

Art and Identity: How Communities were Created and Destroyed during the Second World War

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Not only does war threaten the lives of individuals, but it also threatens communal and historical identities as artifacts are taken, stripped of their original meaning, and transformed into something new, often to support the ideology and desired narrative of the perpetrator. One of the most prominent examples of this was the looting of art from homes, private collections, and museums throughout the Third Reich's rule. To 'cleanse' German society of meaningless art, it was first taken from a series of collections or bought from dealers that had acquired the art from individuals trying to flee the country and displayed as a trophy. This signified to the public, as well as the international community that liberation and freedom from the degenerate had been achieved. If the art was not destroyed, it was hidden in mines, caves, abandoned buildings, and the homes of prominent Nazi officers. As the Second World War progressed, the Allies began participating in the lucrative business that had developed. The Allies saw themselves as liberators of art and trapped society, which had limitations on the media they could consume. Despite this, their intentions changed as they wanted to control the market they were trying to free, demonstrating their claim to victory. This case illustrates how art, and the cultural and social identities attached to them, were stolen and re-shaped multiple times. Not only does looted art from the Second World War demonstrate how important artifacts are to collective and individual identities, but it also demonstrates how they can be forced into perpetrator narratives through control and monopolization.

Art was used to create communities of people who shared experiences through connections to an artist and their art due to racial, cultural, and social struggles. Harriet Hawkins and Ruth Catlow explore this idea very broadly, as there is a "widely recognized social value of the arts, and

their possibilities for connecting people and places,” as the “relationship that arts practices can produce between individuals ... and the communities and environments in which they live”¹ are imperative. As a result of communities using art to reinforce collective experiences and memories, new communities and identities can also be created and reinforced. Hawkins and Catlow state that art can be a tool for “connecting and reconnecting existing communities and creating new ones.”² Art would have been imperative during the Second World War as it helped maintain connections between individuals and ideologies.

As art was used as an indicating and shaping factor of individual and collective identity in the twentieth century, there were conflicting ideas of what art should be. This allowed for the promotion of ‘superior’ identities and their intentions of saving the victims of inappropriate and degenerate identities. The art preferred by Hitler and, by extension, the Nazi regime, was seen as proper and had several classical features, including a strict focus on a single subject or scene. Features are clearly defined as the completed works were extremely detailed, as seen in a series of images within Hitler’s private collection, titled *Katalog der Privat-Gallerie Adolf Hitlers*. Most of the images were portraits featuring Hitler’s family members, including his niece and mother, with an emphasis on the human subjects of the paintings.³

Within the *Katalog der Privat-Gallerie Adolf Hitlers*, three paintings did not feature family members but featured mythical and heroic personifications. Firstly, there are two knights in two separate images. One is standing on a hill in armour, and another has just slain a dragon, creating

¹ Harriet Hawkins and Ruth Catlow, “Shaping subjects, connecting communities, imagining futures?: Critically investigating *Play Your Place*” in *Public Art Encounters: Art, Space, and Identity* by Martin Zabracki and Joni M. Palmer (Routledge, 2017), 91.

² Hawkins and Catlow, “Shaping subjects,” 91.

³ Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, *Katalog Der Privat-Gallerie Adolf Hitlers*, 1936, 1 album (75 p.); 31 x 41 cm. (album), *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA*, 1936, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004676971/>, images 1-4.

a scene of bravery and heroics conquering evil. The final painting in this catalogue was one of Cupid complaining to Venus, demonstrating the value of classical art and its figures. Although these three works communicated different scenes and stories based on various attributes and artistic values, they were painted in the same style as the family portraits, focusing on humankind's physical form and power.⁴ This catalogue was minimal, but it ultimately demonstrated Hitler's values. He built an identity on the foundation of subject-based classical art, even choosing art that depicted images and scenes of superiority and control, such as the knight killing a soldier with a naked damsel in front of him. These heroics directly reflected Hitler's views, and the supposed thoughts of the Nazi party, contrasting what would be known as degenerate art and the victim of mass and industrial looting.

Contrasting the art Hitler approved of, degenerate art needed to be controlled because of the ideas and identity it promoted; one of these paintings was an unsigned Vincent van Gogh piece, *View of the Asylum and Chapel of Saint-Rémy*, painted in 1889 and featuring the surroundings van Gogh saw after admitting himself to an asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. The mechanics of the painting include large brushstrokes and vibrant colours, including a green-blue hue to the sky above the asylum and chapel, setting itself apart from the works admired by Hitler and the Nazi party, as seen in Figure 1.⁵ The different classifications of art rose not just because of technical differences, but also because of who owned the paintings, creating a foundation for all of the events that would occur from 1937 onwards.

