

Entartete Kunst:

The War against Modern Art in the Third Reich

Honors Capstone Project

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Background	5
Modern Art in Prewar Germany.....	5
Hitler and Art	7
Jewish Modern Art vs. Aryan Classic Art.....	10
Hitler in Vienna.....	11
Munich and Dietrich Eckart	13
War against Art	15
The First Attacks on Modern Art	15
National Socialist Art	20
The Degenerate Art Exhibition	25
<i>Entartete Kunst</i> in Austria.....	36
Focus on Emil Nolde	38
Conclusion	42
Works Cited	43
Appendix #1: Visuals	45

Introduction

In July 1937, the Nazi Party exhibited a collection of modern artwork confiscated from museums throughout Germany. This display, entitled the “Degenerate Art Exhibition,” was organized to ridicule the artwork being presented.

The events that led to such a breaking point had started forming around the early 20th century. In Germany, after the First World War, the blossoming of modern art had coincided with the forming of a racist ideology. Meanwhile, Hitler was also discovering his own racist views and dislike of modern art. An artist who delved into politics, Hitler integrated his artistic views into his political ideologies. Eventually, this would lead to the Nazi association of Judaism with modern art. The degradation of modern art by Nazi officials led to modern artwork being labeled “degenerate.”

The “Great German Art Exhibition,” also in July 1937, officially defined “German art.” Such art abided by the standards of 19th century realism, and was seen by Hitler as a visual manifestation of the genius of the German people. By defining beauty, it would once again be possible to unite the German society. Furthermore, “German art” would help the rebirth of the country by providing an understanding of its past. A day after the Great German Art Exhibition, the “Degenerate Art” Exhibition opened. This display, organized in an incomprehensible manner, aimed to ridicule modern art and to imbue the audience with feelings of dislike. The “Degenerate Art” Exhibition, in many ways, was the most powerful demonstration of Nazi endeavors against modern art.

This project will focus on the events that led to the “Degenerate Art” Exhibition. It will provide background information on the status of modern art in Germany in the early 20th century,

as well as Hitler's own background in art and his experiences in Vienna and Munich. There will also be a brief discussion of how Judaism was associated with modern art, and how the Aryan race was associated with "pure," realistic art.

The paper will later delve into the Nazi war against modern art. In order to do so, it will first explore the initial conflicts and the steps taken against modern art. Later, there will be a discussion of the "Great German Art Exhibition" that was created in an attempt to further define what would constitute National Socialist Art. The most crucial part of the paper will be that focusing on the "Degenerate Art" Exhibition, with analyses of the organization and the display of the exhibit. There will also be information provided on the Austrian "Degenerate Art" exhibitions. Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of one of the most curious cases of the time, Emil Nolde, an artist initially embraced by the Nazi community only to later be banned from painting.

The purpose of this paper is to research the state of modern art in Germany during World War II. The "degenerate art" phenomenon is an especially interesting historical period to research. The fact that a dictatorship as potent as the Nazi Party felt the need to control the art movements within Germany attests to the power that art holds. By researching the ways in which the fight against modern art was carried out during the Third Reich, this paper will discover how political ideology intertwined with artistic beliefs during the time.

Background

In order to fully understand the concept of “Degenerate Art,” we will first research the background history that led to this understanding of art as a danger to the norm of life.

Modern Art in Prewar Germany

Between 1910 and 1920, Germany was experiencing a blossoming of modern art, film, music and literature. The wave of modern art that had taken over Europe and prewar Germany included art forms such as Futurism, Cubism, and Expressionism. Something that modern artists had in common was that they stood against materialistic order of the world. In their work, these artists discovered issues such as atheism, individualism, and love, and discouraged the current order of the world.¹ Modern artists sought revolution and an awakening of both the individual psychology and the collective mindset. Furthermore, these artists were interested in the “exotic,” such as the art of ethnic people or the art created by psychotic patients.² However, movements within modern art were often viewed as distant from the working class, therefore leading to the collapse of the society. This would become one of the reasons for the association of modern art with Communism and Judaism, identifying it as a target for National Socialism.³

Also between 1920 and 1930, racism gained popularity in Germany. This would support the presupposition that art was directly defined by the race of the artist, therefore making certain styles less desirable than others.⁴ It was during this time that the new literature on “Aryan art” first

¹ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 8-9.

² Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

emerged. Max Nordau, for example, wrote to demonstrate the superiority of German culture. Such works embodied the idea of racism in art, by associating 19th century realism with German art. “Degenerate art” created by Jewish artists, on the other hand, was criticized.

Hitler and Art

One of the reasons why art carried such an importance in the Third Reich was Hitler's background in the arts. After being rejected from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts twice, his career as an artist had come to an end before it started.⁵ Nevertheless, he continued to paint and read, and eventually left Vienna to return to Munich, the "center of culture."⁶ After the First World War, recognizing that his career as an artist would not flourish, Hitler delved into politics. Nevertheless, he continually complained about having to sacrifice his painting interests in order to become a politician, and looked forward to the day when he would "retire from political affairs" in order to pursue his true passion.⁷

Hitler preserved his interest in the arts, and even made his view of culture the basis of his political beliefs. Not only did he have aesthetic ideals, he also used art to strengthen his power and to outline his mission.⁸ Although he lacked talent in art, he was talented politically and often referred to artistic processes in order to explain his political ideologies. An example of this is his speech in January 1928 explaining culture: "The process within a nation is thus there is always the individual as creator; nothing comes from the mass of the people itself. What we regard as culture does not come about through majority vote. No. It is the product of individuals, of creative acts of single persons. They have risen above the common crowd and followed the lead of the best minds."⁹

The importance that Hitler placed on culture was unparalleled. His beliefs about art and culture drove him to reorganize the art scene in Germany according to his own ideals. The most

⁵ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2003), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2003), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

crucial of these principles may have been the superiority of the Aryan race. He strongly believed that the Aryan race had worked hard in creating great cultures that were fostered by their stable political environments.¹⁰ According to Hitler, a crucial problem in culture was that the Jew did not have his own art. For Hitler, culture and nationalism went hand-in-hand and just as all great artists had a strong “German” mentality, all modern art stemmed from a Jewish mentality.¹¹

Several aspects of modern art were bothersome to Hitler. He argued that modern art drove stable societies into “madness,” that architecture in cities no longer determined their unique characters, and that “Jewish art” was neither aesthetically nor characteristically original.¹² He admired classical art as portrayed in the Mediterranean, especially in Ancient Greece. Not only did he idealize Greek architecture, he admired the “Greek man” with his spiritual, physical and mental superiority.¹³ His high regard of Ancient Rome, on the other hand, came from the splendor of the Romans and the influence of their city structures.¹⁴

An important figure in Hitler’s ideology was Richard Wagner. Hitler believed that in order to understand National Socialism, one had to first comprehend Wagner. Hitler aimed to one day produce the operas that he admired, and identified Wagner’s work with greatness and unity.¹⁵ He recognized the way in which Wagner used the power that art held, and adapted this to his own belief system. Hitler also modeled his own ideals on Christianity after Wagner’s belief in conquering only the “visible existence of concrete nature.”¹⁶ This, however, would create a separation between German ideology and the Jewish understanding of the invisible God. Finally,

¹⁰ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2003), 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Hitler's statement "The direction of the creation of the future stems from our criticism of our opponents,"¹⁷ was also influenced by his Wagnerian beliefs.

