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Georg Kolbe in Frankfurt am Main— Ambivalence and Opportunism

In his will, the sculptor Georg Kolbe, who died in Berlin in 1947, provided for the establishment of a foundation to “preserve and safeguard my work.” He bequeathed his artistic estate, as well as his studio building and library, to the foundation. He named the City of Frankfurt am Main—or rather the Städtische Galerie—as the foundation’s reversionary heir. In the event of the foundation’s dissolution, Frankfurt would have received first and foremost the artistic estate. In this sense, Frankfurt is also mentioned in the statutes of the foundation.¹

Kolbe’s decision to include Frankfurt in the bequest can also be justified by the large number of works acquired there during his lifetime. The works in the collection of the Städtische Galerie im Städel were acquired between 1919 and 1983. Among them are at least sixteen sheets of mainly nude drawings dating from 1912 to the late 1930s. In addition, the bronze sculptures *Frauenraub* (Abduction of Women, 1916) and *Verkündung* (Proclamation, 1923/1924) have been in the collection since 1919 and 1927, respectively. *Verkündung* is now once again installed in the garden of the Städel Museum.²

In the public space of Frankfurt am Main there are three monuments in bronze by Kolbe: the “Heine Monument” unveiled in the Friedberger Anlage in 1913, the “Beethoven Monument” erected in the Taunusanlage in 1951, and the *Ring der Statuen* (Ring of Statues) installed in Rothschild Park in 1954. In addition, there is the bronze sculpture *Adam* (1919/21) in the Main Cemetery and the sculpture *Stehendes Mädchen* (Standing Girl, 1937) in the Goethe House. The latter work was acquired in connection with the Goethe Prize awarded to Georg Kolbe by the City of Frankfurt am Main in 1936.

This essay is based on a subchapter of the exhibition “*Divinely Gifted.*” *National Socialism’s Favoured Artists in the Federal Republic*, which was on view at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM) in Berlin in 2021. The exhibition dealt with the careers of several protagonists of the National Socialist art establishment in the Federal Republic of Germany—from the 1953 unveiling of the “Memorial for the Victims of July 20, 1944,” the design of which was commissioned from the former “divinely gifted” sculptor Richard Scheibe, to the controversy surrounding the bronze busts of the art collectors Peter and Irene Ludwig by Arno Breker in the late 1980s. The Georg Kolbe Museum supported the exhibition project with exhibits, including a plaster model of the *Ring der Statuen*. Kolbe was commissioned by public authorities to create the group of sculptures during the National Socialist era. Its completion after the end of the war in 1945 made it an interesting work for the DHM’s exhibition project. In the following, the scope of the research will be expanded, and the three monuments mentioned will be analyzed. These bronze sculptures were created over a period of almost forty years and in four state systems. As will be shown, the monuments and the history of their creation reflect a tension in the sculptor’s work, which is revealing for his activities under National Socialism. The Frankfurt-based art historians and museum directors Georg Swarzenski and Alfred Wolters were instrumental in the commissioning and realization of the works. In accordance with the question of how Georg Kolbe’s life and work fit into the context of National Socialism, the focus is on this period.

The “Heine Monument”

In June 1910, the Committee for the Erection of a Heine Monument approached Dr. Franz Adickes, Mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main, to obtain permission to erect a monument in a public place. The committee, initiated by the Freie Literarische Gesellschaft (Free Literary Society) of Frankfurt, planned to finance the project through donations, and they also wanted to administer the competition process themselves. The city agreed. Georg Swarzenski, the director of the Städelsches Kunstinstitut at the time and a member of the committee, took charge of the competition. In addition to Georg Kolbe, he invited Fritz Klimsch and the Frankfurt-based sculptor Emil Hub to participate in the competition. The decision was made in favor of Kolbe, who then signed the contracts with Georg Swarzenski as the committee’s representative in August 1913. The unveiling took place in December of the same year. The Friedberger Anlage was chosen as the site.³

As requested by the committee, Kolbe did not create a portrait of Heinrich Heine, but rather an allegorical representation of poetry and lyricism. The design realized for Frankfurt features a young couple, with the male figure captured standing in a dancing movement. His arms are outstretched to either side, and his upper body is frontally aligned with the viewer. The hips are turned to the side. Viewed from above, the axes of the bodies almost form a cross.

