

# THE ARTIST AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS BY OTTO FREUNDLICH

"The Artist and the Economic Crisis" (*"Der Künstler und die Wirtschaftskrise"*), is an essay written in 1931 by Otto Freundlich, a German-Jewish artist and politically active Marxist. Following the Nazi takeover in 1933, Freundlich's work was condemned and to a large extent destroyed. The Nazi regime included a few of his remaining pieces in the propaganda exhibit *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) in 1937. Freundlich was murdered in the concentration camp Lublin Majdanek in 1943.



Still from Fritz Lang, *Hangmen Also Die!*, 1943, 134 min, written by Bertolt Brecht with music by Hanns Eisler. This American film about Nazi war crimes in Prague is based on real events and was made while Lang and Brecht were exiled in Los Angeles. In this still, a Nazi official disrupts a film screening.

## Crisis and Critique

**A video and audio-sculptural installation by Per-Oskar Leu**  
**155 Freeman Street, Brooklyn, NY**

Triple Canopy is pleased to present *Crisis and Critique*, a video and audio-sculptural installation by Norwegian artist Per-Oskar Leu. The exhibition considers the distance between historical truths and fiction and asks: What role can or should the artist play during watershed political moments?

Leu takes as his point of departure German playwright Bertolt Brecht's appearance in 1947 before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Using Brecht's plays, screenplays, films, and signature leather jacket as touchstones, Leu orchestrates a theatrical presentation of archival recordings and audio-sculptural objects. The centerpiece of the installation is a new video edited by Leu, weaving together German films of the 1930s and '40s that dramatize the trial format, including Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933); Brecht's *Kuhle Wampe, oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (1932) and *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943); and the film adaptation of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (1931). In combining archival recordings of the 1947 tes-

timony with excerpts from period films, Leu investigates the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* ("distancing effect") as it relates to the playwright's personal experience of this critical moment in American history.

Per-Oskar Leu (b. 1980) lives and works in Oslo, Norway. In 2009, he graduated from the Städelschule, Frankfurt. He has recently presented solo projects at Dortmund Bodega, Oslo; 1/9 Unosonove, Rome; Vanish, Frankfurt; and Johan Berggren Gallery, Malmö. His work has been included in exhibitions at the Malmö Konstmuseum; Entree, Bergen; Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato; and SWG3, Glasgow. Leu has contributed to LISTE Performance Project, Basel, and Frieze Projects, London.

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STRIPLING: Mr. Brecht since you have been in the United States, have you contributed articles to the, to any Communist publications in the United States? BRECHT: I don't think so, no. STRIPLING: Uh, are you familiar with the magazine *New Masses*? BRECHT: No. STRIPLING: You never heard of it? BRECHT: Yes, of course. STRIPLING: Did you ever contribute anything to it? BRECHT: No. STRIPLING: Did they ever publish any of your works? BRECHT: That I do not know. They m—might have published some po—uh, some translation of a poem. But, uh, I had no, uh, direct connections.



Left: Bertolt Brecht during Un-American Activities Hearing, 1947. Photograph by Francis Miller.. Photograph by Konrad Ressler. Right: Photograph of Eric Bentley, *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been: The Investigations of Show-Business by the Un-American Activities Committee 1947-1958*, staged in 1975 by director William Divine. The American play is based on transcripts from hearings before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Photograph by Keyvne Baar.

**TODAY, POVERTY HAS** virtually been legitimized, affecting nearly the whole of our nation. Poverty is the great leveler, and what until recently was carefully kept quiet has now become the topic and main interest of public opinion. The painter or the sculptor, pursuing his profession without guarantee of a secure existence, almost invariably owes his livelihood to chance, since the number of art works traded in the art market and purchased at exhibitions has always been quite small compared to the number of actively working artists. Today, however, even this small element of chance has all but disappeared. As already suggested, art dealers and exhibitions constitute the most important intermediaries between the artist and the public. Even the state, i.e. the museum as a buyer of art, only rarely approaches the artist directly, but mostly becomes aware of his work through art dealers and art publications. The economic crisis has brought about a quantitative and qualitative decline in the art market and the purchases made by museums. The major art collectors, a considerable

STRIPLING: Did you... BRECHT: Not in the sense you meant. STRIPLING: Did you collaborate with Hanns Eisler in song, uh, "In Praise of Learning"? BRECHT: Yeah, uh, collaborate, I wrote that song, he only wrote the music. STRIPLING: You wrote, you wrote the song. BRECHT: I wrote the song. STRIPLING: Would you, uh, would you recite to the committee the words of that song? BRECHT: Yeah I would. May I point out that that song is, is a, is... comes from, an, an adaptation I made of, uh, Gorky's novel *The Mother*, and in, in this song a Russian worker woman. STRIPLING (interrupting): What? BRECHT: Advises



