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## Art Historians and Nazi Plunder

Imagine the thoughts that passed through the mind of Kajetan Mühlmann in June 1941 as he sat in the first-class compartment of the Reichsbahn train carrying him from Cracow to Berlin. Next to him, wrapped tightly in protective packaging, were three paintings: Raphael's *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*, and Rembrandt's *Landscape with the Good Samaritan*. They were three of the most prized artworks in Poland—taken from the Czartoryski family's collection—and they were in his personal care.

Mühlmann, it would seem, had very mixed emotions as he watched the Polish countryside pass outside the window. On the one hand, he was a Nazi, a German nationalist, and took great satisfaction in the notion that these masterpieces, these examples of "Aryan" superiority, were returning *heim ins Reich* ("home to the Reich"). Mühlmann later testified about the excitement he felt merely transporting these masterpieces and the prospect of reporting their arrival in Berlin to Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, his patron and protector, undoubtedly enhanced this sentiment. Göring was then at the height of his power and had undeniable presence. To be summoned by the Reichsmarschall to his grandiose Carinhall estate was a heady experience that helped bolster Mühlmann's ego and made him feel a part of the Nazi elite. Yet his excitement and self-satisfaction were tempered by a certain frustration and dread. This was now the second trip to hand over these paintings: after the first delivery to Berlin, when Göring had stored the works in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, General Governor Hans Frank, another of his superiors, had responded by ordering them returned to Cracow, and Mühlmann had complied. He recounted later that he hated being caught in a struggle between rapacious Nazi leaders and feared that it might not only undermine his career, but jeopardize his life. This scholar, who had earned his doctorate by writing a dissertation on baroque fountains in his native Salzburg, also knew at some level that he was violating fundamental ethical precepts, although he remonstrated after the war, "we were art historians; what did we know about international law, the Geneva Convention and such?" He added defensively,

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“we carried out our project in Poland with absolute humanity.” Mühlmann was close friends with several high-ranking SS leaders who played prominent roles in the persecution of Jews and other subject peoples and was actually well aware of the Germans’ policies. Feeling powerful and a part of a historical process, yet at that same time complicit in grave deeds beyond his control, Kajetan Mühlmann expressed his ambivalence about his undertaking in Poland by jumping at the opportunity to transfer his operations to the less brutal occupation administration in the Netherlands.

These conflicting thoughts and emotions were common to nearly all of the experts who implemented the Nazi leaders’ art policies. The scene above was not unique. When museum director Ernst Buchner entered a chateau in the south of France and encountered the multipaneled Ghent altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers, he, too, later testified in 1945 to a flood of mixed emotions. An expert in early modern northern European painting, he had a profound appreciation of this altar, one of the greatest artworks of its kind. Yet despite his belief that the altar belonged to Germany and should be repatriated, there was the stark reality that he was escorted by an armed detachment and that the work was being taken by force. Both Mühlmann and Buchner found ways to assuage these pangs of guilt. They rationalized their behavior on the grounds that they were safeguarding cultural property, following orders, and taking what was rightfully Germany’s. It is these varying emotions, this psychic drama, that makes the history of the Nazi art experts so compelling.

The “art world” is a somewhat vague term that encompasses a host of professions, ranging from dealers to museum officials and from academics to practicing artists. Additionally, this term conjures up varied and at times conflicting associations. On the one hand, it is characterized by a certain mystery—a place where personal connections are paramount and clandestine transactions not infrequent. Conversely, it is populated by erudite and polished professionals, members of a glamorous international elite who have mastered vast stores of arcane knowledge. It is important to emphasize at the outset that the subjects I am considering here qualify as intellectuals. Most had the benefit of formal education, were cognizant of contemporary political and cultural trends, and possessed a veneer of sophistication. This is the history of skilled and successful individuals who collaborated with the Nazi leaders and helped implement a nefarious cultural program.

While it is naïve and without historic foundation to expect members of the intelligentsia to behave in a more scrupulous and humane fashion than those who do not lead the life of the mind, there has nonetheless been a persistent expectation that they will do so. This was especially the case in the nineteenth century, when those who were educated were imagined to have greater insight and a more highly developed social conscience. This expectation was also shared by the U.S. intelligence agents in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—many of them academics—who hatched a plan during the war to contact intellectuals as part of the invasion of Germany. The OSS agents believed that German intellectuals, along with labor and church leaders, would be most inclined to join the anti-Nazi resistance as soon as it became feasible. The OSS agents were sorely mistaken, and as we have subsequently discovered, those in the learned professions were often among the first to be co-opted, not to mention

frequently supportive of the Nazi regime right until the end. Even later, in the German Democratic Republic, with the lessons of National Socialism all too clear, the professoriate was overrepresented among Stasi (the East German secret police) informers: Timothy Garton Ash cites the statistic that “one in every six professors and one in ten university employees had worked for or in some way cooperated with the secret police under the old regime.” In both dictatorships, the Third Reich and the former East Germany, one cannot help but ask, why was this the case and what were they thinking?

My attempt in the pages to follow is to understand the various motivations that induced talented and respected professionals in the art world to become accomplices of the Nazi leaders—in most cases, to become art plunderers. As I have suggested, in considering this question, it is important to recognize that the art history profession has long been relatively diffuse because it has typically included individuals outside academic departments: curators, dealers, and critics have all penned serious books on art history. If one takes Fogg Museum director Paul Sachs’s list from the spring of 1945 in which he assessed the qualities and skills of individuals in a range of German artistic professions, one sees personnel across the spectrum, both inside and outside academia, described as “good scholar” or “fine scholar” (this includes, for example, the Berlin graphic arts curator Friedrich Winkler and the Munich curator Karl Feuchtmayr). To focus on art historians with university appointments, then, would be too limiting and would not accurately convey the professional context in which scholarship was produced.

One can, of course, write a history of just the academic art historians during the Third Reich and how the profession was effectively bifurcated in 1933. A tremendous number chose emigration, and this includes luminaries such as Erwin Panofsky, Aby Warburg, Walter Friedlaender, and Richard Krautheimer, among others. Karen Michels wrote, “The forced migration of German and Austrian art historians to the United States is now seen as the most momentous transmission process in the history of twentieth-century scholarship, comparable in its effects only to the migrations of sociologists and psychologists.” This flight was precipitated by both “pushing” and “pulling”: the Nazis forced Jewish and left-wing scholars out of their positions (Reich Minister Rust reported in 1937 that eighty professors at art academies and universities had been “removed”), and foreign institutions—especially in the United States and Britain—sought to benefit from this brain drain. As for the opportunities abroad, Michels described how

in both Britain and the United States generous gestures of welcome were made to art historians driven out of Germany and Austria by the National Socialist regime. British colleagues gave up part of their own salaries to fund aid programs for the refugees, and the transfer of the Warburg Library from Hamburg to London was regarded as a valuable gift. In the United States, which opened its borders by issuing “nonquota” visas, one of the institutions that benefitted most from the influx of refugees gave thanks with a wisecrack: “Hitler shakes the tree,” said Walter Cook, director of New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, “and I pick up the apples.”

Despite the gravitation of many German exiles to southern California (Thomas

Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, among many others), art historians had more opportunities on the East Coast. This was the heart of the artistic establishment in the U.S. As art historian and museum director Alois Schardt wrote to his colleague Georg Swarzenski in January 1944, “since the opportunities here in the West are as good as hopeless, I am resolved to go East where perhaps I can find a position as college lecturer, museum official, or employee at a press.”

The emigration of art historians devastated the profession in Germany. Beyond losing a number of famous scholars, the Reich lost many of the most theoretically sophisticated. Bettina Preiss noted, “in academic art history before 1933 only a small part of their representatives were really prepared to pursue a serious critical method. These ‘hard core of a soft discipline,’ with their fundamental considerations concerning the history and theory of the humanistic fields, had a broad influence which is still evident today.” But many of these “hard core” were not welcome in Nazi Germany, where there was a widespread distrust of art historians that grew out of a pervasive anti-intellectualism. For example, art critic and curator Walter Hansen wrote in 1937, “art historians, according to Jewish ways, insert themselves as supposed intermediaries between artist and artwork. . . . The past has shown that through this fully unnecessary engagement of supposedly essential intermediaries of German art (that is, agents for artists and art dealers), immeasurable damage has been done, and in the future this can be made passably good again only through a possible exclusion of art historians and art critics. Art historians in the last thirty years have been directly dependent on the advice of the Jewish art trade.” There was a sense that the entire discipline needed an overhaul, and some of the proposals for it were quite remarkable. This included Bernhard Rust’s instructions that “the art historian must learn everything in his education, also the works of degeneration.”

