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Wien Museum

Common information

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The City of Vienna asks its citizens for assistance: Restitution of looted Jewish assets

The City of Vienna is seeking the former owners of art and cultural objects looted during the National Socialist era. It would like to return the objects currently in its possession to their original owners and is therefore asking for the assistance of the citizens of Vienna in identifying them.

On 29 April 1999 the Vienna City Council adopted a resolution concerning the return of art and cultural objects from Viennese museums, libraries, archives and collections that were purchased during the National Socialist period and are regarded as “questionable” acquisitions (looting, seizure, confiscation, etc.) or that were given free of charge to the City of Vienna after 1945 under the terms of the Export Prohibition Law during the restitution proceedings at the time. The municipal authorities were authorised to determine the original owners or their legal successors and to return the art or cultural objects to them. Those objects whose original owner can no longer be identified are transferred to the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism for disposal, with the proceeds going to victims of the Nazi regime.

It is a matter of great concern to the City of Vienna that the seized art objects still in its possession be returned as such to their rightful owners and that they be disposed of to compensate victims of National Socialism only as a last resort within the restitution efforts. On 27 September 2001 the Museums of the City of Vienna (Museen der Stadt Wien) therefore published on their website a list of 148 objects acquired from Vugesta (‘Gestapo Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants’) with a detailed description and photos. Since 27 August 2002, the website of the Museums of the City of Vienna (www.wienmuseum.at) has also posted a list of 1,545 objects acquired from the Dorotheum during the National Socialist regime, and since September 2003 a list was posted of 550 objects from art dealers, 12 donations from public bodies and 212 purchases or donations by Julius Fargel, whose owners at the time of the National Socialist assumption of power in Austria in March 1938 could not be determined beyond doubt.

It has been established that the purchases by the Municipal Collections, as it was at the time, from Vugesta, which from its establishment in early autumn 1940 until the end of the war ‘disposed of’ 5,000 to 6,000 items of property as well as the furniture and fittings from the homes of at least 10,000 escaping or deported Jewish families, and from Julius Fargel, who was expert assessor of paintings for Vugesta and art restorer for the Municipal Collections, were seized from Jews and should be returned. It is also likely that some of the purchases from the auction house Dorotheum, art and antique dealers and the donations from public bodies were auctioned or sold in the wake of National Socialist persecutions and should be returned to their original owners or legal successors.

The Museums of the City of Vienna would be grateful for information from the general public about the origins of the listed objects acquired from Vugesta, the Dorotheum, art and antique dealers, public bodies and Julius Fargel and their former owners or legal successors.