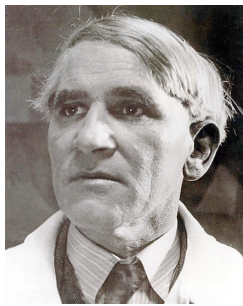


ART OF DISSIDENT



Case Study: Artist Otto Freundlich 1878–1943

- Otto Freundlich was truly an international artist. Born in Pomerania near the Baltic Sea, he studied and lived in Berlin, Hamburg, Paris and Cologne. His first studio was in Montmartre where Picasso, Braque and Brancusi were his neighbours.

The decade between 1914 and 1924 Freundlich lived predominantly in the *Rheinland* where he first interacted with the artists of *Die Bruecke* and later aligned himself with the Cologne artists involved with dada and art for the proletariat. In 1933 he joined a French communistically-inclined group *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Revolutionnaires* as a protest against growing Nazi repression. He was incensed by the Nazi dismissal of his friends Otto Dix and Paul Klee from academic positions and by the closing of the Bauhaus.

In 1934 Freundlich sought to align his art more closely with *the revolutionary proletariat*. He also sought and failed to become a naturalized French citizen which would have helped as the years between 1935 and his death in 1943 were filled with restricted living conditions, arrests, internment, hiding and betrayal.

During his last dark years Freundlich exhibited in France and internationally and had the support of many powerful friends, yet, as a Jew and a degenerate artist he was a marked man.

In many senses, Otto Freundlich was the Nazis' "poster boy" for degeneracy. Hitler, in his 1935 speech on Party Day in Munich had stated that those artists who claimed to be inspired by primitive art were not representing pure, naïve souls but rather total corruption and degeneracy.



In 1937 the Nazis removed 14 of Freundlich's works from German museums, placed two works into the travelling Degenerate Art exhibition and used a photo of his sculpture *Der neue Mensch* on the cover of the catalogue for the Degenerate Art exhibition—depicted was a large primitive head.

In February 1943 Freundlich was betrayed while hiding in the small village of Saint Martin-de-Fenouilletin. He spent a short time in the camps at Gurs and then Drancy before he was sent on March 4th by train to Lublin-Maidanek where he was registered as prisoner number 197. He died March 9th on the day of his arrival.

"The artist is a barometer of transformations. He senses them in his acts and his thoughts before they are realised in the world. When he detaches himself from the generally admitted forms and truths, he is executing the edicts of a new reality. All artistic realisations have an inclination: a narrow inclination when it is the safeguard of the artist, a large one when the artist renounces himself and his work opens mental frontiers. A forcing of barriers—social, political, spiritual—begins every historical period. Ours will for the first time accomplish the union of man with the whole earth and will thus change nostalgia and desire for far-away things into something else, certainly much greater, although everywhere within our reach."

(Otto Freundlich in *Cercle et Carré*, No. 2)