Newsletter

Fall 2025 | N. 21

European Network
of Restitution Committees
on Nazi-Looted Art

The Newsletter is published by the CIVS, France. ©2025 by the European Network of Restitution Committees on Nazi Looted Art. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. Photos ©2025 Benoît Granier / Matignon.

This newsletter concludes our year of French governance of the network. We are pleased to pass the baton to the Austrian Commission. The CIVS is handing over to the *Kommission für Provenienzforschung*.

Stay connected

Subscribe to the European Network of Restitution Committees Newsletter for updates, future events, and ongoing restitution efforts: civs.berlin-amba@diplomatie.gouv.fr

Contents

4… “RECOVERED MEMORIES” CONFERENCE, 26 JUNE 2025, PARIS

6… OUTLOOK: AUSTRIA’S PRESIDENCY OF THE NETWORK IN 2026

7… NEWS | GERMANY

8… CASE STUDY | FRANCE

11… CASE STUDY | AUSTRIA

17… CASE STUDY | GERMANY

21… CASE STUDY | NETHERLANDS

23… CASE STUDY | UNITED KINGDOM

“RECOVERED MEMORIES” CONFERENCE
26 JUNE 2025, PARIS

The “Recovered Memories” conference brought together European restitution committees, heirs of victims, legal experts, researchers, and cultural institutions to highlight a crucial dimension often overlooked: the voices of families affected by Nazi looting. The interdisciplinary program aimed to restore narrative balance by focusing on testimonies and the human consequences of restitution.

The day opened with a thoughtful welcome speech by Frédérique Dreifuss-Netter, Chairwoman of the CIVS, who reaffirmed the Commission’s mission: to restore justice and remembrance through acts of restitution. She was followed by Léa Veinstein, philosopher and documentary filmmaker, who moderated the afternoon’s discussions with sensitivity and clarity, underlining the role of memory transmission through testimony.

5 Restitution Stories, 5 National Perspectives

The heart of the conference lay in five case studies presented by national restitution committees. Each one illustrated a unique pathway, from looting and silence to recognition and restitution. Above all, they gave a voice to the heirs, whose families endured loss and whose histories are finally being acknowledged.

UNITED KINGDOM - The Robert Bing Case

The story of Robert Bing was the first case presented at the conference. A French Jewish art collector and member of the Resistance, saw in 1941, his Paris apartment looted by agents of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg. A painting attributed to Gustave Courbet, La Ronde Enfantine, was among the works seized and destined for the Goering collection.

After more than 70 years, the painting resurfaced at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Thanks to the efforts of the Spoliation Advisory Panel and a comprehensive provenance investigation, the painting was returned to the heirs of Robert Bing, represented at the conference.

The session brought together legal experts, museum professionals, and restitution advocates, including representatives from the UK Department for Culture, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and art law specialist Melina Wolman. Their reflections highlighted not only the legal complexities but also the deep symbolic resonance that such restitutions hold for families long deprived of their history and heritage.

NETHERLANDS - The Abraham Nijstad Case

The Dutch session shed light on the tragic fate of Abraham Nijstad, a Jewish art dealer who, under Nazi pressure, was forced to sell artworks in a desperate attempt to protect his family. Despite his efforts, he and his loved ones were deported and survived imprisonment in Theresienstadt.

His story was brought to life through the testimonies of two of his grandchildren, who were present at the conference. Their words served as a powerful reminder that restituted artworks are not merely objects, they are fragments of memory, loss, and resilience.

Thanks to the efforts of the Dutch Restitutions Committee, supported by experts from the NIOD Institute and the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, three paintings were returned to the family. The case was emblematic of the moral and emotional weight behind restitution, an act of recognition and repair, often decades after the initial injustice.

AUSTRIA - The Saul Juer Case

Presented by the Art Restitution Advisory Board and the Commission for Provenance Research, the Austrian segment centered on Saul Juer, a Jewish entrepreneur and art collector whose life was

destroyed by Nazi persecution. After being stripped of his business, he was forced to sell off his collection before being deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1944.

The conference featured a moving video message from his grandson, Steve Glauber, a journalist based in New York, who recently received over 500 restituted objects. A process made possible by systematic provenance research within Austrian museums.

The case revealed not only the gaps in historical awareness but also the emotional magnitude of restitution for descendants. The dedication of Austrian researchers such as Stefan Kurz and Mathias Lichtenwagner, and the leadership of Dr. Pia Schölnberger, was widely praised as a model of persistent and ethical commitment.

GERMANY - Roundtable Discussion

The German session took the form of a rich dialogue between Prof. Dr. Wolf Tegethoff from the german Advisory Commission and Rüdiger Mahlo, representative of the Jewish Claims Conference in Germany. Their discussion focused on the broader moral and political responsibility of Germany with regard to Nazi-looted cultural property.

Beyond policy, the discussion emphasized the expectations and emotional journeys of heirs still seeking justice after decades. These families often face legal, administrative, and emotional hurdles in reclaiming objects that were once integral to their identity and history.

Through examples from the Commission's work, the panel reaffirmed the essential value of moral reasoning in restitution cases, especially when legal ownership may be clear, but the ethical imperative is even stronger. The emphasis was placed on human dignity, the recognition of suffering, and the long road from dispossession to reparation.

FRANCE - The Books of Henry Torrès

Presented by the CIVS, this final segment of the conference offered a deeply moving moment: the on-stage restitution of over 200 looted books belonging to Henry Torrès, a prominent Jewish lawyer, Resistance figure, and postwar senator.

In the presence of one of his heirs, the symbolic return of these books, identified across five German libraries, served as a strong act of justice. The gesture underscored the personal nature of restitution, far beyond legal or institutional processes.

The moment was enriched by the participation of Michaela Scheibe, Deputy Director at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and specialist in library looting under National Socialism, as well as Dr. Dirk Naguschewski, provenance researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Literary and Cultural Research. Both highlighted the essential role of cross-border collaboration in locating and restoring cultural property.

In a poignant video message, Dominique Torrès, granddaughter of Henry Torrès, spoke movingly about her grandfather's life, legacy, and the symbolic power of recovering these modest but meaningful items, some still bearing dedications from his circle of friends and intellectuals.

