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And Death Shall Have No Dominion: Art in the Holocaust 1933-1945 by Jürgen Kaumkötter

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The Art of the Times – Europe After the War

Auschwitz 1947 – the concentration camp is turned into a museum: Jerzy Adam Brandhuber and Wladyslaw Siwek work on two comprehensive series. Brandhuber, who was arrested in Poland in 1942 and deported to Auschwitz in 1943, called his cycle "Vergessene Erde" (Forgotten Earth), large-format charcoal drawings that metaphorically describe life in the camp. The SS cap and skull symbolise terror. The zebra-striped suits. Life and death from the perspective of the prisoners.

Siwek, who was artistically active while still an inmate in Auschwitz, produced monumental oil paintings. In "Der Appell" (The Roll Call)¹, kapos beat to death defenceless prisoners in the theatrical lighting of an illuminated Christmas tree, bare feet and bodies lying on the ground symbolise death. Beneath a dramatic evening sky, SS standing with their legs wide apart count the prisoners.

Brandhuber's sketches are mentioned in the first museum guide that was published when the exhibition was opened in 1947, and displayed in Block 7, Siwek's are not. His pictures were purchased in 1950.

The Polish sculptor Xawery Dunikowski, who had worked with Rodin in Paris before the war, one of the oldest inmates at Auschwitz, produced "Christmas in Auschwitz" in 1950. The painting depicts three bodies hanging from a needle-less, stylized tree, in the bottom right are the barracks, in the background a snarling, teeth-baring dog led by an apocalyptic figure: Christmas as the end of the world.

The artist Carl Rabus called his woodcuts from 1946 "Passion": as if shot in Cinemascope format, an endless stream of crosses shouldered by maltreated prisoners passes the torturer. Right in front of the viewer, as if the camera were directly behind him, the soldier appears only as a torso. His riding breeches are tucked into his boots, his jacket is belted. His enormous left hand holds a cat with nine tails, his right hand an oversized pistol, ready to fire and strike out at the wretched prisoners. Among the cross bearers are a man with a star of David, a pregnant woman, children. A Christian theme to represent the extermination of the Jews? Together with his artist friend Felix Nussbaum, Rabus was imprisoned in the French internment camp of St. Cyprien in the Ardennes from 1940/41. The themes of many of his woodcuts recall this period: people cowering on a beach, deathly inactivity, barbed wire, stricken expressions, oversized limbs – these are his motifs. Rabus had attracted the attention of the Nazis because he refused to leave his Jewish partner: he was kept under Gestapo surveillance in Brussels and repeatedly imprisoned. He was familiar with the topography of terror at that time. His woodcuts illustrate the book "Leben auf Widerruf" (Living on Borrowed Time) by Joseph Joos, who described his internment in the Dachau concentration camp. The book was published in 1946, not in one of the occupation zones but in Switzerland. Like Felix Nussbaum, Carl Rabus frequently banished his horrific experiences to his pictures. Impressive oil paintings, woodcuts and drawings have been preserved, but Rabus is rarely exhibited today. Only the Centre for Persecuted Arts in Solingen shows his work.

The Centre for Persecuted Arts at the Solingen Art Museum is one of few museums in the world dedicated to art by contemporary witnesses from the period between 1937 and 1947. This collection contains an extensive series of works from Berlin artist Georg Netzband. His exaggerated, manieristically dramatic pictures are also typical of catastrophe art. In the centre of the picture, a ravaged body lies on a pile of corpses, one hand still clutching a hand grenade. Ragged green uniforms, guts and bones spewing forth in lurid colours. On the bottom right, the pallid hand of a dead person, on the left, a head with twisted eyes lying in its own blood. On the

¹ The original Polish title "Wigilia" is a traditional Polish Christmas dish

horizon loom two oversized tanks, the cannon of one of them destroyed. The picture is cynically titled: "Der Ritterkreuzträger" (The Bearer of the Knight's Cross). It resembles a scene from a horror movie. All of Netzband's paintings from this period speak this unambiguous, brutal language. They are an expression of their time, a representation of reality. For today's audience, difficult art, too close to a past we are familiar with from the media, too loud and documentary-like to be reflected art, too artistic to be a pure document, a disruption of semantics that demands more of the viewer than "traditional" art.

