

Wildlife art and the Nazis

*The case of Sweden's
Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939)*

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Introduction

A well-known date in the historiography of "art during the Third Reich" is 18 July 1937, when Adolf Hitler delivered a programmatic speech about NS art and art policy at the opening of the infamous "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" (great German art exhibition). This exhibition was the first of eight, staged in Munich's "Haus der Deutschen Kunst" (house of German art) during the period 1937 to 1944. In tandem, another exhibition was put on, entitled "Entartete Kunst" (degenerate art), which opened one day after the "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung," also in Munich, and which during the following nearly four years travelled to 12 other cities. The 1937 Munich art shows marked the start of an aggressive phase in the campaign by the Nazis of "cleansing" German art, which already had begun in 1933 upon the "Machtergreifung" (seizure of power) by the National Socialists. In the years leading up to the Berlin and Munich exhibitions of 1937 the Nazis muzzled or forced into exile a substantial number of artists.¹ "Degenerate art" included all artistic creations that were incommensurable with NS ideology, such as works of expressionism, impressionism, surrealism, Dadaism, cubism, fauvism and other modern art "-isms."²

By contrast, "healthy" German art was naturalistic, true-to-nature, with subjects such as breast-feeding women, muscular men, rural scenes etc., and included animal art with its attention to visual accuracy. Modernism had denigrated and ridiculed this art genre for being naturalistic kitsch, but during the Third Reich it experienced a revival. In the same year that in Munich the "Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung" took place, in Berlin an exhibition of animal art was organized by the NS art establishment.³ In the NS periodical *Kunst und Volk* (art and nation), it was pointed out that the exhibition not only rehabilitated many animal painters from the previous century, among whom Richard Friese (1854–1918) and Wilhelm Kuhnert (1853–1926), but also paid attention to contemporary ones, such as Michael Mathias Kiefer (1902–1980) and Karl Ewold Olszewski (1884–1965).⁴ Germany had many animal painters whose works were part of the German "Volksseele" (soul of the people). Animal art was considered "bodenständige" (down-to-earth) art that contributed to

”Volksgesundheit” (health of the people). In his *Tiere in Natur und Kunst* (animals in nature and art, 1942), Lutz Heck (1892–1983), the director of the Berlin Zoological Gardens and a committed member of the National Socialist German Workers Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) explained: ”The inborn love for animals of the Nordic peoples [...] could never be fully suppressed in the Germans. Today animal painting and sculpture is a richly flourishing art form in Germany [...] and our National Socialist, scientifically based and hence naturally based *Weltanschauung* provides a superb and fertile ground for it [...] It is surely the truly German, national German, racially German way to be deeply involved in animal life, as after all only the German soul is capable of doing, due to its innate love of animals!”⁵

The fact that animal art, depicting both wild and domestic creatures, proved congenial to the National Socialists was – Kai Artinger points out in his study of wildlife representation during the age of zoos – because it matched the NS *Blut-und-Boden* (blood-and-soil) ideology. No new styles or themes of animal art to speak of were generated during the Third Reich, but what the genre had produced during Wilhelmian and Weimar times was appropriated by being invested with a greater than ever racist meaning.⁶ I agree with Artinger’s interpretation, yet there was more to the revival of animal art under the fascists than the fact that its naturalistic style fitted the new NS definition of ”healthy art”. Here I argue that the cultivation of animal art under the National Socialists was mediated by the patronage that this art genre enjoyed from the international hunting élite. This connection with hunting existed, because animal art functioned, in many instances, as hunting art, and therefore could be appropriated by the hunting establishment with its membership of the socially and politically powerful. I show that animal art was not only promoted by the head of the ”Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda” (Reichsminister for public information and propaganda), Josef Goebbels (1897–1945) and his subordinate, the ”Präsident der Reichskulturkammer” (president of the German chamber of cultural matters) Adolf Ziegler (1892–1959), but also by the ”Reichsforst- und Reichsjägermeister” (head of forests and hunting) Hermann Göring (1893–1946) and his personal *Jagdmalers* (hunting artist) Gerhard Löbenberg (1891–1946).⁷ It was not only promoted by the NS periodical *Kunst und Volk* but also by another NS periodical, the *Deutsche Jägerzeitung* (German hunters journal). In Berlin, it was not only celebrated in the 1937 *Kunstaussstellung* (art exhibition) of animal art but also in the 1937 *Internationale Jagdausstellung* (international hunting exhibition).

I develop this argument by focusing on the greatest animal painter of the period, Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939). The example is of particular interest, because Liljefors was not German but Swedish and his case illuminates the Nordic dimension that, it was said, existed to the growth

and consolidation of NS art.⁸ Regarded as one of Sweden's greatest painters, today Liljefors is recognized by the experts as the artist who most challenges the boundary between high art and animal art.⁹ Indeed he is considered the founder of a specialized form of animal art – with wild mammals and birds as its subject – described increasingly as "wildlife art" following World War II. "He was not only Sweden's greatest wildlife painter; he was also, it can be argued, the greatest epic wildlife artist of all time."¹⁰

What is generally not mentioned about wildlife art is its close historical connection with the pursuit and killing of game animals for pleasure. Hunting and painting are age-old companions of which one example is the nineteenth century German school of *Jagdmalerei* with its focus on the hunting rituals and game species of Northern Europe. Liljefors is a prime example of an artist who was also a hunter – a *Jagdmaler* – and this Germanic double-role was central to his reception as one of the world's foremost painters of animals. Wild animals, often depicted in a dramatic predator-and-prey relationship, were the primary subject of Liljefors' art and he used as models the animals he killed as well as those he held in his menagerie of bears, foxes, wild cats, martens, hawks, eagles and other creatures. The two domestic species he depicted were cats and hunting dogs, the former a kind of animal he especially admired for its instinctual ability to hunt and kill in the wild.