Watch the integral restitution:

https://youtu.be/lzvFRihs_KA

OUTLOOK:
AUSTRIA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE NETWORK IN 2026

We are delighted that Austria will be chairing the European Network of Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art for the second time in the upcoming year 2026. The presidency will take place under the guiding principle and question: *Challenges in provenance research and art restitution today. Dealing with Nazi-era loss of cultural assets in the second quarter of the 21st century* and aims to stimulate new perspectives, impulses, and ideas for shaping our field of research and the work of the decision-making bodies.

After the plans for Austria's first presidency could not be implemented due to the Covid pandemic and various lockdowns, we are now looking forward to announcing a scientific conference, expected to take place in November 2026, at which we will address the current and future challenges of our discipline. It is very important to us to bring together the two central foundations of art restitution: namely, the decision-makers as well as the scientific research underlying their decisions and recommendations, which actively interact as communicating vessels and, within the framework of the conference, should be given the opportunity for exchange, networking, and shaping solutions to future challenges.

To ensure that we can discuss a wide range of creative and innovative contributions at this conference, we will be sending out a call for papers at the beginning of next year. We will publish the expected results and contributions of the conference as the conclusion of Austria's chairmanship in an anthology of the established publication series of the Commission for Provenance Research, thus making them permanently available to researchers and all those involved in this topic.

We would also like to use our presidency to better pool our internationally networked knowledge and invite the other commissions, as well as researchers in our field who are active beyond them, to enrich our Lexicon of Provenance Research with their contributions.

Of course, newsletters are also planned under the Austrian presidency, with a particular focus on the presentation of research projects, analogue and digital research tools, and the discussion of cases/case studies.

Finally, we hope that the European Network of Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art will be able to welcome new members in line with the numerous signatory states to the Washington Principles and their Best Practices, and we look forward to an interesting and constructive exchange.

Last but not least we would like to thank and congratulate our French colleagues for their excellent presidency, which has provided us with numerous interesting encounters and valuable insights, and has helped to foster greater multilateral understanding. Given the current situation, which is fraught with multiple crises, all of our work is guided by the idea of dealing responsibly with a guilt-ridden past.

Pia Schölnberger, Director of the commission for provenance research/ Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport

Sabine Loitfellner, Bureau of the commission for provenance research

After 22 years the German Advisory Commission on the return of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property has ceased its work.

On 1st December 2025, the Court of Arbitration for Nazi-looted Cultural Property has commenced its work. Victims or their descendants may initiate proceedings before an arbitration panel. The Court of Arbitration is an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for disagreements on the return of Nazi-looted cultural property. It was established by Federation, Länder and national associations of local authorities in consultation with the Central Council of Jews in Germany and of the Jewish Claims Conference.

Arbitration proceedings may be initiated by the affected, if the institution holding the cultural property has made a Standing Offer or agrees to arbitration in the specific case. The institution holding cultural property may also initiate proceedings, if the affected party agrees.

The Court of Arbitration will work with a list of 36 arbitrators (jurists and (art) historians). Each panel will consist of five arbitrators, four of which will be appointed by the parties, the fifth will be chosen by those four arbitrators. On the website schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-raubgut.de you can find an overview of the Standing Offers submitted to date. You'll also find the list of the 36 arbitrators as well as an overview of the procedural steps. In addition, you will find the basic documents for the work of the Court of Arbitration and the contact information for our Service Desk – soon also in English.

CASE STUDY | FRANCE

When they concerned works of art belonging to public collections, the restitution measures that the CIVS recommended to the Prime Minister encountered obstacles in heritage law, which did not allow such works to be removed from public collections, even when spoliation was proven, due to the inalienable nature of public collections.

The framework law of 22 July 2023, adopted unanimously, now allows derogation, after an opinion from the CIVS, from the principle of inalienability in order to remove a spoliated cultural asset from the public domain so that it may be returned to its legitimate owners.

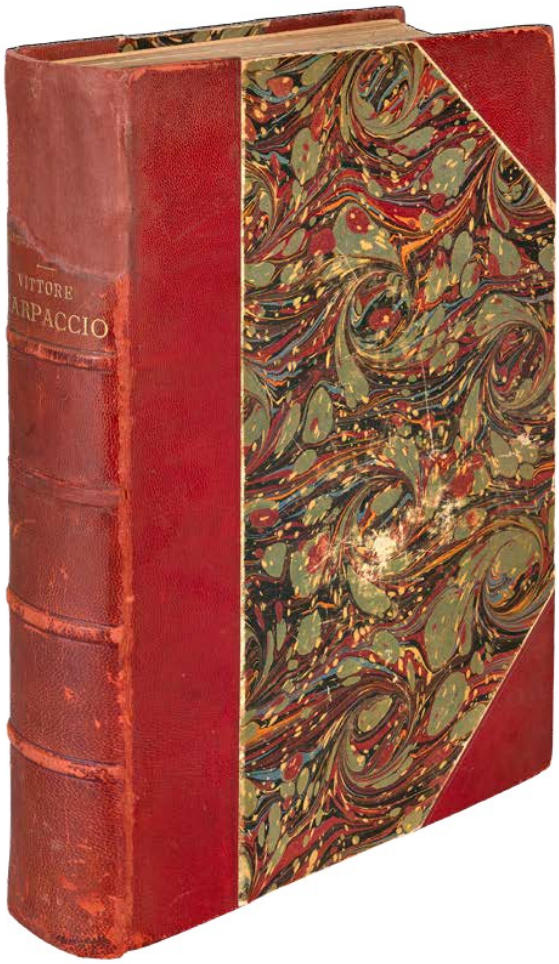
More than five million books were looted in France during the Occupation. Several thousand are held in public libraries. These institutions—such as the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* or the *Institut national d'histoire de l'art*—actively seek out items that may have been looted in order to return them.

In 2025, under the new law, the CIVS issued favourable opinions for the restitution of two looted works. The histories of these two books illustrate the complexity of the path toward their restitution to their rightful owners.

