

“Chambers of Horrors of Art” and “Degenerate Art”: On Censorship in the Visual Arts in Nazi Germany

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For Stephanie Barron

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1920, ADOLF HITLER announced the program of the National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP). There we read: “We demand the legal fight against a tendency in art and literature which exerts a subversive influence on the life of our people.”¹ Thus, thirteen years before the fascists came to power, they programmatically planned the systematic and institutionalized fight against “subversive” art and its representatives, an attack which began with ferocity in 1933 and lasted through the fall of the Third Reich.

The Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat (Order of the Reichspräsident for the Protection of the People and the State) dates February 28, 1933, repealed all the basic political rights granted in the constitution of the Weimar Republic, including the freedom of the arts. The Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums (Professional Civil Service Restoration Act), dated April 7, 1933, was the legal basis for the summary dismissal of unwanted university and academy professors and museum consultants for political or racial reasons. About thirty museum directors were removed from office, among them Ernst Gosebruch (Essen), Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (Mannheim), Carl Georg Heise (Lübeck), Ludwig Justi (Berlin), and Max Sauerlandt (Hamburg). Others lost their chairs at academies of art, including Willi Baumeister and Max Beckmann (both Frankfurt/Main), Otto Dix (Dresden), Karl Hofer and Käthe Kollwitz (both Berlin), Paul Klee (Düsseldorf), and Gerhard Marcks (Halle/Saale). These massive attacks came as no surprise. They were the culmination of an ideo-

logical battle waged by nationalistic groups and conventional artists against both avant-garde artists and those museum directors who had adopted progressive acquisitions policies.

How strongly antimodernist tendencies, which had developed parallel to modern art since the end of the nineteenth century, were interspersed right from the beginning with a conservative and nationalistic ideology is shown by the disputes about French impressionism around the turn of the century. In this context, the director of the Berliner Nationalgalerie from 1896 to 1909, Hugo von Tschudi, should be mentioned. His commitment to French art led to open quarrels with Kaiser Wilhelm II, and finally to Tschudi's dismissal.² Other important examples include two publications of 1911 that received great attention. In the massive book *Die Herabwertung deutscher Kunst durch die Parteigänger des Impressionismus* (The Disparagement of German Art by the Party Followers of Impressionism), the Mannheim lawyer Theodor Alt called impressionism a "perverted style of art" and Vincent van Gogh a "mentally ill dilettante." He compared Franz von Defregger to Édouard Manet, Hans Makart to Hans von Marées, and Adolf Hildebrand to Auguste Rodin, and came to the conclusion that nineteenth-century art was classical art, whereas modern art (impressionism, in particular) was nothing but a formalist-subjective and temporary trend. When in the same year (1911) Gustav Pauli bought a painting by van Gogh, *Mohnfeld* (Poppy Field), for the Bremer Kunsthalle, a wave of indignation arose. Carl Vinnen, an unknown landscape painter from Cuxhaven, who was close to the artists' colony of Worpswede, put together a publication entitled *Protest deutscher Künstler* (Protest of German Artists), in which 134 artists participated. In the introduction Vinnen says:

Given the tremendous invasion of French art . . . it seems to me that the dictates of necessity require that German artists raise their warning voice. . . . Why is the introduction of foreign art so dangerous . . . ? Well, in particular, because it overestimates the foreign nature, not adequate to our own, original disposition. . . . And wherever foreign influences . . . want to reorganize fundamental structures here, our cultural traditions are in danger. . . . If one now considers the fact that prices have risen tremendously, it becomes clear that every year millions get lost which could be spent on national art.³

The controversy about impressionism was both the beginning and the climax of the dispute over modern art in Germany. During the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic, numerous "art scandals" arose concerning the work and public presentation of certain artists. Purchases were prevented, exhibi-

tions censored or closed (such as the Munch exhibition of 1892 in Berlin), and artists had to answer to the courts. Quite often the attacks were sparked by works of art and artists who were later discriminated against in the National Socialist campaign "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art). This was the case with Otto Dix, George Grosz, Ludwig Gies, and Wilhelm Lehmbruck.⁴ In the course of these quarrels, the stereotypes and vocabulary for disparaging modern art—as obscene, violating religious feelings, appealing to class struggle, encouraging military sabotage, resembling the artistic efforts of mentally ill persons—were created. In this context special attention must be paid to the role of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Combat League for German Culture). Founded in 1927–29 by Alfred Rosenberg, it was the reservoir of racist and national-conservative associations. The local and openly aggressive agitation pursued by this Combat League, which was organized throughout the country in local groups, against modern art and its defenders led in 1930 to the dismissal of the Zwickau museum director, Hildebrand Gurlitt.⁵

Returning to the events of 1933: the dismissed civil servants in museums and universities were replaced by functionaries and supporters of the NSDAP, who in most cases were closely connected with the Combat League. In many towns, the new directors—some of them artists themselves—began their activities by arranging exhibitions, which in the National Socialist press were frequently and popularly described as "Schreckenskammern der Kunst" (Chambers of Horrors of Art). These were special shows where the respective inventory of modern art, regardless of its style, was presented in order to defame it. In their political function, ideological thrust, and propagandist staging these exhibitions anticipated the 1937 "Entartete Kunst" show in Munich.⁶ They were held in Mannheim, with the title "Kulturbolschewistische Bilder" (Images of Cultural Bolshevism); Karlsruhe, "Regierungskunst, 1918–1933" (Government Art, 1918–1933); Nuremberg, "Schreckenskammer" (Chamber of Horrors); Chemnitz, "Kunst, die nicht aus unserer Seele kam" (Art That Did Not Issue from Our Soul); Stuttgart, "Novembergeist—Kunst im Dienste der Zersetzung" (November Spirit—Art in the Service of Subversion); Dessau(?), Ulm, "Zehn Jahre Ulmer Kunstpolitik" (Ten Years of Arts Policy in Ulm); Dresden, "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art); Breslau, "Kunst der Geistesrichtung, 1918–1933" (Intellectual Art, 1918–1933); and Halle/S., "Schreckenskammer" (Chamber of Horrors). The titles of these Schreckenskammern reveal their function as primarily political: the works of art were presented to the public, not for their own sake, but as symptoms of the degeneration of Weimar democracy, to discredit the latter and cele-



FIG. 1. Gallery in the exhibition "Kulturbolschewistische Bilder" (Images of Cultural Bolshevism), Städtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim, 1933; works by Oskar Schlemmer, James Ensor, Max Beckmann, Jankel Adler, Karl Hofer, Willi Baumeister, and others. Archiv der Städtischen Kunsthalle, Mannheim.

brate Hitler's victory as a revolutionary new beginning. However, this was an illusion which was to blind the public to the actual continuity of social and economic conditions under Hitler. Provoking the indignation of the public about modern art was not the aim but merely one means of obtaining wide support for the new state and thus contributing to its political stabilization.

