

HOW NAZIS PLUNDER EUROPEAN ART

BY EUGENE TILLINGER



HITLER VIEWING THE TREASURES AT THERMEN MUSEUM. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WORLD'S ARTISTS HAVE BEEN GRABBED BY NAZIS.

SOME time ago, newspapers reported that Hitler had removed the famous painting of the "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre, in Paris, and had it brought to Berchtesgaden. At the first glance, this seems almost incredible. We simply cannot conceive of this former paper-hanger of Braunau hanging one of the most famous works of art of all times in his bedroom. Yet the last years should have taught us that, as far as Hitler is concerned, the most unbelievable things become real.

This brings to mind a story told me by a Nazi movie-producer in Paris a short time before the outbreak of the war, a story whose meaning becomes apparent in connection with the theft of the "Mona Lisa." Hitler is said to find a particular pleasure in hanging nude paintings on the walls of his bedroom and he does not care what kind of paintings they are. Once he saw a poorly gifted movie-actress, Jutta Preybe whose appearance inflamed him to such an extent that he wished to possess a painting of her in the nude. Goering assumed the task of persuading the actress to be painted by a Nazi painter as a Modern Eve. Hitler's enthusiasm for this terribly dauby picture was boundless. He got so excited that he assigned it a place of honor in his bedroom. The "Fuehrer" has assured his most intimate friends that, in his bedroom, the Masters are interspersed with modern nudes, and that, for hours, he has studied the differences between the classical and modern type of beauty.

Can you imagine the "Mona Lisa" hanging in Hitler's bedroom, in Berchtesgaden, and—side by side—the gaudy nude of a little Nazi film actress painted by some German painter, chosen for this particular distinction for the only reason that he had been a member of the Nazi party ever since its foundation? Can you imagine the former house-painter and paper hanger staring at these pictures and drawing comparisons? The real taste of this man whom Nazi propaganda agents depict not only as the greatest of all statesmen and soldiers, but, in addition, as one of the outstanding art

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HITLER'S MOUNTAIN HOME IN BAVARIA
HOLDS MANY PRICELESS PAINTINGS.

connoisseurs of all times, is revealed in his childishly amateurish water-colors. After his ascension to power, Hitler did not withdraw these paintings from the market. On the contrary, they are being sold now at prices which formerly were paid by internationally famous collectors for the works of Rubens or Franz Hals.

Recently, at the opening of an exhibition of German war paintings, a Nazi paper wrote: "The Fuehrer leads the way, as shown by several of his water colors and drawings of the last war. These are not merely evidence of his talent, but explain his statement that 'art is a nation's noblest defense.' "

In the present phase of the war, information on atrocities committed by German soldiers, execution of hostages and military operations, undoubtedly overshadows all other news coming out of Nazi-occupied Europe. However, it is important to throw some light on a fact which hitherto has scarcely been noticed. Yes, it is necessary to point to the systematical looting of the great works of art, organized by the Nazis into the smallest detail. Some time ago, a meeting of art experts of the United Nations took place in London. At this meeting, sensational revelations of the looting of



NAZI ARTIST ARTHUR FISCHER COMPLETING
HERR HITLER'S FAVORITE PAINTING SUBJECT.

