

Bad Art. Propaganda. No Art at All: The Struggle of German Art History to Come to Terms with the Art (Politics) of National Socialism¹

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——— This article aims to explore the challenges the art produced for and under the national socialist regime between 1933 and 1945 poses for the field of art history in Germany. It does so by outlining recent developments in the research on this topic and on the presentation of those artworks in German museums. These developments will be contextualized by a discussion of “Degenerate Art” as a political rather than an aesthetic phenomenon and the construction of the binary opposition of “Degenerate Art” and national socialist art in the history of the field of German art history. Currently a shift in the discipline is taking place, employing a cultural historical approach to deal with the art and art politics of National Socialism which leads to more differentiated research that even enters the institution of the art museum.

Keywords: national socialist art, Degenerate Art, German art history.

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1.

View of the first room of the exhibition *Artige Kunst* contrasting Horst Strepfels's triptych *Nacht über Deutschland (Night over Germany)* with paintings by Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbrück and Hermann Otto Hoyer depicting the national socialist family ideal. Photo: Katharina Zimmermann, Stiftung Situation Kunst, Bochum

Parodos *Artige Kunst* pirmosios salės vaizdas

Artige Kunst (Compliant Art) – An Exhibition as a Thermometer

In 2016 and 2017 the exhibition *Artige Kunst. Kunst und Politik im Nationalsozialismus (Compliant Art. Art and Politics under National Socialism)* presented artworks persecuted as *Degenerate Art* by the national socialist regime alongside those accepted between 1933 and 1945 to audiences in Bochum, Rostock and Regensburg [ill. 1].² The show was a success: it did not cause a big scandal like similar endeavours in the past,³

² The exhibition was shown from 5 November 2016 to 17 April 2017 in the art collection of Ruhruniversität Bochum Situation Kunst (für Max Imdahl) in Bochum, from 27 April 2017 to 18 June 2017 in the Kunsthalle Rostock and from 14 July 2017 to 29 October 2017 in the Ostdeutsche Galerie in Regensburg.

³ For example, the exhibition *Deutsche Kunst 1933–1945 in Braunschweig. Kunst im Nationalsozialismus (German Art 1933–1945 in Braunschweig. Art under National Socialism)* in 2000 opened after a big controversy just in a newly curated version, see: Heino R. Möller, “Zur Ausstellung Deutsche Kunst 1933–1945 in Braunschweig. Kunst im Nationalsozialismus”, in: *Deutsche Kunst 1933–1945 in Braunschweig. Kunst im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Städtisches Museum Braunschweig, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000, pp. 20–24. The 2006 Arno Breker exhibition in Schwerin as well was accompanied by intense discussions, see: Hermann Junghans, “Das Schweriner Breker-Projekt – eine Bilanz”, in: *Das Schweriner Arno-Breker-Projekt. Dokumentation*, ed. Rudolf Conrades, Schwerin: Landeshauptstadt Schwerin, 2007, pp. 2–14.

it generated much coverage – even featuring in the major evening news on television – and drew above-average audiences.⁴ However, this exhibition illustrates the problems that the art of this period still poses for the discipline of art history in Germany.

The preparation of the exhibition as well as its presentation point to continuing obstacles for the discipline of art history in Germany in its treatment of the art production and art policies under National Socialism. On their search for cooperation partners that would show the exhibition, the curators faced refusal on the grounds that those works accepted by the National Socialists were political and thus should not be presented in an art museum. Furthermore, these works would lack artistic quality and not qualify as art at all.⁵ This argument stood firmly in the tradition of the practice to show national socialist artworks solely in (cultural) history museums; just in few temporary exemptions they entered the realm of the art world after 1945. The hesitation of many art historians to accept the politically charged artworks of the national socialist period as an integral part of the field has led to certain blind spots.

In this article I make three points: first, the persecution of “Degenerate Art” can be better understood when analysed as a political phenomenon, rather than on aesthetic grounds; second, the binary opposition of persecuted modern art against art that was officially accepted under National Socialism was constructed to exonerate German art history, and has resulted in a blind spot within the discipline; and third, a shift in the discipline is currently taking place. While traditional discourses around “Degenerate Art” and national socialist art still dominate research, recent work in the field begins to be more differentiated, and even enters the institution of the art museum in temporary exhibitions and presentations of permanent collections.

4 The exhibition had more than 10,000 visitors in Bochum. See: Sven Westernströer, “Ausstellung zur Kunstpolitik der Nazis findet enormes Echo”, in: WAZ, [online], April 3, 2017, [cited 12/07/2018], <https://www.waz.de/staedte/bochum/ausstellung-zur-kunstpolitik-der-nazis-findet-ermoes-echo-id210147673.html>. As Cindy Höhne of the Kunsthalle Rostock informed me via e-mail on 11 April 2018, 7,580 visitors saw this station of the exhibition – an above-average turnout for this museum. The Ostdeutsche Galerie Regensburg refused to comment on the number of visitors, but according to anecdotal reports there was a high number of attendees as well.