Despite the common ideological basis, the forerunner exhibitions came into being independently of each other, as individual local activities. In this lies a significant difference from the show of 1937, which was officially ordered and centrally prepared by the National Socialist government. The content of the Schreckenskammern varied from location to location, depending on the strengths of the local collections; thus in Karlsruhe the main emphasis was on German impressionism, in Chemnitz on expressionism, and in Stuttgart on the sociocritical realism of the 1920s. As examples, two of the forerunner exhibitions, the ones in Mannheim and Dresden, will be described in more detail.

The Mannheim exhibition, presented under the rabble-rousing name "Kulturbolschewistische Bilder" (Images of Cultural Bolshevism) in the Kunsthalle from April 4 to June 5, 1933, was the first of its kind (fig. 1).⁷ Otto

Gebele von Waldstein, one of the leading NSDAP functionaries in Mannheim and since April 3 the municipal assistant consultant for the Nationaltheater and the Kunsthalle, arranged it on the instructions of the town leaders only a few days after Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub had been given "time off." The exhibition's 64 paintings, 2 sculptures, and 20 graphics by 55 different artists (Jankel Adler, Willi Baumeister, Max Beckmann, Marc Chagall, Robert Delaunay, André Derain, Otto Dix, Franz Marc, Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde, and others) were depicted as "sorry efforts of cultural Bolshevism" and deserving of public ridicule. The exhibition planners took advantage of all available means of stage management. The paintings were taken out of their frames to emphasize their unworthiness and were hung close together without discernible logic. Works were also exhibited that had never been intended for display in the Kunsthalle. They were, in fact, recent purchases made with a special fund meant for the support of impoverished Mannheim artists. The "images of cultural Bolshevism" were crudely contrasted with an ideal "model cabinet" consisting of framed paintings by conventional Mannheim artists. The National Socialist propaganda exhibitions soon developed such an antithetic principle of display, in which the works of conventional, approved artists would be exhibited next to those of modernists, to the advantage of the former and the defamation of the latter. The purchase price—very high partly as a result of the inflation and deliberately not converted into reichsmarks (the currency introduced in 1924)—was stated on each label in order to evoke the indignation of the "national comrades" about the alleged waste of their tax money. The fact that this show was "for adults only" created an aura of illicitness. The propagandist press blamed the supposedly "fraudulent activities of the Jewish art dealers" for these allegedly inflated, unreasonable prices and equated them with the "penetration by Marxism" in order to stir up anti-Semitic and anti-Communist resentment.

A key work of the Mannheim show was a painting, now in Basle, entitled *Die Prise (Rabbiner)* (A Pinch of Snuff [Rabbi]), by Marc Chagall—the depiction of a "Jewish" theme by a "Jewish" artist born in "Bolshevist" Russia (fig. 2). A spectacle was set up but exactly what happened is not clear. Hartlaub remembered that the painting, "which he himself had purchased, was put on a cart, which was pulled through the city, and then it was so to speak pilloried in a shop window."⁸ According to another report, it was a cigar shop where this painting, labeled "Taxpayer, you shall know where your money has gone," was exhibited.⁹ The results of this special Mannheim exhibition—with 20,141 visitors it was one of the greatest attractions of the Kunsthalle—

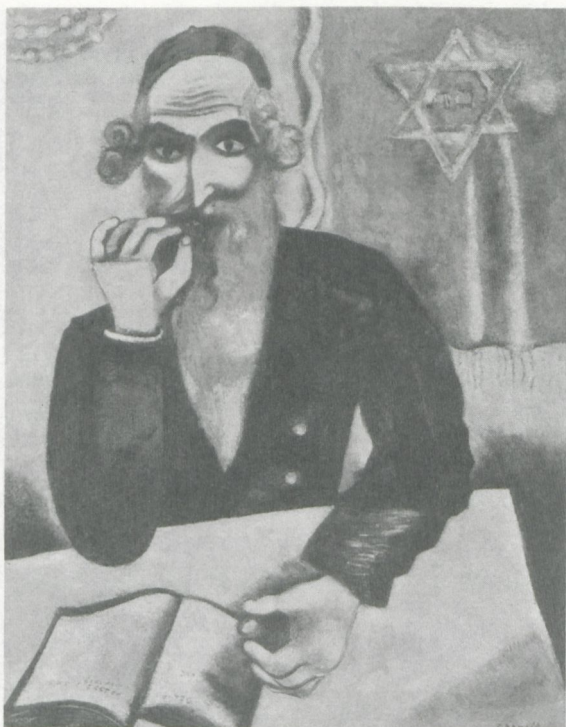


FIG. 2. Marc Chagall, *Die Prise (Rabbiner)*
(*A Pinch of Snuff [Rabbi]*), 1923–26.

Oil on canvas, 117×89.5 cm (46×35 in.).

Öffentliche Kunstsammlung/Kunstmuseum, Basle.

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 1996.

must have greatly satisfied von Waldstein and his associates, because an abridged version was lent to Munich and Erlangen.

Another precursor exhibition deserves special attention, not least as a forerunner of the title given to the major 1937 show. This was “Entartete Kunst,” held in the inner courtyard of the Neues Rathaus in Dresden from September 23 to October 18, 1933 (fig. 3). Like other Schreckenskammern it owed its existence to the zeal of a conventional artist, the Nazi and academy director Richard Müller. He now saw his chance to take revenge on his progressive colleagues, such as Otto Dix, who had been expelled from the Dresden academy. The center of the exposition was formed by sociocritical works of the Dresden Secession Group 1919 and the Association of Revolutionary

[illegible]

Ministerpräsident
General Göring
besucht die Dres-
dener Hofkapell-
kammer.
Göring steht auf dem
Nicht der Überlebens-
kammer der Stadt Dres-
den. (Göring)

[illegible]

„Hochachtungsvoll“
 der hochw. Bischofshofmeister
 Johann Baptist Dr. ...

„Die Menschen sind Engel“,
die Nichterwartbarkeit des aus seiner Dignität herausgeworfenen Wesens, auch
„eine Neugierde und eine Art Schamlosigkeit“ sein sollte. Für den Staat gelte die Idee
„Gerechtigkeit, nicht Macht.“

Kaiser-Fine
"Leute"
Familie:
von Hart
Feldens-Hofen "Le-
mille" - genannt
Speckel von H. v.
Münchberg-Hofen

Heft Das
Morgblatt
des Deutschen
Kunst
Schmeiers
für seine Kunst,
Poesie, Pöppel,
Vollständiges
und deutsches
Kunstversteher

Private collection, Stuttgart.

