

Georg Kolbe and Art Policy 1933–45

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“Franco and Beethoven, how can I manage this?”

**Georg Kolbe and the
Controversy over
Modernism: The Sculptor
within the Art Political
Situation of the Years
after 1933**

1 John Heartfield, *Brauner Künstlertraum* (Brown Artist's Dream), photomontage (copper intaglio, 38 × 27 cm.) with the caption: "Soliloquy in a dream: 'Franco and Beethoven, how can I manage this? The best thing I can do is to make a centaur, half animal, half human,'" published in the magazine *Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 29, July 20, 1938, Prague, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Art Collection



Kolbe had not even begun his portrait of Franco when, in July 1938, John Heartfield published one of his photomontages in the socialist magazine *Volks-Illustrierte* (fig. 1).¹ In the foreground, Kolbe sits, visibly distressed, with his forehead propped in his hand. Behind him is his *opus*, a hybrid figure with the head of Beethoven (alluding to Kolbe's commission for the Beethoven monument in Frankfurt am Main in 1939) and the body of the Spanish General Franco in uniform, a violin in his left hand, a dagger in his right. The ruins of Guernica are piled up on the pedestal; photographs of children's corpses are mounted between the general's leather boots. Heartfield thus alludes to the destruction of the Basque town on April 26, 1937, initiated by Franco, which cost the lives of several hundred civilians.

The actual subject of the collage is, however, the sculptor Georg Kolbe in his studio. Heartfield had probably read the announcement of the portrait commission in the Berlin press and now visualized a moral dilemma: Kolbe's desire to work for a cultural nation and ultimately serving barbarism. The question "Franco and Beethoven, how can I manage this?" is paradigmatic for Kolbe's balancing act between his own claim to a spiritualized, intellectually sophisticated art and the exploitation of his persona by National Socialist propaganda. In this way, Heartfield also touches on Kolbe's position between the modernists and the traditionalists, between skeptics and supporters, and not least between



2 Front cover of the publication *Georg Kolbe. Werke der letzten Jahre, mit Betrachtungen über Kolbes Plastik von Wilhelm Pinder* (with 64 intaglio plates), Berlin 1937

how he saw himself and how he was seen by others: between his *perceived* distance from the NS regime and the actual closeness that, by 1938, could no longer be overlooked. Heartfield also saw a conflict in the Franco commission because Kolbe could *not* be clearly assigned to the camp of the traditionalists, whose ideological proximity to the NS regime was indisputable. After all, Kolbe was one of the great sculptors of the Weimar Republic, which, after 1933, had also become a cultural-political target as the “time of the System.” Kolbe’s Heine monument and the Rathenau fountain had been removed in 1933 and 1934, respectively, as had his marble statue, the *Genius* (1928), in the opera house and his figure *Große Nacht* (Large Night, 1926/30) in the Berlin Haus des Rundfunks.² Despite the removal of these works, and despite Kolbe’s prominent position and esteem in the Weimar Republic, he had not disappeared from the scene after 1933 or fled into exile like the communist Heartfield. He remained publicly visible even under National Socialism. The art historian Wilhelm Pinder, who was open to National Socialism, considered precisely this continuity to be significant and emphasized it in his lavishly illustrated book on Kolbe, published in 1937 (fig. 2): “Our new Germany is also fortunate in that this master from an older generation stands out in the new age of great artistic expectations.”³ According to Pinder, Kolbe represented the continuation of a moderate modernism, the orientation of which was, in his opinion, compatible with the official view of art in the National Socialist state. Indeed, Kolbe’s thematic interests, such as his veneration of Stefan George, about

whom he compiled his own small collection of newspaper clippings on the occasion of his death in December 1933 and even published an obituary for,⁴ and his preoccupation with Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig van Beethoven reveal points of intersection with several of the German “intellectual heroes” whom National Socialism instrumentalized for its ideology after 1933.⁵

Kolbe’s Dilemma in National Socialism

In April 1934, Kolbe’s intellectual faculty was praised in the journal *Kunst der Nation*: “Never has there been a more spiritual sculptor in Germany”; Kolbe had “rescued the highest from neglected and barbaric times into the silence of art.”⁶ While the *Kunst der Nation* was a short-lived affair (its committed advocacy of a NS-compatible modernism led to its discontinuation in early 1935), the review stands *pars pro toto* for an interpretation of Kolbe that did not cause offense even in the culturally conservative reactionary camp. Despite their rough surface structure, Kolbe’s symbolic figures, with their figurative, antique-style physicality, hardly offered a target for attack. This was quite different, for example, from the work of the painter Emil Nolde, who was positioned as a “Nordic” Expressionist and as the “greatest visionary” with an editorial on the front page of the same issue of *Kunst der Nation*: a rhetoric strategy which did not succeed in the long run, despite all efforts and despite Nolde’s declarations of loyalty to the NS regime.⁷ While in Nolde’s case, opponents from the circle around Paul Schultze-Naumburg and Alfred Rosenberg regularly protested when he was once again celebrated as “Nordic,” there were no objections to newspaper articles with titles such as “Georg Kolbe, a Herald of the Nordic Attitude to Life”⁸ or “Nordic Beauty in German Art.”⁹ This was mainly due to the aesthetic characteristics of Kolbe’s work, which, in its comparatively classical formal language, was less provocative. In his treatise *Säuberung des Kunsttempels* (Purge of the Temple of Art, 1937), Wolfgang Willrich summed up Kolbe’s special position within modernism when he claimed that Kolbe was the only artist from the then popular publication series *Junge Kunst* (Young Art) who had “remained healthy,” and that “he, too, was at times on the verge of fashionable mannerism. All the others were predisposed to or participated in artistic degeneration or allowed themselves to be pushed into it.”¹⁰

Dispute about Modernism

With such questionable compliments, Kolbe found himself in a strange situation after 1933: around him, many of those with whom he had previously exhibited were being fiercely debated, while he himself remained unscathed, even celebrated. Kolbe experienced the controversy surrounding modernism firsthand, whether in the dispute over the exhibition *30 deutsche Künstler* (30 German Artists) at Galerie Ferdinand Möller, which was temporarily banned because of the participation of Emil Nolde and Ernst Barlach, and



3 “Die Jury an der Arbeit. Wie die Ausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes vorbereitet wird” (The Jury at Work. How the exhibition of the Deutsche Künstlerbund is prepared): (left to right) Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, the sculptor Philipp Harth, Georg Kolbe, and Erich Heckel, in: *Magdeburger Zeitung*, probably May 1933, collection of press clippings, Georg Kolbe Museum Archive, Berlin

in which Kolbe presented two sculptures,¹¹ or on the occasion of the rally of the National Socialist German Students' League in Berlin at the end of June 1933, whose slogan was “Youth fights for German art,” and at which he was mentioned in the same sentence as Heckel, Nolde, Rohlf, Schmidt-Rottluff, Barlach, and Lehmbruck as “the forerunners of the art that National Socialism wants to continue in its spirit.”¹²

Kolbe was also directly affected by the disputes over the Deutscher Künstlerbund and its orientation. A photograph of the exhibition jury published in the *Magdeburger Zeitung* in May 1933 shows him standing between Philipp Harth and Erich Heckel, with his good acquaintance Karl Schmidt-Rottluff to his left (fig. 3).¹³ It was only with great reluctance that Kolbe accepted the chairmanship of the Deutscher Künstlerbund in early 1935, during an already extremely turbulent period. Then, in 1936—still under his chairmanship—the association was banned for exhibiting Expressionist works.¹⁴ As a co-organizer, Kolbe was also involved in the scandal surrounding the exhibition *Berliner Kunst in München* (Berlin Art in Munich) in March 1935, in which twenty-six works, including works by Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Nolde, had been excluded in advance.¹⁵ One final example of Kolbe's involvement in initiatives to promote a pluralistic modernism is the 1938 *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art* at the Burlington Galleries in London. Was his work out of place there? The NSDAP party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, was outraged that Kolbe was included in London among the works shown in Germany in the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition. In a scathing polemical review entitled “Der Kunstswindel in London” (The Art Swindle in London) it was emphasized that “Kolbe's sculptures, both in the previous year [1937] and this year [1938], were among

the main works in the exhibition at Haus der Kunst in Munich, which was representative of the artistic will of the new Germany.”¹⁶ The author, Robert Scholz, concealed the fact that Kolbe’s exhibit in London was his bronze bust of Paul Cassirer from the collection of Hugo Simon—that is, the portrait of a Jewish art dealer from a Jewish collection. John Heartfield’s question “Franco and Beethoven, how can I manage this?” could be varied: Paul Cassirer, Friedrich Ebert, and Max Liebermann were all portrayed by Kolbe; a few years later, he created portraits of the fascist General Francisco Franco and of Konstantin Hierl, head of the Reich Labor Service; in March 1934, he had also proposed to the Reich Chancellery to create a bust of Adolf Hitler. How can one explain Kolbe’s willingness to ennoble individuals from such opposing camps with bronze portraits? The inconsistency also shows that a categorization, as carried out by NS propaganda and continued in the opposite direction after the Second World War, in its narrow definition between “degenerate” and regime-compliant art, only inadequately describes the complex situation of conflict in which numerous modern artists and sculptors operated.

Kolbe’s Commitment to His Colleagues

What did Kolbe think about the cultural-political scuffles, about who was allowed to belong and who was excluded? He did not let all events pass him by without comment. At the end of May 1934, for example, at the invitation of the National Socialist German Students’ League, he wrote a statement entitled “An die deutschen Studenten!” (To the German Students!) that was published in the *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung* (fig. 4).¹⁷ On the controversial question of what constituted “German” art, he declared: “I know genuine German men of art whose work is very much misinterpreted. They are better, purer than many who profess to be.”¹⁸ He was probably referring, without naming names, to his acquaintances Schmidt-Rottluff and Heckel, and perhaps also to other controversial figures such as Barlach and Nolde. Kolbe warned against condemning them too hastily: “Every genuine man had to carry his faith alone,” a solo effort that he felt the younger generation could not comprehend. He concluded by explaining to the young National Socialists: “A Führer has rallied you and called upon you to march. What great fortune!”¹⁹ This sentence, however, does not appear in any of Kolbe’s drafts in his estate, neither in handwriting nor in typewriting. Is it possible that the newspaper’s editorial staff helped out here, and that the reference to the “Führer” did not come from Kolbe himself?

While the local Berlin chapter of the Students’ League actively supported modernism, the editorial staff of the *Studenten-Zeitung* in Munich was conservative. Kolbe would experience this firsthand in the context of his activities as a member of the commission during the preparations for the 1935 exhibition *Berliner Kunst in München*.²⁰ Kolbe himself was present for the set-up on March 14, but missed how, on the opening day, twenty-six of the works transported from Berlin to Munich for the show, including pictures by Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, and Nolde, were removed from the Pinakothek.²¹ When he read in the *Studenten-Zeitung* that the removal was an overdue signal—to “finally clarify

Prof. Dr. h. c. Georg Kolbe:

An die deutschen Studenten!

Dah die deutschen Studenten in ihrem Kampfblatt ein Wort von mir hören wollen, ist eine große Freude für mich, zeigt mir dieser Wunsch doch ein geistiges Bedürfnis meines Werkes mit der nationalen Jugend, die als Erbeiter des Stoffs streift, in den kulturellen Aufbau des neuen Deutschlands zu treten.

Leider bin ich kein Wertgemäßer, der Ihnen in großer Rede nie gehörte Dinge bringen kann. Sie wissen selbst auch schon um die Wege und Ziele, die vor Ihnen liegen. Es ist ein herrliches Gefühl und Erleben für uns Männer — daß heute eine Jugend sich leidenschaftlich in den Kampf um deutsche Kultur stellt. Von solcher Gemeinschaft und solchem Glauben mußten wir früher nichts. Kunst wurde damals nur „geplagt“ und „gehandelt“. Ein Führer hat es geschaut und zum Kampf aufgerufen. Welches Glück!

