

Sue McNab
Michael White

T899

NC 0020158 8



m0056342NC

THE ARTS UNDER SUPPRESSION

AN EXTRACT IN HISTORY

BY

MICHAEL WHITE

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

1991

Adviser: Sue Mac Nab

Department of Art & Design

CONTENTS

<u>PREFACE</u>	I
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	P. 1
<u>CHAPTER I: The Rise of Nationalism</u>	P. 3
<u>The Weimar Republic</u>	P. 4
<u>The NS Regime</u>	P. 7
<u>CHAPTER II: "DEGENERATE ART"</u>	P. 17
<u>CHAPTER III: "THE OFFICIAL ART"</u>	P. 27
<u>APPENDIX</u>	P. 35
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	P. 36

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Oskar Schlemmer: Murals in the entrance hall of the workshop building in Weimar, 1923
2. Hitler viewing the exhibition of "Degenerate" Art, Munich 1937
3. E. Eber: Painting "So was the SA"
4. M. Padua, painting, "Leda with the swan", 1939
5. A. Ziegler, painting "The Judgment of Paris"
6. A. Speer, outside view of the main stadium of the Zeppelinfeld, Nuernberg, 1937
7. W. Kreis, Model of the yard at the army headquarters, C. 1939, Berlin
8. A. Breker, sculpture, "The Party" 1939
9. Thorak at work in his studio
10. A. Breker, sculpture, "You and me" 1944

PREFACE

Excerpt from Hitler's speech at the opening of the "Great Exhibition of German Art 1937" in Munich.

" I have observed among the pictures submitted here, quite a few paintings which make one actually come to the conclusion that the eye shows things differently to certain human beings than the way they really are, that is, that there really are men who see the present population of our nation only as rotten cretins! who, on principal, see meadows blue, skies green, clouds sulphur yellow, and so on, or, as they say, experience them as such in the name of the German people. I want to forbid these pitiful misfortunates who quite obviously suffer from an eye disease, to try vehemently to foist these products of their misinterpretations upon the age we live in, or even to wish to present them as "Art" - No, here there are only two possibilities:

Either these so-called "Artists" really see things this way and therefore believe in what they depict; then we would have to examine their eyesight-deformation to see if it is the product of a mechanical failure or of inheritance. In the first case, these unfortunates can only be pitied, in the second case, they would be the subject of great interest to the Ministry of Interior of the Reich which would then have to take up the question of whether further inheritance of such gruesome malfunctioning of the eyes cannot at least be checked. If, on the other hand, they themselves do not believe in the reality of such impressions but try to harass the nation with this humbug for other reasons, then such an attempt falls within the jurisdiction of the penal law.

INTRODUCTION

Seen in a wider context the demands Fascists Germany made of the arts represents only one aspect of the many ways different political systems approach the arts. Generally our attitude today in the western world is that we grant artists relative creative freedom but this is not always the case. In past centuries art had to fulfil certain expectations such as illustrating biblical scenes in Gothic and Renaissance churches. Similarly are played a public and monumental role in Egyptian Society. During our own century we have witnessed state imposed criteria for the arts in, for instance, the Stalinist era in the U.S.S.R.. Hitler too firmly laid down the functions of art in the Third Reich.

This may be seen as the glorification of the National-socialists thousand year state. But unlike other ages the official art of that period did not achieve any lasting significance. I will hope to show that the reason for this lies in the forced stylisation that was demanded. Hitler did not acknowledge the art styles of the early twentieth century such as Expressionism, Dada and abstract art but he referred back to German Romanticism of the nineteenth century as the only true German art of recent times.¹ Thus he removed the reference points for many artists working after World War 1 whose work had grown with those developments and who greatly admired the modernist movements especially German Expressionism.

INTRODUCTION

Seen in a wider context the demands Fascist Germany made of the artist represented only one aspect of the many ways in which the artist's position approached the artist. Generally one might say that in the western world it is that we grant artists a special status. In fact this is not always the case. In past centuries art had to fulfill certain expectations such as those of religious and political scenes in Gothic and Renaissance churches. The artist played a public and monumental role in Egyptian art. In our own century we have witnessed state imposed art. For the artist in the instance, the Stalinist era in the U.S.S.R. Hitler too firmly laid down the function of art in the Third Reich.

This may be seen as the glorification of the National Socialist artist. In the last years of the Nazi era, but unlike other ages, the artist did not achieve any lasting significance. It is to be hoped that the reason for this lies in the fact that the artist was demanded. Hitler did not acknowledge the artist as the early twentieth century such as Expressionism. The artist and abstract art but he referred back to German art of the nineteenth century as the only true German art. Thus he removed the reference points for modern art. After World War I whose work had grown with those who greatly admired the modernist movement.

German Expressionism

After eliminating all artists who were sympathetic to the avantgarde, or the avantgarde themselves, only insignificant "officially" approved artists were left to carry out Hitler's nationalistic ideas. Without the stimulus of new cultural ideas from the outside world these artists were unable to create anything of lasting importance to the history of art. After all, the countries of the world, through newly developed technological means had achieved closer inter-communication and Hitler's steps in trying to establish an "authentic" German state merely meant closing off Germany from the rest of the world.

In this thesis I intend to retrace the events that led to the eradication of modernist art and to look at the forms of official art.

1. "When on that fateful day of June in 1931 the old "Glaspalast" burnt down in that horrible fire, an immortal treasure of such true German art went up in flames. They were called the Romantics, but in essence they were the most glorious representatives of those noble Germans in search of the true intrinsic virtue of our people and the honest and respectable expression of those only inwardly experienced laws of life. Yet it was not only the chosen subject matter that was decisive for the characterisation of the German substance, but just as important was the clear and simple manner in which these feelings were represented."