German Artists (Asso) and taken from the inventory of the Dresdner Stadtmuseum. Between 1933 and 1937 it was shown in thirteen cities, the inventory being supplemented by local works in each case. By touring the country during four years, the Dresden show exceeded the otherwise customary local impact of the Schreckenskammern. Individual venues were Hagen/Westfalen, Nuremberg, Dortmund, Regensburg, Munich, Ingolstadt, Darmstadt, Frankfurt, Mainz, Koblenz, Worms, and finally Wiesbaden—before the ex-

hibition was integrated en bloc into the Munich exhibition of the same name in July 1937.

In Frankfurt the exhibition was presented in the so-called Volksbildungsheim (National Education Home) from September 1 to 30, 1936. It was promoted by the National Socialist group Kraft durch Freude (Strength by Pleasure) and the Hans-Thoma-Gesellschaft (Hans-Thoma-Society). From the published reviews it is clear that the Frankfurt show was also based on the antithetic exhibition principle: "But then there is also a small exhibition presenting the justification of the national socialist fight in a sanctuary of real, lasting German art."¹⁰ This "model cabinet" contained paintings and graphics of unknown provenance by Fritz Boehle, Hans Adolf Bühler, Georg Poppe, Otto Scholderer, Hans Thoma, and others. Several sources show that this defamatory show in Frankfurt encountered resistance from some of the viewers. *The Frankfurter Volksblatt* carried a detailed report of the criticism expressed by a group of visitors, who, in the article, were defamed as being "Jewish or of Jewish origin."¹¹ According to various files of the Stadtarchiv as well as an account by an eyewitness, there was even a stir created in connection with the visit of a high school class, which was dealt with by various authorities over a period of more than two and a half months. A teacher from a public school had made some positive remarks to his class of seniors about the works exhibited, with the result that he got involved in an argument with a Nazi informer, who denounced him to the regional director of the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (Reich Chamber of Visual Arts) in Hessen-Nassau.¹² Certainly, these controversies, some of which were held in public, reinforced the sensational character of the exhibition.

The total state control of the arts was formed on a legal and organizational-institutional basis. It was part of a process of streamlining, comprising all fields of society, politics, economy, and culture, in the course of which the party and the state were united. Besides the Professional Civil Service Restoration Act, important changes in the cultural sector were the setting up of the Ministry of National Enlightenment and Propaganda under Goebbels (March 11, 1933) and the Reich Chamber of Culture subordinate to this ministry (November 15, 1933).¹³ The latter consisted of seven special chambers for the fields of literature, press, broadcasting, theater, music, film, and the visual arts. It was instrumental in controlling all persons working in the cultural field and their products. Only those who were members of a chamber were permitted to practice their profession. A test of the political reliability and racial ancestry of applicants made it possible to exclude unwanted artists

and thus impose a professional ban on them. In view of this complete elimination of the autonomy of art, it sounds like pure cynicism when Goebbels promised on the occasion of the inauguration of the Chamber of Culture: "We do not want to restrict the artistic-cultural development but to promote it."¹⁴ The formal streamlining of art was completed by Goebbels's prohibition of art criticism in November 1936.

In spite of these measures, the development of National Socialist art policy up to 1937 did not follow a straight course nor was it free of contradiction. Besides individual protests against both the Schreckenskammern and the widespread condemnation of the avant-garde, an oppositional group arose and began to fight in public for the recognition of expressionism as "German" and "Nordic" art. Unlike most of the museum departments of modern art, which had been closed in 1933 and their collections ordered into storage, the Berliner Kronprinzenpalais remained open until the "year of the Olympics" (1936). The artists ostracized in the precursor shows were able to exhibit in private galleries and art societies and even obtained state commissions. This paradoxical situation was possible because of the power struggle raging among the top leaders of the Nazi party with regard to responsibilities and the future course of cultural policy—particularly involved were the rivals Goebbels, founder of the Combat League Rosenberg, and Minister of Education Bernhard Rust. Last but not least, it was the function of the 1937 exhibitions "Entartete Kunst" and "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" (Great German Art) to finally establish definite guidelines for the National Socialist cultural policy.

In order to understand why the show "Entartete Kunst" took place when it did, another important factor has to be taken into account. In 1937, the phase of consolidation in the field of domestic affairs had largely been completed. Hitler's policy vis-à-vis his allies had strengthened Germany's position abroad, and at the same time the economy was beginning to flourish. The time had come for the rulers to account for the first four years of their government and to make sure that the population would consent with enthusiasm to their further activities. As one important instrument of their propagandistic self-portrayal they chose the tool of exhibition. Under the title "Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit" (Give Me Four Years' Time) a gigantic show promoting economic and military performance was held in Berlin from April 30 to June 20, 1937 (fig. 4). One of the 1.35 million visitors was the French ambassador André François-Poncet, who made the following note in his diary: "One can see only fighter planes, U-boats, and tanks. These are not

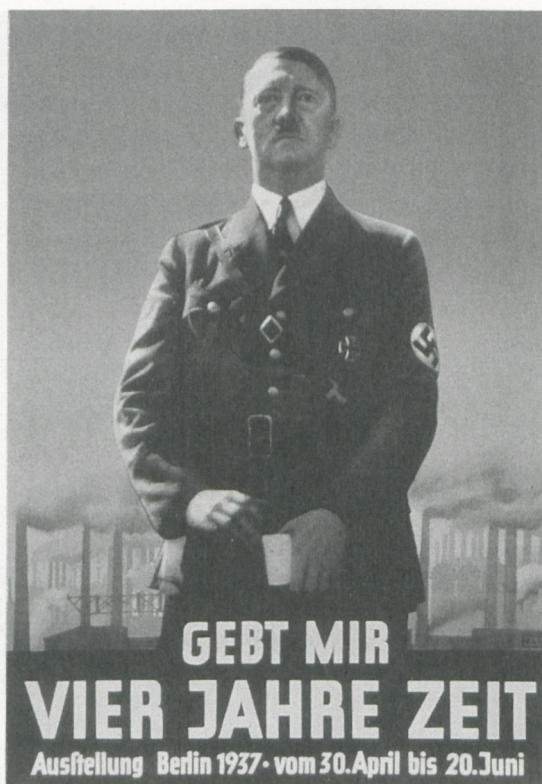


FIG. 4. Exhibition "Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit"
(Give Me Four Years' Time), Berlin, 1937; poster.

Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich.

the only indications of Hitler's thoughts and plans. The tone of his speeches becomes sharper and sharper, especially when he is talking about Soviet Russia."¹⁵

The "creation of new German art" was another achievement to be celebrated within the framework of a representative show in Munich, the "Hauptstadt der Bewegung" (Capital of Movement). On July 18, 1937, the "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" (fig. 5) was solemnly inaugurated in the newly built House of German Art, the building replacing the glass palace that burned down in 1931 was soon popularly called Palazzo Kitschi because of its monstrous size.¹⁶ In forty roomy, brightly lit halls of the temple of art, the visitor was shown about 1,200 sculptures, paintings, and graphics by 557

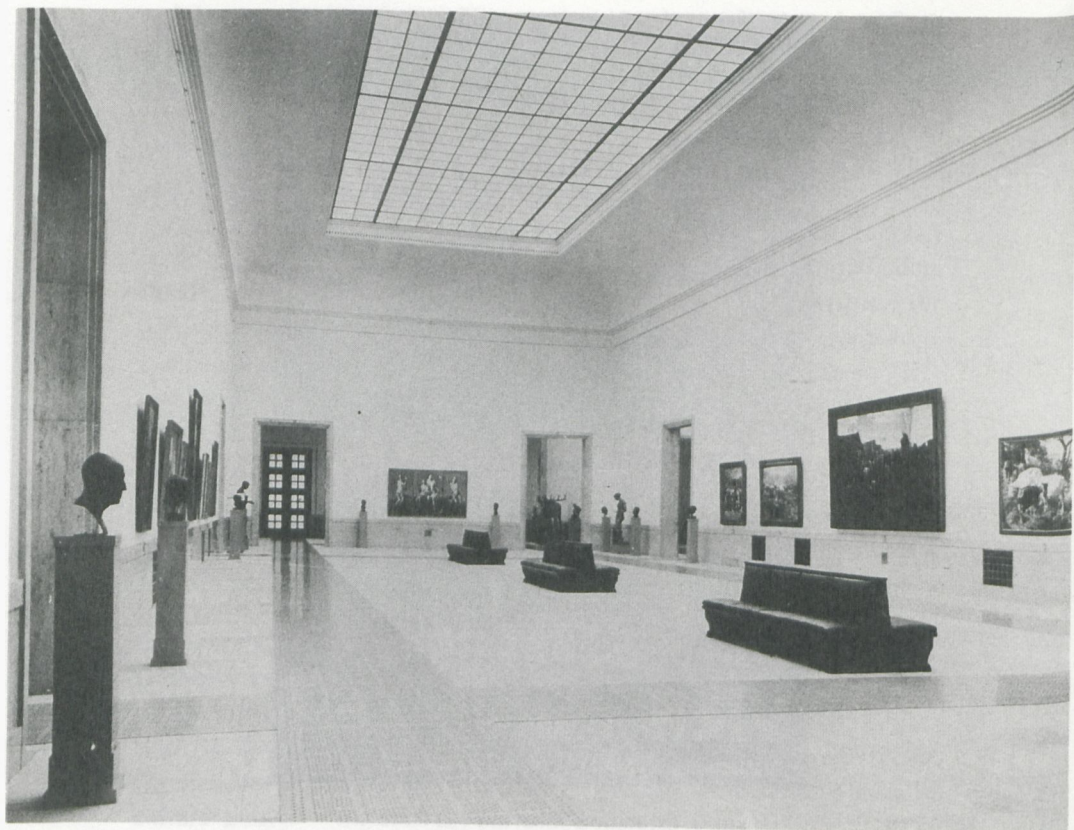


FIG. 5. Gallery in the exhibition "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" (Great German Art Exhibition), Munich, 1937; Adolf Ziegler's triptych *Die vier Elemente* (The Four Elements) is on the far wall.

Bildarchiv Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

artists arranged in a deliberately spacious and clear manner. But what was presented as a supposedly new and revolutionary style of art, as the "expression of a new era," was mainly a second- or third-rate rehash of conventional historical scenes, landscapes, and nude paintings. Even filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl admits to having suffered when visiting the show: "How embarrassing Adolf Ziegler's four naked bodies were as 'The Four Elements' . . . or Hitler as a 'knight' on a white nag and another dozen of heroic and allegoric portraits of the Führer."¹⁷ In propagandistic terms as well, the success of the

exhibition was mediocre: it is true that according to press reports it attained the considerable number of 420,000 visitors in the three and a half months it was open ("Entartete Kunst," however, recorded approximately two million). The interest in buying "great German art" was also very limited.

While Hitler in his inaugural address in front of the House of German Art announced, snorting with rage, a "relentless purging war" against "decadence in art," feverish work was done in the arcades of the nearby Hofgarten. The rooms usually presenting the collection of plaster casts of the University Institute for Archaeology had been emptied and the defamatory show "Entartete Kunst" hastily set up. As a contrast to the "German" art, it was to be inaugurated the following day with a speech by Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts. Ziegler—furnished with a decree from Propaganda Minister Goebbels and accompanied by a commission—had in a lightning operation from July 4 to 10 descended on the most important collections of modern art in Germany, confiscating hundreds of works of art and shipping them to Munich. In his address broadcast by all German radio stations, Ziegler said: "All around us you see the monstrous offspring of insanity, impudence, ineptitude, and sheer degeneracy. Train wagons would not have been sufficient to remove all this rubbish from the German museums. But this will be done, and it will be done very soon."¹⁸ Only a few weeks later this threat came true: in a second, much more extensive operation throughout the country, several committees appointed by Ziegler confiscated thousands of works of art in more than a hundred museums. The first operation had been a superficial inspection carried out under pressure in order to requisition exhibits for the Munich show. The second operation represented a systematic liquidation of modern art in the whole of Germany. Extremely affected were the major art museums of Essen, Hamburg, Berlin, Mannheim, and Frankfurt. The Gesetz über Einziehung von Erzeugnissen entarteter Kunst (Law on the Confiscation of Products of Degenerate Art) was passed on May 31, 1938, in order to legalize the expropriation of artworks and to establish a legal basis for their sale.

How did the defamatory show manifest itself to the more than two million visitors from both Germany and abroad?¹⁹ Crowded together in nine narrow rooms (figs. 6 and 7), two on the ground floor and seven on the first floor, were about 600 paintings, sculptures, graphics, photographs, and books, by 120 artists. The spectrum of the artistic styles ranged from German impressionism (Corinth) and expressionism (Barlach, Lehmbruck, Heckel, Kirchner, Marc, Mueller, Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff) to Dadaism (Schwitters)



FIG. 6. Galleries in the exhibition "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art),
Munich, 1937; works by various expressionist artists.

