

# Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz

## The Journey of Paintings

Hitler's cultural politics, art trade and storage  
during the NS era in the Salzkammergut



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# Introduction

Like no other region in Austria, the Salzkammergut served as a point of transit and storage for important works of European art history during the Second World War, including art looted by the National Socialists. After the first bombing raids, exhibits for Adolf Hitler's "Führer Museum" and works of art from the Schack art collection in Munich were stored in the Altaussee salt mine and in makeshift depots such as inns and churches. Austrian museums also used a mine, the Franz-Josef-Erbstollen (Franz Josef adit) in Lauffen near Bad Ischl in the Salzkammergut, as a refuge facility in 1944/45.

The exhibition features more than 80 paintings and objects that were collected, stored, retrieved and rescued in the Salzkammergut during the war years. All of the items are on loan from public museums, and their current and historical ownership status is documented in the exhibition. They include artworks that were looted by the Nazis and later restituted to their owners, as well as works of art whose origins are the subject of ongoing provenance research.

Masterpieces from the 8th to the 20th centuries by Arnold Böcklin, Goya, Edvard Munch, Lovis Corinth, Jacob van Ruisdael, Anthonis van Dyck, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Max Liebermann, Jakob Jordaens, Titian, Moritz von Schwind and Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, among others, as well as a historical model of the Ghent Altarpiece tell the stories of their odysseys with many stops along the way.

With the critical intervention *Ruinenwert* by the successful German artist Henrike Naumann the exhibition is complemented by a contemporary perspective.

# The “Fuehrermuseum”

The so-called “Fuehrermuseum”, which Adolf Hitler planned for Linz, was crucial to the Nazis’ systematic art looting campaign. A key date was June 18, 1938, when during a visit to the Dresden Gemäldegalerie Hitler found in Hans Posse (1879–1942) a personality ideally suited for setting up a new museum. On the same day Hitler issued a proclamation, the “Fuehrervorbehalt”, which enabled him to lay hands on Jewish art collections impounded after Austria’s Anschluss with Nazi Germany. With help from Vienna’s museums, these works were amassed in the city’s Hofburg, scientifically registered and prepared for being offered to Hitler. From July 1939, Posse, acting as Hitler’s special envoy, concerned himself with putting together a museum collection on the basis of these and other works. After his death, Posse was followed by Hermann Voss (1884–1969) in March 1942.

The authentic, if informal name “Fuehrermuseum” is telling in that the project was closely linked to Hitler’s person. The museum building was designed according to his sketches and in

close contact with him. Hitler’s own collection of paintings was to have formed the core of the new museum’s holdings. The dictator reserved the final decision on acquisitions for himself. Planning envisaged a collector’s museum, that is, a picture gallery that was to present its works in an ensemble of items of furniture, sculpture and applied art in what was referred to as “Stilräume”.

The myth of the world’s largest museum persists to this day. What set the standard for Hitler’s undertaking, however, were Munich’s Alte Pinakothek and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Accordingly, the collection comprised around 1,500 paintings at the end of 1944. Not all works of art that Hitler had looted and amassed were destined for Linz. Many were supposed to end up in various museums of the Großdeutsches Reich.

# “Sonderauftrag Linz”

“Sonderauftrag Linz”, the Special Commission Linz, referred to a grandiose museum-political project that preoccupied Adolf Hitler to his very end. He was aiming, on the one hand, at putting together a collection for the “Fuehrermuseum” he planned for Linz and, on the other, at broadening the state collections of the Großdeutsches Reich with works of art that had been looted, appropriated in the context of persecution or acquired in the art market.

Hitler left the implementation of this plan in 1939 largely to Hans Posse, the long-time director of the Dresdner Gemäldegalerie. Posse was answerable directly to Hitler and cooperated closely with Hitler’s innermost staff and with other state and Nazi agencies. After three years of frantic activity and numerous trips to the occupied countries, to Italy and to Switzerland, Posse died of cancer in December 1942. As director of the Dresdner Galerie and as Hitler’s special envoy he was succeeded in March 1943 by Hermann Voss, who had been the director of the Wiesbadener Gemäldegalerie up until then.

Appointed after the watershed in the fortunes of war in the winter of 1942/43, Voss already had his eye on the end of the Nazi regime. This is why he called himself “Sonderbeauftragter für Linz”, Special Envoy for Linz, skirting the mention of terms such as “Fuehrer” or “Fuehrermuseum”. In the postwar era, the term “Sonderauftrag Linz” was only used to refer to the “Fuehrermuseum”, giving rise to the myth of the “Fuehrermuseum Linz” as the largest museum of all time.

# Hans Posse

On June 18, 1938 Adolf Hitler took a hand in rehabilitating someone who had formerly been considered one of the foremost museum experts of the Deutsches Reich, Dr Hans Posse, the long-time director of the Dresdner Gemäldegalerie. Posse had discredited himself in the eyes of the regime by acquiring expressionist works by such artists as Oskar Kokoschka, which were classified as “degenerate”, and was therefore in line for being pensioned off by the Saxon ministry. Hitler, however, who considered him to be the preeminent collection expert of the Deutsches Reich, needed him for the establishment of the gallery of paintings in the “Fuehrermuseum”.

In 1910, Posse, then no more than 30 years old, but a protégé of the influential Director General of the Museums of Berlin, Wilhelm von Bode, had been appointed director of the Dresdner Gemäldegalerie. He had gone on to give the world famous baroque gallery a new lease of life by rehangng and enlarging its holdings of 19th and early 20th century paintings. As the commissar of the German pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1922 and 1930 and in the role he played at the Internationale Kunstausstellung 1926 in Dresden he exerted a formative influence on the art policy of the Weimar Republic. Posse’s signature project in

Dresden, the construction of a museum building dedicated to 19th and 20th century art, was halted owing to a lack of funds. In Hitler’s eyes the project nevertheless marked Posse as a visionary in museum matters and qualified him for the leading role in the establishment of the “Fuehrermuseum”.

As Hitler’s special envoy, Hans Posse was far and away the most influential figure in the museum scene of the German Reich from summer 1939. He was in charge of the distribution of looted art to different museums, with a view to restructuring the museum landscape according to Hitler’s ideas and to enhancing the role 19th century painting played in museums. In the spring of 1942 Posse was diagnosed with cancer. An operation and radiation therapy could do nothing to prevent the disease from progressing rapidly. After his death on December 7, 1942, he was given a state funeral on Hitler’s orders. On this occasion, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels addressed the project of the “Fuehrermuseum” for the first time in public. It had been kept secret up until then.



# Hitler's Taste in Art

Hitler's taste in art was by no means confined to the arid naturalism of Nazi art, which was on open display at the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellungen in Munich. In Vienna, young Hitler had come under the formative aesthetic influence of painters such as Peter Paul Rubens and Hans Makart and the master pieces of baroque and neo-baroque painting with its riot of colours. As a collector he kept his options open. Among his favourite painters were 19th century artists from Munich such as Carl Spitzweg, Franz von Lembach, Franz von Defregger, and Moritz von Schwind. After 1933 Hitler modelled his taste on Frederick the Great of Prussia. This broadened his canon by adding French Rococo painting, which had formerly been considered to be decadent.

Hitler's predilections were governed not least by ideological postulates. When as a young man he was casting about for a model career as an artist, he found one in the image of the "underrated artist", a trope frequently touted by pulp fiction novels. In 1929 he began to collect works by German painters of the 19th century, casting the artists as geniuses sidelined by the Jewish art trade. The result of this preoccupation, Hitler's self-identification as an art sponsor and as an artist in his own right, formed the basis after 1933 for his claim to power as the "Fuehrer".

# The Schack-Galerie

The collection of paintings assembled by Adolf Schack (1815–1894) known as the Schack-Galerie, which comprises 270 paintings from the 19th century, is today part of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, the Bavarian State Collection of Paintings. Hitler transferred ownership of the collection to the Bavarian State in 1939 to integrate it into the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. Hitler planned to use the fifteen rooms in the gallery building at Prinzregentenstraße vacated by the transfer to present to the public the collection for the “Fuehrermuseum”, until such time the museum building in Linz was ready to house it.

