

Vienna, October 2021

## **VIENNA FALLS IN LINE**

### **The Politics of Art under National Socialism**

**Press:** Press conference, Wednesday, October 13, 2021, 10 a.m.  
We would also be happy to arrange an individual guided tour of the exhibition for you. Please, contact us to make an appointment.

**Exhibition location:** **Wien Museum MUSA**, 1010 Wien, Felderstraße 6–8,  
T: +43 (0)1 4000 85169

**Opening hours:** Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
24 December and 31 December 2021: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Closed: 1 January, 1 May and 25 December

**Exhibition duration:** **October 14, 2021 until April 24, 2022**

**Press photos:** [www.wienmuseum.at/en/press](http://www.wienmuseum.at/en/press)

The Reich Chamber of Fine Arts (Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, RdbK) was the most powerful institution for the political control of art under National Socialism.

Membership was a prerequisite for professional art work, making it a de facto obligation for active artists. Persons with Jewish backgrounds, political dissidents, and artists considered too avant-garde were denied membership.

The files of the Viennese Reichskammer have now been examined for the first time, revealing the records of about 3,000 artists. Countless works by such figures active during the Nazi regime have also found their way into the collections of Vienna's museums.

New research into these materials provides insight into the political power structures, processes, networks, and artistic attitudes of the Nazi regime, the artists working under it, and their artworks. The exhibition *Vienna Falls in Line: The Politics of Art under National Socialism* presents these new findings in seven sections. Original objects and documents provide information about the working artists of Nazi Vienna in general and

their production of explicitly political propaganda art in particular. The consequences of *Gleichschaltung* (the total control of all aspects of cultural life) are traced through nine artist biographies. And the exhibition makes it possible to search the database of the Reich Chamber's membership files, making them public for the first time. The role of Vienna's municipality as an important patron of Nazi art is explored as are the "Gottbegnadeten," the category of exceptional creators who enjoyed special privileges in the Third Reich. In conclusion, the exhibit shines a light on the situation after 1945, examining the aesthetic and personal continuities evidenced in individual artistic careers. In light of the Wien Museum's collection holdings and the current renovation of the Oswald Haerdtl building on Karlsplatz, the exhibition is also an examination of its own institutional history.

The exhibition is a cooperation of the Wien Museum with the Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Künstler Österreichs, Landesverband für Wien, Niederösterreich, Burgenland.

**Admission MUSA:** Adults: € 7 / Discounted Rate: € 5  
Visitors under 19 years of age – free admission  
First Sunday of every month (all visitors) – free admission  
**Visitor information:** +43 1 5058747-85173, [service@wienmuseum.at](mailto:service@wienmuseum.at), [www.wienmuseum.at](http://www.wienmuseum.at)

**Curators:** Ingrid Holzschuh, Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber  
**Curator Wien Museum:** Gerhard Milchram  
**Exhibition architecture:** koerdtutech  
**Graphics:** seite zwei  
**Exhibition production:** Gunda Achleitner, Isabelle Exinger-Lang

**Accompanying publication:** Ingrid Holzschuh, Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber:  
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**Accompanying program:** Please, contact us for further information.

**Main sponsor:** **WIENER STADTWERKE**

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# The Exhibition

## PREPARING THE GROUND

The Nazification of politics and culture predated the *Anschluss*. In 1936, under the Austrofascist regime, the first Nazi propaganda exhibitions were held, and Austrians participated in expositions in the German Reich. The sculptor Wilhelm Frass, in 1935, hid a letter in which he professed his fealty to Nazism under the Monument to the Unknown Soldier in the Heroes' Gate; many other Austrian artists, meanwhile, openly flaunted their Nazi sympathies. The anti-Semitic Union of German Painters of Austria was founded in 1937. Many artists' associations were infiltrated by "illegals," individuals who remained loyal National Socialists from the ban on the Nazi Party on June 19, 1933, until the Anschluss on March 12, 1938. Liberal cultural policies were systematically eliminated.

