

NEWS *Restitution*

Painting acquired by Gurlitt turns up in Chicago home

Work bought from persecuted Jews by dealer privileged by the Nazis is now with Jewish couple

UNITED STATES

Chicago. A painting that was acquired from victimised Jews by Hildebrand Gurlitt, the Hamburg-based dealer privileged by the Nazis, and which was returned to Gurlitt after the Second World War by German authorities who succeeded the Monuments Men, has been found in America. It is now in the Chicago home of Jewish benefactors of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

The work, Jules Pascin's *L'Atelier du Peintre Grossman*, 1909, depicts a painter with two subjects: one partially clothed, another nude but for a pair of stockings. Its subject – a Jewish artist – and the work's nudity and Expressionist style meant that it qualified as *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art), which was condemned by the Nazis. Ditto the fact that Pascin (1885-1930), born in Bulgaria as Julius Mordecai Pincas, was Jewish.

Suicide – and a forced sale?

The work was the property of Julius Ferdinand Wolff, the former editor-in-chief of the *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* newspaper and a Jew who was ousted from his job in 1933. In 1942, when Wolff and his wife were due to be deported to a concentration camp, Nazis authorities "permitted" the couple and Wolff's brother to commit suicide.

In 1945, when a crate containing the picture was opened in Aschbach Castle, a Nazi storage space, Gurlitt told a lawyer under the command of the US Third Army that he had bought the picture from Wolff for 600 Reichsmarks in 1935. Although Wolff's persecution suggested a forced sale, the painting was returned to Gurlitt by the Wiesbaden



"We have the work in our bedroom [in Chicago] right now"

Central Collecting Point in 1950.

Around 1,400 Modern works of art were recently seized from a Munich apartment belonging to Gurlitt's son, Cornelius. The hoard contained many

Hildebrand Gurlitt at the Kunstverein Düsseldorf in 1954

so-called "degenerate" works that were removed from museum collections but are not eligible for restitution. Last month, Cornelius set up a website to present his side of the story.

Patchy provenance

L'Atelier du Peintre Grossman is now in the collection of Joel and Carol Honigberg, in Highland Park, Chicago. They bought it in Paris in around 1980 from the art dealer Abel Rambert, who is listed as one of the four authors of Pascin's catalogue raisonné, Joel says. He remembers paying around \$40,000 for the work. "We have it in our bedroom right now," Carol says. The couple say they had no knowledge of the picture's involvement with the Nazis.

It is not clear when the work left Gurlitt's possession and entered the art market. It was offered at Christie's in 1972 as part of "A Collection of Modern Paintings and Drawings Formed By Dr Robert Ducroquet", and was bought by the Parisian dealer Hervé Odebert for \$39,060. The auction catalogue lists a Matthias Fels of Paris as the work's only former owner, and says that its exhibition history began with the Haus der Kunst, Munich, in 1969. But German exhibition records reveal that Julius Wolff lent the work to a museum in 1929, providing independent documentation that Wolff was the owner.

A claim for the work could be possible: in 2008, heirs of the Wolff family sued and won the restitution of two porcelain objects that were found in the collection of the Zwinger museum in Dresden.

David D'Arcy

In brief

German museums to be searched for looted art...

Germany is establishing an independent agency to scour the nation's museums for art looted during the Holocaust. The move comes amid criticism of the country's secretive handling of restitution cases, such as the recent revelations that Cornelius Gurlitt, the son of an art dealer with connections to Hitler, hid Nazi-stolen art worth \$100m in two troves in Munich and Salzburg. Monika Grütters, Germany's culture minister, says that she supports doubling the country's current €2m budget for provenance research to assist the new organisation, which she aims to establish as soon as this autumn. R.C.

...while Canadian institutions check works

Six Canadian museums are taking steps to investigate their collections in search of art looted by the Nazis during the Second World War. The two-year pilot project, run by the Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization, is funded by a C\$191,000 (\$174,000) government grant. The museums taking part are the Art Gallery of Windsor, the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton and Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario and Royal Ontario Museum. In 2007, the organisation surveyed 12 museum collections and found around 400 works with provenance gaps. P.P.

On our website

A British brand of hero

While George Clooney's film "The Monuments Men" offers a Hollywood view of the Allied officers who helped to save Europe's art, Noah Charney tells the story of the overlooked British scholar-soldiers who fought to protect cultural heritage during the Second World War. Archaeologists including Mortimer Wheeler, John Ward-Perkins and Leonard Woolley worked to preserve art and monuments in Italy and Libya, something that has proved more difficult in recent wars, including Iraq and Afghanistan. H.S.

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