The academic art historians who remained in Germany had two principal concerns that constituted the core of National Socialist art history. The first was the belief in a scholarship that was politically engaged. One Nazi art historian, Hans Weigert, explained this philosophy quite succinctly when he wrote, “the university stands in the service of politics.” He went on to say, “certainly it is the new ideal of the voluntaristic, soldierly type that must be adopted in order to secure the fearful threats to the foundations of our naked existence.” In other words, art historians were supposed to serve as intellectual shock troops for the regime and provide a key component of the cultural, and even spiritual, underpinning for the Nazi movement. One therefore finds examples such as the essays penned by renowned art historian Wilhelm Pinder (1878–1947), “Architecture as Morality” and “Duty and Claims of Scholarship,” which both appeared in 1935, as well as a *Festschrift* that he helped compile to honor Adolf Hitler in 1939. An OSS report on Pinder added: “Originally a scholar of high standing . . . he is known to have worked with the Nazis in every respect and to have informed the Gestapo on his former friends.” Some German art historians served the regime in more particular ways, such as Dagobert Frey (1883–1962), who used his study trips to Poland and other Eastern European nations to compile inventories

of valuable artworks—lists that were later used by plundering commandos (which Frey, among others in the field, staffed). It is perhaps not surprising that Bernard Berenson referred to one of these scholars working in the service of the Nazi regime as the “Attila of art history.”

The other central tenet of National Socialist art history was the advancement of Germanic culture. This meant, of course, the glorification of German artists and their work. Art historians were supposed to discover the roots of a great culture and therefore enhance national consciousness, and this project helped distinguish them from scholars in other fields, including historians, whose support for the Nazi regime has recently become the subject of much discussion. Heinrich Himmler and his cohorts in the SS were especially enthusiastic about early Germanic cultural history and promoted the study of archeology, anthropology, and art history through organizations like the *Ahnenerbe*, the Society for the Promotion and Care of German Cultural Monuments, and the Nordland Press. Others, including Hitler, sought to emphasize the emergence of the German spirit in the early modern and modern periods. One therefore finds works like Wilhelm Pinder’s *On the Essence and Development of German Forms: The Visual Arts in the New German State*, where he, in Bettina Preiss’s words, “supplied evidence of the success of National Socialist art historical writing, which among other high points of discovery, counted that [Hans] Memling, an original German (*Urdeutscher*) in Seligenstadt am Main, had caught sight of the first light of the world.” These art historians in the service of the Reich sought to document the rise of the Germans as the supposedly racially superior people who threw off their chains and finally realized their potential.

This undertaking of examining the emergence of the dominant Aryans included the more specific task of revealing the existence of German culture in neighboring lands. Most Nazi territorial claims were based upon the notion that meritorious culture found abroad—whether it be in Poland, the Baltic States, and other regions in the East or in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, chief among Western countries—had been created by Germanic peoples. The art historians were expected to use their scholarship to justify Nazi irredentism. During the war, cultural historian Hermann Aubin declared that “the work of our ancestors . . . represents the great legal brief for territory.” Another variation on this theme was supplied by Gustav Barthel, an art historian from the university in Breslau, who accused “Polish scholars [of] having falsely claimed the achievements of their own artists.” In the few cases where German art historians actually discussed Polish artists, they were viewed as pale imitators of German predecessors. Lynn Nicholas adds a touch of humor when she describes these scholars as part of the “Poland-is-really-Germany school.” Of course, there was very little that was amusing about the Germanification programs undertaken by the regime. Cultural cleansing was accompanied by ethnic cleansing. Objects deemed to be Germanic in origin were preserved, while those of Slavic, Jewish, Sinti, and Roma (“gypsy”) cultures, among others, were destroyed. The art historians, like those in other respected professions, played a role in the Holocaust that went far beyond that of bystander. They first provided intellectual justifications for the aggressive and genocidal program,

then they served the Nazi leaders and helped denude the victims of their property. And as became increasingly evident, the expropriation of property was part of a continuum that culminated in murder.

It is admittedly sometimes difficult to take these art historians seriously. As noted above, most of those who were theoretically sophisticated went into exile, and of those few who stayed, such as Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Pinder, the glory days of most were in the past and they did not produce significant scholarship during the Third Reich (although Pinder in particular continued to publish). The main exception to this generalization is Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984), an Austrian who was among what one scholar termed “the critical historians of art.” Sedlmayr, who subscribed to notions of collective psychology, attempted to apply them to artistic interpretation and build upon the concept of “artistic intention” (*Kunstwollen*) pioneered by his Viennese predecessor, Alois Riegl (1858–1905). Sedlmayr was a member of the NSDAP—and evidently supported the Party before the *Anschluss* in 1938 (making him an *Illegaler*, a member during the time when the Party was illegal in Austria). But his formulations were somewhat more subtle and not as explicitly political as those of many of his colleagues. Sedlmayr talked of “purity” and “pure forms”—terms that had special meaning during the Third Reich—but he did not go so far as to call openly for German expansion into the East. Sedlmayr was nonetheless compromised to the point where he was forced to give up his professorship at the University of Vienna in 1945. But he moved to Bavaria and in 1951 again became a professor, this time at the Ludwig Maximilian University, where he received the chair in art history once held by Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Pinder. Today, there is even a street named after him in the heart of Munich.

The majority of the art historians of the Third Reich who advocated political engagement and a nationalist agenda are now obscure and generally known only by scholars who study the period. Individuals like Hans Weigert and Alfred Stange in Bonn, Dagobert Frey in Breslau, and Paul Schultze-Naumburg in Weimar did very little to advance the study of art. In Bettina Preiss’s words, “the entire art research of the Third Reich is therefore almost meaningless; it is simply the conscious accommodation to the cultural policy of the Third Reich that made art history subservient as an instrument of propaganda.” When one surveys the lists of art historians compiled by Allied investigators at war’s end—they identified about 110 faculty at German universities, not counting those who worked for museums or as independent scholars—it is striking to see that at least half either produced explicitly National Socialist scholarship or played a role in the plundering program. The art historians who remained in Germany, then, contributed to the culture of the Third Reich, but not to the advancement of their discipline.

In this half-hidden history, one figure is of particular interest, since his career exemplifies many of the patterns which recur in the careers of others whose work made possible the overall cultural program of the Nazis. Kajetan Mühlmann was arguably the single most prodigious art plunderer in the history of human civilization. This intelligent and, according to the testimony of contemporaries, rather congenial

Salzburger stole artworks from victims first in his native Austria, then in Poland, and finally in the Netherlands. Mühlmann's story is instructive for a variety of other reasons as well. With a doctorate in art history, Mühlmann was a successful member of the Austrian intelligentsia. His biography reminds us that National Socialism was not an exclusively lower-class phenomenon, but relied upon the cooperation and skills of the educated bourgeoisie. Beyond his personal descent into criminality, Mühlmann's case underscores the crucial role played by Austrians in bolstering the Nazi regime. Recent studies have drawn attention to the Austrians' involvement in the deportation measures and the extermination camp, but Austrians served in other branches of the government, including the cultural bureaucracy. Finally, Mühlmann's story sheds light on the denouement and aftermath of the war and the ethically clouded environment precipitated by a devastated continent and the burgeoning cold war. He took advantage of the opportunities created by the competing intelligence agencies and, by finding accommodation with the Americans, carved out a fairly comfortable existence. Mühlmann, like many of the second-rank figures, avoided both postwar justice and the scrutiny of historians.

Mühlmann, whose friends called him Kai, was born in Uttendorf near Zell am See in western Austria on 26 June 1898. While little is known about his childhood, it was quite tumultuous. Kajetan's father died when he was quite young and his mother then married his father's cousin. Together, both marriages yielded eight children, although two died in infancy. Among Kajetan's siblings the most notable was his older half-brother Josef Mühlmann (1886–1972), an art critic and restorer, who as a member of the SS and the Gestapo teamed up with Kajetan as a plunderer in the occupied lands. Kajetan grew up on a farm and claimed in his official biography in the late 1930s that he was of "peasant lineage." This was partly personal publicity, peasant stock being much valued among the blood-and-soil Nazis. His childhood milieu was not entirely rural, however, as he attended school in nearby Salzburg. It is difficult to ascertain much about his personality or views at this time, but he evidently embraced the pan-Germanic ideas that were so popular among Austrian youth and volunteered for the Salzburger Infantry Regiment Number 59 as soon as he had reached the legal age of seventeen in 1915. It was typical of many ethnic Germans living in border regions to feel heightened attachment to *Deutschtum*, or all things German; Hitler, who grew up nearby, and Alfred Rosenberg, from Estonia in the Baltic, offer two better-studied cases. Later, in a 1919 plebiscite, Salzburgerers "voted overwhelmingly" (158,058 to 463) for a union with Germany.

Mühlmann served with distinction in World War I and received multiple decorations. He was seriously wounded in 1918, and the injury was compounded by an illness that affected his lungs. He suffered considerable pain while recuperating in the years directly after the war and continued to experience problems with his lungs for the rest of his life. Feeling that he had sacrificed a great deal during his service, Mühlmann viewed the ensuing Treaty of St. Germain as an unjust and unnatural fate for the Hapsburg Empire. While it may seem surprising that a nationalist like Mühlmann would join the socialists, membership in the Austrian Social Democratic Party offered a means to protest the general settlement in Europe and helped recreate the comradeship of

the front. But Mühlmann was left dissatisfied, and he gradually became less political following his demobilization.

