
ROBERT ULLMANN
An Artist's Dilemma

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Kaitlin Anne Vervoort

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58 East 79th Street
New York, N.Y. 10075

Tel: 1 212 861 4050
ShepherdNY@aol.com
www.shepherdgallery.com

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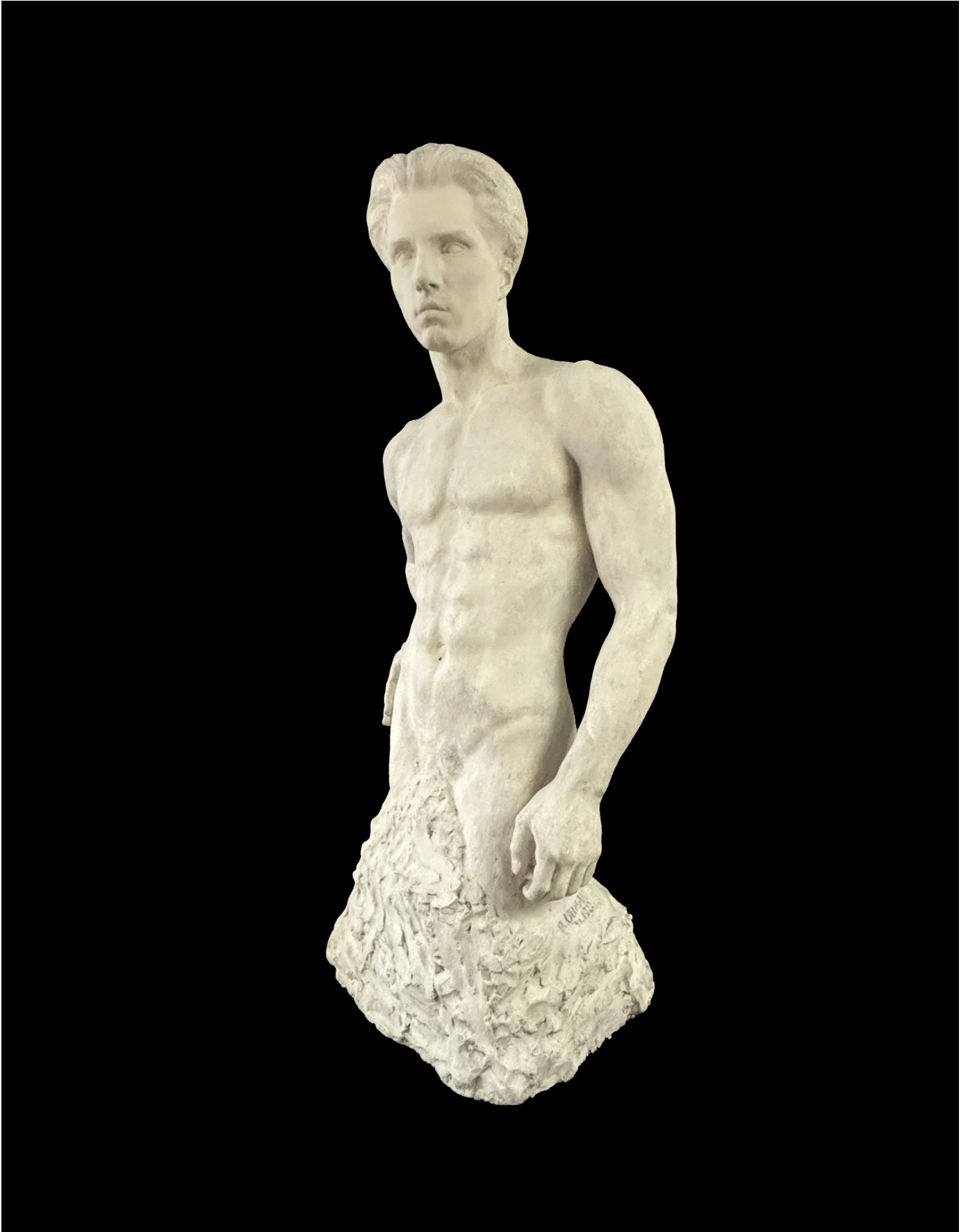
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ULLMANN, Robert (Mönchengladbach 1903 – 1966 Vienna)

Austrian School

SELF-PORTRAIT, 1922

Plaster. Height, from bottom of self-base to top of head: 45” (114.4 cm); depth, from left elbow to front of self-base: 18” (45.8 cm); width, from left elbow to right forearm: 24” (61 cm). Signature and date incised after casting at rear left of self-base: *R. ULLMANN | VI. 1922.*



I never worked for the NSDAP or its objectives before 13 March 1938, but only joined in May 1938. I am therefore not an old fighter, illegal member or sponsor in the sense of the Prohibition Act. Like many artists in the years after World War I, I had to struggle with economic hardship and finally hoped for better opportunities by joining the party after the Anschluss. To become a member more easily and as soon as possible, I was encouraged by the local group in Favoriten to work with them for at least two years. I was assigned to the department of propaganda literature and was put in charge of decorating halls and artistic designs. It is clear that I had no real understanding for this work, so I never actually worked in the field of propaganda. After two years, I managed with great difficulty to shake off and finally resign from this activity, which was detrimental to my artistic work. From then on, I never accepted any kind of party-political work. I have never taken advantage of my party membership and have harmed no one; I have earned my artistic successes on the basis of my artistic achievements. My works testify to my humane, progressive way of thinking; I have never glorified war.

Robert Ullmann¹

Intro

The life and work of Robert Heinrich Viktor Ullmann (1903 – 1966) poses some deeply complicated questions. He lived in a time of upheaval and struggle, constant change and uncertainty. His life spanned four diverging societal states: the Austro-Hungarian Empire and First World War (1867 – 1918), the interwar First Austrian Republic (1918 – 1934) and the Federal State of Austria (1934 – 1938), the Anschluss and the Third Reich (1938 – 1945), and the postwar Second Austrian Republic (1945 – present). Though each of these states brought both success and failure, opportunities and frustration, one must question Ullmann's intentions, his dire need to succeed despite the risks of aligning

himself with a totalitarian state, and his reasoning and explanations for such associations. The above statement was included in the application submitted to the denazification committee from the Gmunden district as part of his testimony of “good intentions” and desire to be downgraded from “incriminated” to “less incriminated.” The lack of moral responsibility, personal accountability, and social awareness in said statement is troubling given how revered he was by Adolf Hitler (1889 – 1945) and his chief architect, General Building Inspector, Inspector General for Water and Energy and German Roadways, Reich Minister of Industry and Production, and Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer (1905 – 1981), making it difficult sympathize with his claims of victimization. That being said, it is also too far a leap to call him a fanatic Nazi. It is true that he was a member of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), but he was categorically not a war criminal.

