war even longer due to patriotic rejection of the art of the enemy? Or did there persist on the part of art magazine and news editors a fear that the artistic tastes and preferences of the citizens of the Western democracies might concur with Nazi tastes: i.e., joining in the Nazi purge of *Entartete Kunst* and embracing artworks from the Great German Art Exhibitions? Even provisional answers to these questions demand a review of some actual attitudes and commentary.

[24] Concern that Nazi art would appeal to audiences in the democracies went hand in hand with the related fear that the exhibition of modernist German art could stimulate a backlash from pro-Nazi elements within the democratic public sphere. This came to inform tactical planning for art exhibitions outside of Germany within months of the first Great German Art Exhibition's opening. Consider an insightful comment from 30 November 1937, by Basel Kunstmuseum curator, Georg Schmidt (1896-1965), writing to Paris-based Paul Westheim. Schmidt was concerned with the potentially anti-modernist and pro-Nazi responses to modern art around Europe and the United Kingdom, as the Paris exiles grappled with how to formulate a counter-exhibition to answer the two Nazi art exhibitions in Munich. Writing to Westheim, Schmidt explained:

[...] if one is not certain that the english public is spontaneously shocked that such great works are being banned by the nazis, then better to let the matter be. and advocate for modern art without any anti-nazi viewpoint. with us in switzerland, for example, one can likewise cultivate much more anti-nazi sentiment, if one simply writes in the newspaper: the world famous picture of the greatest german painter of the 20th century, the tower of the blue horses, is being condemned by the nazis! but when one shows the thing, the effect shall rather be pro-nazi. for this reason, the values of modern art are not yet certain enough. in paris it is a little better. but at the moment, where the cause of anti-nazism is raised, the people come in to see the modern pictures for the first time – and the reaction is pro-nazi.²⁷

[25] Although the Swiss curator was concerned with the politics of exhibiting emphatically modernist art, not Nazi art, his awareness of inflaming a "pro-nazi reaction" by an audience or audiences within the democracies guided his advice to the exiled art editor and critic. Schmidt's knowledgeable advice is telling as it identifies an ongoing fear informing public efforts to redress Nazi art and the propaganda that shaped it. Had Schmidt addressed the issue of the exhibition or publication of Nazi art in the

²⁷ "[...] wenn man nicht sicher ist, dass das englische publikum spontan empört ist darüber, dass so grosse werke von den nazis verbannt werden, dann lässt man die sache lieber sein. und tritt für moderne kunst ohne antinazi-absicht ein. bei uns in der schweiz z.b. kann man ebenfalls viel mehr antinazi-empörung stiften, wenn man einfach in der zeitung schreibt: das weltberühmte bild des grössten deutschen malers des 20. jahrhundert, der turm der blauen pferde, ist von den nazis verdammt worden! aber wenn man denen dinge zeigt, wird die wirkung eher pronazi sein. dazu sind die werte der modernen kunst noch nicht gesichert genug. in paris ist es ein wenig besser. aber im augenblick, wo die sache antinazisch aufgezoogen wird, kommen leute hin, die moderne bilder zum ersten mal sehen – und die reaction ist pronazisch." Georg Schmidt (Basel) to Paul Westheim (Paris), 30 November 1937 letter, Moscow, Russian State Military Archive, Teilnachlass Westheim, no. 602, Akte 7, Bl. 102.

democracies, it is reasonable to presume that one of his foremost concerns would also have been that audiences in the democracies might engage in an affirmative embrace of Nazi art.

[26] A major result of Westheim and London dealers' endeavors to answer the paired exhibitions in Munich was the exhibition of two hundred sixty-nine plus examples of modern German art in London at the New Burlington Gallery in *Twentieth Century German Art*.²⁸ On this occasion, and as if confirming Georg Schmidt's predictions, the press commentary of Raymond Mortimer, critic for the left-liberal *New Statesman & Nation*, suggested why modern German art might better not be put before the eyes of the British public. He wrote:

[I]n so far as the German Exhibition at the New Burlington Gallery is propaganda, it is, in my opinion, extremely bad propaganda. People who go to see the Exhibition are only too likely to say: 'If Hitler doesn't like these [modern] pictures, it's the best thing I've heard about Hitler.' For the general impressionism made by the Show upon the ordinary public must be one of extraordinary ugliness.²⁹

[27] Again, the boogiemanager feared in London, just as Schmidt imagined from Switzerland, was the "ordinary public" who may well agree with Hitler. Put differently, the anxieties articulated by Schmidt and Mortimer about the public – that engine and foundation of modern democracies – might best be regarded as the recurrence of a nightmare long suppressed by modernist champions through their long-time and institutionalized neglect of the tastes of the masses, but that had now returned to haunt them.

[28] Another British commentator, known for his informed reporting on Germany, was Francis Watson. In "The New Laokoon," published in August 1938 in the *Architectural Review* (London),³⁰ this esteemed foreign news correspondent for the *Yorkshire Post* put his finger on another more consuming issue. Following his opening comments upon Hitler the failed artist turned statesman, as well as Hitler's intolerance of *Degenerate Art*, Watson warned it was not Hitler's ideas or Nazi ideologies themselves that merited most attention, rather it was the unprecedented technological context in place for the widespread distribution of ideas. Watson noted the common demographic bases of British and German anti-modernism, noting that anyone familiar with rural British art exhibitions would be familiar with similar intolerance among the public. But he stressed that most significant was the new context of what was happening in Germany rather than the ideas and claims themselves.

²⁸ On the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, see: Keith Holz, "Recasting exiled artists groups as transnational diasporic communities," in: *Netzwerke des Exils. Künstlerische Verflechtungen, Austausch und Patronage nach 1933*, eds. Burcu Dogramaci and Karin Wimmer, Berlin 2011, 280-295; and Keith Holz, *Modern German Art for Thirties Paris, Prague and London: Resistance and Acquiescence in a Democratic Public Sphere*, Ann Arbor 2004, 195-222.

²⁹ Raymond Mortimer, *New Statesman & Nation* (16 July 1938), cited in: Cordula Frowein, "Ausstellungsaktivitäten der Exilkünstler," in: *Kunst im Exil in Großbritannien 1933-1945*, exh. cat., Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst 1986, 37, 48, n. 13.

