



**Shulamith Behr, Marian Malet, eds.** *Arts in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. Table of contents. \$95.00 (paper), ISBN 978-90-420-1786-3.



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## Visual Cultures, Identity and Exile: New British Art History

This anthology assesses the cultural impact of refugees from German-speaking Europe on the visual arts in Britain during the 1930s. Some readers may find this collection of articles by British scholars somewhat provincial, even insular, in its outlook. Striking is the pervasive, yet never explicitly formulated, question subtending many of these articles: How did exiles change this place where we live, and how might they have changed us? The editors' silence on these matters might well be construed as indifference to any readership the volume might find beyond the British Isles. Put differently, instead of introducing the ten individual case studies through what has been called the optic or lens of the exile, or viewing the influx of refugees in the arts from another, perhaps multiple, perspectives, the brief preface introduces the volume on this historic incoming of exiles through the lens of the native. Together with the volume's lackluster cover design, this academic tome threatens to encounter rejection from anyone unfamiliar with the scholarship of the authors gathered together in this issue of the *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*. Moreover, the perfunctory preface exacerbates the book's initial lack of appeal

by opting not to place the varied contributions within larger discursive contexts.

But neglecting this book for any of the above reasons would be a mistake. Curious readers will quickly recognize that the advantage reaped by limiting the contributions to this group of mostly indigenous contributors is a rich harvest of previously neglected materials from British archives, often interpreted with impressive care and brilliance. Moreover, the contributions stand apart from much of previous exile studies in other significant ways. Austrian, particularly Viennese, exiles are given extensive attention along with those from Germany. Exiles' creative activities and experiences are considered well beyond the end of World War II; the book attends to the many exiles who opted to remain in Britain, rather than returning immediately to the continent, if at all. While the volume is devoted strictly to the visual arts, a broad range of visual cultural production and related career activities also receive attention from the authors. These include architecture, art dealing, didactic photography exhibits and even painting restoration.

In each of these ways, yet with little aplomb, the vol-

ume exceeds the oft-rehearsed standard assumptions of *Exilforschung* about geography and chronology. Generally speaking, the articles also avoid tendentious claims or earth-shattering theses. Together, they suggest a relaxed moment in the art and visual historiography of exile to Great Britain that is content to pursue a protracted phase of continuing to gather untapped or overlooked archival sources and to provide careful and rich assessments of them. Much is to be admired in this tone and approach.

Following an unsigned preface that provides few clues about what to expect in the near four hundred pages that follow, the volume opens with an exemplary case study on art historian Klaus E. Hinrichsen as an art critic who was subtly attuned to the modest but poignantly freighted art produced and exhibited by his fellow German internees in a British internment camp on the Isle of Man. Its author, Shulamith Behr, considers how Hinrichsen's early education, art historical studies at university and familiarity with Expressionism (for example, its "concept of redemption through suffering," [p. 33]) informed his interests and identity in English exile. Growing up in L&uuml;beck in a family of Lutherans of Jewish ancestry, the young Hinrichsen was exposed to the public culture nourished by museum director Carl Georg Heise. Heise's views concerning the integral relation between local art traditions of the past and the newest in contemporary art left their impression on Hinrichsen. Behr's essay is a synthetic and well-documented intellectual and biographical account that also refines our understanding of the vicissitudes of art's functions within an internment camp.

In "Politics, Photography and Exile in the Life of Edith Tudor-Hart (1908-1973)," Duncan Forbes pursues Behr's concerns with modifications to intellectual heritage and identity in exile and also factors the political biography of this exiled photographer into the history of twentieth-century photography. Forbes offers convincing interpretations of several of Tudor-Hart's photographs in relation to the specific needs of the Communist Party, particularly during the Popular Front era. The essay also reconstructs her involvements in progressive, socialist pedagogy in Red Vienna and in Germany, first in Montessori circles, then at the Dessau Bauhaus. Forbes discusses Tudor-Hart's photojournalistic activities in the early thirties, and how such engagements continued to inform her practices in London exile, as she involved herself with an array of English art groups and publications. Also addressed is her life as a "low-level Communist agent" on into the postwar years. Forbes excels in

elucidating what he terms "the complexity of the political self" (p. 51) by reading particular photographs in terms of evolving Communist Party social aesthetics and in light of her longstanding socialist commitments. Especially suggestive is the proposition that her many photographs of children from the late 1930s on, in English exile, might be read in terms of a displacement of the futurity and hope she once placed in social movements that were national scope and international political developments to that of the world of children (pp. 75-77). By reconstructing a documentary leftist and largely central European practice undervalued if not completely occluded by post-1930s modernist photo history, Forbes offers an highly authoritative, not merely polemical, revision to dominant modernist historiography.

