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UAW Strike, West Campus Picket, day one, UC Santa Barbara.

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## Defining the Volk: Nazi Persecution and Politicization Within Popular Art

*Parker J. Bovée*<sup>1</sup>

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The National Socialist Party's rise to dominate and ultimately reconstruct German politics can be traced along political, economic, and cultural lines. With an intentionally divisive party platform appealing strongly to ethnicity, the Nazi ideology of pride in German identity came at the expense of groups deemed unfit to represent the German people (Volk).<sup>2</sup> By the eighteenth century, ideas of a Volk had begun to solidify with German philosophers Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, both analyzing the word "Volksgeist" for its relation to German identity.<sup>3</sup> Both concluded that the word reflected the national spirit of the Volk, or German people, defined by shared morals, customs, language, national prejudices, and culture.<sup>4</sup> As referenced by German cultural scholar J. Laurence Hare, this definition loosely manifested into a physical image during the Napoleonic Wars but was only ever politicized under the National Socialists.<sup>5</sup>

For the National Socialists, the importance of the Volk was two-fold: service to the Volk and identification of the Volk. Identification rapidly crystallized through party messages idealizing pure-blood Aryans and the removal of Jews, cripples, Gypsies, and general minorities from the population.<sup>6</sup> Service to this Volk took on a more refined meaning. Much of the party platform focused on unity and furthering the status of the Volk politically, economically, and culturally, rapidly segregating German society into combative spheres. This essay will focus exclusively on the cultural component, specifically paintings and sculptures. With these ideas of cultural purity in mind, I will first relate the National Socialists' policies of artistic cleansing to Nazi acts of persecution toward alleged corrupting social influences within the Volk before touching briefly on what state-sponsored art took the form of. Focusing on the cultural aspect of this program, I will identify how high-culture art forms were critiqued, erased, and remade in the hopes of attacking undesirable

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<sup>2</sup> "Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party," The Avalon Project : Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, n.d. <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/nsdappro.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Hare, J. Laurence, and Fabian Link, "The Idea of Volk and the Origins of Völkisch Research, 1800–1930s," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 80, no. 4 (2019): pp. 575–596. doi:10.1353/jhi.2019.0032.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, "Von den deutsch-orientalischen Dichtern," in *Frühe Schriften 1764–1772*, ed. Ulrich Gaier (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), pp. 277–95, 283–84, 289.

<sup>5</sup> Hare and Link, "The Idea of Volk and the Origins of Völkisch Research, 1800–1930s," p.582.

<sup>6</sup> deutschen Polizei, "Runderlass des Reichsführers SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei zur Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage." 8. Dezember. 1938. In: *Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern* 51 (1938): p.2105.

people. In this work, I argue that Nazi artistic policy was an extreme example of cultural revisionism to Germany's artistic tradition, mirroring the intensive social engineering of Nazi Germany.

### Literature Preface

It is important to note that the history of National Socialist artistic policy has been thoroughly researched and examined. Specifically, Alan E. Steinweis provides extensive German artistic timelines before and during Nazi dominance. Steinweis successfully argues that the Reich Chamber of Culture was simply the most blatant political body to pursue artistic policies of Gleichschaltung, or coordination, aimed at restructuring the German art scene. *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany* explores this idea wonderfully, constructing a multidecade narrative about government cultural policies that guided art from outside artistic circles. Steinweis expands this analysis to include theater, film, press, and more, furthering his nuanced argument. I believe he falls short in a clear differentiation of National Socialist cultural agendas as opposed to those of Weimar or Imperial Germany. Hitler's Reich Chamber of Culture was more blatant than Steinweis claims, but this is an oversimplification. The two other governments mentioned did control high culture, primarily through the patronage of painting and sculpting, but were never able nor willing to uproot an entire art scene in just a few years. This work argues that the Nazi's blatant and intentional acts of cultural genocide, mirroring the genocide committed within Germany and conquered territories, fueled a mass cultural upheaval that was unprecedented in scale and severity.

