

Harvard's Busch-Reisinger Museum and the American reception of post-war German art in the 1940s and 1950s

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Figure 1 George Grosz, *Uprooted*, 1948. Watercolour on off-white laid paper, 65.1 × 48.2 cm., Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Association Fund, BR49.711. Available online at <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/225061?position=4>

Surrounded by canvases and holding a brush in his mouth, the stick-like figure in George Grosz's watercolour *Uprooted* (1948) [Fig. 1] can easily be identified as a painter.¹ His hands and feet, as well as the ends of his brush, resemble thin roots recently ripped from the soil. The damaged canvases and frames around him give the scene a post-apocalyptic air. Part of the series of stick men that Grosz (1893-1959) painted in the late 1940s, the watercolour reflects his struggle to establish himself as

¹ This article is based on the author's extended research as Renke B. and Pamela M. Thye Curatorial Fellow at the Busch-Reisinger Museum/Harvard Art Museums between 2014 and 2017. The results were also incorporated in the Harvard Art Museums' 2018 exhibition *Inventur—Art in Germany 1943-55* and in part published in the exhibition catalogue; see Ilka Voermann, 'An absolutely unknown aspect of modern art: the U.S. reception of post-war German art in the 1950s', in *Inventur. Art in Germany 1943-55*, ed. Lynette Roth, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2018, 77-105.

a German figurative painter now living in the United States. *Uprooted* was acquired by Harvard's Busch-Reisinger Museum (then called the Germanic Museum) in 1949, the same year that the museum mounted a solo exhibition entitled *George Grosz. A Piece of My World: Paintings and Drawings of Social Satire*, organised by curator Charles L. Kuhn (1902-1985).² Trained in medieval art, Kuhn developed a strong interest in contemporary German art in the 1930s, and like many of his American counterparts at the time, he focussed increasingly on German art labelled 'degenerate' by the National Socialists.³

According to a press release issued by the museum, the aim of the 1949 exhibition was to promote works that Grosz had made since arriving in America and to prove that he had not 'turned soft' and lost 'the bitter strength of his earlier works', as American critics claimed.⁴ Kuhn wanted to 'demonstrate the fallaciousness of this concept', hoping to show that 'Grosz [had] developed steadily in technique and in sensitivity to his environment.' He strongly defended Grosz's post-war work and stated that unlike other German artists, he did not 'seek refuge from the unpleasant realities of the world in romantic dreams or in an ordered cosmos of geometric shapes.'⁵

Although Kuhn himself was convinced that Grosz's post-war oeuvre was as strong as his earlier works, he did not rely exclusively on this strength to make his case. He instead juxtaposed works from the pre-war period with more recent works to underline the artist's significance both before and after World War II.⁶ In the

² That was not the first solo exhibition of Grosz's work at the Germanic Museum. In 1935, the museum had presented *George Grosz: Exhibitions of Water Colors and Drawings, 1932-34*, and in 1942 it hosted *Paintings, Drawings, Prints by George Grosz*, which had been organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

³ On the American reception of German art labelled 'degenerate' in Nazi Germany, see Gregor Langfeld, *German Art in New York: The Canonization of Modern Art, 1904-1957*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015; Pamela Kort, 'The Myths of Expressionism in America', in *New World: German and Austrian Art, 1890-1940*, ed. Renée Price, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press; New York: Neue Galerie, 2001, 260-93; and Sabine Eckmann, 'German Exile, Modern Art, and National Identity', in *Caught by Politics: Hitler Exiles and American Visual Culture*, ed. Sabine Eckmann and Lutz Koepnick, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 95-125.

⁴ Press release (1949); Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931-1994, Carton 37. Barbara McCloskey, *The Exile of George Grosz: Modernism, America, and the One World Order*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, 35.

⁵ Kuhn's statement is surprising, for he later became one of the most important supporters of art from the Bauhaus; figurative art from the post-war period assumed a comparatively minor role in the Busch-Reisinger Museum's collection.

⁶ This curatorial strategy was well established by previous exhibitions and served public expectations of viewing works by Grosz. Many of the major U.S. shows, including exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago (1938), the Museum of Modern Art (1941), the Associated American Artists Galleries in New York (1946), and the Whitney Museum of

following years, this method of contextualising German art from the immediate post-war period would become a common curatorial strategy, and it greatly influenced how the art of this period has been received in the United States. While Grosz's story as an exiled German artist has been the topic of numerous studies, the American reception of the German artists who stayed in Germany has not been examined widely.⁷ Analysing the American reception of artists who stayed in Germany between 1933 and 1945 can add a new layer to our understanding of the German artist in the immediate post-war period and if this period has been canonised abroad. The Busch-Reisinger Museum in particular – until the opening of the Neue Galerie in New York in 2001 the only U.S. museum dedicated to art from German-speaking countries – is a prime example of the ways American institutions, beginning in the 1950s, acquired and presented German art from the immediate post-war period.

The term 'post-war' does not distinguish a specific time period but is widely used for art produced after the end of World War II. This essay covers the period from 1945 to 1955, often called the immediate post-war period, which starts with the end of the war and ends with the first *documenta* in Kassel, the first international art exhibition in post-war Germany. The immediate post-war period has often been understood as a gap in German art history, a transition period in which German artist had come to terms with their past. This period ends in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the rising fame of artists like Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke or Gerhard Richter and the founding of the ZERO group around Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack and Otto Piene who clearly rejected the art from the early years after the war.⁸ Due to the separation of East and West Germany and the beginning of the Cold War in

American Art (1954), displayed Grosz's most recent works in the context of his pre-war art. See Ralph Jentsch, comp., 'Solo Exhibitions with Works from the American Years', in *George Grosz: The Years in America, 1933–1958*, ed. Juerg M. Judin, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009, 270–71.

