Lee Sorensen wrote the original review. Robert Edsel’s response to the review is posted below. In addition, the ARLIS/NA Reviews Editors agreed to publish one further response from each of the two parties, and these appear further down the page.

I am writing in response to Lee Sorensen’s review of Nancy H. Yeide’s Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: The Hermann Goering Collection in ARLIS/NA Reviews. As publisher of the book, I am compelled to correct some fundamental misunderstandings on Mr. Sorensen’s part. First, it is simply incorrect to state that with the exception of Rorimer there have been no publications on looting and repatriation from the vantage point of a ‘trained art historian.’ In the years following World War II, numerous books and articles were written by members of the Monument, Fine Arts, and Archives section, most of whom were art historians and museum professionals. Mr. Sorensen is also apparently unaware of the wealth of publications from ‘trained art historians’ within the past several years – Sopie Lillie’s Was Einmal War and Birgit Schwarz’s Hitlers Museum and Geniewahn: Hilter und die Kunst come to mind, not to mention the efforts of art historians including Katja Terlau, Angelica Goernandt Enderlein, Victoria Reed, Laurie Stein and others. In fact most research on the topic conducted in the United Sites today is done by art historians and art museum professionals, including Ms. Yeide herself. Underlying Mr. Sorensen’s review is a lack of recognition that provenance research is an integral element of scholarly inquiries into the history of collecting and advances critical inquiry. His implied dismissal of the core of Ms. Yeide’s research as non-academic reflects an opinion that is contrary to the current climate. Despite Mr. Sorensen’s presumption, Ms. Yeide’s book was never intended as a history of Goering’s collections, a topic which has been covered previously in several books (not merely the two to which Mr. Sorensen refers) and within larger scholarly studies of Nazi collecting (by, for example, Jonathan Petropoulos, Lynn H. Nicholas, Anya Heuss, Hanns Christian Löhr and other authors too numerous to mention). Yeide’s book is the first comprehensive and authoritative presentation of the specific contents of Goering’s collecting, and was conceived as a complement to the extant scholarship and a catalyst for future analysis on the subject.

Concerning Mr. Sorensen’s opinion of the book’s layout, matters of ‘taste are naturally personal. However he does seem to have misunderstood the point of the layout, which was not to reference a military inventory but rather to emulate the Salon style display of Goering’s collection at his residences. The layout underscores the quantity of objects and, by extension, the quality.

Fundamentally I am shocked by the apparent necessity of having to explain to Mr. Sorensen, an art librarian, the value of this type of reference book or, for that matter, to apologize for its cost, driven, as he should surely understand, by the multitude of reproductions. For what it is worth, I can assure you that the sales price of the book doesn’t approach our company’s cost to produce it. That said, it is an important subject written by the world’s leading authority on Goering’s collection. For that reason, even in the abyss of these difficult financial times, we never wavered on its publishing.

I would be grateful if my position regarding Mr. Sorensen’s review were made known to the ARLIS/NA Reviews readership. If the opinion of a more neutral party, the distinguished scholar Lynn H. Nicholas, would be appreciated, her review of Ms. Yeide’s book is published in this month’s Art & Antiques and available online at:


Sincerely,
Robert M. Edsel
President [Laurel Publishing]
Mr. Edsel's defense of his company's book is understandable. ARLIS/NA Reviews reviews are necessarily limited to 450 words, hardly enough to cover a history of the literature of the topic and evaluate the book itself. His response changes none of the facts of the review, however. Books (as opposed to articles) on Nazi looting and repatriation—the subject of my review—are almost exclusively written by non-art historians. To use his own examples, the author Jonathan Petropolis, whose excellent book on the Reich and art is a major text, is an English professor with a degree in literature. Ms Yeide, the author in question, though a provenance researcher, holds neither a terminal degree nor any in art history. I think it's Mr Edsel who's missed the point: the issue is not what constitutes an 'art historian,' but rather that the literature on Nazi art thieving has mostly been approached from the archival side or the swashbuckling approach, as in Mr Edsel's own Rescuing Da Vinci [sic], and not as an art-historical phenomenon. The penetrating questions of art history haven't been considered in this field. For example, Göring's collection, rather than an odd mish-mash based upon availability, appears to have been carefully assembled to both endorse the fickle Party line and assert difference. As to his dispute about the book's layout, usefulness to researchers and cost, ARLIS readers, many of whom, like myself have twenty years professional experience in teaching, academic- and art-museum libraries, are better judges than the book publisher. I leave it to them. Regarding his protest about the review's assessment of the text, it is unusual, I think, that someone could research and compile a detailed catalog of Göring's collection and come up with no insight on the Reichsmarschall's collecting, a fact of the book which Mr Edsel himself concedes. That clearly seems relevant to a review. Finally, the —neutral— review he instead refers readers to was written by Lynn Nicholas, who has close ties both to Mr Edsel (she wrote the forward to his 2007 book) and Ms Yeide. I can claim no such intimacy with the authors of books I review.

