

## ART

## The Art of Adolf Hitler

by Mark Warren

In reading the Charles Manson story, *Helter Skelter*, I was struck by a brief passage about Manson's admiration for Hitler. Manson believed he had things in common with Hitler, and there were similarities in their lives, however trivial: both were vegetarians; both had an incredible ability to influence others; and both were frustrated, rejected artists.

Hitler—a frustrated, rejected artist? What was this all about? I had long heard that Hitler was a housepainter, though William Shirer claims “there is no evidence that he ever followed such a trade.” And I knew that, in 1907, when he was 18 years old, Hitler had been rejected for admission by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and that he had been rejected again in 1908. The burning question for me was “Why was he rejected?” According to Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, his rejection came as a blow, a shocking mistake, because he was so certain the academy would accept him. He claims that he was dissatisfied with himself for the first time in his life.

But where was information about Hitler's art—locations, catalogues, reproductions? Local universities had nothing to offer, but I found exactly what I needed buried in a big-city public library: a treasure-trove of 260 pages of Hitler's art, some in black-and-white reproductions, some in color. This book, cataloguing hundreds of sketches, drawings, and paintings by Hitler, was a stunning revelation to me. Most interesting were several examples of paintings that Hitler had submitted to the academy in 1907, as well as several drawings, two of which received a grade of “good.” Much

of Hitler's art, as this book makes clear, is today in private collections not open to the public.

This discovery fired my interest further. It was apparent to me, as an artist, that Hitler had talent. His artistic skill, in my opinion, was sufficient for entrance to the Vienna Academy, and other art authorities have concluded that he should not have been rejected. The work he produced between 1908 and 1914 was more revealing still; that work showed a marked improvement in his art. During his Vienna years, a number of dealers even sold his work.

Growing frustration tinged with anger and disappointment with the course of his life in Vienna apparently caused Hitler to seek an escape from his trials. His interest shifted from art to reading, which he took up avidly, focusing on politics, Austrian history, and the plight of the dispossessed. He began to hate Vienna and to attribute his own artistic problems and all the social and economic problems in Austria to the influence of the Jews, as he admitted in *Mein Kampf*. Before the Vienna years, there is little evidence that Hitler particularly hated Jews. Anti-Semitism was not an issue in the environments where he grew up. His mother's doctor was a Jew, and Hitler is not on record as hating the Jewish art dealers in Vienna who sold his work. But his hatred of Jews was clearly established by the end of his years in Vienna. He blamed them for his failures, and particularly for his failed art career, but were the academy's administrators and faculty really Jewish? I thought this worthy of investigation.

I tried to learn more about Hitler's rejection by the academy. What was the Jewish connection there, if any? I wrote to the director of Vienna's *Kunst-historisches Museum* and asked outright if the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, in 1907, had Jewish teachers and a Jewish administration. Surprisingly, the academy still existed, and the director stated that “obviously” there had been teachers of the Mosaic faith. He suggested that I write to the academy for more detailed information. I wrote, but I received no answer. This only height-

ened my interest.

Most biographers claim that Hitler was a lazy, poor student who showed little ambition or sense of purpose. Actually, he did well in lower school—and well in upper school in what interested him. The tools he had to become a successful artist—talent, perseverance, determination, and energy—were all for the good, but these same tools became evil in the Vienna years.

Art was on Hitler's mind his entire life. He drew and sketched incessantly. He supervised the design of all the new structures he built and planned to build. Albert Speer headed Hitler's team of architects, and he attests to Hitler's skill in the conception and design of the New Germany's architecture. Many of these sketches and drawings still exist. Art was on Hitler's mind when he strove, after becoming chancellor in 1933, to rid Germany and Austria of the modernist painters and their art, all of which was eventually removed from museums. The artists lost their teaching jobs. Some fled Europe, some went to jail. The great Ludwig Kirchner committed suicide. Hitler built the House of German Art in Munich, based on his idea of what art should be. His lifelong project was to eliminate Vienna as the prime art center in Austria, and to this end he decided to make Linz, his home, the greatest art center in the world. Art remained on Hitler's mind all through the war. In his *Table Talk*, a record of mealtime conversations from 1941 to 1944, a good number of his discussions were about artists, all forms of art, and plans for the cultural New Germany. Werner Maser, his biographer, tells how in March 1945, four weeks before he died, he was engaged in a wooden model of Linz that incorporated his ideas.

Hitler frequently deplored his life, expressing his dearest wish to wander through Italy as an unknown painter. He often quoted Nero's dying words, “What an artist dies in me.” While speaking to Carl Burckhardt about destroying Poland, he paused and stated how glad he would be if he could stay there and work as an artist.