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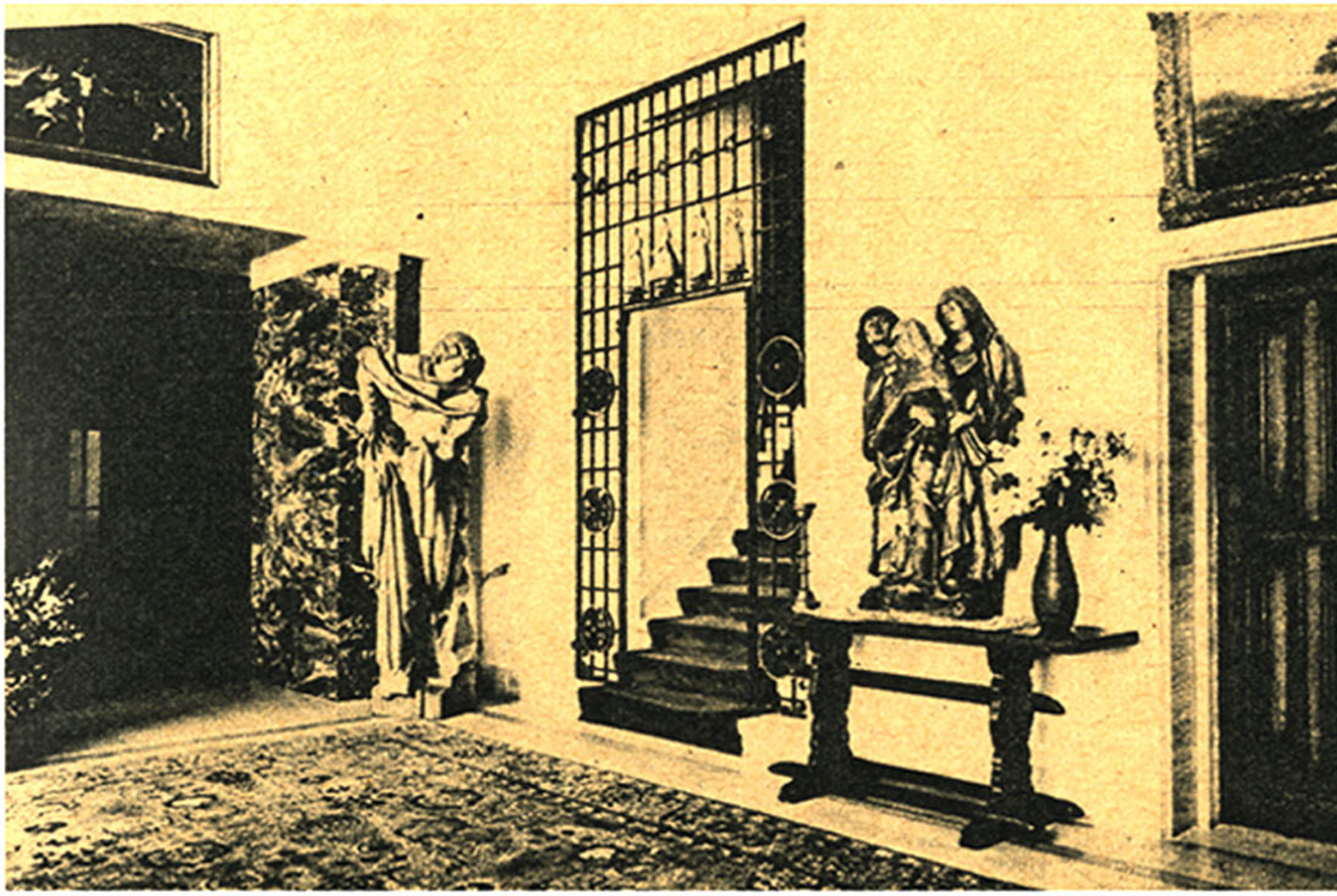
European art-treasures by the German Occupying Forces, were made for the first time.

The German Foreign Office has organized a special "Nazi Art Corps," under the direct command of Herr von Ribbentrop. This corps consists of four battalions, chiefly composed of members of the Elite-Guard having the necessary background and thoroughly trained. The Commander of the "Art-Corps" is Major von Kuensberg of the Elite-Guard. It is the special task of these battalions to seize the historical and cultural treasures of occupied cities immediately after their conquest, to confiscate the libraries of scientific institutions, to comb them for precious books and manuscripts, and to send all these objects directly to Germany. This information from art experts on the systematic looting on the part of the Hitler bandits is supplemented by a very interesting document recently published by the Government of Soviet Russia.

