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Dieppe from a German Perspective

German Second World War Art in the Collection of the Canadian War Museum

Antonia Weetman

The Canadian War Museum (CWM) has custody of 28 drawings, prints and paintings produced under the German War Art program during the Second World War. The CWM's pieces focus on the Dieppe Raid of 19 August 1942. Of the 4,963 Canadians who participated 913 men were killed and 1,946 were taken prisoner.¹ Full details of the losses were kept out of the Canadian papers for three weeks to try to protect morale.² The CWM's German artworks illustrate the wreckage on the beach but they also draw attention to the numerous Canadian casualties.

Germany established its official war art program earlier than Canada.

Abstract: The Canadian War Museum has custody of 28 drawings, prints and paintings produced under the German War Art program during the Second World War. These pieces focus on the Dieppe Raid of 19 August 1942 and illustrate the wreckage on the beach as well as the Canadian casualties as a measure of German success in the battle. This artwork is different from the better-known art that was created under a regime famous for its monstrously large heroic art and architecture. These works show that German artists, like their Canadian counterparts in the Canadian War Records program, felt a need to reflect on the nature of the war they participated in and witnessed as fellow soldiers at war.

In 1941, Hitler ordered the German High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht or OKW) to establish a "Visual Arts Group" (Staffel der Bildenden Künstler or SBK) to visually document German military exploits. This aim was exemplified in P.K. Muller Gera's 1943 action drawing *German Fighters Strafing Troops*.³ The SBK artworks were intended to hang in mess rooms and army museums after the war. During the war, the art was shown in Germany, Belgium, France, Poland, Norway, Italy and Austria for "educational purposes," but in reality to exemplify and support German power.⁴ The artists selected for the German War Art program had been vetted first. They were artists whose work was considered suitable for display in the "House of German Art" (Haus der Deutschen Kunst or HDK), where exhibitions took place between 1937 and 1944. All the artists were considered acceptable promoters of National Socialist ideology as their work upheld the strength of Germany and its people.

The German artists whose works are in the CWM collection were members of the SBK and saw active service in the war. Alfred Hierl (1910-unknown) initially won party favour as the silver medal winner of the Graphic Design prize at the

1936 Berlin Olympics with his car racing poster.⁵ After the war began, he became a technical sergeant in the Luftwaffe. His artwork was exhibited at the House of German Art in Munich from 1941 to 1944, and he painted in France, the Netherlands and East Prussia. Franz Martin Lunstroth (1880-1968) was a captain in the German army and painted in Belgium, France and Russia. His work was on show at the HDK in 1937 and 1941. Wilhelm Strauss (1916-1993) painted in France, North Africa and Germany. He worked on submarines before the war. He is said to have

Résumé : Le Musée canadien de la guerre a sous sa garde 28 dessins, estampes et peintures produits pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, dans le cadre du programme d'art militaire allemand. Ces œuvres ont pour sujet le raid sur Dieppe du 19 août 1942 et présentent la désolation sur la plage ainsi que les pertes canadiennes de façon à mettre en évidence la victoire allemande. Ces œuvres se démarquent de celles, plus connues, créées sous un régime marqué par son art et son architecture héroïques et massifs. Elles montrent que les artistes allemands, à l'instar de leur homologues canadiens du programme des Archives militaires canadiennes, ressentaient le besoin de réfléchir à la nature de la guerre à laquelle ils participaient et dont ils étaient témoins en tant que collègues des soldats en guerre.

Canadian War Museum 19710261-2460



Above: P.K. Muller Gera – German Fighters Strafing Troops.

Right: Franz Martin Lunstroth – Mopping Up After the Battle, No.2.

(Entartete Kunst) Exhibition of 1937. This exhibition subsequently travelled to 13 German and Austrian cities.⁶ This art was considered to be twisted, deformed and, in Otto Dix’s case, anti-war, implying too much human weakness and disorder.⁷ Otto Freundlich’s sculpture, *The New Man*, a modernist stone sculpture of a worried-looking man, was on the cover of the 1937 catalogue. Freundlich, who was Jewish, was to die in concentration camp in 1943.⁸ Many modern artists were forced to flee Nazi Germany when their work did not fit in with Nazi ideology. Other artists, like Otto Dix, concentrated on landscapes during this time.

