

Art During WWII
Persecution and Patronage

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ABSTRACT

The Nazi use of the term “degenerate” was inconsistently applied. It was often used as a label for which Nazi financial advancement was the foremost motive. The application of the label “degenerate” was often used as a rationale to persecute patrons of the arts, when in practice it served to advance the financial and personal goals of the Nazi party. By studying the Nazi label “degeneracy” and persecution of the patrons who owned the works of Vincent van Gogh’s *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*, and Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*, a pattern is revealed that supports ways in which the patron is persecuted through avenues of “degenerate” labeling. Furthermore, inconsistency in applying the term “degenerate” art in the persecution of patrons, artists, and artwork highlights the irony, hypocrisy, and inconsistency of how the Nazis often used the ideology of “degeneracy” for purposes of financial gain rather than for advancing racial politics.

INTRODUCTION

The two case studies outlined within this research include the works of Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait *To my friend Paul Gauguin* with Gustav Klimt's 1907 *Woman in Gold*. Central to the theme of these case studies is the argument that patronage and the monetary value of these two works contributed to the ways in which the Nazi party utilized these works of art to contribute to the systematic definition and culture of "degenerate" art during WWII. An understanding of what "degenerate art" is and the complexities of how works became designated as "degenerate" is essential to developing a full understanding of the relationship between patronage and persecution during the Nazi era. Furthermore, inconsistency in the application of "degenerate" labeling within the persecution of patrons, artists, and artwork creates an overarching sense of irony. This irony highlights contradictory impulses satisfied only by situational personal gain.

The conceptual origin of "degenerate" art was not unique to Hitler's propagandistic regime. This term, though popularized by and most commonly attributed to Hitler's intensified control and persecution of artists and their works through government-enforced censorship and persecution, did not originate within the Nazi party. "Degenerate Art" was also not an immediate Nazi led response to modern art, but rather a slowly growing academic reaction pitting the so-called "norm" which was considered healthy, while the "deviant" was deemed "sick".¹ This systematic way of thinking about "degenerate art" which enabled the oppression and persecution of "degenerate" artists during WWII has its roots in the nineteenth century, decades before the existence of the Nazi party.

¹ Peters, Olaf, and Steven Lindberg. "Fear and Propaganda: National Socialism and the Concept of 'Degenerate Art.'" *Johns Hopkins University Press* 83, no. 1 (2016): 42–48.

“Degenerate art” was first popularized by Simcha Südfeld in his book *Entartung* (*Degeneration*), who was better known by the alias of Max Nordau.² In Nordau’s two volume series, published in 1892 and 1893, he expanded upon the conceptual theories of Cesare Lombroso of Turin.³ Nordau proposed a warped medical perspective in which he diagnosed “degeneration” as a mental illness.⁴ Within Nordau’s definition of “degeneracy”, he claimed that this “mental illness” was caused by “rapid changes to modern civilization to which his contemporaries could not adequately adapt.”⁵ Though others discussed modern society in terms of racist, anti-Semitic, and persecutory terms of “degeneration”, Nordau’s discussion of “degeneracy” is important in that it places the artistic and literary avant-garde at the center of a “degenerate” diagnosis.⁶ Pitting art against science, Nordau established ideologies that avant-garde art exhibited symptoms of mental illness. Furthering a belief system that the avant-garde artist was “degenerate”, Nordau laid societal and systematic foundations for the persecution of artists by applying criminality to modern artistic creation.

“It never occurs to us to permit the criminal by organic disposition to “expand” his individuality in crime, and just as little can it be expected of us to permit the degenerate artist to expand his individuality in immoral works of art. The artist who complacently represents what is reprehensible, vicious, criminal, approves of it, perhaps glorifies it, differs not in kind, but only in degree, from the criminal who actually commits it”.⁷

-Max Nordau

² Peters, Olaf, and Steven Lindberg. “Fear and Propaganda: National Socialism and the Concept of ‘Degenerate Art.’” *Johns Hopkins University Press* 83, no. 1 (2016): 42–48.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Max Nordau's conceptual foundation of what he considered "degenerate" became further problematic when he began to link "degeneration" to certain mental and physical characteristics.⁸ This expansive and ill-defined method of exclusionary-thinking encouraged the development of beliefs that the "non-degenerate" defined the vast qualities of the "other" as "degenerate". "Degeneracy" was a term that was widely applied to individuals that did not fit the German Aryan ideal. Individuals that were considered "degenerate" were considered to be racially impure, genetically unhealthy, politically deviant, feebleminded, and psychologically disordered.⁹ Jews, Roma (Gypsies), African Americans, and the disabled were specifically targeted and labeled as "degenerate."¹⁰ This labeling of "degeneracy" attempted to lower non-Aryan individuals to an animalistic level of the sub-human. This lowering of status created an arena of permissible Nazi led sterilization and persecution.

The fabrication of the term "degenerate" is contingent upon a narrow concept of "correct" physical, mental, and cultural characteristics. Within this fabrication, the "correct," Nazi ideal refers to physically and mentally healthy white Germans and Nazi politically adherent individuals. Members of the "Aryan race" also held characteristics of blonde hair and blue eyes. The purity of German identity, as Hitler saw it, was threatened by an impurity caused by the breeding of the "degenerate" with the racially "pure". The perceived threat of German impurity imposed by the existence and reproduction of "degenerate" individuals was enforced through further persecution of the "degenerate." On July 14, 1933, the Law for the Prevention of

⁸ Peters, Olaf, and Steven Lindberg. "Fear and Propaganda: National Socialism and the Concept of 'Degenerate Art.'" *Johns Hopkins University Press* 83, no. 1 (2016): 42–48.

⁹ Meinecke, William. "The Quest for Racial Purity: Germans with Mental and Physical Disabilities, African Germans, and Roma." In *Nazi Ideology and the Holocaust*, 79. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20090831-nazi-ideology-book-part2.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Genetically Diseased Offspring was enacted.¹¹ This law stated that the “degenerate” (hereditarily diseased) would be sterilized.¹² A fear that the “other” (the degenerate) would taint an overly valued and fabricated concept of “ideal” created a systematic way of thinking in which the persecution of the “degenerate” operated. Max Nordau’s ideas of “degeneracy” were later expanded upon by Paul Schultze-Naumburg, in three editions of *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race). Ideas about “degenerate art” appealed to and permeated the National Socialists’ policies of “preservation” in which goals of German preservation and enlightenment of “good” moral values regarding race, art, science, and the military were at the forefront of a hypothetical future in which a return to and preservation of the “ideal” was of the utmost importance¹³.

These complicated issues of “degenerate art” as they relate to patronage, and persecution of modern art during the Hitler era thrived during WWII as a utility of propagandistic control within Nazi regime. During WWII, cultural control of the “degenerate” was heightened by the Nazi looting of artwork, and Nazi held art auctions, such as the Fischer auction. This contributed to widespread Nazi sentiments of the systematic persecution of the “degenerate”. Modern art as “degenerate” was adopted and popularized during Hitler’s regime as a way to persecute artists associated with the modernist avant-garde. Patrons of art operating within these forms of persecution facilitated the making of modern (“degenerate”) artwork. Patrons of “degenerate” art established an environment where artists were supported to create, enabling the continued creation of artistic culture in which Nazi policies of “degeneracy” operated. As the patron was central to the advancement of avant-garde modernist ideas and practices, it is essential in

¹¹ Meinecke, William. “The Quest for Racial Purity: Germans with Mental and Physical Disabilities, African Germans, and Roma.” In *Nazi Ideology and the Holocaust*, 76-78. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20090831-nazi-ideology-book-part2.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

discussions of “degeneracy” during WWII to highlight the patron’s role as sometimes in support of avant-garde art while at other times supporting the persecution of the avant-garde. The role of the patron in the persecution of avant-garde art can be best illustrated in Theodore Fischer’s Grand Hotel Auction. In this complex, ever shifting dynamic, art is both restored to safety and destroyed within the Nazi system of “degenerate” persecution. The complexities of patronage during WWII “degenerate art” increase as patrons are both enablers of artistic creation and persecuted as such. In some cases, “degenerate” patrons of art monetarily contributed to the Nazi Party by buying art that was looted within a context of “degeneracy.”

Patronage plays a vital and intricate role in discussions about “degenerate” art and about persecution as an avenue through which modern art operated during WWII. In the case of Vincent van Gogh’s *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*, the piece was not created for a patron, but rather changed hands through a series of patrons (Ambroise Vollard, Dr. Hugo con Tschudi, Angela con Tschudi, and the Neue Staatsgalerie)¹⁴. In this case, the persecuted patron is the Neue Staatsgalerie, where the piece was taken by Nazi authorities. The role of patronage within *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* is further complicated when the piece is bought from a Nazi held auction by Maurice Wertheim, a Jew. The role of the patron facilitates the location of the piece at the Neue Staatsgalerie, and also the piece’s escape from Nazi authority in the hands of a Jew. In this case, the existence and willingness of the patron (Maurice Wertheim) provides a motive for the Nazis to sell rather than destroy artwork. The consideration of the patron by Nazi officials reveals a larger hypocrisy, where rather than consistently destroying/persecuting “degenerate” artwork, it used as a tool for financial and personal gain.

¹⁴ Harvard. “From the Harvard Art Museums’ Collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin.” From the Harvard Art Museums’ collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, July 17, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/299843>.

In the case of Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*, patronage plays an equally important yet vastly different role than it does with *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*. Klimt's *Woman in Gold* was created for a prominent Jewish patron, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer (Figure 6). Furthermore, *Woman in Gold* is a portrait of a Jewish woman- Adele Bloch-Bauer (Figure 7). Here, the identity of the patron as a Jew creates an avenue through which Nazi officials can confiscate the work under a precedence of "degeneracy". It was the patron's Jewish (labeled "degenerate") identity that allowed for a form of persecution through art looting, rather than the art looting that occurred at the Neue Staatsgalerie because of "degenerate" art. The persecution of Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer was not equally placed on the legacy of Gustav Klimt, or *Woman in Gold*. Instead, *Woman in Gold* escaped persecution, and was used for the personal financial advancement of Nazi authorities.