George Grosz, a World War One volunteer, then a pacifist, a personal acquaintance of Lenin and Trotzky, a passionate political artist who was convicted of insulting the army during the Weimar Republic like Carl von Ossietzky, succumbed to alcohol in American exile. In 1944, he painted "Cain" in New York: Abel lies slain on the ground, Cain holds his brow with a cloth, and glances fearfully at his dead brother. Cain is unmistakably Adolf Hitler. The setting is an apocalyptic hell out of which tiny skeletons try to pull themselves against the crouching figure of Hitler. There are no individuals. Only Hitler. The background is a lake of fire and a sea of flames – visions of the apocalypse according to St. John.

Most artists from the generation of perpetrators and victims, who tried to capture the here and now in their art, had one thing in common: they no longer trusted their own language. Their work was a silent cry. The atrocities they had experienced were so immense that they transcended any normal subject. They developed powerful, forceful metaphors, rhetorical figures, such as the dead figure still clutching a hand grenade, symbolising the helpless struggle right up until death, barbed wire as a symbol of the concentration camp, oversized, emaciated bare feet on the ground that stood for all the people who died in the camp every day, landscapes of ruins as symbols of ubiquitous destruction. Conversely, some subjects are missing altogether. It is difficult to portray what did not exist.

But where are the pictures by the inhabitants of "Trizonesien"² about the occupation? Where is the artistic preoccupation with the American, English and French soldiers? Where are the pictures of the Soviet occupiers beyond those that propagated a non-existent fraternity of peoples?

Apart from time-specific metaphors, the artists found symbols from Christian iconography or from antiquity, they reduced them to one specific aspect and placed these in the spotlight, and made them the focus of attention. The result is a mannerism of horror that complicates and distorts contemplation of the work today, weighing down on our appreciation of this art like a lead carpet.

Caught in the middle

Works of art that focus on the history of National Socialism, exile, persecution, and on terror and oppression in the concentration camps do not play an important role either in art history, visual culture, in the art market or in the exhibition business. Their marginal existence is best illustrated by a comparison with literature, film and television, in other words the kind of media that is of relevance to visual culture beyond the context of art history. After World Wars One and Two, a certain form of literature emerged. Many pacifist novels were published after World War One, for example, Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front". After 1945, poets such as Paul Celan and Else Lasker-Schüler produced haunting and today still recognised works of art on genocide, exile and terror – despite Theodor W. Adorno's pronouncement that "Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric".

² Translator's note: From the song "Wir sind die Eingeborenen von Trizonesien" by Karl Berbuer referring to the three occupied zones in West Germany.

The art of catastrophe

The art of catastrophe is the visual art that emerged out of the direct and indirect environment of Nazi terror between the mid-1930s and late 1940s in the German Reich, or in German-occupied regions. The art of catastrophe comes from a political territory, it does not pay homage to any virtuous idea, its subject is nothing grand or sublime, and quite often it is of no notably artistic quality. For this kind of art, artistic brilliance is not even important. It is not rooted in the tradition of the Renaissance or classical antiquity which is so important for art history. Nor can many of the pictures claim to be aesthetically pleasing. Perhaps this is the main reason why neither the art business nor museums pay much attention to this art, beyond the context of historical presentations. What is more important is their humanistic intention. I avoid the term testimony since it usually stands in diametrical opposition to the intention of a work of art. This forgotten art era lies in the archives of Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, in the depots of many regional and historically specific museums, from Zielona Gora, the collecting point for relicts from German-Silesian museums, to the Centre for Persecuted Arts in Solingen. This special art is sometimes even derogatively referred to as stock goods. Such defamation exposes the critic who is unwilling to transcend customary art standards and approach the artistic objects with the necessary sensitivity. The art of catastrophe also reflects a personal accountability.

Absence from exhibitions

A comparative review shows that art from World War One, which was also bound to a specific context, was received quite differently. It has become an inherent part of art history; Dadaism and the collective term *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) are subjects of research, and the pictures an expressive art form from that time. For example, in the 1920s, Otto Dix concentrated the entire wretchedness of the post-war era in his painting of a young boy selling matches. A child devoid of expression with oversized ears stands next to a column, timidly holding out a packet of matches to the viewer. Rulers are often shown in their portraits next to a column. They are supposed to symbolise power and grandeur. In this picture, the column almost dwarfs the boy. Not only the child's lethargy, but the painting's entire colour range, the yellow, green, brown, the pale grey skin all shout out misery and despair. This is not a beautiful picture, yet it is still a masterpiece. George Grosz and Max Beckmann focus on society's brutalisation in their paintings, they create icons of their time. Grosz' cripple even smiles as he hands the viewer a bunch of flowers. There are no appropriate statistics, and this is therefore merely a claim, but the art of the 1920s, the processing of World War One and its repercussions in the art of New Objectivity is far more present in museums and exhibition halls than art from the second half of the 1940s and 1950s.