⁴ Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, *Katalog Der Privat-Gallerie Adolf Hitlers*, images 5-7

⁵ Vincent van Gogh, *View of the Asylum and Chapel of Saint-Rémy*, 1889, Oil on canvas. 45.1 cm × 60.4 cm (17.8 in × 23.8 in), 1889, Located in a private collection, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/View_of_the_Asylum_and_Chapel_of_Saint-R%C3%A9my#/media/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_View_of_the_Asylum_and_Chapel_of_Saint-R%C3%A9my_\(F803\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/View_of_the_Asylum_and_Chapel_of_Saint-R%C3%A9my#/media/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_View_of_the_Asylum_and_Chapel_of_Saint-R%C3%A9my_(F803).jpg); Lauren Redman, "Orkin v. Taylor: A Satisfying Solution to a Dispute over a van Gogh or a Blow for Holocaust Art Restitution Claims in United States Federal Court?," *Art Antiquity and Law* 12, no. 4 (2007), 390.



Figure 1: Vincent van Gogh, *View of the Asylum and Chapel of Saint-Rémy*, 1889, oil on canvas. 45.1 cm × 60.4 cm (17.8 in × 23.8 in), located in a private collection.

As a result of this art perpetuating less-than-valuable ideals and ways of living, the art was looted and stolen from various types of collections – including private Jewish collections. Early on in the efforts to control art and its consumption, “German Jews [were stripped] of their citizenship and... their collections of art, their furniture, all their possessions right down to the silverware and their family photos [were confiscated].”⁶ In order to control degenerate art and its owners, they were deemed to be a threat to the ‘proper’ way of life. The Munich Exhibit of 1937 was created to demonstrate this control.

The Munich Exhibit attracted worldwide attention, allowing everyone to see how what was deemed as degenerate identity and community connection changed even before the official

⁶ Robert M Edsel and Bret Witter, *Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (London: Arrow Books, 2014), 13.

outbreak of the Second World War. Compared to the ‘German’ art exhibit that was taking place simultaneously, the degenerate art exhibit gathered more attention. Most likely, the German population was interested in seeing the fundamental reasons why they were considered superior, and as art was at the centre of this understanding, it allowed for a visual representation of conflicting ideas and identities. Another possibility of the high attendance was given by the New York Times, published on August 6, 1937, stating that many of those in attendance were “foreign tourists, especially American and British, but included... many German art students to whom this exhibit [was] presumably their last opportunity to study modern art.”⁷ Here, no matter the intent of visiting the degenerate art exhibit in Munich, Hitler and the Nazis had established a monopoly on art as an object and its consumption on an international scale, as the exhibition attracted tourists and scholars.

Along with this, there was a monopoly on ideology and identity as the art was degenerate compared to the proper German way of life. As the art began to be stolen, the meaning of the paintings was stripped and turned into something new by the Germans. As a result, new communities formed surrounding these art categories, supporting the idea of right and wrong identities.⁸ This was one of the monumental events in art and art looting, creating a very lucrative market that was traced from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. Once the motives of Hitler and the Nazi regime concerning the control of art were understood, the conditions in which Hitler and other prominent Nazis acquired this art exemplify how these categories were maintained throughout the war and influenced future communities and identities.

⁷ “Degenerate Art Popular in Reich: Modern Show More Than 3 Times as Popular as Exhibit of ‘German’ Painting. Press Ignores Figures. Hitler and Goering are Reported to be Heavy Purchasers of ‘Regenerate’ Pictures” (quote); *Degenerate Art Exhibition Munich view of one section*, 1937, from University of California, San Diego ARTstor Slide Gallery, JPG, image 1 and 2.

⁸ Hawkins and Catlow, “Shaping subjects, connecting communities, imagining futures?,” 91.

Many individuals, including the owner of *View of the Asylum and Chapel of Saint-Rémy*, sold or gave pieces of their family collections to art dealers before fleeing and emigrating in hopes of escaping the Nazi regime.⁹ This was an effort of liquidation, starting in 1933, meaning these communities were forced to give up pieces of their identity to survive, giving the art dealers of this period immense power over the newly reformed art market that Hermann Göring oversaw. Jonathan Petropoulos describes the power art dealers held, as they were part of the Liquidation Committee created because there was a need to “sell off the ‘degenerate art’ from German site collections,”¹⁰ signalling the process of dealers working to acquire, assess, and determine the worthiness of the art, both sold to and stolen for them. As this art was acquired, the dealers gained enormous profits on their own accord and through a well-maintained system of agency.