Vielleicht wollen Sie von mir eine Antwort hören auf die jetzt tausendfach aufgeworfene Frage, was deutsche Kunst sei. Wollen Deutsche wirklich darum diskutieren? Warum wissen wir alle eindeutig, was deutsches Dichten, deutsche Musik ist? Ja, wäre darüber ein Fragen überhaupt denkbar? So sicher sei also an der deutschen Sprache und so unklar unter deutsches Gefühl? Nein und hundertmal nein! Freilich ist vieles verdrängt überwandert und entstellt. Ihr werdet aber herausfinden, wo echte Fragen schlafen — wenn auch ihre Wesen sehr verschieden und nicht leicht verständlich scheinen. Versteht nicht gleich den, der kein Meister ist oder einen anderen, weil er Euch nicht göttlich genug scheint. Kunststillerische Schlagwörter sind gefährlich. Nach der Vorwurf, das Thema macht es nicht — weder ebend noch in aller Zukunft. Am meisten haben Herzen — am meisten ist deutsche Art zu erkennen. Ein Schüler ist der Deutsche.

Ich kenne echte anrechte deutsche Männer der Kunst, deren Wert doch sehr mißachtet wird. Besser, reiner sind sie als viele, die sich laut bekennen. Eine Gedächtnis kann sehr heil sein. Haben Sie Mißtrauen gegen die gefassten Urteil. Denken Sie daran, daß wir nicht so glücklich waren, da kein gemeinsamer Welt über uns ausgesprochen wurde. Es wurde kein Vorhang vor uns aufgerissen. Jeder Edele mußte seinen Glauben allein befehlen tragen — wenn er nicht in einem Künstlerverein als verkannter Meister sein Leben fristen mochte. Hier liegt viel edles deutsches Geistes.

Man will wieder ein hartes deutsches Volk leben und seine Form finden und seine Kunst. Ihr Jungen sollt ihr schaffen! Hochachtungsvoll steht das Ziel!

Georg Kolbe

vorgelassen, nur um das freudvolle Kelles willen, aber gar um das Eigenwillige abzuschaffen. Er darf auch die Bürger auf merkwürdig erscheinende Kunst hinweisen. Er soll sich dabei allerdings weitgehend des Platz der Mittel bedienen — Breiten hat seit Jahrhunderten in der Akademie der Künste ein vorzügliches Instrument.

Erstarrt bei künftlich mit Recht vor der fernmenschlichen Veralgemeinerung gewarnt, nach der die Technik der Feind der Seele ist. Ich sehe mit ihm in unerschöpflichen Angriff auf so etwas, das uns im Wettbewerb der Völker in eine schäme Lage bringen könnte. Aber ich merke ebenso heilig vor dem Zehler der vorrevolutionären Willenshaft, die da zu weigt, die Welt der Kunst, des Dichters und des Redners zu verabschieden und für heilig zu erklären; mir ist, als wäre ich die nächste Zeit einen überlappenden Zustand gegen die nur zivilisatorischen Fortschritte der Technik bringend, die langweilig wie ein abstrakter Monismus wirken, und als bringe das Verlangen



Prof. Georg Kolbe

Jüngling, Bronze

4 Georg Kolbe's text "An die deutschen Studenten!" (To the German Students!) in: *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung. Kampfblatt der deutschen Studenten* 2, no. 9, May 31, 1934, p. 3

the boundaries of art, to clearly separate the spirits, and to irreproachably distinguish the sick [people and works] from the healthy"²²—Kolbe wrote to the author of the article, Hannes Kremer, who was also the head of the cultural headquarters of the Reich Leadership of the NS German Students' League and who had asked him the previous year for the position statement "An die deutschen Studenten!" Kolbe now explained to the young man: "I myself was appointed as a responsible member of the admissions jury, and I know what I did." And he continued: "Everything that was subsequently taken away in Munich, I fully stand behind as German works of art. Perhaps you are not at all familiar with these rejected works? I therefore tell you that not a single one of them belonged in the slightest to the category of those which you rightly critique in your article."²³

Kolbe's Stance

Kolbe felt that his colleagues were being judged unfairly, even by National Socialist standards. What he thought of the "rightly" criticized category, and who he counted among them, is not known. For Kolbe was committed to those modernists who were appreciated by national conservative circles and who had signaled their willingness to compromise through words and works. The fact that he was keen to remove his companions from the "firing line" is quite understandable, and his demand that they finally be included was anything but absurd: Heckel and Nolde were supported by some of the same patrons as

Kolbe, for example the industrialists and NSDAP members Wilhelm-Adolf Farenholtz in Magdeburg and Ernst Henke in Essen, whose political loyalty was not in doubt; and the same journalists who wrote about Kolbe—Fritz Hellwag, Bruno E. Werner, Paul Fechter, Gerd Theunissen—also positively reviewed the works of those already often ostracized after 1933. Kolbe's plea is supplemented by an article by the Hitler Youth leader Martin Hieronimi entitled "Jugend spricht. Völkisch or "Popular"? (Der nationalsozialistische Kunstanspruch und seine Verwirklichung in der Gegenwart)" (The Youth Speaks. Völkisch or "Popular"? [The National Socialist Claim to Art and its Realization in the Present]), which the sculptor included in his collection of newspaper clippings and commented on with the words "excellent and courageous"—rare praise in Kolbe's colored-pencil marginal notes. In the article, the author warns against rejecting things "which, despite their inner complexity, are thoroughly German and völkisch."²⁴

How, then, can Kolbe's cultural-political views in these early years of National Socialism be summarized? Apart from his conviction that the concept of "völkisch" (national-racial) in art was, in his opinion, too narrow, and that some of his colleagues also deserved to be appreciated by the National Socialists, much remains unclear about Kolbe's attitude toward National Socialism. A review of the archival documents in the Georg Kolbe Museum reveals numerous observations that suggest an ambivalent relationship to National Socialist cultural policies. It is surprising, for example, that Kolbe agreed with some of the statements made by the culturally conservative activist and opponent of modern art, Alfred Rosenberg, on the reorientation of art policy. In late September 1934, Kolbe commented in red pencil on Rosenberg's speech entitled "Die kommende Kunst wird monumental, werkgerecht und artgemäß sein" (The Forthcoming Art Will Be Monumental, True to the Work, and Appropriate to the Race). In the text, he found the passage on the struggle against national and religious kitsch to be "good"; he also liked Rosenberg's establishment of a connection between the Germanic people and the Greek brother nation.²⁵ Rosenberg's preference for an antique ideal of the human body was, under certain circumstances, a welcome confirmation of Kolbe's own work for, as late as the end of January 1933, Kolbe had complained that he was always ranked behind Ernst Barlach in the press coverage. At that time, he had written about his colleague Barlach: "He is and remains the awe-inspiring sculptor of the German soul—despite the fact that he often forms poorly and weakly—even the Nazis are beginning to pay homage to him."²⁶

Rosenberg's statements may thus have reassured Kolbe, for a certain rivalry with his fellow sculptors runs like a thread throughout Kolbe's career. Incidentally, the fact that Kolbe was still writing about the "Nazis" in January 1933 certainly suggests an inner distance from the NSDAP. In the first months after the seizure of power, Kolbe, too, would have been unsettled by the internal party squabbles and unsolicited decision-making at the base. The following comment from February 1933 is to be understood in this context: "How happy I am not to have an office: what loathsome fellows one must certainly have to encounter there!"²⁷ Here, Kolbe was presumably commenting on all those party lackeys who had gained the upper hand with the election victory. Both statements come at the beginning of twelve years of NS rule, in which party and state soon became

indistinguishable from one another, with the result that Kolbe increasingly came to terms with the situation and established himself within the regime.

This approximation was certainly also due to Kolbe's strong desire for commissions and recognition. Any attempt at a more concrete assessment of Kolbe's political views will inevitably remain fragmentary, since Kolbe, unlike many other artists, was very reluctant to comment on contemporary politics. However, he was a critical reader and closely followed developments in the cultural sector through his impressively diligent reading of newspapers. Two examples: He worked through Hitler's Nuremberg "Day of Culture" on September 5, 1934, in red crayon, putting a question mark over, among other things, Hitler's announcement, also relevant to him, that "perhaps the greatest cultural and artistic commissioning of all time" would pass over those whom Hitler called "charlatans."²⁸ What might he have thought of this announcement? Without further commentary in the margins, it is difficult to interpret what he meant by this emphasis. Another article Kolbe read carefully was about the two-year anniversary of the founding of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts on November 15, 1935. In it, underlined in red with a ruler, are, among other things, Goebbels's announcements regarding discrimination against Jewish artists: "The Reich Chamber of Culture is now free of Jews. Jews are no longer active in the cultural life of our people. Therefore, a Jew cannot be a member of a chamber."²⁹ Nor is it possible to reconstruct from this underlining how Kolbe—or perhaps his son-in-law Kurt von Keudell, with whom he shared the newspapers and who could have also marked these passages—stood with regard to one of the most important features of NS ideology: the systematic persecution of Jews, which also affected cultural policy.

"Call of the Cultural Workers"

Often mentioned in Kolbe literature in connection with the artist himself during the National Socialist era was his signature on the "Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden" (Call of the Cultural Workers) of August 16, 1934.³⁰ At first glance, the signing of this declaration of loyalty to Adolf Hitler in the context of the referendum of August 19, 1934 (regarding the unification of the offices of Reich President and Reich Chancellor) leaves little room for interpretation. How could it not be interpreted as pandering?³¹ However, it should be taken into account that presumably also in Kolbe's case—as in the cases of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Emil Nolde—the Reich Chamber of Culture asked for the signature only three days in advance and even enclosed the postage for the reply telegram.³² It must have been difficult to refuse such an urgent request. The manner in which Kolbe was approached puts into perspective the suspicion of ingratiation that has also existed for decades with regard to Barlach, Heckel, and Mies. In fact, the publication of the appeal was closely linked to the internal party struggle. With the list of signatories, the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda wanted to cleverly include the artists who were controversial within the party, such as Mies, Nolde, Heckel, and Barlach. The latter, for example, commented sarcastically that at least now he could no longer be accused

Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden

Die unterzeichneten Persönlichkeiten richten folgenden Aufruf an die Öffentlichkeit:

Volksgenossen, Freunde!

Wir haben einen der Größten deutscher Geschichte zu Grabe geleitet. An seinem Sarge sprach der junge Führer des Reiches für uns alle und legte Bekenntnis ab für sich und den Zukunftswillen der Nation. Wort und Leben setzte er zum Pfand für die Wiederaufrichtung unseres Volkes das in Einheit und Ehre leben und Bürgen des Friedens sein will, der die Völker bindet. Wir glauben an diesen Führer, der unsern heißen Wunsch nach Eintracht erfüllt hat. Wir vertrauen seinem Werk, das Hingabe fordert jenseits aller kittelnden Vernünftelei, wir setzen unsere Hoffnung auf den Mann, der über Mensch und Ding hinaus in Gottes Vorsehung gläubig ist. Weil der Dichter und Künstler nur in gleicher Treue zum Volk zu schaffen vermag und weil er von der gleichen und tiefsten Ueberzeugung kündet, daß das heiligste Recht der Völker in der eigenen Schicksalsbestimmung besteht, gehören wir zu des Führers Gefolgschaft. Wir fordern nichts anderes für uns, als was wir anderen Völkern ohne Vorbehalte zugestehen, wir müssen es für dieses Volk, das Deutsche Volk, fordern, weil seine Einheit, Freiheit und Ehre unser aller Not und Wille ist.

