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1. A. J. Philpott, 'No Hitler in Mural at Harvard; It's Just Students' Imagination', *The Boston Globe*, 1 February 1936. Philpott incorrectly cites Rubenstein's name as Lewis R. Rubenstein, instead of Lewis W. Rubenstein.
2. Charles Kuhn, letter to Eda Loeb, 26 June 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.
3. Prince Heinrich of Prussia, quoted in Peter Nisbet and Emilie Norris (eds), *Busch-Reisinger Museum: History and Holdings* (Harvard University Art Museums: Cambridge, 1991), p. 9.
4. For a history of plaster cast collections amassed in the nineteenth century by US museums, see Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1998), pp. 38–56.
5. For a review of Wilhelm II's gifts to Harvard, see Jörg Nagler, 'From Culture to Kultur: Changing American Perceptions of Imperial Germany, 1870–1914', in David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (eds), *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America Since 1776* (German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press: Washington, DC and Cambridge, 1997), pp. 131–54.

On 1 February 1936, A. J. Philpott, an art critic for *The Boston Globe*, wrote, 'A rather small mural painting by Lewis R. [sic] Rubenstein in the Germanic Museum at Harvard has created a little excitement among some imaginative students who regard it as a bit of Hitler propaganda in picture form'.¹ The article titled 'No Hitler in Mural at Harvard; It's Just Students' Imagination' reassured readers that a group of Harvard College undergraduates had simply followed youthful folly in their 'misunderstanding and misinterpretation' of the work's 'symbolical composition', which, according to Philpott, was based on scenes from Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century *Der Ring des Niebelungen* operas. In point of fact, both Philpott and the Harvard students were correct, as Rubenstein – a Jewish-American painter – designed the work to visually reference Teutonic folklore, but subversively act as anti-Nazi propaganda in the years preceding World War II. Commissioned in 1935 by Charles L. Kuhn, curator of the Germanic Museum (now the Busch-Reisinger Museum), Rubenstein's mural cycle was intended to introduce museum audiences to modernised scenes from the *Ring* operas, which Wagner had liberally adapted in the late 1800s from the *Niebelungenlied*, a medieval Middle High German epic poem, and the *Prose Edda*, a thirteenth-century Old Norse poetic compilation. The result was a series of six frescoes, respectively, titled *Scenes from the Niebelungen Legend* (1935–1936, Fig. 1) and *Scenes from the Ragnarok Legend* (1936–1937, Fig. 2).

The impetus for the Germanic Museum mural project was not, however, born from Kuhn's desire to place overt, political propaganda on the walls of his museum. Instead, the curator sought to adorn the austere foyer in Adolphus Busch Hall (home to the museum from 1921 until 1991) with images that 'would not only immensely improve the looks of the room, would not only give a job to a very deserving and undoubtedly "coming" artist, but would show the world at large that we are not a German institution but American and that our aim is to serve the American public'.² Founded in 1903 as a means of educating Harvard students in the history of German and Northern European visual culture, the Germanic Museum was already known by the 1930s for its notable collection of plaster casts that, in the words of Prince Heinrich of Prussia, represented 'key monuments in the development of German sculpture'.³ The core of the plaster collection⁴ had in fact been given as a gift to Harvard in 1903 by Heinrich's older brother, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, whose diplomatic generosity was regarded as both a goodwill gesture towards the United States and Harvard, as well as a token of the emperor's gratitude for the honorary degree Harvard bestowed upon the prince in 1902.⁵

Adolphus Busch Hall (Fig. 3), begun in 1912 as the second and more permanent home of the Germanic Museum, was designed by the



Fig. 1. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Scenes from the Niebelungen Legend: Alberich and Dwarfs, Alberich's Hand, Curse of the Ring*, 1935–1936, fresco painting, buon fresco, hall view. Harvard Art Museums/ Busch-Reisinger Museum, Purchased through the generosity of Eda K. Loeb, Rubenstein. 1. (Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)



Fig. 2. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Scenes from the Ragnarok Legend: Doom of the Gods, Thor, The Regenerated Man*, 1936–1937, fresco painting, buon fresco, hall view. Harvard Art Museums/ Busch-Reisinger Museum, Purchased through the generosity of Eda K. Loeb, Rubenstein. 2. (Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

6. Nisbet and Norris, *The Busch-Reisinger Museum*, p. 11.



Fig. 3. Adolphus Busch Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010. (Photo: courtesy of the author.)

Munich-based architect German Bestelmeyer in the then-fashionable German historicist and *Jugendstil* styles, with an interior resembling the plan of a medieval European cathedral, complete with a neo-Romanesque crossing, apse, and grand hall. Although the building was completed in 1917, the museum did not open its doors to the public until 1921. Officially, the museum staff indicated that a lack of coal necessitated this decision, though in reality, the strong and prevalent anti-German sentiments that permeated American society throughout the years of World War I caused university officials to postpone the museum's grand re-opening. When the doors finally did open, over 50,000 visitors frequented the museum in the first year alone.⁶ Adolphus Busch Hall thus exemplified the museum's larger mission to preserve and present a wide breadth of Teutonic art and architecture to the Harvard community, as well as the public at large. Given this emphasis on the medieval Germanic past, Rubenstein's contemporary mural offered an abrupt contrast to objects in the permanent collection, and was among the first modern artworks acquired by the museum in the 1930s.

Consider, then, the surprise expressed by those Harvard undergraduates who entered the Germanic Museum in 1936 expecting to see the same old plasterworks representing medieval and renaissance German monuments, and who were instead confronted with the following scenes: the malevolent dwarf Alberich from the *Nibelungenlied* uncannily rendered as a bare-chested Adolf Hitler wearing a double-horned helmet and whipping his ammunition-building slaves into submission; Wagnerian gods donning World War I-era gas masks and operating flamethrowers and mustard gas canisters; the valiant god Thor dressed in a welder's apron and skullcap, wielding a modern-day sledgehammer (see Fig. 4). Given the conspicuous incongruity of such iconographic juxtapositions in a museum devoted to the Germanic arts, it is not difficult to imagine why individuals in the contemporary press were equally intrigued by these satirical images. In fact, Rubenstein's frescoes



Fig. 4. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Adolphus Busch Hall Murals*, 1937, fresco painting. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum. (Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

enjoyed a certain infamy in the critical press of Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts between the years 1936 and 1937. Today, however, they have been neglected in the critical literature examining artistic parody as a form of anti-Nazi propaganda in the United States prior to the inception of World War II. The present study aims to resolve this lacuna, offering that Rubenstein's satirical mural sought to 'serve the American public' by deliberately criticising the politics of the Third Reich and its visual propaganda.

