Ruby Valadez

Senior Division

Paper

Word Count - 1,701

The Destruction and Rescue of World War II Art
During World War II millions of works of art were stolen and looted from the Jewish, German, and French communities. The art stolen was meant for the Führermuseum, a museum for Hitler's hometown in Austria called Linz. Hitler was determined to have all traditional German art for his fantasy museum. Thousands of artwork were stolen severely damaged or lost forever. The Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I and the Ghent Altarpiece were two of the most famous pieces stolen. This has impacted our movement through art history, as many works of art have been lost or stolen. This was a tragedy, and the triumph would not come for a long time. The effects of Nazi theft and the search for Raubkunst -art looted by the Natzis- are still being undone today.

Unraveling the effects of Nazi art looting is still happening today. “From March 1941 to July 1944, 29 large shipments including 137 freight cars filled with 4,174 crates containing 21,903 art objects of all kinds went to Germany. Altogether, about 100,000 works were looted by the Nazis from Jews in France alone. The total number of works plundered has been estimated at around 650,000 ” (Shoumatoff, Alex. "The Devil and the Art Dealer." Vanity Fair). Many pieces have been believed lost forever or damaged beyond repair. This was true however as more and more art is being recovered people are gaining hope that the priceless art can be restored. In September 2018, “Germany has identified four drawings that Nazis stole from a Jewish home
during the Third Reich. The art belonged to the Deutsch de la Meurthe family, who lived in Paris when Germany invaded and occupied France.” (Little, Becky. "Four Works of Nazi-Looted Art Identified and Returned to Jewish Family.") When people left Germany to get away from the Nazi Party, they often left all their valuables and art to the whim of fate. So when Nazi soldiers were sent out to collect art, they often raided abandoned or occupied houses for art and valuables. Finding more of the missing art could mean that more historic works of art could be recovered and restored to their rightful owners. This would be a major triumph for art collectors and the heirs who thought their families heirloom art had been lost forever.

Just as the Nazi’s burned books to destroy opposition they also burned artwork. Art was burned to destroy one’s faith in the modern times. “Expressionism was particularly singled out. In 1937, German museums were purged of modern art by the government, a total of some 15,550 works being removed” ("Degenerate Art." Tate) Hitler wanted to destroy all modern art and succeeded by ridding all German museums of modern art or expressionism through burning them in secret. Nearly 5,000 works of modern art were destroyed. In 1933, “Sanctions were created to forbid the exhibition and even the creation of any contemporary art not approved by the Nazi Party; such work was labeled, along with the artists who created it, as “degenerate” ("Degenerate Art." Encyclopedia Britannica). This means all modern art became reclassified by the Nazi party as degenerate, and people were forbidden to show or display their art to anyone. People that were creating “degenerate” or modern art were often killed or beaten for their portrayal of art. Many of the artists went unnamed and recognized because of their early deaths and beatings. This was a major tragedy as many now famous artists were considered degenerate and their lives destroyed because of it.
Such famous artists of the time including Michelangelo, George Grosz and Picasso, were considered degenerate and their art destroyed. The destruction of many modern art pieces has impacted the movements in art history. “The attack on “Degenerate art” was a manifestation of Hitler's long obsession with dictating artistic tastes, rooted in his youthful experience as a failed artist in Vienna” (O'Connor, Anne-Marie. *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*). Hitler wanted something to target, so he targeted the Jews and anyone that wasn’t Nordic or Aryan German. This was a sort of revenge for the failed attempt at being an artist. Hitler was a rejected student at the prestigious Vienna Fine Arts Academy in 1907. It was here that Hitler was told that he did not appreciate art enough to become a student. This denial did not stop Hitler from obsessionally craving art.

When Hitler realised that he was losing his war on art he ordered soldiers to start hiding art in salt mines, caves, and places he thought no one would be able to find it. “Hitler's last feverish thoughts were of art” (O'Connor, Anne-Marie. *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*). When the Allies heard that Hitler planned on stealing the Ghent Altarpiece they made a special force dedicated to finding and restoring art to their rightful owners. “The Monuments Men were a group of approximately 345 men and women from fourteen nations who served in the newly created Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section during World War II. Many were accomplished museum directors, curators, art historians, archivists, architects, educators, and artists. They all shared a common goal: to save cultural treasures from the destructiveness of war, and theft by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.” ("The Monuments Men." *Monuments Men Foundation: For the
Preservation of Art) This team was successful in finding and saving countless works of priceless art.