Dance was a favorite motif in the visual arts at this time, including in Georg Kolbe’s sculptural work. He probably modeled the figures of the “Heine Monument” after the ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and his partner Tamara Karsavina. Both belonged to the ensemble of the Ballets Russes, which also performed around 1911/12 in Berlin, where Georg Kolbe saw them. Kolbe drew both of them; they posed for him in his studio, and the drawings have been preserved.⁴

Since as early as 1912, there had been resistance and protests with an anti-Semitic background against the erection of a Heine monument in Frankfurt, often already during the German Empire. In 1923, Kolbe’s work was defaced with a swastika, presumably as a result of the failed NSDAP coup attempt in Munich in November of that year. Finally, in April 1933, the monument dedicated to the poet of Jewish origin was forcibly removed from its pedestal.⁵ A photograph from the estate of the sculptor Richard Scheibe, showing the monument standing on a wooden cart, appears to have been taken after the fall (fig. 1). In 1934, Richard Scheibe attributed the visibly bent pedestal and the male figure bent backward “at the ankles” to the fall.⁶

In the following years, the group of figures stood in the garden of the Städel, where it was given the innocuous title *Frühlingslied* (Spring Song). In 1947, it was reinstalled as a “Heine Monument,” this time in the Taunusanlage, a public park in the city, where it remains to this day.

In fact, the “Heine Monument” was not a public commission. Nor was it financed with public funds. It was created on the basis of a private initiative, although the committee included members of the city council and Georg Swarzenski held a municipal office at the time in his position as director of both the Städtische Galerie and the Liebieghaus. It was



1 The Heine monument by Georg Kolbe after it was toppled in April 1933, historical photograph

the first sculptural work by Kolbe to be placed in a public space in Frankfurt am Main. It was also the first time that Georg Kolbe and Georg Swarzenski collaborated on a large-scale project.

The “Beethoven Monument”

Also in the Taunusanlage and only 150 meters away from the “Heine Monument” is Georg Kolbe’s “Beethoven Monument.” Almost twenty-five years passed between the first sketches and the unveiling in June 1951. Some sources describe the “Beethoven Monument” as Kolbe’s “life’s work.”⁷ Kolbe’s “passionately expressed wish” in 1941 to have the monument for the City of Frankfurt made not in bronze as originally planned, but in marble, the “noblest material,” suggests that he also wanted to emphasize the group of figures.⁸ The monument was eventually cast in bronze.

In 1926, the City of Berlin announced a competition for a “Beethoven Monument,” which was to be erected as part of the redesign of Bülow-Platz (now Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz) to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the death of the composer (1770–1827). In addition to Kolbe, Ernst Barlach, Rudolf Belling, Hugo Lederer, and Edwin Scharff

were among those invited to participate. Kolbe produced at least three designs, two of which he submitted.⁹ None of the eight sculptors was able to convince the jury with a model, so the competition remained inconclusive.¹⁰

When the Kunstsalon Cassirer decided in 1928 to present the Beethoven drafts in a solo exhibition of Kolbe's works, the nationally minded author Rudolf G. Binding agreed to write a text on the "Beethoven Monument,"¹¹ which was published in the accompanying catalog. Binding wrote an "Aufruf" (Appeal) of several pages, in which he stated:

"This was his [Georg Kolbe's] draft design for a monument to the heroic German soul, the work of a secretive, shy year, in which the time had come for him to dare to do it. [...] Not like a cock in the night that does not know the time, a voice sounds here for an artist and his work, but because the time has come for the world-conquering German soul to express i t s e l f in a monument. May cities, may private individuals feel moved to erect this most German and humane monument for their people—it would be the true n a t i o n a l m o n u m e n t of the German people."¹²

No less convinced of Kolbe's work and, in contrast to Binding, elaborating on the musical and sculptural sensibility of the work, was the text by Georg Swarzenski, also published in the catalog that accompanied the exhibition in the Kunstsalon Cassirer in 1928.¹³ The son of wealthy and educated Polish Jewish parents, Swarzenski had been increasingly subjected to defamation and persecution by the National Socialists since the "seizure of power." He was suspended in March 1933, prior to the enactment of the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" on April 7, 1933.¹⁴

In 1906, Swarzenski was appointed director of the Städelsches Kunstinstitut. In 1928, he was then appointed general director of the Frankfurt museums, including the Städtische Galerie and the Liebieghaus. Despite his dismissal, Swarzenski remained in Frankfurt and headed the Städelsches Kunstinstitut until 1938; this was possible because it was a private foundation. A well-connected museum professional, Swarzenski was on friendly terms with Georg Kolbe, as evidenced by their surviving correspondence. He also advised Kolbe on the sale of the statue *Stehendes Mädchen*, which was purchased in connection with the Goethe Prize awarded to the artist in 1936.¹⁵ Kolbe was the first sculptor to receive the prize, which was established in 1927. He concluded his acceptance speech for the prize, in which the Prometheus motif played an important role, with the words:

"I accept the prize with heartfelt gratitude. But the 'honor' is, I think, for the whole of the fine arts, to which Goethe's heart was so close, and especially for the German sculptors from whom the new Germany now expects the greatest achievements."¹⁶

Georg Swarzenski was not present at the award ceremony and he wrote to Kolbe on August 7, 1936, that he had already not been invited for the first time the year before

and that he assumed that this had happened “not by mistake, but on purpose!”¹⁷ He went into exile in 1938—in the same year, Georg Kolbe was commissioned to produce a “Beethoven Monument” for the City of Frankfurt am Main.