The book by Gustav Ludwig and Pompeo Molmenti, Vittore Carpaccio: The Life and Work of the Painter, translated by H. L. de Perera, Paris, Hachette, 1910, held at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.

In May 1945, the French Army's 2nd Armoured Division (2e DB), commanded by General Leclerc, took 54 books from Berchtesgaden in Bavaria, at Hitler's Berghof residence. These books were given to the Bibliothèque nationale de France and entered its collections.

The library examined the stamps applied by the 2nd Armoured Division. They show that 49 books came from Hermann Göring's "personal collections" and 3 others from Adolf Hitler's. Among them, the library identified a book by Gustav Ludwig and Pompeo Molmenti, Vittore Carpaccio: The Life and Work of the Painter (Paris, Hachette, 1910), which bears, next to the 2e DB stamp, the ex-libris of August Liebmann Mayer.



Upon referral by the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Ministry of Culture's Mission for Research and Restitution of Cultural Property Looted between 1933 and 1945, the CIVS issued an opinion on 17 January 2025 concerning the spoliation of August Liebmann Mayer and the restitution of the book to his heir.

Research on the spoliation of August Liebmann Mayer

In 2014, the commission, seized by the sole heir of August Liebmann Mayer, retraced his biography and confirmed the spoliation of his family's property.

To escape antisemitic persecution in Germany, Mayer emigrated in 1936 with his wife, Luise Dauschiger, and their daughter Angelika to Paris,

where he continued to work as an art expert. He brought with him the bulk of his library—more than a thousand volumes—and acquired additional books in Paris.

Detained twice by French authorities after the defeat, he settled in Nice in 1941, where his daughter joined him after his wife's death. His entire library was removed by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) on 9–10 May 1942, along with all the furnishings and artworks.

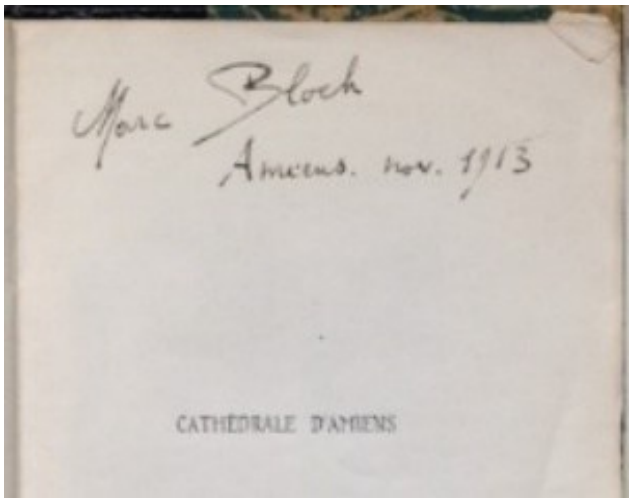
Denounced, Mayer was arrested by the Gestapo on 3 February 1944, interned at Drancy, and deported on convoy no. 69 of 7 March 1944. He was murdered at Auschwitz on 12 March 1944.

The commission believes that the books—packed into 39 crates—were transported to Berlin to supply Hermann Göring's personal collection. They were later moved, at least in part, to Kogl Castle in Austria, requisitioned by the ERR for the evacuation of looted collections, before being found by American soldiers and taken to the Munich Central Collecting Point.

Recent research by the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* uncovered books taken from the Berghof by the 2e DB in May 1945 that came from Göring's personal collection. A small number of them were given to the BnF in September 1945 and entered under accession number 336886. Among them was the Ludwig & Molmenti volume bearing Mayer's ex-libris.

In its opinion of 17 January 2025, the CIVS confirmed that the book had been looted from August Liebmann Mayer as a result of anti-Semitic persecution and recommended its restitution to his heir.

The book's removal from the public domain was then formalised by a decree of the Prime Minister dated 27 May 2025, authorising the Minister of Culture to carry out the restitution on 13 June 2025.



The book by Georges Durand, *Description abrégée de la cathédrale d'Amiens* (or *Petit guide de la cathédrale d'Amiens*), Imprimerie Yvert et Tellier, Amiens, 1904, held by the library of the National Institute of Art History (INHA).

Since 2010, the National Institute of Art History has conducted extensive research into looted books that may have entered its library collections.

A detailed investigation of the collections of the *Bibliothèque centrale des musées nationaux*—which were transferred to the INHA in 2016—together with lengthy research into modes of acquisition, led to the identification of Georges Durand's *Description abrégée de la cathédrale d'Amiens* (Amiens, 1904), bearing a handwritten ex-libris of Marc Bloch.

The CIVS was referred the case on 5 February 2025 by the INHA, following a report by the Ministry of Culture's Mission for Research and Restitution of Cultural Property Looted between 1933 and 1945. The book contains a handwritten ex-libris on the half-title page, along with the words "Amiens novembre 1913", a memento of Marc Bloch's visit to Amiens and its cathedral.

Research on the spoliation of Marc Bloch

After the Armistice, Marc Bloch's family left their Paris apartment for refuge in Bourg-d'Hem (Creuse). The apartment was requisitioned by German authorities. The order of 23 December 1941 described Bloch as a "Jewish professor". His entire library—5,000 to 7,000 volumes, mostly on medieval history—was seized and transported to Germany.

Bloch wrote to Jérôme Carcopino, Minister of Public Instruction and former Rector of Paris, from his home in the Creuse after August 1941 to report that his personal library had been seized and moved to Germany.

Bloch was arrested by the Gestapo on 8 March 1944, tortured, imprisoned, and executed on 16 June 1944. His library, of exceptional scope and quality, was valued at 7 million francs by Bloch himself in 1941; after the war, his heirs assessed its value at 5–7 million francs for war damage procedures.

Many books bearing Bloch's printed or handwritten ex-libris were found in Germany after the war. Between 1945 and 1950, between 1,708 and 2,200 books were returned to the family. However, Georges Durand's 1904 Description abrégée de la cathédrale d'Amiens—held at the INHA—was not among them.

Its handwritten ex-libris is small and less identifiable than Bloch's usual engraved bookplate, which may explain why it was not among the items restituted in 1948–1950.

