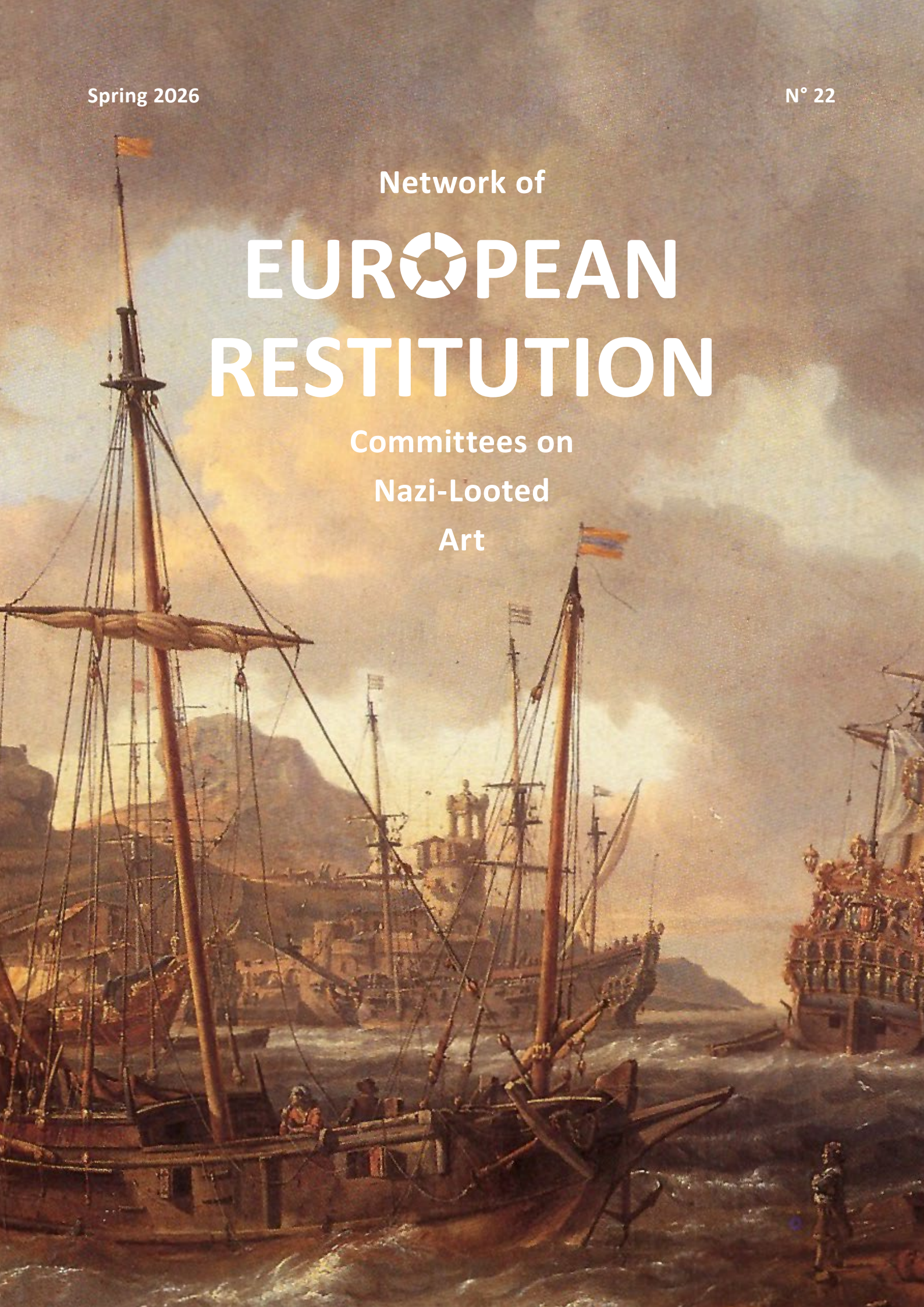


Spring 2026

N° 22

Network of
**EUROPEAN
RESTITUTION**

Committees on
Nazi-Looted
Art



Newsletter

**Network of European
Restitution Committees on
Nazi-Looted Art**

Spring 2026 | N° 22



Austria | France | Germany | Netherlands | United Kingdom



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Editorial

After an involuntarily restricted Corona chairmanship in 2020, Austria has taken over the presidency of our network for the second time. 'Austria' therefore refers to the Austrian Art Restitution Advisory Board as well as the Commission for Provenance Research. This newsletter under Austrian presidency is the first to appear in a new format and in a more detailed form; we inform you about the latest developments, ongoing initiatives and upcoming activities within the network.

Three newsletters are expected to be published in 2026. The contributions from the various countries are organized under the main headings "News," "Case Studies," and "Projects." This is intended, in particular, to reflect the fact that the newsletter is our most important channel and medium for public relations as well as for publicizing our activities and results internationally. The Network of European Restitution Committees stands for knowledge exchange, cooperation and solution-oriented approaches in dealing with cultural property confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution.

We are now in the 28th year, since the Washington Principles were adopted. Provenance research is now firmly established in museums and collections, and the need to resolve Nazi looted art cases is undisputed. Although provenance research has gained visibility and sometimes determines cultural and remembrance policy debates, there are considerable structural, institutional and political differences between individual countries. Recent developments underscore the need to adapt to possible framework conditions and implementation

patterns in resolving art restitution cases. In addition, experience and expert knowledge can make a significant contribution to newly emerging issues relevant to provenance history and occupy further peripheries and related areas of our field of research, like colonial or SBZ injustice contexts, or, most recently, the founding of the "Florentiner Commission" in Austria in connection with the Habsburg jewels that have surfaced in Canada.