From the Baltic resort of Heiligendamm, Kolbe wrote to Swarzenski on September 15, 1938:

“Dear friend, where might you be? [...] I have heard rumors about your plans, which cannot possibly make me happy, but which I must understand. Unfortunately, we are all old now and will soon be leaving.”¹⁸

Swarzenski had left Frankfurt in early September 1938 and emigrated to the United States. His contact was his son, Hanns Swarzenski, who was then working with Erwin Panofsky at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. In 1939, Georg Swarzenski began working at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Of greater importance for this essay, however, is his membership in the American Defense Harvard Group and his consulting work for the Roberts Commission. His name is associated with the “Cooper List of German Art Personnel” compiled by Paul J. Sachs after consultation with Swarzenski and Jakob Rosenberg.¹⁹ This means that Swarzenski was involved in the evaluation of German (art) personnel and, by compiling lists of names, suggested to the Allies persons who seemed suitable for reconstruction.

After Kolbe’s letter of September 15, 1938, cited above, no sources or references could be found that would suggest an attitude towards Swarzenski’s fate. The letters preserved in the archive of the Georg Kolbe Museum and the correspondence of intimate friends published in 1987 by Maria von Tiesenhausen—the sculptor’s granddaughter and director of the Georg Kolbe Museum from 1969 to 1977—ended in the late 1930s.

Due to the outbreak of the war, the “Beethoven Monument” could not be completed and therefore could not be unveiled as planned for the sixtieth anniversary of the opera house in 1940. The art historian Wilhelm Pinder, who had been a professor at the Institute of Art History at the Friedrich Wilhelms University in Berlin since 1935, therefore wrote to the mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main, Friedrich Krebs, in May 1940:

“Although all my thoughts are with the Western Army, I would like to take the liberty of mentioning the issue of the Beethoven monument. [...] The idea of pushing through such a Beethoven monument during the war, of all times, is not only beautiful, it would be tremendous cultural propaganda.”²⁰

Pinder had written the letter only a few days after the beginning of the Western Offensive and the invasion of the Benelux countries by German troops. The attempt to convince Friedrich Krebs of the monument’s value for Nazi propaganda was unsuccessful.²¹

After the end of the war, Georg Kolbe’s connection to Frankfurt am Main consisted of his contact with the art historian Alfred Wolters, whose name appears as early as 1938 in documents of the City of Frankfurt concerning the “Beethoven Monument.”²² Alfred

Wolters came to Frankfurt in 1912 and was employed as an assistant to the director, Georg Swarzenski. After Swarzenski was appointed general director of the Frankfurt museums in 1928, Wolters was promoted to the position of director of the Städtische Galerie. He remained in this position throughout the NS era and until 1949, managing the collection of modern art that Swarzenski had built up and from which many works were confiscated in the course of the “Entartete Kunst” (Degenerate Art) campaign. Wolters also worked as an “expert for the determination of nationally valuable cultural assets” and examined the confiscated property of Jewish emigrants for the local foreign exchange office. After 1945, he assisted in the restitution of illegally acquired works of art.²³

A handwritten note on the person of Alfred Wolters reads: “Ask Dr. Swarzenski.” The note comes from a collection of documents from the Roberts Commission from 1943 to 1946. The American commission was part of the Office of Strategic Service (OSS).²⁴ It investigated the looting of art and damage to cultural institutions and monuments during the Second World War and compiled the “‘whitelist’ of German personnel.” Alfred Wolter’s name appears on the “whitelist,” which was completed in 1944. He was classified as “decent, honest, reliable, non-Nazi,” which meant that he could be called upon to assist in the reconstruction effort,²⁵ which Georg Swarzenski probably also advocated.

The biography of Alfred Wolters is ambivalent and politically difficult to interpret. It is precisely for this reason that his career as a leader in the “operational system” of art is so characteristic. As an experienced museum director with professional competence and outstanding knowledge of the museum location Frankfurt am Main, he was difficult to replace. Moreover, he had not taken a public position on National Socialism. Thus, he was able to continue working in the same position after the end of the war and despite his activities during the NS regime.