Mühlmann finally pursued university studies in 1922, and he spent the next four years in Vienna and Innsbruck. He concentrated on art history, and he himself evidently had an interest in painting (when he disappeared after the war a Viennese newspaper actually described him as a “*Kunstmaler*,” or painter). He received his doctorate in 1926 from the University of Vienna, with his dissertation titled *Baroque Fountains and Water Art in Salzburg*. Moving back to Salzburg in 1926, Mühlmann professed an interest in the city and its monuments. He wrote for many of the local newspapers, reviewed art exhibitions, and penned articles such as “The Redesign of the Salzburg Garden,” and “The Endangering of St. Peter’s Cemetery.” He established a name for himself as a concerned civic activist, and in 1932, published a lavish book titled *Civic Preservation and Renovation in Salzburg: The Example of the Restorer Franz Wagner*, which not only lauded the accomplishments of a leading refurbisher of old buildings, but included an advertisement section at the end that promoted numerous local construction and design firms.

Mühlmann’s primary avocation, however, was the Salzburg Festival. In 1926, he became the *Propagandaleiter*, or chief publicity agent, of the *Festspiele*. Janet Flanner described him in *The New Yorker* in 1947 as “a booking agent from whom chic Americans bought their train and music festival tickets.” Despite seeming to be a peculiar occupation in light of his later activities, this position proved a suitable match for Mühlmann’s talents and views. Scholar Michael Steinberg has pointed out that the festival, despite its associations with the liberal and worldly Max Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, served generally to promote Austrian culture: that is, both the high tradition, as represented by Mozart, and the folk variety, as featured in the many choral and dance groups that performed there. Mühlmann’s publicity celebrated this tradition and also reflected his strong sense of civic pride. In one article in the *Münchener Illustrierte Fremden-Zeitung*, he quoted Hofmannsthal, “Central Europe has no place more beautiful—Mozart must have been born here.” Mühlmann’s position afforded him considerable visibility in the community and helped him make contacts with important individuals. He could be very charming and spoke using a heavy Austrian dialect, which was helpful when interacting with fellow Austrians. As an art critic, he was strikingly gentle, and his reviews of both traditional and modern art were almost invariably positive. His early career, then, indicates an aptitude for what we would today call networking. In 1932, he married Poldi Woytek, an artist who enjoyed considerable success in Salzburg. The Mühlmanns indeed played prominent roles in the cultural life of the city.

Even prior to working at the Salzburg Festival, Mühlmann displayed the ability to cultivate relationships with important individuals. For example, he was friends with Hermann Göring’s sisters, who lived near Salzburg. An apocryphal story has also appeared in accounts of his life, whereby he supposedly helped the future Reichsmarschall flee Germany after the latter took a bullet near the groin in the failed beer hall putsch of 1923. Mühlmann denied the story when on the witness stand in 1947 in the trial of Guido Schmidt, but he noted that he was invited to Göring’s home

on the Obersalzberg in the mid-1930s to discuss art and politics. Mühlmann was certainly well acquainted with Göring's sister Olga, and this connection led to contact with the future Reichsmarschall.

The reasons and circumstances behind Mühlmann's gravitation to the Austrian Nazi Party remain unclear. In his postwar interrogations, he himself denied ever being an *Illegaler*: he repeatedly stated under oath that he was "neither before the [1934–38] ban nor during the ban a member of the NSDAP." Mühlmann admitted only to social relationships with Nazis such as Arthur Seyss-Inquart, an attorney from Moravia who practiced law in Austria. Yet he testified to this under threat of conviction for Party membership prior to 1938. Many sources, including the American Counter Intelligence Corps, identified him as an early Nazi and part of the "fifth column."

Still, Mühlmann's association with the Austrian Nazi Party remained sufficiently concealed as to enable him to work as a seemingly independent front man or liaison during the period of the Nazi prohibition. The Nazi Party in Austria had been banned by Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg in July 1934 after Nazi putschists had murdered Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. Even prior to this event, selected Austrian Nazi leaders had been arrested because of terrorist activities. During this period, even with his efforts to avoid the appearance of any firm commitments, Mühlmann was repeatedly embroiled in conflicts and controversy. He was arrested at least four times in the mid-1930s for offenses ranging from reckless driving to the "defamation of a public official." Many of his greatest imbroglios occurred within the Nazi Party.

Mühlmann allied himself principally with Seyss-Inquart and other Austrian National Socialists who were viewed prior to the *Anschluss* as the moderates in the Party. Prior to the *Anschluss*, the moderates distinguished themselves by their widespread contacts, both inside and beyond the Austrian Nazi Party. For his part, Mühlmann had the ability to bridge existing gaps: first, within the Austrian Nazi Party and, second, between certain Nazis and officials in the Fatherland Front. In the end, the moderate faction of the Austrian Nazi Party prevailed as the victors in this internecine conflict. Significantly, the leading figures in this group began their political careers outside the Party. Both Seyss-Inquart and Mühlmann underwent a process of gradually warming to the Nazi cause. In Seyss-Inquart's case, he first joined organizations affiliated with the Party, such as the German-Austrian People's League. Mühlmann, as was his nature, tried to avoid any overt political commitments. Later, both developed loyalties to Hitler and sought closer relations between Austria and Germany, but neither ever imagined the complete evaporation of their country—a position not uncommon among Austrian Nazis. They hoped that closer ties with the Reich would bring greater economic prosperity, as well as end the sense of being diplomatically isolated, a sentiment that became even stronger after the September 1936 agreement between Mussolini and Hitler. Instead of merely serving as Hitler's agents, they hoped to combine a pride in things local and Austrian with the notion of being a part of a larger German and fascist bloc. Wilhelm Keppler, an SD official and SS major general who served as one of the "point men" in Austria for the Berlin government, also put their views in perspective when he noted that they "favor[ed] the path of evolution . . . [versus] the other faction which was bent on continuing strictly revolutionary and illegal activities."

Mühlmann and Seyss-Inquart were ambitious beyond their respective professional careers as an art historian and lawyer, and this in part explains why they assisted Hitler in the annexation of Austria. The interparty feud among the Austrian Nazis helped induce them to cooperate with Berlin authorities as the moderates sought the upper hand. Seyss-Inquart advanced his careerist ambitions by receiving the post of minister of the interior on 16 February. The following month, he even acted as chancellor for forty-eight hours of the critical phase of the *Anschluss*. In turn, Mühlmann benefited from his efforts in helping prepare the *Anschluss* when Seyss-Inquart appointed him state secretary, first in the Federal Chancellor's Office for a month (in March 1938) and then, after changes in the governmental structure, in the Ministry for Interior and Cultural Affairs. Mühlmann also had a position directly subordinate to Seyss-Inquart as the Representative for State Art Policy and as Foreign Tourism and Leader of Department III of the Office of the Reich Governor. These positions offered great promise because Mühlmann administered the budgets for all state cultural organizations and played an important role in the personnel changes that were then taking place.

The Nazis worked rapidly to award adherents the plum positions. Seyss-Inquart and Mühlmann tried in their own ways to combat the growing influence of the "Prussians," as the Austrians often referred to those from the *Altreich*. They, like many other Austrians, believed in a type of National Socialist rule for Austria that differed (primarily in tone, but also in substance) from that originating in Berlin. It was a very delicate balancing act. On the one hand, they pledged obedience to the Reich authorities. Mühlmann and his brother Josef, for example, played a role in the city of Salzburg's giving Hitler a Spitzweg painting from the Carolino Augusteum Museum and Göring a picture by C. P. List from St. Peter's cloister (also in the heart of the city). Mühlmann also directed funds to an SS excavation project in Carinthia, noting in a letter to Himmler, "Reichsführer! I may further assure you of my preparedness to undertake tasks for the SS" (signing it as an SS captain). Yet on the other hand, Mühlmann and many of his Austrian colleagues promulgated the notion of a distinct Austrian (*Östmärkisch*) culture and, accordingly, interceded on behalf of artists under attack, including the former director of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Bernhard Paumgartner, and a Salzburg painter, Eduard Bäumer. Mühlmann tried to pursue a cultural program that was more open and less heavy-handed than that which prevailed in the *Altreich*. While he was openly anti-Semitic and gave speeches where he talked of the threat of Jewry, he permitted performances by a cabaret called the Wiener Werkel, which produced satirical pieces that were at times directed at the authorities in Berlin. He also tolerated certain genres of modern art—or so claimed his bitter critic, Reich Student Leader and Gauleiter Gustav Scheel, who complained during the war that he "earlier expressly supported expressionistic art." Indeed, going back as far as 1926, Mühlmann wrote reviews praising the modernist artist Anton Faistauer, whose mural for the Salzburg Festival House was removed by zealots after the *Anschluss*. In late 1938, Mühlmann provided the funds for the fresco's preservation in his capacity as the state administrator for art and then reportedly kept a painting by the artist in his private residence. He also approved the purchase of art by Austrian Expressionist painter Herbert Böckl, and although the remuneration was small (RM 200), it helped

the artist, who had eight children. Mühlmann's second wife, Hilde, on reflecting on Kajetan's appreciation of certain kinds of modern art, as well as his deprecating remarks made in private about certain works in the official Nazi style, observed that "He was never entirely true to the Nazi line."