¹⁷ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 25.

Jewish Modern Art vs. Aryan Classic Art

An important distinction that drove the “Degenerate Art” movement was the association of Judaism with modern art and the association of Aryanism with classic art. Therefore, these two became antonyms in the Nazi mind.

Hitler continued to develop the idea of the connection between modern art and Judaism. He asserted, various times, that Jews did not produce their own art, but rather took over foreign cultures and created imitations. Meanwhile, the Aryan race was the creator of pure art.¹⁸ Hitler believed that modern art was unstructured and uninspired, and asserted that “it is not the function of art to wallow in dirt for dirt’s sake, never its task to paint men in the state of decomposition, to draw cretins as the symbol of motherhood, to picture hunch-backed idiots as representative of manly strength.”¹⁹ Hitler believed that modern art was synonymous with madness and psychological disorders.

The concept of “cultural racism” emerged through this Nazi association of Judaism with modern art. Jewish art was destructive while Aryan culture was the backbone and founder of beauty.²⁰ This was followed by the idea that Aryan culture had to be preserved, and all that could endanger the Aryan ideology of beauty had to be eliminated. Thus began the process of “cultural cleansing.”²¹

¹⁸ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 78.

¹⁹ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

Hitler in Vienna

A crucial matter that affected Hitler's view of art and culture was his time in the Austrian capital of Vienna. Although rejected by the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts, the aspiring artist remained in Vienna for several more years. His time in this city affected Hitler greatly, and many references to it can be found in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*.

In Vienna Hitler focused on art. He attended various performances, read, and produced paintings and poems. Although Vienna was associated with "intellectual and artistic light,"²² Hitler soon despised all that the city stood for. It was here that he first spent time considering the matter of race and discovered his racism against Jews, which would later also affect his contempt for modern art.

Nevertheless, Hitler's dislike of modern art did not solely originate from his anti-Semitism. He was already invested in the idea of traditional art and did not approve of the modernist movements. Vienna, in the meantime, saw a rise in modern artists that played with color and forms, altering the way beauty had been depicted until then. Although not everyone in Austria was happy with this change, starting with 1897, The Vienna Secession started exhibiting to the society examples of the movements that had been changing the art world abroad.²³ The hostility between modern and classical art remained in the city for quite a while after, as artists such as Klimt and Schiele were often criticized by art critics for their sensual portrayals of the human body.²⁴

Around the same time, Berlin seemed to be one of the most active locations in the wave of modernism. The notion of German art and artists changed, and German art began using non-

²² Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

German subjects as the artists traveled to countries outside Germany.²⁵ In the early 20th century, young artists in Berlin seemed to support modernism as opposed to Nazi ideas of realism. Accordingly, modern artists in the city started developing their own unique styles in depicting the new world that they experienced around them.²⁶ Germany was a great contributor in the new wave of modern art, as artists not only created works of art but also published material in support of the new modernism, such as Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual Art*.²⁷

Hitler, in Vienna, did not partake in this new wave of modernism in terms of either production or discussion. He did not travel, did not engage in contact with modern art, and did not change his own style of watercolor. Hitler's art remained within its confines, and although he was not part of the new creative endeavors, Hitler registered himself as "painter and writer" upon his arrival in Munich.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 40.

²⁶ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 42.

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ Ibid., 46.

Munich and Dietrich Eckart

In Munich in 1911 the Blue Rider exhibition was held and in 1912 the Blue Rider Almanac was published in order to introduce the new art form to German viewers.²⁹ Soon after, modern artists became established new figures in the art world. With the outbreak of World War I, however, life in Germany was radically changed, and the effects of war also appeared in the work of the modern artists. Although most artists strayed from politics before the war, the aftermath of the devastation brought with it an inclusion of political opinions in art. Artists such as Felixmuller and Schmidt-Rottluff, for example, actively depicted their leftist opinions.³⁰ Nevertheless, although a great number of artists shared these liberal views, soon most had separated their political beliefs from their creations.

In 1918, Hitler returned to Munich after his military service. In the chaotic atmosphere of the postwar city, between 1918 and 1923 Hitler formed most of his opinions about Germany and art. A crucial figure who affected Hitler's sentiments on European art and culture was Dietrich Eckart. Eckart was a writer, an anti-Semite, and a nationalist figure held in high esteem by Hitler. A highly knowledgeable man who nevertheless let his anti-Semitic views get in the way of his historical beliefs, Eckart influenced Hitler greatly.

What was most significant in Eckart's interpretation of history was his "analysis of cultural decline."³¹ He believed that Germany no longer stood united, and that the German way of life had been contaminated by "cultural Bolshevism."³² Eckart suspected that the only way to reinstate Germany's cultural purity was to stop the spread of foreign influences within German culture. This

²⁹ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983),41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³² *Ibid.*, 63.

had caused not only the mixture of the German race with Jews, but also the defeat of Germany in World War I.³³ Therefore, Germany had to cease allowing the mix of its culture with alien influences and instead focus on returning to its state of cultural purity.

Eckart also believed that art was a crucial part of history, and that German art projected the truth of the nation. The artist had to not only depict what he experienced, but also depict history as truthfully as he could in order to revive German national identity and reunite Germany. Art that was specific to the ideal German race would once again separate the nation from the rest of the world.³⁴ In order to do so, German art had to be based on German ideals alone. This left no place for other trends in modernism, and supported a return to classic art. For Eckart, artists were a crucial part of society.

Such ideals, however, were deeply tainted by Eckart's anti-Semitism and nationalism. He believed that pure art could only be produced by Germany. Eckart's anti-Semitism, his beliefs of "cultural decline," and his ideals of art seem to have exerted long-lasting impacts on Hitler's views.

³³ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 66.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

War against Art

After examining the background related to the war on modern art in Nazi Germany by studying Hitler's experience with art and culture, we will now delve into the topic of modern art and the actions taken to suppress it.

