

HITLER BANNED HIS PAINTINGS

By a Staff Reporter

ANTI-NAZI, veteran of Stalingrad, and one of the very few Western painters whose work is shown in Communist Russia, Wilhelm Helmstedt, a great name in contemporary German art, arrived in Johannesburg this week for a six-month visit to South Africa.

In an interview today Mr. Helmstedt told me something of his action-filled career, which began in 1924 when he went to Berlin, then one of the great cultural capitals of Europe.

He studied theatre design, met the Expressionist painters of the time, became a friend of Emil

Nolde and Ernst Barlach, two of the great names of the period — and then, with Hitler, came disaster.

Mr. Helmstedt, in company with all the other German artists whose work did not accord with Nazi philosophies, was officially banned from all exhibitions in Germany.

THEATRE SETS

He managed to make a living designing theatre sets and working for U.F.A., the big German film company, until 1939, when he was conscripted into the army.

He served in Poland, France, Yugoslavia and, under General Paulus, found himself in Russia. He fought at Stalingrad, where his unit was cut off and he was taken prisoner.

Mr. Helmstedt was behind barbed wire at Brest-Litovsk, Moscow and Stalinhogorsk, where he was forced to work in a coal mine. Five years after the war, in 1950, he was released.

Of those years Mr. Helmstedt was reluctant to talk, except to say that it was only his belief in the value of art, and his own ability to paint, which kept him alive.



MR. W. HELMSTEDT

He was conscripted by the Russians into painting election poster portraits of the candidates to the Supreme Soviet. Among these was Nikita Khrushchev, then Minister-President of the Ukraine.

Many of these portraits — including Mr. K's — are still on exhibition in Moscow.

After being released, Mr. Helmstedt — his development as a painter hindered by his prison camp ordeal — returned to Berlin where friends helped him to establish himself again.

OUTSTANDING

Today Wilhelm Helmstedt, an artist whose work belongs to no "isms," is regarded as one of the outstanding painters of Germany. His paintings hang in all the leading public and private collections in Germany and other European countries.

There are about 50 of his works in private collections in South Africa. His son lives in Johannesburg.

Mr. Helmstedt will be touring South Africa for about six months. He will probably hold an exhibition of his South African work before he returns to Germany.