Patronage of art supported the ability of Nazi authorities to financially benefit from "degenerate" artwork. The patron (if deemed "degenerate") was used as a stepping stone upon which Nazi's could loot artwork ("degenerate" or non-degenerate), then gain personally and financially. The labeling of patrons, artists and artworks as "degenerate" during WWII forever altered the trajectory of ownership.

In discussions about "degeneracy" and patronage during WWII it is important to consider ways these systems of persecution operated. For instance, Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait, *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was included in Theodor Fischer's 1939 Grand Hotel Auction (Figure 4). The case of the Van Gogh Self Portrait is important in understanding how the Nazi's used "degenerate art". The Nazi party simultaneously stripped artwork of its accepted place in society by labeling it as "degenerate", while at the same time exploiting its monetary worth as a beneficial and valuable way to garner support for and advancement of Nazi ideology. This duality exposes the ways that the monetary value of artwork transcends (in some cases) the ways in which the Nazi

party perceived the value of art. The Nazi claim that “degenerate” artwork depleted ideal cultural values was financially supported by the monetary value that they assigned to “degenerate” artwork. In doing this, the Nazi labeling of artwork as “degenerate” did not necessarily strip artwork of its monetary value, but rather enabled the cultural persecution of avant-garde artwork. In this contradictory mindset of “degenerate” artwork, the Nazi party exploited artwork for the advancement of twisted ideals of perfection. This formulated ideal of perfection included only the mentally and physically elite, white, and German, while excluding all individuals of non-German descent, Jewish, physically or mentally disabled, and black, or gay individuals.

The monetary value of artwork in this case is important to consider because by assigning monetary value to “degenerate” artwork (an acknowledgement that artwork is of cultural and societal significance and in essence, is “worth paying for”) contradicts exploiting the persecution of the artist or the patron. The complexities and contradictions of “degeneracy” in the persecution and patronage of artwork can further be discussed in the case of Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*. In Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*, it becomes apparent that labeling a work of art as “degenerate” (or not degenerate) was not always dependent upon typical persecutory classifications of mental and physical characteristics. The politics and monetary value surrounding a work of art at times lifted it beyond classification of “degeneration” through means of Nazi advancement. The provenance of *Woman in Gold* tells a complicated story in which persecution fell upon the patron, who happened to be Jewish, rather than the work of art or artist. This is essential in understanding that the formal qualities of a work of art were not always the sole factor in determining a work as “degenerate.” Instead the Nazi’s employed an intricate system of classification to define the perceived value of artwork and the individuals surrounding its creation and ownership. This intricate system of classification can be seen within Joseph

Goebbels' seven chambers of artistic classification. The seven sub chambers of the Reich Chamber of Culture included literature, music, film, theater, radio, fine arts, and press.¹⁵ Artists were required to seek membership within these chambers. Members of these chambers were subject to political investigation.¹⁶ Those expelled from chambers were forced to either cease making art, or transfer business to an acceptable chamber member.¹⁷

Irony permeates the stories of patronage and provenance in *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*, and *Woman in Gold*. Vincent van Gogh's *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*, is looted from the Neue Staatsgalerie, then sold at the Fischer Auction to Maurice Wertheim, a prominent American Jewish art collector. The irony that the painting was sold by Nazis to Wertheim is punctuated by Wertheim's willingness to purchase a painting from the Nazi party that would inevitably fund the Nazi party. In the case of Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*, irony is revealed when *Woman in Gold*, a piece paid for by a prominent Jew (Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer), painted of a prominent Jew (Adele Bloch-Bauer), is looted, prized and displayed by Nazi's. Furthermore, irony is revealed through Klimt's son's involvement with the Nazi led transaction of the work that resulted in its hanging at the Belvedere Gallery. In both of these cases, irony is revealed through the unpredictability and hypocrisy of the Nazi party, exemplified through their decisions to sell rather than destroy "degenerate" art. These hypocrisies are revealed through the pattern in both works in which Nazi personal and financial advancement outweigh a consistent application of persecution through the ideology of the "degenerate".

¹⁵ Department of Financial Services. "HCPO Gallery: Reichskulturkammer," n.d. <https://www.dfs.ny.gov/consumer/holocaust/reichskulturkammer.htm>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

VINCENT VAN GOGH'S 1888 SELF PORTRAIT, *TO MY FRIEND PAUL GAUGUIN*

Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait *To my friend Paul Gauguin* has a complex provenance that began when the artist painted a self-portrait of himself for Gauguin. Gauguin held the painting in his possession until 1897 when he sold it to Ambroise Vollard.¹⁸ Vollard bought the painting from Gauguin for 300 Fr, who sold the painting when his friendship with Van Gogh deteriorated.¹⁹ Vollard then sold the painting to Dr. Hugo von Tschudi who owned it from 1906 to 1911.²⁰ When Dr. Hugo von Tschudi died, Angela von Tschudi inherited the painting by descent and held ownership of the painting from 1911 to 1919.²¹ Hugo von Tschudi initially bought the painting with funding from sponsors with the intention of displaying it at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin.²² It was from the Neue Nationalgalerie that the painting was looted by National Socialists (Nazis) in 1938.²³

After the painting was looted from the Nationalgalerie on March 27, 1938, it was stored at the Schloss Niederschönhausen.²⁴ The painting was consigned to Theodor Fischer by Nazi authorities in 1938, then held at the Fischer Gallery in Lucerne Switzerland.²⁵ The Nazi looting of the painting and Theodor Fischer's ownership of it began a saga in which the painting's identity grew in complexity. The painting became a leading symbol of the Nazi use of works of art to finance the Third Reich. Though Van Gogh's painting is only one of thousands that were

¹⁸ Harvard. "From the Harvard Art Museums' Collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin." From the Harvard Art Museums' collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, July 17, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/299843>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

looted by the National Socialist party during WWII, it was the crown jewel of Theodor Fischer's Grand Hotel Auction because it brought more money to the Nazi party than any other painting.

When Vincent Van Gogh painted *To my friend Paul Gauguin* in 1888, the intended purpose of the painting was drastically different from what it eventually became during WWII. Through a system of looting, buying, selling, and exploitation *To my friend Paul Gauguin* served the Nazi goal of extracting as much money for the work as possible. It is important to consider that as Nazis sold looted artwork, they seemingly relied heavily on the assumption that their personal identification of artwork was not shared by all. In essence, if a collector/individual/gallery owned a work of art that was designated as "degenerate", Nazis could take possession of the work of art. But if a collector/individual/gallery bought a "degenerate" work of art from the Nazi party, then the collector would not be considered "degenerate" or persecuted for owning the work of art. Later, this becomes increasingly apparent when the buyer of Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait *To my friend Paul Gauguin* at the 1939 Grand Hotel Auction is Maurice Wertheim, an American Jew.

In 1888, well before the beginning of WWII, Vincent Van Gogh painted *To my friend Paul Gauguin* as a means through which to reinvent painting through the genre of portraiture.²⁶ Van Gogh's original intentions for the work of art dissipated when the function of the work changed through the control and viewership of others (the Nazi party). Of course, this happens to all art to some degree, however, the degree to which this happened to Van Gogh's work is heightened through its looting and selling by the Nazi party. When Van Gogh painted this portrait, he was

²⁶ Harvard. "From the Harvard Art Museums' Collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin." From the Harvard Art Museums' collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, July 17, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/299843>.

living in Arles in the south of France. Here, he believed that portraiture could act as an experimental medium through which painting could be “reinvented”.²⁷ This “reinvention” of painting through portraiture occurred through the use of blue (colored) contouring, elimination of shadows, and mimicking of Japanese prints.²⁸ Through this belief, Van Gogh encouraged Emile Bernard and Gauguin to also investigate painting through portraiture. These artists sent Van Gogh self-portraits, and Gauguin in return received *To my friend Paul Gauguin*.

In letters to his brother, Van Gogh described the formal qualities of his self-portrait by outlining the ways in which he sought to mimic Japanese prints, and how he used color to emphasize contours and eliminate shadows.²⁹ Nearly all modern art was considered “degenerate” by the Nazis and *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was no exception as it was highly experimental and expressionist. *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was one of 15,550 “degenerate” works of modern art that were looted from German museums between 1937 and 1938.³⁰ Some of these looted works of modern art were displayed in a “degenerate” art exhibition in Munich (Entartete Kunst), sold at auction, disposed through private dealers and collectors, or destroyed.³¹ Of these 15,550 works of art, *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was perhaps among the most famous works declared “degenerate”, and the most publicly sold. It was the most valuable work auctioned at the Grand Hotel Auction.

²⁷ Harvard. “From the Harvard Art Museums’ Collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin.” From the Harvard Art Museums’ collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, July 17, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/299843>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tate. “Degenerate Art – Art Term.” Accessed March 3, 2020. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/degenerate-art>.

³¹ Ibid.

Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was looted by the Nazi party and was declared "degenerate", therefore worthy of removal (looting) by Nazi control. When the painting was put up for sale in the 1939 Grand Hotel Auction, it became clear that using "degenerate" art objects for monetary economic advancement took precedence over National Socialist art policy.³² The Nazi looting of artwork operated through inconsistent reasoning. At times, the Nazi looting of artwork was supported with reasonings of enacting and facilitating a purge of "degeneracy". More often, the term "degeneracy" acted as a playing card through which Nazi's could loot freely, only applying persecution through "degeneracy" within scenarios in which the Nazi party (or Nazi individual) could personally and financially benefit. This inconsistency in the application of "degeneracy" represents an overarching pattern of irony and hypocrisy. The formal motive of the Nazi's was a purge of "degeneracy", while an underlying motive of personal and financial advancement created an arena in which "degeneracy" was inconsistently applied as a tool to further financial benefit.