The First Attacks on Modern Art

Many precursors drove the fight against modern art, leading to the *Entartete Kunst* exhibit in July 1937. The first opposition against modern art in Germany began in the 1920s, with the German Art Association (*Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft*) united against the "corruption of art."³⁵ The *Kunstgesellschaft* attempted to restore "pure German art" by attacking exhibitions they viewed as art-Bolshevism (*Kulturbolschewismus*). Later, in 1927, the Combat League for German Culture (*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*) was founded for the same goal.³⁶ The *Kultur* was founded by Alfred Rosenberg, the chief ideologist of the Nazi party, and although at first it was an undercover organization, it eventually started working alongside the Nazi party. In 1925, Schultze-Naumburg had written *The ABCs of the Bauhaus*, and in 1928, *Art and Race*, in which he attacked modern art by referring to it as "degenerate." Wilhelm Frick, who became Interior Minister to Thuringia in 1927, later appointed Schultze-Naumburg as an architect for the Nazi Party. Schultze-Naumburg replaced Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus School.³⁷ Following a previous study by Hans Prinzhorn in 1922 examining art created by mental patients, Schultze-Naumburg likened modern

³⁵ Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

art to mental illness.³⁸ This became an important technique used in Nazi propaganda against “Degenerate Art.”

Although modern art was viewed as degenerate, the Nazi attitude towards Expressionism remained vague in 1933. Some, including Goebbels, assumed that the Expressionist style mirrored the condition of German youth. This resulted in a disagreement between Goebbels and Rosenberg, who condemned all of modern art, and championed the art of the German people (*völkisch*).³⁹ Eventually Hitler himself, who endorsed neither Expressionism nor *völkisch* art as Nazi, solved the conflict.

After becoming chancellor in 1933, Hitler also made recurrent statements against modern artists. In 1933, the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was established and Goebbels was appointed the Reich Minister. This ministry would control all Nazi cultural activities.⁴⁰ Some artists such as George Grosz, Heinrich Ehmsen, Otto Dix, Oskar Schlemmer, and Rudolf Egelhofer, suffered immediate consequences while for other artists there was confusion as to what steps the Nazi party would follow. Alfred Rosenberg, who became the director of the Office for the Supervision of the Cultural and Ideological Education and Training of the Nazi Party in 1934, attempted to take power away from Goebbels regarding Nazi policies for aesthetic and cultural life.⁴¹ This, again, led to conflicts between Goebbels and Rosenberg, which would be resolved when the Chamber for Arts and Culture being was established under Goebbels. All art exhibitions would now have to formally be approved by Goebbels and this chamber.⁴²

³⁸ Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12

⁴⁰ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983) 72.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

Also in 1933, Goebbels published the German Art Report (*Deutscher Kunstbericht*). This report focused on all new approaches that would be taken against modern art. These points were drastic, foreshadowing the offered persecution of modern art in 1937. The *Kunstbericht* included points on how Bolshevist art would be exhibited to society and later burned, how museum directors who bought art that was not German would be fired, how artists with Marxist or Bolshevik influences would be deemed irrelevant, how buildings that did not comply with Bauhaus architecture would not be built, and how public sculptures not living up to “German” standards would be removed.⁴³

In 1934, Hitler further defined the type of art that would not be allowed in Nazi Germany. Modern art was now forbidden in the nation, in which only “pure” and “clear” German art would be allowed.⁴⁴ After Hitler’s official statement, Goebbels ceased making exceptions for certain artists such as Nolde and Barlach, and a greater number of modern artists started suffering the consequences of the new regime. The magazine *Kunst der Nation*, supporting modern art in Germany, was shut down in 1935.⁴⁵ In accordance, catalogs and books published by modern artists or that included modern artwork were confiscated and destroyed. In 1936, the National Gallery of Berlin had to close its section of modern art, and art criticism was forbidden except objective reporting with the Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda’s approval.⁴⁶ Hitler expressed open dislike of criticism, stating: “The right to criticize must be recognized as an obligation to truth, and truth can only be found within the framework of the task of maintaining a people’s life. Never must criticism be an end in itself. He who frees criticism from the moral duty

⁴³ Stephanie Barron, *“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 13.

⁴⁴ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 74.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

of placing itself in the service of a general, recognized, and pursued life-task is treading the path which leads to nihilism and anarchy.”⁴⁷

Although some artists attempted to protest the new system, and others portrayed mockeries of Hitler in their work, none were successful.⁴⁸ After deteriorating consequences, most artists such as Klee, Feininger, Beckmann, Campendonk, Belling, and Meidner fled the country. Other artists, however, such as Barlach, Dix, Kollwitz, Nolde, Schlemmer, Hofer, and Heckel remained in Germany, attempting to survive under the regime as “degenerate” artists.⁴⁹ The artists who were not able to flee Germany faced continuously challenging situations, able to produce artwork only under tough circumstances.

Hitler believed that the aesthetic standards set by the ancient people of the Mediterranean were standards that the Germans had to abide by. He stated, “We were throwing stone hatchets and crouching around open fires when Greece and Rome had already reached the highest degree of culture. We really should do our best to keep quiet about the past.”⁵⁰ Hitler believed classical art had already achieved perfection, and that therefore no innovation in art was necessary. He viewed classical art as a manner of defending the nation from the perils of modern art, as it had not been influenced by Jews and carried “pure” beauty. Furthermore, Hitler was not supportive of eroticism in art and believed that classical art had only included sensuality in it as a “controlled desire,” therefore making it unpolluted.⁵¹ Hitler’s disdain for sensual paintings was, just as in

⁴⁷ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

modern art, projected upon the artists producing them. He supported “innocent” paintings, which also included natural nudity. He valued only art that was physically beautiful or conveyed strength.

National Socialist Art

In the 1930s, many Nazi theorists spoke of their cultural and racial ideologies in order to support the racist ideologies held by the Nazi party. Hans Günther, the “chair of racial science,” was one of these people.⁵² In 1933, Günther spoke of the Nordic Race as the ideal race. In this speech, he also expressed ideas about how the Nordic race was the “superior” image to be portrayed in art. He stated, “If an illustrator, painter, or sculptor wants to represent the image of a bold, goal-determined, resolute person, or of a noble, superior and heroic human being, man or woman, he will in most cases create an image which more or less approximates the image of the Nordic race.”⁵³ This belief in Nordic superiority was in many ways the visual backbone of German ideology, and it intertwined aesthetics with political dogma. This mix of beauty and political affairs, therefore, also politicized art in a way that carried the same racism to the act of visual representation.

The Nazi party did not only manifest their ideas on art through speeches but also through exhibitions. Prior to the Degenerate Art exhibition, the House of German Art held the Great German Art Exhibition. This was the initial step in teaching the greater German population about what would be classified as “German art.”

The Great German Art Exhibition (*Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*) opened on July 18, 1937, in the House of German Art (*Haus der Kunst*). Hitler expected this exhibition to restructure art, which had been straying away from classicism into degeneration. This exhibition marked the official beginning of the war against Jewish artists and modern art, and commenced the attempts

⁵² George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 57.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 64.

at reinstalling the cultural and aesthetic standards of German art. The House only exhibited art that had been formally approved and displayed standards that all artwork would have to abide by. All decisions regarding this building and the art exhibited in it belonged to Hitler, who now held complete power over the nation's cultural life.