Der Führer hat uns wiederum aufgefordert, in Vertrauen und Treue zu ihm zu stehen. Niemand von uns wird fehlen, wenn es gilt, das zu bekunden.

Berner Neuemburg, Ernst Barlach, Rudolf G. Binding, Hans Friedrich Blund, Verleger Alfred Bruckmann, Richard Euringer, Professor Emil Fahrenkamp, Erich Feyerabend, Gustav Frenssen, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Professor Dr. Eberhard Hanffstaengl, Guitav Havemann, Eich Heckel, Professor Ernst Hönig, Heinz Ihler, Hanns Johst, Georg Kolbe, Erwin Kolbenheyer, Werner Krauß, Franz Lent, Heinrich Lersch, Professor Karl Lörcher, Architekt Walter March, Agnes Miegel, Böries Freiherr von Münchhausen, Emil Nolde, Paul Pfund, Hans Pfizner, Professor Dr. Wilhelm Rinder, Wies van der Rohe, Professor Dr. h. c. Paul Schulze-Naumburg, Hermann Stehr, Richard Strauß, Joseph Thoral, Generalintendant Heinz Tietjen, Oberbürgermeister Dr. Weidemann, Arnold Weinmüller.

5 "Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden" (Call of the Cultural Workers), published in various daily newspapers, here without indication of the name of the newspaper, probably around August 18, 1934. In the right margin, Kolbe's comment on the composition of the signatories from artistically opposing camps: "köstliches Nebeneinander!" (delightful juxtaposition!)

Köstliches Nebeneinander!

of “cultural Bolshevism.”³³ Kolbe probably only noticed the range of signatories in the printed newspaper—he commented on it as a “delightful juxtaposition!” (fig. 5).³⁴ The publication of the appeal in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and elsewhere then also surprised Alfred Rosenberg, who complained in two letters to Goebbels personally that Nolde and Mies had been approached; finally, he even wrote to the head of the Reich Chancellery.³⁵ Compared to this power struggle over cultural policy, the actual content of the appeal played a subordinate role. It was rather the list of signatories that caused a sensation, not only within the party but also in art circles. Significantly, in an NSDAP party court case, the Hamburg museum curator Harald Busch defended his own advocacy of Expressionism by referring to the “Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden” and its signatories. To demonstrate the ambivalent attitude of the state and the party toward modern artists, Busch emphasized that Nolde, Heckel, and Barlach had been asked to sign by no less an authority than the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda—“together with those who had never yet been suspected and misunderstood, such as Schultze-Naumburg, Kolbe, and others.”³⁶ Busch argued logically that, given the list of names compiled by Goebbels’s staff, he could hardly be blamed for his own presentation of Nolde paintings in the Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Kolbe’s Self-Perception

With regard to Kolbe, it is noteworthy that Busch included him among those “who have never been suspected and misunderstood.” This assessment differs from Kolbe’s own self-perception, for the sculptor was not at all sure of his position in the first years after 1933. In fact, in 1936, his work was rejected as “Eastern European” and “African” in an internal report from the Reich Security Headquarters to the Gestapo.³⁷ The Office for the Preservation of Art, Cultural-Political Archive, accused him, among other things, of being a member of the Workers’ Council for Art, from which Kolbe rigorously distanced himself in 1937, dismissing it as a “spool” and a “small absurdity.”³⁸ The internal letter of 1936 remained without consequences and is by no means typical of Kolbe’s reception under National Socialism; nevertheless, it testifies to certain problems of attribution.³⁹ Even without knowledge of this extreme defamation, Kolbe carefully registered the rejections, was deeply dismayed by the dismantling of several of his works, and lamented that, in the years after 1933, he initially received fewer commissions than he had hoped. In August 1933, he wrote that “no one asks for ‘nothing.’”⁴⁰ A perhaps rather curious example of the fact that many commissions passed him by is the acceptance of the death mask of Paul von Hindenburg by Josef Thorak, a commission Kolbe commented on as a “put-up job.”⁴¹ And even a project promised to him such as the memorial in Stralsund which he called the “group of soldiers” was accompanied by uncertainty. In March 1935, he wrote about the planned erection of the soldiers’ memorial: “Who knows if this can be done without obstacles. There are still too many forces in opposition.”⁴² The fact that, in the meantime, Kolbe had been chosen at all also had something to do with the fact that Barlach, who had



6 Georg Kolbe, Stralsund war memorial, 1934/35, bronze on stone pedestal, h. 250 cm, historical photograph

originally been intended, had been rejected as a “cultural Bolshevik”⁴³ by the Reich Warriors’ Association, among others. Kolbe, on the other hand, was confronted with rather annoying differences of opinion, since the NSDAP district leader felt that his two male figures were too athletic and not heroic enough (fig. 6).⁴⁴ What Kolbe himself perceived as an affront and an ideologically motivated, fundamental criticism should not, in retrospect, be judged solely from his perspective. Another example from the same year: In the fall of 1935, Kolbe was asked by the responsible committee to tone up his *Ruhender Athlet* (Resting Athlete) for the Sportforum.⁴⁵ In October 1935 he therefore complained that his figures for the Sportforum were not what “the people out there want” and that they were “perceived as one-sidedly artistic”; he even came to the conclusion that he “was not seriously considered for the great tasks.”⁴⁶ Even with such an assertion, a distinction must be made between Kolbe’s self-perception and how he was perceived by others. For a representative of Weimar sculpture, Kolbe was surprisingly successful, more so than many of his sidelined colleagues although less so than Josef Thorak. And not all of the resistance and criticism Kolbe encountered in connection with commissions was politically motivated. In March 1936, for example, Kolbe was outraged by a newspaper reviewer who had written about his “limitations.” He commented: “How could this stupid devil have gotten so far ahead? Most likely as a ‘stowaway.’”⁴⁷ Was Kolbe surprised, for instance, that a journalist was still writing critically about him? And in July 1936, shortly before the opening of

the Olympic Games, Kolbe expressed his disappointment on a picture postcard showing an aerial view of the Olympic Village that he had not received free tickets to the Games. He wrote: "I will see only the 'Führer's' march [into the stadium]."48

This example also suggests that, compared to many of his artist colleagues, Kolbe was complaining on a high level. For while Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, for example, who was a frequent guest of Kolbe's, saw his hopes for official recognition shattered—first with the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in the summer of 1937, then with the imposition of a professional ban in 1941—an objective look at Kolbe's situation with regard to commissions shows that it had already begun to pick up momentum in 1936, although his annual income had already been comparatively high in previous years.⁴⁹ Incidentally, Kolbe's moderate health also affected his productivity—a not insignificant factor. In 1937 he admitted: "If I were only between forty and fifty today, the situation [referring to his studio, which he jokingly referred to as a 'factory'] would look much better—but now my shaking bones are a serious hindrance. At least I am still working hard and running the show."⁵⁰ In better health, Kolbe would have gladly taken on many more commissions.

The Request for a Portrait Session with Adolf Hitler

How did the sculptor Kolbe manage to maintain his successful course under National Socialism—despite occasional setbacks?⁵¹ After all, a *conditio sine qua non* in the National Socialist dictatorship was to sufficiently demonstrate not only artistic talent but also one's own political reliability. Kolbe, however, was more circumspect; he did not join the NSDAP, but only the National Socialist People's Welfare organization, as, incidentally, did Mies van der Rohe and Max Pechstein. An overt conformism was at odds with his elitist view of society, and he was suspicious of anything too popular.⁵² However, he was open-minded enough about the National Socialist regime and Adolf Hitler that in March 1934, through an acquaintance in Munich, he asked the Reich Chancellery for the opportunity to study Hitler at close range in order to create a large bust. The hitherto unpublished correspondence in the files of the Reich Chancellery in the Federal Archives in Berlin could be viewed in its original form by Elisa Tamaschke, Georg Kolbe Museum, in January 2023. It was already mentioned in an essay by Josephine Gabler in 1997 but was not commented on further at that time.⁵³

Elisabeth Feder, the author of the letter to Hitler and his undersecretary Lammers, was the well-connected wife of Gottfried Feder, born in 1883, who knew Hitler personally and who had already given a speech at the party congress of 1923 [!] as financial policy spokesman of the NSDAP, founded in 1920, immediately after Hitler. In June 1933, Feder was appointed undersecretary in the Reich Ministry of Economics; at the end of March 1934, Hitler also appointed him Reich Commissioner for Housing Affairs. A co-founder of the Kampfbund Deutscher Architekten und Ingenieure (KDAI, League of German Architects and Engineers), he had stated in mid-December 1933 that once political opponents had been eliminated, "the way would soon be clear for the penetration of

art and science.”⁵⁴ It is not known when the connection between Kolbe and the Feders was established. It probably came about through the Munich-based painter Columbus [known as Colombo] Max, whom Kolbe knew from his student days and who wrote to Kolbe at the end of 1933 to remind him of himself.⁵⁵ In Kolbe’s appointment calendar, a visit by Colombo Max’s wife is noted in December 1934, together with a “Miss Feder.”⁵⁶ It therefore seems quite plausible that there was contact during these months and that Elisabeth Feder’s letter to Adolf Hitler (additionally addressed to the head of the Reich Chancellery, Undersecretary Hans Heinrich Lammers) was written in consultation with Kolbe. Here, it is stated:

“Prof. Georg Kolbe, Berlin, would like to make a large bust of the Führer and asks for a very short and casual session while the Führer is working or signing papers. Prof. Kolbe feels that it would be sufficient for him to study the Führer once up close in a relaxed setting. Prof. Kolbe is one of the best sculptors in Germany; there are many of his sculptures in public places in Berlin. He would then take the liberty of bringing the monograph of his works and presenting it to the Führer. He is a professor at the municipal Academy of Art in Berlin and has a very nice studio in the building on Heerstrasse. If you could forward this request, another first-class bust of the Führer would be attainable. With best thanks for your efforts and the request to contact Prof. Kolbe, I remain in humble gratitude, Heil Hitler, Elisabeth Feder.”⁵⁷

A response to Kolbe’s request came quickly. On the very next day, after personal consultation with Hitler, Undersecretary Lammers wrote a letter of refusal. In this letter, which was addressed not to Elisabeth Feder but to Kolbe personally, Lammers stated:

“Dear Professor! Mrs. Elisabeth Feder has asked me on your behalf to persuade the Reich Chancellor to grant you a meeting for the production of a bust. I have gladly presented your request to the Reich Chancellor, but to my regret I must inform you that the Reich Chancellor refuses on principle to make himself available for meetings for the production of a bust or a painting. I may humbly suggest that you try to get close to the Reich Chancellor on the occasion of a public event in order to study his features.”⁵⁸

After the war ended, Kolbe was thus spared having to explain himself in favor of a Hitler portrait, in addition to his bust of Franco. The letter of response from the Reich Chancellery has not been preserved in the Kolbe estate, nor is there any correspondence between Kolbe and Elisabeth Feder. This makes it impossible to reconstruct the initiative more precisely. For example, it is unclear whether Kolbe made a second attempt to portray Hitler in the late summer of 1939. According to the executor of the estate of Kolbe’s granddaughter and biographer, Maria von Tiesenhausen, Kolbe was commissioned to create a portrait of Hitler at the beginning of the Second World War. The personal

initiative of 1934 remained unmentioned. According to the granddaughter's recollection, Kolbe agreed, albeit hesitantly and "with a feeling of uneasiness." There was allegedly only one session, and a bust did not come about, because Kolbe had estimated twelve to fourteen sessions.⁵⁹ Such accounts should be treated with caution. The files of the Reich Chancellery suggest that sculptors were not commissioned to make portraits of Hitler; quite the contrary. As a rule, written requests for a portrait session to produce oil paintings or busts were promptly declined, usually with the recommendation to use Heinrich Hoffmann's photographs as a guide, and more rarely—as in March 1934 to Kolbe—with the suggestion to study Adolf Hitler's facial features at a reception or other event.⁶⁰ It also seems absurd that Kolbe would have requested twelve to fourteen sessions, since in March 1934 he had only suggested a "short and casual session." The oral recollection of Kolbe's granddaughter therefore seems questionable in many respects. It is conceivable that, in the alleged incident of 1939, Kolbe's request of 1934 was changed to the effect that it was no longer Kolbe who wanted to create a "large bust of Hitler," but rather that the commission was given to *him*. The two letters of March 1934 can also be used to interpret another story, one that is not time-specific. According to Kolbe's private pupil Liselotte Specht-Büchting, Kolbe commented on a request for a portrait of Hitler with the following statement: "He had portrayed Mr. Müller and Mr. Meier, why shouldn't he portray Mr. Hitler?"⁶¹ According to this recollection, the commission was subsequently not taken any further. Does this anecdote also have its origin in Kolbe's request of March 1934? Is it possible that the incident was narratively reshaped in such a way that Kolbe could no longer be perceived as an admirer of Hitler, but rather as a steadfast executioner of public commissions who relativized Hitler's significance by comparing him to "Mr. Müller and Mr. Meier," even making a joke about it?

