



Art Restitution in Austria after 1945

In 1945, after the victory of the Allies over the National Socialist regime, the task of returning the numerous works of art seized by the National Socialists in Austria to their lawful owners rested upon the Second Republic. The US Army screened and kept safe in the Central Art Collecting Point in Munich a majority of the seized and secured objects of art during the years immediately following the war. In cooperation with the commissioner for restitution of each country it was, hence, possible to return a part of these objects to their country of origin. On Austria's side, the responsible department for the restitution of expropriated artwork was the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments. After the annulment of the National Socialist legislation in 1945, there was no automatic restitution of property. Former owners had to assert their claims in accordance with relevant restitution laws before the restitution authorities. For property which remained unclaimed two Artistic and Cultural Assets Settlement Acts were passed in 1969 and 1986. These acts created the opportunity to retrieve artwork which was kept in the custody of the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments or was owned by the Republic of Austria and the owner of which could not be identified. In 1995 those works of art which had still not been able to be restituted were transferred into the ownership of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Austria. The following year Christie's auction house auctioned these objects of art for the benefit of the victims of the NS regime.

Recently it has become clear that art objects can still be found in public collections in Austria, the provenance of which require more detailed examination. In 1998 with the passing of the Art Restitution Law and the establishment of the Commission for Provenance Research, the Republic of Austria created the opportunity to also return these works to their lawful owners. In Vienna and in most provincial states, laws or decisions were passed in relation to the restitution of art.

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