The opening day resembled a parade, and was named the "Second Day of German Art," after the initial "Day of German Art" that had celebrated the German genius. The festival was very long and dramatic as works of art representing many ages marched by.⁵⁴ The festivities drew people into the exhibition. Goebbels said that the role of German art was to "express the immortal soul of the people, by drawing it from the past and the present, in a poetic and artistic form, and to bestow upon its ever-active creative ability strength for the future."⁵⁵ The parade that embodied many different eras also portrayed the immortality of German art, and underlined the notion that the essence of German art was its ability to understand and draw from its own history.

While the opening day of the exhibition was a parade, the museum in which the works were exhibited was a temple.⁵⁶ The temple symbolized eternity and the endurance of National Socialism. This notion was echoed in the paintings and sculptures within the museum. All works of art stood to prove the eternal genius of the Aryan race.

The House of German Art, in addition to setting the norm for the type of art that would be produced from then on, also became an important center of commerce. Many works were sold in a short amount of time, generating great profit, even though most of the more expensive pieces

⁵⁴ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 105.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

were sold to party members.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the Great German Art exhibition was too unorganized and chaotic. It only accepted art that would set the basis for “new German art,” and although the exhibition was supposed to be comprehensive, very few pieces were included in it.

Hitler’s statement that he desired “as comprehensive and high quality a survey of contemporary German painting, sculpture and graphic arts as possible”⁵⁸ was prevented from becoming true not only because of the fact that no modern artists would be able to participate in the exhibition, but also because of the selection committee. Disappointed with the initial jury of artists, Hitler then placed himself in charge and Heinrich Hoffman, who had no artistic knowledge or background, selected the initial group of artists while Hitler made the final decisions.⁵⁹ Together, they eliminated every hint of modernism from the selections, and included only those works of art that proved the “racial health” of the German art scene.

The exhibition, which included both paintings and sculptures, was divided into different halls. Most of the artwork did not celebrate iconography or propaganda, and the exhibit included some artists who had been previously included in the “degenerate” category. The display therefore lacked direction, and even the placement of objects within it was short of organization. Because clear themes for the specific halls were absent, the arrangement of works appeared ambiguous.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, there was one clear message: If it wanted to be reborn, German society would have to follow the “genius” displayed in this exhibition and carry the same vision of its past into its future.⁶¹ The idea of immortality manifested itself throughout the temple. As complicated as the

⁵⁷ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany*, 1937 ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶¹ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 112.

layout was, it was evident that the primary function of art was a dogmatic vehicle of race and politics.

Artists accepted by the GDK could become extraordinarily successful both financially and through official recognition. Nevertheless, those who were rejected faced the danger of being deemed a “degenerate” enemy of National Socialism. These artists could then face grave consequences such as losing their titles, their financial security, and their reputation.⁶²

The artwork exhibited in the museum included sculptures of human figures as well, but perhaps the most prominent type of art exhibited was German landscapes. Art historian Oskar Hagen explained this notion: “German landscape is a self-portrait of the soul. The soul expresses all its beauty only when its body has been exhausted into annihilation.”⁶³ The idea behind landscapes was not the expectation of beauty but rather a direct link between the artwork and the genius behind it. Landscapes were therefore not only “self-portraits of the soul,” as Hagen had asserted, but also self-portraits of genius. Furthermore, by mostly exhibiting landscapes, Hitler and the Nazi party hoped to create a society that viewed beauty in the same manner. The unity of objective views would therefore ensure that all individuals would perceive beauty in the same manner.

In total, there were eight German Art Exhibitions arranged with a growing number of applicants and artwork displayed. The main characteristics of the artists included in the exhibition, however, remained the same: overwhelmingly male conservative artists were acclaimed by the GDK. The exhibited artwork also carried increasingly similar styles: Hitler made it clear that only

⁶² Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 102.

⁶³ Eric Michaud, and Janet Lloyd, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 114.

paintings in “Munich style,” such as realistic landscapes and portraits, had real chances of participating in the displays. The Second World War did not have overwhelmingly altering effects on the GDK; the only real difference between exhibitions was the quality of the material used to produce the artwork. Furthermore, a crucial goal of the artwork presented became to motivate war-weary Germans.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 103.

The Degenerate Art Exhibition

As the National Socialist party developed, the party's stance towards modern art drastically evolved. A day after the opening of the German Art Exhibition, the *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition became the manifestation of all Nazi endeavors against modern art, primarily because it stigmatized modern art for its "wicked" principles, such as the pursuit of change and a strong belief in the separation of art from nationalism. The ways in which artists such as Emil Nolde, Oskar Kokoschka and Paul Klee were portrayed in the exhibit exposes the way in which the National Socialist party structured Hitler's ideal society by rejecting the modernist movement popular throughout the rest of the world.

Modern art, continuously stigmatized as "degenerate," was the antonym for German art. Hitler often asserted what he believed to be the characteristics of German art and promised he would rid German art of any impurities. On July 19, 1937, the exhibition of "Degenerate Art" (*Entartete Kunst*) opened in the Archäologisches Institut in Munich. It carried artwork by artists such as Emil Nolde, Otto Dix, Erich Heckel, Schmidt-Rotluff, Paul Klee, Lovis Corinth, Kirchner, Beckmann, Gauguin and Picasso.⁶⁵

When examined, the events leading to the Degenerate Art Exhibition seem to be Goebbels' idea. In the spring of 1937, Goebbels was already interested in the degeneracy of modern art after a propaganda show put on by Hitler. This propaganda exhibition was called "Give Me Four Years' Time" (*Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit*), and portrayed the Allied powers in a negative manner.⁶⁶ Although this show exhibited modern art by showing the ways in which it challenged German

⁶⁵ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 105.

⁶⁶ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 114.

culture, it still left open the question of whether Expressionism would be allowed in Germany, and whether it could be the official art of the Nazi movement. Some artists, such as Walter Hansen and Wolfgang Willrich, were allowed to produce “German Expressionist” paintings. However, although these fanatic artists that held the spotlight were strong proponents of Nazism, they were not particularly talented. This received criticism from even the leading extremists of the Nazi party.⁶⁷ Eventually both of these artists would be eliminated from the art scene in Nazi Germany as Expressionism was also condemned as degenerate.

There were additional attempts at gathering catalogues of degenerate art in addition to the *Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit* exhibition. From 1929 until the opening of the *Entartete Kunst* in 1937, many groups within the Combat League for German Culture attempted to create campaigns against modern art.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Hansen sought to gather an archive of “degenerate” art. It was only when Goebbels took the initiative for the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition that the first national archive of degenerate art opened to the public. In organizing the exhibition, Joseph Goebbels insisted on the topic “degenerate art” despite some internal backlash, and turned his back on all previous sympathy towards modern art in order to gain Hitler’s favor.⁶⁹ Goebbels eventually got the approval for such an exhibition from Hitler, and started working.

