Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection: The Looting of Europe’s Art Treasures and Their Dispersal after World War II, by Kenneth D. Alford. McFarland, April 2012. 269 p. ill. ISBN 9780786468157 (pbk.), $45.00; ISBN 9780786489558 (ebook), $45.00

Hermann Göring held several senior military and governmental positions in Hitler’s Germany, among them commander in chief of the Air Force and Reichsmarshall. He is also a major figure in the story of Nazi art looting. His art collection contained over 3,000 objects, acquired primarily through gifts, illegal purchase, and looting during the Third Reich. Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection by Kenneth D. Alford provides information on the network of Nazi deputies and private citizens who conspired to move objects from private and public art collections throughout Germany and occupied Europe to Göring’s possession.

Alford, author of several books on Nazi art looting, drew heavily from archival sources in the writing of this book. The Art Looting Investigation Reports, from the Office of Strategic Services created during the summer of 1945, are a major source, as are the Property Art Cards from the Munich Collection Point, which list the 3,325 objects from Göring’s collection captured by U.S. forces. The book’s appendices reproduce inventories of this collection.

The author provides a biographical sketch of Göring and details how he amassed his collection, attempted to hide and protect it from the advancing Allied forces, and what happened to it in the months following the end of conflict. Of particular usefulness to researchers of the art market during the war are several chapters that list the dealers, galleries, and collectors that willingly and not, made it possible for Göring to amass his collection. Occasionally these brief descriptions of dealers and galleries also list the items sold or gifted to Göring. The writing style of these and subsequent chapters is sparse and dry, and facts are dispensed briskly. It is difficult to keep track of the dozens of people discussed in the book – secretaries, art dealers, government functionaries, art conservators and forgers are mentioned and described with a few biographical facts before Alford continues on with the story.

Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection is a focused study on a major perpetrator of Nazi looting and, despite the problems in writing quality and style mentioned above, is recommended for libraries that already have more general books on the topic. This book also serves as a nice accompaniment to the catalog of Göring’s collection written by Nancy Yeide in 2009 Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: The Hermann Göring Collection (Laurel Publishing). It includes black and white illustrations and lists of the objects in Göring’s collection. The index is detailed and the bibliography and notes provide a useful reference list of primary and secondary sources.

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