



COLEGIO CONCEPCIÓN
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AESTHETIC ESSAY

Art - politics, the case of the nazi holocaust

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The Second World War changed not just the political borders and societies of Europe and beyond, but also the arts world, in the most significant way. Throughout the years between 1939 and 1945, artistic communities in Europe and beyond assisted with and were involved in an international art context defined by violence, censorship and ideological manipulations. Totalitarian regimes including, most notably, Nazi Germany used art as a weapon of propaganda, and the Allied nations employed images and visual cultural forms in their struggle to gain public support for their war efforts against fascism, and for national morale. Many avant-garde artists took on the madness of war with new modes of expression--often in a resistant way--that questioned legitimacy and violence. This essay will investigate the different functions art served, as weapon a propaganda, resistance, theft, and even a frail lifeline for some individuals who were interned in Concentration Camps.

The authoritarian regimes of the time used art as a tool for propaganda and control, while the Allies used it to mobilize the population, in addition to the artistic avant-grades that also reacted to the war, generally with a mixture of disillusionment and reflecting the loss and collapse of traditional values, some movements like expressionism focused on representing the horror and destruction of the war.

For example In Nazi Germany, an aesthetic emerged that glorified militarism and racial purity began to be promoted. At the same time, European works of art were stolen for the consumption of their leaders. Among the works stolen by the Nazis were famous modern art pieces such as Pablo Picasso "Madame Soler" and Emil Nolde "Das Leben Christi," which was considered degenerate art and displayed as unacceptable in a large exhibition of confiscated art.

World war two turned out to be a lucrative business for those who began stealing European art, as they enriched themselves through the theft and appropriation of artworks from occupied European territories, seeking to create large collections for personal consumption or, as I mentioned earlier, for the benefit of their leaders.

The countries that made up the Allies side began producing posters/banners and documentaries whose objective was to mobilize the population and generate support for the participation in the war.

In the public sphere, opposition to the Nazis began to adopt more symbolic forms of artistic expression. In 1941, a group of artists known as “Jeunes peintres de tradition française” exhibited Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works in Paris, characterized by semi-abstract art and bright colors, which were considered a form of resistance against the Nazis.

As I mentioned after, the Nazi persecution forced many European avant-garde artists into exile in the United States thus shifting the artistic epicenter from Paris to New York, causing artists who opposed the nazis work abroad or clandestinely.

In concentration camps, art was also created clandestinely, as art production was forbidden in these institutions and being caught creating art could be a death sentence. For the prisoners, art was a form of distraction and an escape from the horrors they experienced within the camp. Furthermore, by creating visual artifacts, they maintained the hope of creating something that would survive death and bear witness to the existence of all those people who had been taken there against their will.

To conclude, I want to emphasize that World War II was an incredibly violent and pivotal moment in the history of art itself. The creation of art was either restricted, used as propaganda, or surveilled and evaluated by authoritarian regimes, while the Allies utilized art as a necessary means of communication and solidarity. Furthermore, the suppression and exile of avant-garde artists, particularly in Europe, meant the displacement and relocation of the art world outside of Europe and into New York as the new artistic center of gravity. Simultaneously, secretive art-making within concentration camps stands as an emblem of resistance and a desire to honor one's expression even when stripped of human dignity. So, art of the war is not only prolifically documenting the political and social upheavals of time and place, but it can also function politically as art resists oppression, denounces suffering, and attains humanity.

To what extent did the artistic transformations brought about by World War II permanently redefine the global cultural landscape?

