

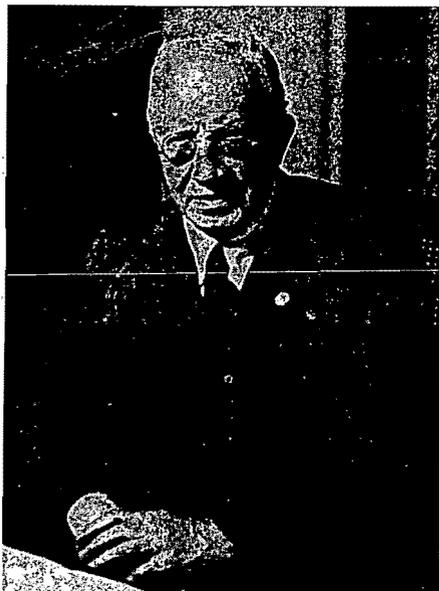
**ART**  
**AS POLITICS**  
**IN THE THIRD**  
**REICH**

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Otto Kümmel, Generaldirektor of the Berlin State Museums and chief researcher for Rückforderung program, 1940 (BAK).

reaucracy in the west, these aspirations did not yield results, as other NS leaders also advanced schemes of their own. The propaganda minister, to speak metaphorically, became entangled in the bureaucratic jungle that took hold in this fertile territory. By autumn 1940 the following ministers were vying with Goebbels for control of Jewish-owned and Germanic artworks in the occupied western regions: Alfred Rosenberg, who headed what became probably the most effective art plundering agency the world has ever witnessed—the ERR; Martin Bormann, who was Rosenberg's superior in the Party and hence the ERR and also controlled the Sonderauftrag Linz agents; Hermann Göring, who also possessed some authority over the ERR (by way of an alliance with Rosenberg) and used his various offices, such as the Devisenschutzkommando (foreign currency-protection commando) within the Four-Year Plan office, as well as his small army of private agents to collect artworks; Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who received orders directly from Hitler to confiscate art in France and used his staff in the Paris embassy for this purpose; Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, the masters of the polycephalic police apparatus that permeated all occupation zones; Franz Graf Wolff Metternich, who headed the Oberkommando des Heeres' (army's) *Kunstschutz* unit, which made an effort to actually safeguard artworks; and Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who as Reich commissioner for the occupied Netherlands hired Kajetan Mühlmann to steal and purchase artworks wherever he found them.

Goebbels made a concerted effort to win out over these rivals: after so-

liciting the 12 August 1940 decree from Hitler to start the Rückforderung project, he attempted to broaden his base of support by convening an advisory board comprised of representatives of the various branches of government.<sup>13</sup> The board's first session, which Goebbels chaired, met on 22 August 1939 in the RMVP's building on the Wilhelmstraße. Those present included Robert Scholz, who acted on Rosenberg's behalf, and Hans Posse, the head of the Linz Project, as well as subordinates representing Göring, Speer, Ribbentrop, Rust, and Frick.<sup>14</sup> This attempt to muster broad-based support, which was reminiscent of the way Goebbels had created the *entartete Kunst* Disposal Commission, did not lead to success. One can only speculate as to why Goebbels failed to triumph in the plundering bureaucracy. He still suffered in 1940 from falling out of favor with Hitler in the wake of the Baarova affair and therefore did not have the Führer's ear. He incurred disadvantages vis-à-vis his rivals by not spending much time physically present in the occupied west (for example, Rosenberg had ERR offices in Paris, and Göring made frequent excursions in order supervise the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain). Also, Goebbels's preexisting dominance over the cultural sphere of the Nazi government made Hitler, with his divide and rule philosophy, wary of investing him with more power. All these factors, combined with his relative alienation from the military (he not only lacked a military appointment but also had never experienced combat as a result of his physical disability), worked against Goebbels. While a fast starter in the race to control the plundering of art, he soon faded from contention.<sup>15</sup>

#### ROSENBERG AND THE ART PLUNDERING BUREAUCRACY IN FRANCE

The victor in this competition to administer the artistic booty emerged in the fall of 1940. The indefatigable Alfred Rosenberg, though repeatedly discredited by past failures, nonetheless managed to rebound and enjoy his greatest success within the cultural bureaucracy. To be sure, he had a legitimate claim to oversee the disposition of the newly acquired artworks, having been one of the Nazi authorities on painting and sculpture. Yet his commission as head of the ERR came about primarily as an extension of his position as the Party ideologue. Whereas he once concentrated on theorizing about the opponents of National Socialism—Jews, Freemasons, and Communists—he now played an active role in destroying them. This shift from theory to praxis centered around his Hohe Schule project, the planned network of ten institutions that were to serve as the loci of higher education for NS studies. Rosenberg, who received the commission for the

Hohe Schule from Hitler on 29 January 1940, did not initially market them as a vehicle for plundering; rather, he stressed their importance in propagating the Nazi ideology and proving its validity.<sup>16</sup> This goal is discernible in the names of the branch institutes themselves: for example, the Institute for Jewish Research in Frankfurt, which focused on the Jews (with the Nazis' biases of course), and the Institute for Biology and Racial Studies (*Rassenkunde*) in Stuttgart, which aimed to legitimate the Nazi racialistic worldview. Rosenberg's Hohe Schule only became a part of the plundering bureaucracy on 5 July 1940, when, through a Führerbefehl, he received authorization to collect the archives and libraries of the declared enemies of National Socialism.<sup>17</sup> This commission did not apply to artworks. In fact, shortly thereafter, on 15 July 1940, the OKH issued an order that strictly prohibited the movement of art without written permission from the Militärbefehlshaber (regional military commander).<sup>18</sup>

Rosenberg and his colleagues quickly organized a staff to locate the archives and books that they had been commissioned to secure. By reshuffling personnel within the DBFU and bringing in a few new "specialists," they created the ERR. Gerhard Utikal, an employee in the DBFU who emerged gradually during the war as Rosenberg's right-hand man, obtained the position of administrative chief of the ERR (Leiter des Zentralamtes).<sup>19</sup> From their Berlin headquarters Utikal and his staff in the Zentralamt began to spin the absurdly complex web of staffs, special commandos, and work groups that eventually came to comprise the ERR. The various branches of the ERR that came into existence in the summer of 1940, including the notorious Dienststelle Westen (Western Office) of Kurt von Behr, initially confined their activities to written materials. However, they were far from inactive: for example, on 26 August 1940, an Organization Todt transport of eleven train cars (1,224 cases) left France for the Sonthofen Ordensburg (one of a series of ideological training centers) via Frankfurt am Main.<sup>20</sup> The contents of this transport came from various archives and libraries, the most notable targets being the Polish, Turgenev, Jewish, and Rothschild libraries in Paris.<sup>21</sup>

The radicalization of the Nazis' plans for art in the occupied west continued, despite the ERR's restricted scope of authority and despite the efforts of the OKH to safeguard France's artistic treasures. In addition to the 15 July order limiting the ERR and other rapacious agencies, the army utilized a *Kunstschutz* unit organized in June 1940 under Graf Wolff Metternich, which endeavored quite earnestly to protect the artworks and monuments threatened by battle. The drift toward radicalization continued unabated, however, as the uncertain commands stemming from above provided the more malignant types room for maneuvering. As early as 30 June