⁷ The first in-depth studies on the topic were delivered by Jennifer McComas and Dorothea Schöne; see Jennifer McComas, *The Politics of Display: Exhibiting Modern German Art in America, 1937–1957*, Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2014; and Dorothea Schöne, *Freie Künstler in einer freien Stadt. Die amerikanische Förderung der Berliner Nachkriegsmoderne*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016. As Sabine Eckmann points out, an exiled artist such as Grosz offers more positive possibilities to identify with the past. For Germany, the exiled artist as a German victim gives the opportunity to mourn the past, while the immigration of numerous exiled artists underscored the conception of the United States as a safe, 'democratic haven'. See Eckmann, *German Exile*, 96. In 2018, the exhibition *Inventur – Art in Germany 1943-55* at the Harvard presented German art from the first twelve years after the end of World War II. Other than earlier presentations, *Inventur* focused on the German artists who stayed in Germany during and after the war to complete the American narration of post-war German art.

⁸ On the immediate post-war period see Lynette Rot 'Inventur. Art in Germany 1943-55', in *Inventur. Art in Germany 1943-55*, ed. Lynette Roth, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2018, 25-73.

1949, the American reception of German art from the immediate post-war period is reduced to artworks that were produced in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In this essay, I will first examine the Busch-Reisinger Museum's acquisition and exhibition strategies to promote German post-war art in the late 1940s and 1950s, with a special focus on *Contemporary Berlin Artists*, the first exhibition dedicated to post-war German art, which travelled the United States between 1951 and 1952. Both examinations will show that post-war German art has always been presented and explained in the context of pre-war art. By comparing the efforts of the Busch-Reisinger Museum to promote post-war German art to the strategies of other American museums such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, I will showcase in the final section that German art from this period has in fact never been canonised in the United States.

Collecting post-war German art



Figure 2 Fritz Winter, *In Front of Red (Vor Rot)*, 1951. Oil on paper, 50 × 70 cm, Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Museum purchase, BR51.271. Available online at: <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/225261?q=in+front+of+red+winter>

In 1951, Charles Kuhn purchased Fritz Winter's *In Front of Red* (1951) [Fig. 2], the first work to enter the Busch-Reisinger Museum's collection by an artist who remained in Nazi Germany during the war.⁹ Winter (1905-1976), one of the most influential representatives of German abstract art after World War II, was one of the few German artists who enjoyed a strong, albeit short-lived, reception in the United States. His works were first presented to a U.S. audience in 1952, in the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Painting* at the Carnegie Institute and in a solo show at the Hacker Gallery in New York. Subsequently, institutions like the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Carnegie Institute of Art, and the Busch-

⁹ Kuhn purchased Winter's *In Front of Red* directly at the Galerie Günther Francke in Munich during one of his travels to Germany.

Reisinger Museum, as well as private collectors, purchased his works. Winter had been trained at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, but his career was interrupted by the rise of the Nazi regime.¹⁰ After serving as a soldier in World War II, he was a prisoner of war in Russia and did not return to Germany until 1948. *In Front of Red* is typical of Winter's style in the early 1950s. The composition is dominated by a calligraphic black figure on a bright red background combined with areas of green and blue. Although the black lines look as if they have been spontaneously applied, the artist in fact used a ruler and stencils to place them precisely on the colourful background. The gestural composition is based on a careful balance of colour and form, revealing Winter's intense training at the Bauhaus prior to the war. Indeed, his connection to the Bauhaus made his work rather fitting for the Busch-Reisinger Museum: Kuhn began acquiring works by Bauhaus artists in the 1950s, and the Bauhaus collection soon became a major focus of the museum.¹¹

Kuhn believed post-war German art to be rooted in the early 20th century. In his 1957 book *German Expressionism and Abstract Art*, he states: 'Most of the artistic movements which had contributed to the formation of the new type of abstract painting had been firmly established on German soil before the advent of the Nazis.'¹² By creating a continuum between German pre-war modernism and post-war art, Kuhn connected contemporary painters and sculptors to a German artistic tradition that was, by this time, well accepted in the United States.

The introduction of modern German art to the American public had come about only in 1912, with the exhibition *Contemporary German Graphic Art* at the Galleries of the Berlin Photographic Company in New York and the *Armory Show (International Exhibition of Modern Art)* one year later. Reactions, especially with regard to expressionism, ranged from hesitant to hostile. Often contrasted with French artistic traditions, German art was perceived as brutal and bold.¹³ With the onset of World War I, the reception of contemporary German art in the United States was put on hold until the 1920s and early 1930s, when art historians, museum

¹⁰ Before 1937, Winter was relatively untouched by Nazi cultural policy. He had been a member of the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) since 1936, and even applied for the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) in Munich. Gabriele Lohberg mentions that he was banned from work at some point after 1937 without giving the exact details; see Gabriele Lohberg, *Fritz Winter, Leben und Werk: mit Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und einem Anhang der sonstigen Techniken*, Munich: Bruckmann, 1986, 23–24.

¹¹ See the Harvard Art Museums' online resource *The Bauhaus* (<http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/tour/the-bauhaus/stop/1076>) for more information on this extensive collection.

¹² Charles Kuhn, *German Expressionism and Abstract Art: The Harvard Collections*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, 16.

¹³ Kimberly Orcutt, 'Public Verdict: Debating Modernism at the Armory Show', in *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, ed. Marilyn Satin Kushner and Kimberly Orcutt, New York: New York Historical Society; in association with London: D. Giles, 2013, 327–39.

directors, and collectors – Katherine Dreier, Wilhelm R. Valentiner, and Alfred Barr chief among them – began to feature German art in major exhibitions.¹⁴ None of these exhibitions were comprehensive, and with the exception of Dreier's program, all were focused on German expressionism. Critical reactions were mixed, with the art still described as rough and ugly – qualities that came to be seen as somehow typical of German art.¹⁵

Such negative appraisals remained common until the late 1930s, when news about the National Socialist 'degenerate art' campaign reached the United States; after that point, the reception of modern German art gained a political dimension. In a press release for the 1942 exhibition *New Acquisitions: Free German Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, director Alfred Barr (1902-1981) states:

Among the Freedoms which the Nazis have destroyed, none has been more cynically perverted, more brutally stamped upon than the Freedom of Art. ... But in free countries [the works of banned German artists] can still be seen, can still bear witness to the survival of a free German culture These men and their works are welcome here, and ... the Museum is proud to acquire and show their work¹⁶

By 1945, this had become the more typical attitude toward pre-war German art. And so, it was in this context that Kuhn began to collect modern German art in the late 1930s. He purchased major works that had been removed from German collections as part of the degenerate art campaign, such as Max Beckmann's *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (1927), shortly before the Busch-Reisinger Museum (then still known as the Germanic Museum) was closed in 1942.¹⁷ After the museum reopened in 1948, Kuhn continued to follow this collecting strategy but also began to purchase contemporary German art. By 1959, he had added contemporary works by Hans Jaenisch and Hann Trier to the collection.¹⁸ Gifts, like a small gouache by Winter and

¹⁴ For a detailed study of the early reception of modern German art, see Langfeld, *German Art in New York*.