Archiv der Alten Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

and constructivism (Mondrian, Lissitzky, Dexel), and from artists from the Bauhaus and all forms of abstract art (Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee, Schlemmer) to the New Objectivity (Dix, Schlichter, Scholz). Adler, Beckmann, Chagall, Grosz, Hofer, and Kokoschka were represented as well. It was the expressionists, in particular the artists of *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), who were subject to extremely violent attacks. An attempt had been made to structure the exhibition according to theme—such as religious subjects, representations of women, scenes from rural life, landscapes—but the plan was not consistently carried out.

The exhibition was characterized by a distinctive form of presentation. Hung close together in narrow and half-dark rooms, the pictures conveyed an impression of chaos and oppressive narrowness. The high purchase prices—partly due to the inflation—were posted in order to provoke indignation about the alleged waste of tax money. The fact that minors were forbidden entry contributed to the exhibition's aura of sensationalism. The crowd of viewers—an average of more than 23,000 persons a day for two and a half months—were confronted with polemically aggressive captions on the walls encouraging resentment toward modern art and raising anti-Semitic and anti-Communist apprehensions. Thus emotions were heightened and hatred was fostered against artists and critics, dealers and museum directors. This created an associative framework with the powerful agenda of reducing all the artworks to the same level, to prevent any single one from



FIG. 7. Gallery in the exhibition "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art), Munich, 1937; Room 3 with the Dada wall; works by George Grosz, Christoph Voll, Kurt Schwitters, Richard Haizmann, Paul Klee, Oswald Herzog, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Margarethe Moll, and others; postcard.
George Grosz-Archiv, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

having an individual presence, or from being perceived in isolation. The psychological effects thus achieved were given a political function. The art historian Georg Bussmann is worth quoting here:

Captions and pictures, juxtaposed or arranged in orderless confusion, are intended to stir the viewer's emotions, triggering feelings of repulsion and indignation; these feelings in turn, like the opinions expressed in the captions, are intended to encourage a sense of satisfaction at the demise of this type of art and ultimately to inspire agreement with the "revolutionary" new beginning and political succession.²⁰

Even though one can speak of how viewers were conditioned by propagandistic methods, it is necessary to consider the visitors' predisposition. What level of knowledge and expectations did they have? Most of the public were probably extremely susceptible to this rabble-rousing propaganda be-

cause few people were familiar with modern art, which had not yet received widespread acceptance in the 1930s. For many visitors such exhibitions were their first encounter with avant-garde art. As far as their expectations were concerned, the sensationalism promoted by the press had played an important role. Carl Linfert wrote in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "For a very great number of those present, it is certainly the first time in their life that they are visiting an exhibition. Most of them had come with the will and the awareness that they would be outraged."²¹

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the vocabulary employed by the exhibitions and the publications accompanying them.²² The concept of "degeneration" had been transferred from the field of psychiatry to the visual arts by Max Nordau, who published his book *Entartung* (Degeneration) in 1892–93. Debates about art policy soon adopted it. A polemic against the Munich Secession written by Martin Feddersen in 1894 was headed "Die Entartung der Münchener Kunst" (The Degeneration of Munich Art). "Jewish-Bolshevist Art," a slogan that was almost synonymous with "degenerate art," was, however, a purely National Socialist construct. It was on this irrational level, and not by seemingly formal distinctions or aesthetic criteria, that modern art could best be appropriated for fascist purposes. The other reproaches (obscenity, violation of religious feelings, appeal to class struggle, military sabotage, relationship to the artistic activities of mentally ill persons) may easily be subsumed under this one concept and applied to very different styles.

After its spectacular start in Munich, the defamatory show was sent on tour by the Propaganda Ministry. In spring 1938 it could be seen in the Berlin House of Art (fig. 8). For this second venue, the works had been reorganized, leading to a fundamental change in the show's appearance: whereas it had been the expressionists who bore the brunt of the attack in Munich, it was the sociocritical, politically committed art of the 1920s that was preponderant in Berlin, such as works by Otto Dix and George Grosz. This tendency also determined the choice of works reproduced in the notorious exhibition guide (fig. 9), a quarter of which clearly demonstrated social criticism. The guide had not been available before the Berlin venue. The 32-page rabble-rousing pamphlet had a clever structure: in a pseudo-scientific manner it divided the "host of manifestations of degeneration" into nine sections, such as "disregard for the basics of technique," "violation of religious feelings," "appeal to class struggle and anarchy," "incitement of military sabotage, ridiculing of the German front soldier," and "representation of moral decline, idealization of the prostitute." It was interspersed with quotations from Hit-



FIG. 8. Gallery in the exhibition "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art), Berlin, 1938; works by Jankel Adler and Marc Chagall. Bilderdienst Süddeutscher Verlag, Munich.

ler's speeches given at party rallies in 1933 and 1935 as well as on the occasion of the inauguration of the House of German Art. Opposite the text pages were reproductions of individual works, reduced to the size of a stamp and corresponding only in part to the actual objects on display. The pictures were arranged in complete disorder and were explained by cynical comments. The most infamous technique of discrimination is undoubtedly the unscrupulous use of "insane art." On four out of sixteen illustrated pages, works of modern art (such as a self-portrait by Kokoschka done in 1923) are contrasted with works from the famous Prinzhorn Collection of the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Heidelberg (fig. 10). Depending on the text accompanying the illustrations, the strategy of defamation was applied at different levels: either the visitor was to regard the artists' creations and those of the mentally ill as "similar" and thus be led to the false conclusion that the artists were also "ill" (and in National Socialist terms this meant "racially inferior," and thus ultimately "unworthy of life"); or the "comparison" was to prove that "incurably insane nonartists" still created "better" works (i.e.,



FIG. 9. Cover of the exhibition guide for "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art), 1937-38; image: Otto Freundlich, *Der neue Mensch* (The New Man), 1912. Plaster cast, height 139 cm (54¾ in.); location unknown. Archive of the author.

more similar to the natural model) than modern artists did, thus proving the artist's lack of ability. A third variant was expressed in Hitler's characterization: "deliberate madness."

At this point it becomes clear that the artists of the European avant-garde had in many respects provided antimodernist propagandists with an easy target. In seeking sources of inspiration and new possibilities of expression, and rejecting the more traditional models favored by their predecessors, they had turned to the creations of children, the mentally ill, and so-called primitive tribes. Fascism mercilessly avenged this seeking! Of course, the warning expressed by Doctor Hans Prinzhorn in 1922 in his groundbreaking book

der Mitwelt mit Gewalt als Wirklichkeiten aufzuwähnen versuchen, oder ihr gar als „Kunst“ vorsetzen wollen.

