

The poems in the series “A Longing for Wilderness Reveals Itself” come from *Plunder*, a full-length manuscript I’ve been working on that marries ekphrasis, persona and found poetry to act as a testament of witness to the cultural plunder of “degenerate art” from Jewish owners and dealers by the Nazi regime during WWII.

So much of this project sprang out of an unquellable curiosity to know my roots and find a kinship with my ancestors in a way that simple genealogy can’t address. Though I was raised Jewish by Jewish parents, both sides of my family bear complicated histories with their heritage of Judaism—my mother’s father was raised Catholic, only to have his Hungarian Jewish bloodline revealed to him the evening before he was shipped out to fight on the coast of France in 1943; my father’s grandmother was raised in Buenos Aires after her Polish family narrowly escaped one of the many pogroms meant to cleanse the country’s Jewish population—these are the stories I grew up hearing, stories of silence and flight, and these are the stories that fuel my near-pathological desire to discover myself in the lives that came before me.

As such, I came to the project interested in the ways in which the misappropriation and theft of physical objects deepens the injustices faced by European Jews during Nazi occupation and with the aim of bearing witness and resisting the silence of forgetting. As such, I began the collection with a series of ekphrastic poems written after so-called “degenerate art,” a designation given to more than 16,000 examples of confiscated (read: stolen) modern art that were “abstract or expressionistic, ... [or] by a Jewish artist,” according to Jonathan Petropoulos, professor of European History at Claremont McKenna College. Alongside these ekphrastic pieces are historically-informed persona poems as well as poems that reconfigure Nazi ledger and bookkeeping texts. The goal, in the convergence of all of these elements, was to lift out these lives from the footnotes of short books detailing the monumental atrocities of the Nazi regime and create for them an exigent opportunity for these critical stories to be told.

Theodor Adorno’s oft-quoted pronouncement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” has taken up permanent resonant residence in my brain and my response, which certainly might be an essay (or series of essays) unto itself, for now is the manuscript of *Plunder* and its contention that witness is imperative, and much stronger, than any ethic that might seek to impose silence to silence.

So much of the research for these poems came from the incredible cache of documents compiled and maintained by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in conjunction with the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, *Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg: Database of Art Objects at the Jeu de Paume*. The website is a trove of information and facsimiles of physical documents kept by the ERR during the Nazi occupation, documents that include both the chillingly precise Nazi ledgers as well as copies of the impeccably detailed placards affixed to looted art pieces.