Besides attempting to protect a few associates from the pre-*Anschluss* period, Mühlmann also pursued a program to support the culture of Vienna and other Austrian cities. Even though Austria—or as the Nazis initially called the formerly independent country, the *Ostmark* (Eastern Marches)—was subsumed into the Reich, there were still opportunities for autonomous initiatives. Mühlmann had considerable success diverting funds to Salzburg and other provincial centers, but it proved more difficult for him to realize his ambitions for Vienna. He had long held the idea that Vienna had previously served as a bulwark on the fringes of German civilization and should reemerge as a great metropolis on the Danube. Mühlmann's chief Seyss-Inquart also subscribed to this vision and together they tried to advance policies that would enhance Vienna's reputation. Perhaps most notably, they proposed the creation of a Viennese (or alternatively, *Ostmärkisches*) Cultural Institute, which would oversee all cultural activities in the *Ostmark*. Seyss-Inquart planned to make Mühlmann the director of the institute. The Reich Governor drafted a series of long and detailed memoranda and submitted them to Hitler seeking approval; he even sent Mühlmann to Berlin to explain the proposal to Hitler in person. Yet their plan was energetically opposed by Reich Commissioner Bürckel, and this precluded the chances for reform. Hitler did not wish to alter the balance of power and therefore issued a "standstill order," which directed the structure of the cultural administration to remain unchanged. Although Bürckel, Seyss-Inquart, and Mühlmann all left Vienna during the early stages of the war and assumed other duties, the issue of a separate Austrian culture persisted up until the end of the Third Reich.

Despite Mühlmann's more liberal ideas about culture, he subscribed to a racist worldview, even believing that Austrians were a quasi-distinct German tribe. He also did nothing to soften the regime's anti-Semitic program. This attitude was typical in the *Ostmark*, where anti-Semitism was at least as severe as it was in the *Altreich*. The "Viennese model" entailed pioneering measures regarding both Aryanization and anti-Semitic legislation. The Austrians carried out organized and what were called "wild Aryanizations" from the outset, with 8,000 "legal" seizures of Jewish residences prior to 1939 and an estimated 25,000 wild Aryanizations also taking place in the first months before the process was effectively bureaucratized. Mühlmann and his brother Josef, who hired on with the Gestapo, availed themselves of the opportunities presented by the new regime. Kajetan lived in an apartment in Schloss Belvedere, and his office was in a confiscated building on the Prinz Eugenstrasse, while Josef also received an Aryanized residence. Later, during the war, Kajetan and his wife Poldi used their connections to obtain a villa on the outskirts of Salzburg that belonged to a Jewish woman, Helena Taussig. After the intervention of the local Gauleiter Friedrich Rainer and other high ranking officials (to whom Mühlmann wrote from Poland in 1941, requesting their assistance) the Villa Taussig in Salzburg-Anif was put in the name of

Poldi Woytek Mühlmann. The marriage of Mühlmann and Poldi ended later that year (after securing Himmler's permission, Mühlmann married his mistress Hilde Ziegler in 1942); and Poldi, so neighbors reported in 1997, lived in the house on her own—even in the postwar period. The fate of Helena Taussig is unknown.

Back in Vienna, a branch of the Gestapo was established with the acronym Vugesta (*Vermögensumzugsgut Gestapo*, or Transferred Property of the Gestapo), which liquidated the property of Jews who had left the country or who were incarcerated. As an employee of the Vienna Gauleitung noted to the NSDAP Treasurer in Munich, "The sale of this furniture to old Party members and also offices of the NSDAP was carried out at that time by the 'Vugesta' at extremely favorable prices." Postwar investigators determined that Mühlmann gave his sister (who lived in Strobl and went by the name Frau Esch) a painting as a wedding gift that they described as "a beautiful Heda"; it came from seized Jewish property, and it was claimed that she burned it in May 1945 knowing that it had been acquired in a problematic way. The Mühlmanns, then, personally benefited in a material sense from this anti-Semitic program.

Kajetan Mühlmann also played an important role in helping determine the anti-Semitic measures imposed by the government. He attended meetings in which the guidelines for expropriating Jewish property were formulated. The protocols from these meetings represented the hands-on implementation of the series of laws that were passed in the second half of 1938. The 20 November Ordinance for the Attachment of the Property of the People's and State's Enemies and the 3 December Ordinance for the Employment of Jewish Property were the most important of these anti-Jewish measures at this time. While Göring and the other top leaders in Berlin assumed chief responsibility for these laws, the importance of on-site advice from figures like Mühlmann, Adolf Eichmann, and Hans Fischböck cannot be underestimated. It seems fitting that Eichmann ran his Jewish deportation office in the Rothschild palace just across the street from Kajetan Mühlmann's new apartment and office.

The expropriation of Jewish property in Austria that began in 1938 entailed more than persecution and self-enrichment, as heated battles over jurisdiction arose when the plunder began to accumulate. Historian Hans Witek has written that with the "dispossession of the Jews, the fights between the interest groups had not only a power-political character, but were also indivisibly linked to the struggle to 'divide the booty.'" With regard to the Jewish-owned artworks confiscated by the Gestapo, SS, and police in the course of the Aryanizations—and these artworks were the chief concern of Mühlmann—the primary issue was their custody. Upon Hitler's direct order, the artworks were initially stored in the Neue Burg palace in the heart of the city, as well as in the Rothschilds' hunting retreat, Schloss Steinbach, which was located a short distance from Vienna. Later, in August, Hitler issued what was called the "Reservation of the Führer" in which he claimed the prerogative to determine the fate of artworks.

This order did not prevent the subleaders from formulating their own plans or from lobbying vigorously to implement them. Seyss-Inquart and Mühlmann represented the opinion that the most important artworks must stay in Austria, and above all, in Vienna. They argued that pieces that came from Vienna's Jews were a part of the city's

cultural patrimony. No one saw an inherent contradiction in the idea that the art was Vienna's "cultural patrimony" and should be kept there, while it was perfectly acceptable to take it from the hands of Jews who had brought it to the city in the first place. Mühlmann, who played a central role in expropriating the Rothschilds' art collection, wrote Hitler a report in mid-1939 pleading that the confiscated artworks, which all told were valued at sixty to seventy million Reichsmarks, be kept in Vienna. Seyss-Inquart suggested selling off a third of the works, thereby raising enough money to build a new natural history museum and allowing the Kunsthistorisches Museum to expand into the preexisting Naturhistorisches Museum across the plaza.

Most of the other *Reichsdeutsche* viewed the works as booty that should benefit the Reich. They believed that just as the Holy Roman Empire treasures were shipped from Vienna to Nuremberg to right a historic injustice (Mühlmann helped organize the transfer) and just as much of Austria's wealth was in the process of heading to the *Altreich*, these Jewish-owned works should meet a similar fate. Himmler made very concrete suggestions to Hitler, writing him that he was prepared to take over an operation to send the plunder to storage depots in Berlin and Munich. Mühlmann was a fairly practical individual and was prepared to sacrifice certain works to the *Reichsdeutsche*, and especially to his patrons. He sent Göring lists of objects from both Jewish collections and confiscated church property and expressly noted that the works were for the Reichsmarschall to take: one letter, for example, stated that the objects came from the "Viennese (Jewish) collections of Lederer and Bondy." Mühlmann hoped that passing on a limited number of works to Nazi leaders would enable him to keep the majority of the art in Vienna. Because he was backed by Seyss-Inquart and Reich Commissioner Bürckel (in a rare instance of agreement), this was not a completely unreasonable expectation. As was frequently the case, Hitler refrained from arbitrating this dispute and ordered the SS and SD to guard the treasures while art experts, including Karl Haberstock, prepared an inventory. But Hitler was very much interested in the matter and, accompanied by Mühlmann, inspected the seized works housed in the Neue Burg in June 1939. Mühlmann's desire to keep the bulk of the art in Vienna should not be underestimated: when Haberstock visited his office and told him of his plan to sell the Rothschild collection to Dutch dealers, the Austrian, according to his postwar testimony, "threw him out."

