



TOP Goering's interrogation by an American judge at Nuremberg, 1946, was captured by Soviet photographer Yevgeny Khaldei.

LEFT A gallery at Carinhall, Goering's country estate.

BOTTOM American soldiers recovered Goering's beloved "Vermeer"—actually a forgery by Han van Meegeren—in a private house.



A LEGACY OF PLUNDER

For the first time, a new book lays bare the entire paintings collection of the notorious Hitler henchman Hermann Goering

BY JONATHAN LOPEZ

In the mid-1990s, with *ARTnews* and other publications exposing the unresolved legacy of Holocaust-era art looting, the American Association of Museums directed its members to examine their collections for artworks stolen by the Nazis. Each participating institution designated a point person for the project. At the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C., that person was Nancy H. Yeide, head of the department of curatorial records.

Restitution has since become Yeide's area of academic specialization. Most significantly, she coauthored *The AAM Guide to Provenance Research* with *ARTnews* contributing editor Konstantin Akinsha and Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator Amy L. Walsh. Published in 2001, the book is now a standard reference

Jonathan Lopez's biography of Dutch art forger Han van Meegeren, The Man Who Made Vermeers, was published last September by Harcourt.

for museum professionals throughout the world.

Yeide's latest book, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: The Hermann Goering Collection*, will be issued by Laurel Publishing in March. A catalogue raisonné of the Reichsmarschall's collection of paintings, it began as an offshoot of the earlier assignment, but it has since developed into the first truly comprehensive study of Goering's obsession with fine pictures. "Examining the archival resources that were available to research World War II looted art made me very aware of what had and had not been looked at in the field," says Yeide. "Goering was essentially a black hole."

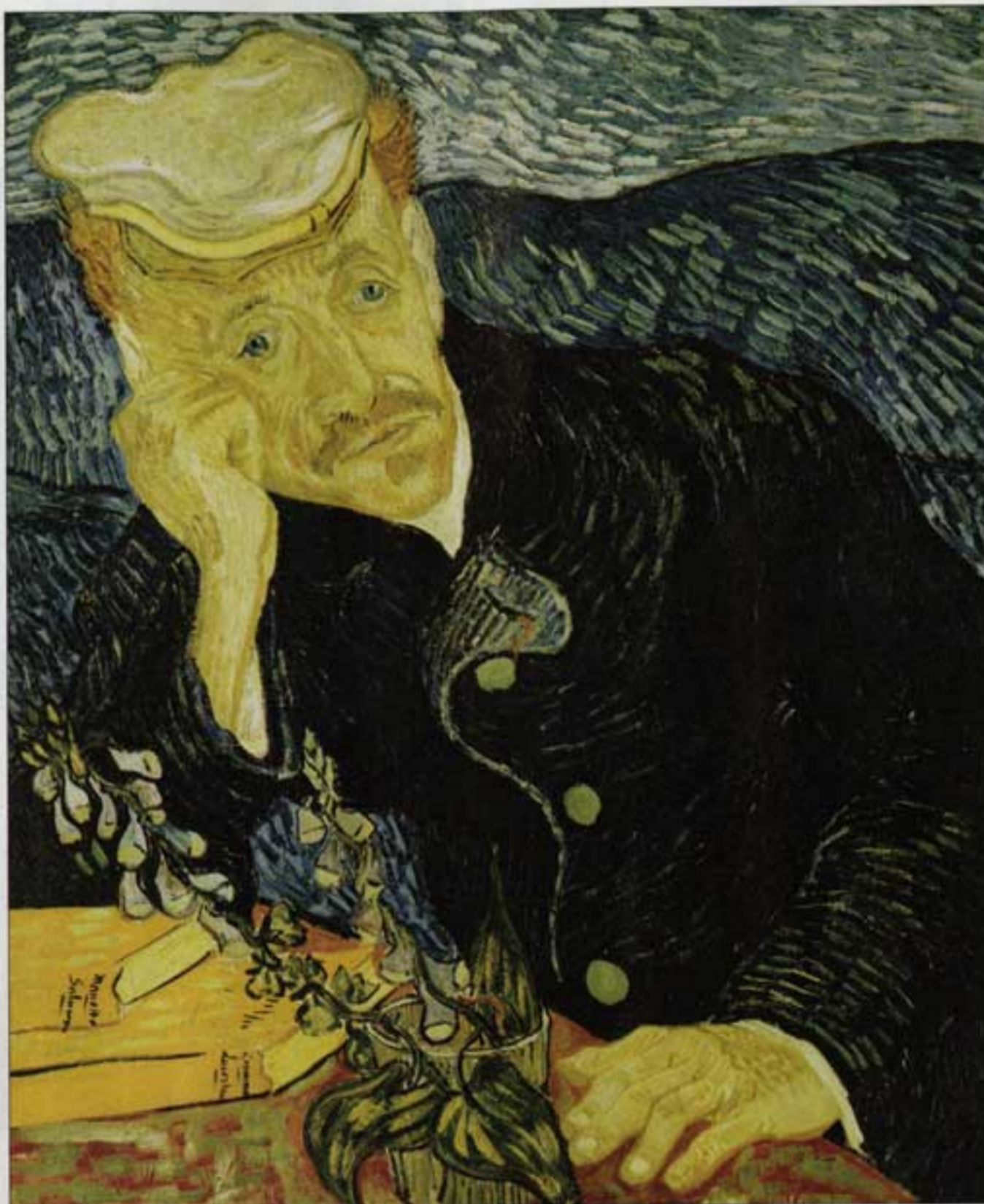
Although Goering has been the subject of numerous biographies, both popular and scholarly, they focus on his military and political exploits, mentioning his enormous art collection in only a general way. "No one has ever really looked closely at the collection and tried to reconstruct everything that was ever in it," Yeide observes. "That's been my goal."

