



The Führer's donation

Art objects from the Central Depot in the Neue Burg, which is part of the Imperial Palace in Vienna not designated for the Führer Museum in Linz were distributed to Austrian museums at Hitler's instigation.[1] The decision on the allocation of the confiscated artwork to individual museums was made by Hans Posse, the special representative for Linz. The preselection, however, was made at the Central Office for the Protection of Monuments.[2]

The national collections in Vienna as well as the provincial state museums promptly submitted their requests for the allocation of artwork. Fritz Dworschak, First Director of the Museum of Art History in Vienna from 1938 to 1945, thought that the distribution of confiscated artwork was *a singular, never to be repeated opportunity for expansion [...] in a great number of areas*.[3] It was not unusual for museum directors or curators to personally approach the Central Office for the Protection of Monuments to order certain artwork for their collections.

Hitler's determined goal was to enhance the status of museums in the provincial state capitals and smaller regional museums by the Führer's donations and at the same time to weaken the supremacy of the famous museums in Vienna.[4] This increased the smoldering rivalry between the provincial state museums and the large national collections in Vienna. All museums were keen to close gaps in their holdings or to acquire single major works. In the provincial states, even high-ranking NS officials – in spite of Hitler's support – were worried of missing out. The Styrian Reich Governor, for example, was outraged that Styria *had been seriously disadvantaged regarding the distribution of the confiscated Jewish artwork [...]*.^[5]

[1] Brückler T, *Kunstwerke zwischen Kunstraub und Kunstbergung: 1938 – 1945*, in: Theodor Brückler (publ.), *Kunstraub, Kunstbergung und Restitution in Österreich 1938 bis heute*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, 1999, at 23f. (quoted hereafter as: Brückler, *Kunstraub und Kunstbergung*).

[2] In 1940, the Central Office for the Protection of Monuments was renamed Institute for the Preservation of Monuments. After the end of World War Two it became the present Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments (Editor's note).

[3] Quoted from: Haupt H, *Jahre der Gefährdung. Das Kunsthistorische Museum 1938 – 1945*, Vienna, 1995, at 18.

[4] Anderl G, Caruso A, *Einleitung*, in: Gabriele Anderl, Alexandra Caruso (publ.), *NS-Kunstraub in Österreich und die Folgen*, Innsbruck, 2005, at 13.

[5] Letter from the Reich Governor in Styria dated October 19, 1940, Vienna, Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments, archive, restitution files, box 8, folder 7, file no. 2973/K/40; quoted from: Brückler, *Kunstraub und Kunstbergung*, at 24, note 50.