This work shares significant overlap with Steinweis' work in analyzing how the National Socialist party manipulated art through direct intervention in the creative process and the title or backstory. While I will be discussing sculptor Arno Breker for this work, Steinweis' work *Anti-Semitism and the Arts in Nazi Ideology and Policy* elaborates on other Nazi-approved artists in varied crafts. I address this, as many historians, such as Jonathan Petropoulos and Pamela M. Potter, fail to adequately address how much significance the National Socialists placed on promoting new artists fitting their political ideals. These two historians analyze the violent persecution of Jewish or other culturally undesirable artists. Petropoulos and Potter's works do well in linking the close relationship between cultural and societal segregation, discrimination, and genocide as the National Socialist party rose in authority. However, both Potter and Petropoulos fail to identify the second wing of Nazi artistic policy: the direct, state-led return to neoclassical architecture and art. This work aims to fill historic policy gaps in how the National Socialist party simultaneously aimed to clean out a degenerate artistic scene while rebuilding it in the state-approved model of masculine neoclassicism.

### Origins of Nazi Artistic Policy

From its 1920 birth, the National Socialist agenda focused on forming a "Union of all Germans in a Great Germany."<sup>7</sup> Yet, how would this strategy be applied culturally? The 23<sup>rd</sup> point in the party's platform is one of the more specific ones, focusing almost explicitly on attacking non-German and politically motivated newspapers apart from a final, more vague section: Newspapers transgressing

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<sup>7</sup> "Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party."

against the common welfare shall be suppressed. We demand legal action against those tendencies in art and literature that have a disruptive influence upon the life of our folk and that any organizations that offend against the foregoing demands shall be dissolved.<sup>8</sup> Here the National Socialists explicitly linked their political enemies to decay in art and literature. Moreover, while not overtly stating it, the “disruptive influence” on German life can be interpreted as Jewish influence due to the 23<sup>rd</sup> point’s heavy focus on Jewish control of media.<sup>9</sup> This link offered a flexible target for Nazi propaganda that slowly grew in scope to include Jews, Gypsies, Blacks, and political dissidents.<sup>10</sup> By politicizing arts and literature as an epicenter of attacks on the Volk, the National Socialists cast doubt upon German art as something infected with foreign, corrupting influence. This opened the door for intense campaigns of artistic regulation disguised as state-building as the party came to power.

The first acts of this cultural revolution came from outside the party. Alfred Rosenberg led the Militant League for German Culture, a cultural offshoot of rising National Socialist ideologies, in public attacks on anti-war artists such as Ernst Balach.<sup>11</sup> While not directly tied to the party, these attacks won favor with party officials, allowing men like Rosenberg and Hans Severus Ziegler to take up prominent positions relating to cultural regulation in 1933 with the total Nazi takeover of the German government. Upon his appointment as a leading Nazi in cultural reformation, Rosenberg immediately resumed publishing scathing, now party-endorsed, attacks on modernist artistic figures.<sup>12</sup> Focusing mainly on style instead of content, other key Nazi cultural figures, such as Joseph Goebbels, took issue with Rosenberg’s failure to identify Jewish influence in his critiques.<sup>13</sup> Goebbels focused explicitly on the artists’ heritage and the social, ethnic, and religious communities they cultivated or affiliated with.<sup>14</sup> If the artist failed to represent Goebbels’ ideal Volk, he labeled their work an unequivocal failure, even going as far as to ban art critique from those outside the party.<sup>15</sup> Forced to mediate between these interpretations with an official party stance, Adolf Hitler’s *Art and Its Commitment to Truth* condemned both modern styles without purpose and over-attachment to the past artistic movements. Instead, Hitler advocated for an art based on Germanic heritage, tradition,

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<sup>8</sup> “Program of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.”

<sup>9</sup> “Program of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.”

<sup>10</sup> Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, “Introduction” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed., Anson Rabinbach, and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 483–86.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontations of Our Age*, (Ostara Publications, 2019), p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, “Revolution in the Visual Arts?”, in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, ( Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 488–89.

