ARTISTS UNDER HITLER

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COLLABORATION AND SURVIVAL IN NAZI GERMANY

JONATHAN PETROPOULOS

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To Dennis, Christopher, and David

WHEN I VISITED France and Italy right after the war, I was full of that righteous antifascist feeling tha we all had in the safety of America. I didn't want to meet the people who had, if not exactly collaborated, certainly had not fought the Nazis. I was too prissy. And then, as I began to learn more about Europe under the occupation, and what it was like, and to compare it to us, I became less prissy about it. Because the people who were defending their children and their lives were in a different situation from the people who were defending their swimming pools and their contracts at Metro. They weren't brave enough to be partisans, but they hadn't sent any Jews to Auschwitz, either. I wasn't gonna be the one from America to tell them they were wrong. Of course, I never forgave the people who sent Jews to the camps. But I did get so I could forgive the people who entertained the German troops. What else were they gonna do—not entertain them? Not entertain, and go where? If you had no group, if you were a group of one, what could you do? I can make a case for all the points of view.

ORSON WELLES

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PREFACE

IS THE NOTION of Nazi culture an oxymoron? Was any "good" culture produced during the Third Reich? There are, of course, the well-known accomplishments of Albert Speer and Leni Riefenstahl, Carl Orff, and Ernst Jünger. But conventional wisdom insists that any genuinely interesting art was rooted in the modernism of the Weimar Republic, while Nazi culture, with its rigidity and monumentality, was bad. This view is both coarse and wrong.

The cultural life of Nazi Germany was complex. Fascism did not defeat modernism. It persisted a an unresolved issue throughout Hitler's reign. Simply put, what are we to make of those cultural figures, many already with significant international reputations, who tried to find accommodation with the Nazi regime? And what effect, if any, did doing so have on their work? This book offers a more comprehensive and complicated understanding of culture during the Third Reich. While no single volume will ever be exhaustive, the history of these modernist (and modernist-influenced) artists goes a long way to capturing the rich and contentious cultural life of this period.

"Modernism" and "modernist" are terms that I use to refer to cultural figures—and their ideas an works—that were in sympathy with avant-garde movements that rose and flourished in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Some historians have employed the phrase "classic modernism," while others prefer "modernisms" to denote the plurality of styles and projects.[1] Yet these modernists were united in questioning the social realism of the period and in arguing that the world as it appears to our senses constitutes an inadequate representation of reality. Instead, they argued for a deeper interiority, a greater appreciation of our instincts, and a heightened awareness of the subjectivity of our perceptions. In rejecting verisimilitude and traditional historicist idioms, they developed new aesthetic strategies, including the use of abstraction and alternative colo schemes. In the visual arts the key modernist movements include Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dada, and New Objectivity. In music, atonality and dissonance were its hallmarks, with Arnold Schoenberg playing a particularly important role. Literature, for its part, featured an expressionist style of its own, although modernism in this discipline might also extend to nonlinear narrative structures and the efforts to give a voice to the poor and marginalized (for example, the works of Émile Zola). There were parallel stylistic trends across the disciplines, as well as common intellectual projects: among them, Sigmund Freud's quest to understand the unconscious; a fascination with irrational impulses; an exploration of social alienation, and a desire to challenge the stale and oppressive conventions of the regnant order. That said, modernism can be an elusive concept, and for some it has more to do with a visceral impression. It is akin to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's famous definition of pornography—that he knew it when he saw it.

My approach in this book rests upon a fairly expansive conception of modernism. I recognize tha certain figures do not qualify as ideal types—that their work and aesthetic philosophies contain contradictory elements. But all the figures treated at length here engaged modernist ideas in a meaningful manner at some stage of their careers. Rather than advancing a narrow conception of modernism—and trying to force figures as varied as Barlach and Riefenstahl into a procrustean bed– I argue for a broader and more flexible conception of the term: one that allows for more fruitful analytical comparisons and a more holistic examination of the multifaceted cultural history of the Third Reich.

I am also aware of the sensitivities that arise when one explores the engagement with National

Socialism on the part of individuals who have long been viewed as anti-Nazi or, for that matter, those who were pro-Nazi. This finds expression in the word *collaboration*, which has myriad associations. While some scholars have used the word to denote complicity in the crimes of the Nazi regime, I tak a more expansive definition that includes accommodation and the pursuit of accommodation.

The sensitivities attendant with the study of Nazi Germany demand certain responsibilities from the historian. Chief among them is scholarly and moral precision, and I take care to ensure that my sources are clearly identifiable. Researching this book compelled me to visit numerous archives and examine original documents, as well as to synthesize a vast secondary literature. In terms of the former, some figures presented particular challenges: for example, the painter Emil Nolde. I was denied access to his papers in Seebüll in northern Germany and was advised simply to consult the existing scholarly literature. But this does not prevent a deeper understanding of the subjects. Even with figures as elusive and as private as Nolde in North Schleswig or Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in the Swiss Alps, there are rich sources to consult. Understanding the past is inherently fraught. I undertak it with humility in the hope that my efforts will shed light on what remains a dark and haunting time.