Nazi policy outlined that all "degenerate" artwork should either be exchanged for foreign currency or destroyed.³³ It is important to note that Nazis emphasized that buyers at the Grand Hotel Auction should be "foreign", creating a seemingly grey area in which buyers might be considered "degenerate", but at least (in Nazi perspectives), they were not German "degenerates". A "degenerate" buyer would be a buyer that held characteristics of mental, or physical disabilities, or racial differences from a white Aryan "ideal". The Nazi fear and persecution of the "degenerate" was based largely upon a fear that the "degenerate" would

³² Khut, Chiew-Lee. "Primacy of Ideology? The Confiscation and Exchange of 'Degenerate Art' in the Third Reich." Center for European Studies and General Linguistics, University of Adelaide, 2001. [file:///C:/Users/knigh/Downloads/02whole%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/knigh/Downloads/02whole%20(1).pdf).

³³ One of the great modern art collections • 1936–1959 · Foundation E.G. Bührle Collection. "The Bührle Collection One of the Great Modern Art Collections • 1936–1959," n.d. <https://www.buehrle.ch/en/history/the-collection/>.

further create impurities within the “ideal” German identity. This distinction further separated Nazi association with the appreciation for modern art. This becomes increasingly clear when the buyer of *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was Maurice Wertheim, a Jewish American. This is not to say that any Nazi favor was given to the persecuted “degenerate” individual simply because they wanted to buy artwork from the Grand Hotel Auction, but rather that a suspiciously blind eye was turned towards the highly publicized front of Nazi ideals during matters in which the Nazi party could advance economically by doing so.

Buyers were faced with an ethical dilemma; if they purchased a work they would be contributing to Nazi militaristic economic advancement.³⁴ Some buyers felt that it was more important to buy the work of art and save it from potential destruction.³⁵ For these reasons, the politics of the Grand Hotel Auction were incredibly complex, as some buyers were in favor of or apathetic to the economic and militaristic financial support of the Nazi party, while others cared only for the preservation of the artwork. Following the looting of the Neue Nationalgalerie in 1938 by the Nazis, the auction was organized. Theodor Fischer, a Swiss art dealer was chosen by the Nazi party to organize and facilitate the auction. Fischer was chosen because of his respected status as a Swiss art dealer and because he was not Jewish.³⁶ Fischer’s connections and status within art circles created an environment in which his deep involvement with the avant-garde allowed him to exploit the avant-garde for personal gain. Unlike many of the buyers at the auction (and many of the protestors of the auction), Fischer’s primary motivation was making money. This motivation overshadowed any reservations towards exploiting “degenerate” avant-garde artworks as looted valuables, or in facilitating economic support for the National Socialist

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lane, Mary. In *Hitlers Last Hostages: Looted Art and the Soul of the Third Reich*, 139–41. PublicAffairs, 2019.

Party. Theodor Fischer received 15, 12.5, or 7 percent commission from the Nazi party for each painting that was sold.³⁷ In addition to collecting commissions from each artwork sold, Fischer sold entry tickets for attending the auction. Fischer sold a total of three hundred tickets for three Swiss francs each.³⁸ Fischer was informed to keep silent about the Nazi connection to the auction in the hope that buyers would not be deterred by the Nazi connection to it.³⁹ Though the Nazi connection to the auction was intended to be a secret, it became widely known that it was connected to the Nazi party, resulting in a widespread rejection of the auction within curatorial and collection circles.⁴⁰

On June 30th, 1939, the Grand Hotel Auction took place in Switzerland.⁴¹ Though the auction only took place over the course of three hours, several measures of preparation were taken before June 30th.⁴² The auction presented 125 paintings and sculptures. Of these, 108 works were paintings and 17 were sculpture.⁴³ Fischer created an auction catalogue and facilitated a ten day period of time during which buyers could preview the artwork (Figure 5).⁴⁴ The preview took place from May 17th to May 27th, 1939.⁴⁵ Out of all 125 paintings and sculptures at the auction, Vincent van Gogh's *To my friend Paul Gauguin* was of extreme importance to both Fischer and the Nazi party as it was anticipated to bring in a large amount of money. At the auction, the Jewish American industrialist, Maurice Wertheim bought the painting for \$40,000.

³⁷ Lane, Mary. In *Hitlers Last Hostages: Looted Art and the Soul of the Third Reich*, 139–41. PublicAffairs, 2019.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

It is incredibly ironic that the most celebrated and valuable piece of “degenerate” art at the auction would be bought by a “degenerate” Jew for substantially less than what Fischer and the Nazi party had asked for. In this remarkable turn of events the funds received by the Nazis from this “degenerate” Jew likely advanced the Nazi agenda of confiscating “degenerate” works of art for sale in the foreign market. Ironically, the cyclical nature of corrupt economic support and exploitation of “degeneracy” was made possible by Maurice Wertheim’s highly contested decision to participate in this controversial auction. While many potential buyers had declined participation in the auction as an ethical choice to avoid participating in the exploitation of modern artwork in support of the Nazis, Maurice Wertheim circumvented this ethical dilemma by reasoning that his participation was as a patron of preservation. Wertheim’s \$40,000 purchase of the painting was \$8,000 lower than the price Fischer and the Nazi party had hoped to receive.⁴⁶ The auction as a whole brought in considerably less money than what was originally expected. Only 70 percent of the artwork sold.⁴⁷ Considering the high quality of the artwork for sale, it is surely the ethical dilemma of the buyers that prevented much higher bidding and overall revenue from the auction. Of the three hundred museum directors, private collectors, art dealers and other attendees, many arrived at the auction curious about the proceedings, but left empty handed as they had resolved not to buy for fear of contributing towards a toxic Nazi agenda. Another concern for attendees was the fear of ruining their ethical reputations by contributing to an auction that so volatily opposed modern art and supported troublesome Nazi ideals.⁴⁸ Despite the disappointing attendance, and surprisingly low bidding, the auction raised \$500,000 Swiss francs in support of the Nazi party.

⁴⁶ Lane, Mary. In *Hitlers Last Hostages: Looted Art and the Soul of the Third Reich*, 139–41. PublicAffairs, 2019.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Maurice Wertheim's involvement with the Grand Hotel Auction tells a complicated and shocking story. Who was Maurice Wertheim, and how did he, an American Jew, become a buyer at the Grand Hotel auction in Europe during WWII? Wertheim did not begin his career as an art collector, but rather a Harvard graduate that dabbled in many areas of business. Wertheim's first venture, post-graduation, was with the United Cigar Manufacturers Company.⁴⁹ Following this business venture, Wertheim worked with Hallgarten & Co., the Underwood Corporation, the Cuban Atlantic Sugar Company, the Hat Corporation of America, the Bonds Stores Company, and Wertheim and Co.⁵⁰ Outside of his business adventures, Wertheim spent time serving several organizations and foundations including the War Production Board.⁵¹ Wertheim also participated in founding the New York Theatre Guild, serving as a trustee and publisher of *The Nation*, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, the American Wildlife Foundation and Mount Sinai Hospital.⁵² Wertheim also donated 1,800 acres of land to the United States Government as a wildlife refuge.⁵³ It was not until Wertheim was 50 years old that he began to show interest in art.⁵⁴ Wertheim's vast resume of passionate business and service involvement allows insight into the tenacious approach towards life that Wertheim seems to have had. For this reason, it is not surprising that Wertheim's passion for collecting art grew quickly. Wertheim began his collection by purchasing Picasso's *The Blind Man*, followed with more purchases over the next fourteen years.⁵⁵ Wertheim's collection was fairly small, but dense in impressionist and post-

⁴⁹ Barksdale, Jake. "Maurice Wertheim." New York Public Library, June 18, 2010. <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2010/06/18/maurice-wertheim>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ———. "Uncovering New Ground in the Wertheim Collection." Harvard Art Museums, May 16, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/article/uncovering-new-ground-in-the-wertheim-collection>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

impressionist works of art. Wertheim's collection included 43 pieces by Vincent van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse, Monet, Degas, Renoir, Seurat, and others.⁵⁶

Several art collectors did not attend the auction out of protest while others feared that any involvement with the auction would be interpreted as support of the Nazi regime. Among those protesting Theodor Fischer's Grand Hotel Auction were Etta Cone.⁵⁷ Etta Cone felt strongly that attendance at the auction would show support of the Nazis.⁵⁸ Siegfried Rosengart, knowing of Cone's deep interest in Matisse's paintings, wrote to her describing that several Matisse's had been sold at Fischer's auction to American collectors for very low prices.⁵⁹ Siegfried Rosengart also wrote to Etta Cone that Dr. Frankfurter purchased Vincent van Gogh's 1888 Self Portrait *To my friend Paul Gauguin* on the behalf of Maurice Wertheim.⁶⁰ This self-portrait by Van Gogh appealed to Wertheim because it pictured a man who "suffered much, was disillusioned by so much, and yet looked upon the world without hatred or judgement."⁶¹ Those in attendance at the auction included Henri Matisse's son Pierre, Joseph Pulitzer, and Curt Valentin.⁶² Emil Bührle bid against Wertheim at the Grand Hotel Auction, but lost against Wertheim's bid of \$40,000.⁶³ Later, during 1942, Bührle and Fischer became partners in

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ In *Degas to Matisse: The Maurice Wertheim Collection*, 26. Abrams, 1988.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Lane, Mary. In *Hitlers Last Hostages: Looted Art and the Soul of the Third Reich*, 139–41. PublicAffairs, 2019.

⁶³ One of the great modern art collections • 1936–1959 · Foundation E.G. Bührle Collection. "The Bührle Collection One of the Great Modern Art Collections • 1936–1959," n.d. <https://www.buehrle.ch/en/history/the-collection/>.

collecting artwork by sharing ownership of the Coray Collection of Old Master paintings.⁶⁴

Fischer also partnered with Bührlé by selling him French Impressionist paintings.⁶⁵

Though it seems obvious that contributing to the financial advancement of the Nazi party is ethically troublesome, it is also important to consider that without the active participation of these patrons in support of the avant-garde, the existence of modern art would have been imperiled. This is not to say that those patrons who bought work from Theodor Fischer were morally correct by their participation in the Nazi machine, but it is to say that the future trajectory of modern art as we know it was altered and somewhat preserved because of those who bought work at the troublesome Grand Hotel Auction of 1939. It is difficult to hear about the story of Maurice Wertheim, an American Jew, buying a critical work of modern art without participating in a feeling of sinister trickery in the Nazi party's persecution of the "degenerate".