### **Artists' associations and unions before 1938**

The liberal artists' associations, including the Österreichischer Werkbund, the Hagenbund, and the women artists' club Wiener Frauenkunst, continued to exhibit works by Jewish artists until the *Anschluss*; by contrast, the Vienna Secession, led by its president Alexander Popp, began trying to curry favor with the fascist regimes in 1937 by mounting exhibitions like *The Art of Urban Planning in Italy and German Architectural Art*, *German Sculpture on the Reich Sports Field in Berlin*. The membership rolls of the associations organized in the Permanent Delegation of the Visual Artists of Austria, which fell into the Nazis' hands in 1938, proved instrumental in the rapid integration of Vienna's artist community into the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts.

## BROUGHT INTO LINE AND UNDER CONTROL

Immediately after the *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938, the laws of the German Reich were put into effect in the annexed territory. Among them was the Law on the Reich Chamber of Culture, which had been passed in 1933 and established the legal framework for cultural endeavors in Nazi Germany going forward. It provided for the enforced ideological conformity of all workers in the cultural sector and set the nationalization and state surveillance of German culture in motion. The law installed the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts (Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, RdbK) as the central administrative body overseeing the arts and artists in the Third Reich and made membership a prerequisite for the exercise of a creative profession. Artists were selected in a rigorous application process in which they had to document not only their artistic skills, but also their political trustworthiness and "ancestry." In this way, the Nazi

regime secured control of the art world and steered it in accordance with its ideological and racist vision.

### **Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, Vienna Head Office**

The Vienna Head Office of the Reich Chamber was installed at the Künstlerhaus (Karlsplatz 5, 1<sup>st</sup> district), and Leopold Blauensteiner was appointed its director. Its first managing director was Marcel Kammerer, followed upon his retirement by the writer Franz Schlögel. The agency moved into the rooms of the Reich Propaganda Office at Palais Epstein (Reisnerstraße 40, 3<sup>rd</sup> district) in 1939 and then, just before the end of the war, to the Trattnerhof (Graben, 1<sup>st</sup> district). Like the leadership, the consultants of the various disciplinary divisions were recruited from the Vienna artist community; the team included representatives of the older and younger generations and acclaimed artists as well as ones primarily recommended by their political activism.

### **Personalities of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, Vienna:**

Leopold Blauensteiner (1880–1947), painter, state director (1938–1945)

Marcel Kammerer (1878–1959), architect and painter, managing director (1938–1944)

Franz Schlögel (1894–1968), writer, managing director (1943–1945)

Igo Pötsch (1884–1943), painter, consultant on painting

Ferdinand Opitz (1885–1960), sculptor, consultant on sculpture

Robert Örley (1876–1945), architect, consultant on architecture

Hanns Sanders (1904–?), painter, graphic designer, consultant on artisan craftwork

### **Admitted duly and by special dispensation**

The Reich Chamber's admissions process for new members was subject to strict bureaucratic regulations; aspiring members needed to meet the Nazi regime's artistic, political, and racial criteria. Political dissidents and Jewish artists were barred from membership. The Vienna head office reviewed the applications to make sure they were complete, and the consultants of the disciplinary divisions assessed candidates' creative accomplishments. The state director and managing director then forwarded the applications to the central office in Berlin. The special dispensations indicate that the rules were not always followed to the letter and hint at the individual stories behind each application. The power to decide a candidate's fate and issue a letter of admission rested with the Berlin office.

### **3,000 membership files from the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, Vienna**

The archives of the Association of Austrian Visual Artists contain ca. 3,000 membership files from the erstwhile Reich Chamber. Each of these files stands for the fate of an individual artist. Considered in its entirety, the collection offers insight into the rigid

system of Nazi art policy, which was characterized by exclusion, oppression, and enforced conformity.