ARTISTS UNDER HITLER

Introduction

IN MARCH 1945, with the Soviet Red Army pursuing its brutal Vistula-Oder offensive and the Western Allies advancing from the opposite direction, battling to cross the Rhine at Remagen, all of Germany's major cities lay in ruin. Basic services were disrupted, and transport proved a difficult if not impossible proposition (many German soldiers had recently fled the Netherlands on stolen bicycles). Yet amid this chaos and destruction something remarkable occurred—or, more precisely, continued. Art dealers carried on with transactions involving the paintings of Emil Nolde and other Expressionist artists. Renowned dealer Ferdinand Möller had long based his operations in Berlin, where he provided one of the havens for lovers of modern art, but he had recently relocated to his home in eastern Pomerania, where he persevered with his trade in modern works. Möller negotiated with his counterpart Ludwig Gutbier, who had left Munich for the more secure environs of rural Bavaria. On 26 February 1945, Möller had written to Gutbier to request the transport of several modern paintings to him in the East: "I would ask you to please send the crates to me here."[1] Gutbier responded on 9 March 1945—their correspondence having been delayed—"Yesterday I received your lines from 26 February. … [but] there is no possibility of sending objects to Berlin, or to the location of both of my [Karl Schmidt-] Rottluff and [Erich] Heckel customers." He added, "I have marked as unsellable the two other paintings by Nolde and [Swiss modernist Lothar] Bechstein that are kept in my study. We follow the events in Berlin with great excitement and communicate to you our hopes that there will soon be a turn of events." In other words, Gutbier had finally accepted that the current situation precluded the transport of these Expressionist works in his possession, but he continued to hope for a change of fortune. Möller and Gutbier had sustained their enterprises until that point, and other colleagues of theirs actually continued to sell modern works until late April 1945—some two weeks before the final defeat. Their establishments had become rubble-strewn and lacked heat, but they carried on. They even used the official Reichspost to transact their business. The dealers also did not appear unduly concerned about the Gestapo or other intelligence agencies pursuing them for trading in officially proscribed art.

A second revealing episode involves Max Beckmann, the legendary artist who had left Germany in July 1937 when the Nazi regime had opened the twin shows in Munich, *The Great German Art Exhibition*, which featured officially accepted works, and the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, which mocked and vilified modernist works. Beckmann had relocated to Amsterdam, where he enjoyed one of his most productive periods. He completed over seven hundred paintings during his time in the Netherlands, many of them during the war. Despite being a modernist and a figure associated with the Weimar Republic—which the Nazis reviled—Beckmann continued his work unimpeded after the Nazi occupation commenced in May 1940. He also overcame the logistical challenges when canvas and paints proved difficult to come by. How did he manage this? The answer lies in his close friend, Erhard Göpel, an art historian and dealer. Göpel also served as an agent for Adolf Hitler and scoured the Netherlands and France for artworks that would go to the Führermuseum planned for Linz. Göpel trafficked in looted art, playing a central role, for example, in the liquidation of the famed Schloss collection in France, consisting of some 330 paintings. Yet even while working as a plunderer and navigating networks of nefarious characters, Göpel remained friends with Beckmann. He carried letters back and forth between the artist and various contacts in Germany and, on occasion, transported paintings. Beckmann painted Göpel's portrait during the war, including a well-known picture created

in the midst of the infamous Dutch “Hunger Winter” of 1944 in which he portrayed Hitler’s agent in ~~seemingly full health, seated in a comfortable interior and holding an art book. The two men~~ continued their close relationship into the post-war period. Later, after the artist had succumbed to a heart attack in 1950, Göpel edited Beckmann’s diaries for the war years, and also published a series o well-regarded books on the artist, including a catalogue raisonné of Beckmann’s paintings. Erhard Göpel, along with his wife, art historian Barbara Göpel, became authorities on Beckmann in the postwar period. Max Beckmann would not be the only modernist cultural figure to consort with plunderers and perpetrators in Nazi Germany.

A third vignette took place even earlier—in February of 1933—and concerns a competition to design a new Reichsbank in Berlin. Hitler had been appointed chancellor on 30 January and had immediately set out to define his regime by way of architecture and other cultural initiatives. He ordered bank president Hans Luther, a former Reich chancellor, to organize a competition, which Luther in turn entrusted to Heinrich Wolff, the head of the Reichsbank’s building department. Rather than commence a time-consuming open competition, Wolff and his committee selected thirty architects to submit designs. Among them were Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius and the current Bauhaus director, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The Bauhaus, which counted as the most famous art school in Germany—if not the world—stood as a vivid symbol of the Weimar Republic. The locus of controversy since its founding in 1919—the Bauhaus had been forced to move from Weimar to Dessa in 1925 due to local opposition, and then to Berlin in 1932 for similar reasons—the school had been a favorite target of the Nazis. Yet here were two of its leaders asked to undertake a design for Hitler’s first public building. Gropius and Mies complied, submitting elaborate plans and models. Indeed, Gropius provided a great deal more material than was called for, including blueprints, cost estimates a philosophical statement, and photographs of a mock-up.[2] The image of Walter Gropius working feverishly on the new Reichsbank headquarters in early 1933 and hoping that he would become an official architect in the Third Reich needs to be integrated into the cultural history of Nazi Germany.

Examining the experiences of those modernist cultural figures who sought to find a place in the Third Reich prompts a central question: why did they seek accommodation with the Nazi regime? Th answer is multifaceted. People are complex and rarely, if ever, act due to a single motivation. Rather several factors entered into the thinking of the figures in this book: first, a misunderstanding of the Nazi leaders and their goals; second, an unchecked ego and sense of self-importance, whereby they thought their work to be indispensable to their field; third, a highly developed survival instinct—in part a legacy of an earlier time when modernism provoked veritable culture wars—combined with a more garden-variety opportunism; fourth, the mixed signals from the Nazi leaders themselves, some of whom embraced modernism and buoyed the cultural figures’ optimism; and finally, a belief that the intellectual goals of modernism and fascism were compatible—that a new and meaningful synthesis between the two was possible. It is helpful, before considering specific figures and their experiences, to elaborate briefly on these factors.