5 Alexander von Berswordt-Wallrabe, “Nothing but Questions (a personal epilogue...)”, in: *Artige Kunst. Kunst und Politik im Nationalsozialismus/Compliant Art. Art and Politics in the National Socialist Era*, ed. Jörg-Uwe Neumann, Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe, and Agnes Tietze, Bielefeld: Kerber, 2016, p. 234.

Understanding “Degenerate Art” as a Political Phenomenon

In the final discussion of a conference held in Berlin this March again the question arose how “Degenerate Art” could be defined in an aesthetic sense.⁶ More than 70 years after the end of the national socialist regime there remains a desire to set stylistic criteria for the persecuted art, and in turn for the accepted art; but no satisfactory answer can be given. “Degenerate Art” was not a well-defined aesthetic concept. While the regime was unified by an overall opposition to modern art, the persecution of modern artworks and the artists that created them as “degenerate” was situative: it depended on the individuals who made the decision and their specific contexts.

It is indisputable that on the one hand Adolf Hitler resented modern art and important members of the Nazi party like Alfred Rosenberg, one of the central ideologues of National Socialism, shared this position. On the other hand, other National Socialists were much more open with regard to modern tendencies in the arts. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels showed tolerance for modern art in his struggle for influence during the years 1933 to 1935. For instance, he protected the magazine *Kunst der Nation* (*Art of the Nation*) that lobbied for the acceptance of German modernism, especially expressionism, as the artistic representation of the new state.⁷ In 1933 student leaders in Berlin also acted on behalf of modern artists: They held a rally against the backward position on artistic matters of many National Socialists and organized a group exhibition in the art gallery of Ferdinand Möller that encompassed works by well-known modern artists like Ernst Barlach, Emil Nolde and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff alongside some artists like Georg Kolbe and Richard Scheibe who were easier for the new state to accept. Though the exhibition was closed for a few days by Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick, who was an adversary of modern art, and the National Socialist German Students’ League had to abdicate as organiser, eventually it could reopen and proceed. Ultimately Goebbels had to backtrack his support for modern artists, while Rosenberg and his faction – more in line with Hitler’s taste – could enforce their position.⁸ Im-

⁶ Conference *Degenerate Art’ in Breslau, Stettin and Königsberg*, Freie Universität Berlin, March 15–16, 2018.

⁷ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 38–40.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 15–18 and 35–38.

portantly though, Hitler, in his speech on cultural affairs at the Nazi party convention in 1934, not only opposed the attempt to turn the so called Nordic expressionism into the officially accepted style, but also criticized those who tried to promote a backward-oriented, *völkisch* style.⁹ Thus, even after Hitler's intervention in the artistic conflict in the national socialist movement, there was no clear vision of what the art of the Third Reich should look like. Artists who tried to continue their work under the new political conditions tried to cover a safe middle ground, leading to complaints by cultural officials and even Hitler himself who bemoaned a lack of quality and development in the production of art.¹⁰

Even after the summer of 1937, when the Great German Art Exhibition and the "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich contrasted the accepted and the persecuted art, officials could take a more modern stance on artistic matters. For example, Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth and Reichsstatthalter of Vienna, conceived himself as being culturally more open and thus organized an exhibition that contained more modern tendencies.¹¹ Therefore, the level of tolerance or repression with regard to modern art depended much on the personal position of national socialist officials. For the high-ranking individuals those diverse positions are known; there is a lack of knowledge, however, about the perspectives of lower-level officials towards modern art. Gauleiter (district leaders of the National Socialist German Workers' Party) and the Gau representatives of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts shaped local cultural policies, though we lack in understanding of their individual attitudes towards modern art and how those attitudes directed the policies.

Beyond this personal level of national socialist politics, "Degenerate Art" had a clear political function in different contexts. For instance, the fight against "cultural Bolshevistic" art was a symbol for the wider anti-communist stance of National Socialism. In this context it followed gener-

9 Birgit Schwarz, *Geniewahn. Hitler und die Kunst*, Wien: Böhlau, 2009, pp. 205; Anders V. Munch, "Redemption in Totality. Cultural Utopias of Late Romanticism and Crossroads of Art and Politics: Wagner, Behrens, Fidus, Hitler", in: *Totalitarian Art and Modernity*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wamberg, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010, pp. 32–33.

10 Birgit Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 208–209; Ines Schlenker, *Hitler's Salon. The Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich 1937–1944*, Oxford: Lang, 2007, p. 143.

