

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT MADE BY HERBERT M. RITTER,
MUNICH

Czechoslovak national, later naturalized in Germany. Lived in Czechoslovakia, with certain interruptions, until 1930. Had many friends among foreigners and Jews. Worked in the sanitorium owned by his father. Moved to Munich after the sanitarium had been closed and became a business man. All his friends rejected the rising Nazi movement. Had no contact whatever with the Nazi party.

Drafted into the army at the outbreak of war, and assigned to the Abwehr office in the 7th Service Command. His immediate superior was Captain Ickrath; also received assignments from Dr. Schmidhuber. After his two superiors had been arrested because of suspected treason, Ritter was dismissed from the Abwehr, (Sep 1942). Was drafted again and assigned to anti-air raid activity in April 1943. After a training course, he was assigned to Potsdam where he worked in the Air Corps Directive Staff. After July 20 he was denounced for having made defeatist remarks. Was thoroughly interrogated by a Lt. Col. Hohl. Was released as a result of the intervention of a Dr. Bernhard; transferred to the Eastern front. At the end of the war was taken prisoner by the Czechs, and soon released and sent home. His brother, Dr. Walther Ritter, received an Anti Fascist Certificate from the Czechs as welll as a certificate of political reliability.

16 November 1945

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY HERBERT M. RITTER

I have been in constant touch with events in the world of art. I will limit myself to the description of certain happenings on the art market. The transfer of important German and foreign art objects into the hands of Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, von Ribbentrop, Frank, etc. resulted principally from the taking of such objects out of confiscated supplies, particularly from Jewish property and the property of politically unpopular persons. A small part was acquired on the regular market and on public auctions. I am going to mention some transactions in the regular trade as far as I can remember them without reliable sources of information and without the use of any documents.

The main reasons for the acquisitions of Ribbentrop were the ambitions of Mrs. R. Her family was extremely annoyed when, during the temporary absence of Mrs. R's mother, a beautiful painting by Lukas Cranach was taken to Ribbentrop's house. After the fall of France, Ribbentrop needed more art objects for the furnishing of his house in the Wilhelmstrasse and for his estate in Fuschel. In the person of Mr. Adolf Wuester, he found a competent buyer. Wuester had lived in Paris as art dealer for 16 years. According to my information he started to provide for Ribbentrop in Paris, and the Paris dealers were happy to be able to make some transactions. Later Wuester received the title of Consul, and became the cultural expert at the German Embassy in Paris. He is actually an idealist, and not a business man, and had convinced himself that the measures and aims of his employer were quite legal. Ribbentrop was known to pay poor prices and many dealers did not want to sell to him since he was known to make payment only after a long time. His purchases are noted in the catalogues of several of the better known auction houses, as for instance the Hotel Drouot, Hans W. Langer in Berlin, the Dorotheum in Vienna, etc. I believe that one of my friends has the complete list of the paintings taken from Holland, regardless of whom they were given to. I have not yet been able to

get in touch with this gentleman. In order to illustrate the basic attitude, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ towards property and money I would like to give the example of the acquisition of Fuschel Castle. The former owner of the castle, Baron Remfitz, a son-in-law of the Baroness Berg-Thyssen, was taken to a concentration camp as a politically unreliable Austrian. He died soon thereafter. The Ribbentrops then picked Fuschel as their summer estate and moved in. The widow of Baron Remfitz had gone to boarding school with Mrs. Ribbentrop, and some decent people believed that they might undertake a friendly intervention. A lady who knew Mrs. Ribbentrop suggested that the Baroness Remfitz be given an appropriate sum for Fuschel. Mrs. Ribbentrop was extremely surprised at this suggestion but promised to take it up with her husband. No settlement was ever made.

On Ribbentrops orders numerous objects of art were acquired for the furnishings of numerous German Embassies and Legations. The German Embassy in Madrid received numerous valuable paintings, and it was believed that some of them were the private property of Ribbentrop. Among others, a very well known painting by M. v. Schwind was taken to Madrid. Several paintings which were needed by the foreign office to be given away as presents were bought on the market, mostly through the Chief of Protocol, Minister von Doernberg. The last such purchase that I heard of was a present for Count Ciano, which was bought in the open market. Hitler had given orders never to purchase German objects of art for these purposes since he did not want them to leave the country.