In around 1900, the Schack Collection was among the most highly frequented museums in Munich. For Hitler as a collector it was the model of a national gallery of underrated German artists. Moritz von Schwind, Carl Spitzweg, Anselm Feuerbach, and Arnold Böcklin, all of whom held prominent places in the collection, were among the dictator's favourite artists.

Shortly before the Nazis' invasion of Poland the Director General of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen Ernst Buchner was instructed to initiate measures for the safekeeping and preservation of the paintings in the collection. This was the beginning of a long and tortuous journey for the Schack paintings. One staging post was the former monastery Dietramszell near Bad Tölz, which was to become an important

storage location for works of the Staatsgemäldesammlungen. The most important works were stored in Ludwig II's “fairy story castle”, Neuschwanstein, which was considered to be particularly secure. Other storage locations were the monasteries at Ettal and Polling. When the risk posed by bombing raids mounted in September 1944, 70 of the most famous works in the Schack Collection and around 230 other paintings from Munich, including 29 paintings by Schwind, 12 by Boecklin, 7 by Franz von Lembach, 6 by Feuerbach, and 4 by Spitzweg, were transferred from Neuschwanstein to the salt mine at Altaussee.

In the chaotic finale of the war, the order issued by the Linz Gauleiter August Eigruber to blow up the cache of works of art triggered another emergency transfer of 70 paintings of the Schack Collection. At the initiative of Bergungsleiter [Head of Safekeeping] Herbert Seiberl, the paintings were evacuated from the mine, where they were at risk of being blown up, and deposited in the Spitalkirche in Aussee. There Art Protection Officer Frederick Hartt of the US Army took charge of them in October 1945 and arranged for them to be returned to Munich. On August 2, 1950, the Schack-Galerie was the first museum in Munich to reopen after the war. The building in Prinzregentenstraße had weathered the bombing raids relatively unharmed.

# Bombs in the Mountain!

In the last days of the war, Linz born Gauleiter August Eigruber, who intermittently resided in the aryanised Kremenetzky Villa in Altaussee, gave orders to blow up the Altaussee salt mine together with the artworks that were stored in it. He caused eight crates filled with aerial bombs, deceptively marked with "Vorsicht Marmor – nicht stürzen [sic]" [Take care, marble – Do not tilt] to be deposited in the mine. The Director General of the Österreichische Salinen (at the time: Alpenländische Salinen), Emmerich Pöchmüller, tried in vain to get Eigruber to change his mind. As Hitler had explicitly forbidden to destroy the artworks, Eigruber was in breach of Hitler's express orders. He was executed in 1947 as a war criminal.

In late April, restorer Max Eder, the Director of Vienna's Denkmalamt, Herbert Seiberl, and their staff transferred the most valuable works in Hitler's depot, such as the *Ghent Altarpiece* and Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*, to parts of the salt mine that were considered safe. The paintings from Munich's Schack-Galerie, deposited by the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, were now taken to the Spitalkirche in Bad Aussee. Works from Austrian museums were taken to Lauffen and Ischl, mostly without wrapping or some other protective cover. The altarpieces of Albrecht Altdorfer's famous Altar of St. Sebastian from St. Florian Monastery was stashed away in a hurry on the verandah of the pub Engljähringer in Bad Ischl.

On April 28, 1945, Salinendirektor Pöchmüller instructed Bergrat Högler to remove the bombs from inside the mountain. He feared for the salt mine, the miners feared for their jobs. Even so the order was not carried out immediately. Instead, the miner Alois Raudaschl was despatched to secure the help of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Austria's top-ranking SS functionary, who was to be executed as a war criminal in 1946. At that time, Kaltenbrunner had sought refuge in the Villa Kerry (Fischerndorf 7) with his Aussee lover, Gisela von Westarp, who had given birth to their twins in the autumn. Kaltenbrunner had paid Hitler a visit in the Berlin Fuehrerbunker shortly before the latter's suicide. He had been briefed by the dictator regarding the art depot and came to the miners' assistance. In a shouting match with Eigruber on the telephone – the fanaticized Gauleiter was reputed to have screamed, "If we lose the war, I'm going to chuck a couple of handgrenades down the mine myself" – Kaltenbrunner vetoed the destruction. Miners then removed the bombs in the night of May 3–4. On May 5, the entrance to the mine was sealed with a targeted explosion. The survival of the works of art is therefore owed to a motley crew, from workers of the salt mine, the staff of Vienna's Denkmalamt and agents of the "Sonderauftrag Linz" and the Higher SS and Police Leader of the Oberabschnitt Donau to the Director General of the Salines.

# “Sonderauftrag Linz” under Hermann Voss

In March 1943 Hermann Voss, up until then the director of the Picture Gallery of the Nassauische Landesmuseum in Wiesbaden (today: Museum Wiesbaden), succeeded Hans Posse as director of the Dresdner Gemäldegalerie and as Hitler’s special envoy. What proved crucial for Voss’s appointment was the fact that he was an expert on periods of art history that were to be the mainstay of the collection of the “Fuehrermuseum”, Old German art of the Danube region around 1500 (“Donauschule”), Italian art of the 16th and German art of the 19th centuries. Moreover, Hermann Voss had studied under art historian Henry Thode, Richard Wagner’s son-in-law, who was in Hitler’s good books. Like Posse, Voss belonged to the circle of the influential Director General of the Berlin Museums, Wilhelm von Bode.

Voss was appointed after the watershed of the fortunes of war in 1942–43 and had his eye already on the end of the Third Reich. He therefore

shunned all tasks that might have incriminated him politically after the collapse of the Nazi rule. He delegated art lootings in territories outside the Reich to agents such as art historian Hildebrand Gurlitt.

The second phase of the “Sonderauftrag” under Voss is characterised by the storage and safekeeping activities that became necessary on account of intensifying aerial bombardment. These activities went hand in hand with a stock-taking of the hoarded artworks, which was carried out at Hitler’s explicit orders. Comprehensive photo files were compiled at the Gemäldegalerie Dresden. These were seized by a Soviet trophy commission and taken to Moscow. They have been inaccessible for researchers ever since.

No legal action was taken against Hermann Voss after 1945. He was free to continue his career as an art historian.

# From St Agatha to Linz

The large-size paintings stored in St Agatha were taken care of by American administrative units. On the Austrian side, responsibility lay with the Federal Chancellery. After complaints from the innkeeper in St Agatha, the paintings were transferred on March 13 and May 31, 1947 to Ennsegg Castle in Upper Austria's Enns. When this depot was also closed down in 1947, the search for a new storage location was guided by the stipulation articulated by the Denkmalamt that these paintings had to remain inside Austria. On April 26, 1948, they were transferred to the Steinerner Saal at the Linz Landhaus, where "Property Control" had established a depot. That the Director of Upper Austria's Landesmuseum was appointed to be in charge explains why the paintings were subsequently transferred to the depot the Landesmuseum had established at the old brewery at the Donaulände in Linz. When they risked "being damaged" there, they were finally stored at the Landesmuseum.

According to the "Collecting Point Munich", 17 paintings were to repatriated to countries such as Germany (8), Holland (1), and Italy (1), where they had originally been acquired by the "Sonderauftrag Linz". They were kept at the Landesmuseum "ready for repatriation", but by the time when the "Collecting Point" was dissolved and even later, this repatriation simply failed to take effect for reasons unknown. The 17 paintings remained in Linz and were made part of the inventory of Upper Austria's Landesmuseum in the 1960s. It took a special research project in the early 2000s for their background to be "rediscovered". Attempts were made to clarify their prior provenance and to find clues to Nazi confiscations. One painting has been restituted since then, the provenances of several others were clarified, and some are still the object of further research.

# A Storage and Safekeeping Odyssey

*“The paintings were there, no one knew where they had come from, so they remained in place where they were.”* Birgit Kirchmayr in *Geraubte Kunst in Oberdonau (Linz 2007)*.

Stift Kremsmünster – Schloss Thürnthal – Destination Altaussee Stollen: left stranded in St Agatha at the Gasthaus Petter – Enns, Ennsegg Castle – Steinerner Saal Landhaus Linz – Depot Altes Brauhaus at the Donaulände Linz, Landesmuseum – OÖ Landesmuseum Linz.

