

# THE *Art Digest*

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## Exiled Art Finds Haven in Modern Museum

THE ART that Hitler has exiled as "degenerate" is finding ready homes in other lands that have not yet been culturally crushed beneath the heel of Europe's twin tyrannies, Fascism and Communism. Because Adolf, like his new-found friend Joe, has embraced the calendar decoration as the supreme art form, the Museum of Modern Art in New York has been able to acquire five works that formerly were housed in prominent German museums.

These acquisitions, which will remain on exhibition as part of the Modern Museum's "Art in Our Times" display until late in September, were purchased through the Buchholz Gallery and include two examples considered by the museum officials as of unusual importance: Henri Matisse's *The Blue Window* (1912) and Wilhelm Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Figure* (1911), formerly in the Essen Museum and the National Gallery of Berlin, respectively.

The other exiled works are Andre Derain's *Valley of the Lot at Vers* (1912), formerly in the Cologne Museum; Ernst L. Kirchner's *Street Scene* (1913), formerly in the National Gallery in Berlin; and Paul Klee's *Around the Fish* (1926), formerly in the Dresden Gallery.

These works of art, several of which were included in the official exhibition of "degenerate" art at Munich in 1937, were not excluded from German museums on racial grounds. Two of the artists, Lehmbruck and Kirchner, are Aryan Germans; two, Derain and Matisse, are Frenchmen; and Klee, though a native of Switzerland, was long a resident of Germany and identified with the art of that land, having been in pre-Nazi days a professor at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf.

In announcing the acquisitions, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Modern Museum's director, said that "the museum is very fortunate in having acquired these works of art. The *Kneeling Woman* is one of the great masterpieces of modern sculpture and was so regarded in the native land of the artist for many years. The Derain painting, far from being radical, is a severely disciplined landscape in a modern classical style derived from Cézanne and Poussin. All the paintings are the work of men who are generally considered in other countries to be among the best of living artists. The only good thing about the exile of such fine works of art from one country is the consequent enrichment of other lands where cultural freedom still exists."



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In relating briefly the events that led to the shifting of modern art's status in Germany, Barr pointed out that "the Nazi opposition to modern art seems in fact to be due to Hitler's personal taste rather than to any racial or political factors. In spite of his radical political philosophy Hitler's taste in art is as reactionary as was that of Lenin in the Russian revolution of twenty years ago.

"Hitler was at one time a painter of feeble and mediocre academic watercolors—a fact which seems permanently to have affected his taste. His antipathy toward new forms of art and architecture found a good deal of sympathy among the less cultivated Brown Shirts, as well as among academic artists who seized the opportunity to recover some of their lost prestige. There are, however, more cultivated elements in the Nazi party who are very much embarrassed by the degenerate art theories of Der Führer. These men sincerely regret the loss of many works of art. They also regret the terrible damage done to Germany's reputation as a cultivated nation, for, before the Nazi Revolution, the art of Germany stood second only to that of France among European nations."

"In those days," concurred Edward Alden Jewell in the *New York Times*, "many of the big German collections of modern art were magnificent." But the *Times* critic, in referring specifically to the new Modern Museum acquisitions, did not find it necessary to bring superlatives out of the camphor. "Henri Matisse," he wrote, "in the *Blue Window* of 1912, is seen working from the previous *Fauve* revolt into graver, more considered plastic statement; yet has the process been carried far along toward a triumphant end? Certainly his design is dismally unpliant, jejune and static. On this count the Klee trifle seems still worse, nor is there to be found any sort of redemption in the Swiss artist's color. Sometimes Paul Klee's color will vibrate with a kind of intense strange loveliness, but that is not the case here."

"The Kirchner canvas is pretty fully representative," continued Jewell. "Kirchner's harsh color harmonies are deliberately devised; his strident centrifugal mass rhythms belong to the scheme embraced. These may prove disturbing, for some they may be unpleasant, but they have been adopted in obedience to a definite purpose and are carried out—if not, perhaps, in fully clarified statement—with intelligence."

To Jewell the Derain 1912 landscape was "vigorous, substantial, to some extent provocative;" but the *Times* writer concluded that "Derain seems here not conspicuously to have shepherded to telling original statement the more or less obvious fruits of an omnipresent eclecticism." Coming to the Lehmbruck sculpture Jewell found both noteworthy elements and deficiencies. "Some of the serenity of Lehmbruck's earlier 'classic' style in-



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vests, with gaunt tenderness and oblique strength, this *Kneeling Woman*, which besides conveys, in half articulated phrase, an obscure sense of indwelling modern *Sturm und Drang*. But more than elongation would seem to be required if one is to denote clearly an emotional state."

In discussing the larger, international implications that the purchase of exiled art carries with it, Jewell was in perfect accord with the remarks of director Barr, quoted above. Refugee works of art are but another manifestation of the cultural stagnation accompanying dictatorship of any kind. They provide a contrast that should heighten appreciation of the freedom still existent in America. "In sum," concluded Edward Alden Jewell, "we may deem ourselves peculiarly blest. It would be futile, of course, to pretend that all is well in America. There are enormous problems yet unsolved, vital and difficult goals yet far from reached. But the arts here are free. Here men are free to develop culturally as they will."