It is in this vein of questioning that we present a life-size plaster self-portrait of Robert Ullmann. It was created in 1922 at the age of 19 while he was at the academy. 1922 was a time in Vienna of progress, colloquially named Red Vienna, the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (SDAP) sponsored an expansion of social services, housing, health care, and education. The prospect of another war and the rise of a fascistic state and strongman leader was a distant possibility. *Self-Portrait* was executed in a time of great artistic development for the Austrian Wunderkind born in Germany, one free from the pressures of war in Interwar Vienna. It is crafted with precision and finesse with great attention paid to the human body showing him at the pinnacle of his artistic ability, emerging “freely from the stone.”² His hands are those of a sculptor, capable of great strength and ability. He

is heroic, proud, and in command. As an artist and a subject, he is here untainted by National Socialism. How then should one think of Ullmann and his work from before, during, and after the Second World War? Each work must be viewed and considered as a work in the context of its time.

Wunderkind [1903 – 1918] in the Austro-Hungarian Empire [1867 – 1918]

Robert Ullmann was born on July 18, 1903 to Viktor Ullmann (1877 – 1935), a fabric engraver and Anna Ullmann, née Rövenich (1873 – 1942) in Mönchengladbach, in the Düsseldorf district of the Rhine Province near the Dutch border (now North Rhine-Westphalia).³ When Robert Ullmann was a mere nine-months-old, the family relocated to Guntramsdorf, a town near Vienna where Viktor could find work. There, Robert's father was brought on by the Marianthal Textile Factory as a fabric engraver.⁴ After the birth of his sister Gertrude in 1906, the family moved to Oswaldgasse 8 in the 12th district of Vienna.⁵

To ease the financial burdens of having two children and living in Vienna on the modest income earned by his father, Robert's parents sent him to live with his paternal Grandmother in Hennersdorf/Dolni Branná (then Bohemia, now Czech Republic) at some point between 1906 and 1909. By the time he was enrolled in primary school in September 1909, Robert had already earned a reputation in the village as a "kleiner Künstler" (Little Artist) with a talent for molding animals out of plasticine.⁶ Encouraged by Robert's aptitude for the arts, Viktor consulted Professor Franz Thiele (1868 – 1945) at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague who advised him to enroll the budding artist in youth art classes at the k.k. [Kaiserlich-Königliche] Kunstgewerbeschule (Imperial and Royal School of

Arts and Crafts) taught by Franz Čížek (1865 – 1946), the Austrian genre and portrait painter, professor, and art education reformer.⁷

In the fall of 1911, Robert began his education under Čížek, attending classes on the weekend. As Robert's artistic training continued and his artistic ability grew, he went from making animal figurines and silhouettes to monumental works. For an exhibition of work by Čížek's students held at Vienna's Kunstgewerbemuseum on May 12, 1912, Robert produced his greatest work to date, an equestrian monument in honor of Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830 – 1916). Archduke Rainer, an official representative of the imperial family attended the exhibition and took note of the monumental sculpture by the young artist.⁸

After the onset of illness in the summer of 1912, Viktor Ullmann lost his job at the Marianthal Textile Factory. With no income to speak of, the Ullmann family returned to the Rhineland to seek support from their extended family. Still intent on furthering his son's artistic training, Viktor sought out influential members of the artistic and ruling elite. In a letter dated November 20, 1913, he pled with Emperor Franz Joseph I to honor the family with a financial gift allowing them to return to their Austrian fatherland:

*To His Emperor and Royal Apostolic Majesty
Emperor Franz Josef I Emperor of Austria!*

*I humbly request Your Emperor and Royal Majesty
to graciously allow me to approach the same with a
request from your Majesty.*

*At the beginning of 1912, I suddenly fell ill and lost
my job as an engraver in Marienthal near Vienna.
Forced into dire straits due to a long period of
unemployment and destitution, I and my family
sought shelter with relatives in the Rhineland. Now
that I have recovered, my wish would be to return
to Vienna; even more so the most ardent wish of
my son, whose eager ambition is to develop his
talent in the youth art department of the Imperial*

and Royal School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna—Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna—which he attended years ago and whose works were exhibited at the k.k. Arts and Crafts Exhibition and praised and admired by His Imperial and Royal Highness Archduke Rainer.

In this regard, as an Austrian, blameless subject, 36 years old and father of two children, I humbly request Your Emperor and Royal Majesty to graciously grant me a gift of money for the journey. I enclose this picture of the self-designed and modeled hunting monument of Your Emperor and Royal Highness and ask Your Majesty to inspect my son's work. Even before the age of three, the little boy showed artistic talent in silhouette sculpting and by the age of five he had begun modeling. It is impossible for me to give the boy any further training, especially as, as a foreigner, he does not receive any scholarships here. He would probably be accepted privately if we were immediately neutralized as Germans. However, we have turned down this offer, as we only wish to remain Austrian subjects, especially our son, who wholeheartedly wishes to obtain an education in his own fatherland through scholarships.

I most humbly request that Your Emperor and Royal Majesty grant the boy's most heartfelt request and graciously accept this enclosed portfolio with the portraits and the development of the silhouette cut-outs in memory of a ten-year-old pupil.

The boy's greatest pleasure was to send Your Emperor and Royal Majesty the original of the hunting monument, but unfortunately this is impossible due to the unsustainability of the modeled mass and a cast of it is prohibitively expensive for us.

In the hope that Your Emperor and Royal Majesty will graciously accept and forgive these requests of mine, I remain in the deepest humility.