11 Josephine Gabler, *Skulptur in Deutschland in den Ausstellungen zwischen 1933 und 1945*, PhD thesis, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1996, pp. 190–202.

al patterns of national socialist propaganda. When the diplomatic relations with the USSR did not allow for those attacks, the rhetoric could get toned down. A detailed analysis of the patterns regarding the propagandistic context of the persecution of “Degenerate Art” is still due.¹² A further example is the framing of modern art as Polish in the context of the Germanisation politics in the occupied city of Łódź.¹³ These political contexts could at times work in favour of modern art: while the first anti-modern wave rushed over Germany in 1933, an exhibition of futurist artworks took place in Hamburg and Berlin, and the National Gallery presented modern Italian masters, attended among others by Hermann Göring, honouring the Italian allies.¹⁴ Thus, while the national socialist state was totalitarian, there never was a monolithic art policy in effect. Hitler’s position on artistic matters certainly held strong influence, but the different personal and external political factors allowed different scopes of action at different times. For example, Emil Nolde still hoped for his rehabilitation as late as 1940, despite being one of the most established expressionist painters targeted by the National Socialists as “Degenerate Artists” while he was ideologically aligned to the regime and maybe the most prominent case of an occupational ban.¹⁵

The political aspect of “Degenerate Art” explains why so many artists that worked in a modern style could pursue their careers in Germany between 1933 and 1945. This fact does not obscure the hardships of political persecution and emigration for artists, but it highlights the much more complex cultural landscape under the regime: while it is certainly true that the national socialist struggle against modern art depended on stylistic factors like the deconstruction of the human figure and the growing trend towards abstraction and they preferred realism and classicism as styles, the

¹² For a detailed analysis of anti-Bolshevist propaganda as a general phenomenon, see, for example: Moritz Florin, “Mobilisierung für den Vernichtungskrieg? Nationalsozialistische Propaganda und Stalinismus 1933–1941”, in: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunikationsforschung*, Berlin: Aufbau, 2011, pp. 31, 33–34.

¹³ See, for example: W. Künkler, “Kunst als Kulturspiegel. Nur in einem gesunden Volk kann sich eine Gesunde Kunst entfalten”, in: *Litzmannstädter Zeitung* 54, 23.02.1941, p. 13.

¹⁴ Dieter Scholz, “Prolog: Ein Bildertausch mit Italien,” in: *Die schwarzen Jahre: Geschichte einer Sammlung 1933–1945*, ed. Dieter Scholz and Maria Obenaus, Berlin: Verbrecher, 2015, pp. 45–48.

¹⁵ Bernhard Fulda, “‘Hinter jedem Busch lauert Verknennung und Neid.’ Emil Noldes Reaktion auf den Sieg der Traditionalisten”, in: *Künstler im Nationalsozialismus: Die “Deutsche Kunst”, die Kunstpolitik und die Berliner Kunsthochschule*, ed. Wolfgang Ruppert, Köln: Böhlau, 2015, pp. 262–263, 265–268.

artists most targeted by the policies and actions directed against “Degenerate Art” were those with a high profile and visibility. Such artists included those whose works got collected and exhibited by museums during the Weimar years and were framed as aligned with a complex network in the art scene – often described as Jewish – and ultimately the democratic system.¹⁶

This situation has led to contradictions that cannot be explained solely on an aesthetic level. For instance, the Bauhaus as an institution was, on the one hand, a prime target of the anti-modernist rhetoric and policies, and on the other, many architects, artists and aesthetic practices of the Bauhaus remained part of the art scene.¹⁷ Even famous modernists like the painters Max Pechstein and Otto Dix whose personal styles had left behind their most avant-garde phase could carry on. Though they faced repression at times, overall, these modernist artists were allowed to work and participate in the art market because national socialist art bureaucrats mostly positioned “degenerate” works of art as separate from the artists who created them.¹⁸ This situation allowed many artists that were part of the Secession groups or other modernist associations, and who had developed a more or less moderate modern style, to continue their careers without big obstacles. The officials of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts were contacted by many concerned artists after the opening of the “Degenerate Art” exhibition in Munich in 1937, while they took the position that those artists in light of their current work had nothing to worry about.¹⁹ For example, even if eight works of Wilhelm Kohlhoff got seized from museums in 1937, he could exhibit in the Great German Art Exhibitions in Munich and painted murals for military buildings.²⁰ Leo von König was disliked by Hitler, but

¹⁶ One of the most influential publications in this regard was Wolfgang Willrich, *Säuberung der Kunsttempels: Eine kunstpolitische Kampfschrift zur Gesundung deutscher Kunst im Geiste nordischer Art*, München: J. F. Lehmanns, 1938, pp. 9–10, 55, 99.

¹⁷ Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung*, München: Prestel, 1993.