Center: Bertolt Brecht, 1927. Photograph by Konrad Ressler. Right: Still from G.W. Pabst, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera), 1931, 112 min. Beggars' protest march to disrupt the coronation of Queen Victoria in London. The film is loosely based on Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Threepenny Opera*, which offers a Marxist critique of the capitalist world.

majority of whom retain their wealth even today and who never bought works of art in order to resell them but because they were passionate collectors, have pared down their purchases or stopped buying altogether. The impact of the economic crisis is not solely of a material nature; it oppresses mind and spirit, and easily turns into fatalism.

(...) The failure of the buyer to be daring can be attributed to the mental distress brought about by the economic crisis, which, in turn, prevents art dealers from selling works of an unconventional character. This leads to a predilection for kitsch or technical dexterity in some style or another, more or less sidestepping the artist who genuinely wrestles with the new problems of form posed by our time. The artist, who all along has had to make the most out of practically nothing, who oftentimes with wife and child and even in times of great economic prosperity has had to eke out a meager existence, and who nevertheless created works unveiling new perspectives to the human mind: to the very uncertainty of his existence does he owe his inner discipline and hardy spirit in times of misfortune, qualities that must now be demanded of those who, compared to most others, continue to enjoy considerable economic privileges. (...) Given that state and

other poor people STRIPLING: Uh, it was produced in this country wasn't it. BRECHT: Yes. STRIPLING: Uh. BRECHT: 1935, New York. STRIPLING: Yes. Now I'll read the words, and ask you if this is true. BRECHT: Please. STRIPLING: *Learn now the simple truth / You for whom the time has come at last / It is not too late / Learn now the ABC / It is not enough but learn it still / Fear not, be not downhearted / Again, you must learn the lesson / You must be ready to take over / You must—* BRECHT (*interrupting*): No, uh, excuse me that is the wrong translation. (*Audience laughter*) Uh, uh, that is not the right, just one



Right: Still from G.W. Pabst, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera), 1931, 112 min. Headquarters of Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum, the “Beggars’ Friend,” controller of all the beggars in London.

municipal budgets for purchasing works of art have been almost completely cut and the few remaining funds hardly stand in proportion to the number of artists, one must attempt to revitalize or reawaken the public and private interest in artistic works of high quality. It requires one to sever one’s view of the future if one should wish to see or hear anything but familiar commonplaces. We all are as obliged to think as we are to do, and one should think that our historical awareness has made us sufficiently mature to prepare for any manner of surprises in the evolutionary course of life. Film and radio bring each of us into constant contact with the rest of the world. International allegiance is becoming an ever more common notion, and the feature pages of newspapers bring us frequent reports about new ideas, discoveries, and inventions in the field of science and technology. New music has found general acceptance as a force pointing to the future. The visual arts alone seem to have fallen victim to the spirit of inertia. Making music without being versed in the profound principles of this skill would be a farce. The musician must incorporate these laws as the basis and discipline of his artistic endeavors. Does the same not apply to the painter and the sculptor? And of what, then, do these laws consist? (...) The most impor-

second I give you the correct text. STRIPLING: That's not a correct translation? BRECHT: That is not correct, no. As to the meaning it is not correct as to the meaning. It is not very beautiful but I am not speaking about that. (*crossstalk*) STRIPLING: Well what does it mean? BRECHT: No. \* \* \* STRIPLING: Have many of your writings been based on the philosophy of Lenin, Marx? BRECHT: No, I don't think that is quite correct. And, uh, but of course, uh, I studied, uh, had to study as a playwright, I think, who wrote historical plays, I, of course, had to study to study, uh, uh, Marx's ideas about history. I do not think that,



Left: Hollywood film star and “friendly witness” Robert Taylor being sworn in by Chairman J. Parnell Thomas at an Un-American Activities Hearing, 1947. Richard M. Nixon sits to Thomas’s left. Right: Still from Fritz Lang, *M*, 1931, 117 min. The “Court of Criminals,” depicted here, featured real-life delinquents as extras. The film was partly inspired by Bertolt Brecht’s play, *The Threepenny Opera*.