A key to understanding the history of Nazi Germany is the realization that the regime gradually grew more radical. The dark, totalitarian society of 1943, with the ongoing murder of European Jews the violent response to dissent, and the near complete mobilization of the population as part of the “total war” measures, was quite different from Germany in 1933—or even 1937. Of course, intimidation and violence also characterized the earlier years, and anti-Semitism proved an enduring facet of National Socialism, but many initially held out hope for a “kinder and gentler” Nazi regime. Hitler had checks on his power—for example, in President Paul von Hindenburg until August 1934, and in the armed forces and the Foreign Office. Correspondingly, there was also considerable cultura heterogeneity. The Nazis’ efforts at coordination (the virtually untranslatable word they coined was

Gleichschaltung) had not yet run their course. Furthermore, most artists did not endorse a racial war of conquest or mass murder. Their efforts at accommodation were born out of fundamental misapprehensions about the Nazi regime. This does not mean that they were not anti-Semitic, or fervently anti-Communist, or chauvinistically nationalistic. Some were all of the above. But when they sought out a place in the Reich, they scarcely imagined what would transpire during the war. Th modernists were not the only ones to underestimate Hitler. Kurt Hahn, the Jewish educator who had overseen an elite school at Salem on Lake Constance before emigrating to the United Kingdom (whe he founded the Gordonstoun School, among other institutions), initially believed that the responsibilities of office would moderate the behavior of the Nazi leader; but this, according to historian Golo Mann, "was not the real Hitler but an imaginary one that had a place in Hahn's politic thought."[3]

Their own egos often blinded them to the realities of the time. Some saw themselves as gods in a kind of modernist pantheon and were often celebrated as such on an international level. For example, the Museum of Modern Art in New York organized a grand retrospective on the Bauhaus in 1938, an Gropius was the star of this show—just as he had been in the 1930 exhibition on the Bauhaus organized in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by a coterie of Harvard students.[4] Many cultural figures believed their work was so central to their fields that excluding them would be virtually impossible. They had altered the courses of their disciplines and remained confident that they would continue to play a pivotal role, even if this meant making concessions to the new regime. The triumphs they had enjoyed in the 1920s—professorships, directorships, commercial success, and fame—had only added to their sense of self-importance. The last director of the Bauhaus before it was closed in 1933, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, to take another example, was a gruff man, a "difficult genius" type. He preferred the word "Baukunst" (literally, building art) to "Architektur." Years after he had immigrate to the United States, Mies remained brusquely demanding. With regard to the Seagram Building in New York that he designed with Philip Johnson, his biographer Elaine Hochman noted that between 1954 and 1958 "the Seagram employees were not allowed to close the Venetian blinds in their office in his skyscraper in New York, lest the resulting disorder mar the appearance of the façade from the street. Only Mies's death released them from this constraint."[5] Comprehending his colleague's belie that art came first and that he possessed the extraordinary talent that enabled him to design for anyone, Philip Johnson quipped, "If the devil himself offered Mies a job he would take it."[6]

Of course, these modernist icons expected certain difficulties in Nazi Germany, but they had weathered storms throughout their careers. Before World War I, audiences rioted at Stravinsky concerts and few bought Expressionist paintings. Even during the Weimar Republic, when, to play upon historian Peter Gay's famous phrase, "The outsider became an insider," they faced strong opposition in many quarters, especially in the countryside and in provincial cities.[7] But just as they had endured attacks and insults before, they expected to find a way to move forward after 1933. The figures in question were not Jewish. Most Jewish modernists recognized that it would be impossible make a career in Nazi Germany and therefore emigrated. Those non-Jews who sought accommodatio with the Nazi regime did not want to lose their positions, or to part with family and friends. Reality eventually set in for many—especially those who were iconic figures in their fields prior to the Nazi seizure of power—who gradually came to the realization that they would never be accepted. Despite their egos and predilection for opportunism, many departed Germany in the mid-to-late-1930s, finall giving up in the face of the regime's unrelenting radicalization.

Another key component that induced many modernists to seek accommodation was the perceived sympathy for their cause exhibited by certain Nazi leaders. The central figure in the early years of th Third Reich was Joseph Goebbels, the intensely energetic Propaganda Minister who styled himself as

the “czar of Nazi culture.” With his Reich Ministry for People’s Enlightenment and Propaganda, which came into existence in March 1933, and the establishment of his Reich Chamber of Culture the following September (every practicing artist was obliged to join the latter group) he was well on his way to realizing his ambitions. His appointment as Reich Minister included the provision that Goebbels was “competent for tasks concerning the cultural molding of the nation,” and this augured well for the pro-modernist camp. In the spring of 1933, Goebbels engaged a young and then unknown architect-designer named Albert Speer to remodel his home on Lake Wannsee in Berlin. The Reich Propaganda Minister expressed his approval of Speer’s choice of landscapes by Emil Nolde as part of the decoration. Indeed, Goebbels’s wife, Magda, had accompanied Speer to the Berlin Nationalgalerie and helped select the pictures by Nolde, an act that suggested even greater solidarity in support of the artist.[8] Back in 1924, after visiting the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Goebbels noted in his journal that he had discovered “a Spanish dancer by Nolde. Wonderful colors. An exquisite, deep red.”[9] Goebbels also kept a small figure on his desk (*Man in a Storm*) by Expressionist artist Ernst Barlach. In a January 1936 letter to his son, Barlach wrote that he believed that Goebbels actually owned two of his sculptures (the other was apparently *Begging Woman*). In 1924, Goebbels had written about another Barlach sculpture, *The Berserker* (1910), that was also exhibited in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, exclaiming that he was “gripped by the sculpture. … The true spirit of Expressionism! Brevity raised to the level of grandiose interpretation.”[10] In mid-1935, Goebbels commissioned a portrait by Berlin Secessionist Leo von König, an aristocratic painter who worked in a distinctly modern style (his paintings were purged two years later as part of the “degenerate art” action). Goebbels admired the painting and ordered a second rendition (paid for with ministerial funds). Baron von König signed his letters to the Propaganda Ministry “Heil Hitler!”—indicating that he also hoped for official acceptance.[11]

Modernists continued to have sympathizers in the upper reaches of the Nazi state and carved out room to create and exhibit their work. For example, in the late 1930s Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his wife, Annelies, commissioned painter Otto Dix to paint a portrait of their children, despite the fact that Dix had been a prominent modernist in both the Expressionist and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movements and had always been associated with the political left. The Ribbentrops hung works in their homes by Franz Radziwill (a former member of the left-wing Novembergruppe), André Derain (a French Fauve), and Gustave Courbet (a leader of the Paris Commune and radical in his day).[12] The art of the former Communist and Neue Sachlichkeit painter Georg Schrimpf, whose works were included in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, hung in the homes of Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess, Reich Peasant Leader Richard Walter Darré, and Bernhard Rust, Reich Minister for Science, Education, and People’s Culture.[13] Modernist works were also exhibited in public spaces during the Third Reich. In Vienna, for example, an exhibition of young artists, many of whom worked in abstracted styles, opened in February 1943, the same time the regime was moving to a “total war” footing and growing more malignant. That the Viennese governor and former Hitler Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach had sponsored the show made it all the more remarkable. The exhibition *Junge Kunst im Deutschen Reich* (*Youthful Art in the German Reich*) elicited controversy and was shut down on Hitler’s orders. But Vienna’s cultural life continued to include modernist elements until 1945. Exhibitions of the art of Gustav Klimt and the regular sale of works by Egon Schiele at the Dorotheum, the state-owned auction house, were but two indications of the persistence of modernism in the former Habsburg capital.