As with these two opening studies, each of the volume's contributions is striking for the way it develops exile in terms of the experience of individuals, lives embarked upon on the continent and continued in England. The two essays by Anna M&uuml;ller-H&ouml;rlin on Fred Uhlman not only provide a sensitive reading of his internment camp drawings from the Isle of Man and expand our knowledge of the collective endeavors of the Free German League of Culture, but truly usher in a new phase of critical scholarship on this organizer, attorney, writer and artist, whose multifaceted identity and multiple career paths have eluded previous scholars. Anyone wishing to reckon with the art, writings, life or career of Uhlman will need to begin with these related studies of M&uuml;ller-H&ouml;rlin. Rebecca Scraggs's essay on Joseph Flatters's *Mein Kampf Illustrated Series, 1938-1942* retrieves neglected materials from British archives to write political biography at its best. Her deft reckonings with the portraitist Flatters's caricatures of Hitler are repeatedly insightful and also lead into several fruitful engagements with the critical literature on caricature.

The careers, art and assimilation experiences of three sculptors, two from Vienna and one from Brno, are discussed, compared and intertwined in Margaret Garlake's ambitiously synthetic essay on George Ehrlich, Siegfried Charoux and Franta Belsky. The more public efforts at monumental sculpture by these artists, who to varying degrees remained on the outer fringes of British and international modernism, are singled out in this essay. Another Viennese &#x2013;migr&#x2013; receiving focused attention is Sigmund Freud's youngest son, the architect Ernst L. Freud. Freud's career had prospered with domestic commissions in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Volker Welker establishes the continuities between Freud's private domestic commissions, many from Jew-

ish clients, first in Berlin and then in greater London, as well as the decline of such commissions after 1945, when private construction in England collapsed in favor of government-sponsored social housing. The infamous Warburg Library comes into view in Dorothea McEwan's examination of the remarkably extensive art education exhibits realized by its librarian Fritz Saxl. We learn how Saxl conceived and prepared numerous exhibits of photographs of art mounted on panels. McEwan links the art educational panels that Saxl prepared for adult education in Jewish institutions in Vienna and the Warburg Library in Hamburg prior to 1933 and the photographic exhibitions he realized in London beginning in 1939 that addressed such topics as Greek and Roman Art, Indian Art and Portraiture and Character.

A feature of all of the essays is their common focus upon individual experience, which bears pointing out not to signal some methodological or ideological shortcoming, but rather to stress that the object of exile studies here is deeply invested in the life and career experiences of individuals. Taking the essays together, one derives a sense of lives being rhetorically reconstructed to better reassess the creative, usually aesthetic, achievements of individuals. This underlying assumption signals a remarkable break with the master narratives that have framed, or swamped, much earlier scholarship on art and artists in exile from the Third Reich (such as anti-fascism versus fascism, modernist art versus National Socialist art, democracy versus fascism), or the general portrayal of world historical events invading the life of the individual exile-agent. In these studies, world history does not fail to appear as much as it makes its entrances only through the life experiences of individual exiles.

Another contribution meriting particular attention is Jutta Vinzent's essay on artist and art dealer Jack Bilbo and the curatorial program and publishing endeavors of his successful Modern Art Gallery from October 1941 to 1947. Vinzent demonstrates how both the Jewish identity and communist activities of his recent German past were

downplayed by this foreigner in London exile, as he promoted notions of modern art anchored in autonomous art. According to Vinzent's sampling of the critical reception of the gallery's exhibitions, the British press gravitated toward reading the art Bilbo exhibited in terms of formal criteria and avoided nationalist interpretations of the art or Bilbo's gallery-based project, even when art by German and other central European refugees was the fare. The essay stands out for the clarity with which it distills and presents a staggering amount of empirical data into an elegant, theoretically informed and moving discussion of Bilbo's mostly successful, yet often precarious career, which developed through assimilation that entailed withholding his political, national and ethnic identity in the public and commercial culture of 1940s London. The essay also includes appendices of the exhibitions held at Bilbo's Modern Art Gallery, its publications and the sparse secondary literature on the topic.

As with many anthologies, this volume may be read cover to cover by only a few readers. An essay on picture restorers will likely appeal to a different reader than the ones on anti-fascist artists, but the anthology's contributions share an approach to critical biography grounded in documents, related to politics and attuned to public versus private experience, as well as to issues of assimilation and identity among exiles (often as Jews, Germans or Austrians). Taken together, the entire volume may overwhelm anyone but the art historian who specializes in visual arts in exile from Nazi Europe, or historians concerned with exiles to the United Kingdom. Each of the essays is written in a style infinitely accessible to undergraduates, graduate students and general readers alike. Faculty teaching courses in any of the historical disciplines that engage visual or material culture during the 1930s or 1940s in Great Britain will want to study this volume closely to consider adding any number of its essays to their next course reading list. Not only are the topics of the essays relevant, but each of the essays is a carefully crafted and finely tuned example of what historical scholarship in the humanities can be.

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