This story does, however, need to be accompanied with an understanding of the ethical complexities of the ways in which this act of trickery participated in the funding of those it was deceiving. It is impossible to say with certainty what the motives of Wertheim were, but one might speculate (with probable accuracy) that on some level, Wertheim sought to preserve the existence and integrity of Van Gogh's work. This explanation may accurately reflect his views or may be only a perception that Wertheim desired to publicly promote. In either case it is an inevitable question that must be pondered when grappling with the complexities of Wertheim's decision to buy the painting at a Nazi auction. One cannot say with certainty that the Van Gogh piece would have been destroyed if it had not been bought by Wertheim. Had the intention of the Nazi party been to destroy the work, it likely would have been immediately

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

destroyed and never put up for auction. It is undeniable that the projected monetary worth of the piece likely saved it from destruction. This consideration is important in that Wertheim's public motive for buying the piece may have been to act as a conservator for the piece, saving the piece from wanton destruction at the hands of the Nazis. However, a subsequent consideration cannot be denied- the Van Gogh piece, which otherwise had not been for sale, was sold for a shockingly low price to an eager art collector. Regardless of Wertheim's perceived or actual motive, the initial Nazi decision to sell the work rather than destroy the work perhaps reveals Wertheim's true intention as the buyer of the piece, simply to buy a coveted piece of artwork for a shockingly low price.

Though collectors like Etta Cone viewed Wertheim's participation as reprehensible, Wertheim was not rejected by the American Jewish community because of his participation in the Grand Hotel Auction. Later, Wertheim was elected president of the American Jewish Committee.⁶⁶ It is also important to note that while one of the most prominent art auctions during WWII, the Grand Hotel Auction was not the only Nazi auction, but rather one of high profile (artists, and buyers). The exact number of Nazi art auctions held during WWII is unknown, however ongoing projects such as the German Sales project are working to consolidate this information.⁶⁷ This project has thus far catalogued over 830,000 individual auction sales.⁶⁸

This case study also reveals the intense and continuing complexity of art patronage and collecting within politics and within the intense value that is placed upon the physical existence or destruction of a work of art. The lasting impact of the Fischer Auction can be experienced by

⁶⁶ In *Degas to Matisse: The Maurice Wertheim Collection*, 26. Abrams, 1988.

⁶⁷ The Getty Research Institute. "German Sales Catalogs, 1900-1945," n.d. http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/german_sales.html.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

viewing Vincent van Gogh's *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* in Wertheim's collection currently among the holdings of Harvard's Fogg Museum. Wertheim's collection was donated to Harvard with the stipulation that the works within would not be separated, meaning that the works in it were to be displayed all at once or not at all. Viewership of this painting is more than viewership of *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*. It is viewership of a work with a complex history of involvement in the Nazi party, art looting, and "degenerate" ownership.

This inquiry into the sale of Vincent van Gogh's *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* at the Grand Hotel Auction of 1939 tells a tale about the persecution of "degenerate" art, financial and collecting ethics, and the complex political intricacies of Wertheim's buying of modern art. This study also reveals the political power of art (modern art in this case) as objects of monetary value. In this case, it was the formal properties of its appearance, its style, and its fame that *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* prompted its Nazi label of "degenerate", thus beginning its deep involvement in the politics of the Nazi regime. Now the work of art resides in the Wertheim Collection at the Harvard Fogg Museum where it was donated by Maurice Wertheim himself.

GUSTAV KLIMT, *PORTRAIT OF ADELE BLOCH-BAUER I/ WOMAN IN GOLD*

The Nazi-led systematic labeling and use of “degeneracy” as an avenue through which to enforce persecution, also allowed for the persecution of art patrons. This systematic form of persecution placed specifically upon Jewish patrons, allowed for art to be confiscated from Jewish homes, and recontextualized and exploited in such a manner that allowed for the advancement of the financial gain of the Nazi party. The label of “degeneracy” superseded the “rationale” of Nazi policy regarding works of art. “Degeneracy” was used selectively as a means through which to persecute patrons, usually of Jewish descent, for the financial gain of the Nazi party. In the case of Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*, persecution landed upon the work’s patron, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, and not the artist or the artwork. Despite the creation of the piece resulting from Jewish patronage, *Woman in Gold* and Gustav Klimt were elevated to a status of cultural heroism.

This chapter discusses the complexities of Gustav Klimt’s position within the German system of “degenerate art”. The curious theme of irony arises and reveals that while Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold* was confiscated under the authority of Nazi “degenerate” art policy and the widespread persecution of patrons and artists, Klimt himself (though deceased) seemingly escaped the Nazi label of “degenerate”. Failing to label Gustav Klimt a “degenerate” artist further supports the idea that the Nazi persecution of artists and patrons superseded a consistent rationale and reinforced the rationale that the fate of an artist or work of art could be altered for the financial benefit of the Nazi party.

In the case of Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*, it was the patron that faced persecution rather than the artist. Within this twisted realm of selective persecution, it was Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer (the patron) that faced persecution. How then, did the patron of the *Women in Gold* face

persecution while the artist Gustav Klimt escaped being declared “degenerate” and the work itself was celebrated and on public display in the Belvedere during Nazi regime? To state the obvious, the patron, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer was Jewish. This does not, however, explain how an artist and portrait created for and of a Jewish patron escaped the label of “degeneracy” and Nazi persecution.

There are many factors that allowed for Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold* to evade the widespread persecution applied to the patron of the piece and numerous other individuals labeled as “degenerate”. It is first important to consider Gustav Klimt’s personal involvement with the Jewish community. Klimt’s curious evasion of Nazi persecution was not in any way due to an alignment of anti-Semitic expression from Klimt with the Nazi party. On the contrary, Klimt’s artistic creation and processes were highly intertwined with Jewish patronage.⁶⁹ It is also important to note that Klimt’s involvement with Jewish patrons extended beyond monetary exchange. Klimt was known to spend time with patrons at their homes, as well as summering at their cottages.⁷⁰ Emil and Berta Zuckerkandl and Fritz Waerndorfer were among the associates and friends who spent time with Klimt as patrons of his work.⁷¹

How then, despite his involvement with Jewish patrons, did Klimt’s work not only escape Nazi persecution, but align with certain Nazi artistic preferences and ideals? In order to fully understand how Klimt evaded widespread persecution despite being an experimental avant-garde artist who frequently created commissioned work for Jewish patrons, it is first important to discuss the formal qualities of Klimt’s work that appealed to the Nazi regime. It is important to

⁶⁹ Morowitz, Laura. ““Heil the Hero Klimt!”: Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective.” *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 116.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

note two major factors that allowed Klimt to escape persecution while his patrons did not. The first being the formal qualities and content of Klimt's work, the second (and more prominent) was the Nazi instigated recontextualization and appropriation of Klimt's work. The intersection of these two circumstances highlighting the re-appropriation of Klimt's work are best illustrated in the 1943 Klimt Retrospective at the Belvedere in Vienna.

In this context it is important to consider if Klimt's work is recognized in contemporary settings as the work he created for Jewish patrons, or if the Nazi appropriation of Klimt's work and the erasure of the Jewish patron has today resulted in a fragmented understanding of Klimt's work. Klimt's *Woman in Gold* provides a striking example of Nazi persecution of the patron. The identity of the patron has been removed through the change in the title of the piece, and through the relocation of the piece. The painting no longer solely represents a portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer. The Nazi involvement in looting, selling, and retitling the piece has recontextualized the piece as a whole. Following these events, this piece (now located in New York City) took on an identity of symbolic Austrian identity, as the crown jewel of the Belvedere collection. This symbolism participated within the erasure of Adele Bloch-Bauer's role as subject of the piece, and of Ferdinand's role as patron of the piece. The Nazi looting, selling, and retitling of the piece also recontextualized the piece's identity from a personal, family owned portrait, to a golden spoil of war. This work is also now symbolic of the Nazi intention of looting and persecuting the patron through the label of "degeneracy". This intention was one of personal financial advancement and the advancement of a glorious new Germanic identity.

It is difficult to say how exactly Klimt's work became a cultural symbol of artistic celebration and success within the Nazi party. There are, however, a few ways in which the subject matter and style of Klimt's work aligned with Nazi ideals even though Klimt, having

died in 1918, was not in support of furthering Nazi ideals through his artwork. Klimt did not create work with the purpose of it fitting within the highly persecutory bounds of the Nazi party. Instead his work was re-appropriated in such ways that any traces of “degeneracy” were erased from it. Any trace of “degeneracy,” that was later erased from his work, was often associated with Jewish patronage. These pieces, like the *Woman in Gold*, were painted of Jewish individuals, paid for by Jewish individuals, for the homes of Jewish individuals. The process of patron persecution through the avenue of Nazi erasure within Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*, and other works is largely a result of erasure processes that occurred during the 1943 Klimt Retrospective.