US Anti-Nazi Murals of the 1930s

As a relative pioneer in pre-war, anti-Hitler propaganda in the United States, Rubenstein was one of only a few artists working in the country in the 1930s to confront Nazi anti-Semitism in public works. Two independent murals painted in New York City by the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera are arguably the earliest of these propagandistic attacks against Hitler and the National Socialists. The first of these frescoes, *Man at the Crossroads* (1932–1934, Fig. 5), was commissioned for the foyer in the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) Building at Rockefeller Center and incited controversy when its patron, Nelson A. Rockefeller, had the work famously destroyed in 1934 after Rivera refused to remove an image of Vladimir Lenin from the wall.⁷ In response to this censorship, Rivera wrote:

The attack on the portrait of Lenin was merely a pretext to destroy the entire Rockefeller Center fresco. In reality, the whole mural was displeasing to the bourgeoisie. Chemical warfare, typified by hordes of masked soldiers in the uniforms of Hitlerized Germany; unemployment, the result of the crisis; the degeneration and persistent pleasures of the rich in the midst of the atrocious sufferings of the exploited toilers – all these symbolized the capitalist world on one of the crossed roads.⁸

7. See Robert Linsley, 'Utopia Will Not Be Tolerated: Rivera at Rockefeller Center', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1994, pp. 48–62.

8. Diego Rivera, *Portrait of America* (Covici, Friede, Inc.: New York, 1934), p. 28.

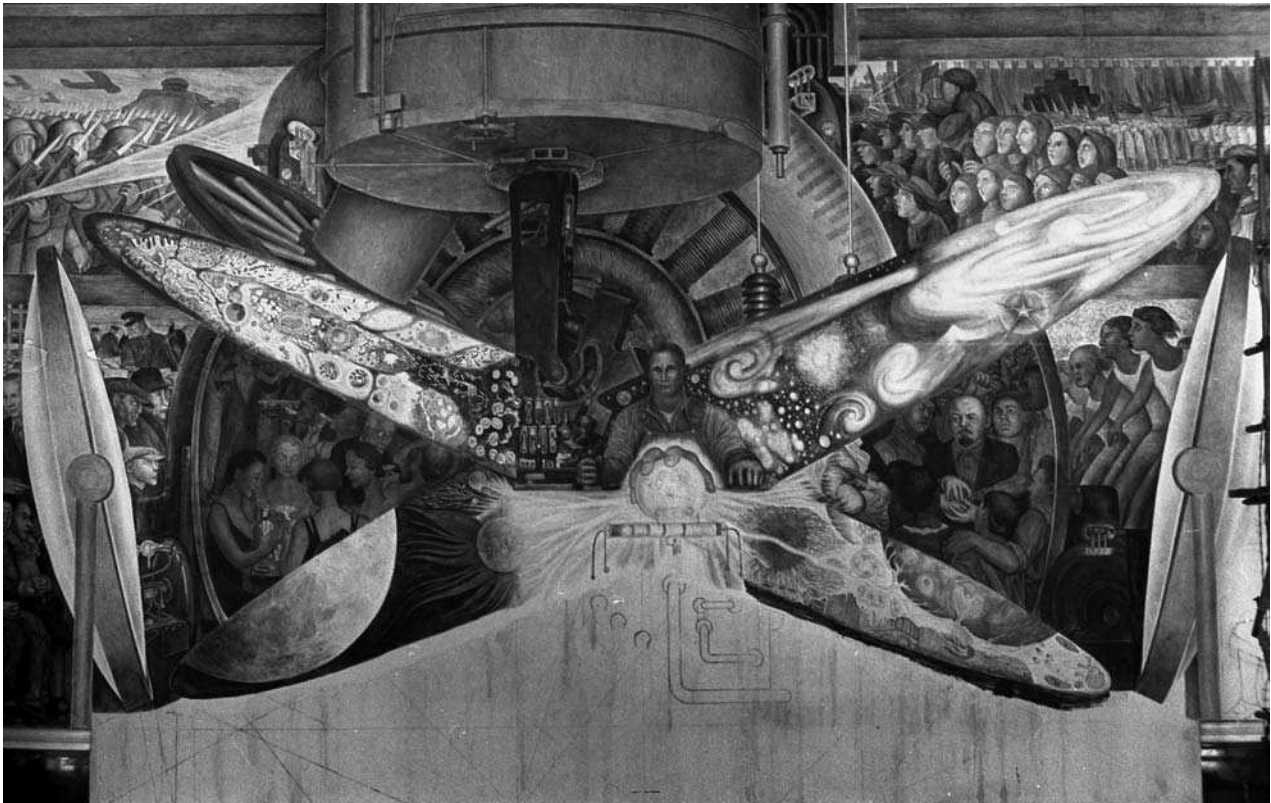


Fig. 5. Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads* (centre panel, in progress), 1932–1934, fresco painting, Rockefeller Center, New York, destroyed. (© 2012 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Lucienne Bloch, Courtesy Old Stage Studios.)

9. See Charles A. H. Thomson, *Overseas Information Service of the United States Government* (Brookings Institution: Washington, DC, 1948), p. 118; and Paul Kramer, 'Nelson Rockefeller and British Security Coordination', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 16, no. 1, The Second World War: Part 1 (January 1981), pp. 73–88.

10. Rivera, *Portrait of America*, p. 31.

Rivera believed that it was not simply an image of the Communist leader that displeased Rockefeller, but rather the rampant unemployment of the Great Depression, as well as the discomfort felt by upper middle-class Americans towards Hitler and his control of Germany. Rivera's statement, however biased, implies that Rockefeller felt a relative unease in reminding the American public of the economic crisis at hand, particularly when he and his family were prospering. One should not assume, however, that Rivera's anti-Nazi sentiments were not shared by his patron, seeing as Rockefeller later became the founder and benefactor of the newly created Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a federal counterespionage agency, which, starting in 1940, sought to 'discredit, depose, or in other ways damage the powers of Axis conspirators in South America' prior to the US involvement in World War II.⁹ Regardless of Rockefeller's true reasons for removing the mural from the RCA building, the end result is largely the point here: Rivera's pro-Communist, anti-fascist propaganda was silenced.

Rivera's anti-Hitler sentiments were more adamantly expressed in a subsequent mural created in 1933 for the New Workers School that the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) had opened in New York in 1923. Under the auspices of the school's director, Bertram D. Wolfe – Rivera's 'friend and comrade' – the artist was allowed to execute (largely at his own expense, and from the money he had earned from the failed Rockefeller Center project) the extensive *Portrait of America* portable mural cycle, which featured a section known as the *Hitler Panel* (Panel XVIII, Fig. 6).¹⁰ Despite



Fig. 6. Diego Rivera, *Hitler Panel* from *Portrait of America*, 1933, fresco painting, New Workers School, New York, destroyed. (© 2012 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Lucienne Bloch, Courtesy Old Stage Studios.)

one contemporary critic referring to the cycle as ‘confused, doctrinaire diagrams’ and the artist’s ‘biased’ interpretation of the current American scene, it is nevertheless clear that the *Hitler Panel* deliberately exposed US audiences to anti-Nazi propaganda as early as 1933.¹¹ In the centre of the composition, Hitler, standing before a collection of Nazi flags, passionately shouts to the masses with wild, tyrannical fervour. In the bottom left of the composition, a likeness of Albert Einstein points to a Jewish man, whose visage Rivera rendered according to the Nazi stereotype of the ‘hook-nosed’ Jew found in numerous anti-Semitic caricatures published in German newspapers, such as *Der Stürmer*, in the late 1920s and 1930s. In Rivera’s painting, the man is being beaten with the butt of a Nazi’s rifle. To the right of this figure, a woman with a shaved head and closed eyes wears a sign

12. Joseph Goebbels, *Der Angriff: Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit* (Zentralverlag der NSDAP: Munich, 1935), pp. 322–4.

