# “Monuments of German Baseness”: The Legacy of Nazi-Era Art in Germany and the United States from 1945 to the Present

By

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**Abstract**

This project follows the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany and the United States through the treatment of artwork produced under the Nazi regime at the official governmental level, in the press, academic circles, and among the wider public from the postwar era to the present. It argues that the path taken through time and space of the Nazi-era artwork, including the German War Art Collection, is an important lens through which to understand *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany. Furthermore, it shows that this process comprised emotionally charged political and cultural processes that occurred in West Germany *and* the United States from the immediate postwar era through the Cold War to today – *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is not just a German story, and instead has taken, and continues to take place within an international setting. The U.S. steered, consciously and unconsciously, the process of "coming to terms with the past" in Germany through this artwork. The works' historical trajectory was a mirror for both the U.S. government's and public's fears and desires, especially as inflected by the Cold War, regarding the relationship between Germany's past and the U.S.'s present and future, and one that was heavily inflected by the Cold War.

The starting point for this process is the so-called German War Art Collection, a group of nearly 9,000 works of art created by artists working in the Nazi regime, including paintings and drawings from so-called *Kriegsmaler* ("combat artists"), that were collected and confiscated from Germany by American Captain Gordon W. Gilkey immediately following the Second World War. These works were sent to the United States for storage for several decades in order to "protect" the German people in the postwar years from "reverting" to Nazism. The dissertation traces the fate of this artwork, as well as other smaller collections of Nazi-era artwork, in both the United States and West Germany between the postwar period and the present. Using a series of "snapshots," or historical moments, it examines the reactions – at the political and governmental level, at the cultural institutional level, and at the intimate, personal level – at key moments in both countries to trace the contentious, often recursive, road to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The first chapter focuses on the case of Gordon Gilkey and his seizure of Nazi-era artwork from occupied Germany, as well as his subsequent relationships with many of the artists whose works he confiscated in the postwar and nascent Cold War era. In the next chapter, the focus shifts to a seminal exhibition of Nazi-era artwork in the turbulent wake of the progressive 68er movement in West Germany. The penultimate chapter returns to the United States to trace the return and repatriation of thousands of works in United States custody back into West German custody. Finally, the last chapter examines the role of leftist German politics and the Green Party in posing the question of "what to do with Nazi-era art" in a country that continues to debate how to confront and work through its past.

# Table of Contents

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# Introduction

**Fort Belvoir, Virginia**

The warehouse is vast and cold and gray, illuminated by unforgiving fluorescent lights. It sits in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, an army post founded during the First World War, and former home of the Army Engineering School, located a little more than 20 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. The yellow lights of the storage facility illuminate racks of paintings and an array of bronze and marble sculptures and busts, ranging in size from massive canvases to postcard-sized watercolors. An army art custodian gestures to several racks of paintings, indicating that they are part of the U.S. army art program, paintings and drawings created by American troops on the frontlines of wars ranging from World War I to Afghanistan.[1]

Throughout the immense space are dollies where other large canvases rest, and it is these paintings that immediately draw attention, as their subject matter departs radically from the renderings of American struggling with the unforgiving realities of war. One painting looms forebodingly, more than twice human-sized, in a wooden frame. Within the frame, the figure of Adolf Hitler stands with authority on a wooden pedestal in front of the familiar red Nazi flag, rendered like a preacher, lecturing to a group of men and women who sit and stand, enraptured. [Fig. 1] The overwhelming painting is Nazi-era artist Hermann Otto Hoyer's "In the Beginning Was the Word," a 1937 depiction of a quasi-messianic Hitler mesmerizing an audience during the 1920s (the painting is now part of the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The painting's strange draw comes not only from its overwhelming size, but the bizarre juxtaposition of its taboo subject matter with its setting and surroundings. Just a few steps

[1] Based on a visit to the U.S. Army Center of Military History's storage site for the German War Art Collection by the author in June of 2015.

away, another large metal dolly props up two paintings whose imagery is even more uncanny. [Fig. 2] Both paintings are by German painter and combat artist, or *Kriegsmaler*, Willfried Nagel. On the left is the startling and apocalyptic *Red Terror (An Allegory)*, a 1942 oil painting showing a frightening red-robed skeleton riding a white horse through a fiery, blood-red sea in which drowning victims reach their arms up in resignation. The painting was meant to demonize the "red threat" of the communist Russians. Next to this painting, Nagel's *East Front Fighter* (1943) depicts a similarly nightmarish scene, as an ostensible member from the Red Army sitting atop another white horse, which itself stands at the peak of a mountain of dead bodies, waves a ghostly white flag in surrender. The painting is told from the point of view of a *Wehrmacht* soldier, back to the viewer, who looks on in horror. Both paintings are nightmare-scapes that, though they demonize the Russian "enemy," also might not be out of place in an Otto Dix exhibition of the otherworldly horrors of the First World War.

The army custodian gestures at the paintings, revealing that hundreds more, including watercolors by Hitler, remain hidden away in this storage facility, available only on request to private researchers (though there are plans to open a museum of the Center of Military History's collection of art and material culture in the near future). The custodian leans in and whispers conspiratorially that sometimes, he thinks he would not be disappointed if the facility holding all of this artwork from Nazi Germany just burned down. The art seems to hold some sort of power, even if that has been imbued by those who view and take care of it – it is either seen as a dangerous visual relic, whose presence is no longer welcome in the world, or a piece of banal "non-art," a mere visual documentation of a period in history that was overcome by the United States. Some of these paintings were offered to the Smithsonian Museums in the 1960s; they were rejected. The stash of Nazi-era art, mostly paintings, but some sculptures and drawings as

well, known as the German War Art Collection, used to be larger by several thousand works. In 1951, 1979, and 1986, a large portion of the paintings and drawings deemed innocuous in subject matter – that is, containing no explicit Nazistic or militaristic imagery – were repatriated to West Germany, gestures of trust and friendship that were nonetheless fraught with uncertainty and controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. Much of the collection's archival documents were, as of 2017, uncatalogued, revealing a sort of ambivalence toward the collection of art (or visual "historical documentation"), or, simply a lack of prioritization: the art was not soon to be lent out to high-profile art museums like the National Gallery,[2] so perhaps there was no point to methodically filing any archival documentation related to it.

The collection of artwork, which originally numbered nearly 9,000, came to be at the end of the Second World War. In 1946, Captain Cordon W. Gilkey, a printmaker and art teacher by occupation, was tasked by the Colonel Harold Potter, Chief of the Historical Division in Frankfurt to coordinate information on, then ultimately collect and confiscate, cultural and artistic relics produced under the Third Reich in the U.S. zone of occupation. In an investigation that spanned several months, Gilkey and his troops searched artist ateliers, hundreds of art repositories throughout Germany and Austria, and exhibition spaces (including the infamous *Haus der deutschen Kunst* in Munich), ultimately seizing 9,176 paintings and drawings that were produced by artists working for the Third Reich, especially so-called war artists, or *Kriegsmaler*. While some of this collection comprised nudes and landscapes, whose only nod to Nazism was the inherently racialized system in which they were produced, many of Gilkey's confiscations included paintings that purportedly depicted or celebrated Nazism or German militarism. These

[2] Some pieces have since been placed on permanent loan to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

paintings were sent back to the United States and held in a series of storage sites but also, ironically, openly used by some military and political officials to decorate their offices and adorn the walls of their buildings. In this sense, many of the paintings were hidden in plain sight for decades after the end of the Second World War.

In the 1950s, after deciding that it was "safe," and as a gesture of faith to West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, several thousand paintings were returned, though they languished in a harbor in Bremerhaven for nearly three years, as the Chancellor had no interest in publicly accepting them. In the meantime, as the 1960s dawned, West Germans began to have their own moment of reckoning with the artwork, viewing its presence as either necessary in order for Germans to confront the horrors of the past, or harmful and provocative, its potential presence in art museums a moral affront to the victims, including exiled artists and those banned from working in the *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK) because of their race ("non-Aryan") or political affiliation. Yet many former artists in West Germany began to clamor for the return of their paintings, forcing the Helmut Schmidt-led administration to formally request another group of art returns in the late 1970s, later spearheaded by an American congressman who took a special interest in the naval paintings of Nazi-era painter Claus Bergen.

In 1979 and 1986, two more shipments of the artwork were finally returned, amidst some controversy and resistance from, in particular, a group of Holocaust survivors in the United States. This return helped spur another era of controversy regarding the place of the Nazi-era artwork in West Germany – did it belong in museums, and should the public be forced to confront it in a guided context? – which the nascent Green Party, comprised of many former members of Germany's leftist 68er movement, took on as a primary cultural platform at the end of the 1980s. This cultural debate dovetailed with the now-famous *Historikerstreit* amongst West

German academics, politicians, and members of the public, some of whom argued that the Holocaust and Nazi period must be normalized in order for Germany to push forward into the future, and others who insisted that the shame and uniqueness of the Holocaust and the Nazi period remain forever a burden for Germans to bear. Within this debate, Nazi-era artwork became a sort of medium through which notions about how Germans should continue to work through their past – *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – were both examined and challenged. This moment would shape the terms about the debate over the past – as well as the place and presence of Nazi-era artwork in German public and cultural life – into the twenty-first century. This dissertation argues that that the path taken through time and space of the Nazi-era artwork is a pivotal and heretofore overlooked lens through which to understand *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that this process was comprised of a series of confrontations with the artwork that occurred in West Germany *and* the United States from the immediate postwar era through the Cold War to today. The U.S. directed, both knowingly and unknowingly, the process of "coming to terms with the past" in Germany through this artwork, while the works' historical trajectory was a mirror for the U.S. government's and public's own fears and desires regarding the relationship between Germany's past and the U.S.'s present and future. Importantly, debates about this artwork reflected postwar- and Cold War-era questions that plagued both countries, including the nature of West German democracy, West German and American militarism, and the recursive nature of the memory of the Nazi past.

**Nazi-Era Art in Germany and the United States**

This dissertation takes Gilkey's German War Art Collection as a starting point, but is not merely a history of the collection through time, as it traverses the immediate postwar period and storage facilities on American soil, to controversial exhibitions in West Germany, to political and

cultural debates in the decades following the end of the war in both countries. The dissertation examines three frames of reference in each country that were influenced by and engaged with the presence of the German War Art. The first of these is the frame of historical and collective memory – that is, how the memory of the Nazi period, the Holocaust, and the Second World War influenced treatment of visual art, painting in particular, from the period. This has an effect on the second the frame of reference, which is how politics plays into the treatment of the artwork: as this dissertation will show, the U.S.'s decision to remove any "tainted" or "dangerous" artwork from Germany in the immediate postwar period had a specific political rationale, as did the decisions in the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s, to return the artworks. The political climate, likewise, in West Germany from the 1950s to the late 1960s and 1970s to the end of the 1980s swayed how and in what context art from the Nazi era was discussed and exhibited (and sometimes, protested). Finally, the third frame of reference is simply human. Throughout this dissertation, there are moments of humanity that are not driven by politics, or the politics of memory, but rather human sympathy or empathy – from Gordon Gilkey's relationship with the artists whose works he confiscated, to a Congressman's special connection with a German painter of naval battles, to a German collector's personal aesthetic adoration of the works and life of Arno Breker, human emotions and interactions made the story of the "afterlife" of Nazi-era artwork both more interesting and more complicated.

Each chapter of this dissertation is framed as a "snapshot" in time: chapter one focuses on Gilkey's confiscation of artwork throughout Germany and Austria, and its subsequent afterlife in Washington, D.C. Chapter two examines the first large-scale postwar exhibition of Nazi-era artwork in Frankfurt, West Germany and the influence of the 68er movement on the organization and reception of this show. Chapter three returns to the United States to focus on the story of one

Congressman's infatuation with the art of Nazi-era painter Claus Bergen, and the subsequent return of thousands of artworks to West Germany. Chapter four looks at the public and political *Kulturdebatte* in the West German Bundestag, led by the nascent Green Party, over the question of "what to do" with Nazi-era art. This debate was prompted by the return of the German War Art Collection, as well as a proposed exhibition of art from Arno Breker in Cologne. Finally, the conclusion traces the present-day situation of not only the German War Art Collection, but how some American and German cultural institutions continue to confront the question of "what to do" with the Nazi-era artwork in their custody, including the question of the burgeoning art market for art of the Nazi period.

Each of these snapshots embodies all frames of reference – historical and collective memory, political motivation and debate, and human emotions of personal or aesthetic sympathy, revealing the vast reach of the question of Nazi era art and what to do with it in the decades following 1945. The German War Art Collection and its status – in storage, on display on the walls of various political and military officials, pending return to Germany, languishing in a harbor under the watch of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer – provides a common thread. Sometimes its status influenced or provoked the snapshot moments (as with the *Kulturdebatte* in the Bundestag in 1988), and sometimes it drives the narrative itself. This common thread of the German War Art Collection also helps answer other important questions about the concentration of the dissertation: why the focus on flat fine art, that is, painting and drawing, why the specific time period (1945 to the end of the 1980s), and why only West Germany? Some of the answers to these questions are practical. Most of the artwork that was seized by the United States postwar, or remains hidden in storage, is flat. Therefore, most of the works that are discussed throughout are paintings or drawings and sketches. This is the art that was easily collected and

transported, and because of this, was transferred easily between cities and across oceans, unlike, for example, architecture, or large-scale sculptures. Visual art such as painting was also considered a part of "high culture" ("*Hoch Kultur*"), which also lends it a moral heft: unique artwork, even if it had propagandistic purposes, has always been understood in both the U.S. and Germany, also during the Third Reich, to bear an extra moral importance and responsibility. As such, fraught questions such as the "guilt" of art associated with the Nazi regime seemed to have carried a special, Benjaminian aura, and even responsibility. This dissertation will reveal and confront these questions with the passionate reactions of both the American and German public, governments, and cultural institutions to the presence of this artwork.

The emphasis on West Germany is intentional as well, as the traceable artwork quickly became intertwined with U.S. occupying forces, such as Gordon Gilkey, immediately following the war. As a result, many of the archival sources available involve West German public, cultural, and administrative reactions to the seizure and eventual return of the artwork. There are references among archival sources to a small portion of the Nazi-era paintings and drawings, as well as sculptures, that were also stored at a facility in Karlshorst, East Berlin, which also housed a Soviet Compound. However, American access to this facility was limited, so its contents do not play a role in the story of the "afterlife" of Nazi-era art between the U.S. and West Germany.

The time period is also roughly framed by the active moments of the German War Art Collection, as most of it was finally returned to West Germany in 1986. The consequences of this continue to ripple outward, as is addressed in the conclusion. Finally, it is true that East Germany also certainly retained Nazi-era art; however, since this dissertation focuses on the connection between the United States and West Germany, and not the Soviet Union and East Germany, this lies beyond its scope. Though a few scholars, like Cora Sol Goldstein and Jeffrey Herf, have

broached the question of how the Soviet occupying forces and East German political and cultural authorities dealt with Nazi-era art postwar, it certainly remains ripe for research.

The sources for this dissertation span archives in Munich, Berlin, Koblenz, Washington, D.C., Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and Portland, Oregon. It draws heavily on contemporaneous newspaper and magazine articles, official correspondence between U.S. and German officials; correspondence between the foreign offices, and departments of state; and exhibition catalogues and miscellaneous documents surrounding select exhibitions, including transcripts of radio interviews and public reactions in writing to the shows, and newspaper reviews. Additionally, this dissertation makes use of debate transcripts in Congress and the Bundestag concerning not only the transfer for the GWAC, but also the larger question of exhibiting Nazi art in museums in Germany. The dissertation focuses on not just how the elite echelon of society – government and museum curators – have reacted to the artwork, but also how the general public conceived of it. This public includes especially those who attended exhibitions, and those who took part in the public debate about the artwork's return and exhibition. There is also a necessary focus on a small number of artists' families, including those of Herbert Agricola and Heinrich Amersdorffer, who worked as German combat artists during the war and petitioned Gilkey and later the U.S. Department of State for their works to be returned to their own private ateliers in West Germany. Finally, this dissertation understands the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as a conversation which has taken place between the U.S. and Germany since 1945, and which has been mediated by the capture, storage, transfer, and exhibition of Nazi-era paintings. In terms of the specific process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, this is an approach that has been seldom used by historians or art historians interested in material culture.

**A Note on Terminology: "Nazi Art" and "Nazi-Era Art"**

Throughout this dissertation, the phrases "Nazi-era art" or "Nazi-era artwork" are used in place of "Nazi art." The latter is too prescriptive, and only reiterates the notion that various scholars have recently tried to challenge, including James van Dyke, Pamela Potter, Roger Griffith, and Gregory Maertz, that there existed, outside of space and time, one monolithic stylistic and thematic entity that can be easily categorized as "Nazi art." Much of the art that people think of when the phrase "Nazi art" is invoked does indeed follow certain stylistic patterns: the imposing, sexless, heroic sculptures of Arno Breker or Josef Thorak; the precise, marble-like nude paintings of Alfred Ziegler; the industrial landscapes and heroic worker portraits of painters of Erick Mercker and Arthur Kampf; standard portraits of military or political officials by Fritz Erler; paintings of eagles and other wildlife or animal still-lifes; or the "Blut und Boden" paintings celebrating blonde, healthy "Aryan" mothers and women, or regressive images of farmers and their fields of Oskar Martin-Amorbach.[3] This reflects a historiographical tradition that assumes a relatively strict style was prescribed for any artist working successfully during the Third Reich. This characterization of "Nazi art" is a hyperbole, and one that many scholars have helped reify through their studies of the art in the intervening years. As several scholars have begun to reveal, the *Reichskulturkammer*, (Reich Chamber of Culture, or RKK, which comprised seven sub-chambers for theater, visual arts, music, literature, film, the press, and radio, and of which cultural professionals working in the Third Reich must be a member) was much more malleable, and less prescriptive in matters of style and theme, than has been portrayed. As Pamela Potter has argued, the *Gleichschaltung* ("coordination") of the

[3] Berthold Hinz and Peter Adam provide relatively thorough overviews of some of the popular themes in "Nazi artwork" in *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus* (Berlin: Hanser Verlag, 1974) and *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1992).

arts professions in the 1930s was likely "perceived as less of a threat of forced control [by artists] and more as a promise of long-sought after order and stability,"[4] especially after the chaos that reigned in cultural organizations and among professionals in the previous decades. Furthermore, up until the mid-1930s, there was an internal struggle within the leadership (specifically between ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and Josef Goebbels) over what type of art should be encouraged as the "true" German art form. Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Fighting League for German Culture) aggressively defended the conservative, figurative *völkisch* art, while younger members of the party, especially student organizations, suggested that the works of expressionist artists of the Weimar era – Emil Nolde, Ernst Barlach, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, to name a few – should be promoted to the public as both "Nordic" and "Aryan," and thus symbolic of the new direction of "true" German art. This was a promotion that Goebbels eventually endorsed.[5] This conflict of opinion ultimately resulted in chaos during the organization of the infamous *Degenerate Art* show and its antithetical exhibition around the corner at the Haus der deutschen Kunst, the *Great German Art Exhibition*: invitations were sent to Nolde and Barlach for the latter exhibition, even as their works had also been selected to be shown in the former.

In the end, it is perhaps better to reframe the popular notion of the "Nazification" of the visual arts during the 1930s as the "de-Jewification" (*Entjudung*) of visual arts, as Pamela Potter in particular has suggested. While there was less top-down control of what, for example, artists in the RKK could paint, or in what style, there was one explicit, racialized stipulation used to characterize "Nazi-era art": "German" art must be non-Jewish. This meant that any artistic or cultural world under the Third Reich must be a world without, first, the artistic and cultural

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[4] Pamela M. Potter, *The Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 14.
[5] Potter, 24.

contributions of the Jewish population, and second, without the entire Jewish population. All art that was produced with the support of the RKK – artists needed to be members of the RKK in order to call it their profession – was the product of a racist, anti-Semitic system. This fact continued to lead to moral quandaries amongst intellectuals, politicians, leaders of cultural institutions, and the public. Is *any* piece of art produced under the Third Reich inherently anti-Semitic, because of this? What happens with the artwork produced by artists who were not members of the Nazi Party, but rather continued to paint merely to survive? What about combat artists, who chose to create art rather than engage in combat? Does any of this work belong in a separate moral category than, say, the sculptures and privately commissioned busts of Hitler by Arno Breker, who profited immensely as an artist during the Third Reich, and made no effort to protect more vulnerable colleagues from persecution? Finally, how does this artwork relate to contemporaneous art (painting, in particular) from, for example, America, and how does it express continuities with the canonical art historical period, that prefaced it? These questions are important as most of the artists in question did not *begin* their careers as artists right after the *Machtergreifung.* Some of these questions remain unanswered, but this dissertation will reveal some of the intense debates around them since 1945 in both West Germany and the United States. The term "Nazi-era art," as opposed to "Nazi art" throughout this dissertation denotes art created and sanctioned during the Nazi period (that is, created by artists who worked in the RKK), but also connotes a less prescriptive and monolithic style, in particular, and sometimes subject matter, than "Nazi art" does and has in some scholarly literature since 1945.

**A Review of Literature Related to Nazi-Era Art**

From the postwar period to present-day scholarship, trends have emerged in how scholars have treated art from the Nazi period. One of the most notable is a recurring obsession with an

intentionalist model of understanding when it comes to discussing cultural aspects of Nazi Germany, ultimately a limiting mode of interpretation, though understandable, as contemporary politics always influence the ways in which Nazi art and cultural remnants are displayed and understood. Ultimately, the question of moral obligation looms large: many scholars have felt an inability to escape the question of morality in a post-Hitler world when discussing art that has been "tainted" by Nazism. This is a question that is raised time and time again by the actors – ranging from army and political officials to art collectors and curators to private citizens – throughout the body of this dissertation.

### Part 1: Nazi Art in the Immediate Postwar Period and the Beginning of the Cold War

Immediately following victory in Europe, the Allies began the complicated process of denazification in a newly partitioned Germany as agreed upon in the Potsdam Accord of August 1945.[6] The decade and a half that followed the so-called *Stunde Null* saw a spate of mostly German-language books regarding the nefarious role of the arts and culture under the dictatorship of the Third Reich. Many of these authors were scholars who witnessed the implementation of the cultural policies under Nazi Germany. Paul Ortwin Rave's 1949 *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* was the first major work to confront the topic and became a seminal piece of scholarship that subsequent historians, art historians, and cultural critics of the era would later draw upon. Rave was an art historian and the Director of the National Gallery in Berlin following World War I; he was dismissed by Nazi leadership in 1933 but returned to the position in 1937 and remained there until after the Second World War. A proponent of modern art, Rave was critical of the Nazi policy toward art, particularly in terms of 1937's "Degenerate

[6]Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1999) see 72-74.

Art" (*Entartete Kunst*) Exhibition in Munich, and his 1949 work manifested these critiques. Rave described a monolithic dictatorship that was entirely hostile to modern art and artists, and a large part of his tome is focused on that 1937 exhibition, as well as Goebbels's 1938 order to have all art deemed "degenerate" removed from German museums and incinerated.[7] Though he did not specifically address *National Socialist* artists, or artists working under the auspices of the *RKK*, Rave was intent on exposing the complicity of fellow museum directors and curators in the destruction of "degenerate" art in Germany.[8] Rave's understanding of Nazi cultural policy toward art as swiftly and universally implemented, tightly organized, and monolithic would be influential for later scholars of National Socialist art.

Another important early work in the study of Nazi art, especially in the emergent interest in analyzing specific artists working under the RKK, as well as an attempt to categorize styles painting and sculpture that were prominent under Nazi cultural policies, was Helmutt Lehmann-Haupt's 1954 *Art Under a Dictatorship*. At the end of the war, Lehmann-Haupt, who immigrated to New York in the 1930s, worked at the Office of War Information in the US during World War II. He moved back to Berlin in 1947 with the intention of reviving the cultural scene in Allied-occupied Germany and helped artists once denounced as "degenerate" to reestablish their careers in postwar Germany. In *Art Under a Dictatorship*, Lehmann-Haupt reiterated the monolithic, intentionalist model of control of the arts laid out by Rave. This model was clearly influenced by the Cold War context of the publications, which favored grouping totalitarian leaders, including

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[7] Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (März: Margon Verlag,1988) 124-6.
[8] For example, Rave attacked antimodernist and anti-Semitic art historian Klaus Graf von Baudissin for his role in the confiscation of private collections of modern art. Following the war and his release from an internment camp in 1949, Baudissin attempted to defend his actions and threatened to take legal action against Rave for "murdering" his reputation. See Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 1.

Hitler and Stalin, together, and emphasizing the totalizing control that these individuals maintained over their regimes. In the context of the arts, this model presented Hitler as having complete control over the art produced from 1933 to 1945. Furthermore, it treats the form, or outward shape of systems of rule, as their essence, ignoring the actually amorphous nature of the Nazi system in favor of a strict typology. Perhaps most importantly, this approach to the arts of the Third Reich equates Stalinism/communism and Nazism, ignoring the different intentions of both.[9] For Lehmann-Haupt, everything about art created under the Third Reich was a result of Hitler's total control over the political *and* cultural aspects of the regime – Hitler is presented as the "Masterbuilder," the art doctrine of the Nazis is described, again, as monolithic and fully-"crystalized" by 1937, and all artistic output is understood as a result of being "absorb[ed] into the structure of the state."[10] The structure of the totalitarian state, then, is rigid, without cracks or gaps, and artists themselves are depicted as willing participants in the visual instruction of the masses.[11] Lehmann-Haupt also, for the first time, specifically detailed the different forms and styles of art under the Third Reich, however again with rigidity and a sense that styles were strictly controlled and had no continuity with Germany's pre-1933 artistic output. Paintings are characterized as "entirely retrogressive" in style and function, while architecture is incessantly described as "total."[12] Finally, and most importantly, Lehmann-Haupt presented the influential

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[9] For more on interpretations of Nazism, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold, 4th edition: 2000).

[10] See Helmutt Lehmann-Haupt, *Art Under a Dictatorship* (New York, Oxford University Press: 1954), 3-4

[11] Reinforcing an intentionalist interpretation of the Nazi state, Lehmann-Haupt wrote that the dictator "must control [the arts] absolutely, must mold it into a completely subservient instrument." (xviii) Furthermore, Lehmann-Haupt argued that the totalitarian state "exercises complete control over every form of artistic activity…[and] this control is based on a highly specialized and narrow concept of the function of art," statements that would rightly be refuted by a select few scholars, including Hildegard Brenner, a contemporary of Lehmann-Haupt. (236)

[12] *Ibid*, 88-90; 106-107.

and politically motivated thesis that the art policies – and by extension, political policies – of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were analogous, a theme that would reemerge in fits and starts up until the present day not only in scholarship, but also exhibitions of Nazi art.[13]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, two other prominent German art scholars, Franz Roh and Joseph Wulf, addressed the topics of artistic production under the Third Reich. Roh was a renowned art historian and critic, lauded for his work in German Expressionism. *German Art in the 20th Century* (1958) egregiously makes no mention of any art created between 1933 and 1945; instead, the period is characterized as a serious rupture during which no real artistic output ensued. Tellingly, an analysis of artistic output from this period was reserved for a 1962 volume caustically titled *"Entartete Kunst": Kunstbarbarei im Dritten Reich* ("*Degenerate Art": Art Barbarism in the Third Reich*). Roh's volume focused on racial theories in art and the cultural lineage for the "barbarism" of National Socialist art (again characterized as a stylistically united, monolithic entity, under the same totalitarian control as the political system), and also on the stifling organization of culture under Nazi Germany. The Joseph Wulf-edited 1963 volume similarly focused on the stylistic unification supposedly achieved under the Third Reich by 1937, with an emphasis on the "heroic," monumental nature of all sculpture and architecture and the broadly-defined "realism" that was supposedly the official style of paintings.[14] The work also highlights the post-Hitler obsession with morality, immediately framing all arguments as explorations into the "meaningless," "barbaric" battle for 12 years against art that was

[13] The last section of Lehmann-Haupt's book is a morally-tinged warning that even democracies like the U.S. were in danger of falling into the totalitarian trap of artistic control, a reaction against negative conservative (and Congressional) actions in regards to the modern art scene in the United States at the time. (240-8)

[14] See Joseph Wulf, ed.. *Die Bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich*: *eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Sigbert Mohn Verlag, 1963) 175-180, 195-200, 200.

"different," or foreign.[15] Both volumes also embodied an obsession unique to German scholars of the period with extensive *documentation* and cataloguing, again perhaps a by-product of the processes of denazification and the new availability of archival materials related to cultural production between 1933 and 1945. Furthermore, as Paul Jaskot has demonstrated, it is probable that the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann and the 1963 Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials renewed interest in the bureaucratic, "banal" nature of the Nazi as a white-collar perpetrator.[16]

Hildegard Brenner produced an unjustly overlooked tome in 1961 that worked specifically *against* the monolithic, totalizing model of artistic control described by her contemporaries. *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* rejected both the compelling belief that Nazi policy regarding the arts was monolithic and stringent, and the Cold War-era impulse to equate Nazi Germany and the USSR. Brenner avoided the moralistic polemics espoused by Wulf, Lehmann-Haupt, Roh, and Rave. In what John Heskett has described as a "first substantial step forward" in terms of Nazi art scholarship,[17] though she did not closely analyze individual works and their themes (a task that would first be fully undertaken in 1979 by Berthold Hinz), Brenner provided an in-depth study of the myriad policies and organizations – and their complex interplays – relating to Nazi art. More importantly, Brenner eschewed the Cold War-era model of understanding, and allowed for an historically-specific account that did not conflate modes of artistic production under all totalitarian regimes.[18] Interestingly, Brenner's pioneering work

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[15] See Wulf, *Einleitung*.
[16] See Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 62-64.
[17] Heskett, 140.
[18] For example, chapter 9 of Brenner's work outlined the complex struggles that took place within the rather amorphous political web of the Nazi State, rightly highlighting the in-fighting and disagreements amongst greater and lesser Party Officials, and the relative *lack* of artistic consolidation.

would not gain scholarly popularity until the 1990s, an indication that the academic community was not ready or willing to reject a model of examining Nazi-era art that favored examining it through a totalitarian lens.

### Part II: 1970s-1989 in West Germany – The 68ers, the Battle Against Capitalism, and the *Historikerstreit:* Is National Socialist Art Unique?

No more significant volumes on Nazi-era art emerged during the 1960s, with a notable exception of George Mosse's influential *Nazi Culture* (1966).[19] Interest in the subject was renewed with the opening of the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition in Frankfurt in 1974. The exhibition, was organized by the Frankfurter Kunstverein as response to a wave of nostalgia in Germany for the past known as the *Hitlerwelle* ("Hitler Wave"), expressed in a surfeit of films and publications, that used imagery produced in the Third Reich "without questioning the nature of the material used,"[20] which will be examined in more detail in chapter two of this dissertation. The exhibition marked a stark turn against the impulse to conflate the Nazi regime and the communist regime of the USSR.[21] Instead, the emphasis was on *fascism* and its relationship to capitalism: as a sign painted at the entrance to the museum invoked Max Horkheimer's warning that "*Wer vom Faschismus spricht, darf vom Kapitalismus nicht schweigen"* ("*Those who speak*

[19] George Mosse, *Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966). Mosse included a small section on art under the Third Reich, reproducing official documents from Goebbels, Rosenberg, and Hitler regarding the centrality of art to the German racial project. However, again, Mosse's work reinforced an intentionalist understanding of Nazi Germany, taking the leaders' words at face value, and emphasizing the "total control" that Hitler had over the arts.

[20] Heskett, 140.

[21] Berthold Hinz, one of the exhibition's organizers, argued vehemently against conflation of Stalinism, the Fascism of Mussolini, and the National Socialism of Hitler: "that kind of arguable art history represents the thesis of political totalitarianism, and serves the 'theory' of international anti-communism." (Heskett, 144.)

*of fascism may not be silent about capitalism").*[22] This warning, once again, reflected the Left's anti-capitalist backlash of the protests of 1968. The exhibition's popularity spoke volumes to the high degree of interest in – and perhaps even fetishization of – relics related to Germany's dark past, a past that by 1974 was regarded by many as related to the "crimes of our fathers."[23] Although the exhibition was one of the first to display the myriad of artworks produced by RKK-sanctioned artists and was meant to "strip away the taboos"[24] surrounding art of National Socialism, it was just as polemical as earlier works by Lehmann-Haupt, Wulf, and Roh. The exhibition was thematized into sections like "women, "work," and "war."[25] The works were, importantly, placed in the wider social, political, and historical context of the Nazi period; however, as Heskett rightly critiqued, the catalogue and exhibition interpreted the works *solely* in the context of selective snippets of information about life under the Third Reich. For example, the artists themselves were presented as having little agency, and the complex, amorphous nature of the State and Party apparatuses involving arts and culture were not explored. Heskett's critiques were unusually shrewd and relatively un-politically motivated; however, they fell upon deaf ears in the academic community, which was clearly still obsessed with the use of the physical relics and memories of Nazi-era culture to make statements about contemporary politics and society. This exhibition and its cultural-political context will be examined in close detail in the second chapter of this dissertation

West German art historian Berthold Hinz's *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus* (1974) was published shortly after the Frankfurt exhibition (Hinz helped Bussmann organize and write

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[22] Bussmann, 1.
[23] See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[24] Heskett, 140.
[25] See Bussmann catalogue, 130-132, 144, 182-184.

for the show) and again revealed an obsession with artistic themes without paying much credence to the agency of the artist or the complexity and chaos under which the artistic program actually developed, as laid out by Brenner. The moral overtones in Hinz's work are clear; his forward ends with the cry of the Italian anti-fascists, *Non dimenticare! (Never Forget!)*[26] To this day, Hinz's book remains the only major text on specifically Nazi painting.[27] He also rejected the totalitarian mode of understanding that was so popular in the 1950s and early 1960s, a debate that would explode in 1986 with the *Historikerstreit*.[28] Hinz presented the martialing of art in the Third Reich "as [a] necessary condition for the existence and political practice of a system suffering from an overwhelming lack of legitimation."[29] Like the exhibition, *Art in the Third Reich* adhered to what Ian Kershaw has described as the "fascist" framework, isolating German National Socialism as particular: "There is a widely held view that similar governmental systems will produce similar art. Nothing could be further from the truth."[30] Hinz did, in some ways, attempt to eschew the moral burden felt by previous scholars when discussing art of the Third Reich, deriding the assumption that art commissioned by the state does not deserve scholarly or popular attention.[31] Hinz worked to treat Nazi art not as an anomaly, but as a part of a broader artistic tradition, including nineteenth-century German genre painting, Romantic landscapes of

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[26]Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, i.

[27]One reason for this could be that art historians have begun to favor placing Nazi-era paintings in a broader temporal context, which is, ultimately, a productive tendency (see Van Dyke, as well as Olaf Peters, *Neue Sachlicbkeit und Nationalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik 1931-1947*, Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1999).

[28]Lasting between 1986 and 1989, the so-called "Historians' Debate" pitted right-wing intellectuals against left-wing intellectuals concerning the appropriateness of conflating Nazism and the crimes of the Soviet Union (right-wingers generally followed the comparative, totalitarianism approach, while left-wingers tended to emphasize the *uniqueness* of the Nazi racial state.)

[29] Hinz, xi.

[30] Hinz, 1.

[31] *Ibid*.

the same period, and even the roots of *völkisch* aesthetics in early Dutch and Flemish paintings.[32] Ultimately, Hinz suggested that Nazi art visually embodied a struggle between old values and a modernized society, a theory that would be adopted further by historians in the next decade.[33] However, again, Hinz raised more questions than he answered: Can and should "Nazi art" be considered a unified movement? What of the agency and intentions of the artists themselves? Finally to what extent were the artistic policies actually enforced? Scholars like Hildegard Brenner argued that they were not as stringent or monolithic as scholars and wider audiences imagined, an argument that is reflected by the myriad styles of art painted and drawn by German combat artists, or *Kriegsmaler*, which will be shown in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Other literature of the late 1970s and 1980s either harkened back to the documentation-heavy approach of immediate postwar-era scholars like Roh and Wulf,[34] or provided schematic overviews of art during the period, with Hitler as the primary and powerful arbiter of culture.[35] It was during this period that the only volume on specifically the German War Art Collection, John

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[32] He did, however, differentiate between these genre scenes and those produced by "Nazi artists": "painting under German fascism had nothing to do with realism, no matter how much it depicted the natural world," 80.

[33] See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[34] See Otto Thomae, *Die Propaganda-Maschinerie*: *Bildende Kunst und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1978), which provided an extensive catalogue of art exhibitions and artists working under the Third Reich, but contained little analysis.

[35] See Klaus Backes, *Hitler und die bildenden Künste: Kulturverständnis und Kunstpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1988) and Reinhard Merker, *Die bildenden Künste im National Sozialismus: Kulturideologie, Kulturpolitik, Kulturkproduktion* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1983). Backes in particular focused on Hitler as the total authority on art and culture, and embraced the *Sonderweg* theory of Germany's "special development, politically, economically, and culturally." (10-11). Both books also emphasized on the idea of an "official Nazi style" in terms of painting and sculpture, which Backes outlined in a section called "Hitler's Aesthetic Standards."

Paul Weber's *The German War Art Collection*, was published as well, a direct reaction to the proposal to return a large portion of the collection in the late 1970s and early 1980s and a volume that portrayed the work of the war artists sympathetically, and somehow different (that is, "untainted" by Nazism) from some other art of the period.[36] Later, a seminal exhibition about art exhibitions in the twentieth century in 1988 in Berlin – *Stationen der Moderne* – included a large section on art under National Socialism, bringing it into the same art historical timeline (and exhibition space) as world-renowned movements like *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Neue Sachlichkeit* ("New Objectivity"). The context here was *how* and *why* art was exhibited under the Third Reich, and the focus was on either "degenerate" art, or the art of exiles during the period, with only ten pages allotted to the *Great German Art Exhibition* of 1937, which featured sanctioned art by painters and sculptors of the period. Again, the moral question loomed large: "Nazi art" itself was treated as "unfree" and therefore not as worthy of scholarly attention as the art that was deemed *entartete* under the regime.

### Part III: Reunification and Beyond – Toward New Understandings of a Reunified Germany's Past?

The early 1990s brought further interest in the artistic output of the Third Reich. In Germany, this was likely due to the late 1980s-push from the nascent Green Party to make the case of "Nazi art in museums" a cultural platform. Renewed interested in the United States was prompted in part by a 1991 exhibition of "degenerate art" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which will be described in detail at the end of this dissertation. In addition, British reporter Peter Adam's 1992 *Art of the Third Reich* reiterated many of the theses of Hinz's 1979 work, interpreting paintings under National Socialism as "very limited…a few themes,

[36] See John Paul Weber, *The German War Artists* (Columbia, S.C.: Cerberus Books, 1979).

endlessly repeated…to express the whole message,"[37] using many of the works that Gilkey had captured and remained in U.S. custody to make his arguments. Though Adam emphasized the uniqueness of National Socialism when compared to Stalinist art or Italian Fascist art, his book once again overstated the rigidity of the arts program, again treating it as a monolithic, tightly controlled entity, rather than a nebulous, loosely monitored series of bureaucratic webs, often fraught with in-fighting, as Brenner laid out thirty years prior. In the German language, Mortimer Davidson's 1995 three-part volume on art and architecture was exhaustive, providing stereotypical examples of imposing, monumental architecture and sculpture. Yet again, it relegated painting and other visual arts to the pure sphere of propaganda, erasing any agency of the artist, and ignoring any artistic or biographical continuities beyond 1933 and 1945, which certainly existed.[38] An exhibition entitled *Art and Power* that same year in London also visually and intellectually reinforced the totalizing framework in discussions of art, treating National Socialist art and architecture as a stylistically-united entity, and exhibiting it with art from Stalin's and Mussolini's regimes.[39]

Shortly thereafter, several American and British historians began to seriously examine the complexities of the artistic and cultural output of the Third Reich, especially in terms of the arts administration (again, this topic was first broached by Brenner in the early 1960s, but all-but-forgotten until the 1990s). Jonathan Petropoulos's *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (1996) argued, like Brenner, that the "battle" for cultural control took place within the burgeoning arts administration between 1933 and 1935, and that it was fraught with in-fighting amongst leaders

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[37] Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 129.
[38] Mortimer G. Davidson, *Kunst in Deutschland 1933-1945* (Tübingen: Grabert Verlag, 1995).
[39] See Dawn Ades, ed., *Art and Power*, Exh. catalogue (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995).

like Alfred Rosenberg, Goebbels, and Hitler. Yet, Petropoulos continued to sidestep the question of whether there ever existed a united stylistic concept of "Nazi art." His research also examined in detail the Nazi elite and their personal collections of artwork, often noting the dissonance between the art that was produced and displayed in exhibitions of art at the time, and the works that the leaders themselves coveted.[40] A large portion of the work is also, again, focused on "degenerate" art and artists, as well as Nazi plundering of cultural centers in conquered territories.

Glenn Cuomo, Alan Steinweis, and David Welch also broached the subject of art as propaganda as historians, once more substantiating the notion that the Nazi cultural apparatus was *totalizing* and that all art and architecture served as propaganda. None of the scholars examined specific artists and the struggles and "grey zones" they encountered working under the Third Reich, let alone the careers of these artists before or after the period from 1933 to 1945.[41] Even more recent works examining specifically art and aesthetics of the Third Reich, notably Frederic Spotts's *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (2002) once again embraced the paradigm of Hitler as the master arbiter of art, architecture, and culture. In some ways, this focus on Hitler reinforces the very image of the Nazi State that *der Führer* himself sought to propagate. In short, the works of this period reinforced popular notions of the Third Reich as monolithic and controlled strictly from the top-down, instead of complicating them.

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[40] Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chs. 1, 7, 8.

[41] See Glenn Cuomo, ed., *National Socialist Cultural Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995), Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), and David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993). Steinweis admittedly does a more thorough job of analyzing the complicated, sometimes contradictory, artistic policies and aims laid out by the *RKK*.

In the last five to ten years, a few scholars have pushed their examination of art of the Third Reich in more inventive directions, including a focus on specific artists who negotiated working before, during, and after Nazi Germany, and an interest in the *continuities* between artistic styles and production both before and after the Nazi era As early as 1998, German art historian Olaf Peters analyzed ways that New Objectivity painters, including Otto Dix, Franz Radziwill, and Rudolf Schlichter, navigated working – or not working – under the Third Reich. Peters's cleverly stretched his period of study from 1931 to 1947, allowing him to explore ruptures and continuities and style (especially in terms of "war paintings"), as well as the complicated question of opposition to the regime as an artist.[42]

In 2011, art historian James van Dyke conducted a similar biographical undertaking on one artist, Franz Radziwill. The focus on a single artist revealed both the relative freedom that *RKK* artists had in their output, but also the complicated factors that often persuaded them to stay in Germany and work for the Nazis, even if they were not fervent Nazis themselves, including the issues of money..[43] In 2005, Joan Clinefelter also sought to emphasize continuities with Weimar-era artistic policies, styles, and artists themselves in *Artists for the Reich: Culture and Race from Weimar to Nazi Germany*. However, Clinefelter still pitted Weimar art and culture *against* National Socialist art and culture, undermining the continuities and again reinforcing the popular notion that 1933 marked a rupture in artistic and cultural production. Finally, art historian and Eric Michaud wrote on *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* in 2004, an inventive volume that examined the creation of Nazism as myth through art. Michaud stepped outside the

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[42] See Olaf Peters, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Nationalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik, 1931-1947* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1998).
[43] James Van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History, 1919-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

comfortable bounds established by previous scholars of Nazi art and culture, bringing in a variety of European sources, ranging from the writings of Plato, Walter Benjamin and Gustave Le Bon, to Richard Wagner to medieval Christian theology to gauge their contributions to notions concerning the roles of art, image, spectacle, and religion in the establishment of a racial community.[44]

More recent scholarship seems to be moving in the direction of complicating, rather than reinforcing, popular understandings of art in Nazi Germany. Roger Griffin's 2010 *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* questioned scholars' reluctance to bring the idea of artistic modernism together with, not in opposition to, "Nazi art."[45] In fact, as Griffin pointed out, citing Gregory Maertz, many of the canvases that scholars have failed to study seriously[46] present strong evidence that painters working within the Nazi regime continued to produce works that might be considered stylistically or technically modernist until the very end. Griffin's and Maertz's discoveries and new approaches promise a new phase in the cultural history of the Third Reich in which an acknowledgement of the "unsuspected continuity between the explosion of aesthetic modernism under Weimar and Nazi

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[44] Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), xii-iii. However, Michaud, like Spotts, still propagated the idea of Hitler as the supreme authority on art, which again supports a rather monolithic, top-down, and dated understanding of the workings of the Nazi State.

[45] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010). Griffin suggested that the typical and narrow scholarly dismissal of Nazi art as "totalitarian kitsch" is mistaken; instead, it is more useful to eschew such value-judgment, and begin to see art and cultural artifacts "sanctioned by the Nazi brand of political religion as simultaneously expressions of its fundamental socio-political modernism, and hence its *cultural* modernism, *whatever the particular school of aesthetics they employ.* (286)

[46] Some of which still languish in crates in the U.S. and Germany, "silent witnesses of the Nazi cataclysm whom neither government were anxious to call to the stand." (289)

cultural production"[47] becomes more commonplace. Maertz's just-published tome on modernist styles in painting and sculpture produced under the patronage of the Third Reich argues that the perceived censorship of modernist artists and artistic tendencies is actually a persistent myth. Rather, in examining works, including some from the German War Art Collection, he reveals that the notion of Nazi-era art as monolithic or retrogressive in style has been exaggerated since the 1930s.[48] Though Maertz also examines the rehabilitation of German War Artists postwar, his work does not, as this dissertation will, address the ways in which U.S. government and military involvement in collecting, storing, and exhibiting this art shaped the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in postwar West Germany. He also does not follow the fate of this artwork in either country several decades beyond the end of the war. Though he reappraises the meaning of "modernism" in the context of these artworks, he does not probe the implications of the fate of this artwork on the ever-evolving culture of memory surrounding Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. He is also tendentious in his understanding of Gilkey, calling the American captain an "art thief" in interviews, citing in particular Gilkey's alleged decision to retain nearly 100 works of art for his own private collection, though this claim is unsubstantiated.[49]

Finally, Pamela Potter's recent book takes an important step in writing a seminal metahistory of scholarship related to arts in the Third Reich, broaching some of the questions posed since 1945 and in this literature review. This includes examining why the argument of the Nazis' monolithic control of the arts persisted, even though research has shown the opposite. Potter's volume is the first to attempt to confront how and why the scholarly treatment of Nazi-

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[47] *Ibid*.
[48] Maertz, *Nostalgia for the Future: Modernism and Heterogeneity in the Visual Arts of Nazi Germany* (New You: ibidem, 2019).
[49] Ulrike Knöfel, "Time for a New Look at Nazi Art," *Der Spiegel,* 14 August 2019.

era art (including music, literature, and the performing arts) has evolved since 1945, and is therefore one inspiration for the approach of this dissertation. She examines, importantly, the notion that "true art" and politics cannot mix, a long-held belief that has colored the understanding of art produced under the Third Reich for more than seventy years.[50]

In spite of these steps toward a new understanding of Nazi art, as well as the *legacy* of Nazi art in postwar Germany, the sway of the totalitarian framework from examining art of the Nazi period remains strong. In 2007, the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin held comparative exhibition on paintings and sculptures of numerous dictatorships of the twentieth century, including Russia, Germany, Italy, and Spain (and also brought in WPA-era art from the United States, another point of comparison ripe with possibility and political implications). While the exhibition did present thoughtful examinations of specific genres and styles of art as well as a short series of essays regarding how some of the art fared after 1945, controversial waters remained uncharted[51]: can or should "Nazi art" ever be studied as its own movement, separate from the looming shadows of Hitler and the Holocaust? Does a "Nazi aesthetic" even exist? (The work of scholars like van Dyke, Maertz, and Potter call this into question.) Other more recent shows in Munich, Berlin, and New York, which will be examined in the conclusion of this dissertation, continued to raise these issues. Should Nazi-era art be treated as a rupture, or are the continuities – between artists, artistic styles, even artistic policies – pre-1933 and post-1945 just as important? As Pamela Potter has observed, cultural and art historians will continue

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[50] Pamela M. Potter, *The Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[51] See *Kunst und Propaganda: Im Streit der Nationen, 1930-1945*, Exh. catalogue, Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin: Michel Sandstein Verlag, 2007), especially Gregory Maertz's entry on "The German War Art Collection" (456-464) and James van Dyke on the complicated relationship between art, kitsch, and propaganda from 1933 to 1945 (250-258).

to be plagued by the unsettling paradoxes associated with the crimes of the Third Reich, not least that "the Germans, a people who had enriched the western world with their literature, science, philosophy, and music, could commit unimaginable atrocities, and that, despite these barbarous conditions, cultural life could continue to operate, even flourish."[52] This dissertation will continue to add to this ongoing conversation by examining how these questions have confronted members of the American and West German academe, press, public, and government, since 1945. It will also address how debates surrounding these questions have helped shaped the process of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since 1945.

[52] Pamela Potter, "Dismantling a Dystopia: On the Historiography of Music in the Third Reich," *Central European History*, Vol. 40, Issue 4 (December 2007), 651.

Fig. 1, Hermann Otto Hoyer, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, oil on canvas, 1937 (photo author's own, Center of Military History storage site, Ft. Belvoir, VA)

Fig. 2, Willfried Nagel, *The Red Terror* (left, 1942) and *Vision of an East Front Fighter* (right, 1943, photo author's own, Center of Military History storage site, Ft. Belvoir, VA)

# Chapter One

## "For the Protection of the German People": The Making of the German War Art Collection, 1945-1953

### Introduction

In August 1947, a letter arrived at the Headquarters of the Historical Division of the U.S. European Command in Berlin. Heinrich Amersdorffer, a painter who had worked under the Nazi regime, had signed the typed letter, written in English and addressed to former U.S. Army Air Force Captain Gordon Gilkey. "Herr Luitpold Adam [head of the *Staffel der bildenden Künstler*, or German Combat Artist Division, hereafter SdbK]…informed me that the works of art of the war-painters in the former German Wehrmacht administered by him have been taken over by your office. He pointed out that you were kind enough to declare that you – on a special desire – would return the works to the painters…I would be very much obliged to you if I could also get these works back. May I draw your attention especially to the fact that I never received any compensation for these works[?]"[1]

Amersdorffer's petition to Gilkey, head of the "German Wartime Art Project," was a reaction to Gilkey's 1946 collection and confiscation of 8,722 paintings and drawings from government buildings and private artist studios in Germany and Austria deemed "militaristic" or "propagandistic" (that is, prone to re-igniting a fondness for Nazism in the defeated Germans) in nature, known as the "German War Art Collection." These were works of art produced by Nazi-era artists and *Kriegsmaler*, or combat artists sent to the front to record the war experience. They were sent to the U.S. Army Center of Military History's storage facility in Pueblo, Colorado for

[1]Amersdorffer, Heinrich letter to Gordon Gilkey, 13 August 1947, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

"safekeeping," though all but 450 were returned in 1953 and 1986. The remainder of the paintings, including four of Hitler's personal watercolors that once belonged to Heinrich Hoffmann, are now hidden away in a new warehouse at the CMH's Museum Support Center Facility at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Amersdorffer's letter embodied crucial questions plaguing the U.S. Army's collection of Nazi artwork directly following the war. One issue that still has not resolved itself in the present day was the perceived moral distinction between works painted by members of the German Wehrmacht while stationed on the front and paintings specifically commissioned for art exhibitions under the Nazi regime. Amersdorffer's plea of innocence to the crimes of the Nazi regime also complicated the question confronted by U.S. occupying forces in 1945 of which type of art was morally or aesthetically incendiary, according to the vague definitions laid out in the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. Importantly, his letter concluded on a legal appeal, challenging the assumption that the U.S. did not partake in art looting following the war: "[I've attached] a political certificate regarding…my proprietary rights of the works kept in the former Army Museum."[2]

Amersdorffer's story was significant not because it was an outlier, but because it was so common; in fact dozens of German painters were in contact with Gilkey and the U.S. government following the seizure of their works in 1945/46, in hopes of regaining legal custody of their paintings and sketches. Drawing on letters by *Kriegsmaler* in the years after the war, responses from OMGUS, and the recollections of Gilkey, the chapter begins by examining the

[2] *Ibid*. An attached letter from an attorney claims that at least three of Amersdorffer's paintings of cathedrals from the 1930s were taken from an exhibition in Vienna in 1944, and that the works, signed by Amersdorffer, were the painter's rightful property: "Alle diese Arbeiten sind rechtlich noch eigentum des Herrn Amersdorffer…" Freier, Walter, Dr. jur. "Letter of Confirmation" ("*Bestätigung*"), unspecified recipient, 16 April 1945, B86/1493, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin.

role of these combat artists in Nazi Germany, arguing that they – and their commander, *Hauptmann* Luitpold Adam – understood themselves as somehow apart from other artists and painters functioning within the Third Reich. This section also argues that because the United States Army had a similar history of combat artists, as well as a large squadron of combat artists of their own during the war, groundwork was laid for a certain degree of ambivalence, even empathy and recognition towards the works' purpose and potential historical legacy. These feelings were expressed not just by Gilkey, but by other army officers, both occupying Germany and in Washington, D.C.

The following section traces the story of these paintings and drawings from their seizure in postwar American-occupied Germany by Gilkey and his German War Art Program, a program under the auspices of the Historical Properties Division of the U.S. Army, and somewhat analogous to the MFA&A (though collecting works imagined to be nazisitic or militaristic, instead of works believed to be looted by the Nazis during the war). Here, the nebulous and vague nature of the orders leading to the seizure of the paintings by Gilkey and his men is highlighted, an imprecision that led to confusion among the targeted *Kriegsmaler*, and subsequent legal problems that the U.S. Army worked for the next several years to circumvent. As a reaction to these ambiguities, the final section examines artwork's internment in D.C., and the paintings' partial repatriation to Germany in the early 1950s under the Eisenhower and Adenauer administrations.

The focus on the works of the *Kriegsmaler* is intentional. Gilkey and his men were also in charge of tracking down and collecting paintings from the special holdings of the Nazi elite, including Hitler, Goering, Himmler, and Martin Bormann, a body of 745 non-militaristic and non-nazistic paintings known as the NS-Reichsbesitz. As Gregory Maertz has pointed out, these

paintings were tracked down by Gilkey and his men in Munich's Haus der Kunst and Führerbau, as well as the Reichskanzlei in Berlin during a series of art scavenger hunts extensively detailed by Gilkey in his unpublished account of his duties in occupied Germany following the war. They were then examined and assessed by the trained professionals of the MFA&A and then assigned to the legal custody of Bavaria's Ministerpräsident and stored within the imposing walls of the Hauptzollamt (Customs Office) in Munich, also the storage site for one of the most infamous paintings of the Nazi era, Alfred Ziegler's The Four Elements (1937), which hung at Hitler's residence in the city until the war's end.[3] Most of this artwork, comprising conservative and classical nudes, still-lifes, and landscapes that adorned the walls of not only Nazi dignitaries, but also art galleries and exhibitions (including the infamous annual Great German Art Exhibitions at the Haus der deutschen Kunst, which sold many of the paintings to members of the Nazi elite), embodied stereotypical aesthetic ideals of Nazi art, including the nineteenth-century figurative paintings favored by Hitler and the aesthetically regressive ideologue Alfred Rosenberg. The collection's most recognizable painting, Hubert Lanzinger's *Der Bannerträger* (1935), which features the messianic figure of Hitler in a suit of armor with the Nazi flag swelling behind him, remains in the hands of the U.S. Army to this day.

The movement through time and space of the contents of the *Reichsbesitz* are also worth exploring, and parts of the story will be referenced later in this dissertation. This chapter,

[3] Maertz rightly points out that because the contents of the *Reichsbesitz* were often used for exhibitions and research, including shows in West German Frankfurt in the 1970s and Cologne in the 1980s (which will be addressed in subsequent chapters), this "conservative" aesthetic was and remains, more often than not, associated with a "Nazi aesthetic," even to this day. The contents of the German War Art Collection challenge this. In 2005, the contents of the collection were transferred from the custody of the *Oberfinanzdirektion* (Federal Finance Ministry) at the *Hauptzollamt* to the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (German Historical Museum) in Berlin and reunited with the repatriated selection of the German War Art Collection in 2005. See Maertz, "The Invisible Museum."

however, focuses primarily on *Kriegsmaler* and the German War Art Collection because of the tensions, anxieties, and empathies its journey reveals between the United States and Germany regarding how to treat and understand the Nazi project and the role of "ordinary" (that is, non-Nazi elite) Germans and soldiers. Furthermore, the contents of the German War Art Collection reveal several works that do not fit neatly into the dichotomy of "Entartete" and "Nazi" art that has developed in both the scholarly and public consciousness.

Ultimately, this chapter engages in ongoing debates concerning art restitution and art looting during the postwar period, arguing that contrary to the official story, the postwar American policy towards Germany and its cultural properties may have initially incorporated art looting. It also raises questions regarding official U.S. understanding of what constituted "Nazi artwork," and whether art could be a catalyst for a return to militarism in Germany postwar**.** Finally, it examines the ambivalent, sometimes empathetic, reaction that both Gilkey and the Army had to works created by German soldiers during the war. On a broader level, the U.S. Army's understanding and treatment of the artwork of the German War Art Collection suggests the U.S. helped shape the process of "coming to terms with the past" in Germany through this artwork. In this way, the works' historical trajectory was a mirror for American fears and desires regarding the relationship between Germany's past and the U.S.'s present.

**German War Art and Scholars since 1946**

The interest in Nazi-era artwork has largely been in regards to works that comprised the *NS-Reichsbesitz,* including the landscapes, still-lifes, portraits, and architectural paintings that were sold to members of the Nazi elite from the walls of exhibition halls or specifically commissioned by Nazi dignitaries to join their private collections. Yet with few notable

exceptions, the movement of this artwork since 1945 has been under-documented.[4] American involvement in the collection and internment of artwork during World War II and into the immediate postwar period is a well-trodden narrative when approached from the angle of the so-called "Monuments Men."

As Cora Sol Goldstein and Pamela Potter, among other scholars, have noted, the MFA&A officers also worked in the postwar period of occupation to bring the fine arts into the American re-education program and enable a renaissance of modern art in Germany.[5] The historiography relating to the American response to and role in the visual arts, specifically painting, however, tends to focus on the American military government's initial indifference to the fine arts (immediately following the war), and the subsequent efforts of MFA&A officers to match the Soviet Military Administration's (SMAD) instrumentalization of German artists as "potential agents of social transformation" and "political assets" postwar.[6]

Monographs addressing the role of Gilkey and the German War Art Program and Collection are limited, especially in the field of history. Beginning in the late 1970s, there was a wave of interest in the topic radiating from inside the U.S. military, most likely coinciding with

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[4] See Gregory Maertz, "The Invisible Museum," and Iris Lauterbach, *Der Central Collecting Point in München: Kunstschutz, Restitution, Neubeginn* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015). As mentioned above, Maertz touches upon the aesthetic dichotomy in "degenerate" versus "Nazi" art that was created and reinforced by the interest in the limited contents of the *Reichsbesitz*, notably from the 1970s-1990s, especially in West Germany. Lauterbach's work is more interested in the complicated systems of collection, assessment, and repatriation by the Monuments Men and the German who assisted them that dovetailed at Munich's Central Collecting Point, though she also mentions Gilkey's work in collecting and registering thousands of works at the CCP from the *Haus der Kunst* and his raids of works by the *Kriegsmaler*. See 162-165.