Where objects were not acquired by sequestration I believe that Heinrich Hoffmann usually had a hand in them. In the case of sequestration, this was the case anyway. Everything was done via Hoffmann, which involved a great many competitive manouvers and profiteering. The Munich art Gallery, Maria Dittrich - Almas was very close to Hoffmann. Any objects that were to be offered to the Reich Chancellery were first screened by Hoffman who then recommended to Hitler whether he should buy them or not. Mrs Almas Dittrich usually gave Hoffman big commissions. The acquisition of a painting by Vermeer van Delft, which had belonged to the family of Count Czernin was the subject of much discussion. Hoffman had from Vienna offered the painting to Hitler for three and a half million marks. After some time the painting was sold to Hitler through an attorney of the Czernin family, a Mr. von Scanzeni. Hitler learned that Hoffman had wanted to get a profit of a million marks for himself, out of this transaction. The acquisitions of Hoffman for himself and for his son-in-law, Baldur von Shirach, are considerable. There is a very good collection of Spitzwegs.

It is not possible to cite all transactions or the method by which prices were arrived at. Hitler once refused to buy two paintings by a well known Bavarian master because the price of 80,000 marks was too high. Shortly thereafter, these same paintings were bought by the Gau leadership in Munich, and presented to Gauleiter Koch in Koenigsberg, as a gift. One hundred and forty thousand marks were finally paid for these paintings.

Through these methods a boom was created. At one auction for instance, three representatives of Hitler were bidding for the same article and thus raised the price considerably. Everybody was interested in making a commission, and since the Reich Chancellery was paying anyway, the price made no difference. Hitler once said, "I know that I'm ruining prices, but, after all, something has to be done for art."

Goering's acquisitions transcend anything that has ever been seen before. Goering loved to determine which objects he wanted to receive as presents. Banks, industrial organizations etc. then knew exactly what they had to do. In Karinhall the rooms and corridors were full of the most beautiful things; yet further purchases were made. He bought among others from a Mr. Bornheim of the Galerie fuer Alte Kunst in Munich which had formerly been ~~a~~ well known Jewish firm,

A. B. Drey. This firm was being financed by a Cologne lawyer, Dr. Spengler. Mr. Bornheim and Mrs. Almas Dittrich, always had permits to go to France in order to make purchases. Goering is reported to have said to a dealer in Karinhall on his birthday in 1942, "I estimate that my presents must be worth around eleven million marks."

These inflationists price policies of the Nazis led a considerable number of private persons to buy objects of art as a capital investment. Professor Heinkel, for instance, acquired a considerable collection. Dr. Goebbels liked to buy what the Nazis then generally considered "degenerate Art", impressionists and also the works of Jews. A few days ago I was told in Vienna that Professor Hoffman last year attempted to sell Hitler three forged Spitzwegs and had attempted to procure an expert certificate for them. The Viennese artist-historian (I think it was Professor Eigenberger) who refused to write out a certificate was released from his position. His rehabilitation is being effected now. Another example will show how unscrupulous the Nazis were. There was a large painting by Spitzweg which experts did not consider genuine despite the fact that it was of high quality. Hoffman declared that the painting was genuine, and wanted to buy it for someone. The dealer who had the painting states that he could not sell it as a Spitzweg and cited the negative opinions prepared by art experts. The firm then wrote a letter to Hoffman to the effect that they would sell the painting on the condition that they were to receive a statement that they had neither offered nor sold the painting as a Spitzweg.

The acquisitions in Holland through the former state secretary Muehlmann, Vienna, are a special subject. Some people in Vienna are quite astonished that Muehlmann seems to have found entry to officials in the New Austria. It would not be difficult to get further details.

Another chapter are the transactions that a Mr. Pfundmeyer, Vienna, together with an official of the Gestapo carried on. They engaged in blackmail and ^{behalf} expropriation. An attorney is now investigating in whose/~~xxxxx~~ these transactions were made.

An attorney whom I know is at present working on the legal aspects, from the

Austrian point of view, of the transfer of art objects to Germany, particularly the acquisitions made for the museum in Linz. Part of the problems involved are the art objects in Italy, whose prices were raised enormously by Professor Voss, of Dresden. I have been asked by this attorney to help him, and believe that I can be helpful in view of my knowledge of the situation. It seems that progress in Vienna in this matter is very slow, and it also seems that no one wants to have anything to do with the matter in order not to become suspect. It would be necessary first to gain clarity concerning each and every event since the Anschluss of Austria.

There are a certain number of sources which I have not used in this report, because of lack of time. It would be possible though to get a complete report from a reliable expert concerning a certain definite question as for example the whereabouts of the most important Dutch masters.