The paintings that American Art Protection Units had taken charge of at the end of the war, which included paintings from the “Sonderauftrag Linz”, fell under the administrative oversight of the “Central Collecting Point” established in Munich. Some of them, however, were never taken to Munich but continued their journey from one Austrian storage location to another even after the end of the war.

In 1941, the paintings of the “Sonderauftrag Linz” were stored in the “Reichskunstdepot Kremsmünster”, from where they were evacuated in 1944 on account of the risk posed by bombing raids. As the salt mines were considered to be not wide enough, the large-format paintings were initially taken to the baroque Thürnthal Castle near Fels am Wagram rather than to Aussee. In the spring of 1945 they, too, were transferred to Aussee. Owing to the inclement weather in February 1945 – the lorries transporting the artworks were unable to negotiate the steep Poetschen Pass on account of heavy snowfall – a provisional depot was installed at the Gasthaus Petter, an inn in St. Agatha near Bad Goisern. Here the 17 paintings from Thürnthal were to remain in an emergency shelter, the dining hall of the inn, until long after the end of the war.



# Keeping the Art Treasures of Vienna's Museums Safe in Times of War

The Salzkammergut easily trumped all other regions in Austria during World War II as a transshipment point, storage location, and as a place of safekeeping for European works of art.

Where were Austria's most treasured works of art to go after the first bombing raids?

The first safekeeping activities concerning Vienna's museums were initiated in mid-1939 by the Director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Fritz Dworschak. In the summer of 1942, the Head of the Reichsstatthalterei Advisory Department on Museums in Vienna, Ludwig Berg, was put in charge of all safekeeping activities and assumed responsibility for them.

The holdings of the museums were subdivided into categories A, B, and C, according to their art historical significance. Works belonging to category A were stored away from Vienna, at Charterhouse Gaming and the

Rothschild hunting lodge, Steinbach Castle near Göstling. Works belonging to category B were stored in what was considered a secure location in Vienna and works belonging to category C remained inside the museums.

On August 31, 1939, the first transport took place from the Kunsthistorisches Museum to the hunting lodge, where several confiscated collections were already stored. This was followed by other shipments from the Österreichische Galerie and the Barockmuseum on September 2, 1939. Works from the Albertina, the Liechtenstein Gallery and the Völkerkundemuseum [Museum of Ethnology] were stored in Gaming. All in all, more than 200 storage depots for objects of artistic and cultural interest were set up, the majority of which were located initially in Vienna and Lower Austria.

# Mines as Art Depots

For the purpose of storing works of art in the salt mine, cavities, so-called “Werke”, were adapted. For this, extensive installations and construction work were required. Floors were levelled, wooden floors were installed, shelves were set up for the paintings, doors were put in, and the mine was wired for electricity. The required construction and installation material and getting this material to and into the mountain by track-laying vehicles, lorries and mine locomotives presupposed fuel. Both material and fuel were scarce at the end of the war and could only be procured with great difficulty and with help from the top echelons of the Nazi party.

Prior to all this, the suitability of the mine as a storage location had been assessed by a committee of experts comprised of chemists, geologists, restorers, and museum directors. Professional standards were observed throughout

the storage and safekeeping operations. The Director of Vienna’s Denkmalbehörde [Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments], Herbert Seiberl, took charge of Altaussee; for Lauffen, responsibility initially lay with the Director of the Picture Gallery of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (KHM), Gert Adriani. After a logistical misjudgment Adriani had to make way for the Director of the Collection of Historic Musical Instruments of the KHM, Victor Luithlen. The support for the directors, which came from their staff, was crucial. Once the works of art had been deposited in the mines restorers were always at hand and put safekeeping measures into practice when required. It is a fact that the art treasures stored in the Salzkammergut survived the dangers and turmoil at the end of the war astonishingly well with minimal losses.

# The Lauffen Mine as a Storage Location

The salt mine in Lauffen near Bad Ischl was to play a crucial role in the final phases of the storage and safekeeping operations in the last months of the war. The first shipments from museums in Vienna arrived in November 1944 after they had been cleared with the Deputy Director of the “Sonderauftrag”, Gottfried Reimer. Head of safekeeping operations was the Director of the Painting Gallery of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gert Adriani, who was succeeded in March 1945 by the Curator of the Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente [Collection of Historic Musical Instruments], Victor Luithlen, who remained in that position until 1947. At that early stage, no restriction was in place on access to the mines, there were no padlocks, and sufficiently dry wood for panelling and shelves was in short supply.

The museum objects were usually shipped by train as far as Attnang, then loaded onto lorries and taken to Ischl, partly with a detour via the Selztal when required. Lorries were difficult to come by. Petrol came at a price, and the goodwill of the saltworks was crucial. A track-laying vehicle was used

for the last bit of the narrow and steep road to the mine. Strong snowfall often made it necessary for the picture crates to be lugged to the Ischl salt mountain on carts drawn by oxen. As the safekeeping operations were “top secret”, the art treasures always travelled incognito, in sturdy crates marked with mysterious numbers and codes. The Gasthof Engljähriger, an inn in Ischl called “Grüner Baum” in Grazer Straße 389, was adapted to serve art historians and restorers as an office and a temporary storage depot.

The Lauffen mine primarily housed objects from state collections in Vienna. Industrial companies located in the Salzkammergut also appealed to Saline Director Pöchmüller to ensure the safeguarding of their assets such as gold in the Lauffen mine. It took until March 1945 for peace and quiet to return to the mine. As railway lines came increasingly under attack from bombing raids, the journey from Vienna to Lauffen, often interrupted by air raid alerts, could last as long as 36 hours. The last trip to Lauffen took place on March 30, 1945.

# The End of Storage and Safekeeping Operations

On May 4, 1945, the Lauffen mine was sealed and covered with top soil. On May 13, US troops arrived in Lauffen. “Monuments Man” Robert Pusey assumed control of the depot.

While the depot in the Altaussee salt mine acquired a great deal of publicity – not least because of box office hits such as *Monuments Men* (2014) and *Ein Dorf wehrt sich* (2019) [*A Village Puts up Resistance*] and because the former storage locations are accessible to this day to guided tours and have even been given a new makeover – the

depots in the salt mine at Lauffen/Bad Ischl were a well-kept secret for a long time. Outside a small circle of members of Viennese museum personnel the general public was for security reasons kept in the dark about Operation “Berg”, involving thousands of masterpieces from Austria’s museums stashed away in what history showed to be a safe location. Only a few losses occurred. By contrast to the salt mine in Altaussee, the Lauffen mines had been decommissioned beforehand. The salt mine has been off limits to visitors for a long time.

# An Odyssey “to the West”

It was not only human failings and aerial bombardments that spelled danger for the priceless art treasures on their journey from Vienna to the Salzkammergut. There was also the idea long cherished by Vienna’s Gauleiter, Baldur von Schirach, of “transferring the most valuable cultural assets to the West”, which inevitably set alarm bells ringing for the directors of Vienna’s museums. This journey was to end up in the Kühtai, a snowed-up region of the Tyrol prone to avalanches and with roads that were virtually impassable at times. Nevertheless, on the order of Reichstatthalter Schirach and under the threat of force the Kunsthistorisches Museum’s most valuable paintings, tapestries, and sculptures were bundled off and shipped to the West, notwithstanding the museum directors’ massive protest. The directors were kept in the dark regarding the final destination.

The shipment, comprised of masterpieces by Titian, Rembrandt, and Velazquez and Pieter Bruegel’s *Peasant Wedding*, stopped over at Bramberg near Mühlbach in Salzburg’s Pinzgau at the Hotel Weyerhof, which, incidentally, is still operational today, before going on to St Johann in the Tyrol, accompanied only by Wehrmacht officers. In St Johann, the art treasures were handed over to the US Military Administration. After a spell at Klessheim Castle near Salzburg, the artworks were returned to Vienna on November 17, 1945. There they were again put on display in the *Ausstellung von Meisterwerken der Gemäldegalerie des Kunsthistorischen Museums* at the Hofburg, the picture galleries of the Kunsthistorisches Museum having fallen victim to the bombing raids.