After the Jewish population liquidated their assets, Hermann Göring, one of the most prominent figures within German looting and the art trade during the Second World War, began to search for private collections that could be purged. An order from November 5, 1940, found in *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*, detailed the plan concerning the distribution of art found in Jewish collections or possession. Göring stated that when Jewish art was seized, all pieces would be available to Hitler and possibly placed in his private collection. Subsequently, art was reserved for the Reichsmarchall, Göring himself. After Göring hand-selected pieces for his collection, all remaining suitable art would be used to build the Hohe Schule collection. Finally, “those art objects that are appropriate for turning over to German museums; will immediately be inventoried, packed, and transported to Germany

⁹ Jonathan Petropoulos, “Art Dealer Networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 3 (2016): 546–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416637417>, 548; Redman, “Orkin v. Taylor: A Satisfying Solution to a Dispute over a van Gogh or a Blow for Holocaust Art Restitution Claims in United States Federal Court?,” 393.

¹⁰ Petropoulos, “Art Dealer Networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period,” 548.

by the Einsatzstab with all due care and with the assistance of the Luftwaffe.”¹¹ After following the first steps outlined in the document, sorting the pure from impure, then moving them to specific people and places once they were deemed acceptable and hand-selected, they moved back into the hands of the art dealers, most famously Bruno Lohse due to his connections with Göring, and cycled through the French and German art trade through auctions.¹²

Göring, second only to Hitler in the newly formed art world, was racing against the system he built to add to his own collection. Carinhall, Göring’s country estate, harboured such a large amount of the Göring collection that it gained the reputation of rivalling the museum in Linz.¹³ Göring made collecting these treasures one of his goals during the Second World War, allowing him to grow “his personal collection [to] over seven-thousand masterpieces, amassed at his country home.”¹⁴ Göring became a crucial figure in looting and owning art, making it part of his character and identity; Carinhall was well-known for its displays of degenerate art, aided by Lohse, but also Jewish art dealers such as Allen and Manon Loebel.¹⁵ Even though this degenerate art was often already in the private sphere, owned by Jewish families and other private collectors, the looting changed how the paintings influenced and expressed the identity of various communities through ownership and consumption – they were no longer objects of expression. The paintings were stolen and sold in an ‘underground’ market, providing little to no protection from destruction or damage

¹¹ “November 5, 1940 Reichmarschall Hermann Göring’s order concerning distribution of Jewish art treasures,” in *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* by Robert M. Edsel and Bret Witter, 31.

¹² “November 5, 1940 Reichmarschall Hermann Göring’s order concerning distribution of Jewish art treasures,” in *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* by Robert M. Edsel and Bret Witter, 31.

¹³ Monika Ginkey Puloy, “High Art and national Socialism, Part I: Linz Museum as Ideological Arena,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 201–15, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/8.2.201>, 207.

¹⁴ Noah Charney, “A Brief History of Art Theft in Conflict Zones,” *Journal of Art Crime* 12 (2014): 77–84, 83.

¹⁵ Donald S. Burris, “Keynote: Restoration of a Culture: A California Lawyer’s Lengthy Quest to Restitute Nazi-Looted Art,” *North Carolina Journal in International Law* 45, no. 2 (2020): 277–332, 285; Jonathan Petropoulos, “Five Uncomfortable and Difficult Topics Relating to the Restitution of Nazi-Looted Art,” *New German Critique* 44, no. 1 130 (February 2017): 125–42, <https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033x-3705730>, 132.

from being improperly stored and cared for. The new form of collection, sold illegally and kept completely private, was seemingly spearheaded by Göring and his network of dealers willing to sell or give him art, as there is an unclear and essentially lost understanding of several transactions.¹⁶ As a result, in the eyes of Göring, art was a means of collection, acting as a spoil of war.