Fascist Italy, where Mussolini had embraced Futurism and other cultural modes associated with the avant-garde, provided yet another reason for the modernists’ hopefulness. The acceptance of modernism prevented the alienation of key constituencies and helped legitimate the political leaders

—validating them as sophisticated elites, which was especially important after years of "thuggery an vulgarity."[14] Fascism and modernism also shared many core principles, starting with the "myth of national regeneration." As historian Emilio Gentile has noted, exponents of "the modernist avant-garde … proposed a spiritual revolution that, starting from a philosophy or art, should affect all areas of life, including the world of politics."[15] Gentile mapped much of the common terrain shared by the Italian modernists and the Fascists, including the notion of a spiritual revolution, the belief in youth a a regenerative force, and the glorification of violence. The Futurists also celebrated speed and technology, detested Bolshevism, and styled themselves as nationalists, and did so publicly (and in th German press) well into the late 1930s.[16] All of these ideas could easily be reconciled with the German brand of fascism. It also did not hurt that Mussolini had been influenced by his mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, and had come to appreciate German Expressionism, with a special regard for the artists in Die Brücke (The Bridge). Young Fascisti also often evinced enthusiasm about other Germa modernists. The Neue Sachlichkeit works of Otto Dix, for example, were exhibited in Milan in 1933. Mussolini himself believed that his German counterparts should embrace modernism, albeit with distinctive national characteristics. Because the Nazis had borrowed heavily from the original Fascis —the Roman salute ("Heil Hitler!") and the black shirts of the Squadristi as uniforms for the SS, to take two examples—many observers believed that the Fascists and the Nazis would share a common cultural policy. Even the contemporaneous Austro-fascist leaders in Vienna promoted modernism, despite their nationalistic, anti-Bolshevist, and staunchly Catholic orientation. Certain Nazi officials appreciated the potential for a common, or at least coordinated, cultural policy among fascist countries, and invited Mussolini's government to send exemplars of its modernist art to Berlin in the spring of 1934.

The reconciliation of fascism and modernism emerged as an international trend and constitutes th fifth key factor frequently underlying the search for accommodation. French author Louis-Ferdinand Céline, American poet Ezra Pound, American architect and designer Philip Johnson, and Finnish composer Jean Sibelius count among the modernists who exhibited sympathies for fascism. In many respects, this quest for a synthesis between modernism and, in the German case, National Socialism brings to mind literary critic George Steiner's question that he posed in his 1971 essay "A Season in Hell":

> Art, intellectual pursuits, the development of the natural sciences, many branches of scholarship flourished in close spatial, temporal proximity to massacre and the death camps. It is this structure and meaning of that proximity which must be looked at. Why did humanistic traditions and models of conduct prove so fragile a barrier against political bestiality? In fact, were they a barrier, or is it more realistic to perceive in humanistic culture express solicitations of authoritarian rule and cruelty?[18]

As Steiner suggests, certain aspects of modernism dovetailed with the National Socialist ideology. While this synergistic relationship took many forms, three elements stood out: a desire to explore an exploit the irrational side of humans; a belief that modernist cultural forms corresponded to specifically German national characteristics; and an appreciation of technology and machines.

Many modernists and National Socialists shared a belief in the power of irrational instincts. An earlier generation of modernists had tried to tap into the Dionysian forces—the wild, instinctive, and animalistic aspects of humanity that played a role in sublime art (at least according to Friedrich Nietzsche). This energy was part of the appeal of the "neo-Primitivism" of Picasso and others—what George Steiner called "the charismatic appeal of 'barbaric forms.'" Hitler and his cohort also proved adept at utilizing irrational appeals to followers. Standing among hundreds of thousands of spectators in Nuremberg, surrounded by vibrant red and black swastika banners and otherworldly lighting effects, the viewer lost himself (or, less often, herself) in an amorphous crowd. The religious qualitie

of the event—the “longing for transcendence”—and the hypnotic appeal of the dictator affirmed thes irrational impulses. With the chorus of “Heil Hitler” chants shouted in unison, among other theatrica effects, the Nazis organized a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that touched people on a deep, visceral level. Thomas Mann realized this when he opined in the 1930s that National Socialism and Expressionism stemmed from the same “root.”[19] A number of modernist cultural figures who tried to find accommodation with the Nazis—Martin Heidegger, Gottfried Benn, even Albert Speer—identified commonalities based on emotions, instincts, and profound life forces. Historian Richard Wolin coine the phrase “the seduction of unreason” to describe certain intellectuals’ gravitation to fascism.[20]

Another argument advanced in this effort to reconcile modernism with National Socialism concerned national character. In the realm of visual arts (along with architecture, the focal point of th debate about modernism in the Third Reich), many believed that Expressionism captured essentially Germanic qualities. The landscapes of Emil Nolde, with their rural settings and spiritual overtones, seemed a perfect representation of the “Blut und Boden” (Blood and Soil) motif favored by the Nazis —or, certainly, the conservative, *völkisch* faction. It did not hurt that Nolde was an avid supporter of the Nazis and begged to play a meaningful role in the “new” Germany. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner painte mountain scenes that glowed incandescently in vibrant hues—suggesting a deeper spiritual resonanc —and he populated many of his canvases with isolated peasant herders and their animals. The focus on the power of nature and the soul-killing effects of modern society provided additional linkages between German Expressionism and National Socialism. The black and white wood-block print, a favored medium for German Expressionists, harkened back to the German medieval tradition, and th historic Gothic style resonated in the work of sculptors like Ernst Barlach. These affinities between the medieval, Romantic, and modernist cultural forms offered an intellectual underpinning for those who hoped for a more tolerant *Kunstpolitik* (arts policy). The phrase “Nordic Expressionism,” which occurred with greater frequency in the early 1930s, also reflected a belief that Expressionism and National Socialism could be reconciled (Plates 4–7).[21]