³⁰ Francis Watson, "The New Laokoon," *Architectural Review* LXXXIV, no. 501 (August 1938), 45-46. License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Never before in history have discourses on aesthetics found a fraction of the numerical audience that they reach in the Third Reich. It is neither a city councillor telling a hundred collapsible chairs that he knows what he likes, nor a fashionable critic expounding Vico and Breton to a drawing room. It is the responsible head of a government speaking for an hour and a half to as many citizens that can be assembled in a megalithic stadium and further served by a radio network. And he is speaking about art. In face of this unprecedented phenomenon what he [Hitler] says begins to seem of secondary importance.³¹

[29] All too aware that the English public would not stray far from Hitler's opinions about art, and may well join with Hitler in his turn against the "degenerate half-wits who on principle see blue fields, a green sky and sulphureous clouds"³² and agree with Hitler's other anti-modernist jabs, Watson proposes:

But these negatives, however picturesque, are too vague and too familiar to invite serious discussion. In themselves they suggest no new dialectic, no programme, not even a definite black-list. Their interest lies in their echo of the resentful bewilderment of the 'man-in-the-street' in all countries.³³

[30] Continuing with a citation from Hitler's Cultural Address at the Nuremberg Party Congress of 1937, Watson cited the Führer's provocation: "Ask these uncorrupted people, and you will receive an unqualified reply. [...]" Continuing, Watson added: "If he [Hitler] is not quite sure what he likes, at least he knows what his uncorrupted audience does not like. It does not like MODERN ART."³⁴ The Nazis' connection to the people, or, as Watson phrases it, Hitler's uncanny capacity to serve as the "mouthpiece of *demos* and the declared enemy of cliques, intellectuals, 'literati,' 'ink-slingers,' and 'the yelping of the critic against a decent and solid average'"³⁵ posed the biggest danger. In sum, while sharing the fear that the Nazis' message was in tune with ordinary people in Germany and England, Watson alerted his readers to critically attend to the new technological capacity and reach that this head of state had at his disposal to communicate to the masses about art. Watson's insight, while in no way developed as a method of critical analysis, nonetheless outflanked the conundrums and contradictions of National Socialist German aesthetics, by instead highlighting the technological apparatus of the culture industry that had been developed to support and distribute it.³⁶

³¹ Watson, "New Laokoon," 45.

³² Watson, "New Laokoon," 45.

³³ Watson, "New Laokoon," 45.

³⁴ Watson, "New Laokoon," 45.

³⁵ Watson, "New Laokoon," 45.

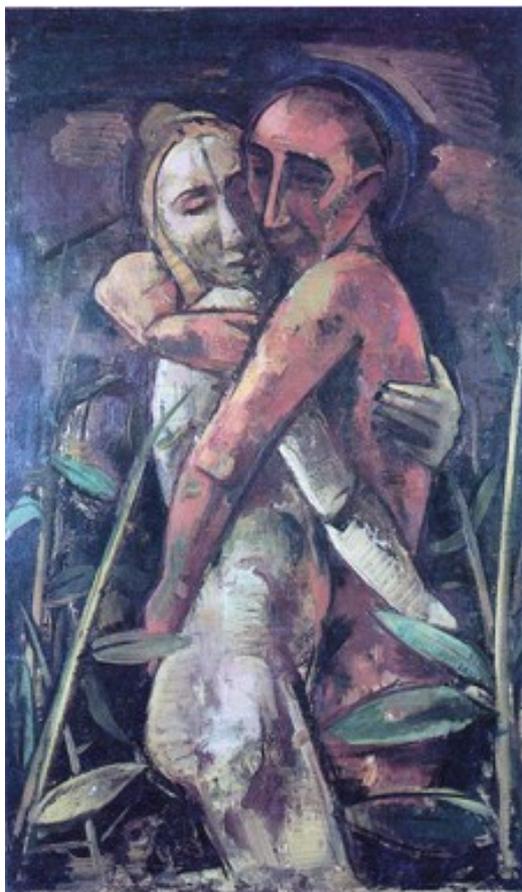
³⁶ Francis Watson's commentary bursts through thickets of obfuscating commentary that in fall 1938 attempted to analyze the meaning of National Socialist art and art policy. His urging of readers to pay most attention to context, particularly the new and emerging technological context for distributing their art and ideas, points to the shortcomings of art historians, who all too rarely have taken stock of this recognition in formulating their methodologies. From Watson's perspective, the Twentieth Century German Art exhibition, and the press banter that followed in England and inside Germany, may have had its greatest significance as a resonator of Hitler's views on art. Other substantial articles published in England that address or mention the Great German Art Exhibition of 1938, but with emphasis upon Hitler's speeches or National Socialist art policy in general, include: Herbert Read, "Hitler on Art," *The Listener* (22 September 1937), 605-607; J. B. C. Grundy, "Art Tendencies in the Third Reich," *German Life and Letters* 2, no. 3 (April 1938), 210-216; License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

[31] And the dilemma posed by fear of the everyman's views was not confined to Europe. In November 1939, on the occasion of the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston's modernist exhibition *Contemporary German Art* curated by Mary Udall under the director James Plaut, the *Boston Globe* reviewer, A. I. Philpott, echoed Raymond Mortimer's claim. "There are probably many people – art lovers – in Boston, who will side with Hitler in this particular purge. [...] So it is that the war of opinions has come to Boston – the judgment seat of the United States in art matters – with the emphasis slightly on the side of traditions which Hitler seems to respect."³⁷

[32] Further attitudes in the United States toward National Socialist art surface when one attends to the discussions attending the scaled-down version of the London exhibition "Twentieth Century German Art" that toured about seventy artworks to museums in cities around the United States. Opening in far-flung cities, including Milwaukee, Saint Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, Massachusetts, and San Francisco, the featured modernist German works were often met with incomprehension, anti-modernism and intolerance. One of the more poignant documented responses occurred in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In a June 26, 1939, letter forwarded on August 30, 1939, by Milwaukee Art Institute Director, Alfred G. Pelikan to Meyrick Rogers, Director of Saint Louis City Art Museum, Pelikan claimed that the letter was "typical [of] ones addressed to me and to the Board of Trustees." The letter's author was Senior Canon of All Saints Cathedral, Milwaukee. The cleric objected to some of the exhibition's pictures; particularly to the eroticism of Carl Hofer's painting *Liebespaar* [*Pair of Lovers*] (Fig. 5).

and Gonda Gore, "Art in Nazi Germany," *The Fortnightly*, no. 860, new series (August 1938), 210-216.

³⁷ A. I. Philpott, "Contemporary German Art at the Institute of Modern Art," *Boston Globe* (2 November 1939), 12; cited in Reinhold Heller, "The Expressionist Challenge," in: *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston*, exh. cat., Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art 1985, 32. On the reception of German modernist art in Boston, see Judith Bookbinder, *Boston Modern: Figurative Expressionism as Alternative Modernism*, Durham, NH 2005.