Commander in chief of the Luftwaffe and second only to Hitler in the Nazi Party hierarchy, Goering was a voracious collector and notorious plunderer of art. Although he could not access the state treasury to fund his acquisitions, as Hitler did, he possessed a substantial personal fortune. Born into a prominent family, Goering further enriched himself during the Nazis' 12 years in power through influence peddling and graft, routinely routing government contracts to corporations he controlled. As a result, he enjoyed a lifestyle so luxurious that it bordered on the absurd. A former World War I flying ace, Goering liked to play the part of the gentleman squire, dressing up in fanciful Tyrolean costumes and practicing longbow archery on the manicured lawns of Carinhall, his country estate just north of Berlin.

Goering's penchant for self-aggrandizement was also reflected in his collecting. Carinhall, named for his deceased first wife, the Swedish baroness Carin von Kantzow, boasted entire wings and galleries devoted to the display of art: paintings, sculpture, tapestries, antique furniture, Persian rugs, medieval armor, Ming and Meissen porcelain, majolica, and much else. Many of these objects had been purchased from their previous owners, albeit with coercion sometimes applied to seal the deal. Others were looted from Jewish collectors. Still others were presented to Goering as gifts by people seeking government favor. (He circulated wish lists so that he could be sure of getting what he wanted.) Despite the often questionable origins of his treasures, Goering considered himself a great sophisticate. "Ich bin nun mal ein Renaissancetyp" ("After all, I'm a Renaissance man"), he liked to say.

The new book will allow scholars to assess Goering's collection of paintings in its entirety for the first time. (Other categories of objects in his

possession have been left for subsequent research.) This impressive work of art-historical scholarship reveals Goering's holdings to have been far more extensive than was previously known: nearly 2,000 paintings are included, rather than the approximately 1,300 usually associated with the collection. The lower figure, which is cited in virtually every book on Nazi looting, does not de-



rive from the sort of painstaking research that Yeide conducted—comparing and evaluating thousands of archival documents in the United States and Germany—but instead from a single inventory prepared in 1945 under conditions limited by historical circumstances.

In the closing months of World War II, with the Russians bearing down on Berlin in one of the most ferocious and deadly military campaigns in history, Goering was obliged to evacuate his beloved Carinhall. He ordered his collections loaded over a period of weeks into a succession of private railway trains, which he dispatched to Burg Veldenstein, another of his properties, deep in the Bavarian heartland. Before bidding adieu to Carinhall, Goering dynamited the main buildings to deny the Red Army the pleasure of occupying them.

As the Allies closed in on all sides, Goering's

Goering traded away van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, 1890, which had been removed from a museum in Frankfurt.

trains reassembled at Veldenstein and then moved even farther from the front lines, to Berchtesgaden, on the Austrian border. Goering himself was captured by the U.S. Army at nearby Schloss Fischhorn, in the Austrian town of Zell am See. At Berchtesgaden the bulk of Goering's collection was secured by Allied forces and inventoried before being sent to the Central Collecting Point for re-

cently, the crucial documentary photographs from Munich, which allow for positive identification of the objects in the inventory, were essentially lost to history. Most of them existed only in the form of negatives stored at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. Few of the photos had ever been printed.

This situation was remedied by the National Gallery of Art's former deputy director Charles Parkhurst, who had been among the "monuments men"—art experts called upon by the U.S. government during World War II to identify and protect European art treasures and later to investigate Nazi looting. In 1981 Parkhurst (who died last June at the age of 95) arranged to transfer the Munich negatives, still in their original army boxes, to the National Gallery for printing. Many of the negatives were on shattered or cracked glass plates and required extensive conservation. The printing did not begin in earnest until the 1990s and was completed only in 2006. The original negatives and a set of prints were returned to the National Archives; a duplicate set of prints is now kept at the National Gallery, two floors below Nancy Yeide's office.

Beyond the Dreams of Avarice provides a photograph of each painting from the Goering collection for which a photo is known to exist, along with extensive documentation of each work's provenance, both before and after Goering's ownership. This last feature is the result of a mammoth investigation that occupied Yeide's attention for more than seven years as she delved into dealers' records, auction catalogues, official documents produced by the Nazi government, and correspondence between Goering and his agents. It may well be the catalogue's most significant accomplishment, and it is one that is likely to stimulate many further discoveries.