1937 to 1947

The timeframe for this survey, the chronological core of the book, are two art exhibitions that could not be more different: the Nazi's defamatory exhibition "Degenerate Art" from 1937, and the first exhibition of art in Auschwitz in 1947. Neither of the exhibitions were what they were supposed to have been. The Nazis' exhibition was designed to deride the work, scorn it, as the "Völkische Beobachter" declared in its cover story on July 20, 1937, and yet it became the last major exhibition of classical modernism before the war. The opening exhibition in Auschwitz was intended to manifest man's victory over terror, but it documented the atrocities of the camp, speechlessness and the disastrous failure to acknowledge the art of the survivors. The two exhibitions are two sides of a coin each with opposing intentions. The Degenerate Art exhibition was reconstructed in 1991 by Stephanie Barron at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and is a constant subject of artistic and popular scientific debate. The opening show in Auschwitz, its humanistic approach, is totally unknown today. The aim of this book is to reconstruct the idea of the Auschwitz show. In The Times, on May 23, 2005, Roger Boyes gave his review of an art exhibition at the Centrum Judaicum in Berlin the title: "The Forgotten Artists of Auschwitz". Sixty

years after their liberation, after the liberation of their work, these artists were still forgotten. The artists from Auschwitz are a particularly salient example. Many other artists who had been imprisoned in camps, who worked and were murdered there, have been ignored by art history. Many who tried to banish the atrocities they had experienced to pictures during and shortly after the war were forgotten, and their work reduced to the status of archive material.

Holocaust art, exile art, art of catastrophe

On January 20, 2002, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, when Nazi functionaries systematically planned the extermination of Jews in Europe, the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin launched an exhibition with the title "Holocaust. Der Nationalsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung" (Holocaust. The Nazi Genocide and How it is Commemorated in Art). The exhibition poster shows the picture "Dreiergruppe" (Group of Three), which Felix Nussbaum painted while in exile in Belgium in 1944.

It depicts a room with a window opening on the left and three people sitting at a table. They have different hair, clothing and gestures, otherwise they have no distinctive features. A folded newspaper lies on the table, the letters "Le" are visible on the front page. Nussbaum alludes to "Le Soir", the paper published under German military censorship in Belgium during the war. Next to the paper is a star of David. In addition to these two historically specific objects, the simplified, schematic pictorial space shows a map on the rear wall, a symbol of the external world.

Nussbaum uses a compositional pattern common in Dutch Golden Age painting, such as in Vermeer's "The Art of Painting / Painter in his Studio": a clearly defined pictorial space, light falling through a window on the left of the picture, in the background a map. The figures in Nussbaum's painting are arranged in the traditional triangular order, behind and above each other. Each of them repeats with the contour of his or her body the triangular form of the group as a whole. The man in the foreground holds his hand in front of his chest in a dramatic gesture and looks to the right out of the picture. The central blonde figure looks to the left, the three heads are inclined in different directions. The man at the back is wearing a tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl, which surrounds the entire group. He looks upwards to the right out of the picture. His gesture is directed towards an invisible reference point, perhaps to Yahweh, who is subject to a strict image ban in the Jewish faith. The man at the back casts a shadow over the map which depicts precisely the parts of the world where most Jews live. Large parts of Asia, such as China, are missing completely, and India is merely a jagged point. Against the brown tones of the picture, the prayer shawl stands out with its white and blue local colours, later to become the colours of the state of Israel. The picture proverbially describes the Jews as wandering people and at the same time allegorically symbolises the situation of the Jews in the 1940s.

The use of Nussbaum's painting as a poster for a complex historical exhibition on the genocide of European Jews reflects today's assessment of Nussbaum's work to Holocaust art. The reception to Nussbaum's work is paradigmatic. It illustrates in an exemplary way the state of research, the fatal interpretation pattern of backward-looking prophecy and the problem of the perpetrators' perspective. By making the conditions of persecution and dehumanization of the terror apparatus a basis of classification, the autonomy of the artists is called into question and their work reduced to the status of victim art, even if it was perhaps created under quite different conditions and with quite different intentions.