Even though high-ranking Nazi officers and art dealers associated with them, including Bruno Lohse and Allen and Manon Loeb, often collected degenerate art, creating new identities surrounding illegality or undesirability as they were the spoils of war, others within the Reich fought against this, demonstrating another portion of this newly formed identity and its relation to degenerate art. Eric Koch, another well-known Nazi art collector during the Second World War, often acquired paintings from Göring. This would give the impression that Koch, the Reich Commissar of Ukraine, was also looking for degenerate art as a signifier to the successful control of art and those associated with it, but his collection primarily consisted of old Dutch masters.¹⁷ Patricia Kennedy made it clear that Koch and Göring had developed an interesting relationship through art, as both heavily partook in looting and collection efforts, but there is no mention of any degenerate artists in the Koch collection. This could be credited to his location in the East, limiting ready-to-loom degenerate art, but as there was a strong relationship between the two Nazi collectors, Koch may have believed that degenerate art was indeed that: degenerate and unworthy, maybe even a threat to the Third Reich, as seen in the Munich exhibit.¹⁸ As a collector, Eric Koch demonstrated that another form of identity emerged from the looting and private collecting of

¹⁶ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Nazi-Looted Art from East and West in East Prussia: Initial Findings on the Erich Koch Collection," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 22, no. 1 (February 2015): 7–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0940739115000065>, 31-2; Petropoulos, "Five Uncomfortable and Difficult Topics Relating to the Restitution of Nazi-Looted Art," 132-3.

¹⁷ Grimsted, "Nazi-Looted Art from East and West in East Prussia," 10-11.

¹⁸ *Degenerate Art Exhibition Munich view of one section*, image 1 and 2; Mary-Margaret Goggin, "'Decent' vs. 'Degenerate' Art," *Art Journal* 50, no. 4 (1991): 84–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1991.10791484>, 84-85.

degenerate art. This was one of control, giving him and others with the same mindset power over the art and those who owned it in a different way than that of Göring. Even though both men demonstrate control and power over the art, Göring displayed its availability and newfound ownership because of control and want, giving him dominion over the art as he collected it with no meaning. In contrast, Koch seemed to refuse the degenerate art, solidifying the worthlessness of both the art and its previous owners. Even though these two mindsets and emerging identities would be conflicting, they were the frameworks for what happened to degenerate art until the end of the Second World War.

The following emerging identities concerning art, proper and degenerate, were simply maintaining control. Nazi collectors played a role as their collections grew after the art was displayed, vandalized and destroyed, or cycled into the art trade. After this, much of the degenerate art was stored in various places because of the sheer number collected throughout the Second World War. The storage of these paintings, often in salt and copper mines in Austria, placed them in danger as they were “stacked side by side.”¹⁹ Usually, the paintings were placed in these mines as the Allies approached, but there was no indication of protective materials or precautions to protect the works in the damp mines.

Even though the storage process of these paintings and degenerate art pieces was one of concern, recognized by the individuals tasked with taking care of and protecting these pieces while in storage, solidifying their role as degenerate within the new art world, they were stored with precious and valued pieces. For instance, the solid gold sarcophagus of Emperor Charlemagne and very classical paintings such as *Descent to Hades* and *Holy Family* by Ruben and Van Dyck, respectively.²⁰ Other paintings were kept by their new owners, mostly art dealers who worked

¹⁹ “Masterpieces of Art Found in Nazi Mine,” *New York Times* (1923-), May 06, 1945.

²⁰ “Masterpieces of Art Found in Nazi Mine,” *New York Times* (1923-), May 06, 1945.

closely with Nazis. One of these people who managed to keep their newly looted forty-seven paintings was Lohse, with some held in a Swiss bank vault.²¹ As the Allies began to discover these troves of art, both degenerate and proper, the identifying factors shifted once again. Nazi identity no longer relied on the cleansing of art as defeat inched closer and closer. Instead, they wanted to continue their monopolization of the lucrative commodity.

While the Nazis were building an identity of control and maintaining a monopoly on art, the Allies were simultaneously building new communities centred around art they had never seen in person. The Allies expressed the looting and destruction of art as a tragedy. They acted on these sentiments, opposing the community of the Third Reich and their idea of control, instead wanting to liberate both the art and the original owners' identity. Even though this was initially a fight against fascism and the lack of freedom of consumption, liberation became detrimental, and in some cases, even more so than the original looting that occurred. Eventually, ideas of freedom within Europe and its degenerate art were rewritten to fit a Western way of life. Despite this, the idea of liberation was not unified between individual soldiers, newly created specialty units, and organizing bodies such as governments and militaries. This created mass discrepancies in efforts of liberation and restitution.

