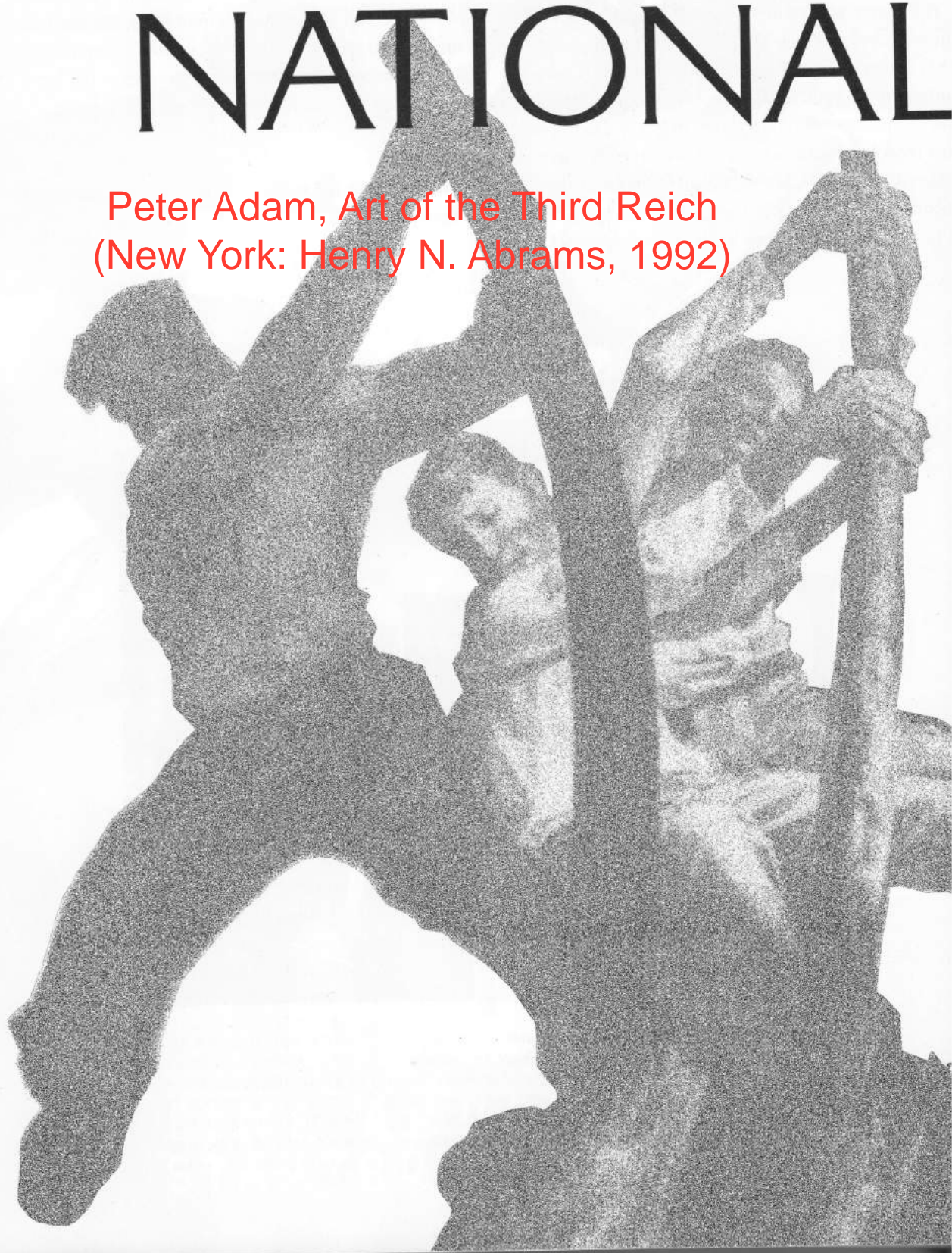


CHAPTER 8 THE VISUAL
NATIONAL

Peter Adam, Art of the Third Reich
(New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1992)



LIZATION OF SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

*WHILE WE ARE CERTAIN THAT WE HAVE EXPRESSED
THE SPIRIT AND LIFE SOURCE OF OUR PEOPLE
CORRECTLY IN POLITICS, WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT
WE WILL BE CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING ITS
CULTURAL EQUIVALENT AND REALIZE IT.*

—Hitler, Party Day 1935, Nuremberg!

It is a widely held view that all twentieth-century totalitarian systems produced the same kind of art. Stalinist art or that sponsored in Italy under Mussolini or in Spain under Franco often looks similar. But National Socialism is the only regime which excluded all but the approved art forms right from the start. The iconography of National Socialist art was very limited. A few themes, endlessly repeated, sufficed to express the whole message. A close look at the subjects the National Socialists favored and vigorously promoted shows that art was not only the direct expression of their political ideas, but also at the base of their political system in all its aspects.

NATURE

"German art represents homeland and longing for the home. In landscape paintings the soul is expressed. It is the language of the homeland which speaks even in an alien atmosphere or in foreign lands. . . . When one speaks German, then the soul speaks. If one speaks with an alien tongue, a cosmopolitan, fashionable Esperanto, then the soul is silenced."²

In all the official "German Art Exhibitions" landscape painting dominated. It was often the one kind of painting artists could do without declaring too close an allegiance to

National Socialist theories. But it was also seen as the genre in which the German soul could best be expressed.

Again and again the idea of the *Volk* was linked with the landscape. The country was a place of belonging. The nineteenth century, too, had dreamed of a medieval and rural Utopia in which man and nature could be fused together (see the Bruegel-like landscape of Karl Alexander Flügel on page 108). The National Socialists picked up these ideas and made them one of the central themes of their philosophy of art. But what for the Romantic painter was an idealized dream became reality for the new painters. Their landscape represented the Germans' *Lebensraum*, their living space.

The new landscape painting followed closely the tradition of the Romantic painters, especially Caspar David Friedrich and Philipp Otto Runge, both artists Hitler cited in his speech at the opening of the House of German Art. Their feeling of longing and the specific mood they expressed appealed to many beyond the leadership. But landscape for the new artist was not only a place of contemplation, it was also a space for living, for action. The landscapes of Werner Peiner share with the Romantics' landscapes a longing for expansive distances, but Friedrich's landscape was an imaginary one; the landscapes of the new painters were meant to be real. Landscape, in National Socialist thinking, was always the German landscape. "The painters of today are nearer to nature than the Romantics. They do not look for a religious mood but for elementary existence. Each landscape is a piece of the German homeland which the artists illuminate with their soul. . . . Above all art today stands the law of the people."³

The style of new German landscape painting was also seen as a direct reaction to the Impressionists: "Artists create again under the spell of the silent forces which reign above and in us. The German landscape painter rejects the virtuosic rendering of the impressions of light and air. He searches for the unity between man and landscape; he interprets the eternal laws of organic growth."⁴

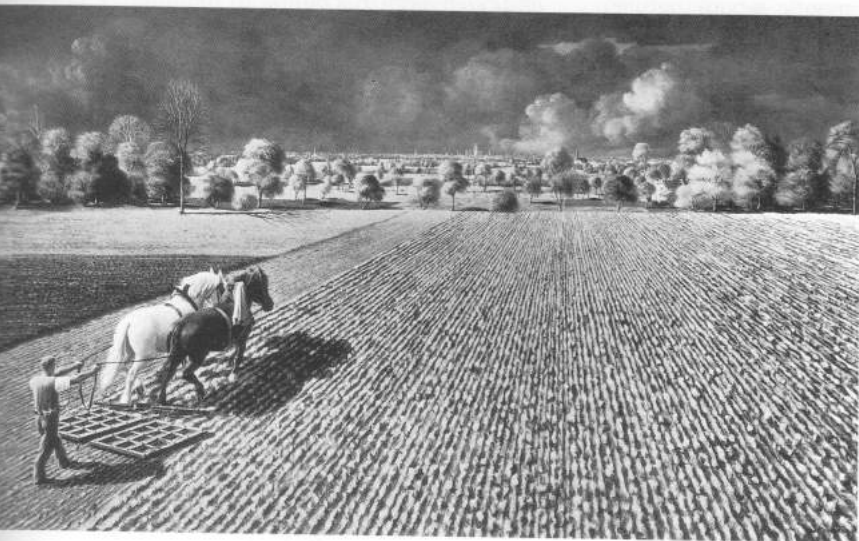


For the National Socialists questions of style or form did not exist. All artistic problems were metaphysical ones. Richard Wagner's dictum that art is "the presentation of religion in a lively form" was fully subscribed to by the ideologists of the regime. "The desire of the Germans to create always grew from the two roots: a strong sensuous feeling for nature and a deep metaphysical longing. The capacity of the Germans to make the divine visible in nature, and to illuminate the sensuous with spiritual values, fulfills Wagner's demands for art to become religion," wrote Robert Scholz.⁵

The act of creation was seen as a mysterious pseudo-religious event. "Painting is not a matter of artistic decision, of composition or formal choices. The



*Caspar David Friedrich. Two Men
Observing the Moon*



Werner Peiner. German Soil



Fritz Bernuth. *The Fight*



Michael Kiefer. *Meadow near Chiemsee: Eagles.*
"Great German Art Exhibition 1943"

hour of creation is one of the great secrets of creation; it has to be faithfully prepared and humbly awaited."⁶

Nature was not only seen as an antidote to the city, but was also enjoyed as the arena in which the strong dominated the weak, in which the elements ruled, and where animals shared a life-giving force. As in the heroic landscape, a genre the Nazis took from Dutch landscape paintings and the Romantic school, nature was seen as a fighting ground.

Animal paintings took on a kind of monumental, even heroic, stance. The eagle, the lion, and the bull were the favorite symbols of victory and courage. The proud eagle and the storm trooper's gaze are two sides of the same coin. Michael Kiefer's soaring eagles were the painter's version of another of the Nazis' favorite emblems: the symbol of ruling. In the paintings by Carl Baum and Julius Paul Junghanns, even horses and cows became symbols of strength, the animal equivalent of the naked hero.

Junghanns (see illustrations pages 65, 100, and 134–35), Germany's most prestigious animal painter, had taught since 1904 at the Düsseldorf Academy. Un-

der the National Socialists his animal paintings took on a new meaning. Hitler personally selected his work for the first "Great German Art Exhibition." How much this painter of apparently harmless alpine landscapes, with animals and simple peasants, could be bent to suit the National Socialists is best demonstrated by the presentation of his work in the magazine *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*. According to the interpretation of the new era, Junghanns's work had little to do with the traditional animal paintings of the Dutch school, where animals were merely shown as friends of the humans. "Julius Paul Junghanns has done more than merely paint people and animals, he has shown them as monuments. Monuments of a speechless, heroic attitude and strength, the most dignified witnesses of our time."⁷

COUNTRY LIFE

Hand in hand with the longing for deep communication with nature came the call for a simple life, with the peasant as the incarnation of the true German (see illustrations pages 136–37 and 142–44). "Traveling



"Germany, Your Colonies!" Poster

through the German countryside today, one still finds among our peasants customs which have survived for a thousand years. . . . Everywhere one will find primordial peasant customs that reach far back into the past. Everywhere there is evidence that the German peasantry . . . knew how to preserve its unique character and its customs against every attempt to wipe them out, including the attempts of the Church. It preferred to go under rather than bend its head to the alien law imposed upon it by the lords. . . . Despite this thousand-year effort to alienate the German peasant from his nature, the common sense and the deep blood-feeling of the German peasant knew how to preserve his German breed. . . .⁸ There was a tradition of earthy peasant paintings, especially in Austria. The Tyrolean painters Franz Defregger (1835–1921) and the younger Albin Egger-Lienz were seen as the great precursors of the National Socialist peasant painters.