Adolf Hitler, speech inaugurating the "Great Exhibition of German Art 1937" Munich.

CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

Nationalistic Theories from the 19th Century

The development of the Third Reich may be understood in terms of the nationalistic ideas of the nineteenth century, since these were carried over in to the twentieth century. Among the nineteenth century theories which became widely accepted were those of the Frenchman Gobineau who saw in the Revolution of 1848 and uprising of the inferior Celts against the Germanic nobility and in the Germanic or Aryan man the highergrade human being. Also there were the theories of the British statesman Chamberlain who believed that man's instincts will indicate what "breed" is.

Emperor Wilhelm II was fascinated by Chamberlain's insubstantial theories. Even Bismark, the creator and first chancellor of modern Germany, considered the Romany race as exhausted and Celts and Slavs as feminine and unproductive. As far back as 1861 Heinrich Naudmann had published a book about the German State and the Jew, characterising the Jew as mere profit-maker. A large number preached similar race theories and many of the attempts to assert the superiority of the Nordic race were totally unfounded, infantile, absurd and merely emotional.

But more influential were the works of E. Fischer and F. Lenz, because their approach was more scientific. The number of publications dealing with this subject were numerous and a large section of the public was familiar with these theories and accepted them as true. In 1937 Hitler summarised these theories in his speech at the opening of the new museum "Haus der Deutschen

Kunst" in Munich:

"From the history of the development of our people we know that it is composed of a number of more or less differentiated races which in the course of millenimus thanks to the overwhelming formative influence of one outstanding core, resulted in that particular mixture which we see in our people today. This power once capable of forming a people and thus still today an active one is contained here again in the same Aryan race which we recognise not only as the carrier of our own culture, but as that of the preceding culture of antiquity as well."

The Weimar Republic

After the defeat in World War 1 Germany was made responsible for the outbreak of the war. In difficult political and economic conditions Germans suffered a loss of self-esteem. In 1919 with the formation of the Weimar Republic an attempt was made to introduce democracy to Germany. But Germany had been for too long an authoritarian state to adapt easily to added freedom and responsibilities. Continuous uprisings, hostility between socialists and communists, a riot of voluntary soldiers, inflation, secatrian assassinations and unemployment added to the instability of the Republic. In particular the middle-classes saw their existence threatened and they called for an authoritarian state with a powerful leader. Democracy seemed to entail cultural decay and the majority of the public held a hostile attitude towards modern architecture, painting and sculpture.

By 1929 there were the first signs of a group organised against modern art, the "Alliance for the Fight for German Culture".² This alliance stated that it wanted to represent national interests independent of any party or political

association. Their leader Alfred Rosenberg called upon the audience of their first public lecture to unite in the "everywhere awakening national myth".³ But its claim to be nonpolitical was only a veil. In reality this organisation was part of the NSDAP, the National-Socialist German worker's party. In 1929 twenty-five local groups began work all over Germany, first of all in the form of lectures. Alexander von Senger claimed that modern Architecture in its theories, its methods of propaganda and aims as well as its effects was a mere bolshevist affair. Many socially eminent personalities such as generals, writers, publishers and professors promoted the Alliance which was directed at the average middle-class citizen. National dictatorship of cultural affairs was demanded as vital for national survival.

Thus national-socialist politicians had found justification for a national-socialist policy in matters of culture and the arts. The Alliance attracted all those who wanted "Germany to remain German" which meant free from western influences such as Expressionism, Jazz and any social-critical art forms. They called for an authoritarian state, similar to the era of the last emperor Wilhelm II. Some advocated imperialism in the area of eastern europe. They saw Germany as leader of

2. "Kampfbund fuer deutsche Kulfur".

3. E. Brenner "Die Kunst im Nationalsozialisums" p 8

4. This was a slogan of the time

5.

all Nodic races. Antisemitic tendencies were strong. What made the Alliance so attractive to those nationalistically inclined was the promise to finally take steps towards the realisation of their aims. Indeed the Alliance let no opportunity slip in order to assert itself.

In 1930 in Zwickau they succeeded in getting Museum Director Gurlitt, a collector of modern works of art, dismissed. The Alliance magazine named their "enemies". Among these were Kurt Tucholsky, Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Schwitters, Nolde, Beckmann and Georg Grosz. One of its most effective lecturers was Schultze-Naumburg. He compared images from modern paintings with clinical disorders by showing photographs of physical deformity and illustrating those with works of Nolde, Barlach, Heckel, Hofer, Kirchner etc. The audience reacted with excessive applause and the few opponents were silenced by the NS "hall-protection squad".

In Thuringen where the NSDAP had taken an early stronghold, more so than in any other county, the first interference with museum property took place as early as 1930. According to an order by the Ministry for Inner Affairs the Weimar Museum was cleared of seventy modern works of art by Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Oskar Schlemmer etc. Schlemmer's wall paintings in the Weimar Bauhaus were painted over.⁵

5. See illustration 1

The public was told that these works had nothing to do with the Nordic-German spirit, but depicted eastern or otherwise racially inferior humans.

"As little as the character and the blood of our people will change, so much will art have to lose its mortal character and replace it with worthy images expressing the life-course of our people in the steadily unfolding growth of its creations. Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism etc. have nothing to do with our German people. For these concepts are neither old nor modern but are only the art-ification, stammerings of men to whom God has denied the grace of a truly artistic talent and in its place has awarded them the gift of jabbering or deception".

The reaction of most newspapers was at this time disbelief and ridicule.