Liljefors was born in 1860 into a provincial middle-class family in the small university town of Uppsala, Sweden, where his father was a gunpowder merchant. From early on, Liljefors was a passionate hunter who developed his visual skills as a naturalist and artist by observing, tracking and shooting wild animals in the fields and forests surrounding Uppsala. Liljefors also lived and painted on the archipelagos of Småland, Stockholm and Mörkö, and the outer islands of the Baltic coast were his hunting grounds. In 1917 he returned to Dannemora, in the northern province of Uppland, where he established his studio on the historic hunting grounds of the Österbybruk estate. Liljefors' paintings often featured the rugged typically Nordic landscape, showing waves crashing on grey granite rocks, which he observed first hand for many years while hunting on Bullerö, his large coastal estate of some 350 skerries. Here the rich variety of seabirds and large numbers of migrating species provided him with the motifs for some of his most dramatic paintings.

Liljefors internationally

Liljefors already exhibited his works internationally during the early part of his career, before he established his reputation in Sweden: at the Paris Salon (in 1884 he exhibited his monumental painting of a goshawk attacking a group of black grouse; further exhibitions in 1886, 1889) and

in group shows of Scandinavian artists in the United States (World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893; Society of American Artists in New York, 1894; Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904; Scandinavian Art Exhibition in New York, 1913), with paintings such as "Foxes," "Wild geese," "Hawks nest," and "Grouse shooting." Like Friese, Liljefors was known in the US as a European painter of hunting scenes and game animals, of a genre that became increasingly isolated from mainstream fine art after 1900 as did animal art in general.¹¹

His greatest international exposure Liljefors enjoyed in Germany, where he exhibited regularly, in Munich, Düsseldorf and Berlin. In Munich in 1892 he was awarded the gold medal for his painting "Tjäderskytten," which depicts a man hunting capercaillie on the edge of a forest. Also in 1892 Liljefors had his first solo show of paintings at "Fritz Gurlitt," a commercial gallery active in Berlin from 1880 to 1918. The same group of paintings was made part of the 1893 International Art Exhibition in Berlin, and the Dresden Gallery bought a painting of a fox that had just killed a hare, "Räf som tagit en hare." His most important museum sale came in 1895 when the New Pinakothek in Munich purchased his monumental work of capercaillies performing their mating rituals on the ancient glacier boulders of a Nordic forest, painted in 1888. Liljefors produced many such scenes of capercaillie, a bird species categorized in northern European hunting traditions as *Hochwild*, or noble game.¹²

Germany gave Liljefors his early professional and academic recognition, when in 1906 he was made a member of the prestigious Berlin Academy of Art – 14 years before he was elected a member of the Swedish Academy (1920) – and when in 1919 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Rostock (well before he received a similar honour from Uppsala University in 1927). The contemporaneous German art historian Reinhard Piper (1879–1953) included two reproductions of Liljefors paintings in his frequently reprinted book *Das Tier in der Kunst* (1910), and described the Swedish artist as a *Jagdmaler* who had brought "fresh blood" to the genre.¹³

In Northern Continental Europe as well as in the United States, Liljefors was bracketed with a number of other animal painters who were leading representatives of *Jagdmalerei*, among whom Friese, Kuhnert and also Carl Clemens Moritz Rungius (1869–1959).¹⁴ A good example of this bracketing is to be found in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, in the eastern Dutch town of Enschede, which opened its doors to the public in 1930. It holds one of the finest collections of animal and hunting art anywhere – 132 animal paintings and drawings by 19 artists – including the largest number of works by Liljefors outside Sweden, most of them purchased between 1919 and 1929.¹⁵ The art was collected by the industrialist and hunter Gerrit Jan van Heek Jr. (1880–1958), who in 1919 and 1920 commissioned the Swedish artist Albert Zetterberg (1883–1955) to replicate

on life-sized scale three well-known paintings by Liljefors: "Tjäderlek" (1888, *Göteborgs konstmuseum*), "Havsörnar" (1897, *Nationalmuseum*), and "Kungsörn jagande hare" (1904, *Thielska Galleriet*). The first public showing of van Heek's animal art collection was in 1936, featuring the fauna of northern countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Canada).¹⁶ Included were 21 works by Liljefors such as coastal scenes of migrating ducks and geese, done in the 1920s as variations on one of Liljefors' most classic motifs.

To repeat, the connection between wildlife painting and hunting is rarely made; and this applies also to the case of Liljefors. Yet to him the two activities were close companions.¹⁷ Among those invited by Liljefors to Bullerö to join him on his hunts were fellow artists Anders Zorn (1860–1920) and Albert Ekström (1868–1940), both enthusiastic hunters, as well as the explorer Sven Hedin (1865–1952) and various others from Sweden's high society. In Germany, however, Liljefors was in fact seen by many as a typical *Jagdmaler* and his reputation was spread by the illustrated hunting press.¹⁸ One of the most widely distributed magazines was *Das Weidwerk in Wort und Bild* (Hunting in words and pictures) published bi-monthly as part of the *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung* (1883–1973). It employed exclusively professional *Jagdmaler* to illustrate its pages, thereby helping



Fig. 1. "Bruno Liljefors als Jagdmaler", photo in the *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung*, 1925.

to establish *Jagdmalerei* as a distinct genre of art. The *Jagdmaler* was expected not only to know the anatomy of wild mammals and birds, but also to be a skillful hunter and an experienced naturalist who understood the habits of his quarry in the wild. Furthermore, the *Jagdmaler* was expected to make his artistic studies in the field, drawing and painting directly from nature. Many of the best-known paintings by *Jagdmaler* were published in the illustrated hunting press and, as printing technology improved, photo-mechanical reproductions were printed in colour as separate tear-out pictures (*Kunst Beilagen*).