Hitler had assented to a verbal order that called for the expropriation of Jewish-owned artworks.<sup>22</sup> This order and hence the first organized plundering of art in France went through the Foreign Office, with the chain of command stretching from Hitler to Ribbentrop to Otto Abetz (the German ambassador to occupied France). Abetz in turn charged three embassy employees, Dr. Karl Epting, Carl-Theodor Zeitschel, and Eberhard Freiherr von Künsberg (the latter two also being field police agents), with the specific task of securing and transporting to the Louvre artworks belonging to French Jews that had been removed by the French to chateaus in the Loire.<sup>23</sup> Plans were developed to catalog the works that would be assembled at the Louvre and then send the suitable pieces to Germany.<sup>24</sup> This scheme elicited frequent protests from both the army's *Kunstschutz* chief Wolff Metternich and his superiors (General Karl Heinrich von Stülpnagel, General Walther von Brauchitsch, and others are also on record for their complaints).<sup>25</sup> An army report from 1941 also did not shy away from the damning facts. For example, one passage in the report revealed that in the summer of 1940 Abetz had "allowed a series of collections from Jewish possessions to be brought to a house neighboring the German embassy on the Rue de Lille," and that "he has the intention of examining the list of artworks himself, and from it, selecting approximately twenty to twenty-five outstanding pieces."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, by August 1940 the commandos led by Künsberg had placed some 1,500 Jewish-owned paintings in the embassy depot and a curator from the Berlin state museums named Dr. Maier had begun to make an inventory of the plunder.<sup>27</sup> But neither the protests nor the reports with specific allegations proved sufficient to stem the onslaught of the plunderers.

While Joachim von Ribbentrop had Hitler's permission to pursue Jewish-owned artworks in France, he, for inexplicable reasons, failed to secure a written and circulated order.<sup>28</sup> This quite understandably contributed to the confusion and allowed Metternich and his *Kunstschutz* staff, backed by their superiors in the army, to oppose Ribbentrop and Abetz's program. Metternich's battle with the various plunderers is well known—even if he did embellish the story in postwar accounts. He indeed refused to surrender artworks in his unit's care, challenged efforts to remove the seized artworks to Germany, resigned his commission as a Hauptsturmführer (lieutenant captain) in the SS, and was eventually fired in 1942—reportedly on Hitler's express orders—as a result of his intransigence.<sup>29</sup> Throughout his stint as head of the *Kunstschutz*, Wolff Metternich insisted that the other occupiers respect the 15 July 1940 order of the army prohibiting the movement of artworks. However, Abetz, like Rosenberg later on, instructed his agents to ignore these objections. He told them that they had directives of

their own to follow and argued that they, in fact, were taking steps that would best protect the artworks in that the treasures would be much safer in Germany.<sup>30</sup> Amid the quarrel between Metternich and Abetz, Rosenberg reasserted himself and won the crucial commission for the ERR to secure artworks in France.

Rosenberg's coup came in the form of an order on 17 September 1940 from Field Marshal Keitel, head of the OKW to General von Brauchitsch, the head of the Military Administration in France; the decision, however, according to a Military Administration report, came *vom Führer persönlich*.<sup>31</sup> The ERR was empowered to secure all ownerless (*herrenlos*) cultural property, including those objects given to the French state by the enemies of the National Socialists since the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939. This order struck Rosenberg's rivals like a lightning bolt in that it reversed a trend that had been developing: the limiting of the ERR's jurisdiction by the various authorities in the occupied regions. For example, on 28 August 1940 representatives of the ERR and the Military Administration had met to delineate their respective spheres of authority. The results of the conference left the ERR with little independence apart from the Military Administration and allowed them to deal only with "the protection of archives."<sup>32</sup> Prior to that meeting, the OKH had, on 3 August 1940, issued guidelines to the ERR that the Military Administration report had characterized as having a "clearly restrictive tendency."<sup>33</sup> Until the 17 September order the fight to control the fate of the artistic booty in France appeared to center around the Foreign Office and the army. Rosenberg's agency, the Himmler/Heydrich police apparatus, and Göring's Devisenschutzkommandos were ostensibly secondary or auxiliary forces.

Clearly Hitler allowed a chaotic and redundant bureaucracy for art plunder to develop in France as well in as Belgium and Holland. The situation mirrored the governing process of the Third Reich in general. The "polyocracy," to use Martin Broszat's expression, entailed numerous advantages for Hitler and emerged as a result of a more or less conscious policy. Placing ministers in competition with one another elicited energetic and industrious behavior and actualized his Social Darwinist worldview. As illustrated by Goebbels's, Rosenberg's, and Ribbentrop's appeals to Hitler, where they requested authorization to organize looting campaigns, Nazi subleaders exhibited tremendous initiative. Aside from establishing a dynamic or motor force to drive the plundering bureaucracy, this overlapping succession of offices assured Hitler the position as arbiter, and the stakes of this game were not solely political power, but the control of the much-desired artworks. Obsessed as Hitler was with amassing his mammoth art collection, it was of paramount importance to him that he alone deter-

mine the fate of the looted art. By making his underlings insecure and beholden to him, he assured himself this pivotal role. So essential was this polycratic arrangement to Hitler's power that at no point during the war did one minister or agency have sole jurisdiction over the plunder.

The rationale behind Hitler's decision to invest Rosenberg with this important commission is not entirely clear. There was a certain logic in giving this task to the leader of the ideological war. Rosenberg's demonstrated ability during the summer of 1940 to assemble operation units quickly within the ERR also made him an attractive choice. Rosenberg's indisputable enthusiasm for the project also played a role in Hitler's decision, as the Party philosopher repeatedly approached Hitler about the matter and displayed no hesitancy about dealing with the occupation officials in France.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the ERR, while pursuing archives and books, also acquired artworks; or as the Military Administration report noted, "the Einsatzstab, while investigating archival materials also stumbled upon artistic treasure."<sup>35</sup> Lastly, Hitler knew Rosenberg to be one of the more subservient and malleable Nazi subleaders. The important position of overseeing the collection of precious art objects—the sinecure made all the more valuable because so many of the elite also sought the assignment—was not to be entrusted to one of his more independent-minded colleagues.<sup>36</sup>

With the 17 September 1940 order in hand, Rosenberg set out in earnest to pursue Jewish-owned artworks. He did so very quickly. The French government after the war estimated that three-fourths of the ERR's plunder was confiscated prior to mid-1941.<sup>37</sup> Key works taken by the ERR included Vermeer's *The Astronomer*, Frans Hals, *Lady with a Rose*, Fragonard's *Young Girl with Chinese Figure*, Chardin's *Portrait of a Young Girl*, and Boucher's *Portrait of Madame Pompadour*. All five of these works came from the Rothschilds and were amongst the 3,978 objects lost by the various branches of the family.<sup>38</sup> Other noteworthy collections confiscated by the ERR belonged to the Kanns, the Seligmanns, the Wildensteins, the David-Weils, the Levys, and the Cassels. The most important of Rosenberg's subordinates in the initial confiscations was Kurt von Behr, a fanatical Nazi who had worked for the German Red Cross and who continued to wear the uniform as he plundered art in France (as compared with to the brown uniforms with swastikas that were worn by the other members of the ERR).<sup>39</sup> Heading the ERR's main working group, which he expanded into a division called the Dienststelle Westen, Behr established his headquarters in Paris, first in the Louvre, then in the Jeu de Paume. He coordinated the activities of a variety of workers, from art historians who identified and cataloged the artworks to soldiers who accompanied the commandos. Behr had one key rival: Robert Scholz, Rosenberg's longtime expert on art. Scholz continued



