Why Degenerate? From Nordau to Nolde and Beyond

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Interieur mit nackter Liegender und Mann (Interior with Nude Woman and Man), 1924

Saturday 13 October 2018, 9am - 5pm

Hawthornden Lecture Theatre, Scottish National Gallery, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH2 2EL

This one-day Research Forum for German Visual Culture symposium, organised by Dr Christian Weikop (ECA) and Frances Blythe (ECA), in collaboration with the National Galleries of Scotland, celebrates an exhibition retrospective of one of Germany’s greatest Expressionist artists, namely Emil Nolde (1867-1956). In the late 1930s, the National Socialist regime would condemn Nolde’s art as ‘degenerate’ and he would become a central figure of their Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) exhibition, which started in Munich and travelled to twelve other cities between 1937 and 1941.

The aim of this international symposium, which features world-leading experts on modern German art, is to consider the inception, reception and reverberations of the notion of ‘Entartung’ (Degeneration), whilst challenging and updating existing orthodoxies in the field. Moving beyond the ideas underpinning the ‘Degenerate Art’ reconstruction exhibition at LACMA (1991), and more recently at the Neue Galerie, New York (2014), with their attendant catalogue scholarship focusing chiefly on the events of 1937, this project seeks to produce a fresh survey of the roots and developmental branches of the concept of ‘degeneration’. In this symposium, the complex meanings of ‘degenerate’ or ‘degeneration’ will also be considered with respect to avant-garde music and architecture, as well as for the visual arts.
Programme

9.00 - 9.30: Registration

9.30 - 9.50: Welcome address by Keith Hartley (Chief Curator and Deputy Director of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art) and Dr Christian Weikop (Senior Lecturer in History of Art, ECA, University of Edinburgh)

Session I – Prophets and Dealers of ‘Degeneracy’

9.50 - 10.20: The Evidence of Exhibitions: Max Nordau and the Paris Art World

Prof Richard Thomson (History of Art, ECA, University of Edinburgh)

Although a Hungarian born in Pest, Max Nordau moved to Paris in 1880 and lived there for much of his life, dying in the city in 1923. This paper seeks to explore certain aspects of contemporary French culture in the capital, pointing out how it shaped the arguments that Nordau put forward in Entartung (1892). In particular it will consider Nordau’s responses to the visual arts, a rather over-looked dimension of his book which is so substantially text-based. It will be demonstrated that Nordau must have visited some very specific exhibitions, as he cites works which were on show in 1891 and 1892, just as he was preparing Entartung. This specificity is of triple interest. First it shows that Nordau was interested in the visual arts and, not unexpectedly, held strong opinions about what he saw. Second, it suggests that he followed his medical instincts as he diagnosed cultural problems using art objects as evidence. Third, his responses to works of art seem rather confused, at times consistent with contemporary viewpoints, at others oddly disjointed from what he actually saw.

10.20 - 10.50: Hildebrand Gurlitt’s dealings with Degenerate Art: his strategies and their moral implications

Dr Meike Hoffmann (Degenerate Art Research Centre, Free University of Berlin)

With the unexpected discovery of the Munich Art Trove in November 2013, the name of Hildebrand Gurlitt became famous overnight through media stories around the world. Spanning four periods of German history, Gurlitt started as an art historian in the late-period German Reich. During the Weimar Republic, he became a driving force behind a museum reform movement promoting a policy for arts and culture that supported the collection of vanguard art in German museums. After Hitler’s rise to power, Gurlitt had to step down from his museum role and started a career as an art dealer of so-called ‘Degenerate Art’ on behalf of the Nazis. Thus, he helped to liquidate the art that he previously promoted intensely. How could it come to this? Under what conditions did Gurlitt act and what was his personal disposition? This presentation will try to evaluate his dealings from today’s perspective.

10.50 - 11.20: Tea and Coffee provided
Session II - Degenerate Architecture, Sculpture and Music

11.20 - 11.50: Degenerate Architecture?

Prof Iain Boyd Whyte (Architectural History, ECA, University of Edinburgh)

In contrast to the polarized discussion on degenerate painting and sculpture, which employed simple criteria to determine what was acceptable and what not, the National Socialist position on architecture was more subtly articulated. This necessarily reflected the nature of architecture, as not all buildings have the same purpose. A design that works well for a factory cannot satisfy the needs, both functional and symbolic, of a hospital or the headquarters of a political party. As a result, an assortment of historical and non-historical styles of design were approved for use in different types of building, with a hierarchy that descended from the monumental classicism favoured for significant NS buildings in the city centres, to high-tech modernism for industrial production, transportation infrastructure, and scientific research. In addition to this vertical hierarchy, regional elements also came into play in the context of specific building types like farmhouses or the hostels designed for the Hitler Youth. National identity also played a role, and the various architectural styles employed were also proposed as specifically German variants on universal themes. Architecture for National Socialism also extended beyond the design and construction of buildings, and extended to the formation and articulation of large assemblies of the party faithful in the context of party rallies, parades, and commemorative events. An obverse ordering of the body in space can also be seen in the planning of the concentration camps, in which those who were unacceptable to the party were interned. These are the themes to be addressed in this paper.