Paintings by Liljefors were often published in the German hunting magazines, and a 1925 issue of *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung* featured a photograph of him as a *Jagdmaler* on its front page¹⁹ (Fig. 1). Liljefors is seen at work on a canvas in his Österbybruk studio, his hunting rifle displayed beside him. Reproduced in the article were eight half-page reproductions of paintings by Liljefors as well as a rare photograph of Liljefors' wife, Signe, posed as a falconer with a trained eagle gripping her outstretched arm. In the same issue of the *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung* was an article on the "Berufsjäger" (professional hunter), that featured a photograph entitled "Bruno Liljefors' Waffensammlung" (Bruno Liljefors' collection of fire-arms), showing the artist's collection of 16 hunting rifles displayed on a wall of his home.²⁰

The Nazi appropriation of wildlife art

The German recognition that was given to Liljefors during the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic continued in the course of the period 1933–1945, in fact taking on new dimensions. Hunting art was prominently and publicly displayed in the context of hunting exhibitions, and had been so during The First International Hunting Exhibition, which was held in 1910, in Vienna, under the patronage of Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830–1916). On that occasion, a major display of wildlife and hunting art was organised in a purpose-built *Kunstpavillon* (art pavilion), and additional art shows were put on in the individual national pavilions. The catalogue mentioned Liljefors, although just in the context of a description of the Swedish pavilion, printing a small picture of his oil painting of a snow hare in a winter landscape.²¹

The second, most ostentatious of these grandiose hunting exhibitions was the 1937 *Internationale Jagdausstellung* in Berlin, organised under the auspices of the *Reichsjägermeister* Göring, an avid hunter himself. He owned a lodge on the historic hunting grounds of Rominten, engaged the personal services of the *Jagdmaler* Löbenberg, and served as Hitler's link to the many aristocrats and industrial magnates, who traditionally dominated big game hunting and trophy collecting.²² The 1937 exhibition took place in the wake of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, which had been

a massive propaganda success for the Nazis. Göring conceived the *Jagdausstellung* as a similar pageantry of totalitarian strength, using as venue the same main hall that had been built for the Olympics as a monument of fascist architecture.²³ The walls were richly emblazoned with swastika flags and, as a variety of photographs in the official catalogue showed, the event was accompanied by mass declarations of fascist loyalty in the form of the "Hitler greeting".²⁴ The central attraction was a huge three-dimensional panorama called "Deutsches Wild im deutschen Wald" (German game in the German forest) which displayed the favourite German game species in their natural habitats. The *Reichsjägermeister* gave a speech at the opening ceremony on 2 November 1937, and afterwards toured the exhibition with the *Führer*, Hitler himself (Fig. 2).

In addition to Germany, 20 European countries – Sweden included – as well as Egypt and Japan, took part in the *Jagdausstellung*. The largest of the various national honorary-cum-executive committees was the British, star-studded with dukes, earls, marquises and an assortment of "mere" regular peers and knights. Among the royal patrons were the kings of Bulgaria, Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Romania. The Swedish committee was headed by its patron the Prince Gustav Adolf, Duke of Västergötland (1906–1947), and included no fewer than 30 honorary and executive members from the country's academic, aristocratic and arts elite, among these Liljefors who, however, because of the infirmity of advanced age (he died two years later), had to call off his intended attendance at the opening of the exhibition.²⁵ Also an honorary committee member was Liljefors' friend, the ornithologist and wildlife photographer



Fig. 2. "Reichsjägermeister Generalfeldmarschall Göring hält die Eröffnungsansprache", photo in *Waidwerk der Welt*, 1938.

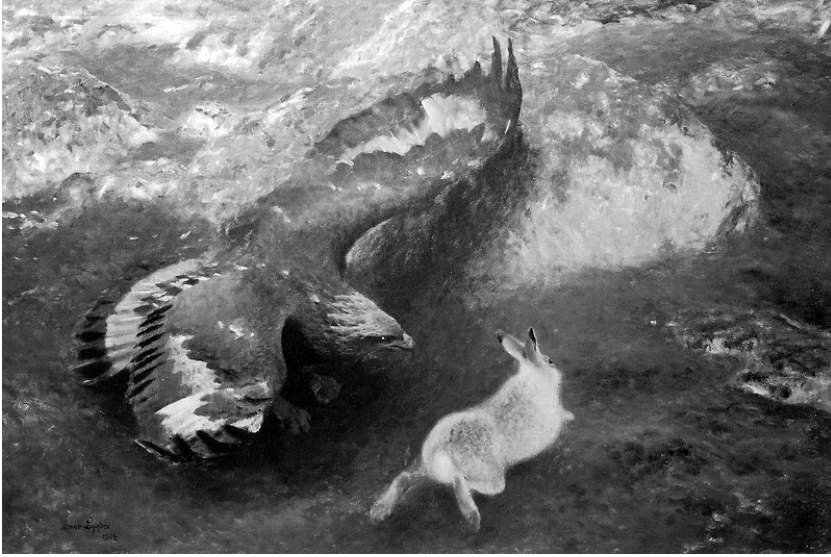


Fig. 3. "Kungsörn jagande en hare", 1904, Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm.