<sup>13</sup> Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth*, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Furtwängler and Joseph Goebbels, “The Case of Wilhelm Furtwängler (1933),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 532–34.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “Ban on Art Criticism (1936),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, pp. 492–93.

and meaning to the Volk.<sup>16</sup> *Art and Its Commitment to Truth* did little to solidify a party stance. However, it did offer a broad justification to rising Nazi cultural figure Adolf Ziegler and others in their new policy of confiscating “degenerate art” across Germany.<sup>17</sup>

### **Barlach, Lohse-Wächtler, Mueller, and Freundlich: What Was “Degenerate?”**

Ziegler capitalized on the party’s undecided position toward artistic reform, possibly in connection to his good graces with both Hitler and Goebbels, to orchestrate the anti-modernist artistic purge against what he deemed “degenerate art.”<sup>18</sup> The lack of firm party definition lent Ziegler greater freedom in his crusade against the German art scene as he targeted modern styles of Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism, and generally abstract or modern conceptions of art.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Ziegler took up Goebbels’ offensive on non-German influences by targeting Jews, anti-war advocates, the mentally ill, and Gypsies within the artistic community.<sup>20</sup> Ziegler broadly categorized art of this style and influence under the term “degenerate” and thus unrepresentative of the Volk. This allowed him to confiscate works across Germany.

Ernst Barlach was a focus of this campaign, with both his works *Magdeburger Ehrenmal* and *Hamburger Ehrenmal* (see appendices for discussed images) being condemned as “degenerate.”<sup>21</sup> *Magdeburger Ehrenmal* (Fig. 1) was controversial even before the National Socialists’ ascent due to its harsh anti-war depiction focusing on traumatized soldiers.<sup>22</sup> The sculpture’s use of a cross with dates of World War I is the only semblance of a memorial to the victims as the distraught soldiers are overshadowed by solemn, detached-looking combatants and a religious figure. Similarly, the *Hamburger Ehrenmal* (Fig. 2) sharply reminded Germans of the city’s forty thousand casualties through an inscription on the monument.<sup>23</sup> Headed by a mournful child and detached mother, Barlach again commented on the unseen and forgotten victims of war.

These two works, with *Magdeburger Ehrenmal* representing the global suffering of World War I and *Hamburger Ehrenmal* shaming the supporters of WWI with the deaths of Germans, were treated as anti-nationalist propaganda, a reputation that barred Barlach from the Nazi’s new artistic scene.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Adolf Hitler, “Art and Its Commitment to Truth (1934),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 489-92.

<sup>17</sup> Adolf Ziegler, “Speech at the Opening of the Degenerate Art Exhibition (1937),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 500–503.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Dialectics of Design and Destruction: The “Degenerate Art” Exhibition (1937) and the “Exhibition Internationale Du Surréalisme” (1938),” *October* 150 (2014): pp. 49-62.

<sup>19</sup> Rabinbach and Gilman, “Introduction” pp. 483-86.

<sup>20</sup> Rabinbach and Gilman, “Introduction,” pp. 483-486.

<sup>21</sup> William M. Chace, “Review of An Artist against the Third Reich: Ernst Barlach, 1933-1938,” *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 2 (2004): pp. 356-357.

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Barlach, “Magdeburger Ehrenmal,” Wood Sculpture, 1929, Magdeburg Cathedral, In *Fotoeins Fotografie*, by Henry Lee, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

<sup>23</sup> Ernst Barlach, “Hamburger Ehrenmal”, Plaster, 1931. Hamburg, Deutschland, Hamburg.de.

<sup>24</sup> Chace, “Review of An Artist against the Third Reich,” pp. 356-357.

Barlach is a key example of Nazi artistic persecution, as he had been the target of career sabotage long before his works were officially seized.<sup>25</sup> His choice to speak freely on anti-war views and shame toward Germany's role in the war put him in direct opposition with the Nazi's desire to annul the Treaty of Versailles and restore lost German honor.<sup>26</sup> Barlach was to be an example of Ziegler's desire to clean up the artistic community from anti-nationalists, leading to the seizure of his work under the label of degenerate art damaging to the Volk.

Advocating for a mix of both Rosenberg's stylistic message and Goebbels' ideals of artistic purity within the Volk, the following three artists faced artistic and social condemnation from Ziegler. Starting with Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, this artist stood as almost the polar opposite of the Nazi message of pure, Volk-representing art. While not hugely influential in modern approaches, Lohse-Wächtler's focus on portraits of the lower tiers of society raised eyebrows within the party. Party artists often supported paintings of workers and farmers. However, Lohse-Wächtler controversially chose to depict an aging prostitute in her acclaimed work *Lissy* (Fig. 3).<sup>27</sup> Combined with the stylistically distorted features of the prostitute and surrounding characters, the piece strayed away from Goebbels' morally-upright image and Rosenberg's preferred realism style of Nazi art.<sup>28</sup> Lohse-Wächtler's portraits of patients in a mental ward, the same one she was confined in, were also deemed "degenerate" and likely destroyed.<sup>29</sup>