Nearly one third of the paintings included in the 1943 Klimt Retrospective were taken from Jewish families. All of the Klimt pieces that were taken from the Bloch-Bauer family (five pieces in total) were included in the 1943 Klimt Retrospective.⁷² There was no mention of the Jewish Bloch-Bauer patronage that supported Klimt’s work in the 1943 Klimt Retrospective. The erasure of truthful historical representation of the magnitude of Jewish patronage in relation to Klimt’s work is indicative of the widespread persecution of Jewish “degenerate” patrons during the Nazi regime. This erasure and persecution can be clearly exemplified by the alteration of several titles of works painted by Gustav Klimt. As many of Klimt’s pieces were created for Jewish patrons, many were titled with the names of said Jewish patrons.⁷³ The most prominent example of the Nazi led erasure of Jewish involvement in the creation of art is Gustav Klimt’s *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, which was renamed and displayed as *Portrait of a Woman with Gold Background* for the 1943 Klimt Retrospective.⁷⁴

⁷² Morowitz, Laura. “‘Heil the Hero Klimt!’: Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective.” *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 122.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment during which Klimt was, for lack of a better word, exonerated from the possibility of persecution. Perhaps Klimt's evasion of persecution as an artist began with the (likely unintentional) alignment of formal qualities within Klimt's work with artistic qualities that were commonly triumphed by the Nazi party. This is not at all to say that the formal qualities of Klimt's work prevented him from facing persecution, but rather that it is important to highlight the capricious and inconsistent Nazi rationale that may have excused the Jewish dimension of Klimt's work. Some of Klimt's work displayed an aesthetic of ancient Greece similar to Greek aesthetics championed by Nazi's. For example, Klimt's cold and golden *Pallas Athena* is similar to the metallic and Greek artistic ideals supported within the Nazi regime.⁷⁵ Beyond this cloudy similarity between the presence of a Greek aesthetic within some of Klimt's work, and work deemed as acceptable to the Nazi party, it is difficult to understand how Klimt's work fit within Nazi acceptability at all. Klimt, as an experimental avant-garde artist, inspired the work of artists who were deemed "degenerate" by the Nazi party (such as those by Oscar Kokoschka). Klimt's work displayed thematic evidence of his artistic desire to seek truth, innovate, and defy artistic rules.⁷⁶ Klimt's artistic displays of erotic female sexuality also defied expressions of ideal womanhood that were perpetuated by the Nazis⁷⁷.

It is important to discuss the formal and thematic qualities of Klimt's work that appealed to the Nazi party. The thematic qualities in Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze (1902)* and *Pallas Athena (1898)* best exemplify the Nazi appeal to Klimt's work.⁷⁸ *Beethoven Frieze* was inspired by Richard Wagner's interpretation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

⁷⁵ Morowitz, Laura. "'Heil the Hero Klimt!': Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective." *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 120-22.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Morowitz, Laura. "'Heil the Hero Klimt!': Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective." *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 118-19.

was a coveted work by Alfred Rosenberg, who frequently played this piece of music at Nazi events.⁷⁹ While *Beethoven's Frieze* represents some thematic appeal to the Nazi party, *Pallas Athena* represents both a formal and thematic appeal to the Nazi party. *Pallas Athena* depicts a cold, archaic and pagan aesthetic. Athena's figure is formed with pale skin and gold armor. Athena's rigid eyes, stiff posture, pale skin, and gold apparel give her figure a statuesque appearance, similar to Greek aesthetics coveted by the Nazis. In 1937, on the Day of German Art, a parade took place to commemorate and celebrate the Great German Art Exhibitions.⁸⁰ At this parade, a float of Athena was carried throughout the streets of Munich.⁸¹

This is not to say that all of Klimt's work held some version of thematic or formal appeal within Nazi ideals. On the contrary, Klimt's work often depicted Jewish subjects, pieces with Jewish patrons, experimental modern artwork, and female sexuality by painting masturbating girls- all of which were vehemently opposed by the Nazi party.⁸² A thematic and visual cleansing of Klimt's artwork took place in order to make Klimt's work fit in the confines of a Nazi paradigm. Klimt's work did not always fit Nazi ideals, rather it was re-appropriated to such an extent that it left behind any trace of "degeneracy" and turned into a symbol of Nazi control. A discussion of Klimt and his works "escape" of persecution is essential within an understanding of the ways in which Nazis persecuted patrons of artwork. The 1943 Klimt Retrospective creates an essential understanding of the systematic exoneration of Klimt from a trajectory of "degeneracy", often facilitated through the erasure of Jewish patrons.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hagen, Joshua. "Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography." *Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on Behalf of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography*, *Parades, Public Space, and Propaganda: The Nazi Culture Parades in Munich*, 90, no. 4 (2008): 349.

⁸¹ Morowitz, Laura. "'Heil the Hero Klimt!': Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective." *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 118-22.

⁸² Ibid.

The 1943 Klimt Retrospective took place at the Österreichische National Galerie (Belvedere) from February 7th to March 7th.⁸³ This exhibit, organized by Der Reichstatthalter in Wien, displayed seventy-six paintings and one hundred Klimt drawings.⁸⁴ The retrospective was visited by 24,000 people.⁸⁵ Bruno Grimschitz, who was responsible for the Belvedere's acquisition of *Woman in Gold*, was invited by Walter Thomas to help curate the exhibition.⁸⁶ Notable works included in this exhibition are *Woman in Gold*, *Pallas Athena*, and studies for the *Beethoven Frieze*. The exhibition was hung in four gallery rooms, where each room had white walls with minimal labeling.⁸⁷ One third of the paintings included in the retrospective had been looted from Jewish families.⁸⁸ This posed a curatorial task in which all works were to be separated from their Jewish pasts, creating an erasure of Jewish subject matter and patronage. This was done largely through a curatorial effort of relabeling. Pieces with titles that referenced their Jewish origins, were completely changed. For example, *The Portrait of Margaret Stonborough Wittgenstein (a Jew)* became *Damenbildnis in Weiss (Portrait of a lady in white)*. *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*'s title was changed to *Damenbildnis vor Goldgrund (Portrait of a Woman with Gold Background)*.⁸⁹

In addition to the relabeling and Jewish erasure through curatorial decisions, two texts released in tandem with the 1943 Klimt Retrospective participated in the recontextualization of Klimt's work. These texts included the exhibition catalogue, and a monogram titled *Gustav Klimt: Ein Künstler aus Wien* by Emil Pirchan published in 1942 (Figure 8).⁹⁰ Both texts posed Klimt as a

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Morowitz, Laura. "“Heil the Hero Klimt!”: Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective." *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 122-23.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

model artist, recontextualizing Klimt for a Nazi palette. The catalogue included an essay by Fritz Novotny.⁹¹ This essay outlined Klimt's idealistic and painterly ability to convey reality.⁹² Novotny writes of Klimt's ability to assign form to ideas, pairing Klimt to Nazi art ideology published in *Kunst dem Volk*, conveying that true German artists portray the spiritual through nature.⁹³ In this way, an emphasis was created upon Klimt's work that assigned it the nature centric artistic qualities outlined by Nazis in *Kunst dem Volk*. *Kunst dem Volk* conveyed the artistic preferences of Hitler, displaying the work of Rubens, Albert Speer, and Rembrandt.⁹⁴

Even more so than the catalogue, the monogram, *Gustav Klimt: Ein Künstler aus Wien* by Emil Pirchan recontextualizes Klimt's work to fit within Nazi art policy. Pirchan proposes an erasure of Klimt's categorization in the fin de siècle and a recategorization of Klimt's work as a hero of National Socialism.⁹⁵ Pirchan does this by introducing each chapter with a quote from a German philosopher, poet, or artist (including Friedrich Schiller and Max Klinger).⁹⁶ In doing so, Pirchan links Klimt to a history of German and Nazi acceptable artistry. Pirchan also includes information indicating that Klimt's ability to draw with ornamental line could only be found within the work of true German artists.⁹⁷ Pirchan further recontextualizes and addresses the bold sexuality displayed within Klimt's art by describing nudity as the way that Klimt reveals the subject's soul to the viewer, and the sexual content of Klimt's art as a mere lust for life.⁹⁸

Though never explicitly stated by the organizers of the 1943 Klimt Retrospective, the propagandistic intentions of the exhibit are clear. Through efforts to recontextualize, remove

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Morowitz, Laura. "“Heil the Hero Klimt!”: Nazi Aesthetics in Vienna and the 1943 Gustav Klimt Retrospective." *Oxford University Press* 39, no. 1 (2016): 123-24.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

from Jewish patronage, and associate with Nazi art policy through exhibition, relabeling, catalogue and monogram, the retrospective attempts to act as a trojan horse of Nazi appeal to the Austrian people. Gustav Klimt, perhaps the artist most associated with Austrian identity, was recontextualized to fit within the confines of Nazi art policy. In doing so, Nazis attempted to appeal a Nazi ideal to an Austrian identity through the medium of an Austrian art hero.

Three avenues of persecution are formed within Nazi systems of art confiscation. The patron, the artist, and the artwork are all subject to the possibility of Nazi persecution within the label of “degenerate”. Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold* is unique among many “degenerate” works of art in that only the patron was persecuted. As Klimt was dead long before his artwork was looted from the Bloch-Bauer’s, it is impossible to determine with certainty that had he been alive, he would have escaped persecution. For this reason, Klimt (as the artist) is deemed to have escaped persecution only because his artwork escaped persecution. Klimt’s artwork immortalized his essence as an artist to reveal a hypothetical legacy in which Klimt, as an avant-garde artist, evaded persecution. Perhaps if Klimt had lived to continue making avant-garde artwork during the Nazi Regime, he would have been labeled as “degenerate” after all.

One can only speculate whether or not Klimt’s death affected the ability of Nazis to re-appropriate Klimt’s work. It is with certainty that one can say that the persecution of the patron allowed for the Nazi re-appropriation of Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*. This is because the patrons of the work were so prominently Jewish and were displayed at the forefront of Klimt’s subject matter and labeling. This form of persecution through looting placed upon Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer and his family was not uncommon. Ferdinand Bloch Bauer’s persecution began before the Nazi seizure of his belongings and artwork (as he was forced to flee Vienna); however, it was heightened through this seizure. Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer was the first of the Bloch Bauer family

to flee Vienna. On March 15, 1938, Bloch-Bauer fled Austria, only three days after the Anschluss took place, politically unifying Austria and Germany.⁹⁹ During this time, Bloch-Bauer was in his seventies, first fleeing to Czechoslovakia, and later to Paris and Switzerland.¹⁰⁰ This Nazi purge of his belongings acted as a form of cultural purge and dehumanization that eradicated Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer from the future possibility of having a home and cultural tie to Austria. Ferdinand fled Austria because of his status as a prominent Jew, however the persecution of Bloch-Bauer continued through the Nazi confiscation, misuse, and re-appropriation of his artwork.