¹⁸ Bernhard Fulda and Aya Soika, *Max Pechstein: the Rise and Fall of Expressionism*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 312–315, 321–326; Ina Jessen, “‘Ein typischer Vertreter der Verfallserscheinung’. Otto Dix zwischen Verfemung und Anerkennung”, in: *Die Kammer schreibt schon wieder. Das Reglement für den Handel mit moderner Kunst im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Anja Tiedemann, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, p. 147.

¹⁹ Nina Kubowitsch, “Die Reichskammer der bildenden Künste. Grenzsetzungen in der künstlerischen Freiheit”, in: *Künstler im Nationalsozialismus: Die “Deutsche Kunst”, die Kunstpolitik und die Berliner Kunsthochschule*, ed. Wolfgang Ruppert, Köln: Böhlau, 2015, p. 86.

²⁰ Rudolf Pfefferkorn, *Wilhelm Kohlhoff*, Berlin: Stapp, 1975, p. 37.



2.

Leo von König, *Portrait of Dr. Goebbels*, 1935. Photo: Bruno Kroll, Leo von König, Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1941

Leo von König, *Dr. Goebbels portretas*, 1935

Goebbels nonetheless let him paint a portrait of himself [ill. 2] in a moderate expressive style and von Schirach appointed him as honorary member of the art academy in Vienna in 1941.²¹ Oskar Nerlinger was represented by Herwarth Walden's Sturm gallery and joined the Association of Revolutionary Visual Artists in 1932. The Reich Chamber of Fine Arts noted the past political affiliation of Nerlinger, though his file contains a proposal by him for a study trip to the Western front battlegrounds of the First World War, and his promotion to a higher position at the school he taught at did not get opposed by the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts.²²

These examples – just three of many – highlight that the art scene under the national socialist regime was far more complex than a binary opposition of good “Degenerate Art” and regressive official art established on stylistic grounds. Policies and actions were often contradictory, and there

21 Jonathan Petropoulos, op. cit., p. 6; Irene Nierhaus, “Adoration und Selbstverherrlichung. Künstlerische und kunstpolitische Schwerpunkte an der Akademie der bildenden Künste von den dreißiger bis Ende der vierziger Jahre”, in: *Im Reich der Kunst. Die Wiener Akademie der Bildenden Künste und die faschistische Kunstpolitik*, ed. Hans Seiger et al., Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1990, p. 112.

22 Landesarchiv Berlin, A Rep. 243-04 Nr. 6225, Klaus Lederer, head of the Berlin branch of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, to the president of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, 25 October 1939 and Oskar Nerlinger to the head of the Berlin branch of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, 28 August 1940.

existed spaces for modern artists and holdouts of modern styles in national socialist Germany that are not limited to the notion of “inner emigration”.

After World War II – Binary Oppositions

The art historical discourse on “Degenerate Art” and the art of National Socialism still is shaped by narratives established in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. In this context, the officially accepted art of National Socialism was eliminated from the canon – and in some instances not regarded as art at all and defined instead solely as propaganda. In contrast, modern art, especially expressionism, which survived in exile or in “inner emigration”, was reinstated as the true German art.²³ Art historians and artists alike had an interest in this post-war development. There were certainly many individuals who had suffered from repressive practices and got compensated in this context; the establishment of the narrative offered cover for others. Maybe the most prominent case is Emil Nolde, whose entanglement with national socialist ideology and politics just recently became the topic of research after decades in which he served as an icon of the persecuted artists.²⁴

The development in the field of art history was similar. Before 1933 modern art was part of the field in museums and art criticism, but in the academic context it held a more marginal position. On the second *Kunsthistorikertag*, the primary arena of German art historians, in Munich in 1948, the attempt to construct a line of tradition for the full incorporation of modern art into the academic field was undertaken. One critic was Werner Haftmann who later co-founded the Documenta, though he did not address his own role during National Socialism.²⁵ In the magazine *Art of the Nation* he and other

²³ Christian Fuhrmeister, “Die (mindestens) doppelte Zurichtung der ‘gewordenen Kunst’”, in: *Artige Kunst. Kunst und Politik im Nationalsozialismus/Compliant Art. Art and Politics in the National Socialist Era*, ed. Jörg-Uwe Neumann, Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe, and Agnes Tietze, Bielefeld: Kerber, 2016, p. 103; Pamela M. Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016, pp. 180–181.

²⁴ Stefan Koldehoff, “NS-Vergangenheit des Malers. Noldes Bekenntnis”, in: *Die ZEIT*, No. 42, October 10, 2013, [online], October 21, 2013, [cited 13/07/2018], <https://www.zeit.de/2013/42/emil-nolde-nationalsozialismus/komplettansicht>; Bernhard Fulda, “Hinter jedem Busch lauert Ver- kennung und Neid. Emil Noldes Reaktion auf den Sieg der Traditionalisten”; Bernhard Fulda, “Emil Noldes Berufsverbot. Eine Spurensuche”, in: *Die Kammer schreibt schon wieder. Das Reglement für den Handel mit moderner Kunst im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Anja Tiedemann, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 127–146.