**Case studies:**

Maria Strauss-Likarz (1893–1971), designer of the Wiener Werkstätte

Erwin Lang (1886–1962), painter and jewelry designer

Helga Schenker (1907–2004), graphic designer

Gustinus Ambrosi (1893–1975), sculptor

Hans Harald Rath (1904–1968), Lobmeyer company, member of the Vienna Artisans' Association

Franz Zülow (1883–1963), painter

Leopold Schmid (1901–1989), painter

Willi Bahner (1906–1981), painter and set designer

Elisabeth Hofbauer-Lachner (1913–1977), architect

**Database of the Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Künstler Österreichs**

**Membership files of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, Vienna**

In the course of his tenure as president of the Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Künstler Österreichs (2007–2015), the sculptor Karl Novak sifted through the Reich Chamber's membership files in his organization's archives, arranged them in alphabetical order, and then painstakingly entered the data in the files into a database that is now available to researchers and constitutes a singular source of information on the history of the Nazis' art policies in Vienna. The information was reviewed for the exhibition and is now accessible to the public for the first time. In addition, the exhibition recounts the names of Viennese artists who were forced into emigration, persecuted or murdered in concentration camps by the National Socialist regime.

**The Vienna Office of Culture**

By commissioning art, the Office of Culture founded by the National Socialists supported selected Viennese artists, who were also entrusted with the task of redesigning the artistic decoration of City Hall in line with the Nazi regime's preferences. By holding competitions and directly ordering works, political decisionmakers secured their influence over the output of artists and guided their production toward their own aesthetic and propagandistic vision.

Political direction and control rested with the administrative apparatus, represented on the municipal level by the newly established Office of Culture, which was installed at City Hall and headed by Deputy Mayor Hanns Blaschke. Awards and honors created by

the Nazi cultural authorities not only served to spotlight the oeuvres of artists, they also demonstrate the political influence over the arts.

The objectives of Nazi cultural policy were promulgated in various speeches by the gauleiters and disseminated in propagandistic brochures. In 1943, the Office of Culture celebrated its fifth anniversary with a dedicated publication that surveyed the expansive scope of Vienna's cultural policy under National Socialism.

Mirroring the organization of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, the Office of Culture was divided into teams dedicated to the various arts. To head these teams, the political leadership recruited established as well as younger artists who appeared to be open to National Socialist ideas. Among the younger generation of artists, in particular, some had been sympathetic to Nazism before the *Anschluss*; becoming involved in politics now offered opportunities for professional advancement. After 1945, their engagement was a liability, but ultimately put no more than a minor dent in their careers.

**Personalities of the Vienna Office of Culture:**

Consultant on painting: Rudolf Böttger (1887–1973)

Consultant on sculpture: Wilhelm Frass (1886–1968)

Consultant on architecture: Hermann Kutschera (1903–1991)

Consultant on lettering and typeface design: Johannes Cech (1903–1973)

Consultant on artisan craftwork: Robert Obsieger (1884–1958)

Consultant on fashion: Günther Ohnheiser (1911–1971)

Consultant on music: Armin Hochstetter

Consultant on literature: Hermann Stuppäck

Consultant on theater: Oskar Jölli

Consultant on libraries: Hans Ruppe und Anton Gottschald

Consultant on national traditions and customs: Franz Vogl

Consultant on event and exhibition design: Fritz Friedrich

## **MUNICIPAL PRODUCTION**

Under the Nazis, art production not only aimed at the aesthetic education of the ethnically homogeneous “Volksgemeinschaft,” it also took on considerable economic importance. Promoting “Wiener Mode” as a fashion trademark and strengthening artisan training in Vienna were central pillars of the economic plans for the city. The municipal authorities accordingly supported and subsidized the establishment of institutions like

the House of Fashion, the School of Art and Fashion, the Vienna Artisans' Association, and the Vienna Design and Experimental Workshops.

### **House of Fashion and Vienna School of Art and Fashion**

The founding of the House of Fashion and the Vienna School of Art and Fashion gave institutional substance to the political will to promote the textile industry and establish Vienna as the Third Reich's "fashion city." The House of Fashion was an association that resided amid the baroque splendor of the Aryanized Palais Lobkowitz. Remodeled after plans by the architect Josef Hoffmann, the building was reopened in 1939 and featured imposing showrooms as well as administrative offices and a sizable fashion library. The Vienna School of Art and Fashion, the successor organization of the Women's Academy, hired party-approved artists to teach the next generation of fashion designers, who, the decisionmakers hoped, would position "Viennese fashion" as a brand throughout the *Ostmark* and beyond.

