



**Primacy of Ideology? The Confiscation and Exchange of  
"Degenerate Art" in the Third Reich.**

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**ABSTRACT****THE PRIMACY OF IDEOLOGY? THE CONFISCATION AND EXCHANGE OF "DEGENERATE ART" IN THE THIRD REICH.**

The campaign against "degenerate art" is conventionally depicted by historians as an ideologically driven crusade against those artists whom the National Socialists branded as "degenerate". This aim of this thesis is to show how in practice the National Socialists sacrificed ideological considerations to the material advantages that could be gained from the sale of "degenerate art". In practice the term "degenerate" was extended beyond modern art to include French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, specifically because they were highly saleable. This is evinced by the sales of "degenerate art" which were conducted by the *Reichministerium für Volksklärung und Propaganda* (RMVP). The record of the sales compiled by the propaganda ministry in the summer of 1941, provide conclusive evidence that the Reich government compromised its ideological position for financial gain. The sale of "degenerate art" conducted by order of the Reich at the *Galerie Fischer* auction in Lucerne in 1939, provides further evidence that the practice of confiscation was economically driven.

The diminishing importance of ideology is evinced by the purchase of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art by German officials and museums between the period 1941 and 1942. That German museums sought to replenish their depleted collections with acquisitions of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, suggests that while this art was regarded as "degenerate" in theory, in practice museums were able to purchase "degenerate art" without any difficulties. The fact that German museums were allowed to purchase officially proscribed art again suggests that the commercial exploitation of "degenerate art" took precedence to the ideological justifications which had originally been employed to provide the justification for the practice of confiscation.

The willingness for German officials to benefit commercially from the disposal of "degenerate art" is also evinced by their disposal of "degenerate art" through a series of exchanges between 1941-1943. The method of exchange became a favoured means of acquisition after the issuance of an edict prohibited the transportation of "degenerate art" to the Reich. The sustained demand for "degenerate art" among German dealers after 1941 is also indicated from their

eagerness to engage in exchanges and sales involving officially proscribed art in the period between 1941-1943.

**STATEMENT**

This work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, or other tertiary institution. To the best of the author's knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text. The author hereby gives consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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