But the artists were alarmed. Oskar Schlemmer notes in his diary:

"The terrible thing, the cultural reaction lies in the fact that this is not a case of persecuting works with a political tendency, but of purely artistic esthetic works, that, simply because they are new, different and wilful are equated with Bolshevism. With the Iconoclasm of the Weimar Museum artists were affected whose German way of thinking and feeling cannot be doubted. Masters of the past centuries can be no substitute for the work of contemporary artists".⁷

The NS Regime

On January 30th, 1933, Hitler was made German Reichs chancellor. It was not until the autumn of the same year that the formal control system, the "Reichs-Kulturkammer" ⁸ for the

-
6. Hitler speech inaugurating the "Great Exhibition of German Art 1937" Munich
 7. H. Brenner, *ibid.* p 34
 8. Reichs Cultural Chamber, short RKK

art-sector was established. The intervening months allowed associations such as the Alliance to organise extensive discrimination and "cleansing" campaigns to get rid of modern art. Prohibition lists appeared, especially for film and theatre. An association of NS artists published their programme "What German Artists Expect of the New Government". They demanded the removal of all products of cosmopolitan and Bolshevist nature" 9 from German museums, the dismissal of the responsible Museum Director, the removal of corresponding monuments and the future ostracism of the artist in question.

This programme was presented to the, so far, uninformed circles, which until then were unaccustomed to modern art but were now mobilised. During that summer of 1933 in Karlsruhe the local Alliance organised an exhibition of paintings designated as bolshevist and "degenerate". Those represented were the Expressionist groups, "the Bridge" and "The Blue Rider", Liebermann Corinth, Slevogt, Maree and Munch. In order to incite the public each painting was tagged with its price in inflationary sums rather than the fixed Reichsmark currency. The climax was a sensational "erotic cabinet" with no entrance for juveniles. A supervisor there showed sheets of drawings by a few artists and academy students which had been confiscated.

9. H. Brenner, *ibid.* p 37

This exhibition became famous far beyond Karlsruhe causing indignation in the liberal press and applause amongst the NS. The public was persuaded that tax money had been squandered for "dirt and rubbish". Similar exhibitions took place in other cities. Stuttgart showed paintings by Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, Chagall etc. In Mannheim, where the Museum Director had already been dismissed, works that had never been shown to the public were brought from the cellars of the museum. There were purposely badly hung and were commented on in an even worse manner.

Simultaneously an exhibition of "pure German art" was arranged and shown in various cities. In the spring and summer of the same year these actions reached their climax. Numerous new associations were formed with similar aims as the Alliance. Several newspapers tried to warn the public but the warnings no longer reached their readers. The political left had already been paralyzed. As a gesture many leading personalities involved with German art, civil servants, museum directors, teachers, writers, theatrical and film directors, who did not agree with the National-Socialist policies vacated their positions. Others who did not do so voluntarily were forced to resign.

Autumn 1933 saw a successful reactionary cultural policy. Numerous actions had attracted the interest of the public and their approval. The unwanted and "most dangerous representatives of decay" ¹⁰ had been removed from public life. But what was left was empty positions. As a result serious disruptions occurred. Book production went down by 30%. The number of newspapers

10. Slogan

decreased from 4,700 in 1932 to 3,100 in 1934. Of over 10,000 magazine titles more than half ceased publication in the space of five years. What was lacking were competent and experienced persons who might have been able to continue the public cultural activities. The dilemma was so great that opponents of the new regime were courted again. Amongst the NSDAP critical voices could be heard, warning of mental primitivism that was caused by the mere negative principles of selection. The time had come for an institution for the "proper" organisation of the arts.

On November 15th, 1933 the founding of the Reichskulturkammer was announced with Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister as president. The RKK was sub-divided into departments for press, theatre, radio, music, the fine arts, film and publications. The declared aim was to bring the public back into contact with the arts, to guarantee employment for artists and to ease commercial pressure that might be a hindrance to artistic creativity.

Goebbels appealed to the artists to join the chamber. he assured them that political pressures would not be exerted. But soon it became apparent that this was not the case. In fact all artists had to register. Anyone unable to prove Aryan descendancy was not allowed as a member and hence not allowed to continue with his work. Exhibitions or any other public events or meetings needed the permission of the Department of Propaganda and Information. If this regulation was not adhered to the police intervened. The RKK made ample use of its right to exclude any member and to prohibit the continuation of his or her work. The Secret Police followed up any denunciations.

systematically traced works by unacceptable artists (also in private possession), and controlled the observance of work-bans.

Only a few months after attaining power the NSDAP had set up an effective model of a centrally controlled organisation of the arts section. At the same time opposition to the new system made itself heard. NS cultural policy was publicly called reactionary. This opposition was formed mainly by the artists themselves, by students and young lecturers of art history, and art critics. To them the first generation after World War 1 - the German expressionists - meant quality and truthfulness. Their own work was based on this tradition and was not conceivable without it. These opponents gathered around the NSD student association and their leader the painter O.A. Schreiber.

The NSD Student association was firmly based on the NS ideology which gave them opportunity to bring their protests into the open and gave hope to the more liberal circles. The students' opposition was based on the claim to continue the national-socialists revolution in the arts section. This combination of their cultural programme with the political ideological revolution theory gave strong impetus to their actions.

A series of meetings was organised at which Schreiber laid out the lines of their attack. He described the riots of the Alliance in the provinces as well as the existence of black lists for artists and he exposed the development which threatened artistic creativity in Germany.