Amongst the wealth of literature on the subjects of National Socialism, concentration camps and world war, scholarly assessments of works of art from Auschwitz, the other camps, ghettos and hiding places appear only incidentally in publications about Holocaust art. Exhibitions that focus on art produced under Nazi terror are always historical. The place of origin is the decisive criterion for research. At the same time, the term Holocaust art is not unambiguously clarified.

Every author has his or her own thematic, historical or topographical definition. The term refers neither to an art genre, generation of artists nor a certain artistic direction.

Holocaust art – three standard works

One of the first publications on Holocaust art exposes the problems of the ambivalence of interpretation: "Uncovered in various ghettos, concentration camps, and other hiding places, this very special art speaks of the drama, dignity, and courage of the victims. By defying the Nazis on paper, the artists of the Holocaust reflected the spiritual resistance of millions and transcended the horrors of their existence. In a world of the most grotesque reality, these works of art have no need of embellishment." Nelly Toll survived the genocide as a Jewish child, hidden away by Polish Catholics. She captured her experiences in sketches. In the introduction to her book, she addresses the key problems of describing Holocaust art. To illustrate this passage, she uses Felix Nussbaum's sketch "St. Cyprien". The author cites persecution, grotesque reality, the abnormal environment and intellectual resistance as triggers for the need to create art. This anti-fascist retrospective view of the "special art of drama" appears in two other publications, which have significantly impacted our view of Holocaust art today. Janet Blatter and Sibyle Milton attempt to geographically systematise Holocaust art. Ziva Amishai-Maisel's monumental work on the difference between the representation and interpretation of the Holocaust also highlights the testimonial character of the art, even if she initially tries to resist being guided by personal or moral involvement.

Everlasting evidence – not art

Daniel Libeskind, the architect of the Felix Nussbaum House, an annexe of the Kulturgeschichtliche Museum in Osnabrück, which has housed the Nussbaum collection since 1998, says that Nussbaum's pictures are "more than mere paintings". At a time when eye witnesses are dying out, the pictures are "everlasting evidence" of the destruction of Jewish culture by the Nazis. Libeskind emphasises the testimonial character of the pictures which sustain and keep alive memories of the horrors of the persecution and extermination of European Jewry. The conclusion of this assessment, which implies that the pictures are "more than merely paintings", in other words more than merely art, suggests an historical and religious elevation of the objects to "everlasting evidence", and in this context a reduction of their individuality. Even if Nussbaum's pictures are pictorial representations of the persecution and extermination of European Jews, this extreme interpretation takes away much of their artistic and formal autonomy. It is difficult to acknowledge artistic quality in a differentiated and individual way if the pictures become untouchable victim art. What is missing here is a well-balanced appreciation that respects form and content equally.

While Felix Nussbaum, Peter Kien and Marian Ruzamski worked in hiding or from concentration camps "with an open visor", as it were, portraying themselves in their pictures, many artists at this time and after the war hid themselves in their art behind Christ's suffering and withdrew into mythological Christian imagery. Even now, preoccupation with the work of Kien, Nussbaum and Ruzamski is not entirely impartial. They still force viewers to question their own accountability even today.

Others politicised their work retroactively. After the war, Franz Radziwill, a Nazi from the very beginning, revised his 1940 picture "Wohin in dieser Welt" (Where in this world) and added more menacing British aircraft to the night-time sky.

Art is adapted to the political conditions

Another equally astonishing example is "Die sieben Todsünden" (The Seven Deadly Sins) by Otto Dix. Dix was born on December 2, 1891 in Gera, the son of working-class parents. Between 1905 and 1909, he completed an apprenticeship as a decorative painter. A scholarship provided by the Prince of Reuss enabled him to study at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Dresden. Volunteering for the German army in 1914, he served as a machine gunner in France and Russia. In 1927, he was appointed professor at the Kunstakademie in Dresden. After 1933, he was released from his teaching activities, he left Dresden and initially moved to Schloß Randegg near Singen and in 1936 to Hemmenhofen on Lake Constance. As part of the "degenerate art" campaign, 260 of his paintings were confiscated from German museums, sold and some of them burned. In 1945, Dix was drafted into the home guard but was made a prisoner of war by the French in Alsace. Dix did not return to Dresden, but died in Singen on July 25, 1969.

