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Universalmuseum Joanneum

Common information

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Provenance research

Provenance researcher

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In early April 1998, a work group consisting of museum employees and designated “Acquisitions and Restitutions from Jewish ownership 1938-1955” was established at the Landesmuseum Joanneum (Provincial Museum Joanneum). Its task was to examine file materials from the National Socialist and post-war eras with a view to assessing whether objects contained in the museum’s collection had been dubiously acquired.

In the preliminary stages, old inventory books, old exhibition and collection catalogues, the department’s own archives and the following external archives were of importance: The archives of the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments in Vienna, Archives of the Republic in Vienna, the archives of the Museum of Art History in Vienna, the Steiermark Regional Archives in Graz and certain others. The work group initially focused on acquisitions during the National Socialist era and the way in which objects from well known collections were dealt with in the post-war period, for example the extorted dedications from the Rothschild family.

At the end of 1999, the results of the research – an approximately 400 page report – were able to be presented to the Styrian regional government. The initial research revealed that essentially three departments of the Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz were affected by the matter: the Cultural-Historical Collection (“Kulturhistorische Sammlung”), the New Gallery (“Neue Galerie”) and the Old Gallery (“Alte Galerie”).

In addition to well-known names such as the Rothschild family, Gutmann and Bondy, anonymous acquisitions through the art trade, auction houses and state organisations (Gestapo, “Vugesta” - Gestapo Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants) were also listed in the report. For reasons of completeness, the restitutions completed in the post-war period are also included: By the end of the 1950s, over 95 % of art objects which had reached the Joanneum during the post-war period from confiscated collections had been returned. Several objects, however, remained in the collections, in some cases as so-called “extorted dedications” and in other cases because the previous owners were unknown or because no claim for restitution had been filed.

On the 14th March 2000, on the basis of the research report, the Parliament of the province of Styria passed the Provincial Constitution Law on the Return of Dubious Acquisitions from Property Confiscated during the National Socialist era and called for, in addition to research in the archives and museum, the search for heirs.

In March 2003, a department for restitution and provenance research was installed at the Provincial Museum Joanneum Ltd. within the department “museum service”. The tasks of this department are the continuation of research work in provincial and national archives, work towards the expansion of the existing research report from 1999 and the compilation of dossiers concerning individual problems. The latter form the basis for the decision on the return of individual objects from the collections of the Joanneum by the Department of Culture of the province of Styria (“Kulturabteilung des Landes Steiermark”) which conveys the instruction to restitute to the Museum Ltd. after a legal assessment of both the case and of the succession.