# The Kunsthistorisches Museum

It was not only Vienna's Staatsoper and the Burgtheater that were badly damaged by fire and bombs in World War II, but the Kunsthistorisches Museum as well. The flagship of Austria's museums was hit by four bombs during a devastating air raid on March 12, 1945. The cupola was gutted by fire. The part of the building adjacent to the intersection of Babenbergerstraße and Ringstraße collapsed. With the roof gone, what was left was a charred ruin. Sections of the cupola's steel frame smashed the museum's core, the central hall, and the so-called Van Dyck-Saal (Saal XV) was also badly hit.

A Viennese diplomat described the extent of the damage: "What is left of the cupola of the Kunsthistorisches Museum is its mere skeleton. [...] It is astonishing that the building's stone structure proved sturdy enough for the heavy facades to remain standing. In the park in front the Schwind monument has been left standing in a desert of stone fragments, albeit without its head."

The Staatsamt für Öffentliche Bauten estimated in October 1945 that it would take three years to rebuild the museum: even though the entire museum staff joined forces to remove debris and broken glass, the scarcity of building materials and of workers prevented even the most urgently needed emergency measures from being undertaken. It took in fact all of 15 years until the opening of the last remaining rooms made the entire museum again accessible for visitors in May 1962.

On November 17, 1945, the art treasures of the Kunsthistorisches Museum that had originally been transferred to the Tyrol on Baldur von Schirach's orders were returned to Vienna on the "Mozart" express train from the interim storage depot near Schloss Klessheim together with the pictures stored in Lauffen. On 19 December 1945 the 263 paintings retrieved from Lauffen and St. Johann were again exhibited in Vienna's Hofburg. The long journey of the paintings had come to a satisfactory end.

# Kremsmünster Monastery

*At the same time, the first art shipments kept arriving week by week in an unending succession in Kremsmuenster from the East and the West. This was the beginning of the greatest accumulation of cultural assets [in one place], the most terrific mass migration of paintings and works of art of all kinds that world history had witnessed up until then.*

Franz Juraschek, 1947

Kremsmünster Monastery in Upper Austria was founded by the Bavarian Duke Tassilo III in 777. The highlights of its art collection include the Tassilokelch, a chalice dating to the 8th century, the Tassilo candle sticks, a wheel cross and the ivory diptych dating to the 14th century, which is part of this exhibition.

On April 3, 1941, the monastery was seized by the Nazis and its abbot and monks were forced to leave. The monastery's assets were confiscated and handed over to the Reichsgau Oberdonau. The monastery itself was slated for use in the context of the storage and safekeeping operations of the "Sonderauftrag Linz". Shortly afterwards, in the summer of 1941, the first works of the "Fuehrersammlung" arrived from Vienna and were followed by works from Munich.

By 1942, roughly 5,000 paintings and 40 crates had been put in storage at the Kremsmünster Monastery, including works from the collections of Alphonse and Louis Rothschild and Oscar Bondy, which had been confiscated by the Nazis. To minimize the risk posed by air raids, camouflage measures were considered, such as camouflage netting or a coat of green paint. However, none of these measures was felt to provide adequate security.

In September 1944, the transfer of the "Fuehrersammlung" from Kremsmünster to the salt mine at Altaussee was completed. 2,000 paintings loaded onto 40 lorries had been sent on their way from January 10, 1944 under the harsh conditions posed by mid-winter.

The art works stored in Altaussee included most of the priceless objects in the Monastery's own collection. Only the most valuable piece, the unique Tassilokelch, was stashed away in the mine in Lauffen/Bad Ischl. Before the end of the war Gaukonservator Franz Juraschek packed it in a rucksack. After a journey partly by train, partly on foot, he deposited it in Pettenbach, from where Pater Petrus Mayrhofer returned it to Kremsmünster on April 18, 1945.

# The Ghent Altarpiece at the Altaussee Salt Mine

The most famous work of art to be stored at the Altaussee salt mine was the Ghent Altarpiece, a polyptych dating to the late Middle Ages, which had been looted from St Bavo, the cathedral in the Belgian city of Ghent. It is reckoned that Jan van Eyck, aided presumably by his brother Hubert, completed the altar pieces in 1432. The realistic presentation marks the 18 pieces as a unique milestone in the development of European painting.

The history of the Ghent Altarpiece is tortuous, not least because the ensemble was ripped apart at the end of the 18th century. The central altar panels were carried off by French revolutionary troops to Paris and deposited in France's premier museum, the Louvre, which had been founded in 1793. In 1816 these panels were returned to St Bavo. This, however, did not prevent the Belgians from selling the side panels of the polyptych which the French had initially left behind. They were acquired in 1821 by the Prussian king, Wilhelm II, for the museum in Berlin in what was a valid legal transaction. In 1919, the Treaty of Versailles stipulated that Germany return the panels to Belgium to compensate the country for war damage

to its cultural assets. In the eyes of the Germans, this amounted to an art heist.

When the German Wehrmacht invaded Belgium, the panels of the Ghent Altarpiece were evacuated in May 1940 to the French city of Pau in the foothills of the Pyrenees. In 1942, the fears that had motivated this move were shown to have been justified: Hitler ordered the Director General of the Bayerische Gemäldesammlungen, Ernst Buchner, to have the panels transferred from Pau to Germany and to store them at Bavaria's Neuschwanstein Castle for safekeeping. From there they were transferred on account of the rising threat of aerial bombardment in September 1944 to Hitler's depot of artworks in the Altaussee salt mine together with works from Munich's Schack-Galerie. This gave food to the suspicion that the dictator wanted the Ghent Altarpiece to become part of his "Fuehrermuseum". The Hollywood blockbuster *Monuments Men* (2014) makes use of this urban legend for its background story. However, documents dating to the time in question show that Hitler was planning to make the Ghent Altarpiece part of the Berlin Gemäldegalerie.



# Nazi Looted Art under “Fuehrervorbehalt”

By contrast to the Holocaust, for which no written order is extant, there is such a thing in the case of the looting of art, the “Fuehrervorbehalt” of June 18, 1938. With this reservation clause Hitler claimed the right to have the final say on each and every museum-worthy work of art. This also meant a paradigm change from confiscation of art to art looting in the proper sense of the term. Prior to this, the Nazi regime had treated works of art like any other confiscated assets. The “Fuehrervorbehalt” made it possible for significant objects to be withheld from the treasury and to be given as the Fuehrer’s gifts to the museums of the Großdeutsches Reich. Hitler had art looted for the sake of its artistic worth.

The “Fuehrervorbehalt” was first put to use in Austria for confiscated art collections owned by Jews. In the end it applied to all museum-worthy looted art in the Deutsches Reich and in the occupied countries. In Austria the looted artworks were distributed as planned. They were assigned to museums and were inventoried in those institutions. As regards museums in Germany, the project never left the project stage.

# Storage and Safekeeping Operations in the Salzkammergut

Storage and safekeeping operations in the salt mines of the Salzkammergut took off in 1943, when Vienna's Denkmalamt was looking for underground depots for art treasures held by the church and the state. The so-called "Steinberg-horizont" in the decommissioned part of the Altausse salt mines was eminently suitable for this purpose on account of its constant air temperature and humidity. The so-called sink works, chambers that were formerly filled with water to dissolve salt, provided the space needed for the storage of a great number of artworks. The first shipment of art treasures to arrive in the mine came from Wiener Neustadt, a city exposed to intense aerial bombardment since 1943 on account of its aircraft factory.

In late 1944 the salt mine became the "Reich Depot of Storage and Safekeeping", when the collections of the Fuehrer were stored there. Hitler had the cultural assets that had formerly been part of his "Alpenresidenz", the Berghof on the Obersalzberg, and those destined for the "Fuehrerresidenz" in Posen stored there as well as the Nazi art he had acquired for the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellungen. This also included objects of daily use from the Partei-Kanzlei in Berlin, tapestries from the General Commissariat Kraków, art belonging to the Dictator of the Independent State of Croatia, Ante Pavelić, and 60 paintings confiscated by Reich Fuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler.

Towards the end of the war objects from Hitler's depot in Hohenfurth Monastery (Vyšší Brod) and from the depot of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in Neuschwanstein Castle, which included paintings from Munich's Schack-Galerie, were transferred to Aussee. The holdings of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, art from the National Museum in Naples and from the Church of Our Lady in Bruges, such as Michelangelo's *Madonna of Bruges*, which had initially been stored in Monte Cassino Monastery, were also transferred to Aussee to keep them out of the reach of the advancing Allies.