The fact that only Georg Swarzenski could be his judge seems to be suggested by the subtext of Wolters’s essay “Ein Bildnis Victor Müllers von Wilhelm Leibl” (A Portrait of Victor Müller by Wilhelm Leibl), published in a commemorative volume on the occasion of Georg Swarzenski’s seventy-fifth birthday in 1951. At the beginning of the text, Wolters describes a situation in 1933 in which he was appointed judge of what he calls an “ostracism” against Georg Swarzenski. What is probably meant is the “Kommission zur Durchführung der Untersuchungsangelegenheit Dr. Swarzensky [sic] und Gen.” (Commission for the Conduct of the Investigation into the Matter of Dr. Swarzensky [sic] and Ass.). Swarzenski was accused of having “corroded” “the good gallery property of the Städel with a large quantity of concoctions from foreign races and cultural Bolsheviks.”²⁶ Wolters’s recollection of this perfidious anti-Semitic smear campaign is followed by an art-historical treatise on a portrait of a man painted by Wilhelm Leibl around 1870. Wolters identifies the sitter as the Frankfurt-based painter Victor Müller, a fact that had not been previously documented. Knowing who the person is “automatically” leads one “to contemplate the picture with different, more discerning, and more perceptive eyes and to thus to perceive things in it that, without this knowledge, would probably never be recognized in their full artistic and human significance”: so reads Wolters’s ominous conclusion, which he cites for his own “exoneration.”²⁷ The essay, which Wolters begins with

“Dear Boss!,” can be read as a justification of his actions. He does not ask Swarzenski for forgiveness, but rather for understanding. Wolters and Swarzenski remained in personal contact after the end of the war, as Alfred Wolters reports in letters to Georg Kolbe.²⁸

Wolters spoke out in favor of Kolbe when it came to awarding public contracts by the City of Frankfurt. Like Swarzenski, he purchased works for the collection of the Städtische Galerie. As a member of the board of the Georg Kolbe Foundation, he represented Kolbe's designs before the city council and the City of Frankfurt. Kolbe had stipulated in his will that Wolters should become a member of this board. In the years following Georg Kolbe's death, Wolters had an intensive exchange with Margrit Schwartzkopff, the executor of his estate and founding director of the Georg Kolbe Foundation. Together, they pushed through the installation of the *Ring der Statuen* and the “Beethoven Monument” with the City of Frankfurt. Alfred Wolters had already pushed for the completion and erection of the “Beethoven Monument” only a few months after the end of the war. Casting had been halted in 1939 due to a shortage of materials and the general ban on casting; and even in 1946/47, it was not easy to obtain metal for completion. Thanks in part to Alfred Wolters's good connections and high standing with the military government, as well as Georg Kolbe's international reputation, the Noack fine art foundry in Berlin, which had been commissioned with the casting, soon received scrap metal (fig. 2). In addition, parts of a “Craftsmen's Fountain” by the “divinely gifted” Max Esser were melted down. Esser had been commissioned by the City of Frankfurt in 1935. Wolters justified the decision to Esser's widow in September 1947 by saying that the “Fountain of German Craftsmanship” was a “symbol of the Nazi era” and therefore could no longer be installed in the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁹ He did not explain why the “Beethoven Monument” was not such a symbol and what justified its installation after 1945.

In 1948, Kolbe's “Beethoven Monument” was finally completed (fig. 3). The ceremonial unveiling on a hill in the Taunusanlage took place on June 16, 1951. The city simultaneously hosted the first Bundessängerfest (National Singing Festival) in the postwar period, and in addition to a speech by the new mayor, Walter Kolb, a choir performed Beethoven's “Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre” (The Heavens Are Telling) and “Die Flamme lodert” (The Flame Is Blazing), accompanied by a police band.³⁰

The group of figures in double life size consists of two female figures and one male figure: the *Rufender Genius* (Calling Genius), the *Sinnender Genius* (Contemplating Genius), and a male hero, the *Herabschreitender* (Descending Man). His closed posture with arms folded in front of the chest is defensive, although they could also open to the side in the sense of “using one's elbows” to signal assertiveness. To no small extent, it is formal-aesthetic criteria such as the pathos and the monumentality of the depiction that make Kolbe's “Beethoven Monument” compatible with a *völkisch* (national-racial) and NS-ideologically oriented reception. Binding, who also signed a “pledge of loyalty” to Adolf Hitler in 1933, continued to publish on Georg Kolbe's work during the Nazi era in Germany. In the monograph *Vom Leben der Plastik. Inhalt und Schönheit des Werkes von Georg Kolbe* (On the Life of Sculpture. The Content and Beauty of the Work of Georg Kolbe), which appeared in several editions after 1933 in the series *Kunstbücher des Volkes* (Art



2 Employees of the Noack fine art foundry in front of Georg Kolbe's Beethoven monument, 1947, historical photograph



3 Georg Kolbe, Beethoven monument, 1926–47, bronze, double life-size, Taunusanlage, Frankfurt am Main, 2020

Books of the People) published by Rembrandt-Verlag in Berlin, he adopted the wording of his interpretations of the “monument to the heroic German soul” and the “German [...] soul-dominating” genius that he had first used in public in 1928.³¹ Although the text had been decisively altered, and the passage on the national monument is missing, the author and publisher must be described as leaning towards NS ideology. It should be noted that other interpretations of the monument are possible, including a discourse-immanent interpretation as (artistic) genius.