The book was purchased by the *Bibliothèque centrale des musées nationaux* in 1951 from the French administration of the Domaines for 20 francs. Through such acquisitions, the library received 770 books and 607 periodical issues in 1951–52, three of which belonged to spoliated persons—including this volume belonging to Marc Bloch.

In its opinion of 11 July 2025, the CIVS recognised the antisemitic nature of the spoliation and confirmed that the book had been looted from Marc Bloch. It therefore recommended restitution to his heirs. The book's removal from the public domain was formalised by a decree of the Prime Minister dated 8 September 2025.

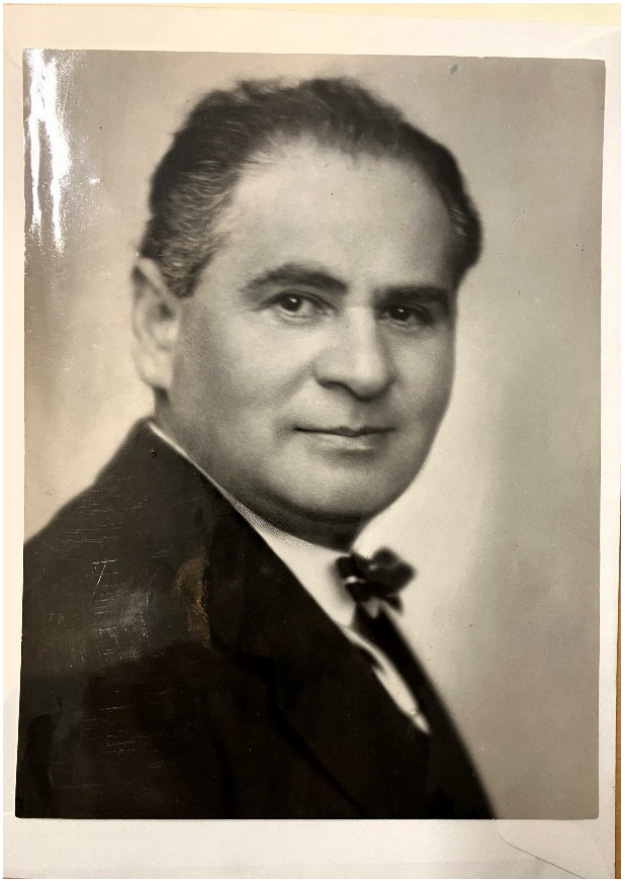
CASE STUDY | AUSTRIA

Results of the 107th meeting of the of the Art Restitution Advisory Board

At its meeting on July 8, 2025, the Art Restitution Advisory Board issued three recommendations regarding the return of collection items from the Austrian National Library and the Theatermuseum (KHM Museum Association).

The Advisory Board initially recommended the return of a total of 24 music scores in the Austrian National Library, which could be attributed to Walter Benedikt through provenance research. In addition to his work as a merchant, Benedikt was also a composer, conductor, flutist, and pianist whose works were played on the radio and in various concert halls in Vienna. As a Jew threatened with persecution after the "Anschluss", i.e. the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany, he fled Vienna with his family in August 1938 and settled in the United States. However, the belongings he had entrusted to the Bäuml moving company never left Vienna. Instead, his assets were liquidated by the "*Verwaltungsstelle für jüdisches Umzugsgut der Gestapo*" (Vugesta, Administrative Office for Jewish Moving Goods of the Gestapo). In the course of this, the sheet music in question – twenty-two compositions by Walter Benedikt and two pieces by Adolf Jensen bearing Benedikt's stamp – ended up at the National Library.

In the holdings of the Austrian National Library, provenance research also attributed 615 inventory numbers to the author, journalist, and translator Max Hayek, who was well connected within Vienna's art and cultural life, including in the so-called "Teschner Circle," as evidenced by numerous surviving letters. Hayek, who had left the Jewish Community in 1907, was persecuted as a Jew after the "Anschluss" and arrested several times by the Gestapo.



Portrait of Max Hayek (1930) from his photo collection comprising several hundred objects, which is now to be restituted.

At the turn of 1938/39, he fled to Brussels, believing it to be a safe haven, but was caught again by the Nazi regime and forced to register as a Jew. In May 1944, Max Hayek was deported to Auschwitz, where he was probably murdered immediately upon arrival. Numerous other family members met a violent death in the Shoah, which is why neither restitution claims nor death declaration proceedings were initiated after 1945. In the year Max Hayek perished in the camp, his friend, the Burgtheater actor Hans Marr, donated his extensive photo collection to the National Library, where it was inventoried in 1948. The Advisory Board considered these transfers to be null and void and recommended that the photographs be returned to Max Hayek's legal successors.

Finally, the Advisory Board dealt with 21 theatre drawings and prints that had been recorded in 1951 as "older holdings" with the addition of "(Grün)", in the Theatermuseum. The Commission for Provenance Research was able to identify the prominent stage writer Alfred Grünwald behind this entry, who was in "protective custody" after the

"Anschluss" together with the later Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, among others, and subsequently fled Vienna with his family. The Central Office for the Protection of Monuments imposed an export ban on parts of his art collection and handed it over to the theater collection, which at that time belonged to the National Library.

Figurine "The Imaginary Invalid," hand drawing in pencil, watercolours, and pen and ink on paper; recommended for restitution to the heirs of Alfred Grünwald along with 20 other figurines.

Johann Christian Schoeller: A scene from the farce "Salerl, die schöne Wienerin" (Salerl, the Beautiful Viennese Woman), 1837, paper/copperplate engraving, colored, also from the Grünwald collection.

The remaining household effects were sent to the Grünwald family in Paris, from where they fled, now without their furniture, in view of the German occupation of France, and finally crossed the Atlantic. While Alfred Granville Grunwald and, after his death in 1951, his children sought to recover their once vast fortune and did manage to get some of it back, the art prints retained in 1938 remained in the Theatermuseum. The Advisory Board recognized the legal acts underlying their acquisition as null and void and recommended their restitution.

