

Out and About group is enriched by exhibit at Milwaukee Jewish Museum

A huge, stunning Marc Chagall tapestry, “The Prophet Jeremiah,” dominates a high wall at the entrance of the Milwaukee Jewish Museum. Our tour guide, Cathy Nemerovski, explained Chagall’s works and hundreds of others, were deemed “Degenerate” by Hitler in his quest to eradicate any kind of thinking that didn’t align with his view of a superior race of white people. Chagall was labeled a degenerate artist as well as his art in German museums, which his why his work was confiscated. This Jeremiah tapestry was commissioned in 1972.

This “Out and About” tour for St. Agnes Parish members was like no other we have experienced. Using examples of the “condemned” art and historical background, Nemerovski explained Hitler’s obsession with creating a strong German government and a pure, white race. He sent Nazi soldiers to people’s studios and homes and demolished art that reflected “degenerate” thinking.

His totalitarian government included a “ministry of culture,” which was actually a ministry of propaganda. Art reflects culture and vice versa, so anything that Hitler disliked was considered degenerate. That included gypsies, homosexuals, Jews—all of whom were put into labor camps in the 1930s, which devolved into concentration camps in the 1940s.

Art, Nemerovski explained, reflects the thought of the time. Nazis didn’t like art that was primitive (like woodcuts), hard to understand, unreal, incomplete, irregular in shape, dark and/or apocalyptic. In the exhibit, placards accompany examples of “degenerate” art, explaining why Hitler hated them. It is obvious that freedom of thought, which is integral to democracy, was forbidden in Nazi Germany.

The current exhibit will be here through August 20. Through HERC (Holocaust Education Research Center), the museum has speakers who are Holocaust survivors or relatives of survivors. The museum’s permanent exhibit will continue to be open year-round.



St. Agnes Parish Out and About group

OUR THOUGHTS



I had not realized how Hitler’s ideology also led him to destroy art for being corrupt or “degenerate.” He was trying to destroy anyone or anything that didn’t fit his way of thinking.

–Linda Barrington



So many questions were answered as to how Hitler was able to develop the leadership of the Nazi movement.

–Kathy Bitante



It was very interesting in that I never really knew what happened during the time of Hitler, especially about art.

–Betty Buchholz



I knew Hitler confiscated paintings, but this was very educational to learn why the degenerative artists and paintings were targeted.

–Jan Endries



I did not expect to learn so much. It was beautiful and so informative.

–Barb Franken



Our docent was so very knowledgeable—in the history, the art, the political environment. Excellent tour. I’d come back.

– Leslie Hasenbush



I learned so much about the Jewish religion. I thought it was very informative. I didn’t know the museum was so large

--Alice Hodges



It never ceases to amaze me—I always find new things and information on subjects and topics that I thought I was very knowledgeable about. Extremely thought provoking!

- Warren Pischke



This makes me want to learn more about art history. Very interesting.

–Mary Sal Pohl



This fabulous museum holds onto the dreams and lives of the past, giving honor to the living and those who perished. I can’t imagine if the world would have been eradicated of God’s chosen people, along with their life-affirming and warning messages in their art.

–Kathy Schroeder