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Mr. Edsel responds:
To begin with, let's get your facts correct: Nancy Yeide does have an MA in Art History; Jonathan Petropoulos is a European History professor, not an English professor, with a Ph.D. and an A.M. in Modern European History; and I can assure you, as can others---the professionalism of Lynn Nicholas supercedes any friendship.
My defense of Nancy Yeide's work is not in my capacity as her publisher, but as someone who for seven years has worked in various archives around the world as well as having studied books, articles, and key documents involving the subject of Nazi looting (although I focus on the heroes of the story-- the men and women of thirteen nations who served in the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section). In the course of my experience I have noted those reference books on the subject that make such work easy and interesting, and those that make research even more difficult than it inherently is. Nancy's book was specifically designed to capture the best parts of other research material we all access while avoiding the pitfalls of those that are poorly organized. It was created for those curious of mind in addition to those with experienced minds.
Set aside my meager seven years of experience: Lynn Nicholas has been doing such research for twenty-five plus years (much of it pre-internet!), and Nancy for about thirteen years. In our world, that's the beginning of time for study in this area. Incorporating the real-world experience of two such learned and hands-on scholars is vastly more important than strictly adhering to classroom tenants.
My first book, Rescuing Da Vinci, is hardly the —swashbuckling— approach you describe, rather it uses 460 photographs, some of which had never before been seen, to tell the story of the protection of the most important works of art and other cultural treasures of western civilization by officials in Europe, and later the Monuments Men and women, from the destruction of war and theft by Hitler and the Nazis.
lives of nine men and one woman – the most unlikely of spies – using their never before seen letters home to wives and other loved ones written during combat. I am also the co-producer of the award-winning documentary film, *The Rape of Europa*, based on scholar Lynn Nicholas’s outstanding book, and Founder and President of the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art, the 2007 National Humanities Medal recipient, our nation’s highest honor for work in the humanities.

You would be interested to know that five of the Monuments Men were distinguished librarians and archivists in their post-war careers (see below), not the least of whom was Dr. Leslie Poste. Dr. Poste and the others knew, like all of us who work in this complicated area, that until all the data is accurately assembled and made accessible to scholars and researchers, forming conclusions is premature. Because of Nancy’s pioneering work, only now can art historians, professionals in the museum world, or interested art collectors and connoisseurs form an opinion about Goering the art collector based on those paintings he acquired for his personal collection. That was not – I repeat – not--Nancy’s objective and she stated that on page vi: —Most importantly, this catalogue is not the final word on the collection, rather a foundation on which additional research and interpretation can be built.|| Now that the vital source material is for the first time available I think it likely someone will write the book you criticize Nancy’s for not being – and they’ll have her work to credit for it being possible.

If this had been an easy endeavor, I’m sure someone would have accomplished it in the sixty-five years that have passed since the end of World War II: no one did. Nancy Yeide’s book is, and I expect will remain, the defining work on reconstructing Hermann Goering’s painting collection. In any event, we appreciate the time you allocated to your review of Nancy’s book. In the course of time, I hope that you will reconsider your criticism of her book as news of its role in connecting long sought works to their rightful owners becomes more commonly known among the public. This book is, after all, not just a book ABOUT history, but will play an active role in helping to write it.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Eds

Monuments Men who worked as Librarians and Archivists

Seymour J. Pomrenze: After his wartime service, Pomrenze worked as a consultant to the National Archives, and as a records manager and archivist for the U.S. Army from 1950 until 1976. He taught as an adjunct professor in records management at American University in Washington, D.C. until 1980.

Edgar Breitenbach: From 1952 to 1955 he supervised the construction and organization of the American Memorial Library in Berlin. After spending a decade in Germany working on restitution and recovery efforts, Breitenbach returned to Washington, D.C. in 1956 to accept a position at the Library of Congress. He remained the chief of the Prints and Photographs Division until his retirement in 1973. Jesse E. Boell: He worked at the National Archives as assistant Chief of War Records Division during World War II. He was Wisconsin State Archivist from 1947-1959, developed the University of Wisconsin – Madison Archives, and became University Archivist from 1959 –1971. Lester K. Born: Worked at the Library of Congress. Leslie I. Poste: After serving with the MFAA dealing with the difficult recovery and restitution of archives from across the continent, Poste became a professor of library and information science at SUNY-Geneseo from 1958 to 1978.

For more information on the Monuments Men, and a complete listing of all the men and women of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section, please visit:

WWW.MONUMENTSMENFOUNDATION.ORG