



The Twentieth Century German Art Exhibition

Answering Degenerate Art in 1930s London

LUCY WASENSTEINER

The *Twentieth Century German Art Exhibition*

This book represents the first study dedicated to *Twentieth Century German Art*, the 1938 London exhibition that was the largest international response to the cultural policies of National Socialist Germany and the infamous Munich exhibition *Degenerate Art*. Provenance research into the catalogued exhibits has enabled a full reconstruction of the show for the first time: its contents and form, its contributors and their motivations, and its impact both in Britain and internationally.

Presenting the research via six case-study exhibits, the book sheds new light on the exhibition and reveals it as one of the largest émigré projects of the period, which drew contributions from scores of German émigré collectors, dealers, art critics, and from the ‘degenerate’ artists themselves. The book explores the show’s potency as an anti-Nazi statement, which prompted a direct reaction from Hitler himself.

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Abbreviations

AdK Spiro	Akademie der Künste Archive, Berlin, Eugen Spiro collection
DKb	Deutscher Künstlerbund
ERR	Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg
FU EK database	Datenbank zum Beschlagnahmeinventar der Aktion 'Entartete Kunst', Forschungsstelle 'Entartete Kunst', Freie Universität Berlin, available at www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/ db_entart_kunst (accessed 14 July 2015)
Hunter photographs	Netherlands Fotomuseum Archive, Peter Hunter collection, film no. 586, photographs of the opening of the exhibition of <i>Twentieth Century German Art</i> , New Burlington Galleries, London 1938
LBI Selver memoirs	Leo Baeck Institute, New York, LBI Memoir collection, I. Selver, 'My Memoirs, 1906–1989', PID 413124, call no. ME 727 MM 69
LMA NBG	London Metropolitan Archives, London County Council Architects' Department collection, ref. GLC/AR/BR/13/ 152199, New Burlington Galleries, 3–5 Burlington Gardens
Phillips photographs	Tate Gallery Photographic Archive, Ewan Phillips collection, photographs of the interior of the exhibition of <i>Twentieth Century German Art</i> , New Burlington Galleries, London 1938
RSMA	Russian State Military Archive, Moscow, 'Sonderarchiv', Fond 602, Paul Westheim collection
SLAD	Society of London Art Dealers

Introduction

1 *Twentieth Century German Art*: Showcasing German Modernist Culture in 1930s London

The exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art* (Plate 1), staged at London's New Burlington Galleries from 7 July to 27 August 1938, stands to this day among the largest displays of German art ever shown in Britain. The exhibition's small-format, unillustrated catalogue (Figs. 0.1 and 0.2) listed a total of 271 artworks: paintings, sculptures and works on paper by sixty-four artists, either born in Germany, or who had made their name there. Numerous further works by the catalogued artists were in stock at the galleries, as a note affixed to the back of each catalogued testified, available for viewing upon request.¹

Two sets of interior photography survive from this London exhibition. The first, taken during the exhibition's opening by photographer Peter Hunter, are today housed in the Netherlands Fotomuseum Archive in Rotterdam; the second, taken some days later by the photographer Ewan Phillips, are held by the Tate Archive in London.² Thanks in particular to the Phillips photographs, the layout of *Twentieth Century German Art* can be reconstructed in some detail.

The New Burlington Galleries occupied the fourth floor of 3–5 Burlington Gardens, Westminster, a site at the southern end of Cork Street, at the centre of London's commercial art scene (Fig. 0.3).³ Having ascended to the galleries, the visitor was led by an entrance foyer to the moderately sized first gallery. This was hung primarily with figurative oil paintings by the earliest generation of German modernists, among them Max Liebermann, Lovis Corinth, and Paula Modersohn-Becker (Figs. 0.4 and 0.5). The larger second gallery contained a broad selection of artists active in the first decades of the twentieth century, characterised in one contemporary press report as 'the Expressionist movement proper'.⁴ Dominated at its western end by Max Beckmann's triptych *Versuchung* (1937, Fig. 0.6), this gallery also contained works by Wassily Kandinsky, Ernst Barlach, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Erich Heckel and Otto Dix, among others (Figs. 0.7 and 0.8). A smaller third gallery adjoined this main space. Though no photographs of its contents survive, it was described by a contemporary journalist as 'a postscript [showing] the abstract or semi-abstract painters Kandinsky and Paul Klee'.⁵ Linking the main second gallery with the entrance foyer, a fourth, corridor-like space was hung with at least two large oils by Max Pechstein (Fig. 0.9). A covered balcony, running around the exterior of the building, appears to have housed works on paper.⁶ Sculptures by artists including