Hilden, Nov. 20, 1913
Geresheimerstr. 133
Rhine Province

Victor Ullmann engraver
born in Hennersdorf
b. Hohenelbe, Bohemia⁹

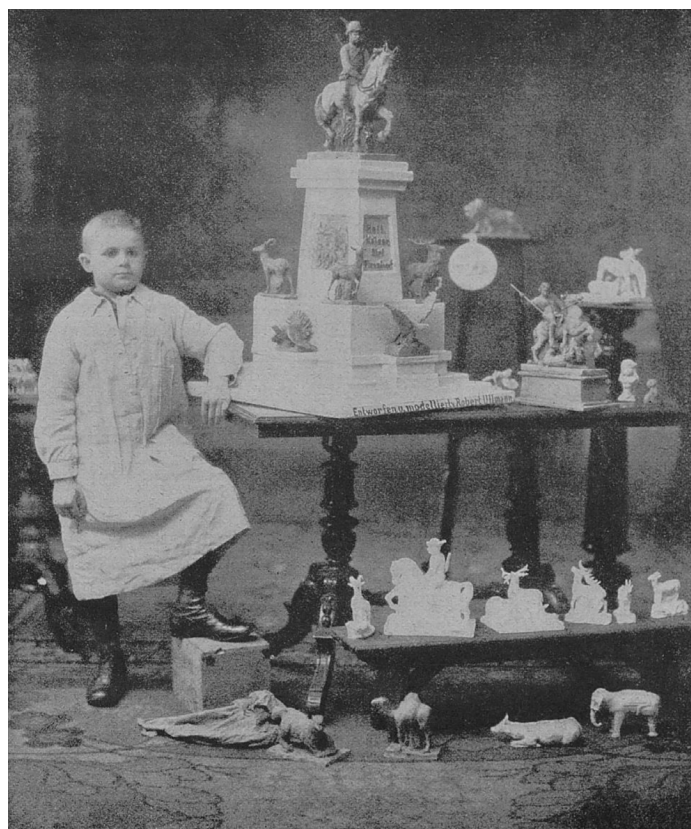


FIGURE 1. The 10 year-old Robert Ullmann among his works, 1913. Illustrated in *Rhein und Düsseldorf*, no. 47 (22 November 1913), 383.

Citing their wish to remain Austrian citizens, and perhaps more urgently their desire to provide young Robert with the proper instruction to facilitate his artistic development at the Imperial and Royal School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna, Viktor appealed to his sovereign. To highlight both the boy's loyalty to the monarchy and his artistic aptitude, Viktor included an example of Robert's animal silhouettes and a photo of the 10-year-old surrounded by over a dozen of his animal figurines [SEE FIGURE 1]. To his left, towering above both the boy and the other works, stands the aforementioned equestrian monument dedicated to the Emperor.¹⁰ Without further views or descriptions of the sculpture, only two sides of it are visible. Ullmann situated Emperor Franz Joseph I on horseback surmounted on a four-sided plinth supported by a two-tiered base adorned with figurines of animals

often found on hunting excursions. An inscribed relief of the Austrian Coat of Arms and slogans in praise of hunters and hunting is visible on each side of the plinth. Just two days after Viktor penned this letter to the emperor, this photo was published in the newspaper supplement, *Rhein und Düssel: Illustrierte Wochenschrift zum Düsseldorfer General-Anzeiger* [SEE FIGURE 2]. The inscription accompanying the



FIGURE 2. *Rhein und Düssel*, no. 47 (22 November 1913).

photo reads: “The boy, son of the engraver Ullmann in Hilden, has been drawing and silhouetting out of his own impulse since his earliest childhood; since the age of 5 he has been modeling in clay, mostly without a model from his imagination. As his parents are of modest means, it would be desirable if a

patron could be found for the boy.”¹¹ Indeed a patron was found for the burgeoning artist in the Austrian primary school teacher, conductor, and Director of the Vienna Männergesangsverein, Viktor Keldorfer (1873 – 1959).

Finally, on January 9, 1914, the family was informed that their request to the Emperor was granted. After departing for Vienna on April 27, 1914, the Ullmann family once again settled in the city on May 1, 1914. Despite the financial assistance from the Imperial family, Viktor Ullmann was unable to secure a job until the intervention of Keldorfer, who procured him an engraving position at the Arsenal.¹²

In June of 1914, Robert Ullmann, approaching his eleventh birthday, resumed his class at the Imperial and Royal School of Arts and Crafts under the tutelage of Franz Čížek. A month later, the outbreak of war

consumed the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The effects can even be seen in the art of young Ullmann over the following three years at Čížeks school. During this tumultuous time, he, along with some of his fellow classmates including Franz Barwig the Younger (1903 – 1985) and his brother Walter Barwig (b. 1898), produced battle scenes and other war themed works.¹³

Even at such young age, it seemed certain that Robert Ullmann would succeed where others had failed. As a child prodigy much was expected of his future. At the conclusion of the youth art class in June of 1917, Franz Čížek delivered a lecture emphasizing the talent and potential of his favored student, a young man just short of fourteen years old:

When you hear your fellow pupils mention the name Ullmann in better times, and this is quite certain, then you must feel joy and pride at having been a fellow pupil of such a great man. I hope that this present lecture on the work of this young man will serve as a lesson to all you students, and that you will take this young man as an example and endeavor to produce works of the same kind. Of course, I do not mean the same works, but in this sense to create full of vitality and spirit, for many of you also produce much, but still wooden work. The name Ullmann already says it all - if you say it here, you have to imagine the brave little man with the penetrating, observant gaze and his lively, creative works.”¹⁴

Success and Failure in the First Austrian Republic [1919 – 1934] and the Federal State of Austria [1934 – 1938]

From 1919 to 1927 Ullmann attended the Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna) under the Austrian sculptor Josef Müllner (1879 – 1968). In the process of developing his own style, Ullmann sought to channel the work of the French sculptor, Auguste Rodin (1840 – 1917)