[5] Cora Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 70-75. See also Pamela M. Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016),

[6] Sol Goldstein, 69.

congressional debates that culminated in the return of a swath of paintings and drawings to West Germany in the mid-1980s.[7] The interest in and praise of German combat art reflected in the work of American military historians Marian and James Weber may also be related to double-sided desire by American scholars and military personnel to improve relations with West Germany and distance military art created by German soldiers from some of the more well-known state sanctioned art (including works by court painters and artists such as Ziegler and Arno Breker).[8] Weber's book in particular focused solely on German War Art and *Kriegsmaler*, and the U.S. Army's role in identifying, collecting, storing, and later returning, the artwork in the decades following 1945. Weber's monograph was completed with assistance from Gordon

[7] James Weber and Marian McNaughton both addressed the topic of the German War Art Collection and *Kriegsmaler* in 1979 tomes. McNaughton, then the staff curator of the Army Art Collection at the Center of Military History, wrote a chapter in renowned military historian Robert Coakley's *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History* on the Army Art Program. (Coakley was part of the War Department's Office of Chief of Military History following World War II, which later became the Center of Military History). McNaughton's contribution referred to the U.S. Army Art Collection as a "rich and often neglected source of material for research," a statement that was true nearly 35 years after World War II and continues to hold truth more than 35 years later. Treating the Army's collection of war art as an undiscovered treasure trove, McNaughton's focus is primarily the American war art program (U.S. Army Combat Art Program). In comparison to the U.S.'s program, she frames the German war art program as much larger more developed, and one that, under Luitpold's Adam's guidance, had "prodigious results." Like Weber after her, McNaughton also brings an air of admiration to her analysis of the paintings and drawings of the German *Kriegsmaler*, regarding the quality as "uniformly high," ("although they had to serve the purpose of Hitler") reflecting a certain respect for the art that Gilkey shared and explicitly admitted decades later, when he was no longer head of the German War Art Project. McNaughton rightfully points out that the German artists, though operating within the boundaries of figurative realism (an observation that is open for challenge), at least seem to have had a certain degree of flexibility within their subject matter. Furthermore, McNaughton praises the immediacy of many of the paintings, a trait that might be attributed to Captain Adam's insistence that the painters produced their sketches – and often their paintings – on the front.

[8] This art had, in the mid-1970s, become the topic of anxiety in Germany, coinciding with the so-called *Hitlerwelle*, the publishing of Joachim Fest's pivotal biography of Hitler in 1973 (as well as Goebbels's diaries a few years earlier), and a groundbreaking exhibition of Nazi-era paintings in Frankfurt in 1974, which will be examined in the following chapters.

Gilkey (who died in 2000), several of the war artists themselves, as well as their families, and importantly, Virginia Congressman G. William Whitehurst. Whitehurst's bill authorizing the return of paintings by German naval combat artist Claus Bergen, which will be addressed later in this chapter and in the following chapters, was a clearly an impetus for Weber's research and publication. Tellingly, the book is also prefaced by an introduction that preemptively defends the merits of serious study of German war art and war artists:

> I believed that creative individuals in Nazi Germany had been forced to conform to an ideal of monumental realism and self-serving propaganda. Perhaps the well-publicized paintings of the Third Reich were meant to convey that impression. But the works produced by the *Kriegsmaler* are of a very different nature…the wide range of artistic styles and techniques was totally unexpected. The diversity of subject matter was just as surprising.[9]

Quelling this initial skepticism regarding the merits of studying this type of art is the relief that the paintings and drawings did not fit into the monolithic category of "monumental realism" assigned to most Nazi art. This stylistic categorization remains pervasive in scholarship to this day. These studies importantly opened new doors for scholarship of Nazi-era artwork; however, the question of the ethics of taking this artwork "seriously," both as art and as historical document, always looms. The justification for studying this artwork by scholars is clear: this art is somehow "different" because it adheres to a certain idea about both art and artists the Americans prioritized – art must come from a place of freedom in order to be taken seriously. For McNaughton and Weber, the art is only worthy of study *because* it somehow stands apart

[9] Robert Mills, "Introduction," in John Paul Weber, *The German War Artists* (Columbia, South Carolina: The Cerberus Book Company, 1979), 7.

from other artwork produced under the Nazi regime. In short, for the first time, certain art was distanced from the oppressiveness of Nazism, and thus seen as fit for serious study.

Studies of war art paintings and the German War Art Collection receded again into the perceived monolith of "Nazi artwork" reinforced by the visibility of works from the *Reichsbesitz* until the early 2000s. Gregory Maertz addressed the topic again in a 2007 article, picking up where Weber's investigations ended, rightly noting continuities between many paintings in the German War Art Collection and modernist art pre-1933.[10] Roger Griffin alluded to these visual continuities in his study of modernism and fascism, questioning scholars' reluctance to bring the idea of aesthetic modernism together with, not in opposition to, "Nazi art."[11] Jonathan Petropoulos returned to this idea regarding specific artists working under the Third Reich, though he did not take into account combat art or artists. The stylistic variation in the artwork of the *Kriegsmaler* will become clear later in this chapter.[12] Yet these scholars all overlooked the deeper implications of the confrontations and conversations between the United States and Germany regarding not only this collection, but also paintings in the *Reichsbesitz*.[13] In short, in

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[10] Gregory Maertz, "The Invisible Museum: Unearthing the Lost Modernist Art of the Third Reich," *Modernism/modernity* 15.1 (2007): 63-85.

[11] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010). Griffin suggests that the typical and narrow scholarly dismissal of Nazi art as "totalitarian kitsch" is mistaken; instead, it is more useful to eschew such value-judgment, and begin to see art and cultural artifacts "sanctioned by the Nazi brand of political religion as simultaneously expressions of its fundamental socio-political modernism, and hence its *cultural* modernism*, whatever the particular school of aesthetics they employ,* 286.

[12] Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[13] See Gregory Maertz, "The Invisible Museum: Unearthing the Lost Modernist Art of the Third Reich," *Modernism/modernity* 15.1 (2007): 63-85; Maertz, "The German War Art Collection," *Kunst und Propaganda: Im Streit der Nationen, 1930-1945*, Exh. catalogue, Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin: Michel Sandstein Verlag, 2007), 456-464. Cora Sol Goldstein also touched on the treatment by American forces of Nazi-era artwork in the aftermath of the war, but ultimately, her interest was limited to the American efforts to revitalize the visual arts in Occupied Germany, as well as American-made visual propaganda in the Zero Hour and beyond.

spite of a brief but limited uptick in interest during the late 1970s, there has been little scholarly interest (besides Pamela Potter's monograph on the historiography of Nazi culture from 1945 to the present) in asking key questions that have implications for understanding how the U.S.'s attitude toward Nazi artwork helped to shape the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the decade following the war.

**Luitpold Adam and the War Art Program in Nazi Germany**

In 1942, through an order from Hitler, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) founded the *Staffel der bildenden Künstler Propaganda Abteilung* (SdbK). The tradition of combat art went back to World War I in Germany. In his official war art report, Gilkey noted that German soldiers produced combat art for the Nazi regime even prior to the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the war, with painter-soldiers using military subjects from World War I and exhibiting or selling their works to Nazi dignitaries.[14] With the invasion of Poland in 1939, the number of combat artists swelled, though they were not yet officially part of their own special unit; rather, artists often tagged along as "war correspondents" with commercial magazines and newspapers. Gilkey even claimed that artists occasionally "cooked up" images from the comfort of their own atelier to illustrate the nascent war effort, a practice that Adam hoped to eliminate with the SdbK several years later. War art of this period from 1939 to 1941, at least through Gilkey's eyes, was "over the top," meant purely to galvanize the viewing public and glorify the war effort. But Gilkey implied that this changed at least marginally under the eye of Adam after 1942.[15] U.S. forces had also shared this tradition of combat art since 1917, though the World

[14] Painter Roman Feldmeyer, for example, made several paintings around Fromelles, France, where Hitler had famously boasted of his experience on the front lines. According to Gilkey, Hitler bought several of the paintings, though this is unconfirmed in the archives. Gilkey, "German War Art," 9.
[15] *Ibid*.

War II-era program was better developed in Germany.[16] The U.S. Army's familiarity with the program and goals of combat art programs certainly contributed to the high level of interest in – and respect for – the German War Art Collection following its seizure and internment at numerous central collection points across Germany, and finally in Washington, D.C. Several well-known painters who worked during the Nazi regime, including Bloß and Otto Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, had prior experience as *Kriegsmaler* during World War I.[17]

The man appointed head of the SdbK, *Hauptmann* Luitpold Adam, had also served as a *Kriegsmaler* during the previous war and, in Gilkey's own words, "came from a family of combat artists."[18] In June of 1941, Adam was recalled to active duty as First Lieutenant and assigned to the *Propaganda-Ersatz-Abteilung* (Propaganda Replacement Center) in Potsdam, where he oversaw the output of the group *Kriegsmaler und Pressezeichner* ("War Painters and

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[16]For more on the American war art program, as well as a brief intro to the German and Japanese war art programs, see Marian R. McNaughton, "The Army Art Program" in John E. Jessup, Jr. and Robert W. Coakley, *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History/U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 319-329. McNaughton notes that the U.S. Army Combat Art Program began during World War I, when the War Department decided to make a visual record of "terrain, uniforms, equipment, and actions of the war." (328) The germ-seed of the program was the deployment of eight artists, hand-picked by famed "Gibson Girl" artist Charles Dana Gibson, to France to pictorially record the activities of the American Expeditionary Forces. The resultant war art (paintings and some drawings) was deposited in the Smithsonian Institution. The combat art program grew exponentially during World War II – the Associated Americans Artists (founded in 1939) recruited experienced artists for the War Art Unit, founded by the Army Corps of Engineers in late 1942. Some of the most high-profile painters of the 1930s and 1940s were selected to enlist in the program, including Reginald Marsh, Jack Levine, and Henry Varnum Poor.

[17] Prior to the invasion of Poland in 1939, military subjects from World War I-era combat art were recycled and used to exalt the German army and promote a feeling of militarism both throughout art exhibitions and in government offices. Prior to the official establishment of the SdbK, that is, with the Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland, German war correspondents/artists tagged along with magazine and newspaper syndicates. For more on the history of World War I combat artists in Germany, see Weber, 41-48.

[18] Gordon Gilkey, "German War Art (Office of the Chief Historian Headquarters, European Command), April 25, 1947, 14. NARA: RG 319. Box 72, Folder 17.

Newspaper Artists.")[19] This group of painters and graphic artists ultimately served as the germ-seed for the larger SdbK, officially founded less than one year later. The goal of the SdbK was to establish an official group of artists, both vetted and accredited by the regime, who would go with the German Army to the front and visually record its progress and campaigns. The initial group of 27 artists recruited in 1941 for Adam's group of *Kriegsmaler und Pressezeichner* were members of the *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK) and had been recommended by President of the *Reichskammer der bildenden Künste*, Walter Hoffmann.[20]

When Adam first took his post in Potsdam, this small collection of artists was in dire need of both equipment and space. Adam immediately went to work, ordering the construction of an art supply depot and gathering new supplies for the artists in preparation for their deployment to the front.[21] He also secured a "safe space" in recently vacated rooms of the Society of Berlin Artists in Berlin, which was to be used as an archive, supply, and exhibition area for the paintings coming in from the front.[22] By spring of 1942, the official founding date of the SdbK, the Artists Division of the German High Command comprised 80 combat artists, a number that would reach 300 by the war's end, with a production estimation of nearly 10,000 paintings and drawings. Half were to be assigned to the Wehrmacht and the other half to the Navy and Luftwaffe, all ready to be sent to the front.[23] From this point on, the art, mostly paintings (watercolor and oil) and drawings, the resulted from the project were exhibited throughout

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[19] Michael Reese and Diane Weathers, "The Pentagon's Nazi Art," *Newsweek*, 22 February 1982, 31.
[20] Hoffmann's list included Franz Eichhorst, Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, and Elk Eber, all established painters since pre-World War I.
[21] See Weber, 44-45.
[22] Gordon Gilkey, Unpublished/untitled manuscript, 1980, 89, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.
[23] *Ibid*.

Germany and occupied Europe for "educational and cultural purposes."[24] Artists also produced quick sketches on location on the front and sent them back to Potsdam, using the sketches to produce large-scale studio paintings that adorned the walls of Army museums and the offices of Nazi dignitaries.[25] A purchase commission comprising Major von Fromberg of the *Oberkommando des Herres* (OKH), who also worked with Adam to select artists for the Sdbk, representatives of the German Chief of the Army Museums, and the Wehrmacht's *Bauamt* (Construction Office) also met with Adam and some of the painters regularly and selected their favorite paintings to hang in the German Army Museums and Casinos.[26] In the expected event of an Allied defeat, the works were designated to narrate the German victory in army museums, barracks, and military war headquarters, commemorative visual reminders of the Wehrmacht's struggles and victory over Allied forces.[27]

The artists were enticed not only by monetary and equipment compensation, but also by the promise that they would be allowed relative freedom in the expression of their ideas on the front. There is also evidence of willingness to help compensate for living accommodations as well; a letter from Adolf Eichmann to Johannes Hentschel, the master electro-mechanic for Hitler's apartments in the *Reichskanzlei*, confirmed a transfer of more than 2000 RM to make

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[24] Bess Hormats, "Art of the Götterdämmerung: The United States Army's Strange and Little-Known Collection of Nazi War Art," *ARTnews*, January 1975, 69.

[25] As Cora Sol Goldstein notes, by 1944 the Army and Army Museums had acquired 320,000 RM worth of *Kriegsmalerei*. See *Power and the Visual Domain: Images, Iconoclasm, and Indoctrination in American Occupied German, 1945-1949*, Diss., University of Chicago, 2002, 186.

[26] Gilkey, "German War Art," 17. These meetings commenced in 1943, and by 1944, the OKH and the Herresmuseum had invested RM 320,000 in paintings from artists at the SdbK.

[27] See Weber. Notable exhibitions of the paintings include one held personally by Hitler in December 1943, and a final showing organized by Goebbels at Berlin's Propaganda Ministry building in January 1945. Weber notes that "another German war art show was staged at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, but poorly attended because Picasso's war pictures were not on exhibition," 41-42

adjustments to a *Marinemaler*'s apartment in Berlin.[28] Adam himself initially had no control over the artists' subject matter or output, as this was left up to the leader of each individual *Propaganda-Kompanie* to which the artist was assigned, though Adam later reviewed each piece of art with its artist as it arrived in Potsdam, then the depository in Berlin.[29] This promise challenges the long-held idea that Nazi visual ideology was rigidly defined and controlled by the RKK. It also confirms newer research that characterizes RKK as a trade union rather than an organization that rigidly prescribed a specific aesthetic to artists, and that represent "Nazi artwork" as thematically and stylistically ill-defined, varied, and malleable.[30]

Each *Propaganda-Kompanie* officially employed one "fine artist" and two commercial, or advertising artists. Because war painters sometimes found themselves in need of new and suitable subjects if their company had been stationary for a long period of time, Adam pushed for

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[28] 30 April 1941, letter from Adolf Eichmann to Johannes Hentschel, R43/II 1250a, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

[29] The job announcement pledged: "Es wird hierbei gleichzeitig darauf hingewiesen, dass bezüglich der Gestaltung der Ideen dem Künstler freie Hand gelassen ist." Center of Military History Archive (uncategorized); reprinted in Weber, 43. See also Gilkey, Untitled/unpublished manuscript, 1980, 90, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

[30] See Pamela Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts*, Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), and Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art As Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). In his seminal book, Steinweis challenges previous assumptions (many crystalized during the height of the Cold War-era) about totalitarian power and control in Nazi Germany, presenting Reich Chambers like the RKK as part of a period of professionalization that began in German during the Weimar Republic. Though he does not consider Adam's squadron, Steinweis does emphasize that benefits and prime living and working conditions offered to those in arts professions during the period, arguing that in order to attain these benefits, artists had to embrace neocorporatism (in other words, professionalization that eschewed or overcame social or political boundaries in their artistic communities). Potter and Petropoulos (in both 1996 and 2014/2015) supported Steinweis's thesis, that the RKK (and other chambers) were less about totalitarian control and more about professionalization/neocorporatism.

Company leaders to send their war painters to the front while battles were in progress in order to record more stirring documentation of the war.[31] According to Gilkey's recollection, Adam was ultimately successful in receiving authorization from the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* for an operational procedure that allowed the artists three months in combat area to paint or draw, then required a return to Potsdam to register their watercolors or drawings, pick up supplies, and work on finishing their paintings in the studio for another three months. He also obtained a special order from the OKW allowing artists with "special ideas" to be withdrawn from their PK and sent out on their own assignment – for example, one *Kriegsmaler* by the name of Hanzl spent the crushing winter of 1941/2 with the Spanish Blue Division in Novgorod in Russia, and went on to shadow the "Free Indian Troops in their position on the Southwest Coast of France."[32] Like Gilkey and the Americans, Adam viewed the role of the *Kriegsmaler* and their immersion on the front as vital not only to posterity and history, but also to the spirit of the troops on the front lines of battle. In his support of embedding artists on the front, Adam argued that "German troop morale would be raised by the presence of combat artists up front immortalizing the soldier and his 'important' contributions, his 'heroic' deeds."[33] Furthermore, in conversations with Gilkey immediately following the war's end, Adam emphasized that the war artists were expected to visualize "not just the horrible wide of war, but war's episodical [*sic*] and lyrical moments."[34] Adam's dual understanding of the *Kriegsmaler* as both combatant and artist, as someone who took part in and contribute to the action and war effort but also experienced and then visually

[31] Weber, 44. Adam often fought with PK leaders on this point, as many of them preferred to keep their *Kriegsmaler* away from the front lines, instead "cook[ing] up] pictures" removed from the scene.
[32] Weber, 44.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] Adam in Gilkey, "German War Art," 19.

rendered the war, immortalizing it for generations to come, was echoed not only by war artists and reporters themselves, but also ultimately the U.S. Occupying Forces.

Even a cursory glance at some of the paintings and sketches produced reveals a tension ostensibly felt by the *Kriegsmaler* between exalting the war and documenting both the day-to-day horrors and malaise felt by those on the front. This tension was no doubt exacerbated by the promises of artistic freedom made by Adam and his subsequent inspection and oversight of the paintings and drawings produced and sent back to the depots in Berlin and Potsdam. For example, while overseeing the *Propaganda-Ersatz-Abteilung* before it was subsumed into the Sdbk during the winter of 1941/2, Adam oversaw a fairly rigorous artist training program to ensure those employed as *Kriegsmaler* or *Pressezeichner* could cope with the job requirements, which prescribed not only artistic ability, but also the capacity to work quickly "with an impersonal power of concentration to record what is going on around, but [also the ability to] abstract himself from a personal feeling of danger."[35]

**Combat Art: Between "Realism" and Immortalization**

The artists working under Luitpold Adam produced works of art whose style and subject matter both reinforce and challenge expectations prescribed to it by scholars of Nazi-era artwork. Stylistically, the works that Gilkey encountered in 1946 ran the gamut from the standard exultant portraits of military leaders and triumphant soldiers to melancholic and abstracted images that attempted to convey not only the trauma of war, but also a certain degree of *Innerlichkeit* of the combat artist himself. This impulse might be traced to the popularity and influence of *Storm of Steel*, Ernst Jünger's memoir of life as a soldier on the Western Front during the First World War. Importantly, the works also fit into a broader cannon of war art

[35] Adam in Weber, 44.

produced during the period by other combatants, notably American and Japanese soldiers, a trend that scholars following McNaughton and Weber in the 1970s are just now beginning to treat with interest.[36]

The combat painting of the German soldiers shared, unsurprisingly, much with the art of their American counterparts. The fact that there exists, perhaps, more similarities than differences in paintings produced by a democracy and those produced under an authoritarian regime seemed to both intrigue and trouble American officers like Gilkey, in the same way that it challenges scholars of the Nazi period today. A brief survey of paintings shown at American combat art exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. reinforces this. Works from the *Wehrmacht* could be displayed next to paintings and drawings from American soldiers with little apparent interruption in style of subject matter. The German combat art produced by members of the *Wehrmacht* and encountered by Gilkey and his team following the war did seem to adhere to some guidelines, though there is no written evidence that Adam (or Hitler, for that matter) ever explicitly prescribed rules as to what the soldiers-artists could and could not record. Many of the works are typical (by 1930s and 1940s standards, as evidenced by analogous works of American combat art) lionzing portraits of military leaders, adorned in the attire of their particular unit.

Olaf Jordan, for example, specialized in stunningly realistic and probing portraits of volunteer soldiers in the 1st Cossack Cavalry Division, as well as heroic likenesses of German army leaders, such as his portrait of Generalmajor Helmuth von Pannwitz [Fig. 1]. Wilhelm Wessel, another *Kriegsmaler,* made several charcoal portraits of soldiers from the Afrikakorps.

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[36] For example, see Asato Ikeda, Aya Louise McDonald, and Ming Tiampo, eds., *Art and War in Japan and its Empire, 1931-1960* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013).

[Fig. 2] These portraits bear a resemblance to the heroic portraits of American combat artist Peter Hurd, who painted the famous 8th Air Force Bomber Command in England. [Fig. 3] The clear stylistic similarities between the two artists, German and American, challenge the idea of a monolithic, prescriptive "Nazi art," even among German combat artists, suggesting instead that the heroic realism of war officer portraits was an international trend understood by artists on both sides of the Atlantic, regardless of the political affiliation of their country. In fact, if anything, the Wessel's portrait is more realistically rendered, while Hurd's portrait has almost a mythical aura to it. More broadly, catalogues of American war art suggests something important: while there may have been a slightly greater degree of variation in terms of style and subject matter within American combat art than German war art,[37] the variation is not striking enough to separate them into two entirely discrete art historical traditions based simply on the political situations that produced them. The fact that there existed more similarities than differences in paintings produced by a democracy and those produced under an authoritarian regime seemed to simultaneously disconcert and fascinate American officers like Gilkey.

A simultaneous lionization and demonization of war is palpable in several other paintings and drawings by *Kriegsmaler* collected by Gilkey and his task force. Though posed portraits of generals and soldiers comprised many of the paintings collected, another seemingly standard subject was that of beleaguered soldiers and battle scenes. Sometimes these included images of German technological might bulldozing through enemy territory, or the antithesis – technology

[37] For example, first place in a Life/NGA-sponsored show in 1943 entitled simply *Art Exhibition by Men of the Armed Forces* went to a striking painting by Private Robert Burns ("Troop Movements,"), a work whose cubist forms set it apart from other figurative art in the exhibition.

destroyed, prostrate at the feet of man and horse, as in the remarkably detailed ink drawings by prolific *Kriegsmaler* Josef Arens.[38] [Fig. 4, 5]

Other works, such as the melancholic and impressionist watercolors of *Kriegsmaler* Rudolf Hengstenberg [Fig. 6, 7], deviate from the figurative realism of portraiture, approximating more closely some of the abstracted, almost cubist bodies and forms also present in some American combat art.[39] Some of the sketches of Herbert Agricola also utilize near-abstracted forms to convey the smallness of the German troops seeking shelter on the face of a rocky mountain.[40] [Fig. 8] Still other combat artists, including Heinrich Amersdorffer, specialized in landscapes and townscapes, paintings and sketches seemingly unfettered by the horrors of war until one notices small details – for example, a black blot approximating a [battle?]ship here – that allude to pervasive violence. [Fig. 9] And still others, including Bavarian artist Otto Bloß, took inspiration from the dark, fetid color palette of Otto Dix to render the nightmarish deathscape of war, though in the case of Bloß's *Landscape of War*, the only "bodies" present are mechanical – Panzers and airplanes – while singed trees dominate the skyline.[41] [Fig. 10]

A sketchbook titled "Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers" [Figs. 11-15] from a combat artist (referred to as "Meister Bibow" in a short dedication opening the book) stationed on the Eastern Front, ostensibly part of Operation Barbarossa, in late 1941 reveals images that would not be out of place in an Otto Dix or George Grosz exhibition: a horse, stomach-bulging, dying in a trench; the mangled, metal corpse of a Panzer; a jumbled pile of Wehrmacht corpses, helmets discarded

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[38] See, *Tank Spearheads Through Sedan*, ink, 1940 and *Abandoned 75 mm A/A Equipment, La Panne, France*, 1940.
[39]See Hengstenberg, *Road4*, watercolor, 1942(?) and *Boatload of Wounded Soldiers* (undated).
[40] See Herbert Agricola, *Bivouac Near Cliff, Italy*, charcoal, undated.
[41] See Otto Bloß, *Landscape of War*, undated.

and limbs askew; a disembodied hand, fingers curled unnervingly, laying in a field while storm clouds gather ominously overhead. Admittedly, the Tagebuch also contains several caricatures of drunken Cossacks and genetically disadvantaged villagers, sometimes contrasted with the capable bodies of Wehrmacht soldiers, renderings that aesthetically evoke the political caricatures of George Grosz. Yet even the German soldiers are often depicted as anonymous, with interchangeable faces, swathed in darkness, suggesting that the stereotypical "heroic Aryan" victor did not always triumph, at least aesthetically.

The sketchbook's flowery introductory dedication, penned by a *Kriegsberichter,* or War Reporter, named Hans Huffzky from the same PK, glorifies and romanticizes Meister Bibow, the artist, as a vital contributor to the war effort. His words also emphasize the idea of the "war artist" as conceptualized by Luitpold Adam as a near mythic figure, grounded by the reality of war and working alongside the troops, but whose task of visually rendering the war for future generations set him apart from war reporters and photographers. Art, specifically painting, is framed as conveying a powerful and eternal truth that even photography cannot capture:

> His [the *Kriegsmaler*'s] studio was a meadow, his roof a tarpaulin, stretched between the trees, or simply the empty sky, his stool, a petrol canister…We, the other members of the Propaganda Company, wrote our reports, took photographs, shot footage, broadcast – but good God, our work was missing something, which we would not have known, had our 'Comrades of the Palette' not been with us. Just as they do not create their work in a fleeting instant, they also do not create their work *for* a fleeting instant. [42]

[42] "Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers," June 1941, NS571/179, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau. "Ihr Atelier war eine Waldwiese, ihr Dach eine Zeltbahn, gespannt von Baum zu Baum, oder der blanke Himmel, ihr Stuhl ein Benzinkannister…Wir anderen PK – Männer haben unsere Berichte geschrieben, wir haben fotografiert, wir haben gekurbelt, wir haben gerundfunkt – aber weiss Gott, unsere Arbeit fehlte etwas, wenn wir nicht wüssten, dass unsere

Huffzky's words are ripe with pathos-laden imagery that presents an idea of the war artist as a humble but great servant of the German war effort, at home in both nature and the company of his fellow soldiers in the PK. His words also visualize a certain Nazified romantic "heroic landscape,"[43] in which the landscape is often German, and embodies a certain sense of nationalism. It is peaceful and bucolic, and interacts with emblems of war or technological might, in this case, the image of a painter-soldier seated on a petrol canister while painting under a canopy of trees.

Once again, however, it would be a mistake to construe this romantic understanding of the combat artist's role as somehow specifically "German," or of the Nazi era. American combat artists, and the institutions that exhibited their work, shared some of this hyperbolic language lauding the courage and importance of the war artist to the tides of history, noting that the beauty wrought by the destruction of war must be immortalized. The forward to a 1943 show of paintings commissioned of American war artists by *Life Magazine* expressed that "…it is inescapable that to military men and civilians alike that there is also in war a certain desperate beauty…in short, even out of agony there is beauty to be distilled." The forward continued that, "in these days it is not only the opportunity but the inescapable duty of the war artist to see one

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'Kamaraden von der Palette' bei uns wären…Wie sie nicht aus dem Augenblick schaffen, schaffen sie auch nicht für den Augenblick." (Translation author's own)

[43] For more on the notion of the Nazi "heroic landscape" in painting, see Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 116. The term was coined by Nazi architect Paul Schulze-Naumberg around 1940/1941. These were scenes that juxtaposed the unique beauty and appeal of that Nordic landscape with scenes of worksites and war images – from granite quarries to bridges to the *Autobahnen*, to renderings of Panzers embedded in a grassy meadow (see Artur Ahrens, *Advance in Russia*). This imagery gained popularity in paintings and drawings from 1939 to 1942, coinciding with several of the most stunning military successes of the Third Reich.

in terms of the other."[44] Other catalogues of combat art, such as that of a 1944 show at the National Gallery of Art, made sure to emphasize that the role of the war artist was not simply to "glorify" war, but also to "express the emotions of our people and their leaders," and portray "the realism of the day."[45] Though it is easy to pick out scenes of German combat art that celebrate the German war effort, it is also clear that many *Kriegsmaler* strove to immortalize a sense of realism of the struggles of combat beyond a simple glorification of violence. And like Huffzky, who, in the introduction to the *Tagebuch*, saw the artist as an exceptional figure grounded by the raw experience of war, exhibitions of American combat artists lauded "courage, skill, [and] watchfulness"[46] as important attributes of both soldiers and artists alike. Ultimately, in their words and the images they produced of war, laudatory and damning, intricate and banal, the combat artists of the U.S. and German battalions were more alike than different. This is perhaps another reason that Gilkey, as well as subsequent viewers and consumers of German combat art, often felt a certain closeness to the art that was seized following the war. Simply put, it was familiar. Furthermore, the position of the German combat artist was grounded in a reality they knew: when the choice was to paint or use bullets, the decision to enlist as a *Kriegsmaler* in the Wehrmacht was most likely not a difficult one.

## "Just Doing Their Job": The *Kriegsmaler* of Adam's *Staffel der bildenden Künstler*

[44] Francis Henry Taylor, ed. *War Art: A Catalogue of Paintings Done on the War Fronts by American Artists for "Life,"* 1943 (publication information not available), National Gallery of Art Gallery Archives.
[45] Elinor F. Morgenthau, ed. *The Army at War by American Artists: Paintings and Drawings Lent by the War Department to the Treasury Department*, 1944 (publication information not available), National Gallery of Art Gallery Archives.
[46] *Ibid*.

The German combat artists chosen by the OKW to enlist in Adam's squadron ran the gamut from established painter/graphic artist (or even art teacher) to inexperienced but promising neophyte. Weber's 1979 survey and archival sources give several of the artist-soldiers ample space for biography, implying yet again that, at least in the few decades following the war, there was a certain degree of respect and admiration allotted to the *Kriegsmaler* as professionals "just doing their job," like many others (including their American counterparts) during the war effort. For example, Wilhelm Wessel (b. 1904) was a painter, graphic artist, and art teacher who studied at Weimar's famed Bauhaus prior to its closure in that city in 1926. Called to service in 1939 at the dawn of the war, Wessel served as a platoon leader of the 6th Panzer Division, which campaigned in Poland, France, and Russia. After the SdbK was founded in 1942, Wessel was assigned to the post of *Kriegsmaler*, where he served under *Generalfeldmarschall* Erwin Rommel in Africa, then later with *Generalfeldmarschall* Albert Kesselring in Italy. In the years following the war, Wessel aggressively sought the restitution of six paintings that were produced during a leave of absence from the SbdK; his requests were denied twice, in 1947 and again in 1954. The responses from both the Chief of Military History stated that "the oil paintings referred to are all dated 1944, indicating that they were done while you were a member of the 'Artists' Squadron' (Sdbk) of the Wehrmacht High Command and as such are legal war booty."[47]

[47] See Weber, 115 and letter regarding addressed to the Chief of Military History from the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, dated 26 May 1954, B115/458, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz, Koblenz, Germany. The Judge's letter responds to a draft of a letter from a month prior that refers to Wessel's paintings as "war booty," and thus legitimate property of the U.S. Army following 1045. The Judge tempers the language in a subsequent letter sent back to Wessel, suggesting instead that the paintings be referred to as "captured property" and that they "are retained in accordance with allied occupation policies."

The names and biographies of several other artists recruited for Adam's squadron were known because of their subsequent efforts to retrieve their artwork from Gilkey and the U.S. Army following the war. Ludwig Orth was a painting teacher and Iron Cross recipient who later specialized in portraiture. Rudolf Hengstenberg was an established painter whose angular paintings of tanks and infantry described previously beg comparisons to the cubism of the early twentieth century, and whose works continue to be shown in museums throughout Germany.[48] Renowned *Kriegsmaler* and *Marinemaler* Claus Bergen first gained notoriety during World War I, and his paintings of naval battles during the Second World War would come to be admired by Congressman G. William Whitehurst of Virginia in the 1970s. This was an admiration that Whitehurst later turned into a Congressional act mandating the return of a batch of paintings held in Washington, D.C. to Germany, an act that will be examined later in this dissertation.[49] Still other known painters included Herbert Agricola, a well-regarded painter based in Munich; and Olaf Jordan a portraitist who ran his own atelier on Yugoslavia's Dalmatian Coast in the 1930s until he was called to active duty. The stories of Bergen, Agricola, and Jordan will be addressed

[48] Hengstenberg was declared a *Mitläufer*, or Follower, during his denazification trial in 1948, most likely because of his early membership in the Nazi Party (1931) and the popularity and wide reach of his paintings from the front between 1942 and 1945.

[49] Because he was a highly regarded *Marinemaler* from World War I, Bergen's case was slightly different, narratively and, arguably, morally. A fervent believer, he joined the Nazi Party in 1922, and was placed on the famed *Gottbegnadeten-Liste* ("God Gifted List," or "Important Artist Exempt List," a list of artists assembled in 1944 by Goebbels who were considered crucial to the legacy of Nazi culture). These artists were exempt from military service. Several of Bergen's naval paintings were exhibited in the Great German Art Exhibitions; Hitler even purchased a number of these. Like many other combat artists and in spite of his status on the "List," Bergen was not prosecuted for his Nazi associations at war's end. Of the high-ranking artists who were, many were ultimately exonerated. Even famed court artist Adolf Ziegler initially only received the sentence in his denazification trial of "Mitläufer," or "Follower," and more fervent "believers" such as Bavarian Master Artist Josef Keller-Kühne, who joined the Nazi Party earlier, was ultimately fined and branded "Minderbelasteter," or "Minor Offender." See Denazification Files in Bayerische Haupstaatsarchiv (BaHSA).

later. In short, the biographies, skills, and interests of those recruited as *Kriegsmaler* ran the gamut from amateur to professional. While some were established enough to have paintings exhibited at the Great German Art Exhibitions (as was Amersdorffer), others were relieved to have their artistic skills recognized by Adam after serving several tours of duty as soldiers following the outbreak of war in Europe.

All of this is to say that there was not a prototypical *Kriegsmaler* recruited to record the war effort. Some had proven themselves in the artistic field for many years before their recruitment, even exhibiting in the Great German Art Exhibitions, while others were fledgling artists whose skills impressed or intrigued Adam. Others were art professionals – teachers, printmakers, commercial artists, lecturers – whose works may not have initially landed them coveted spots in the *Haus der deutschen Kunst* or smaller galleries, but for whom the promise of professional compensation and perhaps the chance to avoid full-on combat as a normal solder in the *Wehrmacht* or pilot in the *Luftwaffe* was thoroughly enticing. Even their ages varied wildly: while Orth was 34 when he began painting portraits for *Kompanie* 281, Bergen was pushing 60, though he painted as a protected member of the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste,* ("God Gifted List," or "Important Artist Exempt List"), a collection of artists assembled in 1944 by Goebbels who were considered crucial to the legacy of Nazi culture. These artists were exempt from military service. As Olaf Jordan, who was never a member of the Nazi Party, would write of his decision to become a *Kriegsmaler* in 1950, "the fact that I preferred [during the war] to paint [rather than] to shoot, or – in case I had refused both ways – to be shot myself, cannot be put up as a blame for me."[50]

[50] Olaf Jordan letter to the Army Historical Department, February 1950, in Weber, 104.

Of course, not all of those interested in working as soldier-artists under Adam were innocent painters seeking merely to protect their lives and livelihood. Jordan's postwar denial of complicity in the Nazi project contrasts sharply not only with Bergen's biography as a celebrated war painter who eagerly joined the Nazi Party in 1922 and sold several paintings to Nazi dignitaries for thousands of Reichsmark, but also with that of other prospective recruits, like Berlin-born Otto Fischer-Credo, a world-traveled artist in Holland, Berlin, and Paris. Fischer-Credo's resume spends little time chronicling his artistic experience, instead devoting space to highlighting his NSDAP credentials, including his admittance into the Nazi Party and the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in 1932, and his rise to *Truppenführer* (Commander) in the SA by 1935. His experience secured him a spot as a *Kriegsmaler*, where, unlike most artists recruited, he worked as a sculptor whose subjects included Hitler and Himmler.[51]

After the paintings and sketches were finalized in the studio and collected by Adam, Goebbels oversaw the final exhibition of such artwork (some of which was part of his own personal collection) in January 1945 at the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin. In the anticipated case of Allied defeat, the works created by artists of the SdbK were expected to narrate the German victory in army museums, clubs, barracks, and military war headquarters.[52]

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[51] Otto Fischer-Credo *Lebenslauf* (resume) and cover letter for post as *Kriegsmaler*, 8 May 1941, R55/22113, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde. Like Claus Bergen, in spite of his passion for the Nazi Party, Fischer-Credo enjoyed a fairly successful sculpting career after 1945, and died in Vancouver, B.C. in 1959.

[52] See Weber. Notable exhibitions of the paintings include one held personally by Hitler in December 1943, and a final showing organized by Goebbels at Berlin's Propaganda Ministry building in January 1945. Weber notes that "another German war art show was staged at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, but poorly attended because Picasso's war pictures were not on exhibition," 41-42

**Gilkey and the Confiscation of the German War Art Collection**

Knowing the background and role of Captain Gordon Gilkey as head of the German Wartime Art Project is indispensable to understanding the fate of German war art following 1945. Originally trained as an art teacher and printmaker in Oregon, Gordon Waverly Gilkey reported for active duty in June of 1942, enrolling in the Army Air Force as a volunteer. Two years later, in 1944, he joined the United States Air Force as a combat intelligence officer.[53] Even before the U.S.'s entry into World War II in 1939, Gilkey's interest in combat had been focused on protecting Europe's legacy in the realm of the arts; he wrote one letter in earnest to Franklin Roosevelt urging the President that should war break out, a "sincere effort should be made to save Europe's great cultural monuments."[54] Eventually, such a commission was formed, though there is no evidence that Gilkey's bidding was to thank. The so-called Roberts Commission, active from 1943 to mid-1946, comprised officers who worked with the U.S. Army to protect specific "cultural treasures" of the European Theater, bring together information on cultural property looted by the Axis Powers, specifically Germany, and ultimately promote restitution of this property. The Commission also compiled research for the more familiar Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives (MFA&A). While on active duty, Gilkey made several

[53] According to Weber and himself, Gilkey did not have the necessary "points" to become a civilian again following World War II, so he volunteered to be a member of the occupation forces in Europe. Weber, 35.

[54] Gilkey, Gordon. Unpublished/untitled manuscript, 1980, 1, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum. Roosevelt ultimately paid heed to this suggestion (which did not belong solely to Gilkey; rather, a group of faculty at Harvard and the ACLS banded together in 1943 to compile a catalogue of threatened European cultural monuments, private collections, and museums, and promptly began sharing this information with the U.S. Army prior to their continental offensive), and in 1943 formed the Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, which was abolished in June 1946. The commission's shorthand, the Roberts Commission, comes from Associate Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts, who served as its chairman until its dissolution.

attempts to be transferred to the Roberts Commission; each time the assignment was prevented or blocked by "higher priority duties."[55]

At war's end, in part because of his French and German language skills, Gilkey's desire to become involved in the cultural projects of the U.S. government was realized, though perhaps not exactly as he had envisioned. Following the establishment of a Historical Properties section in the Office of the Army Headquarters Commandant in Washington, D.C., a War Department memorandum dated 11 June 1945 provided for the "collection, processing, preservation, and control of war paintings, photographs, maps, trophies, relics, and objects of actual or potential historical interest or value produced during the present war which are or may become the property of the War Department." A subsequent section, added five months later and addressed to the Headquarters of the European Theater, bid for the collection of "available paintings, watercolors, engravings, and drawings showing troop activities, views of battlefields, military installations, industrial or home-front activities produced by German and Italian artists during the present war."[56]

There stories of Gilkey and the head of the SdbK, Captain Luitpold Adam, bear a certain symmetry. Both were artists who understood their tasks – protecting the story of war as captured on canvas – as a calling of the highest importance. Both also understood the job of the combat artist as morally elevated, a calling existing, perhaps, outside of any specific political framework. Following the war, for example, Adam expressed his desire to "[make] the artists' intellectual and art contributions, not just the horrible side of war, but war's episodic and lyrical moments,

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[55] *Ibid.*, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.
[56] *Ibid*. These categories were codified into on June 1, 1946 into Law 52 of the U.S. Zone's Military Government in Germany, which also prohibited commerce in works of art/cultural materials and did not delineate between art by great masters, Nazi art, and war or military art.

available to the German people, who by nature are inclined to meditate on and assimilate the spiritual-cultural values of a nation."[57] This sentiment is reflective not only of statements that Gilkey made in the years following the war as a civilian, but also in his interactions with some of the artists whose ateliers he visited and then raided, including Agricola, who remembered Gilkey as interested in the subject of his war paintings, but also in the high quality of their workmanship. These sympathies were not just limited to Gilkey. The consistent desire of U.S. Army and Pentagon officials to "borrow" art from the German War Art Collection to adorn office walls, coupled with the Army's willingness to loan out works to military museums (explicitly advertised in a catalogue for a show of the artwork in 1962), and later, specific political figures' investment in returning paintings to their original creators in Germany, indicate a high level of admiration for the artwork.[58]

Initially, Gilkey served as an information coordinator regarding cultural materials discovered in the American Zone of Occupation,[59] then was chosen to lead the Wartime Art Project, also known as the German War Art Program.[60] Here, Gilkey was put into contact with the Headquarters' Allied Restitution Missions. On November 8, 1945, Gilkey was assigned the specific task of finding, collecting, then transporting visual art objects "dealing with Nazi propaganda." Of specific interest to Gilkey were the paintings of the German *Kriegsmaler*,

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[57] Interview with Adam in Weber, 51.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59]See Weber, 35-36. As Weber notes, by the time the war was settling to an end and the U.S. Army swept its way through Europe, 849 temporary art repositories had been set up, the contents of which were recorded and maintained by officers of the MFA&A. Within these caches, the works deemed most valuable were cent to Central Collecting Points at Marburg, Munich, and Wiesbaden.
[60]Gilkey described his role as "head of the U.S. War Department Special Staff Art Projects in Europe." Unpublished/untitled manuscript, 1980, 1, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

which he believed were "of more historic significance."[61] Precisely to whom their work was of higher value, Gilkey never specified; his personal correspondence and friendliness with several of these war artists through the decades suggests that Gilkey regarded them as distinct from the so-called court painters like Adolf Ziegler or portraitist Fritz Erler, whose work he denigrated as "a summer re-run of German art of the 19th century,"[62] and whose paintings complemented Hitler's aesthetic tastes. Gilkey dismissed such art as "19th century…representational art that had no imagination…nudes, landscapes with people working in the fields."[63]

Gilkey's orders to collect works of visual art related to "Nazi propaganda" had their roots at Yalta, where Allied leaders called for the removal of all "Nazi and militaristic influences from public office and from the cultural and economic life of the German people,"[64] an order that was echoed by the Potsdam Agreement later that summer,[65] then finally codified by the Allied Control Council via Control Council Directive No. 30 the following year:

> The planning, designing, erection, installation, posting or other display of any monument, memorial, poster, statue, edifice, street or highway name marker, emblem, tablet, or insignia which tends to preserve and keep alive the German military tradition, to revive militarism or to commemorate the Nazi Party, or which is of such a nature as to glorify incidents of war…will be prohibited and declared illegal…Every existing

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[61] Potter, Captain Harold E. letter to Gordon Gilkey, 8 February 1946, Unspecified Folder, German War Art Collection, U.S. Center of Military History Archive.
[62] Gilkey manuscript, 13.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] Yalta Communiqué, Appendix II, 11 February 1945 (accessed online)
[65] The Potsdam Agreement, Part 2, Section A.3.iii, Potsdam (Berlin) Conference, 17 July-2 August 1945. Part 2 of the accord addresses the principles to govern Germany in the initial postwar control period, and also lays forth the principles of democratization, demilitarization, disarmament, and denazification, and called for the prevention of "Nazi and militarist activity or propaganda," opening the door for the U.S. War Department to carry out the confiscation of paintings, drawings, prints, and sculpture within the American Zone of Occupation that were produced by Nazi military and propaganda artists.

> monument, poster, statue, edifice, street or highway name marker, emblem, tablet, or insignia…must be completely destroyed and liquidated.[66]

Gilkey understood the connection between Potsdam and Yalta and his task of collecting "visual propaganda" as head of the Wartime Art Project, emphasizing that with the accords, the Allies were "united in declaring German militarism and Nazism would be destroyed and that such references would be removed from the cultural life of the German people."[67] The captain's task was not an easy one, as much of the Nazi war art had been hidden by the Nazi leadership "to protect it for posterity" from Allied bombings as the war raged to its conclusion.[68] His official army report from 1947 spelled out in exhaustive detail Gilkey's Indiana Jones-like quest to track down and bring the paintings to their various collecting points, primarily in Munich, to where Hitler's own private collection, discovered in salt mines at Altaussee in Austria, was also brought and processed. There were also other collecting points in Wiesbaden, Marburg, and Offenbach. According to the Army report, his investigation began with his acquisition of every annual exhibition catalogue of the *Haus der deutschen Kunst's* Great German Art Exhibitions between 1937 and 1944, as well as catalogues of traveling exhibitions of war art and popular art magazines, including *Kunst im Dritten Reich* (later *Kunst im deutschen Reich*). Importantly, Gilkey also used the last known addresses of those registered as *Kriegsmaler* to track down those remaining in the U.S. Zone, as well as the American Sector of Berlin. It was through these lists that Gilkey met some of the artists in person, including Amersdorffer and Agricola, who were living outside of Munich at the time. During these visits, Gilkey not only raided private ateliers

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[66] Weber, 75.
[67] Gilkey, 2.
[68] Cora Sol Goldstein, *Power and the Visual Domain: Images, Iconoclasm, and Indoctrination in American Occupied German, 1945-1949*, Diss., University of Chicago, 2002, 187.

(as was the case with Agricola), but also established personal contact with some of the war artists, apparently unable or unwilling to keep the art seizures strictly professional and sometimes, according to the recollection of the artists, complimenting the high quality of the works and promising to return paintings as soon as possible.[69] These lists also led Gilkey to the man in charge of the war artists, Captain Luitpold Adam, who had escaped the Society of Berlin Artists at Lützowplatz 7 with the inventory of the building on hand during the last month of the war, hoping to preserve not only his life, but also the legacy of the works created by his squadron of combat artists. When Gilkey finally tracked Adam and his wife down in Frauenau, a village near Passau in Bavaria, the former head of the SdbK guided him to a cache of paintings at *Schloss Oberfrauenau*, as well a large stash in an abandoned woodcutter's mountaintop hut straddling the German-Czech border.[70] According to Gilkey, Adam willingly helped Gilkey and his men gather and pack the artwork, realizing that "my [Gilkey's] arrival saved the total collection from destruction via the mice or the moisture."[71] Though it is possible that Gilkey embellished the German Commander's graciousness in another act of empathy towards the combat art program and its creators in Germany, it is clear that Gilkey understood their goals as similar: two army men, appreciative of art, trying to save paintings from crumbling into the dustbin of history.

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[69] See, for example, Agricola, Herbert letter to the Army War College in Washington, D.C., 30 December 1948, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz.

[70] According to Adam, he, his wife, and a local boy had spent the nights leading up to the armistice carrying the bundles of art up the mountain into the hut for safekeeping. The collection included paintings and a large number of sketches by war artists that had been sent back to Potsdam and Berlin to be turned into studio paintings. The cabin at Frauenau had apparently been caught in American-SS crossfire during the last days of the war, but the structure, and the art inside survived. The men did not.

[71] Gilkey manuscript, 4-10.

More than 800 similar art repositories had been reported, from *Keller* to *Schlößer*, from railway depots and salt mines to more standard caches, including the massive exhibition hall of the *Haus der deutschen Kunst* in Munich, where Gilkey discovered war paintings "rolled up, camouflaged, and placed to resemble a stage curtain."[72] While hidden Nazi-looted masterpieces were the priority of the officers of the MFA&A, heaps of art seen as propagandistic or militaristic in nature remained for Gilkey's crew to find and mine.[73] Gilkey and his team classified 9,176 paintings and drawings as "Nazistic" or "militaristic" in theme. In his official record, had these works remained in Germany, they would "have been a potential threat to the world through [their] future reinstallation and German misuse."[74] Despite his task to collect and confiscate these paintings, or perhaps because of it, Gilkey seemed to feel empathy to the notion of *Kriegsmaler* as soldiers, artists, and keepers of history, not necessarily enemy combatants, and to the idea that their artistic record of the war must be protected for posterity. Yet, this empathy was tempered with ambivalence, at least in the two years immediately following the war, by other characterizations of the artwork by Gilkey as "monument[s] of German baseness."[75]

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[72] Gordon Gilkey, "German War Art Report" (Office of the Chief Historian Headquarters, European Command), April 25, 1947, 23. NARA: RG 319. Box 72, Folder 17.

[73] Gordon Gilkey, "German War Art" (Office of the Chief Historian Headquarters, European Command), April 25, 1947, Charles Parkhurst Papers, National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives; Memorandum "Return of Captured Paintings to Germany," from E.M. Harris, Lt. Colonel, G.S.C., executive, to the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, November 6, 1950. : RG 319. Box 72, Folder 17. *NS-Reichsbesitz* (as cited in Goldstein), were stashed in Bad Aussee's famous salt mines, as well as in a castle and dance hall in Austria; the *Luftgaukommando VI*'s private collection (part of which had been purchased during Great German Art Exhibitions) was transported to a castle near the Tegernsee in Bavaria; much of Himmler's and Martin Bormann's private collections of propaganda and war paintings were stored in the basement of the *Führerbau* (now the *Hochschüle für Musik*) at Munich's Königsplatz. Gilkey's team also discovered several crates of rolled-up war paintings, hidden behind more innocuous-seeming nudes and landscapes, in the basement of the *Haus der deutschen Kunst*

[74] Gilkey, "German War Art," 29.

[75] Gordon Gilkey, "German War Art," 24.

Gilkey remained ambivalent as the Germans' defeat faded into memory; several decades later, Captain Gilkey went on record to describe the paintings in the German War Art Collection as "fine illustrations in the same category as war paintings made by American artists covering the American campaigns."[76] Interestingly, this quote, made when Gilkey was no longer commissioned in the Army and once again a private citizen, is in tension with assertions he made during his campaign about the artwork, including that it was "a tool to spread the manure of Nazism."[77] Though his initial task was to coldly collect any paintings from the period, an empathetic response to the skill and plight of German combat artists – seeing them as akin to American artists with the same task during the war, and thus revealing a certain degree of solidarity with and respect for German soldiers that was not uncommon amongst members of the American military – is evidenced not only in his later words, but also his continued correspondence artists following the war. Gilkey's connection to the paintings also manifested in a December 1946 exhibition of eight days organized in the basement of destroyed Frankfurt's Städel Museum, open to American and Allied personnel and any "interested Germans." [78]

Gilkey selected a "representative" group of 103 paintings, toeing the line between celebrating the spoils of war and a genuine interest in and respect for the paintings of the *Kriegsmaler*. "Very few" Germans showed up, perhaps understandably considering there was little reason for them to attend in the wake of their defeat unless if by force, but the exhibition, in spite of the frigid winter conditions, did attract 1500 American military personnel. Though Amersdorffer's paintings were not among those included in the show, several from Rudolf

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[76] Gilkey quoted in Andrew Decker, "Nazi Art Returns to Germany," *ARTnews 83, no. 9* (November 1984), 143.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] Gilkey, "German War Art," 7.

Hengstenberg, Otto Bloß, Ernst Thöny, all of whose paintings blurred the line between "Nazi realism" and a sort of expressionism that has been disassociated from Nazi-era works by scholars were. The show also included paintings from Olaf Jordan, a portraitist who also later petitioned Gilkey and the Army for the repatriation of his paintings and will discussed later in the chapter.[79] This 1947 show would be echoed 15 years later with a "Part 2" exhibition in Washington, D.C. – but then, all of the paintings would be made available for loan, ostensibly to both museums and the private offices of army officials. After the Städel show, with his redeployment imminent, Gilkey worked tirelessly, sometimes up to 15 hours per day, in an unheated and unventilated room to get the war art "in some semblance of order." This task, which Gilkey carried out with care and precision characteristic of an artist and a man who respected the historical significance of the works he had collected, required repainting and cleaning water-damaged oils and spraying all charcoals and watercolors with protective Fixatif.[80] Three months later, in May of 1947, all of the paintings and prints were finally sent to Washington. There, several works ended up adorning the office walls of high-ranking military officers, again blurring the line between varied understandings of the paintings. Were they war trophies, incendiary tools capable of reigniting the spirit of Nazism, important historical and artistic documents, or merely soldiers' records of the universal experience of wartime?[81] As Weber himself noted in 1979, once the paintings had been confiscated by the army and shipped to D.C. and Pueblo, Colorado, their potency was

[79] All that remains of the catalogue is a title page and a list of paintings, which organized the show into three rooms. With just a list of paintings as a reference, there seems to be little clear reason as to why the paintings were broken into groups the way they were, besides, perhaps, by artist and general geography.
[80] Gilkey quoted in Charles Gould, "Gordon Gilkey and His Art: How He Collected It," *Northwest Magazine*, 3 December 1978, 4. See also Gilkey, "German War Art," 7.
[81] Two unspecified Nazi-era paintings hung on the wall of Major General Orlando Ward's office, and another decorated the wall of Lt. Colonel James's office. See: RG 319, Box 72, Folder 14.

ostensibly controlled. That is, the danger that Germans might revert back to their "Nazistic" or "militaristic" ways – "any thought that the German war art might be forever sequestered was quickly dispelled," as the once-banned paintings quickly reemerged as decorations for Pentagon office walls, and later, traveling exhibitions and in the pages of widely circulated magazines, like *Life.*[82] The paintings of the enemy, once symbolizing the power and evil of Nazism, as officially conceptualized by the U.S. Army, once again came to honor the profession of arms.

Gilkey's confiscations were part of a complex web of what Cora Sol Goldstein has referred to as "iconoclastic actions" by first the U.S. Army and then OMGUS in the years immediately following the war.[83] This Potsdam and Yalta-inspired campaign touched not only works of art created under the auspices of the regime, including war art and the paintings of the *NS-Reichsbesitz*, but also the removal of eagles, swastikas, and plaques honoring Hitler from party offices, schools, residences, and post offices.[84] This policy dovetailed with a policy of "selective preservation,"[85] which laid out the need to protect any German cultural property that was not touched by or associated with Nazism. At that time, this clearly did not extend to works of the *Kriegsmaler* that Adam, and even Gilkey, still saw as vital historical and artistic documents relating to experiences of war for the German soldier. This position that would later be questioned as American ideas about what type of German culture was allowed and desired shifted over time. For example, as several scholars, including Sol Goldstein and Potter, have

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[82] Weber, 134.
[83] Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye*, 106-107. Goldstein breaks down this iconoclastic campaign in a way that previous scholars covering the immediate postwar occupation period, including Jeffrey Herf in *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), only touched upon briefly (in Herf's case, notably the campaign to remove street signs and physical markers of Nazism on buildings in East and West Germany.)
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] Codified in Title 18.

revealed, in terms of painting, OMGUS made the resurrection of Expressionism (and sometimes, anything seen as anti-figurative) a priority in German during the period of occupation, a push that showed a fundamental misunderstanding by the Americans as to how National Socialist cultural policy regarding painting developed and was carried out.[86]

Expressionism was also lauded in the U.S. during World War II as news spread of the Nazi "rejection" of Expressionist artists. U.S. cultural institutions, academics, and even the CIA pushed an association of the style with a certain degree of *American* patriotism, but more broadly, anti-authoritarian, capitalist, Western, and importantly, democratic ideals that played in opposition to Germany during the war. These ideals as embodied in non-figurative art encouraged as a desirable aspect of culture that was to be simultaneously imposed upon and resurrected in Germans during the Occupation. American cultural authorities also viewed the resurrection of Expressionism as a shedding of the nationalism that fed the base of National Socialism and an embrace of its antithesis – internationalism. At the same time, the culture of the so-called *Stunde Null* also sought to rediscover a salvageable German artistic identity untainted by Nazism. Expressionism represented a German artistic tradition that the Nazis had ultimately

[86] The Nazi elite were initially starkly divided regarding the issue of modern and Expressionist art with Goebbels, a fan of Emil Nolde, famously advocating for Expressionism as the truest reflection of the German soul and therefore the best artistic manifestation of the New Order. Ideologue Alfred Rosenberg (head of the *Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur* [Fighting League for German Culture] and architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg, on the other hand, reviled modernist art, believing it challenged *völkisch* conceptions of German culture and national identity, and pushed for a New Order based on retrogressive Teutonic ideals. The latter eventually prevailed, with Hitler declaring figurative art to be the only acceptable kind, a declaration that allowed for some degree more flexibility than often suggested by scholars. In fact, as seen in some of the war art, some tendencies of modernism and Expressionism did prevail, including the use of color to convey feeling and meaning, and forms that toed the line between purely figurative and abstract. See Potter, 24-25, 246. Potter notes that even staunch anti-Expressionists like Rosenberg sometimes showed a degree of ambivalence, especially in regards to the Bauhaus.

discarded and maligned rather than lionized.[87] These factors undeniably provoked the American ambivalence – as embodied by Gilkey – toward particularly the art of the *Kriegsmaler*, which featured styles and subjects that were recognizable in the combat art of their own soldiers. The staunch association of any painting created under the Third Reich with anti-modernism or anti-Expressionism, or anti-abstraction has also caused many, from Gilkey and the U.S. Army, to scholars from the period to the present, to overlook modernist impulses in artwork produced by *Kriegsmaler*, (not to mention other "Nazi artists" such as Franz Radziwill).[88] This has consistently resulted in the promotion of a monolithic, totalitarian idea of what makes artwork "Nazistic, and thus "dangerous," and, conversely, what makes it "democratic," and thus "good."

**"So I Have Never Been in one of the Goebbels-Propaganda-Kompanies": *Kriegsmaler* and Art Confiscations post-1946**

Gilkey seemed to make a moral demarcation between three categories of artwork: those that "[showed] the Nazi emblem, [and] Nazi military victories attained through inhumanity towards individuals"; the nudes and landscapes in the *Haus der deutschen Kunst* (which he did not see as politically meaningful); and the visual records of wartime left by many *Kriegsmaler*. Yet he did not make the distinction between the former and latter group until after he had completed his confiscations, in spite of the apparent feelings of empathy for the war artists that he felt following the war. Gilkey's art raids cast a wide net, often ensnaring the works of combat artists who felt that their works were far from propagandistic, or capable of igniting "old passions" in post-Hitler Germany. And sometimes the law was on their side.

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[87] Potter, 125.