¹⁵ Langfeld, *German Art in New York*, 60; Kort, *Myth of Expressionism*, 260; and Eckmann, *German Exile*, 106.

¹⁶ MoMA Archives, Press Releases, 42622-41. See also Eckmann, *German Exile, Modern*, 105–6.

¹⁷ This was the year the United States entered World War II against Germany. A shortage of funds kept the museum closed even after the war, until a generous gift from Edmée Busch Greenough, daughter of Adolphus Busch, allowed it to reopen in 1948.

¹⁸ Harvard's Fogg Museum made complementary acquisitions in 1955 with a painting by Fritz Winter and two works on paper by Theodor Werner.

two paintings by Willi Baumeister and Heinz Trökes, rounded out the collection of post-war German art.¹⁹

All of these artists worked in an abstract style and were related to German avant-garde traditions like expressionism and the Bauhaus. The highly selective approach of the Busch-Reisinger Museum and other American institutions in acquiring new works was reinforced by the American market for contemporary German art. While Kuhn was able to purchase some works directly from German galleries during his travels to that country, he, like other museum curators and directors, acquired a number of works through New York-based art dealers such as Curt Valentin, Henry Kleemann, and Martha Jackson. These dealers focused on pre-war German art (primarily expressionism) and, again, tended to present contemporary German art in relation to pre-war examples.²⁰

Exhibiting post-war German art

Besides acquiring post-war German art, loan exhibitions became a major means of promoting contemporary German art in the United States. However, as both German and American scholars have pointed out, these exhibitions, including *Contemporary Berlin Artists* and *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, were strongly influenced by Cold War politics.²¹

In the spring of 1949, William Constable (1887-1976), curator of paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was sent to Germany by the Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS) to report on the situation of German museums. For several months, Constable travelled to the American zone and the American sector in Berlin, interviewing both museum staff and artists. In his official report, *Art Reorientation in Western Germany* (1949), he suggested hosting contemporary German art exhibitions in the United States to 'encourage the more enlightened and experimental German artists' and to 'provoke criticism that would be healthful for Germans.'²² Constable's recommendations demonstrate the educational approach to

¹⁹ The paintings by Baumeister and Trökes were given to the museum by Charles Kuhn himself. Since the works went directly to the museum and never entered Kuhn's private collections, it can be inferred that he procured them specifically to give to Harvard.

²⁰ Kleemann's gallery mainly included modern art from Germany and contemporary German and American artists. Between 1951 and 1959, he exhibited works by Rolf Nesch, Fritz Winter, Hann Trier, Willi Baumeister, Hans Hartung, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Rolf Cavael, Hans Jaenisch, and Hans Uhlmann.

²¹ Less attention has been paid to the early period of promoting German art in the United States. See McComas, *The Politics of Display*; and Schöne, *Freie Künstler*.

²² Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, W. G. Constable Papers, 1905–1983, bulk 1920–1976. American Defense Harvard Group, Office of Military Government for Germany, Exhibitions, A, Box 15, Folder: report, 'Art Reorientation in Western Germany', p. 20.

contemporary German art that was so characteristic of the relationship between American and German art historians shortly after the end of World War II.

Constable's report came after a long struggle within OMGUS about the right way to approach the fine arts in Germany. While American allies quickly started to use photography, film, and newspaper for their re-education program²³ in occupied Germany, the fine arts were not an integral part of anti-Nazi propaganda.²⁴ British allies were similarly disinterested in the fine arts, but French and Russian occupying forces were strongly engaged in re-establishing a German art scene. Within a year of war's end, the Soviets had created a number of art institutions in Berlin to revive the German art world.²⁵ As for the American military government, the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFA&A) section was the only group to deal with the fine arts. But while Soviet institutions focused on supporting living artists with materials, food, and housing, MFA&A worked mostly on restitutions, repairs, and reconstruction. The lack of an overall system to support contemporary German art within the American zone and the American sector in Berlin made the task of promoting that art in the United States even more difficult. As a result, the first attempts to bring post-war German art to the United States were rather hesitant, stymied by the absence of a ruling concept or functioning infrastructure.

Even Harvard's early attempts to promote contemporary German art in the United States were influenced by such factors, as seen in Kuhn's reaction to a letter from Kurt Martin (1899-1975), Director of the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, who proposed an exhibition of contemporary German art in 1949. Martin writes:

For the German exhibition, we propose 4 painters (Baumeister–
Stuttgart, Gilles–München, Nay–Frankfurt, Spangenberg–Hamburg),
and 3 sculptors (Marcks–Hamburg, Blumenthal +, Mataré–Düsseldorf.)
We think of about 16 pictures, 3 or 4 sculptures and about 70 water-

²³ Re-education, also called 'Denazification', was an Allied initiative to purge Nazi ideology from German society. The initiative included not only removing former Nazi Party members from their positions but also educating the German people about democratic values. See Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany*, London: Bloomsbury Press, 2011.

²⁴ The fact that OMGUS had no section dedicated to the fine arts reveals just how little it understood about the importance of high culture for the Germans. For a more detailed study on the cultural politics of the American and Soviet allies, see Cora Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, esp. 'ICD's Blind Spot: The Fine Arts and Overt and Covert American Actions in the German Fine Arts', 69–103. For the situation in Berlin, see Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, esp. 'Evaluierungen der amerikanischen Kunstpolitik im besetzten Deutschland', 73–80.