On a more practical level, Germans had often taken the lead with modernist projects in the twentieth century, and this provided Goebbels and his cohorts with plenty of German talent to exploi Goebbels believed with good reason that having gifted people in Germany would reflect positively o his ministry and the regime more generally. He therefore sought to enlist the most prestigious cultura figures he could. The Reich Chamber of Culture offered the best opportunity. The seven arts-specific chambers (literature, journalism, radio, theater, music, film, and visual arts) each needed a president and a vice president, and there would be a Reich Cultural Senate to which he could appoint those luminaries whom he favored. Goebbels, for example, explored the idea of luring director Fritz Lang back from Hollywood to head up the Reich Chamber of Film. Both Goebbels and Hitler greatly admired Lang’s 1926 epic, *Metropolis*, which explored the theme of a leader’s psychological power over the masses. In particular, they praised the manner in which the director coordinated the movement of people. Although an iconic figure in the Weimar modernist renaissance, Fritz Lang came into consideration for the post, just as Goebbels turned to Richard Strauss, who served as the first president of the Reich Chamber of Music. According to Lang, he met with Goebbels in March 1933 and, rather than being castigated for putting “Nazi slogans into the mouth of a pathological criminal,” which he had done in *The Last Will of Dr. Mabeuse*, Lang was offered “a leading post in th German film industry.” The director, of course, did not accept the offer from Goebbels. He later engaged in some self-mythologizing about his departure from Germany—he did not, as he claimed, flee to Paris that very night “practically penniless”—yet the discussions about his assuming the presidency of the film Chamber are in themselves illuminating.[22]

The Reich Propaganda Minister was also prepared to mend fences with Thomas Mann, who had s

forcefully defended the Weimar Republic and denounced National Socialism. Because Mann had bee a patriot in World War I, was loyal to the imperial monarchy, and was not Jewish, Goebbels believed it might be possible to bring him into the fold.[23] Mann's books, such as his modernist novella *Death in Venice*, were not thrown into the pyres during the protests "against the un-German spirit" on 10 May 1933. Thomas Mann as head of the Reich Chamber for Literature would have been a sensation. There were other appointments to make, and other cultural luminaries to co-opt. Goebbels would compel Wilhelm Furtwängler, arguably the most famous conductor in the world at the time, to continue on at the Berlin Philharmonic, which Goebbels effectively controlled. He also made Furtwängler the vice president (under Strauss) of the Reich Chamber of Music. Perhaps he could eve lure Marlene Dietrich back from Hollywood?

An enthusiasm for technology offered another affinity shared by modernists and Nazis. Granted, one must avoid the simplification that an embrace of technology equals modernity, which in turn equals modernism. The relationships are far more complicated and provisional. Yet machine aesthetics intrigued many modernists, especially those with a more rationalistic approach (as compared to the Expressionists). Machines offered a highly favored metaphor, with Le Corbusier, fo example, articulating his well-known credo, "A house is a machine for living in." Kurt Weill and Pau Hindemith engaged modern technology in another way in their opera *Der Lindberghflug* (*The Lindbergh Flight*) (1929), which also allowed them to explore myths about the United States (a country that itself constituted one of the "quintessential symbols of modernity").[24] Modernist architects typically engaged technology, with most favoring austere, streamlined design and embracing new machine-made materials such as glass, concrete, and steel. This kind of architecture persisted throughout the Third Reich. Modernists during the Weimar period also worked in the diver fields of industrial design—what Pierre Bourdieu would later call (with an element of sarcasm) "the illegitimate arts": that is, the less established fields such as graphic design, advertising, and photography, among others.[25] Because these newer arts did not attract the same publicity as more traditional genres, with practitioners working out of the limelight and often as members of larger teams, it was often possible to continue this work during the Third Reich. The graphic artists for the magazine *Die neue Linie* (*The New Line*), for example, which was published in Leipzig, continued with progressive design techniques until the magazine ceased production in 1943.[26] Bauhaus "Werkmeister" Christian Dell, who created sleek modernist lamps, also continued his industrial design work during the Third Reich. And Herbert Bayer, who conceived so many of the iconic image associated with the Bauhaus and was later known for the ski posters he did in Aspen, produced image for a propagandistic exhibition staged by the Nazi regime in 1934. Bayer also contributed to a brochure in the mid-1930s "meant to lure people from all over the world to see the Führer's achievements."[27] Despite the relatively low visibility of most of these designers with modernist ties, they were important to the culture of the Third Reich.

Modernists, therefore, often sought accommodation with the National Socialist regime, and did s for both ideological and personal reasons. This is not to deny that some modernists were truly agains Hitler and chose to emigrate. The German émigré community during the Third Reich represented the greatest assemblage of cultural talent ever to leave a country. Yet the image of virtuous émigrés has long overshadowed the fact that a wide array of cultural figures who were trained or who worked in a modernist tradition attempted to find a place in Hitler's Reich. This includes Walter Gropius, Paul Hindemith, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Barlach, Emil Nolde, Richard Strauss, Gustaf Gründgens, Leni Riefenstahl, Arno Breker, and Albert Speer, as well as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Carl Orff, Werner Egk, Herbert von Karajan, Martin Heidegger, Gerhart Hauptmann, an Ernst Jünger. The list goes on. Although it is important to preserve distinctions and recognize

significant differences between these figures, including their different relationships to modernism, they all shared a belief that their work would be an asset to the new Germany.