In "The Seven Deadly Sins", on the wall in the background, appears a Nietzsche quote from "Thus Spoke Zarathustra": "The barren desert groweth: woe unto him who harbors in himself such a wasteland!" Envy, in the form of a severely cross-eyed boy with blonde hair and Hitler moustache, sits astride Greed, an old witch. Behind her, Sloth, disguised as Death, brandishes a scythe, to the left a monster, Wrath, cries out his anger. The voluptuous young woman offering a breast is unmistakably Lust. Gluttony greets us from the background, a pretzel in his hand and a pot on his head, while the nose of Pride is dying off from being too haughty and the mouth becomes an anus. In this respect, everything is intuitive and easily identifiable, as is the case in many of Otto Dix's paintings. With our knowledge of all of the events that happened after 1933, we interpret the picture to be the artist's vision of what is to come after 1933 and as a harsh criticism of National Socialism. However, this is a subsequent reinterpretation by the artist himself in 1945. The central issue is Envy's thin moustache. The moustache is a topos for Adolf Hitler, whoever wears it. When Dix left behind "The Seven Deadly Sins" in his studio in Dresden in 1933, the personification of Envy was not Hitler, but one of his professor colleagues at the academy, somebody with whom Dix was at loggerheads and whom he blamed for his dismissal – Envy. The boy's little moustache changes *pars pro toto* the painting's entire statement. By adding the moustache, The Seven Deadly Sins becomes a regime-critical picture. Dix and Radziwill's pictures that were adapted to their respective political conditions are two particularly telling examples of the functionalisation of metaphors.

Kien, Nussbaum, Ruzamski – Attempts at being understood

The special quality of the work cycles of Felix Nussbaum, Peter Kien and Marian Ruzamski becomes clear when compared with Radziwill, Dix and the other voiceless painters of the war and post-war era. All three introduce themselves into their pictures, and assume responsibility as individuals. Form and content are congruent in their work. Their paintings lose nothing of their language. They do not hide themselves behind biblical stories or generalising metaphors.

While in hiding, Felix Nussbaum systematically used his artistic means, elements of classicism from the 1920s or 19th century. His intention was not be misunderstood, and thus in the 1970s, he was rediscovered and is today regarded as the exile painter, his "Selbstbildnis mit Judenpass" (Self-Portrait with Jewish Identity Card) an icon of persecution.

Working from the camp infirmary in Auschwitz, Marian Ruzamski rejected any form of symbolic language and achieved an immediacy in his portraits, which turned his work cycle "Auschwitzmappe" (Auschwitz portfolio) into a Polish Guernica.

In Theresienstadt, Peter Kien wanders somnabulistically between the visual arts, poetry and dramatic art and in this way circumvents the non-representability of the genocide. Reason enough to take a closer look at these three artists, in addition to the pictures from the Auschwitz

collection, and to ask ourselves why such valuable and moving art has received such little attention.

Unfortunately, this is not an empirical study. Because of the vastness of material, it has to be restricted to a selection of examples. The choice of artists and works of art is intended to represent an overview of forgotten art of the war and post-war era, and attempts to present the phenomena, the different ways in which this art in general and, specifically, the artists Marian Ruzamski, Peter Kien, Peter Weiss, Felix Nussbaum, Dinah Gottliebowa, Otto Pankok and Max Beckmann were received.

Image ban – Theodor W. Adorno

"Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today." Theodor W. Adorno

Adorno's provocation "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" comes from the essay "Cultural Criticism and Society", which was published in 1951 in a commemorative publication for the sociologist Leopold von Wiese. Adorno wrote the sentence in 1949. Few other statements about Auschwitz and culture have been quoted, discussed, abbreviated and assessed as frequently. While Adorno's pronouncement was understood in the 1960s as a kind of ban, Stefan Krankenhagen said 40 years later that Adorno had made the "feeling of guilt" tangible. Not only Adorno's statement is radical. Beyond its content, the vehemence of the debate that continues even today shows that Adorno addressed something existential with regard to the topos of Auschwitz: the impossibility of producing a tangible image of something unimaginable and thus breaking up the semantics of the image ban. The artists objectify this image ban itself. They cannot reproduce this inhuman reality, they can only capture scenes of horror. After the liberation, paintings were produced on the topos of Auschwitz that failed in Adorno's most causative meaning. Going one step further, they fail in their visual language, in the semantics of art. As part of the Ten Commandments from the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, the ban on images is the basis of monotheistic culture. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Roman-Catholic Christians have undermined the image ban most thoroughly. Even the Reformation, which culminated in a wave of iconoclasm, used the power of images to communicate its ideas. Only Judaism still adheres today to this ban. The post-war artists were bound to fail when they attempted to create visual memories of the millions of murdered Jews through Christian symbolism: painting a picture after Auschwitz is barbaric. This is something only the second generation can do.