²⁵ Those institutions were the *Kammer der Kunstschaffenden* (Chamber of Art Workers), the *Deutsche Verwaltung für Volksbildung* (German Agency for Popular Enlightenment), and the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Cultural League for the Democratic Revival of Germany).

colors, drawings and prints. I imagine that this could be done [in an] exhibition and also [could be] a good representation of modern German art.²⁶

Although Kuhn seemed interested in showing recent German art, he hesitated at Martin's offer, first discussing the concept with several American colleagues. He knew that the project would be too expensive and ambitious, but those were not his main concerns. In his reply to Martin, Kuhn explains that he would like to see more newcomers 'who are unknown outside of Germany' – a rather surprising objection given that most of the artists Martin mentioned were barely known to the American public at that time.²⁷ Whether he had a specific newcomer in mind is difficult to say, because Kuhn never names an artist.²⁸ In this context, his second concern is even more astonishing: Kuhn suggests that the selection of artists and works should be made by an 'American dealer or museum man', since they would be 'in a better position to judge what is of interest to the public in this country.'²⁹ This argument reveals yet another problem in the early attempts to promote contemporary German art in the United States: the fear of failing to show works that would suit American tastes. Kuhn was worried about the quality of contemporary German art. His concern is implied in a letter to Burton Cumming, Director of the Milwaukee Art Museum, in which he writes that an exhibition of contemporary German art in the United States would 'subject the German artist to international criticism which however painful might be very

²⁶ Letter from Kurt Martin to Charles L. Kuhn, February 12, 1949; Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Mod. Ger. 1950'.

²⁷ Letter from Charles L. Kuhn to Kurt Martin, February 25, 1949; Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Mod. Ger. 1950'. The most successful artists among those mentioned by Martin was probably Gerhard Marcks, whose works were bought by many museums and collectors before and after the war. One reason for his success was likely his dealer, Curt Valentin. Willi Baumeister's work was presented to the American public in the 1927 exhibition of the Société Anonyme. For the American reception of Baumeister's work, see Peter Chametzky, 'Verpasste Chancen, Missverständnisse, Baumeister und die Vereinigten Staaten', in *Willi Baumeister International*, ed. Felicitas Baumeister and Ulrike Groos, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013, 43–55.

²⁸ It is hard to tell how much Kuhn knew about the German art scene in the immediate post-war period. Kuhn had been a Monuments Man in Frankfurt between March and October 1945 but traveled frequently through the American zone. See his biography on the Monuments Men Foundation's website at <https://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/intl/de/the-heroes/the-monuments-men/kuhn-lt.-cdr.-charles-1> (accessed August 2018). In the early 1950s, Kuhn spent most of his summers in Europe; it is uncertain if he also did so in the late 1940s. I would like to thank Sally Kuhn and Kathryn Brush for this information.

²⁹ Letter from Kuhn to Martin, February 25, 1949.

beneficial to him.³⁰ This line of argument was repeated by several American art historians, who often described contemporary German art as 'very secondary', and who deemed it too hard to assemble comprehensive exhibitions because of a presumed lack of 'sufficient material of quality.'³¹ Although many German artists were indeed struggling to re-establish themselves after the war, the harsh judgments meted out by Kuhn and other critics are, in my view, likely based on their unfamiliarity with contemporary Germany and their reliance on traditional stereotypes. Travelling to and throughout Germany was still difficult and expensive in the late 1940s, and most American art historians did not have the opportunity to see contemporary German art until the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Paintings* at the Carnegie Institute in 1950.³² Furthermore, the fact that Germany had been isolated from the rest of the world for twelve years had an enormous impact on expectations of contemporary German art. Lack of knowledge, difficulties in learning more about recent German art, and the absence of a clear concept of how to present most recent German art to the American public: all combined to prevent American museum professionals from confidently promoting contemporary German art.

For his part, Kuhn remained seriously interested in promoting contemporary German art in the United States, which 'would bring before the American people an absolutely unknown aspect of modern art',³³ but the exhibition that Martin had proposed to him was never accomplished.³⁴ In the end, Kuhn's concerns were perhaps more logistical than anything: he expressed that the ambitious task of presenting the first exhibition of contemporary German art to the American public

³⁰ Letter from Charles L. Kuhn to Burton Cumming, November 29, 1949; Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Mod. Ger. 1950'.

³¹ Letter from Daniel Catton Rich to I. B. Neumann, June 5, 1950, and Letter from Andrew C. Ritchie to I. B. Neumann, June 2, 1950; Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, I. B. Neumann Papers, 1905–1967.

³² *The Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Paintings*, Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute, 1950.

³³ Letter from Charles L. Kuhn to Burton Cumming, November 29, 1949; Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Mod. Ger. 1950'.

³⁴ The fact that Kuhn repeatedly expressed his concerns about the quality of post-war German art and his attempts to build a collection of recent German art seems contradictory. There is no evidence on why he still chose to purchase post-war German art for the Busch-Reisinger Museum's collection; but it seems most likely that he felt a certain responsibility as the curator of a German-focused museum as well as towards the German artists. Nevertheless, Kuhn's attempts to build a post-war collection were often less strategic and more random. He would mainly acquire a work for the collection on the occasion of visiting exhibitions either in New York or in Germany.

'would be better off in the hands of either the Museum of Modern Art or the American Federation of Arts.'³⁵

Contemporary Berlin artists

The first exhibition to present exclusively contemporary German art to an American audience was *Contemporary Berlin Artists*, which travelled to various venues in the United States from 1951 to 1952, including the Busch-Reisinger Museum.³⁶ By that time, Germany had been divided (in 1949) into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, the result of growing tensions between Western allies and the Soviets and an important moment in the fledgling Cold War. *Contemporary Berlin Artists* was conceived by Edgar Breitenbach (1903-1977), fine arts consultant to the High Commissioner of Germany (HICOG).³⁷ Breitenbach chose German-born curator Charlotte Weidler (1895-1983) to organize the exhibition in collaboration with the American Federation of Arts (AFA), a New York-based organization that arranged traveling exhibitions and conferences and that published the *Magazine of Art*.³⁸ Since 1924, Weidler had been responsible for the German selection for the Carnegie Institute's *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Painting*,³⁹ but it was only in 1950 that she made her first trip to Germany after the war, to select works for the *Contemporary Berlin Artists* exhibition.