Bengt Berg (1885–1967), whose 1923 book on the last pair of eagles in Sweden – with a cover painting by Liljefors – was a German bestseller.²⁶ Although King Gustav V was neither patron nor honorary member of the Swedish committee, he submitted to the Berlin *Jagdausstellung* a collection of his personal hunting trophies, which formed the centre piece of his country's participation.²⁷

The Swedish exhibition was divided into three parts, an historical, a contemporary and an art division, the latter dominated by the work of Liljefors. In fact, his was the most highly acclaimed, dominant artistic presence in the entire *Jagdausstellung*.²⁸ Two of the exhibited paintings were reproduced in the folio catalogue of the exhibition; one, dated 1931, depicted a moose hunter shooting a heavily antlered bull moose, supporting the assertion that Sweden was "das klassische Land des Elches, des edelsten Geweihträgers der nordischen Wälder" ("the classic land of the elk, the most noble of antlered game of the Nordic forests").²⁹ The other was a spectacular and well-known Liljefors work, painted in 1904, which depicted a golden eagle attacking a hare (Fig. 3). This painting had often been reproduced in hunting literature and other non-art publications such as a 1928 German book on falconry.³⁰ Göring was an avid falconer dedicated to reviving this ancient hunting tradition in Germany, and the *Jagdausstellung* included an entire section on falconry, the star attraction being a trained golden eagle displayed in the open. Unlike in the case of game birds, there existed no established history of representational conventions for raptors, and Liljefors' depictions of species such as the goshawk and pilgrim falcon were ground-breaking.³¹

As the exhibition catalogue attested: "Towering above all others, the great art personality of Liljefors dominated. His breathtakingly beautiful paintings, in which not only almost every game species is represented with unsurpassed artistic skill and incomprehensible truth, but also the Swedish forest, the skerries and lakes as well as the hunter, formed the main part."³² The Swedish exhibition in its totality received the "Ehrenpreis der Stadt Berlin" (prize of the city of Berlin), but the greatest honour remained reserved for Liljefors personally whose collection of paintings received "der große Preis Adolf Hitlers" (great prize of Adolf Hitler). As mentioned by a member of the Swedish committee, Oskar Wilhelm Douglas, Duke of Gerstop (1888–1952), Germany and Sweden enthusiastically approved of this honour and so did the rest of the world.³³

Liljefors' paintings in the exhibition were given on loan by the Swedish National Museum and the Thiel Gallery in Stockholm; but also Liljefors himself lent some of his canvasses.³⁴ Liljefors was one of the favourite artists of Göring, who had close ties to Sweden, where he had lived in exile from 1923 to 1927. He wrote the foreword to *Das Reich des Wildes* (1937; 1938) (the realm of the wild), which was the authorised translation into German of Liljefors' *Det vildas rike* (1934), brought out by the *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung*. Göring praised the Swedish artist for strengthening the connection between Nordic nature and Germany: "The magnificent works of the great Swedish painter are not unknown to the German hunter. His paintings, in which both the austere Nordic nature and the simple beauty of the animal kingdom are represented to the highest perfection, have long been familiar to many German hunters. I therefore greatly welcome that now Liljefors' art and life have been made accessible in an anthology in German to the German hunting community."³⁵ Liljefors responded with an expression of delight over the German edition and an affirmation of friendship with Germany's hunting community: "It is a true pleasure to me that now my book *Det vildas rike* is presented to my fellow hunters and friends in Germany in a German edition."³⁶ His signature was united with that of Göring on the dedication pages of the translated book. Moreover, in an interview with a German visitor, published in the weekly periodical *Deutsche Jagd*, Liljefors expressed his "besondere Freude" (particular joy) over the fact that the author of the foreword to the German translation of his book was Göring.³⁷

The Nazi appreciation of Liljefors also manifested itself in this and other translations into German of books by him. In addition to *Det vildas rike/Das Reich der Natur*, which was a compilation of hunting narratives with 24 colour reproductions and 34 illustrations, Liljefors' large folio book, *Ute i markerna*, containing 32 full-page colour reproductions, first published in 1912, appeared in German under the title *In Schwedens Wäldern und Schären* (1942; in Sweden's forests and skerries).³⁸ Among various related manifestations of Liljefors' prominence in Third Reich

culture was the fact that *Kunst im Dritten Reich* (1937) featured as a major artistic achievement a self-portrait by the artist as a hunter (now in Uppsala University's art collection).³⁹

Discussion

From van Heek and the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in the Netherlands to Göring and the 1937 *Internationale Jagdausstellung* in Berlin, Liljefors' paintings were appreciated and appropriated by the Northern European hunting elite. The sponsors were those who killed the animals – the hunters – and the paintings were shown alongside the hunters' trophies at hunting exhibitions. The fact and manner of this appropriation of wildlife art became all the more conspicuous for being associated with some of the most powerful and notorious names from Third Reich political history, who succeeded in instrumentalising Liljefors' nature representations for National Socialist purposes.

After the war, appreciation of Liljefors and his art by and large disappeared from the German cultural landscape. The collapse of the Third Reich and the simultaneous collapse of Nazi art policy also marked the end to the public prominence that wildlife and hunting art had enjoyed. Liljefors' paintings, which had been made to play a role in the campaign by Hitler and his cronies against "degenerate art", lost that socio-political anchoring ground. In a defeated Germany that was rebuilding itself on the rubble of a discredited past of fascist ideology, there existed no obvious, new socio-political niche for one of Göring's favourite, Swedish wildlife artists. Even at the third *Internationale Jagdausstellung* (international hunting exhibition), which already in 1954 was staged again in Germany, this time in the city of Düsseldorf and under the auspices of the Federal President Theodor Heuss (1884–1963), the memory of Liljefors had all but vanished. In a lengthy catalogue contribution on "Die Jagd in der Kunst" (hunting in art) by the Düsseldorf art historian Heinz Peters, Liljefors was mentioned merely once, and only in passing,⁴⁰ although an oil painting by Bruno's son Lindorm Liljefors (1909–1985) was reproduced in black and white.⁴¹ Neither in the context of the Atlantic reorientation of the BRD (West Germany) nor of the Marxist-Leninist Soviet alignment of the GDR (East Germany), a significant reappraisal of Liljefors occurred. Peters noted the decline of naturalistic hunting art and the rise of abstract styles of representation.⁴² In art circles a return to the pre-Nazi disparagement of wildlife and hunting art took place and Liljefors' canvasses were removed from the exhibition halls of museums that previously had prominently displayed these or were made inaccessible. Even at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, which had been built specifically for the purpose of exhibiting the works by Liljefors and other wildlife painters, over time these were hidden from public sight and stored in the cellar.