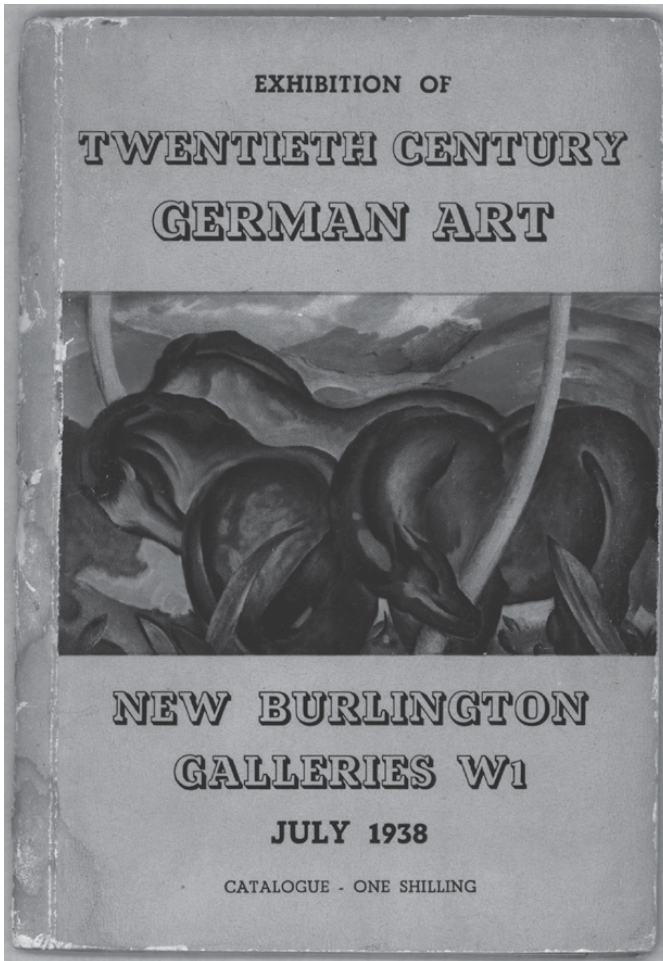


Figure 0.1 *Twentieth Century German Art* exhibition catalogue, cover
Source: Courtesy of The Wiener Library

Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Tisa Hess and Wolf Demeter were displayed on podiums throughout the galleries.

Twentieth Century German Art provided British audiences with their first retrospective presentation of modern German art – including each major movement from the Berlin Secession to the Blaue Reiter, from Die Brücke and Dada to New Objectivity. It also occasioned the first English-language book dedicated to the topic of German modernism. Together with the exhibition catalogue, for their 1s. 6d. entrance fee visitors received a copy of the 108-page *Modern German Art* (Plate 2), released by London's Penguin publishers to coincide with the New Burlington Galleries show. As the cover set out, the book formed part of Penguin's 'Pelican Special' series, dedicated to subjects of particular 'topical importance'. Authored by 'a very well-known German art critic' writing under the name of Peter Thoene, the book's seven chapters provided