Weidler limited her selection to Berlin-based artists, but she strove to present a broad overview of the current trends in Germany and included several artists who were then completely unknown in the United States.⁴⁰ Still, *Contemporary Berlin Artists* was a highly selective presentation that focused mainly on abstract

³⁵ Letter from Charles L. Kuhn to Edgar Breitenbach, November 28, 1949; Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Mod. Ger. 1950'.

³⁶ For a more detailed study of the exhibition, see McComas, *Politics of Display*; and Schöne, *Freie Künstler*.

³⁷ HICOG had replaced OMGUS in 1949.

³⁸ Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Federation of Arts, Series 5, Exhibition Files 1934–1969, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany Public Relations Division, AFO 757-A, U.S. Army Frankfurt/Main, November 9, 1950.

³⁹ Although Weidler was a significant figure in the promotion of German art in the United States before and after World War II, she has never been the topic of an in-depth study. Her name became more widely known only through her involvement with Paul Westheim, followed by a lawsuit in 2013.

⁴⁰ The list of artists included older painters and sculptors who were already well-known before the start of World War II, such as Max Pechstein, Renee Sintenis, and Karl Hofer, as well as younger artists like Heinz Trökes, Werner Heldt, and Juro Kubicek. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Federation of Arts, Series 5, Exhibition Files 1934–1969, catalogue list.

tendencies in West Berlin. To give her audience a better understanding of the developments, Weidler divided artists into five stylistic groups: 'abstract, semi-abstract, surrealist, expressionist (or at least following those trends), and Bauhaus group in Berlin.'⁴¹ This grouping not only gave Weidler's selection a structure, but also affiliated the artists with traditions that were known in the United States. The strategy is reinforced in the press release announcing the exhibition:

The first thing to be said about West German art, is that it is not gloomy or morose. It is spirited and shows a continuing evolution from the interest in and compositional principles sparked by Klee, Kandinsky, Franz Marc and others – perhaps to prove more productive for the period of banishment under Hitler.⁴²

The press release was also surprisingly candid in the discussion of political developments:

In considering contemporary German art it must be remembered that this field, too, is split. It is by now clear that the artist in East Germany has exchanged one state imposed ideology for another, as a recent thought-provoking article on the artistic situation in East Germany in the *Magazine of Art* points out.⁴³

The mentioned article was written and published in 1951 by MFA&A officer Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, in which he reports on the latest developments in Soviet cultural policies. Convinced that the Soviets would use artists' talents for their ideological propaganda and would repress nonconformist art just as the Nazis had, Lehmann-Haupt urged the American military government to take action.⁴⁴ Weidler, who on several occasions had reported on the miserable circumstances faced by artists living in Berlin, agreed with him, fearing for the artists' wellbeing if nothing was done.⁴⁵ Since Weidler knew many of the exhibited artists personally, her

⁴¹ It is unknown how far this classification influenced the presentation of the art because each venue was at liberty to arrange the works however it saw fit. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Federation of Arts, Series 5, Exhibition Files 1934–1969, list with artists.

⁴² Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Berlin Artists'.

⁴³ Harvard Art Museums Archives, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Exhibitions Records, 1931–1994, Carton 37, file 'Exhibition – Berlin Artists'.

⁴⁴ Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, 'German Art Behind the Iron Curtain', *Magazine of Art* 44, 3, 1951, 83–88.

⁴⁵ In a letter to Annemarie Pope, director of the International Exhibition Service of the AFA, Weidler writes that she knows 'the bad situation the artists have to face every day and I want to help them. Their desire is to go outside of the "fortress Berlin" and to be understood

concerns were undoubtedly genuine. Although she did not prepare the press release, Weidler's views might have influenced the text which reveals how deeply she was caught in Cold War politics:⁴⁶ it describes *Contemporary Berlin Artists* as an 'evidence of American-German friendship' and the opportunity for German artists to exhibit in the United States as being 'of tremendous value in counteracting Russian propaganda.'⁴⁷

The exhibition was sponsored by HICOG, a fact that is left out of the press release.⁴⁸ Instead of showcasing American cultural policies, it repeatedly discredits the Soviets. In 1951, Weidler published an article on contemporary German art in the *Magazine of Art* to accompany and advertise the exhibition. In it, she reports on her visit to Germany in preparation for the show, mainly focusing on an accumulation of typical post-war anecdotes on the hardships facing German artists in Berlin and elsewhere. Fritz Winter, because of his time in a Russian POW camp, served as her prime example of the Soviets' lack of regard for modern art: according to Weidler, the 'worst of all the hardships he had suffered there was the Russians' disdain for all but hard labour, and their contempt for Winter's abstract art, which, not being in line with communism, was considered "degenerate and bourgeois."⁴⁹ Weidler's story, though, is dubious. Not only was Winter able to draw during his imprisonment (he did, however, choose to destroy all his works before returning home to avoid making himself a target of espionage), it is also unlikely that the Russian military government was even aware of Winter's art.⁵⁰ Weidler included the anecdote mainly to discredit the Soviets and, in using the term 'degenerate,' to directly connect their cultural policies with those of the Nazis.

Contemporary Berlin Artists was not the success that Weidler had hoped for. Although the exhibition travelled to various U.S. cities, many larger museums refused to host the exhibition and few works were sold. Weidler's cooperation with the AFA ended in 1953, but she continued to promote contemporary German art in the United States. Her efforts included a hugely popular article in a special issue of

here.' Letter from Charlotte Weidler to Annemarie Pope, March 3, 1951, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Federation of Arts, Series 5, Exhibition Files 1934-1969.

⁴⁶ I would like to thank Jennifer McComas for pointing out Weidler's degree of involvement in the preparation of the press release.

⁴⁷ Charlotte Weidler, 'Art in Western Germany Today', *Magazine of Art*, 44, 4, 1951, 137, 136. See also McComas, *The Politics of Display*, 270.

⁴⁸ Dorothea Schöne mentions an internal paper proving that the funding from HICOG was unofficial and should be kept secret. See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 123, and Jennifer McComas, 'Modern Art and German Reconstruction: American Curatorial Interventions in Post-war Berlin', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 5: 3, December 2016, 290-311.

⁴⁹ Weidler, *Art in Western Germany*, 137.