Ziegler's artistic purge coincided with a continued Nazi focus on addressing Germany's mentally ill population. Originating as forced sterilization before rapidly progressing to programs of euthanasia, the mentally ill were gradually considered a societal burden to be solved through mass murder.<sup>30</sup> Both Lohse-Wächtler's struggle with mental health, which eventually led to her murder under this program, and attempts to normalize the mentally ill as artistic subjects in German art convinced leading Nazi officials of her art's moral depravity and "degenerate" nature.<sup>31</sup> Alongside the modern twists distorting the human figure within her work, Ziegler had no issue confiscating or destroying her work as unfit to represent the Volk.

Just as Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler was targeted for her work depicting the mentally ill, Otto Mueller's legacy of depicting Gypsy life and culture prompted the ire of Ziegler and leading officials on artistic policy. Mueller passed away years before the Nazis enacted their artistic purge. Nevertheless, he left two lasting imprints on German art: a reputation as a key figure in German

<sup>25</sup> Chace, "Review of An Artist against the Third Reich," pp. 356-357.

<sup>26</sup> "Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party."

<sup>27</sup> Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, "Lissy," Pencil and Watercolor, 1931. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, in der STÄDEL BLOG.

<sup>28</sup> Rosenberg, "Revolution in the Visual Arts?," p. 489.

<sup>29</sup> Britany L. Salsbury, "Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler: A Feminist View of Weimar Culture," *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008): pp. 23-30.

<sup>30</sup> "Psychiatric Eugenics in Nazi Germany," in *From Madness to Mental Health: Psychiatric Disorder and Its Treatment in Western Civilization*, ed. Eghigian Greg, (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 294-311.

<sup>31</sup> Salsbury, "Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler: A Feminist View of Weimar Culture," p. 26.

Expressionism and Gypsy-centered work.<sup>32</sup> Notable pieces such as *Landschaft Mit Gelben Akten* (Fig. 4) and *Reclining Figure* (Fig. 5) captured a curiosity toward Gypsy populations depicted as living within nature and apart from German civilization. *Landschaft Mit Gelben Akten*, in particular, emphasized a detachment from reality with brightly-colored, oddly-shaped bodies without any indications of gender.<sup>33</sup> *Reclining Figure* and most of Mueller's recovered works also focused on this depiction of Gypsies as non-human within the expressionist style.<sup>34</sup>

Mueller's works were some of the most heavily persecuted under the "degenerate" label. Nazi officials seized 357 of Mueller's works, many of which centered around his depictions of Gypsies.<sup>35</sup> Mueller himself was also highly speculated to be from a Gypsy family. While not originally the target of the Nuremberg Laws, a series of largely anti-Semitic segregation policies, Gypsy populations became a focal point of Nazi harassment and sterilization efforts beginning in 1933 and ramping up in 1935.<sup>36</sup> Combined with increasingly restrictive interpretations of the Reich Citizenship Law and Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, Nazi racial policies had become focused on targeting the Gypsies alongside the Jewish population as alien groups.<sup>37</sup> It is not a tremendous leap to view the attacks on Mueller's work as a cultural arm of this anti-Gypsy policy, especially when considering Ziegler's focus on cleaning out "artistic degeneracy" unfit to represent the Volk.<sup>38</sup> The mass cleansing of Mueller's work on Gypsies from German museums indicates rising cultural contempt for Germany's Gypsy populations, which bled into coordinated attempts to remove Gypsies from Germany and German art entirely.

Otto Freundlich's *Der Neue Mensch* was also labeled as "degenerate" and became the cover image of Ziegler's Degenerate Art Exhibition.<sup>39</sup> While the piece fits Alfred Rosenberg's critiques of non-realistic art, Ziegler was the one to popularize the image.<sup>40</sup> The sculpture itself was a five-foot-tall head incorporating elements of Cubism and Primitivism in a manner resembling the Easter Island heads. It served as the primary example of Nazi disdain for Primitivism due to Western art's conceptions of Primitivism often centered around former colonial subjects.<sup>41</sup> Yet, this sculpture became especially significant for its use by the Nazis. Contrary to most other works discussed, *Der Neue Mensch* served as the quintessential image of degenerate art. Used in media for

<sup>32</sup> "Otto Mueller 1874-1930," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 45, no. 3/4 (1966): pp. 59-62.

