

The Führer's prerogative and the planned Führer Museum in Linz

On June 18, 1938, Adolf Hitler placed all artwork seized in Austria under the Führer's prerogative[1]. This provision was a reaction to the numerous confiscations by the Gestapo and NSDAP organizations during the first weeks after Austria's Anschluss by the Third Reich.[2] The Führer's prerogative was supposed to place the expropriations – especially in the art center Vienna – under Berlin's control and to secure Hitler's priority access to the prestigious art collections of Vienna's Jewish bourgeoisie.[3] Paintings which, until 1938, were the major works of the Rothschild, Gutmann or Bondy collections, were intended to grace Hitler's private collection and, above all, the planned Führer Museum in Linz.

The Führer Museum was planned as part of the new European art and cultural center proposed to be established in Linz at Hitler's request.[4] An opera house, a library and the Führer Gallery were to be built along a typical National Socialist axis street south of Linz's historic part of town. Like many of the National Socialist regime's building projects, however, the Führer City Linz remained a proposal. Construction was planned to be finished by the year 1950, though only the so called Nibelungen Bridge, which still exists today, was completed.[5]

In 1939, Hans Posse, director of the Picture Gallery in Dresden, was appointed special representative for this planned museum in Linz.[6] It was his task to compile the collection for the planned Führer Museum in Linz. A large part of the paintings was allocated to the collection designated for Linz out of confiscated holdings from Jewish collectors in Germany, Austria and the occupied territories. The special representative for Linz acquired a large number of artwork on extensive purchasing trips through Europe and by arrangement through art dealers.[7] In the late summer and autumn of 1939, Hans Posse paid several visits to the Central Depot for confiscated art in the Neue Burg in Vienna and reserved its most significant pieces for the museum in Linz.[8] After Posse's death in 1942, Hermann Voss, the former deputy director of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin, was appointed new special representative for Linz.[9]

In the absence of accurate inventories for the paintings intended for Linz, the size of the collection compiled for the Führer Museum can only be estimated. In 1945, the US American Art Looting Investigation Unit listed a total of 6,755 objects which had been designated for the Linz Museum amongst the artwork recovered in Altaussee. The Dresden Catalogue, now kept at the Federal Archive Koblenz, mentions 4,000 paintings.[10] Photo albums in leather binding prepared for Hitler to show him the latest acquisitions for Linz, now stored in the archives of the regional tax office Berlin, yield further evidence.[11]

[1] *As part of the seizure of assets hostile to the state – especially Jewish assets – in Austria, paintings and other artwork of great value, among other things, have been confiscated. The Führer requests that this artwork, for the most part from Jewish hands, be neither used as furnishings of administration offices or senior bureaucrats' official residences nor purchased by leading state and party leaders. The Führer plans to personally decide on the use of the property after its seizure. He is considering putting artwork first and foremost at the disposal of small Austrian towns for their collections.*, Decree issued by Reich Minister and Head of the Chancellery of the Reich, June 18, 1938.

Vienna, Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments, archive, restitution files, box 8/1, fascicle 1. As facsimile in: Theodor Brückler (publ.), *Kunstraub, Kunstbergung und Restitution in Österreich 1938 bis heute*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, 1999, at 157.

[2] The Führer's prerogative was initially only applied in Austria and was only later extended to the Old Reich and the occupied territories (editor's note).

[3] Anderl G, Caruso A, Einleitung, in: Gabriele Anderl, Alexandra Caruso (publ.), *NS-Kunstraub in Österreich und seine Folgen*, Innsbruck, 2005, at 13.

[4] Weihsmann H, *Bauen unter dem Hakenkreuz. Architektur des Untergangs*, Vienna, 1998, at 942.

[5] Ibid, at 944.

[6] Diary of Hans Posse 1936 – 1942, entry on June 21, 1939. Archive of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, Posse

estate.

[7] Kirchmayr B, *Adolf Hitlers Sonderauftrag Linz und seine Bedeutung für den NS-Kunstraub in Österreich*, in: Gabriele Anderl, Alexandra Caruso (publ.), *NS-Kunstraub in Österreich und seine Folgen*, Innsbruck, 2005, at 29ff (quoted hereafter as: Kirchmayr, *Sonderauftrag Linz*).

[8] Haupt H, *Jahre der Gefährdung. Das Kunsthistorische Museum 1938 – 1945*, Vienna, 1995, at 18 and 92.

[9] Kirchmayr, *Sonderauftrag Linz*, at 28.

[10] *Ibid*, at 31.

[11] *Ibid*, at 31; Schwarz B, *Hitlers Museum. Die Fotoalben Gemäldegalerie Linz. Dokumente zum Führermuseum*, Vienna, 2004.