11.50 - 12.20: “What might the twisted something be?”: Taking a Closer Look at “Degenerate” Sculpture

Dr Ines Schlenker (Independent Art Historian)

Sculpture featured prominently in the National Socialist campaign against modern art. The cover of the catalogue to the infamous Degenerate Art exhibition, for example, showed Otto Freundlich’s plaster head The New Man, embodying all the National Socialist regime found abhorrent in art and no longer tolerated. Sculpture also dominated National Socialist propaganda material on “degenerate” art. In the exhibition itself, however, sculpture played only a very subordinate role. Both the number of sculptures and sculptors included are strikingly small. Among the over 650 artworks shown in the exhibition’s first venue in Munich in 1937 were only 28 sculptures. They had been created by the 18 sculptors among the altogether 112 artists featured. Many of the sculptors were relatively unknown and often represented by a single work. Besides, most sculptures seem to have been added to the exhibition as a randomly arranged afterthought. This paper raises various aspects of National Socialist art policies. It will look at the difficulties in defining what “degenerate” sculpture exactly was and show the porous boundaries between defamed and officially accepted National Socialist art which, for example, made it possible for Rudolf Belling to simultaneously show works in both the Degenerate Art exhibition and the Great German Art Exhibition. This paper will also investigate how “degenerate” sculptors who enjoyed close associations with Emil Nolde fared under National Socialism. Rudolf Haizmann, for instance, who had advanced from being Nolde’s dealer to becoming a personal friend, saw his work labelled “twisted something” and held up as typical examples of “degenerate” sculpture.
The campaign against ‘Degenerate Music’ in Nazi Germany

Prof Neil Gregor (History, University of Southampton)

As well as the notorious ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibition the National Socialist regime staged a much less well-known exhibition on ‘Degenerate Music’, which ran alongside the Düsseldorf Music Congress of 1938 and underwent a short tour through Germany thereafter. The notion of ‘degeneracy’ in music was no more an invention of National Socialist cultural critics in the 1930s than was the idea of ‘degenerate’ art. Rather, it drew upon diverse strands of conservative, nationalist, racist and anti-modernist criticism that had emerged around the turn of the century and coalesced in the 1920s. The targets of the critique were correspondingly diffuse, and ranged from Jazz to diverse strands of modernist art music that were collectively lampooned as ‘atonalism’. Defining it in principle, and spotting it in practice, remained a challenge after 1933 – unsurprisingly, since during the National Socialist era aesthetics remained a field of open argument rather than a single set of positions or precepts that communicated clear artistic ideals on behalf of the regime. This created both ambiguity and space for a variety of forms and practice during the period of the ‘Third Reich’ to continue. The polysemous language of nationalist argumentation offered a variety of actors the opportunity to champion their various causes; differences of opinion were rarely resolved. Clashes over what constituted National Socialist culture thus cannot be explained solely in terms of the polycratic political system of the regime, but rather as a reflection of the element of openness that characterized ‘Nazi culture’ throughout.

Session III - Degenerate Art on Display in London and Berlin

Defending ‘Degenerate Art’ in 1930s Britain

Dr Lucy Wasensteiner (History of Art, University of Bonn)

This talk considers the international reaction to the National Socialist campaign against so-called ‘degenerate’ art. In particular in Britain: how did the British respond to cultural developments in Germany, both during the early years of National Socialist rule, and following the Munich exhibition of Entartete Kunst? The talk’s central case study is the London exhibition Twentieth Century German Art – the largest international response to Entartete Kunst, which opened at the New Burlington Galleries in central London in the July of 1938. This remarkable exhibition contained over 300 pieces of German modernist art, by some 65 of the artists branded ‘degenerate’ in Germany: including large scale oils by Max Beckmann and Wassily Kandinsky, drawings and watercolours by Franz Marc and Paul Klee, graphic works by Käthe Kollwitz and Oskar Kokoschka, and at least 11 pieces by Emil Nolde. It was the first significant retrospective of German modernism in the English-speaking world, remaining to this day among the largest displays of German art of any kind ever staged in Britain. After briefly considering how this London exhibition was brought together, the talk will explore how German modernism was presented to the British at Twentieth Century German Art, and as well as the impact of the exhibition in the London of 1938.