Soon, within individual soldiers, the desire to liberate became a need to seek revenge out of anger, and it seemed to be common sense to achieve this the same way it started: through looting. Even though there is no mention of art explicitly, Ben Kaplow demonstrated this anger in a letter to his family. Ben's father asked him why he and the other soldiers were not treating the people of Lorraine with kindness, stealing food and other items from their homes. Kaplow responded angrily, stating "I would say that the majority of the people resent our coming. They were satisfied

²¹ Petropoulos, "Art Dealer Networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period," 548-9.

under Hitler... That's why my conscience doesn't bother me when I break into their homes & take things from them. Nothing they have is too good for us."²² Kaplow was not the only soldier to do this, as Seth A. Givens explained. "Servicemen justified their actions by claiming wartime necessity, opportunities for profit or trade, keepsakes, and revenge for Nazi atrocities."²³ Even though Givens details these events occurring mainly in Germany, Kaplow's letter demonstrated how widespread and accepted this practice was. Kaplow and Givens agree on one thing: this was a case of revenge. Individual soldiers looted houses and other locations, possibly including the mines that acted as hiding places, because they thought it was their right.²⁴ Ownership meant something different to the Allies and, more specifically, the American forces. Examining the individual soldier uncovers this, giving the impression that ownership was exclusive and a demonstration of power and superiority.

There was little regulation of what liberation should have looked like with individual soldiers with no training in handling works of art, as seen in the anger Kaplow expressed, and within the evidence Givens provides. They acted out of individual interest and motive with no mention of punishment for mistreating these significant objects. Instead, 'liberation' was their right, letting them take in "sheer amount[s]."²⁵ This was now an act of trophy hunting, not the imagined effort of saving something that should be consumed openly.

In an attempt to counter this, specialty units were created and trained. The Monuments Men, a group of soldiers that served in the Western Allied military efforts from 1943 to 1951, were

²² Benjamin Kaplow, *Dec 8, 1944 -- Don't worry if I know what I'm fighting for. Every time I look into the face of a dead Nazi, I remind myself.* Letter. From Society for Military History, Ben Kaplow Letters. <https://benkaplowcom.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/19441208.pdf>, 4.

²³ Seth A. Givens, "Liberating the Germans: The US Army and Looting in Germany during the Second World War," *War in History* 21, no. 1 (2014): 33–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344513504521>, 33.

²⁴ Kaplow, *Dec 8, 1944 -- Don't worry if I know what I'm fighting for*, 4; Givens, "Liberating the Germans," 34; "Masterpieces of Art Found in Nazi Mine," *New York Times* (1923-), May 06, 1945.

²⁵ Givens, "Liberating the Germans," 35.

first meant to “mitigate combat damage, primarily structures – churches, museums, and other important monuments.”²⁶ Robert M. Edsel, known for being the leading expert on the Monuments Men, their past efforts, and their retribution efforts, presented this identity in a format that detailed the desire to help and protect national and individual identity. This countered the mission of the Nazis and individuals such as Hitler, Göring, and Koch, who wanted to control art, as seen in the orders given and the records kept of the looted art. Instead, Allied efforts such as this wanted to liberate and save the art and ensure it was returned to those it was stolen from, essentially allowing victims and survivors to reclaim their identity. Countering the sentiments felt by Ben Kaplow and other soldiers who saw looting as their right, the early values and missions of the Monuments Men were solely to find and save art.

There was a lack of community within the Allied forces, specifically regarding looting, art preservation, and art in general; “Monuments Man S. Lane Faison Jr. ... arrived in Germany and promptly went to Altaisee, Austria, to assist with interrogating key Nazi officials detained by Western Allied forces. His particular assignment was to find out as much as possible about Hitler’s art collection and his plans for the Führermuseum.”²⁷ Faison was trained for this, and as this was an assigned mission, this would have affected his sentiments regarding looting and art in general, which Kaplow and other soldiers within the Allied forces did not feel. As a result, there was a lack of continuity regarding looting and its practices within the Allied forces, seen through Nazi organization and enforcement, ensuring art was properly catalogued and transferred once categorized. The Allies were not rigorous in training entire units and armies to handle found degenerate art.²⁸ As a result, even the Monuments Men and those affiliated with them began to

²⁶ Edsel and Witter, *Monuments Men*, p. xiv.

²⁷ Edsel and Witter, *Monuments Men*, pp. xv-xvi.