Rosenberg arriving at the Jeu de Paume to inspect the work of his Einsatzstab, 1940 (Librarie Plon)

with many of his prewar activities (including editing *Kunst im Deutschen Reich*) while overseeing the Sonderstab Bildende Kunst, which also collected artworks in France. Scholz maintained his office in Berlin, making only occasional trips to the west. Behr therefore was the crucial on-the-spot authority for the ERR. The geographic separation of the two functionaries did not prevent a power struggle from gradually developing. It came to a climax in 1943 and nearly precipitated a collapse of the agency.<sup>40</sup>

The ERR, despite having Hitler's backing, still encountered serious difficulties in executing their commission in the early fall of 1940. The first of these problems stemmed from a lack of funding, a seemingly perpetual concern for Rosenberg. Turning to his previous source of assistance, Party Treasurer F. X. Schwarz (the ERR was a Party agency), he tried to gain financial support with the promise of great returns on the investment. For example, in an 18 September 1940 letter Rosenberg recounted the acquisition of the Rothschild treasures and noted that the ERR was "on the trail of valuable materials in Belgium and Holland."<sup>41</sup> The appeal here appeared more financial than ideological. Yet it eventually worked, as the Party sent

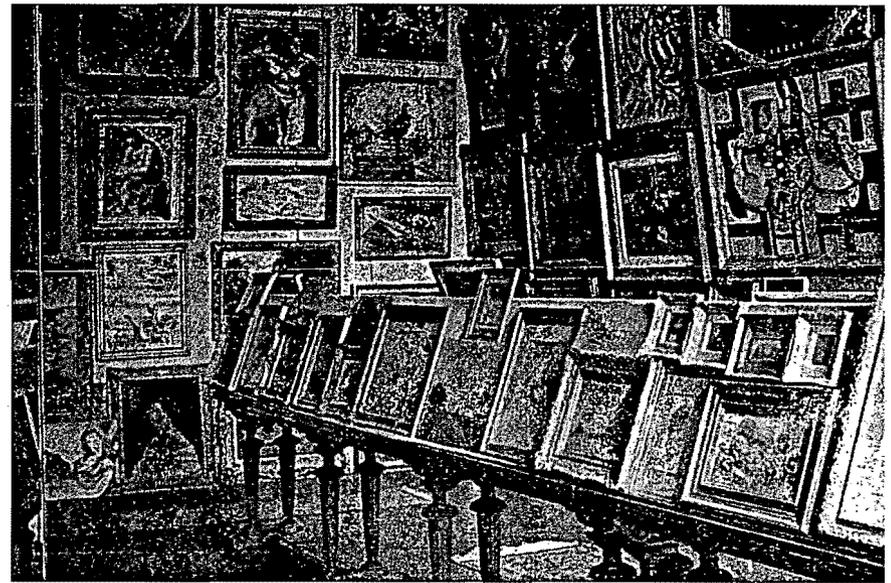
the first RM 100,000 grant in November and effectively solved the ERR's funding dilemma.<sup>42</sup>

The other major difficulties faced by the fledgling ERR can be divided into two categories: transportation and the continued opposition from other German offices. Rosenberg solved both these problems by joining forces with Hermann Göring. Rosenberg was in contact with the Reichsmarschall almost immediately after gaining his commission to pursue artworks. In a letter dated 21 September 1940 Rosenberg tentatively explored the possibilities of a cooperative approach to the confiscation of Jewish artistic property.<sup>43</sup> Göring, who hoped to derive personal advantage from such a relationship, responded affirmatively to Rosenberg's inquiry, and among other things, he offered to place the Luftwaffe's trains and guard staff at the ERR's disposal (a useful service considering the army's reluctance to assist the plunderers). Rosenberg knew full well that this provided the shrewd Reichsmarschall with a means of involving himself in the looting operation. But previously the ERR had suffered frustrating problems with the Organization Todt's overextended transportation network. The first shipment of archives and books destined for the Sonthofen Ordensburg had been lost (albeit temporarily), and the ERR was developing a backlog of materials to be shipped.<sup>44</sup> Rosenberg's approach to Göring came with the realization that securing a reliable means of transport back to the Reich was essential for the ERR to fend off its rivals.

Rosenberg also agreed to an alliance with the powerful Reichsmarschall due to *Realpolitik* considerations. He knew that he lacked the stature and resources to hold off the competing German agencies, and at this point he had yet to secure funding from the Party. Rosenberg also had learned through Reinhard Heydrich that Göring himself intended to oversee an art plundering operation by way of his offices, utilizing both the Four-Year Plan agency (specifically the Devisenschutzkommando, which had offices in Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam) and the Luftwaffe.<sup>45</sup> On 14 August 1940 the Devisenschutzkommando, whose task was to oversee mints and detect currency violations in the occupied territories, garnered the right to search bank vaults in the course of conducting investigations.<sup>46</sup> Rosenberg's letter to Göring on 21 September therefore had a nervous, threatened undertone to it. While not an explicit invitation for an alliance—Rosenberg merely said that he wished to avoid conflict and felt confident that arrangements could be worked out—the letter led to their collaboration. Rosenberg's fear of Göring developing a rival organization, when added to the threat posed by Ribbentrop/Abetz and Goebbels, as well as the opposition of the army and its *Kunstschutz* unit induced him to sacrifice some of his agency's autonomy in return for assistance.

Rosenberg and Göring together proved an unbeatable combination—at least early in the war, before the Luftwaffe chief was discredited. Examples of their cooperation included the Devisenschutzkommando assisting the ERR units in their plundering forays, the sharing of intelligence garnered through bribes (large sums were spent in this manner), and the intermingling of two leaders' staffs (Göring would loan personnel, such as the art historian Dr. Bruno Lohse, who helped catalog plundered collections in the Jeu de Paume, while many ERR employees developed a primary allegiance to the Reichsmarschall).<sup>47</sup> So extensive was their mutual assistance that Göring's agency voluntarily relinquished artworks to the ERR. A Devisenschutzkommando chief wrote in May 1941, "According to the decision of the Reichsmarschall, all of the art objects have been taken over by the ERR."<sup>48</sup> Göring also explicitly stated his willingness to use his influence to smooth over any difficulties that Rosenberg's agency encountered and to approach the Führer when the need arose.<sup>49</sup>