A Dr. Foerster, Elite-Corps officer of the fourth company of an art looting battalion was made prisoner by the Russians. On November 10, 1942, he signed a statement in which the exact composition, the special tasks and the organization of the German art looting brigade were described. The statement reads, in part: "Before leaving for Russia, Major von Kuensberg brought us Ribbentrop's official instructions. We were instructed thoroughly to examine all scientific and other institutions, to search all libraries and palaces, carefully to comb all archives, and to seize all articles of value . . . From the Korolenko Library we sent several thousand precious editions to Berlin. All other books were destroyed. From the Art Gallery in Kharkow, hundreds of precious paintings were carried away, among them works by Auvazovsky, Repin, Polenow, etc. All sculptures and the rich scientific archives of the Museum were also confiscated. Moreover, German soldiers simply appropriated embroideries, rugs, tapestries and other objects of art. . . ."

However, Ribbentrop's office of art looting has met with unofficial competition on the part of Hermann Goering who has his own men to do the looting for him. Proudly, he contends that Karin-Hall, his sumptuous estate in Schorfheide, near Berlin, lodges the most precious collection of paintings to be found today, anywhere in the world. Goering had found occasion to loot the great collections of Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, etc. Goering appointed for his personal service two of Germany's most important art experts. These experts arrived in Goering's private plane simultaneously with the invading German armies. In Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris and Athens they gave orders what paintings and art objects were to be sent to Germany at once. Then these valuable paintings were sold at auction in Vienna or Budapest where intermediaries acquired them for Goering's private collection. Thus, during these last years, Goering's collection was enriched by numerous genuine paintings by the world's most famous

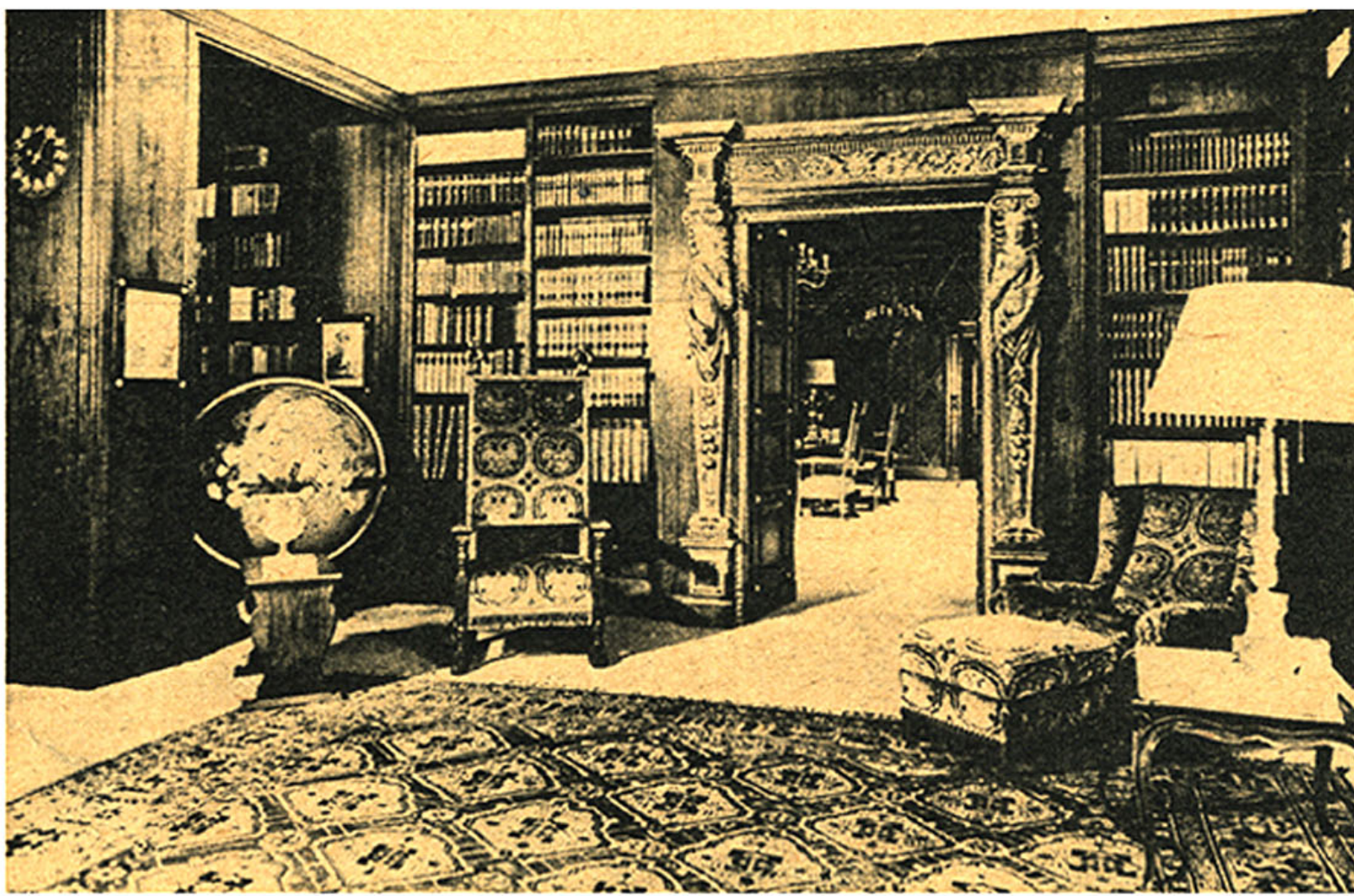
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GOERING'S VESTIBULE REFLECTS HIS ABILITY AS A PLUNDERER.