"Sunday and Literary painters are living through their greatest time, for the former imitates nature and declares that people understand him while the latter paints Germanic subject-matter and declares that his art is national". 11 Schreiber called the organised defamation of Barlach, Heckel, Kirchner, Mueller, Schmidt-Rotluff and Nolde an assault on German culture.

The biggest and most effective event took place on the 29th of June, 1933 at the university of Berlin. For days posters advertised the demonstration, "Youth Fights for German Art". The lectures called upon the large audience to fight against any supervision of the arts and the resurgence of Wilhelminian academism. These were read out in defence of modern art. Schreiber called for a new German art which would develop from the tradition of the Expressionists and he announced an exhibition of modern German artists under the special protection of the NSD student association. The approval of the audience was so strong that the revolt appeared successful.

Other university towns sent proclamations of solidarity. The liberal press reacted with optimism. Amongst artistic circles the question whether this meant a liberalisation of cultural political practises was much discussed. Rumours which turned out to be true, suggested that even Hitler felt sorry for the discord with Barlach and attempts were made to reconcile him with the new regime; that Reichsminister Rust regarded Nolde as the greatest living painter and the book-burnings a mistake;

11. H. Brenner, Ibid. p. 67

and, that Goebbels brought several of Nolde's paintings (actually the property of the National Gallery) to his house and hung them there.

The planned exhibition with the title "Thirty German Artists" took place on July 22nd, 1933. Again works by Pechstein, Macke, Schmidt-Rotluff, Nolde and Barlach were represented. But three days later the exhibition was closed. Another modern exhibition put together by professor Schardt, director of the National Gallery in Berlin was not allowed to open and Schardt was dismissed.

In January 1934 Hitler set up a "Board for the Supervision of the entire Spiritual and Ideological Schooling and Education of the NSDAP" and made Alfred Rosenberg its leader. The motives for this new institution are not entirely known, even today. Goebbels and Rosenberg were the main contestants in the cultural-political fight for power and we can be certain that Hitler wanted to see this power divided. But Rosenberg who was firmly on the reactionary side of this battle about modern art, was ironically responsible for a second phase of opposition.

This new gathering which started in the autumn of 1933 centred around the newly published monthly magazine "Weltkunst". This well-researched magazine was non-political and in defense of Expressionism. Almost two years of publications were issued before it was forbidden in 1935.

The climax of this second phase of opposition was the Italian Futurist exhibition "Aeropittura" in March 1934. Several politicians, among them Goebbels, were members of the honour

committee. Despite this official protection the Berlin exhibition opened with a scandal. Rosenberg declared this exhibition a case of foreign interference and an attempt to credit German modern art through the circuitous route of befriended Fascist Italy. He declared Futurism in Italy itself an insignificant movement. Among liberal circles "Aeropittura" caused a stir although the works themselves were disappointing. Following this were exhibitions in several cities, one with sixty watercolours and lithographs by Nolde; others with Feininger and Schmidt-Rothluff.

This second attempt to change NS culture-policy in favour of modern art by reference to art practises in Fascist Italy 12 demanded a declaration from Hitler himself. He chose the Nuernberg Reichsparty Rally on September 5th, 1934 to clarify NS policy and condemned the actions of both Goebbels and Rosenberg. Goebbels, to perpetuate cultural activity acted in a relatively unorthodox way. He favoured quality and opposed to political Kitsch, and therefore his personnel policy was initially generous. He asked potential emigrants to remain in Germany and he circulated successful propaganda for the return of prominent emigrants. He admired Italian film-making for its attempts to integrate in to the services of the state. Goebbels affirmed the "law of revolution" a national principle.

However a few days later at the Party rally Hitler announced that the National-Socialist revolution was at an end. This removed the basis for the opposition which held just this

principle of revolution. Thus Hitler rejected the liberalising efforts. At the same time he mentioned a second danger that National-Socialism had to overcome. Addressing himself to Rosenberg he said: "Those living in the world of the past lack any concept of the greatness of the revolution that happened in the meantime to the German people". Hitler was referring to the group of painters whom Schreiber, leader of the first wave of opposition, had called the "Sunday and Literary painters".

It is not so difficult to answer the question as to why Hitler rejected modern art. On the one hand it did not correspond with his own taste and, on the other hand, he was fully aware of the slight political implications of such intellectual groups. "To be German is to be clear" was a slogan Hitler coined at the Rally in 1934. Such thinking indicated the type of art which was expected of the artist.

"Until the moment when National-Socialism took power, there existed in Germany a so-called "modern-art", that is to be sure, almost every year another one.... Nationalist-Socialist Germany however, wants again a "German Art", and this art shall and will be of eternal value Should this art, however, again lack this eternal value for our people, then indeed it will mean that it also has no higher value today. When, therefore, the corner stone of this building was laid, it was with the intention of constructing a temple, not for a so-called modern art but for a true and everlasting German art, that is better still a House for the art of the German people, and not for any international art of the year 1937, '40, '50 or '60. For art is not founded on time, but only on peoples. It is therefore imperative for the artist to erect a monument not so much to a period, but to his people".¹⁴

Art that was confusing or even provocative endangered the political programme and was not acceptable. "The NS party", Hitler wrote to Goebbels in 1930, "will not, as long as I lead it, become a debate club of rootless men of letters or of chaotic saloon - Bolshevists but it will remain what it is today: an organisation of discipline". 15 NS cultural policy was now affirmed and clearly laid down.

