

MEDIA INFORMATION

Munich, 23 February 2023

ART, LOOTING, AND RESTITUTION – FORGOTTEN LIFE STORIES

The Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, together with broadcasters rbb and BR, commemorate the victims of Nazi art looting – joint project tells forgotten life stories of Jewish people based on cases of restitution – launch event in the Bode Museum – Minister of State for Culture Claudia Roth: trace the life stories behind stolen works of art – President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Josef Schuster: project is important so that memory does not fade

The Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), the Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (Central Archive of the National Museums in Berlin) and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (Bavarian State Painting Collections) have launched a unique commemorative project that is being funded with 690,000 euros from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. It tells the stories of Jewish people who once had a significant influence on Germany's cultural life, but were then ostracized, disenfranchised, persecuted, dispossessed, and murdered by the National Socialists. The two leading institutions hope that it will broaden the hitherto narrow focus on restituted objects solely as works of art, so as to include the life stories of the many art collectors, some barely known, to whom they once belonged. The goal is to create a multi-faceted cinematic memorial to these individuals, in collaboration with broadcasters Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) and Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb). A separate project website will be set up as a multimedia library of remembrance.

Speaking at the launch event of the project in the Bode Museum, the Minister of State for Culture, **Claudia Roth**, declared: "Behind every stolen or expropriated work of art is the story of a person's life and the injustice suffered by them. Tracing the biographies behind the looted works of art and casting light on the diversity of Jewish life in German society before 1933 enables us to carry an important remembrance into the future and remains an important task for society as a whole. With the 'Art, Looting, and Restitution' project, the SPK and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, together with BR and rbb, are making an important contribution to this undertaking. This project exemplifies our ongoing responsibility to thoroughly investigate art looting by the Nazis and the crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust, to keep the memory of the victims alive, and to make this knowledge generally accessible."

The President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, **Josef Schuster**, said in his welcoming address: "This project is important so that memory does not fade; so that the stories of Jews do not disappear. And what else can follow from this than a responsibility – not to 'make amends' (Wiedergutmachung), as it is sometimes called complacently and inappropriately – but to restore justice; to restore ownership?"

The names that provenance researchers come across in their work are often unknown. Who were these people? And what does it mean to their descendants when a work of art that had been confiscated in consequence of persecution is returned? Behind every work that is tracked down lies the story and the fate of a person – and even of entire families. The media library is due to go online in early summer 2023 with the first five life stories, which will be told with the help of texts, images, films, maps, and audio elements; they will be successively augmented with more life stories as the project progresses. By the end of 2024, the media library should comprise the stories of thirty individuals.

Hermann Parzinger, President of the SPK, remarked: "Twenty-five years have passed since the Washington Conference. Like us, many institutions in Germany have restituted works of art and books, and have reached fair and just solutions in consensus with the owners' descendants. But there is still a lot to be done, because the looting of art by the Nazis was on such a huge scale. And in each case, we are dealing not just with files, but with the violently uprooted lives of people, who were ostracized and persecuted and destroyed. Their names and their families were to be consigned to oblivion. We want to commemorate as many of these people as possible with our project and at the same time do something against the evil of antisemitism – wherever and in whatever form it may occur. Ours is a pilot project. Other institutions can and should follow suit. Our aim is to be able to tell as many of these forgotten and harrowing biographies as possible."

Bernhard Maaz, Director General of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, added: "It seems obvious and humane to relate the results of provenance research not only to the objects due for restitution, but also to the fates of their former owners. For a long time, the focus was primarily on the memorial value of the works of art, which was the intention behind the Washington Declaration. But who are the descendants, who is dealing with these objects today, and in what way? And how does provenance research actually work? Berlin, as the one-time 'capital of the German Reich' and Munich as the so-called 'capital of the Movement' have more reason than many other cities to reassess these questions proactively. We share an interest in communicating jointly to a broad section of the public."