[88] For an excellent breakdown of the "Nazi art" monolith through the life and work of one artist who functioned under the Nazi regime, see James van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History, 1919-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

Amersdorffer's story, and the confusion about whether works of art seized by American forces during and following the war were U.S. property or "war booty," or stolen property of the artists, was just one of several tales that emerged in the years following Gilkey's art raids. Herbert Agricola, for example, was another painter based in Bavaria who worked as a commercial artist in Munich, most famous for designing the poster for the infamous 1937 "Great Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition" in Berlin, before joining Army Group South at Stalingrad as a war painter. Agricola also took up correspondence with the Military Government in the years following the war to retrieve his paintings after their seizure by Gilkey's team. Besides the posters and placards he designed as a commercial artist in the years leading up to the war, he was not as recognized as Amersdorffer as a "fine artist." For example, he never exhibited in the Great German Art Exhibitions and there is no evidence of sale of his paintings to any members of the Nazi elite, though his later paintings from the front in France, Russia, Yugoslavia, and Italy were exhibited at several smaller German museums as "Wehrmacht property."[89]

According to Agricola, his paintings were "an artistic standpoint in contrary [*sic*] to Goebbels's Nazi propaganda art," and the works were not intended to invoke "a new German heroism, as these pictures showed our desperate situation as well as destroyed landscapes."[90] Furthermore, just as Amersdorffer pointed out in his letter to Gilkey, Agricola seemed surprised that a "considerable number" of his paintings, watercolors, and sketches, innocent in his eyes of

[89]Agricola, Herbert letter to Murray van Wagoner, Director of the U.S. Military Government in Bavaria, 28 April 1949, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK).
[90] Agricola, Herbert letter to the Army War College in Washington, D.C., 30 December 1948, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK).

ties to the inflammatory "Nazi Propaganda" of Goebbels, were taken by Gilkey in 1947 without compensation[91]:

> One day I came in touch with Captain Gilkey…He asked me to give him 5 or 10 paintings…I [wanted] to do him a favor and offered him all my works for this purpose. He was very friendly to me and promised to return all paintings…as soon as possible. Some day[s] later in my absence from home, CIC [Counterintelligence Corps] personnel checked my rooms for war pictures and confiscated them by order of the Munich Collecting Point…All my requests not to confiscate them were in vain.[92]

Gilkey never left a list of the paintings he and his men seized from Agricola during their art raids with the MFA&A officers working at the Munich Central Collecting Point (CCP), so the exact artworks in U.S. custody were unknown. Furthermore, as Jonathan Petropoulos has pointed out, art was not always treated with care at the Central Collecting Point and was, indeed, destroyed by some officers of the MFA&A, though not Gilkey. Lane Faison, a professor of art history at Williams College-turned director of the CCP in Munich between 1949 and 1951, and Theodore Heinrich, cultural affairs adviser in the office of the High Commissioner on Germany (HICOG), oversaw the immolation of some art – up to five hundred objects – in both Munich and Wiesbaden that was seen as "explicitly" National Socialistic in theme, as well as art created by Nazi leaders such as Alfred Rosenberg and Julius Streicher.[93] The decision by American

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[91] These details are laid out in a letter from Koslowski, Helen to Stefan Munsing, Chief of MFA&A Bavaria, 5 July 1949, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK). As Koslowski notes in the letter, Gilkey did not leave a list of the paintings from Agricola that he confiscated at the Munich Central Collecting Point, so the exact artworks are unknown.

[92] Agricola, Herbert letter to the Army War College in Washington, D.C., 30 December 1948, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz

[93] Jonathan Petropoulos, "Five Uncomfortable and Difficult Topics Relating to the Restitution of Nazi Looted Art," in *New German Critique* 130, vol. 33, no. 1 (130) (February 2017): 128-129.

occupying forces to destroy art by burning was hypocritical (and one that Faison later regretted, according to Petropoulos) considering the Nazis' propensity for burning not only books, but modern artwork as well, though one that was never explicitly called into question as violating the 1907 Agreement, which prohibited the seizure of cultural property during wartime.

Agricola's complaints eventually made their way to Stefan Munsing, Chief of the MFA&A in Bavaria. However, in reviewing them, Munsing noted that more than 100 watercolors had been returned to Agricola in 1947, that there was no documentation of his remaining artworks at the Central Collection Point in Munich, and that Gilkey was never officially part of the MFA&A while carrying out his art confiscations. Munsing decided that the MFA&A bore no responsibility for ensuring the return of the remaining paintings back to Agricola.[94] Agricola appealed the decision in 1949, writing to the head of the Military Government in Bavaria. It is unclear why Agricola never appealed directly to Gilkey; perhaps he did not trust the Captain to listen to his case, as he had felt duped by Gilkey's initial seizure of his artworks in 1947. Once again, in his letter to the head of the Military Government, he characterized his paintings as "stolen," and pleaded that "the character of all my lost works has nothing to do with militarism nor Nazi-propaganda."[95]

Agricola's initial appeals were denied, though Gilkey struck up correspondence with him in the 1970s, claiming to have had the "highest regard for your artistry."[96] Gilkey also recalled conversations he and another officer had about several of Agricola's paintings, and assured Agricola that "it has never been the policy of the U.S. to destroy great or lesser works of art,"

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[94] Koslowski letter to Munsing.
[95]Agricola, Herbert letter to Murray van Wagoner, Director of the U.S. Military Government in Bavaria, 28 April 1949, B323/349, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK).
[96]Gilkey letter to Agricola, 15 March 1978, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

and if any of Agricola's art had been destroyed, it was merely a consequence of the war.[97] By 1988, ostensibly with Gilkey's assistance, and in a different political environment,[98] Agricola informed Gilkey that his war paintings had finally been returned after filing a claim at a Bavarian court: "I think you know, I was never a militaristic or political fan…[and] my endeavors, to become [a] war painter were obvious: I did not kill ore [sic] hurt anybody, and I came fairly through [sic]. This is quite a lot!"[99]

Yet another *Kriegsmaler,* Olaf Jordan, a portrait-painter and Sudeten German by birth, was transferred into the SdbK in 1942, then enrolled as a *Kriegsmaler* in the *Kosaken Kavallerie Division I.* He spent three years following the Cossack legions, until his Division surrendered to the British in Austria on 8 May 1945. After spending nearly two years as a POW, Jordan settled outside of Stockholm, Sweden and began a postwar career as a children's portraitist.[100] Jordan saw his paintings reproduced in a 1950 issue of *Life Magazine,* and sent his own appeal to the Department of the Army. He was not in contact with Gilkey, ostensibly because he was not informed that Gilkey himself had headed up the operation and might be a sympathetic listener. His letter was even more emotional Amersdorffer's or Agricola's:

> …I wish to point out that the discovery of some of my works in *Life Magazine* was more painful to me than happy when reading the text below them: 'War Through Nazi Eyes,' which I must feel as a bitter injustice to me. I was never a member of the Nazi Party, but the fact that I preferred, during the Nazi war, to

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[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Ibid.* Gilkey promised Agricola that his previous letter would be forwarded to the Chief of the Office of Military History.
[99] Agricola letter to Gilkey, 16 June 1988, Box 55, Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.
[100] See *The Captured World War II Art of Olaf Jordan* (Exh. Catalogue), 6-17 January 1975, The Hewlett Gallery at Carnegie-Mellon University in Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

paint rather than to shoot…or to be shot myself cannot be put up as a blame to me…"[101] Though Jordan's request was denied, Gilkey learned of the artist's plea, and eventually helped arrange an art exhibition at Carnegie-Mellon of his paintings, an act that did set him apart from his brethren in the military, though he was admittedly acting as a private citizen by then. Jordan's appeals for his paintings' return were denied in the following decades by the various Army personnel, who maintained that the paintings were property of the Wehrmacht during the war, and thus "legitimate war booty."[102] Jordan died before his exhibition opened and any of his works were returned. The fate of Amersdorffer's paintings followed the same path: in the 1970s, the Army responded to his decades-long pleas with a final decision, stating that his works in U.S. custody displayed "propagandistic" imagery (without clearly defining what it was), and did not technically belong to him, but rather to the Wehrmacht, and was subject to seizure by the U.S. Army.[103] The petitions of these artists did not cease in the years immediately following the war. Rather, they would continue with high frequency, addressed to both Gilkey (who maintained contact with many of the artists and their families) and the Army Historical Department into the 1980s, when another large part of the Army's collection of war art was repatriated to West Germany.

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[101] Weber, 104. Jordan, a portrait-painter and *Sudetendeutsche* by birth, was transferred into the SdbK in 1942, then enrolled as a *Kriegsmaler* in the *Kosaken Kavallerie Division I.* He spent three years following the Cossack legions, until his Division surrendered to the British in Austria on 8 May 1945. After spending nearly two years as a POW, Jordan settled outside of Stockholm, Sweden and began a postwar career as a children's portraitist.

[102] Weber, 106.

[103] Letter from Colonel Robert Fechtman, Chief of the Historical Services Division to Amersdorffer, 16 April 1970, B86/1493, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin. The rest were finally returned in 1986, with two paintings remaining in U.S. custody to this day.

**Spoils of War or Looted Artwork – The Partial Repatriation of the GWAC**

The War Art Program's directives and Gilkey's actions were cause for legal concern not just among the *Kriegsmaler*, but also OMGUS and Washington. Almost as soon as the art began to arrive in D.C. in 1946, military lawyers cautioned that the Army could be holding them in violation of the Article 56 of the Hague Convention of 1907 Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The article prohibited the seizure of cultural property during times of war, stating that:

> The property of municipalities, that of institutions dedicated to religion, charity, and education, the arts and sciences, even when state property, shall be treated as private property. All seizure or destruction of, or willful damage to, institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art and science, is forbidden, and should be made the subject of legal proceedings.[104]

A memorandum from OMGUS's Legal Division to the Chief of the Restitution Branch retroactively answered the question of whether the works might be considered legal "war booty" as opposed to illegally confiscated cultural property. The response by Charles Fahy, Director of the Legal Division at OMGUS: the paintings in question could not be considered "trophies of war" and were thus not legally seized. Fahy argued that when legal authorities stated that publicly owned properties of the enemy found on "the battlefield" might be appropriated and considered property of the victor, they were never speaking of works of art, of which Article 56 explicitly forbade all seizure.[105] The memo sparked confusion and led to a series of internal

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[104] David D'Arcy, "The Army's Hidden Collection of Nazi Art," *Art Newspaper* No. 177, February 2007.

[105] Memorandum from Charles Fahy, Director of Legal Division, OMGUS to Colonel John H. Allen, GSC, Chief, Restitution Branch, 14 February 1946, reprinted in Weber, 62-63.

debates regarding the legality of the actions of Gilkey's men; finally, in March of 1947, there was a tenuous conclusion that though the Allied powers might have violated international law, the removal of the property could be justified if an authority could demonstrate "an overriding public interest" in removing the artwork. This again favored the argument that works believed to stoke "militarism or Nazism" in a German viewing public legally could be removed, regardless of whether they were considered art. Furthermore, it allowed the U.S. Army flexibility to broadly define what did and did not constitute "militaristic" art, though "Nazistic" art (generally, art that contained symbols relating to National Socialism or images of familiar Nazi elite) was more easily defined.[106]

Gilkey's own actions and attitudes towards the confiscation of the artwork only seem to have muddied the waters. Gilkey alternately referred to the paintings and drawings he collected as "art" or "historical document," a notable dichotomy when considering "art" was, according to Fahy's reading, protected by Article 56 of the Hague Convention of 1907, and "historical document" may not have been. As demonstrated in the previous sections, even when he did not clearly articulate it, Gilkey felt constant tension between several competing factors. The first was his proud background and training as an artist and art historian. The second, his duty as an Army officer and American citizen working to rebuild Germany and protect its citizens from the shadow of Nazism and militarism as visually manifested in the paintings of the *Kriegsmaler*. These were in tension with his appreciation for the scope of history and, and his very human empathy for the task of not only the *Kriegsmaler* as trained artists *and* soldiers, but also for Luitpold Adam, a German officer who had a similar appreciation for artwork and its importance

[106] Memorandum from John M. Raymond, Colonel GSC, Associate Director of OMGUS Legal Division, to the Restitution Branch, Economics Division, OMGUS, 17 March 1947, reprinted in Weber, 64-75.

to the larger tides of time. Gilkey also reportedly suggested allowing the retention and display of a representative group of works, though he did not specify precisely what was meant by "representative," in Germany. Though there exists no documentation that OMGUS or the MFA&A ever seriously considered this proposal,[107] the political climate in the immediate postwar period was certainly not ripe for concessions of this nature. All of that is to say, Gilkey's battles with these questions as an officer were also indicative of larger-scale official ambivalence toward this artwork. This struggle is reflected by the Army's confiscation of "dangerous" paintings and drawings, only to use them to decorate government offices and display in exhibitions once they had been safely sequestered back in the States.

As letters from aggrieved war artists poured in to Gilkey and the Historical Division Offices, further debates in 1947 and 1948 enfeebled the Army's argument that an "overriding public interest" underlay Gilkey's art raids. Once again the question of what, exactly, might constitute "incendiary" artwork in the case of art of the Third Reich was left open, implying that many in the Army were still uncertain. In 1950, military historians expressed their desire to seek a formal, outside legal opinion through the Office of the Judge Advocate General concerning the legitimacy of their continued possession of the works in the German War Art Collection, a move that caused some anxiety, as the historians suspected that the attorneys of the Office of the Judge Advocate General might decide that the law was not on Gilkey's, or the Army's, side.[108] Of overriding concern to the historians seemed to be reversal of a decision as to the legality of the Army's seizure. More specifically, they feared that a decision that returning legal ownership to *Kriegsmaler* or his heirs would provoke an even larger flood of ownership claims from the

[107] See Weber, 134.
[108] Weber, 87.

German artists, and foil unofficial plans to display the confiscated art permanently at the National Military Museum, as well as the availability of the art to commercial firms for reproduction, which was already underway.[109] Once again, the Army seemed stuck between their fascination with and admiration for the paintings and drawings as art *and* historical documents, and their desire to retain legal claim to the works as incendiary, and legally obtained, canvases of enemy property that should remain hidden away. The letter to the Advocate General was structured as a call for "clarification" as to the Army's authority to possess the artwork, rather than a legal decision as to the works' rightful owners, a framing that the Army historians perhaps hoped would allow them a cushion in case the decision did not go their way. Lawyers met this call for clarification with an uneasy request for further information and a declaration that if there was no clear evidence that the government of the defeated nation previously held legal title to the confiscated works in question, all must be decided on a case-by-case basis. They also emphasized the need to see primary source documentation that established a relationship between the *Kriegsmaler* and German High Command, which could ostensibly legally prove whether the High Command had legal property rights to the works once they were completed. The Army historians never followed up with the lawyers for undisclosed reasons, and the controversy reached another stalemate until the end of the year.

Seven months later, in late 1950, the historians inexplicably and drastically reversed their position, proposing to the U.S. Army Chief of Staff that informal talks begin with the Department of State with the goal of returning more than 1,600 "non-political" and "non-

[109] Memorandum from Thomas E. McCracken, Major, Infantry, to Chief, Services Branch of the Army, 8 February 1950, *Ibid*. "It is proposed that a National Military Museum be built as a memorial to all who have served in the Armed Forces of the U.S. This museum would house the historical items belonging to all of the services. These items would be of U.S. or enemy origin." This museum was ultimately never built, though plans are in place for a 2021 opening.

military" paintings from the GWAC, though their letter reiterated that the more than 9,176 works in the custody of the Office of Military History were "legitimate war booty" seized from the German Armed Forces.[110] As Weber rightly points out, the historians probably had an ulterior motive: they hoped that if they offered up the return of the 1,600 innocuous works to their rightful owners in Germany, they might quell the influx of requests and questions from the *Kriegsmaler* and their heirs, as well as within the Army, and preserve the majority of the collection with "immense potential historical value,"[111] a phrase used often by both Gilkey and Adam, for the impending National Military Museum. Thus, in 1951, the confusion reached a breaking point, and the entire German War Art Collection was reexamined, though Army officials maintained that the German Armed Forces owned any works executed by artists in the Propaganda Division and their title had legally passed to the U.S. at the time of seizure. Army historians and officials divided the collection into three categories. The first was those exhibiting an official stamp denoting their status as property of the German Armed Forces, the second, those with "obvious military or Nazi subject matter" (and therefore legally subject to confiscation, as determined three years earlier), and finally, those neither stamped nor of "propagandistic" nature.[112] They ultimately deemed 1600 works neither propagandistic nor militaristic, and therefore of "no value as historical material" and set aside for repatriation to

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[110] Memorandum from Major General Orlando Ward, to the Chief of Staff of the Office of Military History, 4 October 1950, in Weber, 92. As noted previously, Ward had at least two (unspecified) paintings from Gilkey's collection of German war art hanging on the walls of his office.

[111] *Ibid*.

[112] *Ibid*. Much of that work at the time had already been distributed to Army offices for decoration or to Army schools for "practical use" in military study.

their legal owners in Germany. Officially, they were found to have been "taken in error" and their owners simply "temporarily deprived of legal possession."[113]

Gregory Maertz has suggested that the reversal of attitude toward the art had less to do with the military's desire to open a National Military Museum and more to do with warming diplomatic relations between the United States and West Germany as the Cold War turned icy. Rightly, Maertz points out that both the U.S. government and military officials were increasingly wary of potential comparisons to the Soviet Occupiers, who infamously looted, raped, and pillaged their way from East to West during the final weeks of the war, keen to take any objects related to the German armed forces as their own war plunder. Furthermore, SMAD's attitude toward the fine arts at the beginning of the Occupation period was much more draconian than that of the Americans, as they understood all aspects of culture, including fine arts, as inherently political and therefore vulnerable to exploitation as propaganda.[114] In 1951, U.S. Army officials were also keen improve their relations with the nascent Federal Republic of Germany, especially as the Korean War hit a bloody impasse. Maertz argues that "placating" West Germany by returning the contentious artwork, rather than focusing on the restitution of Holocaust assets, took precedent in this period, prompting action by the Department of State in returning parts of the German War Art Collection.[115] Military officials and political figures in the U.S. favorable to

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[113] Weber, 98.

[114] See Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye*, 76-77. SMAD, or the Soviet Military Administration in Germany, was OMGUS's analogue in the Soviet sector. As part of their effort to revive German culture, from 1945 to mid-1946, SMAD quickly (much more quickly than the American sector) organized art exhibitions of German artists that featured works by those marked as "modernist" or "degenerate" under the Nazi regime. This aesthetic tolerance ceased during the summer of 1946, following Andrei Zhdanov's offensive against modernism (as mandated by Stalin) in the USSR and a new art policy that glorified Socialist Realism and condemned modernist art.

[115] Maertz, *The Invisible Museum,* 9-10.

repatriating the GWAC might also have believed that the return of the artwork would be welcomed because of the burgeoning myth in West Germany of the *Saubere Wehrmacht*, or "Clean Wehrmacht. " In this telling, the *Wehrmacht*, like its predecessor the *Reichswehr*, was an apolitical organization, innocent of the crimes of Nazi Germany. During and after the war, swaths of the U.S. Army evidently accepted and embraced the notion that German soldiers comported themselves as honorably as the armed forces of the Western Allies. This is illustrated by Gilkey's sense of connection to the plight of the combat artists, if not their cause, and the fact that many combat artists were not forced by occupying forces postwar to testify before the *Spruchkammern*.[116] In 1951, President Dwight Eisenhower publicly reinforced the myth, stating that "there was a real difference between the German soldier and Hitler and his criminal group."[117] However, this theory does not entirely pass muster when held against the West German government's response to the partial repatriation of the paintings, as seen below. Instead, it seems that the push for placation was misinterpreted and one-sided.

The State Department approved the historians' proposal without incident, and in early 1951, they drew up plans to formally deliver the stash of paintings to West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer at the office of the Commanding General at the Headquarters of the European Command in the West German capital of Bonn. The plans included a ceremony in Bonn attended by "press representation (particularly German)" and the presentation of a single "symbolic" painting to Adenauer, representing the 1,659 pieces that would be shipped to a location of the

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[116] This myth has its roots in German responses to the practice of "victor's justice" during the denazification period. Later, in 1950, at the call of Adenauer, a group of former senior *Wehrmacht* officers met at Himmerod Abbey to discuss the possibility of rearmament, resulting in a memorandum that demanded the historical rehabilitation of the *Wehrmacht*.

[117] Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 236-238; Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany: From Shadow to Substance, 1945-1963* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 283-284.

Chancellor's designation. From there, the paintings were to be systematically distributed to their private owners, the painters themselves or their heirs, or museums of the Bonn government's choosing.[118] Adenauer, however, was not enthused or impressed by what the U.S. anticipated he would interpret as a gesture of friendship. In late 1951, Colonel W.S. Nye, Chief of the U.S. Army Historical Division, wrote "We still have the German 'War Art'…Bonn claims that they haven't facilities for tracking down the individual owners, which probably is true to some extent. And I suspect that for political reasons they are avoiding accepting what is to them a partial restitution."[119] Workers finally loaded the paintings onto a freighter bound for Bremerhaven, West Germany, only to be left unclaimed in a warehouse near the harbor for nearly two years. In 1953, Adenauer finally accepted the paintings, without pomp or ceremony, and the repatriated works were sent back to Munich, where they languished in storage in the same place Gilkey and his men had once assessed and catalogued them – the former Nazi *Verwaltungsbau* on Königsplatz, site of the Central Collecting point from 1945 to 1949. The story – and journey – of the objects was far from over, as will be seen in the following chapters. Amersdorffer's paintings were never sent back.

In 1947, Gilkey had characterized the artwork he was tasked to confiscate and send back to D.C. as mere visual conduits of Hitler's dreams of a "super-race built upon the bones of destruction of all who opposed him."[120] The Gilkey of 1946 and 1947, working to collect these paintings and sketches, acknowledged that though "perhaps the combat artists were sincere," all worked unequivocally within the confines of "monumental realism," and that all whose views

[118] Letter from Colonel W.S. Nye, Chief, Historical Division, Headquarters, European Command, to the Chief of Military History, 5 February 1951, republished in Weber, 141.
[119] Letter from Colonel Nye to Major General Orlando Ward, 26 September 1951, *Ibid.*
[120] Gilkey, "German War Art," 23.

did not coincide with Hitler's were "forbidden to paint, exhibit, or sell."[121] In his 1947 official report, Gilkey also harshly condemned the arts programs in Nazi Germany in no uncertain terms, writing that "a blindfold was placed on the borders of Germany to keep the German people free from the contamination and influence of contemporary culture and creative movements in other lands." He insisted that all German art became, without question, "a tool" to spread the seeds of Nazism.[122] Though he had exhibited a degree of empathy towards the *Kriegsmaler,* reporting back to OMGUS Headquarters, Gilkey was clear-cut in his condemnation of all Nazi-era art as politically *and* stylistically undemocratic, and therefore antithetical to American art and American values. Yet several years after his work with the Army and the German War Art Collection was finished, Gilkey, now operating as a private citizen, had softened and complicated his views, writing that they did not fit the widely accepted characterization of Nazi art as either "empty" or "propaganda." His statement seems to be the result of years of correspondence with the artists whose work he was tasked with confiscating, and adds one more layer to the ambivalent attitude towards Nazi war art held by the U.S. government and military following the war:

> There is an inherent separate life in each art object, fully apart from the creator of the art, or the circumstances responsible for the object of art. Thus, the war art of that period of time, in both the U.S…and in Germany, is completely on its own, will sink or survive on the individual artistic merits of each work…and not because of the politics or contemporary occupation (such as soldier-artist) of the creators.[123]

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[121] *Ibid.*
[122] Gilkey, "German War Art," 24. In the full quote, laid out on page 63 of this dissertation, Gilkey denigrates the art as a "tool to spread the manure of Nazism."
[123] Gilkey manuscript, 34.

These tensions, embodied and ultimately put into writing by Gilkey, would persist into the next four decades. They persist today, as 456 of the paintings remain hidden away in a warehouse closed to the public and difficult for even researchers to access. The ambivalences toward the artwork would also be repeated in West Germany even more overtly than with Adenauer's refusal to accept the repatriated paintings beyond the harbor at Bremerhaven; this initial batch of restituted paintings began to stir anxieties, some dormant since the end of the war, in Germans themselves about what mirror this artwork, created by this "other" (those who seemingly participated in the Nazi project) might show them as memories of the Nazi regime began to fade. As Adenauer's (non)action illustrates, nearly a decade after the war, the German government was not yet ready to look back in the mirror, let alone let the public gaze into the mirror as represented by the return of these prodigal paintings.

The German War Art Collection's story was far from over. In the decades following the war, the paintings' straddled two countries, America and West Germany. Their journey can provide a means of understanding not only how Germans' began the process of coming to terms with their past, but also how the United States drove and sometimes it. At the same time, the presence and visibility – or lack thereof – of the paintings in America forced U.S. authorities to ask uncomfortable questions about the country's own potential to march down the same road to fascism that their West German allies once had. The combat art of the German Art Collection was both exceptional and ordinary. While the artists working under the SdbK painted within the auspices of the RKK, the RKK also allowed them a certain degree of freedom in style and subject matter that is often overlooked, and bolsters an understanding of "Nazi artwork" as less monolithic than once imagined. More importantly, because of their respect for the German Armed Forces and familiarity with combat art from within their own ranks, some in the U.S.

Army, Gilkey included, were empathetic to the visual renderings of their enemy, and perhaps even saw themselves in them. From 1945 to 1953, this empathy challenged the standard and accepted notion of art created under the Nazi regime as somehow dangerous or incendiary. Gilkey's reckoning with the art that began in 1945 was just the beginning of the story. Legally and ethically, who had the right to artworks produced under the Nazi regime? Did the U.S. policy toward Nazi-era artwork include art looting, a potentially uncomfortable association that brings to mind the Germans' 1937 Degenerate Art Action? What role did Gilkey's own empathy toward the combat artists play in legal confusions following the confiscation of the art? How do we define what art is – and is not – dangerous? Ultimately, the larger moral issue that once plagued OMGUS and Gilkey would continue to haunt government officials, heads of cultural institutions, and the public, into the next decades, as the next chapters will explore: What did it mean as an American or postwar German to understand or appreciate artwork created under an oppressive and deadly regime. Perhaps "the other" was not as far away as they wished to imagine.


Fig. 1, Wilhelm Wessel, *Afrikakorps Trooper*, charcoal, 1941 (G.P.1.8235.47, U.S. Army Art Collection, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland)

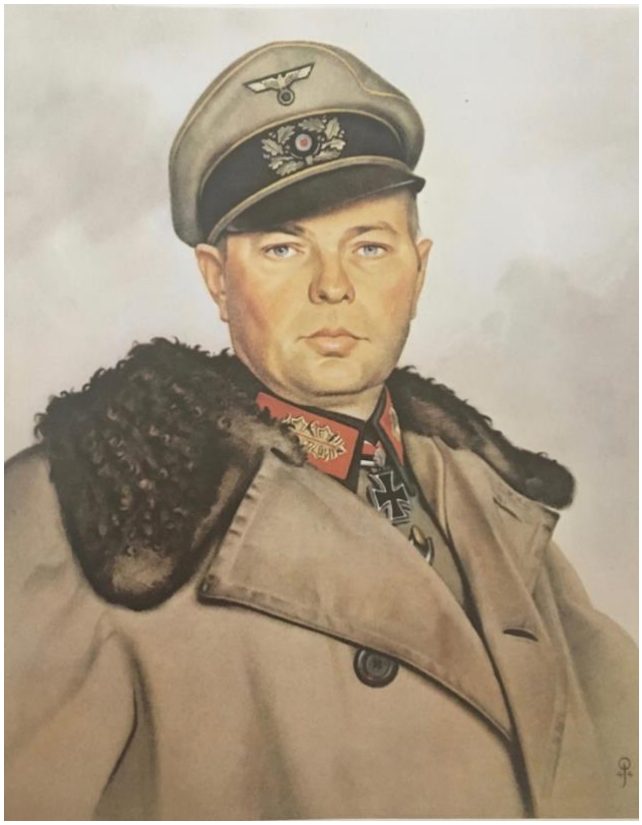

Fig. 2, Olaf Jordan, *Generalmajor Helmut von Pannwitz*, gouache, 1944 (Webster)

Fig. 3, Peter Hurd, *Portrait of Captain W.W. Foster, Navigator and Operations Officer*, oil, 1943 (RG9C1, Gallery Publications, Temporary Exhibition Catalogues, National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Washington D.C.)

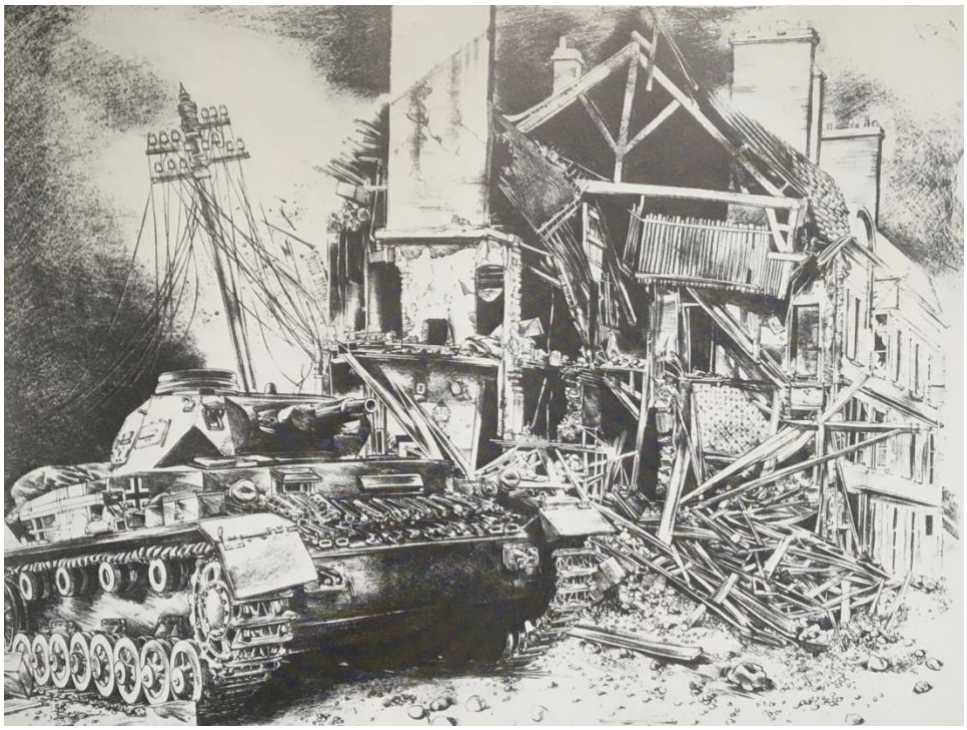

Fig. 4, Josef Arens (German *Kriegsmaler*), *Tank Spearheads Through Sedan*, ink, 1940 (Webster)

Fig. 5, Josef Arens, *Abandoned 75 mm A/A Equipment, La Panne, France*, 1940 (G.W.1.2748.49, U.S. Army Art Collection, NARA, College Park, Maryland)

Fig. 6, Rudolf Hengstenberg, *Road March*, watercolor, 1942(?) (Webster)

Fig. 7, Rudolf Hengstenberg, *Boatload of Wounded Soldiers*, watercolor, undated (G.W.1.2748.47, U.S. Army Art Collection, NARA, College Park, Maryland)

Fig. 8, Herbert Agricola, *Bivouac Near Cliff, Italy*, charcoal, undated (G.P.1.161.47, U.S Army Art Collection, NARA, College Park, Maryland)

Fig. 9, Heinrich Amersdorffer, *Waterfront – Balaclava, Crimea*, watercolor, 1942 (G.W.1.355.47, U.S. Army Art Collection, NARA, College Park, Maryland)

Fig. 10, Otto Bloß, *Landscape of War*, undated, probably 1942 (G.O.2.221.50, U.S. Army Art Collection, NARA, College Park, Maryland)

Fig. 11, Helmut Bibow, *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers*, ink, late 1941 (N591/179, Bundesarchiv-Militär Archiv, Freiburg, Germany)

Fig. 12, Helmut Bibow, *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers*, ink, late 1941 (N591/179, Bundesarchiv-Militär Archiv, Freiburg, Germany)

Fig. 13, Helmut Bibow, *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers*, ink, late 1941 (N591/179, Bundesarchiv-Militär Archiv, Freiburg, Germany)

Fig. 14, Helmut Bibow, *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers*, ink, late 1941 (N591/179, Bundesarchiv-Militär Archiv, Freiburg, Germany)

Fig. 15, Helmut Bibow, *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers*, ink, late 1941 (N591/179, Bundesarchiv-Militär Archiv, Freiburg, Germany)

# Chapter Two

## *Documents of Oppression:* Nazi-Era Art and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in West Germany's late 68er Movement

### Introduction: Frankfurt, 1974

> *It's about time that we gain a sensory perspective on the Third Reich. We are ruled more by Hitler when we hide images away, than when we deliberately look at them, full of terror, disgust, and awareness [enlightenment].*[1]

In October 1974, the Frankfurter Kunstverein, an inconspicuous corner-building museum in the twin shadows of Frankfurt's Dom and the angular glass façade of the Schirn Kunsthalle, opened its doors to select visitors. These visitors, comprised mainly of school groups and reporters, waited in line to tour a trove of artwork that had not, with the strictest of intentions, seen the light of day since the end of World War II. During the subsequent eight-week period in the city, after which these visual documents traveled to Hamburg, Ludwigshafen, Stuttgart, and Wuppertal, 36,000 visitors streamed into the show, known officially as *Art in the Third Reich: Documents of Oppression* ("*Kunst im 3. Reich: Dokumente der Unterwerfung*"). The exhibition was presented by a collaboration between the Kunstverein and members of the Marxist-leaning Frankfurt University, home to the illustrious Frankfurt School, whose leaders (including, at the time, Adorno, Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and later, Jürgen Habermas) and subscribers had become

[1] German writer special to *Der Spiegel* Karin Struck, "Werbung für Gasbadeöfnen," *Der Spiegel*, October 21, 1974; also republished at the beginning of the exhibition catalogue to *Dokumente der Enterwerfung*. See Georg Bussmann, ed,. *Kunst im 3. Reich: Dokumente der Unterwerfung*, "Zu dieser Ausstellung" (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1975), 0. "…Es ist lange an die Zeit, daß wir eine sinnliche Anschauung gewinnen von dem, was das Dritte Reich zusammenhielt. Wir werden wohl mehr von Hitler beherrscht, wenn wir die Bilder verstecken, als wenn wir sie bewußt und voll Schrecken und Ekel und Erkenntnis sehen." (Translation author's own.)

wildly influential in the so-called "68er Movement" whose intentions and makeup had changed substantially by 1974.[2] Interestingly, it took place just over one kilometer away from Frankfurter's Städel Museum. There, in the basement of Frankfurt's most famous art museum, just less than thirty years earlier, American occupying forces, including Gordon Gilkey, had organized the exhibition of confiscated German War Art and Nazi-era art, open to all "interested" visitors, but attended and enjoyed by a primarily American military audience. Though the organizers of *Documents of Oppression* made no mention of their knowledge of this show, it was certainly no historical coincidence that three decades later, visitors would flock to the same city to gawk at, even quietly revel in, the taboo art produced during Germany's darkest era.

This chapter will examine the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition, which lasted just less than one year, and traveled all over the cultural hubs of West Germany between 1974 and 1975. The show was both paradigmatic and entirely unique, as it was the first large-scale, and well publicized, exhibition of Nazi-era artwork in West Germany since the end of the war. The show's stated, and successful, purpose was to serve as a direct response to a wave of nostalgia in Germany for the past known as the *Hitlerwelle* ("Hitler Wave"), expressed in a spate of films and publications that used imagery produced in the Third Reich for purely illustrative, not analytic, purposes. According to the Kunstverein, the propagandistic image that the Nazis

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[2] See Hans Kundani, *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), who convincingly argues that the leftist movement radicalized through the late 1960s and into the 1970s, ultimately marginalizing the Holocaust in their support of the "continuity thesis," which posited that Germany's Federal Republic as the fascist successor to the Third Reich, and capitalism as one of the most important driving forces of the Holocaust. Though the 68ers did initially force Germany to confront its past, its leading activists in fact had a much more ambivalent attitude toward the Holocaust (see page 18), an attitude that Frankfurt School theorists including Adorno and Habermas found deeply troubling.

created of themselves was on its way to being preserved in the consciousness of a generation that was removed from the atrocities of the Third Reich. They hoped the exhibition of Nazi artwork would summon the controversial subject matter into the open for the first time since the end of the war, inviting critical discussion on a national, even international, scale. Various groups, including German-Jewish painter Arie Goral-Sternheim[3] and the Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime, protested the event, worried that placing artwork in the context of an art museum defied social necessity, and that the exhibition would incite fascist sympathizers.

As this chapter will reveal, the exhibition drew further varied and heated response from not only art critics, but members of the press, both sides of the political spectrum, and the general public as well. Some zeroed in on the exhibition as a means of discussing contemporary political issues –for example, members of the German New Left lauded the show for its implications that fascism was the result of a crisis of capitalist, bourgeois values. Others saw clear links between the German Democratic Republic and Nazism; others simply critiqued the aesthetics of the show, which highlighted the characteristics of realism, the style perhaps most widely associated with paintings produced during the Third Reich. In examining in detail the exhibition's purpose, layout, and reception, this chapter will argue that this exhibition was an important and overlooked turning point in the process of postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.* The emotional and myriad responses to the exhibition, from the contemporary press, visitors, even those who never stepped foot into the museum, are, in some ways, a microcosm for the generational and political debates occurring at the time in Germany. They also coincided with the increasingly violent radicalization of the Left stemming originally from how the Nazi past should be

[3] See *Beitrifft: Reaktionen"* accompaniment to the exhibition, 177-180, where Arie Goral's myriad protestations, both visual and written, were collected and reprinted by Bussmann and the event's organizers.

discussed and commemorated. The obsessive documentation of the event itself also reflects the popularization of both an historicist and "history workshop" approach to the discipline: the fact that all reactions to the exhibition were deemed worthy of collection and publication speaks to the fevered interest in opening up a larger discussion about Germany's past among a new generation of people, and a belief that the more discordant the discussion, the closer Germans might come to confronting the sins of the last generation. The exhibition also reveals tensions at the heart of the late 68er movement regarding the public display of visual imagery from the Nazi period in that it sought to both to connect the Nazi past with the West German, capitalist, and democratic present, and emphasize the unique crimes of the Nazi period. Organizers and some members of the intellectual left feared that the staggering nature of these crimes had become trivialized in the thirty years since the end of the war. *Documents of Oppression* became a focal point around which debates about how to confront the recent Nazi past in West Germany played out. It also served as a conduit through which West German and international visitors' anxieties about the Cold War present, played out. Finally, in its polemical and didactic nature, the exhibition exposed deeply seated and unresolved notions about the nature of Nazi-era art in general, as it hypostasized long-held beliefs about the monolithic nature of the stylistic and thematic tendencies of art of the Third Reich that contrasted sharply with some of the Nazi-era combat art analyzed in the previous chapter.

**German War Art, Nazi-Era Art, and Germany in the 1950s and 1960s**

The story of Nazi-era art on canvas and paper remained relatively suspended in the United States for the next decade, after the Adenauer-era attempts to return more than 1,600 confiscated paintings and sketches from Gilkey's German War Art Collection first succeeded, then the paintings languished in the harbor of Bremerhaven under the West German Chancellor

orders. As the previous chapter revealed, Adenauer, without ceremony, accepted the repatriated paintings of the GWAC in 1953. These Nazi-era paintings, along with several more that had never been shipped back to the United States, were stored in several locations in Bavaria, hidden from a German public that was not, at least according to its government, allowed or prepared to view any visual remnant of Germany's slide into authoritarianism. This even though U.S. officials did not classify most of the works repatriated under Eisenhower as exhibiting any "incendiary" – that is, explicitly Nazi – imagery. These works were sent back to the former *Verwaltungsbau* (once the NS-Administration offices) and Hitler's *Führerbau* in Munich. Since the end of the U.S. military's use of the buildings as Central Collecting Points in 1948, the former building accommodated the Central Institute for Art History (*Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte*) while the latter eventually housed Munich's renowned University for Music (*Hochschule für Musik).*[4]

There remains a persistent notion in the historiography of the post-1945 era that a defining characteristic of the Adenauer Years, from the founding of West Germany in 1949 to the end of his tenure as the country's Chancellor in 1963, was a silence about the crimes of the past and Germans' complicity in them. Recent scholars have challenged and complicated this narrative, which is in some ways a product of the *Stunde Null*, or Zero Hour, myth following the war's calamitous conclusion. The phrase, though it existed previously as a military term, took on a particular and powerful meaning following the war.[5] Germany's *Stunde Null* served as a tool

[4] For more on the post-war history of the buildings and their uses, see Lauterbach, *Der Central Collecting Point in München*.

[5] As scholars including Pamela Potter point out, the phrase came into existence as early as 1937. Writers in exile such as Karl Becker, Erika Mann, and Richard Freund used the phrase, a military term, as a call to arms to those remaining in Germany to stand against Hitler. Potter also notes that the term gained international popularity with the release of Roberto Rosselini's *Germania, anno zero* (1948), which chronicled the difficulties faced by a German family that survived the

for the politicians and artists of the rubble-strewn German nation as they used it as a new founding myth envisioning West Germany's rise from the ashes of its destruction. At the same time, the myth and spirit of the *Stunde Null* gave American occupying forces[6] a way *out* of punishing the German people as a whole to the full extent of the law for their involvement in the Holocaust. Rather, with the exception of the infamously brief and unsuccessful run of the U.S. Department of War-produced and Billy Wilder-directed *Die Todesmühlen* (*Death Mills*) in 1945, the looming specter of the Cold War and the enemy in the east became the instant priority of occupying forces in the American sector. As such, punishing those familiar with the complicated state bureaucracy, let alone figures such as artists, as anything beyond *Mitläufer* ("followers") in denazification trials was not only not a priority, it was impractical. As Norbert Frei has pointed out, the desire for a "tabula rasa" for West Germany following the war did not necessarily involve "a consistent expression of moral indifference …[rather] [o]ften it was grounded in the complicated circumstances surrounding postwar guilt and punishment," which manifested in the "gradually abating rigor of the denazification process, accompanied by a shift from penalizing to promoting many heavily implicated individuals."[7]

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war and faced the poverty and moral and generational schisms provoked by the end of the war. See Potter, 123-124.

[6] Of course, the myth was not limited to the American zone of occupation, and also served its purpose in the British and French, and particularly Soviet, sectors. However, as an interest of this dissertation is the relationship between Americans and National Socialist-era art, as well as how this relationship helped guide the process of "coming to terms with the past," the use of the Zero Hour narrative in the three other sectors lies beyond the scope of this project. Pamela Potter's *Art of Suppression* also provides an excellent overview of how each zone of occupation dealt with the revival (or suppression) of culture immediately following the Allied victory and partitioning of Germany.

[7] Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1997, 5-6.

The notion that the 15-odd years that followed Germany's defeat were marked by a complete silence about the recent persists in the popular narrative of Germans' *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It has been perhaps much simpler to imagine that the 68er movement fought against an impermeable wall of silence about the Nazi past, a narrative that was, in part, prompted by the 1967 publication of *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern* (*The Inability to Mourn*). Penned by husband and wife psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, the book attempted to define and explain the German mentality, specifically toward the past, in the postwar period, using Freudian psychology. According to their psychoanalytic reading of German trauma, contemporary Germans were unable to confront their past because they still identified with it, much in the same way a child identified with his or her own parent. In the popular narrative, this intergenerational barrier was finally breached with words and violence, primarily by the student movements of 1968, which finally brought the crimes of real and metaphorical parents to the court of public opinion. Thus, West Germans were finally able to mine the complex archaeology of their past, "coming to terms" with the crimes of the previous generation, and producing a healthier democracy, protected from future wrongdoing by the persistent knowledge of and shame about the Holocaust. Of course, there is truth to this narrative. The denazification process had commenced fervently in January 1946 with a series of directives issued to all allied zones, though each zone of occupation carried out the procedures differently and with varying degrees of intensity. Yet as scholars have well documented,[8]

[8] See Cora Sol Goldstein on the myriad attempts to denazify postwar Germany in the four zones of occupation, Pamela M. Potter, and Frederick Taylor's massive but muddled tome *Exorcising Hitler*: *The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Contemporaneous historians and political scientists, too, considered it a forgone conclusion "that denazification has not been a success in Germany," see John H. Herz, "The Fiasco of Denazification in Germany," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Dec., 1948), 569.

denazification was largely a failure, a fact that was as clear to a displaced person living in the immediate postwar period of occupation as it must have been to the myriad student protestors of the late 68er movement, irate to discover that "many Nazi-era sculptors were able to continue their careers in West Germany,"[9] including one of Hitler's favored court artists, Arno Breker, a controversy that will be explored in the last chapter of this dissertation. Many among the postwar generation were drawn to the far left and Marxism as a sort of referendum on the ultimately annihilative leanings of their parents and grandparents; Marxism was understood by the 68ers as the antithesis of Nazism, and thus a radical refutation of the crimes of the previous generation. However, as sociologist Norbert Elias argued in the late 1980s and 1990s, the embrace of Marxism gave the 68er generation an ideological framework that not only provided an explanation for fascism, but also exonerated them, allowing "the feeling that they had nothing to do with the past and that they were free of all guilt."[10] This tendency also permeated the 1974 exhibition in Frankfurt as visitors were forced to confront the stylistically and thematically monolithic work of "the other" – Germans who participated in the Third Reich. Such "othering" also reinforced a stylistic moralization that had been encouraged by American forces following the end of the war, which equated figurative, "conservative" art of the kind chosen for the exhibition in Frankfurt with Nazism, and modernist, non-figurative art with democracy.[11]

**The Frankfurt School and the Late-68er Movement**

The city of Frankfurt was the locus of the debate regarding the exhibition of Nazi-era artwork in the 1970s for two reasons. The fact that the Frankfurter Kunstverein, located in the

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[9] Pamela M. Potter, *Art of Suppression*: *Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 149.
[10] Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, 537. See Also Kundani, 11.
[11] See Cora Sol Goldstein, 89-92.

heart of the city's Altstadt, would be the host of this exhibition, was the main factor. The Kunstverein had become progressively more political at the dawn of the 1970s as reflected in their selection of Georg Bussmann, who already had a reputation in the art and museum community as an activist-curator, as their new director. But of equal importance was the presence of the Goethe-Universität, the University of Frankfurt. Students from the school, many who continued to be involved in the 68er movement as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, were eager to put their beliefs and educational training to practical use in the city, and the Kunstverein was an ideal place to merge the theoretical with the practical. Thus it was to be expected that the influence of the internationally famous Institute of Social Research, housed at the University in Frankfurt after a period of exile during the Third Reich, served as a main influence for the conception and organization of *Documents of Oppression*

The historiography of the effect of the Frankfurt School on both German leftism and the 68er movement is vast and varied; Pamela Potter in particular provides a succinct overview of the school of thought in western (Anglo-American and West German) intellectual history from its inception during the Weimar era to the 1980s and beyond, including both Adorno's and Horkheimer's prescient theories about the visual and artistic culture of the Nazi period. Theorists of the school first began applying Marxist philosophy in the early 1920s to interpret and explain the reactionary politics of the tumultuous Weimar years, from the failed communist revolution of 1918/19 to the rise of Nazism. Shortly after Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in 1933, the school's founders, including the aforementioned Horkheimer (then-director) and Adorno, as well as Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, and Leo Löwenthal, moved the Institute for Social Research into temporary exile in Geneva to a more permanent spot at Columbia University. Here they continued to carry out research in German, ultimately shifting their focus to Nazi culture, in a

project proposal that they hoped would be funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.[12] Adorno's focus was to be on the arts of Nazi Germany, where he aimed to use material from both the Weimar Republic and National Socialism to "delineate aesthetic categories" which would ultimately expose "underlying social or cultural tendencies,"[13] and likely revealing ties between Weimar democracy and National Socialism. The main tenets of this proposed project were laid out in 1944's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Yet the Rockefeller Foundation turned the project down, anxious about a "project that focused on the relationship between Weimar democracy and Nazism"[14] for obvious reasons – any project that suggested or exposed some sort of trajectory from democracy to fascism was at least unsavory, and at most dangerous, especially if it was funded by prominent members (the Rockefellers) or the world's oldest, and proudest, democracy.

There is, then, both a strange continuity and symmetry between the Rockefeller Foundation's swift objection to Adorno's proposed project, and the paradoxical reactions of the American government and military to Nazi-era artwork in the years and decades following the war. OMGUS (and Gilkey) confiscated as much art created under National Socialism as possible, warning of its power to revert Germans to Nazis. There was an urgent need, they said, for America, as the strong, democratic savior, to hide the art away and "protect" postwar Germany from its dangers. Yet at the same time, many of these same men, as well as other U.S. officials, took pleasure in the artwork, either from its taboo qualities, or simply by feeling a

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[12] See Potter, 72-74. As Potter lays out, Horkheimer sought to find funding amidst a shaky relationship with Columbia in the form of a project titled "Cultural Aspects of National Socialism" that he hoped would entice the support of American, especially Jewish, donors. Each theorist, from Marcuse to Pollock, had a specific focus, ranging from the bureaucracy of the Nazi regime to mass culture to literature, music, and the arts.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] Potter, 74.

connection to its mainly conservative, figurative stylistic and thematic tendencies. What might it mean for democratic subjects in America to feel a connection to artwork created under fascistic circumstances? Adorno's study, if completed, might have held a disturbing mirror up to the fragility of American democracy (and capitalism) and its potential to slide into fascism, as had happened during the Weimar era to Germany. Artwork of the Nazi era, and contemporary visitors' reactions to it, possessed a similar capacity to hold this same mirror to the faces of its democratized, capitalist viewers. In this way, a quotation from Horkheimer, that "Wer vom Faschismus spricht, darf vom Kapitalismus nicht schweigen" ("He who speaks of fascism must not be silent about capitalism"),[15] was a fitting way for Bussmann and the organizers of the exhibition, many of them students from the University of Frankfurt, to greet and guide visitors. Adorno's failed project, which lived on in other ways in the writings of the Frankfurt School, also, in some ways, looms over all American *and* West German reactions to artwork from the Nazi era, from the political to the public echelons.

After a stint in Los Angeles, and the end of the war, the founders of the Institute for Social Research finally returned to Frankfurt in 1949, where Adorno and Horkheimer developed their critique of the mass culture of capitalism, which they also saw embodied by the commodified kitsch, enabled by capitalism, that "placated" the mass public and workers under National Socialism, pitting it against the healthy intellectualism embodied by modernist and avant-garde "high art."[16] The writings of Adorno and Marcuse in particular (notably 1950's *The Authoritarian Personality* and *The One-Dimensional Man* in 1964) found new life in the student movements and the New Left in American and West German students. Yet the growing

[15] This quotation challenged (and intellectually guided) visitors to *Documents of Oppression* upon their entry into the exhibition.
[16] See Potter, 74-5.

radicalism of the 68er movement, marked as time went on by violence and an ever-increasing generational divide, left Adorno, and prominent younger members of the School like Habermas, torn, as students began to turn on their intellectual leaders, deriding them as members of the "establishment." (Following the death of student protestor Benno Ohnesorg in 1967, Habermas recalled being critiqued by spokesman for the 68er student movement Rudi Dutschke for both his lack of activism, and disbelief in any sort of ultimate student-led "revolution." Habermas grew increasingly concerned over Dutschke's calls for violence, and when he later attempted to speak to a room of Dutschke's supporters about these concerns, and critique their lust for violent action as "left-wing fascism," he was booed off the stage.[17])

Bussmann and the Frankfurt School's joint project in the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition exemplified an amalgamation of the impulses of the "armchair activist" academics that both inspired, but then were criticized by, student protestors of the 68er movement, and pure activist impulses of many of the students themselves. While it incorporated the theoretical beliefs of its original founders, notably Horkheimer, the exhibition was also intended to pull the public, including the press, both domestic and international, into a large-scale discussion about not just the place of Nazi-era artwork in contemporary West German cultural life, but also the connections between present-day capitalistic, and democratic society, and Nazism (which was, Bussmann argued, not simply part of the past, but part of the German present and future).

**The 68ers on Display**

Georg Bussmann, a well-known historian of contemporary art and then-director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, originally conceived of the seminal exhibition in Frankfurt, the first of its kind in the decades since the end of the war. By 1974, Bussmann already had a reputation in

[17] See Hans Kundani, 44-46.

the academic and museum community of West Germany as a political figure – between 1967 and 1969, he was director of Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, where he became known for his politically tinged art exhibitions, including a show in 1970 called *Kunst und Politik* in cooperation with the Frankfurter Kunstverein and the Kunsthalle Basel. When he was selected as the new director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein in 1974, then, his penchant for political exhibitions was a selling point, one that he underscored with his first exhibition in Frankfurt two years later, in 1972, *Kunst in der Revolution*. A director whose clear interests were at the intersection of art and politics also made sense in the city that accommodated the Institute for Social Research.

The idea of an exhibition of exclusively Nazi-era artwork in West Germany provided challenges from the beginning, and not just of the moral or ethical persuasion. As chapter one revealed, a large portion of the art that had been produced, collected, and displayed during the Nazi period, from the paintings and drawings of the combat artists working in the SdbK, to the large-scale paintings and sculptures exhibited and purchased annually at the Great German Art Exhibition, to smaller-scale exhibitions of private collections of Nazi elite, had been discovered and confiscated by Gilkey and his troops between 1945 and 1946.

Practically speaking, simply compiling a collection of Nazi-era art that was readily available (that is, not having to go through the West German and American government to apply for a loan) provided obstacles for Bussmann and his team of exhibition organizers. While less than 2,000 works from the U.S. military collection had been returned in 1951 (and formally accepted by Adenauer two years later), the question of "what is to be done?" with the repatriated art was never seriously posed by the CDU-helmed West German administration upon its acceptance. This question would return several decades later in West Germany, arguably

prompted in part by both the success of *Documents of Oppression* and the return and repatriation of thousands more pieces of art once seized by Gilkey to West German in 1986. Instead, upon his formal acceptance of the artwork, which was met with next to no public fanfare or press coverage, Adenauer had quietly stipulated that the art be distributed to several storage and holding centers throughout the Federal Republic, notably in Bavaria, including the former *Verwaltungsbau* and Bavarian Army Museum in Munich[18] and the office of the *Hauptzollamt* in Munich, which had also, mysteriously, initially retained Adolf Ziegler's infamous triptych "The Four Elements."[19] Until the late 1970s, when a U.S. politician began a public campaign to repatriate a larger portion of the U.S.'s collection of "looted" Nazi-era artwork to West Germany, the level of general public awareness as to where all of the art that had been produced during the Nazi regime was relatively low. Even when West German radio, television, and newspaper outlets began carrying news of rumors of a large stash of Nazi-era artwork in sites in the United States, the West German government was largely out of the loop as to the status of the artwork, as will be seen later.[20] All of that is to say that, twenty years after Adenauer discretely

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[18] This museum was relocated to Ingolstadt in 1972 and retains a small collection of repatriated Nazi-era art to this day.

[19] Most of these works that had been returned in 1951 came under the jurisdiction of the Oberfinanzministerium in Munich, and the Hauptzollamt housed some of these paintings, including landscapes from famed artist Julius Hans Junghahns. See file "Oberfinanzministerium in Munich" in archive at the Bundesamt für zentrale Dienste und offene Vermögensfragen (BADV), Berlin, Germany.

[20] A concerned missive sent shortly after the airing of a television program describing the United States's collection of Nazi-era art from the Federal Republic's Ministerium des Innern (Office of the Interior) to the Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office) in 1976 asked: "[In regards to the U.S.'s readiness to return Nazi-era artwork to West Germany as reported on *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente*], I would be grateful if you would inform me of the status [of what's actually happening]?" See letter from "König," representing the Bundesministerium des Innern to the Auswärtiges Amt, "Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie mich über den tatsächlichen Sachverhalt unterrichten wollten," 16 August 1976, in Akten 331/133/17, Band 1, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK).

accepted the repatriation of several thousand pieces of art from the Nazi-era, and despite the maintenance of a collection of thousands more artworks in the United States, when Bussmann and his organizers contemplated a large exhibition of Nazi-era art at the Kunstverein, there was little public knowledge of (or even interest in) what had happened to all of the artwork after the war.

Bussmann, however, was unfazed, and even blasé about the fact that he, and others, were in the dark as to the location of some of the original artwork that they wished to use in the exhibition. In fact, he was upfront about the fact that most of the artwork shown was reproductions, or photos of art. According to Bussmann, this was "probably [because] the Americans took them," pointing directly to the U.S. Army's collection of much of the artwork postwar, and indicating that though he may not have known precisely where the art was located at the moment, its hidden status was a direct result of American denazification efforts in the immediate postwar period.[21] In some ways, Bussmann's lack of concern about where the original artwork was, and his disinterest in having it for his exhibition, also reveals his attitude toward art of the Nazi era – that is, though the show was to be held in an art, not historical, museum, the objects comprising it were not "art" in the traditional sense. Indeed, for Bussmann it did not matter if what visitors saw and responded to was merely a reproduction of photograph of a work of art, because the art was not something whose aura, to invoke Walter Benjamin, was to be experienced and enjoyed in the way that it might typically be in an art museum context. Rather, this show was to be purely *polemical*, didactic, and used for a political purpose, a cautionary tale about the danger of imagery and propaganda. In this sense, it only mattered to Bussmann that visitors were able to see, understand, and be "taught," the precise purpose of the artwork, and

[21] Ruth Berenson, "An Anti-Nazi Show of Nazi Art," *The New York Times*, 1 December 1974.

how it was supposedly wielded by the Nazi apparatus, not appreciate its beauty, power, or complexity as a work of art. This exhibition was serving a didactic purpose larger than the appreciation and analysis of art by self-guided visitors; rather, by design, it would seek to prescribe a specific understanding of the purpose of consequences of art produced during and sanctioned by the Nazi regime (that is, produced by artists who worked legally as members of the RKK).

Though containing almost no original art, the exhibition was revolutionary, both historically and in the minds of its Frankfurt School-oriented organizers, for a few reasons. First and foremost, it was the first large-scale exhibition of National Socialist artwork since the fall of the Third Reich, a chilling echo thirty years later of how important art exhibitions, especially the annual Great German Art Exhibitions held at Munich's Haus der Kunst, were to Hitler and the Nazi elite. In an interesting coincidence, and though it is unclear whether the organizers of *Documents of Oppression* were aware on not, the last time that visuals associated with and created by artists under the Third Reich was also in Frankfurt; in late 1946, in an exhibition meant for members of the U.S. military only, the Historical Division of the United States Army European Command had a small exhibition of approximately 100 paintings from the German War Art Collection at Frankfurt's Städel Museum,[22] the result of months of postwar collection

[22] The exhibition catalogue for the show at the Städel, as shown in the first chapter, sparsely preserved, seems to have consisted only of a front-and-back page printout of the 103 paintings that were displayed in the museum, whose galleries were substantially damaged during wartime bombing. The collection came mostly from what the German War Art Collection, whose origins were traced in the previous chapter of this dissertation. (That is, these paintings were collected by Captain Gordon Waverly Gilkey, who, after failing to join either the MFAA [Monuments, Fine Arts, & Archives Program] under the U.S Army or an Army combat artist, was asked to lead the "German Wartime Art Project" under the U.S. Army of Occupation (under General George Marshall). Conceived of by Colonel H.E. Potter, Chief of the Historical Division of the U.S. Army, Gilkey's task was to carry out General Marshall's directive that all German art in the American zone created under the Third Reich be collected, confiscated, and sent to Washington,

and confiscation by the team led by Gilkey of the German War Art Project of the Army's Historical Division. As discussed in the previous chapter, the paintings of war in this exhibition, mostly comprised of canvases by wartime artists presented the grim, and perhaps universal, reality of war, rather than extoling the strength of the Nazi war machine, though a visual emphasis on the importance of bodily sacrifice for the national community arguably lingered.[23] Other paintings collected by Gilkey, including renders of Nazi leadership, and some of the nudes and landscape paintings often shown in the Haus der deutschen Kunst, had been immediately shipped back to the United States postwar where there remained in storage. These works, unlike military-themed art, were not openly displayed by U.S. military or political officials.

Yet nearly thirty years after the ramshackle show of military art for U.S. military personnel in the icy basement of the Städel, the mood in Frankfurt was different, though one familiar fear bubbled once again to the surface: that a fondness for Hitler, induced by visual imagery, might return among the Germans. This fear coincided with the reemergence of Hitler and the Nazi regime as topics of conversation, spurred largely by the curiosity of a generation

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D.C., where about 450 pieces of work remain today. See Gregory Maertz, who is in the process of writing the only monograph on the subject of Gilkey and the GWAC, "The Invisible Museum: Unearthing the Lost Modernist Art of the Third Reich," *Modernism/modernity* 15.1 (2007), 3-5. See also Cora Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), which briefly mentions the 1946 exhibition in Frankfurt of wartime art that Gilkey helped organize.