5 Karl (Carl) Hofer, *Pair of Lovers*, a.k.a. *Love: Human Couple* [*Liebespaar*, a.k.a. *Liebe (Menschenpaar)*], 1922, oil on canvas, 129 x 80,5 cm. Private Collection, reproduced in: *Stationen der Moderne. Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, exh. cat., Berlin 1988, 329, Fig. 10/9 (© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2012)

[33] The canon wrote that it "was decidedly crude and vulgar to such an extent that it was nothing less than lewd and pornographic. If police were to arrest a person with a photograph of this picture, he would certainly be charged with possessing an indecent picture. Several other subjects were far from edifying."³⁸ Writing from Milwaukee – that center of pre-World War I German emigration and industrialized breweries – Pelikan further informed Rogers: "At the time that we had the Twentieth Century German Art Exhibition here a small but determined and active group of 'Sanity in Art' followers took advantage of the opportunity to attack modern art in general and the Twentieth Century German Art in particular. Through the press some of these people openly advocated the belief that in matters of art Hitler must be right."³⁹

[34] "Sanity in Art" referred to the Chicago-based anti-art society founded and led from March 1936 by the arts patron and heiress Josephine Hancock Logan (1862-1943).

³⁸ Copy of letter from Senior Canon, All Saints Cathedral Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Alfred G. Pelikan, 26 June 1939, The Saint Louis Art Museum Archives, Director's Office Exhibition Correspondence.

³⁹ 30 August 1939 letter from Alfred G. Pelikan, Director, Milwaukee Art Institute, to Meyric Rogers, Director, City Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri, The Saint Louis Art Museum Archives, Director's Office Exhibition Correspondence.

Chapters were formed in cities across the country from San Francisco to Boston.⁴⁰ During the decade prior to her death in November 1943, Mrs. Logan had published her anti-modernist views widely. Her critics in Chicago and mid-western circles were numerous, but also included Paul Westheim in Paris. In the 15 December 1938, Prague-based German exile journal *Die Neue Weltbühne*, Westheim reviewed how Logan and "Sanity in Art" were against all art that was not "rationally beautiful." He stressed Logan's opposition to modern art because it is sickly and degenerate, and described her efforts to cleanse the art temples of Chicago.⁴¹ Upon her group's founding, Mrs. Logan had publically defined Sanity in Art's objectives to include: "to censure modern art", and to make a concerted stand "against the modernistic, moronic grotesqueries that masquerade as art." She spoke of her "endeavor" to "rid us of the examples such as are at present displayed on the walls of our [Art] Institute [of Chicago], and as a matter of fact, shown all over America."⁴²

[35] Reviewing these anti-modernist responses to modernist German art suggests that to have published immediate reviews or discussions of the Great German Art Exhibitions would have been understood to have risked advancing National Socialist propaganda, and more specifically would have been regarded as a risk to trigger an affirmative embrace in the United States of the National Socialist art endorsed and exhibited in Munich. Whether we speak of modernist savants like Schmidt and Westheim in Switzerland and France, or media-savvy operatives like Mortimer and Watson in England, an anxious concern was mounting across Europe and the United States that the tastes of common people might take shape and voice dissent from precariously established modernist tastes. Such an outpouring of popular sentiment would have upended decades of a highly differentiated project to institutionally align modern art with existing democratic nations and governments.

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Blinded by National Socialist cultural propaganda

[36] A key exception to the lack of serious attention paid in the United States to the Great German Art Exhibitions that also gives rise to my third thesis concerning the hazards of criticism being absorbed into the Nazi-defined debate, is the August 1938, *Art News* article "A New Germany Shows in Munich."⁴³ The author was one of this prominent art magazine's regular reviewers, Rosamund Frost. Unlike other passing mentions of the Great German Art Exhibitions in the American press, Frost's review is based on an actual visit to the second Great German Art Exhibition. Her sustained analysis in the American

⁴⁰ Heller, "The Expressionist Challenge," 32.

⁴¹ Paul Westheim, "Sanity in Art," *Die Neue Weltbühne* XXXIV, no. 50 (15 December 1938), 1589-1590.

⁴² Marcia Winn, "'Sanity in Art' Group Formed by Mrs. Logan," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (6 March 1936), 19.

⁴³ Rosamund Frost, "A New Germany Shows in Munich," *Art News* XXXVI (August 1938), 17, 20-21. License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](#).

press was a rare exception between 1937 and 1944. She began with a discussion of the architecture of the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* replacing that of the *Glaspalast*, and praises the architecture in affirmative tones. Inside the building, she notes: "Thousands of people can be accommodated in its high, spacious rooms and thousands are visiting it daily to carry away with them a heightened impression of the natural beauty, unity and solidarity of their country." She continued: "Art has here been made not only accessible, but comprehensible to the masses. Scarcely a single work here but can be readily understood and generally connected with personal associations."⁴⁴ She linked the many landscape paintings to the German peoples' love for the land, and for excursions [*Ausflüge*] distinctive to Germans. The predominance of genre and landscape paintings was noted, as was the presence of a continuing *Neue Sachlichkeit* "technique." Frost stressed the "carefulness of drawing and seriousness of approach" informing all of the paintings.⁴⁵

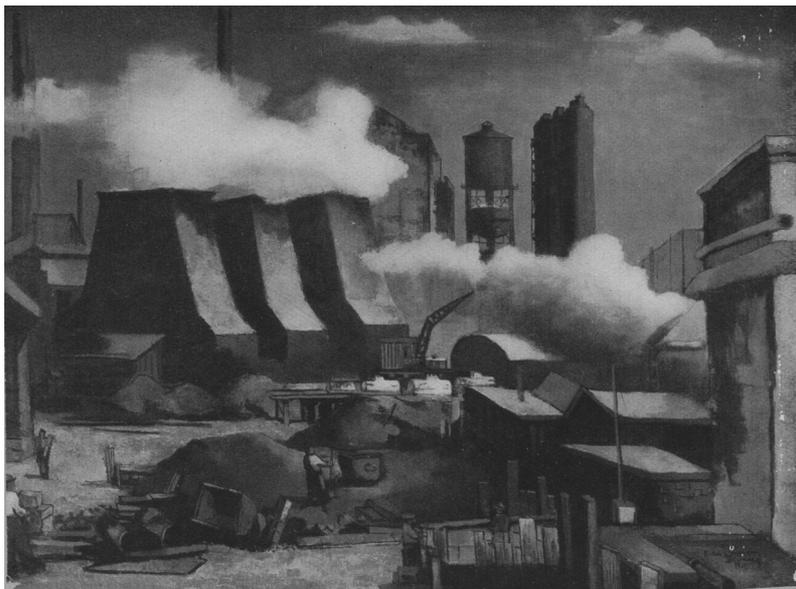
[37] Frost's conscientious review – written in a dry and descriptive tone – seldom strays from positive affirmations of the exhibited art. Reading her report, one immediately grasps the dangers of making Nazi art appealing that was feared by more stridently modernist champions. Consider her dutiful descriptions of exhibited works, i.e. Richard Gessner's *Tar Refinery* [*Teerdestillation*] (Fig. 6) "is quiet and convincing", and Hans Happ's *Reader* [*Lesende*] (Fig. 7),