Nein, hier gibt es nur zwei Möglichkeiten: Entweder diese sogenannten „Künstler“ leben die Dinge wirklich so und glauben daher an das, was sie darstellen, dann wäre nur zu unteruchen, ob ihre Augensehler entweder auf mechanische Weise oder durch Vererbung zustande gekommen sind. Im einen Fall tief bedauerlich für diese Unglücklichen, im zweiten wichtig für das Reichsinnenministerium, das sich dann mit der Frage zu beschäftigen hätte, wenigstens eine weitere Vererbung derartiger grauenhafter Sehstörungen zu unterbinden. Oder aber sie glauben selbst nicht an die Wirklichkeit solcher Eindrücke, sondern sie bemühen sich aus anderen Gründen, die Nation mit diesem Humbug zu belästigen, dann fällt es ein Vergehen in das Gebiet der Strafrechtspflege.... Es interessiert mich dabei auch nicht im geringsten, ob sich diese Auch-Künstler die von ihnen gelegten Eier dann gegenseitig begadern und damit begutachten oder nicht! Denn der Künstler schafft nicht für den Künstler, sondern er schafft genau so wie alle Anderen für das Volk! Und wir werden dafür Sorge tragen, daß gerade das Volk von jetzt ab wieder zum Richter über seine Kunst aufgerufen wird.

Durch bewusste Verrücktheiten sich auszuzeichnen, um damit die Aufmerksamkeit zu erringen, das zeugt nicht nur von einem künstlerischen Verfall, sondern auch von einem moralischen Defekt.

Der Führer
Reichsparteitag 1933.



Welche von diesen drei

Zeichnungen ist wohl eine Dilettantenarbeit vom Insassen eines Irrenhauses? Staunen Sie: Die rechte obere! Die beiden anderen dagegen wurden einst als meisterliche Graphiken Kokoschka bezeichnet.



FIG. 10. Exhibition guide "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art), Berlin, 1937–38; pages 30–31, with works by Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Birnbacher (mentally ill patient of the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Heidelberg).

Archive of the author.

Bildnerie der Geisteskranken (Image Making by the Mentally Ill), was preached to deaf ears: "It is superficial and wrong to construct out of similarity of outward appearance equality of underlying mental conditions."²³ And as far as sociocritical and left-wing art was concerned, the Nazi reproaches might perfectly mirror the artists' intentions. To accuse Dix of "military sabotage" hits the nail on the head, for what did that combatant intend by his apocalyptic paintings if not to fight against war and militarism?

The propaganda strategists were convinced of the success of their defamatory show. Between 1938 and 1941, a reduced version of the exhibition traveled with changing contents to twelve towns of the Reich: Berlin, Leipzig,

Düsseldorf, Salzburg, Hamburg, Stettin, Weimar, Vienna, Frankfurt, Chemnitz, Waldenburg/Silesia, and Halle. According to press reports, it was visited by more than 3.2 million persons in all. On November 12, 1941, the exhibition "Entartete Kunst" was given back to the Propaganda Ministry. The list stored in the Bundesarchiv Potsdam mentions 7 sculptures, about 50 paintings, and approximately 180 graphics.²⁴ A comparison with the checklist of objects shown in Munich in the summer of 1937 demonstrates that of the works returned in 1941, only 8 paintings, a sculpture, and 32 graphics belonged to the initial show. These are presumably the only works that were exhibited at all thirteen venues.

In order to adequately estimate the significance of the defamatory art exhibitions as an instrument of National Socialist propaganda, one has to broaden one's horizons and take into account other exhibition projects. The National Socialists had recognized the propagandistic possibilities of such exhibitions staged as *Gemeinschaftsrituale*²⁵ (community rituals) and made use of them for their own purposes. One of the most effective instruments of mass propaganda used to censor the arts and popularize fascist ideology was undoubtedly the exhibition as such, particularly the traveling show aimed at a large public. The Schreckenskammern, especially the Dresden show "Entartete Kunst" of 1933, marked the beginning of this practice. The strategy was based on the antithetic principle, and the names of the positive, often thematic exhibitions sounded like the topics of a party propaganda catalogue: "The Elite," "Heroic Art," "The Streets of Adolf Hitler in Art," "The German Forest," "The Beauty of Labor," "The Greatness of Germany." From 1939 on, there was a rapid increase in shows glorifying the war and condemning the enemy: "Scenes and Portraits from the Poland Campaign," "Front Art," "The Pirate State of England," "The Soviet Paradise." In contrast, exhibitions dealing with conceptions of the enemy took a negative stance. The precursor exhibitions, which were primarily aimed at the Weimar Republic with its parliamentary system, and the show "Entartete Kunst" of 1937, which was used to generate popular support for the planned war in the East as well as the mass murder of the Jewish people, belonged to this group. Furthermore, from 1936 on the so-called anti-Bolshevist exhibitions, and from 1937 on the show "The Wandering Jew," served to further ideological preparation for war and mass murder.

In our context, it is of interest that in these latter touring exhibitions as well, works of modern art were shown with the intention of ostracizing them. A photograph from the "Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition" in Munich in 1936 (fig. 11) shows several works of art, such as paintings by Beckmann

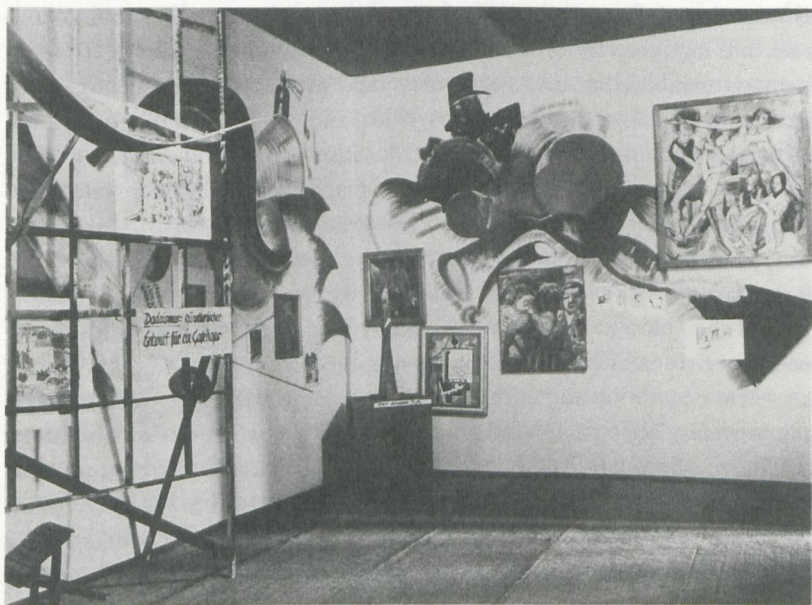


FIG. 11. Gallery in the exhibition “Antibolschewistische Ausstellung” (Anti-Bolshevik Exhibition), Munich, 1936; identifiable works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Willi Baumeister, Paul Kleinschmidt, and Max Beckmann.
Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