²⁵ Heinrich Dilly, *Deutsche Kunsthistoriker 1933-1945*, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1988, pp. 18, 83–85.

art historians and critics had attempted to advocate for modern art, especially expressionism, as artistic manifestation of the regime by stressing its Nordic qualities and the alignment of the artists with the German nation and the artistic tradition.²⁶ After the war art historians like him framed the same art as part of a democratic culture. Pamela M. Potter concluded in her 2016 monograph on the historiography of national socialist visual and performing arts with regard to expressionism: “The transformation of expressionism into something abstract and ‘absolute’ in the 1950s offered refuge as an art that was autonomous, free from politics, and supranational.”²⁷

This development caused two blind spots for the discipline of German art history. First, the construction of an autonomous and apolitical modern art that functioned as a line of tradition for the emerging Federal Republic of Germany was itself a political discourse, directed against socialist realism in East Germany and the Soviet bloc.²⁸ The politicization of this process, at times with direct support by the CIA, only recently became a topic of deeper research in Germany.²⁹ Second, the promoted tradition of modern art and the removal of the conservative art that was successful under National Socialism from the canon and, thus, out of the disciplinary field of art history obscured the fact that neither those artists nor their works disappeared.

On the contrary, many of them who had careers in Germany between 1933 and 1945 could continue and got awarded official commissions and honours. The notorious example of Hitler’s favourite sculptor Arno Breker’s success with the post-war political and industrial elites obscures the fact that many more artists could carry on. Some of them ended up in teaching positions: Adolf Wamper who produced some of the monumental sculptures for the national socialist regime taught at the Folkwang School in Essen in West Germany and got awarded a professor’s title in 1970 [ill. 3, 4].³⁰ Heinrich Drake had a teaching position at the art school Berlin-Weißen-

²⁶ Stefan Germer, “Kunst der Nation. Zu einem Versuch, die Avantgarde zu nationalisieren”, in: *Kunst auf Befehl? Dreiunddreißig bis Fünfundvierzig*, ed. Bazon Brock and Achim Preiß, München: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1990, pp. 27, 33–37.

²⁷ Pamela M. Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–119

²⁹ Dorothea Schöne, *Freie Künstler in einer freien Stadt. Die amerikanische Förderung der Berliner Nachkriegsmoderne*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

³⁰ Bettina Oesl, “Der Bildhauer Adolf Wamper (1901-1977)”, in: *Rheinische Heimatpflege*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 129–131, 136–137, 140.



3.
Adolf Wamper; *Genius des Sieges* (*Genius of Victory*), 1940. Photo: Heinrich Hoffmann, Photothek Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München

Adolf Wamper; *Pergalės genijus*, 1940



4.
Adolf Wamper; *Turnfestdenkmal* (*Monument for the Deutsches Turnfest*), 1963, Essen-Rüttenscheid. Photo: Wiki05, Wikimedia Commons

Adolf Wamper; *Paminklas Vokietijos gimnastikos šventei*, 1963

see, was member of the Academy of Arts in East Berlin and received the National Prize of the German Democratic Republic on two occasions after participating with smaller sculptures in the art scene under National Socialism and getting awarded the Rome Prize in 1940 [ill. 5].³¹ A representative of the older generation of artists, Fritz Mackensen, who was a cofounder of the artists' colony Worpswede in 1889, was appointed director of the Nordic art college in Bremen when it was founded in 1934. In 1953 he got awarded the Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany based on his artistic merits.³² There are many more examples of artists who continued their careers in the periphery, not entering the collections of the big museums

³¹ "Heinrich Drake", in: *Biografische Datenbank*, ed. Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, [online], [cited 24/08/2018], <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363;-1424.html?ID=622>.

³² Andrea Beatrice Merkel, *Career Structures and Artistic Diversity in Nazi Germany: A Study of Award-Winning Painters under the Third Reich*, PhD thesis, London: University College London, 1997, pp. 67, 77.



5.

Heinrich Drake receiving the National Prize of the German Democratic Republic on 7 October 1954.

Photo: Walter Heilig, Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-26788-0031 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Heinrichui Drakei iteikiama Vokietijos Demokratinės Respublikos nacionalinė premija, 1954 10 07

or nationwide discourses but having their share of the market. In all those cases, the years between 1933 and 1945 got more or less eliminated from the biographies, the continued relation of state and artists and the career mechanisms that have led over the caesuras are for the most part still a desideratum.³³

Art history as a field has generally ignored the more conservative part of the art field, which has led to a dangerous ignorance. In contrast to the image transmitted by the canon, progressive modern and contemporary art by far was not the only art produced and consumed. Though contrary to the historical situation, German art history so far has almost exclusively focused on the social history of modern artists, the taste for modern art and