²⁸ Edsel and Witter, *Monuments Men*, pp. xv-xvi.; Kaplow, Dec 8, 1944 -- Don't worry if I know what I'm fighting for, 4.

suffer from deep communal divides. Two communities of soldiers were created: one focused on liberation, as seen in trained individuals such as Faison, and finding spoils and trophies of war, analyzed by Kirrily Freeman. Although Freeman focuses on gender within the Monuments Men and their efforts, the idea that “the United States assumed the mantle of protector and champion of Western Civilization by asserting custodianship of its greatest masterpieces”²⁹ demonstrates how and why this divide developed on an individual level, eventually making its way through every Allied effort related to degenerate art. The trained men like Faison saw themselves as protectors, whereas others such as Kaplow saw themselves as champions with the right to plunder and loot.³⁰ This was the beginning of recorded discrepancies within Allied identity and its formation surrounding degenerate art.

The attitudes of individual soldiers, with the want of revenge and control surpassing that of liberation, eventually made their way back to the home fronts of the Allies – a new community with an identity centred on degenerate art and the artists themselves. Many artists fled Germany and Austria, finding themselves in the Hutchinson Internment Camp, Isle of Man. Klaus E. Hinrichsen describes this movement as one of survival as artists and their art were no longer welcome within the traditional German society, referring to the newly transformed ideals related to art and artists. Britain then became a saviour and a place of hope for these artists, allowing them a place to keep creating.³¹ Despite the nature of this, the camp was truly an internment camp, as it was set up in a field, or a terraced lawn as described by Hinrichsen, and boarding houses surrounded by rows of barbed wire with soldiers patrolling it.³² Art creation was reportedly

²⁹ Kirrily Freeman, “Saving Civilization: The ‘Monuments Men’ in History and Memory,” *Journal of Women’s History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 85–110, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2021.0016>, 86.

³⁰ Edsel and Witter, *Monuments Men*, xv-xvi; Kaplow, Dec 8, 1944 -- Don't worry if I know what I'm fighting for, 4.

³¹ Klaus E. Hinrichsen, “Visual Art behind the Wire,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 11, no. 3 (1992): 188–209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1992.9974795>, 188-209.

³² Hinrichsen, “Visual Art behind the Wire,” p. 189.

encouraged not only to maintain internee morale and identity, but also because it helped maintain “administrative pride in the camp.”³³ There was no reported ‘sympathetic’ atmosphere, only support. Here, the identity of liberation was imperative, as it allowed the artists to find refuge in an Allied country, resulting in one more Allied identity that stemmed from degenerate art and, now, those who created it. As seen with the Monuments Men, this was a familiar feeling and identity many would adopt, giving them a sense of pride for saving what many would call a vital piece of human life as well as hope because their actions were creating a positive impact in a time where art and the narratives and identities it fueled was filtered.

Despite these feelings of peace, liberation, and even safety felt by the British and artists within the internment camp, some felt as though they were trapped.

On 28 August 1940 the *New Statesman and Nation* published a letter from Hutchinson Internment Camp in Douglas, Isle of Man, signed by 16 artists from Germany and Austria. It read, in part, ‘Art cannot live behind barbed wire... the tensions under which we exist here, the sense of grievous injustice done to us, the restlessness cause by living in the close proximity with thousands of other men... prevent all work and creativity...’. It ends with an appeal to British artists and others’ to help us obtain our liberty again.’³⁴

The crafted views and narratives by the camp administration and other British officials were accompanied by another identity. When this is seen with the quote from the *New Stateman and Nation* analyzed by Hinrichsen, as the independent newspaper did not seem to keep this specific publication in their archive, it uncovered another developing identity surrounding degenerate art and control. The Allies demonstrated they could control material and consumable objects and those who created them. To the outside world, those not associated with or ignorant to the running of the internment camps that housed these enemy aliens, the camps did provoke and promote

³³ Suzanne Snizek, “‘Spiritual Vitamins’: Music in Huyton and Central Internment Camps May 1940 to January 1941” in *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire* eds. Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum (Taylor & Francis, 2012), 36.

³⁴ Hinrichsen, “Visual Art behind the Wire,” 188.

creativity as the artists continued to paint, transforming the houses and other buildings within the camp, successfully seeing past the barbed wire that trapped them in.³⁵ Even though this seemed to be a system allowing protection and continued creativity, the Allies saw this as an opportunity to control and possibly further influence the ‘degenerate’ art these artists created. As a result, when the crafted identities of the Allies on individual or small institutional scales are examined, they are not comparable to the German identities created, as there was no inherent good and bad when discussing the liberation of art. Instead, the two seemingly hoped to simultaneously control and liberate aspects of this art and their involvement in society.