### **Vienna Artisans' Association and Vienna Design and Experimental Workshop**

Eminent Viennese artists including Josef Hoffmann and Oswald Haerdtl recognized that the Nazi regime's political objectives presented an opportunity to promote and bolster artisan craftsmanship in Vienna. Their vision was realized with the establishment of the Vienna Design and Experimental Workshop and the Vienna Artisans' Association. Both institutions were subsidized by the city and allocated workspaces and showrooms at the Aryanized Zwieback-Haus (Kärntner Straße, 1<sup>st</sup> district). The building emerged as the hub of the Viennese artisans' scene. Josef Hoffmann, who led the Design and Experimental Workshop, was widely regarded as a key figure in this effort, and in 1941, Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach made him "Special Commissioner for Artisan Craftwork."

### **City Hall gets an artistic makeover in line with Nazi ideology**

Vienna's City Hall was the seat of the Nazi municipal administration. In 1939, competitions were held for a redesign of the representative and office rooms in line with Nazi ideology, and selected artists were hired to paint official portraits of high-ranking appointees. Monumental murals depicted subjects from German legend and the new *Ostmark*. Tapestries with Nazi slogans and insignia were an integral part of the regime's aesthetic program. A platform was added to the tower from which Hitler could address the masses. Passages from Hitler's speech from April 1938 in which he had called Vienna the "gem of the Reich" framed a tapestry as well as the new "exterior pulpit," where his words were immortalized on bronze plaques.



### **Competitions and commissions**

The Office of Culture held several competitions for monuments designed to lend historical legitimacy to the National Socialists' ideological vision. Among the honorees were Walther von der Vogelweide and the proto-fascist ideologist Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The program also yielded designs for permanent embellishments in the city and a memorial at the former detention camp in Wöllersdorf. Portraits and Nazi art in architecture were commissioned directly from artists. Posters were another important medium of Nazi propaganda, and the Office of Culture invited artists to submit designs. A major undertaking was a remodeling of Vienna's theaters, where "Führer's boxes" and newly designed fire curtains were installed. Orders also came from the Reich government. For instance, Albert Speer, Hitler's favorite architect and General Building Inspector for the Reich Capital, commissioned works for the Neue Reichskanzlei in Berlin from the Austrian sculptors Gustinus Ambrosi and Robert Ullmann.

## **PROPAGANDA**

Expositions inculcating hatred of Jews and glorifying war were a staple of Nazi cultural programming; so were presentations of art designed to disseminate National Socialist ideology and propaganda. Most of these shows were traveling presentations from the "Altreich." The largest propaganda exhibition produced in the *Ostmark* was *Mountains, People, and Economy of the Ostmark*, which was shown in Berlin in 1939. The Nazi regime systematically promoted ideologically conforming exhibitions by making acquisitions and awarding prizes. The most important venues in Vienna were the Künstlerhaus, the exhibition building on Friedrichstraße (Secession), and the Wiener Kunsthalle (Zedlitzhalle). Dedicated "women artists' exhibitions" ensured a place for this group of creators on the cultural scene. From 1942 on, the artist community increasingly emphasized specifically Viennese themes, as in *The Beautiful Likeness of Woman in Vienna* (1942) or *Viennese Portraits of Artists and Scientists, 1900–1943*. These efforts bolstered the cultural policy of Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach, who envisioned a leading role for Viennese culture in a fascist Europe.

### **The Künstlerhaus**

Even before the *Anschluss*, the local Nazi artist élite had gathered at the Künstlerhaus. During the tenure of its president Leopold Blauensteiner (1937–1939), the institution forged closer ties to National Socialist Germany. In December 1939, the Künstlerhaus merged with the Secession and took control of its exhibition building. President Rudolf H. Eisenmenger (1939–1945) made the Künstlerhaus on Karlsplatz and the gallery on Friedrichstraße central venues for the propaganda exhibitions in which the local Nazi grandees liked to present themselves to the public. In August 1941, Gauleiter Baldur

von Schirach personally became honorary patron of the Künstlerhaus. The exhibition programming ended in August 1944, when the building was requisitioned for military use.