Some of the modernists successfully acted on this belief and, by altering the styles of their work, reached the apogees of their careers. Speer and Riefenstahl, who were trained in modernist traditions offer vivid examples. Others went even further in terms of adapting to the regime and meeting its "needs." Fritz Ertl, for example, who was one of about 1,300 students to pass through the Bauhaus, studying at the Dessau facility between 1928 and 1931, became a Waffen-SS officer, and an urban planner at the Auschwitz site.[28] Ertl obviously represented an extreme example, while most other modernists sought accommodation in a less injurious manner. These efforts, as indicated earlier, wer more common in the early years of the Third Reich. For example, an August 1934 petition in support of Hitler succeeding Paul von Hindenburg as head of state bore the signatures of many leading cultur figures, including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Emil Nolde, Erich Heckel, and Ernst Barlach. Granted, as detailed later, these signatures were obtained in certain instances by subjecting the artists to a measure of duress, but their compliance nonetheless attested t a yearning for a peaceful coexistence with the Nazi regime.

Other documents penned by modernist heroes prove more troubling. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, a founding member of Die Brücke and a pioneer of German Expressionism, responded to pressure to resign from the Prussian Academy of the Arts (Preussische Akademie der Künste) on 17 May 1933 b sending the executive secretary the following response:

> I have never derived any personal advantages from the membership. I have instead tried to honor the institution and have always sent my best work for your exhibitions. For more than thirty years now, I have struggled through my work for a new, strong, and authentic German art and will continue to do this as long as I live. I am neither a Jew nor a Social Democrat, nor otherwise been politically active; and in general, have a clean conscience. I am therefore waiting patiently to see what the new government will do with regard to the question of the Academy and leave with confidence the question of my membership in your hands.[29]

The Prussian Academy held off making a decision about Kirchner, as it did with architect Mies van der Rohe and sculptor Rudolf Belling. All three tried to find accommodation with the Nazi regime. A artist Max Pechstein said about Belling, "he is performing the most fantastic leaps, like a salmon he trying again and again to overcome the weir to climb the heights, but until now in vain."[30] Yet all three were later forced out of the Academy in 1937. Of course, they were not alone in expressing regret about being unable to play a role in the new Reich. In July 1937, architect Bruno Paul wrote, " would still like to emphasize how much I have regretted, and still regret, that I was not able to use m extensive experience and knowledge in the area … of art … in the service of National Socialistic principles."[31]

This book in no way seeks to minimize the sacrifices or suffering of the many modernist cultural figures who opposed the regime, especially during the war. Painter Max Pechstein went fishing in order to feed himself, and former Bauhaus Master Oskar Schlemmer painted camouflage for the Luftwaffe and then worked in a lacquer factory in Wuppertal.[32] At a different level of hardship, Bauhaus-trained artist Franz Ehrlich, who had studied with Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Lázló Moholy-Nagy, designed the gates of the Buchenwald concentration camp, where he had been a prisoner since 1935. Ehrlich rendered the inscription, "Jedem das Seine" (To each his own), in such a way that the Bauhaus influence was readily apparent.[33] A number of cultural figures opposed to the regime paid with their lives, including writer Erich Mühsam (1878–1934), journalist Carl von Ossietzky (1889–1938), film director Herbert Selpin (1904–1942), and pianist Karlrobert Kreiten (1916–1943). And Jews always faced grave dangers, as evidenced by the tragic fates of modernist painters Felix Nussbaum (1904–1944), Ignaz Kaufmann (1885–1941), and Charlotte Salomon (1917–

1943), as well as sculptor Otto Freundlich (1878–1943). Yet this clearly was not the entire story.

The figures in this book have been selected for a variety of reasons, but largely because of their important artistic work and high-profile careers, and because they were representative of the most important fields in the cultural life of the Third Reich. In both Chapter 2 (about failed attempts to fin accommodation) and Chapter 3 (accommodation realized), I have selected five figures that broadly cover the cultural life of Nazi Germany. Chapter 3 does not include a painter (only a sculptor, Arno Breker), which in part speaks to the more stridently anti-modernist policies that eventually prevailed with regard to pictures. Of course, there were painters with modernist roots that found official acceptance—Paul Mathias Padua, Albin Egger-Lienz, and even Adolf Ziegler, among others—but none rivaled Breker in terms of importance of their work to the field of the visual arts. These ten figures, when considered collectively, cannot reflect every facet of culture in Nazi Germany, but they go a long way toward capturing this complex history.

Bauhaus-trained artist Franz Ehrlich, who studied at the Dessau school from 1927 to 1930, designed the gates of Buchenwald in 19 while incarcerated in the camp. It features the famous slogan “Jedem das Seine” (To each his own). (Peter Hansen/Sammlung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald)

Part I

“The Summer of Art” and Beyond

MODERNISTS CAME CLOSEST to realizing their vision of reconciliation with the National Socialists in 1933—more specifically, during “the summer of art,” as some have called it. At least, this proved tru in terms of the coalescence of support for modernism among certain Nazi leaders. The summer of 1933 marked the apogee regarding the debate over Expressionism. Hitler remained indecisive with respect to cultural policy, and this created an environment rife with impassioned debate. In order to understand the modernists’ quest for accommodation, one must appreciate the uncertainty, the aspirations, and the alliances that provided the basis for this hopefulness. This “summer of art” saw the misapprehension of the true nature of National Socialism and the belief in the importance and compatibility of the modernists’ own work in a revived Germany. These views would persist until 1937, when Hitler induced Goebbels to organize the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*. Even then, support fo Expressionism and other forms of modernism continued, but not with the transparency and optimism of the earlier years. A cohort of former Bauhaus architects, for example, constructing the massive Hermann Göring Works in Linz in the late 1930s in a modern, functional idiom, might offer a different high point in terms of practice. Hitler himself cared most about architecture among all the arts (although painting, his former profession, and opera, especially Richard Wagner’s work, also occupied important parts of his mental life). Yet in the early years of the Third Reich, the visual arts offered the most dramatic contest over aesthetic policy.