These Allied identities, centred on liberation, control, and ownership, eventually made their way into the intelligence that was collected to find, save, and possibly return the degenerate art by the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU), part of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The main goal of this investigation unit and those within it was to identify and detain “individual war crimes suspects and – partly as a by-product – the location of concealed works of looted art.”³⁶ On the surface, this goal was essential as it allowed for collecting evidence proving initial war crimes related to cultural plundering. This coincides with the initial goal of the Allied forces concerning degenerate art. Despite their success, the desire to keep finding information and liberating art harboured undertones of the want to control the market related to art and information regarding it.³⁷

³⁵ Hinrichsen, “Visual Art behind the Wire,” p. 204; Rachel Dickson, “‘Our Horizon Is the Barbed Wire’: Artistic Life in the British Internment Camps,” in *Insiders Outsiders Festival: Internment in Britain in 1940*, 2020, <https://insidersoutsidersfestival.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IO-RD-Our-horizon-is-the-barbed-wire-EXTRACT.pdf>, 2-3.

³⁶ M. Salter, “A Critical Assessment of US Intelligence’s Investigation of Nazi Art Looting,” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 13, no. 2 (2015): 257–80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqv015>, 268.

³⁷ Salter, “A Critical Assessment of US Intelligence’s Investigation of Nazi Art Looting,” 277.

The Allied identity concerning degenerate art and its creators spanned the entire network of intelligence and armed forces, and as this network was vast and widespread, allowing for the community of revenge, want, and control to spread into government and intelligence efforts. This created a new Allied identity of control, which differed slightly from the Nazi style of artistic control, as they both harboured the goal of controlling and monopolizing degenerate art. In order to achieve this control, ignoring the original intentions of the Monuments Men and ALIU, art looted from the Germans was cycled into the private art market in the Western world. In some cases, no restitution efforts were pursued. As a result, a community of control and power overshadowed the original community of liberators who wanted to save and return lost art.

The degenerate art exhibit that opened in Munich in 1937, exhibiting control and the qualities deemed harmful to society, was recreated after the war. Christopher Hitchens published his feelings and experience at the Washington showing of the exhibition, where it was marketed as a way of teaching Western society about what happened to degenerate art in Nazi Germany. Hitchens expressed his interest in going because he had never seen some pieces before due to the censorship, including paintings by Otto Dix, as they attacked German culture and religion.³⁸ Hitchens went to the exhibition to learn and view newly uncensored art and ideas, but the recreation of the initial Munich exhibit harboured a sense of irony. This was because the art was presented in the same format, exhibiting the same historical discussion: this art was degenerate and needed to be presented as such. In turn, the legacy of controlling art lived on, even in the Western sphere of ideas after the Second World War.

As art was taken from one private market and given to another, control of these commodities was synonymous with that of Göring and his order concerning the distribution of

³⁸ Christopher Hitchens, "Minority Report," *The Nation*, 1992.

Jewish treasures. The best-known example of this occurred with Elizabeth Taylor, a British-American actress, who bought the van Gogh painting *View of the Asylum and Chapel at St. Rémy* and kept it in her private collection until her death. This painting was a well-known example of degenerate art and its victimhood because of the long history of complicated ownership before and during the Second World War, something characteristic of looted paintings, making it challenging to pursue restitution.

Lauren Fielder Redman, one of the many legal scholars who has analyzed the *Orkin v. Taylor* challenging to follow the path of *View of the Asylum and Chapel at St. Rémy*. It was said to be owned by Alfred Wolf, a German Jew and art collector who fled to Switzerland in 1934. This was where the discrepancy emerged, as it apparently can be traced from Wolf and through a long list of dealers to the Mauthner family. Presumably, Margarete Mauthner gave it to an art collector to avoid its seizure. The next known point of the painting was its sale in 1963, after Wolf's death.³⁹ Wolf did move to South America, where he died, but his fleeing, presumably with the painting, demonstrated the danger owning this type of art posed, and as a result, it is not entirely known where the painting was until it was bought for Elizabeth Taylor by her father at a private auction for £92,000.⁴⁰

There was a considerable dispute surrounding the rightful owner of the painting, as both Taylor and the Mauthner heirs have significantly different stories regarding the ownership of the painting. However, both allude to the painting being sold to survive, a concept explored by Jonathan Petropoulos.⁴¹ This was when *Orkin v. Taylor* gained nationwide attention because the case was working toward an answer of restitution and ownership of looted art, the initial focus of

³⁹ Redman, "Orkin v. Taylor," 391; Petropoulos, "Art Dealer Networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period," 548.

⁴⁰ Redman, "Orkin v. Taylor," 392.