The Nazi process through which Bloch-Bauer's artwork was taken began with a seizure of property followed by accusations of tax evasion and was further punctuated with the Nazi seizure and distribution of Bloch-Bauer's belongings (*Woman in Gold* among these). In April, after Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer had fled Austria, Bloch-Bauer was charged with tax evasion, and expected to pay the Financial Office of Vienna 700,000 Reichsmarks (RM).¹⁰¹ This financial debt was later increased to 1.4 million RM.¹⁰² In May, a permit of property seizure was issued, and the "legal" confiscation of Bloch-Bauer's belongings began. As Bloch-Bauer had fled Austria, he was forced to rely upon appointed Nazi attorney, Dr. Erich Führer, who was tasked with the responsibility of liquidating Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's belongings.¹⁰³

Dr. Erich Führer is an interesting character within discussions of the Bloch-Bauer fortune. Führer, a Nazi attorney, notified Bloch-Bauer as the auctioning, selling, and redistribution of Bloch-Bauer's artwork began.¹⁰⁴ Führer posed as a helpful advisor, informing

⁹⁹ Furman, Ariel. "Saving Adele: A History of the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I." *Quest*, 5, 3 (2019): 6-8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Bloch-Bauer about the selling prices of his artwork. As Bloch-Bauer began to realize the unethical treatment that his artwork was receiving, he wrote to Führer saying “I fail to understand and can hardly believe the way things are proceeding. I divested you of any power to represent me or act on my behalf on February 8 of this year. What, then, gives you the right to sell my pictures?”¹⁰⁵ Bloch-Bauer continues in his letter to Führer by outlining the true value of his artwork, criticizing the low prices that they were being sold for.¹⁰⁶ Bloch-Bauer also criticized Führer for failing to accurately communicate the state of his belongings, and falsifying information about sale prices.¹⁰⁷ It was within this chaos of falsified information and unethical art looting under the guidance of Führer that Klimt’s *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* switched ownership from Führer to Bruno Grimschitz, the director of the Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere.¹⁰⁸ Führer traded *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* to Grimschitz in return for Klimt’s *Schloss Kammer am Attersee III*, a painting that had been previously donated to the Belvedere by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer. This exchange was further complicated by the surprising involvement of Gustav Klimt’s illegitimate son, Gustav Ucicky.¹⁰⁹

Gustav Ucicky was a cinematographer and film director, and in 1933 was appointed the position of director at the national film institute.¹¹⁰ During this time, Joseph Goebbels controlled the national film institute.¹¹¹ Ucicky became a pioneer in the creation and distribution of Nazi propaganda film, making Nazi propagandistic films such as *Refugees*, which depicted “menacing dark-skinned Slavs eager to ravish blonde German women”.¹¹² Returning to Vienna, Ucicky

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Furman, Ariel. “Saving Adele: A History of the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I.” *Quest*, 5, 3 (2019): 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ O’Connor, Anne Marie. In *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt’s Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, Illustrated, Reprint., 150. Knopf, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

began to mingle with Hitler and Goebbels.¹¹³ As Ucicky accumulated wealth from the making of his Nazi propagandistic films, he began to search for the artwork of his father. Ucicky began his collection of Klimt's work with the acquisition of a Klimt painting from the Dorotheum, an auction house that was used as a "clearinghouse" for artwork stolen from Jewish families.¹¹⁴

Ucicky contacted Erich Führer, who held power over Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's estate and struck a deal. Ucicky wanted ownership of *Schloss Kammer am Attersee*, a Klimt piece that had previously been donated to the Belvedere by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer. Führer contacted Grimschitz and facilitated a deal between Grimschitz, Ucicky and himself on September 30, 1941.¹¹⁵ This deal proposed that Führer would buy *Schloss Kammer am Attersee* from Grimschitz.¹¹⁶ In return, Grimschitz would receive Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (soon to be changed to *Woman in Gold*).¹¹⁷ Though it is never explicitly stated, Klimt's son's deep involvement with Nazi art dealing may have created a precedence in which Gustav Klimt's work was associated through a Klimt heir with the Nazi party. These were the circumstances through which the piece began to circulate within Nazi ownership, and eventually, in 1943 became a displayed and heroized piece within the Klimt Retrospective at the Belvedere.

It is important to note that the forms of persecution that Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer endured were not unique to him or his family. These processes of property and artwork confiscation were commonly practiced by the Nazi party. Systems were created in which individuals were dehumanized to an extent that capricious Nazi law allowed for legal persecution and seizure of property. The uniqueness in this case does not come from the Nazi seizure of Bloch-Bauer's

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ O'Connor, Anne Marie. In *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, Illustrated, Reprint., 151. Knopf, 2015.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Furman, Ariel. "Saving Adele: A History of the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I." *Quest*, 5, 3 (2019): 9.

artwork (*Woman in Gold*), but rather that this piece of artwork which was taken within the context of “degeneracy” (persecution of the patron), escaped “degeneracy”, and was culturally championed by the Nazi party. Nazi seized artwork typically fell within the categories of destruction, auctions, or private Nazi ownership.

When restitution of *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* came into question, the Belvedere’s argument was based largely upon a supposed will left by Adele Bloch-Bauer. The circumstances in which *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* came to be in the Belvedere are essential in understanding the continuous persecution that the original patrons and owners of the piece faced. The work did not arrive at the Belvedere within the context of a (contested) will, but within a context of Nazi looting and secretive trading. For this reason, the Nazi seizure of Bloch-Bauer’s artwork marks a poignant point of cultural eradication and re-appropriation, a symbolic disappearance of hope for Bloch-Bauer during which a sense of having something to return to was no longer possible.

The case of Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold* is riddled with irony. The work was originally created as a portrait of a Jewish woman, paid for by the money of a Jewish patron. The piece was looted from the Bloch-Bauer home by Nazis and exchanged from Führer to the Belvedere within the context of a deal constructed by Klimt’s Nazi son. Gustav Klimt escaped the title of “degenerate” artist, and his work escaped the title of “degenerate” art, all while his work was looted by Nazi’s within contexts of persecution facilitated by the “degenerate” label. The *Woman in Gold* was first owned by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, followed by Dr. Erich Führer. In 1941 the work was sold and taken to the Belvedere where it stayed until 2006 when the Republic of Austria returned the work to its rightful owner and descendant of Ferdinand Bloch-

Bauer, Maria Altmann. Maria Altmann sold the piece to Ronald Lauder for \$135 million in 2006.¹¹⁸ Now, *Woman in Gold* is located at the Neue Galerie in New York City (Figure 9).

¹¹⁸ Neue, Galerie. "Adele Bloch-Bauer I | Neue Galerie NY." Neue Galerie New York, n.d. <https://www.neuegalerie.org/content/adele-bloch-bauer-i>.

CONCLUSION

Themes of patronage, persecution, “degeneracy” and irony resonate throughout the cases of Van Gogh’s *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* and Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold*. In *To My Friend Paul Gauguin*, the patron is persecuted through the form of Nazi looting and auctioning, facilitated through the ostracization and othering that occurs by being labeled “degenerate”. Central to the theme of these case studies is the argument that patronage and the great monetary value of both works contributed to the Nazi party’s using the label of “degeneracy” to turn these works of art into objects of financial advancement. This occurred through a process of looting, selling and persecution legitimated by the systematic labeling of artworks as “degenerate” during WWII. How ironic it must be that works declared as degenerate and therefore illegitimate and dangerous are also praised as celebrated objects of fine art sold to the highest bidder to finance the Nazi war effort.

The label of “degeneracy” proclaimed a level of dehumanization and othering that allowed (within Nazi policy) a form of persecution that would not have otherwise been possible. Irony permeates the case of Van Gogh’s *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* when Wertheim, a Jew, purchases *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* from a Nazi held auction. It is ironic that Wertheim’s purchase highlights an overarching pattern of Nazi persecuting Jewish patrons by looting their works and then auctioning them to the very Jewish people they declared “degenerate”. “Acceptable” Nazi art is founded upon a (non-Jewish) nationalistic, German oriented ideal of a lost golden age of art, a standard to which all other art should strive to return to.¹¹⁹ The subject matter of art that was deemed acceptable within Nazi art policy was limited to that of certain types of landscape paintings, representations of everyday life, still life’s,

¹¹⁹ Lippman, Matthew. “Art and Ideology in the Third Reich: The Protection of Cultural Property and the Humanitarian Law of War.” *Dickinson Journal of International Law* 17, no. 1 (1998): 7.

and portraits of animals.¹²⁰ Furthermore, depictions of the human form were limited to those of classical styles of representation that exemplified the Aryan race, meaning that they represented from the Nazi perspective superiority within categories of race, beauty, and strength.¹²¹

In the case of Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*, the irony lies with the persecution of the Jewish patron and subject depicted in the picture as being "degenerate" while in a different context the work is celebrated by the Nazi's as a great work of art. *Woman in Gold* was looted and confiscated from Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's estate by Erich Führer, a Nazi attorney appointed to liquidate the Bloch-Bauer art collection. Führer facilitated an exchange in which Bruno Grimschitz, the director of the Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere, would sell Gustav Ucicky (the Nazi son of Gustav Klimt) a Klimt painting from the Belvedere in return for the *Woman in Gold* from the Bloch-Bauer estate. The irony of this transaction lies in this avant-garde modern painting's escape from being declared "degenerate." The Nazis facilitated a deal, prompted by the involvement of Gustav Klimt's Nazi son, that allowed the Belvedere to obtain ownership of the *Woman in Gold* and make it one of the most celebrated works in this collection.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Reich Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda and Reich Chamber of Culture, asserted that he had power over "all influences on the intellectual life of the nation" and authorization to regulate the arts.¹²² Under the authority of Goebbels, art was categorized into seven chambers.¹²³ Within the Chamber for Visual Arts, subcategories of "architecture, auctioneering, craft associations, interior and graphic design, painting, art

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Lippman, Matthew. "Art and Ideology in the Third Reich: The Protection of Cultural Property and the Humanitarian Law of War." *Dickinson Journal of International Law* 17, no. 1 (1998): 8-9.