The Monuments Men were not soldiers, although they were trained in combat. They were a group of historians, architects, and many other educated people all with a appreciation of art. The Monuments Men faced conflict when recovering artifacts but were never in the front lines of war. The Monument Men were sent out to Germany, Japan, Austria, and Italy. As a whole they returned near five million stolen works of art. The recovered art was then returned to their rightful families or museums. Later in 1942 they found a hidden cache of art in the Altaussee Salt mine. Hitler had hidden multitudes of priceless art in a salt mine. The art was hidden there for the early part of the War and was eventually found by the Monuments Men. The total worth of all the art was near 3.5 million dollars. The Ghent Altarpiece was among those found in the salt mine. Hitler's last attempt at creating his Fuhrermuseum was lost. The Ghent Altarpiece was one of the most sought after pieces during this time, as it was stolen multiple times. It was eventually returned to Saint Bavo Cathedral in Ghent in 1945 and is still being restored today.

To prevent theft, some major works of art were purposely moved to more secure locations. The Crown Jewels of England were moved to a safer location in a tin dish that was once used to hold cookies. They were said to have been “Packed in the kind of tin that families throughout Britain would have had in their kitchens, probably to make them both innocuous and easy to grab and go in a quick evacuation” (Hendrix, Steve. "As the Nazis Bombed Britain, the Royals Hid the Crown Jewels in the Least Likely Place.") This was the perfect concealment. The Nazis wanted the Crown Jewels for their own purposes. The Royal family supposedly hid the jewels under Windsor Castle, UK while also hiding young Queen Elizabeth inside the castle. The
Royal family has recently released the information in the documentary on the Crown Jewels, and where they were hidden during World War II. BBC News states that the “Details of the mystery, unknown by the Queen, were discovered in letters from Sir Owen Morshead, the royal librarian, to Queen Mary, the mother of George VI”. It was rumoured the King and Queen were so secretive about the whereabouts of the jewels during this time that they didn’t even tell, the young teenage Queen Elizabeth about the hidden location. That shows the determination to keep priceless art, Crown Jewels, Black Prince’s Ruby and many other precious metals away from the Nazis. This was only a small triumph in part of a large tragedy. Sometimes the hiding of priceless art backfired because the owners died and the hidden location died with them.

Although the tragedy is still has made its mark in history, the recovery of lost art is still happening today. On February 28, 2012 a warrant was issued to search the residence of Cornelius Gurlitt. “When the police and customs and tax officials entered Gurlitt’s 1,076-square-foot apartment, they found an astonishing trove of 121 framed and 1,285 unframed artworks, including pieces by Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, Chagall, Max Liebermann, Otto Dix, Franz Marc, Emil Nolde, Oskar Kokoschka, Ernst Kirchner, Delacroix, Daumier, and Courbet. There was a Dürer. A Canaletto. The collection could be worth more than a billion dollars” (Shoumatoff, Alex. "The Devil and the Art Dealer." Vanity Fair). The legalities of this Raubkunst has not been resolved to this day. The ultimate triumph may take years to be fully achieved. Art cannot stay hidden, people will want to find it and enjoy it for themselves. Although Hitler did try to make that vision possible, he went about it the wrong way. Hitler’s fatal mistake was stealing and suppressing art and its movement through history. Art is a special thing that cannot be contained, and people will fight to save their culture and save their view of the world. After
Hitler’s rejection at the Fine Arts Academy Hitler became crazed, “Art was not just an interest for Hitler, it was an obsession” (O’Connor, Anne-Marie. *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt’s Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*). This just proves that Hitler had surpassed liking, or admiring art. He was obsessed and crazed with the desire to have and showcase only traditional German art to the world. This obsession went to far and the people demanded to have their culture, art, and history back. This is a tragedy that has lived for far too long, and is slowly being turned into a triumph as more works of art are being restored and found.
Works Cited

"Crown Jewels Hidden in Biscuit Tin during World War II." BBC News, 12 Jan. 2018, www.bbc.com/news/uk-42662795. This was a website that helped me learn about the BBC News documentary. This was helpful to my final product for the Crown Jewels, and where the Royals hid them during World War II.

