In a time of censorship and social control under the ideology of the Nazi regime, Hitler and his counterparts produced an exhibition to discredit artistic developments deemed inappropriate and counterproductive for society. This project analyzed the “Degenerate Art” exhibition within the context of Nazi Germany, giving particular attention to the curatorial methods used to display the works, in order to understand the purpose of this exhibition and evaluate its impact.

How to Stage Art Poorly

1) Make the exhibit space feel chaotic by hanging the art very close together in a condensed area

2) Misidentify the artist or the title of the work in the labels underneath

3) Utilize propagandistic script for background information

4) Group art together according to unclear themes

Ironically, in such an extreme effort to malign modern art and prove its degeneracy in the mind of the public, the Nazis succeeded in making sure more people were exposed to it. To this day, it remains one of the most visited exhibits of all time.

Statistical Comparisons

“Degenerate Art” Exhibition
July 19, 1937 — November 30, 1937 in Munich, Germany .............. 2,009,899 visitors
1938 – 1941 tour through Berlin, Leipzig, Düsseldorf, Welmair, Halle, Vienna and Salzburg ................................................ 1,000,000 visitors

Great German Art Exhibition
July 18, 1937 — November 1937 ........................................... 600,000 visitors

Final Conclusion

While the Nazis did their best to permanently alter and destroy the image of modern art in the public mind, the sense of freedom which all modernists and their supporters sought to achieve in modern artwork seemed to have made it resilient enough to survive what is with little doubt the most scathing exhibition in history.