[23] Titles of the works in the exhibition included *Disasters of War* (Anonymous) and *Bringing Back the Wounded* (Franz Eichhorst), see exhibition leaflet, *German War Art*, courtesy of the Städel Museum Archive in Frankfurt, December 1946. Compared to the graphic World War I-era paintings of trench warfare by Otto Dix, paintings like Eichhorst's admittedly remain fairly aestheticized, ultimately emphasizing the importance of sacrifice for the national community, an idea that was doubtless meant to stimulate viewers at the Great German Art Exhibition, where many of these were displayed in 1943. For more on images of the "broken soldier" in German paintings, see Carole Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 92-96.

born after the collapse of the Third Reich.[24] It was in this environment that Bussmann viewed the purpose of a new exhibition of Nazi-era artwork, shaped by the values of the 68-er generation, to be revolutionary. As described above, Bussmann was not merely interested in allowing the public to view and contemplate the artwork of the era that haunted, sometimes violently, the present. Rather, Bussmann was seeking to create an experience that went beyond an exhibition, one that was prescriptive, didactic, left its own "*Dokumentationszentrum"* ("Documentation Center") for future generations. This is indicated by the extensive resources published alongside the exhibition, including not only a catalogue and accompanying book of essays, but also a volume documenting the inception and reactions to the exhibition, including responses (*Einwände*) left visitors after the show. Bussmann was also ultimately interested in an exhibition that commented not only on the German past, but also forced viewers to question their present, making explicit connections between the two for them:

> We were and are of the opinion that this exhibition is only meaningful when we treat fascism not as something that is completed [finished], but rather [something whose presence] in the present is visible.[25]

Bussmann denied in interviews, including one included as an introduction to the "behind the scenes" publication (*Betrifft: Reaktionen, Anlaß: Kunst im 3. Reich*, which was released the year

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[24] This "fear" was an impetus for part 2, section iii of the Potsdam Agreement, which (vaguely) stipulated that in the "initial control period," a key principal of governance by the occupying powers was to "destroy the National Socialist Party and its affiliated and supervised organizations, to dissolve all Nazi institutions, to ensure that they are not revived in any form, and to prevent all Nazi and militarist activity or propaganda." This was one of the main objectives of Captain Gilkey's mission, and this belief in the history-shaking power of the image repeated itself on the advent of the 1974 exhibition in Frankfurt.

[25] "Wir waren und sind der Überzeugung, daß die Ausstellung nur dann sinnvoll ist, wenn wir den Faschismus nicht als eine abgeschlossene Sache behandeln, sondern seine Aktualität sichtbar machen," Bussmann interview with Gisela Brackert, in Bussmann (ed.) *Betrifft: Reaktionen, Anlaß: Kunst im 3. Reich – Dokumente der Unterwerfung*, Frankfurt: WDA, 1975, 5.

following the exhibition), that the purpose of the exhibition was in any ways prescriptive or didactic, arguing in an interview just before the show's opening that the exhibition encouraged "conclusions [to] be drawn by the viewers themselves."[26] However, the organization of the exhibition indicated otherwise, from the looming Horkheimer quotation instructing visitors that the connections between capitalism and fascism were clear, to the placement of art next to photographs of atrocities committed in the Third Reich, as will be examined later in the chapter. Ultimately, Bussmann's conception of the exhibition – that it should reveal the connections between capitalism and fascism to a capitalistic audience through Nazi-era artwork, and that this should cause visitors to question the status of present-day West Germany – inadvertently fell into a sort of paradox regarding the intention of the show. In the press, Bussmann argued that the show encouraged visitors to think for themselves, turn inward, and ponder the links between the past and the present, using Nazi-era artwork as a visual conduit. Yet the show's clear purpose was to convince visitors that there was, indeed, a clear line between the economic, cultural, and political systems of the fascist past and the capitalist present, links that could be made clear in the art of the Nazi period, leaving no room for visitors to argue otherwise. For Bussmann, the show was not simply about understanding the role of art in the political goals of the Third Reich. It was also about convincing the visiting public that these goals had not been vanquished in 1945, but rather lived on in the present. Bussmann believed that the show itself, which included extensive documentation of viewers' reactions and responses (in the form of questionnaires and comments on a *Wandzeitung*, or wall newspaper, at the conclusion of the exhibition), was a way to reveal and confront "fascism as a major [foundational] problem in our [contemporary]

[26] "Wir halten es für didaktisch falsch, die Paralelen direkt zu nenne, wir legen Schlußfolgerungen nahe, gezogen werden sollten sie vom Betrachter selbst," *Ibid*.

society," a problem that, according to Bussmann, became clear by examining visitors' responses to the show.[27] The show's purpose was already prescribed, therefore, despite Bussmann's insistence that it was up to visitors to decide what they thought, any discussion or disagreement was already inherently framed in terms of the question of fascism and present-day West Germany.

**Protests and Controversy: Making Nazi-Era Art "Palatable"?**

Because of the explicit political nature of the show, Bussmann partook in an extensive press tour as the Kunstverein prepared for its opening in October of 1974. This press tour, which ranged from members of the local Frankfurt media, including newspapers and television stations, to interviews with national press like Deutschlandfunk, reveals a few things. First, Bussmann was already aware that the opening of *Documents of Oppression* marked a seminal moment in history – the first exhibition of only Nazi-era art held on the soil of the *Täter*, or perpetrator, was bound to attract attention, and Bussmann was intent to frame the show's purpose as clearly as possible in order to combat any suspicion that the choice to place Nazi-era art (or photographs/reproductions of it) in an art museum context was meant in any way to either glorify it or place it on the same metaphorical pedestal as "real" art. Secondly, Bussmann intuited that the show might be susceptible to misunderstanding, not only from those who were anxious about the ramifications of bringing art from the Nazi-era out into the open, but also those who were enthused, or emboldened, by what they might see as renewed enthusiasm for visual reminders of

[27] "Damit wird zugleich versucht…deutlich zu machen: die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Faschismus also einem Grundproblem unserer Gesellschaft. So gesehen ermöglichen die Aufzeichnung der Auseinandersetzung um die Ausstellung eine Art Bestandsaufnahme eines gesellschaftlichen Bewußtseinszustandes," from "Zu Dieser Dokumentation," *Betrifft*, 3.

the period in history, interpreting the exhibition as a tacit approval of not only art from the Nazi period, but the Nazi period itself.

This point was made brutally clear by organizers' response to an Austrian private art dealer and collector named Karl Stöger, who sent the Kunstverein a letter just before the opening of the exhibition. In his letter, Stöger excitedly indicated that he had retained in his personal collection several pieces of art, including a bronze bust of Hitler ("Hitlerbronzekopf") from 1938 and other "rarities from the Third Reich," including a sizable collection of "NS-Militarie [sic.]" memorabilia.[28] Noting that he had bids on some of the collection from private collectors in the U.S. and England, Stöger offered to sell some of his works to the Kunstverein, apparently grossly misunderstanding the purpose of the exhibition. An administrator working on the exhibition promptly responded, "[O]ur exhibition is a political one, we don't buy or sell anything. The photos you have sent us with your letter [of your collection] are enclosed."[29] In spite of Bussmann's efforts to underscore the political nature of the show, an exhibition of just Nazi-Kunst was ripe for misunderstanding from the public, those eager to capitalize on the appeal of the once-taboo visual remnants of the era, remnants that had already created a sort of black market for collectors and sellers in Europe and the United States.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Bussmann's extensive involvement with the press in publicizing the show in the months leading up to its opening, the exhibition was fraught with public controversy even before it opened in mid-October of 1974. Particularly vocal in their objections to the exhibition were members of the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nazi-Regimes*

[28] Letter to the Frankfurter Kunstverein from Karl Stöger, 10 September 1974, "Dokumente der Unterwerfung" File, Frankfurter Kunstverein Archive, Frankfurt, Germany.
[29] Letter from Knorsch to Stöger, 29 September 1974, "Dokumente der Unterwerfung" File, Frankfurter Kunstverein Archive, Frankfurt, Germany.

(The Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime, or VVN). The VVN had formed in the immediate wake of World War II, comprising former political prisoners and persecutees living in all four sectors of the postwar occupation. Following the division of West and East Germany, the group split, though communists retained a major influence in the West German organization. The group had grown increasingly vocal in the 1960s, protesting against reunions of SS-officers, Holocaust denial, and the foundation of the far-right National Democratic Party in 1964, and grew larger in 1970 with their expansion to include the *Bund der Antifaschisten* (Association of Anti-Fascists).[30] Though technically nonpartisan, many members of the West German group were both Jewish and communist (prior to the banning of the Communist Party in West Germany in 1956), and sought compensation for both political and religious victims of Nazi persecution. In contrast to proponents of the Frankfurt School and other members of the 68er movement, including organizers of *Documents of Oppression*, the group attempted to keep its theoretical analysis of fascism to a minimum, fearing that extended analysis would eventually implicate a relationship between fascism and capitalism, losing it new allies.[31] Protestors from the organization, upon hearing about the show's purpose and opening in October of 1974, panned the impending exhibition as socially unnecessary, offensive to victims of the Nazi regime and, worst of all, an encouragement to fascist sympathizers.[32]

When Bussmann clarified the intention to continue with the exhibition in spite of the protests, the VNN demanded that the show have limited access, and that visitors not only be

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[30] Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics After 1945*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 35-37.
[31] Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 154-155.
[32] For a contemporaneous, outsider (British) account of the protest against the exhibition, see John Heskett, "Art and Design in Nazi Germany," *History Workshop* No. 6 (Autumn 1978): 140-151.

required to provide a *reason* for viewing the show, but also that they must be accompanied by a guide who would ensure that they understood the full extent of the crimes of the Nazi regime. Bussmann refused their stipulations. Yet in some ways, the organizers of the exhibitions and the VVN were not so far apart in their notions about the museum-going public. Like Bussmann, the VVN did not seem to trust the public to understand that the intention of the exhibition was not to glorify, honor, or even normalize art from the Nazi era. Bussmann had partaken in a media blitz to explain to the public that the purpose of the exhibition was to engender a dialogue about insidious relationships between the fascist past and the West German (capitalist) present, therefore prescribing a specific way for visitors to interact with the art on display. In response, the VVN pushed Bussmann's framework of how the exhibition should be understood by visitors one step further, asking that visitors' experience be prescribed and shaped by a human guide. Though Bussmann might balk at the implication, in some ways the VVN's demands were merely the logical extension of what he had already built into the exhibition experience, from his press interviews preceding the show's opening to Horkheimer's instructive quote welcoming people into the exhibition space.

The group finally demanded a boycott of the show when the Kunstverein refused to enforce these mandates, condemning it as a "mockery of [the dangers of] fascism and all those who…attempt to combat it."[33] This insistence by the VVN that exhibition visitors would not comprehend the purpose of the exhibition and, more broadly, the extent of the destruction of the

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[33] *Press Release of the Initiative Against the Spread of NS Art*, October 1974, in Georg Bussmann (ed.) *Betrifft: Reaktionen. Anlaß: Kunst im 3. Reich – Dokumente der Unterwerfung. Ort: Frankfurt* (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Kunstverein, WDA), 169. The press release, and numerous other documents used as a basis for this paper, were gathered and published in this volume following the closing of the Frankfurt exhibition by its organizers. It includes interviews, a walk-through of the exhibition with photographs, local and national newspaper reviews, and protest documents, as described previously in the chapter.

Nazi regime, revealed a fundamental misunderstanding between the Kunstverein and its detractors concerning the goals and layout of the exhibition. Furthermore, the anxieties of the VVN reflected the forces working *against* the type of open dialogue and conversation that the Kunstverein, the Frankfurt School, and many in the 68er Generation, wished to promote. Of course, as revealed above, the "openness" of this dialogue may have been more limited than Bussmann and the show's organizers imagined as they also instructed visitors how to experience the exhibition. Bussmann and the organizers of *Documents of Oppression* argued to the VVN that in order to eradicate misunderstanding of art of the Nazi era, it was necessary to get rid of the taboos surrounding it, "clear[ly] showing the role and function of art in national-socialism," a task that could be completed in a show that "was no conceived of in terms of pure art exhibition, but as a documentation that showed which policies art served, and it what measure."[34] While they apparently imagined the show to be, in some ways, a neutral documentation of the role of art in the Third Reich, and one which would open up an informed dialogue among the viewing public, the exhibition was, in reality, polemical enough to potentially please even members of the VVN.

**"Nazi-Kunst" in the Present?**

The organizers of the exhibition did not understand criticisms of their efforts as an attempt to make palatable or mitigate the crimes of the Nazi regime. Rather, Bussmann and others, including co-sponsors and students from the University of Frankfurt and art historian Berthold Hinz, expressed concern at the development of apparent nostalgia in Germany for the past (known as the *Hitlerwelle*, or "Hitler Wave"), which coincided with the fortieth anniversary of Hitler's rise to power in 1973, as well as the publication of Joachim Fest's monumental

[34] Heskett, 140.

biography on the dictator, the first published since 1945. The phenomenon was demonstrated by a slew of films, documentaries, and publications that employed visual imagery for illustrative purposes produced under the Third Reich without contextualizing or questioning the material used.[35] The *Hitlerwelle* reached a fever pitch near the end of the 1970s, so the organizers of *Documents of Oppression* were prescient in their belief that the separation of imagery related to Hitler and the Third Reich would soon proliferate uncontrollably. *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit* both published features on the phenomenon when it peaked in 1977, three years after Bussmann and his fellow exhibition organizers expressed their fears about the consequences of a mass proliferation of Nazi imagery uncoupled from its original context. In this sense, the decision to organize a serious, prescriptive exhibition about the art produced during the Third Reich, might be seen as an attempt to protect Germans from the seductive power of Nazi and Hitler imagery, a notable parallel to the occupying American forces' fear that exposure to art containing explicit Nazi imagery might prompt Germans to regress back into National Socialism. American forces, including Gilkey, seemed to believe that the mere image of a swastika or Nazi Party official was enough to "renazify" defeated Germans. The problem with the *Hitlerwelle*, as laid out by *Die Zeit* (and understood by organizers of *Documents of Oppression*) was slightly different, and also, in many ways, closely tied to capitalism. Prompted in part by the publication of Fest's best-selling *Hitler* in 1973, as well as the intense dialogue about the past spurred by members of the 68er movement, an unbridled spate of culture – from *Hitlerplatten* ("Hitler records") to books to films to, eventually, a Hitler Rock Opera ("Der Führer," which sought to "debunk the dictator as

[35] For more on this phenomenon of the 1970s, see Anton Kaes, *From Heimat to Hitler: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 21-23. See also Robert Harris, *Selling Hitler*

a drug-ridden demagogue"[36]), the *Hitlerwelle* marked a strange nostalgic turn toward imagery related to the Nazi period, even if the cultural production did not portray Hitler favorably.

The *Hitlerwelle* could, in one sense, be characterized as a logical consequence of the 68er and student movement's unrelentingly serious quest to confront West Germany's Nazi past. This rubbed up against the use of Nazi imagery (including swastikas) in student movement protests, notably by members of the increasingly militant left, like the RAF. While the intellectual side of the 68er push gave people "the language to analyze the Nazis…in particular, anti-authoritarianism,"[37] it also encouraged the study of, and fascination with, the "authoritarian personality,"[38] a framework of analysis that many students ultimately wished to use to not only expose the crimes of their fathers and mothers, but also to "find a theoretical basis for a world beyond capitalism, and beyond socialism as it existed in the GDR."[39] This notion that the past is buried in the present, and also holds a blueprint for the future, engendered the use of Nazi-era imagery decoupled from its historical context by members of the leftist 68er and student movement as well. The terms "fascist," "Nazi," and "Hitler" became popular labels for any entity seen as perpetrating a wrong (including America, and, ironically, Israel). If everyone is a fascist or a Nazi, what, then, do those words and symbols, which *do* have specific historical contexts, mean? In this way, some of those hoping to expose the crimes of the Nazi era to a new generation of West Germans were themselves responsible for the denigration of meaning of words and images from the period. The proliferation of discussion of Hitler and the crimes of the Nazi past in the public sphere, which had been spurred by the 68er and student movement,

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[36] Ellen Lentz, "A Rock Opera About Der Führer," *The New York Times*, 13 October 1977.
[37] Kundani, 27.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] According to Detlev Claussen, 68er and student of philosophy at Frankfurt University, Kundani, 28.

evolved into something more nefarious than simply a mass public awareness of the crimes of Germans in the 1930s and 1940s, many of whom were still alive and living freely in West Germany and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s. The taboo surrounding Hitler and the Nazi period became a *commodity* in capitalist West Germany, ripe for mass consumption, perhaps encouraged by the immense popularity of Fest's Hitler biography. All of a sudden, Hitler and the Nazi period were neither repressed memories *nor* topics of serious and productive dialogue. Instead, Hitler's driver's license was being auctioned off in Munich for thousands of marks, a signed copy of *Mein Kampf* was being sold in Berlin for a record price,[40] and the Nazi leader's life was being scrutinized in titillating detail as never before. This was, at least for Bussmann and the organizers, as well as a concerned (but sometimes complicit) German media, a study of the crimes of the past not for the sake of shame, understanding, and clarification, but for the sake of excitement and, perhaps most damning, entertainment. It was also potentially dangerous: in 1975, infamous British historian David Irving published *Hitler und seine Feldherren* (*Hitler and His Generals*), arguing that Hitler was ultimately an intelligent and rational leader who had had knowledge of the Holocaust while it was being carried out.[41]

The concerns maintained by Bussmann and exhibition organizers about the "taboo-ization" of art from the Nazi period were confirmed when the custodian of the storage facility in Munich where Germany's collection of surviving Nazi art remained reported that interest in the art, despite strictly limited access to it, had recently increased. The most chilling part, according to worried parties: according to the custodian, who was interviewed by a reporter with the *New York Times* as the show's opening grew nearer, visitors to the storage site actually liked what

[40] Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, "Was Bedeutet Die Hitlerwelle?" *Die Zeit*, 2 September 1974, 1.
[41] Dönhoff, 2.

they saw. This was a worrisome notion, particularly to German lefitsts, when coupled with some members of the art world's "re-branding" of the art as "pop art of the 1930s," and akin to the works of contemporaneous photo-realists.[42]

Bussmann prefaced the exhibition catalogue with a brief but powerful statement regarding the necessity of the show in Germany, implicating the conditions in the present as one of the driving forces:

> If art – for example, art of the National Socialists – is identified with its epoch and societal structure, this method must be valid for art of other epochs as well. Although there exists no noteworthy continuity of NS-Art in the present, there remains continuity in how art functions. If the art of the 'Third Reich' had the task to doctor reality and destroy every consciousness of it, one must ask: What relationship to reality does art have today?[43]

The introduction to the catalogue is at once sweeping and vague, imploring visitors to the exhibition to apply the same critical approach to art they should exercise in *Documents of Oppression* to all art, particularly contemporary art. Interestingly, Bussmann seems to deny that, at least aesthetically, remnants of art of the national socialist period persisted into contemporary art of the time. With his claim that there "exists not noteworthy continuity of NS-Art in the present," the art historian reinforced the narrative that many before him had introduced, and

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[42] Ruth Berenson, "An Anti-Nazi Show of Nazi Art," *The New York Times*, 1 December 1974.
[43] Georg Bussmann, "Zu dieser Ausstellung," in *Kunst im 3. Reich: Dokumente der Unterwerfung*.(Frankfurt: Frankurter Kunstverein, 1974), 9. Translation author's own. ("Wenn Kunst – belegt am Beispiel der nationalsozialistischen – grundsäztlich mit ihrer Epoche und schaftsform zu identifizieren ist, so behält eine derart arbeitende Methode auch Gültigkeit für andere Epochen. Existiert auch keine nenneswerte Kontinuität der NS-Kunst in der Gegenwart, so bleibt doch die Kontinuität im jeweilig Funktionalen. Hatte die Kunst im "Dritten Reich" die Aufgabe, Wirklichkeit zu verstellen und jedes Bewußtein von ihr zu zerstören, es ist zu fragen: Was für ein Verhältnis zur Wirklichkeit hat die Kunst heute?")

many after him continue endorse: that art of the Nazi period was an anomaly and an aberration, and existed somehow outside the confines of the "normal" trajectory of the artistic cannon of the twentieth century. In short, though Bussmann cautioned his readers and the show's visitors that our critical understanding of the role and power of art must not be limited to the National Socialist Era, he also solidified the understanding of Nazi-era art as deviant and anomalous, somehow totally disconnected from the stylistic and political urges that prefaced and followed it.

This is an idea that, of course, more and more contemporary art historians attempt to combat as they seek to find lines of diachronic and synchronic continuity between, for example, the paintings of the Nazi era, those of the Weimar period, and those of the postwar era. The stories of many of the war artists chronicled in the previous chapter, in fact, dispute the idea that art of the National Socialist period existed purely as an aberration.[44] Artists under Hitler may have created their work under a shadow, but they did not produce in an artistic vacuum. Many artists, including *Kriegsmaler*, as well as more famous and controversial artists who worked under the Nazi regime, such as Arno Breker, Werner Peiner, and Franz Radziwill, enjoyed careers before 1933 and after 1945 without radically altering the stylistic tendencies of their work, whether painting or sculpture.[45] Ultimately, Busmmann's politically-charged

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[44] See, for example, James van Dyke's revolutionary biography of painter Franz Radziwill, which chronicles the painter's career before 1933 and after 1945, as well as his unending ethical and aesthetic negotiations to maintain his occupation under the Nazi regime, destabilizing traditional narratives of the relationship between modern German art and National Socialism. (James van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History, 1919-1945*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.)

[45] After 1945, most of their careers were not without controversy; as Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang note in their article "Banishing the Past: The German Avant-Garde and Nazi Art" (*Qualitative Sociology,* Vol. 19, No. 3, 1996, 323-333), the rehabilitation effort for Breker, and Peiner in particular in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were difficult, as the past Nazi involvement of the men, particularly Breker as one of Hitler's "irreplaceables" and court artists, was difficult to shake. In the decades following the war's end, Peiner enjoyed healthy sales, despite his complaints of feeling "artistically isolated." Particularly in conservative Bavaria, his realist style,

conceptualization of Nazi art as a deviation from the "normal" course of German art history, an idea that was first implemented by Americans during the Zero Hour period, as Cora Sol Goldstein has argued in her examination of U.S. visual propaganda in the American sector immediately following World War II. As Sol Goldstein contends, in the pre-war of the Third Reich (before 1939), German Expressionism was framed as an "apt reflection of the German soul" and "a symbol of the new world order."[46]

Following the war, Adenauer said that "…[T]he Nazis have laid German culture just as flat as the ruins of the Rhineland and the Ruhr…Years of Nazi rule have left Germany a spiritual desert, and perhaps it is more necessary to draw attention to this than to the physical ruins." Some younger artists chose to distance themselves from such nefarious associations with Nazi-era art by embracing abstraction, "the suppression of meaning, and the rejection of formal structures."[47] And yet while the postwar resurgence of modern art in German is still often framed as a grassroots return to the "normal" course of artistic production that the cultural repression of the Nazi period had interrupted, and prompted solely by a new generation of young German artists, in the American sector U.S. cultural officers actually facilitated this revival.[48] Thus it was

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which had changed little during his career, was attractive to wealthy patrons. However, an exhibition in the 1990s of his paintings in Leichlengen drew criticism from the press. Breker went through denazification proceedings beginning in 1947; by the end of the 1960s, he was again enjoying an illustrious career and attempts at an image rehabilitation (including the formation of the U.S.-based Arno Breker Society and the 1972 French publication of his autobiography, *Hitler et Moi* (the German-language version was published two years later, coinciding, interestingly, with the exhibition in Frankfurt).

[46] Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany*, 72.

[47] Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 124-125.

[48] Sol Goldstein, 89-90. As Sol Goldstein notes, beginning in 1946, cultural officers in the U.S. zone of occupation "implemented overt and covert operations to retain German artists in the American zone…fostered political and personal links between German artists and the democratic West by forming cultural associations…and sponsoring art exhibits and publications…[and] used private institutions and private funds to avoid government scrutiny." (89). The first American

during the nascent Cold War that the "image of the [modern] artist as resistor against Soviet oppression smoothly replaced the trope of the artist as a victim of Nazism [and] the German artist in the American zone and sector was portrayed as the embodiment of resistance and moral courage."[49] This was in spite of the fact that much of the German fine art produced immediately following the war actually seemed "atemporal and acontextual" to visiting American art critics. In much of this art, they were surprised by how few references they saw to the disasters of war in the work of postwar German artists. Rather, in a strange echo of the popular paintings produced under the Nazi regime, which was actually dominated by landscapes, still lifes, and paintings of animals and flowers rather than overtly violent or political works, American art critics were surprised in the postwar period by the spate of seemingly benign and nonpolitical paintings.[50] The persistent popularity of politically neutral art and paintings in the postwar period was not an abnormal phenomenon, despite our expectation that all art embraced in the post-traumatic period of the late 1940s and 1950s should address the horrors that preceded it.[51] Rather, it echoes the constant tension during the Adenauer years that not only the West German people, but also American occupying forces, and later the Adenauer government faced. That is, many were either

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exhibit of modern art in postwar (West) Berlin was organized in part by Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, a German-born MFA&A officer who penned a seminal 1954 book, *Art Under a Dictatorship*, which brought Nazi-era artwork into the (Cold War) totalitarian paradigm. It featured the paintings of Henry Koerner, a Jewish-Austrian-Americans whose family had perished in the Holocaust, and whose work was influenced by German Neue Sachlichkeit painters like George Grosz and Otto Dix.

[49] Sol Goldstein, 92.

[50] For a discussion of the various genres and popularity of paintings produced under Nazi Germany, see Berthold Hinz, *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschimus: Kunst und Konterrevolution* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1974).

[51] Historians of the postwar period, including Robert Moeller, have noted that the war's physical destruction was so substantial and traumatic for Germans that they quickly came to understand themselves as the main victims of Nazism, overshadowing the actual victims of Nazi terror. Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001). See also Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 124.

torn between critically working through the recent traumas wreaked by the Nazi period (sometimes by "ordinary Germans"), and pushing critical self-examination aside in favor of either a narrative of victimization or the myth of the *Stunde Null*. This myth imagined that West Germans could and must start anew, culturally, spiritually, and politically, in order to help the United States wage a new war against a new enemy in the east. The 1974 exhibition in Frankfurt was conceived in the aftermath of this struggle. Though Bussmann's goal in the show's conception was to challenge visitors to adopt this mode of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – "look directly at the lies that the Nazis sold the German people through art" – he also distanced Germans in the present from the crimes of the Nazi period by reinforcing the narrative that Nazi-era art was an aberration, existing outside the confines of the "normal" course of history.

Bussmann's foreboding introduction to the show's catalogue was prefaced by Horkheimer's directive that "he who speaks of fascism cannot be silent about capitalism." In case there were any doubts about the political leanings of the Kunstverein and the exhibition before, these words from the famed Frankfurt School scholar made explicit the leftist sympathies of both. Horkheimer's quote repeated itself visually in the exhibition itself, "welcoming" then rigidly leading visitors into the first gallery, a directive that echoed, in an unsettling fashion, the polemic qualities of the first Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937.

Berthold Hinz, the first scholar to systematically analyze Nazi painting as a unified aesthetic *program*, collaborated with Bussmann on both the exhibition and the catalogue. (Hinz's 1974 monograph on Nazi painting, *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus*, remains one of the seminal works on the subject, even today[52].) The exhibition itself was divided into two major "artistic" sections: the first tackled both sculpture and architecture under the Third Reich,

[52] *Ibid.*

introduced by Bertolt Brecht's assertion that "Der Faschimus ist der große Formalist."[53] The second section, guided primarily by Hinz's *Malerei im Deutschen Faschimus*, focused on the painting and graphics program of the Third Reich. The exhibition's layout focused on presenting the works in a documentary-style, rather than purely art historical (or what might typically be associated with art in an art museum context). This layout predated what Karen Till has described as the *History Workshop* approach to the memory industry in West Germany, which gained popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and is best exemplified by the cool, rational exhibition of Berlin's Topography of Terror.[54] *Documents of Oppression* was arguably *guided* by the opposite of this coldness: indeed, heated emotion *drove* the show – the fear that the potency of imagery related to the Nazi-era had been diminished in the public consciousness – as did the polemical association of the terrors of fascism with the crimes of capitalism, thus tying the exhibition's purpose to contemporary-era Germany.

Though the exhibition was hardly cool-headed, it did feature one hallmark of the nascent History Workshop/*Alltagsgeschichte* movement, present even in the show's title. That is, the organizers favored an approach that presented the illusion of a meticulously documented show, with texts that attempted to place each image firmly in political and historical context, though tempered by a strong desire to expose – or create – continuities between the crimes of Germany's

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[53] See the systematic "walk-through" of the exhibition as published in the show's companion piece, *Betrifft: Reaktionen*, beginning on page 7.

[54] See Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press), 90-137. Here, Till argues convincingly that in response to the terror pedagogy of the 1960s in Germany, in the late 70s, pedagogy worked through local contexts and emotions, not theory and shock value. In short, *the place* became vital, as did a "hands-on," empathic approach, as described by Herbert Marcuse, reflecting the growing influence of *Alltagsgeschichte* (90). The ultimate manifestation of this was the cool, documentary style of the Topography of Terror exhibition of the former Gestapo headquarters, whose remnants were discovered and excavated by amateur historians and students in the late 1970s, and whose first display opened in 1987 (though plans for a memorial on the site date back to 1979).

past and its present.[55] Yet as noted earlier, this message existed somewhat in tension with Bussmann's assertion introducing the exhibition catalogue that "there exists no noteworthy continuity of NS-Art in the present," which both emphasized *and* downplayed the power of the aesthetics of Nazi painting. The show seemed apprehensive of pointing to any artistic continuities between Nazi-era art and art of canonically celebrated eras (that is, pre-1933 and post-1945), because this might combat the notion of a monolithic, easily recognizable "Nazi art," or, worse, it might suggest that art produced during the period of the Third Reich was just that – *art,* with stylistic and thematic tendencies that could be traced to other moments in time that did not lie outside of the "aberration" of the Nazi period. Thus, in some ways, the show exposed the problems with its own polemicism: while it wanted to prove that art from the Nazi era was "un-art," an aberration, or simply kitsch, it simultaneously argued that the period itself had continuities with capitalism both before and after 1945, thus asking contemporary West Germans to question the possibility for fascism to return in the present. Was it possible to on one hand "other" the artwork from the Nazi period, and also somehow ask visitors to identify the Nazi past with their own present? Visitor reactions to the exhibition, which will be analyzed in the following section, reveal some of the confused responses.

**An Exhibition Walk-Through – "Documentation," Not "Pure Art Exhibition"**

The exhibition's organizing committee was guided by two straightforward goals. First, Bussmann and the committee at the Frankfurter Kunstverein maintained that to counter the

[55] See Till, 81-98, which includes a discussion on the excavations of the former Gestapo headquarters around the Martin-Gropius-Bau in the late 1970s in Berlin. Till rightly asserts that public debates and citizen initiatives to discover a silenced history drove the memorialization of the sight in 1980. The exhibition in Frankfurt had a similar impetus, though it happened a few years earlier, and was more influenced by the polemics and theory of the leftist Frankfurt School-associated curators and organizers than the "everyone can be a historian" mindset surrounding the excavation of the Gestapo headquarters.

misunderstanding of art in the Third Reich, it was necessary to strip away the taboos, both salacious and serious, surrounding artwork of the period and "clearly show the role and function of art in National Socialism." [56] This task was, of course, not easy, as controlling the reactions of visitors to any artwork is a difficult task, even in a didactic exhibition space. Furthermore, as American coverage of the exhibition hinted, not only were visitors and those intending to see the exhibition intrigued by the works' associations with the darkest period of German history, they were also, sometimes, attracted to the familiarities of the aesthetics of it. Just as Americans, including politicians and military officials, were often drawn to war art from the period that featured traditional, figurative elements (that is, easy to understand in a narrative sense), it was not a surprise that some visitors in Germany might feel the same, especially as some of the art was billed as "pop art" of the 1930s and 1940s.[57]

Compounding this was the issue, as mentioned previously, of the decontextualization of Nazi-era imagery without political context. Because the Kunstverein was concerned about the proliferation of the use of Nazi-era imagery without historical context that defined the *Hitlerwelle* of the late 1970s, they also aimed to recontextualize the visual imagery of the era in a serious academic context that was available for wise public consumption and guided engagement. This phenomenon reached a fever pitch during and following the exhibition in Frankfurt. Newspapers like *Die Zeit* reported with apprehension on a new propagation of "*Hitlersouvenirs*," mass produced trinkets, even books, films, and plays, featuring Hitler's visage that gained popularity in the wake of the 68er movement and ultimately decoupled the atrocities of the Nazi regime and the history of National Socialism from imagery related to it. Therefore, as

[56] Bussmann, "Introduction," in *Dokumente der Unterwerfung Ausstellungskatalog*, 3.
[57] Berenson, 1.

noted earlier, the show was not conceived in terms of a "pure art exhibition, but as a documentation that shows which policies art served, and in what measure."[58] Following the aforementioned Horkheimer quote that both ushered the visitors to the exhibition and linked the show's contents to the "crimes" of the capitalist present, visitors were guided into the tripartite exhibition space. The exhibition's layout did not encourage visitors to wander freely through the halls of the museum, taking in the art spontaneously or organically. Instead, as mentioned above, Bussmann and his crew aimed to limit the myriad ways that Nazi-era art might be experienced and thus interpreted by guiding and instructing viewers one a sort of "one-way route" through the exhibition space, accomplished by not only dividing the show thematically, but also by physically partitioning the formerly wide-open rooms of the Kunstverein building into a maze of temporary walls and barriers. Of course, this is not an uncommon practice for museum exhibitions, but the inflexibility of the physical experience of *Documents of Oppression* revealed the rigid educational goals that the show's organizers desired.

These broad groupings of architecture and sculpture, paintings, and graphic arts were further delineated by theme, most of which seem familiar to those studying Nazi-era art today. The section on architecture, for example, included displays and accompanying texts[59] on the party building programs, the Autobahn, and memorials, each of which merited a parallel essay by an expert in Bussmann's catalogue.[60] The section on sculpture included displays on animals,

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[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Which generally profiled specific artists only if their names were famous – or infamous – enough to be recognized by the general public, including sculptors Arno Breker and Josef Thorak (see page 17 of *Betrifft: Reaktionen* for a visual account of this).

[60] Among these essays are multiple pieces by Bussmann himself as well as Hinz, who wrote not only extensively about the painting program, but also about the memorial culture of Nazi Germany. Other contributors included art historian Gisela Kraut.

portraits, the heroic works of Thorak and Breker, and the well-known female nudes; the section on painting comprised sub-sections on representations of women, farmers, work, and war.

While architecture and sculpture were lumped together in the show's first half, a remarkably large part of the show was devoted to the diversity of paintings produced, even if this diversity was still dogmatically divided into themes by Bussmann and Hinz. The catalogue featured six separate essays on Nazi painting, four of which fell in line with Hinz's thesis on Nazi-era genre painting. The emphasis on flat works of art may have been simply convenient; the show featured reproductions of most of the works exhibited, choice and medium that arguably benefited paintings more than large-scale sculptures of architectural projects. Hinz's interest in pushing the theory of Nazi painting as a last manifestation of genre painting, a style originating in the seventeenth century Netherlands that appealed to the domestic tastes of a burgeoning middle class and apotheosized, usually with a degree of photographic naturalism, the mundane or banal,[61] is also striking, given the leftist political context of the show. In short, according to Hinz, the subject matter and style of Nazi-era paintings were *historically* bourgeois, again linking the violence of fascism with the crimes of capitalism. Horkheimer's line echoed again and again throughout the exhibition, begging the visitors to conclude that any differences between the art of the Nazi period and art – and perhaps political programs – of contemporary capitalist states were merely a matter of degree. The obvious aesthetic similarities between Nazi art and Soviet-era art were not addressed, though comments of visitors following the show made note of them, challenging the silence of the Kunstverein on the matter.

[61] For a more thorough breakdown of Hinz's theory, referred to as a "problematic heuristic," on Nazi painting as a continuation of the genre painting tradition, see Matthew Burkhalter's excellent a boundary-pushing thesis, "Art 'Vexed to Nightmare'? Traditionalism and Modernism in Nazi Germany" (Master's Thesis, Florida State University, 2014), 20-28.

Photographs, statistics, and explicatory texts accompanied the artwork, placing them in the visual and political context of their time. A section devoted to heroic images of work in painting was juxtaposed with photographs of the working and living conditions under the Third Reich, as well as statistics illustrating how wages fell during those twelve year, and texts on the destruction of trade unions and incarceration of their leaders. Another portion on the representation of family in paintings [Fig. 2] contrasted the placid, didactic genre scenes of ideal Aryan families with the photographic reality of a family torn apart by a bombing attack; another area that focused on the female form in painting placed a canvas of two classicized female nudes next to a photograph of women working in a munitions factory, with accompanying text pointing out that these paintings were not "die Kunst dem Volk," as claimed, but rather a continuation of an elite bourgeois taste, the theory espoused by Hinz [Fig. 3]. Perhaps most strikingly, Josef Thorak's famed sculpture *Comradeship* was shown next to a heap of bones from Buchenwald.[62] Again, visitors must have felt the tension between "objective" documentation and demystification of a taboo subject and the polemical, political leanings of the show's organizers; visitors were presented with a plethora of visual and textual information, flattening the art's aesthetic appeal, and framing the art as *document* as opposed to *art*, a decision complicated, perhaps even strengthened, by exhibiting the art in an art museum, as opposed to in a historical museum.

A subsequent part of the exhibition focusing on the representation of war repeated the pattern. Several stereotypical reproductions of paintings, most done by *Kriegsmaler*, were contrasted with an overwhelming, life-sized photograph of shell-shocked looking German

[62] See *Betrifft: Reaktionen*, 48-53.

soldiers being led, eyes-closed and scarves covering their heads, into a prisoner-of-war camp.[63] [Figs. 4-5] Of note is the type of war paintings used for the exhibition – almost all are portraits of heroic-looking (and Aryanized) German soldiers and officers, visages hardened with pride in the face of violence. For perhaps obvious purposes, no reproductions of some of the more sympathetic paintings created by *Kriegsmaler* analyzed in chapter one, such as those that deviated from commonly-held notions about Nazi "aesthetics" (that is, figurative and heroic) or theme are included. There are no fetid deathscapes from Otto Bloß, no tortured sketches of death from anonymous soldiers, and no satirical caricatures evoking George Grosz. Instead, paintings like Elk Erber's well-known painting of a soldier gearing up to toss a hand grenade, squinting dauntlessly into the smoke, are juxtaposed with the (constructed and prescribed) "reality" of cold, weary, and shamed German soldiers being marched to a POW camp. However, the show featured one familiar painter – *Marinemaler* Claus Bergen, whose powerful, heroic images of the navy were favored by U.S. military officials and politicians, as well as Nazi elite.[64]

Yet as a contemporary American scholar reported at the time, the effect of the heavy-handed didacticism produced mixed results. While the visual irony, the contrast between Nazi myth and violent reality, was effective, even striking, the almost *pleading* nature of the exhibition blunted the effect of the art itself. The show, in fact, was not about Nazi art; one could further argue that it had virtually no interest in Nazi art, at least from a stylistic and art historical perspective. The origins, extrapolitical significance, and connections of the art to contemporaneous movements of the 1930s and 1940s were left by the wayside. Significantly, the organizers of the show ignored any exploration of the relationship of the art to modernist art, in

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[63] *Betrifft: Reaktionen*,65-69.
[64] *Betrifft: Reaktionen*, 64-65. The exhibition featured a photograph of Bergen's *Im Atlantik* from 1942, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

favor of retrogressive artistic comparisons to the nineteenth and pre-nineteenth centuries, a less-than-groundbreaking framing of Nazi artwork supported by Hinz and later scholars. Only more recently have more daring scholars dared to explore the modernistic tendencies in some Nazi art, painting in particular, a trend that could have radical implications for the conceptual framework of Nazism more generally.[65]

**The Reactions: Local, National, and International**

If the show's goals were to both break down the taboo of Nazi-era artwork and encourage the public to talk about it frankly in relation to its historical political context, it was, at the very least, wildly successful in the latter. Doubtlessly, Bussmann and the other organizers at the Kunstverein were prepared for the onslaught of criticism and scrutiny from both the press and the general public, and they immediately set to collecting the reactions to press releases and conducting radio and print interviews before the show opened. The exhibition was set apart by Bussmann's insistence that reactions to it, both positive and negative, from the press and "ordinary" visitors, no matter the age and regardless of background, be meticulously collected and preserved, which was part of Bussmann's conception of both the show and the coverage of the show be treated as a "documentation" of the past and the present. This compendium of reactions and push for open dialogue was built into the physical structure of the show itself, replicated in print in the companion to the catalogue. Thirty-six thousand visitors streamed into

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[65] See James van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History 1919-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Burkhalter's excellent thesis, "Art 'Vexed to Nightmare'? Traditionalism and Modernism in Nazi Germany" (Master's Thesis, Florida State University, 2014); Forthcoming books by Gregory Maertz. Even the American art historian reporting from the scene commented on a few continuities between modernist art and artwork in the show, naming *neue Sachlichkeit*'s realist appeal, as well as the repeated rhythms inherent in Swiss symbolist Ferdinand Hodler's work, which lent themselves nicely to scenes depicting marching soldiers or scythe-bearing peasants.

the show in its first eight weeks in Frankfurt alone.[66] Visitors were presented with questionnaires following their walk-through, which asked, among other things, if they better understood the function of art in Nazi Germany, and if they read all of the wall text, though less than a quarter read all of it.[67]

At the end of the exhibition was a *Wandzeitung* – a paper-covered wall on which visitors were encouraged to write their responses to the art.[68] [Figs. 8-9] Perhaps not surprisingly, the recorded attitudes of these visitors reflected an awareness the show's didactic nature. As such, much of the critique or support of the show was shaped by political support of or opposition to its basic concept, and the imprecision of many of the juxtapositions presented in the show meant that viewers could also come away with the *opposite* understanding that the show wished to impart. One comment on the wall, for example, quipped, "he who speaks of fascism cannot remain silent about socialism"; quite a few others questioned the silence of the show on the similarities between Nazi art and the socialist realist art of the Soviet Union, with one visitor writing, "take away the Nazi emblems and you'll find yourself in the GDR!"[69] Other students appreciated the inherent critiques of the Federal Republic's political system: "Socialism or barbarity!" exclaimed another.[70] The lack of detailed *artistic* analysis of each individual work within the show contributed to this, as did the often broad connection between what an artwork depicted and the social reality – in the end, a painting or sculpture is not photographic evidence.[71]

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[66] Heskett, 141.
[67] *Betrifft*, 148-149.
[68] See *Betrifft* 139-145 for a reproduction of this wall.
[69] *Betrifft* 142-143.
[70] *Betrifft*, 141.
[71] See Heskett, 141.

The show was also not shy about the controversy it courted following its opening; on the contrary, it seemed to revel in it. Bussmann included the anti-exhibition posters and petitions distributed by student and community groups in Frankfurt and Hamburg in the days leading up to and during the run of the exhibition in the catalogue's companion piece. The *Berufsverband Bildender Künstler* in Frankfurt sent in a formal letter of protestation, citing their fears that the exhibition would needlessly provoke and "wake sleeping dogs."[72] Hamburg-based Jewish activist and artist Arie Goral led a campaign against the show, writing letters to Bussmann and distributing flyers in Frankfurt. These flyers cited anxieties that since the Kunstverein had no actual control over the reception of the artwork by visitors, the combination of "banality and evil" could incite violence again.[73] [Figs. 6-7] This concern was perhaps not so overstated, especially in conjunction with the show's leftist sympathies**;** there had recently been growing wave of anti-Semitism, stoked by the rhetoric of militant leftists like RAF member Gudrun Ensslin**,** which relativized the phenomenon of National Socialism and was increasingly fond of labeling Israel a "fascist state."[74]

Another popular criticism of the show was that its organization – art accompanied by didactic commentary – was actually reminiscent of the way that the Nazis exhibited art in the Degenerate Art Exhibition. Again, this attempt to connect the left wing organizers of the show with Nazism was simply a microcosm of the contemporary political landscape: by the mid-1970s, especially with the violent disruptions of the first- and second-generation Red Army

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[72] *Betrifft*, 174.
[73] *Betrifft*, 181, which is a reproduction of Goral's flyers.
[74] Kundani, 92-93. This rhetoric, of course, did not apply to all of the radical left, but its presence and volatility increased as the movement continued to radicalize in the early 1970s.

Faction fresh in the national consciousness[75], there was a growing suspicion of those who identified with the radical left, though many second-generation intellectual leaders of the Frankfurt Institute, including Jürgen Habermas, had by this time distanced themselves from the movement.[76] This type of analysis and meta-analysis was also a product of the nascent History Workshop movement of the 1970s. Ultimately, the tension between polemics and documentation reinforced visually throughout the exhibition might also be read into the Kunstverein's preparation for and responses to reactions to the show. In short: Bussmann and his colleagues had a sense of the show's monumentality, and decided that preemptively engaging the public and press in debates over its merits would only augment its impact.

The press coverage in Germany paradoxically but perhaps understandably *embraced* and even encouraged the taboo appeal of the show. This came with a few exceptions, including a review in the *Unsere Zeit*, the paper of the German Communist Party, which criticized the show's tenuous connections to contemporary issues for not going far *enough*: "Though they correctly depicted Fascism as the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary section of monopoly capital, but did not refer to the continuity of monopoly-rule in the Federal Republic."[77] On the other end of the spectrum, some outlets questioned and mocked the leftist polemics espoused by the show: "The left-tainted intellectuals must in any case be very naive, otherwise they would have noticed in time the boomerang of this exhibition. Everywhere one heard young

[75]Andreas Baader and his associates were still at large, though they would be captured and held at Stammheim the next year.
[76] See Kundani, 45-47, where he describes Jürgen Habermas's alarm after watching a speech in 1967 in Berlin in which Rudi Dutschke used the violent term *Kampf* to describe how the student movement should react to the shooting death of Benno Ohnesorg.
[77] "Kräfte wirken weiter," *Unsere Zeit*, 26 October 1974 (translation author's own).

men telling their wives that the art of the Soviet Union was exactly the same."[78] All over Germany, the exhibition merited front page headlines and full-page articles in papers ranging from *Die Zeit* ("Pinsel-Faschismus: Umstrittene Ausstellung in Frankfurt") to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* ("Wer hat Angst vor Nazikunst?," a variation on a fairly popular headline) to the West German New Left *Konkret* (which ultimately derided the artwork as bourgeois "kitsch").[79] *Der Spiegel* covered the show with the lurid headline "Werbung für Gasbadöfen," calling the Nazi art displayed in the Kunstverein just that. Few, if any, of the newspapers seriously addressed, however, one of the main concerns of the organizing party: why did so many members of the general public find Nazi art appealing? This oversight, purposeful or not, was doubtless shaped by the exhibition's lack of focus on the artwork as autonomous, or as stylistically contextualized. Most of the shows lauded the Kunstverein's exhaustively researched effort, then went on to denigrate the aesthetic appeal of the art, with *Konkret* calling it "porno-realismus" and an "aesthetic lie." Thus, rather than bringing visitors closer to the past, the "official" reactions to the show reflect a desire to continue to "other" the German perpetrators of the previous generation.

English-language coverage of the show, limited to an extensive article by art historian Ruth Berenson in the *New York Times,* addressed this question more frankly in relation to the United States, while also denigrating the show's correlations between contemporary capitalism and fascism as unimpressive. As Berenson pointed out, American visitors might be reminded of the familiar and beloved paintings of Grant Wood, Art Deco reliefs on buildings such as the

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[78] Heskett, 143; Heinz Beckmann, "Ein Bumerand aus dem Dritten Reich," *Rheinischer Merkur,* 11 November 1974 (translation from Heskett).
[79]Gottfried Sello, "Pinsel-Faschimus," *Die Zeit*, 18 October 1974; Wilfried Wiegand, "Wer hat Angst vor Nazikunst?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 23 October 1974; Hartmut Schulze, "Für Hitler und Horten,"*Konkret*, 31 October 1974, in *Betrifft: Reaktionen*.

Rockefeller Center, and the comforting murals of the WPA-era, pointing out that in spite of the Kunstverein's focus on Nazi-era Germany, certain stylistic aspects of the art were, unsurprisingly, international (both historically and contemporaneously, as visitors' curiosity about the place of Soviet Socialist Realism indicated). Interestingly, the American review concluded with a similar "othering" or distancing of the appeal of the artwork, pointing out that "the Nazi artists seen in Frankfurt were far more inept and provincial than the Americans."[80]

**After Frankfurt**

Following Frankfurt, the exhibition traveled to a handful of other cities, including Hamburg, West Berlin, Stuttgart, and Wupptertal. It never made it to Munich, the former *Hauptstadt der Bewegung* and center for Nazi art. Though it is unclear whether deliberately intentioned as a conservative counter to the Frankfurt exhibition or not, another exhibition featuring Nazi artwork, "The Thirties: Showplace Germany," opened in Munich in 1977. This exhibition presented a diametrically different approach, taking the stance that modern German art and design survived the 1930s by artists suppressed by the Nazi regime. Stylistically, Nazi art was presented as a philistine disruption in the artistic continuity of the period; any positively attributed visual remnants of the Nazi past, including the Volkswagen, were displayed as "pure form," the political and historical context of their form denied.[81] The show in Frankfurt also inspired two German artists in London to organize an international symposium in 1976 called *Art in Germany under the National Socialists*, which in turn motivated a conference in 1977 in Frankfurt, *Fascism – Art and Visual Media.*[82]

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[80] Ruth Berenson, "An Anti-Nazi Show of Nazi Art," *The New York Times*, 1 December 1974.
[81] See Heskett, 145-146 for a more thorough description of the show.
[82] Heskett, 146. Berthold Hinz, unsurprisingly, played a large role in the conference.

The artwork was simultaneously receiving attention across the Atlantic in the late 1970s and early 1980s, though in an entirely different context. Gilkey helped organize a small exhibition of the paintings of Olaf Jordan, a *Kriegsmaler* who had begged the U.S. Army (unsuccessfully) for the return of his artwork, dismayed on seeing it in a LIFE Magazine article about "War Through Nazi Eyes."[83] In a warehouse in Pueblo, Colorado, curious visitors were beginning to flock to catch a glimpse of art that had been seized by Gilkey in 1945 and 1946, some after reading that the exhibition in Frankfurt had included copies of artwork still in custody, tantalized by the promise of images of swastikas and Nazi leaders, or simply curious about *Kriegsmaler* renderings of war. Though the context was different – no didactic purpose, contextualization, or explicit instructions on how to interpret the artwork, the response from visitors was, in some ways, similar: an influx of popular curiosity marked by titillation, then a moral "othering" of the artwork, despite, perhaps, its popular aesthetic appeal, a troubling trend that will be examined further in the next few chapters. Politically, Nazi artwork, paintings in particular, became a point of contention in West Germany again in 1979 and the 1980s with the repatriation of thousands more works of art from Gilkey's "German War Art Collection." This included the repatriation of ten paintings from Claus Bergen, an artist whose paintings were featured in *Documents of Oppression*, following nearly ten years of tense bilateral negotiations between several U.S. and West German administrations, a process that will be examined in the following chapter. Political and cultural impetus for initiating the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* continued to ripen, even amidst increased concerns of the *Hitlerwelle* and *Hakenkreuznostalgie* ("Swastika-Nostalgia") with the 1979 airing of the American miniseries *Holocaust*, the publication of Goebbels's *Tagebücher* later that year, and

[83] See chapter one.

four years later, the election to the Bundestag of the first members of the German Green Party. Members of the Greens fought vehemently to have the repatriated art displayed, rehashing one argument of the Frankfurter Kunstverein in 1974 that sequestration might dangerously mythologize the art, which will be examined in detail in chapter four. Their pleas went unanswered by the conservative Kohl administration, which decided instead to quarantine the artwork in the basement of the Ingolstadt's Bavarian Army Museum.[84] Interestingly, Bussmann, along with several other high-profile museum curators and directors, signed an *Aufruf* in 1986 entitled "Keine Nazi-Kunst in unsere Museen" from an important collection of essays from curators and scholars as the question of Nazi art in museum contexts reemerged fervently in the next decade.[85] The statement was a direct reaction against another high profile and politically charged reemergence of Nazi artwork in the public sphere, this time the desire of wealthy Cologne-based chocolatier and modern art collector and patron Peter Ludwig, whose intentions to include works from Arno Breker in his eponymous gallery in Cologne drew heated backlash from senior officials from museums all over Germany, an event that will be examined in more contextual detail in the chapter final chapter. The *Aufruf* condemned the morality of including art from Nazi-era artists in a pure art museum context (that is, without the polemical tone of the

[84] Gregory Maertz argues that this act of restitution, which had been contested within the U.S. government for several years, was an "effort to speed up the process of reconciliation" between the two nations, preceded one year earlier by President Ronald Reagan's infamous wreath-laying at the German military cemetery in Bitburg. Maertz further posits that these two "public relations" acts were an attempt by the U.S. government to garner support from Chancellor Helmut Kohl for the "Star Wars" missile defense program and the installation of Pershing nuclear missiles in West Germany. See Maertz, "The Invisible Museum," 10-13. This artwork was given to the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin on a permanent loan from the Federal Republic of Germany in 2007.

[85] Klaus Staeck, ed. *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1988), 150-151.

1974 exhibition), without historical contextualization (unlike *Documents of Oppression*), arguing:

> Nazi art of 'artistic' quality is not known to us, as more exhibitions in the past few years have made clearer. Art also has to do with ethics. Therefore we call out once again: Nazi art does not belong in our museums.[86]

*Documents of Oppression* was a visual embodiment of the battle that began in earnest with the 68er movement to confront and reeducate the German public with the violence of the Nazi period. It was also reflective of a desire, originating with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, to prove that capitalistic, democratic nations were not immune to the pulls of Nazism and fascism – and that in fact, there was a line to be drawn between capitalism and fascism. The show was an implicit critique of contemporaneous West Germany and America, asking visitors to contemplate the ways that the past haunted the present. And as the next chapter reveals, America, including viewers of the same Nazi-era art, as well as political figures, were not ready to look into the mirror.

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[86] *Ibid*. ""Nazi-Kunst von künstlerischer Qualität ist uns nicht bekannt, wie dies durch mehrere Ausstellungen in den letzten Jahren immer wieder deutlich wurde…Kunst had auch mit Ethik zu tun. Deshalb rufen wir erneut öffentlich auf: Nazi-Kunst gehört nicht in unsere Museen." (Translation author's own.)