tant role in the development of an artist is his inner decisiveness. It enables him to progress from apprentice to master. The mental forces of a master have become known to him and he is thus in a position to choose and to decide. And as every landscape, every portrait requires a new and independent choice and decision in order to be regarded as true and essential from the artist’s point of view, its representation must reveal itself down to the tiniest brush stroke as a vital function within the painting as a whole. For a painting is constructed like a house: each layer of color applied, no matter how small, must be a force in support of the entire painted organism. The close scrutiny of every color employed in a painting is part of the gymnastics and discipline of the spectator’s re-creative imagination. It is his obligation to demand the utmost of his own discernment. Lies are not possible in the art of painting, where any creation betrays the will, and the ability to will, of its creator. And one only ever learns from those with the courage, as artists, to express their creed fully and distinctly, unmitigated by conventions. The romantic view of nature has liberated artists from the structural rigidity that formerly, like an invisible scaffold, constituted the bony skeleton of the image, around which the soft tissue, i.e. colors and

uh, intelligent plays today... today can be written without, uh, that study. Also history, now, is, uh, written now, is widely influenced by this, by the studies of Marx about history. \* \* \* THOMAS: Mr. Stripling, do you have any more questions? STRIPLING: I would like to ask uh, Mr. Brecht whether or not he wrote, a poem, a song rather entitled "Forward, We've Not Forgotten!" UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: Forward we've what? STRIPLING: "Forward, We've Not Forgotten!" BRECHT: Uh, I do not, uh, recognize the English title maybe. Can I see? STRIPLING (to translator): Would you translate it for him into German?



Center: Still from Fritz Lang, *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (The Testament of Dr. Mabuse), 1933, 122 min. Silhouette representing criminal mastermind Dr. Mabuse. Nazi authorities banned the film the year of its release for being a threat to public health and safety. As Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels stated he would not accept the film as it "showed that an extremely dedicated group of people are perfectly capable of overthrowing any state with violence."

natural shapes, was constructed. Ignorance, exaggerated individualism, and the loss of social and historical responsibility ultimately led to that final and most vacuous romanticization of nature: kitsch. Humanity at its most hollow and irresponsible, without a modicum of structure in private or in social life, pilfering like wanton parasites in times of prosperity, lacking moral resilience and throwing in the towel in times of crisis, or shooting at anything without discrimination: this manifestation of humanity is ultimately and completely embodied by kitsch. Therefore, the artist protests against kitsch and the type of human individual who delights in it. (...) Moreover, the artist protests against the declining confrontation with issues of an artistic nature, and demands that these issues be rendered discernible and visible to all. This confrontation is unavoidable, as it is part of the social and spiritual healing process of mankind. To witness the obliteration of intellectual resilience in the midst of today's economic crisis, as if twenty-five years of culture never had been, is a sad spectacle. The fact that buyers, for decades combated by forward-looking artistic perspicacity, suddenly set the standards, shows that one-time advocates of quality workmanship have cleared the battlefield without a struggle, leaving values

BRECHT: Oh now I re- , yes, I know, yes. (crosstalk) STRIPLING: You wrote that. Are you familiar with the words to that?  
 BRECHT: That is, yes, that is, yeah. STRIPLING: Uh, would the committee like me to read that? THOMAS: There is no objection,  
 so ordered. STRIPLING: *Forward, we've not forgotten / Our strength in the fights we have won / No matter what may  
 threaten / Forward, not forgotten / How strong we are as one / Only these our hands now aching / Built the roads,  
 the walls, the towers / All the world is of our making / What of it- What of it can we call ours* (The refrain) *Forward,*



Left: Still from Jack Kinney, dir., *Der Fuehrer's Face*, 1942, 8 min. Right: Still from Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe, oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe, or: Who Owns the World?*), 1932, 71 min., with music by Hanns Eisler. *Kuhle Wampe* is a leftist German film about unemployment in the Weimar Republic. In this scene, unemployed men unsuccessfully seek work.