who imbued his naturalistic work with allegorical and mythological symbolism. The work of Rodin coupled with that of Müllner significantly influenced the young Ullmann. In 1921, Ullmann described his marble sculpture *Torso einer Sinnenden* (Torso of a Contemplative Woman) as being of his own style and created “freely from the stone.” After a study trip to Germany in 1923, the importance of creating a unique style while still being influenced by others rang true. Years later in *Eigene Darstellung des künstlerischen Lebenslaufes seit Eintritt in die Akademie bis 1947* (Personal account of artistic career from joining the academy until 1947), a personal résumé of his life up until 1947, he wrote, “I came to the realization that there are still many stylistic possibilities. I soon realized even more that a creative artist has his own style and is best off going his own way. From that time onwards, this was my ambition, even if other styles influenced me at different times, but without completely suppressing my own individuality.”¹⁵ It was a turning point in formulating a unique aesthetic he could call his own. Nearing the end of his formal artistic training, Ullmann presented a sensual sculpture of a mother cradling a child entitled *Mutter mit Kind* (Mother with Child) or *Mutterliebe* (Motherly Love) for his final thesis for the Academy in 1927. Still working under Müllner, Ullmann had created something expressionistic and emotive, evocative of the timeless themes of unconditional maternal love and protection. The sculpture, lauded by the professors at the Academy and awarded the Rome Prize, marked the end of his formal artistic training. Leaving the academy with such a success convinced Ullmann that the rest of his artistic career was destined to be a triumph. In his personal account from 1947, he recalled both the expectation of success and the devastation that followed from its foundering: “I had now successfully

completed my studies and I thought at the time that I would then be given appropriate commissions and that my proven abilities would come to fruition, but I soon had to realize that reality was different from what I had imagined from the descriptions of artists’ biographies. Nothing came of it!”¹⁶

Nearly a decade followed of sporadic commissions facilitated by Viktor Keldorfer via the Schubertbund. Three memorial plaques of Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828) were ordered for the Lichtenthal parish church in the 9th district, where the musician was baptized, the façade of St. Josef’s Church in Schönbrunner Straße in the 5th district, and the Haus zum Römischen Kaiser in the 1st district, at Renngasse 1. Further work also came by way of Keldorfer, including reliefs and plaques of the musicians and composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) at the Maria Geburt church on Rennweg, Josef Haydn (1732 – 1809) at the Gumpendorf church, Eduard Kremser (1838 – 1914) at Vienna’s Central Cemetery, Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) at the Hotel Imperial, and Adolf Kirchl (1858 – 1936) at Vienna’s Central Cemetery.¹⁷

For several decades following his departure from the academy, Ullmann found work in the famous Austrian Porzellanmanufaktur Augarten. Originally founded in 1718 by Claudius Innocentius du Paquier (1679 – 1751), Augarten, or as it was known then, Ärarial-Porzellan-Manufaktur (later known as Alt-Wiener Porzellanmanufaktur) was the second oldest producer of porcelain in Europe after Meißen (established in 1707). The present Porzellanmanufaktur Augarten reopened in 1923 after shuttering its doors in 1866 for economic reasons. Representing current aesthetic trends such as Art Deco, the manufactory also dealt in more classic modes of art and decoration.¹⁸ In 1929, Ullmann, in dire need of supplementary income,

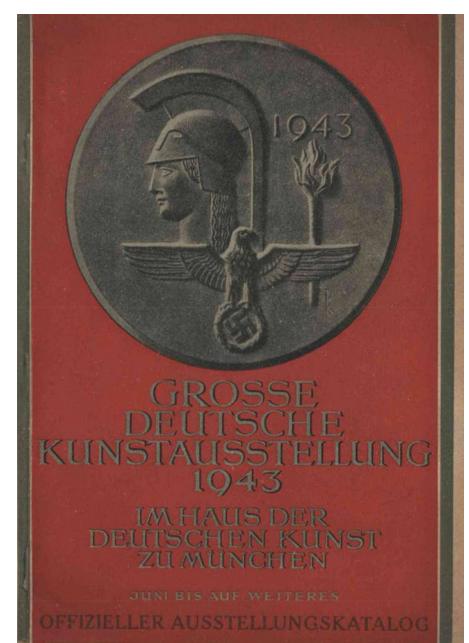
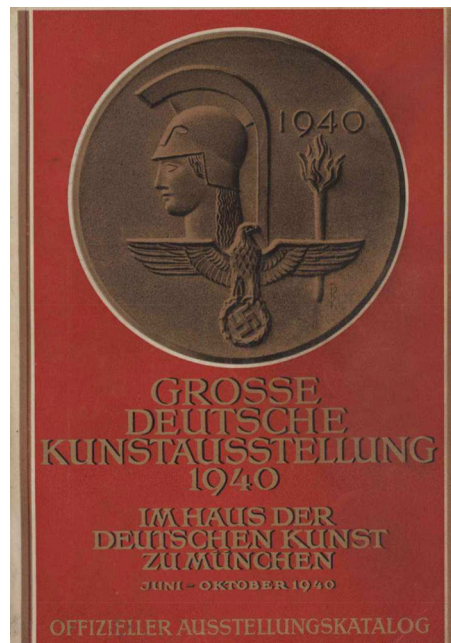
began taking orders from Augarten. He continued to work for Augarten for decades, before, during, and after the war, in prosperous times and in periods of financial struggle. His work for the porcelain manufactory included animals, such as horses, dogs, and deer all based on observations of nature, and sensual classical human nudes.

Eager for further opportunities for commissions, Ullmann joined the „Deutsche Gesellschaft für Christliche Kunst e. V.“ (German Society for Christian Art) on November 14, 1928, member number, 16,809.¹⁹ He also participated in exhibitions organized by the Austrian Society for Christian Art, which resulted in a commission from San Francisco of *Mutter mit Kind* (*Mother with Child*) in lime wood, a plaster version of which was shown in the “II International Church Art Exhibition” in Rome in 1936.²⁰

After the Anschluss, church commissions dwindled and future commissions were no longer forthcoming for Ullmann, leading him to write that “Due to this sudden loss of the planned commissions,

I was once again in dire material straits, having only just recovered from the previous difficult years,”²¹ Because of the restrictions imposed by the Nazis on the production and sale of art, artists were required to establish their “Aryan” ancestry and loyalty to the National Socialist aesthetic and political ideology in an application to the Reich Chamber of Culture. Nazi party membership was a critical, albeit not obligatory part of this process. Without the government’s approval, artists would face constraints on the purchase of art materials and the exhibition and sale of work. Ullmann saw this as the most effective way to achieve his dream of being a successful and influential artist and applied for membership in 1938 after years of artistic instability.

From Wunderkind to struggling artist, Ullmann found himself in a position he never imagined. Told from a young age of his talent and potential, finding himself under-employed and under-appreciated the prospect of being gainfully employed by the new government in their expansion of public art was irresistible to Ullmann, regardless of any political



FIGURES 3, 4 AND 5. Cover of 1938, 1940, and 1943 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (GDK) Catalogs.

implications of the association with the Nazis.