⁵⁰ Both Horst Keller and Carla Schulz-Hoffmann give this account of Winter's time in the camp. See Horst Keller, *Fritz Winter*, Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann KG, 1976, 34; and Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, *Fritz Winter. Kriegszeichnungen 1939-1944*, Munich: Hirmer, 1988, 51.

Life magazine on Germany, which featured numerous colour photos of West German artists and their works.⁵¹

As it gained economic and political strength, the young Federal Republic started to show more of an interest in exhibiting German art in the United States (and thereby exemplifying its new democratic values). In 1954, the German embassy in Washington, D.C., called for an exhibition of pre-war and contemporary German art in the hope of increasing acceptance of art created in that country after 1945. The AFA agreed to this plan, anticipating that the inclusion of expressionist works from the early 20th century would encourage major American museums to book the show.⁵² Thus *A Mid-Century Review: German Watercolors, Drawings and Print, 1905–55* toured the United States throughout 1956.⁵³ Funded by the Federal Republic, the exhibition featured expressionist works almost exclusively and presented, as Jenny McComas has stated, a 'highly edited version of German art history.'⁵⁴ In showing contemporary German art in the context of earlier works, the exhibition joined with methods used by Kuhn and others in presenting post-war German art to an American audience. The concept of *A Mid-Century Review* would also set the tone for the 1957 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *German Art of the 20th Century*.⁵⁵ The museum's press release claimed that this show was the first comprehensive exhibition of modern German art in the United States; however, several scholars have since pointed out that the show, which focused mainly on German expressionism, was far from all-inclusive.⁵⁶ Nor did it demonstrate a new approach to German art, relying heavily on the existing pre-war canon by presenting works largely from MoMA's permanent collection. The contemporary works included in the exhibition were mostly done by artists who were already well-known before the beginning of World War II such as Gerhard Marcks and Karl Hofer or younger artists who could easily be associated with accepted German artistic traditions like the Bauhaus or Expressionism.⁵⁷

Initiated by curator Andrew Ritchie (1907-1978), the show slowly became the product of American/German collaboration: after Ritchie contacted the German

⁵¹ 'Outburst of Art', *Life Magazine*, May 10, 1954. Although Weidler is not credited as the author, it is very likely that she wrote the text, as Dorothea Schöne convincingly argues. See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 155–56.

⁵² See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 149–50.

⁵³ The Busch-Reisinger Museum was among the venues that hosted the exhibition.

⁵⁴ McComas, *Politics of Display*, 275.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed study of *A Mid-Century Review*, see McComas, *Politics of Display*, 274–78; and Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 149–55.

⁵⁶ See Langfeld, *German Art in New York*, 168–83; Jennifer McComas, 'Exhibiting Post-war German Art in the 1950s: The Politics of Exclusion', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 2: 3, 2013, 330–54; and Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 179–88.

⁵⁷ Artists like Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Fritz Winter or Hans Uhlmann belonged to the group of younger artists. See *German Art of the twentieth century*, ed. Andrew C. Ritchie, New York: Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with the City Art Museum of St. Louis, 1957.

ambassador seeking financial assistance, the German government became closely involved. Ritchie was mainly supported by German art historians Kurt Martin, Alfred Hentzen (1903-1985), and Werner Haftmann (1912-1999). Although much has been speculated about the intention of the Germans and how that suited Ritchie's initial plan for the show, the correspondence between Haftmann and Ritchie reveals that the exhibition developed as a close and friendly collaboration.⁵⁸ Of course, everyone seemed to benefit from the collaboration. While Ritchie needed the German colleagues (especially Haftmann) to make contact with German artists and collectors on his behalf, the Germans knew of MoMA's status in the American art world and hoped to give German art a boost in the American opinion and on the market.⁵⁹ MoMA, on the other hand, had an opportunity to put their significant collection of modern German art on display. And yet the exhibition did not remain immune from Cold War politics. Certain styles, like New Objectivity and Dada, were almost completely excluded, as they did not fit the context.⁶⁰ While the exhibition was considered a huge success for the German art, it did not increase demand for contemporary German art on the market or in the museum world.⁶¹ However, in comparison with *Contemporary Berlin Artists*, the political message was obfuscated. In the end, MoMA's show had only a minor impact on the reception of contemporary German art, continuing to promote German art in a pre-war context.⁶²

Post-war German art in an international context

Presenting contemporary German art alongside pre-war examples was not employed uniquely in the United States, nor was it used only for promoting German art abroad. Even within Germany, the relationship to the past played a

⁵⁸ Langfeld and McComas describe the planning as an American/German collaboration, while Schöne assumes that Ritchie's initial concept was a rather different one than the final exhibition. Schöne suggests that Ritchie planned an exhibition of contemporary German art, while the German art historians insisted on including German expressionists. However, Schöne offers no evidence for that argument. Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 181–85.

⁵⁹ See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 182. Haftmann provided Ritchie with a list of living artists he needed to visit on his trip to Germany. See letter from Werner Haftmann to Andrew C. Ritchie, May 2, 1956, The Museum of Modern Art Archive, NY, MoMA exhibition records, 622.11.

⁶⁰ Figurative art was, in general, associated with Nazi art and social realism. See McComas, 'Exhibiting Post-war German Art', 332–34, 336; Langfeld, *German Art in New York*, 169-75.

⁶¹ While the show did indeed increase the value of expressionist art, the impact on the reception of post-war art was minor. Schöne reports rising prices for post-war German art but not rising sales. See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 228–31, 240.

⁶² Since the 1957 exhibition, German art often had been seen exclusively through the lens of expressionism. Pamela Kort describes the deep misunderstanding of Joseph Beuys's work in his 1979 show at the Guggenheim Museum as owing to the general association of German art with expressionism. See Kort, *The Myths of Expressionism*, 286.

significant role. German artists began to present their own works in a large number of exhibitions at the end of the war. In 1945, most of these exhibitions were small in scale, regional, and organized by the artists themselves. That changed in 1946, however, with *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Dresden and *Deutsche Kunst unserer Zeit* in Überlingen, the first exhibitions to be *gesamtddeutsch*, or entirely German.⁶³ Many of these early exhibitions exclusively presented works that originated before or during the war. Given that the war had only recently ended, this is not surprising. But most of the shows also included artists who had died during the war or went missing. Although some artists displayed works they had recently created, the focus of the early exhibitions was largely to rehabilitate those artists who had been banned under Nazi rule for being 'degenerate.' Exhibition titles like *Nach 12 Jahren. Antifaschistische Künstler stellen aus* (After 12 Years—Antifascist Artists Exhibit), *Befreite Kunst* (Freed Art), and *Freie Künstler* (Free Artists) underline those intentions.