It is also worth mentioning that the fact that the Degenerate Art exhibition was located in Munich was fitting because the Nazi party had originated in this city. Furthermore, Munich was also the origin of modern art in Germany. Art students, many of whom later became integral parts

⁶⁷ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany*, 1937 ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 114.

⁶⁸ Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 45.

⁶⁹ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany*, 1937 ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 116.

of the modernist movement, studied in Munich. Ernst Kirchner studied in the city, while other artists such as Paul Klee and Vassily Kandinsky were all linked to it.⁷⁰ Although Munich had been on the decline as the center of art, it still remained an art city.

The opening of *Entartete Kunst* was announced by Adolf Ziegler a single day after the opening of the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Ziegler stated “You see about you the products of insanity, of impudence, of ineptitude, and of decadence,” and asked the viewers to express their shock.⁷¹ German people were to realize the level of degenerateness produced by all modern artworks. Nevertheless, despite such an attitude, modernism did not disappear from the German art scene all at once. “Degenerate art” continued to be exhibited in museums throughout the country.⁷²

Before the opening on July 19, a committee of officials were given the right to travel within Germany and confiscate modern artwork in preparation for the exhibition. Ziegler was allowed to act on behalf of the Nazi party, and alongside him there was Goebbels, who was given the right to seize any “decadent” art from German museums for display in the exhibition. Others in the committee included Klaus von Baudissin who was a museum director, Hans Schweitzer, who would assist in the designing process, Robert Scholz, who was an expert on art theory, and Walter Hansen, an author.⁷³ Together, they traveled in Germany in order to select artwork to be displayed in the *Entartete Kunst*. They transferred more artwork to Munich than could be organized within the museum.

⁷⁰ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 97.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷² Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* ed. (Olaf Peters, Munich: Prestel, 2014), 117.

⁷³ Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 45.

The exhibition was installed fairly quickly. The body of work was placed around the exhibition area in an incomprehensible manner. The artwork was labeled with pejorative titles such as “insult to German womanhood” or “two monkeys in nightskirts” in order to generate aversion.⁷⁴ There were photographs, books, drawings and prints scattered around the exhibition space, and some were not even framed. Works were labeled with the name of the artist, the title, the museum they had been taken from, the date, and the price of acquisition. However, these labels were often incorrect as they attributed works to the wrong artists, titled them incorrectly, or assigned them the wrong dates. Most works were also accompanied by the words “Paid for by the taxes of the working German people” (“Bezahlt von der steuergroschen des arbeitenden deutschen volkes”).⁷⁵ This approach attempted to cause unease in the audience by exposing the fact that hardworking German people had inadvertently paid for the acquisition of such ludicrously priced works of art by the public museums.

The layout of the museum was drastically negative, an approach aimed to validate the fact that such an exhibition was necessary. The exhibition highlighted the view that such artwork was only produced to confuse the German people and divert them from their natural genius. A true German would have to react strongly against the display, and to express his dislike clearly.

Those who viewed the *Entartete Kunst* exhibit often experienced shock. Such art, after all, had been displayed in respectable museums until then. While those who were experienced in modern art demonstrated astonishment at the display, those who were not regular audiences of modern art appeared angry. In “Three Days in Munich, July 1937,” Peter Guenther recalls visiting

⁷⁴ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 107.

⁷⁵ Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 45.

the Degenerate Art exhibition after the Great German Art exhibition. He says about his feelings, “Specific details have faded, but the shock, dismay, and sadness I experienced during my visit are as vivid as if it happened just a short while ago.”⁷⁶ Meanwhile, he remembers the display as having “narrow rooms” and being “badly lit.” “From the types of works selected, their hideous hanging and placement, the graffiti-like inscriptions on the walls, the notations of price, and the use of truncated quotes by museum directors and art historians it was very obvious to me that this exhibition was not intended to introduce people to modern art but to inflame them against these works. It was a blatant attempt to discredit everything on view.”⁷⁷ Guenther appears to be an individual familiar with modern artwork, as he credits the plethora of color gradation used in the works and tries to explain the manner of artistic approach. He explains feeling insulted due to artists from different movements being displayed in the same room, and expresses sadness at the mockery and hostility projected around him. However, he also makes interesting points about the essential audience – those who did not seem to belong in a modern art museum. Guenther explains that angry reactions in the exhibit hall were understandable, as to those who had never before experienced such a form of art, the *Entratete Kunst* was the first point of contact with modernism and not only did they expect to dislike the display, they were encouraged to do so. Nevertheless, Guenther also explains that he believed even his own “sensible pastor” would have appreciated the effort in the paintings although he would not have liked them.⁷⁸

The catalogue produced for the show was equally depreciatory. It included degrading statements about modern art and reproductions of “degenerate” art that had caused the decline of the German nation. Similarities were drawn between “degenerate art” and non-German people.

⁷⁶ Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 36.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

German values were once again asserted to remind the viewers of the distinction between Aryan purity and degeneracy.⁷⁹ Published in November 1937, this brochure was only used in the exhibitions after the one in Munich. The guide divided the exhibition into nine categories in order to aid the audience, and included an explanation of what the show aimed to achieve.⁸⁰

The nine categories are as follows:⁸¹

1. Distortion of form and misapplication of color
2. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of religion
3. Distorted political views and advocacy
4. Mockery of German ideals
5. The lacking morality of degenerate art, such as sexuality
6. Marxist and Bolshevik inclinations
7. Interest in mental problems
8. Jewish artists
9. "Utter Madness," or a general compilation of the most outrageous or comical artwork

The floors of the exhibition, on the other hand, were as follows:⁸²

1. Room One: The beginning of the exhibition, on the top floor. Included religious paintings.

⁷⁹ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 107.

⁸⁰ Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 356.

⁸¹ Henry Grosshans, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 109.

⁸² Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 49.

2. Room Two: Smaller room. Included artwork by Jewish artists. Included quotes by Hitler and Rosenberg, and explanations next to artists' names.
3. Room Three: Offensive slogans around the display of modern art. The contents of this room were often changed
4. Room Four: No slogans around the artwork, only captions containing the name of the piece and the artist, the museum, and the purchase fee. No specific thematic arrangement
5. Room Five: Thematic room, focused especially on "madness" and "insanity." Works by Kandinsky were presented wrong on purpose.
6. Room Six: Contents altered more than once. No titles provided for the work, only explanations on when it had been acquired and why the piece was decadent.
7. Room Seven: Work in this room also changed frequently. Included work mostly by professors who had been teaching art in Germany
8. Ground Floor Room 1: The ground floor was the second section of the exhibition. It included some artwork by local artists from Dresden, and some by others like Kandinsky and Kokoschka.
9. Room G2: Began mostly with works by Rohlf's and Klee. Clear installation sequence and inventory numbers.

Below is further information on each room. The works of art mentioned are included in Appendix #1.