The question arises as to whether the interpretation of a work is sufficient for its instrumentalization, what significance the ideological exploitation in the NS era, as Pinder suggests for the “Beethoven Monument” in his letter to the mayor of Frankfurt am Main in May 1940, has for the consideration and evaluation in the present, and what significance the artist's intention continues to have in contrast to this.

If Kolbe's late work is only described as having been instrumentalized in a one-sided way, there is the danger of an ahistorical reception. The following consideration of the *Ring der Statuen* is intended to counteract a possible relativization of Kolbe's work during the National Socialist era in Germany.



4 Georg Kolbe, *Ring der Statuen* (Ring of Statues), 1933–47, Rothschildpark, Frankfurt am Main, 2020

Ring der Statuen

Kolbe's design for an installation of seven nude sculptures arranged in a circle was purchased by the City of Frankfurt am Main in 1941. The roundel, nearly nine meters in diameter, was erected in October 1954 (figs. 4 and 5). Alfred Wolters was once again the persistent driving force behind the fulfillment of the 1941 contracts and the erection of the *Ring der Statuen*. The installation of the work was unanimously approved at a meeting of the Deputation for Science, Art, and National Education in October 1953. In March 1954, the same committee selected Rothschild Park as the site for the sculptural group.³² In contrast to the "Beethoven Monument" and also quite unusually, the city administration decided against a ceremonial unveiling. The press release states: "a laudation with many nice speeches" does not correspond to the "quiet, completely self-determined character of the work," and Kolbe's "art monument" is "clear, pleasing, and unambiguous."³³

From today's perspective, the location of the installation seems problematic. The seven bronze sculptures the *Junges Weib* (Young Woman), the *Hüterin* (Guardian), the *Auserwählte* (The Chosen), the *Amazonen* (Amazon), *Der Jüngling* (Youth; developed further from a *Stehender Jüngling* [Standing Youth]), the *Junger Kämpfer* (Young Fighter), and *Der Sinnende* (The Thinker) are located on a site that the City of Frankfurt am Main "acquired" from Maximilian von Goldschmidt-Rothschild in 1937/38 under pressure from the National Socialist city administration. He was forced to sell his important and extensive art collection of nearly 1,400 objects in 1938 under the same conditions.³⁴ Alfred Wolters



5 It was only after Georg Kolbe's death that the *Ring der Statuen* (Ring of Statues) was installed in Rothschildpark. The work consists of an architecture of basalt lava rhythmically arranged with stelae and seven larger-than-life bronze sculptures (left to right): *Amazone* (Amazon, 1937), *Junger Kämpfer* (Young Fighter, 1938/46), *Hüterin* (Guardian, 1938), *Der Sinnende* (Thinker, 1941/47), *Die Auserwählte* (The Chosen, 1939), *Jüngling* (Youth, 1937/46), and *Junges Weib* (Young Woman, 1938)

was also involved in the transfer to municipal ownership as an appraiser on behalf of the mayor.³⁵

Four of the seven nude sculptures of the *Ring der Statuen*—the *Junges Weib* (1938), the *Hüterin* (1938), the *Auserwählte* (1939), and the *Amazone* (1937)—were presented at the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) in Munich. In 1939, Adolf Hitler purchased a cast of the sculpture *Junges Weib* for 18,000 RM at the sales exhibition, which was also intended to be a showcase for “German” art. For the same price and in the same year, Bernhard Rust, then head of the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, purchased the *Hüterin*.³⁶

The nude sculptures of the *Ring der Statuen* are exemplary for the development of human representation in Kolbe's work during the NS era. From the idealized and harmonious depiction of the nude, the development intensified towards the heroic and monumental image of man, towards pathos formulas and emotive compositions. The “true” essence of man was to be portrayed detached from all social contexts and societal ties. In the “art reporting” of the National Socialist state, Kolbe's nude sculptures were occasionally referred to as “immortal human nobility,”³⁷ thus following Wilhelm Pinder's interpretations in the monograph published by Rembrandt-Verlag in 1937. The “ethical appraisal” of Kolbe's depictions of humans as “noble” or “human nobility” was also taken up again by Alfred Wolters in a speech he gave in Düsseldorf in the summer of 1948 on the occasion of the opening of a Kolbe memorial exhibition.³⁸

In addition to the seven sculptures, which are slightly larger than life-size, Kolbe's design includes an eighth niche that is left free. This allows the viewer to enter the installation without having to pass through the narrow spaces between the sculpture and the column.