The paintings of Michael Kiefer, Franz Xaver Wolf (see illustration page 146), Georg Ehlig, Franz Eichhorst, Hans Ebner, Oskar Martin-Amorbach (see illustrations pages 136, 144, and 153), and Friedrich

Kraus all celebrated simple country life on their canvases—especially harvesting. They represented the National Socialist ideal of "Blood and Soil." They pictured peaceful country life, uncomplicated decent people, clean and earthy. The paintings advertised the eternal values of peasant life as a source of strength, as opposed to the destructive life of the city in which there is no continuity, and in which everything is constantly uprooted. ". . . the German man emerged from the German peasantry. Princes, Church, and cities were able to place their stamp on a special kind of German man, but nevertheless, the German peasant down the centuries has been the raw material and . . . the foundation," R. Walther Darré, Minister of Works, proclaimed in 1934.⁹

Also left out was any sign of the increased mechanization of agriculture: the farmer was mostly depicted in a primitive earthbound state, sowing, plowing, mowing the grass with a scythe. The eternal and timeless repetition of a farmer's work was shown as a quasi-religious ritual. Cows and horses and the rainbow; all nature is harmony (see illustrations pages

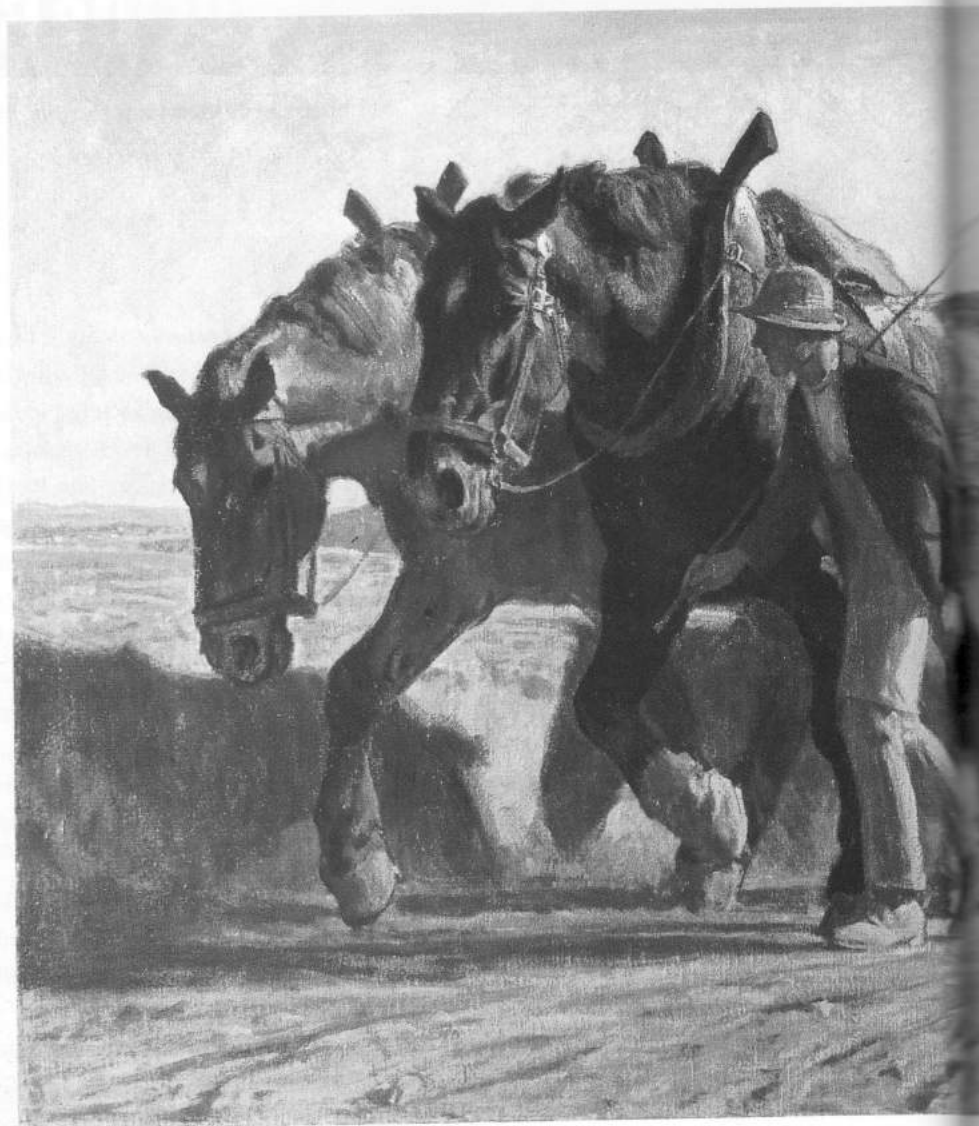
136–37). Work in the country was always seen as diligent and strong. In the painting by Heinrich Berran, *Bergheuer* (The Haymaker), the farmer brings the hay down like Atlas carrying the earth on his shoulders. In Lothar Sperl's *Rodung* (Clearing the Land), the workers are shown as fighters dominating the soil. In Willy Jäckel, the arresting image of the laboring plowman is heightened by a menacing sky.

Exhibitions with rural themes multiplied. This kind of painting was very popular, especially in southern Germany, where the representation of village life had always been part of the local iconography. But a harmless local genre was shamelessly used for propaganda purposes. In the autumn of 1935 an exhibition called "Blood and Soil" opened in Munich. A newspaper

critic wrote: "The exhibition . . . aimed to collect healthy and good and earthbound art and to fight for a new strength in art against decadence. . . . As a preface to the exhibition stand the words of Professor Schultze-Naumburg: 'Art has to grow from the blood and the soil if it wants to live.'"¹⁰

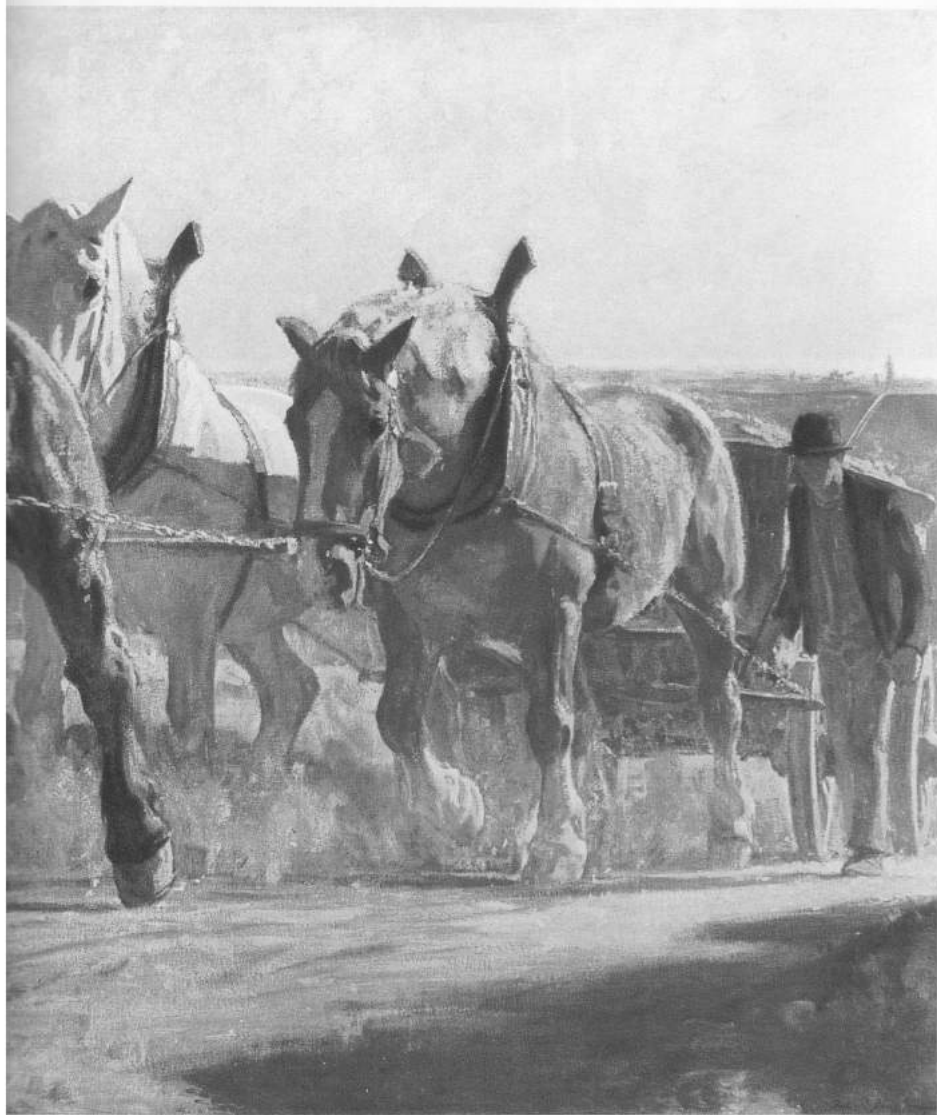
THE FAMILY

"... the eugenic concept of 'family' in its deepest essence is synonymous with the Christian concept of a 'religious-moral family,' which rests upon the twin pillars of 'premarital chastity' and 'conjugal fidelity.' . . . monogamy also stands at the beginning of our culture. . . . It was good morals for a woman to have several children. A childless married woman was re-





*Georg Ehlig. Returning from
the Alpine Meadows*



*Julius Paul Junghans. Hard
Work. "Great German Art
Exhibition 1939"*



Oskar Martin-Amorbach. Harvest.
"Great German Art Exhibition
1938"

Right:
Lothar Sperl. Clearing the Land
"THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE
FORCES THE ARTIST TO BE
REAL; NOT TO SHOW THE
FARMER IN ARTIFICIAL
HOLIDAY POSES BUT RATHER
AS SOMEONE FIGHTING
HARD FOR SURVIVAL, A MAN
WHO UNDERSTANDS HIS
LIFE THREATENED BY
NATURE AND THE ELEMENTS
AS GIVEN BY GOD; IT IS THE
ARTIST, WHO SEES THE
TRACES OF DESTINY IN THE
FARMER'S FACE."—WALTER
HORN



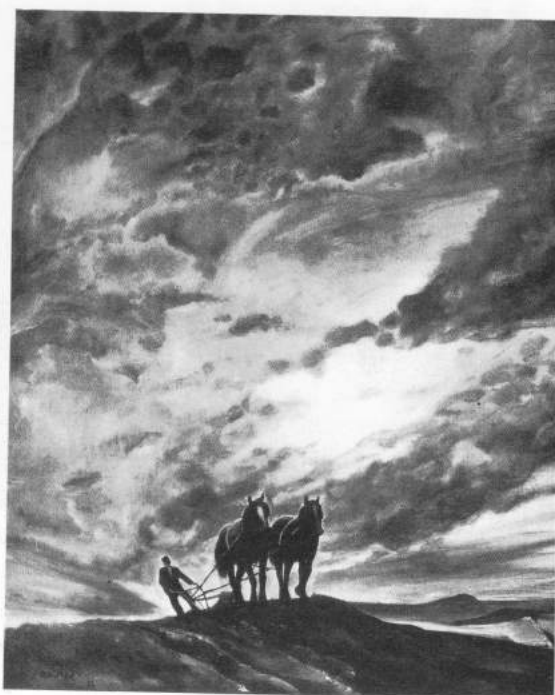


Heinrich Berran. The Haymaker

Right:

Willy Jäckel. Plowing in the Evening, 1938

"A SYMPHONY OF COLORS IN A LIGHT-FLOODED SKY. THE FARMER WALKING THROUGH THE ROARING ELEMENTS, A SYMBOL OF CARE FOR GROWTH AND GROWING."
—WALTER HORN



garded as inferior, as was a woman who had many miscarriages, or who brought deformed, sick, or sickly children into the world,"¹¹ according to Paul Hermann, an expert in racial purity.