The greatest number of objects, those deposited by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), remained packed in crates and were never considered in assessments of the total volume of storage. It has to be assumed that the majority of the 22,000 objects the ERR stole from Jewish owners in France was stored in the salt mine.

In December 1944, 730 crates filled with cultural assets and 1,000 paintings from Viennese collections such as the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, the Naturhistorisches Museum, the Völkerkundemuseum, the Kunstgewerbemuseum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Albertina and the collections of Count Harrach and Prince von und zu Liechtenstein were stored in the Erbstollen at Bad Ischl.

# Villa Munk, Bad Aussee

Dr Heinrich and Virginie Obersteiner – the neurologist had been the owner of the Görgen Sanatorium in Vienna’s district Döbling – had an elegant villa built in Bad Aussee in 1871 by a local master builder, Jakob Ramsauer. In 1916, Aranka Munk purchased the villa and used to spend the summer months there. She had special furniture made for it and installed wood panelling. Priceless paintings, such as the Klimt portrait of her late daughter Ria, and an Aubusson tapestry were transferred from Vienna to Aussee. A houseminder was at hand in the person of Hermann Schiestl. In 1938, Aranka stayed in Bad Aussee from May to August. Even though she was branded as Jewish, she appeared not to be aware that she was in fact in mortal danger. In the same year a particularly ruthless aryanizer from Bad Ischl, Wilhelm Haenel, was appointed as commissar for the Munk villa. Haenel’s “wild aryanizations” even brought him into conflict with Gauleiter Eigruber in what was basically an intra-party feud. The Munk villa was seized on November 25, 1938 – “The Jewess therefore no longer has any right of disposal” – and tenants moved in. Between 1939 and 1941, Aranka fought in vain to reclaim her property in Bad Aussee, with only Schiestl by her side. Virtually

destitute herself, she was no match for the powers that be. What she felt particularly anxious about was “the portrait of poor Mitzerl – which has no glass – and is the worse for it [...] Perhaps it would be best to take the picture down from the wall and to put it in Lola’s room – please be very careful [...] so that the pictures do not come to harm!”

## Looted Art

After Aranka’s death and the murder of her daughter Lola the villa and its furniture were declared as “forfeited” and passed into Reich ownership. There were many potential buyers: Auguste Rottensteiner, who had rented several rooms in the house since 1941, was one of them. She wanted to sublet the house to patients at the health resort. Aranka’s physician, Dr. Otto Hauswirth, was also interested. On May 28, 1941, Hermann and Ruth Maria Kobbe were awarded the contract. Part of the furniture was given to the rest home Alpenhof. The Gaukonservator of Oberdonau, Dr. Franz Juraschek, catalogued the inventory: rustic furniture und Gmunden jugs were to be integrated into the holdings of the Heimathaus Bad Aussee. Two portraits by Ernst Klimt and drawings by Fernand Khnopff

were to be offered to the Gaumuseum alongside an unfinished Klimt painting. Did Wolfgang Gurlitt acquire only the Klimt painting? The Viennese architect Lorenz Mahringer made an estimate of the entire inventory. It included a valuable French Aubusson tapestry, which, according to joiner Hugo Petter, was alone worth RM 25,000. Dr. Gottfried Reimer, the art consultant for the "Sonderauftrag Linz", acquired the tapestry on behalf of the "Fuehrermuseum".

The whereabouts of the Khnopff and Ernst Klimt pictures, the tapestry and the applied art objects have remained unknown to this day. None of these works of art is mentioned in the property relocation list Lilly Christiansen drew up in 1949 – the only "inventory" of the Gurlitt art dealership to have come to light so far.

# “Poor Mitzerl”

## Family Tragedies in the Munk Household

In 2009, the Lentos restituted the unfinished portrait *Ria Munk III* by Gustav Klimt to the heirs of Aranka Munk (1862–1941). The daughter of Aranka und Alexander Munk (1952–1924), who was painted by Klimt, was called Maria (1887–1911), “Ria” or “Mitzerl”. In December 1911 Ria, then aged 24, had committed suicide out of unrequited love. Shortly after her death her mother commissioned Klimt, a friend of the family, to paint a commemorative portrait of her beloved late daughter. The paintings that resulted from this commission are a large-scale puzzle to remind us of the gripping fate of Ria Munk and her family in Bad Aussee.

## Ria Munk – Who are you?

As is the case with many girls born to an upper middle-class family, it was Ria’s overarching aim to meet a highly talented, unconventional man. In the winter semester of 1910 she attended Laurenz Müller’s lectures in philosophy. At last she could leave “the dreadful lethargy and stupidity” behind her and

reshuffle her “boring” life. Ria remained in contact with Müllner, a charismatic priest, who taught at the University of Vienna and was a model for many of his students. She frequented his prestigious salon and confided her greatest secrets to him as her confessor. On the evidence of her letters, Ria suffered from melancholia and depressions. In 1911 she spoke of her “unbearable existence” and mentioned thoughts of suicide. In May 1911, a lecture on satanism put her in touch with a well-travelled writer, Hanns Heinz Ewers (1871–1943). When Ewers travelled to Miramare to write a book on a man-eating creature, entitled *Die Alraune. Geschichte eines lebenden Wesens*, Ria, now engaged to him, and her family spent the summer together with him on Brioni. After professional commitments had required Ewers’s return to Germany, he reneged on his promise to marry her. Ria’s disappointment was compounded by the death of her mentor Laurenz Müllner. On December 28, 1911 Ria Munk killed herself with a shot from her revolver.

# The Munk Variants

## Unsolved Riddles Surrounding the Identity of the Subject

After the suicide of Ria Munk (1887–1911) Gustav Klimt was commissioned by her inconsolable mother Aranka to paint a commemorative portrait of her daughter, who had departed life much too early. Aranka was put in touch with the painter by Serena and August Lederer, who belonged to the circle of Klimt's most important collectors. Aranka Munk and Serena Lederer were sisters.

Subsequently Klimt used the commission Ria's parents had given him to work on several variants of a posthumous commemorative portrait of the deceased. He prepared for these paintings with many sketches. These works took shape shortly in 1916–17 before Klimt's own death and remained unfinished. As early as February 28 and March 4, 1913, Klimt complained about the commission in a letter: "The Munk portrait is already turning into a sore, painful spot – I can't bring it off. It simply does not bring her back."

# Lilly Christiansen-Agoston

Lili Mirel Auspitz was born on July 15, 1894 in Budapest into the family of a Jewish engineer. As an actress, she worked in the publishing house Rowohlt up until 1919. In 1920 she joined Wolfgang Gurlitt's art dealership. Even though Gurlitt had been married since 1918 to Alsatian Juliette (Julie, Julia) Goob, Lilly became his "Lebensmensch". This "ménage à trois" was to prove a thoroughly viable success story. When the Gurlitt Gallery and publishing house hit a bad patch financially, Gurlitt in a deft move transferred both to his new business partner Lilly Agoston. As the new Jewish owner of the business she was issued a special licence as an art dealer in March 1939, even though the Gestapo had already taken note of the "Jewish" element in the Gurlitt-Agoston partnership as early as July 1938.

With diverse financial sleights of hand and helped by their connection to the Berlin Landesleiter of the Reich Chamber, Arthur Schmidt, Lilly Agoston and Wolfgang Gurlitt continued to do business as art dealers. Schmidt intervened in person to fend off the business's threatening insolvency. In a precautionary move the gallery was made over in 1937 to Gurlitt's ex-wife Julia, even though it was Gurlitt and Agoston who continued to call the shots at the art dealership.

The duo Gurlitt & Agoston were a mutually complementary couple. While Gurlitt took charge of exhibition programming and of contacts with artists, Agoston kept a strict eye on the bottom line. Both were networkers on a European scale, had excellent connections to the international art market, and were planning offshoots after the end of the war in Würzburg, Salzburg and Zurich.

In March 1939, Lilly Agoston was forced to flee from Nazi persecution and eventually married a young Dane called Christiansen. Gurlitt had arranged this marriage of convenience for her. In 1940 she returned to Berlin with a Danish passport and was free to purchase "degenerate art" with foreign currency. Contacts to the Lucerne art dealer Theodor Fischer took care of storage issues and the export of goods on commission.