A major innovation concerns the member country Germany. On 1 December 2025, the German Arbitration Board for Nazi-Looted Art, chaired by Elisabeth Steiner and Peter Müller, embarked on its work. We would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the board and its representatives to our Network! The arbitration tribunal is intended to serve as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for differences over the restitution of cultural property confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution and was established by the federal government, the states and local authorities with the involvement of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Jewish Claims Conference. We eagerly await the first results, which will be reported on an ongoing basis in the newsletter.

There is also news from Switzerland: at its session on 28 January 2026, the Federal Council appointed the chair and members of the Expert Commission for Historically Burdened Cultural Heritage. The commission will advise the Federal Council and the Federal Administration on issues relating to historically burdened cultural heritage. It can be called upon in disputed cases and issue non-binding recommendations

Editorial

on works of art from the Nazi era and cultural assets from a colonial context and has formally commenced its work on 1 March 2026. Naturally the Network is in contact with the Swiss committee and is committed to Switzerland also becoming a member. There are already frequent thematic overlaps and fruitful cooperation with Switzerland.

The motto of the Austrian chairmanship is “Challenges in provenance research and art restitution today and tomorrow. Dealing with Nazi-era loss of cultural assets in the second quarter of the 21st century”. In the coming year, we would like to focus on forward-looking issues and challenges as part of our presidency. We would like to address these issues at an international conference in Vienna from 30 November to 2 December 2026. From our call for contributions, which we published at the beginning of January (see below), we expect interesting reports and input for the future handling of our

subject area. Looking forward to welcoming a diverse and enthusiastic audience to Vienna this winter we would like to thank everyone in advance for the rich and creative submissions we have already received from different countries. The Austrian Presidency will end with the publication of an anthology on the conference contributions, which will also reflect the results of the cooperation within the committees.

We expect discussions on existing ethical and legal guidelines, particularly in light of new developments in individual countries through new committees, but also legal requirements and practical procedures, the further development of best practices in decision-making, and the intensification of dialogue with partners within and outside Europe.

Finally, we do hope for a productive year, offering many opportunities for exchange and mutual learning!

Clemens Jabloner

Chair of the Art Restitution
Advisory Board

Pia Schölnberger

Head of the Commission
for Provenance Research

Sabine Loitfellner

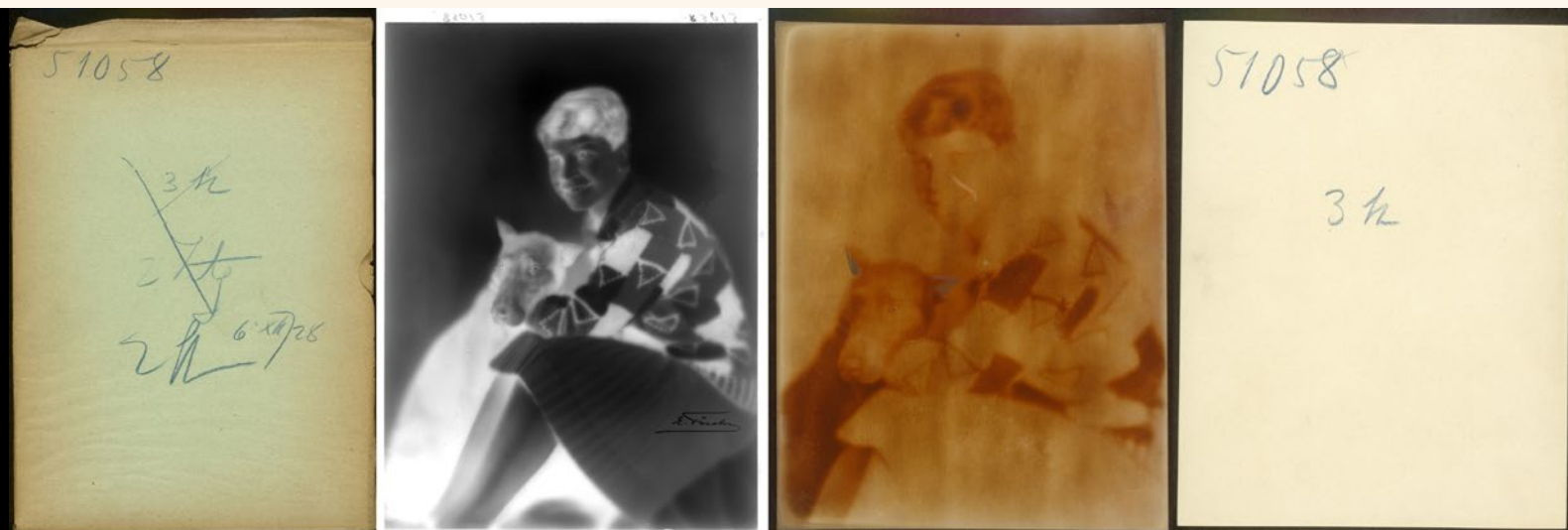
Bureau of the Commission
for Provenance Research



108th Advisory Board meeting

On 18 November 2025, the Art Restitution Advisory Board convened for its 108th meeting and adopted two recommendations. It considered the extensive collection of over 8,000 glass negative plates from the famous “Atelier Adèle”. Once owned by Adele Perlmutter, who in 1868 became the first woman to be awarded the title of “Imperial and Royal Court Photographer”, the studio at Graben 19, a prime location in Vienna’s city centre was taken over by her brother Wilhelm Förster in 1905. The family ran several photographic studios, for example in Vienna, Bad Ischl and Karlsbad. The studio on Graben later passed to Wilhelm’s son Ernst Förster, who expanded it and was particularly renowned for portraits and fashion photography. Hundreds of photographs from the studio appeared in magazines in the 1920s and 1930s and featured many well-known figures from the worlds of art, politics and society.