The decisions taken by the Advisory Board are available at www.provenienzforschung.gv.at

The Federal Minister for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media, and Sport has followed all recommendations, which is why the Commission for Provenance Research has begun searching for the legal successors of Max Hayek and Alfred Grünwald. In the case of Walter Benedikt, this research has already been completed, and his notes were recently handed

over to his family; a separate report on this restitution will follow in the next newsletter.

The *Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research* becoming the *Lexicon of Provenance Research*

The Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research went online in 2018 with the aim of making the biographies researched in the course of provenance research and the knowledge acquired about organizations and actors visible and accessible to an interested public. At the end of August 2025, 16 new entries were posted online for the Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research and brings the total number of entries in the lexicon to 442. These articles represent the diverse interests pursued by provenance researchers: in addition to texts on art and antiques dealers (such as Galerie St. Lucas or the Wiener Auktionshaus J. Fischer), the lexicon includes biographies of collectors and victims of Nazi persecution (i.e. Ernst Königsgarten, Eduard Epstein, Alfred Leimdörfer)as well as an entry for a museum (the Salzburg Provincial Museum) and, last but not least, two articles on the history of perpetrators in the confiscation of art (Hans Schedelmann, Bernhard Witke).

The Lexicon enjoys great popularity and, due to its bilingualism — the articles appear in German and English — is attracting increasing international attention. Not a week goes by without us being notified about one of our articles, whether by relatives of affected families, researchers, or other interested parties. Therefore we would like to further develop the Lexicon and offer researchers from other countries a platform to publish their knowledge. The European dimension of the Nazi regime and its upheavals, especially the confiscation of property, is reflected not least in the Network of European Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art. After all, Nazi art confiscation took place across borders at the time, and research and research interests today are often cross-border as well. We invite you to become part of the team of authors and contribute articles relevant to provenance research at the Lexicon of Provenance research. Our editorial team will be happy to introduce all authors to the lexicon's guidelines and supervise the writing process.

https://www.lexikon-provenienzforschung.org/en

CASE STUDY | AUSTRIA

On the restitution of a Chinese dragon vase to the legal successors of Oscar Bondy (Jasmin Kienberger)

When, in January 1952, a *vase with dragon* was catalogued at the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, today known as the MAK in Vienna, as a 'gift from an unnamed person', the object's history appeared to be a mystery (inv. no. HI 35722, DE 8937). It was not until decades later that research by the Austrian Commission for Provenance Research made it possible to reconstruct the ownership history of the vase. It became clear that the object had been confiscated from Oscar Bondy as a result of Nazi persecution.

Chinese dragon vase (Inv.-No. HI 35722, KE 8937)
© MAK/Georg Mayer

Oskar Bondy was born on 19 October 1870 in Vienna to Philipp and Pauline Bondy (née Hellmann). He was an industrialist and owned sugar factories in the Czechoslovakian cities of Zdice and České Meziříčí. However, his business and private address was located in Vienna: He lived in the Inner City at Kolowratring, which was renamed Schubertring in 1928. Bondy was a passionate art collector. Over the course of many years, he acquired over 1,600 objects, with a strong focus on arts and crafts, which he kept in his home.

As a result of the annexation of Austria to the National Socialist German Reich in March 1938, Oskar Bondy was directly affected by the persecution of the Nazi regime because of his Jewish faith. At that time, he was on a business trip in Czechoslovakia and, due to the political developments, he decided not to return to Austria. In May 1938, he fled first to Switzerland and then, via Portugal, to the United States, together with his assistant Elisabeth Soinig, whom he later married. They both Americanized their first names and went by Oscar and Elizabeth from then on.

A few days after the annexation, the first actions by the regime regarding the Bondy collection were taken. On 18 March, the Central Monument Protection Office ordered the official sealing of the apartment on Schubertring. Richard Ernst, director of the State Arts and Crafts Museum in Vienna, later the MAK, immediately took steps to secure objects from the collection for the museum.

A first seizure of 165 objects from the art collection in Bondy's apartment took place on 1 July 1938. This was followed by further seizures on 22 March and 3 April 1939. During the course of the year 1939, the objects in question were transported to the so-called Central Depot for Seized Collections in the Neue Burg, as well as the Central Office Depot, the Orangery in the Lower Belvedere, and placed in storage there. The Bondy collection fell under the so-called 'Führer reserve'.

With regard to the mandatory declaration of assets from 1938 onwards, in accordance with the Regulation on the Declaration of Assets of Jews of the 26 April 1938, Oscar Bondy refused to submit such a declaration due to his Czechoslovakian citizenship. As a result, Bondy's asset declaration was subsequently filed by the authorities at the Property Transaction Office, and charges were initiated against him. On 30 August 1939, in the context of

these proceedings, the Vienna Regional Court issued a court order for the confiscation of Oscar Bondy's entire art collection, as well as the withdrawal of any power of disposal over it. Previous attempts to have the seizures revoked were unsuccessful. Less than three months later, the more than 1,600 objects were confiscated in favour of the German Reich by order of the Vienna Regional Court, which ultimately enabled the regime to distribute them to various museums and collections. An inventory of the holdings was recorded in the 'seizure file', although it is not complete.

Eventually, the planned so-called 'Führer Museum', the Albertina and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, among others, received allocations from the now confiscated Bondy Collection. Richard Ernst's continuous efforts also paid off: the State Arts and Crafts Museum received seven official allocations in June 1941 and July 1943 (OB nos. 1364, 1395, 1462, 1491, 1494, 1588, and one object without a number). In addition, the museum acquired further objects from Bondy's collection and on 16 November 1944 it took over two porcelain objects from the Institute for Monument Preservation, the former Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz. These were the aforementioned vase with dragon (part of a pair, OB no. 106) and a lid (OB no. 152) from the Viennese manufacturer Du Paquier.

