

Consequently one of the main goals of the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research is to set up a secure virtual space for the provenance research community, which is to function as a socio-technical system. The Bureau for Provenance Investigation will act as an editor and custodian of this information system and function as a contact partner. The results of research and the outcomes of projects supported by federal funding will also be incorporated in the information system.

A shift from a predominantly reactive examination of the provenance of individual objects in the collections to the systematic indexing of inventories in the course of reconstructing and documenting the developmental stages of public and private collections, especially for the second third of the 20th century, remains the major challenge of provenance research for the near future. With the project-oriented research funding established in the past year, an apparatus has been made available in Germany that can link the research on individual cases with contextual research and that can be further built upon.

► **Jacques Lust**

BELGIAN FEDERAL SCIENCE POLICY, BELGIUM

PROVENANCE AND WORLD WAR II: ART, RESEARCH, AND ILLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I want to thank Mrs. Charlotte van Rappard-Boon. She is a long-time friend, and a courteous and devoted colleague of DS, who always combines intelligence with common sense. Also, I

am more than honored to be in the same panel with Ms. Nancy Yeide, whose recent and awaited publication on the Göring collection forms high point of publication in this field of expertise.

Second, I want to remark, that in the program of this working group panel, a question mark was unintentionally omitted in the title "Art research and illusion?" thus changing its meaning. Of course, it is a small dedication to Ernst Gombrich, a highly respected scholar of art history, who in his book *Long-life Interests* describes his fleeing of Vienna in the thirties with his family to London.

Last but not least, I want to thank Mr. Bady, who explained yesterday a lot about Belgium. Rather than spending time on explaining what the general background of the problem is, I can focus on the important details.

Last month, Mrs. van Rappard asked me a few questions. The first thing she asked me was: What happened in the area of provenance research in your country? In 1994, Belgium began a search for cultural goods that had disappeared during World War Two. In 1998, the Belgium Stvanudy Commission started investigating lost property in Belgium, and made an inquiry at thirty cultural institutions, not only at the largest museums, but also in the Royal Library of Belgium, the Royal Museum of the Army and Military History, and other institutions, which might be possible holders of Jewish property.

Afterwards, between 2003 and 2008, the Commission of Indemnification, whose president is here among us, dealt with more than 5,000 individual demands for lost property. A total of 160 special reports on cultural losses were made, and only in two cases a link was found between our museums and the concrete

cultural institutions, resulting in requests for the restitution of cultural goods. As I have said, we did the search in public museums and institutions that were mainly linked to restitution efforts initiated in Belgium after the Second World War. However, we also investigated in the municipal museums in Liege, Antwerpen, Gent, Bruges, and other cities.

In 2001, Belgium published its findings in a final report that included 300 cultural objects and groups of several objects. We did not publish the guidelines, but we might publish them after the adoption of the Terezin Declaration. We used the experience of France and Netherlands, who taught us a lot and who were also moving much faster than were.

Another very good question asked by Mrs. van Rappard was: Were new sources of materials found? Yes, we found a lot of new sources of materials deposited in archives extending over several kilometers. To give you an example of such large archive, in Belgium we have safeguarded an archive of the Ministry of Reconstruction responsible for material damages to private persons. That archive is about 27 kilometers long. Seven hundred dossiers were examined with a focus not only on the Jewish community at large, but also on every individual in Belgium. We did not publish the data on the internet as they did in the Netherlands and France, but all the information, including the restitution information, will be made available before the end of this year or at the beginning of the next one.

To keep my speech brief, I would like to make a few short points. First, I want to point out that sometimes, through our national actions, we might be duplicating research that has been already completed or inquiries that are pending. I have very much respect for the fantastic project of the ERR, which aims to bring all

the research information under one roof. However, I have been in the business now for fifteen years and we have always been talking about the group Rosenberg, which of course is important (even though in Belgium it was only a small group). But we have been working on these documents for a very long time, and we have still about forty or fifty kilometers of relevant documents to examine.

Second, I would like to make a remark on what I call the tyranny of the masterpieces. At conferences, we often hear the same case stories, and I have to say mostly from the lawyers, in which we see the masterpieces being rediscovered and reclaimed. That is of course understandable. Establishing the provenance of the masterpieces is probably easier because there are reasonably direct lines to follow during research. However, 90 percent of the art we are involved with is of lesser value and is much less known, such as musical instruments. There, conducting the provenance research is more difficult and thorough, but the information obtained throughout the process is very important. In provenance research, we are confronted with a mass of information and it is not always easy to find the right piece of data. For example, in the case of material damages, if there are a few unidentified paintings in Belgium, and 700,000 dossiers classified in an administrative way that need to be studied, it is not easy to establish the provenance of the artwork quickly. Nor is it easy to say: We will put it on the internet. That is impossible.

Third, I would like to say that sometimes, surrounded by the terrible tragic events and the importance of the provenance research, we tend to forget that there are also many other fields and restitution policies that have been developing in the past years. A simple example is the case a most European countries with a colonial past are dealing with – the issue of human

remains. This is sometimes forgotten by researchers in some of the fields whose focus is traditionally quite narrow.

My last remark has to do with the profession of a researcher. In my opinion, the expert researcher or the provenance researcher should remain a researcher in the first place, and not become a politician, as we sometimes experience when listening to some of the speeches, because then the facts suddenly seem to disappear and objective views are influenced by a personal relation to the provenance. Likewise, the politicians should not be experts in research fields because then the issues will become more politically charged. We should all focus on what we are good at.

As for provenance, it will definitely retain its crucial importance for every form of collecting. In reality we sometimes tend to forget to look for the connections leading to every point in provenance research. Sometimes the remembrance of the people is forgotten or given only a short space of four or five lines.

If you looked up the materials on postwar restitutions in Belgium, there are some people who were deported and now are completely forgotten. The museums that have their works do not have any relevant materials, because art historians have the tendency not to use too many of the historical documents, and historians do not always look at the other materials. And it is difficult to find people from both sides of the aisle, people who speak four or five languages, who could create bridges among these issues. Nevertheless, it is important to be constantly aware of the complexity of the issues at hand and to find and establish the right lines of provenance, so we can come up with objective results not only in the area of restitutions, but also in the area of history.

To conclude, I believe that the provenance research is important and we need to continue. However, there is one thing I learned while working in Belgium with the different commissions. During the talks on the Belgium agreement, the Jewish community in Belgium cooperated very closely at every step we undertook over the last ten years. And it taught us a lesson in modesty – modesty and humility towards the history, the sense of it and the tragic events of the past.

I thank you for your attention.

► **Nancy Yeide**

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PROVENANCE RESEARCH IN AMERICAN MUSEUMS

There has been a lot of talk at this Conference about provenance research and archival access. However, with the notable exception of my colleagues on this panel and a few people in this room, very few people at the Conference have actually engaged in provenance research. Therefore, I am especially glad to give a voice to provenance researchers. I would like to make some comments about this research because in the end, it is the research that should be the foundation upon which ownership decisions are made. On this panel we are talking about art, fine arts, and increasingly applied arts, and even musical instruments.

Provenance research starts with identifying the object in question; it cannot start anywhere else. It is often noted that artists work in genre, repeat themes, and may create multiple versions of a composition. But the visual examples should bring this home.