The planned interaction between the work and the viewer is ahead of its time. If the viewer remains in the free (eighth) position, they close the (human) ring and becomes part of the group of figures, among which are stereotypes of the National Socialist world view. In the (NS) historical context, the *Hüterin* represents the “bearer of blood and race” and can therefore be described as a Nazi racist stereotype.³⁹ The sculptures of the *Ring der Statuen* are reduced to the naked human figure, and their essential characteristics are therefore referred to primarily by the titles given to them by the artist.

As mentioned at the beginning, the exhibition “*Divinely Gifted.*” *National Socialism’s Favoured Artists in the Federal Republic* included a plaster model of the *Ring der Statuen*. Georg Kolbe, like Richard Scheibe and Fritz Klimsch, was on the list of the “divinely gifted” artists.⁴⁰ When the list was compiled in 1944, none of them was younger than sixty-five years old. The status of “indispensability” that accompanied the entry, which exempted individuals from military service and labor deployment, thus does not seem to have been a sufficient reason for their inclusion. Rather, it underscores their prominent position as “transitional artists” in the NS art establishment. Under German National Socialism, publicists loyal to the regime, such as Kurt Lothar Tank, stylized Klimsch, Kolbe, and Scheibe—sculptors born in the 1870s—as “saviors of the strong German form over a period of decay.”⁴¹ In the book *Deutsche Plastik unserer Zeit* (German Sculpture of Our Time), which Kurt Lothar Tank published in 1942 by Raumbild-Verlag in Munich, they stand for the preservation of values and form in the “period of decay” (as the Weimar Republic was also called in NS jargon) and defame as “form-destroying” modernism with its “isms”—and thus a concept of an enemy of the National Socialists. As a “preserving force of the German soul, they were to have an effect on future generations.”⁴² Tank described these artists as the keepers and defenders of “German art.”

Georg Kolbe spoke publicly about his work. With the *Ring der Statuten*, however, he publicly positioned himself in relation to National Socialism. The *Ring der Statuten* is an example of Kolbe taking the place that was offered to him in German National Socialism. He wanted to create for the “new Germany,” as he put it during his Goethe Prize speech in 1936. Since the late 1930s, his ideal had been the strong, muscular figure, which, especially in larger-than-life size, corresponded to the National Socialists’ ideas of art. He allowed himself to be celebrated by the NS art establishment, and from 1937 to 1944 he regularly participated in the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, which was propagated at the time as an important showcase for “German art.” The figures of the “Heine Monument” are not androgynous, but rather delicately built in comparison to the nude sculptures of the *Ring der Statuen* created twenty years later.

Georg Kolbe’s work can be described as ambivalent. The “Beethoven Monument,” for example, is not a clear commitment to the National Socialist state, but it can easily be connected to its ideology. With regard to the underlying question of Georg Kolbe in National Socialism, the ambiguity of an as yet undefined number of works and the (inevitable) ambiguity of a biography (Kolbe experienced four state systems and two world wars) should not lead to the assumption that his late work is equally ambiguous. It is questionable whether Kolbe’s work in the NS era can be adequately described by the overly

neutral and hesitant formulation of ambivalent activity. The depiction of the human figure and Kolbe's commitment to the NS state from the late 1930s onward testify to the willing conformity of the sculptor, whose work forfeits any totality. In contrast, it is necessary to take a clear and historically critical position. A further approach with the designation as opportunist makes a transfiguring aestheticization of Kolbe's late work impossible and includes the necessary categories of ethical and social action, which are necessary for a historical-critical consideration of Georg Kolbe's work during the National Socialist era.