The Franco Portrait and Its Public Reception

If there is a kernel of truth in the recollection that reached the executor of Kolbe's estate that a Hitler portrait by Kolbe was in the planning stages in the late summer of 1939, then the renewed attempt may have had something to do with the success of Kolbe's bust of Franco (fig. 7). In late 1938, Kolbe had portrayed Franco during the final months of the Spanish Civil War. He traveled to Spain for this purpose and visited the dictator in his private home in Burgos. The portrait was commissioned by HISMA in Salamanca, a German-Spanish front company set up with Hitler's approval to supply Franco's troops with weapons, war materials, and fuel.⁶² The bust of Franco, created by a German sculptor, was intended as a symbol of the German-Spanish alliance and was sent to Hitler by HISMA's managing director, Johannes E. F. Bernhardt, for his fiftieth birthday in April 1939. A few weeks earlier, Kolbe had also sent Franco a cast of the bust as a gift, accompanied by a reverential letter.⁶³ While Franco returned Kolbe's favor with a medal, Hitler thanked Bernhardt for the "bronze bust of Generalissimo Franco created by Professor Kolbe," about which he was "genuinely" pleased (fig. 8).⁶⁴ It is possible that Kolbe's portrait of

7 Georg Kolbe, *Francisco Franco*, 1938, bronze, h. 31 cm, historical photograph



Franco and its overwhelmingly positive reception in the German press in the spring of 1939 triggered Kolbe's desire to make a new attempt and once again propose to Hitler the creation of a portrait—but now with reference to the success of his Franco bust. This is conceivable, but it is also possible that the granddaughter's recollection is wrong in its chronology and refers to the earlier request of March 1934.

Kolbe's portrait of Franco was probably the only single work whose creation had been reported in virtually every region of Germany. While a photograph of the portrait session with Kolbe and Franco appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and several local dailies in early February 1939 (fig. 9), along with other short reports (roughly forty such clippings are preserved in an envelope in the Georg Kolbe Museum), Kolbe's report "Wie ich Franco modellierte" (How I Modeled Franco) followed in the subsequent weeks and was also printed in many newspapers. In it, Kolbe describes his impressions gathered during three portrait sessions in Franco's study in his private home in Burgos and sketches the image of a stern but amiable soldier and family man (fig. 10).⁶⁵ The Kolbe-Franco press coverage in February and March 1939, which coincided with the final phase of the Civil War and Franco's imminent victory, ended with the news that Kolbe had been awarded the Grand Order of the Red Arrows on May 20, 1939, the day after the great victory parade in Madrid. Since Heinrich Himmler also received the order, Kolbe's name now appeared in many newspaper reports next to that of "Reichsführer-SS Himmler."⁶⁶ Another envelope

Der Führer und Reichskanzler

Berchtesgaden, den 23. Juni 39

Sehr geehrter Herr Bernhardt!

Ihnen und den übrigen Herren der Hisma-Gemeinschaft danke ich herzlichst für die von Professor Kolbe geschaffene Bronzebüste des Generalissimus Franco, die Sie mir als Geburtstagsgabe durch den Chef meiner Präsidialkanzlei übergeben liessen. Ich habe mich sowohl über Ihr treues Gedenken als über das Kunstwerk selbst aufrichtig gefreut.

Mit Deutschem Gruß!



Herrn Johannes E.F. Bernhardt,
Leiter der Hisma,
Salamanca.

8 Letter from Adolf Hitler to Johannes E. F. Bernhardt, managing director of the German-Spanish front company HISMA in Salamanca, June 23, 1939, notarized copy from the estate of Maria von Tiesenhausen, Georg Kolbe Museum Archive, Berlin



9 Francisco Franco at a portrait session with Georg Kolbe in Franco's house in Burgos, Spain, November 1938, published in the newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, 29 January 1939

in the museum contains more than forty press reports from May 20/21, 1939, entitled, for example: "Himmler and Kolbe Honored by Franco." Kolbe was very pleased with the public reception. In his draft of a personal letter to Franco, dated March 17, 1939, he proudly noted the "interest and acclamation" of the public: "Your great kindness enabled me to create your portrait, which is everywhere received with great interest and acclaim by the German public." And further: "I therefore take the liberty of presenting you with my work in bronze and humbly ask you to do me the honor of accepting it."⁶⁷ Franco repaid Kolbe by awarding him the Grand Order of the Red Arrows in May. Recognition from one of the most important allies, who had just defeated the Communists in his country—and this with the help of German troops—was an unmistakable signal of Kolbe's political reliability. It also illustrated the international reach and appreciation of his art.

Spanish Civil War

Even then, however, Kolbe's portrait of Franco was met with incomprehension. Kolbe mentioned this to the emigrated art dealer Curt Valentin, perhaps as a proactive response to the many press reports that had just appeared: "There are people who cringe at the name [Franco]. But I found a splendid chivalrous man. I saw much of the country and its strengths."⁶⁸ Given Kolbe's reluctance to comment on politics and politicians, it

Wie ich Franco modellierte

„Ich hatte den Auftrag bekommen, Franco zu modellieren“, erzählt Professor Kolbe. Wir sitzen in dem vertraulichen, lichten Atelier seines hellen, umfäumten Hauses an einer der weltlichen Anfallstrassen Berlins. „Ich hatte erklärt, den Auftrag nur dann zu übernehmen, wenn man mir Gelegenheit gäbe, nach dem Leben zu schaffen. Man war einverstanden.“

Die Reise ging nach Saragossa, wo ich verabredetermaßen Franco treffen sollte. Als ich ankam, war er gerade nach Burao gefahren. „Sie werden nie eine Skulptur bekommen“, prophezeiten spanische Kollegen. Am besten habe damit sie zehn Minuten.“

Ich wartete. Als Franco aber nicht zurückkam, fuhr ich ihm nach Burao nach. Schon Zaar dauerte es, bevor er Zeit für mich fand. Dann aber fand er sofort zu meiner Verfügung.

Durch einen Kordon von Wachen gelangte ich zu ihm. Ich bin immer nervös, bevor es so weit ist, daß ich an eine Arbeit herangehen kann. Sobald ich aber Franco sah, streute ich mich über meine Aufgabe. Franco ist 46, von kleiner Statur. Sein Haar scheint an grau zu werden. Er ist ein strenger, verschlossener Soldat, ganz unauffällig und sehr lebenswürdig. Da ich nicht spanisch verstand, sprachen wir französisch.

Ich hatte mir drei Skulpturen ausbedungen. Sie fanden im Arbeitszimmer seines Wohnhauses in Burao statt. Da es an sein Arbeitszimmer antrat, konnte ich Familienmitglieder ein und aus geben sehen. Es ist ja bekannt, daß Franco ein sehr inniges Familienleben führt. Außer seiner Frau und seiner einzigen Tochter Carmenita leben noch sein Schwager, dessen Gattin und Kinder in dem großen, von einem Garten umgebenen Hause.

Man hatte Franco zur Einführung ein Buch über mich gegeben, in dem meine Plakate abgebildet sind, worüber er mir sehr interessiert sein Gefallen ausdrückte. Etwas wunderte mich diese Zellenanbahnung, weil mein gesamtes Werk ja aus nackten Menschenfiguren besteht, und man in Spanien in diesen Dingen doch sehr streng denkt.

Franco hatte sich vorgeschickt, daß er sitzen bleiben könne, während ich arbeite. Als ich ihn darauf hinwies, daß er sitzen müsse, sagte er sehr lebenswürdig: „Sitz, dann sehe ich.“ Und er hat geblieben, unbeweglich, ausdauernd, jedesmal fast zwei Stunden.

Während dieser Zeit empfing er seine Adjutanten und Generale zu Vorträgen, diktierte, gab Befehle, arbeitete angestrengt und fast pausenlos. Manchmal hat ich Etwas mehr nach links... nach rechts... Dann mußten sich diese Männer



Die Franco-Plastik von Kolbe
 Aufn. Schwartzkopff

auf seinen Stuhl so weit wegdrehen, bis ich ihn sehen konnte, wie ich wollte.“

Worüber hat sich Franco während des Modellierens mit Ihnen unterhalten, Herr Professor?

„Von mir nahm er scheinbar überhaupt keine Notiz. Denn und wann ersuchte ich ihn allerdings dabei, daß er mich verloben beobachtete.“

„Aber irgend etwas wird er doch in zwei Stunden gefast haben“, werfe ich ein. „Über Sie werden etwas gefast haben!“

Kolbe überlegt. „Doch“, meint er, „wir haben über's Weiter gesprochen. — Franco war ein ideales Modell. Es gab nicht die actuellen Schwierigkeiten. Manche Bildbauer machen sich Zeichnenstücken und Ausnahmen des Modells als Arbeitsgrundlage. Obwohl die Zeit zur Ausführung der Arbeit äußerst knapp bemessen war, wollte ich gern Franco das Entstehen seines Bildnislopes miterleben lassen. Ich hatte mir also ein Gerüst aufgebaut und einen Rahmen Ton mitgebracht, und so konnte er nun den Fortschritt der Arbeit verfolgen. Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß ihm meine Arbeitstechnik einen starken Eindruck machte. Denn, als sich der Kopf der Vollendung näherte, sagte er einmal ganz spontan: „Es ist doch wunderbar, wie ein Künstler die Sache anpaßt!“ Und er hat mir von selbst noch eine vierte Sitzung an.“

Das Arbeiten ist ja auch eine Jagd gewesen. Ich mußte in den wenigen Stunden mit äußerster Konzentration arbeiten und war darüber jedesmal vollkommen erschöpft. Alle Teile und Teilschen dieses durchgehenden Gefühls mußten eingebracht werden.

Sie gehörten ja ihm, nicht mir. Ich sollte sie erst übernehmen, begreifen, wiedergeben. Sehen Sie sich einmal den Kopf an“, werde ich aufgefordert.

Das Kunstwerk steht auf einem kleinen Podest und macht auf den Betrachter einen Eindruck von fast bestiger Unmittelbarkeit. An diesem Kopf hat das Leben modelliert, hat jeden Muskel herausgearbeitet.

„Sehen Sie sich diesen Mund an... wie knapp und deidiert... und die Nase, die Augen. Das sind Formen, hundert von Jahren alt.“

„Was hat Ihnen Franco zum Abschied gesagt, Herr Professor?“ „Ich habe noch immer auf eine persönliche kleine Handbemerkung, ein paar interessante Gesprächsleben oder dergleichen. „Gar nichts. Was sollte er sagen? Wir haben uns mit einem gegenseitigen Danke schön! verabschiedet.“

Weiter nichts? „Ich bin enttäuscht, aber nur im ersten Augenblick. Denn findet das gemeinsame Schmecken zweier großer Männer nicht eine sehr bereichende Form des Einverständnisses?“

loz.