[is] probably the best portrait in the show. Reminiscent of Carl Hofer, it also has his aloof, psychological quality. The color scheme of soft, dark reds, browns and white is masterfully handled, the brushwork thick and easy, the arrangement harmonious and unforced. Above all, the figure seems enveloped in space and related to the background."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Frost, "A New Germany," 17. Frost's praise for the personal may have fallen into line with the valorization of personal relationships in 1938 especially in conservative circles faced with the dominance of institutions, governments, and other collectivities that they disparaged. If meant as criticism of National Socialist art policy, it is couched so gently that it is hard to grasp anyone perceiving it.

⁴⁵ Frost, "A New Germany," 17.

⁴⁶ Frost, "A New Germany," 20.



6 Richard Gessner, *Tar Refinery* [*Teerdestillation*], oil, exhibited GDK-1938-Gallery 12, purchased by Hermann Göring. Ownership of rights unknown. Image courtesy of Photothek ZI Munich / GDK Research, <http://www.gdk-research.de/de/obj19401136.html>



7 Hans Happ, *Reading* [*Lesende*], oil, exhibited GDK-1938-Gallery 26. Ownership of rights unknown. Image courtesy of Photothek ZI Munich / GDK Research, <http://www.gdk-research.de/obj19401207.html>

[38] Frost's repeated descriptions are offered with only the faintest contextual analyses. Moreover, her passing references to the influence of Hofer, and to the influence of

Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Georg Kolbe, and Renée Sintenis discerned in the sculpture, point to the modernist predilections subtending her article.⁴⁷

[39] Whether readers found themselves lingering upon Happ's "thick and easy" brushwork, or scrutinizing the exhibited works for traces of Hofer or Lehmbruck, Frost's best-of-show approach, to describe choice artworks as exemplars of their respective genres (not mentioning the dregs or the sameness of the total effect reported by others), would have left readers unsure of any judgment she may have drawn having visited the exhibition. *Art News* might have unwittingly cultivated an innocent appreciation of the new German art, oblivious to its place amid the ideologies of German National Socialism and government propaganda. Yet before relegating Frost's review to the orbit of naïve shallowness, the question needs to be posed whether Frost's polite readings of the subtle undercurrents of admired autonomous modernist precursors accenting the Nazi art would have served to destabilize the draconian separation between official and degenerate art proclaimed by the government? More likely, however, is that readers of the magazine in 1938 would have missed any subversive critique that may, however subtly, have informed Frost's review. Instead, the effect of her review upon readers would likely have been sheer befuddlement at how to share in her affirmative characterizations of the art of the Nazi German government, given everything already known in the United States about Nazi Germany by summer 1938. Readers already favorably predisposed to conventional naturalisms or to the National Socialist government itself, would surely have experienced less confusion.

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New postwar constraints

[40] The fourth thesis to emerge from reviewing the reception, albeit initially surprising, is that Germany's defeat and the cessation of the Great German Art Exhibitions brought an uptick in the discussion of the exhibitions in the American press. But it also meant that discussion of matters German, including German art among Americans, would soon – by late 1946 – become harnessed to new postwar policies of containment implemented by Allied postwar military programs as the United States government developed programs of cultural reorientation for Germany. As much as it rings true, it is not sufficient to assert that the increase in reports about Nazi art (including the Great German Art Exhibitions) be regarded as another case of history being written by the victors. The Allied forces' emerging re-education programs were poised on one hand to counter a resurgence of Nazi values among Germans in postwar Germany. On the other hand, United States policy toward Nazi art aimed to demonize and repress Nazi art, often by conflating it with Soviet Socialist Realism as the Cold War lines were being drawn. The very idea of an empirical assessment of Nazi art including the Great German Art Exhibitions was unthinkable, and would have to wait until decades into the future.

⁴⁷ Frost, "A New Germany," 20.

[41] To sample the attitude of occupying American forces, listen to Colonel Francis S. Swett from the December 1946 *Art Digest*. His article "Haus der deutschen Kunst. Letter from Munich" strikes the tone, and offers information (and misinformation) one might expect from an occupying officer. Writing as if he has just burst from the cockpit of his plane in Munich, he assesses the lay of the land and notes the location of the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* amid the surrounding terrain that Allied Air Forces had badly bombed (or in his words: "air-conditioned"). Noting the minor damage to the architectural structure and location of the United States military government mess hall inside the building, he also lists the facility's current exhibitions of German and Dutch art from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, as well as the current Bavarian Export exhibition of local goods suitable for export, exhibitions endorsed by the occupation authorities.⁴⁸

[42] Colonel Swett notes the Great German Art Exhibitions held annually from the first one in 1938 [*sic*]. He provides statistics on numbers of contributors and artworks included in years 1939 and 1943 as evidence of the vitality of these exhibitions.

They used all of the standard media. All realism, of course; the Nazi scheme of things would tolerate no such foolishness as abstractionism, surrealism, and the like. [...] As was to be expected, the artists paid due homage to the Nazi chiefs with busts and portraits. War was glorified, naturally. But there was a surprising latitude allowed in other subjects – landscapes, industrial subjects, portraits of non VIPs, still life, animals, peasants, pastorals and many nudes. There was so much of it that one can hardly do more than generalize, but one would not be culturally honest without admitting that some of the stuff was not only adequate but good. And some of it was pretty bad."⁴⁹

[43] Swett also suggested his interested way of reading the annual catalogues:

The catalogues of the shows are complete, impressive, and typically methodical. What a trap those catalogues proved to be! Every name listed a Nazi, and thousands of the catalogues scattered throughout the country and the world, every year's catalogues an indictment of Nazi party participation. Little did they dream at the time that what then flattered them in the eyes of their neighbors would damn them so inexorably today.⁵⁰

[44] The Colonel concluded by praising the excellent work the American military government had done since it took over in 1945, and its involvement sorting out Nazi loot, including Nazi art.⁵¹

[45] Unlike the triumphal report of Swett, the writings of two other authors from the United States stand out in the early postwar discussion of the Great German Art Exhibitions and National Socialist art for their acuity or sustained engagement. Best known and most influential of the two in this context is Hellmut E. Lehmann-Haupt (1903-1992), renowned for his *Art under a Dictatorship*, published in 1954 with Oxford

⁴⁸ Francis S. Swett, "Haus der deutschen Kunst. Letter from Munich," *Art Digest* (1 December 1946), 12, 29-31, here 12.