Closely linked with the idea of peasant life was the idea of the family. The family was more than just individual children and parents. The German people as a whole was seen as an interlacing of all German families of the same race. Here too art became a prime spokesman of National Socialist philosophy. The family became an important subject of the visual arts. The family of the farmer in particular was seen as the nucleus of the nation. The National Socialists hoped that the farm family's renewed popularity would lead to an earthly paradise, an order based on nature. "Those to whom Germandom is an essential entity see in the family the health, the salvation, and the future of the state. Around the family table are the sheltering and protecting qualities of the soul: the homeland, the landscape, the language of the community . . . in the soul lives the child, the songs, the fairy tales, the proverbs, the native costumes, and furniture and tools."¹²

The ideal father and mother were the pillars of a family of several children, happy and in harmony, fertile and bound to nature, as in Adolf Wissel's *Farm*

One Nation. One Reich.
One Führer. 10 April 1938.
Commemorative stamp



Family from Kahlenberg (see illustration page 148), a finely executed painting very much in the south German tradition with its love of details, but the perfection of the execution and the immobility of the scene render it lifeless. Constantin Gerhardinger, Thomas Baumgartner, and Wilhelm Petersen also painted several family pictures.

Films, books, and paintings all praised the virtue of the family. "In it lie the ultimate energies of primordial folk art. . . . In it lies also the salutary and profound

feeling for the family arts: folk music, work music, dance music, family music have here their last abode. Here they can work their potent health-giving magic. . . . How laughable, puppet-like, the art groups of the big cities appear. Their changing art fashions are best compared with exotic animals inside the cages of the zoos of the big cities."¹³

The religious role elevates the family to the status of an altarpiece. They listen to the Führer on the radio in Paul Mathias Padua's *The Führer Speaks* (see illustration

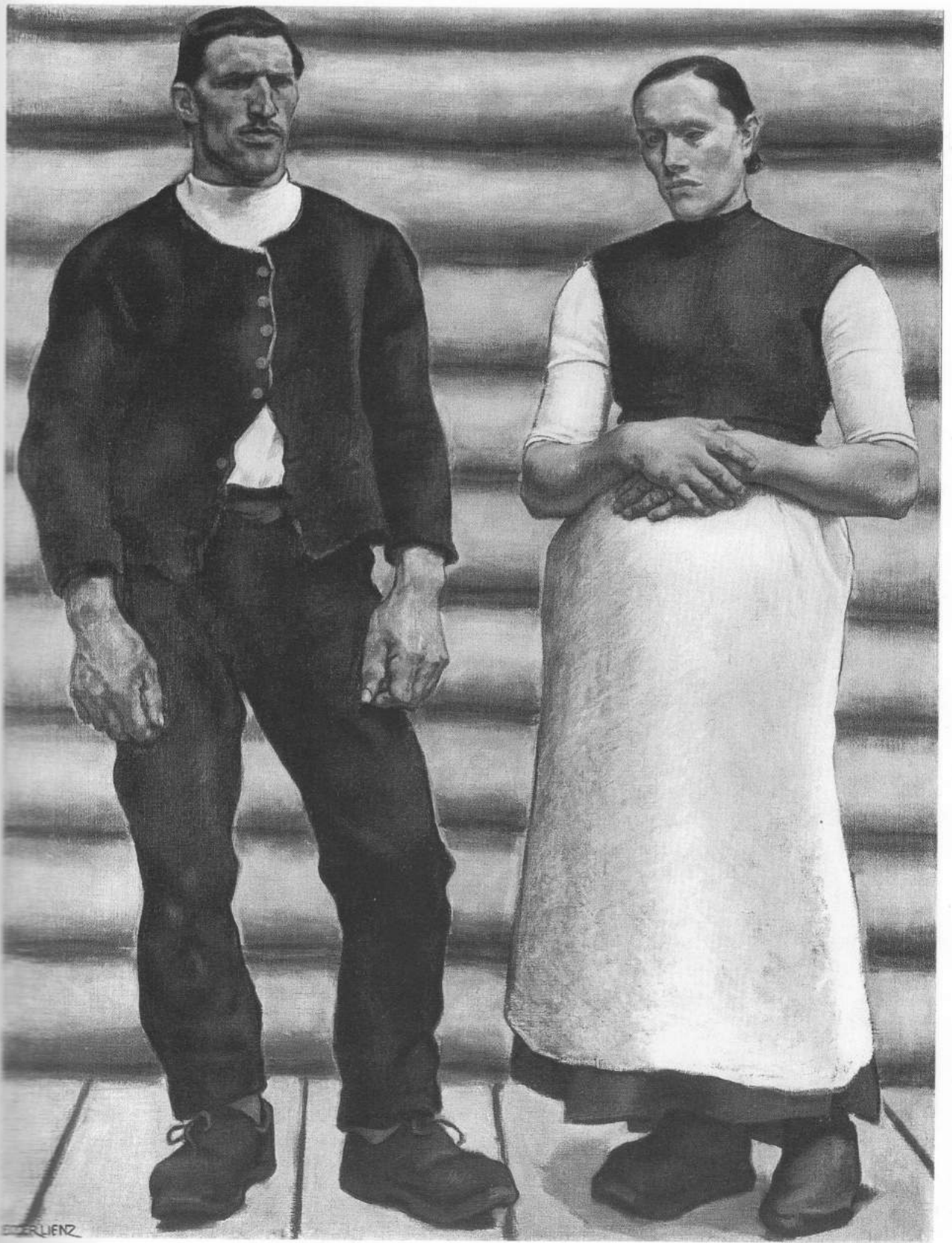


Rudolf Warnecke. Carpenters

page 73), or look at the official art magazine in Udo Wendel's *The Art Magazine* (see illustration page 221)—actually a self-portrait of the artist with his parents. No presentation of social conflict or hardship was allowed to disturb the dream. The overriding requirement to express a racial ideal prevented any real characterization.

The Nazis themselves claimed that their paintings had nothing to do with "realism," however realistic their style. The word "realistic" figured only rarely in the vocabulary of art critics in the Third Reich. A realistic rendering of the present would give a limited picture. The new German artist was creating for eternity. "God forbid that we should succumb to a new materialism in art and imagine that if we want to arrive at the truth, all we need is to mirror reality," wrote Baldur von Schirach. "The artist who thinks he should paint for his own time has misunderstood the Führer. Everything this nation undertakes is done under the sign of eternity."¹⁴

The restful composition, symmetrical design, and frozen gestures of many paintings were supposed to evoke feelings of unchanging universal truth. Here to the ideologist stopped at nothing; even the Bach family was enlisted to serve as a shining example of the purity of race and Germanic virtue:



Albin Egger-Lienz. Husband and Wife, Study for Life Cycles. 1910

Thus biological investigation has uncovered a series of families in which, as a result of the entry of individuals or even only one person of low-grade quality, the whole subsequent generation was ruined. . . . On the other hand, we are acquainted with a sufficient number of families in which the preservation of a family tradition . . . has engendered a great number of high-grade persons. Here I shall mention the clan of Johann Sebastian Bach of Thüringen, which has been thoroughly investigated biologically, and which rightly can serve as a textbook example of the preservation and higher development of a good biological heritage.¹⁵

All the people depicted in this art were racially pure. They did not mirror society but served as role models for it. They had become the incarnation of the National Socialist idea. The arts program was not an intellectual one but one transmitted through the senses, through the eye. That is why everything had to be beautiful, perfect, harmonious.

Unlike the genre paintings of the seventeenth-century Dutch and nineteenth-century German schools, which the new painters tried to imitate, these works did not present a realistic picture of the living and working conditions of their time. They were in fact totally anachronistic, a form of cultural camouflage

and a lie. The world of the Third Reich was far from peaceful and beautiful. The old paintings were lively and real because they grew out of the life which surrounded them. The Third Reich paintings were produced in a vacuum. That is why they looked wooden and lifeless. Form and content were in contradiction. The integration of the artists into the social and political conditions of their times, which the National Socialists proclaimed so loudly, could not be brought about as long as the artists were called upon to propagate the official lie.

THE GERMAN WOMAN

"The woman has her own battlefield. With every child she brings to the world, she fights her battle for the nation. The man stands up for the *Volk*, exactly as the woman stands up for the family," proclaimed Adolf Hitler in a speech to the National Socialist Women's Congress in 1935.¹⁶

The National Socialists left nothing to chance. If art advertised the role of the family, the Party also used art to define the social role of woman and the image



Constantin Gerhardinger, Family Portrait



Jürgen Wegener. Thanksgiving. "Great German Art Exhibition 1943"

she should have. In his novel, *Michael*, Goebbels had written: "The mission of woman is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world. . . . The female bird pretties herself for her mate and hatches the eggs for him. In exchange the mate takes care of gathering the food, stands guard, and wards off the enemy."¹⁷

The ideal women were tall, blue-eyed, blonde representatives of the Aryan race. The ideal beauty had to correspond to the type of human being that was politically sound. For Hitler beauty always involved health: "We only want the celebration of the healthy body in art." The woman was preordained by nature to be the bearer of children, "the sacred mother." The man was preordained to fight. In Hitler's view only this interpretation of the role of man and woman could produce fine art. "We want women in whose life and work the characteristically feminine is preserved," said Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess. "Women we can love. We grant the rest of the world the ideal type of woman that it desires, but the rest of the world should kindly grant us the woman who is most suitable for us. She is a woman who, above all, is able to be a mother. . . . She becomes a mother not merely because the state wants

it, or because her husband wants it, but because she is proud to bring healthy children into the world, and to bring them up for the nation. In this way she too plays her part in the preservation of the life of her *Volk*."¹⁸ Madonna-like renderings of mother and child became a favorite genre.