In late July 1933, the exhibition *Thirty German Artists* opened. The show featured works by established Expressionists, such as Emil Nolde, Ernst Barlach, and Christian Rohlfs, but also by a younger generation, including Otto Andreas Schreiber and Hans Weidemann. The latter two were Nazis who, in addition to painting modernist canvases, were storm troopers (members of the Sturm Abteilung, or SA). Schreiber and Weidemann, along with Fritz Hippler, also headed the Berlin chapt of the National Socialist German Students’ League—the NSD-Studentenbund. The leaders of the Students’ League, along with modernist art dealer Ferdinand Möller, organized *Thirty German Artist* Prior to the opening of the exhibition, the students staged a pro-modernist rally. They advertised the event by making posters themselves. Many were titled “Youth Fights for German Art” and “Witness of Youth for Art.” These were bright red in color and covered the walls of the university in the days prior to the rally. The students also extended special invitations to a number of luminaries, including Mies van der Rohe, Karl Hofer, and Berlin Nationalgalerie director Ludwig Justi. On the evening of 2 June, the students and their special guests convened in the main auditorium at the Humboldt University on Unter den Linden. Observers reported that the atmosphere was electric, with the auditorium bursting with an overflow crowd. Fritz Hippler—later a key aide to Goebbels—delivered speech in which he railed against the “restoration of Wilhelmian academicism and all regulation of art.”[1] He was followed by other speakers who defended Expressionism. The last speaker was Otto Andreas Schreiber, who announced that the art exhibition was formally under the protection of the student group. The participants at the rally approved a resolution that declared, “The principal threat to the birth of a new art lies in the narrow-minded exclusion of valuable German artists from this collaborative effort [to regenerate the nation and its culture]—this, for reasons not related to their personalities or work.”[2]

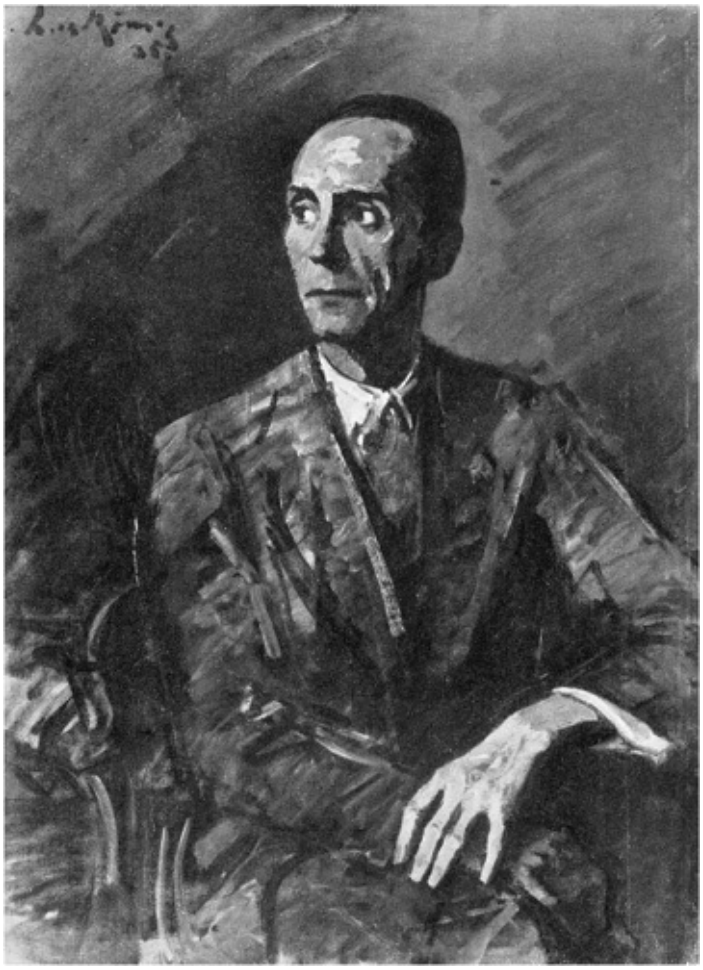
During this pro-modernist rally at the Humboldt University, Hippler and Schreiber whipped the crowd into a frenzy. But they had more in mind than an emotional catharsis. The carefully phrased resolution that they had drafted (with the aforementioned line about “the principal threat to the birth of a new art lies in the narrow-minded exclusion of valuable German artists from this collaborative effort”), and that they proceeded to pass by acclamation, had unambiguous political undertones. Historian Peter Paret noted, “The meeting attracted attention in the public and the press, not only because of the speakers’ challenging words but also because one of the organizers [Weidemann] worked in the Propaganda Ministry, which suggested that the meeting represented Goebbels’s views, or at least was being used by Goebbels to test how far disagreements on cultural issues were still permissible.”[3] If there were any doubts about the implications of the rally, Schreiber also “proclaime the dissolution” of the anti-modernist pressure group, the Fighting League for German Culture, at the Berlin art schools and academies. Schreiber’s speech was published on 10 July 1933 in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, and then again a second time on 14 July. The paper also published declarations o support from student groups at other universities. There was widespread optimism in the bourgeois press, which had not yet been taken over by the Nazis. For example, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that Hitler “regretted the breach with Barlach.”[4] Word then leaked that Goebbels had borrowed several Nolde paintings from the Berlin Nationalgalerie. Rumors also circulated that Goebbels had expressed regrets about the 10 May 1933 book burnings, which had provoked negative reactions abroad.[5]

Ferdinand Möller, a modernist artwork dealer and co-organizer of the important but controversial 1933 exhibition *Thirty German Artists*. (Berlinische Galerie)

Three weeks later, the *Thirty German Artists* exhibition opened at the Ferdinand Möller Galerie o the ~~Lützow-Ufer in central Berlin—just down the street from Jewish modernist Alfred Flechtheim~~'s famous gallery. Throngs of students, artists, and other culturally aware observers packed the premise so that one could hardly move, let alone see the Expressionist works. But the opening was less about viewing the art than it was a demonstration of support for a more "liberal" arts policy. If Hitler and the other Nazi leaders were serious about empowering German youth, if they were to act on their promises for change and renewal, and if they were dedicated to finding a truly Germanic form of art, then they would respect this bold student-led initiative. But in a foreshadowing of events to come—such as the Röhm Purge of June 1934, when the more socialistic branch of the Nazi Party came under attack, including its figurehead, the storm trooper chief—Hitler and key subleaders moved against th overly "progressive" students. Three days after the exhibition's opening, Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick, who controlled the police, set his forces on the Möller Galerie. Utilizing the powers derived in the wake of the Reichstag fire from the Emergency Decree of 28 February 1933, Frick closed the exhibition and stationed uniformed officers at the entrance. This was by no means th end of the battle, and the show's organizers managed to arrange for its reopening a week later; it was however, a clear signal that the fight would be arduous.