that have shaped the face of our time to fall into ruin. Collectors and lovers of avant-garde art shall not be spared the charge that they have learned a poor lesson from the artists whose works they loved. For despite all political and economic crises, these artists have remained true to themselves and continue to serve that great formative and transformative process that is a matter of sacred importance. Why not deepen one's knowledge and insight with advancing age? Why disown one's responsibility towards future generations, for whom a spiritual heritage must be preserved and to whom it must be passed on? Why surrender and allow cunning and unscrupulous picture manufacturers, helped by their equally unscrupulous and undiscerning clients, to regain their power in the public sphere, after it has been wrested from them in decades of struggle for the truth? There is no economic crisis capable of suffocating true enthusiasm for the free play of creative ideas. These creative ideas alone are proof of the vitality and viability of a generation. It is the duty of those whose wealth remains intact and who do not belong to the herd of ignorant soldiers of fortune to support artistic quality in spite of the poor economy. No one demands extravagant prices. This is the one positive outcome of the economic crisis,

march on to power / Through the city, the land, the world / Forward, advance the hour / Just whose city is the city? / Just whose world is the world? / Forward, we've not forgotten / Our union, in hunger and pain / No matter what may threaten / Forward, not forgotten / We have a world to gain / We shall free the world of shadow / Every shop and every room / Every road and every meadow / All the world will be our own. Did you write that Mr. Brecht? BRECHT: No, uh, I wrote a German poem, but that is very different. (Audience Laughter) ☒ *Literal transcript of excerpts from Bertolt Brecht's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Washington D.C., October 30, 1947.*



Right: Still from Fritz Lang, *M*, 1931, 117 min. Actor Gustaf Gründgens as head of the “Court of Criminals.” The film was partly inspired by Bertolt Brecht’s play *The Threepenny Opera*. Poster, verso: John L. Spivak, *The Intricate Structure of Wall Street’s Fascist Conspiracy*. Published by the American Marxist magazine *New Masses*, 1935.

that no one any longer has the ability to pay such prices. The real injustice and demoralization of the art market have been caused by these extravagant prices alone. The cost of a work of art and its value were all but tantamount: a frenzy blurred the senses and prevented the true and lasting joy about a job well done from taking root. The intimate values embraced by true and honest artistic work are not the result of coquetry or speculative sensationalism, but the artist’s surrender to that particular artistic truth that he perceives to be his guiding principle. A painting ought therefore not be regarded as a horse dealer might regard his horse. To one’s own human benefit one will rise above these standards and leave the final remnants of such beliefs to the scapheap. For the newborn spirit may no longer avail itself of their existence. The economic crisis, so disheartening to those spoiled by indulgence, spurs the creative and defiant spirit, which believes in the future. May he be brave enough to affirm this critical time of transition, and the honest artist will be loved all the more if he refuses to adorn himself with the results of earlier civilizations but rather looks upon the struggle of his age and his contemporaries as his own most personal destiny, lending it expression. ☒

SUPPRESSED NAMES OF JE  
BUSINESS WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO AMERICAN  
VIGILANCE INTELLIGENCE FEDERATION  
SUPPRESSED FACTS WHILE INVESTIGATING-FASCISM  
SUPPRESSED BUTLER TESTIMONY NAMING  
AMERICAN LIBERTY LEAGUE  
IGNORED FRANK BELGRANO AFTER HE  
WAS CALLED TO TESTIFY  
ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO OULAW  
COMMUNIST PARTY BEFORE INVESTIGATION  
SUPPRESSED NAME OF REMINGTON ARMS

MURPHY KEPT GERALD MCGUIRE  
ON PAYROLL WHEN MCGUIRE TRIED  
TO GET BUTLER TO ORGANIZE FASCIST  
ARMY WHILE APPARENTLY WORKING  
FOR ROBERT STERLING CLARK

MCGUIRE - \$100. A WEEK BOND  
SALESMAN SUDDENLY BEGAN TO  
HANDLE .LARGE SUMS OF MONEY.

MCGUIRE ACTIVE IN AMERICAN  
LEGION AFFAIRS WHILE SPENDING  
\$65,000.00 HE CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR

GRAYSON M.P. MURPHY,  
DIRECTOR IN NEW YORK TRUST - ON  
MORGAN PREFERRED LISTS, DIRECTOR  
OF GUARANTEE TRUST-FINANCED  
AMERICAN LEGION WITH \$125,000.00

JOHN W. DAVIS - ON MORGAN  
PREFERRED LISTS-MORGAN'S CHIEF  
ATTORNEY, NAMED IN BUTLER'S  
TESTIMONY AS WRITING GOLD SPEECH.

AMERICAN LEGION PASSED GOLD  
RESOLUTION FOR WHICH BUTLER WAS  
OFFERED \$18,000.00 TO SPEAK

FRANK M. BELGRANO, PRESENT  
COMMANDER OF AMERICAN LEGION,  
CALLED TO TESTIFY BEFORE DICKSTEIN  
COMMITTEE BUT NEVER QUESTIONED.