About a tenth of the paintings shown were nudes. The increasing number of nudes in painting, and especially in sculpture, was a reflection of the new body feeling. Nudes were part of the nature culture. The demand for naturalness, vitality, and sensualism found its visual counterpart in the presentation of the naked body. Here too it was antiquity, the Renaissance and the old masters, that provided the models: the nudes of Titian, Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Rubens, and Rembrandt. The nudes of the Impressionists, especially Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, were rejected as a mere "experience of the eye, the body painted for its own sake, the carrier of colors." But not the expression of a moral, sociological, and religious attitude, which was supposed to determine the nudes of the Third Reich. The presentation of the devil woman, the prostitute, as modern artists often depicted her, was not only un-



Above:
Franz Eichhorst. Mother
and Child

Opposite:
Fritz Mackensen. The Baby

thinkable but was considered an insult to German womanhood. If man was shown as the dominator of nature, woman was represented as nature itself. She was the beauty of nature, or the playfulness of nature, and of course was as fertile as nature. She was shown over and over again in a state of ripeness (see the renderings of women in myth by Friedrich Wilhelm Kalb and Ivo Saliger, pages 222 and 223). This was the body

Lower left:
Alfred Kitzig. Tyrolean
Peasant Woman with Child
"IN THE REFLECTIVE
SERIOUSNESS OF A
MOTHERLY WOMAN LIVES

THE PENSIVE SPIRIT OF
AN ARTIST WHOSE
BRUSHSTROKE IS LADEN
WITH THOUGHT."
—EDMUND PESCH

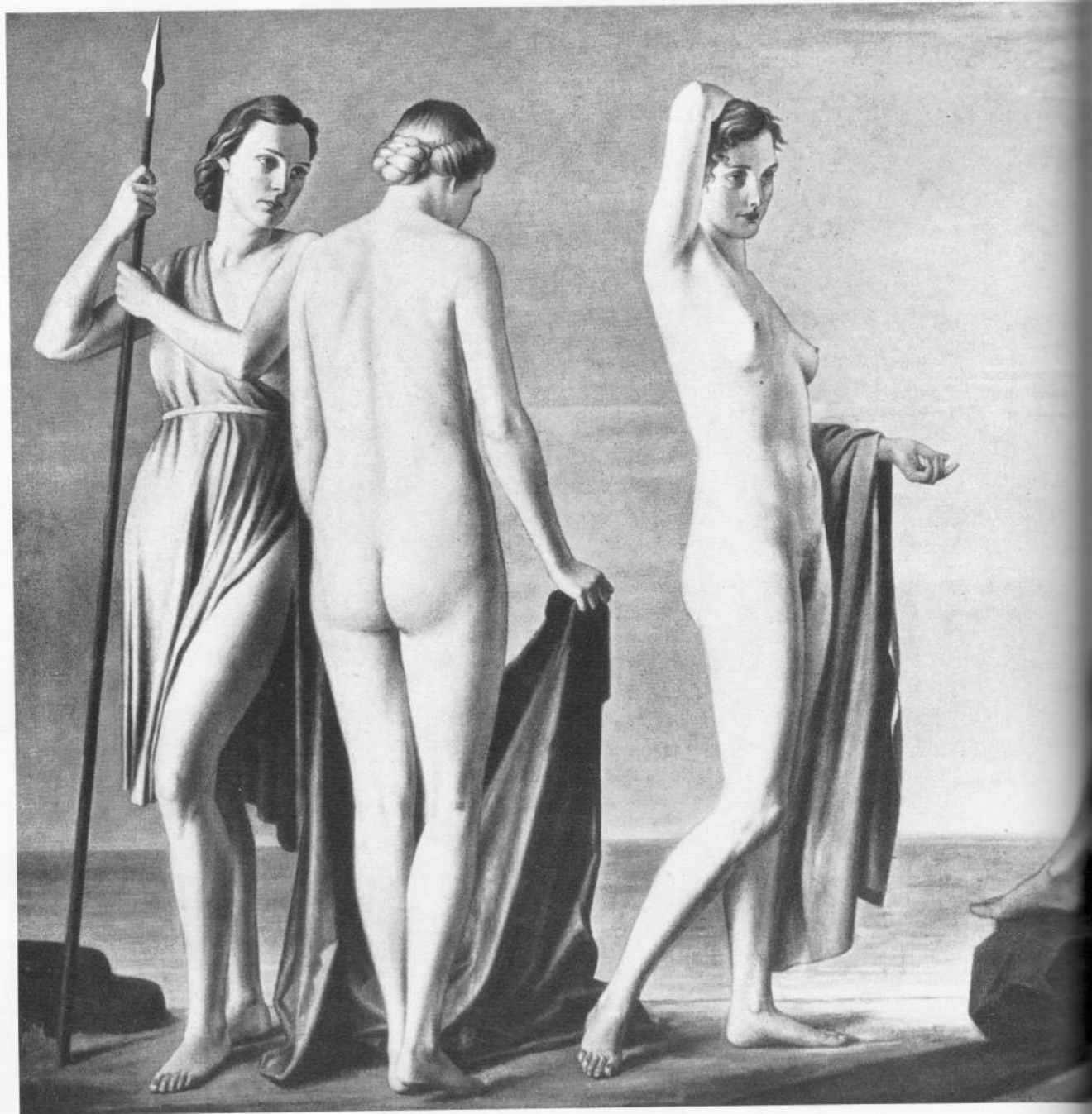


to be desired and adored. Titles such as *Abandon* and *Morning* spelled out the role woman was expected to play. Two themes dominate: the woman in a pose of expectation, and the woman as mother.

If most of the male pictures showed very little individuality, the representation of woman was even more stereotyped. The surface was smooth, with no bulging flesh, no natural folds of skin, no wrinkles. Woman was described with soft lines and gentle contours, the image of devotion and cooperation. Woman was an object; her role was subservient, to be looked at, to be fertilized. Her own sexuality was denied. She was usually seen facing front, without pubic hair. In the past, nudes often cowered, hiding their breasts. The new woman, as in Ivo Saliger's *Diana's Rest*, stood upright, proudly displaying her naked body to the viewer, who, in certain pictures, was also the male judge of its attractions, as in Adolf Ziegler's *Judgment of Paris*.

The president of the Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts, Adolf Ziegler, painted one of the main works for

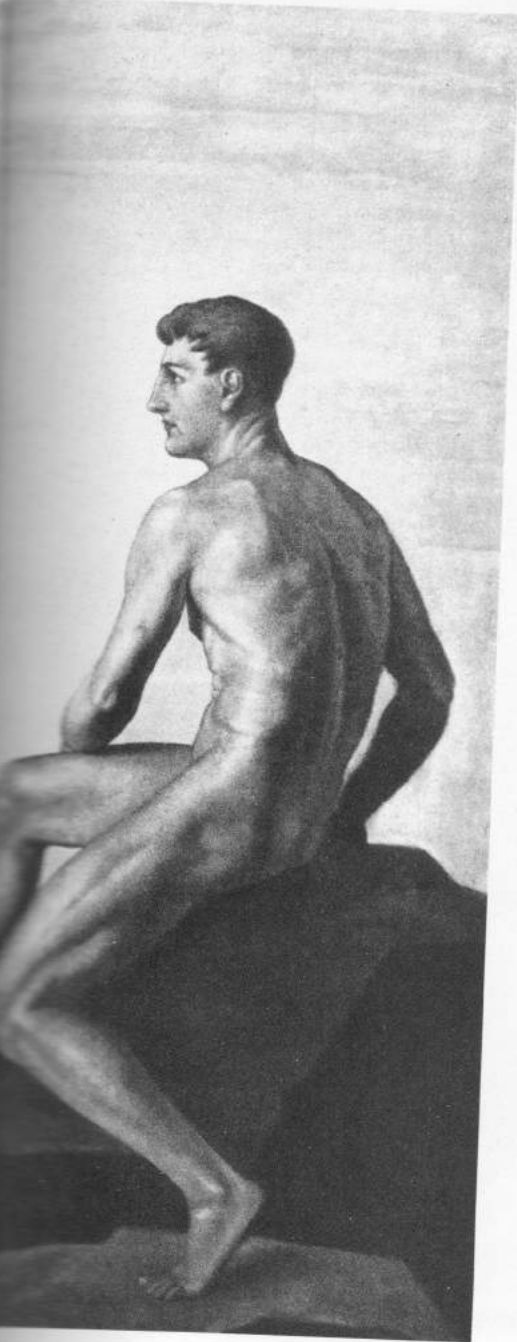




the 1937 exhibition of German art. It became famous almost overnight through frequent reproduction. Hitler acquired it, to hang in his living room in Munich above the fireplace. Ziegler wrote: "Our work represents our philosophy." What is the philosophy spelled out by this picture? Bodies are celebrated, the photorealistic representation of perfect bodies. The sleek, perfect surface detaches the body from reality. The four women representing the four elements, offering themselves to the onlooker, are like four priestesses; they sit on a bench as though on an altar. But they are

also ready for sacrifice. Willingness to be sacrificed for the nation was widely stressed. The combination of priestess and sacrificial object was iconographically new.

This flat and boringly executed painting was obviously much liked, judging by the enormous numbers of postcards and reproductions of it sold. The National Socialists' slick celebrations of the human figure without conflict or suffering were immensely popular. While the Salon paintings of the nineteenth century gave women at least some sensuality, the nudes by the



Left:
Adolf Ziegler. Judgment of Paris.
"Great German Art Exhibition
1939"



Upper Right:
Oskar Martin Amorbach.
Peasant Grace
"A STRONGER LINEAR STYLE
SO TENDER IN ITS
FEELING."—ROBERT SCHOLZ