Fig. 1, *Betrifft: Reaktionen*, the limited-edited publication detailing the organization, intention, and reactions to *Documents of Oppression*, published in 1975 (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

Fig. 2, *Representation of Family in Painting*, Frankfurt, 1974, (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

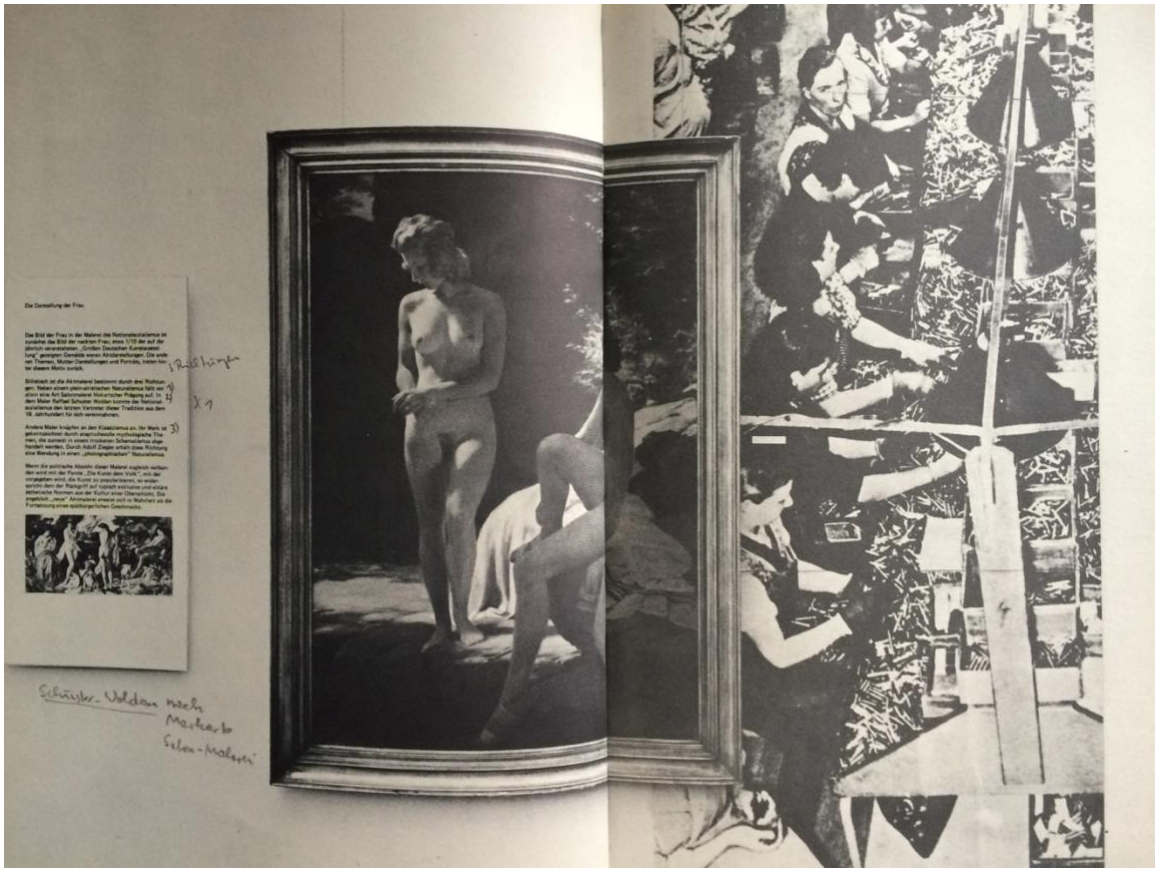

Fig. 3, *Representation of Women in Painting*, Frankfurt, 1974, (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)


Fig. 4, *Representation of War in Painting*, Frankfurt, 1974 (Claus Bergen painting bottom right) (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

Fig. 5, “German Soldiers March to Prison,” *Representation of War in Painting,* Frankfurt, 1974 (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)


Fig. 6, “Oppression of Documents!” Protest Flyer, Arie Goral, 1974 (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

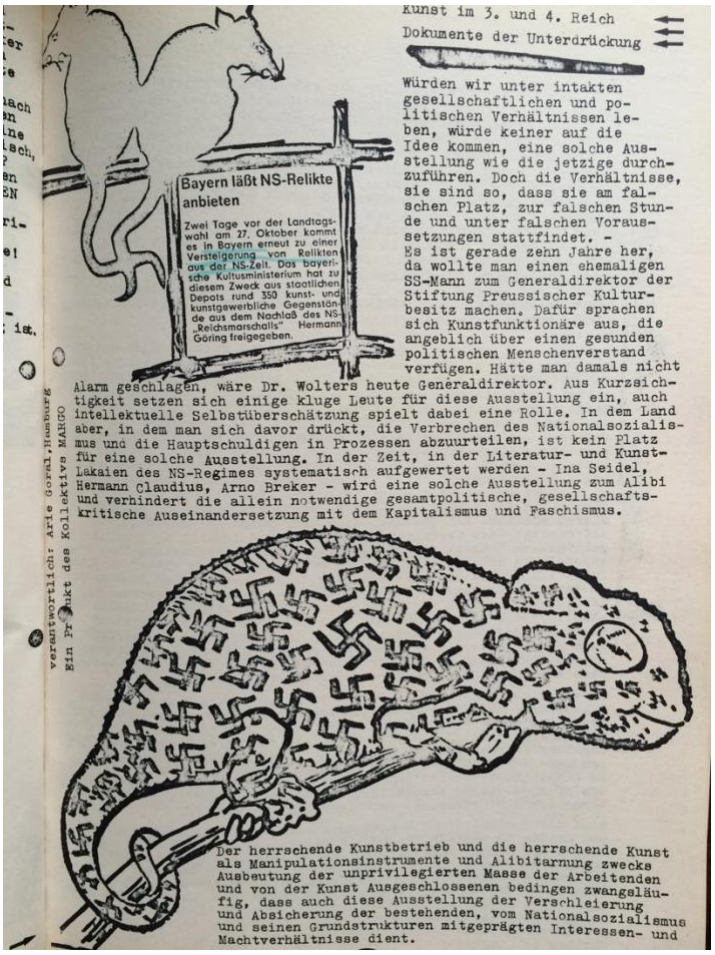


Fig. 7, Protest Flyer, 1974 (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

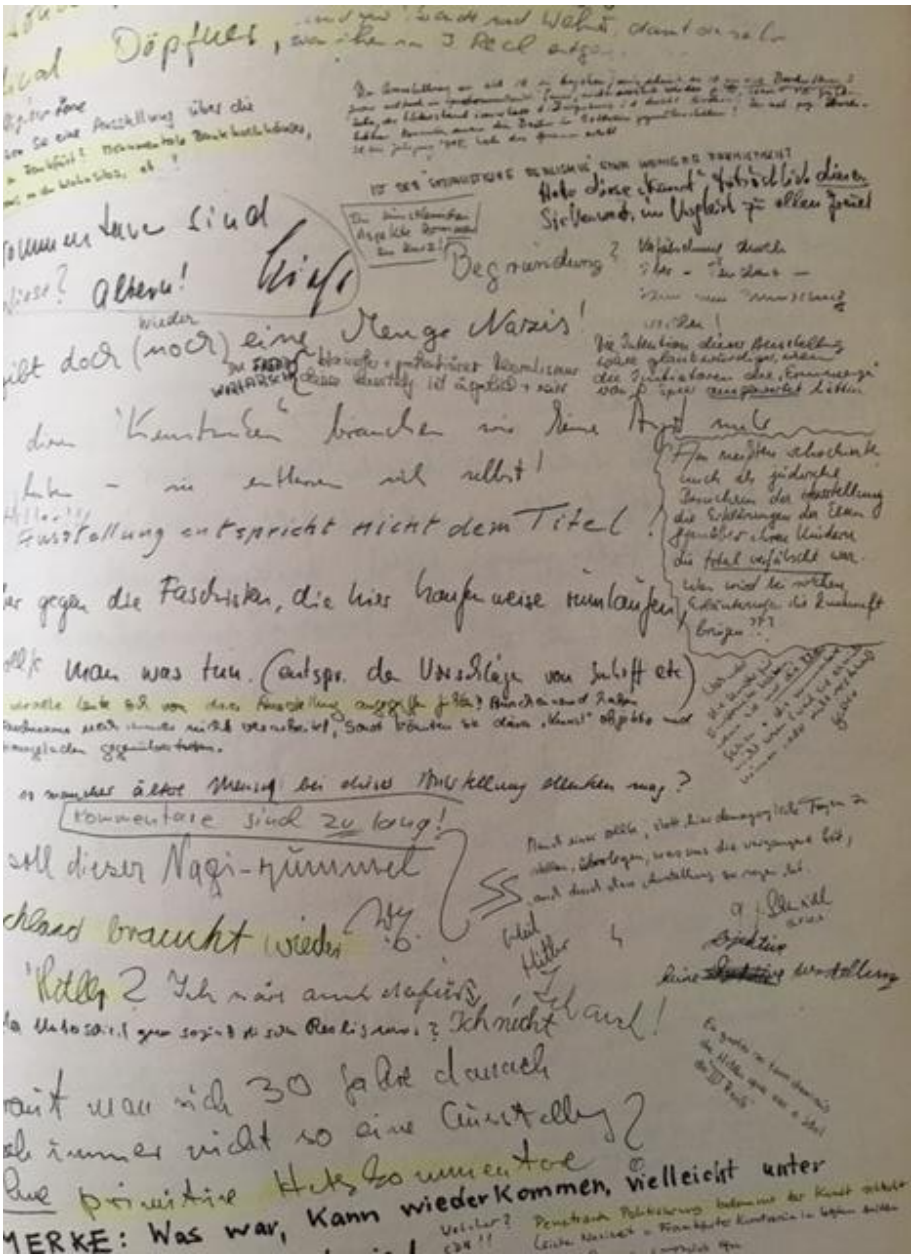


Fig. 8, Excerpt from the *Wandzeitung*, on which Bussmann encouraged visitors to write comments and reactions upon exiting the exhibition (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

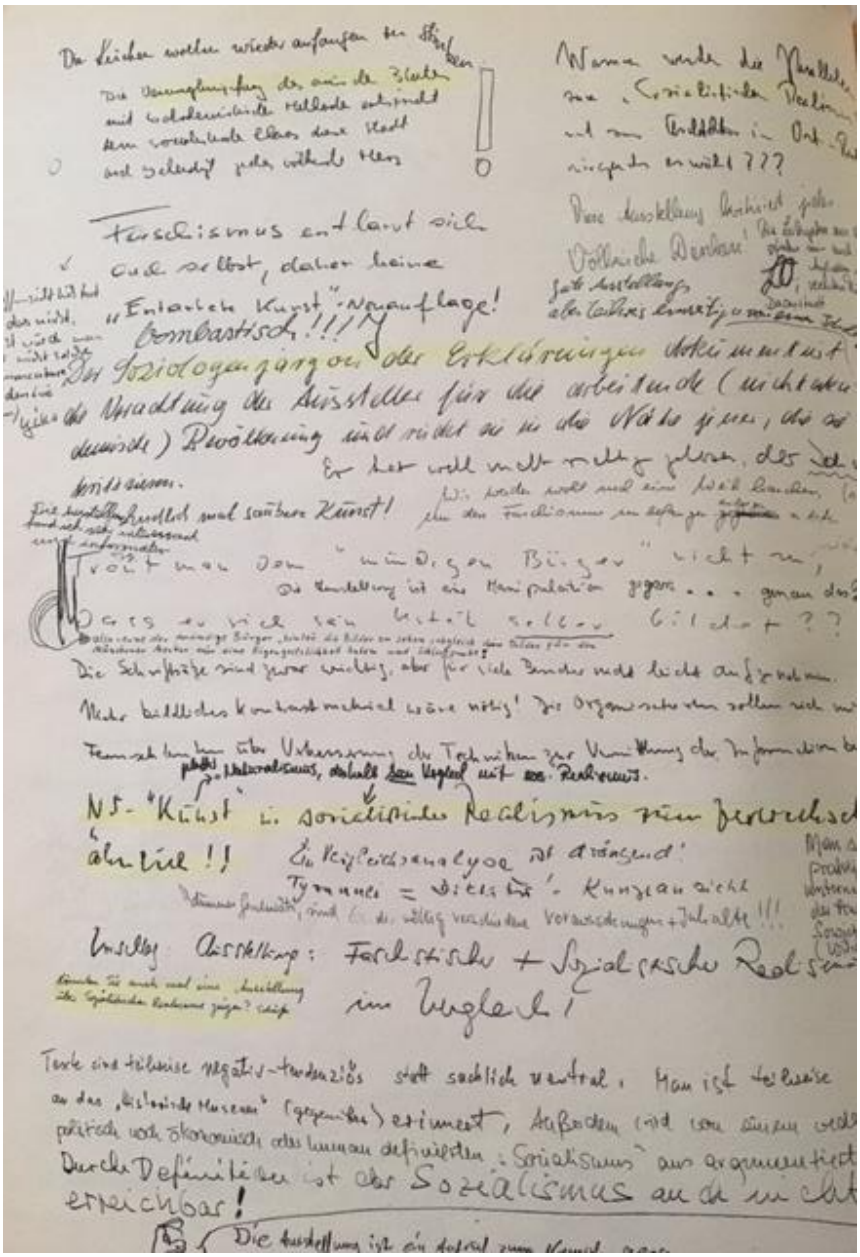


Fig. 9, Excerpt 2 from the *Wandzeitung*, on which on which Bussmann encouraged visitors to write comments and reactions upon exiting the exhibition (Frankfurter Kunstverein Archives)

# Chapter Three

## A Congressman, a *Marinemaler*, and the Second Return of the German War Art Collection

### Introduction

Just a few short years after the Frankfurt Kunstverein disrupted the West German and international community with its angry, polemical exhibition of art, mostly replicas, from the Nazi period, a large storage site more than five thousand miles west was beginning to provoke its own audience with its large holding of artwork created between 1933 and 1945. In the wind-ravaged High Plains of eastern Colorado, at the corner of a partially deserted Army supply depot, sits a large whitewash cinderblock warehouse. The Pueblo building is bleak and uninviting. It was also, for a period in the late 1970s and 1980s, an unlikely art museum that housed and exhibited a trove of Nazi-era artwork and war art, a showroom whose purpose and aesthetics was far removed to the polemics of *Documents of Oppression* at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Under naked electric light bulbs, paintings at this "museum" leaned precariously against boxes and old shipping cartons, the mode of display at once haphazard and evocative. These works seemed like a secret, and yet there they were, sitting frameless in a large warehouse in the middle of a Colorado desert, waiting for visits from curious pilgrims of World War II history [Figs 1-2]. While the first official show of Nazi-era artwork in Frankfurt had been instructive, even prescriptive and didactic, practically daring visitors to feel any affinity toward the art or artists of the Third Reich, the informal permanent "exhibition" at Pueblo was quite the opposite: without context, guidance, or instruction, the artwork here was laid bare, forbidden canvases onto which curious American visitors, confident in their country's victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, might project their fears, curiosities, and even desires.

The Army's Pueblo Ordnance Depot (POD) was built in 1942, just as U.S. involvement in the Second World War was ramping up. Originally planned as a storage and supply site for the military, it eventually also become one of the largest employers in the area. By the 1960s, it had transformed into the Pueblo Army Depot (PAD), and its primary mission had evolved into missile systems repair and maintenance. And by the 1970s, when this role was transferred to another depot in Pennsylvania, the Pueblo Depot became known in the area for another more controversial mission: as a storage site for more than $75 million of Nazi-era art and war art that had been "liberated" (the word used in the U.S. Army's short online history of Pueblo) by Allied Forces near the end of the Second World War.[1] While some of the artwork collected by Gilkey and his men remained in storage in Washington, D.C., at military sites including the Pentagon, even adorning the walls of high-ranking officials and military academies, a portion of the thousands of paintings and drawings seized were sent thousands of miles west, to Pueblo, Colorado in the early 1970s.[2]

The works of art housed in the depot also included more than 16,000 historic Army collectibles and American combat art from the Vietnam War. But it was the Nazi-era art, part of this collection of just under 9,000 works, that was kept "under lock and key" and roped off on the warehouse floor in the desolate desert environs.[3] By 1972, some of the paintings and drawings from Gilkey's art raids had been returned to West Germany; others remained at the Pentagon (including art that was deemed "of interest" to the Air Force) and in storage areas near

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[1] *U.S. Army Pueblo Chemical Depot Factsheet: The History of the Pueblo Depot*, https://www.cma.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/PCD-History.pdf (accessed July 18, 2018).
[2] While it is unclear precisely why the artwork was sent to Pueblo in 1972, it is likely that the Army simply needed more space for storage. It might also be extrapolated that the artwork was seen as better off in location far away from the political interests and prying eyes of D.C. See Dana Parsons, "Army to 'repatriate' Nazi collection of art," *Denver Post*, March 16, 1986, p. 1.
[3] *Ibid*.

the office of the Army's art curator in Alexandria, Virginia.[4] Most of this artwork remained unseen by the public. Pueblo, however, was somewhat different. Though the artwork was cordoned off, perusing the warehouse's taboo collection was permissible for curious visitors and "World War II buffs."[5] Contemporaneous reports of the warehouse's holdings emphasized that it comprised two types of paintings – "battlefield scenes whose themes are similar to those produced by American artists during the war," and "undisguised propaganda"[6]

As Gilkey had done previously during his collection of Nazi-era art in postwar Germany and Austria, Army curators at Pueblo placed the work of the combat artists in its own category, not only in terms of subject matter, but also, implicitly, morally: the art of battle scenes created by German *Kriegsmaler* was clearly separated from any other Nazi-sanctioned artwork that had been collected by Gilkey and other American forces after the war in two key ways. First, it was explicitly excluded from artwork that was "propagandistic" in nature. Secondly, both curators and reporters characterized the artwork stored in Pueblo as more similar thematically, and even stylistically, to the artwork created by American combat artists during the war than other artwork produced during the period that somehow buttressed the tenets of Nazism or fascism. There were no explicitly prescribed ideas from either Gilkey or OMGUS as to what, exactly, constituted artwork that was "Nazistic" in nature beyond the presence of symbols (such as swastikas) or recognizable portraits of leaders in the art. Hubert Lanzinger's infamous painting 1935 "Der Bannerträger," ("the Standard-Bearer"), which remains part of the German War Art Collection to

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[4] "Press Guidance for Posts: Return of German War Art," undated (probably late 1970s or early 1980s), German War Art Archive, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia.
[5] William E. Schmidt, "Army displays Nazi art at Colorado Warehouse," *The New York Times*, 1 September 1981, page 8.
[6] Denoted in the Schmidt article by, for example, images of a "heroic Hitler" holding a Nazi flag and leading uniformed followers across an idyllic Bavarian landscape. *Ibid*.

this day, often seems to be the work held up as a classic example of "Nazistic" art, as it features Hitler riding into battle on a horse in a shining suit of armor, defiantly holding the Nazi flag in his right hand.

Army Center for Military Art curator Mary Lou Gjernes also emphasized that all of the works had not only monetary, but historical value. Echoing many of Gilkey's official reports on the artwork, Gjernes's clearly omitted the phrase "artistic value," an intentional oversight that is noteworthy, and perhaps indicative of a reluctance to categorize any visual object created during the Nazi period as somehow inherently "valuable" beyond its historical significance. For her work with the artwork in Pueblo, Gjernes gave an interview to a West German television broadcast that aired in 1980 ("Feuer und Farbe: Das Dritte Reich und seine Maler zwischen Heroes und Horror," which took its name from a 1943 art book of images of German combat art). The television show revealed to a German audience a potentially troubling characteristic of Nazi-era artwork that *Documents of Oppression* had encountered as well: what might it mean when the viewing public, this time curious Americans, were intrigued by, and even liked, what they saw in this artwork?[7]

This chapter will examine another moment in time when the question and fate of Nazi-era art became entwined in the politics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It focuses on debates, primarily in the United States, surrounding "what to do" with the thousands of paintings that remained in U.S. custody following their partial return to West Germany in 1951. It will also examine continually shifting conceptions about what this artwork, especially that painted by combat artists, represented to U.S. politicians and officials in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and

[7] Or "Fire and Color: The Third Reich and its Painters, Between Heroes and Horror," in "Kriegskult," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 February 1980 in Box 50, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.

interrogate a paradox at the heart of their relationship to some of this art: that many U.S. officials enjoyed, even admired the artwork, a tension first revealed in chapter one with Gilkey's initial art raids. In focusing on two specific laws, both initiated by U.S. Congressman G. William Whitehurst, and debates surrounding their passage – one sanctioning the return of ten paintings of naval warfare by a German artist named Claus Bergen, and one authorizing the repatriation of more than 6,000 pieces of art from the U.S.'s collection of Nazi-era art back to West Germany – this chapter argues that the United States government continued to shape the process of "coming to terms with the past" in West Germany, which itself remained torn as to whether the art should be restituted, and what should be done with it once it came back.

Virginia Congressman G. William Whitehurst would revive the contentious issue of returning Nazi-era artwork and paintings of *Kriegsmaler* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, beginning with an initial inquiry with Bess Hormats, the acting curator of the Army art collection.[8] Whitehurst's interest in transporting the works back to what he saw as their rightful home in West Germany may superficially seem like the simple passion project of a respected congressman. In reality, his request revealed a deeper and more complicated attitude toward Nazi-era art shared by many Americans and West Germans alike. Though the paintings were charged visual remnants of a painful and violent past, many also understood them as valuable artistic and historical products of "unwitting" participants in the Third Reich, a claim that is, of course, contentious. Whitehurst's belief that the artwork initially collected by Gordon Gilkey and stored in the United States should be returned to its country of origin, and reunited with its

[8] "German War Art Chronology," memo from the Chief of Military History and the Center of Military History, late 1979, German War Art Archive, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia.

creators, signaled a desire for West Germany to be able to move beyond the stigma of its past.[9] Whitehurst's belief found support politically with the passage of his bill HR 11945 in 1979, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, which returned ten paintings executed by *Kriegsmaler* Claus Bergen across the North Atlantic the following year. The success of Whitehurst's proposal was echoed on a large scale two years later with the passage of HR 4625 in 1982, which authorized the return of "certain works of art…after [interdepartmental review] by the Secretary of the Army" to West Germany. Ronald Reagan and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl finally executed this task in 1986. This process, and the political and public debate that it triggered in the FRG, was one catalyst for a large-scale public and political debate in West Germany in the following years, spearheaded by a leader in the newly established German Green Party. Once again, the United States and West Germany were bound together inextricably through the contested fate of this artwork, with actions made by U.S. politicians, consciously or not, helping direct the process of confronting the past in Germany.

**Nazi-Era Art Post-Gilkey**

The holdings of the German War Art Collection that remained in the United States following the initial transfer of 1951 disappeared and reappeared from the public realm in the following decades. Gilkey was sympathetic to the plights of many of the German *Kriegsmaler*, Gilkey kept up personal correspondence with some of them in the decades following the war. Within this correspondence, the artists' or their surviving relatives were often under the impression that Gilkey could, and would, return their art to them.[10] One letter, written on behalf

[9] "Stigma" is a word that some intellectual historians, including A. Dirk Moses, have encouraged using instead of "collective guilt," "shame" or "victimization." See Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[10] See Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum, which contains various letters following the end of the war between Gilkey and former war artists or their descendants,

of *Kriegsmaler* Rudolf Hengstenberg, recounted with admiration and astonishment a pleasant encounter the painter had with Gilkey and his men in his atelier, "while the bodies of soldiers lay around us" ["*als bei uns noch Kampftruppen lagen*"]. In the letter, Hengstenberg recalled American officers led by Gilkey entering his apartment while he organized his paintings. Despite their orders, as detailed in chapter one, to gather and confiscate art, one of the officers asked Hengstenberg if he could sit for a portrait, apparently impressed by the quality of his painting. Gilkey then praised Hengstengberg's works for their rejection of "Hurrah-Patriotismus" and in favor of showing the "human side" ["*menschliche Seite*"] of the war.[11] Like other letters with artists encountered in chapter one, this correspondence reveals the tension Gilkey felt between carrying out his mission and admiring and supporting the work of the artists whose paintings he was tasked with confiscating. To Gilkey, the talented artists were not enemy combatants, but rather talented comrades whose war experience was not so different from that of the Americans.

Gilkey's empathetic streak prompted not only continued relationships with these artists after the war, but also his desire to share the works of the painters that had been lost. In 1947, impressed by the quality of the paintings of Olaf Jordan, the *Kriegsmaler* from chapter one who had been dismayed to find his portraits featured in a *Time Magazine* article entitled "War Through Nazi Eyes," Gilkey traced a large collection of the paintings to a small village north of Passau, where Luitpold Adam had hidden them away. Gilkey then had the entire collection, along with others in the GWAC, shipped to the Army's Historical Properties Section in D.C. In

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including Heinrich Amersdorffer, Theodor Scharf, Rudolf Hengstenberg, and Eva Zimmermann, wife to Bodo Zimmermann, a wood engraver. Zimmermann requested, via art dealer Kurt Dietrich, that the engravings of her husband be returned to her residence in the Russian zone of occupation.

[11] Letter from Prof. Dr. Kurt Hesse, friend to Rudolf Hengstenberg, to Gordon Gilkey, 14 April 1947, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.

1975, after several unsuccessful attempts by Jordan to repatriate the works, he helped organize an exhibition of the paintings for the public with Bruce Cartner, a professor at Carnegie-Mellon. The show, held at the university's Hewlett Gallery, ran almost concurrently with *Documents of Oppression* across the Atlantic as it toured through West Germany, though with a very different purpose. While the Frankfurt show juxtaposed art of the Nazi period with photographs of the period's carnage, "The Captured Art of Olaf Jordan" immediately presented the artist as a victim, caught up by accident in the violent policies of his political and military leaders. "Jordan was more concerned with individuals than he was with events," the catalogue's exculpatory introduction began, going on to praise Jordan for his portraits of Cossacks in the Balkans, whose struggle he depicted "not [as] the historic one between Communism and Fascism, but the confrontation between man and war, any war."[12] Just as Gilkey and his officers had admired the ability of Hengstenberg to see past the propagandistic patriotism of a worldwide clash between nations and ideologies to the universal and human suffering of war, the exhibitions lauded Jordan's rendering of "the solder's bitter sense of duty and the often tragic consequences of adherence to that duty."[13] Finally, the show compared Jordan's art to that of two other legendary artists of war, Picasso and Käthe Kollwitz. This time, it was an institution of fine art, not an admiring military officer that sanctioned both the qualitative and historic value of a visual relic of the Nazi era. The catalogue's introduction does not mention that Jordan was a member of the German Armed Forces while he executed most of his paintings.[14]

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[12] Introduction, "The Captured Art of Olaf Jordan," The Hewlitt Gallery, Carnegie-Mellon University, January 6-17, 1975, Box 55, Gordon W. Gilkey Papers, Portland Art Museum.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] Gilkey obviously saw value beyond just that of an "historical document" in Jordan's portraits, as did the curator of the exhibition, Dr. Bruce Carter, who had been struck by the superior drawing and emotional impact of Jordan's work.

**A New Push to Repatriate Nazi-Era Art Holdings in the U.S.**

By the 1970s, then, Gilkey was no longer the sole outspoken champion of some of the artwork confiscated from Germany during and immediately after the war that remained in U.S. custody. As early as 1976, there were some rumblings in the West German media about the thousands of paintings that remained in U.S. custody after the return of the small selection in 1951. That spring, the *Bonner Rundschau* reported with interest that thousands of paintings of the Second World War remained in storage at in Washington, D.C. following the return of nearly 600 in 1951. Notably, the radio report did not sympathize with the artists whose paintings were collected by Gilkey in 1946 and 1947, emphasizing that many of the artists featured in the collection, notably Olaf Jordan, had found success as painters outside of Germany (in Jordan's case, in Sweden) following the war. The article's headline also loudly proclaimed that "Germans never wanted to have the paintings" ["*Die Deutschen wollten die Bilder nie haben*"], though this was arguably a reference to the U.S. Army's own thought process while Gilkey was collecting the works. The article, however, makes sure to underscore that the paintings have little artistic or aesthetic value, again implicitly invoking the anxiety that bestowing this type of value on a product of the Nazi-era might somehow be immoral, or even insidious: "Surely, the collection does not represent 'great' [true] art" ["*Sicherlich repräsentiert die Sammlung nicht große Kunst*"]. Instead, the author closed with the argument that as historical document (again, that phrase, once used by Gilkey to describe the paintings he had collected), the paintings were of "inestimable worth ("unschätzbare[r] Wert"). [15] There was no indication that the works would return to West Germany anytime soon, however, with the author lamenting that it was

[15] A. von Krünstiern, "Die Deutschen wollten die Bilder nie haben," *Bonner Rundschau,* 10 June 1976, in B86/1493, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt, Berlin.

"regrettable" that there seemed to be little prospect of repatriation of the paintings in the near future.[16]

Uncertainty over the paintings' future only increased as the media continued to pique public interest in the story. With this renewed interest in the German War Art Collection in Germany came also growing questions about the status of the artwork from the media. That is, were the thousands of paintings not returned under the Adenauer administration to remain property of the United States forever? Or was there ever a possibility – or even desire – for the works to return to their place of origin? Later in 1976, the West German arts and culture series *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente,* airing on Hessischer Rundfunk (the public broadcaster serving Hesse and headquartered in Frankfurt) aired a television episode on the "schicksal" ("destiny") of Nazi-era artwork in the U.S. Gordon Gilkey was featured as an interview subject, marking the first time that the works seized by Gilkey and his men was publicly revealed to a large West German audience, though the 1974 show in Frankfurt, *Documents of Oppression,* had alluded to their existence. The show, entitled *Paintings from the Nazi Era: To Whom do they Belong*? [*Gemälde aus der Nazi-Zeit – wem gehören sie*?] revealed that some officials within the *Bundesregierung* in Bonn were looking into the possibility of a transfer of select paintings back to Germany, despite the complexity of the legal situation surrounding the works' repatriation.[17]

The seminal 1974 exhibition in Frankfurt had also been an impetus for the television show's production. Though works from the German War Art Collection had not been on view in West German since the end of the war, as the previous chapter argued, *Documents of*

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[16] *Ibid*. "…aus dieser Sicht gesehen ist es bedauerlich, dass auf ihre Rückkehr nach Deutschland vorläuflig kaum aussicht besteht."

[17] Script of *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente,* "Gemälde aus der Nazi-Zeit – wem gehören sie?" 2, B86/1651, Archive of the Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

*Oppression,* organized by leftist intellectuals of the 68er movement, brought the art and visual culture of the Nazi era back into the public realm in a serious, critical way. Almost thirty years after the fact, West Germans had been forced to confront some of the artistic production of the Third Reich. Though that show was didactic and polemical, beseeching viewers to look into a mirror and recognize the relationship between capitalism and fascism, it also piqued the interest of visitors, some of whom found that they *liked* the artwork, or decided it was stylistically and thematically similar to the socialist realist art promoted by the East German government.

In a sound-bite with *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente,* Gilkey shared his story of tracking down and collecting art for the German War Art Collection, a story that was most likely as new to West German listeners as it was to the American public. The show played up the doubts that American officials had regarding the ownership of the art even as early as 1946. Importantly, it also highlighted the ruling of the highest judge in the Army, who had finally decided several decades after the confusion regarding the collection's legal status that "though the U.S. had no legal basis for seizing the collection in question in the first place, and no legal claim to ownership of the works," West Germany also had no legal recourse to force the United States to return the works.[18] The show also indicted Americans, especially military and political officials, for their hypocrisy regarding the perceived "danger" of some of the paintings, which had been used as pretext for Gilkey to carry out his art raids following the war. The narrator noted that most of the art was in storage, including a site in the desert in Colorado (the Pueblo Depot) that occasionally entertained curious visitors. More damningly, the television broadcast brought up

[18] "Die USA haben niemals die Besitzrechte an all den fraglichen Gegenständer besessen. Die USA haben kein eigentumsrechte, wenn es auch auf den anderen Seite keinen rechtlichen Zwang gibt, sie zurückzugeben." Script of *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente,* "Gemälde aus der Nazi-Zeit – wem gehören sie?" 2, B86/1651, Archive of the Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

an apparent fondness for the art that military and political leaders harbored. The narrator observed that for some reason, not *all* the artwork originally confiscated by Gilkey and his men languished in storage, and alluded to the small shows of the paintings, such as the one held in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt in 1946, that were attended and enjoyed by military officials: "Exhibitions are organized, and generals and [other high-ranking officials] pick out the most pleasing ['prettiest'] of the paintings for their offices."[19]

The segment also pointed to the fondness of political and military officials for the naval paintings of Claus Bergen. The curator of the Marine Museum in Washington, D.C. referred to Bergen's works as art that depicted "historical experiences" that people, ostensibly including these officers and politicians, perhaps the broader public as well, had a "right to see."[20] Following the episode's airing, the West German administration in Bonn was understandably inundated with letters from artists and families or artists who had perished in the war, requesting the immediate return of the paintings and drawings produced by their fathers, sons, and brothers, similar to the letters Gilkey received from Amersdorffer and Agricola in the years following his confiscations.[21]

**Chaos, Confusion, and Controversy: Bonn, D.C., and Gilkey's Confiscated Artwork**

The response to the television show could not have been more different than the response to *Documents of Oppression*, which had opened just two years earlier. It is undeniable that the show was successful in somehow humanizing the artists whose works Gilkey had seized in a

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[19] *Ibid*., "Man veranstaltet Austellungen, Generäle und Obertsten suchen sich die schönsten von ihnen [die Bilder] aus," 3.
[20] *Ibid.* "Für mich zeigen, sie historische Ergebnisse und ich glaube, die Menschen haben ein Recht darauf, sie zu sehen," 3.
[21]See correspondence between Mahlberg, Arnold, and Arndt, 25 May 1976, 9 July 1976, 13 July 1976, in B106/160600, Akten 331/133/17, Band 1, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK).

way in which the polemical exhibition in Frankfurt showed little interest. The opening of *Documents of Oppression* had prompted protests and divided the public on the morality of placing art from the Nazi era back in the public sphere, no matter the intention, even though some visitors admitted that they found some of the artwork, or reproductions of the artwork, pleasant, or at least similar to the socialist realist work favored by communist states and in East Germany. Hessicher Rundfunk now framed Nazi-era artwork in a different way to the West German public, an important point considering this was the only wide-reaching broadcast on the topic at the time. All of a sudden, the public in the Federal Republic viewed not just the men behind the artwork, but also men who were apparently attempting to do the least damage possible during the Nazi period by working as artists, not soldiers, at least if they were to believe the stories of the painters laid out in the first chapter. Furthermore, the show's producers reinforced the narrative of potential art looting by the United States, as well as American hypocrisy toward the subject matter and dangerous potential of the seized artworks. Though the show did not go so far as to call for the repatriation of the remainder of the Nazi-era art that remained in U.S. custody, it raised the question of the legality of the U.S.'s sole claim to the artwork, and also pointedly reported on the popularity of some of the works amongst American military and political officials. The black-and-white discussion of the aesthetic components of Nazi culture, or simply visual culture produced under the Nazi regime, suddenly became grayer. However, there is an argument to be made that the organizers of the Frankfurt show in 1974, intent on drawing a clear line from capitalism to fascism, might have found more fuel to fire their argument had they known about some American officials' fondness for artwork produced by members of the Wehrmacht. They might have framed this as an historical irony revealing in

simple terms that capitalist and fascist systems were not as far apart as "the West" (in this case, Americans) would like to imagine.

Amersdorffer, among others, had written to both Gilkey and the U.S. Army as late as 1975 regarding the return of his paintings. Gilkey, by that time a private citizen, forwarded his letters to Army Chief of the Historical Services, Robert Fechtman. Fechtman waited nearly two years to answer the former *Kriegsmaler* with a perfunctory letter noting that the paintings had been seized and detained lawfully, under Law 52, Article One of the Military Government of Germany in the American Zone, and had never rightfully been the property of Amersdorffer. Fechtman went on to note that 1600 paintings from the collection had been returned to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1951, including 31 watercolors done by Amersdorffer. He concluded by noting that any paintings not returned had been deemed "propagandistic or militaristic in nature," and would never be returned to the painter or to West Germany.[22] As was the case with so many of the other paintings that Gilkey had seized and sent back to the United States, the descriptors "propagandistic and militaristic in nature" remained vague and amorphous in the official response. This lent an air of arbitrariness to the paintings that were and were not sanctioned for repatriation, since most of Amersdorffer's paintings and sketches were of seemingly innocuous land- and harbor-scapes.

It was apparently at this point that the West German *Bundesregierung*, under the leadership of SPD (Social Democratic Party) Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, responding to pressure

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[22] Fechtman letter to Amersdorffer, 16 April 1977, B86/1493, Archive of the Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany. Law 52 decreed that "all property owned by the German Reich" (which paintings from *Kriegsmaler* were deemed to be) was "subject to possession…by the Military Government." See also *Military Government Germany – Supreme Commander's Area of Control: Proclamations, Laws, Ordinances and Notices, Directives and Instructions to German Police*, 7 November 1944, accessed at http://moses.law.umn.edu/transitional-justice/pdfs/Military_Government_Germany_Supreme_Commanders.pdf.

from its own nationals, decided that action might be necessary. Yet the path to a solution was not clear, especially since the legal status of much of the artwork was far from settled. Additionally, as the paintings had been in custody of the United States under dubious ownership claims for more than three decades, many of those working in the West German government were unfamiliar with their story, or even that they existed. Underscoring the bureaucratic confusion regarding the artworks' status, a concerned missive sent shortly after the program aired from the Federal Republic's Ministerium des Innern (Office of the Interior) to the Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office) asked simply, in regards to the U.S.'s readiness to return Nazi-era artwork to West Germany as reported on *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente*: "I would be grateful if you would inform me of the status of what's actually happening?"[23] A conference in London late that year, the first international symposium on art of the Third Reich ("Art in Germany Under National Socialism") also encouraged experts like Hormats to bring up the issue of the U.S.'s holdings of Nazi-era art and their potential repatriation to the Federal Republic with the international intellectual community.[24] This placed even more pressure on the West German government in Bonn to respond with a formal request. In late 1976, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany sent an *Aide Mémoire* to the U.S. State Department asking about the more than 1600 paintings that had been returned in 1951 to West Germany. The memo further highlights the chaos within the West German administration as to the status of the confiscated works – not only was there confusion surrounding the works that remained in U.S. custody, which were currently the subject of both the television broadcast on the Hessischer Rundfunk and newspaper and

[23] Letter from "König," representing the Bundesministerium des Innern to the Auswärtiges Amt, 16 August 1976, in Akten 331/133/17, Band 1, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK). "Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie mich über den tatsächlichen Sachverhalt unterrichten wollten."
[24] Hormats, "Captured German War Art," *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1978

magazine articles, but there was also residual chaos and misinformation surrounding the status of the works that had been returned a quarter of a decade ago:

> Out of the original 9000 items, some 1600 were shipped by the Office of the Chief of Military History to the Chief, Historical Division in 195, with the understanding that they would be returned by German authorities to their rightful owners. As the appropriate German authorities have [had] difficulties locating the 1600 objects, the Embassy would be grateful to the Department of State if the Department could be helpful in forwarding a copy of the protocol on the handing over to any German authority of the 1600 items…[25]

The Embassy's missive implied that German authorities remained uncertain, twenty-five years after the fact, as to what precisely was to be done with the works of art that had been returned to West Germany under Adenauer. Furthermore, it seemed that the Embassy was in the dark as to where, precisely, many of those works were being stored, which was understandable since the collection had been stashed in the former NS-*Verwaltungsbau* in Munich and the Bavarian State Archive building in the 1950s without a formal cataloging process.[26] The confusion conveyed in the Embassy's letter also suggests that many of the artists who had written to Gilkey and the Army begging for the return of their paintings may have been waiting in limbo for years as their works languished in Munich storage sites. The Department of State forwarded the request to the William Strobridge, Chief of the Historical Division at the Center for Military History, who responded with a stark rebuke of the West German administration's handling of the works in

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[25]*Aide mémoire* from the West German Embassy (Ambassador Peter Hermes) to the Department of State; forwarded by Lucian Heichler, Dept. Dir. of the Office of Central European Affairs to the Center of Military History 16 July, 1976, Center of Military History Archives, unfiled, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

[26] Maertz, Gregory, "The Invisible Museum," 8.

their custody, comparing their confusion to the Army's precise annual inventory of their collection of confiscated Nazi-era works, and its "care…at considerable expense to the Army."[27] Strobridge also suggested that the West German government would have to show that it was taking more care with the repatriated art in order for any conversation to begin regarding the return of another batch of paintings from the United States. (In response to his critique of the West German government's treatment of the art that had been returned to their care between 1951 and 1953, the *Bundesamt für zentrale Dienst und offene Vermögensfragen* [Federal Office for Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues, or BADV] eventually began cataloging and organizing the stash of artwork sitting in Munich.)

Despite, or perhaps because of, the internal confusion, in the next several months, rumors of the art's potential repatriation to West Germany, hinging on the United States' approval of a formal request from Bonn, reached even more media outlets. Newspapers, both West German and American, noted that the collection's upkeep at the isolated desert warehouse in Pueblo alone was costing $30,000 annually. Yet articles also reported that the West German government was "understandably" not clamoring for the return of the art that originated under the Third Reich, torn between public pressure incited by *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente's* broadcast, a spate of letters from artists and families asking for the return of what they viewed as their "looted" artwork, and the ethics of demanding that visual relics of the darkest period of the country's history be returned.[28]

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[27] Letter from Colonel William Strobridge, Chief, Army Historical Division to the Department of State, 5 November 1976, Center of Military History Archives, unfiled, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.
[28] See, for example, "Kunst der Hitler-Zeit nach Deutschland zurück: USA wollen sich von den Werken trennen," *Kölner Stadt Anzeiger*, 17 February 1978. In B106/160600, Akten 331/133/17, Band 1, Page 27, BAK.

Furthermore, the West German government was apprehensive about the controversy that a public repatriation of the artwork might raise, especially in the aftermath of the 68er movement. The first large-scale exhibition of solely "Nazi art" had happened during a violent, period of West German history. By the mid-1970s, the protests of the student movement had given way to a small but news-dominating cell of militant left-wing activists in the RAF, founded in 1970. Some members of the student movement in West Germany had begun used symbols associated with Nazism, including the swastika and SS-bolt, to describe the "fascistic capitalistic" imperialism of the United States.[29] These symbols were already being deployed in the public sphere during protests in the late 1960s, particularly the SS-bolt as a condemnation of western (that is, the U.S. government's) imperialist and racial policies regarding, for example, the Vietnam War and the treatment of the Black Panthers. Ulrike Meinhof, co-founder of the RAF, had also routinely employed Nazi symbols and references in her column in the leftist magazine *Konkret* (the same magazine that had written a large feature on the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition), often using them to critique the Federal Republic's transatlantic partnership with the United States, thereby explicitly indicating that both capitalistic states were a sort of (inevitable) second-coming of fascism.[30]

The relatively recent exhibition of reproductions of Nazi-era art and the increasing fanaticism of left-wing factions such as the RAF were not the only instances that reintroduced the visual culture of the Third Reich into the public visual sphere in West Germany. That same year, in 1976, a well-known collector of twentieth-century artwork named Peter Ludwig donated

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[29] For a longer discussion, see Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Kundani, *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust*.
[30] See Klimke, 128-9.

a large portion of his collection to what would become Museum Ludwig in Cologne. Ludwig's donation had come with the stipulation that a wing of the museum be dedicated to his sizable collection of sculpture from Arno Breker, one of Hitler's favored artists, an unapologetic member of the Nazi Party even in the postwar period, and one of the most well-known and prolific artists of the Third Reich. Ludwig's request was understandably met with resistance from the city administration in Cologne, and incited a public debate among West German intellectuals, including curators, art historians, activists, and artists. This dispute eventually dovetailed with the *Historikerstreit*, a dialogue about the very nature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and West Germany's past, present, and future, which will be examined in depth in the following chapter.

When discussion of the return of the Nazi-era art in American possession had begun to inundate the public sphere, it is probable that the Schmidt administration was reticent to risk any upheaval or controversy by asking that the works be returned, even though by this time the founding members of the RAF were incarcerated at Stammheim Prison.[31] Schmidt's desire to maintain stability only increased the following year, with the infamous German Autumn [*Deutscher Herbst*], including the kidnapping and murder of industrialist Hanns Schleyer by an RAF insurgent group, and the hijacking of the Lufthansa plane "Landshut" by the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In short, the repatriation of Nazi-era art was neither a priority, nor a "safe bet" for the Schmidt administration in the late 1970s.

Yet many, including some prominent Americans, disagreed. Bess Hormats, the acting curator for the U.S. Army's art collection, argued that to a Cologne newspaper that 30 years after

[31] Ulrike Meinhof was found dead in her cell in May of 1976; Baader, Ensslin, Möller, and Raspe were found dead the following year.

their confiscation from Germany, it was time for the works, an "integral part" of Germany's history, be returned to their home; furthermore, Hormats contested that it was no longer the job of the U.S. Army to "protect Germany from its own pictures."[32] This article from the *Kölner Stadt Anzeiger* concluded that descriptions of the paintings in question show *not* the stereotypical heroic, triumphant images of Hitler and other Nazi dignitaries, or sterilized images of war, but rather sketches done in the heat of battle depicting "human suffering,"[33] underscoring the differences laid out by Gilkey 30 years earlier. That is, art depicting the *suffering* and *trauma* of war was valuable as an artistic object in itself, because it was somehow humanistic, and thus devoid of the morally reprehensible dogma of Nazism and militarism. Of course, this moral understanding of the art that Gilkey had seized was also, once again, at odds with the official directives and reports of Nazi-era art depicting militarism or violence at risk of re-inciting German to war or Nazism in the immediately postwar period. Some West German media outlets pushed the narrative that this was not the return of dangerous, "tainted" pieces of art that had been created with the intention of insidious, violent, or racialized propaganda. Rather, as this artwork was purported to depict the pain experienced by German soldiers during wartime, a pain some West German and American officials saw as both personal and universal, and untethered to a specific ideology, these media outlets framed its repatriation as a return of valuable pieces of visual evidence to its rightful home. Again countering, or nuancing, the narrative presented in *Documents of Oppression*, both Hormats and *Titel-Thesen-Temperatmente* attempted to make a moral distinction between the artwork in U.S. custody in question (that is, paintings from

[32] *Ibid.* Original German: "Verständlicherweise hatten Bonn Regierungen nie Interesse daran, Mühe aufzuwenden, um die verlorengegangenen Bilder und Skulpturen dorthin zurückzuholen, wo sie im Dritten Reich ihren Ursprung hatten."; "über 30 Jahre danach, [es gibt] kein Grund mehr vorhanden sei, die Deutschen vor ihren eigenen Bildern zu schützen" (Hormats quote).
[33] "Menschlichen Leidern," *Ibid.*

*Kriegsmaler*) and other art created during the Nazi era, though this "other" art was never explicitly detailed. This moral distinction was predicated on a distinction in both subject matter and artist biography: this art was not "dangerous" or "fascistic" because it simply presented the universally-recognized reality of wartime, whether that was in paintings of violence and destruction, or peaceful landscapes marred by instruments of war. Furthermore, as Hormats and the television broadcast contended, the artists themselves were ostensibly separate from Nazism and Nazi ideology, since they had presumably signed up to be combat artists in order to avoid partaking in the violence that had been thrust upon the largely apolitical, even victimized, German public. This framing also reflected the continued propagation and acceptance of the "Clean Wehrmacht Myth" by both Americans and some West Germans, which will be examined further in the following section.

Hormats also penned a long article in *The Washington Post* confirming outright that the West German government was, indeed, reluctant to make too strong a demand for the return of the works, let alone welcome their return with open enthusiasm, even though they had informally requested that the artwork be returned in October of 1977.[34] This request did not, however, come without concern from the government in Bonn. According to Hormats, the West German administration was also apprehensive of the potential reaction from both American and leftwing West German press. Hormats explicitly tied the paintings that Gilkey collected to the broader tradition of war art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was an apt connection considering the importance of combat art, like that of *Kriegsmaler* Claus Bergen, during the First World War to the Prussian military tradition. However she also observed that Luitpold Adam,

[34] See "Memorandum to the General Counsel of the Army," 1 January 1978, which mentions the request submitted in October 1977.

the captain and loyal Nazi Party member appointed head of the combat art program in the Wehrmacht, "embraced Nazi art ideology." Though she never explicitly described what this meant, Hormats implied that Adam encouraged painters to depict bloodless, heroic battle scenes – importantly, however, she also emphasized that he was not punitive when they chose to stray from this prescribed subject matter, even when much of the art took on a dark, discouraged aura following Operation Barbarossa in 1941. In this sense, Hormats subtly shifted any "guilt by association to Nazism" from the artists themselves to their leader, Luitpold Adam (who himself even allowed for relative stylistic and thematic flexibility in what they were and were not allowed to depict).[35]

Following West Germany's *Aide Mémoire* to the State Department for the return of the German War Art Program in late 1977, it would take several years before the United States government would begin the formal process of sending thousands more approved paintings and drawings back to West Germany for repatriation. The request from West Germany specifically pointed to the popularity of the *Titel-Thesen-Temperamente* broadcast for raising public interest in the postwar trajectory of the artwork, an interest which had subsequently developed into a certain sympathy for the Sisyphean plight of artists from Amersdorffer to Jordan for their paintings to be returned. The request added that the artists asking for the restitution of their works did so purely out of "reasons of piety and reverence," strangely religious language that underscored the mythical nature of the combat artist in a similar manner that the *Tagebuch eines Kriegsmalers* had done in 1941. The memo also requested that the *entire* collection be returned,

[35] Bess Hormats, "Captured German War Art," *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1978. The later paintings of Otto Bloß, with their dark, dank color palates and sense of hopelessness and confusion, are an example of this.

bold statements that reframed the collection Gilkey had confiscated as ultimately innocuous and unjustly retained.[36]

The request for the paintings' return was forwarded to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Harold Brown), which was striking because it indicated that the return of the art was the decision of the former Department of War. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense responded in early 1978, approving the return of the collection, and, drawing on the unique relationship between West Germany and the U.S., advising that:

> The only basis for our continuing to refuse to return them is they might 'revitalize German militarism or the Nazi spirit.' Our relationship is such that it would be the height of arrogance for us to reach a judgment that this art would infect the German body politic. Indeed, in my view, it would be hubristic for us to entertain the question at all. However, if a finding on that question is necessary in order for us to reach our international obligations, it can be made, and in a way I am sure that it does not cast us in the role of an international censor.[37]

The letter went on to cede responsibility to the Army's General Counsel to lay out a plan for the return of the appropriate artwork within the next year. Of more interest, however, is the approach the letter took toward the artwork remaining in U.S. custody. James Slana, Head of European and NATO Affairs and author of the letter, seemed to mock the old-fashioned reasoning behind the U.S.'s continued confiscation of the artwork, implying that thirty-plus years after the end of the Second World War, it was "hubristic" of the United States to believe that art might still

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[36] *Aide mémoire* from the West Germany Embassy (Ambassador Peter Hermes) to the Department of State, 21 October 1977, Center of Military History Archives, unfiled, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

[37] Letter from James V. Slana, Head of European and NATO Affairs, to the General Counsel of the Army, 1 January 1978, Center of Military History Archives, unfiled, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

adversely affect the people of Germany. He also derides the phrase initially employed by the U.S. government and Gilkey, as reason for confiscating the art in the first place: that it might "revitalize German militarism or the Nazi spirit," arguing that the relationship between the two countries was in a strong enough place that these concerns were not only no longer valid, but were "the height of arrogance." For Slana, it seemed, sufficient time had passed that the whole of the collection was innocuous enough for a safe return to German custody, indicating that though some of the images may have once been potent enough for concern, time, coupled with the strength of the relations between West Germany and the United States (against their common communist enemies) had rendered them harmless. However, the letter remained vague in its discussion of the actual artwork, presumably under the assumption that all of the paintings were of battle scenes whose appeal and subject matter were universal and non-specific. (That is, he never addressed the issue of works that contained, for example, specific Nazi imagery.) Ultimately, however, he left the door open for differing ideas regarding the "danger" of the paintings' content, ending that even if it was decided that the images were not yet ready to leave their safehold in America, it would not be an act of censorship.

Yet the request from the West German government and the approval of the works' return alone was not enough to begin the process of repatriation, especially on a subject that did not seem immediately pressing. Instead, it was the interest of a U.S. congressman in ten specific paintings from a particular Nazi-era artist, and their immediate return to West Germany, that happened first, likely stimulating the ultimate repatriation of several thousand more works from the German War Art Collection to the Federal Republic, a public process that eventually wrought more controversy than the initial, discreet transfer of more than 1600 pieces of Nazi-era art to the Adenauer administration between 1951 and 1953.

**A Congressman and Claus Bergen**

In late 1978, just two years after the first public reports emerged in West Germany that there was intense interest from former artists under the Nazi regime to have what they understood as their property repatriated, Congressman G. William Whitehurst [Fig. 3] became interested in a collection of ten paintings in U.S. Army custody by the *Kriegsmaler* and *Marinemaler* (a painter of the sea and marine combat, especially ships and submarines) Claus Bergen. Whitehurst was a Republican who had served the state of Virginia since 1968 in Congress. He was also a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Assembly, allowing him the rare opportunity to witness the ever-evolving relationship between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.[38] Whitehurst's subsequent closeness to this special connection between the two nations also engendered in him a strong belief in the importance of West Germany as an ally in the postwar period and beyond. He recognized that that:

> Far from fearing the resurgence of German militarism,, the United States and its partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had come to rely on the strength of the *Bundeswehr* [the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany, officially established in 1955] to protect its eastern flank of non-communist Europe.[39]

Whitehurst would invoke the changed relationship between West Germany and the United States – the need not only to foster and maintain a trusting bond between the two countries, but also to reframe the notion of "militarism" as positive and protective (and in the interest of the U.S.),

[38] See Weber, 129, and Phil Walzer, "Ex-Congressman Whitehurst to Receive Norfolk Award," *The Virginia Pilot,* 6 March 2015.
[39] Weber, 129.

instead of dangerous, unwanted, and associated with the Third Reich – in his defense of Bergen's paintings in front of Congress later that year.

Whitehurst was first drawn to Bergen's paintings and his story during a visit in 1977 to the West German port city of Kiel. While in the city, he was given a tour of the German Navy Memorial at Laboe by two former German naval attachés, Captain Klaus Steindorff and Captain Andreas Wiese, both of whom he had met during their previous stopovers at the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. The memorial had been dedicated in the 1950s to the uncontroversial "*all* sailors who had perished at sea."[40] According to Whitehurst, Steindorff had initially brought up the subject of the return of ten specific paintings by the painter Claus Bergen, who had been a member of the *Kriegsmarine* during the Second World War. The paintings were "dramatic renderings of submarines and destroyers at sea and apparently have long inspired German men," Whitehurst noted in a testimony before Congress, and "…have no political significance and in no way glorify the Hitler era. They are instead renderings by a respected artist of German naval tradition. Their worth is clearly artistic and inspirational, not political."[41]

Steindorff and Whitehurst both explicitly described Bergen as a "Norwegian artist," which was inaccurate as Bergen had been born in Stuttgart, and raised in Bavaria, where he also died. Perhaps this was an honest mistake, or perhaps it was an initial effort to distance Bergen

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[40] The impressive memorial had been started in 1927 and finished in 1936, originally meant as a commemorative site to members of the *Kaiserliche Marine* (Imperial Navy) who had perished during the First World War. In 1945, the *Kriegsmarine* who died during World War II were added, and in 1954, it was more neutrally rededicated as a memorial to sailors and naval officers of *all* nationalities who had died at sea.

[41] "Statement of Hon. G. William Whitehurst, A Representative from Virginia, to Congress," in *Hearings on Army Reprogramming Requests before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fifth Congress, Second Session, April 12, 13, May 10 and 16, 1978*, 18, accessed online.

from close ties to Germany, and by extension, close ties to Nazism and the Third Reich.[42] Furthermore, Bergen was already a known and respected entity by political figures in the United States: 15 years earlier, in 1963, he had gifted his room mural *The Atlantic* to President John F. Kennedy, just days before the president's assassination.[43] The work was later displayed at the Kennedy Library in Boston. His paintings had popular appeal as well – in 1964, *Life Magazine* used his paintings to illustrate the naval section of their series on World War I, and in 1979, one of his paintings of a German destroyer was featured on the cover of the popular British board game "Bismarck."[44]

Claus Bergen had a history in combat art, and was a celebrated war artist during the First World War in Germany, a point of admiration for Whitehurst, who saw in him not an enemy combatant, but a fellow brave and suffering soldier of a devastating war. In this way, Whitehurst's understanding of Bergen and his "role" as both a member of the Wehrmacht and a painter mimicked the understanding that Gilkey held of many of the *Kriegsmaler* who he encountered during his period of art confiscations in Germany and Austria. Gilkey's empathy and admiration for these artists, from Heinrich Amersdorffer to Olaf Jordan to Herbert Agricola, had intensified as the decades wore on and he left the Army, becoming a private citizen and art history instructor, and continued personal correspondence with many of them and their families as they attempted to get their works repatriated to West Germany.

Whitehurst's attraction to the paintings of Bergen was not rare amongst American politicians and members of the military. The placement of some of the paintings that Gilkey had seized between 1945 and 1946 actually encouraged this attraction, as those not languishing in

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[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Carl Hupfer, "Seeschlachten aus dem Isarwinkel," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5 June 1964.
[44] See https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/76436/bismarck-second-edition.

storage were sometimes "rented out" by members of the Pentagon, as early as 1950, or hung on the walls of army mess halls and training facilities.[45] According to the former acting curator for the Army Art Collection, "[s]ome of the works were transferred to the Air Force…and dozens are on display in Army museums, hospitals, schools, and in offices and corridors in the Pentagon."[46] Though most of the art remained in storage in the warehouse in Pueblo and in a "ramshackle wooden building in Washington,"[47] it seemed that since Gilkey's art raids in Germany and Austria were completed in 1946, at least some of the works that had been returned to the United States had enjoyed an afterlife on the walls of American Armed Forces and political buildings, rather than those of the Third Reich.

In short, even immediately following the war, some of the Nazi-era art depicting battle scenes was considered free from the taint of Nazism, acceptable as not only war booty to be displayed by members of the government and military for visitors to see, but also as a visual representation of the "Clean Wehrmacht" myth that was propagated under Konrad Adenauer. This phrase was never specifically invoked in either Gilkey's, or select officers' and politicians' desire to "own" and openly (ostensibly with pride) display the paintings, but the implication was clear, and deepened as the Cold War grew colder, and West Germany became a key ally: the universal experience of war was more important than whatever allegiance these painters, even if it was to a destructive fascist regime, a point that Whitehurst himself invoked in his testimony supporting the works' return to Germany:

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[45] See Sol Goldstein, 166, and a memo between two high-ranking military officers (Lt. Cl. Harold R. James and Major General Orlando Ward) from 1950 confirming the transfer and "rental" of three paintings from Gilkey's collection of Nazi-era art in storage to their office walls, RG 319, Box 72, Folder 14, NARA.
[46] Hormats, "Captured German War Art," *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1978.
[47] *Ibid*.

> In 1945, of course, the environment was considerably different. The feeling was that nothing should be left that would do anything to inspire the re-creation of German militarism or anything that would glorify the Third Reich, and so the paintings were confiscated on that basis, and they just never have been returned.[48]

Furthermore, the fact that these paintings were sometimes hung on the walls of high-ranking American officers reveals a certain respect that some members of the U.S. Armed Forces had for the Wehrmacht, a sentiment that was not shared for other enemy combatants such as the Japanese. This fondness was almost certainly rooted as much in the skill of the Wehrmacht as it was in racism. Whitehurst implicitly embraced this myth, clearly delineating between Bergen's talent as an artist in rendering "inspirational" and "respected" paintings of the German (not *Nazi*) naval tradition during the Second World War and the unfortunate fact that he had been fighting a U.S. enemy combatant during that war. Whitehurst's use of "inspirational" and "respected" throughout his testimony, in turn addressing Bergen's paintings as well as the *Kriegsmarine*, also reveals his feelings about Germany's armed forces even under the Third Reich. It is, perhaps, telling that the word "Nazi" or "National Socialist" is not invoked during his testimony as well.

This admiration for, and forgiveness of, the Wehrmacht by the United States reached a crescendo in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the years leading up to Reagan's ill-fated visit to Bitburg, and approximately the same period when Whitehurst took an interest in the paintings of Claus Bergen. This was instigated in the public sphere by the publication of popular military history that exalted the strength of the Wehrmacht, a series of publications by journalist Max

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[48] "Statement of Hon. G. William Whitehurst, A Representative from Virginia, to Congress," in *Hearings on Army Reprogramming Requests before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fifth Congress, Second Session, April 12, 13, May 10 and 16, 1978*, 21, accessed online.

Hastings, who even penned a 1985 op-ed in *The Washington Post* proclaiming, "Their Wehrmacht Was Better Than Our Army."[49] Hastings highlighted the connection that some American troops felt towards their German enemies, as opposed to the "othered" Japanese soldier, quoting a an American marine stationed at Guadalcanal named John Hersey, who wrote in his diary:

> When you looked into the eyes of those boys, you did not feel sorry for the Japs: you felt sorry for the boys. The uniforms, the bravado…were just camouflage…They were just American boys. They did not want that valley or any part of its jungle. They were ex-grocery boys, ex-highway laborers, ex-bank clerks, ex-schoolboys, boys with a clean record, not killers.[50]

The twinge of admiration that officers like Gilkey felt for Germans who fought in the Wehrmacht during the war in the immediate postwar period had, by the 1970s and 1980s, developed into a full-blown admiration that was publicly "respectable" decades following the end of the Second World War. And although there was an element of the proud "conqueror" displaying the looted "war booty" of the defeated in their desire to hang these paintings in political and military offices, it was also clear that the artists who created these works were viewed, with respect, as equals.

Yet despite Whitehurst's (and before him, Captain Steindorff's) insistence that Bergen had been a talented artist serving under and capturing the storied naval tradition of Germany,

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[49] Max Hastings, "Their Wehrmacht Was Better Than Our Army," *The Washington Post*, 5 May 1985. This op-ed dovetailed with the publication of a series of books from Hastings including *Das Reich: March of the Second SS Panzer Division Through France* (London: Henry Holt & Co., 1982) and *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

[50] *Ibid.*

unlike some of the other artists examined earlier, the *Marinemaler*'s resume was not so innocuous. First of all, one of the main defenses that painters used when pleading for Gilkey or the U.S. Army in writing to return their paintings was that they were not, and had never been, members of the Nazi Party, a claim that was easily verifiable.[51] Subsequently, one of Gilkey's main defenses of these artists and the art that they produced was that they were simply surviving – that is, their professions had always been in the arts, they were soldiers by both necessity and requirement, and that they should therefore not be placed in the same category of "guilt" as those artists whose works were repeatedly exhibited and purchased at the Great German Art Exhibitions.[52] In short, the extent to which an artist was, or claimed to be, just a *Mitläufer* (passive follower) of Nazism under the Third Reich seemed to have influenced Gilkey's willingness to accept their art as art (and not mere propaganda), and to accept their art unmarred by its associations with the Nazi regime. Those distinctions may have been hard to prove (beyond checking if or when artists had voluntarily – or involuntarily – joined the Nazi Party), but they at least provided Gilkey and the artists themselves with a sort of moral framework, or justification, as to the acceptability of their art and their role in the destruction waged under the Third Reich. Claus Bergen's history told a different story, and one that reveals an ever-growing postwar lenience towards those who were more actively involved in the Nazi Party.

Bergen had joined the Nazi Party in 1922. This early membership can be taken as evidence of his "true believer" status, unlike many other artists and combat artists who were forced to join the Nazi Party in the late 1930s in order to continue their profession with support

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[51] See letters analyzed in the first chapter from Agricola, Amersdorffer, and Jordan, among others.

[52] See Gilkey's quote in chapter one that these artists, including Nazi elite-favorites and court artists Fritz Erler and Adolf Ziegler, produced art that was "a summer re-run of German art of the 19th century," Gilkey manuscript, 1947, 13, Box 55, Gilkey Archives, Portland Art Museum.

from the state. At that time, he was already a well-regarded painter and veteran in Germany, previously appointed as a combat artist and marine painter by Kaiser Wilhelm II and known for his visceral and heroic renderings of naval battles of World War I. In 1944, Goebbels, impressed by his work during and after the First World War, placed Bergen on the infamous *Gottbegnadeten-Liste,* or "God Gifted List," or "Important Artist Exempt List," a list of artists who were considered crucial to the legacy of Nazi culture. These artists were often exempt from military service, and at least 15 of Bergen's paintings were exhibited at the Haus der deutschen Kunst in Munich during the annual Great German Art Exhibitions, which ran from 1937 to 1944. Hitler even purchased nine of his paintings, mostly scenes of marine battle, for several thousand Reichsmark.[53] Like many respected artists during the period, including Adolf Ziegler and Arno Breker (who were minimally fined and slapped with the innocuous status of *Mitläufer*), Bergen was ultimately exonerated for his involvement in the Nazi Party following the war.