12. Mussolini declared Futurism as the national art. He appreciated in modern art certain dynamic elements: "A new state, a new nation can only thrive if the entire art is revolutionised too". (Kunst der Nation vom 15.4.34)
13. Hitler's speech in Nuernberg, 5.9.1934
14. Hitler's speech at the opening of the new museum, 1937 in Munich
15. letters: Hitler's to Goebbels, 30.6.1930 BDC (File Gregor Strasser)

Chapter 11 - "Degenerate Art"

In 1935 only two years after the fascist takeover Hoeing, head of the section for painting and sculpture at the Department for Propaganda proudly declared that order was now successfully established in the arts section. This indicates that effectiveness with which policies were implemented. All modern painters and sculptures were systematically eliminated. Prior to this the most famous German artists or famous artists living in Germany included:

Willy Baumeister, Max Beckmann, Campendonk, Otto Dix, Max Ernst, Feininger, Georg Grosz, Heckel, Kandinsky, Klee, Kokoschka, Macke, Marc, Modersohn, Otto Mueller, Nolde, Schlemmer, Schmidt-Rothluff, Kurt Schwitters and Christian Rohlf. Their work was called "entartet" (degenerate).

Classed as degenerate were:

- (a) any work by Jewish artists
- (b) Anything with a Jewish identity even if done by Aryan artists.
- (c) Pacifist or war pictures that did not glorify war (e.g. work of Otto Dix)
- (d) work with a socialist or marxist theme
- (e) figures that were not "beautiful" that did not idolise the human being (Barlach or Otto Mueller) such paintings or sculptures were classed as the product of an inferior race.
- (f) expressionism, even if done by Nordic artists such as Emile Nolde. Expressiveness was equated with Bolshevism.
- (g) abstract art (Kandinsky, Moholy, The Bauhaus)

In his speech at the opening of the "Haus de Deutschen Kunst" the new museum for German art in Munich Hitler says of degenerate art:

"Works of art" which cannot be understood in themselves but, for the justification of their existence, need those bombastic instructions for their use, finally reaching that intimidated soul, who is patiently willing to accept such stupid or impertinent nonsense - those works of art from now on will no longer find their way to the German people". 1

Feininger, Klee, Kokoschka and Hofer are designated as Jews, the Bauhaus 2 is accused of "wanting to profit from the destruction of the German soul". 3

An act from June 30th, 1937 authorised the new RKK president Adolf Ziegler to select and secure any works of German decadent art. A commission visited all German museums and confiscated the outlawed paintings. Karlsruhe came first. Confiscated were works by Marees, Liebermann, Slevogt, Corinth, Munch, Graf Baudissin, a Nazi S.S. man with little knowledge of art, assumed the head position of the museum in Essen where director Gosebruch had tried to hold on to modern works for as long as possible.

No less than one thousand seven hundred and seventy three paintings, watercolours and drawings were confiscated. Baudissin declared that "the most perfect object created in the previous epochs did not originate in the studios of our artists and was not done for exhibition purposes, but is the steel helmet worn by the storming grey gangs. 4

-
1. Herschel. B. Chipp "Theories of modern art " p. 479
 2. A school of architecture, design and craftsmanship of modern times founded in Weimar in 1919
 3. H. Brenner, Ibid. p. 89
 4. Baudissin was referring to the military, dressed in grey uniforms. Franz Roh "Entarte Kunst" p. 51

As the "Voelkischer Beobachter", a fascist newspaper, applauded, he announced that from now on he would be "hunting in private hideaways for the products of degenerate art and make its premature destruction punishable". 5 The Berlin National Gallery was virtually destroyed. Amongst the one hundred and sixty four paintings, three hundred and twenty-six drawings and watercolours removed were works by Corinth, Beckmann, Feininger, Van Gogh, Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Schmidt-Rothluff, Schwitters and Signac.

In Mannheim, A. Ziegler destroyed a collection based mainly on modern art and five hundred and eighty-four works were taken away. In Düsseldorf nine hundred works, Frankfurt four hundred and ninety-six, Breslau five hundred and sixty, Stuttgart two hundred and eighty-three, Chemnitz three hundred and sixty-six and two hundred and seventy-five, Dresden three hundred and eighty-one from the Municipal Museum, one hundred and fifty from the National Gallery, three hundred and sixty-five from the Gallery of Etchings, in Hamburg nine hundred and eighty-three and two hundred and sixty-nine were confiscated. Out of one hundred and one public collections twelve thousand graphic works and about five hundred paintings and sculptures were gathered up. Goering brought a lot of these confiscated works to his large mansion.

5. F. Roh. Ibid p. 51

Although he did not understand or appreciate them he knew of their value at the foreign exchange. The other works were lodged in a Berlin warehouse, where the "Fuehrer" viewed them announcing that there was no question of returning them. Luckily the war prevented these raids from becoming more extensive in the affiliated countries of Austria and the Sudetenland.

In order to denounce modern art publicly several exhibitions were organised in German cities. The largest occurred in Munich and was opened by Hitler himself. ⁶ A total of seven hundred and thirty works by virtually all the modern German artists who are important in the history of art, as well as many foreign artists were exhibited in a most cramped space and in bad circumstances with bad lighting and many were hung without frames or merely stood on the floor. To incite the public against this type of art, the purchasing price of each painting was given in inflationary sums rather than the fixed Reichsmark currency and irrelevant comments were added. A catalogue was published with extensive slandering commentary and mere black and white illustrations of paintings. Some of these paintings were compared with those done by inhabitants of mental institutions. Anti-semitic curses were added to works by Jewish artists.

6. See illustration 2

The exhibition included several paintings by Nolde, Kirchner, Schmidt-Rothluff, Otto Mueller, Beckmann, Rohlf, Kokoschka and other important artists. International masters like Mandrian, Kandinsky, Lissitzky and Chagall were denounced and so were critics who showed appreciation for contemporary art like Scheffler, Meier-Graefe, C.G. Heise, Fechter, Hildebrandt, Hausenstein and Nemitz. Analysing the exhibition and the catalogue one will come across numerous psychological tricks which would prevent the public from acquiring a positive approach towards this art.