↑ DICKSTEIN COMMITTEE ↑

OPPOSED BOYCOTT OF NAZI GOODS

HENRY ITTLESON-PRESIDENT  
COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT  
TRUST-AKTIEB. GESELLSCHAFT # BERLIN

ALBERT D. LASKER - ON NAT. AD-  
VISORY COUNCIL OF CRUSADERS

IRVING LEHMAN -  
LEHMAN BROS. HAVE  
INVESTMENTS IN GERMANY.

LESSING J. ROSENWALD -  
COMMITTEE FOR THE  
NATION - CHAIRMAN OF  
THE BOARD-SEARS-ROEBUCK  
WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO  
THE AMERICAN VIGILANCE  
INTELLIGENCE FEDERATION  
THEY USED TO DISSEMINATE  
ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA

ROGER W. STRAUSS-DIRECTOR  
REVERE COPPER AND BRASS IN  
WHICH GERMAN INDUSTRIAL-  
ISTS WERE INTERESTED

LOUIS EDWARD KIRSTEIN  
Vice. Pres. Wm. FILENE'S SONS Co.  
FILENE'S DAUGHTER MARRIED  
JOUETT SHOUSE PRESIDENT  
AMERICAN LIBERTY LEAGUE

JOSEPH M. PROSKAUER-DIRECTOR  
AMERICAN LIBERTY LEAGUE

ORGANIZED AS A MON-  
ETARY REFORM GROUP  
TAKES ACTIVE PART  
IN POLITICS

GETS MONEY FROM  
AMERICAN LIBERTY  
LEAGUE

GETS MONEY  
FROM MYSTERIOUS  
SOURCES.

JAMES P. WARBURG  
AND  
ALBERT D. LASKER  
ON NATIONAL AD-  
VISORY COUNCIL

JOHN W. DAVIS

↑ THE CRUSADERS ↑

↑ AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE ↑

FELIX WARBURG-DIRECTOR-MORGAN CONTROLLED AMER. SECURITIES

ALSO WALTER FREW WHO GAVE MONEY TO MCGUIRE

KUHN LOEB UNDERWROTE NORTH GERMAN LLOYD

MAX WARBURG - BROTHER - IN U.S. TO ARRANGE  
FINANCIAL MATTERS WITH HITLER GOVERNMENT

LEWIS L. STRAUSS - PARTNER - DIRECTOR N.Y.  
AND SUSQUEHANNA R.R. - U.S. RUBBER Co.

SIR WILLIAM WISEMAN - PARTNER-HEAD OF  
BRITISH ESPIONAGE WORK IN U.S. DURING WAR.  
DIRECTOR U.S. RUBBER - NATIONAL R.R. OF MEXICO

ELISHA WALKER - PARTNER - DIRECTOR-RADIO  
KEITH ORPHEUM-BANK OF AMERICA-TRANSAMER-  
ICA CORP.-GENERAL FOODS - BANCAMERICA-BLAIR-

↑ KUHN-LOEB ↑

GRAYSON M.P. MURPHY

WILLIAM S. KNUDSON  
GENERAL MOTORS

NATHAN L. MILLER-COUNSEL  
FOR U.S. STEEL

ALFRED SMITH - NAME  
SUPPRESSED BY DICKSTEIN COM-  
MITTEE IN BUTLER TESTIMONY

IRENEE DU PONT

JOHN J. RASCOB (NAME SUPPRESSED)

↑ AMERICAN LIBERTY LEAGUE ↑

↓ MORGAN CONTROLLED ↑

EDWARD H. CLARK HELPED HEARST  
MAKE MILLIONSTRE INFLATION  
ADVOCATED BY COMMITTEE FOR NATION

HEARST MEN IN MARINE  
MIDLAND CONTROLLED BY  
REMINGTON RAND

GIANNINI OF TRANS AMERICA  
TIED UP WITH HEARST

BELGRANO A GIANNINI MAN  
IN TRANS AMERICA

CLARK ON SEABOARD OIL

↑ REMINGTON RAND ↑

↑ WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST ↓

SEABOARD OIL IN JOINT INTERESTS  
WITH ROYAL DUTCH SHELL

ROYAL DUTCH SHELL CONTROLLED  
BY DETERDING

DETERDING FINANCIALLY BACKED  
MOSLEY-ENGLISH FASCIST

HEARST AND ROTHERMERE IN  
CANADA PAPER DEALS

ROTHERMERE BACKED MOSLEY

DICKSTEIN KNOWN AS HEARST  
MAN IN WASHINGTON