The Bergen paintings in question that were, as of 1978, "scattered over there somewhere in warehouses and in storage, [with] [s]ome hanging in the Pentagon,"[54] were all oil paintings of the navy of Nazi Germany waging battle in the war. Representative examples of the ten paintings requested for return were Bergen's *U-Boot 53* (1939) and *Deutsche Wacht in Der Nordsee* (1940).[55] Both of these works are painted in a traditional, nineteenth-century figurative style,

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[53] See database from the gdk-research.de, a recent project of Munich's *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte* that collects and published photos related to the Great German Art Exhibitions, the art, and its buyers, online. See also B323/158, BAK, which contains records of Hitler's purchases from the 1937 Great German Art Exhibition, including paintings from Bergen, and B323/182, BAK, which has lists of works painted by Bergen exhibited during the Great German Art Exhibitions.

[54] Whitehurst testimony to Congress, 19.

[55] Other titles of the ten paintings include *Andenken an die U-Boot-Helden* (1931), *Nach England* (1939), *Kampf auf dem Atlantik* (1941), *Rückkehr von einer Seeschlacht* (1941), *Auf dem Atlantik* (1942), which had been discovered by Gilkey at the Haus der deutschen Kunst, *Einsamkeit* (undated), *Das Ritterkreuz* (1942), and *Prinz Eugen* (1944), listed in "German War

once again not unlike much of the combat art that was also produced by contemporaneous American and British forces. Unlike some of the paintings shown in chapter one, including the dark, depressed canvases of Otto Bloß or the abstracted, cubist forms of Rudolf Hengstenberg, there is little ambiguity about the morality of war or battle in Bergen's chosen subject matter at style. *Deutsche Wacht* [Fig. 4] for example, features battleship of the Nazi navy in the ice cold, choppy waters of the North Sea. The ship evokes photographs of famed *Kriegsmarine* battleships like the *Scharnhorst*, which engaged in battle during the invasion of Norway in the late spring of 1940. The stark blue and grey color palette of the painting, from the ocean to the ship to the sky, evokes a sort of steely heroism, a navy on the offensive rather than the defensive. The ship's guns are uniformly firing at an enemy beyond the frame, and the ship has taken no clear hits – this ship is an impenetrable force, a man-made marvel of iron and steel conquering the temperamental sea, without vulnerability, and even without the clear presence of humanity (there are no human figures visible).

*U-Boot 53* [Fig. 5] is similarly heroic, though invites a degree of compassion lacking in *Deutsche Wacht*. Here, three men stand atop the raised tower of a German submarine, which is leaning at a precarious 45-degree angle in the rough waters of the Atlantic. Yet again, the color palette is hopeful, the vivid blue of the ocean juxtaposed with the snow-white wave caps. One sailor stares with confident resolve at the viewer, while another looks ahead into the distance. The U-Boat, though facing harsh waters, has a clear forward trajectory, and is assuredly manned by the three visible men on board. These are not works that reveal a feeling of the "universal suffering of war." Rather, they celebrate, even romanticize in a swashbuckling sort of style, the

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Art Collection, 1. Rückgabe – Bericht und Bestand,"Aufstellung der 10 Gemälde von Claus Bergen, 6 August 1979, BADV Archives, Berlin, Germany.

technology and men who partake in war. The works also contain no clear references to Nazism besides a small, blurry red flag adorning the battleship in *Deutsche Wacht*. It is not hard to understand the appeal of these paintings, whose subject matter and sense of morality ("all of those who fight in the name of their nation are heroes") is so clear, and whose stylistic tendencies are reminiscent of traditional academic painting of the 19th century, to politicians and military officials who respected the naval tradition of both the United States and Germany. These paintings were easy to understand and digest, especially if the specific biography of the painter was underplayed, unknown, or forgotten. Or, as Whitehurst noted, perhaps any political reading or backdrop to the paintings was no longer significant due to the current relationship of West Germany and the United States. Expert witnesses called to testify during the hearings agreed with Whitehurst, including Colonel William F. Strobridge, Chief of the Historical Services Division for the Army Center of Military History. Strobridge decided that they "[paid] tribute to those who served in the German navy," and argued that since 1947, the U.S. government and Army had displayed these paintings all over their offices, including in the Pentagon. He also agreed with Committee Chairman Samuel S. Stratton (D-NY) that: "[These wartime paintings] would be regarded as…at least trying to pay some tribute to those who served in uniform."[56]

As Strobridge noted, Whitehurst was not the only high-ranking U.S. official who enjoyed the visual pleasures of Bergen's paintings; a contemporaneous article in *Newsweek* reported:

> Some of the oil paintings, watercolors and drawings have been used for years to decorate Pentagon offices and hallways; others have been long forgotten in an Army storage room. One sprawling Claus Bergen canvas even hung for two decades in the officers' mess at the Atlantic Fleet's submarine headquarters – although few of the young officers who

[56] Whitehurst testimony to Congress, 21-22.

> posed in front of it ever suspected that the painting of a submarine was part of a 9,000-work collection commissioned by Adolf Hitler to bolster the Third Reich's War effort…[57]

To the German artists who had reached out to the Chief of Military History in hopes that their confiscated art might be returned, the answer had remained unchanged: "Legal title to such work is vested in the United States Government and cannot be returned without specific statutory authority of the United States Congress."[58] Whitehurst's decision to use his power as a Congressman to return the artwork of a specific painter to West Germany was, therefore, rather extraordinary, especially considering his uniquely powerful position as a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Assembly. On April 6, 1978, Whitehurst introduced his bill, HR 11945 of the second session of the 95th Congress, authorizing the Secretary of the Army to return the ten Bergen paintings as requested by former German Naval Captain Klaus Steindorff to the Federal Republic of Germany [Fig. 6].[59]

The Virginia Congressman's desire to follow through on the original favor asked by Steindorff during his visit to Kiel seems to have come from two places. First, Whitehurst himself was an admirer of the works. In his testimony during hearings on the bill to return Bergen's paintings to West Germany, Whitehurst also emphasized the impression that the location of meeting with Captains Steindorff and Wiese had made on him, repeatedly describing listening to

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[57] Michael Reese and Diane Weathers, "The Pentagon's Nazi Art," *Newsweek*, Vol. 99, 2 February 1982, 31.
[58] See, for example, letter from Colonel Robert Waggoner, Chief of the Historical Services Division to Herbert Agricola, in response to the latter's continued pleas for his paintings and drawings to be returned to his residence in Munich, 6 January 1981, GWAC 3, Rückgabe IV, Prozessakte Agricola, BADV Archives, Berlin.
[59] Weber, 129.

the two attachés while gazing upon the "impressive and inspiring" Laboe Naval Memorial.[60] It seems that the two Germans had known of, or at least bet on, Whitehurst's romantic streak, "setting the scene" dramatically in their lead-up to request the return of Bergen's paintings in a space specifically meant to arouse the memory of the bravery of *all* of those involved in Germany's storied naval tradition, not just those who fought during World War II. The significance of the request should not be underplayed: Steindorff and Wiese were two members of the *Bundeswehr*, boldly asking an American official for the return of paintings once confiscated for their references to the Nazi military. Furthermore, Steindorff and Wiese were not just requesting the return of the paintings, but rather for the return of the paintings with the explicit intention to publicly *exhibit* them in the vicinity of war memorial that was originally constructed with the purpose of honoring members of the German navy during the First and Second World Wars, when they were enemy combatants of the United States. Whitehurst's positive and sympathetic reaction to their request is also of note. Though Gilkey had a similar response when painters asked for the return of their art following his art raids, his reaction was also tinged with reticence, and an ultimate inability (or unwillingness) to take their request seriously enough to bring it up to political figures who might have the ability to return it.

Yet there was also a reason that both Steindorff and Wiese stressed to Whitehurst that the planned site of exhibition for the Bergen paintings at Laboe was understood in their contemporary era as a memorial to all Germans lost at sea, drawing a connection between the universality of Laboe and the universality of the paintings whose return they requested. This left an impression on Whitehurst as well – as the excerpts from his testimony to Congress above reveal, he was adamant that rather than celebrate or glorify the "Hitler era," the works of Bergen

[60] *Ibid.*

were timeless in their celebration of the entirety of Germany's naval history (though it is noteworthy that Bergen's pre-Third Reich history as an artist was painting scenes of World War I naval battles, which by then was viewed as wholly inoffensive).[61]

Secondly, as Whitehurst noted in his testimony, he understood the contemporaneous context, in terms of West German-U.S. relations, to be exceptional enough more than 30 years after the creation of the ten works in question, that retaining them in custody for the protection of the German people was no longer an argument. Instead, Whitehurst argued that:

> This is the kind of simple act of friendship that can pay enormous dividends in good will…I am certain that wide publicity would be given this in Germany, all of which could only be favorable to our country. I hope that you [Congress] will agree that this little bill not only deserves passage but would reflect favorably on our committee and the Nation.[62]

Whitehurst's interest in sponsoring the bill, then, had as much to do with his own egoism as it did with continuing to strengthen the relationship between the United States and West Germany. Whitehurst's belief that the artwork initially collected by Gordon Gilkey and stored in the United States should be returned to its country of origin signaled his, and by extension, the U.S. government's, desire for West Germany to be able to move beyond the stigma of their past.[63] Yet Whitehurst also understood that his name would be forever tied to the "publicity" garnered by the passage of the bill, a connection be believed would not only reflect positively on the U.S., but himself as a citizen and politician as well.

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[61] See Whitehurst testimony to Congress, April and May 1978, 19.
[62] *Ibid*., 18-19.
[63] "Stigma" is a word that some intellectual historians, including A. Dirk Moses, have encouraged using instead of "collective guilt," "shame" or "victimization." See Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

During the hearing for the bill's passage, Colonel Strobridge and Chairman Stratton both agreed that *especially* considering that some of the Bergen paintings had been adorning the walls of buildings like the Pentagon and the Rayburn House Building as images honoring the work and memories of all who had served in uniform,[64] there should be no problem in passing the bill to return Bergen's paintings to the West German government. Specially, both advocated sending the paintings to either the West German Naval Headquarters, or the Maritime Museum in Kiel. On September 13, 1978, the House Armed Services Committees voted unanimously to report an amended version of Whitehurst's bill. The bill stipulated that at the expense of West Germany, the paintings were to be returned to the Navy of the Federal Republic of Germany, and in October of 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed it into law. On August 6, 1979, Congressman G. William Whitehurst arrived to the harbor in Bremerhaven, the same harbor where Konrad Adenauer had allowed more than 1600 works of art languish for two years, to witness the transfer of custodianship from the United States to West Germany.[65] The paintings of Claus Bergen, the fervent Nazi and combat artist whose works nonetheless enthralled members of the U.S. government and military, returned to their place of origin – with little public fanfare from the West German government or press[66] – as a symbol of American trust in the relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States as a bulwark against communism.

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[64] Whitehurst testimony, 25.
[65] Weber, 131.
[66] The limited press coverage of the event likely had to do less with the event itself and more with its circumstances, as only ten paintings were returned, and they were quickly unpacked from a ship in Bremerhaven, transported to Kiel, and presented to the Maritime Museum near the Laboe Memorial. There they remain on permanent loan from the Bundesministerium der Finanzen, see "Leihvertrag, Claus Bergen," in "German War Art Collection, 1. Rückgabe – Bericht und Bestand," BADV Archives, Berlin, Germany.

Yet the ten paintings of Claus Bergen were not the only works of art brought up during the hearing for HR 11945. At the end of the bill's hearing, Stratton raised the hanging issue almost 9,000 works from Gilkey's art raids that remained in U.S. custody, and the informal *Aide Mémoire* request from the German Embassy for the eventual return of these works. The successful and relatively uncontroversial passage of Whitehurst's bill also piqued more interest within the Army and political sphere not only in the case of Claus Bergen, but also the thousands of remaining confiscated Nazi-era artworks in U.S. custody. In 1979, an abridged history of the German War Art Collection was printed as a chapter in *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History*, published by the Army Center of Military History. The chapter, penned by Army Art Curator Marian McNaughton, comprised the story of the Army Art Collection, which featured American combat art from both World Wars, as well as Vietnam. McNaughton's main purpose was to explicate the importance of the program for combat art amongst U.S. soldiers. But she also revealed the story of Gilkey's confiscation of Nazi-era art, without going into the many legal issues that Gilkey and the Army Counsel faced following the seizure of the collection. McNaughton's contribution both argued for the importance of the tradition of combat art as "historical document…and, in some cases, expression of artistic genius," as well as placed the combat art produced by members of the Wehrmacht in the same tradition as combat artists in the United States.[67] That same year, John Weber, a lawyer, West Point graduate, and Vietnam veteran, published the only in-depth study of the German War Art Collection. Weber's publication told the story of Gilkey's involvement in the seizure of Nazi-era art, as well as the subsequent legal gray areas of property rights faced by the U.S. Army and government following

[67] Marian McNaughton, "The Army Art Program," 319, in *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History* by John F. Jessup, Jr. and Robert W. Coakley, Washington, D.C.: Army Center of Military History, 1979.

the end of the war. Weber's book ended on what he clearly saw as a positive note, Whitehurst's friendship with Steindorff and Wiese, and the subsequent return of Bergen's paintings to West Germany as an act of trust and friendship.[68] Both publications were unconcerned with the paradox of members of the U.S. military and government appreciating and respecting the art collected by Gilkey, while simultaneously deeming parts of it a continued threat to peace in postwar Germany. Perhaps they did not see it as a paradox that men from the democratic United States who had "saved" Europe from Nazism were protected by their belief in democracy enough to enjoy, unburdened, the visual products of an authoritarian regime.

**"Slender Evidence of Strong Support in Germany"[69]?: Whitehurst and the Remainder of the German War Art Collection**

Bergen's paintings were returned in the summer of 1979 to West Germany and exhibited in the Kiel Maritime Museum with little fanfare, perhaps due to their specific subject matter. It is understandable, after all, that paintings of ships returned to a ship museum, even if those paintings were done during the Second World War by an avowed member of the Nazi Party, may not have piqued the interest of the West German press or public. West German and American press was more intently focused on continued talk of the return of the entirety of the German War Art Collection in U.S. custody. The unanimous passage of HR 11945 had finally aroused the interest of Congress in the fate of the artwork that had been collected and confiscated by Gilkey, though both Gilkey and the Army's Historical Division had been dealing with requests

[68] See Weber, *The German War Artists*, Columbia: Cerberus Books, 1979. This book has served as a main expository source for this chapter and the first chapter of this dissertation.
[69]This quote comes from the testimony of Captain Steve Vaughn of the office of the U.S. Army's General Counsel during the Congressional testimony for the passage of HR 11945 during the spring of 1978, who believed there was a general disinterest among the German public for the return of the artwork, despite the informal request from the administration in Bonn for its eventual repatriation, 26.

for the return of the artwork from artists and their families in West Germany for several decades. Public awareness was stimulated as well. Though the collection's presence (both in storage and on the walls of political and military officials) had never been a closely guarded secret, it had also never been publicized, a status that began to change in 1979 when, anticipating the return of Bergen's paintings and new interest in the U.S.'s collection of Nazi-era artwork, the Fenwick Library of George Mason University hosted the first stage of a traveling exhibition organized by the Army Center of Military History. The show at George Mason was notable as it was the first in a non-military setting, placing the works in a context beyond just military documents of war. Journalists covering the show characterized it as "highly provocative," especially for its inclusion of the military's collection of four watercolors attributed to Hitler, described with surprise by one reporter as "innocuous" and reflecting a "draftsmanship [that is] stiff but not that bad."[70] Despite the clear curiosity for the paintings driven in part by the inclusion of Hitler's infamous watercolors, overviews of the exhibition seemed careful not to attribute overtly positive artistic qualifiers to any of the works on display, again revealing an apprehension towards any work associated with the Nazi period..

Whitehurst's fondness for the paintings of Bergen, coupled with the informal request from the Schmidt administration in Bonn, meant that the subject would not fly under the radar politically either. This was especially true as it came to public attention that members of the U.S. government were enjoying the artwork in the halls of government buildings, and visitors were asking for special permission to view the taboo collection that was stored in the desert Army warehouse in Pueblo, Colorado. This irony was also not lost on the West German press, which

[70] Jo Ann Lewis, "Anything but Incognito," *The Washington Post*, B5, 21 April 1979.

reported breathlessly in 1978 that, "Nazi-Bilder Hängen im Pentagon," in spite of the original confiscation of the artworks between 1946 and 1947 "for the protection of the German people."[71]

The easy passage of HR 11945 also set the stage for a new, public, and politically backed conceptualization of some of the artists who worked and profited under the Third Reich. Even those who had been members of the Nazi Party from its inception could be forgiven, as long as the art that was produced appeared, decades after the end of the Second World War, divorced from Nazism. Bergen's paintings fit this mold perfectly, as symbols associated with the Third Reich, including the swastika, Reichsadler, or SS-bolt, were absent from his scenes, and any signifier, including flags, designating his subjects as German, was just blurry enough (see, for example, the smudged red flag in *Deutsche Wacht*) to go unnoticed. On May 12, 1981, Whitehurst, emboldened by both the easy passage of HR 11945 and the apparent openness of the Army General Counsel to discuss returning the remainder of the combat and Nazi-era art in U.S., introduced HR 3555 to Congress. The legislation sanctioned the return of the U.S. Army's collection of Nazi-era artwork to West Germany. Whitehurst's new bill, though much larger in scope than the one dealing with the return of the ten Bergen paintings, once again felt personal to the Virginia Congressman. Whitehurst had viewed his involvement in the return of Bergen's paintings as not only an act of personal friendship to Steindorff and Wiese, the West German naval attachés he had befriended in Kiel, but also as a larger symbol of friendship and generosity toward West Germany as a whole. In interviews, Whitehurst argued that the close West German allyship to the United States since the end of the Second World War, which had grown into a friendship (as he characterized it) by the 1970s and early 1980s, deserved a large-scale symbol of

[71] "Nazi-Bilder hängen im Pentagon," no author and undated, probably late 1979, BAK, B106/160699, Akten 331/133/17 Band 1, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz, Koblenz, Germany.

gratitude and trust from the U.S. side. The return of the art that had once been deemed a "danger" to the postwar German populace was, in Whitehurst's mind, a perfect symbol of this hard-won trust, as he explained in brief interviews on both the ABC and NBC Evening News on May 27, 1981.[72] Whitehurst's interviews with two of the major American news outlets just weeks after introducing his bill indicated that public interest might reach beyond the House floor.

The return of potentially 7,000-plus works of art generated more immediate interest – and pushback – than the return of ten paintings from a *Marinemaler*, which had generally been understood as a quiet, personal gesture of friendship between Whitehurst and the city of Kiel. All of a sudden, the notion that art, especially military art, from the Nazi period, was no longer viewed as controversial or incendiary came under fire. Though many in Congress shared Whitehurst's staunch pro-West Germany outlook, the State Department and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission (USHMC), which had been established by Congress in 1980,[73] fervently opposed HR 3555. Elie Wiesel, the famed author, Holocaust survivor, and human rights activist was appointed the first chair of the USHMC upon its foundation and took on the future of the German War Art Collection as one of his first pet causes as the Commission. After the announcement of HR 3555, began an internal campaign of insisting that the art be turned over to the USHMC so that it could be displayed to visitors in a museum context fitting of its artists and subject matter. Wiesel viewed all of the Nazi-era art in U.S. custody as inherently "Nazi-tainted"

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[72] Whitehurst had been interviewed on May 27, 1981 on both the ABC and NBC Nightly News to explain the introduction of HR 3555 to the public, see *Vanderbilt Television News Archive* (https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/siteindex/1981-5) and Maertz, *The Invisible Museum*, 73.

[73] The Commission had been founded with the intention to "lead the Nation in commemorating the Holocaust and raise private funds for and build the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," according to its foundational doctrine (accessed at https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/council).

and therefore dangerous, and believed that it should only be seen by visitors in the context of a Holocaust Museum.[74]

The controversy occurred not only behind the scenes; news outlets like *The Washington Post* quickly printed articles and even political cartoons questioning Whitehurst's proposal, expressing concern *not* that the paintings' presence back in Germany might incite violence, but asking *why* it was necessary in the first place to dredge up visual remnants of a past that had seemed closed for several decades. Famed cartoonist Herblock penned a cartoon in 1981 in the *Post* depicting HR 3555 as a dead rat dragged in from outside by a proud, mangy cat [Fig. 7]. The feline presents its prize, the rat/proposal, to two horrified men personifying the U.S. and West German governments. The "German" man covers his face in embarrassment and disgust, while the "American" exclaims, "I don't even know the cat that dragged it in!"[75] The cartoon lampoons Whitehurst as the unknown cat who, in a gesture of what he considers friendship and trust, has brought a piece of tainted, "dirty" piece of legislation in front of the governments of the two allies. This act that seems to have brought surprise, shock, and even humiliation to both. "Play with the scourge that is art of the Nazi period all you want on your own time," the cartoon implies to Whitehurst, "but leave the public and government out of it, or risk bringing something fetid back into the solid, civilized relationship that has developed between our two countries over the past three decades." In short, the cartoon cautioned, leave the past where it belongs, buried outside the confines of the Cold War-era relationship between the U.S. and West Germany. Herblock's cartoon embodies several tensions in the continued existence in the U.S. of art from

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[74] See memorandum from Ely Maurer on behalf of Elie Wiesel, to the U.S. Department of State, 29 May 1981, RG 59 Box 55 Folder 1, NARA.
[75] Herblock, "I Don't Even Know the Cat that Dragged It In!" *The Washington Post,* 29 May 1981, RG 59 Box 58 NARA.

the Nazi era. On one hand, it mocks the art as small and unimportant, something that should be left buried, or hidden away. On the other hand, it magnifies the power of these visual remnants of the Nazi regime and World War II, emphasizing their ability to disturb the relationship between the two countries, or at the least, to embarrass both with their public presence, especially considering that West Germany wanted little to do with them. Once again, art was torn between irrelevance and danger, characterizations that exposed the hypocrisy of some politicians, members of the military, and even members of the public for their fascination with, even respect for, art from the collection.

As the months passed, the State Department was on its heels, reflecting not only Wiesel's concerns that the artwork's exhibition and storage context should be tightly controlled by the soon-to-come Holocaust Museum in D.C., but also anxieties whether West Germany truly desired the art to be returned. State Department files from the early 1980s include several newspaper clippings detailing the political situation in West Germany as it related to the Nazi past, with headlines such as "Former SS-Men Meet Again Under the Sign," chronicling the troubling and increasingly bold meet-ups in small Bavarian towns of former members of the *Schutzstaffel*.[76] Though it is not clear why the State Department was so reticent to help repatriate the collection of Nazi-era artwork, it is possible that a combination of pressure from the USHMC, continued waffling on the side of the administration in Bonn amidst local public debate about the collection's return, and anxieties brought on by reports of unabashed meetings of former SS-men triggered some reluctance, even in the face of the continued strength of the Clean Wehrmacht myth in both countries.

[76] "Former SS-Men Meet Again Under the Sign," translated and reprinted from the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* in *The German Tribune*, 26 May 1984, RG 59 Box 56, NARA.

After several more months of stalling, the Secretary of the Army decided the best way to authorize the restitution of the artwork was to agree to stipulations made by the Department of State for the formation of a committee comprising representatives of the Army and State departments, as well as the Smithsonian Institution. Former New York Senator Jacob Javits chaired the committee, a politician "whose profile as a moderate Jewish Republican was stressed as a positive factor."[77] On March 17, 1982, President Ronald Reagan finally approved and signed a revised bill (HR 4625) stipulating the formation of this committee in order to approve artworks that could be repatriated.[78] The committee was tasked with reviewing the thousands of works left in the German War Art Collection and U.S. custody for clear National Socialist themes or symbols, a vague task that ostensibly included the presence of recognizable Nazi-era leaders and renderings of swastikas, the Hitler-Grüß, or symbols related to the SS. The committee decided that a total of more than 600 objects, including ones that failed these tests, and others that were deemed of "superior documentary value," were to remain in American custody, while more than 6,000 were to be returned to their country of origin.[79] Elie Wiesel and the USHMC were apparently satisfied by the promise from the Army's General Counsel to consider the loan of any objects that "might be of interest" to the USHMC for eventual display in the Holocaust Memorial Museum.[80] In January 1986, the Department of State notified the White House that they had reached an agreement with all parties, including the Kohl-helmed CDU administration

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[77] See Maertz, *Invisible Museum*, 74.
[78] See revised draft of "HR 4625," which also prescribed that "no funds from the United States may be expended in connection with any transportation or handling costs incidental to any transfer authorized by the first section of this Act," RG 59 Box 56, NARA.
[79] *Ibid*., 75.
[80] Letter from Susan J. Crawford, General Counsel of the Department of the Army to Mark Talisman, Vice President of the USHMC, 1 April 1986, RG 59 Box 55 Folder 1, NARA, Washington, D.C.

in Bonn. The agreement stipulated the final return of 6,255 pieces of art that Gilkey and his team had seized during the denazification period. Echoing language from the Potsdam and Allied Control Council Directive 30 that had guided Gilkey in his art confiscations, it instructed that: "No items tending to glorify Nazism, revive aggressive German militarism, or containing Nazi symbols will be returned, since this would conflict with U.S. obligations under the Potsdam Agreement." [81]

Included in this group of artworks was also a collection of watercolors that had painted by Hitler himself, which, unlike many of the other works contained in the U.S. collection of seized Nazi-era art, were never allowed to be loaned out or exhibited. The watercolors retained in American custody (to this day) comprise thematically innocuous landscapes and architectural paintings pre-dating the Third Reich or the inception of the Nazi Party, such as *The Courtyard of the Old Residency in Munich* (1914) and *Tree at a Track* (1911). There was a belief that the creator of these paintings, not their subject-matter, had tainted the works themselves. The subsequent insistence that the paintings remain under lock-and-key in the United States, never to be returned to Germany, challenges the stipulation that only art "glorifying Nazism or containing Nazi symbols" be retained. It also, in some ways, runs contrary to the arguments laid out for the for the return of Claus Bergen's paintings to Germany – American politicians and military officials ultimately deemed Bergen's paintings as "safe" to return because their subject matter only indirectly referenced Nazi militarism. Whitehurst and other officials framed his as merely celebrating the German naval tradition. Furthermore, Whitehurst had argued that it was insulting to the relationship between West Germany and the United States that the U.S. still did not trust

[81] Letter from Nicholas Platt (Executive Secretary of the Department of State) John M. Poindexter (White House National Security Adviser), 22 January 1986, RG 69 Box 55 Folder 2, NARA.

their own allies with visual remnants of their dark past. Yet the refusal to return paintings by Hitler reveals that the U.S. government was still wary of the impact of the artist himself on the "purity" of art – that is, the identity of the artist *must* matter, if watercolors completed by Hitler three decades before the beginning of the Second World War were still considered a danger, a discrepancy that is especially egregious considering Bergen himself had joined the Nazi Party as a fervent believer in 1922. The negative power imbued into Hitler's watercolors was, perhaps, reflective of an intentionalist understanding of the Third Reich that still reigned in popular and conservative politics in both the United States and West Germany: it was "the *Führer* alone" who had led the Germans astray, and many, not least artists, and those in the Wehrmacht who fought honorably in spite of the cause for which they fought should be treated forgiven by history.

The Department of State letter also laid out stipulations agreed upon with the Kohl administration, not only that Germany was responsible for the shipping costs across the Atlantic, but, significantly, that there was an "explicit FRG agreement to permit the use of the art only in accord with FRG penal laws directed against Nazi and neo-Nazi activities,"[82] an agreement that was vague enough to cause political strife between the nascent Green Party and the Kohl administration in West Germany in the coming years. The final agreement met little pushback internally or externally in the United States, with most concerns alleviated by the formation of the selection committee comprising members of the USHMC. However, former District Court Judge and Legal Adviser to the Department of State Abraham Sofaer, who had been involved in counseling the State Department amidst the concerns initially raised by Elie Wiesel, wrote to William M. Woessner, the former Head of Central European Affairs at the State Department. In

[82] *Ibid*.

a chilling private memo just before the agreement was finalized with the Kohl administration, he stated:

> After reviewing the full history of this subject, I agree that what we are doing is the proper course both legally and politically. I would not have agreed to this course at the outset, but I can understand the course selected, and agree that we should follow through on Congress' [*sic.*] plans. I do think we should give some thought to getting rid of the remaining 'art.' I fear the Germans will come back for more.[83]

Sofaer's memo exposed the subtext of all of the stipulations, from 1946 to 1986, that no artwork containing images of "Nazism or German militarism" (the latter of which is, of course, depicted in many of the works from the German War Art Collection that were returned) be put back German hands. This term always stated a fear that the Germans may be incited to revert to Nazism if they encountered such visual imagery again, an anxiety that revealed a belief in the power of the artwork. At the same time, the U.S. Army and politicians seemed to believe that Americans were immune to these powerful visual forces, allowing some of the paintings to be displayed in government buildings, or publicly exhibited in warehouses in the Colorado Desert. Despite Whitehurst's intention (and Sofaer's agreement) that the return of the artwork would be "good politically" and signify the strength of U.S.-West German relations, the deep-seated belief remained that the paintings were ultimately tainted beyond repair, haunted by something perhaps supernatural in its ability to reawaken beliefs that (apparently) simply lay dormant in West Germans for forty years. This fear was not limited to Americans like Sofaer, as the following

[83] Memo from Sofaer to William M. Woessner, 16 January 1986, RG 59 Box 55 Folder 2, NARA.

chapter, and the previous chapter examining the West German reactions to the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition in 1974, revealed.

**Conclusion**

Following the signing of papers authorizing the transfer of the art in February, *The New York Times* reported in March of 1986 that after all of the tense negotiations and public controversy within the United States regarding the return of the artwork (the West German administration had primarily replied affirmatively and complied to U.S. demands concerning the repatriation of the collection), operations to begin packing the art from its storage sites in Pueblo and Washington, D.C. were undertaken with "little fanfare."[84] Newspapers like the *Denver Post* referred to the return of the majority of the German War Art Collection as "part of an ongoing project by the West German government to reclaim the work of its artists,"[85] framing the act as one driven by West German desires, not, as had originally been the case, as one propelled by a Virginia Congressman's desire to honor the alliance between the two countries.

Several weeks later, the desolate desert warehouse that had once drawn throngs of curious visitors was nearly empty. Any remaining art deemed too incendiary or problematic to be trusted in West German custody was sent to a vault outside of Washington ,D.C. officials would later transfer it into a warehouse belonging to the Center of Military History, closed to the general public. The art that Gordon Gilkey had collected and confiscated, which had been alternately shunned and enjoyed by U.S. political and military figures and the public, was, once again, Germany's "problem."

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[84] Penny Pagano, "U.S. Will Return German Art Under Hitler's Rule," *The New York Times*, 6 March 1986.
[85] Dana Parsons, "Army to 'Repatriate' Nazi Collection of Art," *The Denver Post,* 16 March 1986.

On the other side of the Atlantic, by the mid-1980s, the political climate had changed, or at least grown grayer, since the relatively easy return of the ten paintings of Claus Bergen to the museum in Kiel, and the initial informal request for the return of the remainder of the collection in 1977. As scholars have noted, the publication of Goebbels's *Tagebücher* in 1979, as well as the airing of the American miniseries *Holocaust* that same year helped to spark a new enthusiasm, initially trigged by the 68er movement, in examining both the past and West Germany's process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The *Documents of Oppression* exhibition had indubitably also propelled this desire at it pertained to visual culture of the Third Reich, and had conceivably also helped inspire the 1977 informal request for the return of Gilkey's confiscated artwork. Furthermore, in 1982, Helmut Kohl took over from Helmut Schmidt, marking the beginning of his 16-year chancellorship of the FRG, and a return, in part, to the CDU-era anti-*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* politics of Konrad Adenauer. Reagan's ill-fated visit to Bitburg in 1985, in the midst of finalizing the details for the return of thousands of pieces art, ignited new concerns in the German press and intellectual circles about the danger of the Clean Wehrmacht narrative, and its potential to negatively interfere with the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the German collective memory. Additionally, the *Historikerstreit*, which began in 1986, as well as the rapid growth of the Green Party (which reflected, in some ways, the institutionalized political consciousness of the 68er movement), brought the debate about how "dangerous" art from the Nazi era actually was, and how important its visibility to the German public was, to the forefront.

The repatriation of this Nazi-era art once in U.S. custody in 1986 shifted these questions squarely on the backs of politicians, artists, and intellectuals in the Federal Republic of Germany, who were forced to debate the moral and practical question of what to *do* with all that artwork

once it had been returned by the U.S. as a gesture of goodwill. This dilemma became more complicated due to the Kohl/Christian Democratic Union administration's antagonism toward allowing the restituted works to be available for wide or public consumption, let alone spur another fraught, even violent era of public reckoning as it had twenty years previously. These questions will be examined in the following chapter in detail.

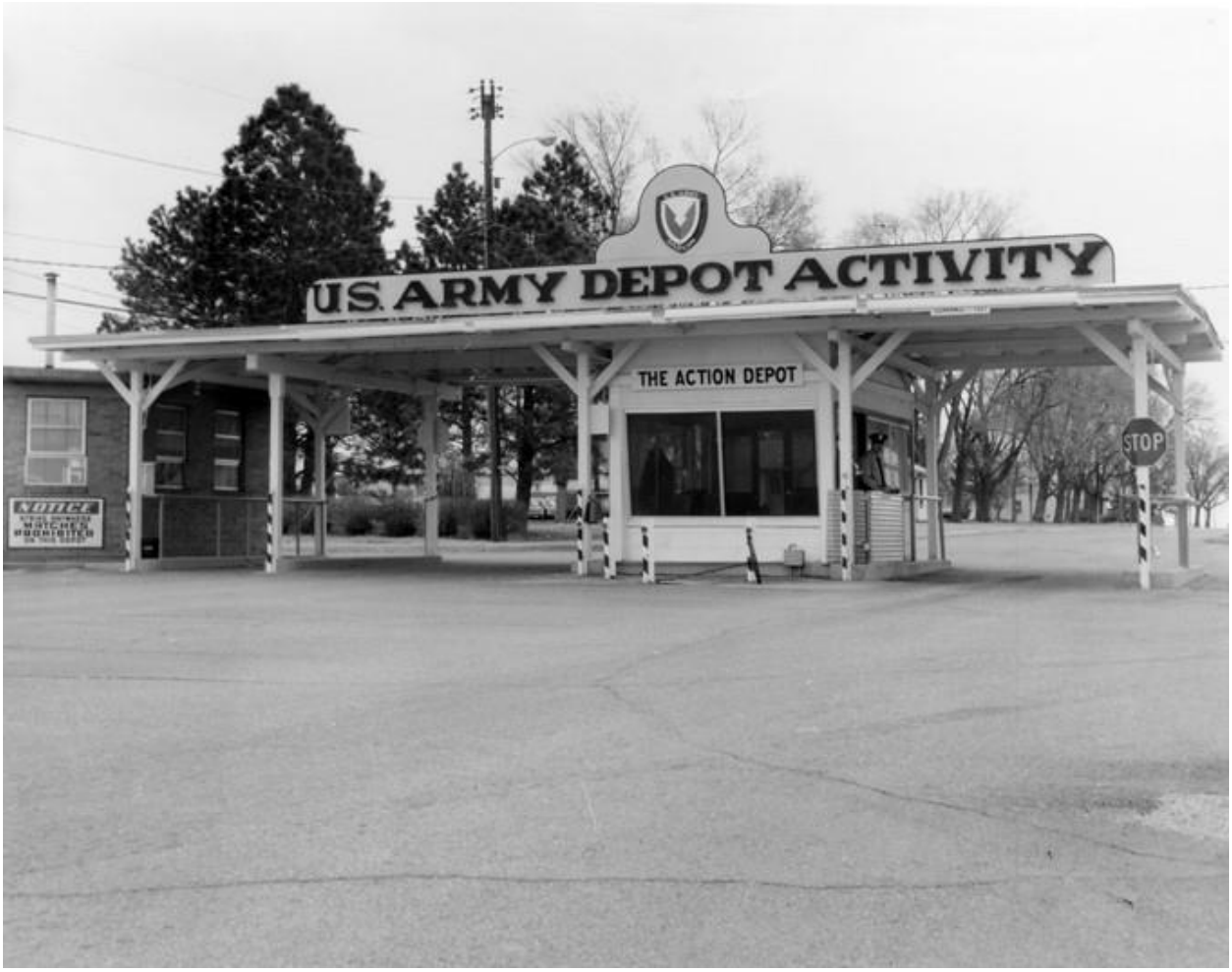



Fig. 1, The entrance to the U.S. Army Depot in Pueblo, CO, where much of the Nazi-era artwork confiscated by Gilkey was stored between 1946 and 1986 (Center for Military History Archives, unfiled, Fort Belvoir, Virginia)


Fig. 2, American visitors (with special permission) take in part of the Army's collection of confiscated Nazi-era artwork, U.S. Army Depot, Pueblo, CO (*The New York Times*, 1 September 1981)

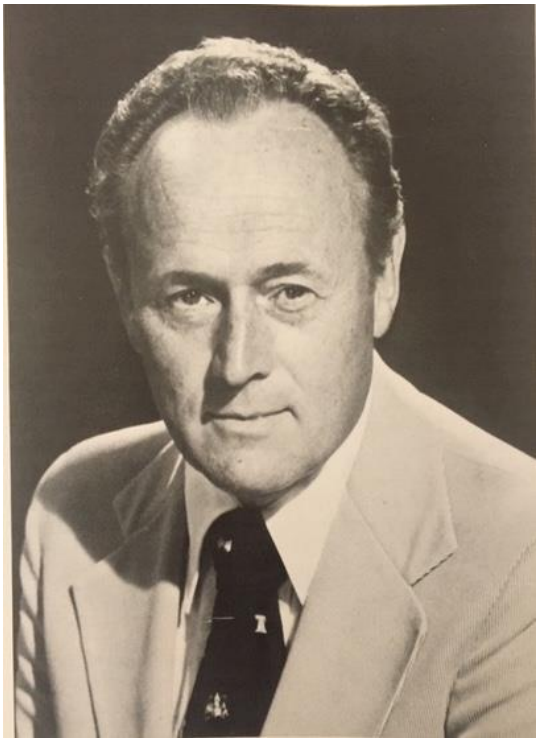
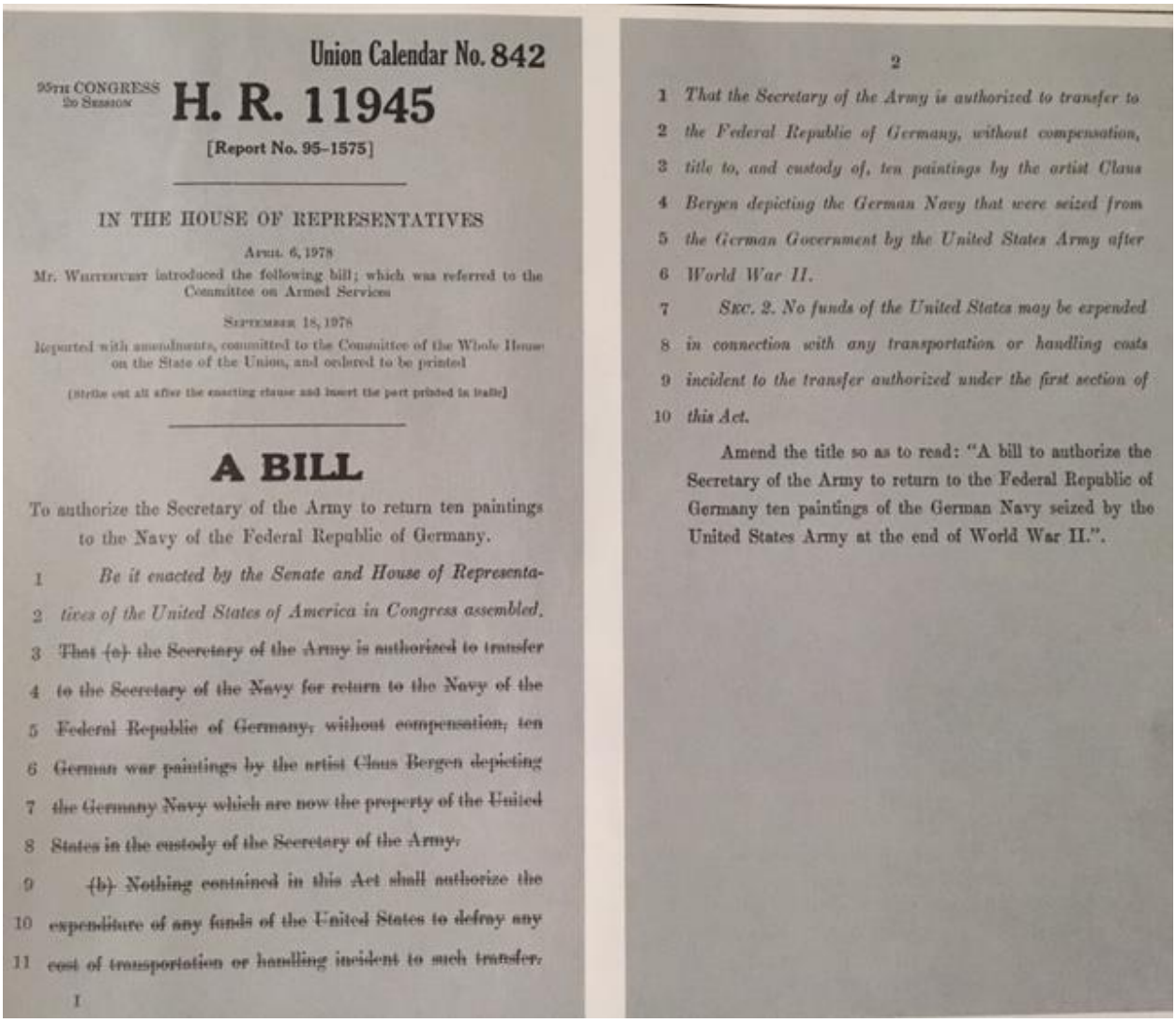


Fig. 3, Congressman G. William Whitehurst (R-VA), who pushed for the paintings of Claus Bergen, and later thousands of works from the German War Art Collection, to be repatriated to West Germany, 1969 (Weber)

Fig. 4, Claus Bergen, *Deutsche Wacht in der Nordsee,* oil, 1940 (Center of Military History Archives, unfiled)

Fig. 5, Claus Bergen, *U-Boot 53*, oil, 1941 (Center of Military History Archives, unfiled)



Union Calendar No. 842

95TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

# H. R. 11945

[Report No. 95-1575]

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 6, 1978

Mr. WHITEHURST introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Armed Services

SEPTEMBER 18, 1978

Reported with amendments, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

## A BILL

To authorize the Secretary of the Army to return ten paintings to the Navy of the Federal Republic of Germany.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

~~That (a) the Secretary of the Army is authorized to transfer to the Secretary of the Navy for return to the Navy of the Federal Republic of Germany, without compensation, ten German war paintings by the artist Claus Bergen depicting the Germany Navy which are now the property of the United States in the custody of the Secretary of the Army.~~

~~(b) Nothing contained in this Act shall authorize the expenditure of any funds of the United States to defray any cost of transportation or handling incident to such transfer.~~

1

2

*That the Secretary of the Army is authorized to transfer to the Federal Republic of Germany, without compensation, title to, and custody of, ten paintings by the artist Claus Bergen depicting the German Navy that were seized from the German Government by the United States Army after World War II.*

*SEC. 2. No funds of the United States may be expended in connection with any transportation or handling costs incident to the transfer authorized under the first section of this Act.*

Amend the title so as to read: "A bill to authorize the Secretary of the Army to return to the Federal Republic of Germany ten paintings of the German Navy seized by the United States Army at the end of World War II.".

Fig. 6, A draft of Whitehurst's HR 11945 (RG 59 Box 56, NARA, Washington, D.C.)


Fig. 7, Herbert Block ("Herblock"), "I Don't Even Know the Cat that Dragged It In," *The Washington Post*, 29 May 1981 (RG 59 Box 58 NARA, Washington, D.C.)

# Chapter Four

## *Nazi-Kunst in Museum*? The Return of the 68ers, the *Historikerstreit,* and Nazi-Era Artwork on the Political Stage

### Introduction

On April 12, 1988, the young Green Party of West Germany (*die Grünen*) sent out a headline-grabbing invitation to members of the German press, public, and government. The nascent political party had been gaining a relatively steady stream of supporters in the Federal Republic of Germany since first entering the Bundestag in the 1983 federal elections, clearing the five percent hurdle three years after its establishment as an official political party.[1] On one side of the pamphlet-sized invitation was a replica of the catalogue cover for the first Great German Art Exhibition at the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1937, featuring the familiar and stark image of the *Reichsadler,* set in gold and red relief between a torch and the helmeted profile of a classical warrior. The picture on the flip side of the pamphlet presented the antithesis: the equally familiar cover of the catalogue for the infamous Degenerate Art Exhibition, also held in Munich in 1937. This side featured Otto Freundlich's monumental sculpture *Der neue Mensch [The New Man]*, which had been confiscated from a museum in Hamburg and shown at the exhibition in Munich as an example of "Jewish-Bolshevist" art, the negative foil to the "healthy" art that could

[1] Branches of special interest groups that categorized themselves under the umbrella *Grüne Liste Umweltschütz* ("Green List for Environmental Protection") would become the Green Party officially in 1980, and first emerged as a loose coalition of groups around West Germany, particularly in Lower Saxony, in 1977. Most of these groups comprised environmentalists and peace activists who had organized in the 1970s by the thousands, originating from a collective opposition to the use of nuclear power, pollution, and NATO military power. Though many of its members came from the new social movements and protests of the 68er movement, they drew from conservative circles as well. For an excellent and contemporaneous overview of Green Party successes in the postwar period in West Germany, see Eva Kolinsky, ed., *The Greens in West Germany*: *Organisation and Policy Making* (Munich: Berg, 1989).

be seen in 1937 at the museum (the Haus der Kunst) just across the street.[2] The text on this invitation described the event in Bonn as a public *Kulturdebatte* organized by the Green Party's Bureau of Culture (*Kulturbüro*). The debate was to be headlined not only by members of the Green Party, but also, importantly, artists, including Georg Meistermann, a painter once classified as "entartete" under the Nazi regime and the former president of the German Künstlerbund, and Gottfried Helnwein, a provocative Austrian-Irish painter whose works often invoked the Holocaust and the Nazi period.

The invitation was provocative and instantly recognizable by most members of the press, public, and government that received it. Not only did it invoke two of the most notorious art exhibitions in German history, relics of that dark past that the 68er movement, founders of the Green Party, had sought to exhume and examine in the previous two decades. It also, perhaps more importantly, was a demand from the Green Party that the rest of the country to engage in a new act of self-reckoning, another step in the recursive process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the public sphere. The 68er movement had reopened some of the wounds of the past (and created new ones, with the rise of violent far-left terrorists like the RAF); but this process, as the Green Party's invitation asserted, was far from finished. Rather, many members of and leaders within the Green Party, as well as an array of intellectuals from the 68er movement, were concerned that under the conservative Helmut Kohl administration and in the midst of the *Historikerstreit*, the Bundesrepublik was turning dangerously away from the lessons of its National Socialist past, under the guise of moving unfettered from shame and guilt into the future.

[2] Invitation to "die Kulturdebatte in der Bundestagsfraktion Die Grünen," 1988, Folder 1 (2833), Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundearchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.

This chapter will examine three key events contributing to the new Green Party's attempt to transfer questions about the Nazi-era past into public and political life in West Germany. First, it will engage with the political and cultural ramifications of the *Historikerstreit*, a debate regarding the relativization of the Holocaust and the Third Reich between conservative and left-leaning intellectuals that bled into the public sphere. It will then place this debate in the context of an infamous and publicized clash between a Cologne art collector and philanthropist named Peter Ludwig, who attempted to exhibit his sizable collection of sculpture from Nazi sculptor Arno Breker in the art museum in Cologne, and city administrators, intellectuals, and other artists and curators. This clash resulted in the publication of *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum*, which called on historians, curators, and artists to examine the eponymous question in a wide-reaching edited volume. It will also argue that the battle over the relationship between West Germany's past and present played out on this stage, inciting 68ers, now nearly two decades after the *Documents of Oppression* show in Frankfurt in 1974, to use Nazi art as a site for discussing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Finally, it will examine the effect of this debate concerning Peter Ludwig and Arno Breker, as well as the contemporaneous 1986 return of several thousand works from the German War Art Collection in the U.S., on the Green Party. The Greens, led by Dr. Antje Vollmer, used both events as a pretext for bringing the question of "Nazi Art in Museums?" into the public sphere. The attempt culminated in a formal written confrontation (*Anfrage/Antwort*) with the conservative Kohl-helmed administration whose representatives, like many conservative thinkers driving the *Historikerstreit*, wished to leave the Nazi era in the past. These political, intellectual, cultural, and public clashes, in part prompted by the United States' controversial decision to repatriate paintings from the Nazi era to West Germany, reveal that years after the excavations of the past conducted during the 68er years, the question of how, and

if, the public should encounter and interpret visual and artistic remnants of the past remained unresolved. This demonstrated that once again, art from the Nazi period continued to incite volatile and contradictory feelings within all of those in West Germany who encountered it.

**The 1980s and the Reemergence of the 68ers in West German Politics**

Though the public debate regarding the exhibition of Nazi-era artwork in German museum spaces was presented as an official platform of the Green Party, the topic was a special passion project of Dr. Antje Vollmer. Vollmer was a member and intellectual of the Green Party and a student of theology in the midst of the 68er movement, previously known throughout West Germany for her progressive political initiatives within the party, especially those connected to Germany's National Socialist past. In the early 1980s, she pushed for compensation and reparations for "forgotten" victims of Nazi violence, including forced laborers, conscientious objectors, homosexuals, and casualties of the euthanasia, or T4, program. She also worked in the early to mid-1980s to start a productive dialogue of de-escalation with the remaining members of the RAF movement, by then long-classified as a left-wing terrorist group. Her interest in the afterlife of visual remnants of Germany's shameful past had clear connections to her other political projects. Vollmer was concerned with uncovering unsavory histories, and keeping them in the public eye, guided by a fear that repressed histories beget dangerous presents and futures, the former which were often doomed to repeat themselves. Vollmer's political interests, though, were not exceptional in the decades following the 68er movement, as they were shared by many 68ers.[3]

[3] "Antje Vollmer Nachlass: Vorwort," N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.

The Green Party was the political 68er movement's official representation in the Bundestag, formed after years of protests and public debates inside and outside of the university. Since winning seats in regional parliaments and local assemblies in the late 1970s, then clearing the five percent hurdle in the 1983 elections, *Die Grünen* attained unprecedented success as the only new postwar party to be elected to the Bundestag, and eventually enter the European parliament.[4] Its party agenda reflected the values and experiences of a new generation of postwar West Germans who had finally reached political adulthood. This generation had been raised in relatively stable conditions of economic prosperity, educational opportunity, and social and career mobility. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, this generation of West Germans who participated and came of age in the 68er movement sought to expand democratic processes and "forge a newly active role for the citizen in the polity."[5] As a result, the traditional three parties that had dominated the political landscape since the end of World War II – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), and Free Democratic Party (FDP) – began to give way to new political parties allowed new channels of political participation. This process was both indicative and a product of the 68er and post-68er generational belief that each individual citizen, as opposed to the state, could (and should) contribute to parties' policy agendas.

While their parents, who had experienced the violence and turmoil of war, embraced the political, economic, and social stability famously perpetuated by Konrad Adenauer, the 68ers and their political progeny saw confrontation as necessary to continued growth as a nation. This

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[4] Kolinsky, 1-3.
[5] Kolinsky (introduction), 1). Historians such as Dagmar Herzog have nuanced this point. See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

clash took place on both large and small stages, socially, culturally, politically, and economically, as evidenced in the previous chapter, where even an art exhibition became a site of intense and morally fraught debate. As chapter two revealed through the exhibition of Nazi art in Frankfurt in 1974, nearly every sector of German life, public and private, became not only a site of generational confrontation, but historical confrontation as well, as "working through" the country's violent twentieth century past, became a goal that manifested not only theoretically, but publicly as well.

*Documents of Oppression* represented a battleground for not only intellectuals, but the general public. West Germans of all ages and political leanings had the chance to view, work through, and even exorcise demons about the crimes of the previous generation. It also allowed for a political commentary on Germany's contemporary situation, not just domestically, but internationally as well, especially in relation to the United States. In the years that followed, *Documents of Oppression* opened the door for more debates in the cultural arena about the merits of Nazi-era artwork. The question did not disappear in the decade following the apex of the 68er movement. Rather, galleries, private collectors, and museums attempted to re-examine, or rehabilitate the legacies of infamous Nazi-era artists such as Arno Breker as West Germany moved past the intensity of the 68er movement. This process coincided with conservative political and intellectual appeals for Germans to return to the "stability" of the Adenauer era. Americans, perhaps without intending to, played no small part in this process of historical normalization, as President Reagan proved in 1984 during his infamous visit to a military cemetery in Bitburg. In other words, the backlash to the 68er movement had arrived in full force. It comprised a call from politicians like Kohl to forget the "Zeitgeist" of the 1960s and 1970s that Helmut Schmidt had overseen and return to a Germany of "normality" – not just stability,

but also pride in the country. Right-wing West German historian Ernst Nolte argued in his seminal 1986 essay "Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will," which instigated the *Historikerstreit,* that the German memory of the Nazi era as solidified by the confrontations and excavations of the 68er movement was "a bugaboo, a past that in the process of establishing itself in the present or that is suspended above the present like an executioner's sword."[6] As many conservative West German politicians and intellectuals understood it, the excessive interest in the Nazi past rendered Germans blind to other pressing problems, domestic and international. Above all, Nolte argued for a relativism of the Holocaust, namely that the obsession with the event as singular, and the constant preoccupation of Germans with their guilt, was keeping the country imprisoned. Nolte's statements, though met with vehement criticism and debate from other historians, certainly rang in the ears of nascent progressive and Green Party politicians like Antje Vollmer as they continued to gain seats in the Bundestag following 1983.

This process, and the political and public debate that it triggered in West Germany, was one catalyst for Vollmer's *Kulturdebatte* two years later, in 1988. Once again, the United States and West Germany were bound together inextricably through the contested fate of this artwork, with actions made by U.S. politicians, consciously or not, helping direct the process of confronting the past in Germany. The public debates and concerns that Vollmer and the Greens raised and were reflected in the larger disputes of the *Historikerstreit*, would even be echoed in museums in the United States just a few years later. The uncanny ability of Nazi-era artwork to

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[6] Ernst Nolte, "Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will: Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht mehr gehalten werden konnte" ("The Past That Will Not Go Away: A Speech That Could Be Written but Not Delivered"), published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 1986, republished in Michael Stürmer, "History In a Land Without History"in *Forever In The Shadow of Hitler?*, ed. Ernst Piper (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993), 18.

capture the imagination of those who confronted it, for better or for worse, would not die anytime soon. The 68er movement attempted, with shows like *Documents of Oppression*, to demystify the taboo of Nazi-era visual culture and emphasize that the crimes of the Third Reich were a part of Germany's – and capitalism's – history that continued to haunt the present. As the 1980s dawned in West Germany and members of the 68er movement moved into the field of institutionalized politics, this topic remained far from settled. As Konrad Jarausch wrote in the decade following the *Historikerstreit*, after the heated debates of the 1960s and 1970s, and on the heels of the Bitburg debacle, "an emotional revisionism controversy testified to a profound and persistent unease about the Nazi legacy" among academics, politicians, and the public.[7]

Hans Kundani, an expert on the 68er generation, argues that by the end of the 1970s, the Green movement in West Germany was beginning to coalesce into a legitimate political party that the CDU and SPD saw as a serious challenger from the progressive left. Considered an intellectual leader of this newly-formed party, Vollmer's obsession with the infinite returns of the past in the present – especially the unspeakable violence committed by the previous generation, which was not blessed by the "mercy of a late birth" ("Gnade der späten Geburt"), as Helmut Kohl famously put it in 1983 – was not exceptional. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Green Party's special focus on a continuing confrontation with the past (or *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,* the phrase favored by one of the intellectual fathers of the 68er movement, Theodor Adorno), stood in stark contrast to the platform introduced by Helmut Kohl and the CDU and German conservatives. As has been well documented by intellectual and cultural historians, the CDU platform in 1980, helmed by an older generation and conservative youth

[7] Konrad H. Jarausch, "Removing the Nazi Stain? The Quarrel of the German Historians," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 1998), 285.

reacting to the success of the 68er movement, was in many ways a referendum on the social, cultural, and political upheaval that resulted from the protests and activities of the 68ers.

By the dawn of the 1980s, Helmut Kohl was already a well-established figure in West German politics who was seen as a challenger to the tyranny of "political correctness" due to his "Spiritual-Moral-Change" ("Geistig-moralische Wende"), first published in a coalition contract in 1982 just before the federal elections. In his party platform, Kohl promised a return to the nationally "black and white morality" of the Adenauer period, and a turn away from social and cultural upheaval. These promises implied a cessation of the cultural and generational clashes that had characterized the tumult of the late 1960s to the late 1970s. His vow was also a critique of Helmut Schmidt's tenure as chancellor, claiming that Schmidt had capitulated to the "Zeitgeist" of the era to the country's detriment. Kohl's platform was, of course, reactionary, and the polarized cultural-political terms of German identity were clear in the fierce reaction to his conservative project. By early 1982, when Kohl finally became chancellor of the Federal Republic, left-liberal and leftist intellectuals, most of whom had come of age and been significant actors during the 68er movement had gained significant footholds in the media, universities, schools, and museums, the "commanding heights of the public institutions of cultural transmission."[8] These leftist public intellectuals, for whom Kohl's nationalist rhetoric aroused negative memories of the 1950s and early 1960s, mobilized quickly and forcefully against the CDU's "conservative counterpolitics of memory."[9] This primarily took the form of the *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980s, which will be discussed at length later in the chapter, during which left-leaning intellectuals argued that the Holocaust was a singular event, especially

[8] A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 219.
[9] Moses, 220.

in relation to the atrocities committed under Stalin. This argument came with strong support from the international community, notably American, English, and Israeli historians, who wished to preserve the unique stigma of the Holocaust. The Green Party's entrance into the Bundestag came in March 1983, when they received 5.6 percent of the votes, coincided with a nearly five percent loss by the SPD, West Germany's historic center-left party. This feat was a culmination of nearly a decade of successes at the regional and state levels, and is also largely understood by scholars as a product of the "affinity between [the] participatory culture and protest [fostered during the 68er movement]."[10]

**The *Historikerstreit* and "Reawakening Old Passions"**

Within the progressive and left-leaning politics that were beginning to threaten the still-powerful CDU, cultural and intellectual spheres refused to comply with Helmut Kohl's desire that the past remain in the past. The pending return of thousands of paintings from the German War Art Collection, initially prompted by Congressman G. William Whitehurst's interest in the paintings of combat painter Claus Bergen, was not the only action that attracted the interest of German academics, the press, and Green Party members like Antje Vollmer. A scandal even closer to home – Cologne, to be precise – had prompted debate once again on the West German national and international stage just a few years after HR 4625 was passed, which called for the return of specific works of Nazi-era art to West Germany, and while another large-scale transfer of nearly 6,000 pieces of artwork from the United States government was underway. This confluence of events also provoked a sort of *Historikerstreit* within the art world specifically, as Pamela Potter has argued.[11]

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[10] Kolinsky, 2.
[11] See Potter, 164-166.