In 1943, Lilly Christiansen Agoston relocated from Berlin to Bad Aussee, where her friend Juliette, Juliette's sister and Wolfgang's wife, Käthe, with their daughters Maria and Angelina resided in the villa on Lenauhügel. Parts of the Gurlitt collection had already been given a temporary home by Theodor Fischer in Bad Aussee, as in the Gurlitt villa, given its six inmates, space was in short supply.



# Theodor (von) Friedrich

Theodor (von) Friedrich remains largely unknown in spite of intense research efforts in Bad Aussee. He had acquired a property in Obertressen 1 in Aussee in 1926, an address Wolfgang Gurlitt used as a storage location for the works of art he had salvaged from Berlin. The property had initially been part of the “Alpenheim” Sanatorium, which had opened in 1883. When the sanatorium closed down, Eleonore Friedrich from Mainz had bought a part of it. In 1926, her engineer son, Theodor Friedrich, who was referred to locally as Baron Friedrich, became the owner of the property until his death in 1949.

When a fire broke out at the adjacent Wehrmacht military hospital, the “Alpenhof”, Gurlitt feared for the safety of the art treasures he had stored with Friedrich since July 1942. They included goods on commission, which the Berlin Landesleiter of the Reich Chamber, Artur Schmidt, had defined as “valuable cultural assets of the nation”. Gurlitt eventually found new storage venues at the Rainer Museum in the Festung Hohensalzburg and in 1946 in Linz. The story of the Villa Friedrich, as the property is called by people in Bad Aussee, ended with its sale in 1975.

# Wolfgang Gurlitt

Wolfgang Gurlitt was born on 15 February 1888 in Berlin into the family of the successful, but short-lived Hofkunsthändler Fritz Gurlitt (1853–1893). In the Galerie, which he received “from his mother’s hands” in 1912, he learned the secrets of the art trade “from scratch”. Around 1900, the Fritz Gurlitt Galerie was one of the leading modern art dealerships in Germany. It was among the first to represent French impressionists, Böcklin, Feuerbach, Leibl, Corinth, and Liebermann, as well as Austrian painters such as Schiele, Klimt, and Kokoschka and drawings by Kubin. In addition to this, the versatile art dealer, sponsor of artists both male and female, and passionate organiser of exhibitions operated a publishing house that specialised in modern graphics and bibliophile editions. In the early 1920s both the publishing house and the Galerie were still highly profitable, not least on account of erotica, which gave them a certain edge in the highly competitive art market. The “roaring twenties” marked the beginning of what turned out to be a long-lived financial crisis for Gurlitt. The extravagant adaptation of his apartment and his gallery led to unpaid

bills piling up. In 1922 Max Pechstein took Gurlitt to court. Gurlitt had originally secured the right to the sole representation of the artist. By 1927, the exhibition activities of the Gurlitt Galerie had to be drastically curtailed. In the 1930s it became obvious that the Berlin art dealership’s heyday was a thing of the past. The economic crisis, inflation, the shrinking market in graphics in addition to Gurlitt’s extravagant lifestyle threatened the very existence of Gurlitt’s extended family. Having specialised in figurative modern art, German expressionism, print graphics, and in up-and-coming Jewish artists such as Eric Isenburger, Jeanne Mammen and Lotte Laserstein, the formerly renowned gallery was now repeatedly under the shadow of bankruptcy.

## Profiteer and Saviour

Propped up by financial transactions and the support of the Landesleiter of the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste [Reich Chamber of Visual Arts], Gurlitt only just managed to stave off bankruptcy. In 1926, he transferred the “Kunsthandlung Fritz Gurlitt G.m.b.H” to

his Jewish partner Lilly Agoston; by 1937, Gurlitt's ex-wife was listed as the gallery's formal owner. On account of his permissive lifestyle, his Jewish grandmother, his collaboration with Jewish staff and not least because of his erotic publications, Gurlitt was classified by the Nazi regime as an "untrustworthy quarter Jew". This did not prevent him or his Jewish partner from claiming their share in foreign-currency deals involving "degenerate" art. Making deft use of his networks, he tried his hand as a buyer for the "Fuehrermuseum" in Linz – with little to show for his efforts. By contrast to his cousin Hildebrand, he was successful as a middleman in only one purchase for the "Sonderauftrag Linz".

As a highly ambivalent art dealer he effected last-moment purchases from collectors who were forced to flee the German Reich. Among other transactions he profited significantly from the – for him – highly advantageous purchase in around 1939 of the Loewenthal Collection. From this collection came the first painting to be restituted in 1999 by the Lentos. Gurlitt also purchased looted art from Vienna's Dorotheum.

In November 1943 Gurlitt's flat and his gallery in Berlin, in whose refurbishment artists had taken a hand, were destroyed in a bombing raid. The gallery in Würzburg, which had been in the process of being launched, was destroyed in 1945. This was followed by Gurlitt's total relocation to Bad Aussee. Here he had access to looted art, as in the case of the Ria Munk portrait. Back in 1940, his wife Käthe and his ex-wife Julia Goob had bought the villa on the Lenauhügel in Bad Aussee, where he moved in with his wife, his ex-wife, and his daughters in 1944. From there the art dealer continued to conduct business in Linz, Salzburg, and Vienna. Part of his collection had been brought to Bad Aussee in time and was stored for safekeeping with Theodor Friedrich in the latter's elective home of Bad Aussee, later at the Hohensalzburg Fortress. On 23 October 1948 the Neue Galerie der Stadt Linz / Wolfgang-Gurlitt-Museum was launched to great press acclaim.

# Johannes Hinrichsen

Hinrichsen was born on February 28, 1884 in Schleswig-Holstein. Having received his first training at the Kunstgewerbeschule [College of Applied Arts] and the museum in Flensburg, he studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Dresden, then at the Academy in Berlin. From 1908 he was active as a freelance sculptor in Berlin and at art academies. His works include sculptures for the Schöneberg Town Hall, a decorative fountain on the Rathausplatz at Lankwitz and facade decoration at the Weinhaus Hut on Potsdamer Platz. Between 1921 and 1926 he was in charge of the exhibitions of the Verein Berliner

Bildender Künstler, the Association of Berlin's Visual Artists. Then he set up an art dealership in Bellevuestrasse. When Paul Lindpaintner joined as a partner, interest in the dealership turned towards ancient art, especially Gothic. This re-orientation made Hinrichsen the chief supplier of art for Hermann Goering. Hinrichsen turned his Berlin gallery into one of the largest in Central Europe and made a name for himself in the art world through international exhibitions. His acquisitions on behalf of Goering and his international trade relations continue to pose questions to researchers today, some of which are rather knotty.

## Lucrative Deals

### Berlin Art Dealers in Aussee during the Nazi-Era

Under the Nazi regime the art trade profited enormously from the marginalisation, persecution, expulsion, and deportation of Jewish collectors and

art dealers. From 1938, increasing numbers of objects from Jewish collections were flogged in the art market. Behind this development were partly the mandatory levies imposed on Jewish would-be emigrants, partly enforced sales, expropriations and confiscations in the context of the deportation of Jews to extermination camps.

From 1933, Jewish art dealerships in Germany were systematically liquidated and some of Berlin's most well-known art dealers fell victim to antisemitism. February 1938 was the deadline for Jewish art dealers such as Lilli Agoston when their licences to sell art and transfer foreign currency to the Reich's tax office were due to expire. In late 1938 the Berlin art trade no longer featured any Jewish dealers. 312 Jewish gallery owners had been deprived of their livelihood, their holdings had been confiscated, looted or sold at auctions, and they themselves had either been forced to flee or had risked being murdered.

"Aryan" art dealers and auctioneers benefitted to a large extent from brutal aryanizations. Profiteers and receivers of stolen goods sympathised unashamedly with the Nazis' persecution of Jews. Any art dealer who managed to integrate themselves into the Nazis' art looting campaign and to supply those works of art they had laid their hands on in this way to avid collectors such as Hitler or Goering was financially secure for life.