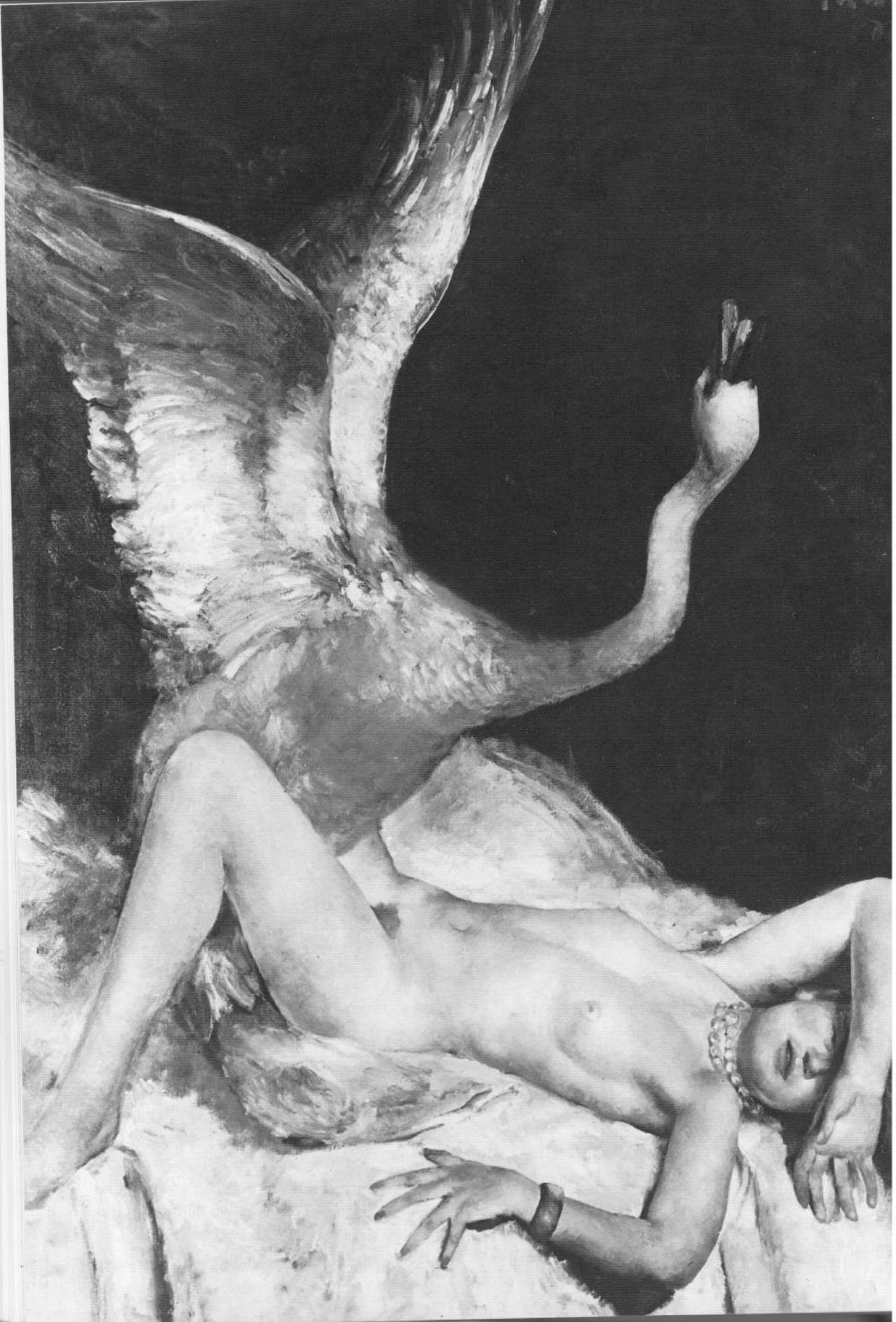
Right:
Sepp Hilz. Peasant Venus.
"Great German Art Exhibition
1940"

favorite painters of the National Socialist regime like Ziegler, Saliger, and Friedrich Kalb were totally passive and impersonal.

From year to year nudes gained in popularity both in painting and sculpture. Many painters of nudes came from the respected Munich Secession, a group much influenced by the French Impressionists. But the Secessionists soon gave up all integrity. The demand for more naked flesh corrupted many, like Oskar Martin-Amorbach in his *Peasant Grace*, or Sepp Hilz, known as "the Master of the Rustic Venus." Their clean

and scrubbed nudes, clad in titillating socks or a choker, resembled pornographic postcards or advertisements.

Gradually, an increasing number of lascivious nudes were exhibited and eagerly bought by the National Socialist leadership, which was a sign of increasing decadence at the center of this health-conscious nation. The painting *Leda and the Swan* by Padua created quite a scandal when it was exhibited because of its salaciousness. It was nevertheless bought by Hitler himself. The offerings of nudes multiplied. There were

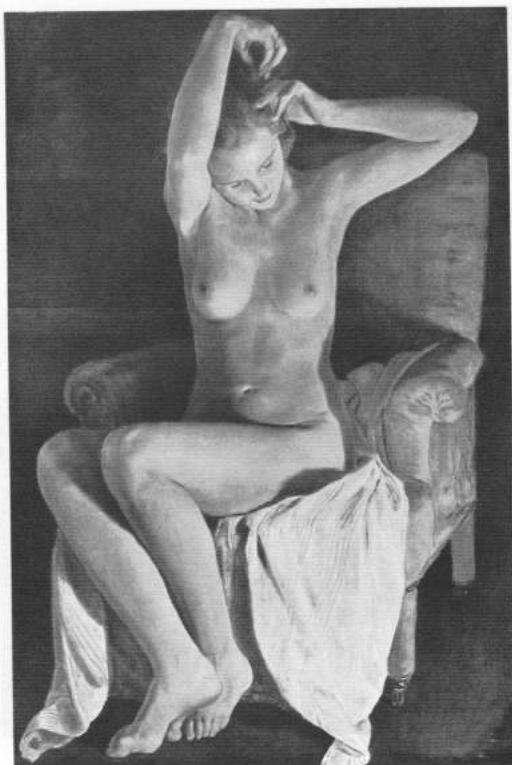


the sensual and lingering nudes of Karl Truppe. Gerhardinger, Oskar Graf, Ernst Liebermann, Johanna Kluska, Johann Schult, Richard Klein, and many others furnished the exhibition with "healthy Aryan flesh."

Women were often represented as allegories of honor, purity, and faith, and as Victoria crowning the hero. These paintings say, "I am like you, you can be like me": an invitation to identify, an accessible ideal, not a distant goddess. That is why artists brought the myths up-to-date: a Venus with a permanent wave. The National Socialist aesthetic required that their figures look smooth and fashionable, as if they had just emerged from the hairdresser or had been sunbathing. That is why these women look so embarrassingly artificial. They were supposed to be the image of motherhood but they are slick and cold. They offer no gentleness, no warmth. The paintings of the nudes belie the claims that the new art grew out of a new dynamic physical sensuality and a depth of feeling. The nudes were meant to be the ultimate synthesis of nature and spirit. In reality, they were—like the farmers, the family, and the men—the embodiment of a racial idea. They were not a reworking of the humanistic ideal of the Greeks, they too were stereotypes.

FEMALE PORTRAITS

Female portraits, especially of leading actresses and the wives of Party bosses, were also popular. Most of them showed the sitter in a demure, ladylike pose. Hand in hand with the demand for naturalness came the demand for simple unaffectedness. The deeply pu-



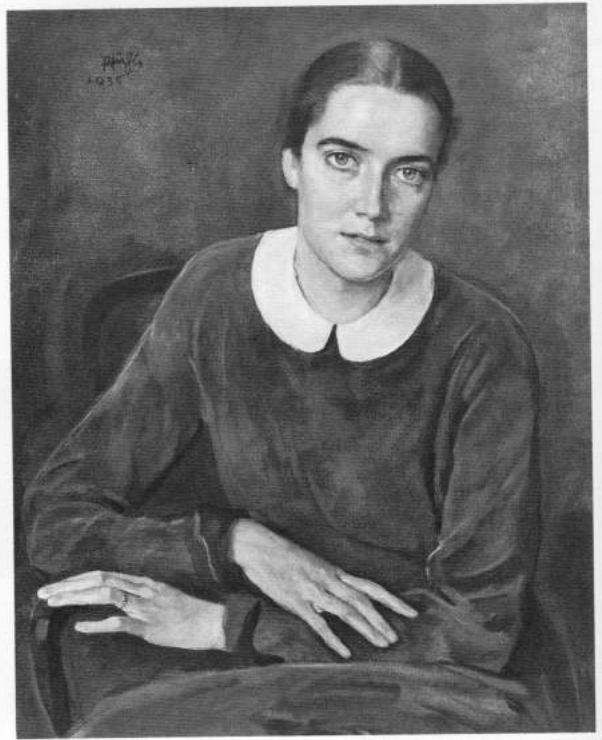
*Johann Schult. After the Bath.
"Great German Art Exhibition
1940"*

"PAINTING THE RIGHT AND GOOD WAY! WITH THE RIPE EXPERIENCE OF THE EYE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAWS WHICH GOVERN THE BODY."—ROBERT SCHOLZ

*Opposite:
Paul Mathias Padua. Leda
and the Swan*

Karl Truppe. Youth





ritanical attitude of most totalitarian regimes also prevailed in Germany and brought forth the most hilarious requirements: "... painted and powdered women will be forbidden entry to all NSBO [National Sozialistischer Betriebs Obman; National Socialist Foremen] gatherings. Women who smoke in public—in hotels, in cafés, on the street, and so forth—will be expelled from the NSBO."¹⁹

"Germany does not need women who can dance beautifully at five o'clock teas, but women who have given proof of their health through accomplishments in the field of sports. 'The javelin and the springboard are more useful than lipstick in promoting health,'" reported the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1937.²⁰ Tea dances equal black music equal Jewishness equal city life—the simplistic equations never stopped.

"Fundamentally, . . . we should reject the custom of the five o'clock tea which came to us from England, where it is already a degenerate social form. . . . First it was the modern way of life, shaped by the Jewish spirit . . . a social gathering in which one cultivates not conversation but gossip. In particular, it is thought that through this abominable American custom (namely, eating and drinking standing up) an especially agreeable and spontaneous conversation can

develop, whereas actually only chatter is achieved. . . . These are not community-conscious, sociable German men, but 'stray international gypsies on a parquet floor.'"²¹

The National Socialist leaders saw themselves increasingly as a feudal caste. A clique that did not mix with others, except for a few actresses who were allowed into their inner circle, they stayed to themselves. Their growing wealth allowed them to adopt the style of the upper middle class, whose taste and aspirations they began to imitate in the country estates they established for themselves.

As well as this idealized image, there were pictures of the idealized traditional housewife turning her attention to old handicrafts. "It must seem amazing that women and girls should return to work at spinning wheels and weaving looms. But this is wholly natural. . . . This work must be taken up again by the women and girls of the Third Reich," declared the *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1936.²²

THE GERMAN MAN

"If anything, the new age of Germany will create the image of the German man. There has never been a richer time for the presentation and interpretation of



From left to right:

Karl Storch the Younger. Portrait of Mrs. Johanna Roth. 1934

Fritz Pfuhle. My Daughter Elisabeth. 1935

"THE NOBLE WOMAN, THE GERMAN WOMAN KNOWS THAT SHE HAS TO DRESS IN A NOBLE, LADYLIKE WAY THAT CONFORMS TO HER NATURE. . . . SHE DOES NOT WANT TO ADVERTISE WITH COLORS OR FORCED ELEGANCE. THIS SHE LEAVES TO THE WHORES. . . . SHE WANTS TO BE WOODED FOR HER INNER QUALITIES, NOT FOR HER ATTIRE."
—KURT ENGELBRECHT

Herbert Kampf. My Daughter Eve

the German character. World War One showed us how little mere strength, diligence, and conscience mean nowadays. Everything depends on the persuasive power of the images provided so that a whole people can identify itself with them."²³

Representation of the heroic man was usually reserved for sculpture. But with the beginning of World War Two, the man as hero became a powerful iconographic element in painting, too. The war absorbed much of the energy of the country, but it never totally extinguished the National Socialists' preoccupation with the arts. The director of the National Museum in Berlin boasted that, while the British Museum and the Louvre fearfully had begun to evacuate their treasures, the German museums "have not been silenced like those of the enemy, waiting for the sad end of this war. The German museums do their duty by serving the people and waiting for victory."²⁴

The "Great German Art Exhibitions" were also widely used as a morale booster. Hitler made sure to attend the openings, at least at the beginning. Later, preoccupied with the losing war, he left this task to Goebbels and Hess. Opening the fourth exhibition, in the first year of the war, Goebbels stressed the role of art as the best way of uplifting people in times of sor-

row and deprivation. In fact, 751 artists displayed 1,397 works. Many rooms were now devoted to war art. The war became the new inspiration for the artist, but not the horror of it: the heroic sacrifice was always stressed. The war was a new source for artistic creation, and many artists elevated the soldier to a symbol. The restrained pain in the face of the wounded soldiers and the expression of the finished battle were designed to move the people deeply.

