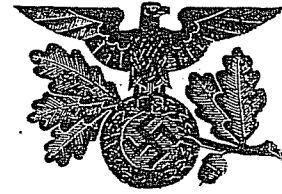


*Gesch. Weltkrieg*  
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# THE LINZ FILE

## Hitler's Plunder of Europe's Art

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The round-up of works of art confiscated from private collections in Vienna paid off handsomely for the Nazis. Out of 269 valuable paintings, 122 were earmarked for the Führer's consideration. Göring meanwhile managed to acquire for his own horde two important paintings from the famous collection of the Polish Count Lanckoronski. When Hitler heard about this he reprimanded the Reichsmarschall and demanded the return of the pictures. But Göring never did return them and, undaunted, was now pursuing a painting from the Academy of Fine Arts Museum. For some time the authorities at the Academy hedged. When Göring became more insistent they told him courteously that the official responsible for this particular picture was away on business in Berlin; the matter would have to wait. This time Austrian officialdom was able to defeat the Nazi art vulture, for he was anxious to keep the matter quiet. Perhaps he forgot about the painting; anyway it never left the Academy.

To forestall any further private negotiations of this kind, Hitler issued an order that all Austrian art treasures must remain in the Ostmark (as Austria was renamed by Hitler). It was permitted, however, to buy works of art outright. One picture that Hitler himself was very anxious to acquire was a Vermeer, *The Artist in His Studio*, owned by Count Czernin, who was most reluctant to sell it. It could not be regarded as the property of an enemy of the State, as the Nazis termed it, for the Czernins were Aryan and old-established Austrian aristocrats. However, it appears that pressure was brought to bear on Count Czernin, and for the sum of 1,600,000 Reichsmarks the picture changed hands.

Austria was annexed in March 1938, and already, by the middle of August of that year, Himmler was able to make a detailed list of the private confiscations: 163 of them, worth 93 billion Reichsmarks, the property of the Habsburg family, the Patriotic Front, and the State police. The works of art listed in the so-called Vienna Album were mostly from the Rothschild collection, the balance coming from smaller collections such as Max Reinhardt's.\* In the reports these are not regarded as sequestered

\* Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), the Austrian actor and stage director, had an important influence in world theatre, founding the world-famous Salzburg Festival in 1920. He left Germany in 1933 when Hitler came to power and went to the United States, where he remained and directed films. He died in the States.

but merely 'secured'. It should be noted that Hitler's art emissaries always 'secured' the art treasures first, and then made further demands which invariably resulted in a decree confiscating the lot, thus lending a kind of legal status to the operation. But on the whole Austria's art treasures were saved from further spoliation partly by Hitler's decree that they should not be taken out of the country, and partly by the actual outbreak of war.

By 1939 war was becoming more and more imminent, and in June of that year the museum authorities in Vienna, having received information that museum staff in Poland were storing their art treasures in safe hiding-places, decided to take their own precautions. They had the most valuable items transported to safe places in the country, keeping the less valuable ones in their own depositories and leaving the least valuable of all on display. Monastery buildings at Melk and Gaming were made available and works of art from the Albertina Museum were sent there. The imperial crown of Austria, the historic collection of coins, and all the jewels from the Hofburg were deposited in the requisitioned Rothschild castle at Stambach. All these precautions were taken in the full knowledge of the Führer.

With the Allied advance and the progressive defeat of the German armies all these treasures were removed to the salt-mines at Laufen, near Salzburg. Stored there too was the entire collection of Vienna's Prince Liechtenstein Gallery. A central heating system was installed in the mine, to prevent the paintings being spoiled by damp. The crown of Charlemagne, which had been housed in the Imperial Treasury, had a different fate, however – or so I was told. Hitler insisted that its rightful place was in Nuremberg in Bavaria, whence it had been taken to Vienna in 1800 for safe keeping. Therefore – despite Austrian protests – it was now removed and lodged at Nuremberg, together with the coronation cloak and regalia.

honorary title conferred by the Führer, equivalent to Federal Councillor) Roderick Fick, a great admirer of his and a former boat-builder turned architect. Fick was to design and build the great Linz art centre. Hitler was pleased by the plans Fick had based on Hitler's sketches; but apparently Fick was a rather conceited man who could not get on with his colleagues. Eventually Hitler realized he was not capable of carrying out the work, and he was relegated to building blocks of flats on the outskirts of Linz. Professor Hermann Giesler was then appointed. He was already in charge of rebuilding in Munich, including the Nazi headquarters and the adjoining mausoleum for Hitler.

