HANNAH SCOTT NHD
STATE EXHIBIT

The Safekeepers of History: A Monumental Stand for Cultural Preservation During the Second World War
Full Exhibit
Full Left Panel
Left Panel Top Section
The Fate of Art in War: Opposing Viewpoints

"We are barbarians and we wish to be barbarians. It is an honourable calling."
—Adolf Hitler (Führer)

"We must exploit culture for our own ends. We must destroy everything that does not serve our purposes."
—Hermann Göring (Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production)

"The Army is interested in extinguishing fires only in such buildings as may be used for Army purposes. All the rest to be destroyed; no historical or artistic building in the rear to escape any risking whatever."
—Order issued by FieldMarshal Alfred von Reichenau and approved by Adolf Hitler (Chief of the Army Staff)
An Unlikely Arsenal

The U.S. established the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program in 1943 for "the protection, preservation, and restoration where necessary of religious, artistic, historic, and other cultural buildings or materials (Hilldrup), 345 museum directors, curators, historians, and architects took a stand by volunteering as MFAA efforts. Soon after D-Day, they began producing maps, posting off-limits bulletins, and surveying damage.

"We realized the need to save something of unity and achievements from the tide of war that was engulfing the world." — Captain Butcher, 1st Corps, Winterthur Museum (Switzerland)

"Fighting to keep enemies from destroying a great art museum." — General Staff, North Africa

"I am not interested in the actual fighting and in the bombing of military targets. I am interested in the sweeping idea of cultural targets. But we can, and must, save what is left as is preserved from all further harm." — MFAA Public Relations (Hilldrup)
Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives officers of World War II stood against destructive Nazi looting by safeguarding more than 5 million of Europe’s monuments and artworks. Through their unprecedented activism, MFAA officers set a standard to restitute historic works endangered during armed conflict, which ultimately laid the groundwork for modern cultural preservation organizations and provenance research alliances.

Middle Panel Top Section
As the Allies approached Germany, the NMFA discovered 1000 repositories containing the contents of Europe's museums, churches, and private collections. NMFA officers overcame obstacles using ingenuity while evacuating more than 5 million items to collecting points for identification.

- Understaffed → Recruited civilian assistance
- Lack of packing resources → Wrapped paintings in fur coats
- Inadequate transportation → Hitlerblitz

"Works of art could no longer be thought of in antiquity terms: a manuscript, a scroll or a vase but as something..." — A.P. U.S. Air Force Major Roger Marlin
**Against the Odds**

**Opposition**
- Principle of military necessity
- Americans doubted potential success
- German propaganda

**Failures**
- Two MEFA officers died
- Some works were destroyed
- 100,000 Nazi-looted works remain missing

"Like hyenas the Anglo-American barbarians in the occupied western territories are piling upon German works of art and beginning a systematic looting campaign. Under cover of a humanitarian facade the agents of this gang of thieves are in the process of removing German art treasures and public buildings in the whole area are being subjected to a new sort of ravage. In most of the cases where the authorities have tried to resist, the Germans have shown in cold blood how necessary it is to surrender all works of art."—German Radio Broadcast, 1939 (Dachau)

"The odds were against it (WFAA). Among those who sponsored the endeavor there were some who believed it could not succeed more than a pious aspiration. Moreover, they reluctantly said, would be difficult to cultivate."—The Evening Star, 1940

"If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more... Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle."—General Eisenhower, 1945 (Stettin)
Full Right Panel
"To save the culture of your allies is a great thing. To conserve the culture of your enemy, to risk your life and the life of other men to save it, to give it all back to them as seen in the battle was won. It was selfless, but that is exactly what [the Monuments Men] intended to do." — Robert Edsel, Founder of the Monuments Men Foundation (Edsel)

While the Soviets confiscated discovered art for war reparations, the MFAA took a stand to restitute works, even those of German origin. When monuments officers received orders to ship 202 German paintings to the U.S., they penned the Wiesbaden Manifesto—the only act of protest by officers during World War II. They declared, “We wish to state that, from our own knowledge, no historical grievance will rankle so long or be the cause of so much justified bitterness as the removal for any reason of a part of the heritage of any nation, even if that heritage may be interpreted as a prize of war” (Farmer).

"I found little or no sympathy in the [American] Army for German works of art... Finding stolen objects was, of course, more spectacular, but it was of equal importance that the great German and German-owned works of art be protected." — MFAA Officer James Ralston (Ralston)

Images: Art treasures returning to Florence, 1945. (National Archives)
Help from the Heartland: Kansas City’s Monuments Men

Once returning home MFAA officers assumed leadership positions in cultural institutions, including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, subsequently expanding their legacy to American communities. “One of the finest examples of 18th century portraiture at the Nelson-Atkins, Nicolas de Largillière’s Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, was found by the Monuments Men in a salt mine in Alt Aussee, Austria, and returned to Clarice de Rothschild, whose family owned the painting. It was purchased by the Nelson-Atkins in 1954 after Rothschild sold it to an art dealer in New York” (Leighton).

“The Nelson-Atkins has a rich history which is only enhanced by the individuals who have worked there. These Monuments Men protected historical artifacts from destruction and saved these treasures for future generations. I am proud to introduce legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the men and women who fought to preserve this priceless history.” —Missouri Senator Roy Blunt (Nelson-Atkins)