⁴⁹ Swett, "Haus der deutschen Kunst," 29-30.

⁵⁰ Swett, "Haus der deutschen Kunst," 31.

⁵¹ Swett, "Haus der deutschen Kunst," 31.

University Press, New York. Lehmann-Haupt was born in Berlin, and educated in early books and printing at the universities in Berlin, Vienna, and Frankfurt. In 1929, he was appointed curator of the Rare Book Department at Columbia University. After a tour of duty and teaching at Columbia in 1948, he became chief bibliography expert for H. P. Kraus in New York.⁵² Although hardly known for his scant writings on Nazi art, another astute contributor to this discourse was Lincoln Kirstein (1907-1996). The energetic son of a wealthy Jewish department store owner (Filene's), Kirstein had attended Harvard where he worked on literary magazines with Varian Fry (*Hound and Horn* and *The Living Age*) and co-founded and ran the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art. At Harvard, he also came to know Alfred Barr and worked with him on curatorial projects for the Museum of Modern Art.⁵³ Kirstein's engagement with modern art, however, has been overshadowed by his promotion of ballet, founding the School of American Ballet in 1936 with George Balanchine, and the New York City Ballet in 1948. Toward the end of the war, Kirstein and Lehmann-Haupt were both in the United States military and made European tours of duty that took each man inside Germany. Kirstein was a lowly private whose tour of duty ran from June 1944 through September 1945, whereas Lehmann-Haupt served from March 1946 to February 1948 as Civil Arts Liaison Officer in the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Division, and from March 1948 into 1949 as Art Intelligence Coordination Officer.⁵⁴

[46] Unlike the German-born Lehmann-Haupt, Kirstein was an American-born Jew and a homosexual. He shared little of Lehmann-Haupt's seemingly innate fondness for the German people and particularly Lehmann-Haupt's open concern for the plight of German artists who had (presumably) worked underground to survive into difficult postwar situations. Instead, Kirstein pressed an edgy and provocative line in his postwar publications with his American readers, striking frequent comparisons between National Socialist architecture and American government architecture, National Socialist art and art policy with recent American art and the art programs of Roosevelt's New Deal. Kirstein's tour of duty began in June 1944 and stationed him briefly in London and Paris, before being dispatched to Altaussee, Austria by May 1945. From there he went on to Munich where he helped to set up the Central Collecting Point. By September 1945, Kirstein returned to the United States where he returned to his long-time passion, ballet.⁵⁵

⁵² William H. Honan, "Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, 88, Author and Bibliography Expert" [obituary], *New York Times* (12 March 1992).

⁵³ Martin Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*, New York 2007, 29-123.

⁵⁴ Significantly, each published some of the first postwar publications on recent German art in leading U.S. magazines, including *Harpers* and *The Magazine of Art*, e.g.: Lincoln Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich - Survey 1945," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 223-242.

⁵⁵ Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*, 390-406.

ART IN THE THIRD REICH—SURVEY, 1945

By LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

I. PAINTING

PAINTING, sculpture, and architecture in Germany after 1933 were conceived on the principle that no advance could have been made in the expression of the creative impulse since 1870. That is to say, painting could go no further than the hyperbroid murals of Feuerbach, sculpture than Rauch's monument to Frederick the Great, and architecture than Gottfried Semper's Dresden Opera. But it is necessary to insist, particularly at this time, on the greatness of the German painting, sculpture, and architecture that preceded Hitler by several centuries, and on the strength of the contemporary German art which he repudiated with the word "degenerate." Stephan Lochner, Schongauer, Dürer, Cranach, Altdorfer, Grünewald, the Holbeins—certainly there is no doubt about their position in the history of western art. Even the Nazis recognized that. Nor will anyone deny that in the 20th century expressionism of Berlin, Dresden and Munich, in the sculpture of Lehmbruck and (to a lesser degree) Barlach, in the surgical satire of Otto Dix and George Grosz, and the work of the Bauhaus—here Germany was in the world's vanguard. But these were not to be the great names in the Nazi lexicon of contemporary art.

It is important to investigate the essential Nazi attitude towards the arts in order to discover how the official architecture of Berlin differs from that of Washington (if indeed it does!), or how WPA painting and sculpture differs from that adorning the airy halls of Hitler-Youth schools.

In September 1939, Wystan Auden wrote, "in one of the dives on Fifty-Second Street, uncertain and afraid . . .

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offense
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic God."

Hitler was sixteen when in September 1905 he went to live in Urfahr, a suburb of Linz. He had just received from the Staatsrealschule in Steyr the final report on his formal education. In geometry and geometrical-drawing he achieved only "Adequate." In free-hand drawing, however, in the first semester he was "Praiseworthy," and in the second "Excellent."

He was to be denied entry, first to the Academy of Fine Arts, then to the School of Architecture. His report-card had noted that the "external form" of his written work was "Displeasing." But if he could not write, he could read. In Linz he read the oracle of his failure in Vienna, his triumph in Munich. He discovered the esthetic of Richard Wagner: "Decay and Regeneration," "The Jews in Music." He learned that Wagner hated meat. The subjects for his 1907 entrance examination were: 1st day, "Expulsion from Paradise"; 2nd day, "Episode from the Deluge." Hitler's drawings were returned "Unsatisfactory."