<sup>33</sup> Otto Muller, "Landschaft Mit Gelben Akten, Oil on Burlap", 1919. Museum of Modern Art, New York, in *German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse*, Starr Figura, Peter Jelavich, New York City, New York, USA.

<sup>34</sup> Otto Mueller, "Reclining Figure," lithograph printed in black ink on wove paper, 1919. Detroit Institute of Arts, in *Detroit Institute of Arts*, by Henry Lee, Detroit, Michigan, USA.

<sup>35</sup> Mueller, "Reclining Figure."

<sup>36</sup> Sybil Milton, "Gypsies and the Holocaust," *The History Teacher* 24, no. 4 (1991): pp. 375-87.

<sup>37</sup> *Runderlass des Reichsführers SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei zur Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage*, p. 2105.

<sup>38</sup> Ziegler, "Speech at the Opening of the Degenerate Art Exhibition (1937)," p. 502.

<sup>39</sup> Otto Freundlich, "Der neue Mensch," Plaster, 1912. Detroit Institute of Arts, in *German History in Documents and Images*.

<sup>40</sup> Rosenberg, "Revolution in the Visual Arts," p. 489.

<sup>41</sup> Ben Etherington, "Primitivism After Its Poststructural Eclipse," in *Literary Primitivism*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), pp. 3-16.



the Degenerate Art Exhibition and prominently displayed during the exhibition in Munich, the work took on an alternative theme.<sup>42</sup> The Nazis began to use *Der Neue Mensch* (fig. 6) as the symbol of a failed era in German art, one dominated by Jewish influence and an erroneous focus on non-German bodies.

As referenced by Ziegler in his speech at the Exhibition, the art displayed represented Jewish-funded projects aimed at stripping away the “honor and dignity” of the Volk.<sup>43</sup> Freundlich was also ethnically Jewish, furthering the controversy surrounding his work and leading to his attempted escape and eventual murder in the Majdanek concentration camp.<sup>44</sup> Both Ziegler’s phrasing and choice to use *Der Neue Mensch* as a cover image of Jewish influence for the Degenerate Art Exhibition cemented a link between Nazi-deemed degenerate art and internal rot in the form of Jewish attacks on the Volk identity, a party focus dating back to their original 1920 platform.<sup>45</sup> Yet, if art that genuinely represented the Volk could not depict themes of Gypsies, Jewish influence, colonial peoples, anti-war sentiment, or modern art styles, what was true German art?

### **Arno Breker: Sculpting as a Political Tool**

According to Robert Scholz, a party art critic, German art aiming to honor and represent the Volk was to be made in the image of the National Socialist ideals.<sup>46</sup> These political ideals were, again, somewhat stylistically confusing when it came to art. Hitler had ambitions of remaking the whole of Berlin in classical Greek and Roman stylings, but these techniques had little to do with a Volk culture. While not expressly German, neoclassicism reflected historic authority calling back to the great Mediterranean military societies and was significantly devoid of foreign influence and meaningless modern styles.<sup>47</sup> Neoclassical art, in other words, was two things: grandiose and militaristic, two key themes of the Nazi regime. This same embrace of grand, monumental architectural style translated to art with the rapid rise of Arno Breker as the preeminent party artist. Famed for his ability to relate neoclassical sculpting styles to Nazi ideals of imposing physical presence and authority, Breker transcended the role of an artist and moved into something of a party organ. Hitler famously renamed Breker’s work from *Der Fackelträger* to *Die Partei* (*The Party*) to merge

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<sup>42</sup> Rabinbach and Gilman, “Introduction,” p. 485.

<sup>43</sup> Ziegler, “Speech at the Opening of the Degenerate Art Exhibition (1937),” p. 502.

<sup>44</sup> Joes Segal, “National and Degenerate Art: The Third Reich,” In *Art and Politics: Between Purity and Propaganda*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 45-60.

<sup>45</sup> “Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party.”

<sup>46</sup> Robert Scholz, “The Mission of the New German Sculpture: On the Arno Breker Exhibit in Paris (1942),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 509-11.