The confiscation of Jewish artworks marked a new phase in the persecution of the Jews. These measures first carried out in Vienna, and then in the wake of *Kristallnacht* (November 1938) in the *Altreich*, were an important juncture on what Karl Schleunes called "the twisted road to Auschwitz." There is widespread agreement among historians that material interests were part of the motivation for persecuting Jews. As Robert Koehl has written, "While Heydrich and later Eichmann seized the initiative in organizing the resettlement and killing of the Jews, they were continually abetted and even rivaled by other government and Party agencies. Not the least of the motives involved in this initiative was the seizure of Jewish wealth." Mühlmann and his associates in the Reich Governor's office were important players in the rivalry for the booty.

With the German success in the Polish campaign in September 1939, Göring found himself in a position to offer Mühlmann a post in the occupation administration.

Whatever the source of the initiative, there is no doubt that Göring and Mühlmann met in Berlin on 6 October 1939 and that Göring appointed him Special Delegate of the Reichsmarschall for the Securing of Artistic Treasures in the Former Polish Territories. Three days later, Göring arranged for his aide, Erich Gritzbach, to sign a written commission granting Mühlmann wide-ranging powers to secure all artworks belonging to Jews, to the “former” Polish state, and to other “enemies” of the National Socialists, which came to include the Roman Catholic Church. Mühlmann also received orders to plunder from Hitler via Reinhard Heydrich and from General Governor Hans Frank and, therefore, had considerable bureaucratic muscle behind him. Although there were other Nazi operatives in Poland, Mühlmann was the chief plunderer, charged with forming squads of agents to locate, transport, and catalog the artworks in that country. He oversaw two commandos of about a dozen men each. One, led by his half-brother Josef, operated in the northern part of Poland above the fifty-first parallel and included Warsaw (the Polish National Museum served as their main depot). The unit in the south, headed by Gustav Barthel, was based in Cracow: more specifically, the Jagellonian Library. Mühlmann traveled back and forth between the two commandos, but spent most of his time in the south. Much of the work, especially early on in the fall of 1939 and the first half of 1940, entailed raids on museums, grand residences of the Polish nobility, and selected churches and monasteries. Mühlmann’s commandos had their own trucks and cars and in most cases carried out the seizures by themselves, but there were instances when they called upon Himmler’s and Heydrich’s security forces for assistance. Because the Poles had concealed many of the cultural treasures, there was often an element of detective work for Mühlmann and his staff; as he noted after the war, “[we had] to look for them in cellars and hiding-places.” Indeed, the Poles had undertaken safeguarding measures such that Mühlmann could claim later on, “I never found pictures hanging in the museums.” At a minimum, the works would have been taken down and put in secure places. It cannot be determined whether physical coercion was used to induce Poles to reveal the locations of artworks, but the confiscations often involved force as the commandos swept in and ran roughshod over any who opposed them. At other times, though, Mühlmann acted more like a messenger, as in 1941, when he took his automobile to Lvov to pick up Dürer drawings from the Lubomirski collection and drove them to Berlin, or when he transported paintings by Raphael, Rembrandt, and Leonardo from Cracow to Berlin by carrying them with him on a train.

Much of the work of Mühlmann and his colleagues in Poland involved sorting and cataloging. Indeed, they made a concerted effort to give their activities a scholarly veneer. Mühlmann’s task was called “coordinated scientific leadership”: he and his colleagues were not stealing, but “securing” (*Sicherstellen*). Their scientific endeavors extended to the creation of two restoration workshops in Warsaw and Cracow and cataloging the works according to their quality, with the best called “Choice I” (*Wahl I*). Josef Mühlmann was so convinced of the scholarly nature of the work that he reported in 1963 that the commandos had only dealt with “state museums,” and that

they had compiled two inventories (one for the north and one for the south) of such great scientific value that they were sent to major libraries and are still of use. He presumed that a copy of the catalog could be found in the National Library in Vienna and went so far as to represent himself at times as “Professor Mühlmann.” Josef Mühlmann claimed furthermore that the works were sent to the Reich only upon the advance of the Soviet troops. This was false: certain works, including the Veit Stoss altar, were transported immediately upon seizure. After the war, Kajetan Mühlmann provided a less embellished account of his commandos’ work: “I confirm that the official policy of General Governor Hans Frank was to take into custody all important artworks of Polish public institutions, private collections, and churches. I confirm that the mentioned artworks were actually confiscated and I myself am clear that in the case of a German victory they would not have remained in Poland, but would have been used for the completion of German art holdings.” Mühlmann played a key role in the plan that Hans Frank described most succinctly: “the Polish lands are to be changed into an intellectual desert.”

The culture that survived was to be Germanic in character, and Mühlmann worked to contribute to the intellectual underpinnings of the Nazis’ policies throughout Europe. Despite the enormous task before him in denuding Poland of its artistic patrimony, Mühlmann still found time to write art and cultural historical studies elaborating the “Poland-is-really-Germany” argument. Kajetan Mühlmann even published two short books based on his “research” in Poland, which had scholarly pretenses, even if they were baldly ideological. Hans Frank, for example, wrote the introduction for Mühlmann’s and Gustav Barthel’s volume on Cracow, and Frank dated his remarks: “Cracow, on the Birthday of the Führer 1940.” Mühlmann’s and Barthel’s volume on culture in Poland was part of a larger Nazi literature on the region, which included Dagobert Frey’s *Krakau* (1941), where he “refused to identify Cracow as a Polish city,” and Karl Baedeker’s guide to the General Government, which announced that Cracow and Lublin were now “*Judenfrei*.” Mühlmann and Barthel, to give a sense of their argument, began their study with the observations, “The *Ostmark*, the Sudetenland, Eastern Silesia, the region of the river Weichsel—many names characterize a piece of German history from an inner consistency that affects us all deeply. German history in the East: that is the fulfillment of a thousand-year-old struggle and fight of Germanic life-energy. . . . Securing German living space (*Lebensraum*) is the task. Achieving it through German spirit and culture is the result. Already centuries ago [this region] was settled and secured by our Germanic ancestors.” Barthel and Mühlmann appropriated words and concepts central to the Nazi ideology and articulated a racist and nationalist cultural history, all with the aim of justifying the Germans’ conquest of the region.

As was the case during his interlude in Vienna, Mühlmann had to contend with the personal politics of his superiors while he carried out his plundering commission in Poland. Göring, who had been appointed Reichsmarschall and Hitler’s official successor on 1 September 1939, and who had first engaged Mühlmann, warranted Mühlmann’s primary allegiance. Göring had used a favorite tactic among the top Nazi leaders by

hiring Mühlmann at a time when the latter was unemployed and had no visible career prospects (just as Hitler had recruited Hans Posse to head the *Führermuseum* after the director had been sacked). This strategy of making subordinates beholden to superiors partly explains, perhaps, their willingness to engage in criminal activities. Regardless of his motivations, Mühlmann made sure to appease his benefactor, and he directed prized artworks to the Reichsmarschall as special gifts, including Antoine Watteau's *Polish Girl* from the Lazienski palace and thirty-one "especially valuable and world famous drawings by Albrecht Dürer from the Lubomirski collection in Lemberg [Lvov]."

Mühlmann also had to contend with the other Nazi powers in Poland. Hans Frank made regular selections from the plunder, which was stored in the Jagellonian Library in Cracow. Frank decorated two castles with the help of Mühlmann, earning the sobriquet "King Stanislas V." Heinrich Himmler, the other notable potentate in the region, likewise made claims on Mühlmann, his SS subordinate. This relationship matured later when Mühlmann moved to the Netherlands and Himmler arranged to obtain artworks for both private and official purposes (one document lists thirty-one objects that Mühlmann acquired for the Reichsführer-SS). Other Nazi leaders, such as his old ally, Salzburg Gauleiter Friedrich Rainer, also tried to induce Mühlmann to forward artworks. Rainer had previously obtained pieces from the Rothschilds' collection in Vienna, and he again asked Mühlmann for art to decorate "castles in Salzburg," above all his official quarters in the *Residenz*. Mühlmann could not accommodate Rainer in this instance, although he wisely advised the Salzburg Gauleiter to raise the matter with Hitler (who also turned him down). Mühlmann simply had too many Nazi leaders making requests for art, and he therefore often rebuffed the second-rank leaders who sought works. He initially rejected the request of Nuremberg mayor Willy Liebl, who sought the Veit Stoss altar from Cracow (on the grounds that the artist was born in Nuremberg) and handed it over only after Hitler's express orders to Hans Frank. Mühlmann made sure to cultivate Hitler's good will, and this included sending him five volumes of photographic albums depicting the "Choice I" artworks, of which there were 521. Hitler reportedly studied the catalogs carefully, with an eye toward enhancing the collection of his *Führermuseum*.