Two Berlin art dealers, who had already holidayed repeatedly in the scenic environment of Bad Aussee in the past, decided to set up home there in the late 1930s, early 1940s. Were they motivated by the prospect of lucrative deals to be made with resident Nazi bigwigs? Or had they set their eyes on looted art? Was it the storage and safe-keeping operations that persuaded the

Berlin dealers to move to Bad Aussee? What we do know is that it was close family ties that attracted Gurlitt and Hinrichsen to Bad Aussee. From 1940 Gurlitt resided in Bad Aussee in his "Villa Lenauhügel", Hinrichsen from 1938 in the luxurious "Wassermann Villa" in Altaussee.

Both Gurlitt and Hinrichsen were ambivalent personalities. They were both supremely familiar with the art market, they were both skilful negotiators and politically highly flexible. Both adapted smoothly to a murderous regime and apparently had no scruples dealing in looted cultural assets.

# Monuments Men

At the end of World War II, the holdings of Austrian and German museums and archives, private collections, the art collections amassed by Hitler and Goering, and art treasures looted by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) were stored in mines, castles, churches and monasteries, at a safe distance from the cities flattened by bombing raids. Finding and securing these art treasures was the task of the Art Protection Officers of the US Army, the “Monuments Men”. Their ultimate aim was to reverse the effects of the Nazis’ looting campaign and to return the objects they found to their rightful owners.

The remarkable work done by this army unit, which was comprised of art experts – museum directors, architects, restorers, and designers –, underpins George Clooney’s film *Monuments Men* (2014). The film focusses on the search for Adolf Hitler’s art depot stored in the salt mine at Altaussee, where it rubbed shoulders with other looted art.

The “Monuments Men“ are portrayed in the film as solely responsible for ensuring the survival of the artworks. It should, however, be borne in mind that this was no one-sided affair. There were others who made a significant contribution to that goal: those in charge of the depot, such as the staff of Vienna’s Denkmalamt, who had admittedly been appointed to that task by the Nazi regime, and the Director and the staff of the Österreichische Salinen.



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## Aranka Munk (1862–1941)

was born in Budapest in 1862. She was related to Joseph Pulitzer of the Pulitzer Prizes. In 1882 she moved to Vienna, where she married Alexander Munk, the wealthy owner of a steam sawmill and a building material and firewood dealership. In 1913, the couple split up. Two daughters, Maria/Ria (b. 1887) and Christine (b. 1900) were the fruit of the brief marriage. The first tragedy occurred in 1911: Tochter Ria committed suicide by shooting herself out of unrequited love.

After her divorce Aranka bought a house in Bad Aussee, Marktleite 78, in 1916. She spent several weeks every year in this summer refuge, leading a relatively secluded life tempered by cultural and social activities. She retrofitted the house, which had originally been built by Jakob Ramsauer for Dr Heinrich and Virginie Obersteiner in 1871. She lived in it, surrounded by her collection of works of art, unaware that owing to her Jewish descent she was completely at the mercy of the Nazi regime from 1938.

On January 30, 1939, she was summoned to the Vermögensverkehrsstelle, the Property Transaction Office. She was never to see either her beloved house or Bad Aussee again. Aranka's villa, its furnishings and works of art were taken under trusteeship by Wilhelm Haenel from Bad Ischl. Haenel even fell foul of the Nazi Property Transaction Office with his arbitrary "aryanization methods". Already in her late 70s and incapable of dealing with the red tape of the Nazi bureaucracy, Aranka filed a special power of attorney on October 17, 1941 regarding her remaining assets. In the same month, Aranka and her daughter Lola were deported from Köstlergasse 10 in Vienna's 6th district to the Łódź Ghetto, where Aranka died on October 26, 1941, aged 79.

Two Nazi agencies were subsequently at loggerheads regarding the house. In the end, the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung, the Central Agency for Jewish Emigration, was entrusted with the sale of the villa.



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## Christine “Lola” Kraus, née Munk (1900–1942)

first married the bookseller Hans Sachsel. After her sister’s tragic death she suffered two other heavy blows: her daughter died in 1924, aged four, and her marriage ended in divorce. Lola then married Dr Eduard Kraus, who left his post in the oil industry to try his hand in the risk-fraught film business. One of his films bombed, putting an end to Lola’s dowry in the process. After a stay in a

sanatorium Kraus committed suicide in 1936 in his own house. Lola, a student of art history, planned to work as a tourist guide in Aussee, but her life, fraught with tragedy as it was, ended in the Holocaust. In 1941, she was deported to the Łódź Ghetto together with her mother, who she had been staying with. On September 9, 1942, she was murdered in the Chelmo extermination camp.

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## Gustav Klimt, *Ria Munk on Her Death Bed*, 1912

50 x 50.5 cm, private ownership, United States

Maria, a.k.a. Ria, put an end to her life on December 28, 1911 over a failed love affair by shooting herself into her left breast with a revolver. Klimt made a painting of her in 1912, immediately after her death. It has been established beyond doubt that this is a portrait of the deceased. Like drowned Ophelia from Shakespeare’s Hamlet in the painting by John Everett Millais, whom Klimt here took as a model, the deceased is bedded on roses in full possession of her youthful beauty.

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## Gustav Klimt, *The Dancer*, 1916/17

180 ≈ 90 cm, private owner, France

After Klimt had accepted the Munks' commission to paint a portrait of deceased Ria, he was given another commission for a full-figure painting, as was credibly attested by Aranka's nephew, Erich Lederer. As this painting apparently failed to come up to the expectations of the commissioners, Klimt, again according to Lederer, turned it into the painting *The Dancer*. In this painting, the dancer hypothetically conceals Ria's portrait that has been overpainted.

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## Gustav Klimt, *Lady in White*, 1917

70 x 70 cm, Belvedere Vienna

In addition to *Backfisch/Portrait of Lady* there is another unfinished painting, now at the Belvedere, that exhibits a close similarity with the portrait *Ria Munk III*. As an x-ray examination has shown, here, too, Klimt made several changes at a later stage. The layer of paint underneath the surface traces exactly the same features Klimt portrayed in *Ria Munk III*. *Lady in White* is in all probability an unfinished study Klimt made for *Ria Munk III*.

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## Gustav Klimt, Female Portrait *Ria Munk III*, 1917

180 x 90 cm, Lewis Collection

The portrait *Ria Munk III* was restituted to the heirs of Aranka Munk in 2009 from the Lentos collection. The work had been permanently on display at the Neue Galerie der Stadt Linz, then at the Lentos, and had been loaned to important exhibitions all over the world over five decades. The original frame has remained at the Lentos. For extensive information on this restitution case, go to the first room of the Collection.

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# Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1916/17

68 x 55 cm, overpainted version of *Backfisch*, c. 1910, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza

This painting, which was called *Backfisch* in its first version before being reworked in 1916, displays astonishing similarities with *Ria Munk on Her Deathbed* or *Ria Munk III*. The collector Giuseppe Ricci Oddi bought the painting in 1925 from painter and art dealer Luigi Scopinich. In 1924, he donated his collection to the City of Piacenza. The first version of the painting, entitled *Backfisch*, which had been on display in late 1910 at the Galerie Miethke in Vienna, where it was also photographed, shows a young woman wearing a voluminous hat and shawl, who closely resembles 23-year-old student Ria Munk. For reasons unknown Klimt overpainted this version in late 1916, early 1917. The hat disappeared, the face remained almost unchanged, the completely altered clothing with the tentative floral pattern is reminiscent of comparable late works and of the female portrait *Ria Munk III*.

## A Spectacular Art Heist

On February 22, 1977, the *Portrait of a Lady* went missing during preparations for an exhibition; only the empty frame was found discarded in the attic. The search for the painting failed to turn up any clues. On December 10, 2019 the painting – in what resembled a miracle – was found in a niche in the outside wall of the museum garden wrapped in a plastic bag. The precise circumstances of the art heist have remained a mystery to this day.

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## Death on the Lenauhügel, “Lilly, the faithful shadow”

When Lilly Agoston-Christiansen was found dead in her bed at Wolfgang Gurlitt's villa on September 9, 1950 – she died completely unexpectedly of a heart failure at the age of 56 – Gurlitt plunged into a protracted depression. The memorial card identifies Lilly Agoston as the Deputy Director of the Gallery and as the co-founder of the Neue Galerie Linz / Wolfgang-Gurlitt-Museum.