<sup>47</sup> Pau Schmitthenner, “Tradition and New Design in Architecture (1933),” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1st ed, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 511-14.

the masculine style of the work with images of the National Socialists.<sup>4849</sup> Yes, Arno Breker's artistic style perfectly fit Hitler's hopes for an artistic compliment to his architectural visions, but what was the defining characteristic between Breker and other neoclassical artists of the time that inspired such admiration from Nazis cultural appendages?

Just as many artists were alienated over their works' ethnic or political associations, Breker's willingness to morph his art to align with visions from party ideologues propelled him to preeminence in Germany's new art scene. As reflected in party art critic Robert Scholz's review of the *Der Wächter* sculpture (fig. 7), Breker's older work was belittled in comparison with his new sculptures, which drew inspiration from the "content of our new political ideals."<sup>50</sup> Scholz continued his detailing, claiming that Breker's "fusion of form and content" surpassed that of any "artist or art epoch."<sup>51</sup> The value of Breker's art had moved away from the physical content he created and instead been augmented by assigned political values. Breker had not won fame because of any stylistic or thematic exploration. He simply regurgitated neoclassical works under the direction of Nazi cultural figures. This was part of the beauty of neoclassical sculpting. A masculine figure is themeless, leaving the meaning to be ascribed to it. By emphasizing slightly more German facial features or simply allowing the renaming of his work, Breker became the Nazi's leading artist (fig. 8). Success as an artist in the newly Nazi-controlled artistic realm was to be found through cooperation with and alignment with party standards regarding style, content, artists' identities, and, most importantly: state superscription of party themes upon one's art.

### **Relationship Between the Nazi's Artistic Purge, State Building, and Persecution**

So, what does the example of Breker's prominence tell us when compared with the experiences of Barlach, Lohse-Wächtler, Freundlich, and Mueller? Breker's work before his close relationship with Hitler was largely apolitical. Any work with a political twist was implemented at the directive of Nazi officials, with Hitler often suggesting tweaks.<sup>52</sup> This acceptance of Nazi political themes saved, elevated, and cemented Breker as a legitimate artist. The exact opposite can be said of Barlach, who often focused on political themes opposed to Nazi views. Barlach's reputation as an anti-nationalist political artist condemned his work when the Nazis rose to power. If art was to be political in Nazi Germany, it would represent National Socialist ideals. Yet, another realm of persecution remained. Lohse-Wächtler, Freundlich, and Mueller all became staples of degenerate art, largely for apolitical identities or subject matter. Choosing to depict Gypsies or the mentally ill did not fit the image of Volk art. Primitivism, Expressionism, and most modern styles also became increasingly detested as

<sup>48</sup> Petropoulos Jonathan, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany*. (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> Arno Breker, "Die Partei," Sculpture, 1939. Breker-Museum Nörvenich, Nörvenich, Germany, in *Restaging "Degenerate Art": The Politics of Memory* by Alan Joshua Itkin, in the Berlin Sculpture Find Exhibit.

<sup>50</sup> Scholz, "The Mission of the New German Sculpture," p. 510.

<sup>51</sup> Scholz, "The Mission of the New German Sculpture," p. 510.

<sup>52</sup> Alan Joshua Itkin, "Restaging 'Degenerate Art': The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Sculpture Find Exhibit," *The German Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2014): p. 413.

they did not fit the neoclassical stylings of Hitler's regime. Moreover, populations targeted by Nazi social reorderings, such as Jews, Gypsies, anti-nationalists, and the mentally ill, were never to represent the Volk artistically.

Breker's success within Nazi Germany is mainly indicative of the politically malleable nature of his work. The National Socialists sought to associate the Volk image with powerful, masculine art rather than representations of groups they considered inferior. The persecution of artists represented examples of Nazi cultural targets: Jews, Gypsies, and the mentally ill as inferior and unable to contribute to the Volk. Artists who happened to fall into, or associate with, one of these groups often faced professional persecution for it. Nazi artistic persecution of these peoples ran parallel with policy targeting these same groups as anti-nationalists, alien populations, or socioeconomic burdens, making the Nazi policy of persecution of degenerate artists a broader political tool of Nazi social engineering. Conversely, Nazi influence within their carefully curated artistic scene created a cultural arm of party propaganda aimed at binding art the party deemed worthy of representing the Volk to strong affiliations with the National Socialist party amongst the German people.