13. For the specifics of Shahn's commission, see Matthew Baigell, 'The Persistence of Holocaust Imagery in American Art', in F. C. DeCoste and Bernard Schwartz (eds), *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law, and Education* (The University of Alberta Press: Edmonton, 2000), p. 124; Diana L. Linden, 'Ben Shahn, The Four Freedoms, and the S.S. St. Louis', *American Jewish History*, vol. 86, no. 4 (1998), pp. 420–1; and Frances K. Pohl, 'Constructing History: A Mural by Ben Shahn', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 62 (September 1987), pp. 36–40. Linden suggests that Shahn's fresco may offer 'the only image of a Nazi figure in a New Deal mural'.

14. In 1949, Rubenstein wrote: 'My viewpoint is similar to a painter of realism, humanism like Ben Shahn'. Lewis Rubenstein quoted in Rebecca Lawton, 'Chronological Biography', in Ruth Middleton (ed.), *Lewis Rubenstein: A Hudson Valley Painter* (Dutchess County Art Association and The Overlook Press: Poughkeepsie and Woodstock, 1993), p. 76.

15. For Einstein's role in the founding of Jersey Homesteads, see Linden, 'Ben Shahn, The Four Freedoms, and the S.S. St. Louis', p. 420.

16. For Shahn's political affiliation, see Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2002), p. 146.

17. It should be stated that the desire to oppose the rise of fascism in the 1930s was only one ideology espoused by both the New Deal and the Popular Front, respectively. For an abbreviated list of scholarship examining US social realist murals created during the 1930s, see Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (eds), *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere* (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 2006); Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*; Cécile Whiting, *Antifascism in American Art* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1989); Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (eds), *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Congress* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1986); Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1984); and David Shapiro (ed.), *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (Ungar: New York, 1973).

around her neck that reads: 'I have given myself to a Jew'. The inclusion of the sign may have been an indictment of the ideas promulgated in Joseph Goebbels's 1929 xenophobic work, 'The Jew', in which the Nazi Minister of Propaganda outlines a number of principles that Germans should follow in order to make the Reich's anti-Jewish movement a success, including the belief that one must physically avoid Jews in order to maintain one's personal hygiene.¹² Known only through extant photographs today, Rivera's *Hitler Panel* was eventually dismantled and destroyed.

Ben Shahn's *Jersey Homesteads Mural* (1937–1938), created a year after Rubenstein completed his work at the Germanic Museum, is a final US mural that publically denounced Nazi anti-Semitism prior to the onset of World War II. Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration for the community centre in Roosevelt, New Jersey (now the Roosevelt Public School), Shahn's mural illustrates the founding of the town (then called Jersey Homesteads), which developed in the late 1930s as a New Deal planned community and workers' cooperative supported largely by European Jewish immigrants.¹³ In the mural, Shahn – a prominent Jewish-American social realist artist, who interestingly assisted Rivera on the RCA Building fresco between May and June 1933, and an artist who Rubenstein personally admired – depicts a Nazi soldier holding a small sign written in German instructing individuals to avoid buying products from Jews.¹⁴ As in Rivera's *Hitler Panel*, Shahn's image contains a portrait of Albert Einstein (who, not incidentally, supported the cooperative at Jersey Homesteads) as a reminder of the intellectual and cultural exodus that took place among German Jewish refugees in the 1930s.¹⁵ Shahn, a social democrat, was understandably not concerned with bringing material form to the Marxist ideologies espoused in Rivera's *Portrait of America*, nor did he paint an image of Hitler in the mural, as previously explored by Rivera at the New Workers School and Rubenstein at the Germanic Museum.¹⁶

Although Rubenstein's mural in Adolphus Busch Hall can be seen to share the anti-fascist ideologies promulgated by New Deal arts programmes, as well as the CPUSA's Popular Front, Rubenstein was not a member of the Communist Party or the leftist John Reed Club, nor was the cycle funded under any of the New Deal public works programmes, such as the Public Works of Art Project (1933–1934), the Treasury Section of Fine Arts (1934–1943), the Treasury Relief Art Project (1935–1938), or the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (1935–1943).¹⁷ Rather, this was a private commission, with a private donor, at a private university art museum. It is worth asking then why officials at the Germanic Museum and the greater university permitted these controversial images to reside on the walls of Adolphus Busch Hall following their completion. One explanation is that individuals in Harvard's administration were simply not cognizant of the politics codified in Rubenstein's iconographies, or worse, considered the mural too arbitrary for their concern. Given the controversy surrounding these images in the popular press, this seems unlikely, as Harvard officials would have been aware of the fact that critics and students were disseminating the belief that these images were a form of anti-Hitler propaganda on campus. Museum officials, for their part, wisely maintained an ambiguous stance regarding the artist's political agenda and ostensibly did so to avoid censorship from the greater administration. Unlike Rivera, who conspicuously included an image of Lenin in *Man at the Crossroads*, and then refused to remove this figure when his patron protested, Rubenstein understood that feigning ignorance towards his parodic image of Hitler was

the best way to ensure the mural's longevity at the university. Based on the correspondences that transpired between Kuhn and Rubenstein throughout this period, it is clear that each of these men intended the mural to serve as a means of effectively satirising fascism and the Third Reich by inverting and thus denouncing the presumed power of the Wagnerian/Aryan body to convey an ideology of racial supremacy and anti-Semitism on the walls of the Germanic Museum. In so doing, these paintings became Rubenstein's personal criticism of Hitler and a public condemnation of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in the mid-1930s when high-ranking Harvard officials, including president James Conant Bryant (term 1933–1953), were contrastingly seeking appeasement with Germany's Nazi government prior to World War II.

Rubenstein and the *Ring* Cycle

Born in Buffalo, New York in 1908, Lewis William Rubenstein began his artistic training at the Albright Gallery Art School, where he attended evening classes during high school.¹⁸ In 1926, he matriculated to Harvard College and worked as a cartoonist for the *Harvard Lampoon*, later earning a bachelor's degree in painting in 1930. Since studio work was not offered as a concentration in the fine arts curriculum at Harvard during this period, Rubenstein left for Europe in the fall of 1930, settling in Paris where he enrolled at the Academie Moderne under the tutelage of Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant. Arthur Pope, one of Rubenstein's former professors at Harvard, visited Paris to observe Rubenstein's progress and consequently recommended him for Harvard's prestigious Edward R. Bacon Fellowship, which allowed Rubenstein to travel and study buon fresco painting in France and Italy between 1931 and 1932. At the conclusion of his fellowship in July 1932, Rubenstein left Rome for Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he completed a fresco for Harvard's Fogg Museum. The mural – a stipulation of his fellowship – was a small panel titled *The End of the World* (1933), which Rubenstein designed after Luca Signorelli's *Finimondo* at Orvieto Cathedral. At the request of Edward Forbes, director of the Fogg, Rubenstein painted a second fresco at the museum titled *Hunger March* (1933), which, in terms of iconography and symbolic content, largely conformed to contemporary, US social realist ideals. Rubenstein collaborated on this particular painting with the Italian-American muralist Rico Lebrun, who he had studied with in Rome, and who he also shared a studio with in New York City.