(*Kreuzabnahme*, *Descent from the Cross*; today in the Museum of Modern Art, New York), Paul Kleinschmidt, Baumeister, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (*Selbstportrait als Soldat*, *Self-portrait as Soldier*; now at Allan Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio), which had all been confiscated from the Frankfurt Städel Museum, as well as the sculpture *Das Ich* (*The Ego*) by Oswald Herzog, which had been removed from the Berliner Nationalgalerie. It is quite evident that the exhibition design employed here in 1936 is already that typical of the Munich 1937 show “*Entartete Kunst*” (figs. 6 and 7)—namely an optically dynamic, spacious mode of presentation combining picture and script, constituting the principles of collage. The installation view (fig. 11) shows the obvious influence of modern exhibition architecture as developed in the late 1920s by El Lissitzky and the members of the Bauhaus, many of whom were denounced by the exhibitions.

The censorship of the visual arts in Nazi Germany ranged from the dismissals of museum staffs and artists via the *Schreckenskammern* to the closing down of exhibitions and the confiscation of publications; from the

elimination of the avant-garde in the museums to the extensive confiscation, sale, and finally methodical destruction of thousands of works of art; from bans on exhibitions, sale, and professional activities, and other reprisals against unwanted artists, to their psychical and physical annihilation. It led to the persecution and flight of numerous intellectuals and artists into exile or inner emigration. The other side of fascist censorship concerned the officially promoted art production. The state cultivated an art that sought only to further a racist human image and the ideological preparation for war, holocaust, and so-called euthanasia: be it with a falsely populist illustration of the "blood and soil" myth, sloshy landscape idylls, glorification of military virtues, or an idealizing presentation of the "Aryan" family. Art thus served as decoration and at the same time as a stabilizing element for a system that despised human values. Submissive artists worked as collaborators.

The total liquidation of the autonomy of art, replaced by central control of the entire cultural life in the Third Reich, corresponded to the state's claim to total power and authority. With pressure and terror, it confiscated the freedom of the arts warranted and protected in the constitution of the Weimar Republic. This was, by the way, in response to censorship in the Kaiserreich, and was taken up again in 1949 in the constitutional law of the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁶

What was the difference between art policy in the Third Reich and censorship of the traditional kind, or the religiously motivated iconoclastic events of the Middle Ages? It was not only that man and work were systematically annihilated without consequence, but that art and art policy were abused for political purposes and the totalitarian rulers turned art policy into a tool with which to lead and dominate the people. And this instrument also served to eliminate a form of art whose effects were feared because it represented individuality, diversity, and intellectual independence in a (partly intentionally) provocative manner—an independence that contained a critical potential as a form of intellectual strength, which those in power might well consider a threat, at least subjectively. As far as the practice and method of National Socialist censorship is concerned, it is remarkable that the objects that were censored were not withheld from the public but were rather systematically exposed.²⁷

Until the 1980s the campaign and exhibition "Entartete Kunst" were generally considered as isolated evidence of Nazi cultural barbarism. But more recent research has placed less emphasis on "poor taste" and more on the historical roots of these ideas and the ideology behind the art policies, as well as on the social and political context of the Third Reich. From this approach, it

becomes clear that the regime did not consider avant-garde art as one of its main opponents but rather used it as a "spektakuläres Paradenfeld ihrer Propaganda"²⁸ (spectacular and perfect vehicle for propaganda). In the context of the general persecution, the fight against modern art proved to be a "means to further objectives not longer concerned with cultural policy: the campaign thereafter contributed to the construction of racist and anti-Communist concepts of the enemy, which the National Socialist regime needed to persecute minorities, to support its interference in Spain and to prepare its Eastern campaign."²⁹ The avant-garde was thus *verwertet* (made use of).

Certainly these functions and appearances of censorship are phenomena of a fascist dictatorship and are conceivable only within the framework of a totalitarian state in this particular manner. But when we discuss today the topical question of the dialectics of culture and administration,³⁰ of public promotion and state censorship in art, it seems to me that we should reflect carefully on this subject. For it clarifies for us the potential dangers and mechanisms of an ideological monopoly and misuse of art for the purpose of materializing overriding interests. The controversy in connection with the National Endowment for the Arts shows not least that the autonomy of art, conceived as a field for experimentation and scope for individual action, is a value for which, even in our democracies, we should never cease to strive.

Translation by Katrin Gatzke

NOTES

1. Program of the NSDAP, § 23 c, section 3; quoted in Werner Maser, *Der Sturm auf die Republik: Frühgeschichte der NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1973), 471. The party, founded in January 1919 under the name Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei, was renamed in 1920.

2. Concerning the "affair Tschudi," see Nicolaas Teeuwisse, *Vom Salon zur Secession: Berliner Kunstleben zwischen Tradition und Aufbruch zur Moderne, 1871–1900* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1986), 197–220, and Barbara Paul, *Hugo von Tschudi und die moderne französische Kunst im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993).

3. *Ein Protest deutscher Künstler, Mit Einleitung von Carl Vinnen* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1911), 2–16. See also Ron Manheim, "Im Kampf um die Kunst": *Die Diskussion von 1911 über zeitgenössische Kunst in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Sautter and Lackmann, 1987).

4. As one example, I would like to mention the wooden sculpture *Kruzifixus* (The Crucified Christ; probably destroyed) by Ludwig Gies, the public presentation of

which led to a scandal in 1921–22 culminating in an attack on the work. See Jenns Eric Howoldt, "Der Kruzifixus von Ludwig Gies: Ein Beispiel 'entarteter Kunst' in Lübeck," *Der Wagen* (1988): 164–74; Bernd Ernsting, "Scandalum Crucis: Der Lübecker Kruzifixus und sein Schicksal," in *Ludwig Gies, 1887–1966*, exh. cat. (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum, Schloß Morsbroich, 1990), 57–71.

5. Concerning the past history of the National Socialist cultural policy and the activities of the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur, see Stephanie Barron, "1937—Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany," in Stephanie Barron, ed., "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 9–23 (with further bibliographical references). Pages 405–11 of that catalogue give a detailed bibliography on the subject.