## Appendix

Figure 1: Barlach, Ernst. “Magdeburger Ehrenmal,” Wood Sculpture, 1929. Magdeburg Cathedral, In Fotocins Fotografie, by Henry Lee, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.



Figure 2: Barlach, Ernst. “Hamburger Ehrenmal,” Plaster, 1931. Hamburg, Germany. In [hamburg.de](http://hamburg.de).



Figure 3: Lohse-Watchler, Elfriede. "Lissy," Pencil and Watercolor, 1931. Stadel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, IN STADEL BLOG.

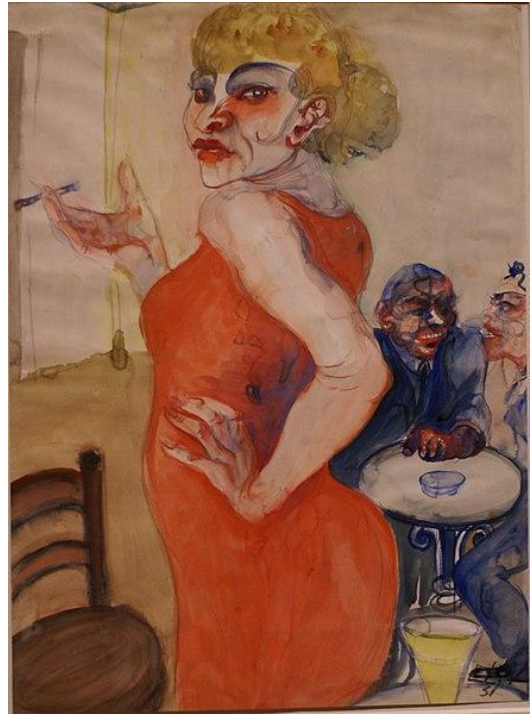


Figure 4: Mueller, Otto. "Landschaft Mit Gelben Akten," Oil on Burlap, 1919. Museum of Modern Art, New York, In German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse, Starr Figura, Peter Jelavich, New York City, New York, USA.

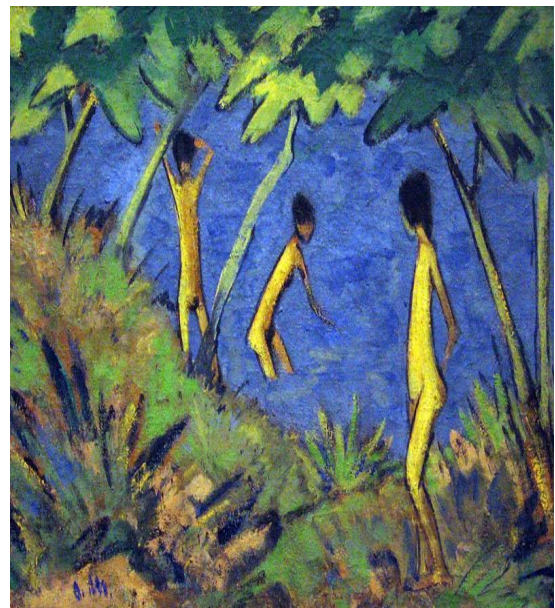


Figure 5: Mueller, Otto. "Reclining Figure," lithograph printed in black ink on wove paper, 1919. Detroit Institute of Arts, In Detroit Institute of Arts, by Henry Lee, Detroit, Michigan, USA.



Figure 6: Freundlich, Otto. "Der Neue Mensch," Plaster, 1912. Detroit Institute of Arts, In German History in Documents and Images.



Figure 7: Breker, Arno. “Die Partei,” Sculpture, 1939. Breker-Museum Norvenich, by Alan Joshua Itkin in Restaging “Degenerate Art”: The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Sculpture Find Exhibit.



Figure 8: Postcard with an image of Arno Breker's The Guardian (Head) (Der Wachter [Kopf]). Photograph by Charlotte Rohrbach. Film, Foto, Verlag, Berlin, SW 68. Collection of Anson Rabinbach. Sculpture Find Exhibit



FIGURE 22. Postcard with an image of Arno Breker's *The Guardian (Head)* (*Der Wachter [Kopf]*). Photograph by Charlotte Rohrbach. Film, Foto, Verlag, Berlin, SW 68. Collection of Anson Rabinbach.