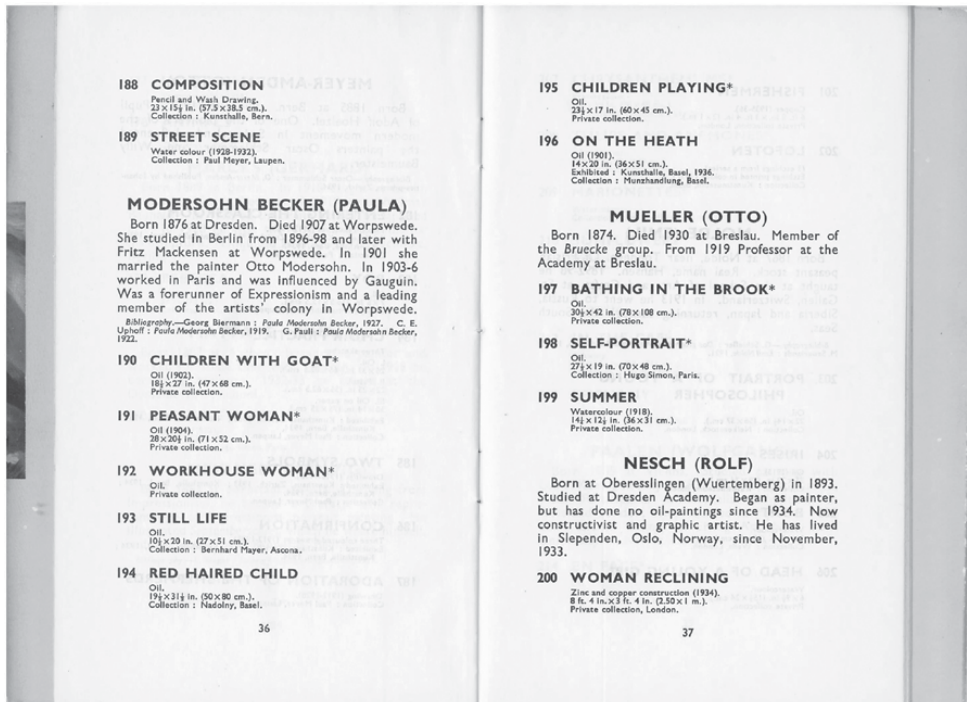


Figure 0.2 *Twentieth Century German Art* exhibition catalogue, 36–37

Source: Courtesy of The Wiener Library

a survey of the main developments in German modernism, with an introduction by the British art historian Herbert Read.⁷

While showcasing German's artistic modernism, *Twentieth Century German Art* also provided the backdrop for a celebration of the country's broader cultural achievements. A three-part 'Festival of German Music' opened at the New Burlington Galleries on 20 July 1938 with pieces by Arnold Schoenberg, Paul Hindemith and others, performed by a group of British, Spanish and Canadian musicians, including a young Benjamin Britten.⁸ A staging of Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* was scheduled for 28 July,⁹ while on 4 August, the émigré German soprano Elisabeth Schumann performed a selection of songs by Bach, Mozart, Schubert and Mahler amidst the artworks.¹⁰ On 3 August, the American singer Paul Robeson gave a concert at the gallery, on his way back from a pro-Republican tour of Spain.¹¹ Fine artists too were invited to perform at the exhibition. The Leipzig-born painter Max Beckmann came to London on Tuesday 19 July 1938, delivering his lecture 'Über meine Malerei' (On My Painting) at the New Burlington Galleries two days later.¹²

2 A Political Exhibition

Given the size and scope of *Twentieth Century German Art*, the ground-breaking nature of its accompanying book *Modern German Art* and the range of its ancillary events, the exhibition demands an important place in any account of the cultural



Figure 0.3 3–5 Burlington Gardens, Westminster, 1946
Source: London Metropolitan Archives, City of London



Figure 0.4 Irmgard Burchard and two unknown men at the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible are works by Paula Modersohn Becker, Lovis Corinth and Max Liebermann

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018



Figure 0.5 Irmgard Burchard and an unknown man at the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible are works by Wolf Demeter and Max Liebermann

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018



Figure 0.6 Photograph of the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible on the far wall is Max Beckmann's triptych *Versuchung* (1937); to the left and right are works by Max Beckmann, Wassily Kandinsky and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018



Figure 0.7 Photograph of the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible are works by Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Wilhelm Lehmbruck and Max Beckmann

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018



Figure 0.8 Photograph of the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible left and right are works by Karl Hofer, hanging in the centre a selection of wood reliefs by Ernst Barlach

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018



Figure 0.9 Photograph of the exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1938. Visible to the right are works by Max Pechstein

Source: Tate Archive, Ewan Phillips collection. Photo: Ewan Phillips © Tate, London 2018

8 Introduction

relationship between Britain and Germany during the interwar years – in particular, considering the disproportionate academic attention that has been paid to cultural exchange between Britain and France during this period.¹³