Around 180 (!) letters of condolence from museum directors, high-ranking politicians and artists from Austria and from all over Europe attest to her standing as an internationally active art dealer in the stormy times before and during the Nazi regime. Lilly Agoston was buried in the “aryan” part of the cemetery at Bad Aussee.

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## Ferdinand von Rayski, *Heroic Landscape*, c. 1855

Oil on canvas, 77 x 109 cm

Theodor Friedrich also dealt in works of art. On January 21, 1943, he sold an impressive landscape painting by Ferdinand Rayski (1806–1890), *Heroic Landscape* for 9,000 RM to the Städtische Sammlungen Würzburg, where it has the inventory number 02851.

The museum in Würzburg was established by a close friend of Wolfgang Gurlitt's, the painter Heiner Dikreiter. Between 1942 and 1944 Gurlitt sold a total of 18 paintings, drawings and prints to the ambitious director. Both the acquisitions from business partner Gurlitt and the purchase of the Rayski landscape call for scrutiny by provenance research. The provenance of the Rayski landscape in particular is unclear and potentially revelatory in view of Friedrich's Aryani-zations in the Salzkammergut.

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# Museum Networks

Wolfgang Gurlitt was considered an outstanding networker and cultivated contacts with leading museum directors. Between 1927 and 1943, he plied the directors of the Nationalgalerie Berlin, Ludwig Justi and Paul Ortwin Rave, with sales offers, and he continued to do so with their successor, Adolf Jannasch. He offered them works by Lovis Corinth, Richard Gerstl, Ludwig Tieck, Hans Thoma, Otto Mueller, Thomas Rowlandson, and Max Pechstein. From 1938, Gurlitt had pictures by Philipp Otto Runge, Caspar David Friedrich, and Eduard Gärtner on offer. Even at the time some attributions were queried. In many cases the quality of the works on offer appeared unsatisfactory. Gurlitt's purchase proposals were often turned down.

Gurlitt did, however, supply several masterpieces to the world-famous collection of the Berlin Nationalgalerie. Pechstein's *Gladiolen* (1919) and *Ruderer* (1928) [Rowers] and Corinth's *Flora* (1928) were acquired by the museum. Between 1919 and 1933, the Nationalgalerie bought a total of seven paintings, such as works by Nauen, Pechstein (2), Corinth (2), Louis Gurlitt, and Otto Mueller's *Judgement of Paris*. Even before that, in the period from 1907, eleven purchases had been made.

Buyers included the Österreichische Galerie (today: Belvedere, Vienna) under the directorship of Bruno Grimschitz, who was in charge between 1939 and 1945, and the Viennese ophthalmologist Rudolf Leopold, both of whom bought directly from Wolfgang Gurlitt. Especially attractive acquisitions bought from Galerie Gurlitt in its early days are to be found in the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig and in the Museum Kulturspeicher Würzburg, whose director was a friend of Gurlitt's.

Why the elective Aussee resident Gurlitt was unable to realise his high-flying plans to reform the exhibition system in Salzburg at the end of the war – he organised several successful exhibitions in the Salzburger Kunstverein – has remained a mystery. A key role was no doubt played by a then influential rival, the Salzburg art dealer Friedrich Welz, who resided in St Gilgen and benefitted from his close connections to Salzburg's Gauleiter. Welz occasionally collaborated with Gurlitt on dubious deals.

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## Aryanizations in the Ausseerland

In 1938 and in the following years roughly 65 villas and properties were seized, expropriated, sold under duress or resold. Aryanizers, who typically assumed the role of trustees of these villas, included Wilhelm Haenel from Bad Ischl and Eduard Beyerer and Theodor Friedrich from Bad Aussee.

Friedrich, who was beset with financial difficulties, had already been reported for fraud by a Munich publishing house in 1936. Things took an economic upturn for Friedrich under the Nazi regime, when he worked as a broker dealing in "Aryanized" properties. On behalf of the Gestapo he took charge of villas in Bad Ischl and on Lakes Attersee, Mondsee and Wolfgangsee. As late as August 1945 he still compiled a list of (formerly) Jewish properties. His real-estate, mortgage and property-management firm was deeply involved in

Aryanizations. After he had been reported for misappropriating carpets and valuable chests from Villa Nemetschke in Altaussee, antiques which in a house search were found in one of Friedrich's properties, he was briefly incarcerated in Bad Ischl in 1941. He had seized the antiques as quid-pro-quo for an unpaid commission. Friedrich also took care of the villa formerly owned by the Jewish art patrons Paul und Irene Hellmann, Puchen 60. Irene Hellmann's assets were confiscated on November 23, 1938. Their son Bernhard was murdered in the Sobibor extermination camp in 1943, Irene was murdered in Auschwitz. After the end of the war, the villa in Altaussee was the home of SS officer and member of the Nazi secret service, Wilhelm Höttl, who had by then morphed into a US spy and the director of a private school in Aussee.

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## “Villa Wassermann”, Altaussee

Hinrichsen, who married the Austrian violin virtuoso Hortense von Kestenach in 1921, spent the summer months in Bad Aussee from 1927. By 1931 Hinrichsen and his wife had become permanent residents and in 1938 they bought the luxurious “Villa Wassermann” from Dr. Leopold Freiherr von Andrian-Werburg. This made the art dealer from Berlin not only the owner of one of the most beautiful villas in Altaussee, but also a major landowner. He was the municipality’s greatest tax payer and owned works of art, particularly from the Middle Ages, that were under

Austrian preservation order. The childless Hinrichsens neither belonged to the NSDAP nor were they active politically in anyway. On July 15, 1946, he was awarded Austrian citizenship. Now a naturalised Austrian, he was planning to return to the international art trade and “to supply [much-needed] foreign currency to his elective homeland”. Hinrichsen lived in Altaussee until his death in 1971. With his extravagant Horch motor car he is the stuff of fond memories in Altaussee to this day. The Hinrichsens are both buried in the Altaussee cemetery.

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## The “Central Collecting Points”

The US Military Administration established so-called “Central Collecting Points” in Munich, Wiesbaden, Marburg, and Offenbach with a view to implementing preservationist and scientific standards in dealing with certain cultural assets found in Germany and Austria and to addressing the complex mission of their restitution to their rightful owners. The US Military Administration relied on the collaboration of German staff throughout.

The largest Collecting Point was installed in the former NSDAP buildings at

the Königsplatz in Munich, the NSDAP’s administrative head quarters and Hitler’s “Fuehrerbau”. The two buildings had survived Munich’s widespread destruction relatively unscathed. The “Munich Collecting Point” became a depot of what was predominantly art looted by the Nazis, such as Hitler’s several collections, the collection of Hermann Göring, and the extensive holdings of works of art amassed by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) in France.

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# The Odyssey of Max Liebermann's *Potato Harvest*

The Berlin art dealer Johannes Hinrichsen, who became active in Altaussee by 1938, cultivated close contacts with the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf in the 1930s. Not only did he sell works of art to its director, Hans Wilhelm Hupp, but he also profited from the museum's sale of works by Jewish artists.

The provenance of *Potato Harvest* by Jewish artist Max Liebermann (1847–1935) is marked by ups and downs. Liebermann painted it in Barbizon, France, in 1875. It was then for a time in the hands of a painter friend, Johann Sperl (1840–1914), in Munich. By 1906 it was part of the collection of the Berlin art dealer Paul Cassirer (1871–1926), who sold it to the director of the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf. In 1924, the painting, which had already been exhibited in 1899 by Fritz Gurlitt, was stolen. It was brutally ripped from its frame and spent some time hidden away in Amsterdam. When the “professional burglars” were arrested, the painting was returned to the museum.

By 1937, given Liebermann's Jewish descent, the painting was considered “degenerate” and had to be removed from the holdings of the museum. In 1938, Hinrichsen suggested a barter deal and proposed to exchange it for a portrait by Wilhelm Leibl, one of Hitler's favourite artists. The director of the museum agreed and handed the painting to Hinrichsen, who in the end gave him a work by an Italian painter in return.

After the war, the Düsseldorf Museum sought to buy back the *Potato Harvest*. The exorbitant price initially demanded by Hinrichsen made negotiations difficult. The art dealer saw himself as the “saviour of the painting”. In the end he relented and in 1952 he reduced his demands to 12,000 DM. Since September 1953, the painting, one of Liebermann's masterpieces, has again been on display at the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf.





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