In 1913 Hitler got himself elected and established the *Reichskulturkammer* under Alfred Rosenberg. Free expression stopped, or rather it was thrown into reverse. Expressionism, surrealism, non-objective painting, the new-functionalism, anything which served as the contemporary channel for the spirit

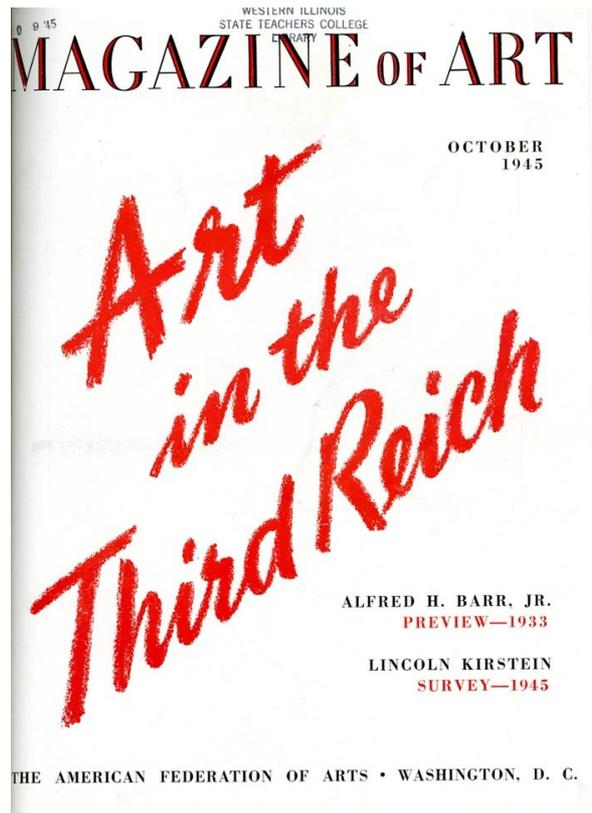


Albert Henrich: 1917, oil in Hitler's private collection.

Fritz Ehrler: REICHSSÜNDER HITLER. Included in the Great German Art Exhibition at the House of German Art, 1939.



8 First page of Lincoln Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich – Survey 1945," *Magazine of Art* 38, no. 6 (October 1945), 223



9 Front cover of special issue on "Art in the Third Reich,"
Magazine of Art 38, no. 6 (October 1945)

[47] Kirstein's main publication on Nazi art, including the Great German Art Exhibitions is his lengthy article "Art in the Third Reich - Survey, 1945," published in the *Magazine of Art* in October 1945.⁵⁶ (Fig. 8) The entire issue of the magazine was devoted to "Art in the Third Reich," (Fig. 9) and included a lengthy article by Alfred H. Barr, which combined the aforementioned three articles Barr had written in 1933 that describe the rise to power of the Nazis and the *Gleichschaltung* of the German art world.⁵⁷ (Fig. 3)

[48] Kirstein's article begins with claims that the arts of Nazi Germany had resumed pre-1870s traditions dating back to Stephan Lochner, Cranach, and Dürer, and noted Nazi refusals to recognize accomplishments of so-called degenerates. Kirstein wrote: "It is important to investigate the essential Nazi attitude towards the arts in order to discover how the official architecture of Berlin differs from that of Washington (if indeed it does!) [...]."⁵⁸ Kirstein's answer to this question, and his other, numerous comparisons to the art and architecture of the United States, is less relevant here than how boldly and early he

⁵⁶ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 223-242. See also Kirstein, "The Quest of the Golden Lamb" [on Altaussee], *Town and Country* 100 (September 1945), 114-199, and his report on the Nuremberg headquarters of the vitriolic anti-Semitic Nazi publisher Julius Streicher, "'A Visit to 'Der Stuermer'," *The Nation*, 30 June 1945, 722-723.

⁵⁷ Barr, "Art in the Third Reich," 212-222. See: Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. Missionary for the Modern*, 105-109, 378.

⁵⁸ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 223.

was suggesting that study of the differences between the state sponsored art of National Socialist Germany and that of the United States was necessary and worthwhile.⁵⁹

[49] Kirstein's essay then elaborated and unpacked the oft recounted story of Hitler the frustrated artist, the creation of the *Reichskulturkammer* in 1933, and the purge of museums in the *Entartete Kunst* campaign that targeted the previous era's "liberal creators identifiable with artistic Jewry, Free Masonry, Bolshevism [...] and international imaginative expression in the West."⁶⁰ Kirstein stated: "The Kulturkampf was won, and victory celebrated by the erection of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, [...]." Characterizing the exhibitions: "These annual salons were the focus of the world of Nazi painting and sculpture through 1944." He continued with the assertion: "Dictated by the Academy of Munich, Nazi painting is conspicuous by its lack of connection with any legitimate tradition. By legitimate, I mean historically alive and chronologically significant." He cited Hitler's speech from the opening of the 1938 exhibition: "Strength and beauty (*Kraft und Schoenheit [sic]*) are the fanfares of the times. Clarity and logic will dominate the struggle. Who wishes to be an artist in this century must identify himself with this epoch."⁶¹ Kirstein went on to note that the Nazis found little of the great Germanic tradition useful; that "on the contrary, they sedulously avoided anything *echt Deutsch* in the long, rich history of German painting to express 'with clarity and logic' the Third Reich."⁶² He then struck stinging comparisons between the "healthy" Adolf Wissel and Grant Wood, and noted the purchase for the "Fuehrerbau" [*sic*] of Adolf Ziegler's *The Four Elements* from the exhibition.⁶³

[50] On the Great German Art Exhibitions, Kirstein further asserted:

Each of the eight annual shows might have been any of the others [a point made earlier by both Louis Beirnaert and Jacques Feschotte]. There was never a suggestion of a progression of influence or idea, and even the reflection of shattering events was perfunctory. The war was of course noted, but in comparison with England or the United States, it was not felt in art. War without victory was an inadmissible public notion. After the last one, sculptors at least turned November 11th into a triumph. Painters had a tougher time.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ While Kirstein's references to American regionalism fell short of the direct and biting criticism lodged against it by exile art historian Horst W. Janson (who like his professor, Erwin Panofsky, was aided by Barr in his relocation to the United States), Kirstein's comparisons between the state art and architecture of the Nazis and America suggests his assumption that American readers also questioned the integrity and purported high ground of U.S. government art and architecture when faced with the state-sponsored art of the Nazi regime. See, for example, H. W. Janson, "Benton and Wood, Champions of Regionalism," *Magazine of Art* 39, no. 5 (May 1946), 184-186; and Sabine Eckmann, "Exilic Vision: H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art at Washington University," in: *H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art*, exh. cat., Saint Louis 2002, 10-54, here 30-34.

⁶⁰ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 223-224.

⁶¹ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 224.

⁶² Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 224.

⁶³ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 225.

⁶⁴ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 225.