Throughout the war Hitler frequented Giesler's Munich studio, where a large-scale model of the new Linz project was being constructed. He would discuss new ideas with Giesler and suggest possible improvements. It was not until February 1945 that the model was completed and installed by Giesler in an underground room of the Reichskanzlei in Berlin, adjoining Hitler's military headquarters in the bunker. Daily Hitler would brood over this model of Linz. A specially designed lighting system enabled him to manipulate spotlights to create the effects of sunshine at different times of the day and year so that he could see where the shadows fell. Often after discussing the latest military situation with his generals he would usher them in to look at the model and tell them of his grandiose plans for the town. When Kaltenbrunner found himself listening to all this even while the Russian shells were pounding the devastated city, he felt he was in the company of a madman obsessed with his model toy. To the end, as the Third Reich collapsed around him, Hitler would spend time every day poring over the model.

I discovered photographs of the model in the archives of the Linz Landesmuseum in 1965, but I could not ascertain what had become of the actual model. Only recently I learnt through correspondence with Professor Giesler, now retired and living in Germany, that it had been removed from the Berlin bunker in March 1945 and taken to a depository in Bavaria. There it must have been destroyed in the aftermath of the war. The only part of the model to be realized in actual construction was the bridge which is still standing.

I found out what the Linz Museum would have contained from a small pamphlet shown to me by Dr Kugler, superintendent of

the library at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. This was published by Heinrich Hoffmann, in honour of Hitler's birthday on 20th April, 1945, and intended for distribution among the armed forces. The frontispiece is a reproduction in colour of the famous Vermeer painting *The Artist in His Studio*, acquired under pressure in 1938 from the Czernin collection in Vienna. The anonymous author of the pamphlet describes the plans for the gallery. It was to contain a limited selection of fine European art, but in particular, thanks to the Führer's purchases, it was to be a centre for Germanic art. What others had taken centuries to create, one man, because of his devotion to the arts and refusal to be daunted, had been creating single-handed. In the 1930s great national treasures were lost by sales abroad, until the Führer put a stop to this shameful traffic. As an example the writer cites Vermeer's *The Artist in His Studio* which was nearly sold to the United States for \$6 million.

The pamphlet lists various paintings to be exhibited in the new Linz gallery. There is a colour reproduction of *The Plague in Florence*, by the Austrian painter Hans Makart, which Mussolini had given to Hitler. I noticed also *The Hay Harvest* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, which had been the property of the princely Lobkowitz family and was looted from their castle, Raudnitz, in Czechoslovakia. It is referred to as 'a new acquisition'. Each of the gallery's rooms was to be decorated and furnished in the style of the period of the paintings, the pamphlet explains. There would be a small gallery just for Makart, and one for Rudolf von Alt together with selected furnishings of his period. The Linz gallery was to become a centre for the art of the past, just as the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, also created by Hitler, was a centre for German contemporary art. The remainder of the pamphlet gives a lyrical description, illustrated with watercolours, of Hitler's birthplace of Braunau, on the Inn River, and the neighbouring village of Lambach where he went to school. It seems doubtful that this tribute to the Führer's contributions to the world of art achieved a wide distribution, appearing as it did just a few weeks before Nazi Germany's capitulation. It must have had Hitler's approval, but who ordered its publication? Was it a last-minute propaganda effort by Goebbels to boost morale in a defeated army? Only the publisher, Hoffmann, could have provided the answer, and he is dead.