In 1934, Forbes again commissioned Rubenstein to create a mural for the Fogg, this time a fresco titled *Structure* (1934–1935) that depicts the chronological development of the museum's building, and which provides a self-portrait of Rubenstein in the process of painting the mural. During this period, Rubenstein, along with fellow artists Tanner Clark and Gridley Barrows, unofficially formed a group known as the Guild of the Pineapple, which collectively executed Rubenstein's frescoes at the Germanic Museum. Five years later, in June 1940, Rubenstein was hired to assist the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco with his six-panelled, portable fresco *Dive Bomber and Tank* commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art.¹⁹ At this time, Rubenstein had already accepted a position as an instructor of art at Vassar College, which, with the exception of serving in the US Navy from 1942 to 1946, he held until his retirement in 1974. In 1999, he was honoured by the Harvard University Art Museums (now the Harvard Art Museums) for his frescoes at the Fogg and Adolphus Busch Hall. Rubenstein

18. For Rubenstein's biography, see Lawton, 'Chronological Biography', pp. 72–8.

19. For a critical examination of Orozco's portable fresco, see Anna Indych-López, 'Mural Gambits: Mexican Muralism in the United States and the "Portable" Fresco', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 89, no. 2, June 2007, pp. 287–305.

20. See Ruth L. Middleton, 'Time and the River', in *Lewis Rubenstein*, p. 11.

21. See John W. Freeman, *The Metropolitan Opera Stories of the Great Operas*, vol. 1 (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: New York, 1984), p. 514; and Richard Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, trans., Andrew Porter (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: New York, 1976).

painted professionally throughout his lifetime, eventually developing a signature genre known as Time Painting, and continued to exhibit his work in national and international exhibitions until his death in 2003.²⁰

Having thus provided three murals for the Fogg by 1935, Rubenstein was a likely choice for the proposed mural project at the Germanic Museum. The first part of his cycle – a group of three frescoes titled *Scenes from the Niebelungen Legend* – appeared on the north wall of the foyer during the winter of 1935–1936, and was designed to visually conflate scenes from Wagner's first and third *Ring* operas, namely *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*. *Das Rheingold*, which premiered at Munich's National Theater on 22 September 1869, and in the United States on 4 January 1889 at New York's Metropolitan Opera, introduced audiences to key figures from German mythology, including Nordic gods and goddesses, giants, Rhine maidens, and the Niebelung dwarves.²¹ In Rubenstein's mural, the lunette fresco on the north wall depicts the evil dwarf-lord Alberich in contemporary military boots and breeches, wearing a double-horned helmet, and commanding his minions to mine and manufacture ammunitions in their subterranean cavern. Alberich's helmet – evocative of the head piece often worn by Brünnhilde in the remaining three *Ring* operas (*Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*), is here meant to represent the magic *Tarnhelm* worn by Alberich and others in the *Niebelungenlied* and *Das Rheingold*, which allows its bearer to become invisible, change shapes, or teleport from one place to another. Below the lunette, the lower left panel shows the hands of a Rhine maiden seizing Alberich's arm as he absconds with her precious Rhine gold. The remaining right panel shows the ring hovering around the armour-clad forearm of Siegfried, the gallant hero and dragon-slayer in the *Ring* cycle. In Siegfried's left hand, lying flat upon an anvil, is the legendary sword *Nothung* that Siegfried utilises to defeat his enemies throughout the operas *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

The second part of Rubenstein's cycle, a collection of three frescoes known as *Scenes from the Ragnarok Legend*, appeared on the east wall of the foyer between 1936 and 1937, and collectively represent scenes from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, a German translation of the Old Norse word *Ragnarök*, meaning 'doom of the gods'. In these paintings, as in Wagner's opera, a war between the gods brings about the end of the world, and mankind must be reborn anew. In the lunette fresco, the fire god Loki attempts to destroy his enemies with a menacing World War I-era flamethrower, while a crouching man in a gas mask (at Loki's left side) operates a canister of German mustard gas. Moving from the lunette to the lower left panel, the god Thor is poised for battle, ready to thrust his modern-day sledgehammer into action against his hostile enemies. Finally, in the corresponding right panel, a nude man emerges from the nearby water, pulling himself onto the grassy, reed-lined riverbank. Joined compositionally to the other two frescoes by the diagonal lines of the massive stone bridge that travels through all three paintings, this final panel illustrates the regenerated man of Norse mythology – the first of a new race of mankind created after the decimation of the world by the folly of the gods.

Rubenstein's decision to utilise parody to communicate his political agenda is more adamantly revealed alongside, and in opposition to, his preliminary plan for the east wall (1936, Fig. 7). Intended to serve as a visual tribute to Harvard's tercentenary, the artist's initial design for the east wall depicts Harvard scholars in commencement gowns juxtaposed against a backdrop of figures operating flamethrowers, much like those that occupy the final lunette. Given the not so subtle and conspicuous conflation of anonymous Harvard academicians alongside (presumably) German soldiers, Rubenstein ultimately abandoned



Fig. 7. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Harvard Tercentenary, Early Design for Adolphus Busch Hall Murals*, 1936, watercolour over graphite on cream laid paper; 63.6 × 45.4 cm (25 1/16 × 17 7/8 in). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Lewis W. Rubenstein, 1991.100. (Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

this early design. Instead, Teutonic figures like Alberich and Siegfried presented more permissible subjects for satirical images at the museum, particularly since earlier representations of these characters, including Wotan and Brünnhilde, were already present as sculptural heads carved into the window lintels on the courtyard façade of Adolphus Busch Hall (see Fig. 3). Museum officials could thus argue that Rubenstein's mural was in keeping with a more integrative, artistic programme at the Germanic Museum, where allusions to the *Nibelungenlied* were incorporated throughout the architecture and ornamentation of the building. By masking contemporary politics behind the iconography of Germanic folklore and Wagnerian opera, Rubenstein and Kuhn had ostensibly hoped to escape public scrutiny of the mural's symbolic content. This, however, was hardly the case.

Hitler at Harvard

22. Eda Loeb, letter to Charles Kuhn, Spring 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

23. Charles Kuhn, letter to Eda Loeb, 26 June 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

24. Eda Loeb, letter to Charles Kuhn, 28 June 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

25. Lewis Rubenstein, letter to Eda Loeb, 7 August 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

26. Eda Loeb, letter to Charles Kuhn, 22 November 1935, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

27. 'Fresco Starts Harvard Row', *The Boston American*, 30 January 1936.