10 Paul Matthias Padua, *The 10th of May 1940* (a.k.a. *Assault Boat with Engineers*) [Der 10. Mai 1940], oil, GDK-1941-Gallery 1, purchased by Deutsche Schlauchbootfabrik [German rubber raft factory] Hans Scheibert (Berlin). Ownership of rights unknown. Image courtesy of Photothek ZI Munich / GDK Research, <http://www.gdk-research.de/de/obj19364379.html>

[51] After comparing Paul Matthias Padua's *10 Mai 1940 (Assault boat with engineers)* (Fig. 10) with *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, his dismissive conclusion about Nazi painting read: "[N]othing that has come out of Germany could not equally well have been done before 1918."⁶⁵ Kirstein's discussion of painting at the annual exhibitions was followed by a lengthy artist-by-artist discussion of the sculpture, a long section on portrait busts of the Nazi leadership, and a section on architecture.⁶⁶

[52] Easy to overlook in Kirstein's ambitious narrative are a few criticisms of Nazi art at the official exhibitions, criticism that amounts to the most scorching to date by American or British commentators. On Nazi art he wrote: "It revenged itself on the imagination. It created an art which was also to serve as the beauty-parlor mask for murder."⁶⁷ And to contradict the claims Hitler made for the Germanness of German art at the 1938 Great German Art Exhibition, Kirstein stated that they "avoided anything *echt Deutsch* in the long, rich history of German painting [...]."⁶⁸ And on sculpture:

In the hands of Breker and Thorak, the nude became spayed or castrated, but still faintly pornographic. The annual sculpture shows looked like vast frozen whorehouses, where muscle was on the market, sweatless, iced, uncircumcised athlete and intact maid, sacrificial virgins for the antiseptic state.⁶⁹

[53] Regarding the architecture of Troost's *Haus der Deutschen Kunst*:

⁶⁵ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 225.

⁶⁶ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 227-240.

⁶⁷ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 224.

⁶⁸ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 224.

⁶⁹ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 230.

It seems to have been conceived not as a series of galleries for changing exhibitions, but as a stranded luxury-liner, complete with promenade-decks and restaurant-lounges. Its long colonnade of blunt-piped stone, its overlarge rooms with their elephantine proportions, were entirely suitable for the display of portable murals disguised as easel-pictures. The detail is poor. Great ventilator grills let into the stone dado distract the eye (or serve as a relief from the exhibits).⁷⁰

[54] And more generally: "Hitler established a state in which intellectual vacuum and imaginative death disguised themselves as painting, sculpture, and monumental building."⁷¹

[55] Kirstein's essay oscillates between stinging criticism of the exhibitions and of Nazi art in general, and is peppered with occasional acknowledgments of the skill or ability manifest in specific works (e.g., he reserved praise for the sculpture of Hans Breker, and the caricaturist A. Paul Weber). Despite his knack to turn a sharp phrase and his drive to criticize the Nazi art of the exhibitions, Kirstein, like every other writer in the American press, lacked a perspective informed by what later would be termed critical theory to animate the terms of his critique. But, Kirstein's reference to art as the "beauty-parlor mask for murder" suggests something else; namely, his positioning of Nazi art in relation to the death camps. And his provocative reading of nude Nazi sculpture nudges them into proximity to the selective and skewed State-directed eugenics policies and lethal practices aimed to cultivate the Aryan dream of a pure racial state. Such passages station Kirstein's essay in a category apart from anything before it, and certainly apart from reports soon to issue from the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Division. In a methodological sense, these examples demonstrate Kirstein operating with a conception of art being ideological, and in need of interpretation through ideology critique. It would be overreaching, however, to identify Kirstein's faint and sporadic critical assertions about Nazi art as more than a step in the direction of ideology critique. And from our perspective, long after the reintroduction of critical theory into the art history on National Socialism from the late 1960s and after, Kirstein's faint formulations in this direction are easy to miss.⁷²

[56] In taking stock of responses to the Great German Art Exhibitions, most surprising has been how little Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt actually published about them. In two essays by Lehmann-Haupt of November and December 1948, the author brings a different perspective to the art of the recently fallen regime. In "Art in Germany Today," he pleads

⁷⁰ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 235.

⁷¹ Kirstein, "Art in the Third Reich," 226.

⁷² Generally speaking, only in the 1960s would early texts by figures associated with Marxist cultural criticism or those of the Frankfurt School of critical theory (e.g., Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, or Marcuse) begin to be reevaluated for their methodological or political use in the interpretation of National Socialist art. Although the turn to methods informed by Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory would occur earlier in the Federal Republic of Germany, readers of English would wait until the translation of Berthold Hinz, *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus*, Munich 1974, *Art in the Third Reich*, trans. by Robert and Rita Kimber, New York 1979, before encountering the art of German National Socialism examined through the lens of an art history informed by such a perspective.

the case of the modernist German artists (Theodor Werner foremost), who having suffered suppression under the Third Reich, now merit support in the face of a non-comprehending German public. He characterizes a lively interest in modern art in contemporary Germany in the aftermath of "an acute case of artistic starvation" during the Nazi years.⁷³ After arguing to re-instill an ethos of individualism in Germany, he calls upon readers in the United States to support relief for Germany – something the U.S. Congress and people had little interest to offer their recent enemy – as a way to counter monumental efforts currently underway by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany. In paradigmatic Cold War thinking, he pitted the necessity of American efforts to suppress Nazi art against the foil of the Soviets' restrictive support for Socialist Realism, writing: "This [Soviet art policy] is an exact parallel to the use of art by the Nazi state."⁷⁴ He concluded his essay detailing the kinds of cultural programs the United States could use to effect a reorientation of postwar Germans toward democracy.⁷⁵

[57] In a longer essay in *Harper's Magazine*, "Art Under the Nazis," Lehmann-Haupt reviewed art under the National Socialist government, but dwelt at greater length upon the Degenerate Art campaign and exhibitions. He then struck comparisons to contemporary Soviet art, writing: "Current Soviet art, such as the painting on exhibition in the shingly refurbished *Haus der Kultur* in the heart of devastated Berlin, bears an astonishing resemblance to the Nazi paintings in the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* in Munich [...]."⁷⁶ He clarified his recommendation for United States art policy toward Germany writing:

It would be a grave mistake for us or for the British Military Government to step in and try to enlist German art and artists in a propaganda campaign for democracy. That would get us exactly nowhere. [...] There is a broad stretch of arable land between the extremes of cultural *laissez-faire* and the prostitution of art through propaganda.⁷⁷

[58] The particulars of the United States' reorientation campaign advocated for in these two 1948 articles is less significant in the context of this analysis of responses to the Great German Art Exhibitions, however, than to stress that Lehmann-Haupt was writing as the voice of the United States government. Furthermore, a disconnection would eventually develop between the pronounced influence of Lehmann-Haupt's writings on subsequent art history and the lack of analytical attention he actually paid to National Socialist art, including the Great German Art Exhibitions. One could legitimately argue that even Private Kirstein's essay of 1945 offered far more in the way of empirical and

⁷³ Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, "Art in Germany Today," *Magazine of Art* 41, no. 8 (December 1948), 314-315, here 315.