This did not mean that Liljefors' renown came to an end altogether; just that it faded in what had been the Third Reich. In his native country, however, and in Scandinavia more generally, this was not the case. All along, the reception of Liljefors had borne its own Scandinavian stamp. To repeat: in Liljefors' Sweden itself, formal recognition of his artistic accomplishments had come later than in Germany. Moreover, it took place in a different cultural context, with less emphasis on Liljefors-the-*Jagdmaler* and more on Liljefors-the-representative-of-National Romanticism. Liljefors sold his paintings to a number of wealthy patrons whose collections became defining expressions of National Romanticism, a movement that linked national identity to folk traditions and to native nature. One of these art patrons was the brother of Sweden's King Gustav V, Prince Eugene (1865–1947), himself a painter of some merit and an admiring pupil of Liljefors. Prince Eugene displayed his Liljefors paintings in a private residence designed by the National Romantic architect Ferdinand Boberg (1860–1946), which residence later became a public museum, *Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde*.

Expressions of a Swedish-national appropriation of Liljefors reached a climax upon his death. The daily press gave considerable coverage to Liljefors' funeral, which took place on Saturday 23 December 1939, in Uppsala *Domkyrka*.⁴³ Newspaper coverage paid particular attention to the eulogy spoken by Prince Eugene, which constituted an emphatic claim to the painter on behalf of his native Sweden. Liljefors had experienced the Nordic landscape as an echo of his own inner being – the Prince maintained – and others spoke similar words, emphasizing that Liljefors' merit as a painter was not just based on his artistic skill but on his identification with the subject matter of his paintings – the country's animals and the nation's soil. Now, in death, his body was returned, quite literally so, to this hallowed earth of the fatherland. In a final tribute to Liljefors, a memorial exhibition of his work was held at the Royal Academy in 1941.⁴⁴

Thus during a period when National Socialists in Germany appropriated Liljefors as part of their cultural politics, the Swedes claimed their native son on behalf of Scandinavian prepossessions. The fact that there existed not a single, unified reception but at least two different ones substantiates the significance of "location", of place and time, for the meaning with which cultural icons have been and are invested. In his *Beethoven in German politics: 1870–1989* (1996), David Dennis shows that in the course of German history Beethoven's music has repeatedly been reinvested with new intent and purpose. Also the Nazis glorified the composer: "When Nazi Germany marched, Beethoven's music accompanied".⁴⁵ Nicolaas Rupke, moreover, in his *Alexander von Humboldt: A metabiography* (2005), identifies for the period 1850 to the present at least six major, distinct biographical appropriations of Humboldt, each the product of a particular period of German political history.⁴⁶

In further substantiation of the importance of "location", and to show by means of contrast the distinctiveness of the "Nazi Liljefors", let us briefly look at the reassessment of Liljefors' significance that has taken place in post-war Sweden, during which time yet further, new meaning has been given to Liljefors' wildlife paintings. Scandinavian Liljefors publications and art exhibitions of recent years have ignored the part their hero played in the development and consolidation of Nazi art, instead creating the perception that Liljefors belonged all along to the tradition of the Anglo-American "good guys" who defeated the fascists.⁴⁷ Just as in post-war West Germany, where the Nazi appropriation of Humboldt as an Aryan supremacist was ignored and Humboldt was turned into a Darwinian ecologist *avant-la-lettre*, in Sweden, a parallel recasting of Liljefors took place. He, too, was turned into a Darwinian and an ecologist. The leader of this hermeneutic strategy of Liljefors scholarship is the Uppsala art historian Alan Ellenius, who has written the fullest and most authoritative interpretation of Liljefors. In his intellectually penetrating monograph on the artist, *Bruno Liljefors: Naturen som livsrum* (1981; 1996), Ellenius focuses on the iconographic idiom of the paintings as well as on their Nordic, cultural sources of inspiration.⁴⁸ He both explores Liljefors' talent in representing animals, and reveals how the paintings gave expression to modern ecological concepts of nature such as "habitat." The artist's intimate knowledge of how animals live in the wild gave him an understanding of "protective coloration", which can be detected in many of his canvasses. Liljefors' skill as a *Jagdzoolog* (hunter-naturalist), together with his ability to engage the viewer, resulted in a dynamic new approach to painting, which Ellenius characterizes as "ecological vision".

In other words, the approach of Ellenius is different from the one I follow and does not aim at telling the story of the contemporaneous reception of Liljefors. Instead, he is concerned with the context of production of Liljefors' canvasses. Thus in emphasizing the "ecological vision" of Liljefors, Ellenius specifically connects him to British cultural and scientific influences, in particular to a Darwinian tradition of ecological thinking. Liljefors' representation of nature is being placed in an interpretative setting of the ecological ideas of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) and even of the Owenian Darwin-critic, George Campbell, eighth Duke of Argyll (1823–1900), famous for a trilogy of popular books on orthogenetic, teleological evolution.⁴⁹

Ellenius' attribution of characteristic features in Liljefors' paintings to specific British sources serves, among other things, to leave out the artist's German connections and to marginalise the contemporaneous context of *Jagdmalerei*. Relegated to a footnote in his Liljefors biography is Ellenius' categorical dismissal as irrelevant and misleading the assertion by Artinger that Liljefors must be classified with the animal artists who were favour-

ed by the National Socialists.⁵⁰ To Ellenius, Artinger's observation constitutes a form of "guilt by association", and he counters that there is nothing in the subject matter or style of paintings by Liljefors that justifies connecting him to Nazi ideology. Others in the Scandinavian world have followed Ellenius' lead and are turning a blind eye to the NS appropriation of Liljefors' art.⁵¹