artists and all were brazenly stolen.

One of the most remarkable cases of Nazi looting concerns a famous art collection which before the invasion belonged to Goudstikker, internationally known art-dealer. Goudstikker escaped from Amsterdam and got aboard a



THE GOERING LIBRARY CONTAINS MORE CONFISCATED TREASURES.

ship bound for England. The Germans immediately installed a so-called "representative" in the Goudstikker business, a man belonging to the Nazi-instituted "Treuhand A. G." (Trust Company) of The Hague, which had no other purpose but to place within the Nazi grasp all possessions left behind by those fortunate enough to escape the invaders. Before this official could get on the job, however, representatives of some of the big Nazi leaders had already put their own machinery into action. In the Goudstikker-case an old school friend of Goering, Aloys Miedel took over the entire collection and announced publicly that he was going to carry on the business. He appointed agents all over the Netherlands to buy up valuable Dutch paintings at any price, provided certificates concerning their authenticity were given by the old German expert Friedlander who gave certificates of authenticity to any painting submitted to him—even those which were actually known to be copies. When one of Miedel's associates objected to the wholesale certification, he was promptly accused of "insulting Hitler" and sent to a concentration camp.

But before long there was a hitch in Miedel's lucrative business . . . when he tried to buy

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up the entire collection of the Amsterdam banker Daniel Wolf he found that this time representatives of Nazi Minister of Economic Affairs Funk, had appropriated practically all of Wolf's paintings. A violent dispute ensued with Funk visiting Holland personally to uphold his claim. He was closely followed by Goering who also raced to Amsterdam. This "difference of opinion" developed into a fight between the thieves. Goering, as might be expected, emerged as the winner, but when he came to collect his loot, a Jan Steen valued at several thousand dollars was missing.

What had happened? While Funk and Goering were battling another Nazi had stepped in. This fellow had persuaded Daniel Wolf's wife to give up the painting in return for a permit to leave the Netherlands. Many months later, it was discovered that the Steen had been sold to another great Nazi "lover of the good and the beautiful" Heinrich Himmler, dreaded leader of the Fascist Gestapo.