10 Lotte Zielesch's reportage „Wie ich General Franco modellierte.“ (Gespräch mit Professor Kolbe), (How I Modeled General Franco), published in various newspapers between late February and early May 1939, partially on the occasion of the German-Spanish Week of Culture in mid-March, here in the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, May 6, 1939

is surprising that on several occasions he was explicit and downright enthusiastic about Franco. Knowledge of Franco's role in the Spanish Civil War apparently did not plunge Kolbe into conflicts of conscience, as Heartfield imagines in his photomontage. However, and this is also noteworthy, nowhere do we get an assessment of the Civil War from Kolbe. This is despite the fact that Kolbe and Günter von Scheven, who accompanied him on the trip, visited a front area during their four-week visit to Spain in November 1938.⁶⁹ Von Scheven reported: “I had to build a bridge between the horrors of the war and the beauty of the south. Light and darkness were always close together. Above all, Kolbe created a good portrait of Franco and thus ensured the success of the whole enterprise, despite all the tribulations.”⁷⁰ Which tribulations and which horrors of the war they actually saw are not mentioned. Kolbe would not have been sufficiently informed about the

deployment of the Legion Condor, a unit of the German Luftwaffe that was instrumental in the attack on the civilian population of Guernica. However, Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937) had been on display a few hundred yards from Kolbe's sculpture *Große Verkündung* (Large Proclamation, 1937) at the 1937 Exposition Internationale in Paris. The brutality of the Civil War was, of course, blamed in German propaganda not on Franco but on the Republicans. In view of Kolbe's statements, we can safely assume that he was on the side of Franco's nationalists⁷¹—unlike numerous leftist-leaning artists and intellectuals in England and France, and unlike John Heartfield in Prague and later in London. That Kolbe was understood by the NS regime as part of its ideological intervention in the Spanish Civil War is evident not only in the coverage of the Franco portrait, but also in the fact that he received an invitation to a reception on June 7, 1939, on the occasion of the return of the Condor Legion, after the secret of the Legion's existence had been revealed and was now being exploited all the more effectively for propaganda purposes.⁷² This reception at the Berlin Zoo was preceded the day before by a grand parade through the Brandenburg Gate with a state ceremony in the Lustgarten—a meticulously planned spectacle.

The Development of Kolbe's Reception under National Socialism

How did the commission come about in the first place, however? In 1980, Ellen Bernhardt, the wife of the aforementioned initiator Johannes E. F. Bernhardt, who was described as a “mediator between Franco and Hitler,” explained to Kolbe's granddaughter, Maria von Tiesenhausen: “The sculptors Breker and Thorak put us off somewhat because of their monumentality; moreover, they were busy with state commissions. Prof. Kolbe appealed to us more because of his humanity, which is expressed in all his works.”⁷³ Kolbe accepted immediately. Perhaps it was a special satisfaction for him that he had been asked, rather than Breker or Thorak. He had an ambivalent relationship with the two younger sculptors—he felt neither an artistic nor a personal connection to them. And at the same time, he had to accept that, from the second half of the 1930s on, he was regularly mentioned in the same breath—if not alongside or even behind them—in the media coverage.⁷⁴ In 1937, Thorak was even referred to as Kolbe's “twin brother,” while Kolbe's circle of acquaintances was amused by the “inflated rubber muscles” of “Pneumothorak.”⁷⁵

This shift could be summarized as the replacement of one narrative by another. As a representative of a free, pluralistic modernism and as a member of a circle that had been presented for the last time in the 1938 London exhibition, Kolbe had become invisible in Germany. Instead, by the end of the 1930s at the latest, he had advanced to being a representative of a national sculptural art that, in current news coverage, could no longer be separated from the NS state and its propaganda. A press photograph from July 1940 shows Kolbe sitting in the first row during Alfred Rosenberg's speech at the opening of the exhibition *Meisterwerke der Plastik in Berlin* (Masterpieces of Sculpture in Berlin), a show that aptly summarized the new canon—Karl Albiker, Breker, and Thorak, as well as



11 Georg Kolbe (first row, far left) listens to Alfred Rosenberg during his opening speech for the exhibition *Meisterwerke der Plastik* (Masterpieces of Sculpture) at the Künstlerhaus of the Verein Berliner Künstler, Berlin. The Italian ambassador Dino Alfieri (first row, second from right) was also present at this event, July 1940, historical photograph

Kolbe, Richard Scheibe, and Fritz Klimsch (fig. 11). The fact that Kolbe was also officially appreciated is evidenced amongst other things by the correspondence in preparation for his sixty-fifth birthday in April 1942. Adolf Ziegler suggested that Hitler award Kolbe the Goethe Medal.⁷⁶ The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, which initiated a congratulatory telegram from Goebbels and at the same time ordered the press release on this, also endorsed the proposal. The bearer of the news was Undersecretary Leopold Gutterer, who paid a surprise courtesy visit to Kolbe with two members of his staff. Was Kolbe pleased? Perhaps less than one might imagine, had he been aware that, the previous year, on May 6, 1941, Gutterer had informed Reinhard Heydrich in anticipatory obedience that his friend Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, as well as Emil Nolde and Edwin Scharff, had been banned from working.⁷⁷ And it was also Gutterer who, in 1940, had introduced an “obligatory marking of Jews” in Germany.⁷⁸ Gutterer is an example of the interconnectedness of different political spheres. Thus, the execution of state commissions was not merely “business as usual,” i.e., what sculptors simply do; Kolbe’s work and his person were instrumentalized without Kolbe having to profess himself in so many words.⁷⁹ Kolbe’s willingness to carry out public commissions, to accept honors, and to be celebrated as a sculptor in the politically conformist press had maneuvered him into a situation that was difficult for some to justify after the war.



12 Georg Kolbe, portrait of the Reich Labor Leader Konstantin Hierl, 1942, bronze, h. 50 cm, historical photograph

The painter Karl Hofer wrote to Kolbe at the end of 1945 that it was embarrassing “that you portrayed one or more of the swine for thousands of marks.”⁸⁰ Kolbe probably did not receive “thousands of marks” for his portrait of Franco or the bust of Reich Labor Leader Konstantin Hierl (fig. 12), as Hofer speculated, but his good contact with Hierl, who even became a minister without portfolio in the summer of 1943, led to various opportunities.

Reich Labor Leader Hierl and Hierlshagen

In September 1943, for example, Hierl arranged for his “workmen” to build Kolbe a new impact-resistant bunker and, at the end of 1943,⁸¹ the sculptor was evacuated to Hierlshagen—a labor service settlement in Lower Silesia named after Hierl—where they set up a studio for him in the so-called Kameradschaftsheim, a kind of military social club.⁸² A visit by Hierl is documented by various photographs in the estate (fig. 13), as well as by a newspaper article. Although Kolbe received preferential treatment thanks to Hierl, the conditions in Hierlshagen were modest. Kolbe himself reported: “The higher authorities of the RAD [Reich Labor Service] mean well with me and want to do everything to keep me happy and healthy here.”⁸³ For a later siege of Berlin, Kolbe was to be housed in Bad Belzig in a block of barracks for displaced persons built on the site of a RAD “maidens’ camp.”⁸⁴ After Kolbe’s death, Hierl was sentenced to first three and then five years in a labor camp, but was eventually released early. In the early 1950s, he continued to publish texts in which he did not renounce his National Socialist worldview.



13 Konstantin Hierl's visit to Georg Kolbe in Hierlshagen, 1944, historical photograph from the estate of Maria von Tiesenhausen, Georg Kolbe Museum Archive, Berlin

But what did Kolbe's worldview look like? Even in the last years of the war, he rarely expressed his thoughts on the matter. In a letter—written three weeks after the attack on the Soviet Union—Kolbe showed himself to be thoroughly influenced by NS propaganda:

“Meanwhile, the terrible judgment has fallen upon the Bolsheviks. A world catastrophe has begun. Roaring, bloodthirsty hatred has been given free rein and is rushing upon humanity like a plague. Believe me, it is very hard to sit at home without being able to do or say anything.”⁸⁵

These sentences do not address the war as a universal catastrophe, but rather the threat posed by the Soviet Union. With the “judgement against Bolshevism,” Kolbe adopted a description of the war of conquest and extermination that was common in those weeks, while the plague rushing toward humanity recalls the popular title of Alfred Rosenberg’s book, in which he used the plague as a metaphor for the threat to Europe posed by Bolshevism.⁸⁶ Among Kolbe’s acquaintances who had been drafted was Günter von Scheven, who died on the Eastern Front on March 21, 1942. For Kolbe, this was a particularly hard blow. In an obituary, he quoted from von Scheven’s field letters; in 1944, Kolbe even published a book about him.⁸⁷ Kolbe’s homage to von Scheven—and not least his own letters—testify to the attempt to exaggerate the war and the death of soldiers in a meaningful way, and thus to fit into the cult of the fallen of National Socialist war propaganda.⁸⁸

104 “Franco and Beethoven, how can I manage this?”

The End of the War

In early 1945, Kolbe's fear of revenge and annihilation at the hands of advancing Soviet troops seems to have been great; the suicide rate in eastern Germany rose rapidly during those months. In February 1945, after returning to Berlin, Kolbe feared that the property he had left behind in Hierlshagen would "now be trampled on by the Russians."⁸⁹ Two weeks later, Kolbe asked a friend, a Red Cross matron, how to take the two pills she had once given him, explaining: "It is necessary to know, just in case, with this prospect!"⁹⁰ Kolbe wanted to be prepared for the worst and did not rule out a death of his own choosing. Having survived the end of the war, however,⁹¹ he expressed surprisingly positive views of the Red Army soldiers toward the end of 1945: "The enemy had become a friend from the first minute."⁹² In 1946, Kolbe even wrote that he had had the good fortune to experience "the day of liberation by the Russians as a resurrection,"⁹³ a formulation that perhaps owed something to the addressee of his letter, Erich Cohn, to whom he wanted to reaffirm his rejection of the NS regime, since the New York-based art collector had asked in his last letter about the motives for Kolbe's Franco portrait.⁹⁴

After the war, circumstances had changed, and Kolbe had no difficulty in adjusting to them. While in 1938 he had described the Franco commission as the culmination of his good fortune,⁹⁵ for painters like Nolde it was now a "stroke of good fortune" not to have had such opportunities in the first place.⁹⁶ The Expressionists benefited from being among the victims of NS art policy. Kolbe could not claim this privilege for himself.⁹⁷ His commissions during the National Socialist era raised uncomfortable questions. Karl Hofer accused him of stabbing other artists in the back.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Kolbe himself was unburdened enough that he was asked for a certificate of exoneration in Breker's denazification proceedings, which he kept short and noncommittal. Kolbe attested to Breker's artistic transformation, which "sank under the strongest Nazi influence."⁹⁹ And he claimed to have visited Breker only *once*, and that *before* his rapprochement with Hitler. Had he actually forgotten the various mutual visits that his appointment diaries document for the period beginning in the fall of 1935?¹⁰⁰

This essay has sketched Kolbe as an artist who, at first, was caught between two stools and, in the end, drew ever closer to those whom, in January and February 1933, he had still regarded from a distance and with suspicion as "Nazis" and "despicable fellows." When he stated shortly before his death that he had been able to "keep himself aloof,"¹⁰¹ this may have corresponded to his self-perception; in retrospect, however, such a statement must be put into perspective. For soon, the NSDAP could no longer be separated from the state—a state that granted him an important role as a sculptor and honored him, and which he, Kolbe, by no means categorically rejected. The interplay of personal situation, political developments, and artistic creation created a complex dynamic. Kolbe's dilemma, as visualized by Heartfield in 1938, came back to haunt him a few times in the remaining years of his life (for example, through the uncomfortable questions posed to him by Hofer or Cohn); however—not least because of his career as a sculptor, which

had already reached its zenith before 1933—it hardly played a role in his canonization in the second half of the twentieth century. Kolbe’s partial estate, which only recently returned to the Georg Kolbe Museum after the death of his granddaughter Maria von Tiesenhausen and which contains, for example, some of the previously unpublished letters on the Franco portrait, could—together with new questions posed to art and artists of the modernist period—contribute to a future reassessment.