"The opening of the 'Great German Art Exhibition,' during a war forced upon us, is the strongest demonstration of our cultural need and our cultural strength," wrote Robert Scholz, in 1940, in his capacity as director for the visual arts in Rosenberg's office for the supervision of the intellectual training of the NSDAP. "The fact that Germany continues its cultural mission, undeterred and protected by its glorious weapons, is part of the miraculous inner renewal of the people. A philosophy has brought out creative forces. The part the visual arts play in this process of cultural renaissance is the miracle of all miracles. . . . War, which a Greek philosopher called 'the father of all things,' is a great challenger. German visual arts have met the challenge. This exhibition is proof of the strong impulses that our Führer's ingenious willpower



Rudolf Hausknecht. Lookout on a U-Boat

and his ingenious creative strength have brought to the arts. His example spurs every creative force to the highest."²⁵

The war was seen as a battle for the salvation of German culture. "In this war, the German *Volk* fights not only for its material existence, but also for the continuation and security of its culture," declared Hitler on the occasion of the 1942 exhibition of German art. "German artists, too, have been called upon to serve the *Heimat* [nation] and the front."

Documentary films, shown in movie houses all over the country, broadcast the artistic message to a large number of people. "Filled with creative joy, our artists have this year, too, despite hardship, produced great works of art," boasted one commentary. Among the "great works of art" the viewer saw were four sculptures: Thorak's *Last Flight*, a sentimental rendering of a woman holding a dead soldier; the bombastic relief of Breker's *The Guardian*, a soldier drawing a sword; and the statuary stereotype rendering of the naked woman, as in Fritz Klimsch's *The Wave* or Anton Grauel's *Pensive Nude*. The example of what the National Socialists con-



Gisbert Palmié. Sniper Aiming a Rifle. 1944.

sidered "great" paintings was not more inspired. There were Julius Paul Junghanns's naturalistic renderings of strong horses and cows; Rudolf Hermann Eisenmenger's allegory *Die Nacht begleitet den Morgen* (The Night Accompanies the Morning), three half-nude ladies; Joseph Piper's *Drei nackte Jünglinge am Meer* (Three Nude Youths at the Sea); and two giant cartoons for Werner Peiner's gigantic tapestries *Die Schlacht König Heinrichs I* (The Battle of King Heinrich I) and *Die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald* (The Battle of Teutoburg Forest). Of course, the filmgoer was also given a generous helping of war art: a giant triptych, *Infanterie* (Infantry), by Rudolf G. Werner; the fierce rendering of



Walter Schmock: Soldiers

Die Flammenwerfer (The Flame Throwers), by Rudolf Liepus; the Hitler portrait by Gerhard Zill, and of course Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbrück's *Kämpfendes Volk* (Fighting People).

Art was constantly presented as a sign of optimism. Its role was not so much to help to overcome the increasingly difficult problems of life as to hide reality. Hitler had occupied France and was heavily engaged in Russia. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers had died in battle. The civilian population was spending night after night in air raid shelters, but art was constantly used to bolster the lie of a victorious Germany. "All forces, the physical as well as the spiritual, fight for the final victory. Art is today, more than ever, a political factor of a high order," wrote Walter Horn, reviewing an exhibition of the Prussian Academy in 1940. "The victorious war has not diminished the creative strength of the Germans. On the contrary. Everything serves to strengthen our will to fight and our determination to defend our soul."²⁶

In 1942, when the House of German Art inaugurated the vast annual exhibition, the journalist and art functionary Robert Scholz bragged:

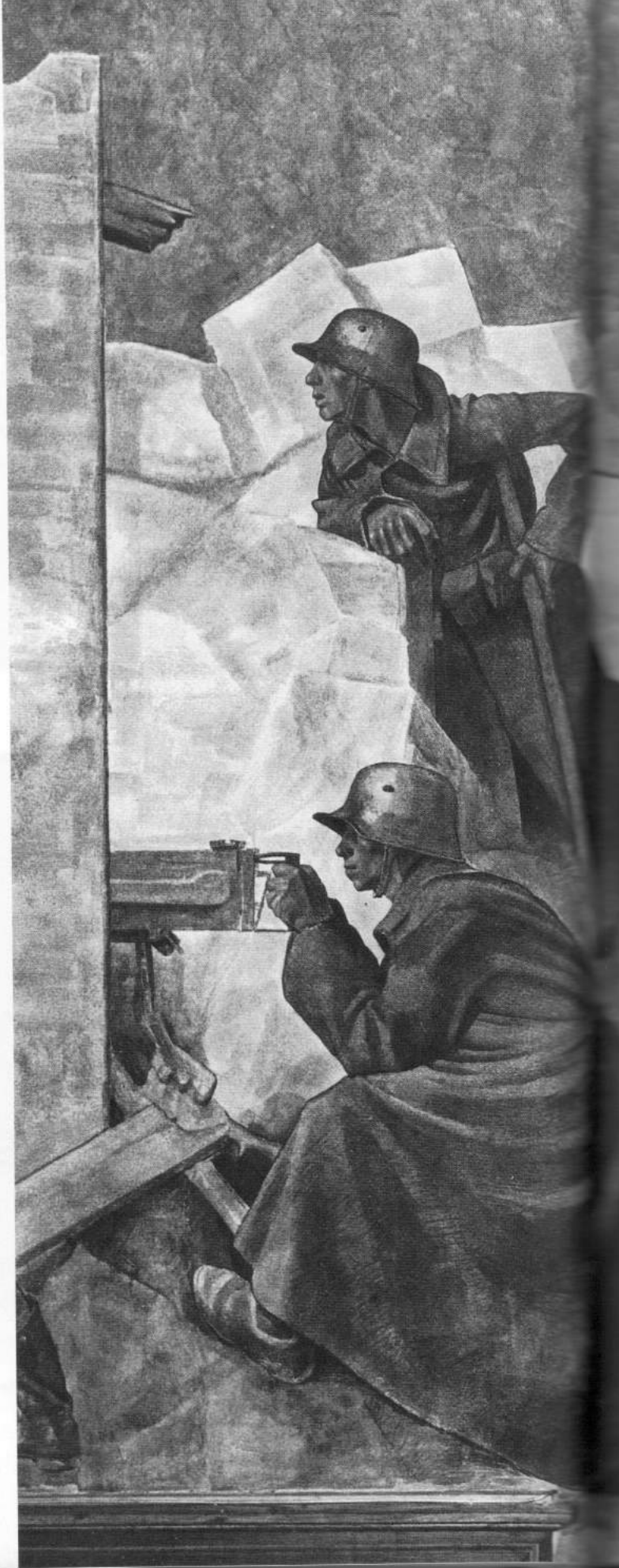
Millions flock to see our art, they come from all parts of Germany. The fact that the "Great German Art Exhibition" opens its

gates for the third time during the war is strong proof of the certainty of the spiritual fundament upon which the battle of our destiny stands. What unites the individual exhibits is the emanation of optimism and a strong artistic idealism. This belief in a future is in times like this the strongest proof of the strength of the German soul. Just compare these works with those of the First World War. . . . What marked the work of those artists was a deep pessimism. The darkness of their colors, the heaviness of their style announced the collapse of their spirit. . . . The inner strength and the general tenor of the present day are of a different mold. . . . The optimism . . . is visible in the many works that depict the lasting values and subjects in art, such as man, animal, and landscape.²⁷

Hitler's pathological military nature was directed toward war. All his politics were aggressive. Their justification was conquest. "Only he who struggles with fate has Providence on his side." Hitler firmly believed that mankind could realize itself only through struggle, and so to him the purpose of art was also a preparation for war. The suffering of war was almost totally absent. Reviewing the frescoes of Franz Eichhorst (see illustration pages 160–61), Robert Volz wrote, "The beauty and singularity of these frescoes is



Elk Eber: Dispatch Courier. 1938–39





the almost total absence of blood and screams, the unbearably realistic has been avoided . . . the idea of readiness to fight and to be sacrificed, the loneliness of heroism overshadows the horrors of reality. What remains is the idea of the destiny of a people."²⁸

The role of the artist was either to portray the struggle for the survival of a peaceful German world or else to represent this world, which had to be defended at all cost.

Painters like Elk Eber, Fritz Erler, and Franz Eichhorst glorified soldiers, Aryan fighters fierce and victorious. "Show the pupils the pictures of soldiers painted by Erler or Spiegel, compare them with the vulgar and horrid works by Dix or Grosz. Every pupil will recognize immediately what decadent art is. . . . The strength of the real artist is in his blood, which leads him to heroism."²⁹

Eber became one of the particular favorites of the regime. He joined the Party early and received many honors. His paintings were widely distributed through postcards and reproductions. Eber was forty-one years old when Hitler came to power. He quickly became one of the most fanatical painters of the National Socialist movement. His pictures were always prominently exhibited and widely reproduced in the press. His paintings of soldiers and SA men, with their fierce profiles, displaying their weapons, were favorite subjects for postcards. *The Dispatch Courier* was especially popular. They embodied the worst of National Socialist art with their call to fight and to sacrifice. "Elk Eber was one of the strongest artistic personalities of our time," declared a colleague in Eber's obituary in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, in 1941 "He drew the war as he saw and lived through it, the heroism of the German soldier during battle. Also his own deprivation and suffering and sometimes even the proud bearing of the soldiers when the battle was hopeless. . . . *The Last Hand Grenade* was one of the most remarkable pictures in the 'Great German Art Exhibition,' because it expressed the attitude of the Party and the whole people. . . . Professor Elk Eber had basically only one theme: the soldierly, heroic masculinity of our time."³⁰

Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbrück's painting *Workers, Soldiers, Farmers* borrowed the traditional format of the triptych to carry a Fascist message. It represented the



three pillars of the state, elevated to icons, symbolizing their contributions—almost but not quite equal. The army dominated the picture, not only by its central position but also by the fact that it was painted as if seen from below, a well-known artistic device for creating awe and emphasis.

Paul Mathias Padua's *The 10th of May 1940* celebrates the Germans' opening of the western offensive. The leader of the fifteen men crossing the Rhine was seen as someone who was beckoning the whole nation to follow him with an almost religious gesture.

An increasing number of war paintings filled the walls of the House of German Art. In them the readiness to fight and to die for the nation was seen as the highest virtue. The soldier was shown mostly as the glorious victor. The horror of war or even death was only rarely portrayed. The National Socialists believed it was not the role of art to augment the anguish of war. It was the task of art to lead people away from reality into an emotional dream world: "The willingness for sacrifice which fills the whole German people is visible in all the works. . . . They are the artistic visualization of a communal experience, the representation of the spiritual attitude of their time." Paintings that could have given an accurate, realistic picture of the



social and historical circumstances of a people at war were censored by the leadership. The National Socialists kept the realistic language of painting, but they restricted its range. The artist was encouraged to adopt a polished photographic style but not to use it with conviction. Once more the emptiness that stares us in the eye when we look at almost any of these paintings stems from the artist's total divorce from reality.