³³ The author pursues the PhD project *Scopes of Action of Artists Accepted under National Socialism. Berlin Artists in the Great German Art Exhibitions and their Role in the City's Art Scene* supervised by Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Savoy at the Technical University Berlin which seeks to analyse the careers of 344 artists before 1933, under the national socialist rule and after 1945.

its collectors, ignoring the majority of conservative artists and their success with the audiences of the time.³⁴ It is not just a historical phenomenon; there still must exist the kind of art that got championed by the *völkisch* movement before 1945. One such case is the Austrian painter Manfred “Odin” Wiesinger who clearly references iconology prominent during National Socialism in some of his paintings. We know about him, because he has acquired a certain prominence as the favourite painter of Norbert Hofer, a politician of the right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria and since the end of 2017 minister for transport, innovation and technology.³⁵ I am absolutely sure: There are more artists like him out there.

Casting judgement retrospectively on the strategies of artists and art historians is unproductive for contemporary discourses within art history. The question how any artist could think he could produce art under the conditions of National Socialism and denying his works the status of art are both ahistorical. And to believe that an artist should have been able to foresee war and genocide as ultimate consequences of National Socialism subscribes to a belief in the artist as genius that otherwise already got thoroughly deconstructed.³⁶ This does not mean that we as researchers should not have an ethical position in relation to our subject – indeed, all historical research and writing entails a subjective process. Though, instead of limiting our material by an aesthetic or moral selection, we should try to reconstruct the art scene as it existed. I believe this is important in order to fully understand the historical context and to avoid the simplification of complex narratives, especially since the canon that still shapes museum displays and research agendas was established against the backdrop of the nation-

³⁴ Christian Fuhrmeister, “Die (mindestens) doppelte Zurichtung der ‘gewordenen Kunst’”, pp. 103–104, 108–109.

³⁵ Anne-Catherine Simon, “Odin: Ein Hofmaler für Norbert Hofer”, in: *Die Presse*, [online], March 23, 2016, [cited 14/08/2018], https://diepresse.com/home/politik/bpwahl/4951741/Odin_Ein-Hofmaler-fuer-Norbert-Hofer.

³⁶ Alexander von Berswordt-Wallrabe, *op. cit.* is a good example for this stance. And it is a particularly interesting read, because he addresses openly his inner conflict between his rejection of the art produced under National Socialism and the understanding that an easy judgement of a later generation should not be passed, as well as a need to address this art as a historical phenomenon. A further interesting example is Achim Preiß, “Das Dritte Reich und seine Kunst. Zum Umgang mit einer Blamage”, in: *Kunst auf Befehl? Dreiunddreißig bis Fünfundvierzig*, ed. Bazou Brock and Achim Preiß, München: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1990, pp. 253–273. By analysing a single artwork, *The Four Elements* by Adolf Ziegler, Preiß aims to expose the lack of quality of the whole art production between 1933 and 1945 and even questions if there is a need to preserve those artworks.

al socialist rule. Part of this research agenda must be the historization of the discipline itself. The discipline of art history in Germany between 1933 and 1945 is still an under-researched topic. The accounting for its national socialist past on a broader scale began with discussions on the Kunsthistorikertag and a short monograph in 1988 – very late in comparison to most other academic fields.³⁷ Since then research has slowly picked up, though the attention for individual art historians focuses mostly on those that took part in the looting activities during the Second World War or had a direct and close connection with the national socialist regime. The art historical practices and theories of that time and their traditions before 1933 and influences after 1945 still wait to become thoroughly researched, though there are developments that point in this direction.³⁸ This leads me to my final observations.

Aesthetic vs. Cultural Historical Art History

The exhibition that I touched upon at the beginning of my paper still upheld the traditional narrative of a binary opposition between “degenerate” and national socialist art. However, the number of exhibition projects that address the complex history of art under the national socialist regime and its legacies is increasing.

In 2013, the Museum im Kulturspeicher in Würzburg, founded in 1941, exhibited *Tradition & Propaganda. Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Kunst aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in der Städtischen Sammlung Würzburg (Tradition & Propaganda. A Survey. Art from the National Socialist Time in the Municipal Collection)*.³⁹ In 2017, the Städtische Galerie Rosenheim that opened in 1937 presented the exhibition *Vermacht. Verfallen. Verdrängt. Kunst und Nationalsozialismus. Die Sammlung der Städtischen Galerie Rosenheim in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und in den Nachkriegsjahren (Bequeathed. Fallen For. Suppressed. Art and National*

³⁷ Heinrich Dilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-10.

³⁸ Two groundbreaking edited volumes in this respect are *Kunstgeschichte im Nationalsozialismus. Beiträge zur Geschichte einer Wissenschaft zwischen 1930 und 1950*, ed. Nikola Doll, Christian Fuhrmeister; Michael H. Sprenger; Weimar: VDG, 2005 and *Kunstgeschichte im “Dritten Reich”. Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, ed. Ruth Heftrig and Barbara Schellewald, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008.