Opportunism in the Anschluss and German-Occupied Austria [1938 – 1945]

In 1939, ten years after he was first commissioned by Augarten, Ullmann also began working for their main competitor Meißen, the oldest porcelain manufactory in Europe (est. 1707). That same year, Ullmann was commissioned by Meißen to create a bust of Hitler. The bust (order no. O259) was to show the leader of the Third Reich “in a martial general’s pose, 60 cm high and 56 cm wide” with one version in porcelain and another in Meißen’s proprietary brown Böttgersteinzeug (Böttger stoneware).²² Ullmann was not the only artist commissioned by Meißen to create a bust of Hitler. Another sculptor and member of Hitler’s “Gottbegnadeten (God-Gifted)” list of artists, Ernst Seger (1868 – 1939) was also given a commission by Meißen for a bust of Hitler.

Starting in 1938, Ullmann participated in three *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) [GDK]. From 1937 to 1944 the GDK took place at the first building commissioned by the Nazi Government, the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) in Munich (est. October 1933), designed by Paul Ludwig Troost (1878 – 1934). The exhibition featured artists from across the Third Reich who represented the National Socialist aesthetic glorifying strength, patriotism, heroism, ideal beauty,



FIGURE 6. Robert Ullmann, *Morgenröte*, 1943.

and classicism. 704 sculptors participated in the eight primary exhibitions and seven “exchange exhibitions,” most of whom only exhibited once or twice.²³ Ullmann exhibited three times in 1938, 1940, and 1943 [SEE FIGURES 3, 4, AND 5]. After *Morgenröte* (*Dawn*) appeared in Ullmann’s third and final GDK exhibition in 1943—to great acclaim—, Speer requested that in addition to casting the fountain group in marble, two bronze casts were also to be completed [SEE FIGURE 6]. One would be permanently exhibited in the House of German Art, the other would be included in Hitler’s personal collection.²⁴ In the end, neither of the bronzes were made as

the original was destroyed during the war, along with many other of Ullmann’s other wartime works.²⁵

After being recognized as a valuable artist for the Third Reich by both Albert Speer and Hitler, Ullmann had high hopes for the future: “These commissions and fees exceeded my wildest imagination! The dream of a successful future with great artistic tasks, to be relieved of all worries about everyday life, as is necessary for free and uninhibited creativity, seemed to have come true.”²⁶ Ullmann began to receive commissions from Speer and the Reich Chancellery in the fall of 1940. By 1941, after being awarded a commission for the fountain group he entered in the 1943 GDK exhibition, Speer asked Ullmann to move to Berlin to more effectively collaborate with other artists and architects.²⁷ After living in Berlin for three months, his new wife, Hertha Ullmann, née Zelber (1922 –

2010), joined him in an apartment provided by Speer. Ullmann was also furnished with the former studio of Arno Breker (1900 – 1991) during the duration of his stay in the German capitol, which only lasted until November 22, 1943, when both the studio and residence were destroyed in an air raid.²⁸

In 1944, Hitler and Joseph Goebbels (1897 – 1945), the President of the Reich Chamber of Culture and Reich Minister further honored Ullmann by placing him on the “Gottbegnadeten-Liste,” a list of 1,041 artists across the field including visual arts, sculpture, music, architecture, literature, and drama. He was one of 18 Austrians included in the list. This elevation exempted him and other artists from military service and ensured them a higher consideration for commissions.²⁹

Atonement in the Second Austrian Republic [1945 to present]

Ullmann was arrested by American forces on July 24, 1945 for his NSDAP membership and his position early in the war as the “propaganda and cultural leader of the Vienna 10 local group.”³⁰ He was imprisoned for seven months until early 1946 at the Glasenbach internment camp in Elsbethen, a town due south of Salzburg near the border with Germany. Upon his release he was classified as “incriminated,” eliminating his right to vote, hindering his ability to practice professionally, and freezing all bank accounts.³¹

After his release from

prison, Ullmann petitioned the denazification committee to change his classification from “incriminated” to “less incriminated,” the least of three categories NSDAP members were separated into, from “war criminal,” to “incriminated,” to “less incriminated.”³² In said statement, he diminished any connection he may have had to National Socialism, claiming that he merely joined to further his career and denying any “party political work,” despite numerous commissions by Albert Speer for the Reich Ministry, busts of Hitler, and participation in the GDK exhibitions. Along with the supporting testimony of five individuals, the statement of innocence and alleged “good conduct” included in the application was a success. On February 20, 1948, Ullmann was classified as “less incriminated” and his right to vote, work, and access to his bank account were restored.³³

Ullmann’s postwar artistic rehabilitation started in 1947 with numerous articles about the artist and his work, especially his porcelain figurines.³⁴ Ullmann’s Augarten porcelain sculptures gained renown after an article entitled „Das weiße Wunder von Wien (The White Wonder of Vienna)” by Otto Basil (1901-1983) alias Markus Hörmann appeared in *Neues Österreich* on December 25, 1952 complete with the illustration one of his works [SEE FIGURE 7].³⁵ The article does not mention Ullmann by name, rather it focuses on the reopening of a company that embodies the Austrian spirit, with Basil writing: “Rarely have



FIGURE 7. *Neues Österreich*, December 25, 1952, 9.



FIGURE 8. Robert Ullmann, *Scheuendes Pferd*, 1948

we felt the Austrian spirit so strongly in a company, the spirit of a tight-knit, patriarchal community that works with love and loyalty to its craft.”³⁶ In the years spanning 1952 – 1986, Ullmann’s Augarten porcelain sculptures were used as state gifts to visiting politicians and foreign dignitaries. In 1952 both the Mayor of the city of Paris and the Austrian Chancellor, Leopold Figl (1902 – 1965), each received a porcelain sculpture, *Hirschgruppe* (*Stag Group*) and *Kämpfende Hirsche* (*Fighting Stags*) respectively. In 1961, the Polish foreign minister, Adam Rapacki (1909 – 1970), Luxembourg’s foreign minister, Eugène Schaus (1901 – 1978), Finnish President Urho Kekkonen (1900 – 1986), and the French Foreign Minister, Jacques-Maurice Couve de Murville (1907 – 1999), all received Ullmann’s Augarten porcelain sculptures. The full circle of redemption and rehabilitation organized by the state concluded with *Scheuendes Pferd* (*Shying Horse*) [SEE FIGURE 8], the last gift of this kind, presented to Princess Diana and Prince Charles on their royal visit to Vienna on April 14, 1986 [SEE FIGURE 9] by the then Mayor of Vienna, Helmut Zilk (1927 – 2008).³⁷ The sculpture given to