6. Concerning the National Socialist propaganda exhibitions described in this essay, in particular the precursors and the venues of the show "Entartete Kunst," see Christoph Zuschlag, "*Entartete Kunst*": *Ausstellungsstrategien im Nazi-Deutschland* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995); idem, "An 'Educational Exhibition': The Precursors of 'Entartete Kunst' and Its Individual Venues," in Barron, "*Degenerate Art*," 83–103; idem, "*Der Kunstverein und die 'Neue Zeit': Der Badische Kunstverein zwischen 1933 und 1945*," in Jutta Dresch and Wilfried Rößling, eds., *Bilder im Zirkel, 175 Jahre Badischer Kunstverein Karlsruhe*, exh. cat. (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 1993), 191–207; idem, "Die verfemte Moderne: Die Ausstellung 'Entartete Kunst'—München 1937," *Kunstpresse*, April 1992, 28–32.

7. See Hans-Jürgen Buderer, "*Entartete Kunst*": *Beschlagnahmeaktionen in der Städtischen Kunsthalle Mannheim 1937*, Kunst and Dokumentation, 10, exh. cat. (Mannheim: Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1987; 2d ed., 1990); Karoline Hille, *Spuren der Moderne: Die Mannheimer Kunsthalle von 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 274–309; Christoph Zuschlag, "Das Schicksal von Chagalls 'Rabbiner': Zur Geschichte der Kunsthalle Mannheim im Nationalsozialismus," in Jörg Schadt, ed., *Mannheim unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Mannheim: Edition Quadrat, 1997).

8. *Mannheimer Morgen*, March 13, 1959; quoted in Buderer, *Beschlagnahmeaktionen*, 37, note 5.

9. According to an account given by Walter Passarge, who, however, did not come to Mannheim until 1936, when he succeeded Hartlaub; quoted in Buderer, *Beschlagnahmeaktionen*, 19.

10. *Nationalblatt*, August 30, 1936; see also the reports in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, August 30 and September 9, 1936.

11. Hans Pott, "Alljuda contra Nationalsozialismus, Herr Professor Beck und eine Handvoll Judenstämmlinge kritisieren die Frankfurter Ausstellung 'Entartete Kunst,'" *Frankfurter Volksblatt*, September 9, 1936.

12. Stadtarchiv Frankfurt/M., Magistratsakten Az. 6022, Bd. 1, Bl. 258–65 c. Hermann Krämer, "Schubert, die Frankfurter Ausstellung 'Entartete Kunst' und was Koschka dazu sagte," in *Jahrbuch der Wöhlerschule* (1986): 51–52.

13. Robert Brady, "The National Chamber of Culture ('Reichskulturkammer')," in

Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, eds., *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester: Winchester Press, 1990), 80–88; Volker Dahm, "Anfänge und Ideologie der Reichskulturkammer: Die 'Berufsgemeinschaft' als Instrument kulturpolitischer Steuerung und sozialer Reglementierung," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 34 (1986): 53–84.

14. *Völkischer Beobachter*, Berlin edition, November 15, 1933; quoted in Heinrich Dilly, *Deutsche Kunsthistoriker, 1933–1945* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1988), 24.

15. André François-Poncet, *Als Botschafter in Berlin, 1931–1938* (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg Verlag, 1947), 285.

16. Today the building is called House of Art. It houses the Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst. However, there is controversy over whether the building should be pulled down or not. See Hans-Joachim Müller, "Die Entsorgung des Kunsttempels," *Die Zeit*, January 26, 1990.

17. Leni Riefenstahl, *Memoiren* (Munich and Hamburg: Knaus, 1987), 293.

18. Quotation from the complete printed version of Ziegler's speech in Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed., *Die "Kunststadt" München 1937, Nationalsozialismus und "Entartete Kunst,"* exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel, 1987), 217.

19. See Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, "'Entartete Kunst,' Munich 1937: A Reconstruction," in Barron, "Degenerate Art," 45–81.

20. Georg Bussmann, "'Entartete Kunst': Blick auf einen nützlichen Mythos," in *Deutsche Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert: Malerei und Plastik, 1905–1985*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1986), 109.

21. Carl Linfert, "Rückblick auf 'Entartete Kunst,'" *Frankfurter Zeitung*, November 14, 1937.

22. In this context the most important book is Wolfgang Willrich's *Säuberung des Kunsttempels: Eine kunstpolitische Kampfschrift zur Gesundung deutscher Kunst im Geiste nordischer Art* (Munich and Berlin: J. F. Lehmanns, 1937). The painter Willrich (1897–1948) played a decisive role in the organization of the Munich exhibition "Entartete Kunst," with his book providing guidelines.

23. Hans Prinzhorn, *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken: Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung* (Berlin: Springer, 1922; quotation from the 4th ed. 1994), 346.

24. Zentrales Staatsarchiv Potsdam (Abteilungen des Bundesarchivs Koblenz), Best. 50.01–1018, Bl. 29–36.

25. Walter Grasskamp, *Museumsgründer und Museumsstürmer: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Kunstmuseums* (Munich: Beck, 1981), 45.

26. Weimarer Reichsverfassung (constitution of the Weimar Republic), art. 142: "Die Kunst, die Wissenschaft und ihre Lehre sind frei. Der Staat gewährt ihnen Schutz und nimmt an ihrer Pflege teil" (The arts, the sciences, and their teaching are free. The state protects them and participates in their cultivation). Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (constitutional law of the FRG), art. 5, paragraph 3:

"Kunst und Wissenschaft, Forschung und Lehre sind frei" (The arts and the sciences, research and teaching are free); quotations from Sieghart Ott, *Kunst und Staat: Der Künstler zwischen Freiheit und Zensur* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968), 102, 104.

27. This was, of course, a safe choice given that the audience was not already familiar with the work; yet it argues, oddly, for the power of art, since the policy implicitly acknowledges the power of the individual, unique work of art over its reproductions. The question whether an exhibition of reproductions would have been as successful is to be considered.

28. Walter Grasskamp, "Die unbewältigte Moderne: Entartete Kunst und documenta I, Verfemung und Entschärfung," in *Museum der Gegenwart: Kunst in öffentlichen Sammlungen bis 1937*, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1987–88), 15.

29. Hans-Ernst Mittag, "'Entartete Kunst': Künstlerische Rückblicke," *Kritische Berichte*, no. 4, 1990, 34.

30. Theodor W. Adorno, "Kultur und Verwaltung," *Merkur*, no. 2, 1960, 101–21; Hilmar Hoffmann, "Staatliche Lenkung der Kunst?" in Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, ed., *Kunst heute und ihr Publikum: Vorträge im Wintersemester, 1988/89* (Heidelberg: Heidelbergerverlagsanstalt, 1990), 9–18.