Göring himself, in a letter to Rosenberg in late November 1940, took credit for vanquishing Ribbentrop and Abetz, as he expressed his satisfaction at having induced the Führer to rescind the authority to secure artworks that had initially been given to the foreign minister.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the losers turned over most of the artworks stored in the Rue de Lille warehouse to the ERR, as they maintained possession of only those works that Ribbentrop had managed to commandeer for his personal collection as well as a number of undesirable modern pieces.<sup>51</sup> The conclusive defeat occurred in October 1940, and accordingly Abetz wrote to the Military Administration on 28 October: "Due to the changed political situation, the confiscation of artworks by my representatives must now fundamentally cease and should be carried out solely by the Military Administration or according to a written *Führerbefehl* [meaning the commission given to the ERR]."<sup>52</sup> It is curious that Ribbentrop and Abetz retained custody of certain modern works (pieces they derisively referred to as the products of *Wilden*, or savages), but they harbored designs to trade these pieces for more acceptable traditional works. Even this unseemly venture brought out the Nazis' competitive instincts, as Ribbentrop and Abetz worried that the ERR might first sell its modernist booty and flood the market.<sup>53</sup> In their forays through occupied France the ERR had, of course, turned up artworks that did not conform to Hitler's stylistic dictates. Behr, Scholz, and the other leaders who made ERR policy attempted to dispose of such art in the fashion mentioned above by Abetz: bartering and selling the pieces at a discount to art dealers in France and Switzerland. With their low regard for such art, they made highly disadvantageous trades, with exchanges of modern art for traditional works not



Separate room in ERR's Jeu de Paume storage facility for "degenerate" modern works, 1942  
(*Librarie Plon*)

uncommonly occurring at a 25-to-1 ratio.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, when forced to retreat eastward from France in mid-1944, they failed to take many modern works with them for fear of "contaminating" the Reich (the pragmatic looters did ship degenerate art to the Slovakian protectorate).<sup>55</sup> Yet an order from Hitler (through Bormann) noted in an ERR report of 15 April 1943 had explicitly prohibited the import of modern art into the Reich.<sup>56</sup>

In exchange for his assistance to the ERR, Göring obtained considerable influence over the agency. The postwar French government report termed the period dating from November 1940 to July 1942 *la période de l'hégémonie Göring*.<sup>57</sup> During this period the Reichsmarschall acquired approximately 600 artworks from the ERR, including a Boucher painting, *Diana*; a prized Watteau, *Galante Scène*; and Velásquez's *Portrait of the Infanta Margareta-Teresa*.<sup>58</sup> In establishing the various areas of cooperation with the ERR, Göring reserved for himself a favorable position in the hierarchy of precedence for the secured works of art. According to his famous order of 5 November 1940 the right to select artworks from the booty proceeded as follows: Hitler had first choice, followed by Göring, Rosenberg's Hohe Schulen, appropriate German museums, and finally, French art dealers, who would be engaged to auction off the remaining pieces, with the proceeds going to widows and children of deceased French soldiers.<sup>59</sup> Göring

claimed that he planned to pay for the works he took – “corresponding compensation,” as it was called – and accordingly employed an art expert named Professor Jacques Beltrand to determine the “estimated price.”<sup>60</sup> But the Reichsmarschall never forwarded any payment to the ERR or to the Party for the art that he received.<sup>61</sup> What was important to the Reichsmarschall was the appearance of legality. He even claimed to have opened bank accounts for such purposes (again, no transfer of funds is discernible).<sup>62</sup>

Göring visited the Jeu de Paume to inspect and select from the ERR’s plunder. He made twenty such visits prior to November 1942, beginning with a session on 5 November 1940 when he dictated the above-noted order. On this first visit alone he earmarked for his own collection an estimated RM 1 million worth of art. Fourteen works from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that stemmed from the Seligmann brothers’ collection pleased him the most.<sup>63</sup> Kurt von Behr oversaw these Jeu de Paume “exhibitions” for the Reichsmarschall, assisted by art historians Bruno Lohse, Hermann Bunjes, and Günther Schiedlausky. These four were so devoted to Göring that Robert Scholz accused them – and Behr in particular – of being more loyal to the Reichsmarschall than to their ostensible chief, Alfred Rosenberg.<sup>64</sup> Scholz also claimed that the ERR’s top administrator, Gerhard Utikal, was overly attentive to Göring. He wrote to Rosenberg in a December 1942 report that “this approach of Behr [to Göring] was concealed and supported by Staff Leader Utikal.”<sup>65</sup> While Behr and Utikal were perhaps just being cynically realistic, acknowledging the true source of their protection, other members of the ERR were in the actual service of Göring. Bruno Lohse and Hermann Bunjes both became members of the Luftwaffe and had to answer directly to the Reichsmarschall.<sup>66</sup> Lohse repeatedly tried to extricate himself from his post as assistant to Behr, finding the job unsavory. Protestations aside, he played a key role in helping Göring establish *la période de l’hégémonie*, and after the war the French extradited and imprisoned him for his deeds.<sup>67</sup>

The ERR employee who exhibited the greatest loyalty to Rosenberg, Robert Scholz, became frustrated by Göring’s nefarious cooptation of the agency, both because of his personal loyalty to his longtime chief and because of his more selfless approach to National Socialism (the plundering action he conducted was, in his mind, not for personal gain). His protests about Göring’s arrangement varied in tone. In trying to resist the Reichsmarschall’s incursions, he initially tried to be calm and factual, as illustrated by the memorandum to the files noted above, where he explained the views of Behr and Utikal. In this document he also remarked that de-



Rosenberg and Kurt von Behr inspect looted objects in Paris, 1940 (*Librarie Plon*)

spite Göring’s declared willingness to pay for the objects transferred to his care, he could not “designate as correct the business ways of Herr von Behr, who bears ultimate responsibility for this affair.”<sup>68</sup> Scholz later became dramatic in his remonstrations. On more than one occasion he threatened to quit Rosenberg’s employ (and evidently serve at the front) if the corruption provoked by Göring did not cease.<sup>69</sup> Rosenberg was never pleased about Göring’s cooptation of his agency, but he was outmaneuvered by his higher-ranking colleague. Göring’s craftiness especially irked him, as works were selected and on view in Carinhall before Rosenberg realized what had happened. Göring utilized various ploys to conceal his expropriations. Typically he himself would serve as a sort of middleman between the ERR and Hitler and in the process would create enough confusion to abscond with desired works.<sup>70</sup> Göring’s selections were so poorly documented by the ERR that earlier, in March 1941, Rosenberg had taken the step of sending Scholz to Paris to determine what objects had found their way to the Reichsmarschall’s collection.<sup>71</sup> Rosenberg’s decision to transfer Behr to another branch of the plundering operation, the M-Aktion, which did not specifically involve artworks, undoubtedly alienated Göring, as Behr was the Reichsmarschall’s key ally within the ERR. It should not be surprising that Behr’s departure from the art plundering scene corresponds with the end of Göring’s period of hegemony over the ERR.

The German civil administration in France made a concerted effort to revive the nation's—or at least the capital's—cultural life after the armistice in June 1940. In addition to opening nightclubs, theaters, and cinemas, they permitted art exhibitions. Most of these exhibitions were projects undertaken by the French that featured indigenous artists. Arno Breker was the only German to have an exhibition in wartime France. The retrospective of his sculpture that took place in the Orangerie gallery of the Louvre from 15 March to 31 May 1942 was an extraordinary event, as French artists, including Aristide Maillol, André Derain, Jean Cocteau, and Charles Despiau mingled with both the French and the German political and military elite. Abel Bonnard, the Vichy minister of education, arranged a reception for artists from both nations at the Hotel Ritz, and Robert Brasillach delivered a lecture on Breker at the Théâtre Hébertot.<sup>72</sup> Breker's patron and friend Albert Speer had arranged the funding and logistics for the exhibition. Despite Speer's inability to attend the opening (he came later), the enterprise proved a tremendous propaganda success for the Germans as they flaunted the collaboration in the press (including the showcase magazine *Signal*) and in newsreels.<sup>73</sup>

The Germans also managed to arrange a limited number of exhibitions in France that conveyed their ideological agenda. As in nearly all of the territories they occupied, the local population and the German armed forces were exposed to a range of propagandistic shows. While the Poles had *Warsaw Accuses* and various cities in the West hosted the sardonic exhibition *The Soviet Paradise*, the French endured *The Jew and France*, which was housed at the Berlitz Palace, and *Free Masonry Unveiled*, which had the Petit Palais as its venue.<sup>74</sup> The Germans also encouraged the French to stage a number of ideologically suitable exhibitions. The General Commissariat for the Family, for example, organized shows that, in the historian Matila Simon's words, "would do honor to Vichy's slogan, 'Country, Family, Work' (which had replaced 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity')." <sup>75</sup> The productions of the General Commissariat stressed pronatalist and profamily messages.