the British Royal couple was produced after the war in 1948, just as he was cleared as a war criminal and years before Ullmann regained wide acceptance in Vienna. Interestingly, two years later, in 1988, during the *Bedenkjahr* (Austrian Year of Reflection)—50 years since the Anschluss—Zilk sponsored an effort to construct a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust on Vienna’s Albertinaplatz (now named the Helmut-Zilk-Platz). The *Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus* (Memorial Against War and Fascism) was designed by the Austrian artist Alfred Hrdlicka (1928 – 2009) and unveiled on November 24, 1988. Hrdlicka completed the memorial in 1991.³⁸ Postwar Vienna was a place of contradiction, both trying to forget the crimes of the past and commemorate the victims.

In the decade between 1949 and 1959 commissions for art by the city of Vienna were on the rise. 2% of all construction costs were allocated



FIGURE 9. Prince Charles, Helmut Zilk (Mayor of Vienna), Princess Diana, and Dagmar Koller (Mayor’s Wife) at Wiener Rathaus on April 4, 1986.

to artistic design. Artists could apply to an array of opportunities and receive pecuniary compensation based on financial need.³⁹ Ullmann was chosen for several commissions over the years, establishing him as an influential and rehabilitated artist. Church commissions were also forthcoming. In 1951, the canon of St. Stephens Cathedral in Vienna, Prelate Jakob Fried, commissioned Ullmann to replace pillars no. 7, 8, and 9 of the Choir of the Apostles, elements that had been damaged by a bomb during the war. The themes of “Repentance,” “Humility,” and “Desire” were chosen and executed in a similar Gothic style as the other existing pillars. Ullmann continued to design sculptures of religious importance, as if in search of redemption both in the eyes of the church and the public. The “Austrian Society for Christian Art” was eager to channel the Christian revitalization of the interwar period, but this time with the hand of modernist principles and aesthetics.

In the 1950s Ullmann began to experiment with modernism, with little success. Ironically, in this new postwar era of art, there was little appetite for Ullmann’s “moderately modernist” sculptures, the public preferred the style he perfected under the Nazis. He was constrained once again by an aesthetic and association that previously cost him his liberty, ability to work, and labeled him as an “incriminated” member of the NSDAP. In a way, this return to a previous artistic style robbed him of any artistic individuality, any chance to further develop his craft and explore modernism on his own terms. For commissions he continually adapted his style to the context and situation, leaving him in a state of artistic limbo.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that nearly 60 years after Robert

Ullmann’s death there is still a dearth of academic investigations into the artist and his actions. There are only a few publications dedicated to this subject, leaving an avenue of both uncertainty and unknown, as well as opportunity and potential discovery. Further work must be done on the artists like Robert Ullmann who found favor in the Third Reich and returned to a normal life after the war.

In Ullmann’s *Personal account of artistic career from joining the academy until 1947*, he gave several accounts of his artistic trajectory and explanations for his successes and failures. What is missing from these personal accounts, however, is any introspection. He does not take responsibility for his own actions or alliances. He seeks to lay blame at anyone but himself. There is no accountability or remorse. According to these statements, he is a victim. Any gains or successes he achieved were down to his own ingenuity and artistic talent. Coddled from a young age by his parents who saw an artistic genius in the making, failure to Ullmann was always caused by external forces. As an adult, outside circumstances, chiefly the war perpetrated by the Nazis, were, according to Ullmann, irrelevant to his practice and professional choices.

This problematic behavior does not by any means indicate that Ullmann was complicit in the mass murder of Jews and other individuals deemed undesirable by the Nazis. Nor does it mean that Ullmann was antisemitic or in any way supportive of the Final Solution. At this point, without further information about his personal beliefs, it appears that Ullmann was one of the many artists who deemed it politically expedient to join and engage with the Nazis, regardless of what National Socialism stood for. Ullmann was opportunistic, seeking to further his career no matter the cost. He put aside any concerns he may have had about the actions of the Nazis and

towed the party line, creating work that aligned with the aesthetic and ideological aims of the government. These facts, while troubling, do not negate the talent of this artist, but it does call into question the use of that talent and the apparent lack of any social conscience. From child prodigy to one of Hitler's chosen "Gottbegnadeten" artists, Ullmann found favor in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the First Austrian Republic, Nazi Germany and Occupied Austria, as well as the Second Austrian Republic. Both his art and his politics morphed to fit the aesthetic and political ideology of the time. Ullmann's *Realpolitik* brought him fame, notoriety, and finally absolution.

No artist, event, or action lives or occurs in a vacuum. We are all products of our time and environment. Regardless of this, troubling facts still remain about Robert Ullmann, his actions during the Third Reich, and his explanations excusing his behavior. He was not alone in his actions. Many prominent artists also colluded with the Nazi regime to receive commissions or to continue practicing art. Painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, and other artists such as Josef Thorak (1889 – 1952), Arno Breker, Josef Hoffmann (1870 – 1956), Walter Gropius (1883 – 1969), Paul Ludwig Troost, as well as members of the Bauhaus all colluded with the Nazis to varying degrees. Some went along to get along, others, such as Fritz Ertl (1908 – 1982), who designed the crematoria, barracks, and gas chambers of Auschwitz, were deeply complicit in the horrific actions of the Nazis. Many artists, but not all (i.e. Albert Speer, who served 20 years in Spandau Prison), were absolved of their National Socialist connections after the war. Postwar German and Austrian society was eager to move beyond the horrors and guilt of the war, so much so that even those who were avowedly antisemitic, instrumental to the murder of millions of people, and active participants

in the war were acquitted in both the eyes of the public and denazification committees. After years of war and societal guilt a collective amnesia took over the public. After all the fighting has stopped, the rubble cleaned up and the bodies laid to rest, was there a collective amnesia about the culpability of those involved? While not guilty of murder, genocide, or blatant antisemitism, Ullmann was complicit by his opportunism. It is only by addressing the actions of these artists during World War II that society will truly be able to reconcile the past and prevent such things in the future.