Notes

- 1 See: "Stiftungsurkunde," typescript in the file "Briefwechsel Schwartzkopff, Margrit [with] Wolters, Alfred," 1949, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 2 Thanks are due to Thomas Pavel, Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin, for providing the information that *Verkündung* was on permanent loan in Lübeck until 2013.
- 3 Dietrich Schubert, "Frühlingslied"? Das Heinrich-Heine-Denkmal von Georg Kolbe in Frankfurt/Main (1910–1913)," in: *Heine-Jahrbuch* 34 (Stuttgart 1995), pp. 119–145. In his essay, Schubert mistakenly confuses the sculptor *Emil Hub* with *Fritz Hub*. In the above-mentioned letter from Georg Swarzenski to the "sculptors Klitsch, Kolbe, Hub," October 30, 1912 (GKM Archive, Berlin), the first names are not mentioned. It is highly probable, however, that this is the Frankfurt-based sculptor Emil Hub, who had been working as an independent sculptor in Frankfurt since the mid-1900s.
- 4 See: *Der schreitende, springende, wirbelnde Mensch. Georg Kolbe und der Tanz*, ed. Ursel Berger, exh. cat. Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin, and Edwin Scharff Museum, Neu-Ulm (Berlin 2003), p. 51.
- 5 Schubert 1995 (see note 3), p. 137.
- 6 See: letter from Richard Scheibe to Georg Kolbe, April 13, 1934, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.323, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 7 Margrit Schwartzkopff and Alfred Wolters in particular were convinced of the outstanding importance of the "Beethoven Monument" for Kolbe's oeuvre as a whole, which is also evident in the surviving correspondence from the years after Kolbe's death, as well as in Wolters's publication *Georg Kolbes Beethoven-Denkmal. Ursprung, Werdegang und Vollendung. Sinn und Bedeutung eines monumentalen Kunstwerks unserer Zeit; ein Deutungsversuch* (Frankfurt am Main 1952).
- 8 Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting with the mayor, September 27, 1941, MvT Estate, GKM.
- 9 See the "Entwurf Beethoven-Denkmal" (Draft Design) from 1926/39 and "Verwandte Objekte" (Related Objects) on the website of the Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin, <https://sammlung.georg-kolbe-museum.de/de/objekte/entwurf-beethoven-denkmal/62936>, and "Beethoven-Denkmal, großer Entwurf II" (Large Draft Design II) from 1926/27 with "Verwandten Objekte," <https://sammlung.georg-kolbe-museum.de/de/objekte/beethoven-denkmal-grosser-entwurf-ii-192627-ton/65743> [both sites last accessed May 16, 2023].
- 10 *Hamburger Illustrierte*, no. 43, n.d., KK Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 11 Postcard from Rudolf G. Binding to Georg Kolbe, December 11, 1927, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.46, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 12 Rudolf G. Binding, "Aufruf," in: *Das Beethoven-Denkmal von Georg Kolbe*, exh. cat. Kunstsalon Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1928, unpaginated, GK Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 13 Georg Swarzenski, in: *ibid.*, unpaginated.
- 14 See: Konstanze Crüwell, "Ein bitterer Abschied. Georg Swarzenski, Städeldirektor von 1906 bis 1937," in: 1938. *Kunst, Künstler, Politik*, ed. Eva Atalan et al., exh. cat. Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt am Main (Göttingen 2013), pp. 259–274, here p. 262. One of the first anti-Semitic and racist laws to be passed in Germany, the misleadingly titled Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service served the purpose of removing Jews, people of Jewish origin, and politically undesirable persons from the civil service.
- 15 See: letters from Georg Swarzenski to Georg Kolbe, June 19 and July 22, 1936, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.406, GKM Archive GKM. The sculpture was acquired by the Frankfurt-based association Freies Deutsches Hochstift in June 1937 for 4,000 RM. Georg Kolbe received the commission in August 1936.
- 16 Speech by Georg Kolbe on the occasion of the awarding of the 1936 Goethe Prize 1936, typescript, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 17 Letter from Georg Swarzenski to Georg Kolbe, August 7, 1936, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.406, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 18 Reproduced in: Maria Freifrau von Tiesenhausen, *Georg Kolbe. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (Tübingen 1987), p. 161, no. 219 [translated].
- 19 NARA M1944. Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, 1943–1946, 239, 0008, p. 143.
- 20 Letter from Wilhelm Pinder, Institute of Art History, Friedrich Wilhelms University, Berlin, to the mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main, May 15, 1940, Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Magistratsakten 7906 [translated].
- 21 The journalist Hans Eckstein called Wilhelm Pinder the "art pope of National Socialism." Hans Eckstein, "Hitlers Kunsthistoriker," in: *Die Neue Zeitung*, December 17, 1945 [translated]. Although Wilhelm Pinder must be viewed in a more differentiated manner, he remains, as Horst Bredekamp notes, "as