Paintings of the great battles in German history glorified the country's military tradition and justified the continuing struggle. Werner Peiner had become one of the most prolific battle painters of the National Socialist regime. In 1937–44 he created the cartoons for his series of large tapestries, four devoted to the subject of the falcon hunt, ten to the virtues of women, five to the five continents, and the rest to the major German battles throughout history. By 1945 only five tapestries were finished. They were huge works, along Gothic and Renaissance models, commissioned by Göring and Hitler for the new Reich Chancellery Speer had designed. They were supposed to be the building's most significant and impressive decorations, launching a monumental modern art form. These historical subjects gave the German Reich a historical

context. The description of these tapestries in 1940 lauded Hitler as the greatest of patrons, who was bringing about the renewed flowering of the art of tapestry. This series by virtue of its scale would outshine those produced in the Middle Ages. It was the triumphant theme that spoke of the heroic spirit of the Reich, and confirmed the rebirth of a vigorous Germany after the shame of the Versailles Treaty and the defeat of World War One.

Ferdinand Spiegel's *Tank*, a giant mural which combined the modern army with the old Prussian cavalry, also celebrated the continuity of battle. The colonization of the past never stopped. The great German battle scenes and the representations of warriors from previous periods all helped to legitimize the present war. The celebration of the precursors of the new Germany was used to tell the story of those who had prepared the ground for National Socialism.

Many artists were selected to become official war artists under the leadership of Luitpold Adam, who had been a war artist in World War One. At the start, Adam's *Staffel der Bildenden Künste* (Division of Visual Arts) included forty-five official war artists; eventually there were eighty. The quantity of war art turned out was enormous. All work belonged to the

government. It was used for special exhibitions, which toured the country. "The Invasion of Poland in Pictures," "The War," "Northern Land," "German Greatness," "Painters at the Front," "A Volk at Work" were all meant to show the cultural and heroic effort of Germany undiminished despite adversity and hardship. Artists were encouraged to create directly from their experience of war. The magazines went to great lengths to prove that the idea that distance was necessary for the artist to gain sufficient perspective to render a great event was false. The direct and subjective experience of war gave their art its artistic stamp. The fact that the artist was at the same time a soldier and no longer a mere observer gave him a special re-

lationship to the events. "Art is the mirror of the soul," wrote Walter Horn in 1942. "It reflects the character and shows if it can master the task of history or if it is defeated by it. Only a soldier-like character, filled with intense feelings, is able to transmit the experience of war in artistic form."³¹

The works of the war artists were more than personal documents; they were the highest artistic expression of an experience which involved the whole nation. "[They] are documents of the German soul. Their content and style are signs of the creative strength, the philosophical [*weltanschauliche*] attitude and the soldierly spirit. . . . The ethical and brave ideals of the SS, the highest volkish values, honor and

Paul Mathias Padua. The Tenth of May 1940
 "THE SINGLE EPISODE
 DEPICTED IN THIS IMAGE IS
 OF NO IMPORTANCE, NOR
 WILL ANYBODY MISTAKE THE
 SOLDIERS' HEADS FOR
 PORTRAITS. THE VIEWER IS
 INFLUENCED BY THE
 MYSTICAL CONTENT RATHER
 THAN BY THE EPISODE OR
 PORTRAITS."—ROBERT
 SCHOLZ



faithfulness, find here their artistic representation. In this way the visitor not only experiences an art exhibition, but conceives a picture of the character of the SS."³²

Not all the work done by the war artists was National Socialist propaganda. For quite a few painters, to be a war artist meant not to have to fight. With the exception of the very fanatical National Socialist devotees among them, much of their work is not any different from that of the war artists of other nations. Many just painted what they saw, although their work was not so prominently featured in magazines. Some might have secretly made some works which rendered the real face of war, but of course they could not have

been shown. There were many drawings and water-colors which simply rendered the life of the soldiers or the landscape. There were even pictures which showed some compassion for the prisoners and the destroyed villages of Russia. But among the many thousands of works preserved, there is not one single drawing showing the absurdity of war. The picture one gets from these works is of a gentle war, of blonde nurses, comradeship, and friendly faces. It is not a picture of blood and tears, of gangrene and death.

THE WORKER

Labor, which was one of the key words in the National Socialists' vocabulary, was usually represented by the





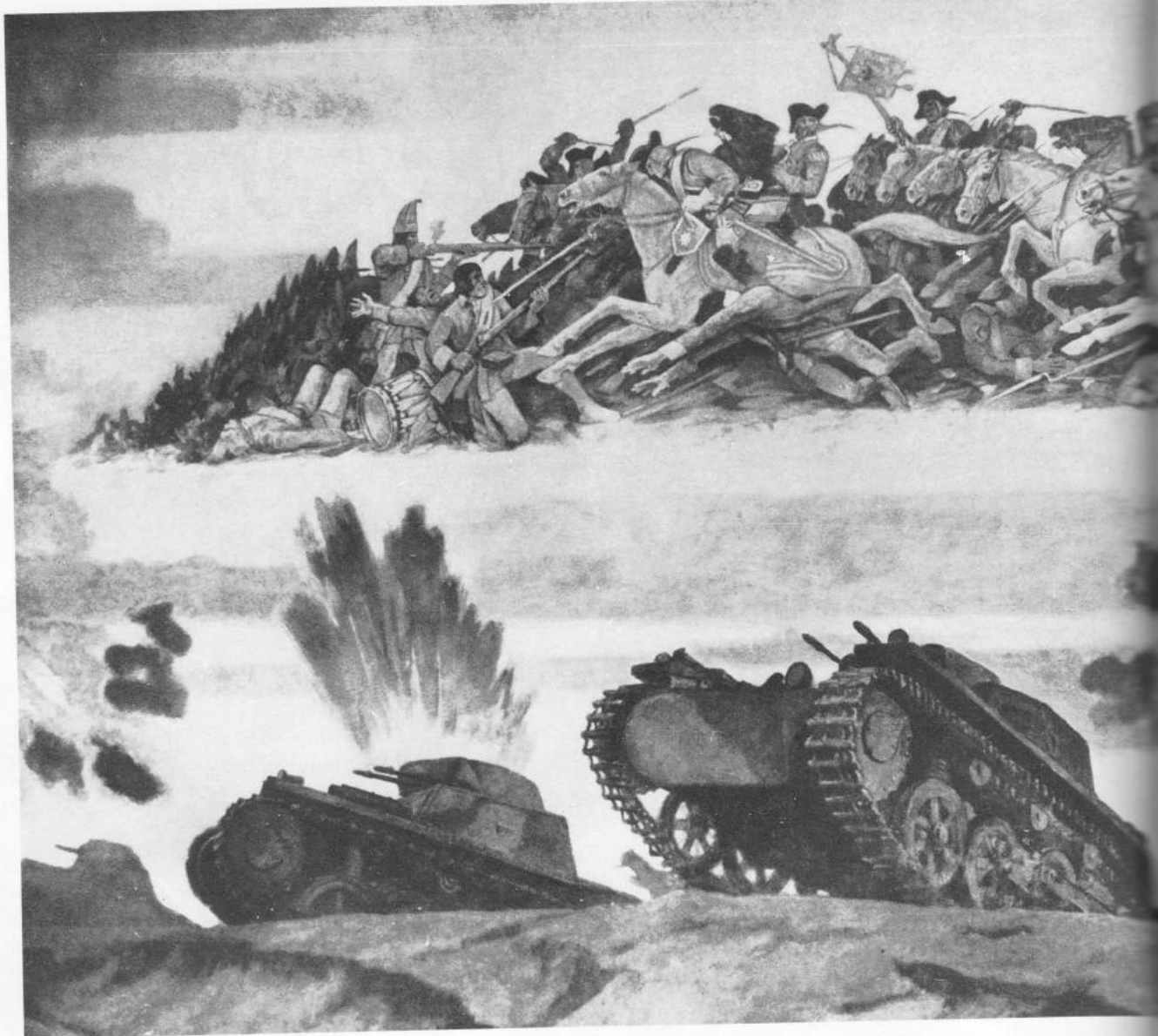


Werner Peiner. Frederick the Great at Kunersdorf. Cartoon for a cycle of tapestries "SINCE GERMANY HAS REVIVED LONG-DESIRED MONUMENTAL ART, WE ARE WITNESSING A RECOVERY OF TAPESTRY WEAVING AND ITS ELEVATION TO MONUMENTAL PAINTING."
—JOHANNES SOMMER

Werner Peiner. Frederick the Great at Kunersdorf. Detail

farmer. There was a notable absence of machine art. All work was done by brawny arms, tough muscles. Many paintings were simply an advertisement for the strong worker, often indistinguishable from posters. Sometimes work was seen as a battle, the worker as the hero, with his tools symbolizing conquest. The problems of modern industrial society did not exist. The portrayal of work as a chore, as seen in paintings by modern artists like Käthe Kollwitz, is almost totally absent. National Socialist artists depicted a world ennobled by hammers and muscles, not a world of exploitation and exhaustion; a world of the idealized worker, not one of sweat and toil. It seems odd that such a highly technological country did not portray technology more in its art. Some painters celebrated achievements like the Autobahn (Oskar Graf), or the great building sites at Nuremberg (Paul Herrmann). Where modern industry is represented, it is the factory rather than the worker that is shown, or the workers are rendered so small that they became just props. The miracle of technology and industry alone was to be celebrated.

The representation of the individual man in the factory was considered a sign of past liberal times that, according to the philosophy of the National Socialists, saw a kind of salvation in technology. In 1942, an article entitled "Kunst und Technik" (Art and Technique) appeared in *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*, which castigated



Ferdinand Spiegel. Tank. Mural

even the socialist realist art of the Soviet Union with its "mechanical dehumanization, blind adoration of the machine, and its crude materialism." Both liberalism and Communism put technology above man. The National Socialists stressed the fact that behind the machines stood the will not of a single man but of the people. "The measure of all things is no longer man or machine but *Volk* and community."³³

This communal will of the German people was expressed in pictures of flaming furnaces, smoking chimneys, and howling wharves, the battlefields of the workers, where the individual counted for little.