There were a number of other events concerning the visual arts that had a propagandistic raison d'être. A group of celebrated French artists toured Germany in November 1941, where they visited the ateliers of their German colleagues. André Derain, Maurice Vlaminck, and others participated in this program, and they were filmed for the newsreels inspecting Speer's architectural models, visiting Breker's atelier, attending a reception hosted by Ziegler, and touring German museums.<sup>76</sup> The French artists had been induced into this fiasco with the promise that between 200 and 250 French

prisoners of war would be released for each participating artist. In fact, no prisoners were released as a result of the trip. The Germans also organized an exhibition of the art of French prisoners of war in the Galliera Museum in mid-1941. Featuring amateur artworks, the show was part of the Germans' effort to generate goodwill. A committee of liberated French prisoners participated in the planning, and visitors to the show could purchase a special postcard to send to those still incarcerated, whose correspondence was normally restricted.<sup>77</sup>

The German occupiers hoped to use cultural events to calm the French population and restore a sense of normality to everyday life. They encouraged the French to stage the 154th Salon d'Automne—which they did at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. Art journals, such as the *Revue des Beaux-Arts de France*, the official organ of the Ministry of National Education and the secretary general of the Fine Arts, appeared beginning in October 1942.<sup>78</sup> The French were also induced to bring some of the safeguarded treasures back from the provinces. The Louvre opened sections of the museum, including the Greek sculpture gallery, at the end of September 1940. A photo of Feldmarschall von Rundstedt and one of the museum's curators before a classical statue was distributed to the press.<sup>79</sup> The Germans even loaned works by Claude Monet from collections in Berlin and Bremen for a Monet-Rodin retrospective organized by the Musée Nationaux in late 1940.<sup>80</sup> Still, the harsh cultural policies of the occupation—which included not only the expropriation of Jewish property and the forced exile of many artistic luminaries but also the smelting down of statues—undermined this halfhearted pacification program.<sup>81</sup>

#### SECURING ART IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

Rosenberg's ERR, while an efficient force in the plundering of France, did not prove as effective in the other areas where branches were established. Various factors contributed to the curtailment of Rosenberg's confiscation plans. But put simply, the ERR in the Netherlands, Belgium, and in the Occupied Eastern Territories lost out to competing agencies. Rosenberg failed to exert his influence in these regions, both in the narrow sense of obtaining the right to capture art and more generally as a respected figure in the occupation administrations. Hence, for example, despite holding the title minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories (appointed by Hitler on 17 July 1941), he lacked real power. The usurpers in the east alone ranged from Himmler and Heydrich to the Reichskommissars and Generalkommissars whom he supposedly oversaw (Hinrich Lohse,

Erich Koch, and Wilhelm Kube).<sup>82</sup> In the Netherlands the ERR lost out to the Dienststelle Mühlmann and the Feindvermögensverwaltung (Enemy Property Administration); agencies that both fell under the jurisdiction of Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart.<sup>83</sup> The two organizations worked together to the exclusion of the ERR, although the scope of their seizures never matched those of Rosenberg's forces in France.

The ERR did possess a mandate to conduct a campaign against the "enemies of National Socialism" in the Netherlands and Belgium. Rosenberg's guidelines, however, stipulated that the methods here were to be more restrained. As the Nazis perceived the Netherlands as a country inhabited by racial types similar to the Aryan and having a history and language with clear German connections, their occupation policies were less harsh and lawless than in the other European countries. The Netherlands was in fact slated to be administratively linked to the Reich.<sup>84</sup> The ERR's work group in the Netherlands, which was headed initially by a bureaucrat named Albert Schmidt-Staehler, therefore proceeded in a more cautious manner. Schmidt-Staehler had a modest staff of about eight workers.<sup>85</sup> They determined that Dutch Jews did not have art collections comparable to those of the Jews in France and decided to focus their limited resources on the securing of archives and libraries as well as Masonic lodges.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, the anti-Jewish measures were not implemented immediately upon the advent of the occupation. Not until 1941 did the full force of the Nazis' genocidal program go into effect.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately some art did find its way into the ERR's storage facilities, but this did not constitute a significant yield.<sup>88</sup> For the most part the ERR played a minor role in the Low Countries, as Rosenberg remained marginalized and without viable allies.

Those significant Jewish art collections that did fall into Nazis' hands usually went to the Dienststelle Mühlmann. The agency's accounts ledger listed 1,114 paintings as passing through their hands, and this did not cover their entire operation.<sup>89</sup> By enjoying the support of Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart the Dienststelle had a great advantage, as their protector had a virtually unassailable position in the country's occupation administration (answering only to Hitler).<sup>90</sup> Mühlmann, fresh from his brutally successful enterprise in Poland, was recruited to the Netherlands by his friend Seyss-Inquart, and he initially viewed this next undertaking with the same malevolent intentions. In his postwar report the Dutch intelligence officer Jean Vlug conveyed the plunderer's eagerness, noting dramatically, "Rotterdam was still burning when Kajetan Mühlmann in his SS-uniform arrived in Holland to take up his task of the Dienststelle."<sup>91</sup> However, Seyss-Inquart restrained Mühlmann, making it clear that this project involved a different set of rules. True, the plunderers had an anti-Jewish ordinance to facilitate

their expropriations. Verordnung no. 189/1940, issued by Seyss-Inquart, required Jews to take their valuables, including jewels, precious metals, and artworks, to the Bankhaus Lippmann, Rosenthal, and Company—an Aryanized Jewish bank in Amsterdam.<sup>92</sup> This property was then handed over to the Feindvermögensverwaltung of the Reichskommissariat, under the direction of the economic chief, Dr. Hans Fischböck. The Feindvermögensverwaltung informed the Dienststelle Mühlmann of those valuable Jewish-owned artworks that came into the Bankhaus and then effected their transfer. There were at least seventy-five instances when this occurred.<sup>93</sup>