The exhibition was tremendously successful. Each day more than twenty thousand people visited it and on one Sunday there were almost thirty-six thousand. Remarks like "The artists should be tied beside their pictures so that every German can spit in their faces" 7 were later reported to have been uttered during the proceedings.

In 1938 a "Commission for the Utilisation of Confiscated Works of Degenerate Art" was formed. A few art dealers got permission to select a number of works and to sell them on the foreign market, making sure that all inscriptions indicating the origin of the pictures (i.e. the German Museums) were removed. In October 1938 it was decided that these works should be sold at an auction held in Switzerland. In 1939 the famous auction took place in Lucerne. Taking part were dealers, collectors and museum directors from Holland and Scandinavia.

The best works numbering one hundred and twenty-five of contemporary art to be found in German collections were auctioned off. According to a Dutch newspaper report an extremely cheerful and high-spirited atmosphere prevailed throughout. At the time the Americans were doubtful whether the money would benefit German museums, as was the impression given to them. In reality it went into the financing of the war preparations. Since the depot in Berlin, where the rest of the confiscated works were lodged, was needed for grain storage it was decided to burn the left-over works as a symbolic act. In March 1939 the depot was cleared and its content thrown into the flames by a mob. It is reckoned that about one thousand and four paintings and sculptures and about three thousand eight hundred and twenty-five water-colours etc. were destroyed. Organised fires like this were not unusual, because books that did not find approval were destroyed in the same way.

In the meantime the restrictions and controls of Jews were further tightened up with an order issued on December 3rd, 1938 forbidding Jews to buy, pawn or sell any objects made of gold, silver, platinum, precious stones or pearls including other sorts of jewellery and objects of art.

With the start of World War II in September 1939 many hoped that art would now move into the background or even be forgotten by the NS, but this was not the case. Expropriation campaigns were simply extended to the now occupied countries. In 1944 twenty one thousand nine hundred and three

art objects from French collections were in German possession. The procedure was similar: first the museums were plundered, then private collections. Amongst the most famous were the Louvre and the Rothschild collections. As in Germany a major part of confiscated works were burned.

Since 1936 Goebbels enforced prohibition of art criticism and to replace this he wanted a mere art-report. One fascist writer went so far as to state that criticism as such was unGerman, a Jewish trait and strange to the German character. Lists were made up of writers who were useful as "art-observers". Jewish persons or persons married to Jews were "a priori" unsuitable. But genuine criticism persisted behind the official scene though these people were not able to come out into the open for fear of their lives.

Amongst those who helped the then degenerate artists at a time when to do so was dangerous was Hugo von Tschudi who was head of the Berlin National Gallery since 1906. He had encouraged the purchase of many modern masterpieces for the Berlin and Munich Gallery and had fought decisively against the reactionary taste of the emperor Wilhelm II. Tschudi's successor at the Berlin gallery, Ludwig Justi, whose book, published in 1931, set out to justify those tendencies in the world of art that the NS tried to eradicate, was quickly dismissed. Alois Schardt who succeeded him conformed to the demanded Nordic principles and he applied them to the German

7. H. Brenner, Ibid. p. 110

Expressionism of Emil Nolde. But the NS had in mind a more realistic image than the expressiveness of Nolde and they dismissed Schardt who subsequently had to flee to America. He was also "Doubtful" because he had dedicated a book to Franz Marc.

There were many more like him who went along with the official policy that Germany should concentrate on its Germanic character rather than acquire an international approach. Many were in favour of German expressionism but to Hitler it was the German Romantics of the 19th century who had been the last representatives of a true German art. How low the level of argument had sunk is evident in the example of Emil Waldmann, head of the Bremer Museum, who could prove that at no time had he bought any Futurist, Dadaist or abstract painting. Among one hundred and ninety purchases there were only three French works. But the official art magazine "kulturwacht" accused him of having bought a painting from the son of a rabbi in Hungary and occasionally having dined with a Jewish collector. Waldmann was to eventually commit suicide.

As well as several art dealers, various associations and clubs publicly voiced their concern about such a development and a lot of criticism came not only from staunch opponents of the NS dictatorship but out of their own camp. The majority of modern artists were stopped in their production. Most of them were prohibited from continuing their work. There were no buyers anymore. Some continued secretly, a most dangerous activity especially for sculptors though this was

almost impossible. Many artists who had held a teaching post were dismissed as early as 1933. Schmidt-Rothluff was expelled from the Prussian Academy in 1933, forbidden to paint in 1941 and then supervised by Nazi police. Kaethe Killwitz too was expelled from the Prussian Academy, as was Max Pechstein and Christian Rohlf. Dismissed from their teaching post for "degeneracy" were Willy Baumeister, Max Beckmann, Oskar Schlemmer, Campendonk and Heinrich Nauen.

A large number of artists fled the country. Amongst them were Erich Heckel, Wassily Kandinsky, Beckmann, Grosz, Campendonk, Kokoschka, Ludwig Meidner. The despair and insecurity that all of them must have suffered finds strong expression in the diaries of Max Beckmann. He left Germany in 1937 and lived for ten years in Amsterdam. He writes :- "september 1940: One year of war Heavy bombing last night I am curious as to how long my nerves will be able to stand this chaos. I am sentenced to live by some unknown force who finds it necessary.

1941:hopeless

1942: The many millions of fates - and always it goes on! ...

