

Degenerate art:

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



Degenerate Art: Art in Post WWI Germany Alex Shin College Writing Mrs. Shorter February 25, 2013 Word Count: 1316

Degenerate Art: Art in Post WWI Germany Paintings, photographs, music, movies, and writing: what unites these together? Not only do they each hold their own specific art category, but they are all various forms of communication. Although many of the items noted are not direct forms of an exchange like speech, they still have the ability to convey a powerful message with ease. Hitler, who was known to be a master at speaking, quickly understood how important paintings and other forms of art could have influenced the general population. Noticing the threat to his reign as chancellor, he quickly went around his homeland and did his best to disturb the image of an already controversial art. He achieved this through the gathering of paintings from all over the country and either crudely displayed them, selling them, or simply destroying them. Blinded by his own prejudice of what art should appear and convey, he only accepted art that was before the impressionist period. In the eyes of the great Fuhrer this was the only proper art. This essay will show how the Nazi party in post World War One dealt with art that did not fit their political agenda. Figure 1. Painting made by Hitler. (Google)

Art Styles In the early 1930s Hitler, who now headed the Nazi party in Germany, was in a position to force his specific tastes in art on the public. As an artist himself he favored art styles from the neoclassical, romanticist, and realistic periods, which tended to be very humanistic and defined. His art preferences could have easily influenced his beliefs in the Aryan race. The Aryan people could only lay its eyes upon art that would exemplify a perfect people. The art that Hitler relentlessly persecuted was distinctively different.

The styles of art he did not appreciate are known collectively as modern art. These styles (impressionism, fauvism, expressionism, cubism, constructivism, dada, and surrealism) were abstract and did not have a particular flow to them (picture below). This kind of art would lead the observer to reflect and hypothesize about its meaning. Hitler, who had an extreme distaste for this art, proposed that the art was foul and would stain an individual's life (The Greatest Theft). By the end of Hitler's reign, he completely altered the nation's liberal arts culture. Germany at the time was one of the leading countries in the arts. By effectively degrading modern art, Hitler can now transfer his hatred of modern art to the Jewish race. Figure 2. Unknown title by Max Ernest. (Prezi) The Purge From the time Hitler first took a stance against modern art, the Nazi party continued to expose the German population to propaganda criticizing it, and by 1933 most of German began to hate degenerate art. When the time came, Hitler began his next move with a speech in which he said, " We will from now on lead an unrelenting war on purification, an unrelenting war on extermination against the last forces which have displaced our art (The Greatest Theft.)" In the year of 1937, Hitler, who became the chancellor of Germany in 1934, gave an order for all modern art in museums to give up all degenerate art. By the end of the purge, about 16000 works of art were taken from various museums around the nation (Mike Burhger). Some of the works included were created by renowned artists such as, Matisse, Van Gogh, and Picasso. Of the works Hitler collected they were sometimes auctioned off to rich collectors or burned for solid demonstrations of the 16000 pieces that he collected, only 650 remained at the end of the purge (The Greatest Theft). Entartete Kunst

Instead of getting rid of all 16000 pieces of art, Hitler had other things in mind. With the remaining 650, he created an exhibition on degenerate art called Entartete Kunst. Entartete Kunst, otherwise known as Degenerate Art, was first opened on July 18th, 1937 in Munich, Germany (Mike Burhger). The whole exhibit's purpose was not to show the people good art but to show the horrors of degenerate art. This exhibit only further accomplished Hitler's goal to exterminate modern art. When German citizens walked in the exhibit, they only saw a painting of a degenerate person. The Entartete Kunst was a traveling exhibit that was run for about four years and visited around three million people. The exhibit was crudely set up with the intention of setting an uncomfortable feeling. Pictures were crowded together and put up on a burlap wall with no frame. Walls were plastered the phrase degenerate art and " smeared with graffiti to ridicule [the] art as a product of sick minds and an insult to women. (Entartete Kunst)" The Nazi Artist As stated before, Hitler was an actual artist. Jonathan Petripoulos, a historian in the documentary The Greatest Theft in History, said " Hitler was only a mediocre painter". His hate for degenerate could have possibly come from his rejection from an art school in Vienna. Hitler Was rejected from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (The Greatest). Hitler did not approve of modern art as some artists were known for. The fact was these artists were Jewish too. So when Hitler applied and was rejected by a group of juror that included a Jewish population, he began to see the modern art as degenerate. Because most of his misfortune seemed to involve the Jewish race, he started to think of them as corrupted and immoral. He made fallible facts about how modern art was created by a wicked Jewish population that could not see colors or forms as

they were in nature. Because of this, Hitler found that Jewish population was in fact inferior to him. This could have triggered the perfect Aryan race in his mind. The painting (Figure two) from Max Ernst that shows what the contemporary art looked like in the eyes of the Fuehrer. He would think that the artist of this particular piece could not see the difference between an actual bird and the look-a-like draw on the canvas.

Effect on People

When Hitler founded the National Socialist Party, or the Nazi Party, in 1933, the Party quickly began to take control of the German art scene. Any art that did not conform to Hitler's high standards were labeled as degenerate; this was any art that was seen as inferior or seen as mentally or morally weak. Artists that were labeled as degenerate faced a variety of consequences such as persecution from citizens and prohibition of making any kind of art (The Greatest Theft). They were not even allowed to draw for themselves, all paintings had to be stopped or the artists would be arrested. Art teachers were fired, exhibiting artists were no longer allowed to display art, the creators were replaced, and some were even banned from creating any art at all. The German artists had it worse than any others who were labeled as unacceptable by Hitler. These German artists were a threat to other nations and rejected by their own country as well. But most wanted to exile themselves, while some artists simply left the country, others were trapped in their own country. Eventually, the stress was so much that some even committed suicide. Other than those that committed suicide, ex-painters now had to find new jobs to keep on living. Some painters were hired by the army to camouflage barracks from the enemy. Some painted labels on factories and trucks, and others that could not find a way to continue

painting got new jobs to make a living (Mike Burhger). Power of Art This is the unknown world of art that play a considerable role in shaping and guiding Hitler and the Nazi regime. The fact is that art is a powerful communicator among the public, in such a way that it can cause a whole world war to occur. References Burhger, M. Degenerate Art: 1937 Germany. Tripod. Retrieved from http://burgher-art-facts.tripod.com/degenerate_art.html College of Liberal Arts in San Luis Obispo. Entartete Kunst: Degenerate art. Cal Poly. Retrieved from <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~mriedlsp/History437/Art/Entartete%20Kunst.htm> Piehl, S. (September 14, 2012). Degenerate Art in WWII. Prezi. Retrieved from <http://prezi.com/d3ej3-dwg94r/degenerate-art-in-wwii/> Robert M. Edsel (Producer). (2009). The Greatest Theft in History [Educational DVD]. Retrieved from <http://www.greatesttheft.com/lessonplan.php?id=1>.