"Degenerate Art." Encyclopedia Britannica, 27 June 2003, www.britannica.com/art/degenerate-art. This website was used for public art burning and the banning of degenerate art. I used this in my paper to prove that Hitler disliked Modern Art. The website was used for the definition of degenerate art. This was used to correctly define degenerate art.

"Degenerate Art." Tate, www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/degenerate-art. I used this website to learn about artists that were classified as "Degenerate", and to learn about burning art. This was used in my paper for Burning art. The website said that near 5,000 works of art were burned for their modernism. This was a tragedy and many more were burned for fun and a show of power.

Hendrix, Steve. "As the Nazis Bombed Britain, the Royals Hid the Crown Jewels in the Least Likely Place." Washington Post, 13 Jan. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/01/13/as-the-nazis-bombed-britain-the-royals-hid-the-crown-jewels-in-the-least-likely-place/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ce8f3d0f2aa8. This website was very useful in giving me information to use in my paper. I used this article to learn about the Crown Jewels. The crown Jewels were hid in the
Windsor Castle along with now Queen Elizabeth. The Jewels were put in the ground in a cracker tin. It was very useful for saved art that was wanted by Hitler, but never stolen.

Little, Becky. "Four Works of Nazi-Looted Art Identified and Returned to Jewish Family." History, 8 Sept. 2018, www.history.com/news/nazi-stolen-art-identified. This website was useful to show that stolen or lost art is still being found today. This helped with my paper greatly and showed that art is still being found from World War II

Martin, James. "Altaussee Salt Mines Guide the Mountain of Treasures:Follow the Trail of the Monuments Men in Their Quest to Discover Looted Nazi Art." Trip Savvy, www.tripsavvy.com/altaussee-salt-mines-guide-1507941. Accessed 6 Nov. 2018. This was a very useful website that described the salt mine. The salt mine held thousands of Nazi looted art. The mine was being used to hold cashes of art for the Nazis until they needed them. The mine was found by the Monument Men, who then returned all the stolen art. This was a very good resource for knowledge in the hiding of Nazi art.

Meier, Allison. "10 of the Most Infamous Art Destruction's of World War II." Hyperallergic, hyperallergic.com/94427/10-of-the-most-infamous-art-destructions-of-world-war-ii/. Accessed 20 Nov. 2013. This article was one in many that talked about the destruction and burning of modern art. This website was used to gain a deeper knowledge of Nazi raiding and theft of modern art. I used this in my essay for background knowledge and to strengthen my essay.

"The Monuments Men." Monuments Men Foundation: For the Preservation of Art, www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/the-heroes/the-monuments-men. This website was about the Monument men, who they were what they did and how they rescued Art. Many
of the Monument Men were not men. They were women and teachers, historians, and Art lovers. This played a major part in my research and knowledge about the Monument Men. This article appeared in my essay a few times and helped me learn about the rescuers of World War II art.

O'Connor, Anne-Marie. *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2012. This book was full of culture and History. This book showed the struggle to maintain your culture. The Lady in Gold went from Jewish to German to Nazi hands in the span of a few years. In *The Lady in Gold* talks about the full journey of the masterpiece painting, *A Lady in Gold*. This book talked about degenerate art, the Nero decree, and many for important topics for my paper. This was a extremely important resource for my Essay, I partially used it for background knowledge and research. Although the book comes up multiple times in my Essay.

O'Reilly, Bill. "Nazi Cash, Art, and Stolen Possessions." *Hitler's Last Days: The Death of the Nazi Regime and the World's Most Notorious Dictator*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2015, pp. 267-72. This book was a very helpful source for my paper. This book showed how the Nazis transported art, and hid it plain sight this was useful for background knowledge and quotes.

Rothfeld, Anne. "Nazi Looted Art." *National Archive*, 11 Dec. 2017, www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/summer/nazi-looted-art-1.html. Although I did not use this site as much as other sources, it was helpful with how the Nazi party
stole art. This helped me become more knowledgeable on the topic of Art theft. The website was used for how they stole art and why.

Shoumatoff, Alex. "The Devil and the Art Dealer." *Vanity Fair*, 14 Apr. 2014, www.vanityfair.com/news/2014/04/degenerate-art-cornelius-gurlitt-munich-apartment. This was a crucial article for my research in finding and recovering stolen art. The website talks about the recovery and the finding of Nazi art theft. It also shows how the people got away with the theft of the art for so long. This was a perfect article to fill in the missing gaps and keep the paper current.