What happened in Nazi Germany, the collaboration of artists, politicians, and lay people with the rhetoric and horrors of the Nazi government is not an isolated instance in the annals of human history, nor is it completely relegated to the past. The potential for further occurrences that mirror the rise of Hitler, and the loyalty he commanded from everyday people despite clear moral and ethical implications of his policies and crimes is already knocking at the door. This is not a partisan statement, but a statement of concern for humanity and democracy, for the lives and liberty of everyone, not just the select few. The real enemy from within is ourselves, and whether or not we will go along to get along, retreat into ourselves, our work, and our own personal success, and disregard the oppressive forces from without. We are part of a broader community, one that while divided can still find common ground in compassion and tolerance of others. Whether we want to admit it or not, all art is political, some more overt than others. The case of Robert Ullmann can serve as a lesson for the future, if not the present. Will we heed the call of history, or will we also compromise our moral values in order to find power and favor for ourselves?

Kaitlin Anne Vervoort

ENDNOTES

1 „Ich habe mich vor dem 13. März 1938 für die NSDAP oder ihre Ziele nie betätigt, sondern bin erst im Mai 1938 beigetreten. Ich bin also im Sinn des Verbotsgesetzes kein alter Kämpfer, Illegaler oder Förderer. So wie viele Künstler in den Jahren nach dem 1. Weltkrieg mit wirtschaftlicher Not zu kämpfen hatten, und schliesslich durch den Beitritt zur Partei nach dem Anschluss bessere Möglichkeiten erhofften, war es auch bei mir der Fall. Um leichter und ehestens Mitglied zu werden, wurde mir von der Ortsgruppe Favoriten nahegelegt, wenigstens 2 Jahre mitzuarbeiten. Ich wurde im Ressort der Propagandaleitung eingeteilt und veranlasst, Saalschmückungen und künstlerische Ausgestaltungen vorzunehmen. Es ist klar, dass ich für diese Tätigkeit kein wirkliches Verständnis aufbringen konnte, also propagandistisch eigentlich nie gearbeitet habe. Mit großer Mühe gelang es mir nach 2 Jahren diese mein künstlerisches Schaffen beeinträchtigende Tätigkeit abzuschütteln und endgültig niederzulegen. Von da an habe ich nie mehr auch nur irgendeine parteipolitische Arbeit angenommen. Ich habe aus meiner Parteizugehörigkeit nie einen Nutzen gezogen und keinen Menschen geschädigt, meine künstlerischen Erfolge erwarb ich auf Grund meiner künstlerischen Leistungen. Meine Arbeiten bezeugen meine menschliche, weltanschauliche Denkungsweise, ich habe auch nie den Krieg verherrlicht.“; quoted in Christine Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann. Ein Künstlerleben in bewegten Zeiten* (Vienna: myMorawa von Morawa Lesezirkel GmbH, 2018), 128-129.

2 „frei aus dem Stein.“ Robert Ullmann quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 44.

3 Dr. Michael Popović, „Die Familie Ullman aus dem Riesengebirgsvorland,“ *Sudetendeutsche Familienforschung* 15, no. 8 (December 2022): 375.

4 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 20.

5 *Ibid.*, 21.

6 *Ibid.*

7 In 1897 Čížek established the first Jugendkunstklasse and began directing youth art classes under the auspices of the School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna in 1903. Students attended until the age of 14.

8 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 25.

9 „An seine Kaiser und Königliche Apostolische Majestät Kaiser Franz Josef I. Kaiser von Österreich!

Bitte untertänigst Euere Kaiser und Königliche Majestät mir huldvollst zu gewähren, mich mit einem Gesuche Allerhöchst demselben zu nahen.

Anfang des Jahres 1912 erkrankte ich plötzlich und verlor dadurch meine Anstellung als Graveur in Mariantal bei Wien. Infolge langer Arbeits- und Mittellosigkeit in größte Notlage gedrängt, suchte ich mit Familie Schutz bei Verwandten im Rheinland. Mein Wunsch wäre, da ich nun genesen, wieder zurück nach Wien; noch mehr der sehnlichste Wunsch meines Sohnes, dessen eifriges Bestreben ist, sein Talent in der Jugendkunstabteilung der k.k. Kunstgewerbeschule zu Wien – die er schon vor Jahren besuchte und dessen Arbeiten der k.k. Kunstgewerbeausstellung von Seiner k.k. Hoheit Herrn Erzherzog Rainer gelobt und bewundert wurden, weiter auszubilden.

Diesbezüglich richte ich als österreichischer, unbescholte-

ner Untertan, 36 Jahre alt und Familienvater von zwei Kindern an Euere Kaiser und Königliche Majestät die untertänigste Bitte, mir in Gnade ein Geldgeschenk für die Reise bewilligen zu wollen. Ich lege Euere Hoheit dies Bild des selbst entworfenen und modellierten Jagddenkmals Euerer Kaiser und Königlichen Hoheit bei und bitte Euere Majestät die Arbeiten meines Sohnes in Augenschein zu nehmen. Schon vor dem dritten Lebensjahre zeigten sich bei dem Kleinen künstlerische Talente im Silhouettenschneiden und mit dem fünften Jahre er das modellieren begann. Dem Knaben eine weitere Ausbildung angedeihen zu lassen, ist mir unmöglich, zumal er als Ausländer hier keine Stipendien erhält. Man würde sich privatum wohl seiner annehmen wenn wir uns sofort als Reichsdeutscher neutralisieren ließen. Jedoch haben wir dieses Angebot abgeschlagen, da wir nur österreichische Untertanen bleiben wollen, zumal unser Sohn, der von ganzem Herzen in seinem eigenen Vaterlande die Ausbildung durch Stipendien erlangen möchte.

Ich bitte untertänigst Euere Kaiser und Königliche Majestät möge der innigsten Bitte des Knaben willfahren und diese beiliegende Mappe mit den Bildnissen und die Entwicklung der Silhouettenausschnitte in Gnaden zum Angedenken eines zehnjährigen Schülers aufzuberechnen.

Die größte Freude des Knaben, Euerer Kaiser und Königlichen Majestät das Original des Jagddenkmals einzuschicken, ist leider wegen der Unhaltbarkeit der modellierten Masse unmöglich und ein Abguß desselben wegen zu großen Kostenpunktes für uns unerschwinglich.