³⁹ *Tradition & Propaganda. Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Kunst aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in der Städtischen Sammlung Würzburg*, ed. Marlene Lauter; Würzburg: Museum im Kulturspeicher, 2013.



6.
View of the room "The Depot" presenting mostly works by Hans Müller-Schnuttenbach in the exhibition *Vermacht. Verfallen. Verdrängt. Kunst und Nationalsozialismus (Bequeathed. Fallen For. Suppressed. Art and National Socialism)* of the Städtische Galerie Rosenheim, 2017. Photo: Martin Weiand, Rosenheim

Parodos Paveldēti. Žlugę. Nuslopinti. Menas ir nacionalsociālizmas vaizdas, 2017

Socialism. The Collection of the Städtische Galerie Rosenheim during National Socialism and after the War) [ill. 6].⁴⁰ Both museums, on the one hand, exhibited their own national socialist history and, on the other, the art produced under the national socialist regime that is part of their collections. The latter cooperated with the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, allowing bachelor and master students of the department for art history to participate in the preparation of the exhibition.⁴¹ In 2015 the National Gallery in Berlin employed a similar approach like the museums in Würzburg and Rosenheim with its exhibition *Die schwarzen Jahre: Geschichte einer Sammlung 1933–1945* (*The Black Years: History of a Collection 1933–1945*).⁴² Instead of a solely aesthetic programme these special exhibitions employed a cultural historical approach, and their reception was largely positive.⁴³

Perhaps the most important development was the establishment of a room dedicated to the officially accepted German art of the 1930s in the permanent collection of the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich in 2016.⁴⁴ Beside the most famous national socialist painting *The Four Elements* by Adolf Ziegler [ill. 7], ten artists with different standings in the national socialist state are represented with their works. It was for the first time that this art was exhibited in a major art museum outside of the context of a special exhibition⁴⁵, sparking controversies about the canon. Some commen-

⁴⁰ *Vermacht. Verfallen. Verdrängt. Kunst und Nationalsozialismus. Die Sammlung der Städtischen Galerie Rosenheim in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und in den Nachkriegsjahren*, ed. Christian Fuhrmeister, Monika Hauser-Mair and Felix Steffan, Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017.

⁴¹ Christian Fuhrmeister, “Vermacht. Verfallen. Verdrängt. Kunst und Nationalsozialismus – eine Einführung”, in: *Vermacht. Verfallen. Verdrängt. Kunst und Nationalsozialismus. Die Sammlung der Städtischen Galerie Rosenheim in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und in den Nachkriegsjahren*, ed. Christian Fuhrmeister, Monika Hauser-Mair and Felix Steffan, Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017, pp. 11–13.

⁴² *Die schwarzen Jahre: Geschichte einer Sammlung 1933–1945*, ed. Dieter Scholz and Maria Obenaus, Berlin: Verbrecher, 2015.

⁴³ See for example for the Berlin exhibition: Hans-Joachim Müller, “Kunst zur NS-Zeit. Diese Bilder sind die reinste Zumutung”, in: *Die Welt*, [online], November 28, 2015, [cited 26/08/2018], <https://www.welt.de/kultur/kunst-und-architektur/article149371567/Diese-Bilder-sind-die-reinste-Zumutung.html>.

⁴⁴ Oliver Kase and Bernhard Maaz, *Künstler im Nationalsozialismus. Erläuterungen zu den ausgestellten Werken/Artists under the National Socialists. Information on the Exhibited Works*, München: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung, 2016.

⁴⁵ For examples of the inclusion of national socialist artworks in museum exhibitions to this date, see: Christoph Zuschlag, “Ein schwieriges Erbe. Über den Umgang mit Kunst aus der NS-Zeit”, in: *Tradition & Propaganda. Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Kunst aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in der Städtischen Sammlung Würzburg*, ed. Marlene Lauter, Würzburg: Museum im Kulturspeicher, 2013, p. 19.



7.

Adolf Ziegler, *Die vier Elemente (The Four Elements)*, 1937. Photo: Photothek Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München

Adolf Ziegler, *Keturi elementai*, 1937

tators in the press mourned the loss of one room that otherwise could be dedicated to true masterpieces that now are relegated to the magazine.⁴⁶

This development goes hand in hand with developments in the academic field. Since 2011 the database gdk-research.de has made available all artworks exhibited in the Great German Art Exhibitions between 1937 and 1944. Up to that point art historians had to work for the most part with a selection determined by the National Socialists for propagandistic purposes and reinforced after the war.⁴⁷ Getting a clearer impression of the variety of works produced between 1933 and 1945 allows for the deconstruction of the image of the arts that the National Socialists wanted to promote in their propaganda and comparing it to the reality of the art world in national socialist Germany. This body of newly accessible visual resources has helped to challenge persistent views on the arts under National Socialism and thus inspired a new wave of research on this topic.