### **“GOTTBEGNADET”. Hitler’s favorite artists from the *Ostmark***

In 1944, Adolf Hitler and the President of the Reich Chamber of Culture and Reich Minister Joseph Goebbels drew up the “Gottbegnadeten” list. It comprised the names of 378 artists in all fields of visual art, architecture, literature, music, and the dramatic arts. The Nazi regime regarded these “divinely gifted creators of culture” as indispensable; their work being an “artistic service to the war,” they were exempt from military service. Among the visual artists and architects were eighteen Austrians as well as the German sculptor Fritz Behn, who worked in Vienna.

Additional “special lists” enumerated individuals who were categorized as “irreplaceable.” One of the twelve visual artists in this august group was the sculptor Josef Thorak, a native of Austria, although he worked almost exclusively in the Reich.

Sculptors: Hans Bitterlich, Michael Drobil, Wilhelm Frass, Josef Müllner,  
Michael Powolny, Robert Ullmann

Painters: Ferdinand Andri, Alfred Cossmann, Wilhelm Dachauer, Rudolf H.  
Eisenmenger, Gottlieb Theodor Kempf-Hartenkampf, Karl Mediz, Erwin Puchinger

Architects: Otto Reitter, Otto Strohmayr, Siegfried Theiss

Commercial artists and designers: Margarethe Klimt, Hans Wagula

*Source: Federal Archives, Berlin, R55/20252a, “Gottbegnadeten” list, 1944..*

Presented in the exhibition biographically and through objects are Wilhelm Frass, Fritz Behn, Michael Powolny, Rudolf H. Eisenmenger, Fritz Behn.

### **LIQUIDATED**

The collapse of the Nazi regime led to the disbandment of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts. Artists were transferred to a new professional association, the Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Künstler Österreichs; as with the Reich Chamber before, they had to apply for membership and pass a vetting process. The selection, in this instance, was meant to keep out former Nazi Party members, who, pursuant to the *Verbotsgesetz*, (1945) had to answer for their actions before the denazification authorities. The decision on whether to bar a defendant from his or her profession rested with a committee

appointed by the Ministry of Education. After 1947, the denazification provisions were relaxed, allowing more and more artists to resume their careers. The democratic cultural life that sprang up contrasted with the centralist cultural policy under the Nazis.

Reestablished and newly founded clubs and associations brought an unwonted diversity to Vienna's cultural scene. Yet nothing could fill the glaring gaps left by the artists who had been forced into exile or murdered by the fascist Nazi regime.

### **Official artists of the Second Republic**

Artists who went about their work during the Nazi era reconciled themselves to the political system in one way or another. After the war, the political debate focused on the Second Republic and its reconstruction program, and most people turned a blind eye to the entanglements that linked it to the Nazi system. Biographies drew connections to the time before 1938, and many artists who had succeeded during the Nazi regime were happy to accept the official accolades of the Second Republic in the postwar era. Important government commissions were given to them.

A belated effort to make amends to the artists who had been forced into exile or fled persecution took the form at most of honors, awards, and exhibitions. Occasional attempts by Austrian politicians to bring artists like Oskar Kokoschka back to Vienna were fruitless. Most emigrants, however, were never invited to return to their native country.

## **NAZI ART IN ARCHITECTURE**

With numerous works of art commissioned to embellish buildings, the Nazis' cultural policy left traces in the cityscape throughout Vienna. Many such works can be found to this day on the façades of private residential structures as well as public buildings. They were ordered by the municipal administration for purposes of propaganda and executed by artists. Besides trivial fairy-tale motifs, their subjects revolve around Nordic heroes and warriors, family idylls, and scenes of labor. Some of these statues, reliefs, ceramics, and sgraffiti were complemented by banderoles with Nazi slogans. Most of the inscriptions were removed after 1945, but the works continue to dot the city's public spaces. An exception is a work by Franz Kralicek in the Wieden district, which remains emblazoned with the quote attributed to Hitler "There is only one nobility, the nobility of labor." In recent years, contemporary artists have contextualized some of these art-in-architecture works in order to draw attention to their Nazi-era origins; others still appear without comment.