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THE LINZ FILE

Hitler's Plunder of Europe's Art

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Webb & Bower
EXETER, ENGLAND

2003: 947



BEILAGE 1
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honorary title conferred by the Führer, equivalent to Federal Councillor) Roderick Fick, a great admirer of his and a former boat-builder turned architect. Fick was to design and build the great Linz art centre. Hitler was pleased by the plans Fick had based on Hitler's sketches; but apparently Fick was a rather conceited man who could not get on with his colleagues. Eventually Hitler realized he was not capable of carrying out the work, and he was relegated to building blocks of flats on the outskirts of Linz. Professor Hermann Giesler was then appointed. He was already in charge of rebuilding in Munich, including the Nazi headquarters and the adjoining mausoleum for Hitler.

Throughout the war Hitler frequented Giesler's Munich studio, where a large-scale model of the new Linz project was being constructed. He would discuss new ideas with Giesler and suggest possible improvements. It was not until February 1945 that the model was completed and installed by Giesler in an underground room of the Reichskanzlei in Berlin, adjoining Hitler's military headquarters in the bunker. Daily Hitler would brood over this model of Linz. A specially designed lighting system enabled him to manipulate spotlights to create the effects of sunshine at different times of the day and year so that he could see where the shadows fell. Often after discussing the latest military situation with his generals he would usher them in to look at the model and tell them of his grandiose plans for the town. When Kaltenbrunner found himself listening to all this even while the Russian shells were pounding the devastated city, he felt he was in the company of a madman obsessed with his model toy. To the end, as the Third Reich collapsed around him, Hitler would spend time every day poring over the model.

I discovered photographs of the model in the archives of the Linz Landesmuseum in 1965, but I could not ascertain what had become of the actual model. Only recently I learnt through correspondence with Professor Giesler, now retired and living in Germany, that it had been removed from the Berlin bunker in March 1945 and taken to a depository in Bavaria. There it must have been destroyed in the aftermath of the war. The only part of the model to be realized in actual construction was the bridge which is still standing.

I found out what the Linz Museum would have contained from a small pamphlet shown to me by Dr Kugler, superintendent of

the library at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. This was published by Heinrich Hoffmann, in honour of Hitler's birthday on 20th April, 1945, and intended for distribution among the armed forces. The frontispiece is a reproduction in colour of the famous Vermeer painting *The Artist in His Studio*, acquired under pressure in 1938 from the Czernin collection in Vienna. The anonymous author of the pamphlet describes the plans for the gallery. It was to contain a limited selection of fine European art, but in particular, thanks to the Führer's purchases, it was to be a centre for Germanic art. What others had taken centuries to create, one man, because of his devotion to the arts and refusal to be daunted, had been creating single-handed. In the 1930s great national treasures were lost by sales abroad, until the Führer put a stop to this shameful traffic. As an example the writer cites Vermeer's *The Artist in His Studio* which was nearly sold to the United States for \$6 million.

The pamphlet lists various paintings to be exhibited in the new Linz gallery. There is a colour reproduction of *The Plague in Florence*, by the Austrian painter Hans Makart, which Mussolini had given to Hitler. I noticed also *The Hay Harvest* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, which had been the property of the princely Lobkowitz family and was looted from their castle, Raudnitz, in Czechoslovakia. It is referred to as 'a new acquisition'. Each of the gallery's rooms was to be decorated and furnished in the style of the period of the paintings, the pamphlet explains. There would be a small gallery just for Makart, and one for Rudolf von Alt together with selected furnishings of his period. The Linz gallery was to become a centre for the art of the past, just as the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, also created by Hitler, was a centre for German contemporary art. The remainder of the pamphlet gives a lyrical description, illustrated with watercolours, of Hitler's birthplace of Braunau, on the Inn River, and the neighbouring village of Lambach where he went to school. It seems doubtful that this tribute to the Führer's contributions to the world of art achieved a wide distribution, appearing as it did just a few weeks before Nazi Germany's capitulation. It must have had Hitler's approval, but who ordered its publication? Was it a last-minute propaganda effort by Goebbels to boost morale in a defeated army? Only the publisher, Hoffmann, could have provided the answer, and he is dead.