With the annexation of Austria to the National Socialist German Reich in 1938, Ernst Förster and his wife Helene began to face persecution by the Nazi regime, as they were considered Jewish under the Nuremberg Laws. The couple left Vienna, moving to Karlsbad and later to Prague. Their household furnishings were presumably auctioned off by the Dorotheum, and their entire fortune was expropriated by the German Reich. The dissolution of the business, which had been extremely successful for decades, took place in October 1940. Following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, the situation worsened. Ernst and Helene Förster were deported to Theresienstadt in 1942; Ernst died there in 1943, and Helene was deported to Auschwitz in the same year and was probably murdered immediately upon arrival. Many other members of the family also fell victim to the Shoah.



Envelope containing a glass negative and a print from the former Atelier Adèle

© Austrian National library



Photo print Atelier Adèle © Austrian National library

After the end of the Nazi regime, part of the Atelier Adèle's negative archive, comprising over 8,000 glass plates, was found at Haus am Graben 19 and subsequently taken over by the Austrian National Library. Only a small portion of the glass negatives was catalogued in 1953; the rest remained unprocessed for decades and were

completely forgotten about. The collection comprises thousands of portrait photographs, mostly of unknown individuals, and nevertheless represents a significant cultural-historical document of Viennese photographic and social history. However, the whereabouts of the glass plates from the early days of the Adèle studio remain unknown to this day.

The Advisory Board decided, on the basis of the circumstances of expropriation during the Nazi era, to return the glass negative plates to the legal successors of Ernst Förster.

In addition, the Art Restitution Advisory Board examined a series of objects from the Theatre Museum which were inventoried in February 1939 with reference to the co-founder of the Theater an der Wien, Josef Simon. He is well known to provenance researchers, particularly due to the collection of items connected with Johann Strauss (son) that he established. The research revealed, however, that the 27 items from the Theatre Museum and the National Library discussed at the meeting had in fact been handed over by Josef Simon as early as 1920 and were merely re-inventoried in 1939; for this reason, the Advisory Board ruled against restitution.

Pia Schönberger, Sabine Loitfellner

The recommendations in English can be found here:

https://provenienzforschung.gv.at/beiratsbeschluesse/Foerster_Ernst-Atelier_Adele_2025-11-18_englisch.pdf

https://provenienzforschung.gv.at/beiratsbeschluesse/Simon_Josef_Louise_2025-11-18_englisch.pdf



Network – Exchange. Large Commission Meeting of the Commission for Provenance Research, held on 23 March 2026 at the Leopold Museum-Privatstiftung

At the invitation of the Commission for Provenance Research at the Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media, and Sports, provenance researchers, provenance officers, and curators from across Austria gathered at the Leopold Museum Vienna to exchange expertise and perspectives.

Colleagues from a wide range of museums and collections, such as the Albertina, the Belvedere Museum, the Haus der Natur Salzburg, the Museum of Military History Vienna, the Jewish Museum Hohenems, the Jewish Museum Vienna, the Kunsthistorische Museum Vienna, the Lower Austrian State Collections, the Lentos Art Museum Linz, the Leopold Museum, the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, the Museum of the Lost Generation Salzburg, the Natural History Museum Vienna, the OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH, the Salzburg Museum, the collection of the City of Graz and the State of Burgenland, the museumkremS, the Technical Museum Vienna, the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, the Wien Museum, the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, the WU University Archives, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, the Vienna University Library, the Austrian National Library, the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, the auction houses Christie's and Dorotheum GmbH & Co KG, and the National Fund

of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, discussed the diverse challenges they face in their daily work. While some institutions are still in the early stages of provenance research, others have already issued final reports. The aim of the meeting was to strengthen professional exchange within Austria's provenance research community and to gain an overview of the current state of research in museums, collections, and other (scientific) institutions.

One of the key topics addressed the heterogeneous legal and organizational frameworks in Austria. Different legislations – based on the Art Restitution Act, Austrian federal states have enacted their own regional laws or regulations concerning the restitution of art and cultural property seized during the Nazi era – as well as varying structural conditions often make it difficult to implement and maintain continuous provenance research. These and other challenges were examined from different institutional perspectives, and potential shared solutions were discussed, including the targeted support offered by the Commission for Provenance Research in the field of their research.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of supra-regional networking structures, which facilitate the continuous exchange of knowledge and methodology, promote synergies between



More than 50 provenance researchers from across Austria gathered at the Leopold Museum for the meeting.

Photograph: © Julia Eßl

ongoing research projects, and contribute to further development. The meeting underscored that the sustainable advancement of provenance research in Austria depends on institutional dialogue, close cooperation and increased public visibility. Through open exchange, shared needs were identified, potential collaborations were encouraged, and impulses for future research strategies were generated.

The Meeting concluded with a guided tour of the current exhibition “Gustave Courbet. Realist and

Rebel”. Hans-Peter Wipplinger, Director of the Leopold Museum-Privatstiftung, offered insights into curatorial decisions and highlighted key questions related to collections and provenance.

Julia Eßl, Albertina, provenance researcher on behalf of the Commission for Provenance Research

Nicole-Melanie Goll, Leopold Museum-Privatstiftung, provenance researcher on behalf of the Commission for Provenance Research



Vienna Conference, December 2026

Challenges in provenance research and art restitution today and tomorrow. Dealing with Nazi-era loss and spoliation of cultural assets in the second quarter of the 21st century

The signing of the Washington Declaration in 1998 marked the beginning of a new phase in the examination of the Nazi era – in particular, the confiscation of art and cultural assets as a result of Nazi persecution. At the same time, it marked the starting point for the establishment of a new field of research: systematic provenance research focusing on the period between 1933 and 1945.

Almost three decades later, provenance research has evolved internationally in terms of methodology, institutions, and theoretic approaches, shaped by national conditions. Today, it is firmly established in museums and collections as a practice-oriented field focused on the restitution of art and cultural objects confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution—including the subsequent research into their heirs—and as an independent, transdisciplinary field of research in the university context. The field increasingly relies on international cooperation, digitization, and methodological innovations in order to enhance research and to document both the transnational dislocation histories of objects and the individual life stories of their former owners as well as those involved in the confiscation of art and cultural property.