¹²³ Ibid.

publishing, design, sales, and sculpture” were created.¹²⁴ The Chamber for Visual Arts excluded all artwork made by Jews, individuals in political opposition of the Nazi party, and other non-Aryan individuals.¹²⁵ Under the direction of Goebbels, 1,657 Jews were expelled from the Visual Arts Chamber.¹²⁶ On November 15, 1933 Goebbels announced that the Visual Arts Chamber was completely devoid of Jews.¹²⁷ Within this hyper structured categorization of acceptable art the term “degenerate art” was often applied to expressionist, avant-garde artwork. Modern avant-garde artwork often experimented with forms of representation that did not fit within categories of the Nazi ideal. The term “degeneracy” facilitated a dehumanization and othering upon which individuals were reduced to a sub-human level of inferiority. “Degeneracy” facilitated an arena in which persecution could occur within an allegedly moral state, if that said persecution fell upon the sub-human “degenerate.”

It is important to note that while these polarizing ways of categorizing art were ever present during WWII, they were not the only determinations employed to persecute patrons or artworks. Even within cases in which artwork was confiscated in the name of “degeneracy” such as *To My Friend Paul Gauguin*, the “degenerate” label does not necessarily define the fate of the piece. Rather than acting as a singular determinant of the fate and persecution of a work of art, the label of “degeneracy” instead enables the Nazis to operate within the bounds of Nazi policy while also satisfying motives for personal gain. For this reason, “degeneracy” is a term systematically, but inconsistently applied depending on

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

the personal, cultural, and financial gain possible for the Nazi party. It was also used to advance personal financial gain rather than ideological purity.

Despite the seemingly clear standards by which the Nazi persecution of patrons, artists, and artwork operated, the application of these standards was sometimes inconsistent, contradictory, and confusing. Monetary and personal advancement created secretive inconsistencies in who was persecuted and how propaganda often pitted the Nazi ideal against the other (“degenerate”). *To my Friend Paul Gauguin*, and *Woman in Gold* were both looted by Nazis under the authority of “degeneracy”. *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* was taken because it was considered a “degenerate” work, while *Woman in Gold* was taken because its owner was considered “degenerate”. In both cases of “degeneracy”, Nazis financially profited from the works. This created an ironic contradiction in which work was stolen in the name of “degenerate” art policy, when in reality Nazis were most interested in financially profiting.

The case studies of Van Gogh’s *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* and Gustav Klimt’s *Woman in Gold* both exemplify the complexities of hypocrisy and irony in conversations about “degeneracy” and Nazi inconsistent persecution of patrons and works of art. This irony, inconsistency, and hypocrisy in who was persecuted can also be illustrated in the work of Emil Nolde, a German Nazi artist. Emil Nolde was an avant-garde artist who was a member of the Nazi party. Nolde was a German Expressionist artist and member of the Die Brücke group. Emil Nolde’s simultaneous involvement with the Nazi party and persecution by the Nazi party exemplifies the unpredictability and hypocrisy of the Nazi party. Despite Nolde’s clear involvement with Expressionism, a movement openly deemed “degenerate” by Nazi art policy,

one might assume that Nolde's involvement with the Nazi party would absolve him from artistic persecution. This assumption might be further supported when comparing Emil Nolde and his sympathies towards the Nazi party with Jewish and other such "degenerate" artists who were subject to Nazi persecution. But this was not so. Nolde's work was displayed in the Entartete Kunst exhibition and Nolde was banned from painting by the Nazi regime (Figure 3).¹²⁸ Furthermore, upwards of one thousand works by Nolde were confiscated by the Nazi party.¹²⁹ The irony and ambiguity of Nazi persecution by the standards of "degeneracy" was far reaching in that it also included Arian members of the Nazi Party.

Vincent Van Gogh's *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* currently resides in the Fogg Art Museum, where it has been since 1951, when Maurice Wertheim bequeathed the piece (Figure 10).¹³⁰ Prior to this, the piece belonged to Paul Gauguin, who sold the painting to Ambroise Vollard.¹³¹ The painting was exchanged to Dr. Hugo von Tschudi, Angela von Tschudi, and finally the Neue Staatsgalerie where it was looted by Nazi authorities, then sold by Theodor Fischer to Maurice Wertheim (a Jew).¹³² Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold* currently resides at the Neue Galerie in New York, where it has been since 2006 when it was restituted by the Republic of Austria and reclaimed by Maria Altmann.¹³³ Prior to this, *Woman in Gold* hung on the walls of the Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere after it had been looted from Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer and bought in a deal facilitated by Erich Führer between Gustav Ucicky, and Bruno Grimschitz.

¹²⁸ Guggenheim. "Emil Nolde," 2013. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/emil-nolde>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Harvard. "From the Harvard Art Museums' Collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin." From the Harvard Art Museums' collections Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, July 17, 2013. <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/299843>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Neue, Galerie. "Adele Bloch-Bauer I | Neue Galerie NY." Neue Galerie New York, n.d. <https://www.neuegalerie.org/content/adele-bloch-bauer-i>.

A parallel of Vincent van Gogh's *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* and Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*'s patronage and persecution provides insight into the irony created by hypocrisy and the situational contradictions of Nazi art looting. It is ironic that the "degenerate" work *To My Friend Paul Gauguin* was purchased at the Fischer Auction by Maurice Wertheim, a leading American Jewish philanthropist. It is also ironic that *Woman in Gold*, created by a leading avant-garde artist who mentored other avant-garde Expressionist artists, was not declared "degenerate" and became a celebrated work in the Reich. The crown jewel of irony in the case of *Woman in Gold* is the involvement of Gustav Klimt's Nazi son, Gustav Ucicky in facilitating the Belvedere's acquisition of the painting. Within all of this, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, the patron of the work and Adele Bloch-Bauer, the subject of the work were erased from history by the Nazi who relabeled the work and cleansed any degenerate Jewish qualities from its existence. *To my Friend Paul Gauguin* and *Woman in Gold* are two leading examples of how the Nazis used the term "degenerate" to systematically loot and profit from artwork. Within these examples, inconsistency in applying the term "degenerate" in persecuting patrons, artists, and artworks highlights the ironic and hypocritical way the Nazis used the ideology of "degeneracy" for purposes of financial gain.



Figure 1.

To my friend Paul Gauguin

Vincent van Gogh

1888

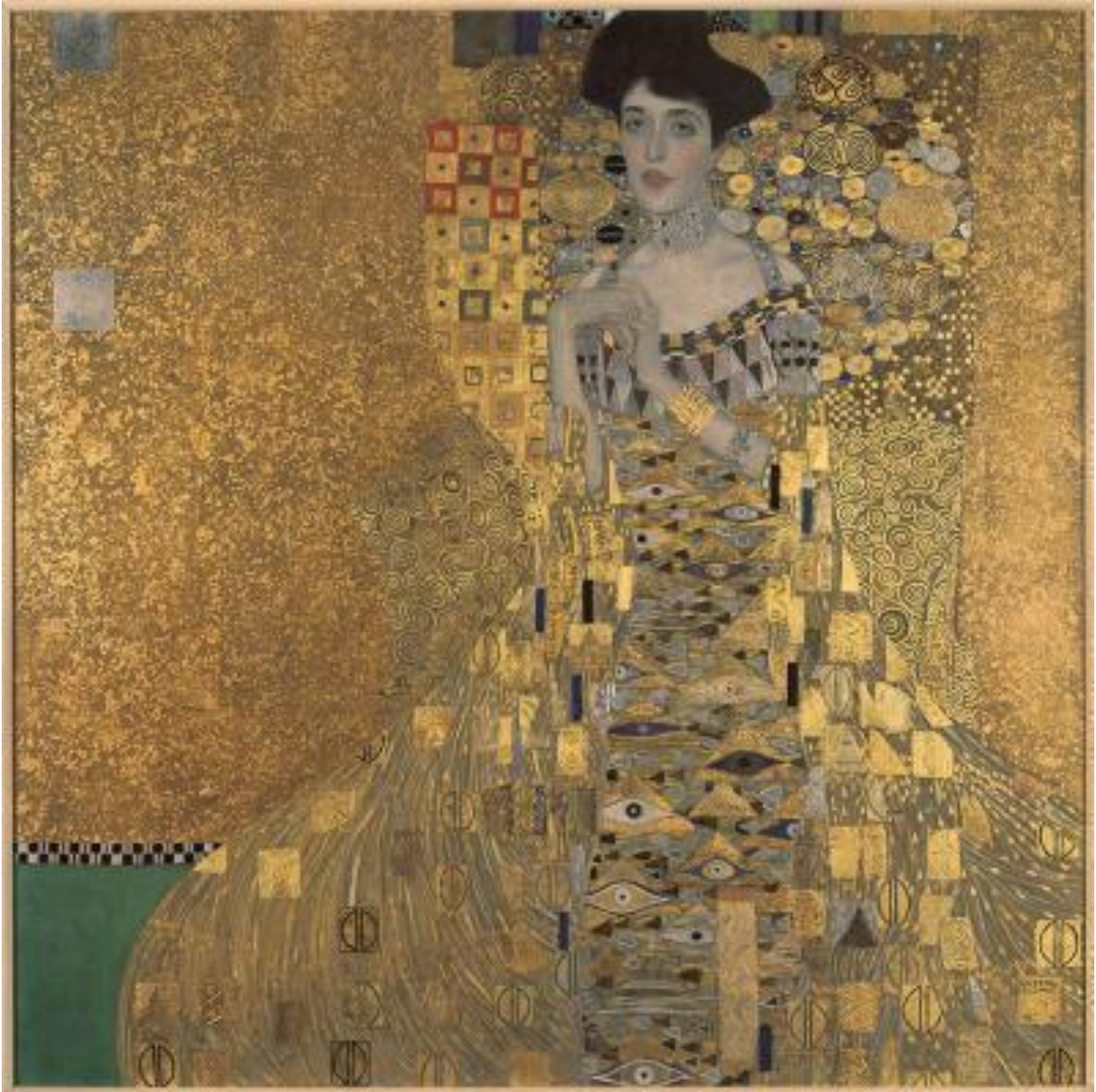


Figure 2.