Return to Oscar Bondy's legal successors on February 26, 2025, at the MAK © MAK/Christian Mendez

Oscar Bondy died in exile in New York City on 3 December 1944. After the war, his widow Elizabeth returned to Austria to pursue restitution efforts regarding the confiscated art collection. She was able to secure the restitution of some of the objects in the years following 1945. Subsequently, some of the artworks were returned to Viennese museums through dedications and donations of Elizabeth Bondy – in the context of the Art Restitution Act, passed in 1998, a number of these transactions are considered problematic and have been critically researched. Furthermore, parts of the restituted collection were sold on the art market, notably in the United States. Examples include the auction 'The Renowned Painting Collection of the Late Oscar Bondy' at Kende Galleries, run by Melanie Kende and her sun Herbert, in New York on 3 March 1949 and further sales by the art dealer Leopold Blumka. Kende and Blumka had been originally based in Vienna and forced to emigrate due to Nazi persecution.

Since 1998, the Art Restitution Advisory Board has issued several recommendations regarding the former Oscar Bondy collection. A total of 29 objects from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Museum of Military History and the MAK, all of them located in Vienna, and also from the Salzburg Museum, were recommended for restitution to the legal successors causa mortis of Oscar Bondy, most recently on 30 March 2022 with regard to the vase with dragon from the MAK. The extensive research conducted by Leonhard Weidinger over many years revealed that the vase originated from the confiscated Bondy collection and, as already mentioned, was transferred to the museum in November 1944. It was only inventoried in 1952 with the note 'gift from an unnamed person'.

As it turned out, this was only one part of a pair of dragon vases: The second OB no. 106 was already restituted to Elizabeth Bondy in 1947. Later on, it became part of the Hans Syz collection through the art market. In 1995, Syz's sons donated the vase to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it has remained ever since (inv. No. 1995.268.275).

After Mathias Lichtenwagner from the Bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research had identified the legal successors, the vase with dragon from Oscar Bondy's collection was handed over to them at the MAK on 26 February 2025.

I would like to express my gratitude to the team of the Austrian Commission for Provenance Research for their excellent assistance with this research.

https://provenienzforschung.gv.at/beiratsbeschluesse/Bondy_Oscar_2022-03-30_english.pdf

Jasmin Kienberger

Intern in the department of provenance research at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna on behalf of the Commission for Provenance Research at the Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport

CASE STUDY | GERMANY

In February 2024 the German Advisory Commission recommended to restitute the drawing *Bauarbeiter / Maurer beim Bau* by Adolph von Menzel to the heirs of Max and Martha Liebermann

The Advisory Commission on the return of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property, chaired by Prof. Hans-Jürgen Papier, dealt with a case concerning a drawing entitled *Bauarbeiter / Construction Workers* (also Bricklayers at Work) (1875) by Adolph von Menzel. The parties involved were the heirs of Max Liebermann as claimants and the Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale) as respondents. In its decision of 29 January 2024, the Advisory Commission unanimously decided to recommend the restitution of the drawing to the heirs of Max and Martha Liebermann.

Along with their daughter Käthe, Martha and Max Liebermann were persecuted from the time the National Socialists seized power on 30 January 1933 because they were Jewish. As early as May 1933, discrimination and persecution forced Max Liebermann (1846–1935) to resign his membership and honorary presidency of the Prussian Academy of Arts, of which he had been a member for 25 years. Faced with imminent deportation, Martha Liebermann (1857–1943) took her own life in 1943. Their daughter Käthe Riezler, née Liebermann (1885–1952), managed to escape with her family to the USA in 1938. Liebermann's extensive art collection was largely forcibly dissolved as a result of the family's persecution.

The disputed drawing *Bauarbeiter* belonged to Max Liebermann from 1916 onwards. In a photograph of Max Liebermann taken in autumn 1932, 16 years after he acquired it, the drawing can be seen in the background, hanging on a wall in his house by Lake Wannsee.

The direct descendants of Martha and Max Liebermann requested the restitution of the drawing. The Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt was of the opinion that the claimants had not provided evidence that the work was still owned by Max Liebermann at the time of the National Socialist seizure of power on 30 January 1933 and therefore during the period relevant to the issue of persecution. The Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt argued that the claimants should prove that the drawing was not sold between the summer of 1932 and the National Socialists' seizure of power.

It is true that the burden of proof demonstrating that the work still belonged to Max Liebermann when the National Socialists seized power lies with the claimants. However, the mere assertion that the Liebermanns might have lost possession of the work during the few months between autumn 1932 and the National Socialists' seizure of power on 30 January 1933 is pure speculation – a shot in the dark. According to the general rules of evidence, anyone claiming that something is true must present a substantiated factual submission. If the Kunststiftung Sachsen-Anhalt asserts that ownership of the work of art might have passed to someone else in the few months before the National Socialists seized power, it must provide evidence that this was the case. No such evidence was provided, however. Since there are no other indications of the work having been traded, and given that Max Liebermann's fondness for the drawing is evident from the fact that he not only owned it from 1916 onwards but that it was also one of the works that hung on a wall of his house, it must be assumed that

the work still belonged to Max Liebermann when the National Socialists seized power.

The Advisory Commission believed that the drawing was seized by the Nazis in April 1936 at the latest, when it was sold by the Hamburg gallery Commeter to the legal predecessor of today's Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt. There are no surviving documents that identify Martha Liebermann, who had become Max Liebermann's heir upon his death on 8 February 1935, as the consignor. However, even a disposition at an earlier point in time is considered to be due to Nazi persecution according to the *Guidelines for implementing the Statement by the Federal Government, the Länder and the national associations of local authorities on the tracing and return of Nazi-confiscated art, especially Jewish property, of December 1999* (New edition 2019) (hereinafter: *Guidelines*), which form the basis for the recommendations of the Advisory Commission. This is because, for the benefit of the persecuted persons, the *Guidelines* stipulate that, with the onset of collective persecution on 30 January 1933, a legal transaction by persons persecuted by the regime is regularly to be assessed as Nazi-persecution-related with the consequence of restitution. Since the *Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt* was not able to provide evidence that the legal transaction would have taken place even if the National Socialists had not been in power, the Advisory Commission recommends the restitution of the drawing *Bauarbeiter* to the heirs of Max and Martha Liebermann.