In recent years, provenance research has increasingly intersected with other contexts of injustice, including colonialism, Soviet Occupation Zone/GDR, and is subject to public demand. The examination of (global) power relations, (historical) appropriation processes, and (structural) inequalities broadens provenance research in both its content and its methodological approaches.

As a result, provenance research has not only gained scientific relevance and public visibility, but is subject of debates in context of cultural and memory politics. At the same time, however, significant structural, institutional, and political differences still persist, reflecting historical developments of individual countries.

At the beginning of the second quarter of the 21st century and on the occasion of Austria's chairmanship of the European Network of Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art, the Commission for Provenance Research will host a conference in Vienna on November 30 and December 1, 2026. The conference aims to discuss and compare recent developments, (trans)national perspectives, methodological approaches, and future challenges in provenance research and restitution.

The following topics will be addressed:

1. Politics, law, provenance research, and restitution

- How do the different legal, administrative, and financing systems as well as ownership structures in each country influence provenance research and, subsequently, restitution?
- Are non-binding regulatory systems such as the Washington Principles (still) sufficient/effective today?
- What research and action guidelines developed in Nazi-era provenance research can be applied to other contexts of injustice (e.g., colonial or SOZ contexts), and how can this field contribute to history more broadly?
- What political/economic impact does the temporal distance from the crimes of the Nazi regime in the third/fourth generation and more than eight decades after the end of the war have on provenance research today?

2. Society, memory, provenance research, and restitution

- What role do provenance research and restitution play in the political debate on memory and the past with regard to the Nazi regime?
- Against the backdrop of current/new geopolitical challenges and crises, how can provenance research contribute to a critical culture of remembrance and commemoration?
- What significance does it have in museum education and how is it perceived by the public?
- How do provenance research and restitution influence the art market?

3. Challenges, debates, strategies, and opportunities: the future or the end of provenance research and restitution?

- How can effective cross-border cooperation between the various actors be achieved and ensured?
- What formats are suitable for making research results visible, documenting them in a sustainable manner, and making them accessible for shared use?
- How do researchers and decision-makers deal with gaps in the sources, and what methods and strategies have been developed/proven effective in solving cases?
- What insights can historical research in general gain from the results of provenance research?

Organizational details

On the afternoon of November 30, 2026, members of the Austrian Commission for Provenance Research will hold themed workshops at selected museums in Vienna (details on content and registration will follow at a later date).

The conference, which will take place on December 1–2, 2026, at Weltmuseum Wien in cooperation with the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, targets experts and academics across all relevant disciplines.

The panel contributions are intended as 10-15-minute presentations in person. The written contributions (in English or German) will be published in a peer-reviewed anthology in the Commission for Provenance Research's series of publications.

Date

Workshops: November 30, 2026

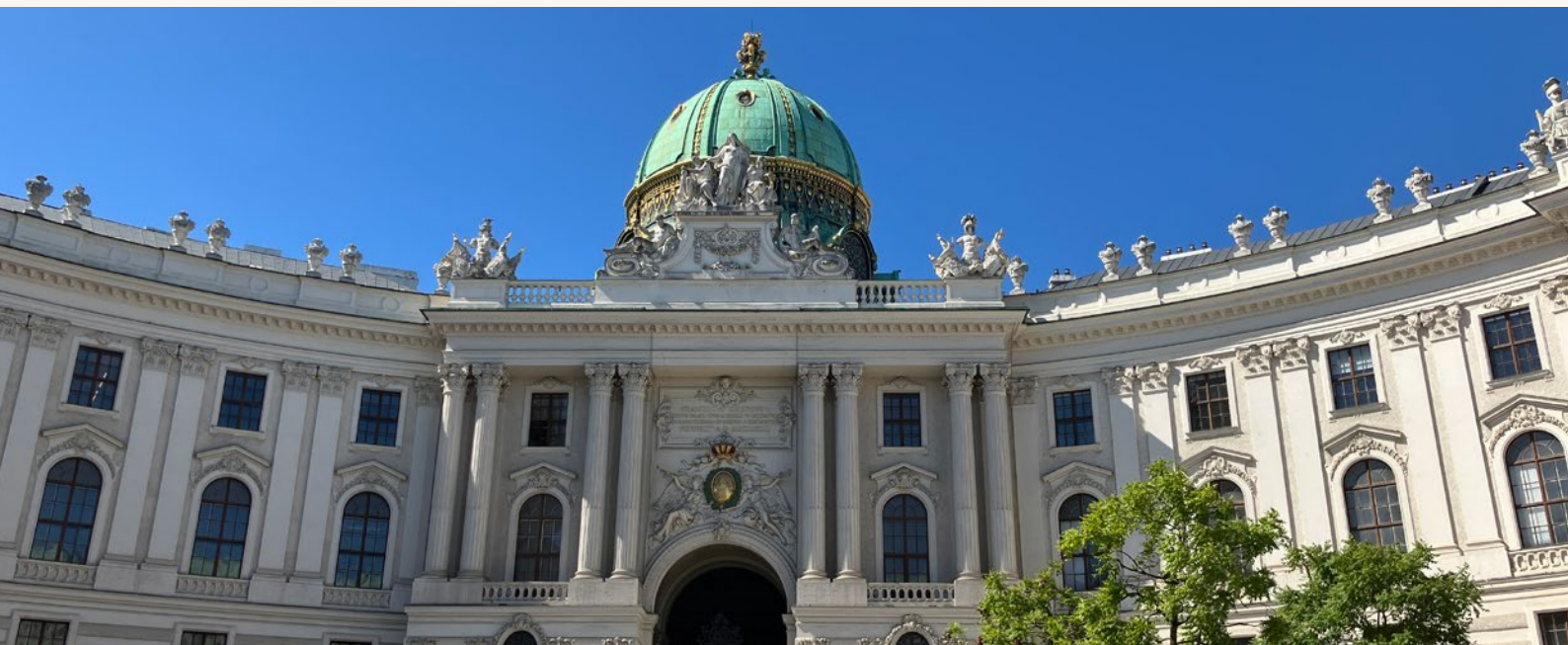
Conference: December 1–2, 2026

Conference venue: Weltmuseum Wien

Organizer:

Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media, and Sport / Commission for Provenance Research in cooperation with the Kunsthistorisches Museum

Photo: © Lisa Frank





Change of Management

Commission for the Restitution of Property and the Compensation of Victims of Anti-Semitic Spoliations changes management in spring 2026

In January, Mr Gilles Bon-Maury stepped down as director of the CIVS, after nearly three years at the head of the service. Prior to assuming a new position, Mr Gilles Bon-Maury will join the Institut National du Service Public (INSP) in order to pursue the government administrators' advanced training.

As of April 1st, the CIVS will be pleased to welcome its new director, Ms. Johanna Barasz, currently Deputy director of the Social policy section at the Haut-commissariat à la Stratégie et au Plan (formerly France Stratégie).

She holds a PhD in History of World War II and has served as Deputy head of the Interministerial Delegation for the Fight against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Anti-LGBT+ Hatred (DILCRAH).





On 4 December 2025, the Grand Chamber of the Court of Cassation hosted a symposium entitled “Justice and Spoliated Property: 80 Years after Ordinance No. 45-770 of 21 April 1945”

Organised by academics, notably Professors Charles-Edouard Bucher and Xavier Perrot, the event marked the 80th anniversary of the Ordinance of 21 April 1945, which implemented the Order of 12 November 1943 on the nullity of spoliation acts committed by the enemy.

This ordinance was intended to enable dispossessed owners or their beneficiaries to invoke the context of the Occupation before the courts after the war, in order to legally regain possession of their property, rights or interests by applying the principle of the nullity of acts of transfer. However,

one of the specific features of the Ordinance is that it remained in force in 2025.

Accordingly, its commemoration is not that of an obsolete act relating solely to past events, but of a text that continues to be applied by judges and relied upon by parties in ongoing cases. The symposium thus sought to shed light on the text’s origins and current jurisprudential relevance, as well as on the contemporary perspectives and challenges involved in redressing historical injustices suffered by victims or their beneficiaries.



Opening Address by the First President of the Court of Cassation, Christophe Soulard, “Justice and Spoliated Property: 80 Years after Ordinance No. 45-770 of 21 April 1945”:

Madam President of the Commission for the Restitution of Property and the Compensation of Victims of Anti-Semitic Spoliations (CIVS),

Members of the Commission,

Ladies and Gentlemen Professors,

My dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Court of Cassation, in this Grand Chamber, where today the proceedings devoted to justice and spoliated property are opening.

This symposium marks the eightieth anniversary of an ordinance which, in the aftermath of the war, made it possible to respond to one of the gravest violations inflicted not only upon human beings but also upon the property of victims. This text remains, even today, a fundamental landmark of our legal order.

There are moments in history when violence does not merely take life: it seeks to erase existence itself.

Stealing property is not just about taking an object; it is about attacking a person in what they own, what they have built, inherited or loved. It is about breaking what Paul Ricœur described as “narrative identity”¹, made up of stories, places and memory.

In this way, the law contributes to restoring the dignity of those who were deprived of their humanity.

Adopted in the post-war context, the Ordinance of 21 April 1945² constitutes a legal mechanism designed to address acts of spoliation committed during the Occupation.

It thus assigns the justice system a decisive role in redress, by giving normative force to the nullity of acts of spoliation and by enabling spoliated persons to have at their disposal a genuine instrument for restitution, while specifying the conditions under which this right may be exercised.

By its coherence and longevity, it illustrates the capacity of the law to organise redress for wrongs committed in exceptional circumstances. Eight decades after its adoption, the spirit of this text remains alive in our law, our case law and our collective memory.

1 P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990, Book VI, chapters 5-6

2 Order No. 45-770 of 21 April 1945 on the second application of the Order of 12 November 1943 on the nullity of acts of spoliation committed by the enemy.

To understand its scope, it is essential to recall the historical and legislative context in which it came into being.

Between 1940 and 1944, the Vichy regime implemented a series of exceptional texts intended to exclude Jews from economic, social and cultural life. The Law of 22 July 1941, concerning businesses, property and assets belonging to Jews, played a central role in the policy of spoliation organised at the instigation of the German occupier and implemented by the Vichy government.

Dispossession took place through various measures: confiscation of businesses, seizure of works of art, deprivation of property and means of subsistence, solely on the basis of a real or supposed religious affiliation. This system systematically organised the economic and patrimonial dismantling of thousands of Jewish families.

At the time of the Liberation, the Provisional Government sought to restore republican legality and to repair these spoliations. It was not enough to declare null and void the acts committed during the Occupation; effective measures were also required to restore property to the victims.

This movement found its first expression in the London Declaration of 5 January 1943, by which many countries, including France, speaking

through the French National Committee, Great Britain and the United States, expressed their intention to deprive spoliation measures of any legal effect³.

This principle was then implemented on French territory by the Ordinance of 12 November 1943⁴, adopted by the French Committee of National Liberation.

One year later, a commission known as the Commission for Artistic Recovery (CRA) was created, tasked with conducting research into the recovery of spoliated works of art, in conjunction with the Office for Private Property and Interests, which ensured their restitution. This commission, which met until December 1949, enabled the return to France of 61,233 objects, more than 45,000 of which were restored to their legitimate owners or their heirs⁵.

The Ordinance of 21 April 1945 made it possible to implement these principles in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

Article 1 provides for the automatic nullity of acts of spoliation, while the following articles specify the consequences of this nullity for the charges, obligations and fruits of the property, as well as for acts carried out by successive purchasers.