- a result of his theory of the 'special achievements' of German art and the ideology of the 'special essence' of the Germans which he advocated, one of the exponents of the nationalist fall from grace of art history." Horst Bredekamp, "Wilhelm Pinder," in: idem (ed.), *In der Mitte Berlins. 200 Jahre Kunstgeschichte an der Humboldt-Universität* (Berlin 2010), pp. 295–310, here p. 298 [translated].
- 22 Typescript with the reference line "Anonymous letter to the mayor, dated September 18, 1938," September 30, 1938; author: Alfred Wolters, Städtische Galerie Frankfurt am Main, ISG FFM, Magistratsakten 7906.
 - 23 Anna Heckötter, "Handeln im Zwiespalt. Ein Fazit zur Podiumsdiskussion 'Alfred Wolters. Direktor des Liebieghauses 1928–1949,'" <https://www.liebieghaus.de/de/einblicke/handeln-im-zwiespalt> [last accessed May 16, 2023].
 - 24 The Office of Strategic Service (OSS) was an intelligence agency of the United States War Department during the Second World War.
 - 25 NARA M1944. Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, 1943–1946, 239, 0065, p. 15, and NARA M1941. Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points ("Ardelia Hall Collection"): OMGUS Headquarters Records, 1938–1951, 260, 0019, p. 135.
 - 26 Konstanze Crüwell, *Worte sind im Museum so überflüssig wie im Konzertsaal. Eine Hommage an Georg Swarzenski. Städeldirektor von 1906–1937* (Cologne 2015), p. 127 [translated]. See also: Tanja Baensch, "Das Museum als 'lebendiger Körper.' Die Geschichte der Städtischen Galerie im Städtischen Kunstinstitut bis 1945," in: Uwe Fleckner and Max Hollein (eds.), *Museum im Widerspruch: Das Städel und der Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin 2011), pp. 25–92, here p. 68.
 - 27 Alfred Wolters, "Ein Bildnis Victor Müllers von Wilhelm Leibl," in: Oswald Goetz (ed.), *Beiträge. Für Georg Swarzenski zum 11. Januar 1951* (Berlin et al. 1951), pp. 216–227, here p. 227 [translated].
 - 28 See: letters from Alfred Wolters to Georg Kolbe, March 12, 1946 and August 17, 1947, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 29 See: letter from Alfred Wolters to Frieda Esser, September 1947, and letter to the Department of Culture of the City of Frankfurt am Main, February 3, 1948, ISG FFM, Kulturamt 431, sheets 23 and 33.
 - 30 See: Vermerk Stadtkanzlei I. 5/Bu., Betreff "Aufstellung und Enthüllung des Beethoven-Denkmal," 18.5.1951, ISG FFM, Kulturamt 904.
 - 31 Rudolf G. Binding, *Vom Leben der Plastik. Inhalt und Schönheit des Werkes von Georg Kolbe* [1933], 8th ed. (Berlin 1935), p. 51 [translated].
 - 32 See the presentation of the magistrate to the city council assembly "Aufstellung des 'Rings der Statuen,'" March 8, 1954, Frankfurt am Main, ISG FFM, I./Gr., Magistratsakten 7863.
 - 33 See: "Pressestelle der Stadt Frankfurt a. M., 'Ring der Statuen' im Rothschildpark," September 30, 1954, ISG FFM, Sammlung Ortsgeschichte S3/K/2536 [translated].
 - 34 The German Lost Art Foundation lists the research project "Raub und Restitution der Sammlung Goldschmidt-Rothschild," conducted by the Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main in 2009; https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Content/03_Forschungsfoerderung/Projekt/Museum-Angewandte-Kunst-Frankfurt/Projekt1.html [last accessed May 17, 2023]. Katharina Weiler has summarized the results of the provenance research on the collection; see: Katharina Weiler, "Die Kunstobjekte Maximilian von Goldschmidt-Rothschilds – Biographie einer Sammlung im Spiegel der Geschichte des Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main," in: Evelyn Brockhoff and Franziska Kiermeier (eds.), *Gesammelt, gehandelt, geraubt. Kunst in Frankfurt und der Region zwischen 1933 und 1945* (Frankfurt am Main 2019), pp. 139–153.
 - 35 See: "Gutachten über den Ankauf der Kunstsammlung Max v. Goldschmidt-Rothschild," undated, ISG FFM, Rechneiam IV, 2, p. 2.
 - 36 All works shown at the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Munich, including details of buyers and prices, can be researched at www.gdk-research.de/en [last accessed May 17, 2023].
 - 37 For example, Wolfgang Schneditz titled a newspaper article "Zu Georg Kolbes neuen Schöpfungen" (On Georg Kolbe's New Creations) in an issue of the *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, published on December 9, 1942, "Unsterblicher Menschenadel" (Immortal Human Nobility).
 - 38 See: "Ansprache zur Eröffnung der Düsseldorfer Kolbe-Gedächtnisausstellung," August 1, 1948, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 39 The motif of the "guardian" is associated during the NS era with ideological and racist ideas. A well-known example is the painting *Die Hüterin der Art* (Guardian of the Race) by the draftsman and writer Wolfgang Willrich. It was used as the frontispiece of the 1937 book by the staunch National Socialist Willrich in the Munich publishing house Lehmanns Verlag, *Säuberung des Kunsttempels. Eine*

kunstpolitische Kampfschrift zur Gesundung deutscher Kunst im Geiste nordischer Art, which was widely distributed.

- 40** See: BArch Berlin, R55/20252a. Georg Kolbe is on the “special list” of the list of the “divinely gifted,” along with the sculptors Arno Breker and Josef Thorak, who regularly carry out government commissions, and the painters Werner Peiner and Arthur Kampf.

41 Kurt Lothar Tank, *Deutsche Plastik unserer Zeit* (Munich 1942), p. 49 [translated].

42 *Ibid.*, p. 47 [translated].