Werner Maser devoted part of one

sentence in his biography of Hitler to musing about this very subject: about what the world might have been spared if Hitler had been accepted by the academy. An examiner rejected his portfolio because of a lack of head drawings. The examiner did not see the portfolio that contained head drawings good enough for entry into any art academy. In a ragged copy of a little book, Wulf Schanzwaller's *The Unknown Hitler*, which I stumbled upon in a secondhand bookstore, I found the name of the Vienna Academy's director: Professor Siegmund l'Allemand, who was indeed Jewish. Perhaps this was why the academy never answered my query.

I lived in the age of Hitler, and I was even in close proximity to him—within five miles of him in the skies over Berlin on February 3, 1945, in a USAAF B17. My guess is that Hitler was even more prone to dream that particular day about wandering through Italy as a painter.

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## POLITICS

### Austria's Populist Face

by Donald Warren

European nations are seeing their cultural if not their actual borders weakened by multiculturalism and the process known as "McDonaldization." But Austrians, in contrast to their neighbors in Germany, where status quo politics are the order of the day, are avidly protesting the corruption, incompetence, and slack enforcement of immigration restrictions characteristic of the "Grand Coalition"—a two-party consociation of socialists and conservatives that has held a virtual monopoly over Austria's politics since the end of World War II.

Thus, the national election of this

past October represented yet another chapter in an ongoing political revolution. Readers of these pages have periodically been apprised of a remarkable rising star in populist politics—Austria's dashing opposition leader, Jörg Haider. The charismatic figure who has vexed the political establishment of this proud middle European nation of seven million once again defied the odds and pulled off a major electoral triumph. Last autumn's parliamentary vote brought Haider's Freedom Party (FPÖ) to within five percentage points of becoming the second most popular party, nearly edging out the ever-weakening Social Democrats and lackluster traditional conservatives. The FPÖ gained nearly a quarter of the seats in Austria's governing representative body, taking yet another step in what Haider's enemies have called his "Kampf," or in what his sympathizers have termed his "Long March." In the eight years since Haider's ascendancy to the leadership of what was a languishing and marginalized "old nationalist" and 19th century-style Liberal party, the FPÖ has trebled its electoral support.

Almost from the beginning of his rise to national prominence, Haider has been the target of both the traditional right and the socialist left, which have branded him a dangerous neo-Nazi and extreme nationalist whose political ascendancy would spell the doom of democracy in Austria. He is accused of being an opportunist who appeals to xenophobia and racism in an effort to awaken the "silent majority" of the Austrian electorate. This characterization notwithstanding, Haider has time and again proved the academic experts and political pundits incapable of gauging either his strategic skills or the depth of his appeal.

Haider has indeed taken a number of risks in his electoral rise, making his share of blunders. In 1986, his ill-advised, if inadvertent, praise of the Third Reich's employment policies forced his resignation as governor of Carinthia, his home province. By way of a political comeback, Haider assumed the party chairmanship to promote Heide Schmidt, a rising young parliamentary leader and once-dedicated loyalist nurtured at his side, into the national political arena. She ran as the FPÖ presidential candidate in 1992. Despite losing some support from traditionalists in rural and small village areas, Schmidt attained a

respectable 18 percent of the vote, drawing many middle-class Austrians to her banner.

Flushed by her relative success and media attention, Schmidt proceeded to spearhead a revolt against her mentor by forming the Liberal Forum in early 1993, and in the aftermath of this much-ballyhooed divorce, experts announced the imminent demise of Haider. It was then that Haider committed what many consider his worst blunder to date: he opposed Austria's entrance into the European Community. Haider told me last May that although the FPÖ was not opposed in principle to the E.C., its flawed structure could put Austria at a disadvantaged position regarding protection of its scenic ecology and the financial arrangements established by other German-speaking nations.

Haider also dismissed the label "German nationalist," pointing out that in earlier decades the FPÖ had championed the cause of European union. "At that time," he told me, "we were accused of promoting a new type of *Anschluss*." He described the push toward the E.C. by the two coalition parties as the height of hypocrisy. His own opposition was conditional: he felt the ruling parties had failed to negotiate a deal good enough for Austria.

In June, when the voters startled even professional pollsters by their resounding 70 percent endorsement of the referendum joining Austria to the E.C., the curtain was once again said to have fallen on the political future of the Freedom Party and its leader. Yet the October election revealed Haider's determination to target the disgruntled blue-collar families of Vienna's traditional "Red" neighborhoods, which has absorbed the brunt of multicultural education policies. When the fall vote was tallied, the socialists had lost nearly 8 percent of their base, or 14 parliamentary seats—shrinking to just over a third of the electorate. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), with its core of Catholic middle- and working-class families, surrendered eight seats, dropping their total to 52. The Freedom Party, following close behind, gained nine seats, boosting its total to 42. (The Green Party also showed gains against the ruling coalition parties, adding three seats to its former total of ten.)

What accounts for Haider's success? Certainly he does not follow the traditional right-wing politics of fiscal conservatism and religious zealotry. Nor is