Says Yeide, "I'm expecting a flood of new information when the book comes out, because the people who currently own some of these works may not know their histories or may know only part of the history and therefore may be concerned. That's what drove me to do the catalogue in the first place—to assemble all the scattered documents relating to Goering's collection and make the information available to restitution researchers working on chain-of-ownership issues."

Yeide has also drawn upon one other crucial resource: the collection of the National Gallery itself. Two of the gallery's Matisse's, *Still Life with Sleeping Woman* and *Pianist and Checker Players*, for instance, are former Goering pictures. They came into his possession after being looted from the dealer Paul Rosenberg of Paris. Both works were restituted to the Rosenberg family during the postwar period, and the National Gallery acquired them in a legitimate purchase, but Yeide's research



A former Goering picture, Jan Gossart's *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1520, was chosen by the U.S. Postal Service for its 2002 Christmas stamp.

covered art at Munich, where many, though not all, of the objects were photographed.

As Yeide has discovered, there was much more to Goering's collection than the paintings included in the Berchtesgaden inventory. Some pieces had been left behind at Veldenstein, some were looted from Goering's train by the local population of Berchtesgaden, and some were recovered by the reconstituted German government long after the Allied collecting points closed in 1950. In addition, Goering had disposed of a large number of pieces before the end of the war, mostly looted Jewish-owned artworks, which he often used as objects of trade.

What's more, the Berchtesgaden inventory itself was not fully studied by scholars: until quite re-

uncovered a wrinkle in their history that casts light on Goering's tastes and practices as a collector.

Although Goering did not necessarily agree with Hitler that modern art was "degenerate"—he did, for example, own a few 19th-century modernist pictures—he generally preferred Old Masters, particularly of the Dutch and German schools. Often when he received important modern works looted from Jewish collections or deaccessioned from German state museums, he traded them to dealers for what would now be considered far less valuable pictures by less famous artists. Among the works Goering traded away were van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* and Degas's *Madame Camus*, the latter stolen from the Kann family of Paris, the former removed from the Städelisches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt. (*Dr. Gachet* was sold at auction in 1990 to the late Japanese industrialist Ryoei Saito for a record \$82.5 million and has since disappeared; *Madame Camus* is in the Foundation E. G. Bührle Collection in Zurich.)

Goering got fairly good works in return for those two pictures, but for the Matisse *Pianist and Checker Players* he received only *Reclining Nude with Cupid* by the minor 17th-century Dutch painter Jan van Neck. Although one could reasonably conclude that the dealer who got the Matisse bested Goering in this trade, Yeide points out that the Nazi had a certain weakness when it came to pictures like the van Neck. "There were a disproportionate number of nudes in Goering's collection," she notes. "The more the better."

The collection, in fact, was very uneven. Certainly, many familiar masterpieces came to hang on the walls at Carinhall: Tiepolo's *Alexander the Great and Campaspe in the Studio of Apelles*, now in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles; a set of four Bouchers looted from the Rothschilds, now in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth; Jan Gossart's *Virgin and Child*, now in the Art Institute of Chicago—a picture chosen by the U.S. Postal Service for its 2002 Christmas stamp. (All of these works were acquired legally by the museums that now own them.) Yet looking through the Goering catalogue, one finds truly magnificent Cranachs and Grünewalds alongside a multitude of 19th-century German forest scenes best described as belonging to the school of Hansel and Gretel.

Indeed, the most expensive picture Goering ever acquired, ostensibly a work by Vermeer, was entirely bogus—a fake made by the notorious Dutch

forgery Han van Meegeren. It was sold to Goering by his unwitting Amsterdam agent Alois Miedl, a Bavarian banker who had taken over the Jewish-owned Goudstikker gallery, with Goering's assistance, shortly after the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. Goering's "Vermeer," *Christ and the Adulteress*, with its dark Teutonic atmosphere and Italianate sense of design, looks strange to today's eyes, but apparently it was everything an Axis leader could want in a Vermeer. Goering kept it among his personal belongings almost until the moment he was captured by the Allies. Accord-



ing to the testimony of others in his entourage, he believed that the painting might help him fund a future life in exile. That was not to be. Convicted of crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, Goering was sentenced to death by hanging in October 1946. He committed suicide in his jail cell the night before his scheduled execution.

Most of Goering's paintings were recovered in the years after the war and found their way back to their rightful owners. But there are still many works, including more than 100 Old Masters that Goering traded for his "Vermeer," whose owners have yet to be identified. There are also works, such as two Memling angels from the Goudstikker collection, whose whereabouts remain unknown. By documenting these pictures and their histories, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice* stands as a testament to the considerable efforts that have gone into setting right Goering's legacy of pillage—and as a sober reminder of the work still left to be done. ■

**Tiepolo's
*Alexander the
Great and
Campaspe in
the Studio of
Apelles*, ca.
1740, once
hung on a wall
at Carinhall.**