In der Hoffnung, dass Euere Kaiser und Königliche Majestät diese meine Bitten in Gnaden huldvoll aufnehmen und verzeihen verharre ich in tiefster Untertänigkeit.

Hilden den 20. Nov. 1913

Geresheimerstr. 133

Rheinprovinz

Victor Ullmann Graveur

geb. zu Hennersdorf

b. Hohenelbe, Böhmen.“

Viktor Ullmann to Emperor Franz Joseph I, November 20, 1913; quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 26-28.

10 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 27-28.

11 „Der Knabe, Sohn des Graveurs Ullmann in Hilden, hat seit seiner frühesten Kindheit aus eigenem Untrieb gezeichnet und Silhouetten; seit seinem 5. Jahre modelliert er in Ton, zumeist ohne Vorbild aus der Phantasie. Da die Eltern unbemittelt sind wäre zu wünschen, daß sich ein Mäzen für den Knaben fände.“ *Rhein und Düssel: Illustrierte Wochenschrift zum Düsseldorfer General-Anzeiger*, no. 47 (November 22, 1913): 383.

12 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 28.

13 *Ibid.*, 31.

14 „Wann ihr Mitschüler und Mitschülerinnen den Namen Ullmann in schöneren Zeiten nennen hört und dies ist ganz gewiß, so müßt euch Freude und Stolz beseelen, Mitschüler eines so großen Mannes gewesen zu sein. Ich will hoffen, dass dieser jetzige Vortrag über die Arbeiten dieses jungen Mannes euch allen Schülern zur Lehre dienen wird, ferner ihr euch dieses jungen Mannes zum Vorbild nehmt und euch befließigt, ebensolche Schaffungen hervor zu bringen. Natürlich meine ich nicht dieselben Arbeiten, sondern in diesem Sinne zu schaffen voll Lebendigkeit und Geist,

denn viele von euch bringen wohl auch vieles, aber noch hölzernes zu Tage. Jetzt schon besagt der Name Ullmann alles, - spricht man ihn hier aus, so muß man sich den kleinen wackeren Manne mit dem durchdringenden vielbeobachteten Blick und seine lebendigen geschaffenen Arbeiten vorstellen.“ Franz Čížek, quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 32.

15 „Ich kam zur Erkenntnis, dass es noch viele Stilmöglichkeiten gibt. Als bald erkannte ich noch weitergehend, dass ein schöpferischer Künstler seinen Stil in sich hat und am besten eigene Wege geht. Von dieser Zeit an war dies mein Bestreben, wenn auch mitunter zu verschiedenen Zeiten andere Stilarten mich beeinflussten, ohne jedoch meine Eigenart ganz zurück zu drängen.“ Robert Ullmann, *Eigene Darstellung des künstlerischen Lebenslaufes seit Eintritt in die Akademie bis 1947*; quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 46.

16 „Nun war mein Studium mit Erfolg beendet und ich dachte damals, dass anschließend entsprechende Aufträge erfolgen müssten und meine erwiesenen Fähigkeiten zur Entfaltung kommen würden, Aber bald musste ich erkennen, dass die Wirklichkeit anders aussieht als ich es mir aus den Schilderungen von Künstlerbiographien vorgestellt hatte. Es kam nichts!“; Robert Ullmann, *Eigene Darstellung des künstlerischen Lebenslaufes seit Eintritt in die Akademie bis 1947*; quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 55.

17 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 66-75.

18 Claudia Bodinek, “300 Years of the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory: Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art (MAK), Vienna 16th May – 23rd September. Eternally Beautiful: 300 Years of Vienna Porcelain: Augarten Porcelain Museum, Vienna 19th March – 15th October,” *The Burlington Magazine* 160, no. 1385, Italian Art and Architecture (August 2018): 675.

19 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 80.

20 Ibid., 81.

21 „Durch diesen plötzlichen Ausfall der in Aussicht gestellten Aufgaben kam ich wieder in die ärgste materielle Bedrängnis, nachdem ich mich erst kurz vorher von den früheren schweren Jahren erholt hatte“, Ullmann, *Eigene Darstellung des künstlerischen Lebenslaufes seit Eintritt in die Akademie bis 1947*; quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 103-104.

22 Alex Granzow, „Meissen und der braune Fleck“, *Handelsblatt* (January 23, 2010): n.p., <https://web.archive.org/web/20150121032345/http://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/mittelstand/porzellan-manufaktur-meissen-und-der-braune-fleck-seite-1/3352220-2.html>. The porcelain bust was for sale for 400 Reichsmarks (RM), the Böttergersteinzeug was 450 RM.

23 Robert Thomas, *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung München 1937 – 1944. Verzeichnis der Künstler in zwei Bänden*, band 2, Bildhauer (Berlin: Neuhaus Verlag, 2011), 8.

24 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 120-121.

25 Ibid., 123.

26 „Diese Aufträge und Honorare übertrafen meine kühnsten Vorstellungen! Der Traum einer erfolgreichen Zukunft mit großen künstlerischen Aufgaben, jeder Sorge um den gewöhnlichen Alltag enthoben zu sein, wie es für ein freies und ungehemmtes

Schaffen notwendig ist, schien sich erfüllt zu haben.“; Ullmann, *Eigene Darstellung des künstlerischen Lebenslaufes seit Eintritt in die Akademie bis 1947*; quoted in Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 113.

27 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 111.

28 Ibid; Ibid., 121.

29 Ingrid Holzschuh and Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Auf Linie: NS-Kunstpolitik in Wien Die Reichskammer der bildenden Künste* (Basel; Wien: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, Wien Museum MUSA, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783035624274>, 125.

30 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 127.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 128.

34 Ibid.

35 Markus Hörmann [Otto Basil], „Das weiße Wunder von Wien“, *Neues Österreich*, December 25, 1952, 9-10, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nos&datum=19521225>.

36 „Wir haben selten in einem Betrieb so sehr den österreichischen Geist gespürt, den Geist einer festgefügtten, patriarchalischen Gemeinschaft, die mit Liebe und Handwerkstreue amidealen Werk ist.“ Ibid, 10.

37 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 214-215.

38 „Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus,“ Memorial Museums, <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/memorialmuseum/mahnmal-gegen-krieg-und-faschismus>.

39 Zippel, *Bildhauer Robert Ullmann*, 148.

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