Because he and his staff had worked very expeditiously in Poland—Mühlmann reported to Hitler that "within six months almost the entire artistic property of the land was seized"—he developed a reputation for efficiency and simultaneously freed himself to engage in other enterprises. And indeed, Mühlmann was soon engaged by the Reich Commissioner of the Occupied Netherlands, Seyss-Inquart, to ply his trade in the Low Countries. A Dutch intelligence officer, Jean Vlug, noted dramatically in his postwar report on art looting, "Rotterdam was still burning when Kajetan Mühlmann in his SS-uniform arrived in Holland to take up the task of his *Dienststelle* [agency]." Vlug's report is flawed in many ways (Mühlmann normally wore a brown Party uniform or, more frequently in the Netherlands, civilian clothes), yet his observation is accurate with respect to Mühlmann's assiduousness as a plunderer.

Here, as usual, he adapted to his surroundings, and just as he had created looting commandos in Poland, he was able with equal ease to establish a type of art dealership

for processing works taken from Jews and other enemies. The agency also sought out any other artworks that could be acquired inexpensively and resold for a profit. Mühlmann's operation became relatively sophisticated. With headquarters in The Hague (where he could be near Seyss-Inquart, who provided him with three bank accounts and the initial capital to start the venture), he eventually opened branches in Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. Because the agency received works from the SD and the Reichskommissariat for Enemy Property, it in many ways resembled a clearing house. Mühlmann stipulated that a commission of 15 percent would be made on all sales, except on those to Hitler and his agents, and this revenue made the operation self-supporting. He also personally dabbled in the art market and acquired works that he shipped back to his family in Salzburg; although there are documented instances when, to quote Jean Vlug, "Mühlmann worked for his *own* profit," it remains unclear to what extent he enriched himself while in the Netherlands. Profit was certainly among the motives that drove Mühlmann during the Third Reich (although it was probably not as significant as his belief in the Nazi ideology). Hilde Mühlmann rationalized his activities during the Third Reich along these lines, noting that "he had to 'trade' in art or else he would have had no financial means (*Existenz*)."

Mühlmann surrounded himself with a small staff, including his half-brother Josef, two Viennese art historians—Franz Kieslinger and Bernhard Degenhart—and Eduard Plietzsch (1886–1961), a Berlin specialist on Dutch art who continued to publish monographs while he worked for the agency. Mühlmann's efforts to gain a hint of respectability entailed not only employing these well-regarded experts, but also publishing catalogs. Mühlmann wrote in the introduction to one volume concerning the seized art of the Mannheimer family, "this catalog contains the results of scientific work and extends to description, critical listing and some new attributions and therein is an essential contribution to German art research." This posturing in the case of the Mannheimers' art is particularly striking because the forced sale of the collection belonging to a deceased Jew (confiscation by the Enemy Property Custodian was threatened) was one of the more unseemly episodes with which Mühlmann was involved in the Netherlands. This veneer of "research" included cultivating relationships with members of the art establishment back in the Reich. He consigned works from the agency to a number of reputable auction houses, including the Dorotheum in Vienna, Adolf Weinmüller in Munich and Vienna, and Hans Lange in Berlin. Records show that the Mühlmann agency sold at least 1,114 artworks during the war.

The pretenses of propriety could not conceal one of the main components of Mühlmann's project, which was to expropriate the artistic property of enemies of the regime and to ensure that the booty flowed in an orderly manner to the top Nazi leaders. During the occupation, Seyss-Inquart issued a series of orders that required Jews to take their valuables, including jewelry and artworks, to the (Aryanized) Bankhaus Lippmann, Rosenthal, and Co. in Amsterdam. Without any tangible compensation given to the owners, this "administered" property was then handed over to the chief of the economic division of the Reichskommissariat: Dr. Hans Fischböck, with whom Mühlmann had earlier worked in Vienna. Fischböck then arranged for the artworks to be delivered to the Mühlmann agency, where they were assessed by the art experts,

and then put up for sale—with Hitler and Göring accorded the right of first refusal. As a result of this arrangement, Mühlmann was in a position to direct works to other members of the Nazi elite (as he had not been in Poland, where he was given less room to maneuver). His customers included Heinrich Himmler, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Hans Frank, Baldur von Schirach, Erich Koch, Fritz Todt, Julius Schaub, Josef Thorak, and Heinrich Hoffmann. The Mühlmann agency was not only the Nazi elite's chief source of art in the Netherlands, but also served the dual functions of liquidating seized property. And through the purchase of works with the working capital provided by Seyss-Inquart, it contributed to the economic exploitation of the country. This clearing house/art dealership was unique in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Despite his apparent freedom of action and the profits he was reaping, Mühlmann was in a difficult position as he tried to appease a number of top leaders. Still, Mühlmann had a talent for self-preservation. He arranged for Hitler to receive a lavish album of photographs which documented the works the agency had acquired for Linz, and sent an accompanying letter signed "from a loyal servant to the Führer." These same survival instincts induced him to pull out of the Netherlands in the summer of 1944. As the Allies invaded the Continent, Mühlmann decided to return to the relative security of Vienna. Because he had provided many artworks to the city's Nazi chieftain, Baldur von Schirach, he thought there were good prospects for a safe haven there. At this point, his main objective was survival. Accordingly, he reduced his business activities to a minimum. Mühlmann reported after the war that from July 1944 until June 1945, he was "without any duties—more or less on sick leave." Because of the deteriorating military situation, he was especially concerned about the welfare of his wife and children. Previously, as early as 1943, he had arranged for them to stay with friends outside of Munich, and then in a house on the Attersee in the Austrian Alps (a residence they shared with opera diva Elisabeth Schwarzkopf). It was in the latter that they took refuge at war's end lest they experience the Red Army's assault on Vienna. Mühlmann nonetheless kept a residence in the former Austrian capital; when the OSS agents arrived in Vienna in the spring of 1945, they located Mühlmann's vacated but well-stocked home at Rennweg 6 and found not only a triptych that came from a Jewish art dealer named Rosenbaum but also reported, "In his cellar are stored cases with Dutch products: soap, Bols [liqueur], rugs, lamps, etc." (This hoarding was not unique by any means. The same agents noted the efforts of his half-brother: "Josef Mühlmann was an SS captain in Poland, but was deprived of this worthy grade for installing a lady friend with objects destined for the Reich.") Kajetan was successful in his corruption in part due to his connections to those with power who could offer him some sort of protection.

After the war, Mühlmann told his captors grand stories about battling SS commando Otto Skorzeny and his contingent of fanatics in the Tyrol. Mühlmann also claimed to have liberated Hermann Göring from incarceration by SS forces in Schloss Mauthendorf, where Göring had been imprisoned by order of Hitler on charges of treason, and then delivered the Reichsmarschall to the Americans. Mühlmann never considered that this story of heroic deeds was inconsistent with his other claim that he was sick and inactive

at the time. In any case, the veracity of his tales remains highly doubtful. But it is ironic that Mühlmann's last act for his one-time benefactor very well may have been to deliver him to the enemy just as the war was ending.

The manner in which Mühlmann escaped prosecution after the war is similarly extraordinary. The Americans captured him in Seewalchen on the Attersee in the Austrian Alps on 13 June 1945 and took him to Camp Markus in Salzburg. On 20 July, he was transferred to the camp at Payerbach in Upper Austria, where he was interrogated by the CIC unit that worked on culture (also known as Culture Intelligence). They induced him to discuss the deeds of Göring, Seyss-Inquart, Frank, and Kaltenbrunner; his blunt and damning testimony was submitted to the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and helped in the convictions and subsequent death sentences of these leaders. Regarding his own actions, Mühlmann admitted responsibility in a way similar to that of Albert Speer. He confessed to a specific and noncapital offense (the expropriation of Jewish property), but claimed to know nothing about the Holocaust. This assertion was a bald-faced lie. More credibly, Mühlmann claimed to have saved the lives of a number of individuals and to have helped arrange the transfer onto his staff of an art historian named Asmus von Troschke, who, Mühlmann maintained, had been drafted into the SS and stationed at Auschwitz where he had "dreadful tasks." This latter assertion, while intended as self-exculpatory, actually indicates that Mühlmann knew about the genocide. Unlike Speer, he failed to make a positive impression on the victors. The assessment of one Allied interrogator read, Mühlmann "is obstinate; he has no conscience; he does not care about art; he is a liar and a vile person." The CIC sent Mühlmann back to the Austrian authorities in October 1946, although the intelligence agents demanded a written pledge that he not be released without prior U.S. approval.

Prior to 1948, Mühlmann remained in a camp for SS men because members of this organization, which was declared criminal at the Nuremberg trials, were automatically supposed to serve two-year prison terms. In 1947, Mühlmann testified in the celebrated treason case of Guido Schmidt. In this public forum, he attempted to pass himself off as an insignificant bureaucrat, and he denied both his SD ties and any illegal pre-*Anschluss* Nazi Party membership. By this time, he was also denying that he had intended to plunder artworks in Poland and the Netherlands. Directly controverting the statement he signed in Nuremberg in 1945 about the Germans' intentions to take control of the seized works, he now stated that he had simply tried to safeguard the art and that he had "not engaged in any criminal activities." He hoped to avoid attention and slip away after his release from the SS prison camp, and in light of the vastness of the internment facilities—the occupation powers detained more than 300,000 individuals active within the NS-regime in a network of camps—this did not seem such a remote possibility. But the ongoing inquiries into his past by both the Austrians and the Americans made this development increasingly unlikely.