Notes

- I am very grateful to the staff of the Kolbe Museum, especially Elisa Tamaschke, for providing me with material. I would also like to thank Julia Wallner and Thomas Pavel for their careful reading and helpful comments.
- 1 *Volks-Illustrierte* (VI), no. 29, July 20, 1938. Until 1936, the VI was called *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (AIZ). It was published by Willi Münzenberg.
 - 2 The Heine monument in Frankfurt am Main (1912/13) was torn from its pedestal by SA men in 1933 and damaged in the process; the Heine monument in Düsseldorf (commissioned in 1931) was not even erected. The Rathenau fountain (1928–30) was installed in the Volkspark Rehberge in Berlin-Wedding and was dismantled in 1934. Kolbe also noted the removal of his *Große Nacht* figure from the Rundfunkhaus. It is noteworthy that it was possibly reinstalled two years later in the broadcasting station of the Ostmarken Rundfunk in Königsberg; its current whereabouts are unknown. See: <https://sammlung.georg-kolbe-museum.de/de/objekte/nacht/62905?term=Die%20nacht&position=0> [last accessed April 15, 2023].
 - 3 Wilhelm Pinder, in: *Georg Kolbe. Werke der letzten Jahre, mit Betrachtungen über Kolbes Plastik von Wilhelm Pinder* (Berlin 1937), p. 15 [translated].
 - 4 Georg Kolbe, “Stefan George, Statthalter des Geistes ...,” in: *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 5, 1933 (evening edition), quoted in: Maria Freifrau von Tiesenhausen, *Georg Kolbe. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (Tübingen 1987), p. 137.
 - 5 See: Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago and London 2002); Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (eds.), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton 2009).
 - 6 Gerd Theunissen, “Georg Kolbe,” in: *Kunst der Nation*, no. 7, April 1, 1934, p. 3 [translated]. There, it states: “Never has there been a more intellectual sculptor in Germany, never one in whom culture, in the sense of a very self-confident and fanatical taming of the chaotic impulses, is expressed more sensually and at the same time more intellectually.” Theunissen concludes with the words: “This sculptor has made man luminous; he has rescued the highest from neglected and barbaric times into the silence of art: the form of the body in the living spirit” [translated].
 - 7 *Ibid.*, p. 1 [translated].
 - 8 Walther Voigt, “Georg Kolbe: Ein Kündler nordischen Lebensgefühls,” in: *Politische Erziehung*, no. 7, July 1937, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 9 Heinz Flügel, “Nordische Schönheit in der deutschen Kunst. Zum 60. Geburtstag Georg Kolbes,” title of the newspaper unknown, April 16, 1937, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 10 Wolfgang Willrich, *Säuberung des Kunsttempels. Eine kunstpolitische Kampfschrift zur Gesundung deutscher Kunst im Geiste nordischer Art* (Munich and Berlin 1937), p. 73 [translated]. It is worth noting that Willrich visited Kolbe in 1937. See the letter from Georg Kolbe to Georg Biermann, November 9, 1937; quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 159, no. 213.
 - 11 In this exhibition at Galerie Ferdinand Möller in Berlin, which ran from July to September 1933, the following works by Kolbe were presented: *Kleine Pietà* (Small Pietà), 1928, bronze, and *Herabschreitender* (Descending Man), 1927, bronze.
 - 12 See: Otto Andreas Schreiber, “Bekenntnis der Jugend zur deutschen Kunst,” in: *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (DAZ), July 10, 1933. A few months later, Kolbe was asked by members of the National Socialist German Students’ League to participate in the debate about “German art” by submitting a written statement.
 - 13 N. N., “Die Jury an der Arbeit. Wie die Ausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes vorbereitet wird,” in: *Magdeburger Zeitung*, undated [May 1933], copy, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin. The Magdeburg exhibition was already accompanied by controversy; in a letter to Hermann Göring dated June 25, 1933, Wilhelm-Adolf Farenholtz championed the artists under attack with a partly anti-Semitic argument. Reprinted in: Aya Soika and Bernhard Fulda, *Emil Nolde. Eine deutsche Legende. Der Künstler im Nationalsozialismus. Chronik und Dokumente*, ed. Bernhard Fulda, Christian Ring, and Aya Soika on behalf of the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Nolde Stiftung Seebüll (Munich 2019), p. 60, doc. 13.
 - 14 For more on Kolbe’s role during the controversy surrounding the Deutscher Künstlerbund (DKB) after 1933, see: Josephine Gabler, “Georg Kolbe in der NS-Zeit,” in: *Georg Kolbe. 1877–1947*, ed. Ursel Berger, exh. cat. Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin (Munich 1997), pp. 87–94, here pp. 89–90; Ursel Berger, “‘Einseitig künstlerisch.’ Georg Kolbe in der NS-Zeit,” PDF document, 2018, p. 5. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20190508074534/https://www.georg-kolbe-museum.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Einseitig-künstlerisch-mit-Bildern->

Titel-1.pdf [last accessed August 5, 2023]. Kolbe initially withdrew his promise to serve as a board member in 1935 when individuals in Magdeburg wanted to interfere with the autonomy of the DKB, but he eventually remained a board member until it was banned in 1936. On the occasion of the awarding of the Goethe Prize in early 1936, the sculptor Philipp Harth therefore congratulated Kolbe as follows: "It is not without humor that the prize winner is president of the art clan whose disgraceful exhibition had to be closed by the police for undermining artistic culture." Letter from Philipp Harth to Georg Kolbe, February 1, 1936, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), pp. 150f., no. 188 [translated].

- 15 For more on this incident, see: Soika/Fulda 2019 (see note 12), p. 60, doc. 25, and pp. 102–103.
- 16 Robert Scholz, "Der Kunstschwindel in London," in: *Völkischer Beobachter* (Vienna edition), August 3, 1938, p. 9, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin: "We can perfectly prove on the basis of the list of the exhibition 'Entartete Kunst' that, of course, neither Kolbe nor Slevogt were represented in this exhibition, that rather [...] Kolbe's sculptures, both in the previous year and this year, were among the main works in the exhibition at Haus der Kunst in Munich, which was representative of the artistic will of the new Germany" [translated]. In fact, Kolbe's sculptures *Junger Streiter* (Young Fighter) and *Junges Weib* (Young Woman) were exhibited at the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) in 1937 and 1938, respectively. See: *London 1938. Defending 'Degenerate' Art. Mit Kandinsky, Liebermann und Nolde gegen Hitler*, ed. Lucy Wasensteiner and Martin Faass, exh. cat. The Wiener Holocaust Library, London and the Liebermann Villa, Berlin (Wädenswil 2018), on Kolbe esp. pp. 70, 72, 192, note 9.
- 17 Georg Kolbe, "An die deutschen Studenten!" in: *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung. Kampfblatt der deutschen Studenten*, vol. 2, no. 9, May 31, 1934, p. 3. The art historian Wilhelm Pinder had encouraged him to participate. See: letter from Georg Kolbe to Wilhelm Pinder, undated [ca. April/May 1934], quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), pp. 184f: "I am not familiar with this organization. Do you know anything about this forum, and would you advise me to go along with the editor's request? Furthermore, not being particularly eloquent by birth, I do not think much of written confessions of all those who are to be represented. That being said, I am moved that the NS German students want to hear my voice" [translated]. After

the war, Karl Hofer held the contribution against him. See: letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, December 1, 1945, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), pp. 184–185, no. 273.

- 18 Kolbe 1934 (see note 17), p. 3. Kolbe explained: "A gesture can be very hollow. Mistrust the swollen breast: Bear in mind that we were not so fortunate because no common spirit was poured out upon us. No curtain was torn open before us. Every true man had to carry his faith beside him alone—if he did not want to eke out a living in an artists' association as a misunderstood Raphael. Here lies much genuine German conscience." For, says Kolbe: "Art was then only 'cultivated' and 'traded'; a Führer rallied you and called upon you to march. What great fortune" [translated].
- 19 Ibid. [translated].
- 20 See: *Berliner Kunst in München*, exh. cat. Neue Pinakothek, Munich (Munich 1935). The opening of the exhibition was scheduled for March 15, 1935, and a total of 280 works were to be shown.
- 21 In addition to Kolbe, Arno Breker, Arthur Kampf, and Leo von König were also members of the exhibition commission, which was coordinated by the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. In response to the protest of the Bavarian Minister of the Interior and Gauleiter Adolf Wagner, the submissions from Berlin were examined, with the result that twenty-six works were taken down on the day of the opening.
- 22 Hannes Kremer, "Eine Bilanz," in: *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung: Kampfblatt der deutschen Studenten: amtliches Nachrichtenblatt des Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbundes NSDSB und der Deutschen Studentenschaft*, Munich, no. 11, 1935, p. 3, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 23 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hannes Kremer, May 25, 1935, copy, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated]. A draft of Kolbe's letter is also preserved in the Georg Kolbe Museum.
- 24 Martin Hieronimi, "Jugend spricht. Völkisch oder 'populär'? (Der nationalsozialistische Kunstanspruch und seine Verwirklichung in der Gegenwart)," in: *Der Türmer: Deutsche Monatshefte. Die Bergstadt* (Berlin 1935), pp. 73–76, GKM Archive, Berlin. Hieronimi also describes the "immense danger that—in a counteraction to the past, which is understandable in itself—the boundaries of true völkisch art are set too narrowly, that art itself is 'organized' far too much" [translated].
- 25 Alfred Rosenberg, "Die kommende Kunst wird monumental, werkgerecht und artgemäß sein," in:

- Völkischer Beobachter*, September 27, 1934, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 26 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Ottilie Schäfer, January 25, 1933, 2 pages, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin: "I have good press myself—however—I always rank far behind Barlach—who is, moreover, very moderately represented. He is and remains the awe-inspiring sculptor of the German soul—despite the fact that he often forms poorly and weakly—even the Nazis are beginning to pay homage to him" [translated].
 - 27 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Julia Hauff, February 16, 1933, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
 - 28 Adolf Hitler, "Neue Kunstgesinnung. Bekenntnis zum Genie – Absage an Konjunktur-Ritter und Romantiker," title of the newspaper and date of publication unknown [1934], collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin. Kolbe put two exclamation marks, for example, next to the sentence highlighting the incompatibility of mysticism and modern times: "Your purported Gothic internalization fits poorly into the age of steel and iron, glass and concrete, of women's beauty and men's strength, of raised head and defiant spirit" [translated].
 - 29 "Zwei Jahre Kulturkammer," in: *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 15, 1935, evening edition, page number unknown, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
 - 30 The "Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden," co-signed by Kolbe, was published in numerous daily newspapers, for example: *Völkischer Beobachter* (Berlin edition), no. 230, August 18, 1934, p. 10. The short text with the signatories was published together with other declarations of loyalty by numerous professional and social groups.
 - 31 Ursel Berger interprets the signing as a public signal of conformity but emphasizes that Ernst Barlach's signature was far less criticized than Kolbe's. See: Berger PDF (see note 14), p. 5.
 - 32 Cf. the letter from the President of the Reich Chamber of Literature (signed Dr. Haupt) to Mies van der Rohe, August 13, 1934, with the text of the appeal as an enclosure, Mies van der Rohe Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; as well as the letter to Emil Nolde, August 13, 1934, likewise with the text of the appeal as an enclosure, reprinted in: Soika/Fulda (see note 13), pp. 76–78, docs. 20, 21.
 - 33 Letter from Ernst Barlach to Hans Barlach, August 31, 1934: "I co-signed the appeal of the 'cultural sector' and am thus free of the accusation of practicing cultural Bolshevism, until they pull it out of the bag again." Quoted in: Ernst Piper, *Ernst Barlach und die nationalsozialistische Kunstpolitik* (Frankfurt am Main 1987), p. 113, doc. 80 [translated]. See also: Berger PDF (see note 14), p. 7, note 29.
 - 34 "Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden," title of the newspaper and date of publication unknown, with handwritten comments by Kolbe, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 35 See: letter from Alfred Rosenberg to Joseph Goebbels, August 30, 1934: "This rejection [of Adolf Hitler towards Barlach, Nolde, and Mies van der Rohe] has also been expressed publicly several times with great unambiguity; and it therefore remains regrettable that precisely these attacked personalities were asked to sign the published essay." See also: letter from Alfred Rosenberg to Joseph Goebbels, October 20, 1934 (probably never sent). In this letter, Rosenberg again takes up the accusation that a government councilor from Goebbels's ministry had urged the "cultural Bolsheviks" to "stand up for the Führer after all." Both letters quoted in Piper 1987 (see note 33), pp. 113f., doc. 81 (Aug. 30), pp. 116f., doc. 84 (Oct. 20) [translated]; letter from Alfred Rosenberg to Philipp Bouhler, head of the Führer's Chancellery, January 25, 1935, BArch, NS 8/208, p. 169, quoted in: Soika/Fulda (see note 13), pp. 78, 86.
 - 36 Letter from Harald Busch to the Gau Court of the Hamburg NSDAP, September 28, 1935, BArch, R 9361-V/4555 [translated]; cf. Soika/Fulda (see note 13), p. 91.
 - 37 Letter from the Office for the Preservation of Art, Cultural-Political Archive to the Gestapo, Berlin, June 8, 1936, BArch, NS 15/69 (provision of and request for information to the Gestapo regarding culturally active persons): "After the revolt of 1918, the sculptor Professor Dr. Georg Kolbe signed the appeal of the (Marxist) 'Work Council for Art, Berlin.' Kolbe was a member of the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin in 1932–33 and received excellent support from the Jewish press. According to reliable sources, Prof. Kolbe is a high-grade freemason. In his art, the sculptor represents a line that today is rejected as 'African' or even 'Eastern European'" [translated]. The accusation of being a "freemason" lacked any basis.
 - 38 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Georg Biermann, November 9, 1937, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 159, no. 213 [translated]. Kolbe wrote: "This small meeting of artists with the important name was anything but capable of working and, after attending two or three meetings, seemed to me a small absurdity. That I held the of-

fice of chairman is a free invention. [...] This spook seems to me to have been forgotten by everyone except Mr. Willrich. At the time of his visit to me, Willrich unfortunately did not speak of this 'highly dangerous' matter" [translated].

- 39 In contrast, an examination conducted by members of the Reich Chamber in 1941 confirmed Kolbe's political reliability. See the cover letter from Ilkier, Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, to the President of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, August 7, 1941, Berlin State Archive, A Rep. 243-04, no. 453. The enclosure confirmed: "With regard to politics, nothing detrimental has become known" [translated].
- 40 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Julia Hauff, August 4, 1933, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.592_004, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 41 See: Peter Engelmann, "Zum 19. August. Die Kunst und Adolf Hitler. Ein Besuch bei Joseph [!] Thorak," August 17, 1934, in: *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (DAZ), collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 42 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Grete Heimholdt, March 25, 1935, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.577, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated]. For more on the awarding of the commission in Stralsund, see: Dietrich Schubert, "Revanche oder Trauer über die Opfer? Kolbe versus Barlach – ein Soldaten-'Ehrenmal' für die Stadt Stralsund 1928–1935," in: Martin Warnke (ed.), *Politische Kunst: Gebärden und Gebaren* (Berlin 2004), pp. 73–96.
- 43 Schubert 2004 (see note 42), p. 85 [translated].
- 44 Ibid., p. 86.
- 45 See: Magdalena Bushart "Die Bildwerke auf dem Reichssportfeld in Berlin," in: Annette Tietenberg (ed.), *Das Kunstwerk als Geschichtsdokument: Festschrift für Hans-Ernst Mittag* (Munich 1999), pp. 129–143, here pp. 134f.
- 46 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hilde von Dirksen, October 1, 1935: "And I can report from here, from myself, that I am not at all suitable for the big tasks that you probably assume, indeed that you had to assume from earlier reports. Only this week, my large marble statue 'Genius 1928' [...] was removed from the opera house. It is the fourth of my works that does not fit into this period. From a private point of view, that does not mean much. But at the moment, there are still some enquiries and requests for collaboration. But what can I offer then?" He goes on to report on his commissioned work for the local sports forum on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and states that it is not what "people out there want"; they are perceived as "one-sidedly artistic" [translated]. Quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), pp. 146–147, no. 180. Cf. also Berger PDF (see note 14), p. 11.
- 47 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Julia Hauff, March 5, 1936, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.595_002, GKM Archive, Berlin. To whose review of the Berlin exhibition he was referring is unknown to the author.
- 48 Postcard from Georg Kolbe to Ottilie Schäfer, July 26, 1936, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin: "I have nothing to expect in terms of visits, and I will not see much of the competitions either, because I did not purchase an entrance ticket, and they did not give me one either—I will see only the 'Führer's' march [into the stadium]" [translated].
- 49 See the tax documents in the MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 50 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Julia Hauff, January 10, 1937, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.596_001, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 51 In 1937, Kolbe had even been proposed for the role of head of the Master Studio for Sculpture at the Prussian Academy of Arts by Arthur Kampf and Richard Scheibe, as, incidentally, was Arno Breker. Kolbe received twelve votes in the internal vote, the best result, followed by Gerhard Marcks and Wilhelm Gerstel with six votes each and Röll and Breker with three votes each. The Academy Senate's proposal was thus Kolbe, followed by Marcks and Gerstel. In the end, however, the position went to Arnold Waldschmidt, sixty-two years old and loyal to the line, who had been proposed by Bernhard Rust, Minister of Science, Education and National Culture, by way of a ministerial directive. See the minutes of the meeting on May 3, 1937, PrAdK 1123, pp. 142–143.
- 52 This was expressed, among other things, in the fact that he often made disparaging remarks about the "plebs"—for example, in his marginal notes made while reading the newspapers.
- 53 Gabler 1997 (see note 14), p. 94, note 13, with reference to the letter in the Federal Archives (BArch, R-II 43/960, Bl. 54–55).
- 54 Gottfried Feder, quoted in: Sigurd Rabe, "Wider den Kulturbolschewismus," in: *Völkischer Beobachter*, December 16, 1933 [translated].
- 55 See: letter from Columbus [Colombo] Max to Georg Kolbe, December 28, 1933, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.232, GKM Archive, Berlin. A letter to Kolbe from his wife Paula Max dated May 12, 1930 has been preserved. GK Estate, inv. no. GK.234, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 56 Cf. the entry in Georg Kolbe's appointment calendar for December 6, 1934, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "Mrs. Colombo Max with

- Miss Feder." In the telephone calendar for 1934, the entries do not begin until mid-September. Presumably, it was Ingeborg Feder. A telephone call by Elisa Tamaschke on February 22, 2023 with a granddaughter of Elisabeth Feder confirmed the close friendship between Elisabeth Feder and Colombo and Paula Max.
- 57 I am grateful to Elisa Tamaschke for passing this information on to me. Letter from Elisabeth Feder to Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler, additionally addressed to Undersecretary Lammers, March 28, 1934, Reich Chancellery Files, Personal Affairs of Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler, BArch, R 43-II/960 [translated].
 - 58 Letter from the undersecretary in the Reich Chancellery [Lammers] to Georg Kolbe, with a stamp on the letter noting the post date of March 29, 1934, Reich Chancellery Files, Personal Affairs of Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler, BArch, R 43-II/960 [translated].
 - 59 E-mail from Elisa Tamaschke to the author, November 13, 2022, in which she summarizes a conversation with the executor of the estate of the granddaughter regarding Kolbe's commission of a Hitler bust on the occasion of the urn burial in November 2022. According to earlier statements by Maria von Tiesenhausen to the executor of the estate, who was a friend, "a portrait session had taken place (Kolbe had drawn him [Hitler]), during which Hitler had asked how long these portrait processes would take Kolbe. Kolbe had answered that he needed an average of twelve to fourteen sessions. [...] Apparently, this was too much work for Hitler, and he subsequently canceled the planned portrait. Kolbe had been worried afterwards because he was uncertain about what this cancellation by Hitler might mean for him" [translated].
 - 60 The requests are documented in the Reich Chancellery files. See: R 43-II/960-963; 957, 959. I am grateful to Elisa Tamaschke for passing this information on to me.
 - 61 Quoted in Berger PDF (see note 14), p. 20, note 38 [translated].
 - 62 Founded in mid-1938, HISMA (Compañía Hispano-Marroquí de Transportes Limitada) was a Spanish-German front company that, through the German merchant Johannes Franz Bernhardt, made it possible to supply Franco's Nationalists with war materials from Germany during the Civil War and eventually to handle all German-Spanish goods traffic. For more on the role of the HISMA director who commissioned Kolbe and with whose widow Maria von Tiesenhausen was later in good contact, see: Clara Blume, *Die Sieger schreiben Geschichte. Mediale Inszenierungen von Johannes Bernhardt und der deutschen Intervention im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg* (Berlin, Bern, and Vienna 2019); Hans-Henning Abendroth, *Mittelsmann zwischen Franco und Hitler. Johannes Bernhardt erinnert 1936* (Marktheidenfeld 1978).
 - 63 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Franco, draft, March 17, 1939, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.
 - 64 Letter from Adolf Hitler to Johannes E. F. Bernhardt, Managing Director of HISMA, June 23, 1939, certified transcript, copy in the MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin. After receiving the "bronze bust of Generalissimo Franco created by Professor Kolbe," Hitler wrote in his letter of thanks from Berchtesgaden to HISMA that he was "genuinely pleased both by your loyal commemoration and by the work of art itself" [translated].
 - 65 See the reportage: Lotte Zielesch, "'Wie ich Franco porträtierte,'" in various newspapers, different publication dates (ca. mid-March 1936), collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin. There, Kolbe is quoted as saying: "Franco is forty-six and of small stature. His hair is beginning to turn gray. He is a stern, reserved soldier, quite unpretentious, and very amiable. Since I do not understand Spanish, we spoke French. I had asked for three sessions. They took place in the study of his home in Burgos. Since it adjoined his dining room, I could see family members coming in and out. It is well known that Franco leads a very intimate family life. In addition to his wife and only daughter, Cormencita, his brother-in-law, along with his wife and children, live in the large house surrounded by a garden" [translated].
 - 66 See the collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin, e.g.: *Völkischer Beobachter*, May 21, 1939; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, May 21, 1939; *Ostdeutsche Morgenpost Beuthen*, May 21, 1939; *Iserlohner Kreisanzeiger und Zeitung*, May 22, 1939.
 - 67 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Franco, draft, March 17, 1939, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "Excellency, Your great kindness enabled me to create your portrait, which is greeted with much interest and acclamation everywhere among the German public. With great gratitude, I therefore take the liberty to present you my work in bronze and to ask you humbly to do me the honor of accepting it" [translated]. The draft was the basis for the letter, which has not been preserved, that accompanied the bronze casting to Spain.