Yet this exhibition is also centrally relevant to the political relationship between Britain and Germany at this time. As the exhibition opened in the summer of 1938, Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party had ruled in Germany for some five-and-a-half years. Since taking power in January 1933, the Hitler government had implemented a programmed campaign of intimidation and violence against both its actual, and perceived, opponents.¹⁴ Among the earliest targets were those who stood against the regime on political grounds, with the Reichstag fire of February 1933, and the ensuing mass arrests of communists and social democrats, prompting a first wave of exile from the Third Reich.¹⁵ The state did not neglect its ideological opponents, however, including those deemed 'undesirable' in the Third Reich on grounds of their sexuality, disability, religion or race. Laws were enacted gradually to exclude these figures from society: most notably the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935, which, in severely restricting the rights of the country's Jewish population, prompted the second major wave of emigration out of Germany.

A precise cultural policy remained somewhat ill-formed during the early years of National Socialist rule.¹⁶ Before taking power, the party had certainly considered the role culture might play in a new Germany, for example with the foundation of the National Socialist Society for German Culture in 1928, later renamed the Militant League for German Culture. This organisation drew heavily on late-nineteenth-century ideas of cultural 'degeneracy', arguing how factors as disparate as urbanisation, increased presence of foreigners and an emphasis on individual 'genius' figures had led to a degradation of traditional cultural values, with distortion and cynicism undermining the clarity and community allegedly central to the German race. Once the party was in government, these loose ideas formed the basis of small-scale 'Schandenausstellungen' (Shame Exhibitions) organised by local supporters of the Militant League from 1933 onwards in cities including Dresden and Mannheim. Exactly what should be included in these shows remained unclear. While Jewish or openly communist artists could quickly be identified as 'un-German', certain expressionists presented a difficult case: striving undeniably in the direction of abstraction, their works were also considered by many as a product of a specifically German, 'Nordic' tradition.¹⁷

What immediately became clear after the National Socialist takeover, however, was that the fine arts were to come under strict governmental control. The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was established in March 1933 under the leadership of Joseph Goebbels, bringing Germany's visual arts under state regulation. The Law on the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed in April 1933, gave the regime power to appoint and dismiss figures within the public services, including university professors, art school tutors and curators at public museums. By September 1933, membership of the newly formed Reich Chamber of Culture had become compulsory for those wishing to work in the cultural sector, the regime holding power to refuse such memberships.

The summer of 1937 saw the most significant articulation of National Socialist cultural policy, with two exhibitions staged by the regime in Munich. In the vast white rooms of the newly constructed House of German Art, the first *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) opened on Sunday 18 July.¹⁸ Some seven months earlier, newspaper advertisements had called on all German artists,

living at home or abroad, to submit works to the exhibition, intended to provide ‘as comprehensive and high quality a survey of contemporary German painting, sculpture and graphic arts as possible’.¹⁹ The only requirement: that the submitting artist be a member of the Reich Chamber of Culture. Over the following weeks, more than 15,000 works were provided to the jury. Though the contributing artists were given little guidance in terms of acceptable subject matter or style, the 884 works eventually chosen for the exhibition made official preferences clear: overwhelmingly figurative works that glorified the German nation, its Aryan people and its National Socialist leaders. Over half-a-million people visited the *Great German Art Exhibition* in the summer of 1937. The show would become annual event, running in Munich every year until 1944.

Meanwhile, at Munich’s nearby Archaeological Institute, the undesirables were also put on show.²⁰ In June 1937 Adolf Ziegler – then director of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, a sub-chamber of the Reich Chamber of Culture – was instructed by Goebbels to tour Germany’s public museum collections and confiscate all artworks considered a symptom of the cultural ‘decline’ that had afflicted the pre-National Socialist state. In total around 20,000 artworks were gathered during this tour of the Reich. From 19 July 1937, around 650 of these were exhibited in Munich in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (*Degenerate Art*). In stark contrast to the spacious, monumental presentation of the *Great German Art Exhibition*, the rooms of *Degenerate Art* were narrow and dark. The selected paintings, sculptures and works on paper were hung in a chaotic, dense arrangement, the walls daubed with derisive slogans and captions providing the (often inflation-era) prices paid by museums for their acquisition. Accompanied by an illustrated guide, the exhibition gave an overview of what ‘degenerate art’ meant for the National Socialist regime: the products of those unwelcome in the Third Reich on racial or political grounds, abstraction in general, and anything considered critical of Germany or the Hitler government. Initial uncertainty regarding expressionist artists had also been overcome, with artists such as Emil Nolde, Wassily Kandinsky and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner featuring prominently in the exhibition.