At the end of the Second World War, art created from 1941 to 1945 under the German war art program was collected under the aegis of US Army Air Force Captain Gordon W. Gilkey, who worked tirelessly to bring the art work to Washington, DC. It became the property of the US War Department for safekeeping with the stated intent to help prevent a Nazi revival. A few items, like Hitler’s watercolours, still remain under strict lock and key because of the fear that die-hard Nazis might

sketched at Dieppe in 1942. Hans Seyppel (1886-1945) served in the German army and painted in France and Germany. In 1944, he witnessed the bombing of Düsseldorf and observed German infantry fighting in Aachen. P.K. Muller-Gera served with the Luftwaffe and the SBK. He painted in France and Germany.

Notably, the SBK artists did not include modernists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emile Nolde, or Otto Dix, whose work was displayed in Munich in the “Degenerate Art”



Canadian War Museum 19801306-001

use them to re-ignite support. In 1977, the Federal Republic of Germany requested that the work be returned to Germany. This was done gradually through selection committees in 1982 and 1986. Even then, 450 paintings were retained of which 200 were thought to comply with the Potsdam Declaration as objects which might revitalise the Nazi spirit or German militarism, including portraits of leaders or overt Nazi propaganda.⁹

In 1971, the National Gallery of Canada transferred to the Canadian War Museum German drawings and paintings recording the Dieppe Raid of 1942 that the US Army had donated in the early 1960s. As there was no official Canadian art program in 1942, the Canadians had no visual record of the event and the gift was likely much appreciated. The CWM works provide insight into the efforts of German artists who recorded events at Dieppe and suggest in their emphasis on wreckage and dead bodies that their intended use was domestic propaganda redolent of victory. Franz Martin Lunstroth's *Mopping Up After the Battle, No.2* shows the beach following the raid, with broken machines and dead and dying men lying scattered across it.¹⁰ It also shows that life goes on for the successful German soldiers who take stock of the debris in a fairly matter-of-fact way.

Canadian War Museum 19710261-5976



Above: Alfred Hierl – Casualty on the Beach.

Below: Franz Martin Lunstroth – German Soldier Rendering Aid.

Alfred Hierl's *Casualty on the Beach at Dieppe* shows a young Canadian soldier lifeless in the water.¹¹ Full of pathos and sympathy, it has been used to illustrate the high Canadian losses at Dieppe.¹² Meanwhile, Franz Martin Lunstroth's image of a German soldier helping an injured soldier, presumably a Canadian, suggests German compassion for the wounded.¹³ The watercolour drawing is dated 19 August 1942, the day of the Dieppe Raid, but Lunstroth probably painted it afterwards from a photograph of the time.¹⁴ P.K. Muller-Gera's *Prisoners of War Guarded by German Soldiers* gives us a glimpse of Canadian prisoners of war at ease; sitting and standing in a relaxed manner with their metal helmets removed.¹⁵ Its eventual purpose may well have been propaganda to demonstrate that the Germans were treating their prisoners kindly.

Canadian War Museum 19710261-5972







Above: Franz Martin Lunstroth, *Carrying Wounded*.

Opposite: P.K. Muller-Gera, *Prisoners of War Guarded by German Soldiers*.

In contrast to these sympathetic portrayals of the dead and defeated, in Berlin, Hitler and his chief architect, Albert Speer were imagining immense, imposing structures such as the planned Berlin Volkshalle (People's Hall) based on the Roman Pantheon. The Volkshalle dome was to be 290 metres high with a diameter of 250 metres.¹⁶ New German art was being championed by Hitler's official sculptor Arno Breker, who created larger than life-size stone figures to accompany the grandeur of the Reich Chancellery designed by Albert Speer in 1938. Breker's 1941 sculpture *Avenger* mimics Hercules with snakes successfully trampled underfoot as if they were the enemy.¹⁷

The Nazi cult of victory involved triumphal presentations of flags, insignia and grandiose art and architecture. Yet victory flags and

classically-inspired heroism are not evident in the German war pieces in the CWM collection. Instead, there is an awareness of the costs of conflict with the beach littered with broken tanks and casualties. The artists took serious note of the dead and the need to assist the injured. Even if the eventual purpose was propaganda, their drawings are reflective, and not bombastic or triumphant. In *Destroyed Tanks being Salvaged*, for example, Wilhelm Strauss' 1942 drawing displays the detritus of war: the battered shore, the machine wreckage on the beach, and the destructive impact of conflict on the natural environment.¹⁸ The artist's reaction to the scene suggests unusual sympathy for the defeated and recognition of war's cruelty.