This perfect storm of national and international action was also infamously incited by President Ronald Reagan's and Chancellor Helmut's Kohl's ceremonial visit to the military cemetery of Bitburg to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in May of 1985. It was here that Reagan, in the midst of strengthening the United States' ties to West Germany, honored the memory of a mass of fallen German soldiers buried beneath rows of snow-covered headstones, which happened to include 49 members of the Waffen-SS. The world-class gaffe was compounded by Reagan's decision not to visit the sites of any former concentration camps for fear of "reawaken[ing] old passions of the time."[12] The sentiment behind this claim is strikingly similar to that used by Gilkey, as well as the language used in the stipulations of Yalta, Potsdam, and Control Council Directive No. 30 in 1945 and 1946 in their orders to collect and confiscate any artwork that might inspire or ignite feelings of Nazism or militarism in the German people following their defeat in the war.

Importantly, this language of "reawakening" or "reigniting" also underscored the apparently persistent belief held by not only the United States government, but also the conservative West German governments (Kohl in particular, but Adenauer included) in the power of the *visual*. While American forces in the immediate postwar period fretted publicly that

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[12] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011) 20. Rosenfeld contends that the proliferation of the Holocaust as both text and trope has, perversely, brought on a decline of its meaning and ultimately a denigration of its memory. Reagan went on the argue, "I think there is nothing wrong with visiting that cemetery where those young men are victims of Nazism also, even though they were fighting in the German uniform, drafted into service to carry out the hateful wishes of the Nazis," (21), an argument that attests to the proliferation of the Clean Wehrmacht Myth since the end of the war, and that no doubt, as shown in the first chapter, positively influenced many Americans' reactions to combat art of the German War Art Collection. Of course, much more has been written on the history of the Bitburg controversy, including near-contemporaneous tomes that detail the events ramifications beyond 1985 and beyond Germany. See, for example, Geoffrey H. Hartman., ed. *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington, 1986) and Ilya Levkov, ed., *Bitburg and Beyond: Encounters in American, German, and Jewish History* (New York, 1987).

merely encountering symbols of the Nazi-era might prompt even ordinary Germans to return to militarism, just forty years later the American government, as represented by Reagan, expressed concern that the site of public commemoration at concentration camps might incite memories of a painful past in the same Germans, a past that was, by implication, painful to the point of damage on an international stage. This notion, of course, must also be placed in the context of the 68er movement, whose fervor (and eventual violence) had waned by the mid- and late-1980s, in Germany, but whose original student participants comprised the nascent Green Party.

As the paradigmatic example of *Documents of Oppression* at the Frankfurter Kunstverein revealed, there existed a fear that the proliferation of images related to the Nazi-era without context was causing a diminution of the crimes of the Third Reich, and a dangerous self-distancing of the German people from their past. Though the show in Frankfurt had left an impression on the public, a decade later the official stance, endorsed by both the U.S. and West Germany, had regressed to an endorsement of the Clean Wehrmacht myth. This myth implicitly endorsed the notion that images related to the pain and violence of the Third Reich (as symbolized in the case of Bitburg by Reagan's refusal to visit a former concentration camp) might negatively impact the "progress" of West Germans since 1945. The 68er movement had not been, however, all in vain by the time the chancellorship of Kohl was underway. Rather, the Bitburg controversy sparked outrage and protest on a national and international scale, revealing the still-present fear in many that the historical significance of the Holocaust was being diminished, a fear that was familiar to many who were active during, or even witnessed, the work of the 68er movement. And approximately one year later, this fear crystalized in the art

world in Cologne, in an event that dovetailed neatly with the *Historikerstreit*, provoked that same year by Nolte's editorial.[13]

Nolte's feuilleton argued that a "line" must be drawn in the German past, that the collective memory of the Nazi era was "a bugaboo, as a past that in the process of establishing itself in the present or that is suspended above the present like an executioner's sword."[14] Nolte went on to complain that the excessive (as he saw it) interest in the Nazi period had the was dangerous and counterproductive, drawing attention away from dire questions of the present, including contemporaneous issues of genocide, such as during the Vietnam War. Importantly, Nolte urged a rethinking of the Nazi atrocities "in context" – specifically in the context of the lethal and destructive campaigns of the Soviets, even suggesting that the Nazis had been inspired by techniques from the east. He ultimately argued that the Holocaust would be most productively remembered and understood as just one among several genocidal actions of the twentieth century, an argument that brought the historian swift criticism, especially from the intellectual left.[15]

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[13] Nolte's editorial, in the form of a feuilleton published in the June 6, 1986 issue of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), was a refinement of ideas he first lectured on between 1976 and 1980. The piece was entitled "Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will: Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht mehr gehalten konnte" ("The Past that Will Not Pass: A Speech that Could Be Written but Not Delivered"). Historian and co-editor of the FAZ Joachim Fest, who had penned the infamous Hitler biography in 1973 that partially incited the *Hitlerwelle* and its backlash, allowed Nolte's artic
le to run after Nolte was supposedly banned from giving it during the annual Frankfurt Römerberg Conversations, a gathering of intellectuals.

[14] James Knowlton, translated by Truett Cates, *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1993), 37.

[15]For example, Nolte writes, "Did the National Socialists or Hitler perhaps commit an 'Asiatic' deed merely because they and their ilk considered themselves to be the potential victims of an 'Asiatic' deed? Wasn't the 'Gulag Archipelago' more original than Auschwitz? Was the Bolshevik murder of an entire class not the logical and factual *prius* of the 'racial murder' of National Socialism? Cannot Hitler's most secret deeds be explained by the fact that he had *not*

The swift condemnation of Nolte's argument was, of course, enhanced by its temporal proximity to the heavily publicized Bitburg Controversy, a one-two punch of events that critics saw as dangerous because of their potential to relativize the atrocities committed during the Third Reich. The left-leaning intellectual community, both in Germany and internationally (especially scholars from the United States, Britain, and Israel) was galvanized and reacted swiftly, condemning any attempt to question or revoke the singularity of the Holocaust and the crimes committed under National Socialism. This coincided almost directly with the return of the German War Art Collection to the Federal Republic, leaving it up to the West Germans to decide what should be done with it, and ultimately eliciting promises from the Kohl administration that none of the works would be "taken seriously" as art.[16] This strange promise, at once vague and loaded, is at the heart of the *Anfrage/Antwort* conducted by the Green Party to the ruling administration in the following years, which will be examined fully at the end of the chapter.

**The Strange Case of the Chocolatier and Arno Breker, and Image Rehabilitation of Nazi-Era Artists**

While these controversies percolated in the public sphere, Peter Ludwig, a wealthy chocolatier, art enthusiast, and collector starred in his own rendition of the (*Kunst)historikerstreit* with senior museum administrators in Cologne [Fig. 1] Ludwig's story was striking enough to make news in West Germany and the English-speaking world, a testament to the interest amongst American and English-speaking audiences in  visual remnants of the Nazi past.

The story began nearly one decade earlier, in 1976, when Ludwig, an assiduous collector of twentieth-century art, as well as the reigning patriarch of a wealthy family of candy

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forgotten the rat cage? Did Auschwitz in its root causes not originate in a past that would not pass?" *Ibid*.

[16] Andrew Decker, "Nazi Art Returns to Germany," *ARTnews 83*, no. 9 (November 1984), 143-4.

manufacturers, and his wife Irene, donated 350 of their most valuable works to Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz Museum. The Ludwigs' art had been in demand for exhibitions all over West Germany for several years, and city officials in Cologne were thrilled by the prospect of inheriting the art, most of it painting and sculpture. They were so thrilled, in fact, that they decided to begin construction on a major extension to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, which stood in the substantial shadow of the legendary Kölner Dom. The impressive public gallery was to be named Museum Ludwig, and filled with the treasures of its namesake, available for Kölners and tourists alike to peruse and enjoy. The promise of future gifted acquisitions from the Ludwigs further bolstered city administrators' decision to put money into the construction of a substantial new museum in the heart of the city. The new exhibition space ultimately opened in early September of 1986, after several years of construction and controversy.[17] Peter Ludwig's interest in and growing collection of the sculptures of infamous sculptor Arno Breker had become an increasing cause for concern amongst not only for city officials like Hugo Borger, director general of Cologne's museums, but also for the public.

Breker, of course, was one of the more well-known artists of the Third Reich whose works were highly valued by Nazi dignitaries, presumed as counterexamples to *Entartete Kunst.*[18] Unlike some of the painters and graphic artists who worked as *Kriegsmaler* (with the

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[17] Fraser, John. "Should Nazi-era art be publicly exhibited? Dispute revives bitter memories." *The Globe and Mail*, December 9. 1986.

[18] As one of the more prolific and well-known artists producing under the Third Reich, Breker is represented fairly extensively in literature, from uncritical monographs (B. John Zavrel, *Arno Breker: His Life and Art*, New York, 1985) to a strange autobiography (Breker, *Paris, Hitler, et Moi*, Paris, 1970) to more recent critical texts (Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014). Petropoulos, for example, characterizes Breker as an artist who hailed from a "truly modernist milieu" who adapted quickly and expertly to the historical circumstances of his life (262). Breker's life and art are the topic of fascination for many scholars and art collectors for many reasons, not least of which was the prolific nature and popularity among collectors of his output

notable exception of Claus Bergen), Breker's works of art were endorsed forcefully and personally by both Hitler and Nazi Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who had famously fought with Goebbels in the early 1930s over the stylistic future of art in the Third Reich.[19] However, as Jonathan Petropoulos has stated, Breker was "a preeminent example of a modernist figure who modified his art to suit the Nazi leaders," once more (as with much of the artistic output of the *Kriegsmaler*) reinforcing the argument that the RKK was more flexible stylistically than previously assumed. His works of the early 1920s-Weimar era, for example, sought to reconcile classicism and modernism in ways that followed the tradition of Auguste Rodin and French naturalists. According to both Petropoulos and the more breathless chroniclers of Breker's work, his figurative sculptures of this era also evoked Picasso, and later hinted at the influence of expressionist Ernst Barlach and surrealist Alberto Giacometti with their elements of abstraction and rough-hewn features. By the late Weimar years, many in the art world viewed Breker as a formidable up-and-coming sculptor; by April 1933, he had caught the eye of Goebbels, who visited Breker and Felix Nussbaum (a German-Jewish painter) during their tenure on a coveted stipend in Fascist Italy at the Villa Massimo in Rome. Goebbels, with the help of prominent Jewish painter Max Liebermann, eventually persuaded Breker to return to Germany.[20] Though

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both *before* and *after* the Third Reich. In fact, in his early years, he felt connections to the left working class, and even once sculpted a portrait bust of fellow left-wing artist Otto Dix in 1922, who would later go on to be labeled "degenerate."

[19] Contra to Goebbels' well-known initial defense of expressionism as a nationalistic style that the Third Reich should embrace, Rosenberg attacked expressionism and other modernist styles as "degenerate." Rosenberg penned the ideological tome *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, and, as outlined in the introduction, his crusading *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Fighting League for German Culture, or KfDK, founded in 1929) was a group of artists and intellectuals who aimed to oversee questions of culture and art in the Reich. Hitler did not trust Rosenberg's organizational skills, and instead appointed Goebbels to create the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Culture Chambers), the large umbrella organization that supervised all cultural activities of the Reich.

[20] Petropoulos, 262-267.

Liebermann abhorred the Nazis, he was optimistic that "more tolerant and humane" figures like Breker would have a moderating force on their cultural policy.[21] A survivor (or one might argue, less generously, an opportunist), Breker knew that he would have to alter his style in order to profit from the admiration and support of the Nazi elite. His artistic transformation was inspired by Breker's time in Italy, where he witnessed the monumental sculpture and "empire style" of the early 1930s, products of Mussolini's desire to align his fascist state with the Roman Empire. According to Breker's defenders, the sculptor remained supportive of artists like Käthe Kollwitz and the new policy of "degenerate art," a claim that, of course, might be taken with some skepticism.[22]

In 1936 and 1937, with the Olympics and the inaugural Great German Art Exhibition, respectively, Breker finally emerged as an official artist representing the Nazi regime, one whose work both pleased the conservative taste of Rosenberg, and the more stylistically open-minded (at least prior to 1937) Goebbels, and Hitler as well. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Breker emerged as one of the most well publicized artists of Nazi Germany, with his twin sculptures *The Party* and *The Army* (1939) guarding the entrance to Speer's New Reich Chancellery, and two 45-foot sculptures adorning the entrance to the *Große Halle*, Speer's enormous venue constructed for the masses to worship Hitler.[23] By then, Breker was quickly producing sculptures for use by the Nazi state, most of which could unambiguously be read as monumental paeans to National Socialism, "beautification[s] of militarism and racial soundness based on the struggle

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[21] *Ibid*. 267.
[22] See Dominique Egret, *Ein Leben für das Schöne* (New York, 1986). Egret does not, however, provide ample evidence of how Breker showed this support or what substantive effect it had, beyond mildly irritating Hitler. Petropoulos is also skeptical of this claim.
[23] Petropoulos 268-9.

against and even liquidation of all things not beautiful."[24] These sculptures, including *Prometheus* (1935), which stood in front of the Reich Propaganda Ministry Building, were not "just" art that pleased adherents of the regime; rather, and importantly for the transformative case involving Peter Ludwig and the city of Cologne, they aesthetically espoused ideas that were fundamental to the Nazi worldview, a fact that many of Breker's earlier and more supportive biographers brushed off. *Prometheus*, for example, was a visualization of Hitler's racial theory in *Mein Kampf* that Prometheus was Aryan, and that "all the human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan."[25] Breker joined the Party in 1937, and in his postwar denazification trials, pointed to this rather late entry as one indication that he was not a so-called true believer.[26] Indeed, many artists *did* join in order to continue to create, promote, sell, and exhibit their artwork. However, Breker's survival instinct went beyond opportunism and into ingratiation, difficult as it may be to ascertain his "true" motives in producing sculpture that promoted racialized theories about art, culture, biopolitics, and militarism of the Third Reich. In 1945, an officer of the MFA&A named Kurt Reutti discovered a trove of mass-produced ceramic busts idealizing Hitler in Breker's Berlin-Grünewald workshop, indicating the sculptor's dedication to circulating visual propaganda of the Hitler cult.[27]

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[24] Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkisch Utopias and National Socialism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), 233.
[25] Petropoulos, 269.
[26] See Breker denazification Akten Ziegler k. 195 (microfiche), Staatsarchiv-München.
[27] *Ibid*. As Petropoulos and art historian Peter Chametzky both point out, the "mass production" element of these busts reflect a modernist approach by Breker to his own artwork, a la Walter Benjamin, a reminder that contrary to long-held ideas about Nazi-era art, they were not inherently retrogressive and anti-modern, but rather *totally* modernist in their approaches to reproduction and technology. In short, Breker did not abandon his modernist roots as he ascended the ranks of popularity as an artist in Nazi Germany, and therefore, the dichotomy of

Breker profited monetarily as well from his work under the Nazi regime. Though Ludwig and other enraptured art historians like B. John Zavrel pointed to the sculptor's propensity for helping or attempting to protect more vulnerable artists when he could, he often did so only as a demonstration of his own power within the regime. Other successful cultural and artistic operators working within the Nazi regime shared this inclination, including Hildegard Gurlitt, the prolific and well-regarded art dealer (who also happened to be one quarter Jewish). Following 1945, Arno Breker was submitted to a denazification trial, where he was "punished" with a minor fine of 100 DM (approximately $25), and a verdict that labeled him as a *Mitläufer*, or "fellow traveler" or "follower," the second least severe judgment after "exonerated person."[28] Breker was therefore able to rehabilitate his career with relative ease, especially since he often drew on his pre-1933 career as a successful artist when vying for public and private commissions, and he completed projects in Cologne, Düsseldorf, Essen, Siegen, and Munich in the 1950s and 1960s. Konrad Adenauer even publicly offered his support by sitting for a bust from the sculptor in the early 1960s, proclaiming that "[as] Breker remains true to the quintessential in his artistic creations, he knows to be hopeful in the future; for without hope, there is no future for humanity."[29]

Other artists who were employed in their respective professions – painter, sculptor, architect – under Nazi Germany, and profited, at the expense of many other artists who were forced to quit their work or go into exile, found success after the war. Most of these artists were

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"degenerate" as modern, "Nazi sanctioned" as anti-modern is at the very least much more complicated, and at the most, false. See also

[28]Denazification Akten of Arno Breker k. 195 (microfiche), Staatsarchiv-München.

[29] Stefan Koldehoff, *Die Bilder sind unter uns. Das Geschäft mit der NS-Raubkunst* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 2009), 203, citing Norbert Seitz, *Die Kanzler und die Künste. Die Geschichte einer schwierigen Beziehung* (Munich: Siedler, 2005), 23.

minimally punished for the involvement in Nazi activities from 1933 to 1945 – if they were tried at all during the denazification period for their involvement in the crimes of the Nazi Party. For example, many *Kriegsmaler* were not, and their largest "punishment" was the seizure of their paintings by Captain Gordon Gilkey. The harshest sentence most received was, like Breker, the title of *Mitläufer* and a relatively small fine. Painter Franz Radziwill, who painted in the expressionist style in the years previous to the Nazi takeover, and who, like many artists who did not consider himself a "true believer" but needed and wanted to maintain their livelihood as artists, famously took advantage of the malleable stylistic guidelines for artists allowed by the RKK. After a brief period of blacklisting by some academies in Germany (Karl Hofer, the Director of Berlin's Hochschüle für Bildenden Künste referred to Radziwill as "Naziwill" in a 1947 letter), he found a relative degree of success and image rehabilitation in both east and West Germany, eventually exhibiting his work throughout Germany and Italy.[30]

Even Hitler's chief architect and later (and perhaps more damningly) Reich Minister for Armaments and War Production Albert Speer was afforded some degree of image rehabilitation following his release from Spandau Prison in 1966: though he abandoned architecture, his two-volume autobiography, written in prison, was published in 1975 and immediately became a bestseller, part of the so-called *Hitlerwelle* referred to in previous chapters. Of course, as recent scholars like Pamela Potter have noted, Speer's image recuperation in the press was the subject

[30] See van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill*. Radziwill's previous fame (during the Weimar era) as a painter working in the expressionist and Neue Sachlichkeit style inarguably also assisted with his postwar fame and image rehabilitation, especially considering the connection of "modernist art" to "moral art" following the war and the monolithic characterization of figurative, regressive styles with Nazism and ultimately totalitarianism. Radziwill also briefly found success in the 1950s painting in the DDR in a social realist style. In short, Radziwill found many of his successes from the beginning of his career to the end in the early 1980s due to his adaptability and flexibility (and some critics might argue his opportunism).

of immediate concern and backlash, both in Germany and across the Atlantic. Coinciding almost directly with the controversy surrounding Peter Ludwig and his attempt to place Arno Breker's life and works back in the public eye artistically, not just historically (as, for example, the exhibition in Frankfurt in 1974 had done), in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Luxembourgish architect and theorist Léon Krier published a series of articles lambasting modernism as a "product of the military-industrial complex."[31] While denigrating modern architecture, which, like modern art, had been (wrongly, in Krier's view) championed as somehow inherently democratic and anti-fascist in the postwar period, especially by American occupying forces.

> In postwar Germany and subsequently throughout the industrialized world, classical architecture has been called reactionary, nostalgic, even fascist, and has been officially suppressed. This suppression, which is equivalent to programmed oblivion, has become actual oblivion for postwar generations, and is thus no longer a subject of feeling or thought. Today no school of architecture teaches the philosophical principles or the technical principles of classical architecture… Classical architecture constructs a beautiful, genuine common world. Modernist architecture can create only an ugly, unreal and abstract world. The discussion in Germany and elsewhere about authoritarian architecture and what a democratic architecture can be is only a diversion from the real problems of human work, which builds and must always rebuild and maintain the town and its architecture. Those engaged in these discussions seem to accept, without exception and almost as a matter of fate, the cultural vacuum of their own profession as an inevitable fact of nature and history. This is why architects remain powerless in the

[31] Potter, 150-151.

> face of protests by all sections of the population against Modernist architecture. Architecture is not political; it is only an instrument of policy.[32]

Furthermore, Krier also called on the public to reevaluate their view of Speer as a Nazi collaborator and separate his classically-inspired work from his role in the Third Reich. Krier went on to denigrate the Marshall Plan for what he saw as the destruction of "German culture," lamenting that in the postwar period, architects accepted in the West "claim…against all odds that modernist architecture is better than it looks, and, on the other, that Nazi architecture is profoundly bad, however good it may look."[33]

Krier's most basic argument, about separating the political ideology, the artist, and the art, held resonance for Peter Ludwig, even if it is not clear whether the Cologne-based chocolatier and philanthropist had read Krier's 1985 book on Speer or any of his previously published articles in from the late 1970s. What is clear, however, is that ideas concerning the morality of a very public rehabilitation of an artist who was not only active, but well respected by highly ranked Nazi Party officials, was percolating in the academic, and then public sphere, in the 1980s. Academics and activists of the 68er movement more than a decade prior had dared to bring Nazi-era artwork forward into a charged and polemic exhibition space with the (controversial) goal of connecting the visual culture of the Third Reich with its atrocities and violent end. Now, some academics and public figures were attempting to do the opposite with some of that same art: divorce it from its incendiary political context, and attempt to exhibit and

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[32] Léon Krier, "The Suppression of Classical Architecture in Postwar Germany," extracted from "Krier on Speer," *Architectural Review*, Vol. 173, 1983, 38.
[33] Krier in Potter, 151. These words were printed in Krier's *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942*, published originally in 1985 (trans. Wilfried Wang, Brussels: Archives d'architecture modern, 1985, 217), and whose reprint in 2013 continued to stir controversy.

appreciate publicly the aesthetic and artistic qualities of said artwork. In some ways, it is an echo of Gilkey's and Whitehurst's attempts several decades after the end of the Second World War to dissociate the art of the *Kriegsmaler* from *its* specific political and social context. Despite his official task to collect "dangerous" artwork postwar, and his concurrent official reports deriding some of the German *Kriegsmaler* as "monuments of German baseness,"[34] Gilkey ultimately felt a sort of kinship with the German combat artists and their renderings of war. Even more explicitly, in his unpublished manuscript from 1980, Gilkey had written that:

> There is an inherent separate life in each art object, fully apart from the creator of the art, or the circumstances responsible for the object of art. Thus, the war art of that period of time, in both the U.S…and in Germany, is completely on its own, will sink or survive on the individual artistic merits of each work…and not because of the politics or contemporary occupation (such as soldier-artist) of the creators.[35]

Like Peter Ludwig and those who attempted, with partial success, to restore the careers of fine artists known to have worked prolifically under the Third Reich, Gilkey had ultimately decided that art should not be condemned explicitly because of the identity of the artist or the time in which it was created. Rather, as Barthes argued in 1967 that the identity of the author of a piece of literature should not be used to distill meaning from the work,[36] both men argued that art should be judged purely on its own aesthetic merits. It is also notable that both Gilkey and Ludwig were art historians or collectors and artists; from the beginning of the Second World War, Gilkey had been interested almost exclusively in preserving artwork from destruction.

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[34] Gilkey, "German War Art," 1947, 24.
[35]Gilkey manuscript, 34.
[36] Roland Barthes, "The Death of an Author" ("La morte de l'auteur"), New York: Macat Library, 1967).

Ludwig, by the 1970s, had accumulated one of the largest private art collections in the world and fancied himself enough of a connoisseur that he was able to see past the troubling political context of an artwork to its "pure" quality as a something of aesthetic value. Ironically, some contemporaneous gallery owners and art collectors did not share Ludwig's high opinion of his discerning eye, with one anonymous owner in Cologne snidely referring to Ludwig as a "vacuum cleaner of a collector…[who has] gone through periods when he simply bought everything he could lay his hands on."[37]

Of course, an important question remains, and may never conclusively answered: Is there or should there be a moral equivalency between the intentions and work of "court artists" or those known by name and knowingly favored by those in the inner circle of the Third Reich, on the one hand, and those like Herbert Agricola, Olaf Jordan, and Heinrich Amersdorffer, who claimed explicitly that they worked as painters only to avoid the violence of the battlefield, and joined the Nazi Party only to continue working in their trained profession? The answer to this question partially lies in the degree to which each artist produced art deliberately and specifically meant to propagate some of the central tenets of National Socialism to the larger public. The question might also be asked, what was the intention of the artists with their creation? According to both Ludwig and Gilkey (decades after his art collecting project in postwar Europe), the intention and political context of art was irrelevant. Instead, art is and must be divorced from political questions, including intention and political context, and understood as somehow "neutral." This understanding of art as somehow existing outside of time and space was completely antithetical to the polemicism of the 68ers and their exhibition of artwork of the Nazi

[37] Fraser, "Should Nazi-era art be publicly exhibited? Dispute revives bitter memories," *Globe and Mail*, December 9, 1986, 1.

period, to the point that its aesthetic qualities were all flattened into an inherently dangerous "Nazi style," and the U.S. Army's and Gilkey's official stance that *all* art produced under the Third Reich was somehow capable of reverting Germans to Nazism.

As shown in the previous chapters, the U.S. Army and government and Gilkey eventually exposed their private hypocrisies, or at the least, ambiguities, on the topic. They revealed these with their fascination with and attraction to the art of the *Kriegsmaler*, and the return of some of this artwork that had originally been amassed by Gilkey also caused increased public interest in the question of Nazi-era artwork in museums in West Germany in the 1980s. The repatriation of several thousand more paintings and drawings in the 1980s, including those paintings whose return had become a pet project of Rep. Whitehurst, was brought up several times in coverage of the debate over Ludwig's desire to give the work of Breker a place in his museum in Cologne. One reporter noted that some of these works, both those by combat artists and the more stereotypical "heroic canvases in the Greco-Germanic style," had found their way back onto the West German art market, finding buyers amongst the "nostalgic or curious."[38] Echoing the concerns of the organizers of *Documents of Oppression* in 1974, this alarmed several city officials, intellectuals, and artists in West Germany.

Though he never framed them as any sort of genius artist, Ludwig did characterize the sculptures of Breker, who was by this time 86 years old and living in Düsseldorf, as "better than good," and argued publicly that the time had come, decades after the Third Reich, for Germans to evaluate the sculptor's work "on its own terms," a statement strikingly similar to the one that Gilkey made in his manuscript around the same time about the "inherent separate life in each art

[38] *Ibid*.

object."[39] Ludwig went on to chastise those, including city officials, the press, and several artists and public intellectuals, who were leery of his desire to publicly showcase Breker's work, in a statement that once again echoed Gilkey's sentiments as a private citizen, as well as the statements of *Kriegsmaler* like Olaf Jordan and Herbert Agricola upon discovering that their works had been confiscated or deemed capable of "reigniting the spirit of Nazism" in postwar Germans:

> We are talking about one man who has done some interesting work. He wasn't a beast or a devil. He was like most Germans of that era – he did what he had to survive. The most you could charge him with is opportunism. He didn't send anyone to his death or to the camps. In this regard, he was an artist like Richard Strauss who also had to make some sort of accommodation to survive. Breker was no worse and no better.[40]

Yet Ludwig's understanding of the sculptor's work, willfully or otherwise, mischaracterized Breker's prolific and popular output under the Third Reich as merely "survival." Though Breker did not personally send anyone to the death camps, his contributions to the racialized art world of Nazi Germany often went beyond survival or opportunism; Breker could be, in fact, a "self-promoting and greedy figure who wielded…power in the Third Reich."[41] As Petropoulos and others critical of Breker's "mere survival defense" have argued, Breker was not only opportunistic, but also frequently went out of his way to make his name and sculptures known to those who wielded power in Nazi Germany. For example, in 1937, an art journalist writing for the *Berliner Tageblatt* failed to include Breker's name in a longform article featuring "promising

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[39] Fraser, 1-2.
[40] Fraser, 3.
[41] Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler*, 274.

young sculptors" of the four-year-old Third Reich. Breker promptly filed a complaint, and following a short investigation, the offending art journalist was banned from any future writing jobs under the Third Reich.[42] Furthermore, in 1938 alone, Breker was estimated to have earned more than 150,000 RM (a number approaching nearly $900,000 today) from private and official commissions stemming mainly from the high-level praise he routinely enjoyed.[43]

Even beyond that, Breker made no effort in the decades following his denazification trial to confront, let alone master and apologize for, his past like Speer had eventually attempted from prison. Instead, and perhaps due to this refusal to look backwards, the sculptor became somewhat of a leader in far-right intellectual and artistic groups in West Germany, often mingling with those whose understanding of the Third Reich fell on the fringes of the mainstream, including infamous Nazi-era art critic Robert Scholz and publisher Gerhard Frey, whose far-right newspaper *National-Zeitung* had infamously used the term *Schreibtischtäter* ("desk perpetrator") to refer to supporters of Israel.[44] Even more troubling were Breker's assertions in a June 1980 interview with *Die Zeit* that French Jews had never truly been dispossessed of their property, and that his friendship with the more contrite Speer had ended: "I haven't had any contact with him for years…I don't like his view of the past…I have nothing to regret, nothing to repent for, nothing to add."[45] While Breker's views and those of some of his intellectual consorts fell outside of the mainstream, they did represent a strain of denial that had infected the conventional German right (that is, the CDU/CSU) under Adenauer, and had returned with a vengeance under Kohl, and been reignited openly in the public and intellectual sphere with Ernst Nolte in 1986. In

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[42] Fraser, 3.
[43] See Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (New York: Phoenix, 1971), 537-8.
[44] Petropoulos, 275.
[45] *Ibid*.

this interview, the past was a dangerous or pointless place to return, and the present and future of West Germany were healthier without incessant and self-flagellating examinations of recent history, whether those be on a personal or collective level.

In late 1986, several curators and professionals (including Dr. Georg Bussmann, the organizer of the 1974 Frankfurt show) released a joint statement condemning Ludwig and interviews he had given to news outlets ranging from the regional *Kölner Express* to *Der Spiegel*, specifically denouncing his equation of the "narrow-minded" censoring of Breker in museums to "erasing twelve years of German history."[46] Once again treading the lines drawn during the concurrent *Historikerstreit* that had begun just a few months earlier, the conservative Ludwig implicitly argued for a normalization of the twelve years of the Third Reich in public memory. Underlying his quotation is a sense of exasperation that the German intellectual community was unable to somehow move on from the taint of 1933 to 1945. The group that signed the statement criticized his remarks as "irresponsible," arguing that the normalization of the period of Nazi rule and the atrocities that it carried engendered by placing Breker back in the context of an art museum encouraged a minimization, and perhaps ultimately dangerous erasure (the same language Ludwig had used in his defense of exhibiting Breker) of the crimes of Germany's past, amongst the public. The undersigned also invoked the terror and crimes committed against great artists during the Third Reich, many of whom were forbidden from carrying out their work or murdered in exile. Finally, and for those reasons, they concluded Nazi-era "art of artistic quality is unknown to us…[a]rt also has to do with ethics," though they do not define what constitutes

[46] "Breker wird zur Seite gedrückt: Interview mit dem Kunstsammler Peter Ludwig," *Der Spiegel* 36, 9 September 1986: "Ich halte es für Blickverengung, zwölf Jahre aus der deutschen Geschichte ausradieren zu wollen."

this art beyond anything created and publicly exhibited during the years from 1933 to 1945.[47] After several years of public struggle with Cologne city officials, and increasingly critical coverage by the German and international press, in late 1986, Peter Ludwig decided to withdraw his offer of his collection of Breker sculptures to the expanded museum next to the Dom in Cologne, which would later come to bear Ludwig's name. With his withdrawal, however, he offered the pointed suggestion that he might wait for "less hysterical times…and more objective evaluations," a proposal that never came to pass before Ludwig's death nine years later.

In the end, though he conceded, Peter Ludwig seemed surprised by the vehement pushback he received from not just the city administration of Cologne, but members of the press, public, and some of his fellow art connoisseurs as well. For Ludwig, who was born in 1924, lived through the Third Reich, and perhaps come of emotional and intellectual maturity during the Adenauer years, memories of the Nazi era seemed to be a best-forgotten blip in his country's history. As both a capitalist and avid art collector, Ludwig also seemed proud of his ability to separate the art of Breker from his politics and involvement with (and some would argue, willful propagation of) Nazism. In his view, Breker's role during the Third Reich was, though unfortunate, a means of professional survival, and his success an example of both his talent and cunning. Ludwig never identified explicitly as political when discussing his understanding of the Nazi sculptor. Yet his views, as channeled through the case of Arno Breker's postwar image rehabilitation, echoed the political lines drawn during the *Historikerstreit*, which had broached the public sphere of debate around the same time. Suddenly, like the return of another portion of

[47] "Aufruf (Düsseldorf)," reprinted in *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1988), 19. "Nazi-Kunst von künstlerische Qualität ist uns nicht bekannt…[k]unst hat auch mit Ethik zu tun."

the German War Art Collection, the question was not merely about art, but about the entirety of Germany's twentieth century past.

**"*Nazi-Kunst ins Museum*?"** [Fig. 2]

The Ludwig affair, coupled with public news of the nearly contemporaneous repatriation of several thousand paintings from the Gilkey's collection of confiscated art, did not go quietly into the night in West Germany. Rather, such controversies served as ammunition for both conservative and progressive politicians, intellectuals, and artists, many of whom had come of age in the 68er movement, to expand their discussion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The question of exhibiting Arno Breker in an *art* museum (not just a historical museum as an instructive piece of historical visual culture), or exhibiting his works in a museum without polemical or moralizing text, as had been done more than a decade earlier in Frankfurt, was open for public debate. While the Frankfurt exhibition had been controversial simply for its use of Nazi-era art in a visible space open to the public, Ludwig's exhibition suggestions pushed the question one step further: was (and is) it possible to display art either from the Third Reich or from artists who actively participated in the Third Reich as *just* art? That is, could, or should, this art be understood and appreciated for just its aesthetic qualities? Should an artist who knowingly produced art for a racist and ultimately genocidal regime be able to work and exhibit again (with a warm public welcome, as Ludwig had expected), without the baggage of his or her past? Finally, how can scholars, art collectors, curators, city and state officials, and the broader public ethically evaluate the "guilt" or the involvement of an artist in the time following the Second World War? To what degree is survival collaboration? And how much does the output of the artist in question before and after 1933 and 1945 matter in terms of the ethics of displaying their art in an art museum, a question that holds the potential for new and provocative ideas about the

question of "Nazi aesthetics." These questions remain frustrating because those on both sides of the arguments during the Ludwig/Breker affair painted with broad strokes: those opposing the placement of Breker's art in a museum framed *all* art produced with the support of the RKK as inherently unethical and tainted by the stain of Nazism, while Ludwig himself desired to separate entirely the art from the deeds of and context of the artist. Though modern scholars like James van Dyke, in the case of painter Franz Radziwill, have begun to methodically break this question down, there is, of course, no conclusive or satisfying answer,[48] as American occupying forces and denazification courts found in the postwar period.

Two years after Ludwig agreed to put his plans for his Breker collection on hold, several public intellectuals and artists published a series of essays regarding the subject of Nazi-era art. *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum* was solicited and edited by Klaus Staeck, a lawyer, graphic artist, and self-identified "Politkünstler" ("political artist") who spent the 1960s and 70s creating creative political posters and prints. One of his most famous motifs featured the words: "Die Reichen müssen noch reicher werden – deshalb CDU!" or "The rich must get richer, so vote CDU!" The germ-seed for Staeck's small but substantial volume was a 1986 long-form article that Staeck penned for *Die Zeit* following a series of interviews about the prospective Breker gallery that Ludwig had given to *Der Spiegel,* and some local and international press. In his four-page treatise, guided by an intense contempt for Ludwig (he referred to him sarcastically as the "Pralinenmeister") and his ideas about Breker's art, Staeck passionately countered the art

[48] Van Dyke, James, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History 1919-1945,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). Van Dyke examines Radziwill and his work beyond the temporal framework of "Nazi Germany," as well as his stylistic shifts during the period. He also traces the series of compromises and negotiations, moral and otherwise, the Radziwill constantly had to make as he attempted to survive and make a living as a painter during the period of National Socialism.

collector's reasoning for inviting the works of Breker back into the museum world. According to Staeck, revealing his 68er upbringing, Ludwig's "honorary doctorate [in art history]" did not make him any sort of expert regarding the complicated question of Nazi art in West Germany's museums. Furthermore, Staeck angrily argued, Ludwig's sense of entitlement in demanding that a public space display the art of Breker was inherently anti-democratic[49], especially as Ludwig had hitherto shown no traces of intellectual rigor in defending his desires beyond his personal opinion of Breker as a talented artist.

Staeck challenged Ludwig's claims that blacklisting artists from the Nazi era and banning certain types of exhibitions was anti-liberal. Though "Liberalität" may indeed be threatened in contemporary West German society, Staeck countered, to use the absence of Nazi art in museums as proof, as Ludwig had done, was absurd:[50] "Placing Breker alongside Max Beckmann without commentary [in an art museum], after all, means nothing more than the final rehabilitation [of Breker]."[51] Finally, deviating somewhat from the arguments of the organizers of the 1974 show in Frankfurt, Staeck disputed the notion that Nazi-era art was a dangerous "taboo": "The works of Nazi artists can be viewed with good reason and based on the individual decision [of museum curators] from their place in the depots [storage]."[52] Staeck's stirring diatribe against Ludwig's wrongheaded sense of accusations of anti-liberalism revealed a deeply-

[49] Staeck's understanding of "democratic" in the context of his article is unclear; however, based on his intellectually elite tone toward Ludwig, it is probably that he understands a democracy as one led not by the masses, but rather by an educated group of representatives.
[50] Klaus Staeck, "Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?" *Die Zeit* No 40, 26 September 1986, 1-2.
[51] "Denn Breker im Museum kommentarlos neben Max Beckmann bedeutet nun einmal nichts anderes als die endgültige rehabilitation," Staeck in *Die Zeit,* 2.
[52] "Die Arbeiten der Nazi-Kunst werden mit gutem Grund kraft individueller Entscheidung der jeweiligen Museumsleute in den Depots gelassen," Staeck in *Die Zeit,* 3.

held anxiety that West Germany was in danger of moving on from its past in a way that would endanger its present and future.

Staeck's editorial also revealed that the Ludwig affair and the broader question of Nazi-era art in West German museums was already a part of heated public discourse; in the same issue, following Staeck's article, *Die Zeit* published responses to his words. Austrian sculptor and painter Alfred Hrdlička complimented Staeck's "apodictic chutzpah" ("apodiktisher Chuzpe"), but cautioned Staeck against acting as an artistic gatekeeper, concluding with the passive aggressive sign-off "[I can offer] no solution [to these problems], but as you've taken it upon yourself to be a 'Politkünstler' in today's society, that's your issue."[53] Hrdlička's arch response also reveals that the opinion regarding Nazi art in museums among 68ers was not monolithic – Hrdlička was an ardent Marxist before and after the war, and marched in leftist and anti-fascist demonstrations during the 1960s and 1970s,[54] but was wary of anything that might approach censorship in the field of art exhibiting, even if the public might be appalled by the ideology that encouraged or produced it. This fundamental disagreement about the role of art in a society would be expanded in Staeck's 1986 *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?*

By the time Staeck transformed this article into a full-fledged volume two years later, his tone, though still passionate, had cooled. Rather than personally attack and mock Ludwig's perceived dilettantism, Staeck compiled what functioned as a book-form of a *Dokumentationszentrum*, organized as a series of "Pro and Con Positions," including Hrdlička's response to his initial article in *Die Zeit*. Staeck's purpose was to collect a series of discussions between historians, art historians, and curators, many of them also once vocal participants in the

[53] Alfred Hrdlička in *Die Zeit,* 3.
[54]Christopher Masters, "Alfred Hrdlička Obituary," *The Guardian,* 9 December 2010.

68er movement, on the theme of the ethics of placing Nazi-era art in art museums, which had been "controversial for a long period of time [especially] recently."[55] The volume was not just a reaction to the Ludwig/Breker situation, but also a predecessor to the debates regarding the topic between the young Green Party, spearheaded by Vollmer and the conservative Kohl *Bundesregierung*. In fact, whether by design or serendipity, the volume echoed the format of Vollmer's and the Kohl administration's *Anfrage/Antwort* that were occurring nearly simultaneously in Bonn. Contributors ranged from the famed social historian Hans Mommsen,[56] who was simultaneously engaged in the *Historikerstreit* and arguing against the normalizing and relativist positions of conservative Nolte, to art critic and historian of modern art Walter Grasskamp and Stephan von Wiese, curator of modern art at the Museum am Ehrenhof (today the Kunstpalast) in Düsseldorf.[57] While some of these contributors directly addressed the question of Nazi art and the Ludwig scandal, others, like Mommsen, wrote more broadly, providing a contextualizing essay on the effect the 68er movement had on the collective memory of the Third Reich. Aligning himself squarely opposite of Ernst Nolte in the *Historikerstreit*,

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[55] Klaus Staeck, ed. *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?,* ii.

[56] Though he participated intellectually with some of the 68er movement, he was what intellectual historians have referred to, along with Nolte, Hillgruber, and Walser, as a "45er" – that is, the party of the "first political generation" of the Federal Republic postwar, who came of age during or was born into the Third Reich, but who "was a bearer of the original federal republic consciousness and westernization which occurred well before 1968. In the 1960s, then, these intellectuals helped to define a culture that was open for redefinition, but nonetheless not part of the radical generation of the 1968ers. (See Moses, 68-69)

[57] Grasskamp would go on to denounce the normalization of Nazi-era artwork of both Breker and Albert Speer shortly after contributing to Staeck's volume, see "The De-Nazification of Nazi Art: Arno Breker and Albert Speer Today," in Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will (eds.), *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester: London, 1990).

Mommsen ends with a call for Germans to continue excavating and engaging critically their past, and to understand that this lengthy process may indeed never have an endpoint.[58]

Most of the contributors picked by Staeck for *Nazi Kunst* had either come of intellectual age during the 1960s, or were already intellectual leaders for the progressive student movement of the 1960s in West Germany. Though the volume includes proponents and opponents of the exhibition of Nazi-era art in museum context, most approach the problem with a leftist background or belief system; though Ludwig's own words are included in the volume, it is through a reprint of his interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1986, in which he infamously claimed that opponents of his desire to place Breker in the museum in Cologne wanted to "erase" twelve years of German history and bemoaned the illiberalism of creating "Nazi artist quarantine lists." As noted previously, though Ludwig never explicitly aligned himself with a political party, his views of Germany's past fell clearly in line with those espoused by the conservative administration as well as conservative academics and public scholars like Nolte partaking in the *Historikerstreit:* Ludwig notes emphatically that around the world, there has been a shift toward "Konservativen," and goes on to lament that artists like Breker should not continue to be punished for their crimes 40 years after the fact (especially if they may have changed their views), and their contributions to history, whether positive or negative, should not be expunged from the visual historical record.[59]

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[58]Hans Mommsen, "Das Dritte Reich in der Erinnerung der Deutschen," in Staeck, *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?*, 59.

[59] Ludwig in *Der Spiegel*, reprinted in Staeck, *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum*, 15. "Bestimmt gibt es auf der ganzen Welt einen Zug zum Koservativen…Ich halte nicht gern nach 40 Jahren einem Menschen Dinge vor, die er das Recht hat inzwischen auch anders zu sehen. Ganz abgesehen davon, dass er sich ja, soviel ich Weiss, nicht in irgendeiner kriminellen Weise schuldig gemacht hat."

The irony about Ludwig's statements to *Der Spiegel* and other press outlets, of course, and one that the authors of Staeck's volume expose, is that Breker was *not* simply a survivor who disagreed with the policies of the Third Reich but kept his head down in order to stay alive and make his living. Breker not only profited from the failure of other artists around him, but actively sought out the approval of Nazi Party leadership, and rarely used his power and sway amongst the leadership to protect other more vulnerable artists. Perhaps even more importantly, the sculptor never repented for (or even sought to explicate) his involvement with Nazi leadership or the propagation of Party policy and ideology in the postwar, though he was given several opportunities to do so; on the contrary, in the several decades after the war, including the 1980s, he aligned himself with far-right thinkers, and espoused inflammatory statements that questioned the veracity of stories of the horrors of the Holocaust and atrocities committed under the Third Reich. Though Ludwig may have raised some thought-provoking questions concerning the "guilt" of those who collaborated under the Nazi regime in order to retain their profession or livelihood, the subject he chose to frame these questions around was far from ideal. Gilkey's war artists, many of whose biographies and subject matter was morally ambiguous, had been far more fitting subjects for such discussions, as Gilkey's own struggles with the legacy of these artists in the decades following the war attested.

Important also to Ludwig's vehement defense of Breker and the need to celebrate his artwork despite what he may or may not have believed or done forty years prior, is his use of vague language when describing the Nazi period and Breker's involvement in it. This is another aspect of his case that his critics, particularly Staeck and others contributing to his volume, exposed. It is also, one might argue, another line of reasoning about that past that echoes the stance taken by conservative thinkers during the *Historikerstreit*. As intellectual historians like

A. Dirk Moses have pointed out, the notion of "stigma" was used often beginning in the early 1980s, whether explicitly or implicitly, by West German conservatives to describe the Germans' harmful relationship to their past. Ludwig asked that West Germany, and therefore Germans, not be stigmatized by what had happened over forty years ago. Similarly, in the early 1980s, then-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (a member of the SPD, but more pragmatic regarding the politics of collective memory than his celebrated predecessor, Willy Brandt) rejected a "stigmatized" German identity in international politics, telling Israelis that he refused to allow his foreign policy to be "held hostage to Auschwitz."[60] This was three years before his successor Kohl took this idea several steps further, with his proclamation about the "grace of a late birth" and attempt to shelter future generations by announcing that, "they refuse to acknowledge a collective guilt for the deeds of their fathers,"[61] a direct challenge to the motives of the 68ers, many of whom by then were involved in Green Party politics. A few years later Nolte presented these ideas fully formed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, disputing what he understood as the instrumentalization of the Holocaust to victimize Germans, and honing in on the stigma implicit in the belief that the Holocaust was unique and, therefore, the German people and its history were somehow abnormal.[62]

Keeping with his own attempt to destigmatize the Third Reich, in the interviews republished in Staeck's volume, Ludwig also speaks of the Third Reich in terms such as "those twelve years of our history,"[63] always avoiding the specific historical acts or atrocities that occurred during the Third Reich. In addition to normalizing the Third Reich as just another

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[60] Moses, 26.
[61] Quoted in Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1996), 578.
[62] Moses, 26-7.
[63] *Ibid*.

unfortunate time in one nation's history, Ludwig's vague language also distanced both him and his contemporaries from the crimes and violence committed during that period. "We should not punish Breker for crimes committed decades ago, especially when we are not certain he still holds these beliefs, just as we should not punish ourselves and future generations by censoring his art in museums," Ludwig believed. This cemented his place as a conservative foil to the deep-seated beliefs of the left-wing academics and curators collected in Staeck's volume. These intellectuals, though not without shades of gray, fell in line with famed philosopher Jürgen Habermas's beliefs that Germany's national memory must be understood in terms of a "dialectic of normalization," that stigmatization of the past was the only way to ultimately normalize, and that ultimately, Germans should "embrace the Holocaust as an element of a broken national identity, branded as a persistent disturbance and warning."[64]

**"Nazi Art in Museums?" Moves to the Bundestag**

While the Ludwig controversy provoked discussion amongst intellectuals, the press, and the public, and news of the imminent return of thousands of paintings and drawings from German War Art Collection made the rounds, West German politicians were paying attention. The Green Party of the Federal Republic celebrated its official entry into the Bundestag during the 1983 elections with 5.6 percent of the popular vote (one year after Kohl took power as Chancellor). This number reached an impressive 8.3 percent during the next federal elections in 1987. The questions about the nation's past were implicitly on the ballot with the Green Party's first appearance on the ballot; the influence of the student movement and the radical left-wing within the nascent party was already palpable by the early 1980s, as many of the participants of

[64] Habermas, "Der Zeigefinger: Die Deutschen und ihr Denkmal, *Die Zeit* 31 March 1999, quoted in Moses, 27.

the 68er movement went were naturally drawn to the political world once they came of age and the movement had solidified itself in West German social and cultural life.[65]

Yet the Green Party consensus on the Nazi past was not as monolithic as their approach to foreign policy, which included calls for a non-aligned Germany and a staunch opposition to nuclear power. In fact, more radical members of the Green Party tended to draw different lessons from the country's Nazi past than other left-wing thinkers and politicians. Because the Green Party initially formed as a ragtag, umbrella organization for leftists disappointed with the SPD, some environmentalists and anti-nuclear activists focused not on the Holocaust, but rather on the general tradition of militarism in the German past.[66] Even more noteworthy was the tendency for some of these activists to relativize the Holocaust in a manner that approached that of their conservative and CDU opposition. Some of these Green Party members endorsed discussing the Holocaust in relativist terms, although with different motives. Conservative politicians like Kohl (and even the SPD Schmidt), and academics believed that there must be a *Schlußstrich*, or "end point," regarding the discussion and "working through" of Germany's past in relation to the Holocaust in order to protect and foster positive feelings of national identity and normalization.

A number of Green Party members, inspired by pacifist ideas, also sought to relativize the Holocaust and the Third Reich by placing them in a larger international context that included other horrors of the twentieth century from the firebombing of German cities by the Allies and the atomic bombings of Japan by American forces. Some Green Party activists even implied that the bombing of Hiroshima was more significant than Auschwitz, with ecofeminist and Green Party co-founder Petra Kelly describing the two atrocities as comparable crimes against

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[65] See Kundani, 5-6, 172-3.
[66] Kundani, 173.

humanity during a tribunal on nuclear weapons held by the Greens leading up to the 1983 elections.[67] Echoing Horkheimer's warning that, "He who is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about fascism," many Green Party members and activists insisted there was an essential continuity between Nazism, capitalism, and the postwar industrial society. Some radical pacifists within the movement even saw the student movement of the 1960s, which had yielded factions that eventually turned militant and violent, as products of the Nazi and fascist tradition they critiqued.

This critique of the radicalism of the 68er movement was by design. Joschka Fischer, a leader in the new Green Party and once a radical student activist, renounced the violence wrought by extremist groups during the 1970s and the so-called "German Autumn" upon joining the Greens, condemning in 1980 the militant left's "radical ethos of refusal" and proclaiming that changing the system from within, rather than destroying it, was the only way forward.[68] To emphasize the motley nature of the Green Party in the 1980s, Fischer was just one of several intellectual leaders within the Party whose stance and values were often hotly contested. Fischer, for example, pragmatically encouraged seeking out a "red-green" coalition with the SPD, endorsing a manifesto laid out by his (in)famous fellow 68er activist Daniel Cohn-Bendit stipulating that the Greens should put up a series of demands to the Social Democrats in exchange for tolerating the administration. The more radical members of the Greens, including self-proclaimed "eco-socialist" Jutta Ditfurth, balked at the suggestion of cooperation with the system, arguing that "realists" like Fischer had hijacked the Party to its detriment. Fischer, of course, condemned the "fundamentalists" for their desire to posture politically rather than enact

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[67] *Ibid.*
[68] Kundani, 174, also see Matthias Geis, *Der Unvollendete: Das Leben Des Joschka Fischer* (Berlin: A. Frest Verlag, 2002), 52.

genuine change.[69] The splintering of ideology and approach within the Greens was not mere semantics; rather, it revealed that even within the newly institutionalized progressive movement in the Federal Republic, the approach to Germany's history and future was not monolithic. Further, it is perhaps telling that for the most part in the 1980s, the Green Party left open explicit questions regarding *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* due to its intellectual splintering: while radical environmentalists and pacifists were eager to relativize the crimes of the Nazi past in order to pursue their agenda, a desire that might accidentally align them with conservative intellectuals and the CDU, others disagreed with the normalization of the German past for whatever reason. Interestingly, Klaus Staeck "never once considered becoming a member of the Greens."[70]

All of that is to say that in spite of its 68er roots, the Green Party initially showed a relative lack of interest in presenting a clear platform regarding the culture of public memory of the Third Reich. Thus, when Dr. Antje Vollmer began to call for confrontations with the Nazi-era past in a way that was both radical and public, it made news. During the 1970s, Vollmer's politics swerved further left, especially into pacifism and anti-interventionism, and she joined the so-called "League Against Imperialism" ("*Liga gegen den Imperialismus*"), a Maoist organization working within the KDP (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, or German Community Party), though she never joined the party. In the early 1980s, she was one of several former 1968ers to rally around the new progressive "umbrella" Green Party. She quickly secured a meeting with East German General Secretary Erich Honecker to discuss disarmament in East Germany and elicited a "personal peace treaty" from Honecker regarding the release of GDR political prisoners. Unfortunately, these promising early relations between the Green Party and

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[69] Kundani, 175.
[70] "Keine Minute habe ich damit befasst, ein Mitglied der Grünen zu werden," in "Gespräch mit Klaus Staeck," *Café Deutschland – Städel Museum*. 1 April 2016.

the GDR deteriorated quickly, when GDR leadership suddenly banned the Greens from entering East Germany, and East German demonstrators were quickly prisoned during protests, leading to series of protests in response from the Green Party delegation.[71] In spite of this failure, just one year later, in 1984, Vollmer became the official spokesperson for the just-formed Green Party. [72]

By the mid-1980s, Vollmer was an influential and respected member of the Green Party, and well known to public. She already had a public reputation for not shying away from issues regarding her country's crimes during the Third Reich: in the early 1980s, as a Green Party member, she publicly pushed for reparations for "forgotten" victims of Nazi violence, including forced laborers, conscientious objectors, and homosexuals, as well as victims of the euthanasia and forced sterilization programs. At the same time, she advocated resuming a public and political dialogue of de-escalation with the vestigial members of the third-generation of the RAF, which had long been classified a left-wing terrorist group, and some of whom had gone into hiding as they continued to plan and attempt to execute robberies and bombings. Vollmer continued to support this open dialogue until the group finally surrendered itself more than a decade later.[73] Importantly, though she initially sparred with Joschka Fischer and his group of "realists" within the Green Party, as the 1980s progressed, Vollmer eventually began to consider herself a centrist within her Party, instead of a "fundamentalist" like Jutta Ditfurth or Petra Kelly.

Vollmer's desire for continued productive confrontations between the German people and their past, in spite of the Party splintering on the topic and lack of clear platform regarding *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, was therefore significant and ripe for press coverage. Furthermore,

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[71] Kolinsky, *The Greens in West Germany*, 144-5.
[72] Kolinsky, *The Greens in West Germany*, 144-5.
[73] "Antje Vollmer Nachlass: Vorwort," N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.

as her early advocacy for reparations for seemingly "forgotten" victims of the Holocaust the Nazi crimes reveals, Vollmer was guided by a strong drive to excavate previously buried injustices. Vollmer and several progressives who supported her within the Green Party did not fit neatly on either side of the brewing *Historikerstreit*. Vollmer certainly stood in opposition to the conservative desire to move on from the incessant shame of the Nazi past, as can be seen in her public debate with the Kohl Bundesregierung over Nazi art in museums. Yet her interest, for example, in bringing public awareness to those who suffered and died under the Third Reich other than Jewish victims, as well as her stark pacifism and opposition to interventionist politics demonstrates an openness to widening the discussion of the Holocaust and Nazi era to include a global context and historicism that some scholars on the left may have been unwilling to concede at the peak of the *Historikerstreit*. However, while proponents of Nolte's arguments agreed with him that it was not possible for West Germany to progress forward without normalizing its past and letting go, finally, of the "shame" associated with the incessant process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Vollmer and her followers within the Green Party, like Klaus Staeck and many of the intellectuals who contributed to his volume on the Ludwig affair, believed that the concept of "moving on" from the Nazi past was not only impossible, but dangerous. Vollmer's interest in the constant mining of the past in order to reveal voices, stories, and crimes lost to the passage of time, and as well as her belief in the importance of consistent confrontations with and examinations of the past, however painful or, as right-wingers believed, stagnating, they might be, was clear in her approach to that controversial question: "Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?"

**Vollmer and the Greens Take on The Kohl *Bundesregierung***

By 1986, the Green Party had already achieved name recognition domestically and intentionally and success in the federal elections, and was poised to win more than eight percent in the 1987 elections under the leadership of Otto Schily. Though some leaders within the partied attempted to brand the Greens as a "party of the center," (reinterpreted by the chairman of the SPD to mean "radically liberal yet largely bourgeois"),[74] by 1986, a majority of West Germans regarded them as a party of the left or far left. Though the party continued to gain popular support, a fair share of the population remained uncertain about the precise political orientation of the Greens, aside from their stance on environmentalism and denuclearization, likely due to both the myriad activists that populated the party ranks, and the subsequent reticence of the party to speak in a unified manner about issues that invaded the public consciousness, such as the relationship to the past. Vollmer's push for a *Kulturdebatte* that took place both on the floor of the Bundestag and within the *Anfrage/Antwort* ("Question/Answer") formal correspondence with the Kohl administration, and permeated the public sphere, was an attempt to cement the Greens' status as a party intent on confronting the problematic past in order to shape the present and future.[75]

Vollmer was also intent to make the *Kulturdebatte* one that the public would follow, and even comment on, which playing into a progressive objective of involving all (educated, implicitly) West Germans in the consistent interrogation of the country's past, and also encouraging them to watch and participate in a (hopefully) productive back-and-forth concerning how the problematic past of the twentieth century continued to reverberate in the present. In her initial proposal for the *Debatte*, written in 1987, Vollmer listed the Ludwig and Arno Breker

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[74] See Helmut Folgt, "The Greens and the New Left: Influences of Left-Extremism on Green Party Organisation and Policies," in Kolinsky, *The Greens in West Germany*, 89-91.
[75] "Antje Vollmer Nachlass: Vorwort," N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.

controversy, as well as Staeck's published volume, as two of the stimuli for her desire to discuss the issue of the exhibition of Nazi-era art in the public sphere (specifically museums) on a public and political stage. She also proposed a concurrent exhibition of Nazi-era artwork, though does not specify exact cities or museums.

Vollmer emphasized in the proposal that this question of Nazi art in museum spaces, was, just a few short years after the Ludwig debacle, still volatile. She also stressed that unlike Ludwig and some of the contributors to Staeck's volume, especially the statement of artist Alfred Hrdlička, which mocked Staeck for considering himself a sort of a "gatekeeper" for politically "good" and "bad" artwork, her interest in bringing the question of Nazi-era art into the political arena for debate did not have to do with questions of its aesthetic quality or worth. Rather, Vollmer argued that, "We are interested in the cultural-historical relevance of Nazi art."[76] Importantly, Vollmer's understanding of Nazi-era artwork as laid out in this document fell in line neatly with some of the arguments used by the intellectuals and students in the 1970s who organized the *Documents of Oppression* exhibition, unsurprising since Vollmer had emerged from their intellectual tradition. She argued that she and her supporters were unconcerned with questions of aesthetics, and also implied that any stylistic and aesthetic qualities of and debates surrounding artwork sanctioned by the Third Reich[77] were moot. Instead, she wrote that only exhibits of art comprising "ideologically important [to the Nazi period] art" were appropriate for public consumption. In short, for Vollmer and the Greens, the artistic qualities of these pieces of artwork made no difference, as they are all "Nazi art," and therefore could only be used as an

[76] *Ibid*. ("[Wir] betonen die kulturhistorische Relevanz der NS-Kunst.")
[77] Presumably artwork created by artists who were part of the RKK, and thus allowed to produce, sell, and exhibit their work under the Third Reich.

ideological point of comparison for the art created by artists in exile or working under conditions of "freedom, or "*Freiheit*."[78]

Ultimately, the argument was that Nazi-era art *must* be shown in *both* historical and art museums that were open to the public with the sole purpose of enlightening the Bundesrepublik as to the consequences an oppressive regime had for artistic and ideological freedom. Even more radically than the organizers of *Documents of Oppression*, Vollmer also proposed the necessity of public access to these exhibitions all the time, not just during select special or temporary exhibitions. Though she did not go so far as to invoke Horkheimer, and suggest that contemporary museums show this artwork to instruct West Germans on the connections between capitalism and fascism, her beliefs about the public's constant visual and intellectual engagement with art of the violent past in order to better understand the importance of present and future freedom (and implicitly, democracy) did rebuke the arguments of Nolte and others that there must be a *Schlußstrich* in discussions of the Holocaust and Third Reich.[79]

Vollmer's initial argument circumvented many of the issues faced by Gilkey and U.S. authorities, as well as Ludwig and administrative officials of Cologne, by simply refusing to acknowledge any nuance or gray zone to the question of the aesthetics or "quality" of artwork of the Nazi period. More succinctly, Nazi art was, tautologically, Nazi art, because it was art created during the Nazi period. Therefore, questions that might inhabit a morally liminal zone,

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[78] "Auch wir halten sie nicht für gute Kunst, aber doch für ideologisch wichtiges Anschauungsmaterial, das der erschreckendengeradezu erklärenden Hintergrund abgibt für die kritischen und mahnenden Bilder der freiheitlich engagierten, verfemten KunstlerInnenvon damals," "Vollmer Nachlass: Vorwart," 2.