The Dienststelle Mühlmann did not normally resort to using commando tactics, although they cooperated extensively with the Gestapo and the Devisenschutzkommando—the two agencies that responded most often when Jews did not voluntarily turn over their valuables. The Dienststelle functioned like an art dealership or a clearinghouse for artworks uncovered by the other occupation agencies. The Dienststelle usually sold the works in its care, charging a commission of 15 percent above the *Schatzpreis*. Most of the major works went to Hitler and Göring, and in this arrangement money usually changed hands. There were instances when no payment was rendered for Jewish collections, as with the art belonging to Alphonse Jaffe and Fritz Lugt.<sup>94</sup> In all cases Hitler and the Linz agents were exempt from the commission. But in general the Dienststelle operated more like a business than any other branch of the NS plundering bureaucracy. Other Nazi elite also bought pieces from the Dienststelle. Among Mühlmann's customers were Heinrich Himmler, Baldur von Schirach, Hans Frank, Erich Koch, Julius Schaub, Heinrich Hoffmann, and Fritz Todt.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, Posse, Voss, and the Linz agents were the Dienststelle's most important clients.<sup>96</sup>

The staff of the Dienststelle Mühlmann included Mühlmann's chief assistant, art historian Eduard Plietzsch; two Viennese art historians, Franz Kieslinger and Bernhard Degenhart (the latter specializing in sculpture); Mühlmann's half-brother, Josef, who had established a reputation as an efficient plunderer in his own right; and a chief administrator, Josef Ernst.<sup>97</sup> Eduard Plietzsch, a specialist in Dutch art who had penned a book on Vermeer, had volunteered for the position, anticipating that it would be lucrative. He was not disappointed, as he reportedly commanded a salary of RM 10,000 per month plus expenses as well as a commission on the sales that he engineered.<sup>98</sup> The Dienststelle Mühlmann was a self-supporting operation; the commercial inclinations of its staff found expression not only in the sales to other Nazi leaders but also in the auctioning of artworks in the Reich, as prestigious firms such as the Dorotheum in Vienna, Adolf



Seyss-Inquart (center) visits exhibition in Düsseldorf, 1942 (BAK)

Weinmüller in Munich and Vienna, and Hans Lange in Berlin sold off the plunder on their behalf.<sup>99</sup> With minimal costs and a sizable clientele, they were assured of a lucrative enterprise.

The Linz directors Hans Posse and Hermann Voss, while not plundering in the literal sense of pillaging or stealing, were so aggressive and exploitative in their behavior that they deserve to be considered part of the Nazi plundering bureaucracy. They also had official clout in the Netherlands. Posse was not only a museum director in Dresden and Linz (both state positions) but also the Referent für Sonderfragen (officer for special questions) in the Reichskommissariat. Posse set up an office at Seyss-Inquart's headquarters in The Hague (the former American embassy), where he could better oversee the three *Sonderkontos* that the Reichskommissar had established for Führermuseum purchases.<sup>100</sup> Even the art dealers working for the Linz Project—Alois Miedl and Erhard Goepel were the most important in the Low Countries—had official appointments issued from Bormann's Party chancellery. Armed with these directives, these dealers could issue very effective threats to reluctant sellers. However, one did not require an official position in order to intimidate or coerce, as indicated by the behavior of other dealers working for the Nazi leaders. Sepp Angerer, for example, who had worked on behalf of Göring to dispose of degenerate art abroad, but who held no state or Party post, was nonetheless known to raise the specter of the Gestapo in the course of difficult negotiations.<sup>101</sup>

Indeed, despite the respectable outward appearance of the Linz agents, their behavior was so sordid that the American OSS officers recommended in 1945 that "Sonderauftrag Linz be declared a criminal organization" and that the agents stand trial.<sup>102</sup>

Posse was very competitive and territorial regarding the art market in the Netherlands. He first approached Bormann in mid-June 1940 to request an ordinance restricting the art trade, whether this be denying other dealers travel passes or imposing regulations on imports to the Reich.<sup>103</sup> No such exclusive privileges were granted, although Bormann initially appeared sympathetic to the idea. Scores of German dealers continued to make their way westward to scour the Dutch market. Earlier, Göring's chief agent, Walter Andreas Hofer, had found his way to Holland, arriving five days after the capitulation; and he devoted much of his time to this market.<sup>104</sup> This mounting competition infuriated Posse, who sent a second unsuccessful proposal for restrictions to Bormann in February 1941. In this letter he argued for the radical measure whereby "private German purchases . . . should be prohibited, or the sale prices should be limited to approximately 1,000–2,000 guilder per item."<sup>105</sup> Yet Posse could have expected little else but a crowded market in light of the decision to link the economy of the Netherlands to the Reich. The currencies of both countries became directly convertible in April 1941, obviating the need for *Devisen* (foreign currency), which was normally very difficult to obtain.<sup>106</sup> In this relatively unregulated environment the Dutch art market experienced a boom and an inflation of prices from 1940 to 1944 that was unparalleled in the history of the country.<sup>107</sup> Göring even claimed that he and his staff of art agents could not come close to evaluating all of the works offered to them for purchase. Posse was forced to work extremely assiduously—to the extent that he continued to exert himself right up until his death from cancer in December 1942. His successor Hermann Voss, who bought even more artworks than Posse, also purchased frenetically. Being ever-diligent predators, they utilized auctions, private tips, renowned galleries, and of course the Dienststelle Mühlmann.<sup>108</sup> Between June 1940 and mid-1944 the Linz agents spent approximately RM 20 million on artworks in the Netherlands and contributed directly to the economic exploitation of the country.<sup>109</sup>

Posse and Voss fared well in the Netherlands not only because they had virtually unlimited resources at their disposal and could therefore outbid the competition but because they were closely allied with Seyss-Inquart. As the post of Reichskommissar was a political appointment—as compared with that of military governor that existed in France and Belgium—greater dedication to NS principles and to Hitler himself could be expected. This was true of Seyss-Inquart, a convinced Nazi of Austrian origin who re-

mained loyal to Hitler until the end (he was appointed foreign minister in the last cabinet of the Third Reich).<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, Seyss-Inquart did not shy away from illegal actions in order to accomplish his objectives. He would regularly intervene in the Linz agents' negotiations and apply pressure to the extent that he thought necessary, as he did with regard to the Mannheimer collection. In this case he threatened to push for the confiscation of the massive collection of Vermeers, Rembrandts, and other old masters, which had belonged to the deceased Jewish banker, unless the trustees of the estate consented to sell the works at far below the market rate.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Seyss-Inquart apparently used his influence to discourage other German buyers from pursuing Mannheimer's art (this was as close as Posse came to his cherished monopoly).<sup>112</sup> The forced sale therefore allowed Hitler to purchase the key works for Linz (which included Rembrandt's *Jewish Doctors*) through the Dienststelle Mühlmann in 1941 for 5.5 million guilders—2 million guilders below the asking price. Lest one believe that Seyss-Inquart was entirely self-effacing in his devotion to Hitler and National Socialism, there have been reliable reports that he personally made a substantial sum on the deal (a figure in the millions of guilders).<sup>113</sup>