Canadians may regard these Dieppe pictures as a tragic monument to a military endeavour that went terribly wrong but it is important to reflect on the fact that the purpose of these works was entirely different.

The German artists depicted Dieppe because for their compatriots the event was a success. The wreckage and the dead bodies they painted were a measure of that success. That the possibility exists that some of the work was made after the event from photographs only heightens the significance of the victory for them. As in Canada, wartime success required documentation in the form of paintings as well as photographs. In terms of German art, the Dieppe work, as an example of German official art as a whole, is significant because it is so manifestly different from the better-known art that was created under a regime famous for its monstrously large heroic art and architecture. Movingly, the Dieppe works unequivocally show that German artists, like their Canadian counterparts in the Canadian War Records program, felt a need to reflect on the nature of the war they participated in and witnessed, as fellow soldiers at war.

Canadian War Museum 19880279-001



Canadian War Museum 19710261-2464



Above: Joseph Albert Benkert, *Der Tote Kanadische (The Dead Canadian)*.

Left: Wilhelm Strauss, *Destroyed Tank Landing Craft*.



Wilhelm Strauss, *Destroyed Tanks Being Salvaged*.

Notes

1. <www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/feature/dieppe. Accessed 24 July 2012>. Veterans' Affairs Canada article marking the 70th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid in 2012.
2. Ronald Atkin, *Dieppe 1942* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp.254-7, "Reporting the Aftermath."
3. P.K. Muller Gera, *German Fighters Strafing Troops*, 1943, chalk and ink on paper, 49.3 x 38.9 cm, Canadian War Museum [CWM], Beaverbrook Collection of War Art [BCWA], 19710261-2460. Dieppe Raid illustration drawn nearly six months after the event.
4. Renée Klish, untitled article (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2001), p.1. CWM Curatorial Files, German Art, Background. Klish is a former curator of the US Army Center of Military History's art collection.
5. <www.olympic-museum.de/art/artcompetition.htm>. Accessed 19 July 2012. Art, music, sculpture, literature and architecture competitions were part of the Olympics from 1912 until 1952. The artwork related to the depiction of sports. In 1936, in Berlin, the German entries won the most awards with the Italians close behind.
6. Toby Clark, *Art & Propaganda* (London: Orion, 1997), p.64.
7. Clark, *Art & Propaganda*, p.65.
8. Clark, *Art & Propaganda*, p.64.
9. Klish, untitled article, p.1.
10. Franz Martin Lunstroth, *Mopping Up After the Battle*, No.2, 1942, watercolour on paper, 64.3 x 49.2 cm, CWM, BCWA, 19801306-001.
11. Alfred Hierl, *Casualty on the Beach*, 1945, pastel on paper, 51.4 x 46.4 cm, CWM, BCWA, 19710261-5976. Completed three years after the 1942 event.
12. For example, Hugo Brewster, *Dieppe: Canada's Darkest Day of World War II* (Toronto Scholastic Canada, 2009), p.35. A detail from the painting is used on the cover of T. Murray Hunter, *Canada at Dieppe* (Ottawa: Balmuir, 1982). Illustration of Alfred Hierl, *Casualty on the Beach*, 1945.
13. Franz Martin Lunstroth, *German Soldier Rendering Aid*, 1942, watercolour on paper, 49.5 x 64.3 cm, CWM, BCWA, 19710261-5972.
14. Ronald Atkin, *Dieppe 1942* (London: Macmillan, 1980), photo pages following p.210, no.15 from Koblenz Archives.
15. P.K. Muller-Gera, *Prisoners of War Guarded by German Soldiers*, 1943, carbon, pencil and ink on paper, 46.8 x 30.9 cm, CWM, BCWA, 19710261-2459.
16. Alex Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press for the College Art Association, 1990), pp.112-3. Illustrations of the Volkshalle.
17. Ibid., see "The Cult of Victory," pp.133-6.
18. Wilhelm Strauss, *Destroyed Tanks Being Salvaged*, c.1942, watercolour on paper 46.3 x 60.4 cm, CWM, BCWA, 19710261-2466.

Antonia Weetman studied Ancient and Modern History at Oxford University. While at the Courtauld Institute in London, England, she wrote her master's thesis on "The Nazi Use of Classicism in the work of Arno Breker, Hitler's Chief Sculptor." She has recently completed a Diploma in Fine Art at the Ottawa School of Art.