What did Liljefors himself think – one might ask? What were his political convictions? Did he harbour Nazi sympathies or was he troubled by the honours showered on him by Göring and Hitler? Was he embarrassed by his Hitler Prize, like those who today do not display the trophy publicly but keep it out of the public eye in the vaults of Uppsala University library? Above, we already noted that Liljefors consented to the use of his works in the 1937 International Hunting Exhibition and that he exchanged pleasantries with Göring – although indirectly, via prefaces to the German translations of one of his books and via one of Liljefors' German visitors; but beyond that, little or nothing is known about his private stance on Third Reich facism and National Socialism.⁵² In the context of the reception approach I follow in this paper, however, these questions need not be answered. My paper is a contribution to reception history and an exploration of how meaning is constructed in a place-and-time dependent way.⁵³ I am here not concerned with whether a particular appropriation of Liljefors was justified – was "right" in the sense that Liljefors shared its ideological presuppositions; instead my point is, no more and no less, that a distinct appropriation of Liljefors did in fact take place in Nazi Germany and that its socio-political location was co-determined by the understanding of his work as hunting art. This claiming of Liljefors assumed extraordinary proportions when none other than Göring and Hitler took part, to whom Liljefors' art proved a useful ally in their combat against modernist, "degenerate" art.⁵⁴

What about my own "location"? Let me end by briefly stating that I, as an environmental art historian, believe that few painters in history have captured the essence of wild animals with the skill and sensitivity of which Liljefors proved capable. His paintings, with their remarkably accurate and sympathetic portrayals of wild animals in nature, represent an important turning point in the animal-human relationship in Western art that deserves on the one hand critical and unrestricted historical study, but on the other also acknowledgement and admiration. In addition, I should like to see Liljefors' paintings made use of in the cause of nature preservation today.

Summary

Wildlife art and the Nazis: the case of Sweden's Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939). by Karen Wonders. In their attempt to "cleanse" German art of

”degenerate” modernism, the German National Socialists rehabilitated wildlife art. Historically this art form was closely connected with the pursuit and killing of game animals for pleasure or sport. My argument is that the cultivation of animal and wildlife art under the Nazis was mediated by the patronage that this art genre enjoyed from the hunting élite. The case of Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939) – today known as one of Sweden’s greatest painters and as the founder of wildlife art – is of particular interest. Liljefors was seen as a typical *Jagdmaler* whose fame as a painter of wild animals, especially birds of prey, reached an apogee at the 1937 International Hunting Exhibition in Berlin when he was honoured by Göring and Hitler. This paper is a contribution to the reception history of Liljefors and acknowledges the importance of ”place and time” in the construction of the meaning with which his paintings have been invested. In post-WW II Sweden, the interpretation of the significance of Liljefors has differed fundamentally from the German Nazi understanding of his works and involves their Anglification together with a ”forgetting” of the place they occupied during the time of the Third Reich.

Noter

1 See for example Stephanie Barron (ed.), *Exil: Flucht und Emigration europäischer Künstler 1933–1945* (Munich and New York, 1998).

2 For ”art and the Nazis” see among others Mortimer G. Davidson, *Kunst in Deutschland 1933–1945: Eine wissenschaftliche Encyclopädie der Kunst im Dritten Reich*. 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1988–1995).

3 *Kunst und Volk: Neue Folge der Zeitschrift Die NS.-Kulturgemeinde*, vol. 5 (1937): 151.

4 Robert Scholz, ”Tiermalerei von heute”, *Kunst und Volk*, vol. 5 (1937): 178–185.

5 Ludwig and Lutz Heck, *Tiere in Natur und Kunst* (Dresden, 1942): 4, 44. ”Im deutschen Menschen hat sich die den nordischen Völkern eingeborene Liebe zum Tier aber nie völlig unterdrücken lassen [...] Heute ist Tiermalerei und Tierbilderei bei uns Deutscher ein reich blühender Kunstzweig [...] und unsere nationalsozialistische, naturwissenschaftlich und damit natürlich begründete Weltanschauung ist dafür ein sehr guter, fruchtbarer Boden. Ist es doch echt deutsche, nationaldeutsche, rassistisch-deutsche Art, sich so in das Tierleben zu vertiefen, wie es eben nur der deutschen Menschenseele möglich ist kraft ihrer eingeborenen Tierliebe!”

6 Kai Artinger, *Von der Tierbude zum*

Turm der blauen Pferde: die künstlerische Wahrnehmung der wilden Tiere im Zeitalter der zoologischen Gärten (Berlin, 1995): 297–8. See also the abbreviated monograph: Allan Ellenius, *Bruno Liljefors* (Stockholm, 2006).

7 Löbenberg performed the same service for Göring as Friese had for the Kaiser, documenting his trophy animals. An exhibition of his work was held in 2004 at the *Ostpreußischen Landesmuseum*: see Christoph Hinkelmann (et. al.), *Natur und Jagd in der Malerei von Gerhard Löbenberg* (Melsungen, 2004).

8 See for example Robert Scholz: ”Der nordische Gedanke in der Kunst” in *Deutsch-nordisches Jahrbuch für Kulturaustausch und Volkskunde/ Nordische Gesellschaft* (1938). Also relevant is his ”Tiermalerei von heute” in the Nazi art magazine *Kunst und Volk*, vol. 5 (1937): 178–185. Scholz was the official art critic of the NS and a museum director in Halle: see Andreas Hüneke, *Der Fall Robert Scholz: Kunstberichte unterm Hakenkreuz* (Köln, 2001).