It was typical of the NS state that the Darwinist struggles between functionaries spawned a network of ententes and even friendships. These relationships developed at all levels, with the Göring-Rosenberg working relationship representing an alliance of two high-ranking leaders, and the Seyss-Inquart–Mühlmann partnership standing as an example of a subleader establishing a long-term collaboration with a functionary. Seyss-Inquart and Mühlmann, of course, worked together in Austria, Poland, and the Netherlands. Alliances below the elite level also formed within the Nazi state. Subordinates would establish contacts and working relationships with their counterparts in different offices. Within the Dienststelle Mühlmann, Dr. Franz Kieslinger handled all business with the Reichskommisariat's Feindvermögensverwaltung.<sup>114</sup> Inducing one agency to turn over artworks to another was rarely easy during the Third Reich. Yet Kieslinger and his counterpart in the Feindvermögensverwaltung, Dr. Gutjahr, developed a relatively frictionless arrangement.<sup>115</sup> Mühlmann and his colleagues in the Dienststelle, who never numbered more than a dozen, also maintained close ties with the SD, the Gestapo, and the SS. Owing to the small size of his agency, Mühlmann thought it important to make use of the German police forces in the Netherlands, and he went so far as to allow Peter Gern, the head of the SD in Holland, to share his house in The Hague.<sup>116</sup> Throughout western Europe Himmler's agents played a largely supporting role in confiscating artworks by assisting with the seizures and lending their transportation network to various agencies. They handled

*Aktion Berta*, for example, where eighteen railway cars filled with art were sent to the salt mine repository at Alt Aussee in March 1944.<sup>117</sup> While the SS rarely retained control of the objects confiscated in the west, Himmler's seemingly ubiquitous forces were so effective as collaborators that they, in a sense, comprised the oil that lubricated the plundering machinery.

#### PLUNDERING ON THE EASTERN FRONT

On the Eastern Front the bitter, unrestrained military conflict was underscored by even greater organizational chaos. While Himmler's forces took the lead, a number of rivals operated simultaneously but with relative autonomy (although significantly there was no *Kunstschutz* in the east). The various German forces inflicted immeasurable suffering on the local populations. In the realm of art plundering, the key organizations mirrored those existing at the more general administrative level. The task of securing art was divided between the SS and the SD, the Wehrmacht, and Rosenberg's RMBO. Added to this mix was the Sonderkommando Ribbentrop, which was something of an anomaly because the organization had no other administrative incarnation. It existed only to plunder. The lawless brutality that prevailed in the east obscured both jurisdictional spheres and the fate of the captured artworks. No orderly cataloging or transport process comparable to that developed by the ERR in France or the Dienststelle Mühlmann in the Low Countries ever existed; hence the complete disappearance of treasures such as the Amber Room—the amber- and jewel-encrusted chamber formerly in the Czarist summer palace at Zarskoje Selo (now called Pushkin).<sup>118</sup>

The ERR once again played a central role in the pursuit of cultural objects. While Rosenberg's organization began operation in the east on 1 September 1941 (with their headquarters in Smolensk), they were repeatedly denied the authority to coordinate art looting operations until they secured a specific Führer decree on 1 March 1942.<sup>119</sup> Previously Rosenberg had submitted numerous plans for a full-scale confiscation program, especially in autumn 1941 when the prospects for a successful campaign appeared the greatest.<sup>120</sup> Bormann, who helped implement Hitler's "divide and rule" theory of government, did not want to invest too much authority in Rosenberg.<sup>121</sup> Bormann therefore arranged for the ERR to achieve the "goal of securing material for the spiritual fighting of opponents" but kept this assignment very general, not allowing Rosenberg to institute a program specifically aimed at artworks.<sup>122</sup> As in the west, some time elapsed before Rosenberg's staff expanded the range of their targets from libraries

and archives to artworks. Such a hiatus provided the basis for the postwar testimony of some of the perpetrators that they had not plundered art. Gerhard Utikal, the head of the ERR's Central Office, for example, stated that "the task [of the ERR in the east] did not extend to art treasures."<sup>123</sup> Utikal, like many of his associates, lied in his postwar statements and was convicted of war crimes.<sup>124</sup>

The March 1942 commission unleashed the ERR-Ost units in the pursuit of artworks. Significantly, many of the ERR art experts in France were listed as part of the agency operating on the Russian front. Even the overtaxed Robert Scholz was listed in the ERR-Ost records as heading the Abteilung Kunst in Rosenberg's RMBO.<sup>125</sup> Niels von Holst, who earlier answered to Rust and Himmler when he oversaw the repatriation of Germanic artworks in the Baltic region, had received a transfer to the ERR-Ost in October 1941. Holst continued to be in contact with Hans Posse, serving as the latter's chief agent in the east, as he looked for highly valued works.<sup>126</sup> The scope of the undertaking on the Eastern Front was daunting, and the ERR was somewhat overwhelmed by the task of securing art up and down the 1,300-mile front from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Yet they engaged units throughout the east. For example, the ERR's Main Work Group Ukraine, with the help of Himmler's forces, removed paintings and other valuable objects from the municipal museum in Taganrog in the spring of 1942 and then struck the picture galleries in Kharkov and Pleskau, shipping back to the Reich forty wagons filled with "cultural goods" in October 1942.<sup>127</sup> The ERR agents emerged as the chief transport coordinators from the Eastern Front to the Reich, often overcoming the stubborn resistance of the local authorities, such as Generalkommissar for White Russia Wilhelm Kube, who battled to retain control of the art in the territory under his administration.<sup>128</sup> The history of the ERR in the east is still being written, as large archival repositories in the Central State Archives in Kiev, for example, have recently been opened. Scholars have even found evidence of considerable destructiveness on the part of the Soviets' Red Army in Kiev and other historic cities, as they implemented a "scorched earth" policy in their initial retreat in 1941.<sup>129</sup>

One must avoid viewing the ERR-Ost operatives as overly solicitous about conservation measures, although they themselves often claimed that they were merely engaged in safeguarding the art.<sup>130</sup> In fact, their behavior frequently reflected the brutal ideological warfare that marked this conflict. There were numerous cases of wanton destruction attributable to the ERR-Ost, including transforming the Tchaikovsky Museum in Klin into a motorcycle garage (with manuscripts and scores used as fuel for the stove) and burning out the Ekaterinsky palace in Pushkin after denuding it



*Rosenberg (center) and Koch (right) inspect cloister at Laura in Kiev, 1942 (BAK)*

of all of its treasures.<sup>131</sup> The ERR-Ost, which made use of the logistical advantages provided by the RMBO, was efficient in moving the artworks westward, but their program was not confined to protecting (or even to stealing) cultural treasures.

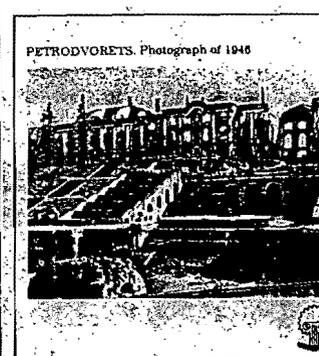
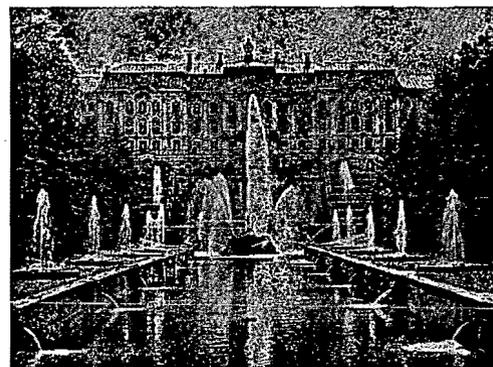
The ERR also engaged units in southeastern Europe and the Balkans, although deployment in these areas usually occurred later in the war and did not entail massive plundering operations. The ERR arrived in Yugoslavia in early 1943, but as the Jews of the region had earlier managed to evacuate most of their valuables, the haul was limited. The "highlight" came when 350 "artistically valuable paintings" from Belgrade were sent north to the monastery at Buxheim near Memmingen.<sup>132</sup> Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary were by and large spared from *Kunstraub* because they had joined the Axis alliance. Hungary lost this exemption in March 1944 when Admiral Horthy refused his country's military cooperation. The ERR then went in and sent back to the Reich a considerable quantity of art belonging to Hungarian aristocrats and Jews. The Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest was one of the state collections that fell into the Nazis' hands. Among the works they lost were a Lenbach portrait of Bismarck, which Hitler ordered directed to the Linz collection, and two Italian landscapes that Göring was rumored to have commandeered.<sup>133</sup> An ERR unit in Greece specialized in antiquities, but their activities were confined largely to carrying out excava-



Eberhard Freiherr von Künsberg, art plunderer in France and the Soviet Union (BDC)

tions, and they left alone nearly all of the national treasures.<sup>134</sup> The ERR-Ost did most of its damage in the Soviet Union. Artworks in the southeast and south were a secondary consideration for them.