Room One was the beginning of the exhibition, and was located on the top floor. It commenced the exhibition with Ludwig Gies' *Kruzifixus* (Figure 9) hung on the wall. Below the crucifix was a photograph of it hung in the Lübeck Cathedral. The rest of the room also included

religious paintings, with derogatory inscriptions under or behind them. Emil Nolde's *Leben Christi* (Figure 3), for example, was displayed with an inscription explaining how it was a mockery of the Divine and the church.⁸³ Another painting by Nolde displayed in this room was *Christ and the adulteress* (Figure 7).

Room Two only displayed works by Jewish artists. There were quotes by Hitler and Rosenberg that explained how "inept" Jewish artists would not be forgiven. This room also included a list of Jewish artists and influential people, alongside descriptions of why they were frowned upon.⁸⁴ In this room, Chagall's *Rabbiner* (Figure 2) was also Jewish themed in the way that it portrayed a Jewish figure and therefore enforced the Nazi idea that "degenerate" modern art was Jewish art.

Room Three was characterized by the extravagant slogans on the walls, and the paintings in the room were organized by theme. The nudes were accompanied by offensive labels such as "The Ideal - cretin and whore." Kirchner's *Self-portrait as a soldier* (Figure 5), for example, was introduced as "An insult to the German heroes of the Great War." Such slogans were based on Hitler and Goebbels' views on modern art, which were part of the fight against modernism. This room placed heavy focus on Dadaism because it was a movement that Hitler particularly abhorred. This section included works of art by Wassily Kandinsky, who was classified as a crucial part of the Dadaist movement. The Dadaist paintings were often hung crooked, accompanied by offensive writings on the wall (Figure 1). The contents of this third room were frequently changed during

⁸³ Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 50.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 52

the first opening weeks.⁸⁵ There were also some nude paintings displayed in this room, such as Mueller's *Boy in front of two standing girls and one sitting girl* (Figure 6).

Room Four did not have a clearly organized pattern to it. There were no slogans or offensive labels on the walls, and the only labels accompanying the artworks were the title, name of the artist, museum and price. The works were mostly by Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.⁸⁶

Room Five, in contrast to the previous room, had a theme. Most paintings in this room were deemed "mad" by the Nazis, as slogans and annotations on the wall explained "Madness becomes method" and "Crazy at any price." The artist exhibited most frequently in the fifth room was Kandinsky (Figure 4). Some works painted by other artists were attributed to Kandinsky, while some of his horizontal paintings were hung vertically. Other paintings in the room were Expressionist landscapes included in order to demonstrate the Nazi idea that Expressionism was the way in which the mentally ill viewed the world.⁸⁷

Room Six exhibited works without titles. However, the dates of acquisition presented next to each work presented the interesting fact that museums had continued buying modern art even after the Nazi party seized power in 1933. The artist most frequently exhibited in this room was Lovis Corinth, whose landscapes were labeled "Decadence exploited for literary and commercial purposes."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 54.

⁸⁶Ibid., 58.

⁸⁷Ibid., 60.

⁸⁸Ibid., 63.

Room Seven appeared to be a continuation of the sixth room. Similarly to the sixth room, the seventh room also had its contents altered more than once. Here, works by German professors were displayed. Most of these professors had been fired from their positions, and the room aimed to display to the audience that this was the group of people shaping the minds of the German youth.⁸⁹

Rooms on the ground floor included paintings and prints, but also books. Works on this floor were not correctly labeled, as many were grouped together under the same artist or museum name. The first room on this floor included works by many artists from Dresden. It also included paintings by Kandinsky, Kokoschka, and Dix. Kokoschka's *Bachkantate* (Figure 8) works were also exhibited here. The second room, on the other hand, displayed works by Rohlf's and Klee. Most oil paintings were not framed.⁹⁰

This extreme design for the Degenerate Art, was organized by the state, included more than 600 works of art. The display had been designed by Adolf Ziegler, Wolfgang Willrich, and Walter Hansen. Paul Ortwin Rave, the curator of the Berlin Nationalgalerie, made the following statement about the exhibition: "The paintings hang close to one another, generally in two superimposed rows. The windows, which are immediately above the partitions, and the narrowness of the rooms make it difficult to view the works on display... The propagandist aim of the exhibition seemed best served by the numerous inscriptions. The guiding principles are written up in the large letters in the individual rooms or on sections of the wall, while some of the individual works had special captions added to them."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Stephanie Barron, "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 64.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-74.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

The Degenerate Art exhibition traveled to other cities on Goebbels' orders: Berlin, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Salzburg, Hamburg, Vienna and Frankfurt. In 1941, the exhibition returned to Munich. Within the four years of touring, the Degenerate Art exhibit changed contents many times. The differences between cities included variations in the work exhibited and the manner of presentation. Some cities placed emphasis only on a single topic, such as "Jewish art," while other cities featured different slogans that accompanied the artwork.⁹²

⁹² Stephanie Barron, "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 90.

Entartete Kunst in Austria

Following the Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich, two of these exhibitions were organized in Austria. One of these was in Salzburg, the other in Vienna. After traveling through Germany, the exhibition had to be adapted to Austria and undergo several changes.

The main reason for which the exhibition had to be altered for the displays in Austria was that it was not simply an art exhibition, but rather an exhibition made to create disdain towards the pieces on display. The first way in which the exhibition was changed, was the catalogue. The catalogue for the first show in Austria was of better quality than the original German catalogue, and divided the artwork into clearer categories. Furthermore, the critique of the pieces was directed mostly at political works.⁹³

Although the arrangement of the artwork was altered in the German exhibits, this was not the case with Austria. The list of works for Salzburg and Vienna do not exist, but it is fair to assume that that the works shown in Salzburg were not altered after the previous German exhibitions. The exhibition in Salzburg was not adapted to Austria, and even the propaganda material used remained the same.⁹⁴ The advertisement of the Viennese exhibition was more dependable than that of the exhibition in Salzburg. In Vienna, the focus was placed most heavily on “Jewish” art, and not so much on mental illness or Bolshevism.

In Austria there was also emphasis placed on how Austrian art had remained pure and untouched by “degeneracy,” with the exception of Oskar Kokoschka and Wilhelm Thöny.⁹⁵ It was clear that Austria still aimed to dictate its own art scene, and although the message that taxes of

⁹³ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Edited by Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2014), 128.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

hardworking citizens had paid for the acquisition of the artwork was removed from the Austrian *Entartete Kunst* exhibitions, it was later banned to acquire art in Austria.⁹⁶

Despite the Salzburg exhibition being almost the same as the previous German exhibitions, it is unclear which works of art were displayed in Vienna. It is assumed that the list included works confiscated by German Reich troops and local assets picked by those with knowledge of the Austrian art scene.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Edited by Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2014), 132.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

Focus on Emil Nolde

One of the most interesting cases during the “Degenerate Art” phenomenon was that of Emil Nolde. As a Nazi supporter, Nolde wanted his Expressionist art to be accepted by the Third Reich. First displayed in museums around Germany, Nolde’s work was then included in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibit and caused him to feel crushed by the defamation that he experienced.