In a series of letters exchanged between Rubenstein, Kuhn, and the patron of the mural – Eda Kuhn Loeb – the specifics of the project are revealed, including the artist's desire to modernise Wagner's interpretation of the *Nibelungenlied* in a manner that criticised Hitler's fascist dictatorship under National Socialism. In the spring of 1935, Loeb, the widow of the late New York philanthropist Morris Loeb and Kuhn's paternal aunt, expressed the following to her nephew:

Since talking to you about your work at the Germanic Museum I have realized more than ever that you are laboring under handicaps; firstly owing to the lack of real interest in German art and then, consequently, the lack of support I should be so glad to contribute towards your good work, but under present German conditions, I feel decidedly that I cannot do anything for purely German art. Is there anything you can suggest that might further your ideals?²²

In response to Loeb, Kuhn expressed the following:

I heartily sympathize with your feeling that you cannot do anything for purely German art. . . . The thing that is uppermost in my mind at the present time is the financing of the painting of a mural in the entrance hall of the Germanic Museum. There is a brilliant young artist in Cambridge, Lewis Rubenstein, an American Jew.²³

The opportunity to finance this particular project greatly appealed to Loeb, who, referring to Rubenstein as the 'young Jewish artist', asked her nephew to supply her with sketches of the proposed work.²⁴ On 7 August 1935, Rubenstein personally wrote to Loeb, explaining the theme and symbolic content of the north wall lunette fresco. He offered this interpretation:

The basic idea of the entire Ring cycle is, as you know, the struggle between the power of love and the power of gold. In this fresco I intend to dramatize this struggle putting, however, a somewhat different interpretation on the two forces. The power of love will become the urge toward spiritual truth, science, art, progress – all that we value in civilization. The power of gold will be the misused power by fascist rule, such as that of the National Socialists. The entire mural will depict the ultimate defeat of such power by the forces of civilization. . . . Alberich, in the Nibelheim, becomes the present day dictator. . . . As to Wagner, I have no thought of glorifying him or his work. . . . Wagner's anti-Semitism does not enter into the picture, except that the tables are somewhat turned. The hateful characters in the Ring, such as Alberich, Wagner intended to be Jews. In my designs, I have made them the protagonists of National Socialism and Fascism.²⁵

Because Loeb and Kuhn were also Jewish, Loeb later expressed her fear that the mural might perpetuate the stereotype of the 'Jewish fiend' found in Wagnerian opera, despite Rubenstein's assurances.²⁶ She did, however, fund the project forthright, so her concerns were ostensibly assuaged by Kuhn in the following months.

After a portion of the north wall frescoes were revealed to the public in late January 1936, a newspaper article titled 'Fresco Starts Harvard Row' appeared in *The Boston American*. The reporter wrote:

A tempest of debate was raging at Harvard today concerning the completed section of a fresco-painting being done in Harvard's Germanic Museum. In the panel, a slave-beating dwarf, the Alberich of tenth-century Norse legend, is shown in modern military boots, breeches and Sam Brown [sic] belt.²⁷

Based on this singular review, one would assume that Rubenstein and Kuhn were successful in conveying their message, insofar as their intent was effectively communicated to an erudite American public, who understood the mural to be a contemporary commentary on war. Consider, however, the subsequent and somewhat alarming sentence in the article:

At the museum, Dr Charles L. Kuhn, curator, said: "I cannot say just what the painter had in mind. I am sure there was no mention made to me of anti-Hitler propaganda or symbolism".²⁸

Kuhn's seemingly duplicitous support of the mural's deliberate criticism of National Socialist ideology, apparent in this quote, again surfaced in a letter dated 3 February 1936 addressed to the German Consulate in Boston. In his correspondence, Kuhn explained that the 'entirely garbled and incorrect' newspaper accounts of the newly completed frescoes were in no way sought, or encouraged, by the Germanic Museum's administrative staff.²⁹ Rather, Kuhn reiterated that the subject of the mural was wholly extracted from Wagner's *Ring* cycle, was quite contrastingly meant to glorify the Teutonic past, and was therefore devoid of any greater political significance. Kuhn had to equally answer to Loeb, who, having read a review in *The Boston Herald*, expressed to her nephew that the completed mural should in no way include Nazis or anti-Nazis.³⁰ Given Rubenstein's explicit desire to have the mural serve as a subversive work, it is all the more interesting that Loeb became increasingly adamant that it not implicate figures associated with the Third Reich, and that Kuhn continued to feign ignorance regarding its political content.

A subsequent article appeared on the front page of *The Boston Transcript* on 29 January 1936, suggesting that the figure of Alberich could visually be read as a 'moustached monster'.³¹ The *Transcript* article, like the review in *The Boston American*, contained an interview by Kuhn, who maintained that he was unaware of the artist's intent and that the painting doubtfully contained any anti-Nazi propaganda. Two days later, *The Boston Herald* ran a story on the mural titled 'Harvard Mural Causes Comment: Subtle Slap at Hitler Seen in Museum Fresco'.³² According to the reviewer, a number of Harvard undergraduates had suggested that the figure of Alberich was a symbolic portrayal of Hitler, albeit one masked behind the façade of a mythological figure. These students explained that the partially clothed miners on the right side of the composition could be seen to represent Germans who willingly conformed to Hitler's regime, while the workers wearing loincloths on the left side of the composition – who Alberich is in the process of whipping – symbolised those individuals who resisted being regimented by the Nazis.³³ At the close of the article, Kuhn argued that he 'never would have approved of the fresco' had he known Rubenstein was intending to paint anti-Nazi images.³⁴ To support Kuhn's position, and to counter the opinions expressed by Harvard undergraduates, Philpott's 'No Hitler in Mural at Harvard' appeared in *The Boston Globe* the following day.

The controversy surrounding Rubenstein's mural continued throughout the summer and fall of 1936, culminating in October when portions of the east wall frescoes were revealed to the public. With the second wall nearly complete, there was little doubt among art critics that the paintings were symbolic attacks on the Nazis. One article in *The Boston Herald* argued that 'the anti-Nazi symbolism is continued in the second mural where a distinctly Nordic type leads the destructive forces against the church and other symbols of civilization'.³⁵ Articles published in October 1936 in *The Boston Globe* and *The Harvard Crimson*, including one titled 'Nazi vs Niebelung', continued to offer readers varied

28. 'Fresco Starts Harvard Row'.

29. Charles Kuhn, letter to Kurt von Tippleskirch, 3 February 1936, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

30. Eda Loeb, letter to Charles Kuhn, 9 February 1936, Rubenstein Murals, Busch-Reisinger Museum Archives, Harvard Art Museums.

31. G. A. H., 'Tenth Century Dwarf in 1936 Breeches Enlivens Harvard's New Germanic Murals', *The Boston Transcript*, 29 January 1936, p. 1.

32. 'Harvard Mural Causes Comment: Subtle Slap at Hitler Seen in Museum Fresco', *The Boston Herald*, 31 January 1936.

33. See 'Harvard Mural Causes Comment'.

34. Charles Kuhn, quoted in 'Harvard Mural Causes Comment'.

35. 'Rubenstein's Second Harvard Mural Continues Symbolic Attack on Nazis', *The Boston Herald*, 14 October 1936.