I am mostly at home in a terrible mood ... The valleys of my soul and want and pain are covered with dark sadness, the future darker and darker. The end is coming.

1944: Tired and melancholic, with terrible pains Dying yes, but to be tortured endlessly is not my thing...

The worst is to have to live on and that you like to, whether you want to or not ... situation here rather desperate - hunger.

1945:... The end of myself and Germany is coming ... every
where brutality.

1946:... Tired for two days after working intensely for one.
No money ... depression ... waiting from one illusion
to the other ... I am nothing but a ridiculous old
clown". 8

After ten year in Amsterdam, Beckmann was invited to the
U.S.A. where he lived for only a further three years. Not all of
those who stayed in Germany survived. Amongst several well-known
artists who died in concentration camps were:
the painter Rudolf Levy, the architect Paul Meller, the painter
and architect Freundlich and Friedel Dicker, weaver and sculptor.

8. F. Roh. Ibid. P. 115/116

Chapter 111

The Official Art

While most art of the past centuries was official in the sense that it was commissioned by an influential person, a group of persons or an institution, it was during the nineteenth century that artists asserted their independence by exhibiting their work outside the official concourse. For example in 1863 artists in France who did not accept the rules and conventions of the French Academy, exhibited officially unacceptable work through their own means in the "Salon des Refuses". At the turn of this century the art historian Hugo von Tschä encounterred the anger of Wilhelm II personally when he was demoted as director of the National Gallery in Berlin after buying twenty-one works of French painters who were modern and thus unofficial. The paintings were by Manet, Degas, Monet, Cezanne Renoir etc.. The Emperor declared that art that had forgotten its patriotic mission and only addressed itself to the eye of the expert, did not exist for him.

It was the task of the "official" painter to represent in visual terms certain ideas and demands of the patron. For example famous battle scenes, important persons and state actions were immortalised. But from the nineteenth century on artists were to work in their own way and to choose their own subject-matter. The impositions placed upon art during the Third Reich were, then, in contradiction to the general direction of the arts of the twentieth century, especially of Expressionism which was so largely to do with the artist's personal interpretation.

Official Painting

At the same time as the Munich exhibition of "Degenerate Art" there was an exhibition of the official art in the other wing of the new museum. At this exhibition almost nine hundred works, paintings, graphics and sculptures of Aryan artists were brought together. For months a commission had carefully selected works and had visited artists in their studios.

Among the motifs, landscapes were by far the most prevalent. These were followed by portraits of peasants, women and men, young people, portraits of well-known personalities, scenes with animals and still-lives. Amongst the working-classes peasants were predominant while craftsmen were least represented. Nature was depicted in an idyllic way. Germans were depicted in a manner which showed composure, mostly in standing pose. Mother and child scenes tended to vary between brazen dignity and pastoral idylls. Most family scenes showed the entire household - vigorous people and plenty of barefooted children.

"Art that cannot count on the most joyful and innermost consent of the sound, general mass of the people, but is based on a small, partly interested party balse clique, is unbearable. This art tries to confuse the instinctively reliable, healthy feelings of a people instead of supporting it joyfully. 1

It is fruitless to look for indications of modern life. The reality of the industrial society did not find expression: cars, machines and factories were not depicted except for two paintings.

1. Adolf Hitler, speech at the opening of the "Haus der Deutschen Kunst", 1937

"One only gets the impression of shoulders of strong men, oxen and handcart transporting materials. People walk or the men ride on horses. The motif of the city exists only in the form of the "Little old town" or gigantic representative buildings" 2 As well as the big modern city and its world of work all the underlying problems which interested the "degenerates" were missing. The exhibits showed an intact world and accordingly intact units: mother and child, man and womanhood, family, sports-clubs etc. Only two paintings indicated any special concern: the "sacrifice" that the military "fight" demanded. These merely adhered to the ideology of the Reich in that they romanticised the cause of the Aryan Nation. 3

Besides these unreal but most realistically painted scenes paintings of nudes predominated. Some of these nudes bordered on the perverse, for instance "Leda with the Swan" by Paul Mathias Padua. 4 Adolf Ziegler, who specialised in nude scenes, was considered the best painter of the time. His style was allegorical but mannered. His intention to both idolise and idealise the Germanic female failed with his stylised and academic approach. 5

Although the exhibition proved very successful and the number of paintings sold was very high, Goebbels was not satisfied. He predicted further and realised that newcomers were lacking. The interest in cultural affairs was steadily growing but to

2. H. Brenner, *Ibid.*, P. 73

3. See illustration 3

4. See illustration 4

5. See illustration 5

continue the mobilisation of the masses new creative impact was vital. This impact did not occur. The general withdrawal to the Classic could not hide the fact that modern works dealing with contemporary problems were missing. To the NS, art was an instrument of propaganda and a dream factory; it had to serve the politics of the state. This was ultimately responsible for the failure of official art.

Architecture

Architecture during the Third Reich was regarded as the most important of all the visual arts. During the years 1934 to 1940 the amount built and the dimensions of buildings was remarkable. This is partly due to the fact that Hitler thought of himself as a "would-be" architect. Hitler's auto-biographical references state, against the wishes of his father, he had always wanted to be an artist. In 1907 he enrolled at the Academy in Vienna which rejected him, as did the school of architecture. He claimed later that, had he not become a politician, he surely would have been a famous creator as Michelangelo had been.