It is estimated that by the end of 1937 some 150,000 people had fled National Socialist Germany, most in the hope of finding refuge in the democracies of western Europe and the Americas.²¹ With their numbers bolstered by the state’s campaign against artistic ‘degeneracy’, hundreds of artists, dealers, academics and museum professionals were among these émigrés. Indeed, the impact of Hitlerian policy was only to increase as 1938 dawned. In March of that year, Germany proceeded with the ‘Anschluß’, the annexation of Austria, which prompted a third major wave of emigration from the now-expanded Reich. Meanwhile, the Munich exhibition of *Degenerate Art* was sent on tour: to Berlin from February to May 1938, to Leipzig from May to June, and to Düsseldorf from June to August.²²

In the Britain of 1938, the official response to political developments in Germany was one of non-confrontation and conflict avoidance.²³ The peaceful relations agreed at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and further secured by the Locarno Treaty in 1925, were not to be abandoned lightly. This attitude prevailed even as Hitler proceeded to flout the terms of both agreements after 1933, with continued rearmament, the militarisation of the Rhineland and the Anschluß of Austria. The summer of 1938 can perhaps be seen as the high point of this British appeasement stance towards Germany. Despite rumours of a further National Socialist expansion into Czechoslovakia, and as some 200 international delegates met in the French town of Evian to attempt to resolve

the mounting European refugee crisis, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain continued to attempt negotiation with Hitler.²⁴ His efforts culminated in the signing of the Munich Agreement on 30 September 1938.²⁵ In exchange for allowing National Socialist expansion into the Czech Sudetenland, Chamberlain was assured by Hitler that their two countries would ‘never go to war with one another again’. On his return to London, Chamberlain famously heralded the agreement as having secured ‘peace for our time’.²⁶

In the catalogue and publicity materials for *Twentieth Century German Art*, this turbulent international political situation was referred to, the catalogue introduction noting how German modernism had been ‘swept away in the country of its origin, condemned on political grounds and ruthlessly suppressed’.²⁷ According to the organisers however, events in Germany were not the reason for the show’s staging. As the introduction continued, the exhibition had in fact been under discussion for some ‘ten or fifteen years’ and was explicitly ‘not concerned with the political’.²⁸

From its timing and scope, however, the London exhibition can be immediately identified as the largest direct response to the National Socialist campaign against ‘degenerate art’ to have been staged anywhere during the period 1933–1945. The show’s opening coincided almost exactly with the one-year anniversary of the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition. In the same week that the New Burlington Galleries opened their doors in London, the second *Great German Art* exhibition was getting under way in Munich, to blanket coverage in the German press.²⁹ In addition, almost every one of the sixty-four artists listed in the London catalogue had been branded ‘degenerate’ by the German regime, had seen their works confiscated from German museums or had been forced into exile by National Socialist policies.³⁰

Twentieth Century German Art was not only a key moment in the story of Germanism in Britain.³¹ It also occupies a central place in accounts of anti-Nazi activism in Britain, of international responses to National Socialist cultural policy and of the campaign against so-called ‘degenerate art’. Though the exhibition has frequently been referred to in accounts of the period, however, it has never been the subject of dedicated research, leaving the most basic questions regarding its conception, organisation and impact unanswered. Who was responsible for bringing so many works of German modernism to London, considering the almost complete absence of such works in British private and museum collections? Who provided their works to London, and what motivated them to do so? And what was the impact of this exhibition, both in Britain, and in Germany, as the two countries came ever closer to war? This book sets out to answer these long-neglected questions.

3 The Problem of Primary Sources

In attempting to investigate *Twentieth Century German Art*, the exhibition’s catalogue appears to provide the ideal starting point. Its opening pages list numerous patrons, organisers and acknowledgements (Fig. 0.10). The body of the catalogue also offers some detail regarding the origins of the exhibits, with over half of the listed works provided with some form of lender information.