A new ‘Kronprinzenpalais’. The Reception of ‘Degenerate Art’ at the National Gallery in Berlin after 1945

Dr Maike Steinkamp (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

This talk analyses the reception of ‘degenerate’ art after the end of the Second World War and the defeat of National Socialism in May 1945. It will draw on The Modern Collection of
the National Gallery in Berlin as a case study for the changing reception of ‘degenerate’ art after 1945 in Germany. The famous collection of Modern Art, which was founded in 1919, was nearly completely destroyed by the ‘Degenerate Art’ campaign of the National Socialist Regime in 1937. After the end of the Second World War and Germany’s distancing from the National Socialist Regime and its cultural politics, the National Gallery in Berlin took the opportunity to make a new beginning. As early as 1946, the idea arose for a new ‘Gallery of Twentieth Century Art’ with the collection of the Kronprinzenpalais that had been destroyed in 1937 as its ideal. The plans for this kind of gallery corresponded with German political and cultural goals in the years immediately following the War. In nearly all sectors, attempts were made to take up to the achievements of the Weimar Republic and to carry out a conscious break with National Socialist cultural politics. With the beginning of the Cold War 1947/48 and the division of Germany in 1949, the promotion of modern, formerly ‘degenerate’ art took on a new dimension. Modern art was no longer solely meant to demonstrate liberty through the variety of artistic work after twelve years of Nazi dictatorship, but rather to aid in the formation of new cultural identities that, in the case of East and West Germany, had different concerns. Both in the GDR and in the Federal Republic ‘degenerate’ art was (again) used politically. How these developments affected the modern collection(s) of the National Gallery in Berlin will be examined in depth.

14.50 - 15.10: Break (Tea and coffee not provided, but available on site)

Session IV - Keynote Lecture

15.10 - 16.10: Emil Nolde and National Socialism

Prof Aya Soika (History of Art, Bard College, Berlin)

The German Expressionist Emil Nolde is arguably the best known among those artists who were labelled ‘degenerate’ by the Nazi regime: no other painter had so many works confiscated (1052), or was presented as prominently as Nolde in the show ‘Degenerate Art’ which opened in Munich in July 1937. As a consequence, Nolde’s role within the ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibitions and the confiscation campaign has dominated accounts of his biography for the years 1933 to 1945. This lecture aims to highlight the peculiarity of Nolde’s case as a victim and a loyal supporter of the regime: not only did Nolde ask that the public should distinguish between his art and the truly ‘degenerate’ pieces in the show, he was convinced that he had been included by mistake. His attitudes to the travelling exhibition also changed over time, in line with news that the hanging of artworks became increasingly professional. He used his considerable network of friends and admirers to have his artworks removed from the exhibition, in which he succeeded in late 1938, to the great disappointment of many of his acquaintances who now thought the show lacking in quality.

16.10 - 17.00: Wine Reception
Prof Richard Thomson was Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art at the University of Edinburgh from 1996 to 2018. An expert on late nineteenth century French art, he has been a Visiting Scholar at the Getty Museum (1993), Van Gogh Visiting Fellow at the University of Amsterdam (2007 and 2016), and Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Oxford (2009). His books include monographs on Seurat (1985) and Degas (1988 and 1995) as well as thematic historical texts such as The Troubled Republic (2004) and Art of the Actual (2012). He has curated many exhibitions, most recently Splendours and Miseries (2015-16, Paris, Musée d’Orsay/Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum), Seurat’s Circus Sideshow (2017, New York, Metropolitan Museum) and Monet & Architecture (2018, London, National Gallery).

Dr Meike Hoffmann organized the first academic training on provenance research at the Free University of Berlin where she received her PhD and now teaches at the department of history and cultural studies on Degenerate Art, and Nazi art policy during the Third Reich. She was a member of the Taskforce Schwabing Art Trove and participated in the follow-up research project on the Gurlitt collection. Since March 2017, Hoffmann directs the Mosse Art Research Initiative (MARI) at FU Berlin which is the first project in provenance research executed by public German institutions in cooperation with descendants of the victims of Nazi persecution. Currently she is preparing a show on Die Brücke artists during the Nazi period at the Brücke Museum Berlin (with Aya Soika and Lisa Marei Schmidt), as well as a conference on Art and Nazi ideology at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin (with Dieter Scholz). She has published widely in the field of her expertise and is author of the Gurlitt Biography “Hitlers Kunsthändler–Hildebrand Gurlitt 1895–1956” (C.H.Beck Munich, 2016).