During the 1950s, connecting contemporary art to pre-war modernism became a common strategy for promoting German art abroad and for re-establishing abstract art within Germany. Artists and art historians alike supported this development. Younger artists such as the Munich-based group ZEN 49 aligned themselves with this tradition in drawing a direct line to the expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider).⁶⁴ The first exhibition of the *art informel* artists K. O. Götz, Heinz Kreutz, Bernard Schultze, and Otto Greis took place at the Zimmere Galerie Francke under the title *Neu-Expressionisten* (New Expressionists) (1952).⁶⁵ Art historians like Werner Haftmann, Ludwig Grote, and Ernst Hanfstaengel constantly drew connections between the most recent art and pre-war modernity. The apex of this development was the first *documenta* exhibition in Kassel in 1955.⁶⁶ Presenting contemporary German art in the context of pre-war art may have been the most dominant strategy, but it was not the only one. In the 1950s, several exhibitions and institutions presented contemporary German art in a broader, international context. While the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Painting* usually displayed art by artist's nationality, the second post-war exhibition, in 1952, presented a different approach. For the first time since the war, the exhibition

⁶³ See Anke Dietrich, 'Die Rehabilitierung der Moderne: Will Grohmann und die *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* 1946 in Dresden', in *Zwischen Intuition und Gewissheit: Will Grohmann und die Rezeption der Moderne in Deutschland und Europa 1918–1968*, ed. Konstanze Rudert, Dresden: Sandstein-Verlag, 2013, 101–7; and Hans-Dieter Miuck, ed., *Rückkehr der Moderne: die erste Nachkriegs-Ausstellung verfemter deutscher Kunst, 1945–1995*, Überlingen: Vonderau Museum, 1995.

⁶⁴ See Dirk Teuber, "'Zen 49, dieser Name passt mir nicht': Zum Selbstverständnis einer deutschen Künstlergruppe', in *Zen 49: Die ersten Zehn Jahre—Orientierungen*, ed. Jochen Poetter, Baden-Baden: Die Kunsthalle, 1986, 25–54.

⁶⁵ See Kort, *The Myths of Expressionism*, 279; and McComas, *Politics of Display*, 251.

⁶⁶ See Schöne, *Freie Künstler*, 188–95; and Ian Wallace, *The First documenta, 1955/Die erste documenta 1955*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011.



Figure 3 Works by Alberto Burri, Fritz Winter, and Marc Mendelson at the *Younger European Painters* exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1952. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives. Available online at:

<https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/findings/picturing-alberto-burris-composizione>

concept was planned according to formal resemblance.⁶⁷ Works by Winter, Baumeister, and Georg Meistermann were presented together with paintings by French, Italian, and American contemporaries. A similar strategy was employed in the 1953 exhibition *Younger European Painters* [Fig. 3] at New York's Guggenheim Museum and in *New Decade* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955. Likewise, also in 1955, Harvard's Fogg Museum presented a recently acquired painting by Winter and two works on paper by Theodor Werner in a show that included German art alongside contemporary French, Italian, and American art.⁶⁸

Each of these exhibitions showcased contemporary West German art in relation to works by other European artists who were searching for their artistic voice in the aftermath of war.⁶⁹ Intermixing German art with European art more

⁶⁷ See Bruce Altshuler, "'The Modern World is our Business': The Carnegie International in the Gordon Bailey Washburn Years', in *International Encounters: The Carnegie International and Contemporary Art, 1896–1996*, Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1996, 92–115.

⁶⁸ Fogg Museum director John Coolidge bought all three works directly from the artists, whom he had met during his trip to Europe in 1954.

⁶⁹ The attempt to re-integrate Germany and its culture into the Western world was a general tendency after 1945. See Langfeld, *German Art in New York*, 168–83; Jennifer McComas, *Exhibiting Post-war German Art*, 330–54.

broadly also highlighted the concept of an international modern language, a new idea that corresponded with developments in the art world in the United States as well.⁷⁰ By presenting the idea of a universal artistic language among Western countries, these exhibitions were just as influenced by Cold War politics as had been the state-funded shows *Contemporary Berlin Artists* and *A Mid-Century Review*. While James Johnson Sweeney (1900-1986) described his exhibition at the Guggenheim as aiming to 'illustrate the vitality of serious research in picture-making today, rather than to propagandize specific contemporary tendency', the curator of the MoMA exhibition, Andrew C. Ritchie, discussed the political dimension of contemporary art.⁷¹ 'The greatest tensions during the decade have been political', he wrote; but it would be 'foolish to suggest that many painters have turned to some kind of non-objective or non-figurative art only to avoid the social realism.'⁷² In their international approach, these exhibitions not only served German artists, presented as equals alongside European colleagues, but also helped American curators to establish contemporary American art in their own museums.⁷³

The canonization of post-war German art

The examination of the Busch-Reisinger Museum's acquisition and exhibition strategies reveals the institutions attempts and struggles to establish a canon for post-war German art in the United States. After presenting the travelling show *A Mid-Century Review* in 1956 and the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *German Art of the 20th Century*, the Busch-Reisinger Museum did not continue its presentations of post-war German art and focused on pre-war art instead. Nevertheless, the museum remained the only institution in the United States that actively collected post-war German art in the late 1940s and 1950s. Although German works from the post-war

⁷⁰ These international approaches might have their roots in Katherine Dreier's understanding of modern art, in which nationality played a minor role. See Langfeld, *German Art in New York*, 42–3.

⁷¹ James Johnson Sweeney, foreword to *Younger European Painters, A Selection*, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1953, n.p. See also Tracey Bashkoff, 'The Acquisitions of James Johnson Sweeney', in *Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949–1960*, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2012, 35–47.