⁴¹ Petropoulos, "Art Dealer Networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period," 548.

units such as the Monuments Men and ALIU. The Mauthner heirs and Orkin wanted the painting returned to the historically rightful owners. This would have been an example of the completion and vigorous efforts of restitution of looted art from the Second World War. However, the court ultimately ruled that Taylor was the rightful owner of *View of the Asylum and Chapel at St. Rémy*, ignoring the proof of ownership Orkin and the Mauthner heirs were able to present, including the fact that the art collector Taylor claimed Mauthner sold the painting to had committed suicide before the purchase could have ever taken place.⁴²

This case is unique because a Hollywood personality owned the painting, and significant discrepancies existed in the ownership history. Despite these extraneous factors, the mass publicity *Orkin v. Taylor* received solidified a newly found divide within international communities and even uncovered centuries-old prejudices that found their way into Allied verdicts related to art. As prejudice and discrimination were crucial for the Nazi looting of art, it may be surprising to see a repeat of this discrimination in Allied and later international restitution efforts. Donald S. Burris, a legal expert in looted art and the processes related to the return of art to the survivors or family members of Holocaust victims, describes the enthusiasm many nations and their officials expressed in these efforts, but in practice, little was done to achieve this.⁴³ The lack of engagement as well as cases such as *Orkin v. Taylor*, where there seemed to be substantial evidence, only solidifies the idea that control was an underlying factor in not only the Nazi looting, but as well as Allied looting and efforts of ownership throughout and after the Second World War. The general understanding of the Allied community often overshadows the historical basis of the Allied communal identity – the want to liberate from an enemy, as seen later in the Allied history of

⁴² Redman, “Orkin v. Taylor,” 394.

⁴³ Burris, “Keynote: Restoration of a Culture,” 295-6.

looted art when American courts were used to reunite victims of Second World War looting with cultural artifacts found in the Russian Federation.⁴⁴ A new enemy was present, overtaking the threat of survivors and their families wanting to take art out of the Western private auction cycle, allowing Allies to monopolize control over these artifacts, even after the war.

The two powers, the Nazis and the Allies, during the Second World War, had fundamentally different goals when discussing looted and degenerate art, but both of these powers essentially wanted to establish control and superiority over an enemy. In the sense of Hitler, Göring, Koch, and other Nazis involved in the art trade fueled by looting, they wanted to cleanse society of 'harmful' media and the enemies that created it. In turn, the Allies wanted to liberate the looted art, and even though there were a handful of trained individuals who truly believed in liberation and restitution, the majority of soldiers, government and military officials, and later society as a whole, saw this as an opportunity to take revenge on the Third Reich while also gaining control of a lucrative and in-demand commodity. As a result, the Allies became a community that thrived on the threat of an enemy and their ownership of the art, explaining the hostility Ben Kaplow demonstrated and through the analyses of Givens, Dickson, and a series of other scholars.⁴⁵

As a result, the conditions created by the Third Reich before and during the Second World War allowed for the looting of degenerate art, stripping historical communities of their identity while simultaneously creating new communities and identities. This disregarded the creation of the works by minority demographics and individuals who had experienced extreme hardship. The

⁴⁴ Michael J. Bazyler and Seth M. Gerber, "Chabad v. Russian Federation: A Case Study in the Use of American Courts to Recover Looted Cultural Property," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 17, no. 2 (May 2010): 361–86, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0940739110000135>, 361-2, 365-79.

⁴⁵ Kaplow, *Dec 8, 1944 -- Don't worry if I know what I'm fighting for*, 4; Freeman, "Saving Civilization," 86; Givens, "Liberating the Germans," 33-34; Hinrichsen, "Visual Art behind the Wire," 188-190, 204; Dickson, "'Our Horizon Is the Barbed Wire,'" 2-3.

Allies thought they could liberate the art and, as a result, the historical communities that initially owned the works. Despite these efforts, the community that wanted to liberate and protect these culturally and socially significant works was overshadowed by control, revenge, and anger, once again transforming the understanding of the paintings as they cycled through the Western auction system. These events uncover how art created new communities by connecting ideology to physical objects and the attempted erasure of original meanings and associated communities. Art was forced from one ideology to another, stripping original owners, predominantly Jewish families and individuals, and other minorities initially targeted by the Nazis of their identity and sense of community. As a result, the degenerate art of the Second World War and its associated experiences demonstrate how identity and communities were transformed and created, but overall, it is centred on control and monopolization, signalling superiority.

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