CASE STUDY | GERMANY

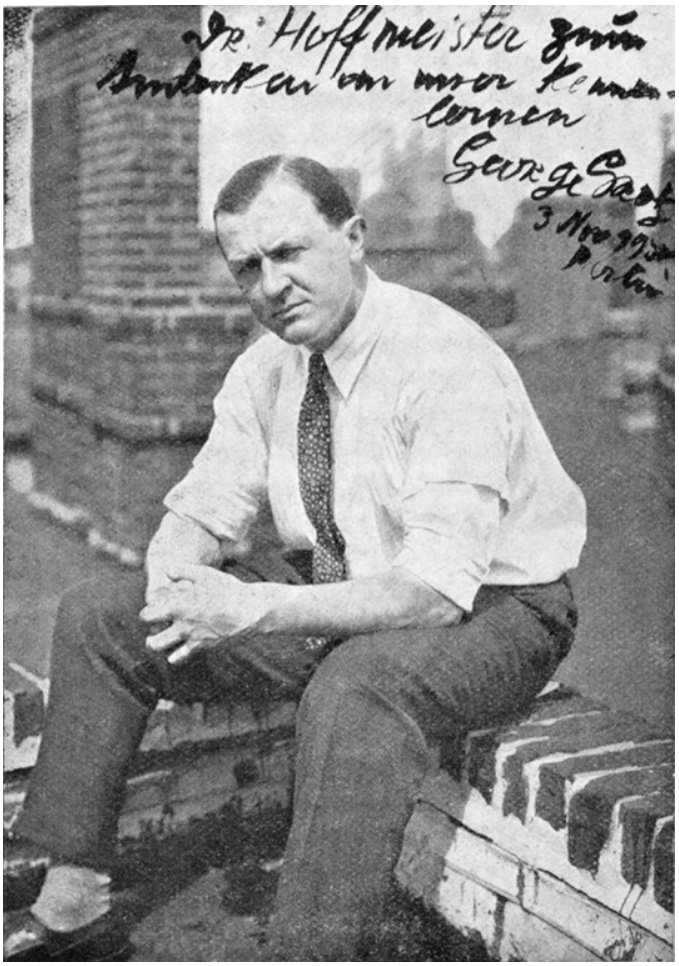
In 2024 the Advisory Commission on the return of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property, dealt with a case concerning two works by George Grosz. The parties involved were the heirs of George Grosz as claimants and the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen as respondents.

The Advisory Commission chaired by Prof. Hans-Jürgen Papier, decided on 6 September 2024 not to recommend restitution of the paintings *Pompe Funèbre* (1928) and *Stillleben mit Okarina, Fisch und Muschel* [Still life with ocarina, fish and shell] (1931) by George Grosz to the heirs of George Grosz.

George Grosz (1893–1959) was one of the prominent artists of the Weimar Republic. He was a member of the German Communist Party, co-organiser of the First International Dada Fair and co-founder of politically radical journals. Between 1921 and 1932, artworks created by him were the subject of several court cases due to accusations that they were indecent and were critical of society and the war.

George Grosz suffered individual persecution under the National Socialists due to his political opposition to National Socialism and on ideological grounds. Additionally, some 500 of his works were confiscated from public ownership in connection with the "Degenerate Art" campaign in 1937, with some of them being defamed at propaganda exhibitions of the same name. Grosz emigrated to New York City in mid-January 1933. Even though he himself emphasised that he had not gone to the USA for political reasons, already in March 1933 his decision to do so seemed to him to be a "Wink des Schicksals" ["stroke of destiny"].

Galerie Alfred Flechtheim GmbH was the official agent for George Grosz's works of art from 1923 onwards. This cooperation was terminated by Alfred Flechtheim (1878–1937) at the end of 1931. At this time Grosz owed Flechtheim a total of more than 16,000.00 Reichsmark, and these debts had existed since as early as 1928. In subsequent years, too, the artist evidently failed to comply with repeated requests and agreements to pay off his debts in instalments.



Alfred Flechtheim suffered collective and individual persecution under the National Socialists on racial grounds. From September 1933, he tried to gain a foothold in business outside the Nazi sphere of power and at the same time appointed the auditor Alfred E. Schulte (1892–1972) to prevent the bankruptcy of his financially ailing company in Germany

George Grosz had had delivered the disputed paintings in dispute to Alfred Flechtheim on commission basis immediately after creating them. *Pompe Funèbre* was located in Paris as of 1933 at Flechtheim's instigation. It is also known that this painting was in the Netherlands from 1937 and was auctioned there in February 1938 as part of Flechtheim's estate. The provenance of the painting *Stillleben mit Okarina, Fisch und Muschel* from May 1932 to January 1960 is unclear.

As the direct descendants and heirs of George Grosz, the claimants requested restitution of the paintings. They were of the opinion that both paintings were lost as a result of Nazi persecution, saying that *Pompe Funèbre* was sold for an unreasonably low price at a sham auction held in the Netherlands in 1938, without either Flechtheim (or his heir) or Grosz having knowledge of this or being in favour of it. *Stillleben mit Okarina, Fisch und Muschel* is likewise said by the claimants to have been sold in the Netherlands before the end of the war.

Freie Hansestadt Bremen was of the opinion that George Grosz transferred ownership of the painting *Pompe Funèbre* to Alfred Flechtheim no later than 1934 due to his heavy debt burden. According to Freie Hansestadt Bremen, there is no evidence that *Stillleben mit Okarina, Fisch und Muschel* was lost as a result of Nazi persecution between 30 January 1933 and 8 May 1945.

The Advisory Commission is convinced that George Grosz lost ownership of the painting *Pompe Funèbre* as a result of transferring ownership to his former gallerist Alfred Flechtheim or the latter's company prior to 15 April 1934. In the view of the Advisory Commission, this emerges clearly from a letter written by Flechtheim to Grosz dated 15 April 1934, in which Flechtheim mentions paintings of which ownership had been transferred to him as security ("als Sicherheit übereignet"). This is also supported by the numerous efforts of Flechtheim and his company to achieve settlement of the debts owed to him by Grosz. In the opinion of the Advisory Commission, the transfer of ownership of the painting does not constitute a case of seizure as a result of Nazi persecution: the painting was not transferred as a consequence of Grosz's persecution but in response to the heavy debt burden that Grosz already had with Flechtheim before 30 January 1933.