Fig. 8. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Scenes from the Niebelungen Legend: Alberich and Dwarfs*, 1935–1936, fresco painting, buon fresco. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Purchased through the generosity of Eda K. Loeb, Rubenstein.1. (Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

36. For these reviews, see 'See Harvard Mural as Slap at Germany: War Techniques in Second Rubenstein Painting', *The Boston Globe*, 14 October 1936; 'Mural Causes Trouble in Germanic Museum: Painting Depicting "The Twilight of the Gods" Claimed to Be Rebuke to Nazi Germany', *The Harvard Crimson*, 14 October 1936, pp. 1, 3; and Caspar W. Weinberger, 'Nazi vs Niebelung', *The Harvard Crimson*, 31 October 1936.

37. Frederick B. Deknatel, 'The Rubenstein Murals', *Germanic Museum Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 4, The Rubenstein Murals, March 1937, pp. 25–30.

38. 'Harvard Museum Fresco Depicts Medieval Saga: Artist Rubenstein Completes Work on Wagnerian Opera Theme in Germanic Building', *Boston Evening Transcript*, 22 December 1936, p. C1.

39. Lewis Rubenstein, 'Travels with Sketch Pad and Paint Brushes: The 1930s Labor Artwork of Lewis Rubenstein', *Labor's Heritage*, vol. 7, no. 3, Winter 1996, p. 36.

40. Rebecca Lawton briefly discusses the controversy surrounding Rubenstein's murals,

opinions on the symbolic 'truth' embedded in these images.³⁶ An official academic analysis of the mural later appeared in the March 1937 edition of the *Germanic Museum Bulletin*, penned by the Harvard art historian Frederick B. Deknatel. In this essay, Deknatel, like Kuhn, addressed only the iconography of the mural in relation to medieval, Teutonic legend, and not the artist's presumed political agenda.³⁷ In an interview with the *Boston Evening Transcript* in December 1936, Rubenstein had even asserted that the figure of Alberich was 'not Hitler or any contemporary figure'.³⁸ In a later article published in 1996, however, the artist revealed his intentions publically for the first time, stating that he utilised the Germanic legends 'to make strong anti-Nazi and anti-war statements', thus corroborating the content of his August 1935 letter to Loeb.³⁹ Given the initial displeasure expressed by the German Consulate in Boston regarding the iconography of the work, and presumably not wanting the mural to meet the same fate as Rivera's Rockefeller Center fresco, the artist and curator strategically remained ambivalent on the matter, falsely asserting that the Germanic Museum mural was not designed to serve as anti-Nazi propaganda in order to assure its permanence in a museum controlled by the greater university.⁴⁰

Parody as Protest

As previously outlined, Rubenstein had hoped to invert Wagner's anti-Semitism⁴¹ by transforming the composer's hateful, 'Jewish' Alberich into the modern-day dictator, Adolf Hitler (see Fig. 8).⁴² Rubenstein's



Fig. 11. Arthur Rackham, *Alberich drives on a band of Niblungs laden with gold and silver treasures*, illustration to Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*, 1910, colour lithograph. Private Collection. (Photo: The Stapleton Collection/Art Resource, New York.)

articulation of Hitler – and particularly Hitler's signature toothbrush mustache – does not, however, conform to other contemporary images of the German Führer, as witnessed in Rivera's *Hitler Panel*, or in the 1933 NSDAP commemorative postcard for *Der historische Tag* (*History Day*, Fig. 9). Instead, Rubenstein portrays the dictator as a bare-chested, muscular dwarf donning a Kaiser-style moustache and wearing an absurd horned helmet. Why, then, were contemporary viewers quick to see a reference to Hitler in Rubenstein's *Alberich*? Initial similarities clearly reside in the Sam Browne



Fig. 9. Artist unknown, *The History Day: January 30, 1933* (*Der historische Tag: 30. Januar 1933*, Adolf Hitler und Paul von Hindenburg), c. 1933, postcard. (Photo: bpk, Berlin/Art Resource, New York.)



Fig. 10. Artist unknown, Adolf Hitler, German National Socialist leader at Braunschweig, Germany, 1931, photograph, from *Deutschland Erwacht*, Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, 1933. (Photo: John Meek/The Art Archive at Art Resource, New York.)



Fig. 12. Heinrich Hoffmann, Adolf Hitler (in profile, with trench coat, hat, and whip in hand), March 1932, photograph. (Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München/Fotoarchiv Hoffmann.)

including the 'furor at the German Embassy', in 'Chronological Biography', p. 73.

41. See Richard Wagner, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. J. Weber: Leipzig, 1896). In addition to Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik*, Paul Rose identifies strong anti-Semitic symbolism in Wagner's *Ring* cycle, as well as the composer's larger oeuvre. See Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1992).

42. Patricia Phagan equally reads the central figure as a 'Hitler-like Alberich' in 'Nazi-style boots and breeches'. See Patricia E. Phagan, *For the People: American Mural Drawings of the 1930s and 1940s* (The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center: Poughkeepsie, 2007), p. 7.

43. See Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (Zeitgeschichte Verlag: Berlin, 1932), plate 1. See also Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1945: Hubris* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: New York, 1998), pp. 187–8.

belt, military breeches, jackboots, and the diagonal breast-strap worn by the historical Hitler and the painted Alberich. Each of the aforementioned accessories are easily recognisable as accoutrements of early twentieth-century German military uniforms, and can be identified in photographs of Hitler published throughout the Third Reich (see Fig. 10).

The inclusion of the two whips is an intriguing feature and one that ostensibly builds upon earlier images of Alberich, as well as contemporary photographs of the Führer. The English artist and book illustrator Arthur Rackham, for example, had created a series of illustrations for Wagner's *Ring* cycle by the early twentieth century. In Rackham's *Alberich drives on a band of Niblungs* (1910, Fig. 11), the dwarf king is seen whipping his kinsmen into submission, driving them to amass gold and silver for his hoard. Rackham's image may have provided the iconographic source for the whipping Alberich in Rubenstein's mural, though one should also consider a photograph of Hitler published in Heinrich Hoffmann's best-selling photo book, *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (*The Hitler Nobody Knows*, 1932). In this image, Hoffmann portrays Hitler holding one of the various whips he owned, which, according to Hoffmann (and later historians), Hitler was known to openly carry in public in the 1930s (Fig. 12).⁴³

Rubenstein's Alberich-Hitler character subsequently appears as a menacing figure positioned above the museum visitor, and yet this hybrid figure is absurd, a pompous fusion of two tyrannical personas conflated into a single painted form. The attributes of this Nazi dwarf render the character in the guise of a diabolical fiend standing in the fiery inferno of hell, a demonic figure complete with helmet and whip that collectively suggest that this malevolent figure has sprouted horns and a tail. To conceive of this metaphor in political terms, Rubenstein painted Hitler as the devil. Based on his personal writings, we know that Rubenstein had hoped to not only invert Wagner's anti-Semitism, but also the xenophobia of the Nazis, which

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Fig. 13. Albert Janesch, *Water Sports* (*Wassersport*), 1936, oil on canvas. Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum. (Photo: Bildarchiv, Deutsches Historisches Museum.)