Mühlmann placed his hopes in the exculpatory story that he had turned resistance fighter at the end of the war. This was difficult for him to verify, especially because

his activities at war's end had rested upon a series of deceptions. In the spring of 1945, Mühlmann had convinced the Americans that he was in the resistance; he had secured papers signed by American Major General Harry J. Collins, commander of the 42nd (Rainbow) Division, attesting to his anti-Nazi activities and permitting him to carry a gun and drive a car. He then took these documents to Karl Gruber, the leader of the resistance in the Tyrol (and subsequently the Austrian foreign minister), who signed another document stating that Mühlmann had been of great service to the resistance movement. Yet Gruber actually met Mühlmann for the first time in mid-May 1945, two weeks after the capitulation, and knew virtually nothing of the latter's activities. It is curious that the head of the resistance would vouch for someone that he did not actually know, but Gruber had very close ties to the Americans, and the Counter Intelligence Corps in particular, and evidently viewed Mühlmann's papers as compelling evidence.

If Mühlmann actually delivered Göring to the Americans in 1945, this deed, along with the information he gave to the Art Looting Investigation Unit and the damning testimony that proved so useful to prosecutors at Nuremberg, may have earned him generous treatment. But despite Mühlmann's apparent usefulness to the Americans, they did not guard him closely enough to prevent his escape. Mühlmann had tried to flee from the OSS officers in 1945 while they interrogated him at Altaussee, but they had apprehended him immediately and made it clear that his fortunes would improve if he cooperated. Yet circumstances had changed by 1948, in part because security measures were more lax and the Allies were not searching for war criminals with the same energy or thoroughness as between 1945 and 1947. The Americans in particular were in the process of concluding their occupation and transferring responsibility for justice to the Germans; they were therefore not especially inclined to prosecute "minor" war criminals. The Americans, though, were still overseeing the restitution of artworks, and OSS agents interrogated Mühlmann about some of the problem cases. In February 1948, however, Mühlmann fell ill and was transferred to the local Hospital Carolinum, where he was kept under guard. But on the sixteenth of February he managed to flee and was never again apprehended.

The details of Mühlmann's escape remain a mystery, but there was clearly little resolve to recapture him. Like the Americans, the West Germans also had other priorities, and it helped Mühlmann that he was Austrian and not guilty of a capital offense. Other Austrian war criminals, such as Adolf Eichmann, Alois Brunner, and Hans Fischböck also escaped, in their cases, to South America. Mühlmann, for his part, had fled to southern Bavaria near Lake Starnberg, a favored locale for many former Nazis. Although in 1951 he was ultimately tried and convicted in absentia and his property (or rather a portion of it) subsequently attached, Mühlmann, always adroit at self-preservation, had prepared for the postwar period by hiding property throughout Bavaria and Austria. Most of this property was in the form of artworks, and he generated an income by selling these pieces. Allied investigators in 1945 had also found evidence of Mühlmann stashing pictures and described instances when he entrusted works to various friends in Salzburg and in several villages on the Attersee. There were also

persistent rumors that he had evacuated artworks to Switzerland and that they remained at his disposal after the war. There is strong testimony that Mühlmann had maintained connections to figures in the art world—specifically to dealers in and around Munich, where Haberstock, Walter Andreas Hofer, Bruno Lohse, Maria Almas Dietrich, Julius Böhler, and many others who had sold to the Nazi elite reestablished their businesses after the war. Mühlmann therefore played a role, albeit a fairly clandestine one, in these circles. Another interesting aspect of Mühlmann’s underground life in the 1950s concerned his romantic relationships. Mühlmann, often described as tall and handsome, by many accounts had a number of romantic liaisons. One of these, according to Höttl, was with filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. They had taken up during the war (Höttl suggested that Riefenstahl was also a client), and their relationship continued after Mühlmann returned from incarceration. Riefenstahl lived in Pöcking on Lake Starnberg and Mühlmann evidently resided nearby, although the possibility of periodic cohabitation is not out of the question. This relationship also sheds light on the network of individuals who were prominent in the Third Reich and who gravitated to southern Bavaria: even the professedly unpolitical Riefenstahl maintained contacts with former Nazis.

Although Mühlmann lived abroad as a fugitive up until his death, this was in marked contrast to the situation of his half-brother Josef. The former Gestapo agent and plunderer had never thought it necessary to leave the country and had managed an almost complete rehabilitation of his reputation in his capacity as an art restorer and curator in the Salzburg royal *Residenzgalerie*, one of the city’s most important cultural institutions. A visitor to Josef Mühlmann in January 1963, who reported back to Simon Wiesenthal, described the following: “he lives here very contentedly, and despite his advanced age (seventy-eight) is still active as an art restorer.” In the 1960s, Josef Mühlmann published books on Christmas songs and their folkloric origins. He was apparently well regarded within the community—a member of the Arts Society, among other organizations—and various local institutions, including the Carolina Augusteum Museum, still possess portraits of him. While Kajetan Mühlmann did not live as comfortably nor live as long, he was able to evade the authorities. Mühlmann had told Allied interrogators in 1947 that he had hoped to take advantage of all that he had learned and become an art dealer. He therefore found a remarkable niche in the circle of surviving Nazis and those sympathetic to them until his death (of cancer) at the age of sixty, in August of 1958.

Some of those involved in the Nazi campaign of expropriation were also able to continue their careers without interruption after the war: Niels von Holst, for instance, an SS member described by Paul Sachs in a 1945 OSS report as “gifted, ambitious, a Nazi, though rather for opportunistic than political reasons.” From early on, Holst had had a long-standing ambition to make a name for himself as an art expert. In one questionnaire he filled out early in the Third Reich, he noted that he wished to write “popular scholarly” works: that is, to reach a broad audience. Even during the war he published a book titled *Art of the Baltic in Light of New Research, 1919–1939*

(1942) and an article in the journal *Baltenland* in 1943. The thrust of his scholarship remained the same after the war, as indicated by the titles of his books: *Danzig—a Book of Remembrance* (1949); *Breslau—a Book of Remembrance* (1950); and *Riga and Reval—a Book of Remembrance* (1952). Holst advanced the pan-German view of the region's history and bemoaned the political and demographic changes that occurred after the war. Throughout his career, he maintained an ethnocentric outlook and viewed both history and art history as weapons with which to fight for German hegemony in the region. This view persisted up through the end of his career as an art historian: in 1981, he published *The German Order of Knights and Their Buildings*, which glorified the Teutonic knights' "civilizing" mission and documented the Germans' historic presence in regions now "lost." Holst also continued to pursue his dream of becoming a popular art historian. To some extent he achieved this by the 1960s, authoring a glossy coffee-table book in 1967 titled *Creators, Collectors, Connoisseurs: The Anatomy of Artistic Taste from Antiquity to the Present Day*; it was published in the United Kingdom by Thames and Hudson and in the United States by Putnam, both reputable presses. Holst also continued to write scholarly essays and penned dozens of articles for the prestigious journal *Die Weltkunst*. Niels von Holst died in 1981, and there is no evidence that he was ever exposed in the postwar period as an art plunderer.

But some figures who were complicit in the Nazis' looting program felt so shamed by their actions that at war's end they could not imagine rehabilitation. Such was the case with art historian Hermann Bunjes, who was an expert on French medieval sculpture and architecture and who headed the SS-run Art Historical Institute in Paris. While Bunjes was far from the worst of the Nazi plunderers, he was involved with various criminal schemes, including the plundering of Jewish art in France by the ERR and an effort late in the war to abscond with the Bayeux Tapestry.

Bunjes had had a rigorous academic training that included a stint as an exchange student at Harvard University and a period in Paris, where he was a student of the curator of sculpture at the Louvre, Marcel Aubert (with whom he later had dealings during the war). Bunjes completed his dissertation at the University of Marburg in October 1935, writing on sculpture in the Ile de France. His first position was at the Rhineland Provincial Administration, where he inventoried architectural and artistic monuments in the city of Trier, and as part of his job he published books and articles on monuments and sculpture in both Trier and France. He completed his *Habilitationschrift* in late 1938, an "investigation into the artistic geography of the Mosel region in Roman and early Gothic times." Amidst this increasing success, Hermann Bunjes completed his service in the *Wehrmacht* (1937–38) and joined the SS (January 1938). His motives for entering the latter organization are unclear, but they appear a mixture of ideology and practicality: Bunjes was enthusiastic about the Nazi program, but also aware that SS membership would help his career. The SS provided him with financial assistance for his scholarly work, for example, financing a project on "Forest and Tree in Aryan-German Spiritual and Cultural History" (he noted in the application that he came from near the Teutoberger forest). There

were also political advantages to be gained from this association. At a minimum, he would be assured of enthusiastic evaluations from the Party bureaucrats, which factored into all civil-service appointments.