Many paintings represented the community, the nation; the demonstration of the unity of all people in which the individual is part of the whole. In Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbrück's *Nation at War*, the mother is en-



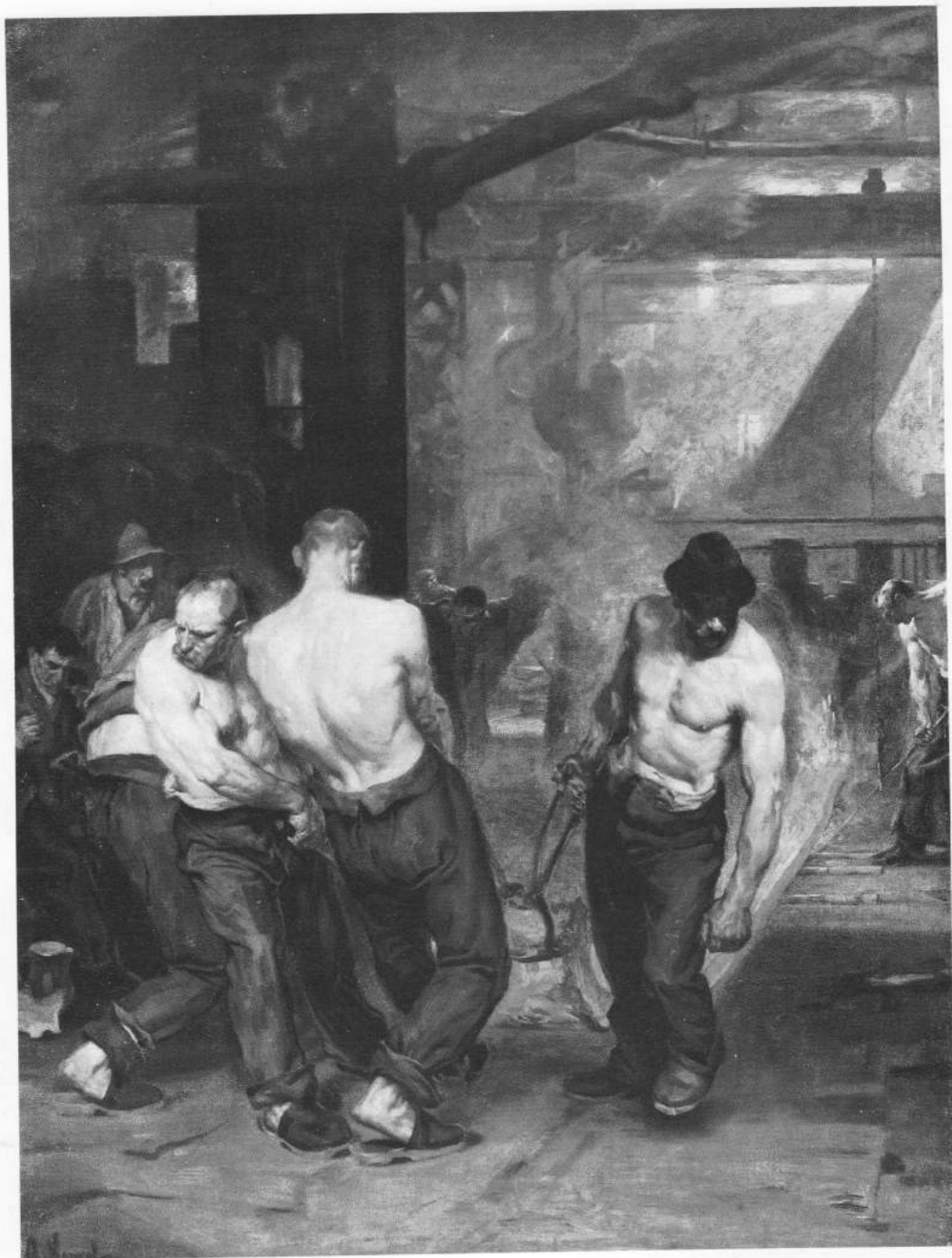
Olaf Jordan.
Two Russian
Prisoners of
the Germans.
1943



Olaf Jordan. Alexej
Pawlowitsch Bondar,
Volunteer in
Germany's Cossack
Division.
1944



Wolfgang Willrich. "Neuberger, Karl
28388. Eastern Front squad leader
from Sauerlach, near Munich, 44
years old, married, 4 children.
Construction worker. Maternal
ancestors farmers in Bavaria."
—Legend on picture



Arthur Kampf. *In the Steelworks.*
 "Great German Art Exhibition
 1939"

throned like a madonna, in her hands the child and the letter from the front. Destiny links the front with the *Heimat*. As the guardian of the nation she sits in the middle. She is surrounded by the other components of the nation, as on a stage: the farmer on her left, the worker on her right, and above her head the soldier riding under a rainbow into battle. We find the nation again in Georg Poppe's *Portrait of the Führer*. This time the mother looks up to the Führer who is surrounded by scientists, farmers, and workers. Behind him is the military.

Knier: Hitler
 "THE HARD EYE OF THE
 COMMANDER IS LIKE
 LIGHTNING OR THE FLASH
 FROM A BULLET SHOT."
 —WILHELM WESTEKER



Below:
Walter Eisebeck: Hitler



PARTY PORTRAITS, PORTRAITS OF HITLER

The so-called Party pictures, depicting top Nazi personalities or events, were an important part of art production, but they were by no means the overriding subject. Elk Eber's fierce SA men, with their armbands designed by Hitler himself, were typical. Party members of the SS were also represented, set in seemingly harmless landscapes or in the midst of peasant lives.

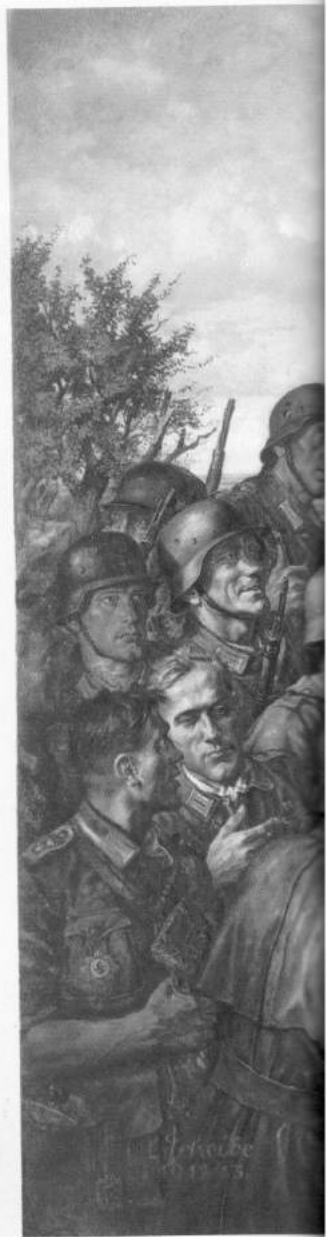
Portraits of Hitler of course dominated. "The Führer is the highest gift to the nation. He is the German fulfillment. An artist who wants to render the Führer must be more than an artist. The entire German people and German eternity will stand silently in front of this work, filled with emotions to gain strength from it today and for all times. Holy is the art and the call to serve the people. Only the best may dare to render the Führer."³⁴

Hitler was often painted full length in order to convey his divine role (see illustration page 210). A seated portrait would look too relaxed and familiar, unless it

was formal and enthroned. Unapproachable, he was never shown at home, in personal surroundings, and at ease. In group portraits he always stood out, dominating, as in Emil Scheibe's *Hitler at the Front*. But primarily he was portrayed alone. There was Hitler the leader or the head of the army, often authoritative, sometimes pensive, gazing into the distance (see Franz Triebisch's portrait, page 21). Fritz Erler pictured him in front of a monumental sculpture making him look like a giant. He appeared on stamps (mostly designed by Richard Klein). Sometimes he was seen as a friend of the family but usually as the icy leader.

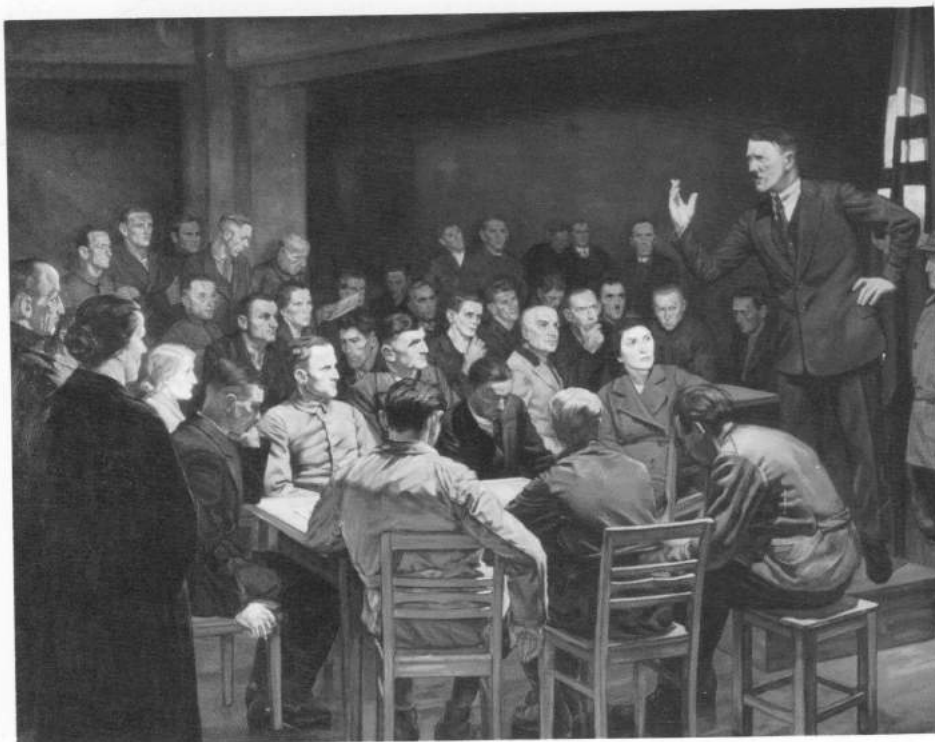
Conrad Hommel (see page 105) was Hitler's portrait painter and the Third Reich's court painter in general. He painted Hitler in the pose of the *Feldherr* (commander-in-chief), the map of the world at his feet, the bunker in the background. Hommel's portraits made wonderful postcards, which were snapped up by the millions.

In Hermann Otto Hoyer's *Am Anfang war das Wort* (In the Beginning Was the Word), a title with strong religious connotations, Hitler stands on a dais in a dark room. Behind him is an SA man with the flag. Hitler is the glorification of the National Socialist idea heightened into religion by the title alone. The light over him falls on the listener. Hitler is the bringer of light, the illuminator.



Above:
Emil Scheibe, *Hitler at the Front*. 1942-43

Hermann Otto Hoyer, *In the Beginning Was the Word*





ANTI-SEMITIC AND OVERTLY DOCTRINAIRE PAINTINGS

The fine arts were certainly an instrument for the dissemination of National Socialist propaganda, but in effectiveness in swaying the masses, they were overshadowed by the mass meetings and the mass media, which had a much larger audience. While cartoonists and filmmakers indulged in orgies of anti-Semitism, we find very few traces of anti-Semitic propaganda in the fine arts. Maybe the notion that the artist created lasting works on a higher plane kept such themes at arm's length. Adolf Reich's *Um Haus und Hof* (All Their Worldly Goods; see illustration page 279) is a picture of the manifestation of greed. A Jewish speculator ap-

propriates the homestead of an honest peasant couple who has run into financial difficulties.

Sometimes the political message was more subtle. Franz Weiss's *The Seven Deadly Sins* (see illustration pages 282–83) is a painting very much in the tradition of the paintings of the Renaissance. It seems to have no political message whatsoever until one discovers in the bottom corner the portraits of Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill as gluttons. After all, art was to concentrate on the good, and the good had to be beautiful, and consequently there was no place for the Jew in it. He would have debased German art just by being there.