- 68** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Curt Valentin, February 9, 1939, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 69** Thus mentioned in the reportage by Lotte Zielesch (see note 65). There, Kolbe is quoted as saying: "I saw Seville, of course; but I also got to know an area of the front" [translated].
- 70** Letter from Günter von Scheven to his mother, December 4, 1938, typed transcript by Maria von Tiesenhausen, undated, quoted in: Udo von Alvensleben (ed.), *Briefe des Bildhauers Günter von Scheven* (Krefeld 1952) [translated].
- 71** Cf. the draft of the letter from Georg Kolbe to Captain Wilhelmi, German Embassy in San Sebastian, March 25, 1939, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "Exactly three months have now passed since my time with Franco in Burgos. I think with much passion of the days of great struggle for my work, in which your kind willingness to help made so much, indeed everything necessary, possible for me. It is a sincere need for me to thank you once again. Enclosed you will find a few photographs of the final result. In the meantime, so much has happened within your sphere of activity, compared to which my small field of work is nothing, which you may have already forgotten. I thus remind you of it, as well as of your promise to visit me, should you have the opportunity. Yours sincerely, your devoted GK (incl. 2 Franco photos)" [translated].
- 72** Invitation: "The national group leader of the Falange Espanola Tradicionalista y de las I. O. N. S. [Adolfo Pardo Redonnet] and Mrs. Pardo, on the occasion of the return of the Condor Legion to Germany, to a tea reception on Wednesday, June 7, 1939 at 5:00 p.m. on the premises of the Zoo," invitation card, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 73** Letter from Ellen Bernhardt to Maria von Tiesenhausen, July 16, 1980, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "My husband simply approached him (he was never shy) and asked Prof. Kolbe whether he would be interested in a trip to Spain and Franco's head. As far as I remember, Kolbe agreed without hesitation. Since my husband never appeared in uniform, and it was a civilian mission (the Hisma was an economic matter), Kolbe probably never had the impression that this was a party mission. It was, in fact, only my husband's idea and had a private character. [...] Once I asked him [Kolbe] about his opinion of Franco as a person (a sculptor understands more than we do about character traits). Kolbe answered me: 'The large eye sockets are a Mediterranean feature, therefore not an individual one. On the other hand, the very small, somewhat feminine, and curved mouth of men strangely indicates cruelty'" [translated].
- 74** See, among others: Kurt Lothar Tank, "Das Heroische als Schicksalsauftrag. Gedanken zur deutschen Plastik unserer Zeit," in: *Pariser Zeitung*, March 21, 1943, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 75** Letter from Rudolf G. Binding to Georg Kolbe, October 16, 1937, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.56, GKM Archive, Berlin: "For your amusement, [I] will reveal that one of my nice young men in Munich has named the colleague Thorak with his inflated rubber muscles as 'Pneumothorak'" [translated]. And the architect Paul Bonatz, in his birthday letter to Kolbe in 1942, made some remarks about Thorak's "boorish reliefs on the Reichsbank" and commented on the "kitschy Art Nouveau sweetness" of the 'Menschenpaar' [Human Couple] at the 'Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung.'" Letter from Paul Bonatz to Georg Kolbe, April 23, 1942, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.69, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 76** Letter from Adolf Ziegler to Joseph Goebbels, December 12, 1942, BArch, R55-97: "In view of his outstanding personality, I suggest, on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday, in addition to an honor by a congratulatory telegram from the Reich Minister, to request the awarding of the Goethe Medal for Art and Science by the Führer." On January 21, 1942, the head of the Presidential Chancellery of the Führer and Reich Chancellor confirmed to the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda: "The Führer will comply with your suggestion and award the Goethe Medal for Art and Science to the sculptor Professor Dr. h. c. Georg Kolbe in Berlin-Charlottenburg 9 on the occasion of his reaching the age of sixty-five on April 15, 1942, in recognition of his services to the German fine arts" [translated].
- 77** Letter from Leopold Gutterer to Reinhard Heydrich, May 6, 1941, BArch, R 55/21018, sheet 18. See the reprint in: Soika/Fulda 2019 (see note 13), p. 154 and p. 182, doc. 67.
- 78** Gutterer was also scheduled to participate in the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, which had taken place a quarter of a year before Kolbe's birthday visit; however, for scheduling reasons, he was unable to attend.
- 79** Thus, in November 1941, the Berlin regional director of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, August Kranz, praised him as follows: "The sculptor Professor Kolbe [...] is at the forefront of German artists and beyond that enjoys world renown. His large ongoing commissions for the state, the party, and the Wehrmacht, as well as his obligations to the

- highest authorities in supplying representative art exhibitions of the Reich (even outside its borders) place him at the center of today's cultural events." Kranz continued: "It is unnecessary to emphasize the extraordinary and at least equally high significance of Kolbe as, for example, that of Prof. Arno Breker. But I would like to emphasize that the latter is still young and enjoys the courtesy of all public authorities," while Kolbe, at the age of sixty-five, has "no more time to lose" and thus cannot wait for better times. Incidentally, this letter was only about an increase in the coal supply for the studio; significant, perhaps, because privileges for Kolbe did indeed exist, but they were comparatively modest. See: letter from Prof. August Kranz, regional director of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, to the coal distribution office, November 15, 1941, Berlin State Archives, A Rep 243-04, no. 45531001.
- 80** Letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, December 16, 1945; quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 185, no. 274 [translated].
- 81** See: Helmut Großmann, "Hiershagen berühmter Gast," in: *Sprotenhagener Tageblatt*, undated [May 1944], collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin. In this reportage from May 1944, Kolbe was presented as a "victim of the bomb terror of the Anglo-American air gangsters" [translated].
- 82** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Konstantin Hierl, Kranzallee 19 [September 1943], draft, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin. Cf. the letter from Georg Kolbe to Hermann Lempeler, January 13, 1944, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.607.1.9_001, GKM Archive, Berlin: "I live here primitively, but free. The thirty maidens are well raised and so childlike that their noise represents life after all" [translated]. At the beginning of March 1944, he wrote to Lempeler about his work: "After you have seen my smashed studio, you will understand with what feelings I sit here in this rural village exile. For me, the tumult seems to be over for good." Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hermann Lempeler, March 9, 1944, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.607.1.9_002, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 83** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Ottilie Schäfer, March 13, 1944, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin [translated].
- 84** See: letter from Georg Kolbe to Annemarie Ritter, March 28, 1945, GK Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "In case B. [Berlin] is besieged, I have been assigned accommodation in the maidens' camp near Belzig in der Mark, because the residences of the outer ring would be evacuated. A dreadful notion!" [translated].
- 85** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hermann Lempeler, July 11, 1941, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.607.1.6_001, GKM Archive, Berlin.
- 86** Cf. Alfred Rosenberg, *Pest in Russland! Der Bolschewismus, seine Häupter, Handlanger und Opfer* (Munich 1922), with later editions.
- 87** Georg Kolbe, "Der Bildhauer Günter von Scheven," in: *Kölnische Zeitung*, May 31, 1942, collection of press clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin (reprinted in: *Der Bücherwurm*, October 1942, pp. 4–6); reprinted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), pp. 168–170, no. 238. See also: Georg Kolbe, *Der Bildhauer Günther von Scheven* (Dessau 1944).
- 88** Von Scheven interpreted the war of aggression as a spiritual and moral turning point. See, for example, his journal entry of July 8, 1941: "One can only precipitately express something of the experiences; the experiences alone are not decisive, but rather the purification and transformation into a form suitable for us." Quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 170 [translated]. For more on the subject, see: Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Vierow 1996).
- 89** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hermann Lempeler, February 15, 1945, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.607.1.10, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].
- 90** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Ottilie Schäfer, February 27, 1945, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin [translated].
- 91** Maria von Tiesenhausen reported on a dramatic end of the war on Sensburger Allee: "Still a few days later, the first combat troops move on; they leave behind unspeakable devastation. Other troops follow, looting, desecrating the daughter's house, setting fire." In: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 31 [translated].
- 92** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hugo Körtzinger, undated [ca. late 1945, before the onset of winter], draft, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "I do not know how the transformation from war to peace took place in your area. Here, the last days were hell, which I already experienced on the side of the Russian tanks. The house was a shooting range, at which the German guns were aiming. But one thing I can say: The enemy had become a friend from the first minute. Everything is far behind us. [...] Some of the former enemies visit the sculptor. On the German side, however, it is still all too quiet; even today, without money it is impossible to exist" [translated].
- 93** Letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, July 8, 1946, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see

note 4), p. 187, no. 279; also quoted in: Berger PDF (see note 14), p. 4 [translated].

- 94** Letter from Erich Cohn to Georg Kolbe, May 27, 1946, in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 187, no. 279; letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, July 8, 1946, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 187, no. 278: "As a friend, I want to speak openly to you. When I talk to people who are interested in art, or when they see your works in our home, I am asked: 'Why did Kolbe make Franco's portrait?'" Kolbe responded to Cohn's question by saying that he did not see the reality clearly. Moreover, he said, it was a private commission. Here, Kolbe was mistaken in that the client was a front company founded with the help of the NSDAP to support Franco.
- 95** Letter from Georg Kolbe to the mayor of his hometown Waldheim, June 1938, draft, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: "A call to Spain to produce a bust of Generalissimo Franco and a commission from the Reich Youth Leader complete the good fortune I am now enjoying" [translated].
- 96** For more on the "stroke of good fortune," see: Peter-Klaus Schuster, "Die doppelte 'Rettung' der modernen Kunst durch die Nationalsozialisten," in: Eugen Blume and Dieter Scholz (eds.), *Überbrückt. Ästhetische Moderne und Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne 1999), pp. 40–47, here p. 45.
- 97** This, of course, does not mean that there were no sympathizers of National Socialism among those defamed; Emil Nolde's case is a prime example of this.
- 98** Letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, December 16, 1945, in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 185, no. 274. Hofer offered Kolbe a professorship at the Berlin University of the Arts (HdK) in November 1945, but did not learn of Kolbe's text for the *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung* and of his portraits of Franco and Hierl until December. He did not withdraw his offer of employment but thought it wise to wait for the reactions first. In his letter, Hofer claimed that "one can rightly say that you stabbed the others in the back, because the gentlemen then bragged about their association with Kolbe" [translated]. Hofer was also aware that there had been other cases, such as Emil Nolde, who had denounced Max Pechstein as a Jew to the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in 1933.
- 99** Letter from Georg Kolbe to the public prosecutor of the denazification tribunal of the administrative district of Donauwörth, July 16, 1947, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.511, GKM Archive, Berlin: "I hereby affirm on oath that Professor Arno Breker cannot have been an opponent of Jews in earlier years, since he socialized with many Jews and also had a Jewish patron. I have no information regarding his private life during the Nazi period, because I was only once in his studio as in his home—and this before his rapprochement with Hitler. From then on, a transformation in his view of art also became visible, which was formerly close to the French view and now sank under the strongest Nazi influence" [translated].
- 100** See Kolbe's appointment and telephone calendars for the period 1935–38, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin: October 6, 1935: [appointment] "Arno Breker and wife"; November 12, 1935: "visit with Breker"; November 23, 1935: "visit with Brekers"; December 15, 1935: [appointment] "Arno Breker and wife"; March 11, 1936: "visit to A. Breker"; June 21, 1937: [appointment] "Arno Breker and wife"; October 16, 1937: [telephone] "Breker"; January 17, 1938: [telephone] "Prof. Breker" [!]; February 9, 1938: [appointment] "Breker"; May 4, 1938: [telephone] "Prof. Breker" [!]; May 8, 1938: [appointment] "Baron Uxküll/Breker and wife."
- 101** This was Kolbe's formulation in the letter to Erich Cohn, quoted above, in which he had to justify his portrait of Franco; letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, July 8, 1946, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 4), p. 187, no. 279 [translated].