Portrait of Adele Block-Bauer I (Woman in Gold)

Gustav Klimt

1907



Figure 3.

Entartete Kunst Exhibition 1937

Pictured: Emil Nolde, *Crucifixion*, 1912



Figure 4.

Theodor Fischer at Grand Hotel Auction

Georges Braque, *Stilleben* 1924

1939

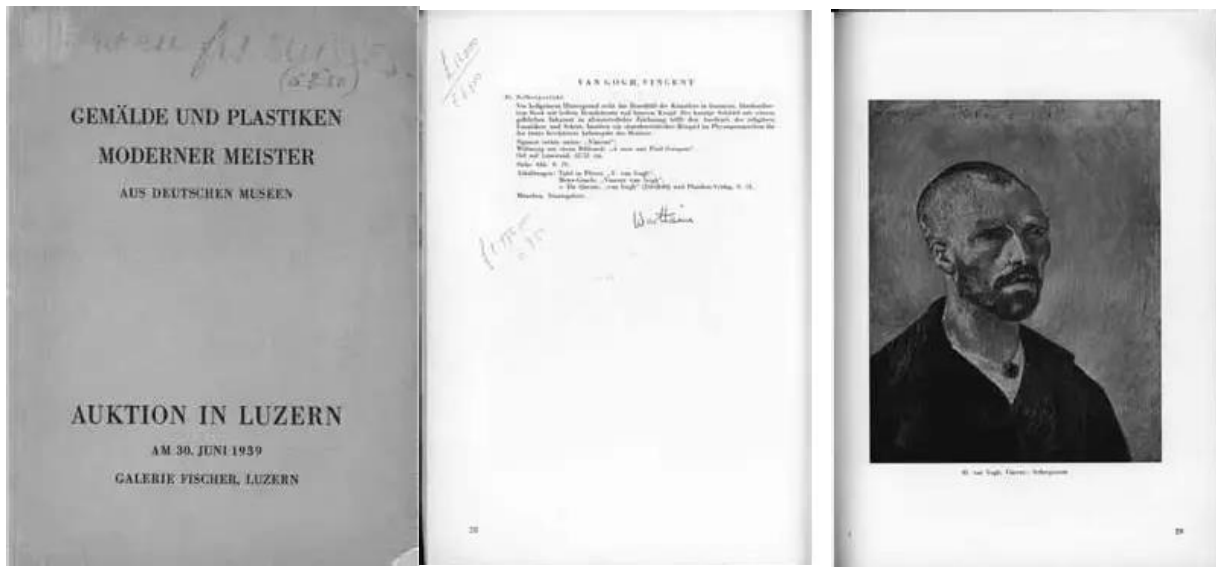


Figure 5.

Excerpt from Grand Hotel Auction Catalogue

1939



Figure 6.
Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer



Figure 7.
Adele Bloch-Bauer

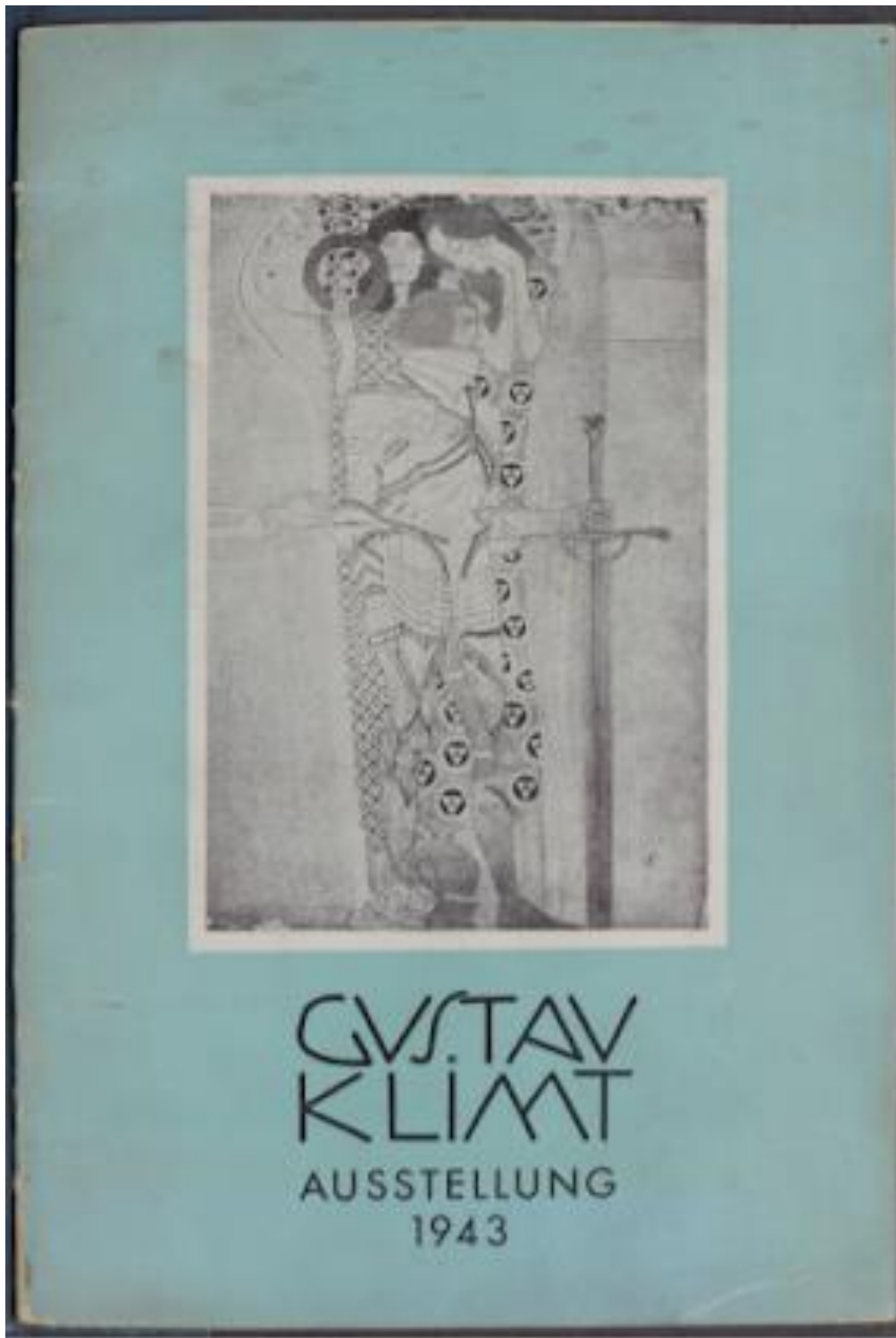


Figure 8.

Cover of 1943 Klimt Retrospective Catalogue



Figure 9.

Announcement of Neue Galerie acquisition of *Woman in Gold*

(Right) Maria Altmann

2006

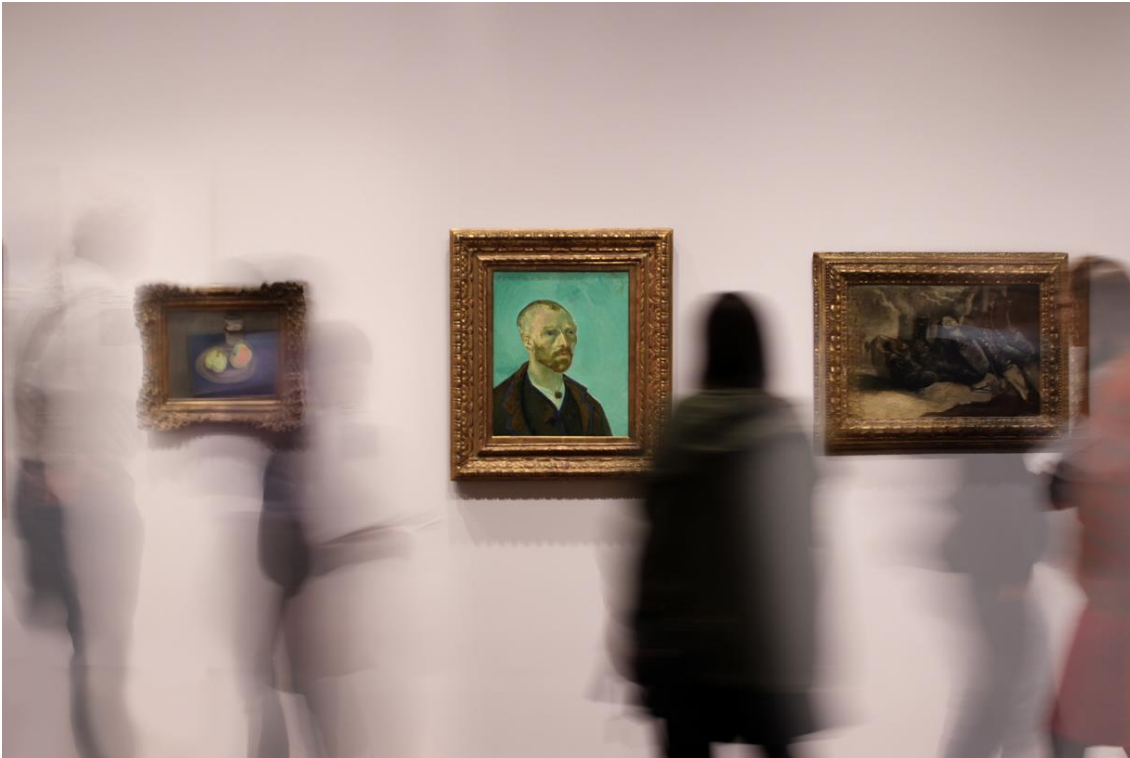


Figure 10.

To my Friend Paul Gauguin hanging in the Harvard Fogg Museum

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