9 For the most comprehensive monograph on Liljefors, see Allan Ellenius, *Bruno Liljefors: Naturen som livsrum* (Stockholm: Bonnier Alba, 1996). This work is a new edition of the earlier *Bruno Liljefors* (Uppsala, 1981) by Ellenius and includes an expanded text

and updated references. It was published in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition on Liljefors held in 1996 at Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde in Stockholm and in 1997 at Göteborgs konstmuseum. During the Stockholm exhibition, a scholarly symposium on the historical importance of Swedish nature representation was held at the Royal Academy (*Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien*). For the published papers, see Hans Henrik Brummer and Allan Ellenius (eds.), *Naturen som livsrum: Ekologiska perspektiv i modern litteratur och bildkonst* (Stockholm, 1996).

10 David Lank, quoted by Ellenius, note 9, 217.

11 According to one authority, because animals in the twentieth century became "incidental to the modern mechanistic world" they were therefore "no longer regarded as central to artistic concerns". See Edward Nygren, "Animal Subjects" in *Grey encyclopedia of art*, vol. 1 (2000):102–107. The general disregard for animal painting is evident in the fact that the 1988 Liljefors exhibition *In the Realm of the Wild* was hosted in the United States not by museums of art but by museums of natural history.

12 Animal artists such as Friedrich Specht (1839–1909), for example, depicted the capercaillie in "Deutsche Wild- und Wald-Bilder" which appeared in the popular press including *Illustriertes Thierleben*, the standard nineteenth century work on animals by Alfred Edmund Brehm (1829–1884). See further: Bruno Liljefors, *Tiere: 32 Malereien*. Mit Text von Franz Servaes (Stockholm, 1916). Servaes' list of publications included writings on Dürer, Rembrandt and Goethe as well as Larsson and Zorn. For his views on *Jagdmalerei*, see Emil Friese, *Richard Friese: ein deutsches Künstlerleben. Mit einer kunstkritischen Würdigung von Franz Servaes* (Berlin: Scherl, 1930).

13 Reinhard Piper, *Das Tier in der Kunst*, 7th ed. (München: 1910): 172–175.

14 On the broader issue of the genre, see Karen Wonders, "Hunting Narratives of the Age of Empire: a Gender Reading of Their Iconography" in *Environment and History* (August 2005); also: Karen Wonders, "Big Game Hunting and the Birth of Wildlife Art" in *Carl Rungius; Artist, Sportsman* (Toronto, 2001): 17–38.

15 The van Heek collection was most re-

cently exhibited in 1972; see O. ter Kuile, *Het wild in de Natuur: Collectie G. J. van Heek Jr.* (Enschede, 1972). The Rijksmuseum Twenthe is currently organizing a touring exhibition of the van Heek wildlife collection in celebration of a new hall being built for its display; personal correspondence with Paul Knolle, Head of Collections and Chief Curator.

16 *Schilderijen uit de Vrije Natuur in de Noordelijke Landen* (Enschede, 1936). Exhibition catalogue. See further: G. J. van Heek Jr., *Levensloop van de Kunstchilders Richard Friese, Bruno Liljefors, Wilhelm Kubnert* (Enschede, 1938), and the second edition *Levensloop van de Kunstchilders Richard Friese, Bruno Liljefors, Wilhelm Kubnert, Carl Rungius, Carl von Dombrowski* (Enschede, 1943). In van Heek's hunting narrative, he included photographs of hunting scenes and trophies in Austria, Rumania, Norway, Sweden and Canada interspersed with reproductions of paintings by Liljefors, Friese and Rungius. G. J. van Heek Jr., *Miene Vreenden: En luk jachtvetelsels oet de oale tied* (Enschede, 1958).

17 Martha Hill, *Bruno Liljefors, the Peerless Eye* (Garden City, 1987).

18 Examples are: *Der Weidmann: Blätter für Jäger und Jagdfreunde* (1869–1915), the first illustrated hunting magazine, published by the Berlin-Schöneberg Hunting Association; *Illustrierte Jagdzeitung: Organ für Jagd, Fischerei, Naturkunde* (1873–1896), published in Leipzig.

19 K. E. Russow, "Bruno Liljefors als Jagdmaler" in *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung*, vol. 85, no. 2 (1925): 25–31. The uncredited photograph was probably taken by Russow as it is the frontispiece to his book *Bruno Liljefors* (1929). See further: K. E. Russow, *Bruno Liljefors: en studie* (Stockholm, 1929). Fritzes also published the book in German and English in 1929.

20 T. vom Walde, "Der Berufsjäger" in *Deutsche Jäger-Zeitung Jäger-Zeitung*, vol. 85, no. 2 (1925): 32–36.

21 *Die Erste Internationale Jagd-Ausstellung, Wien 1910. Ein monumentales Gedenkbuch* (Vienna and Leipzig, Frick, 1912), 45–46; see also a reference to Liljefors, 155.

22 Andreas Gautschi and Burkhard Wismann-Stein, *Rominten gestern und heute* (Bothel, 1992), pp. 110–43.

23 On Berlin's architecture during the Nazi

era see for example Hans J. Reichhardt, *Von Berlin nach Germania* (Transit, 2005).

24 *Waidwerk der Welt*. See photographs illustrating the introductory "Rückblick", 7–28. The frontispiece of the catalogue was a formal portrait of Hitler, wearing a swastika armband on his upper left arm.

25 *Waidwerk der Welt: Erinnerungswerk an die Internationale Jagdausstellung Berlin 1937 2–28 November. Herausgegeben vom Reichsbund "Deutsche Jägerschaft"* (Berlin, 1938): ix–xii.

26 Bengt Berg, *De sista Örnarna* (Stockholm, 1923). The German translation, *Die letzten Adler* (Berlin, 1927), was re-published every year up to 1943.

27 *Waidwerk der Welt*, 105.