3 Dalloz Collection, The restitution of looted cultural property concerning Pissaro's Pea Harvest, Thibault de Ravel d'Esclapon, senior lecturer at the University of Strasbourg, Dalloz Collection 2020 p.1992: "Very early on, the Allied powers became aware of the various acts of looting, confiscation and spoliation perpetrated in Europe. Several texts were adopted demonstrating the victorious powers' determination in this regard. This first series, as recalled by the Paris Court of Appeal, began with the London Declaration of 5 January 1943, in which a number of countries, including France, through the French National Committee, Great Britain and the United States, expressed their desire to render all measures of spoliation null and void. "

4 Ordonnance du 12 novembre 1943.pdf

5 <https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/article/88422330>

Article 11 establishes a significant presumption: any act carried out during the Occupation is presumed to have been performed under the constraint of violence. Through this construction, the ordinance provides a solid framework enabling injured parties to obtain restitution of their property.

Over time, its application has been significantly extended through several complementary mechanisms. In 1949, the creation of the National Museums Recovery (MNR) programme marked the State's determination to preserve, identify and restore spoliated works of art. This work, carried out under the decree of 30 September 1949, made it possible to draw up a specific inventory of works recovered at the conclusion of artistic restitution operations.

In this context, Rose Valland, a conservation officer at the Jeu de Paume Museum during the Occupation, played a decisive role in safeguarding and restoring more than 60,000 works stolen by the Nazis from Jewish families and public institutions⁶. These works, marked with the letter "R" for "Recovery", remain entrusted to national museums to this day, awaiting the identification of their legitimate owners.

Half a century later, the mission chaired by Jean Mattéoli renewed reflection on restitution and compensation. It led, by a decree of 10 September 1999⁷, to the creation of the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation (CIVS), established following the speech delivered by President Jacques Chirac on 16 July 1995 at the commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup.

From the outset, its mission has been based on three ideas that summarise its ambition: to remember, to restore, and to compensate.

It was designed to examine claims submitted by victims or their heirs and, following thorough investigation, to propose recommendations enabling appropriate redress for the spoliations suffered.

In 2018⁸, its remit was extended: the commission was then tasked with directly conducting research into spoliated cultural property, reflecting the evolution of disputes from mass restitution to the restitution of works of art and heritage objects, the identification of which now requires increasingly refined expertise.

This dynamic led the legislature, in 2023, to unanimously adopt a framework law⁹ allowing derogation from the principle of inalienability of public

6 <https://jeudepaume.org/a-propos/histoire/rose-valland/>

7 Decree No. 99-778 of 10 September 1999

8 Decree No. 2018-829 of 1 October 2018 amending Decree No. 99-778 of 10 September 1999 establishing a commission for the compensation of victims of spoliation resulting from anti-Semitic legislation in force during the Occupation

9 Law No. 2023-650 of 22 July 2023 on the restitution of cultural property looted in the context of anti-Semitic persecution perpetrated between 1933 and 1945

collections¹⁰ when the restitution of a cultural asset is required. The decree of 2024¹¹ completed this system, expanding the commission's powers of action and confirming the permanence of its role.

Placed under the authority of the Prime Minister, the commission thus occupies a singular place in our institutional landscape: it offers genuine voice to applicants, relies on extensive and protective archives, and above all issues its recommendations both in law and in equity; an essential specificity strongly emphasised by First President Draï. This consideration of equity is necessary in a field where cases are often charged with a particularly strong human and memorial dimension.

There is, moreover, a close, almost organic link between the commission and the Court of Cassation. Under its statutes, the commission is always chaired by a magistrate of the Court. The first was First President Draï. Today it is chaired by Madame Dreifuss-Netter, Honorary Magistrate of the Court of Cassation, and several magistrates of the Court are members, including Alain Lacabarats, Honorary Chamber President of the Court of Cassation, a member of the deliberating panel, as well as Madame Bénédicte Vassallo-Pasquet, First Advocate General at the Court, who serves as General Rapporteur.

In addition, the commission is composed of members of the Conseil d'État, senior judges of the

Court of Auditors, ensuring representation of all supreme courts, as well as university professors and qualified personalities, reflecting the diversity of its members¹².

As noted in its 2024 activity report, the commission has registered more than 25,000 claims for compensation and has enabled the restitution of several cultural assets, demonstrating the effectiveness of its action.

The commission also works closely with the Mission for Research and Restitution of Cultural Property Spoliated between 1933 and 1945 (M2RS), created in 2010 under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture to strengthen efforts to identify the works concerned.

These successive initiatives testify to the consistency of public action in matters of restitution and to the determination to ensure the effective application of the law.

The Ordinance of 1945 did not merely lay the foundations of a coherent legal regime: it continues to produce concrete effects in contemporary litigation.

In 2020, the Court of Cassation confirmed the restitution of Pissarro's painting "La Cueillette des pois" to heirs, recalling that the Ordinance of 21 April 1945 protects the property rights of victims

10 With this framework law of 2023, a public entity will now be able to directly decide, without the passage of a special law, after consulting the CIVS, to remove cultural property that was looted from its public or similar collections.

11 Decree No. 2024-11 of 5 January 2024 establishing a commission for the restitution of property and compensation for victims of anti-Semitic spoliation and implemented pursuant to Articles L. 115-3, L. 115-4 and L. 451-10-1 of the Heritage Code.

12 Article 3 of Decree No. 2024-11 of 5 January 2024 establishing a commission for the restitution of property and the compensation of victims of anti-Semitic spoliations and implemented pursuant to Articles L. 115-3, L. 115-4 and L. 451-10-1 of the Heritage Code.

of spoliation, including against subsequent purchasers, even those acting in good faith.