Ellen Trapp, Head of Culture at BR: "Science and journalism serve equally to educate and to foster memory. We at Bayerischer Rundfunk are therefore pleased to be able to contribute, together with rbb and our project partners, the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, to rescuing from oblivion at least some of the countless people who were persecuted by the National Socialists, robbed of their works of art and, in many cases, murdered and forgotten. Their moving life stories should be preserved for future generations by our films."

Katrin Vernau, Director of rbb: "The looting of art by the Nazi regime is an injustice that moves us deeply. Each work that is tracked down is linked to a very personal fate. Together with BR, we aim to recall some of these fates on film. We get to know Jewish art collectors, patrons, and citizens who shaped our cultural life at the time, but whose names are hardly known today. It is particularly important to us, as rbb, to be part of this unique memorial project."

The first two films, on the life stories of Friedrich Guttsmann and August Liebmann Mayer, were presented at the launch. Afterwards Shelly Kupferberg hosted a conversation between Guttsmann's granddaughter Ann-Charlott Mörner, **Gilbert Lupfer** of the German Lost Art Foundation, **Rüdiger Mahlo** of the Jewish Claims Conference, and **Hermann Simon**, the founding director of the Centrum Judaicum Berlin, about the project, about remembrance, and about the importance of provenance research. Miriam Friedmann, granddaughter of a couple whose fate is going to be presented in the course of the project, joined in via video link.

Friedrich Guttsmann (1888–1959) was a businessman and sales representative. Owing to his Jewish descent, he lost his job and, after 1933, the family home in Berlin. Financial hardship forced him to sell the furniture and works of art that he owned. Guttsmann survived the Nazi period mainly because he was classed as being in a "privileged mixed marriage" with Henriette Franziska, a Protestant Christian. His sons managed to leave Germany for Sweden in 1939. Guttsmann and his wife joined them there in 1948. In 2019, the SPK returned a drawing that had come from his collection to his descendants.

August Liebmann Mayer (1885–1944) was an internationally recognized expert on Spanish and Italian painting. He worked as a conservator at the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and was a professor of art history at the University of Munich. A smear campaign forced him to resign from his posts in 1931. In 1933, the National Socialists began to confiscate his possessions. Mayer fled to France, but was arrested in 1944 and deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered straight after arriving. In 2010, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen restituted four works from his former collection.

Ludwig and Selma Friedmann were the successful and respected owners of a business in Augsburg and had four children. From 1933 onward, the family suffered from Nazi persecution. The children managed to emigrate, but the parents stayed in Augsburg and had to move to a so-called 'Jew House'. On the evening before they were due to be deported to the camps, the Friedmanns committed suicide. In 2018, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen restituted a painting to their joint heirs.

As the next item of the evening program, **Emma Abel**, a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, presented her book. Abel has been studying the Holocaust for several years; her novel about the experiences and fate of a Jewish girl began as a school assignment. Written in German, the book's title translates as "Only the stars seemed to shine yellow". It is told from the point of view of Eva from Freiburg, who is eight years old at the beginning of the story in 1938. She goes into hiding, but in the end, she is deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto.

The evening concluded with a concert by the **Lebensmelodien** (Life Melodies) project. Nur Ben Shalom and his Nimrod Ensemble aim to remind us that even in the most inhumane situations, in the face of persecution and murder, on the line between life and death, people created melodies and were moved by them. Interwoven with them are the life stories and fates of Jews. Marina Grauman (violin), Francesca Zappa (viola), Nur Ben Shalom (clarinet) and Michael Cohen-Weissert (piano) played the music and Ulrich Matthes presented the stories associated with the various pieces.

For more information on provenance research, visit:

www.pinakothek.de/en/research/provenance-research

www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/priorities/provenance-research-and-issues-of-ownership.html

www.smb.museum/en/research/provenance-research

Press photos:

<https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/newsroom/presse/pressebilder.html>

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für Kultur und Medien

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