⁷² Andrew C. Ritchie, foreword to *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, ed. Andrew C. Ritchie, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955, 9. The impact politics might have had on the development of abstract art in the United States and West Germany is often taken for granted and has yet to be the topic of an in-depth study. Martin Warnke argues that the preference for abstraction was mainly promoted by its use in industrial design. See Martin Warnke, 'Von der Gegenständlichkeit und der Ausbreitung der Abstrakten', in *Die fünfziger Jahre: Beiträge zu Politik und Kultur*, ed. Dieter Bänisch, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1985, 209–22.

⁷³ For a discussion about contemporary art in the United States, see Megan M. Fontanella, 'A Vital Force: Abstract Art and Cultural Politics at Mid-Century', in *Art of Another Kind*, 49–57.

period entered other American museum collections, none of these institutions started building significant collections. The Museum of Modern Art's single acquisition of Fritz Winter's painting *Quiet Sign* (1953) was made after it has been presented in the 1955 exhibition *New Decade*. Other major works from the 1950s like Willi Baumeister's *Aru 6* (1955) and Theodor Werner's *Venice* (1952) were donated to the museum collections.⁷⁴

Besides the Busch-Reisinger Museum, only the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo collected works by Willi Baumeister, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Heinz Trökes and Fritz Winter for a short period between 1952 and 1956. Nevertheless, the Albright-Knox Gallery's motivation differed significantly from the Busch-Reisinger Museum's intentions. In 1952, the Albright Knox Gallery bought Willi Baumeister's *Growing* (1952) and Heinz Trökes' *Between Clouds and Crystals* (1951) at the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Painting*. In a press release the Gallery stated that 'these contemporary purchases demonstrate the Gallery's consistent policy of buying the works of artists while they are living and painting'.⁷⁵ Other than the Busch-Reisinger Museum with its clear national focus on German art, the Albright-Knox Gallery understood the two paintings in a broader international context and integrated them into their international collection of contemporary painting.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, none of the works were exhibited after the end of the 1950s.

The failure of canonizing post-war German art in the United States can be explained by comparing its reception with the successful canonization of Abstract Expressionism in the United States and Germany. Other than the German post-war artists, the Abstract Expressionist had influential supporters in the United States. Besides galleries such as the Pierre Matisse Gallery, the Julien Levy Gallery and Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, it was mainly the Museum of Modern Art's early support that helped establishing a canon for the new painting style. A canvas by Jackson Pollock was already included in the 1947 exhibition *Large-Scale Modern Paintings* and in 1952 works by William Baziotis, Mark Rothko and Clifford Still were presented in *15 Americans*. Additionally, the rise of Abstract Expressionism was boosted by the critical writing of acclaimed art critics such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.⁷⁷

When Abstract Expressionism was introduced to a German audience in the late 1950s, it was already well established and canonised in its home country. The

⁷⁴ The Museum of Modern Art, Object files 9.1956 and 161.1955.

⁷⁵ Albright-Knox Gallery, Object file 'Willi Baumeister, Growing', Press release from May 10, 1953.

⁷⁶ Both paintings were acquired with the 'Room for Contemporary Art Fund'.

⁷⁷ Most influential were Rosenberg's article 'The American Action Painters' and Greenberg's 'American-Type Painting'. Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *Art News*, 10, 1952, 22-23, 48-50; Clement Greenberg, 'American-Type Painting', *Partisan Review*, 22, 1955, 179-96. On the Museum of Modern Art's role in promoting Abstract Expressionism see Ann Temkin, ed., *Abstract Expressionism at the Museum of Modern Art*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.

first in-depth introduction of modern American art was presented in the exhibition *New American Painting* that toured eight European cities between 1958 and 1959. Organised by the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition was enthusiastically celebrated at its European venues. The presented canon of Abstract Expressionism was not challenged by the European critics but rather confirmed. In 1959, the exhibition returned to the United States and its success abroad was celebrated in the presentation *The New American Painting, as Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959*.⁷⁸

The examination of the Busch-Reisinger Museum's involvement in the American reception and canonization of contemporary German art in the 1940s and 1950s reveals that art from that period was examined within a historical or political framework. Even the exhibition *Contemporary Berlin Artists* which exclusively included most recent artworks made a connection between pre- and post-war art by grouping the works into categories related to pre-war artistic traditions. The complex linkage between Cold War politics and the representation and reception of art from the immediate post-war period is probably one reason for the lack of a long-lasting American canonization of German art from those years. Outside of its place in the broader history of art and its general historical context, the immediate post-war period has received scant attention in the United States as a defined period.⁷⁹ Hesitant reactions to German art from the 1950s can be explained in part through a lack of awareness of works created in Germany as well as a general distrust of German artists after 12 years of isolation. In promoting contemporary German art in a pre-war context, American and German art historians alike relied on an existing canon, one established in reaction to National Socialist cultural policy.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Peter J. Schneemann, "'There is no style': Der Diskurs als Krise der 50er Jahre", in *Masterplan: Konstruktion und Dokumenttion amerikanischer Kunstgeschichten*, ed. Peter J. Schneemann, Bern: Peter Lang, 2003, 194. On the Museum of Modern Art's International Program see John Svarkowski, ed., *The Museum of Modern Art at mid-century at home and abroad*, New York: Abrams; New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994.

⁷⁹ Before the exhibition *Inventur. Art in Germany 1943-55*, the only recent occasion on which German art from the immediate post-war period has been presented to an American audience was the 2009 exhibition *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which included German art from 1945 to 1989. See Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, eds., *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*, New York: Abrams; Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009.

⁸⁰ The curatorial strategy to present post-war German art in the context of Expressionism to create a national continuity in art production even continued after the 1950s. When a new generation of painters, such as Georg Baselitz, Markus Lüpertz, Anselm Kiefer or Jörg Immendorf, started working in a representational style, they were labelled as 'Neo-Expressionists'. See *German Art in the 20th Century*, ed. Christos M. Joachimides et. al, Munich: Prestel-Verlag; New York: Royal Academy of Arts, 1985; Kort, *The Myths of Expressionism*, 288-89.

Ilka Voermann Harvard's Busch-Reisinger Museum and the American
reception of post-war German art in the 1940s and 1950s

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