The Advisory Commission was of the opinion that even if the claimants' view is correct and the painting *Pompe Funèbre* was indeed still owned by George Grosz and was auctioned in the Netherlands as a commission good after Alfred Flechtheim's death, this does not constitute a case of seizure as a result of Nazi persecution. In the view of the Advisory Commission, there was no causal link between Grosz's persecution on the one hand and the consignment for auction and the subsequent auction on the other. No documents were submitted proving that the auction took place without either Grosz or Flechtheim's heir having knowledge of this or being in favour of it, or that it was a sham auction.

In the case of *Stillleben mit Okarina, Fisch und Muschel,* the claimants maintained that this painting likewise arrived in the Netherlands via France as part of the set of works on commission basis with Alfred Flechtheim and was sold in the Netherlands before the end of the war. In the opinion of the Advisory Commission, however, there was a lack of evidence to support this: it was up to the claimants to prove both their ownership of the painting and their loss during the period of persecution. The claimants' assertion that the painting was located in Paris, like *Pompe Funèbre*, was not sufficiently substantiated either by a French customs stamp on the back of the work or by a Paris depot list. Neither were there documents to support the assumption that the painting was sold in the occupied Netherlands before the end of the war. In fact, a letter is preserved from the illustrator and writer Leo Lionni (1910–1999), dated 1981, in which he recalls that his father acquired the work "after the war" in the Netherlands.

For these reasons, the Advisory Commission did not recommend restitution in either case.

CASE STUDY | NETHERLANDS

Dutch Restitutions Committee

Latest recommendation: Painting 'Fruit Still Life' by Johannes Bosschaert returns to the Order of Freemasons

NK2856 – Fruit Still Life by Johannes Bosschaert (photo: RCE)

The Restitutions Committee has assessed an application for restitution of the painting Fruit Still Life by Johannes Bosschaert. The painting is currently in the Netherlands Art Property (NK) Collection, which consists of artworks returned to the Netherlands after the Second World War. Although this is not generally known, the Nazis persecuted the Order of Freemasons as an organization during the occupation.

Systematic theft and forced sale of possessions

Hitler viewed the Order of Freemasons as an 'enemy of the people' and a Jewish conspiracy. The Order was banned shortly after his rise to power in Germany. The ban in the Netherlands followed in September 1940. Possessions belonging to the Order of Freemasons were systematically stolen and sold under duress from May 1940 onwards. Lodges (local associations) were liquidated throughout the country.

Photographic material confirms original ownership

The Order of Freemasons under the Grand Orient of the Netherlands owned the painting before the occupation. It can be seen in a 1938 group photograph of the Order of Freemasons' main board. Additional photographic material supports the conclusion that the photograph was taken in the lodge of the Order of Freemasons at the Fluwelen Burgwal in The Hague.

Loss of possession

Research revealed that this painting was sold under duress in June 1944 to the German civil servant Dr Erhard Göpel. Göpel purchased the painting for Sonderauftrag Linz (Special Mission Linz), an organization that acquired works of art for a future Führer Museum. It became clear that the Order of Freemasons had no financial need to divest itself of art. The painting was brought back from Germany after the war and put under the care of the Netherlands Art Property Foundation (SNK).

Recommendation to restitute

Based upon research the Committee deemed it highly likely that the painting was originally the property of the Order of Freemasons. The Committee also considered it sufficiently plausible that the Order lost possession of the painting involuntarily due to circumstances directly connected with the Nazi regime. The Committee therefore recommends restitution. The Minister has adopted the Restitutions Committee's recommendation.

Relevant recommendation and summary: Order of Freemasons

Please visit our website to view all recent recommendations.

Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) provides information about its ongoing provenance research via the WWII portal. Data entered at the back end of the system is now refreshed in the portal daily, instead of periodically, ensuring that the latest information from the RCE's investigation of the Netherlands Art Property Collection (NK Collection) is shown. The new research findings are added to an NK Collection object once the investigation of that object has been completed.

The RCE's Knowledge Base provides more in-depth information about the WWII 1933-1945 Cultural Objects Programme. The Knowledge Base has articles on art dealers and auction houses, the history of the Netherlands' restitution policy and Collecting points and locations.

Stay informed of developments in the area of cultural heritage objects and restitutions in relation to the Second World War by subscribing to the Newsletter.

CASE STUDY | UNITED KINGDOM

Report of the Spoliation Advisory Panel on a claim for the return of the painting "Aeneas and his Family Fleeing Burning Troy" by Henry Gibbs in possession of the Tate Gallery

Published 28 April 2025

Aeneas and his Family Fleeing Burning Troy by the English artist, Henry Gibbs, was one of 66 paintings in a gallery owned by Samuel Hartveld in Antwerp. He and his wife lived in Antwerp but left before the German occupation on 10 May 1940. They left behind their property, including the gallery containing their paintings. On 26 March 1942, an administrator was appointed who was a member of the Nazi party. He prepared a financial audit of the gallery and an inventory of paintings, furniture, porcelain, carpets and a library. He concluded that there was no interest or possibility of continuing the Hartveld business and applied for immediate liquidation. This was granted and he was allowed to sell the paintings. Hartveld and his family received none of the proceeds.

The Henry Gibbs painting was later sold to a shipping company and then to a Belgian art gallery, following which it was acquired by the Tate in 1994. The painting formed part of a list Tate had prepared of paintings with an incomplete provenance during the period 1933-1945 and had been alerted by a journalist to research the fate of the Hartveld catalogue. It was in the process of doing so when a claim for restitution was made to the Spoliation Advisory Panel.

The Panel concluded that the legal and moral claims to restitution of the painting by the great-grandchildren and heirs of Samuel Hartveld who was forced to flee his homeland, leaving behind his property, books and art collection, were obvious. The property, library and the paintings in his gallery were looted as an act of racial persecution.

Accordingly, the Panel advised the Secretary of State that the heirs were entitled to restitution of the painting. The Tate immediately accepted the Panel's recommendation and agreed to return the painting to the heirs of Samuel Hartveld.