At this stage in his career Bunjes sought, above all, academic success, and in September 1939 he joined the faculty of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelm University as a lecturer (*Dozent*). Yet he did not spend much time at the university in Bonn, for he was called for a special assignment in France, effective 5 August 1940. His colleague and nominal superior Wolff-Metternich had been appointed head of the Army's Kunstschutz unit—one of the few German organizations that did a credible job safeguarding and not stealing artworks, as they consciously followed in the tradition of the Kunstschutz unit led by Paul Clemen in World War I. Bunjes joined Metternich in France in the summer of 1940, and they toured the country inspecting repositories of artworks (for example, at the Loire chateaus of Chambord and Cheverny). They met with French museum officials, including Bunjes's former teacher Marcel Aubert, and reassured the French that the works would be safe. Bunjes initially disapproved of the ERR and took certain steps to resist them. He wrote in a May 1941 report that "the measures of the ERR threaten to be a shameful mark on German scholarship and German museum practices. I am asking finally for measures to control Rosenberg's Special Staff." But Bunjes, unlike Wolff-Metternich, finally came to accept the looting campaign and was far more inclined to collaborate with the Nazi leaders. In particular, he was drawn into the plans drafted by Göring. By late 1941, he was part of the smoothly running occupation machinery.

Bunjes, then, was gradually co-opted by the Nazi leaders, and the more accommodating he became, the more power he received. In addition to his position at the Kunstschutz agency, he was given a post within the German Military Government in Paris, where he was a war administration adviser and responsible for "all questions of French cultural life." This position required him to respond to French objections about the seizure of Jewish-owned artworks (he argued that the French people and not the Jews had concluded an armistice) and to coordinate the reopening of certain French museums, such as the Musée de Carnavalet. He also continued to work on his scholarship and published several books on French, Dutch, and German architecture and monuments during the war. These projects came together when he was appointed director of the Art Historical Research Institute in Paris in January 1942. This organization, largely funded by the SS, was extremely ideological: it advanced interpretations of art history and history that were racist and excessively pro-German. Bunjes, then, had fashioned a stellar career as a Nazi art historian. His 1942 evaluation from the commandant of Greater Paris noted that "thanks to his outstanding technical knowledge, his extraordinarily effective negotiating skills, and his tireless industriousness, [Bunjes] had preserved the artworks in France, as well as performed entirely special service in safeguarding German interests." Furthermore, Himmler personally promoted him to SS lieutenant in 1942, and after recommendations to Reichsminister Rust from colleagues in Bonn, he was made a professor in 1944.

The price Bunjes paid for this "success" came in the form of subservience to Göring

and Himmler. In fact, he became such a tool of the Nazi leaders that Wolf-Metternich released him from the Kunstschutz agency in 1942; whereupon the Reichsmarschall engaged him as an employee of the Luftwaffe. Göring used him for a variety of tasks, but most notably, for the procurement of artworks for his own collection. Perhaps most significantly, Bunjes coordinated most of the twenty “exhibitions” of plundered Jewish art at the Jeu de Paume, where the Reichsmarschall selected works for his personal collection. Bunjes was never a member of the ERR, but he had good relations with its members and used these links to outmaneuver Robert Scholz, who sought to block the transfer of artworks to Göring.

Bunjes’s close ties to Göring did not end his relationship with Himmler, as he also served the Reichsführer-SS in much the same vein. Specifically, Bunjes coordinated the project to seize the Bayeux Tapestry and transport it to Germany. Bunjes and Himmler shared a Nazi conception of art history and history, and accordingly, they viewed the remarkable Norman artifact as an example of Teutonic artistic accomplishment. The fate of the tapestry was of utmost importance to these two men, as well as to Wolfram Sievers and others in the SS. Since early in the war Bunjes and other members of the Ahnenerbe had been working on a project to publish photographs of the tapestry, along with annotations advancing the Nazi interpretation. The project was sometimes referred to as Special Project Brittany (*Sonderauftrag Bretagne*) and they used the code name “Matilda” for the tapestry. The episode offered great intrigue and drama as the Nazis tracked down the tapestry. There were all sorts of rumors, including one that the Americans had removed it across the Atlantic. The German plan entailed arranging its transfer from the provincial repository to Paris, whereupon it would be seized by an SS commando (an action comparable to seizure of Michelangelo’s *Bruges Madonna* just prior to the liberation of Belgium in August 1944). Evidently, in the summer of 1944, General Dietrich von Choltitz, the Wehrmacht commander of Paris who is often credited with saving the city from destruction (a lingering point of controversy), “talked the SS out of taking the Bayeux tapestry off to the Fatherland.” Bunjes, who made regular reports to Himmler, was even sending updates as late as 21 February 1945, when he noted, “I have evacuated my entire institute from Paris to Germany. The Norman tapestry has been brought on our orders from its safekeeping place [Sourches] to Paris where it has been entrusted into the custody of the Louvre.” But by this point it was too late: the Germans had been forced from Paris the previous August and had not managed to take the tapestry with them.

The life and career of Hermann Bunjes represents the gradual corruption of an art historian. Of course, like Mühlmann and Holst, those who subscribed to the Nazi worldview were probably inclined toward criminal behavior. Bunjes’s racism and his nationalism helped lead him to support Göring and Himmler in the implementation of their programs. But there was also his own personal ambition. This was not for wealth—Bunjes received modest salaries for his various positions (for example, RM 600 per month for head of the Art History Research Institute). Rather, he sought academic accolades and advancement, which he received within the Nazi-controlled scholarly

establishment. After the war, American investigators asked Robert Scholz and Bruno Lohse about Bunjes and reported “both are agreed that Bunjes is a man of fantastic ambition, who wished to become the leading figure in the arts in Germany. Scholz is certain that Bunjes wished to become German Minister of Culture.” Bunjes also appears to have been tremendously impressed by the Nazi leaders and their display of power. Lynn Nicholas identified this as a source of motivation when she wrote, “officers who at heart condemned the confiscations were still dazzled enough to betray their consciences. This was certainly true of Dr. Bunjes.”

Yet Hermann Bunjes ultimately became conscious of his immoral behavior. The most telling evidence of this came at war’s end when American MFA & A officers Robert Posey and Lincoln Kirstein apprehended him in Trier. Nicholas described the events, as related to her by Kirstein:

The house was decorated with photographs of French monuments, undoubtedly from the documentation project undertaken by the German Institute in Paris. Bunjes, who in a very short time poured forth volumes of information—including the existence of Altaussee—did not fail to mention that he had once studied at Harvard and, now that the war was over, would like to work for the Americans. It also soon appeared that he would even more like to have a safe-conduct for himself and his family to Paris so that he could finish his research on the twelfth-century sculpture of the Ile de France. In the course of these outpourings he confided that he had been in the SS and now feared retribution from other Germans. Posey and Kirstein, who as yet knew little of the machinations of the ERR, found him rather charming, but could offer him nothing, and left. Charm had masked desperation: after a subsequent interrogation, Bunjes shot himself, his wife, and his child.

His suicide was not entirely unique (although murder was far less common). A number of individuals involved with the Nazis’ criminal program for the arts took their lives in 1945, including ERR Paris chief Kurt von Behr and a range of museum officials. Among the latter were E. F. Bange (sculpture collection in Berlin), Dr. Gelpke (from the ethnographic museum in Berlin), Dr. Sieveking in Hamburg, Dr. Waldmann (and his wife) in Bremen, Dr. Feulner in Cologne, and Dr. Kloss in Breslau. Paul Rave noted that others, like Dr. Körte of Freiburg, took their lives by “seeking death in battle.”

The Nazi leaders relied on art historians first to determine the location of artworks and then to catalog the plunder. This discussion has focused on a relatively small number of the art historians who were co-opted by the regime. A list of those involved in plundering programs would extend to several score, and perhaps even to hundreds, which is remarkable considering the limited size of the profession. Of those who collaborated, one can discern certain tendencies: some art historians, like Mühlmann, Holst, and Bunjes, assumed largely supervisory roles in the looting bureaucracy, while others worked in a hands-on manner with the thousands of artworks that filled the depots. There are a plethora of examples of this latter type: from Professor Otto Reich in Vienna, who was engaged by the Gestapo to appraise the Gomperz collection (among others), to Günther Schiedlausky, who worked in the Jeu de Paume as a

cataloger for the ERR. These art historian technocrats were very effective in ordering the massive quantities of loot and keeping precise records—especially considering that many works had been carelessly hauled out of homes and depots in commando raids. Like the conservationists who attended to the physical conditions of the works, these art historians in a certain sense performed acts that helped safeguard the art. The Allied officers utilized their records and relied on their recollections to effect the massive restitution program after the war—a program which remains incomplete. The positive services rendered by these art professionals constitute one of the ironies of this history.