Nolde was a curious personality. Born under a different name, it remained unclear for the greater portion of his life whether he was German or Dutch. He studied woodworking and moved to Berlin only to fight tuberculosis. He started painting at a late age, and after being rejected by the Munich Academy, spent time travelling in Europe.⁹⁸ Although Nolde left Berlin after getting married, he still had a house in the city. From being a novice to becoming one of the most talented painters of the time, Nolde quickly gained prominence and praise.

Emil Nolde was a supporter of the Nazi Party and believed that he had made “great sacrifices for the German cause.”⁹⁹ He seemed to have a fundamentally racist worldview that he came to explore after joining an expedition in New Guinea. Although at first Nolde was reluctant to accept the idea of superiority of one race over the other, he eventually embraced the anti-Semitic view in 1933. Nevertheless, he did not share the same hatred of Jews that most Nazi members did.

Although Nolde was in a group of leftist artists, his career seemed to be progressing. He had joined the Nazi party membership but did not have an official number, which would later shield him from being tried for rebellion through art.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he was a great supporter of not only the Nazi party but also Hitler, whose views he admired. He mentioned in a letter, “The

⁹⁸ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press: 2014), 155.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

Fuhrer is great and noble in his aspirations and a genial man of deeds.”¹⁰¹ In his autobiographies, Nolde spoke of the superiority of the Aryan race, his nationalistic view of Germany, and his support for National Socialism.

During the Third Reich, Emil Nolde had complicated experiences. His modern artwork was first exhibited in museums throughout Germany. At the time, Nazi officials still had some receptivity to German expressionism. Nolde was among those who were allowed to retain their existence in the art world. In the Degenerate Art exhibition, however, Emil Nolde lost this title as a German artist. Being included in the Degenerate Art exhibition was devastating to Nolde because he thought of himself as a great supporter of the regime. Despite his distress, he would later exhibit his work in anti-Nazi exhibitions in cities such as London.¹⁰²

Emil Nolde attempted repeatedly to be officially accepted by the Nazi government. He was successfully exhibited in certain shows, but Goebbels still had mixed emotions on whether to accept Nolde as a German artist. Despite having supporters in the Nazi party, Nolde was eventually asked to resign from the Prussian Academy in 1933. He refused to resign.¹⁰³ As Nolde continued displaying his art in exhibitions across the country, he appeared closer to being accepted as a “modern Nordic” artist. At times, he received support from museum directors clandestinely. Sometimes, the support was more visible. Such was the case with Count Klaus Baudissin, the director of the Essen Folkwang Museum, who would later help select works for *Entartete Kunst*.¹⁰⁴ Baudissin still admired German Expressionism.

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press: 2014), 159

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 166-167

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 163

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press: 2014), 165

It was when Nolde was included in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition that he was completely defeated. With 1,052 of his works confiscated from museums around Germany, Nolde was the artist with the most paintings selected for the exhibition. His painting *The Life of Christ* was at the entrance of the display in Munich.¹⁰⁵ This came as a shock to Nolde, who would find it difficult to recover from such defamation.

Despite the trauma of the Degenerate Art exhibition, Nolde wrote letters to both Goebbels and Rust in order to protest his inclusion in the show. A letter he wrote to Goebbels in 1938 is worth quoting at length: “I take this particularly hard, and especially because I was (...) before the beginning of the National Socialist movement (...) almost the only German artist in open struggle against the foreign infiltration of German art and fought against the unclean art dealers and against machinations of the Liebermann and Cassirer period, a struggle against a superior power that brought me decades of material needs and disadvantages.”¹⁰⁶ As is apparent from this letter, more than anything, Nolde felt betrayed. He had been a fervent supporter of the Nazi regime, and to experience such an assault had affected him deeply.

After the *Entartete Kunst* exhibit, Nolde found the strength to exhibit his work in a London exhibition of 20th century German art organized as a protest against the Degenerate Art movement. To do so, Nolde asked to receive his confiscated artwork, and was successful in doing so.¹⁰⁷ He exhibited eleven of his works at the London show. Continuing to receive support from his close friends and family sustained Nolde’s hope for a better career after the end of the war.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 166

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 155

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press: 2014), 167

¹⁰⁸ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Edited by Olaf Peters, (Munich: Prestel, 2014), 191

Nolde's situation got progressively worse. In March 1939, many of his works were destroyed at the Berlin Main Firehouse.¹⁰⁹ Later, Nolde was forbidden to perform his profession as an artist. This entailed a ban not only on exhibiting in museums, but also on painting. In order to avoid being caught, Nolde changed his painting style but still remained very productive and retained his trademark vision. Caught between the Nazi ban and a slight number of supporters, Nolde still managed to sell some of his work. After the war, he succeeded in reconstructing his career, calling his wartime watercolors "unpainted pictures."¹¹⁰ In addition to receiving many awards for his work, the artist also became a professor of art. Although his prior support of the Third Reich was mostly ignored in order to promote his contributions to modern art, and Nolde himself avoided addressing this situation as well, he remained a controversial figure due to rumors about his support of the Nazi party.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press: 2014), 168

¹¹⁰ Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Edited by Olaf Peters, (Munich: Prestel, 2014), 186

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the many events that led to the “Degenerate Art” movement in Nazi Germany and the ways in which this exhibition was carried out. Through researching both primary and secondary source documents, it can be observed that the Nazi fight against modern art did not simply commence with the “Degenerate Art” Exhibition, but was rather a culmination of events leading up to the opening of the exhibit. The measures taken against modern art developed alongside the Nazi ideology and the rapid increase of power that the party experienced. Furthermore, the war against modern art did not conclude with the exhibition on July 19 1937, but rather continued until the end of the Second World War.

By providing historical research on the war against modern art in the Third Reich, however, this project also raises many questions: Was the reason behind the ban of modern art in Nazi Germany as simple as Hitler’s artistic preferences, or was this ban a way of regulating freedom of expression by taking away the power that art held? Did Hitler, despite not appreciating the aesthetics of modern art, recognize its strength and try to silence it? Why did the Nazi Party choose to approach modern art with such hostility, attempting to create disdain for it by exhibiting it throughout the country, instead of simply silencing it? Was it a matter of coincidence that dictatorships around the world at the time also came to regulate art in similar ways? Furthermore, can traces of such censorship on artistic expression be found around the world today? These are among the many questions that can be researched with regard to the “degenerate art” period in World War II Germany.