Hitler looked upon the arts, and specifically upon architecture, as an expression of the new state that was to last one thousand years. He saw himself as successor to the Bavarian King Ludwig II, a megalomaniac ruler, who built Schloss Neuschwanstein. As in the Middle Ages, architecture according to Hitler was to become leader in the arts. 6 "Symbolic building" and "political architecture" was demanded. The "power", the "greatness of the people", "symbols of eternity" had to be made visible:

6. Unlike the Renaissance where painting, sculpture and architecture were of equal importance.

"When the small human spirit, persecuted by sorrow and trouble looses his confidence in the greatness and future of his people then the time has come to erect him with a hint at the documents of the innermost and therefore immortal highest values of a people that cannot be denied by political and economical difficulty". 7

One of the characteristics of Third Reich architecture was its dimensions. The new museum "Haus der Deutschen Kunst" designed by Paul Ludwig Troost, measuring in length 175 m, was only a beginning. 8 Architecture Speer's "Neue Reichskanzlei" (New Reichschancellery) built in only nine months (1938 - 1939) in Berlin, had as its biggest room a 146 m long 12 m wide and 9.50 m high Marble Gallery. 9 19 windows were each 6 m high and 2.35 m wide. The five huge doors were of mahogany framed by German marble. Two uniformed members of the SS, dressed in black with white gloves, guarded the huge middle door leading to Hitler's office.

Another gigantic project was the civic centre on the outskirts of Nuremberg, an area of about twenty-five square miles including a parading area, stadium measuring 560 m in length, 83 m high and 450 m wide, a congress building and two fields, the Zeppelin and the Maerzfeld. The main arena of the Zeppelinfeld measured on the outside 363 X 378 m; the Maerzfeld (611 X 955 m) accommodated a hundred and fifteen thousand spectators and the German Stadium four hundred and five thousand. The main road between Zeppelinfeld and the stadium was 95 m wide. Berlin was

7. Excerpt from Hitler's speech at the Reichspartyrally 1935

8. See illustration 6

9. The famous "Mirror Gallery" in Versailles measures 74 m!

to become the centre of new planning. A 38.7 m long road was planned along which the biggest and most representative buildings of the German Reich were to be built. A 300m high public hall 10 was to be in the centre. Green areas were to be created, the system of trunk roads improved, blocks of houses sanitated and one million new flats were to be built. 11 Berlin was to be European capital of a world dominated by the German conquerors. Besides Berlin, Nuernberg, Muenchen and Linz were to be re-created; by 1941, twenty-seven further cities were added to these. Other projects were new museums, memorials, schools, operas and airports, including all the necessary administrative buildings. At the beginning of 1939 Speer was quite confident at the progress of the project. But the war interfered and most of the construction stopped. As if to encourage the faith of the population in the near impossible, (that is, to win the numerous wars Hitler had started), the production of ambitious, gigantic plans continued.

The style of architecture was a mixture of almost everything that had been created until then: Roman architecture, classicism with baroque ornaments, even a touch of the medieval. Characteristic was the strict symmetry. Massive stone was used and only materials of German origin. 12

10. St. Peter's cathedral in Rome measures 132.5 m at it's highest point!

11. If one considers these massive building projects it is not surprising that Hitler succeeded in reducing the high number of unemployed, an achievement which won the favour of the majority of the German people.

12. See, illustration 7

Glass and light materials, which were the modern materials used by the Bauhaus architects were dismissed.

The architecture of the Third Reich had a political purpose which was the glorification of the Reich. All human insecurity, smallness and misery were to be swept away by these colossal buildings, symbolising the authoritative state and its eternal existence. Buildings, paintings and sculptures had the function of deflecting any notions questioning the actions and future of the totalitarian state in any way other than the propaganda mechanism wanted it. The cost of all this activity was irrelevant as long as it was a question of building monuments for the following millenia.

Sculpture

To adorn these massive buildings, innumerable sculptures were commissioned, again emphasising monumentality. Arno Breker was one of the acknowledged creators of some of these huge designs which were mainly human figures. For the new Chancellery he made two 3 m high bronze figures, "The Party" ¹³ a nude male bursting with strength and health holding a torch in the right hand, and "The military", another male, this time with sword.

On an even bigger scale was the work of Joseph Thorak, the then leading sculptor and professor at the Munich Academy in his 20 m high studio near Munich, designed specially for him by Speer, he worked at his models which were often up to 17 m high.

14

13. See illustration 8

14. See illustration 9

For example the sculptures for the Nuernberg Maerzfeld (horses, a goddess of victory) and his "Monument of Work" depicting several titans shifting a hardly moveable rock.

Sculptures were executed in the fashion of the antique, many of them depicting nude men or women ¹⁵ and reliefs were popular. Like painting architecture sculpture of the Third Reich did not leave a lasting impression on the arts of the twentieth century they had to serve the political and propagandistic purposes of the fascist state. Artists were not allowed to develop their own, individual style and express personal ideas that did not conform with the official party line.

15. See illustration 10

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Behne, Adolf; Entartete Kunst. Habel, 1947

Brenner, Hildegard; Die Kunst im Nationalsozialismus.

Rowohlt, 1963

Chipp, Herschel; Theories of Modern Art. University of
California Press, 1968

Hieper, Richard; Gewissen und Gestaltung. Rockerberg, 1960

Kaier, E. & J. Lehmann; Grundzuege der Geschichte. Band 3

Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1969

Mueller-Mehlis Reinhard; Die Kunst im Dritten Reich. Heyne

Stilkunde, Band 3

Roh, Franz; Entartete Kunst. Fackeltraeger Verlag, 1962

Schmalenbach, Werner; Kurt Schwitters. Thames & Hudson, 1970

Wingler, Hans M.; The Bauhaus The MIT Press, 1969

Wulf, Joseph; Die Bildended Kuenste im Dritten Reich .

Sigbert Mohn Verlag, 1963

1.





