All too soon, however, this optimism begins to fade. For example, the personal archives of the eight-person ‘organising committee’ named in the catalogue are all apparently lost, or contain no trace of involvement in the London exhibition.³² As a space for hire, it seems that no institutional records were kept by the New Burlington

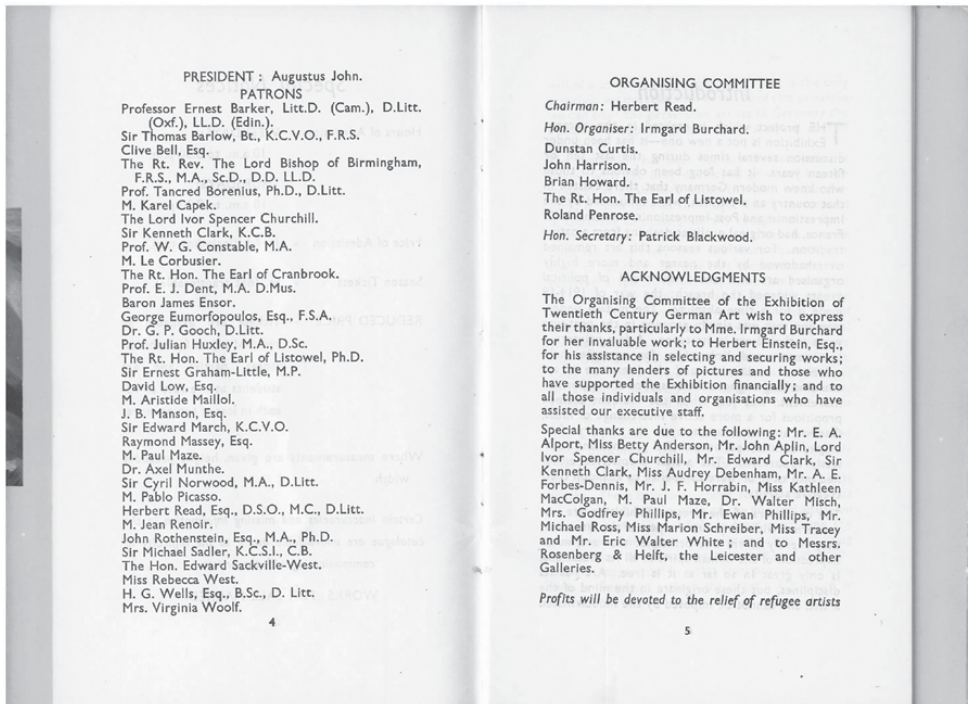


Figure 0.10 *Twentieth Century German Art* exhibition catalogue, 4–5

Galleries and, though the building survived the Second World War, it was demolished for redevelopment in the 1970s.³³ In addition, though the catalogue does list 271 of the exhibited works, closer analysis reveals that they and their origins are often difficult to identify. Work titles are provided almost entirely in English translation, dates and dimensions are often inaccurate or incomplete, and the lender names – to the extent that they are provided – are largely brief or encoded.

Despite this lack of primary evidence, the London exhibition has nonetheless been widely considered by writers in the years since 1938. Over eight decades, *Twentieth Century German Art* has been discussed or referenced in scores of pieces of secondary literature ranging from book chapters and academic journal articles to memoirs and newspaper editorials, published in Britain, the United States, Germany and Switzerland.³⁴ Though these texts do provide a valuable introductory overview of the London show, the limited availability and application of primary sources have allowed certain myths and inaccuracies to arise in respect of the exhibition.

For example, relying on the information provided in the London exhibition catalogue and publicity poster, many writers have assumed it to have been Herbert Read who took the leading role in organising *Twentieth Century German Art*. Read began his art historical career in 1920s London, working as assistant keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum.³⁵ In 1931 he accepted an academic position in the Art History Department at the University of Edinburgh. By 1938 he was back in London, engaged as editor of the arts periodical the *Burlington Magazine*. Read had long displayed

an interest in German culture, producing English translations of German theoretical texts, and writing widely on the ‘Germanic’ artistic tradition throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He had also previously explored the idea of staging a display of German modernist art for the British capital together with his contact Max Sauerlandt, director of the Hamburg Museum of Fine and Applied Arts from 1915 to 1933.³⁶ Despite this output however, Read never wrote a single text regarding his role in *Twentieth Century German Art*; as noted above, there is also scant evidence of his involvement across his extensive archives. Yet he is named as chairman of the organising committee in the London exhibition catalogue, his background supporting an assumed interest in such a project. Across the secondary literature, the centrality of Read to the conception and organisation of the exhibition is therefore unquestioned. As early as the 1940s, the show is described as ‘organised by ... Mr Herbert Read’; by 2011 it is ‘Read’s exhibition’.³⁷