Fig. 14. Hubert Lanzinger, *Adolf Hitler as Standard-Bearer (Der Bannerträger)*, 1934, oil on canvas. US-Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, USA. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.)

maintained that Nordic and Aryan bodies were supreme, heroic, and beautiful, while Jewish bodies were degenerate and grotesque. The artist's decision to depict Hitler as the Teutonic dwarf Alberich cleverly positions the former within the 'degenerate' persona of the latter, but sardonically within the visual language of the Aryan ideal. That is to say, artistic parody would not be effective in the fresco if Alberich's muscular male body failed to conform to the 'blood and soil' ideology of heroic realism touted by Nazi officials and simultaneously explored by German and Austrian artists working during the Third Reich.⁴⁴ One need only study the idealised, athletic bodies in Albert Janesch's *Wassersport (Water Sports)*, 1936, Fig. 13) to understand the visual allusions drawn by Rubenstein in the north and east wall lunette frescoes. Similarly, in the right panel on the north wall, Rubenstein calls further attention to the National Socialist doctrine of Aryan racial supremacy, given that the knightly Siegfried evokes the Nazis' attempt to link the German *Volk* with their nation's chivalrous, medieval past. This propagandist motif is perhaps best typified in Hubert Lanzinger's *Der Bannerträger (The Standard-Bearer)*, 1934), in which Hitler is portrayed as an armour-clad knight carrying a Nazi flag emblazoned with a swastika (Fig. 14).

When analysing Rubenstein's figures in the east wall lunette, the viewer will notice that Loki's hair resembles the snakelike tendrils of a Medusian head, while his compatriot (the man in a gas mask) wears a Spanish *morion*, or conquistador's helmet (see Fig. 15). This bizarre juxtaposition was perhaps intended to convey subtle humour to the viewer, or to draw an artistic

44. For literature on the National Socialist doctrine of 'blood and soil', or *Blut und Boden*, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1987), p. 184; and Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, trans., Edmund Howard (Barnes and Noble, Inc.: New York, 1974), pp. 72–4.

45. For a history of the *Der Krieg* exhibition at the Germanic Museum, see Nisbet and Norris, *The Busch-Reisinger Museum*, p. 103; and Philpott, 'No Hitler in Mural at Harvard'.



Fig. 15. Lewis W. Rubenstein, *Scenes from the Ragnarok Legend: Doom of the Gods*, 1936–1937, fresco painting, buon fresco. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Purchased through the generosity of Eda K. Loeb, Rubenstein.2. (Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

allusion to the politically charged imagery explored by José Clemente Orozco in, for example, *The Epic of American Civilization* (1932–1934) at Dartmouth College, where images of Hernán Cortés and armoured conquistadors stand in stark contrast to Aztec gods and warriors. In keeping with this theme, the helmet could additionally be read as a subtle attack on Francisco Franco's role in the Spanish Civil War, which had already begun in July 1936. Here again, Rubenstein's figures cleverly ridicule the fascist ideal, suggesting that below the surface of these characters' idealised bodies lie hateful, destructive creatures who lack self-awareness – as exemplified by a soldier operating a contemporary mustard gas canister, but wearing a sixteenth-century morion – and who have become dehumanised, mechanised puppets to the Third Reich – as implied by the symbolic nature of a gas mask that visually serves as a surrogate human head.

Although Rubenstein could certainly have been referencing photographs of World War I-era gas masks printed in local Boston newspapers, or in reproductions of Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads*, which also contained masked German soldiers (see Fig. 5), a more immediate artistic source for figures in the east wall fresco is Otto Dix's *Shock Troops Advance under Gas* (1924, Fig. 16), given that this work was displayed at the Germanic Museum from 4 January to 4 February 1936 as part of *Der Krieg: War Etchings by Otto Dix*, an exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art in 1934.⁴⁵ Dix's print creates a strong visual dialogue with Rubenstein's mural, particularly when one considers that these anti-war images were simultaneously displayed on the walls of the Germanic Museum in 1936. Dix's image, which recalls the personal horrors he experienced as a soldier during World War I, symbolically suggests that the gas masks worn by the shock troops have rendered these men in the guise of inhuman, skeleton-like soldiers. In contrast, the god Thor (in the left panel on the east wall) alternatively wears a skullcap, not a Spanish morion or a German gas mask. Even though any



Fig. 16. Otto Dix, *Storm Troops Advance under Gas Attack* (*Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor*) from *The War* (*Der Krieg*), 1924, etching, aquatint and drypoint, plate: 7 5/8 × 11 5/16" (19.3 × 28.8 cm); sheet: 13 11/16 × 18 5/8" (34.8 × 47.3 cm). Publisher: Karl Nierendorf, Berlin. Printer: Otto Felsing, Berlin. Edition: 70. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. (© 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.)

symbolic reading of this cap is highly speculative, it is intriguing to surmise that the inclusion of the skullcap was a deliberate reference to a Jewish kippah or yarmulke, suggesting that the figure of Thor might also be read as a historiated self-portrait of the artist, who, we might remember, had painted his likeness into *Structure* at the Fogg Museum in 1935. If this were Rubenstein's intent, then the figure of Thor literally and metaphorically struggles against the forces of fascism in this fresco, offering that the Jewish (rather than Aryan) body will constitute the regenerated race of mankind depicted in this anti-anti-Semitic painting.

The final query I want to address in this study is why Rubenstein chose to adorn the walls of the Germanic Museum with anti-Nazi propaganda in the first place. The impetus to do so is explained, I believe, alongside a series of events that transpired in Boston and Cambridge between 1934 and 1935 that uncomfortably aligned these cities, as well as Harvard, with members of the Third Reich. The historian Stephen H. Norwood has previously argued that top officials in the Boston area, including Harvard president James Bryant Conant, encouraged the spread of National Socialist ideology by 'warmly welcoming Nazi leaders to the Harvard campus...[in order] to build friendly relations with thoroughly Nazified universities in Germany, while denouncing those who protested against these actions, ... [even as] the Hitler regime...intensified its persecution of Jews and expanded its military strength'.⁴⁶ Basing his analysis on contemporary newspaper reports, Norwood discusses a series of events that transpired at Harvard in the 1930s. The initial incident was hospitality shown to a May 1934 delegation of Nazi leaders to Boston, whose members were entertained with a private tour of campus and an excursion to the Germanic Museum, which was led by

46. Stephen H. Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism: Harvard University and the Hitler Regime, 1933–1937', *American Jewish History*, vol. 92, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 189. Norwood has shown that this attitude of appeasement and indifference towards Nazism in the 1930s was also quite prevalent at Columbia University, as well as other US academic institutions. See Stephen H. Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York, 2009). For a criticism of Norwood's scholarship, see Robert Cohen, 'Big Man on Campus?: Hitler and the American University', *Reviews in American History*, vol. 39, no. 1, March 2011, pp. 163–70.

47. Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism', pp. 196–7.

48. See Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism', p. 196, n17. Although extermination camps did not begin operating until 1941, the living conditions for all of the German concentration camps, including forced-labour and internment camps, were known to be brutal, even in the 1930s. For a history of these institutions, see Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (eds), *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (Routledge: London and New York, 2010); and Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them*, trans., Heinz Norden, 1st revised edn (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2006).