⁷⁴ Lehmann-Haupt, "Art in Germany Today," 315.

⁷⁵ Lehmann-Haupt, "Art in Germany Today," 315.

⁷⁶ Lehmann-Haupt, "Art under the Nazis," *Harpers Magazine* 197, no. 1182 (November 1948), 88-93, here 93.

⁷⁷ Lehmann-Haupt, "Art under the Nazis," 93.

analytical assessment than anything ever published by Lehmann-Haupt in these essays or his well-known book.

[59] In *Art under a Dictatorship*, Lehmann-Haupt continued to elaborate his theory of totalitarian art. He compared official pronouncements about Nazi art in need of more time to develop with "the same tune" sounding today from "communist commentators of Social Realism in the Soviet orbit."⁷⁸ The single page in his book devoted to a discussion of the Great German Art Exhibitions begins with Hitler's last minute rejections of certain works the *Führer* deemed unfinished. The subsequent and longest paragraph asks what kind of art was encountered by the exhibition visitor, and recited the numerous themes of the art that graced the exhibitions.⁷⁹ He stressed that most art exhibited there could have been seen by his parents thirty or forty years ago. Re-asserting the claim made many times before about the unchanging sameness of the exhibitions, yet equally telling of the failure and disinterest of Lehmann-Haupt (like many before him) to look closely at the Nazi art in the exhibitions, he contended:

There was nothing new, nothing spontaneous, nothing unexpected. There was going to be no change. From the first to the last Nazi painting remained the same. It never developed, it stayed fixed at a point of evolution that had been reached in the second half of the nineteenth century. Every official exhibition, every catalogue, every article and book tell the same story.⁸⁰

[60] Lehmann-Haupt's undifferentiated and unsupported, yet vividly stated emphasis upon the static, fixed, homogeneous, and non-evolving nature of a vast and varied group of artworks solidified the key tenets of a derogatory myth about Nazi art that would catch fire and enjoy a long afterlife in postwar art writing in the West. His weakly supported assertions offered a poignant counterpoint and nemesis to accounts of modernist art that was purported to visualize development, innovation, newness, individuality, and originality by freedom-seeking artists.

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Conclusion

[61] Review of these early commentaries upon the Great German Art Exhibitions published outside of Germany is illuminating to recall as the *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte*, Munich, launches an exhaustively researched, compiled, and designed, online database offering access to comprehensive visual and documentary information on the artworks exhibited in these successive exhibitions.⁸¹ Like undercurrents in a river of popular and scholarly opinion about the nature and canonicity of the art, these early assumptions of 1937-1954 have continued to inform fundamental assumptions and shape

⁷⁸ Hellmut E. Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship*, New York 1954, 88.

⁷⁹ Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship*, 89.

⁸⁰ Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship*, 89.

⁸¹ GDK Research – Bildbasierte Forschungsplattform zu den Großen Deutschen Kunstausstellungen 1937-1944 in München, <http://www.gdk-research.de/db/apsisa.dll/ete>, launched October 2011 (accessed repeatedly between November 2011 and September 2012). License: The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0](#).

critical and scholarly inquiry into the art exhibited at this foremost public venue for National Socialist art during the regime. This rings as true for the claims reviewed above, as it does for the fears that shaped and suppressed serious and open discussion for decades after the war. Even as the gains of critical theory and ideology critique empowered and sharpened analysis of Nazi art beginning in the 1960s, and were joined by social and institutional histories of art by the 1980s, too many old myths survived and stand poised to resurface. These myths include the notion that Nazi art is bad art and therefore does not merit serious attention or study, all Nazi art was congruent with Nazi propaganda, audiences in the democracies disliked or even opposed Nazi art, and that Nazi art was discrete from, and diametrically different from, modernist art. By reconstructing these myths from these early, seldom revisited texts, this essay offers more than positivist reclamation of their key issues and themes. For by rendering accessible an array of the critical opinion from this earliest phase of the historiography the likelihood of resurgences and repetitions of these myths is greatly diminished.

[62] In addition to the four theses advanced in this essay, it is also useful to recapitulate two less widespread, but no less poignant, issues we encountered in these texts, issues that have continued to haunt the subsequent study of twentieth century German art. First Louis Beirnaert then Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, when assessing National Socialist art, insisted that it failed to develop or evolve; that the Nazi art on view in the Great German Art Exhibitions was unchanging, as if time had come to a standstill in this art. Claims like these seem significant in light of recent publications by Eric Michaud, especially his book chapter "Images of Nazi Time: Accelerations and Immobilizations," in which he discusses the temporal scope and structure of Nazi ideologies, as well as related fascist and modernist temporalities as involving the retrieval of a past operating in tandem with an accelerated anticipation of an expected future.⁸² More comparative analyses of these (and other) seemingly discrepant concepts of temporality in National Socialist art (and culture) merit further research and closer study.

[63] A second issue raised in these texts is whether the new Nazi art on the one hand, or Expressionism on the other, were particularly or distinctively German? Raising such issues suggests the author's familiarity with debates that had raged within Germany since the early 1930s over what kind of art would best suit, or give appropriate expression to, the new regime. We heard Waldemar George arguing for Expressionism as a distinctly and genuinely German movement, and as the most Germanic of modern art movements, whereas Lincoln Kirstein argued at war's end that there was nothing genuinely German about the new National Socialist art exhibited in the Great German Art Exhibitions. Kirstein's look back at a formerly evolving modernist movement halted by its Nazi successor – a movement he alleged was no longer heir to Germanic traditions, and George's denial that the new Nazi art was genuinely German, share the view that the

⁸² Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. by Janet Lloyd, Stanford 2004, 155-164, 181-222.

national characteristics in German Expressionism were no longer carried forward in National Socialist art. Both, of course, amounted to refutations of the ascendant official claims of Hitler and National Socialist art policy after summer 1937, that included Expressionism being insufficiently German, foisted upon the German people by a conspiracy of Jewish dealers and writers, and that the art supported by the National Socialist government was representative of National Socialist Germany.

[64] New research projects on National Socialist art have much to gain by taking stock of the assumptions and perspectives of early commentaries like those surveyed above. Foremost, critical readings and assessments of these early texts may give today's art historians pause before recycling another repetition of such assumptions and ideologically vested positions from this initial phase. Together with the new open access to the comprehensive, empirical visual and textual documentation on the Great German Art Exhibitions through the *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte's Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* database, future research into the art of National Socialist Germany can be expected to enter a new and distinctive phase that is not only empirically richer but critically reflexive as well.

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