[79] "Sie sollte darum zum Zweck der Aufklärung in der Bundesrepublik sowohl in Historischen Museen als auch in Kunstmuseen enthalten und öffentlich zugänglich sein, damit jeder die Möglichkeit hat, sich mit dieser Kunst und dem, worauf sie verweist, auseinanderzusetzen – immer, wenn er es will, nicht nur auf gelegentlichen Austellungen." *Ibid.*

including those raised in previous chapters about Gilkey, German War Art, and Whitehurst, were quickly quashed. Was the artist a fervent Nazi? Was the art espousing a clearly racial[80], violent, or militaristic ideology? Was the artist merely painting or creating his or her art as a mechanism of survival? What was the career or beliefs of the artist before and after the 1933 and 1945? Was the artist repentant for involvement in the Nazism? Was the style of the artwork similar to or unlike contemporaneous art from other countries or parts of the world? Vollmer's interest in Nazi-era artwork was more didactic, even polemical, than this, as she has a clear idea already of what this artwork represents, which is something inherently illiberal and immoral, and therefore believes that it is *imperative* that it be displayed for the public to see, confront, and question, because it is an important aspect of keeping the present-day democracy in West Germany productive.

Press coverage for Vollmer's attempt to situate the question of Nazi-era artwork as a political question, not just a moral or ethical question, was ambivalent: the left-leaning *Tageszeitung* (TAZ), for example, mockingly reported that the Greens "apparently have no problems" with art from the Nazi period, seemingly misunderstanding Vollmer's differentiation between exhibiting art for purposes of aesthetics, pleasure, and a celebration of the art and the artist, as opposed to the necessity of exhibiting art with an instructive, even didactic, intention.[81] As Vollmer and other members of the Greens continued to push the question of what to "do" with Nazi-era art in West Germany in the press, speeches, and the Bundestag, and began to hold

[80] There is a valid argument, of course, that all of the art created and sanctioned by the RKK was inherently racist, due to the RKK's racialized (and often politicized) membership requirements. See Petropoulos, Cuomo, and Potter.
[81] Christiane Peintz, "Ein Glockenspiel für die Grünen, *Die Tageszeitung*, p. 8, 4 April 1988.

*Kulturdebatte* open to the public, even American journalists started paying renewed attention as well.

A special report in the *New York Times* in the spring of 1988 noted the United States' continued involvement in the issues, even from across the Atlantic, invoking once again the 6,255 works of art on canvas and paper that had finally been repatriated to the Federal Republic just two years earlier, while nearly 600 more remained in U.S. custody due to their "overtly Nazi" nature.[82] The article pointed out that those charged with storing the artwork, including one Finance Ministry official, deferred to the perceived opinion of museum officials that "No, this is not good art," but noted that it may have historic value. The officials interviewed, however, argued that the art probably did not have a place in the public sphere, preferring it remain in storage in West German sites ranging from the Central Customs Office in Munich to the Bavarian Army Museum in the small town of Ingolstadt. These officials were generally reiterating the conservative/CDU party stance under Kohl that the visual remnants of the Third Reich should remain hidden away in the past, not because they were taboo and provocative, but because they simply had no place in the West German present or future. In some ways, it was an idea of a *Schlußstrich* via the forced obsolescence of art of the Nazi period. This understanding also is distant from, say, Peter Ludwig's notions about Nazi-era art as it may superficially seem; while Ludwig favored the exhibition of "quality" art that may have been marred by its ties to Nazism and administrators under Kohl favored hiding them away, both advocated for leaving the "taint" of the past in the past.

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[82] Schmemann, Serge, "West Germans Debate Disposition of Nazi Artwork," *The New York Times*, 23 May 1988.

Of course, the Greens, like the 68er movement before them, had other plans. Vollmer argued in the *Times* that, "[i]n cultural areas, as in others, there can be no future without a relationship to the past. [It is time] to break the taboo of silence around the Nazi art." She added that the paintings would be revealed in all their triteness and kitsch, and "the laughter will help chase away the ghosts of the Nazi period."[83] Yet the American article concluded, tellingly, with the words of another Green Party member who had helped Vollmer plan the public debates. Claudia Siede, chief culture spokesperson of the Greens, expressed concern that not all audiences would, as Vollmer theorized, find the art of the Nazi period so trivial or humorous, and might in fact be attracted to it. This fear had revealed itself in reactions to the 1974 show in Frankfurt, as well as reactions to some of the artwork from the German War Art Collection in the United States years earlier: "There is still uncertainty in dealing with official Nazi art because the so-called 'beautiful art,' which was intended in those days to reflect the 'healthy taste of the people,' is closer to the taste of the broad majority of the public even today than the so-called modern art."[84] Siede's concern indicated a more nuanced idea about the aesthetics of art of the Nazi period than Vollmer in her initial proposal, including the anxiety, also implicitly expressed by Gilkey, Whitehurst, and those involved in showing artwork stored in the warehouse in Pueblo, Colorado, of what *liking*, or being aesthetically drawn to, art produced under a murderous dictatorship might mean not just for a viewer personally, but also for the health of a democratic nation. This is an important point because it reveals the paradox at the heart of the debate over Nazi era art both in Germany and in the United States. Vollmer believed that all art produced under and sanctioned by the Third Reich was inherently not just political, but also both

[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*

inherently immoral and tasteless or kitschy. In her initial calculations, she failed to take into account other more human and less intellectual or abstracted conceptions about art. In short, many people are drawn to a piece of artwork, and even identify with it, simply because of its aesthetic qualities, and how it looks, with little knowledge or care of under what circumstance that art was created. For Vollmer's argument, that Nazi era art could be inherently didactic and instructive, this presented a problem.

It also betrayed a sort of intellectual arrogance that had once belonged to the 68er left, and then was inherited by the Green Party. This arrogance could both productive, in the Greens' desire that the public be educated and discerning, and counterproductive, in that it isolated the left and the Greens from the rest of the public. This was then coupled paradoxically with a fear of the opinion of the masses. Vollmer assumed and expected that the public would encounter Nazi-era art with a sense of taste, history, and morality that would prevent them from actually *liking* that art; this was not, as Siede reminded her and the rest of the Green Party, how democracy always functioned. Vollmer and Siede worked to address this concern as the debate over the question of Nazi-era art in public exhibition spaces continued in the next several months, culminating in a formal *Anfrage/Antwort* with the Kohl administration in late 1988 and 1989.

**The *Debatte***

To return to the introduction, in the spring of 1988, members of the press, Bundesregierung, and some members of the public received provocative invitations featuring the infamous cover of the catalogues for the *Haus der deutschen Kunst*'s annual "Great German Art Exhibition" on one side, and the concurrent and antithetical *Entartete Kunst* show on the flipside. The pamphlets came from the Kulturbüro of the Greens, and summoned invitees to attend a

public debate and discussion with politicians and contemporary artists and scholars addressing the topic of the "defamation and repression of modern art" during the Nazi period, the pertinence of this question to the present and future of West Germany, and the relationship of this art to the "fascist art" of the same period.[85] Important here was Vollmer's intention to include the public in the debate, and to place the question of Nazi art in museums in a political context, while including voices not just from politics and academe, but also from the arts. Vollmer, however, never presented *specific* works of art from the period aside from the example of Breker and Ludwig, once again indicating that her metric had little do with aesthetics, and everything to do with the period during which it was produced precisely because the aesthetics of the art were its politics, and vice versa.[86]

On the list of speakers at the debate, besides Vollmer and other Green Party members, were Georg Meistermann (b. 1911), a German painter and former president of the West German *Künstlerbund* whose art had been deemed "entartete" during the Nazi period and who had suffered under an "Austellungsverbot" ("exhibition ban"); art market expert and artist Werner Alberg (b. 1948); and Gottfried Helnwein (b. 1948), a provocative Austrian photorealist painter and mixed-media artist. Meistermann had argued in Staeck's volume just months prior that Peter Ludwig had been arrogant and ignorant in his notion that Breker's works could be separated from their political and historical context, and therefore placed in an art museum sans disclaimer.

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[85] Invitation to "Die Kulturdebatte in der Bundestagsfraktion Die Grünen," April 1988, Folder 1 (2833), Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.
[86]Vollmer opened the *Debatte* with the words that though it was a political movement, "Der Faschismus war auch und gerade ein kulturelles und ästhetisches Ereignis. Daß er so erfahren wurde, machte einen Teil seiner Massenwirksamkeit aus" ("Fascism was also a cultural and aesthetic event, and being experienced as such constituted part of its mass appeal"), in Günter Bannas, "Das Recht auf Irrtum: Die Erste 'Kulturdebatte' der Grünen in Bonn," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 April 1988.

He also critiqued Ludwig's framing of Breker as a mere survivor, noting that Breker had ample opportunity to help other artists who were threatened, but never did, and finally rebuked Ludwig's argument that Breker's style was simply following a sort of "international pathos" of the 1930s and 1940s.[87] Alberg reported during the *Debatte* on the troubling increase in value and demand for National Socialist paintings on the private art market, which was another ancillary fear for Vollmer (bolstered by Ludwig's extensive collecting of Breker sculptures). This was reflected in Claudia Siede's concern that the public might not "laugh" at the "triteness" of Nazi-era paintings, but rather would be drawn to them, whether because of their aesthetic qualities, or their shock factor. Helnwein, taking a more radical position, contested that no art was inherently political based on the period of time in which it was produced, a point of view that would have pleased some of the *Kriegsmaler* whose art Gilkey had seized following the war, and warned against reading "Nazism" into any art produced during the Third Reich. This argument was, however, inconsistent with the Green Party's, and other leftist writers like Staeck's, idea that art allowed or supported under the Third Reich was inherently political, and politically nefarious, and thus either aesthetically, in terms of "quality," irrelevant (Breker) or subpar.[88]

The first *Kulturdebatte* of the Greens was a success insofar that it garnered publicity and coverage, not least because the young artists like Alberg and Helnwein lent a degree of provocation, even sexiness, to the proceedings. However, Vollmer was not content for the issue to percolate only amongst those in the leftist political sphere of the Green Party; she was determined that the Kohl administration enter the debate on the record as well.

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[87]Meistermann, Georg, "Ludwigs geschmacklose Polemik," in Staeck, *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?,* 104-105.
[88] Bannas, "Das Recht auf Irrtum."

**Sparring with the Kohl *Bundesregierung***

Vollmer's project to bring the question of Nazi art back into the public arena culminated in a formal *Anfrage/Antwort* with the conservative Kohl administration, with the *Anfrage* penned by Vollmer representing the Greens, and the *Antwort* coming directly from Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann. The document, which was then published for the public record, was meant as the final word on the matter under the Kohl *Bundesregierung*. Vollmer's *Anfrage* was sent to the Ministry of the Interior on July 8, 1988, just a few months after the *Kulturdebatte*. The text is divided into four sections, addressing in order a brief history of the arts in Nazi Germany, the question of reparations and rehabilitation for those denigrated as "entartete" artists under the regime, the contemporary treatment of films, buildings, and memorial sites with connections to Nazi "Kunstpolitik" (as a point of comparison), and finally, the larger modern question of freedom of art and media.[89] Importantly, Vollmer also mentioned by name the influence of the return of the German War Art Collection, the Ludwig/Breker affair, and the *Historikerstreit* in her decision to engage in the discussion with both the public, academics and artists, and fellow politicians.[90] Each of these sections was then broken into several questions, many complicated and verging on the philosophical, that Vollmer posed to the Bundesregierung: How can we demystify the art of the Third Reich without placing the "perpetrators," or "*Täter*," on the same level, or in the same space, as the victims?[91] Does it not dangerously reinforce the idea that the crimes of the past were committed by "an other" and

[89]Vollmer, Antje. "Große Anfrage der Abgeordneten Frau Dr. Vollmer und der Fraktion Die Grünen: Umgang mit der sogenannten entarteten und mit der sogenannten schönen Kunst," 8 July 1988, Folder 1 (2833), Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.
[90] *Ibid*., 2.
[91] *Ibid*., 3.

could never be repeated when Germans encounter only exhibitions of art that was considered "entartet," allowing a (perhaps undeserved) sense of relief that freedom of expression and art now reigns supreme?[92] How and why are architecture and film treated differently? How can, or should we treat the private art market for Nazi-era art differently? Where does the question of freedom of art begin and end – and if freedom of art truly existed in the Federal Republic of Germany, was it not hypocritical to "fear" art from the Nazi period so much that it should remain in storage? Finally, she asked if the Kohl administration was finally "ready" for a productive conversation about the relationship between "entartet" art and art that was supported by the Third Reich, asking how exactly the results of the cultural-politics of the Third Reich might be worked through openly and publicly in the present day if much of this artwork remained hidden away.[93]

In addition to posing these challenging questions to Zimmermann and the Kohl administration, Vollmer also attempted to nuance her initially polemical discussion of Nazi artwork. For example, she took into consideration the concerns of fellow Green Party member Claudine Siede, who had questioned what might happen if visitors did not "laugh" at the "triteness" of the Nazi-era art exhibited in a museum when they encountered it, and instead were attracted to it or appreciated its aesthetic qualities. She asked how the administration might address such concerns and suggested a solution in museums of displaying Nazi-era art and "entartete" art side-by-side. She left unmentioned that this line of thinking somewhat undercut her argument that if there truly was "freedom of art" in West Germany, than no art, even art supported by the Nazi regime, can be feared.[94] Importantly, Vollmer did not directly address the

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[92] *Ibid*., 4. This concern was based on a discussion Vollmer overheard at the show "'Entartete Kunst' Dokumentation zum nationalsozialisten Bildersturm am Bestand der Staatsgalerie für Moderne Kunst in München," which ran in Munich's Staatsgalerie from 1987 to 1988.
[93] *Ibid*., 7.
[94] See Schmemann, *The New York Times*.

issue raised in the Ludwig/Breker affair about whether the quality of artwork from the period might override its troublesome political context, indicating that for the Greens, this was never a question – for Vollmer, there existed no art created with the support of the Nazi regime whose aesthetic qualities could ever override ethical concerns. More broadly, Vollmer's *Anfrage* forced the Bundesregierung to take some sort of position on their understanding of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, including how important they, the conservative government, believed that incessant, sometimes upsetting, confrontations with the past were for West Germans in order to become engaged and responsible democratic subjects. The *Antwort* from the Bundesregierung addressed these questions with loud indifference, and even aversion.

This response from the Kohl-helmed CDU Bundesregierung arrived nearly one year later, in April of 1989, indicating, perhaps, a lack of enthusiasm or interest regarding the topic. Longer than the *Anfrage*, the *Antwort* from the Bundesregierung comprises many words but says little. The driving argument of the administration was that the question need not even be discussed or debated at the political, or even public, level, as the question of Nazi-era art in museums should be decided by the individual museums, not at a federal level. The response was, then, dismissive that the question was even truly an issue of national importance.[95] In this way, the Kohl administration recused itself from taking any specific stance on the matter; of course, no stance *was* an implicitly political stance, and one that once again falls in line with conservative arguments during the *Historikerstreit*: Why are we still discussing this topic? Have we not, as a nation, moved on yet from our obsession with the crimes of the Nazi era? Zimmermann also

[95]Zimmermann, Friedrich, Minister of the Interior, "Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Große Anfrage der Abgeorgneten Frau Dr. Vollmer und der Fraktion Die Grünen," 5 April 1989, 3, Folder 1 (2833), Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.

tacitly posed these questions with his insistence throughout the *Antwort* that the debate over Nazi-era art had already been discussed *ad nauseum* in countless publications, newspaper articles, and exhibitions for decades.[96]

The *Antwort* also protected the Bundesregierung by noting that the administration wanted no complicity in spreading any sort of aesthetic or ideology related to the Nazi period via their "handling" of Nazi artwork – in short, better to avoid the controversy and maintain a status quo than risk disturbing any sort of balance that may have been maintained over the decades by keeping the artwork largely hidden from public consumption. There is also a possibility that this had to do with maintaining a positive relationship with the United States after several thousand works from the German War Art Collection had been returned– perhaps the Kohl administration wanted to prove that West Germany was stable enough for the paintings to be returned without the public controversy that might ensue if a position was taken at the federal level to encourage the exhibition of this artwork, which had been a fear previously expressed by anti-hate and Jewish organizations in the United States when news of the paintings' imminent return reached the press.[97] This is supported by a specific reference in the *Antwort* to the 1986 return of parts of the German War Art Collection, wherein Zimmermann shared that the United States government stipulated the works must be handled with discretion. (Interestingly, however, Zimmermann also hinted that these works were somewhat less "controversial," as their motifs ranged from "military scenes to simple land- and city-scapes.")[98] Zimmermann cautiously suggested that

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[96] *Ibid.,* "Eine Debatte über NS-Kunst wird schon seit Jahren in der interessierten Öffentlichkeit geführt. Zahlreiche Publikationen, Ausstellungen, Zeitungsartikel und veröffentlichte Stellungnahmen belegen dies."
[97] See "Former SS Men Meet Again Under the Sign," *The German Tribune*, 25 May 1985, in RG 59 Box 56, NARA, Washington, D.C.
[98] *Ibid*., 4.

some of the works in storage in Munich, Ingolstadt, and Karlshorst might be available for viewing or study, but only as an archive, not an accessible place like an art or historical museum.[99]

Finally, and importantly, the *Antwort* failed to address the larger question of how, exactly, the public might be instructed or bettered by exhibitions featuring Nazi-era art, even if it was art that the public did not aesthetically find problematic. This question was, perhaps, too complicated or daunting to tackle, especially compared to the straightforward and pragmatic responses that the rest of the document provided in response to Vollmer's questions that were, ultimately, about the process and necessity of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in West Germany. Though it was detailed in listing select exhibitions that had displayed Nazi-era art (including *Documents of Oppression* in 1974), as well as explicating in detail how select cities such as Heidelberg chose to handle architectural remnants of Nazism,[100] the response of the Bundesregierung showed no interest in engaging with the Greens or the public on the question of "working through the past." That past, it indicates, is exactly that – the past.

**"Only things that are repressed remain *unbewältigt*"**

Though the Kohl administration was relatively clear in its response to Vollmer's *Anfrage* – that the question of Nazi era was not a primary concern for the Federal Republic at the time, that it was up to individual museums, not the state, as to what to do with the art that they had in storage, and that the issue was not ready for open discussion anytime soon – Vollmer's platform had already successfully returned the question to the public sphere, albeit one consisting mainly

[99] *Ibid.*, 5.
[100] *Ibid.*, 6. Zimmermann pointed out that the controversial *Thingstätte* in Heidelberg (open-air theater) built during the Third Reich was now simply used for cultural events like concerts and plays, a decision that Heidelberg, not the Bundesregierung, made.

of intellectuals. In September of 1989, *Pan*, the highest-circulation arts and culture magazine in Europe, published an eight-page spread on the topic, complete with letters-to-the-editor and other modes of public input. Editor-in-Chief Dr. Christa Maar contacted the Green Party before the issue's publication with the news that "53 percent [of readers] are in favor of exhibitions of Nazi art"[101] in museums. As Maar pointed out in her letter, the numbers showed that the public was still torn on the issue, but in light of public interest, that the Green Party had a responsibility to continue to engage with the public on the topic, because it was a vital one for the future of the Federal Republic. She ended with the stark message, "*Nur was verdrängt wird, bleibt unbewältigt*" – "Only things that are suppressed remain unresolved."[102]

Maar's broader argument, that the public was still torn on the question of Nazi-era artwork in public spaces but apparently willing to engage with the question, proved that even more than 40 years after the fall of the Third Reich, fascination with the topic had not died, despite attempts to hide it away in storage sites on both sides of the Atlantic. Vollmer's decision to target the political sphere with the question also revealed that the topic was volatile enough, especially considering the recent repatriation of paintings from the United States' German War Art Collection, for the Kohl administration to avoid addressing head-on. Though the administration eventually addressed Vollmer's questions in its official *Antwort*, it refused to engage questions at the heart Vollmer's *Anfrage*: Why does this art still maintain so much power in the eyes of the Bundesregierung that it must continue to languish in storage? How should the

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[101] "53 Prozent befürworten die Ausstellung von 'NS-Kunst,'" letter from Dr. Christa Maar to the Green Party Fraktion, 25 August 1989, Folder 1 (2833), Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (BAK), Koblenz, Germany.
[102] *Ibid*. There is no direct English translation for "unbewältigt" – the words that come close, "unresolved," and "unmastered," are both unsatisfactory, though the former comes closer. "Unbewältigt," suggests something that is "un-worked through," especially a memory or a past.

public most productively (and ethically) interact with this artwork, and how stringent should the West German state, cities, and individual museums be in prescribing this interaction? What happens if the public has positive feelings toward the artwork that they see, and what might this insidiously indicate – and is, or should there be, a way to control or direct this? The Ludwig/Breker affair and the dovetailing *Historikerstreit* also helped prompt the Greens' decision to make the question of Nazi-era artwork and its exhibition a platform for discussing the larger theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In particular, the emotional responses to the Ludwig/Breker affair *and* Vollmer's *Kulturdebatte* reveal that the didacticism of the 68er movement had not faded by the 1980s; rather, it evolved from protests and charged, polemical exhibitions to discussions about institutions from individuals working *within* these institutions – Vollmer as a member of the young Green Party, Klaus Staeck as a lawyer and artist, and contributors to the debate as curators, professors, and other politicians.

This debate might have happened without the return of the German War Art Collection. But the decision made between West German and American officials, and propelled forward by Rep. Whitehurst changed the stakes of the debate; it was one thing to discuss in the abstract artwork from the Nazi period. It was another to grapple once again with the physical presence of this artwork back at the "scene of the crime," especially with the expectations placed on it by U.S. officials upon its final return. While U.S. officials like Gilkey and Whitehurst were often able to separate the artist from the art, perhaps an easier task in the case of *Kriegsmaler* than in the case of Arno Breker, this debate took place in more black and white terms back on German soil. While the conservative administration insisted that the public had no reason to see the artwork, as it represented a past that the nation had finally overcome, and others, like Ludwig, argued that artists like Breker should finally be forgiven for their crimes in light of their

contributions to the art historical canon, progressives and leftists like Vollmer and Staeck insisted that the context of the Nazi era could *never* be separated from the art produced therein. This question, however, was not finished, just as the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was not.

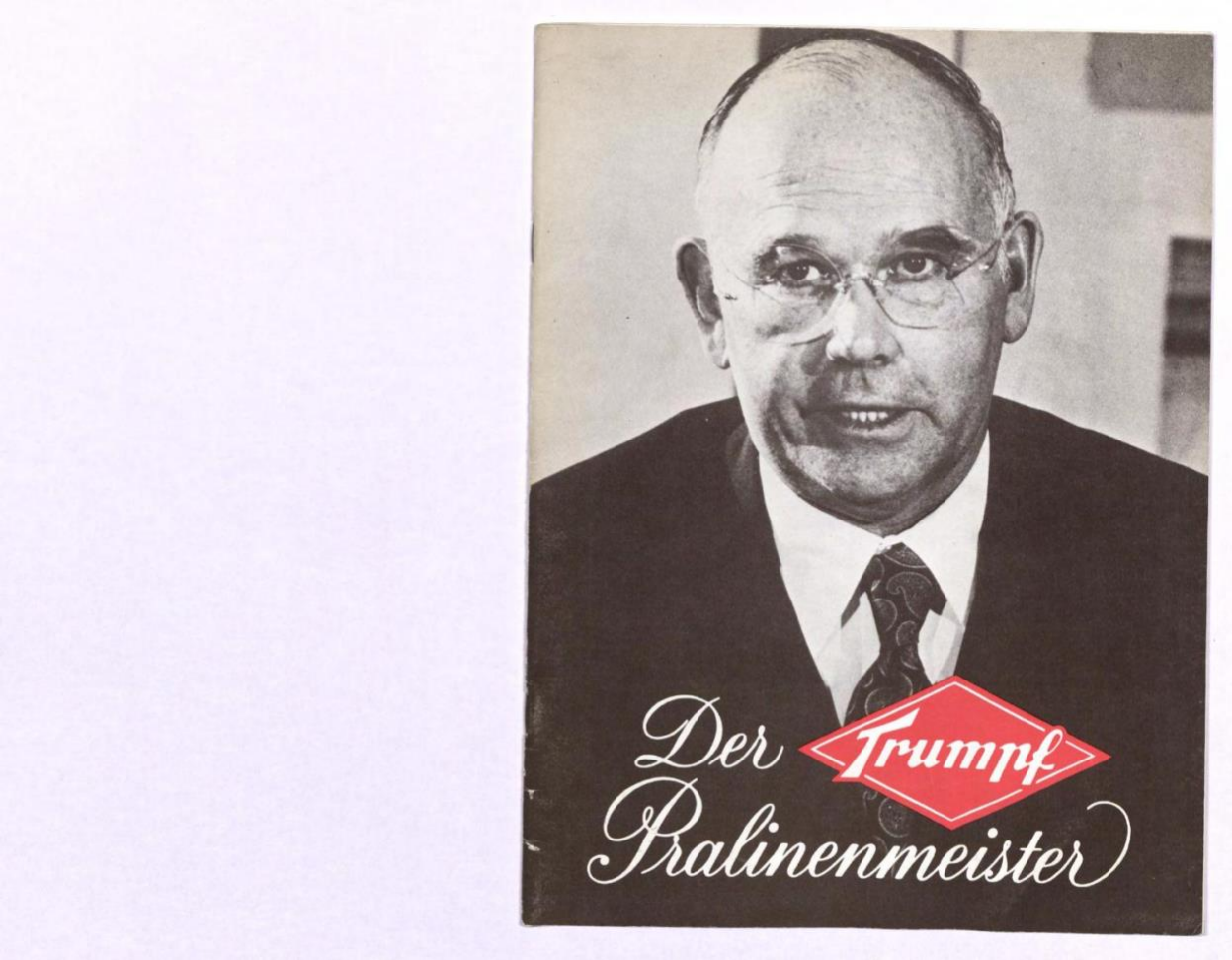


Fig. 1, Cover of *Der Pralinenmeister* (a biography of Peter Ludwig, the controversial and prolific Cologne art collector who consolidated several chocolate favorites, include Trumpf, to found Ludwig Schockolade), Hans Haacke, Toronto, Canada: Art Metropole, 1982 (Antje Vollmer Nachlass, N1569/777, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz [BAK], Koblenz, Germany)

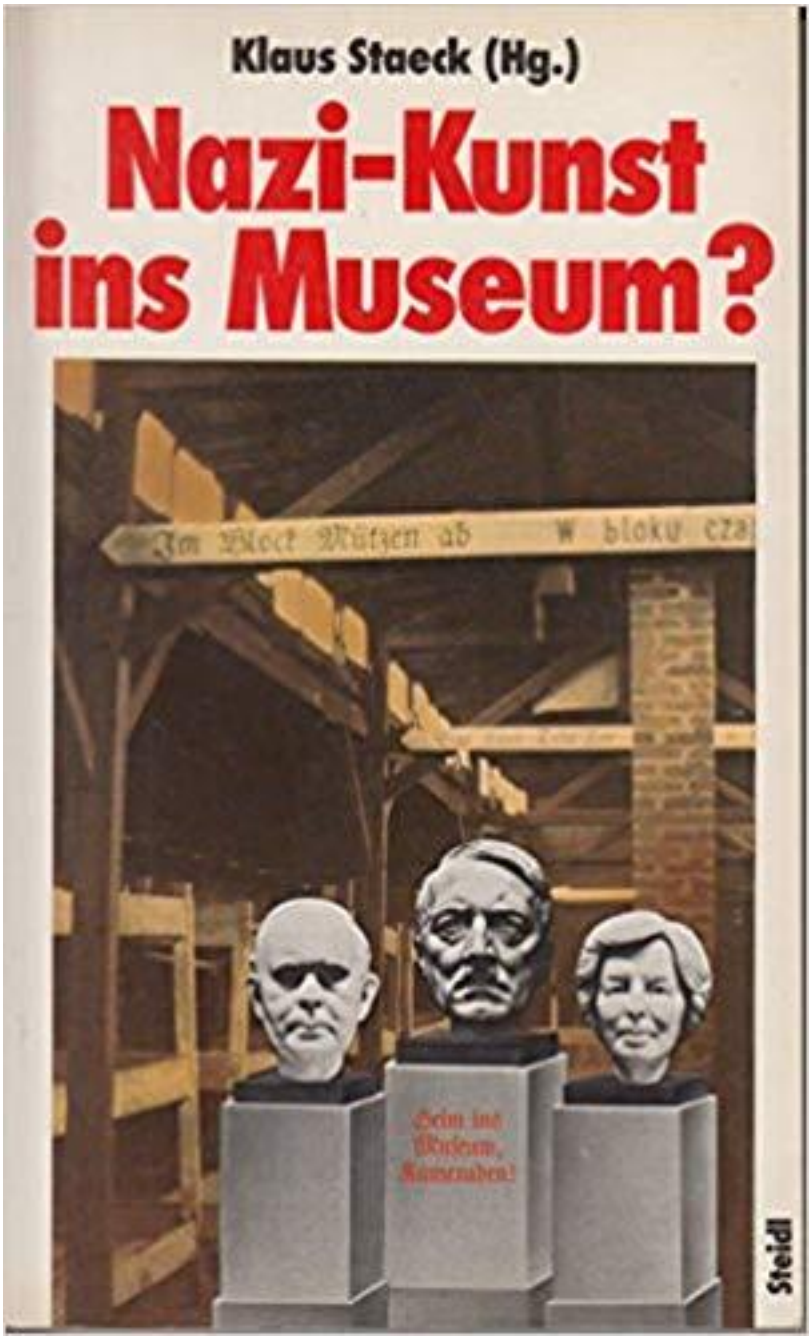


Fig. 2, Cover of Klaus Staeck's *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum*, published in the wake of the Ludwig/Breker Affair in 1988 (photograph author's own)

# Conclusion: Beyond the *Wiedervereinigung*

The *Kulturdebatte* in the Green Party officially solved nothing – the conservative Kohl administration's official stance on the exhibition of Nazi-era artwork remained vague and non-prescriptive, the bureaucratic equivalent of shrugging one's shoulders. Much of the artwork continues to languish in storage, whether in the U.S. or in storage sites in Germany. Yet in the decades following reunification in Germany, both German and American museums and cultural institutions have continued to evolve in how (and why) this art is shown to the public, even if it has only been in academia (James Van Dyke, Gregory Maertz, Pamela Potter) that the once-impermeably aesthetic dichotomies drawn between "Nazi artwork" and all other artwork have started to become more amorphous.

**Exhibitions and the "Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?" Debate After 1990**

In the early 1990s, there was again a renewed cultural and public interest in the art of the Nazi era, this time expressed in a desire to celebrate the art that was forbidden during the period – "degenerate art," or *Entartete Kunst*. Though this rightfully shifted the public interest to the artists who were persecuted under the Nazi regime, they also, generally speaking, reinforced the notions of a monolithic, inherently evil Nazi art aesthetic, which was placed in contrast to the inherently good, generally modernist and abstracted "degenerate art." This juxtaposition echoed the same notions pushed publicly by American occupying forces in the postwar period, that internationalist, abstract, non-figurative art was politically democratic, and thus morally preferable (of course, simultaneously, many army and government officials were privately enjoying the artwork from the Nazi era that Gilkey and his troops had seized in their art confiscations.) One American show in particular, however, used its platform in a political way,

comparable, in some ways, to 1974's *Documents of Oppression*, which intended to use images of the Nazi past to indict the capitalist West German present.

In 1991, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) organized a show called *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, a headline-grabbing show that would travel onto Chicago, Washington, D.C., and, finally, after a series of rave reviews, the Altes Museum in Berlin.[1] According to curator Stephanie Barron, in the three years she spent conducting research for the show in Germany, no German museum official asked if they might host the show,[2] revealing a German public that, just a few years after the public debate concerning Nazi art in German museums, might still have been reluctant to host any sort of high-profile exhibition that in any way dealt with the Nazi treatment of artwork. It might also be indicative of the Kohl administration's success following the Vollmer-led *Kulturdebatte* in tamping down public debates about Nazi-era art, even if the art was from those persecuted, under the Nazi regime.

The concept of the show was to exhibit 150 surviving works of art from the original *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich in 1937. The show juxtaposed the infamous dueling events in Munich in 1937 – the opening of both *Entartete Kunst* and the first Great German Art Exhibition just around the corner, at the *Haus der deutschen Kunst*. It also, as critic Peter Jelavich pointed out, did not "let Americans off the hook."[3] In fact, the exhibition sparked reviewers and journalists to draw a clear connection between the Nazi-era attacks on *Entartete Kunst* and the attacks in the late 1980s and early 1990s in America on the National Endowment

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[1] Peter Jelavich, "Review: National Socialism, Art, and Power in the 1930s," *The Past and Present Society*, No. 164 (August 1999), 251.
[2] Suzanne Muchnic, "LACMA 'Degenerate' Exhibit to Make a Stop in Germany," *The Los Angeles Times*, 6 February 1992.
[3] Jelavich., 252.

of the Arts, picking up on Barron's closing argument in her foreword to the exhibition's catalogue that there exists parallels between "the enemies of artistic freedom today and those responsible for organizing the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition," and that "perhaps after a serious look at events that unfolded over half a century ago in Germany, we may apply what we learn to our own predicament."[4] Like Georg Bussmann and the organizers of *Documents of Oppression*, though perhaps less polemically, LACMA's show sought to use the example of art in Nazi Germany as a warning for the present. This was radical, as it, as Jelavich pointed out, "chipped away at some of the perceived boundaries between the Third Reich and our own times."[5] Like the Frankfurt show in West Germany, the exhibition at LACMA sought for viewers to make the connection between the Nazi past and the present in America – the Nazi era, it intoned, is not as far away temporally, geographically, or ideologically as we all might like to believe.

However, the show also reified the distinctions between "good" (modernist) art and politics (democracy) and "bad/dangerous/reactionary" (Nazi-era, that is, figurative and regressive, as conceived in the exhibition) art and politics. In this way, it *did* let viewers off the hook, not daring to ask the viewer what it might mean to "like" art from the Nazi era, let alone blur any aesthetic boundaries between "modernist" and "Nazi" art. The show still existed in a black-and-white zone, unencumbered by questions of aesthetic continuity or grayness. For example, some expressionist artists, like Emil Nolde, were early supporters of Nazism, and Goebbels pushed for expressionism to become the official style of the new German Reich. Additionally, as this dissertation has explored, several self-proclaimed protectors of democracy in America, from army officials to politicians like G. William Whitehurst, enjoyed some of the

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[4] Stephanie Barron, "Foreword," *"Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1991), 22.
[5] Jelavich, 254.

artistic output from the Nazi period. Furthermore, as Gilkey's interactions with some *Kriegsmaler* revealed, some artists painted in a style that might be considered modernist and abstract if not for their connection to the Third Reich, and even argued that they only painted to survive or avoid killing or being killed during the war. These wrinkles complicate the easy distinctions, both aesthetic and moral, between "good" and "bad" art – complications that, in 1991, cultural institutions and the public were not ready to leap into.

In 1993, the Vienna Künstlerhaus took a comparative approach to Nazi-era artwork, in an exhibition that evoked the totalitarian framework of the Cold War era, aesthetically linking the art produced under dictatorships in Germany/Austria, Italy, and the Soviet Union.[6] The exhibition was noteworthy for its in-depth analysis (political and aesthetic) of Nazi-era artwork, but its themes and subject areas (architecture, sculpture, heroic imagery) were similar to, though less political and polemical than, those presented at Frankfurt in 1974. This show was most notable in the context of this dissertation for its inclusion of a short essay on the art that was seized by American forces immediately after World War II, the first exhibition to place this artwork and the story of the German War Art Collection within the larger context of "Nazi art." In his essay, Jonathan Petropoulos briefly examined Gilkey's seizure of artwork "of possible historical interest,"[7] beginning in June 1945. Importantly, Petropoulos hinted at the degree of aesthetic and thematic variation in some of the seized works, focusing on the "modernist qualities" of works from painters like Rudolf Hengstenberg, but still drawing on a limited number of paintings, most of which still reflected the stereotypical heroic "Aryan" subject,

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[6] Jan Tabor (ed.), *Kunst und Diktatur : Architektur, Bildhauerei und Malerei in Österreich, Deutschland, Italien und der Sowjetunion 1922-1956* (Vienna: Künstlerhaus Wien, 1994).
[7] Jonathan Petropoulos, "Bannerträger und Tiroler Bergjäger: Die von USA beschlagnahmte NS-Kunst," in Tabor, 864.

whether as a worker or a soldier (or Hitler himself, to which the essay's title, "Der Bannerträger," alluded). Though this exhibition hinted at more gray areas, both stylistically and thematically, of the monolith of "Nazi art," it still left untouched the paradigm of "good, abstracted, modernist, *Entartete* art" versus "bad, figurative, regressive/classicist, 'Nazi' art."

The subject matter has attracted less prescriptive and more complicated treatment in German museums, though the morally fraught question of how to exhibit Nazi-era art "responsibly" has reared its head with every new show. In 2012, the Kunst Forum Eifel, a small art museum in Schleiden, Germany, came under fire for its decision to produce a retrospective of Werner Peiner, a German artist who had originally painted in the expressionist style, but who quickly became one of the most well-known and prolific artists working in the RKK in Nazi Germany, and also on the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste*.[8] The exhibition focused on Peiner's output during the 1920s, under the Nazi regime, and in the postwar period, until his death in 1984. The exhibition organizers framed it as an "historic documentation" and not an "art exhibition" and it was inspired by the work of art historian Olaf Peters, whose tome 1998 *Neue Sachlichkeit und Nationalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik 1931-1947* examined continuities between Weimar-era art and art of the Third Reich, challenging the notion of a "Nazi aesthetic" that stood outside of time and place. In spite of this, it still drew a heated "Protestprogramm," with detractors calling it an "insult to both the painters of Eifel and the museum."[9] The head of the city's League Against Right-Extremism, Racism, and Violence argued that it was unethical to exhibit an artist who was allowed to paint under the Third Reich, and whose works were embraced by members of the Nazi elite, without *also* showing works from artists who were banned from creating, or

[8] "Ausstellung zu NS-Maler löst Protest aus," *Die Welt,* 15 May 2012.
[9] *Ibid*. "Das ist eine Verunglimpfung der Eifeler Maler und des Museums."

whose works were banned from exhibitions under the Third Reich.[10] These arguments echoed those made by former 68ers such as Klaus Staeck during the Ludwig controversy in the 1980s, though also reflected Antje Vollmer's ultimate argument that Nazi-era art should be placed in museums as the art of a perpetrator. Again, though, this debate reveals that the line between perpetrator and innocent, at least concerning artists during the Third Reich, remained contested, just as it had when Gilkey anguished over his art confiscations in the years following the war. Yet Claus Bergen who had won the same amount of respect as an artist by Nazi elite as Werner Peiner had, was ultimately deemed innocent of any crimes by the U.S. government, as his works were returned to Germany without much American pushback in 1979, with the sponsorship of Whitehurst.

This suggested model of placing the art of the "perpetrator," like Weiner, alongside art of the "victim," or painters whose work was banned or deemed *entartete*, has continued to develop in both Germany and the United States. The current trend in art museums has been for *all* artwork of the Nazi period to be put on display, side-by-side. That is, art from artists in exile or those whose art was considered "degenerate" alongside the works of painters and sculptors, mostly well-known ones, or those whose works were known to be favored by Hitler and Nazi Party elite. In 2015, the Pinkothek der Moderne in Munich, the former *Hauptstadt der Bewegung*, opened *GegenKunst* (*Against Art*), another high profile and well publicized exhibition of art by "Nazi artists." The exhibition was small, comprising just a single large room. True to its title, the show aimed to pit art from well-known artists whose works were in the

[10] *Ibid*. "Niemals hätte man nur Peiner allein zeigen dürfen, meint Marita Rauchberger vom Eifeler Bündnis gegen Rechtsextremismus, Rassismus und Gewalt. Wenn überhaupt, dann nur mit damals verbotenen Künstlern."

"Degenerate Art" exhibition, such as sculptor Otto Freundlich, against well-known creators of "Nazi art," notably Adolf Ziegler and his triptych "Die Vier Elemente" ("The Four Elements"). Although the exhibition clearly selected works meant to solidify notions about a Nazi aesthetic – Thorak's cold and classicist nudes in *Zwei Menschen*, for example, pitted against the bulbous humanoid forms of Freundlich's sculptures – it also implicitly encouraged visitors to see the artwork at the same time, as part of the same art historical timeline, and subsequently mine the works for not just glaring differences, but subtle similarities. Seemingly taking a cue from the abundant audience inclusivity of *Documents of Oppression*, the exhibition's run period featured weekly talks and seminars, group discussions, audience feedback after the show, and even a Twitter hashtag, meant to foster debate around the show's subject matter.

Several months later at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, the exhibition *Die Schwarzen Jahre* (*The Black Years*) opened. It featured works from the Neue Nationalgalerie that had either been acquired between 1933 and 1945 by the museum, or had been seized by the National Socialist regime. The show asked for a similar level of public involvement, and employed a similar tactic of placing "degenerate" artwork (including works from Otto Dix, Käthe Kollwitz, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner) alongside works from artists that created successfully under the RKK, or whose works were favored or collected by party officials such as Göring and Martin Bormann. These two exhibitions found a middle ground between the occasional brow beating polemics of *Documents of Oppression* and the arguably problematic retrospective show of artists like Peiner. Yet they also continued to leave little room for gray zones about the myriad artists, whose loyalty to Nazism ranged from Breker's "true believer" status to the "I was merely trying to survive" pleas of some *Kriegsmaler*. This, in turn, left little room for gray areas about any stylistic variation of art produced under the Nazi regime.

Around the same time (in 2014), the Neue Galerie in New York City opened *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, which marked the first time since the LACMA show in 1991 that an American exhibition was devoted to the Nazis' infamous exhibition of *Entartete Kunst*. This exhibition also featured a room of juxtaposition, placing so-called "German" artwork against "degenerate art," in a mode similar to Munich's *GegenKunst*, and also featuring Ziegler's triptych and a heroic figurative sculpture by Thorak. As in 1991, and even as Horkheimer and Adorno had attempted to do in the 1930s, the exhibition implicitly asked the primarily American audience to envision the threat of National Socialism as something closer than they might like to imagine. However, also like the LACMA show, the exhibition's treatment of Nazi-approved artwork in effect encouraged visitors to view it as "other," and somehow inherently anti-democratic. In short, it failed to confront the gray stylistic, thematic, and moral spaces occupied by the artwork.

In the meantime, both countries, post-reunification Germany and the United States, continue to debate what to do with Nazi-era artwork that remains in storage or significant pieces that are frequently discovered. In 2005, much of the remainder of the German War Art Collection was transferred to the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, where it is occasionally displayed as an historical document to illustrate exhibitions on the Second World War. Its aesthetic qualities in this context are never discussed. Perhaps it is simpler to include and exhibit the art as part of the larger story of visual documentation of the war and the period of the Third Reich, since removing its designation as "art" removes any fraught discussions. As of August of 2019, the Deutsches Historisches Museum had many of the works, including several bronze sculptures of Hitler, transferred to a large storage facility in the Spandau district of Berlin, protected from public viewing by high fences and intimidating undergrowth. Echoing the

language of Antje Vollmer, a reporter for *Der Spiegel* recently wrote: "For quite some time, the ugly side of beautiful art has been covered up. A thorough, scientific investigation of art from the Nazi period would complete our view of the dictatorship."[11] Germany's State Minister for Culture, Monika Grütters, now has purview over the art; when questioned recently about her stance on the artwork, her office punted responsibility to the Foreign Ministry (*Auswärtiges Amt*), seemingly taking their cue from the Kohl administration's vague position on the same artwork thirty years earlier. At the Foreign Ministry, the commissioner for foreign art, State Minister Michelle Müntefering, stated merely that it would be the "wrong signal" for Germany to call for the return of the rest of the works in U.S. custody, on the basis of the Potsdam Agreement.[12] Back in the United States, the remainder of Gilkey's collection of confiscated artwork, including watercolors painted by Hitler, remains in the custody of the military, and is housed in a storage unit at the Center of Military History in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The collection recently garnered some public interest after an article in the *Washingtonian* magazine "exposed" the U.S.'s "secret collection of Nazi art."[13] There were tentative plans for a public exhibition space for the remainder of the collection, including a large stash of artwork from American combat artists, but those plans are on hold for the near future.

As this dissertation has examined through a series of snapshots in time from 1945 to the present, the path taken through time and space of Nazi-era artwork from the German War Art Collection comprised a series of confrontations and entanglements that occurred in (West) Germany *and* the United States from the immediate postwar era to today. These entanglements

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[11] Ulrike Knöfel, "Time for a New Look at Nazi Art," *Der Spiegel,* 14 August 2019.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Andrew Beaujon, "How a Trove of Nazi Artwork Wound Up Under Lock and Key on an Army Base in Virginia," *Washingtonian Magazine,* 12 November 2017.

occurred on three entangled levels: that of historical and collective memory, a political level driven by both politics and cultural movements, and one that took place on an intimate individual level, through the personal passions and sympathies of figures like Gordon Gilkey, G. William Whitehurst, and Antje Vollmer. The U.S. shaped the process of "coming to terms with the past" in Germany through this artwork, while the works' historical trajectory was a mirror for the U.S. government's and public's own fears and desires regarding the relationship between Germany's past and the U.S.'s present and future.

In his seminal study of Holocaust memorials, *Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, James E. Young writes that the function of memorials commemorating the horrors of the twentieth century – "the art of public memory"— is twofold. First, it encompasses the aesthetic contours of the art and its place in contemporary artistic and art historical discourse. Secondly, and just an importantly, it includes "the activity that brought them into being, the constant give and take between [art] and viewers, and finally the responses of viewers to their own world in light of a memorialized past – the consequences of memory."[14] While Young's study specifically refers to the process of creating and interacting with monuments commemorating the Holocaust, his suggestion that there is a fundamentally interactive, "dialogical quality" to every memory space applies just as well to art created under and sanctioned by the oppressive, murderous regime of the Third Reich.[15] The public memory of the period, and the recursive, never straightforwardly progressive, process of "coming to terms with the past," depends not just on the contents and aesthetics of this art, but also on viewers' responses to this art. These responses both shape and are shaped by political, social, and cultural

[14] James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), ix.
[15] *Ibid*., xii.

factors as time continues to distance viewers from, or alter their perceptions of, the meaning of and circumstances under which the art was produced.

"[M]emorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce," Young writes. The art of the "perpetrator" is also essentially dependent on viewers and the public for whatever meaning and memory it ultimately produces, whether this meaning is "guilty," "incendiary," or merely "grayness," reflecting the unhelpfulness of assigning black-or-white labels to art and artists working within the confines of a totalitarian regime. Ultimately, Young's conclusion that it is the conversation about the artwork, the dialogical analysis, that produces meaning, is apt. The same piece of art from the German War Art Collection, for example, might incite fear, empathy, compassion, anger, admiration, judgement, or indifference, as time marches on and the context and circumstances of its viewer and surroundings changes. Is it "good" art? Is it "pleasing" art? Is it modernist or retrogressive? Ultimately, in the case of Nazi-era painting and artwork, perhaps these questions do not matter as much as it seem they would. Instead, it is the debates facilitated by these questions surrounding the art that is more valuable. It is this perpetual dialogue and discussion, mediated through this artwork of the Nazi period, that that will continue to push the confrontations with the past in both countries, a reunited Germany, and the United States, into new, and possibly more productive, iterations.

## Epilogue: March 2015 – In a Suburb of Amsterdam

Dutch art collector Chris Martens (a pseudonym, as he says he and his family have been threatened for his work) proudly walks around his three-story house in the Netherlands, which is decorated from wall-to-wall with paintings, drawings, and sculptures produced during the Nazi era. Martens runs the online art gallery "The German Art Gallery," (germanartgallery.eu), a purposely under-the-radar collection of Nazi-era art that is up for sale to both European and international buyers. His house, which resembles an art gallery more than a living space, features a collection of Nazi-era art on display that seems even larger than recent shows of the art, from *Die Schwarzen Jahre* at Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof, to *GegenKunst* at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. Martens gestures to the numerous busts of Hitler, bronze sculptures (such as a small horse from 1939 by Josef Thorak), classicist (yet somehow sexless) paintings of blonde-haired nudes, and overwhelming, heroic portraits of soldiers and military leaders, some of which were even exhibited during the 1941 Great German Art Exhibition at the Haus der deutschen Kunst,[16] including a foreboding portrait of Hitler in military garb, which hangs behind a mannequin garbed in a black, leather trench-coat often associated with SS officers. While one of the assistant curators at the Center of Military History's storage warehouse in Fort Belvoir intoned that he wished the facility, containing the remains of Gilkey's collection of seized artwork, would just "burn down," Martens surveys his collection of Nazi-era artwork with awe and admiration, disappointed that there remains a taboo on the collection and exhibition of the art in an art museum context.

Martens's art is not just for the purposes of his personal collection. The Dutch businessman (collecting is his "side" job) runs The German Art Gallery, one of the only retailers

[16] Martens proudly showed the author placards on at least two works confirming this.

of explicitly Nazi-era art. The gallery is online-only for a few reasons. First, Martens explains, many of his clients are non-European, meaning that having a physical gallery location is not practical. Secondly, the collector and dealer implies that that he would fear for not only his reputation, but potentially his safety, if his gallery were housed in a physical space, revealing that the same level of both unease and titillation – if not more – applies to the trade, exhibition, and, not to mention ownership, of art created during the Nazi era as it did during the height of Peter Ludwig's collection of Breker sculptures in the 1970s and 1980s.

Martens intimates that most of his clients are Russian and American businesspeople, though he adds that he does not give out any client information, in order to protect their identity, another indication of the taboo that continues to surround the artwork. This taboo allure, of course, is not limited to the works in Martens collections: in 2015, a group of 15 watercolors and drawings by Hitler sold at a controversial and headline-grabbing auction in Nuremberg to an anonymous buyer for $450,000. Early in 2019, more of his paintings, which auctioneers insisted had "no artistic value," were set to go on auction – the elderly sellers chose to remain anonymous – to an expected group of bidders from the U.S., Russia, and the U.K.[17] The market for Nazi-era artwork has also recently become newsworthy again with not only the discovery of the collection of artwork, some of it possibly looted, of Nazi art dealer Hildebrand Gurlitt in Munich, but also the discovery in 2015 of two massive bronze horses cast by Josef Thorak that once adorned the courtyard of Hitler's New Reich Chancellery. These horses were discovered with the help of another Dutch art lover, detective Arthur Brand, who created the fake persona of a wealthy

[17] "Adolf Hitler paintings 'of no artistic value' go on sale in Berlin," *BBC News*, 24 January 2019.

American entrepreneur and collector of Nazi artwork to bust a ring of collectors who had been hiding a large stash of Nazi art treasures and memorabilia.[18]

Martens is cagey about where he attains most of the artwork, though he notes that most of his paintings and busts of Hitler come from private auctions in America, preferring instead to discuss where some of the paintings end up. He notes that the Russian collectors in particular seem to view ownership of the artwork as a sort of war trophy, more than 70 years after the end of the Second World War, while many American collectors are drawn to both the stylistic qualities of some of the works, as well as their taboo aura – "they just like how they look." The collector also reveals that most of his buyers are not political figures, but rather entrepreneurs. He suggests this allows them to enjoy the art "guilt-free," without any sort of forced moral narrative about what it might mean to pay money for inherently racialized art produced during the Nazi period, some of which would indeed fall under Gilkey's category of "incendiary," though other pieces of which are similar to those he confiscated during his art seizures, and still others which fall into his category of "banal summer reruns of nineteenth-century art."[19] The most viewed piece of artwork on the gallery website is, according to Martens, is "Junges Mädchen" ("Young Girl"), a painting by Ernst Liebermann. The filmmaker and author of *Art of the Third Reich* Peter Adam described this painting as a "sensual and lingering nude [young woman]…with 'healthy Aryan flesh,"[20] a descriptor that Martens's German Art Gallery uses online as well. Though no explanation for the painting's apparent popularity with potential clients comes from the gallery owner, it is possible that the slightly erotic nature of the artwork – which features a young blonde women in profile, staring intensely at something beyond the

[18] Konstantin von Hammerstein, "Das Geheimnis der Hitler-Pferde," *Der Spiegel*, 22 May 2015.
[19] See chapter one.
[20] Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 155.

confines of the canvas, her breasts exposed – combined with the history of its creator (Liebermann's nudes were often displayed at the Great German Art Exhibitions and sold to Nazi Party elite, and in 1944 he was also placed on the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste*), make for a piece whose titillation factor rests in both subject matter and its history.

Not all of the works in the gallery go to private collectors: one large Erich Mercker (the well-known painter of so-called "heroic" industrial landscapes[21]) oil painting of an industrial worksite hanging on Martens's living room wall had just been sold for several thousand Euros by the Grohmann Museum at the Milwaukee School of Engineering.[22] The Grohmann Museum has, in recent years, taken particular care to contextualize the paintings of Mercker in their collection, raising the question in a recent exhibition of the moral obligation of artists working under a repressive regime like the Third Reich. Though he mostly sells to private collectors who are less concerned with the moral questions surrounding the purchasing and exhibiting, even in a private context, Martens does make an effort to historically contextualize each work that is up for sale on the German Art Gallery website, describing in overwhelmingly objective language – never condemning the artists, even those who produced works for Hitler himself, like Thorak or Breker – their provenance, style, subject matter, and, when possible, exhibition history.

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[21] For more on this particular genre of Nazi-era painting, see Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004) 116. These were scenes that juxtaposed the unique beauty and appeal of that Nordic landscape with scenes of worksites and war images – from granite quarries to bridges to the *Autobahnen*, to renderings of Panzers embedded in a grassy meadow (see Ahrens, *Advance in Russia*, one of the painters whose works were confiscated by Gilkey in 1946). This imagery gained popularity in paintings and drawings from 1939 to 1942, coinciding with several of the most stunning military successes of the Third Reich. The term was coined by Paul Schultze-Naumburg a Nazi artist and architect who, like Breker and Claus Bergen, was on placed on the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste*.

[22] The Grohmann Museum currently owns the largest collection of paintings by Mercker. In 2014, it opened an exhibition of their Mercker holdings, called "Erich Mercker: Painter of Industry" that ran until December of that year. The show did not invoke the same vehement protests that the retrospective of Werner Peiner in Germany several years earlier had.

This lack of moral judgment, or even contextualization in a contemporary context is purposeful: for Martens, the time for judgment on the artists who successfully produced art under the Nazi regime has long since passed. Martens questions with agitation why *art* seems to have such a privileged position in not only the public's collective memory, but in its collective morality. There is a relatively open and untroubled market for military paraphernalia and weapons related to the Second World War, he argues. Why is it that art is different? He expressed hope that someday art created during and sanctioned by the Third Reich might be treated the same as "art from the period of Napoleon." Though Martens is clearly drawn to the historical context of the artworks, he sees them – and wants them to be seen – as more than mere historical documents of a troubled past. Like Gordon Gilkey, he empathizes with the plight of some artists who produced art during the Nazi period just to maintain a living, though unlike Gilkey, he does not draw a distinction between these artists (some *Kriegsmaler*, for example), and those who actively profited from the racialization of the RKK, and the favor of Nazi Party elite, like those artists on the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste*. In this regard, Martens is closer to Peter Ludwig, who was surprised to learn that many city officials in Cologne, as well as left-wing academics and museum curators, were troubled by his insistence that the work of art be separated from the biography of the artist, especially if that biography was troubling, as it was for Arno Breker. Though Martens expresses his desire for a future in which the Nazi period is, essentially, normalized enough for visual remnants from it to be treated the same as art from any other violent period of history, a desire similar to that expressed by conservative German politicians and academics during the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, he also recognizes that it is not reflective of the present reality. In the end, for the time being, Martens is happy to cater to wealthy, private collectors and entrepreneurs who, though they may be intrigued by or drawn to the arts' violent

and taboo historical context, are untroubled or unburdened by the potential moral ramifications of purchasing or exhibiting privately these works as either trophies or simply "quality" art. Martens is also resigned to the fact that his online gallery is still upsetting to many, especially, interestingly, those who live in Germany, and sees no near future where a pseudonym is not required for transactions or press.

Martens's story and the presence of the German Art Gallery prove that this topic remains nearly as fraught with emotion and ambivalent gray areas as it was more than 70 years ago, when Gordon Gilkey was first tasked with finding, apprehending, and ultimately removing for "safekeeping" any artwork that was deemed dangerous to the newly liberated German populace in the immediate postwar period. In an article in 1978 for the *Washington Post* reacting to the growing interest from the West German government in the return of Gilkey's seized art, Bess Hormats, a former acting curator of the Army Art Collection, wrote that, "[t]he relatively few works [in U.S. custody] which can be considered Nazi propaganda paintings, only one generation after they were created for the Thousand Year Reich, appear so pompous and ludicrous that they are laughable to all but the lunatic fringe, neo-Nazis in Lincoln., Nebraska."[23] Though her quote is forty years old, and more than thirty years after the end of the war, Hormats's words still strike a chord, especially combined with the increased demand on the art market for art of the Nazi period, and a new era of exhibitions. The question of whether this art is a danger may seem, once again, less trivial and overblown in an era when right-wing nationalism is once again on the increase in both Germany and the United States, anti-Semitic attacks are on the rise worldwide, and images of young Americans carrying torches and swastika flags make the news. Simultaneously, both countries continue to grow more polarized politically, with *Die*

[23] Bess Hormats, "Captured German War Art," *The Washington Post*, 12 February 1978.

*Grünen* making their largest headway in decades in elections throughout Germany, and the unprecedented chance for a coalition between the Greens and the conservative CDU approaching in the 2021 elections. Because human beings often operate in gray areas, discussions, ideally guided by experts, about these gray areas in history, in this case, as mediated through Nazi-era artwork, can be the most meaningful way to engage in the act of historical empathy. Even up against antisemitism, xenophobia, and a resurgence of right-wing populism (and Nazism), confronting and thinking through these gray zones, such as those embodied by the paintings of the German War Artists, or addressing the potential for viewers' attraction to the aesthetics of art created during the Nazi era, is productive. It is these confrontations that reduce the dangerously bifurcated "us versus them" mentality ("*we* would never commit atrocities, because *we* are part of an inherently democratic, good society") that often mars historical collective – and personal – memory, all but ensuring that mistakes of the past recur.

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