49. See Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism', p. 202.

50. 'Protest Harvard Wreath', *The New York Times*, 19 March 1935, p. 4.

51. In addition to serving as treasurer, Shattuck was also a member of the Harvard Corporation, the governing board of the university. See Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism', p. 200.

52. William M. Tuttle Jr, 'American Higher Education and the Nazis: The Case of James B. Conant and Harvard University's "Diplomatic Relations" With Germany', *American Studies*, vol. 20, Spring 1979, p. 66.

53. Morton and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2001), p. 49.

54. Norwood, 'Legitimizing Nazism', p. 191.

55. Richard Breitman, 'Roosevelt and the Holocaust', in Verne W. Newton (ed.), *FDR and the Holocaust* (Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute: New York, 1996), p. 109.

Harvard officials.⁴⁷ Somewhat contemporaneous with this delegation's visit, *The Boston Herald* ran two stories on 12 and 13 May 1934 stating that the Nazis had already begun sending Jews and political protestors to concentration camps.⁴⁸ The second questionable incident that transpired on campus was the prominent position afforded to the high-ranking Nazi officer and Harvard alum Ernst Hanfstaengl at the June 1934 commencement ceremony. This event could arguably be justified as an indifferent, ambivalent act of appeasement towards the German government and an opportunity to highlight the 'prestige' of a former student, yet an article published on 18 June 1934 in the *Baltimore Sun* argued that Hanfstaengl's visit was both absurd and insulting to Jews.⁴⁹

The final event that Rubenstein and Kuhn may have regarded as an indication that Harvard's administration was too complacent with Germany's Nazi Party was the placing of a peace wreath bearing the Nazi swastika in Harvard's Appleton Chapel on 18 March 1935 by the Nazi Consul General to Boston, Baron Kurt von Tippelskirch. This event sparked its own controversy on campus when Harvard's National Student League protested the laying of the 'swastika wreath' as a 'sign of the obscene hypocrisy which is typical of Fascist decay'.⁵⁰ The university, however, seems not to have responded to its students' activist remonstrations. Tippelskirch, a prominent figure in Boston society, later factored into the uproar surrounding Rubenstein's mural, as he was the Consul General who expressed extreme displeasure toward Kuhn when local newspapers began reporting that the Germanic Museum had commissioned anti-Hitler images at Adolphus Busch Hall. In his own calculated act of appeasement, Kuhn acquiesced to Tippelskirch's objections in a truly diplomatic, though nevertheless superficial, manner.

In spite of ongoing protests from Boston's prominent Jewish community, top-ranking Harvard officials, such as president Conant and treasurer Henry L. Shattuck, failed to take a definitive stance against Nazi anti-Semitism or German fascism in the mid-1930s.⁵¹ Given the lack of open criticism of the Nazis by various individuals in Harvard's administration, Norwood's assessment certainly presents a valid and compelling conclusion. One, however, cannot decisively discern the intentions behind these events and actions. Conant was not a Hitler-sympathiser during the war, given that he was an instrumental figure in the development of the Manhattan Project, and, according to William M. Tuttle Jr, he was 'outspoken' against the Nazis in the years just prior to World War II.⁵² Historians Morton and Phyllis Keller have argued that Conant was nevertheless guilty of simultaneously sharing and promulgating 'the mild anti-semitism common to his social group and time'.⁵³ Building upon this assessment, Norwood posits that Conant's behaviour 'was certainly influenced by the anti-Jewish prejudice he harboured', though the historian does concede that Conant expressed some 'formal opposition to Nazism' during his term as president.⁵⁴

Conant's inconsistent attitudes towards Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s seem to parallel, to a certain degree, the public stance adopted by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt throughout the 1930s and 1940s. According to historian Richard Breitman, prior to the war, Roosevelt was:

outwardly gregarious but kept much to himself and often left associates and subordinates with sharply different impressions about his attitudes [toward the Nazis]. ... His calculated ambiguity may be proof of necessary political skills.⁵⁵

Unlike David S. Wyman, who argues that Roosevelt was 'insensitive and indifferent' towards the Nazi extermination of Jews during the Holocaust, Breitman offers that the president actively sought to help Jews escape Germany before the 'murderers gained full sway'.⁵⁶ The US president was nevertheless faced with an increasing national resentment towards Jews immigrating to the United States, as well as the restrictive (anti-Semitic) immigration laws supported by Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, who believed that Germans were supplanting spies among Jewish refugees.⁵⁷ Breitman explains that this perceived ambivalence towards Germany's treatment of Jews prior and during the war was equally reflected in the inability of officials to overturn these restrictive immigration provisions in the 1930s, such as those found in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Regarding these statutes, Breitman writes:

Neither the refugee advocates within the [Roosevelt] administration nor American Jewish organizations lobbying from outside wanted to take the cause of Jewish refugees to Congress or the public, a fact that their opponents inside and outside of government recognized and exploited. The Labor Department, worried by anti-Communist and anti-alien hysteria, in the end backed away... in 1934.⁵⁸

Given this tendency for national leaders to exude a perceived complacency towards fascist atrocities carried out in Nazi Germany, it could be argued that Conant, like Roosevelt, was fundamentally caught in a game of uneasy politics with Germany's foreign leaders prior to the onset of World War II. Regarding Rubenstein's mural at the Germanic Museum, it is certainly important to note that the administration did not remove these images from Adolphus Busch Hall. Because Kuhn and Rubenstein remained ambivalent towards the iconography of the frescoes, university officials ostensibly followed suit, and thankfully so. Given Conant's seeming indifference towards National Socialism in the mid-1930s, this attitude may have been the very catalyst for Rubenstein's anti-Nazi statement on Harvard's campus, and yet Conant might also be commended, ironically, for treating Rubenstein's images with the same indifference. The mural was consequently allowed to persist as a subversive, political attack against the Third Reich, asserting that the entirety of Harvard would not passively condone Nazi atrocities or anti-Semitic ideologies, even when some top-ranking officials were unwilling to publically offer such a stance.

Today, Rubenstein's mural remains on the walls of Adolphus Busch Hall, though few visitors engage with its iconographies the way they had in the 1930s. The current study has aimed to resolve the relative obscurity of Rubenstein's paintings at the Germanic Museum, particularly with respect to their historical status as works that conspicuously lampooned Hitler and the Third Reich. Evident in the abundant contemporary literature on these frescoes, Rubenstein's mural effectively functioned as a public condemnation of National Socialism in the years preceding World War II. His satirical images are subsequently successful as politically subversive works, precisely because his style sardonically conforms to an aesthetic adopted by artists charged with producing propaganda for the Third Reich, but with the adverse intent of inverting the hierarchy of racial and cultural hegemonies espoused by the Nazis. To this end, an artist and a curator offered a bold, critical statement to the American public, utilising satire, irony, and perhaps an acute sense of political wit to bring social awareness to their united cause.

56. David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1984), p. 103; and Breitman, 'Roosevelt and the Holocaust', p. 109.

57. See Henry L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, 1995), pp. 63, 78, 172, 197.

58. Richard Breitman, 'The Failure to Provide a Safe Haven for European Jewry', in *FDR and the Holocaust*, p. 132.

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