That same year, the Paris Court of Appeal ordered the restitution of three works by Derain to the descendants of the spoliated family, holding that the sales carried out during the Occupation constituted forced sales within the meaning of the text.

These decisions illustrate the vitality of a text which, despite its age, retains its full normative force. They also show that the judge remains the guarantor of the faithful application of the ordinance, in accordance with the principles of legality and legal certainty.

Current events bear further witness to this, with a decision rendered by the First Civil Chamber of the Court of Cassation on 26 November last¹³, which will be discussed during the second-round table of this morning.

New challenges continue to emerge: provenance research, often complex; the identification of heirs; the reconciliation of material restitution and compensation; and cooperation between national and foreign institutions. These issues were recently highlighted by the Court of Auditors in its report published in September 2024, devoted to “France’s Redress for the Spoliation of Cultural Property Committed between 1933 and 1945”¹⁴.

Thank you, and I wish you very fruitful discussions.

These challenges relate not only to historical memory but also to the proper application of positive law, and to the balance between legal certainty and the requirement of justice. They reflect the evolution of a field of litigation which, while rooted in history, now mobilises contemporary tools of analysis, expertise and evidence.

The Ordinance of 21 April 1945 illustrates the permanence of a fundamental principle: the law is intended to restore the legal order when it has been disrupted, but also to preserve the memory of those who suffered from its erasure.

By bringing together today jurists, magistrates, professors and researchers, this colloquium offers an opportunity to revisit the foundations of this ordinance and to assess its current relevance. Moreover, the presence of a survivor of the roundup of 5 November 1942¹⁵, Mr Pierre Saragoussi, whom I salute, gives this event a particular memorial significance.

In this year marking the commemoration of the liberation of the camps, and on the anniversary of this text, I would like to thank the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation for its decisive role in organising this day, and in particular Professors Charles-Edouard Bucher and Xavier Perrot, at the initiative of this colloquium.

13 Civ. 1st, 26 November 2025, No. 24-11.376

14 <https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/publications/la-reparation-par-la-france-des-spoliations-de-biens-culturels-commises-entre-1933-et>

15 The roundup of 5 November 1942 involved 1,060 Jews of Greek nationality in Paris and the occupied zone who were deported on convoy no. 44 on 9 November 1942 from Drancy to Auschwitz.



The new Court of Arbitration for Nazi-Looted Cultural Property



Elisabeth Steiner and Peter Müller, Executive Committee of the Court of Arbitration for Nazi-looted Cultural Property

On 1 December 2025, the new Court of Arbitration for Nazi Looted Cultural Property commenced its work. Since then, descendants of those persecuted under the Nazi regime have been able to bring cases before an arbitration panel to pursue claims involving cultural property lost due to Nazi persecution.

In addition to our role as Executive Committee, we are among the thirty-six arbitrators consisting of jurists and (art) historians, who have been selected for this task by politicians and Jewish organisations.

We look forward to our new role and associate it with the hope that disputed cases of Nazi-looted cultural property can be resolved more swiftly for the claimants, and that Nazi-looted art can be identified and restituted more effectively.

System change

The Court of Arbitration for Nazi-Looted Cultural Property [https://schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-](https://schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-raubgut.de/en)

[raubgut.de/en](https://schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-raubgut.de/en) represents a system change compared to the procedures of the Advisory Commission, which terminated its activities on 30 November 2025. While the Advisory Commission could only issue recommendations, the arbitration panel can issue enforceable arbitration awards. Unlike before, there is now a differentiated assessment framework that defines the substantive requirements for claims.

The possibility of decisions guided by moral reasoning, such as those of the Advisory Commission, is not provided for in the assessment framework.

While many cases never made it before the Advisory Commission because the cultural institutions refused to give their consent, the establishment of the Court of Arbitration for Nazi-Looted Cultural Property now gives many claimants the opportunity to initiate proceedings unilaterally, as many cultural institutions have already granted their consent for the future in the form of so-called ‘standing offers’.

Hope and criticism

We very much hope that legitimate claims will now be easier to enforce, as the initiation of proceedings has been simplified for those persecuted under the Nazi regime and their descendants. At the same time, we are aware of the criticism regarding the new regulations voiced by some claimants’ lawyers, and we take these concerns seriously. They fear that it may become more difficult to enforce their clients’ rights, as certain provisions of the assessment framework appear too restrictive to them. Therefore, an evaluation of the procedures and regulations is planned for the point at which ten arbitration proceedings have been concluded, or after three years at the latest.

Key actors and procedures in arbitration proceedings concerning Nazi-looted art

There are three key actors in arbitration proceedings concerning Nazi-looted art: the two-person Executive Committee, the arbitrators and the Service Desk (Schiedsstelle) <https://schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-raubgut.de/en/schiedsgerichtsbarkeit>. The task of the Service Desk (Schiedsstelle) is to administer the proceedings until the respective arbitration panel has been constituted. The Service Desk handles the review of the requirements for initiating proceedings and supports the administrative aspects of the process, including assisting with the administrative handling of the appointment process for arbitrators.

The 36 arbitrators (23 jurist and 13 (art) historians) were appointed by the federal government, the Länder and the national associations of local authorities, as well as the Jewish Claims Conference and the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

A (specific) arbitration panel consists of five arbitrators. Both parties appoint two arbitrators each, a jurist and an (art) historian. The four arbitrators appoint the chairperson, who must also be a jurist. Once the arbitration panel has been constituted and has commenced its work, it holds a management conference to structure the proceedings. In the course of the proceedings, a hearing takes place, which may also be held in public if all parties to the proceedings agree. The

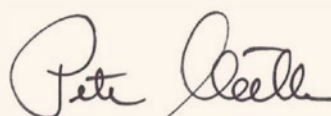
proceedings usually end with an arbitral award, which, like a judgment of the ordinary courts, is enforceable.