Prof Iain Boyd Whyte is Research Professor of Architectural History at the University of Edinburgh. He has published extensively on architectural modernism in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, and on post-1945 urbanism. Beyond architecture, he has written on twentieth-century German art and on Anglo-German literary relations. A former fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and a Getty Scholar, he was co-curator of the Council of Europe exhibition Art and Power, shown in London, Barcelona and Berlin in 1996/97. He is founding editor of the journal, Art in Translation, has served as a Trustee of the National Galleries of Scotland, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a former chair of RIHA, the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art. In 2015-2016 he was Samuel H. Kress Professor at the Centre for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. His recent publications include Das Erhabene in Wissenschaft und Kunst: Über Vernunft und Einbildungskraft, with Roald Hoffmann, 1981 Nobel Prize Laureate for Chemistry (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010; English edition as Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Metropolis Berlin 1880–1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). He is currently working on the pan-European reception of US art in the Cold War.

Dr Ines Schlenker is an independent art historian with a special interest in National Socialist, “degenerate” and émigré art. After completing a degree in Betriebswirtschaftslehre at the University of Tübingen she studied art history at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, finishing with a Ph.D. in 2000. Hitler’s Salon, her study of the officially approved art in the Third Reich as shown at the Great German Art Exhibition, was published in 2007. She wrote the catalogue raisonné of Marie-Louise von Motesiczky’s paintings (2009) and co-edited the painter’s correspondence with the writer Elias Canetti which appeared in 2011. Her book on the émigré artist Milein Cosman will be published by Prestel in 2019. She is currently working on a photographic documentation of German-speaking exile in the UK in the 1930s and 1940s.
Prof Neil Gregor is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Southampton, UK. He has published widely on the social and cultural history of 20th Germany, most recently on aspects of art and music during the Nazi period. His most recent book is *Dreams of Germany: Musical Imaginaries from the Concert Hall to the Dance Floor* (co-edited with Thomas Irvine, Berghahn, 2018); he is currently completing a book on The Symphony Concert in Nazi Germany.

Dr Lucy Wasensteiner studied Law at the universities of Bristol and Oxford, coming to Art History through the topic of provenance research. She studied for an MA at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London on the topic of German modernism, National Socialist cultural policy and art in exile. During 2011-12 she was a DAAD-funded guest student at the Degenerate Art Research Centre of the Freie Universität Berlin. She received her PhD from the Courtauld for a provenance-based investigation of the 1938 London exhibition *Twentieth Century German Art*. She has worked as a researcher for the Tate Gallery and as Associate Lecturer at the Courtauld Institute. Between 2015 and 2018 she worked in the curatorial team at the Max Liebermann Villa in Berlin, staging numerous exhibitions exploring Liebermann's life and work, his contemporaries in the Berlin Secession, and most recently a restaging of *Twentieth Century German Art* under the title *London 1938*. This project is accompanied by a bilingual (German/English) exhibition catalogue (*Nimbus, Zürich*); her monograph on the topic of Twentieth Century German Art is forthcoming (*Routledge, New York*). In 2018 she was appointed lecturer in German Modernism and Provenance Research at the University of Bonn.

Dr Maike Steinkamp studied Art History, German and Italian Literature at the Universities of Bonn and Parma. She received her PhD in 2007 with a study on the reception of ‘degenerate’ art after 1945 in the GDR. She worked as Assistant Curator at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle Bonn and the German Historical Museum in Berlin. From 2005 until 2012, she served as Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History, University of Hamburg and was Visiting Professor at Smith College, Northampton, MA in 2009. From 2012-2017 she was the curator of the Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin/Rolandswerth. In 2018, Steinkamp was appointed curator at the Nationalgalerie, Berlin. She has written extensively on the art and cultural politics of the early twentieth century, with a focus on Expressionism, ‘degenerate’ art, and art after 1945.

Prof Aya Soika teaches art history at Bard College Berlin. She was born and raised in Berlin, and gained a PhD from King’s College, Cambridge. She has published widely in the field of German Expressionism and is author of the catalogue raisonné of Max Pechstein’s oil paintings (*2 vols, 2011*), the monograph *Max Pechstein: The Rise and Fall of Expressionism* (with Bernhard Fulda, 2012), a book on the Brücke artists during the First World War (2014) and one on Max and Lotte Pechstein’s journey to the South Seas (2016). She has also been involved in the curation of numerous exhibitions and is currently preparing shows on Emil Nolde (with Bernhard Fulda and Christian Ring) and on Die Brücke artists during the Nazi period (with Meike Hoffmann and Lisa Marei Schmidt), both opening in April 2019 at Hamburger Bahnhof and the Brücke Museum Berlin. On these occasions the results of her research will be published in the exhibition catalogues and a separate volume with documents on Nolde.

[Book your ticket through Eventbrite](#). All are welcome to this free but ticketed event. Organised by the Edinburgh College of Art in association with the National Galleries of Scotland to coincide with the exhibition *Emil Nolde: Colour is Life* at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (14 Jul - 21 Oct 2018).