This same reliance on names listed in the 1938 catalogue has also had an impact upon the role afforded to other, specifically non-British, figures in organising the London show. One of the first texts to consider *Twentieth Century German Art* was published in 1949 by the German art historian Paul Ortwin Rave, part of his important early study of National Socialist cultural policy, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (*Art Dictatorship in the Third Reich*).³⁸ Rave, who had remained centrally involved with the Berlin art scene during the years of the Hitler regime, suggested in his text that émigré Germans had provided most of the London exhibits.³⁹ There is, however, little to support this claim in the exhibition catalogue. Over 100 of the exhibits were listed without a named lender, while the introduction claimed that works had been gathered only from ‘private collections outside Germany’.⁴⁰ Rave’s claims for émigré involvement in the London exhibition thus remained largely unexplored by later writers. The conception of the show as a primarily British project was allowed to gain momentum.

Even when archives were discovered during the 1980s, evidencing correspondence between a London-based organising team and a group of German émigrés in France, the international contributors to *Twentieth Century German Art* remained under-researched.⁴¹ As these archives made clear, a group of German émigrés had united in Paris in late 1937 as the ‘Deutsche Künstlerbund’ (German Artists’ Association (DKb)). Though this group had initially agreed to cooperate with the organisers of *Twentieth Century German Art* in London, the collaboration ended in conflict, the DKb ultimately staging their own, more explicitly anti-Nazi exhibition in Paris in the November of 1938. Rather than reawakening the possibility of émigré involvement in the London exhibition as ultimately staged, however, these materials have primarily been used to contrast this group of Germans, and their explicitly political November exhibition, with the apparently less politically engaged, predominantly British organisers of *Twentieth Century German Art*.⁴²

Turning to the question of why the exhibition was staged, in the absence of relevant primary sources many texts have adopted what might be seen as a specifically ‘western’ ideological stance, under which the intentions of the show’s contributors can simply be assumed. As art historians Jutta Held and Sabine Eckmann have noted in their discussions of the development of art-historical exile studies as an academic discipline, for much of the post-1945 period the dominant ideology underpinning research published west of the Iron Curtain was that of ‘cultural transfer’.⁴³ It was widely accepted that the ‘free’ ideas of pre-National Socialist German culture would find their natural home in the democratic ‘West’, and that the transmission of these

ideas, and thus the articulation of an effective anti-Nazi statement, could be achieved merely by exposure to the culture in question. The vast majority of the literature considering *Twentieth Century German Art* has originated in this 'western' zone: in Germany (and the former West Germany), Switzerland, Britain and the United States. In much of this literature, 'cultural transfer' has been accepted as the exhibition's primary aim, a desire simply to show the art branded 'degenerate' in Germany and, by so doing, to counteract its derision.⁴⁴

Finally, when it comes to appraising the impact of *Twentieth Century German Art*, the issue of locating primary evidence has once again been avoided, this time by an overreliance on notions of 'context'. Many existing accounts lay heavy emphasis on Britain's appeasement stance towards National Socialist Germany during 1938, while making broader claims for the country's general artistic isolationism, or its preference for the art and culture of France. The Britain of the time is presented as a country that 'still wanted to get along amicably with the Hitler Regime',⁴⁵ where German art was 'alien',⁴⁶ and where 'international connections were very much the exception'.⁴⁷ Having established these contexts, many writers proceed directly to conclusions of the show's artistic and political impotence. Though a small number of press responses have been selectively cited, nowhere are these responses systematically or meaningfully analysed, with one particular negative review from the 16 July 1938 edition of the *New Statesman and Nation* cited in no fewer than ten pieces of secondary literature stretching across six decades of scholarship.⁴⁸ In the existing literature, the alleged British apathy towards art and politics in Germany has all too frequently been used as evidence of the show's failure successfully to communicate either an artistic or a political message.⁴⁹

Despite the limited application of primary evidence, the existing accounts of *Twentieth Century German Art* present a largely consistent narrative of the London exhibition, encompassing its aims, its organisation and its impact. According to this narrative, the exhibition was a predominantly British project, planned under the leadership of Herbert Read. It was intended exclusively as a riposte to National Socialist cultural policy in Germany. And, it was ultimately unsuccessful, failing to convince its British audience of the merits of 'degenerate' art, and thus failing to make an effective anti-Nazi statement.