1

The Fight over Modernism

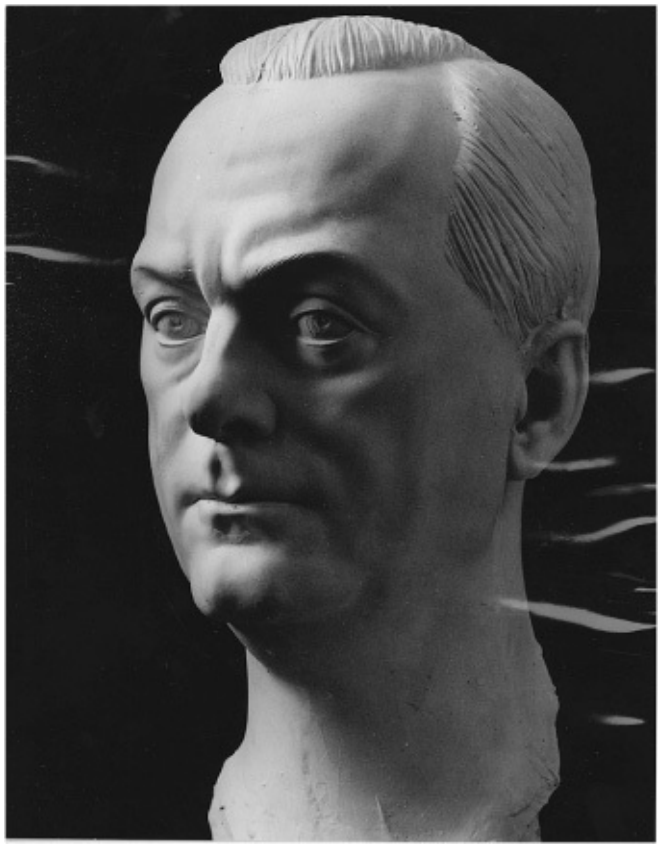


Leo von König, *Portrait of Dr. Goebbels* (1935)—a work that featured modernist stylistic influences and so pleased the Reich Propaganda Minister that he commissioned von König to execute a replica. (Reprinted from Bruno Kroll, *Leo von König*, Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1941)

THE DEBATE OVER Expressionism, which stood out as the most visible fault line in the battle over modernism, actually represented a struggle for overall control of Nazi cultural policy. The two chief combatants, the figureheads of their respective camps in the early years of the Third Reich, were Alfred Rosenberg, a rabidly anti-modernist philosopher, and Joseph Goebbels, the recently appointed Reich Minister for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda and the Gauleiter (Nazi Party district leader) of Berlin. Goebbels and the pro-modernists had a distinct advantage in terms of bureaucratic standing. Rosenberg headed up the Fighting League for German Culture (Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur)—a kind of cultural nongovernmental organization—but had no state or Party position with regard to culture in 1933. On the other hand, the slippery Goebbels was wavering in his support of modernism—at least publicly—and reluctant to expend political capital on a cause that he knew Hitl opposed on a personal level. Having grown up in provincial Linz, Austria, Hitler never developed an appreciation for modernist culture and instead developed affinities for more traditional historicist

styles. One of the pro-modernists' problems grew out of the less than firm support shown by the Reic ~~Propaganda Minister. For example, curator Ernst Holzinger wrote Berlin Nationalgalerie director~~ Eberhard Hanfstaengl in 1937 that Goebbels was reported to have said back in 1934 that "[Franz] Marc would probably have been the leading German artist if he had not fallen in war."[1] The two museum officials were uncertain whether Goebbels actually uttered these words, but the fact that the rumor circulated among museum officials captures the sense among those engaged in this debate tha he supported modernism, but not in an unwavering or open manner. Rosenberg and his allies, on the other hand, were never lacking in resolve or self-assuredness.

Rosenberg had been the first among the Nazi leaders to build an organization for cultural affairs. The editor of the Nazi newspaper, *Der Völkische Beobachter*, Rosenberg had founded the Fighting League for German Culture in Munich in 1927, and by 1933 the pressure group had branches stretching across Germany. He oversaw an ambitious initiative to lobby politicians, publish periodicals, and organize various kinds of lectures and exhibitions. Yet Rosenberg and the Munich leadership of the Fighting League felt somewhat marginalized by their colleagues in Thuringia, who had entered into a coalition government in 1930. This situation came about in the September 1930 elections, when the Nazis fared so well in the provincial elections that they earned a place in the state's government. On a national level, the Nazis saw their percentage of the vote jump from 2.6 percent in 1928 to 18.3 percent, netting an additional 103 seats in the Reichstag. In the Thuringian provincial government, negotiations for cabinet posts resulted in the Nazis gaining hold of the Ministry of Interior, which gave them considerable influence over cultural matters.



Arno Breker, *Portrait Bust of Alfred Rosenberg* (1940), the Nazi ideologue and unofficial leader of the *völkisch* movement. (Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich)

In both Thuringia in 1930 and the Reich government in 1933, Wilhelm Frick served as the Minister of the Interior. Although he seemed a rather dull and forgettable lawyer on the surface, Fric was a radical National Socialist. In Thuringia, he immediately transferred control of the state art academy in Weimar to Paul Schultze-Naumburg, a capable traditional architect and radical *völkisch*

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