28 Fr. Luchs, "Die Jagdkunstschau auf der Internationalen Jagdausstellung Berlin 1937" in *Deutsche Jagd*, no. 35 (26 November 1937): 786–789.

29 *Waidwerk der Welt*, 101–2.

30 Fritz Engelmann, *Die Raubvögel Europas: Naturgeschichte, Kulturgeschichte und Falknerei* (Melsungen: Neumann-Neudamm, 1928).

31 The attacking eagle with widespread wings was a recurrent Liljefors motif; van Heek, for example, owned a similar work (painted in 1924) that was reproduced in the Netherlands no less than seven times before 1939. Eagles especially – often crude copies of Liljefors motifs – were depicted in paintings given titles such as "Die Macht," and "Im Reich der Lüfte".

32 *Waidwerk der Welt*, 105. "Alle anderen überragend dominierte die große Kunstpersönlichkeit Liljefors. Seine wunderschönen Bilder, die nicht nur fast jedes Wild mit einem unübertroffenen künstlerischen Können und mit unbestechlichem Wahrheitssinn darstellen, sondern auch den schwedischen Wald, die Schären und Seen wie auch den Jäger schildern, bildeten den Hauptbestandteil."

33 *Waidwerk der Welt*, 105. Hitler's award was mentioned by van Heek in his entry on Liljefors in *Levensloop* (1938) but deleted from the otherwise identical text when the catalogue was reprinted in 1943.

34 This was reported by Hete Willecke, the authorized translator of Liljefors' two books, who interviewed the Swedish artist in Österbybruk: see his "Kleine Plauderei mit Bruno Liljefors" in *Deutsche Jagd*, no. 31 (29 October 1937): 681–682. This special

issue of the journal had a poster advertising the *Internationale Jagdausstellung* on its front cover.

35 Liljefors, *Das Reich des Wildes*, 5. "Die herrlichen Werke des großen schwedischen Malers Bruno sind den deutschen Jägern nicht unbekannt. Seine Bilder, die in gleicher Weise die herbe Natur des Nordens und die einfache Schönheit der Tierwelt in höchster Vollendung zum Ausdruck bringen, sind längst Allgemeingut vieler deutscher Weidmänner geworden. Ich begrüße es daher außerordentlich, daß nunmehr der deutschen Jägerschaft die Kunst und das Leben Liljefors' in einem Sammelband in deutscher Sprache zugänglich gemacht worden ist."

36 Liljefors, *Das Reich des Wildes*, 6. "Es ist mir eine aufrichtige Freude, daß hiermit meinen deutschen Jagdgenossen und Freunden mein Buch 'Det Vildas Rike' in deutscher Ausgabe vorgelegt wird."

37 Hete Willecke, "Kleine Plauderei mit Bruno Liljefors", *Deutsche Jagd*, 29 Oct. 1937, 681–682, on 682.

38 Bruno Liljefors: *Det vildas rike* (Stockholm, 1934); *Das Reich des Wildes* (Melsungen, 1937, 1938); and *Ute i markerna: Reproduktioner efter taflor af Bruno Liljefors* (Stockholm, 1912, 1922); *In Schwedens Wäldern und Schären* (Melsungen: Neumann-Neudamm, 1942).

39 *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich. Hrsg. vom Beauftragten des Führers für die gesamte geistige und weltanschauliche Erziehung der NSDAP* (München, 1937–1938): 30.

40 Heinz Peters, "Die Jagd in der Kunst", in *Jagd und Hege in aller Welt. Erinnerungswerk an die Internationale Ausstellung Jagd und Sportfischerei Düsseldorf 1954* (Bonn, 1955), 280–296, on 295.

41 *Jagd und Hege in aller Welt*, 270.

42 Peters, "Die Internationale Jagdausstellung 1954", in *Jagd und Hege*, 296–299, on 299.

43 *Dagens Nyheter* (19, 20, 24 December 1939); *Svenska Dagbladet* (19, 20, 24 December 1939).

44 K. Asplund, *Bruno Liljefors: minnesutställning* (Stockholm, 1941).

45 David B. Dennis, *Beethoven in German politics, 1870–1989* (New Haven and London, 1996), 165.

46 Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Alexander von Humboldt: a Metabiography* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005).

47 Characteristic is the exhibition "Bruno Liljefors & Johannes Larsen: naturen – et livs-syn", mounted at the Danish Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst (28 May–28 August 2005) and at the Johannes Larsen Museet (17 September–20 November 2005). A contribution to the catalogue that discussed Liljefors' popularity in Germany during the Third Reich was censored and omitted from the catalogue proofs shortly before printing.

48 See note 9 above. For essays in English, see Allan Ellenius, "Ecological vision and wildlife painting towards the end of the 19th Century" in Allan Ellenius (ed.), *The natural Sciences and the Arts: Aspects of Interaction from the Renaissance to the 20th Century* (Stockholm, 1985), 147–165; and "Bruno Liljefors and the Ecology of Painting" in Björn Fredlund (ed.), *In the Realm of the Wild: the Art of Bruno Liljefors of Sweden* (Göteborg, 1988): 12–17.

49 Ellenius, *Liljefors*, 139–167, 223–224.

50 Artinger, *Von der Tierbude zum Turm der blauen Pferde*, 297–8.

51 Note 46 above.

52 A general treatment of Nazi culture in Sweden is by Birgitta Almgren, *Drömmen om Norden: Nazistisk infiltration i Sverige 1933–1945* (Stockholm, 2005).

53 For a discussion of reception theory in art history see for example Wolfgang Kemp, ed., *Der Betrachter ist im Bild. Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik* (Berlin, 1992).

54 Admittedly, the radical right of the inter-war period also flirted with modernist art, a trend not discussed in this paper; but see Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary modernism: Technology, culture, and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).