"Auschwitz Triptych" – negative metaphor

The Gerhard Schneider collection at the Solingen Art Museum includes the "Auschwitz Triptychon" (Auschwitz Triptych) by Otto Schubert, which was produced in 1960 during the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials. Schubert, himself a camp survivor, chose the form of a three-part altarpiece. In Christian iconography, the triptych usually depicts on the left-hand panel the birth of Christ, in the middle the crucifixion and on the right the resurrection. Schubert follows this compositional form which corresponds with the character of salvation in Christianity. The picture on the left shows a man and a woman: the woman lies naked on her back on a dishevelled bed, shamed and probably defiled. Her violator lights a cigarette as if in triumph: a brutal conception. The centrepiece is a panorama of horror: on the left, the same cigarette-smoking SS soldier threatens a Mosaic figure with a raised riding crop on the right of the picture. A fat kapo whips a naked woman, exposed women cover their private parts, dead bodies are lying on the ground. In the background, musicians play in prisoners' clothing. Above the scene loom dramatically dark clouds, the sky and sun are tinged blood red. The right-hand panel depicts cigarette-

smoking prisoners dragging dead bodies out of the gas chambers with sticks. Schubert's picture is a completely negative metaphor: birth, death and resurrection. Theatrically exaggerated, the pictures illustrate all too clearly the horrors of the genocide and thus allow the viewer no scope for his own feelings; he suffocates them in exaggerated atrocities.

Lost parables

In his book, "Verlorene Gleichnisse. Heine, Kafka, Celan" (Lost Parables. Heine, Kafka, Celan), Jakob Hessing illustrates the literary conflict about the use of parables, the loss of their autonomy and integrity and the decline of culture in Auschwitz. The starting point is Lessing's Ring Parabel in "Nathan the Wise". On the one hand, this was of existential importance to assimilated German Jews, on the other it also shows how the Jews lose their biblical parables, their metaphysical reason for being. According to Hessing, the source of all parables for the self-conception of Jews is the Moriah parable. God commands Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, but at the very last moment, stops him. The salvation of the Jews is thus associated with prevented sacrifice and not with sacrificial death as in Christianity.

Hessing describes the continual process of loss: "[...] Heine – the baptized Jew, the witness of this revolution and its price [...] reviews the various offers of redemption without trusting them, only considering them with ironical scepticism. And yet he still imagined the end of his life as a precarious return to his Jewish roots and saw himself in the role of the prodigal son. For Franz Kafka, this was no longer possible. He too played with elements of the Biblical parable but, like his contemporary Sigmund Freud, he brought them together in completely different constellations, was no longer able to find any promise in them. His work was produced in the century of World War One, and without being aware of it, he belonged to the last generation of German Jews. What Heine's irony still holds in balance, becomes the black humour of despair for Kafka. Barely twenty years after his death, the world changes once again, and this time beyond all recognition. The traditions upon which German culture is based, are destroyed, the surviving Jews from this cultural area lose their home, their language too ceases to exist. When Paul Celan began publishing his poetry at the end of the 1940s, he apparently does once again what Heine did long before him: he leaves his German-speaking environment and moves to France. But between the two poets lies the insurmountable abyss, in which a world came to an end, and with it all of its parables."

The images, metaphors and parables, which Hessing allows Heine, Kafka and Celan to express, expose the loss of culture which ended in the disaster of the last century, the shoah. Witnesses and victims among the visual artists were no longer able to banish the genocide in their pictures immediately after the catastrophe. Only when the boundaries of traditional art were extended in the 1960s did art develop a new language, new parables and metaphors with installations and performances for the catastrophe of the 20th century. This art no longer had a religious iconographic origin. The artists had to turn away from the Moriah parable, from God, in order to regain their language for the catastrophe. By acquiring an emotional quality, the artists were able to re-enter Mount Moriah, and their art became once again something timelessly sacred.