⁴⁶ Catrin Lorch, “Fade Kunst”, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, [online], April 9, 2016, [cited 13/08/2018], <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/Kultur/ns-maler-im-museum-fade-kunst-1.2940410>.

⁴⁷ Christian Fuhrmeister, “Die (mindestens) doppelte Zurichtung der ‘gewordenen Kunst’”, p. 103.

In 1998 the political scientist Klaus von Beyme concluded in an essay on the artistic representation of rule and rulers in the modern age: “One suspects that only time will tell whether these totalitarian dictatorships [the Soviet Union and national socialist Germany; note by the author] yielded enduring works of art by artists that did not oppose the regime.”⁴⁸ He seems to imply that there will be a re-assessment of the quality of the art produced in the Soviet Union and under National Socialism in the future. While in general no one in the field endorses the art produced for or under the national socialist regime, a re-assessment definitely is taking place: the field is shifting to accept it as art and thus as a legitimate and necessary area of research, taking a cultural historical over an aesthetic stance. At the same time, art museums are starting to show interest in the fast-growing research, presenting it to a broader audience, ultimately complicating the perception of artworks in relation to the broader political contexts within which they were produced. This is an on-going development and seems to be part of a general movement of museums and the discipline alike to historicize themselves as public and academic institutions.

Submitted ——— 08/11/2018

⁴⁸ Original quote: “Ob die totalitären Diktaturen bleibende Kunst, bei Künstlern, die nicht in Opposition zum Regime standen, hervorgebracht hat, ist vermutlich erst mit einigem Abstand fair zu evaluieren.” Klaus von Beyme, *Die Kunst der Macht und die Gegenmacht der Kunst. Studien zum Spannungsverhältnis von Kunst und Politik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998, p. 126, translated by Emily Dreyfuß.

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Santrauka

Prastas menas. Propaganda. Joks menas apskritai. Vokiečių meno istorijos bandymai susitaikyti su nacionalsocialistiniu menu (ir jo politika)

Julius Redzinski

Reikšminiai žodžiai: nacionalsocialistinis menas, degeneracinis menas, vokiečių meno istorija.

Parodoje *Artige Kunst (Klusnus menas)*, 2016 ir 2017 metais apeliavusioje tris nedidelius Vokietijos dailės muziejus, nacionalsocialistinis menas buvo supriešintas su persekiotu „degeneratyviuoju menu“ pagal tradicinį vokiečių meno lauke nusistovėjusį modelį. Vis dėlto paskutiniai tyrimai atskleidė kur kas sudėtingesnę vaizdą: kadangi nacionalsocialistai niekada neišdėstė aiškių estetinių principų, apibrėžiančių „degeneratyvųjį meną“, bus vaisingiau jį konceptualizuoti kaip politinį reiškinių. Tai leidžia suvokti neretai vienas kitam prieštaraujančius režimo sprendimus platesniame politiniame kontekste. Be to, įdėmiau patyrinėjus pokarinę meno istorijos disciplinos istoriją Vokietijoje, dvinarės opozicijos kūrimas tarp persekiojamo modernaus meno iš vienos pusės ir nacionalsocialistinio meno, kuris dažnai buvo smerkiamas kaip prastas menas, išskirtinai propagandinis arba apskritai ne menas, iš kitos gali būti suvokiamas kaip Šaltojo karo fenomenas. Pasitelkdama kultūros istorijos požiūrį, ši tyrimų sritis atsigrėžė į sudėtingesnius 1933–1945 m. vokiečių meno istorijos aspektus, kvestionuodama atskirtis ir pabrėždama buvusį tęstinumą. Svarbus veiksnys, paskatinęs šį poslinkį, – gdk-research.de duomenų bazė, kuri atvėrė tyrinėjimams visus 12 500 didžiųjų vokiečių meno parodų kūrinių, išplėsdama siaurą nacionalsocialistinio meno kanoną ir išskeldama naujus klausimus. Tai įvyko ne tik akademiniam lauke – šio proceso rezultatus galima matyti

ir Vokietijos muziejuose, kurie ilgą laiką nenoriai eksponuodavo nacional-socialistinius meno kūrinius. Dabar jie ne tik eksponuoja šiuos tapybos ir grafikos kūrinius bei skulptūras; šios institucijos taip pat atsigręžia į savo pačių nacionalsocialistinę istoriją. Vadinasi, galima daryti išvadą, kad bendras muziejų ir visos mokslo srities siekis istorifikuotis ir remtis kultūriškesne istorine perspektyva pastaraisiais metais stipriai pastūmėjo į priekį nacionalsocialistinės Vokietijos meno ir meno politikos tyrimus.