4 A New Approach: Provenance Research

This book turns to a new source of primary evidence as the basis for its investigation of *Twentieth Century German Art*: namely, the exhibited artworks themselves, as listed in the 1938 catalogue.

This approach to the research was in fact first suggested more than fifty years ago. During the early 1960s the German art historian Erhard Göpel, then chairman of the Max Beckmann Society in Munich, began work on a publication exploring the international responses to the Third Reich's campaign against 'degenerate' art.⁵⁰ In the closing months of 1965 his attention turned to the London exhibition, yet with his death in 1966 the project met an abrupt end. In 1968, in honour of Göpel's unfinished work, a reprint of the *Twentieth Century German Art* catalogue was produced for members of the Max Beckmann Society, with an introduction by Göpel's successor as chairman, the art historian Günter Busch.⁵¹ Busch's text in fact recounted little of Göpel's original work. As he explained, the London catalogue had been reproduced in

the hope it could be used as a starting point for further research into what he clearly viewed as an unjustly neglected exhibition. It was the catalogued works themselves, Busch argued, that presented the most fruitful way into this research. As he wrote:⁵²

[This catalogue is] a document ... that in its apparent harmlessness as a collection of simple data and facts is, at the same time, a thing with a false floor. It will open to the patient reader a wealth of insights into the entanglements of an evil time, into the very fabric of the historical.

This conception of the London exhibition catalogue as something of a trap door, offering insights into the ‘very fabric of the historical’, is certainly enticing. Might it be possible to use the 271 works listed therein to explore the ‘entanglements’ underlying *Twentieth Century German Art*? If the catalogued works were identified, their ownership and geographical histories reconstructed, and their lenders to the 1938 show thus uncovered, might this provide a basis on which to re-evaluate the exhibition?

In the years since 1968, such an approach has never been taken up by researchers. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, such work would have been almost impossibly challenging. Considering the limitations of the catalogue descriptions outlined above, and without illustrations of the exhibited works, it would have required an almost inconceivable breadth and depth of knowledge even to set about identifying the exhibits, let alone reconstructing their histories.

In the last three decades, however, this kind of research has become a reality. First, there have been considerable improvements in the available literature. Many of the artists featured in *Twentieth Century German Art* have witnessed a surge in public and commercial interest in recent years, resulting in the publication of detailed *catalogues raisonnés* in unprecedented numbers.⁵³ It is now possible quickly to review the complete oeuvres of many of the artists exhibited in London, and to search for a work in the literature simply by subject matter, dimensions or date of creation. Secondly, political and technological developments have made relevant resources newly accessible internationally. With the end of the Cold War, the division of archives and academics east and west of the Iron Curtain came to an end, providing those on both sides with a wealth of new material and opportunities for exchange. More recently, with the widespread digitisation of sources and the introduction and development of the internet, it has additionally become possible quickly to search archival collections, museum stores, library catalogues, historical auction sale results and image databases across the world for the smallest reference to the London exhibition.

Perhaps the most important development in facilitating this research, however, has been the rapid growth of Third Reich-era provenance research as a discipline.⁵⁴ As a result of the National Socialist policies outlined above, between 1933 and 1945 millions of artworks were displaced from public and private collections across German-occupied Europe. This displacement took many forms, from sales and exchanges to seizure and theft, of which the confiscations of ‘degenerate’ art from state collections were only one component. For decades, the impact of these displacements was subject to little attention. In 1998, however, following talks in the United States, the governments of forty-four countries agreed to the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art. The signatory nations committed to undertake research into the histories of artworks potentially displaced during the period of National Socialism in Germany, and to take steps to facilitate their restitution.