More enigmatic than the ERR, and arguably more effective as an art plundering organization in the east, was an agency known by its popular name, the Sonderkommando Ribbentrop.<sup>135</sup> Although overseen by the foreign minister and possessing a headquarters on the Hermann Göring Straße in Berlin, the critical figure was the aforementioned SS officer and major in the Geheime Feldpolizei, Eberhard von Künsberg, who accompanied his men to the front (and proved so important that his own squad was often referred to as the Sonderkommando Künsberg).<sup>136</sup> The Sonderkommando Ribbentrop organization consisted of three battalions that followed the invading army groups, an organizational scheme resembling that used by the murdering squads, the Einsatzgruppen; a fourth unit was deployed in North Africa.<sup>137</sup> The Sonderkommando Ribbentrop was comprised primarily of SS forces attached to Ribbentrop's Foreign Ministry.<sup>138</sup> Initially totaling 80 to 100 men, it later grew after the addition of 300 to 400 reserves.<sup>139</sup> A number of the original troops, like Freiherr von Künsberg, had been active plunderers the preceding summer in France. As Alfred Rosenberg had secured a veritable monopoly on the French booty, these forces were freed to move eastward and accompany the invading armies.



The Great Palace near St. Petersburg, 1946 and today (Aurora Art Publishers)

According to testimony given at the Nuremberg trials, the foreign minister issued verbal orders to the commandos' leaders on 5 August 1941, placed the battalions in active service on the Eastern Front.<sup>140</sup> Prior to the groundwork for the Sonderkommandos had been established when 11 June 1941 (prior to the attack on the USSR), General Franz Halder issued a directive—classified as a *Geheim Kommandosache*, or a secret command concern—that ordered all army personnel to support Ribbentrop's operations.<sup>141</sup> It is undeniable that on the Eastern Front, “the Wehrmacht actively engaged in art theft and the conscienceless depredation of irreplaceable cultural objects.”<sup>142</sup>

The most effective of the Sonderkommando Ribbentrop forces followed closely behind General Feldmarschall Wilhelm von Leeb's Army Group North in the advance through the Baltic states into northern Russia during the late summer and autumn of 1941. The Sonderkommando's more noteworthy targets included palaces formerly belonging to the czars and their relations. Peter the Great's estate Montplaisir at Peterhof, the Pavlovsk palace in Pavlovsk, and the magnificent residence referred to in German documents as *Schloß Marly* were all ransacked.<sup>143</sup> Like the ERR, their activities combined destruction with theft. The palaces noted above were left charred remains, as were other cultural landmarks such as Pushkin's and Tolstoy's homes. The Soviet prosecutor at Nuremberg estimated that 34,000 objects alone were taken from the castles Marly, Montplaisir, and Pavlovsk, and the famed Amber Room, which had been a gift from Friedrich Wilhelm I to Peter the Great in 1716, was packed up and shipped westward.<sup>144</sup> As books were also a prime target of Ribbentrop's command, it is difficult to assess the raw numbers reported at the International Military Tribunal.<sup>145</sup> Perhaps more vivid is the estimate that forty freight cars per month of looted valuables were sent westward by the

ous branches of the Sonderkommando.<sup>146</sup> Many of these objects were stored in a depot on the Hardenbergstraße in Berlin, although a number of pieces, including the disassembled Amber Room, went to warehouses in Kaliningrad (Königsberg).<sup>147</sup> The Soviets took steps to evacuate eastward artistic objects in order to keep them from the Germans. For example, none of the 2.5 million artworks in the Hermitage Museum's collection at the time was lost to the enemy.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, more artworks could have been saved from the Germans had the Soviet NKVD agents initially not equated evacuation measures with defeatism and hindered museum staffs in their work.<sup>149</sup>

The Sonderkommando Ribbentrop had no organized cataloging system; more than anything else, they were a part of the machinery of destruction ordered by Hitler.<sup>150</sup> In the summer of 1941 Hitler issued a supplement to *Führererlass* no. 33, in which he argued that his forces would be able to secure large areas only "by striking such terror into the population that it loses all will to resist."<sup>151</sup> In another revealing directive, Feldmarschall von Leeb and the Sonderkommando Ribbentrop were informed in late September 1941 that "the Führer is determined to remove the city of St. Petersburg from the face of the earth."<sup>152</sup> As indicated above, the Sonderkommando acted in accordance with these guidelines by annihilating numerous cultural landmarks. Hitler believed it essential to undermine the culture of the Slavic people. In his *Table Talk* he pontificated, "Education will give the more intelligent among them an opportunity to study history, to acquire a historical sense, and hence to develop political ideas which cannot but be harmful to our interests."<sup>153</sup> The Nazis' program of cultural impoverishment therefore applied to the visual arts: destroying the artistic legacy of the eastern peoples was integral to their policy of subjugation. The Soviets claimed after the war that 427 of the 992 museums that fell into German hands were completely destroyed.<sup>154</sup> Even prior to their arrival the Nazi leaders held the view that the cultureless Slavs would at best have only remnants of the treasures once possessed by the royal family, and even these objects would be mostly of foreign origin (like the Amber Room).<sup>155</sup> After the ideological war of conquest commenced in June 1941, it was terror, more than acquisition, that formed the basis of the wartime policies in the east.

# 6

## THE CONTRACTION OF THE CULTURAL BUREAUCRACY, 1943-1945

As the war progressed unsatisfactorily for the Germans, two members of the NS hierarchy emerged as particularly powerful and capable leaders. Martin Bormann and Joseph Goebbels continued their ministerial battles with inordinate energy and shrewdness, such that they, more than any other of the elite, directed the reorganization of the government and society during the nation's mobilization for total war. Heinrich Himmler and Albert Speer also enhanced their authority during the final stages of the Third Reich; but Bormann, as master of the Führer's antechamber, and Goebbels, who replaced Hitler as the regime's most visible public representative, were the ultimate victors in the twelve-year-long struggle for ministerial hegemony. Conversely, Hermann Göring and Alfred Rosenberg, two Nazi chieftains who had fared so well at the start of the war, suffered ignominious loss of stature and power as the Nazis struggled for their existence.<sup>1</sup> The fate of the two victors and the two who were vanquished lies at the heart of the final realignment within the NS government.