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The Architecture of Doom. Directed by Peter Cohen. October 30, 1991. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvz2HDTvJ4A>

Appendix #1: Visuals



Figure 1

Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 55



Figure 2

Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 134

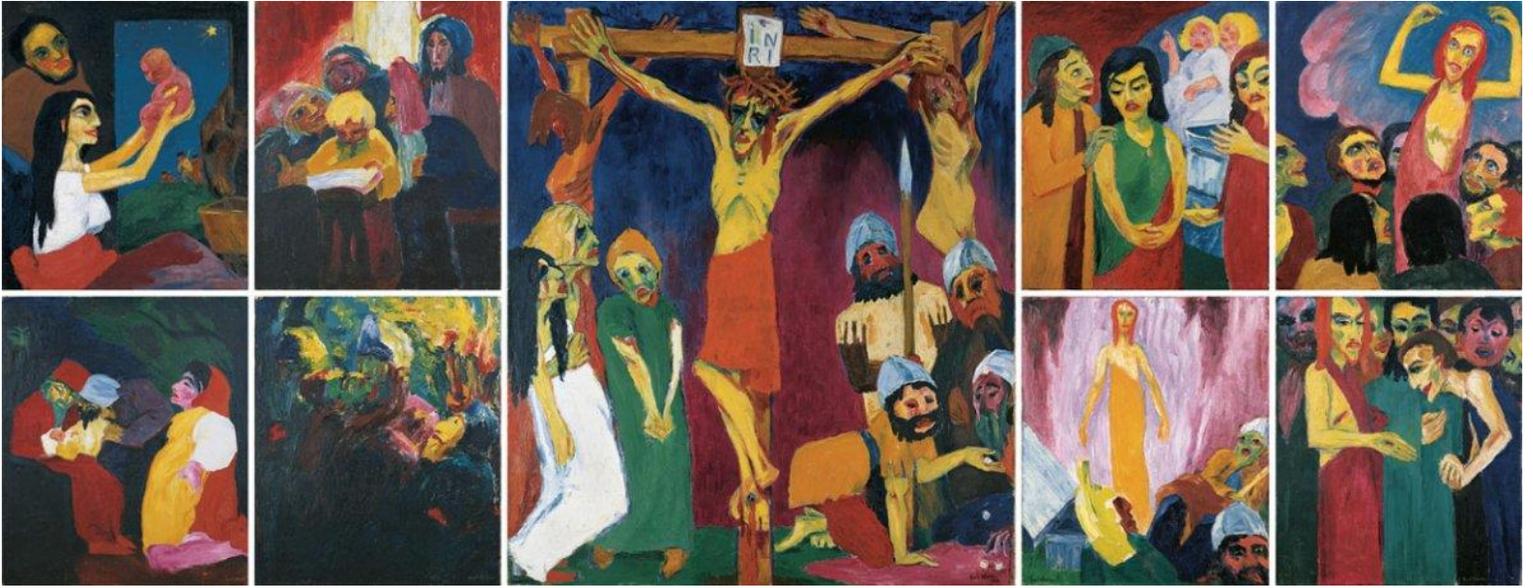


Figure 3

Stephanie Barron, *“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 316



Figure 4

Stephanie Barron, *“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 266



Figure 5

Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 275

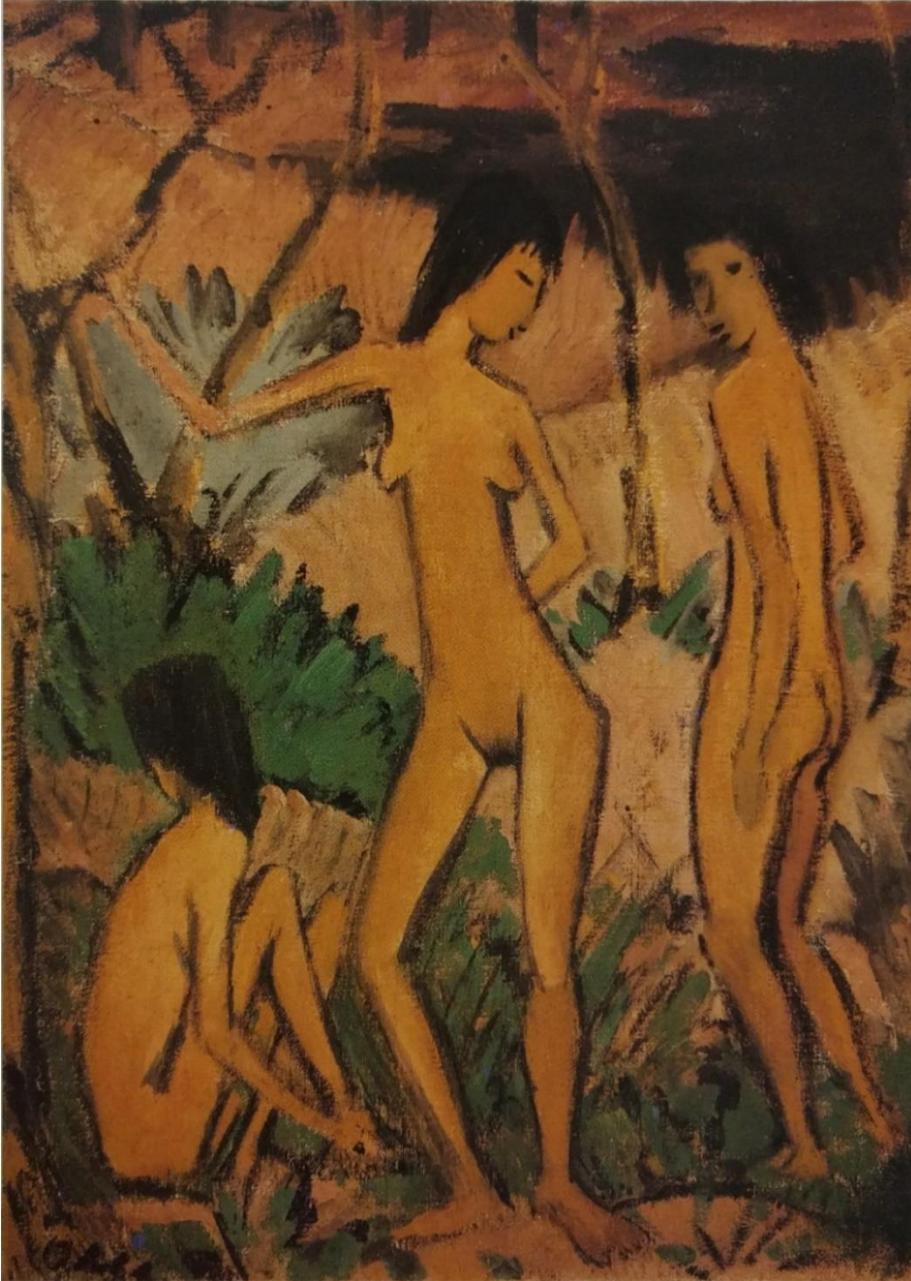


Figure 6

Stephanie Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 309



Figure 7

Stephanie Barron, "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 322



Figure 8

Stephanie Barron, *“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 42



Figure 9

Ronald S Lauder, and Neue Galerie New York, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Edited by Olaf Peters, (Munich: Prestel, 2014), 233