Initiation of proceedings

Proceedings before an arbitration panel can only be initiated if both sides agree. In order to grant this consent now for the future, the federal government, the Länder and the national associations of local authorities have agreed to make so-called ‘standing offers’. Those include a declaration by an institution to agree to future proceedings before an arbitration panel. For the applicant, this means that they can initiate proceedings unilaterally, provided that a ‘standing offer’ exists.

The basic documents

The new procedure is not based on a law, but on the Administrative Agreement between the federal government, the Länder and the national associations of local authorities from March 2025. On the basis of this agreement, arbitration rules governing the procedure and an assessment framework for the substantive rules were agreed upon at the administrative level between the federal government, the Länder and the national associations of local authorities, jointly with the Jewish Claims Conference and the Central Council of Jews in Germany <https://schiedsgerichtsbarkeit-ns-raubgut.de/en/grundlagendokumente>. These (and other) basic documents now form the framework for the proceedings and decisions of the respective arbitration panels.



Restitutions Committee members and reappointment period



From left to right: Dick Oostinga, Jeroen Euwe, Saskia Cohen-Willner, Corjo Jansen, Toon van Mierlo, Jaap Cohen and Annemarie Marck photo:© Barbra Verbij

The Restitutions Committee comprises lawyers, historians and art historians. It consists of seven members. The lawyers specialize in fields such as mediation of disputes and inheritance law. The historians' areas of expertise are art and the Second World War. The Minister of Education, Culture and Science appoints its members and the chair upon the recommendation of an appointments advisory committee. Members are appointed for a period of four years and can be reappointed for an additional four-year term.

By Decree of 20 November 2025 (published in the [Government Gazette on 3 December 2025](#)), Vice-Chair Dick Oostinga's and committee member

Saskia Cohen-Willner's committee membership was extended until respectively, end of year 2026 and mid-May 2027. The extension of the members' official reappointment period was informed by the fact that the term of their initial appointment had run less than four years.

Current members (2026) are:

- **Professor Toon van Mierlo** (Chair), lawyer
- **Dick Oostinga** (Vice-Chair), lawyer
- **Dr Jaap Cohen**, historian
- **Dr Saskia Cohen-Willner**, art historian
- **Dr Jeroen Euwe**, historian
- **Professor Corjo Jansen**, lawyer
- **Annemarie Marck**, historian

Supporting Staff – New Employee

The members of the Restitutions Committee are supported in the execution of their tasks by **Icha El Achkar** (Process Coordinator), **Tonie Brandse** (Office Manager), **Martine Pauli** (Communications Advisor) and **Penny Simmers** (Secretary), a lawyer and art historian. The Secretary supports the committee, among other things, in preparing

and drafting committee recommendations and binding opinions.

On 2 March 2026, **Eline Duyvis** joined the team as an additional Secretary to the committee. Eline is also a lawyer and will support the Committee together with Penny Simmers.

Pending restitution applications

The Committee currently has 29 requests for restitution under consideration.



Lecture series “Roofkunst Ontrafeld (Looted Art Unravelling)”

In the spring of 2026, the Expert Centre Restitution (ECR) of the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Verzetmuseum (Resistance Museum) Amsterdam will present a new programme entitled Roofkunst Ontrafeld (Looted Art Unravelling), a lecture series that sheds light on lesser-known aspects of looted art and restitution. Historians affiliated with the NIOD will present recent research and surprising insights, and engage in dialogue with the audience.

As an independent knowledge and research center, the ECR conducts research into loss of ownership and the restitution of art, cultural property, and other assets during and after con-

flicts, with particular attention to the context of the Second World War, the persecution of Jews, colonialism, and international heritage policy.

This series highlights unknown stories of looted art and restitution — not the familiar cases dominating media coverage, but the layered realities that often remain unseen. With particular emphasis on connections between Jewish and colonial looted art, the restitution of scientific collections, and the role of women in the art trade, the series offers new perspectives on a topic that is more relevant than ever. Museums, governments, and countries of origin around the world are re-examining collections, ownership, and responsibility in light of historic injustices.

12 March 2026 – Machteld van Voskuilen



Invisible players: Women in the art trade during the Second World War

Bachstitz, Rosenbaum, Van Lier: we associate these originally Jewish art dealerships – which sought to survive the years of occupation – with their male owners. Yet, what role did women play? This lecture focuses on the long-overlooked contributions of women in the Dutch art market during the Second World War. It examines how women navigated the large-scale art theft carried out by the Germans and highlights their active and complex roles in both protecting their loved ones and preserving their art dealerships.

9 April 2026 – Daniël Hendrikse



At the crossroads of injustice: “Colonial art” and the Second World War

What should be done with objects that may have been subject to layered dispossession – first under colonial rule and later as a result of the German occupation? Research on art looting during the Second World War and on colonial collections is usually conducted separately, with academic specialisation and ethical concerns hindering a coherent study. This lecture examines the historical intersection of these two fields using concrete examples. What became of Jewish dealers in ethnographic art, and what happened to their collections after the war? Furthermore, how did the Second World War affect trends and networks within the art trade?

28 May 2026 – Maarten van der Bent

The Dubois collection: 28,000 fossils and an Indies voice

In September 2025, the Dutch government decided to return a collection of no fewer than 28,000 fossils from the Naturalis collection to Indonesia. This Dubois collection, excavated in Indonesia at the end of the nineteenth century under the direction of Dutch palaeontologist Eugène Dubois, had been requested by Indonesia for decades. Less well known, however, is that calls for restitution were already being voiced during the colonial period. What was the significance of this ‘scientific collection’ for the Dutch, ‘Indisch’ and Indonesian communities?



The lectures will take place on the above mentioned dates at 4 p.m. in the Resistance Museum Amsterdam. For more information and tickets: <https://www.verzetsmuseum.org/nl/roofkunst-ontrafeld>



Two Special Restitution Moments

As 2025 came to a close, the Dutch Restitutions Committee had the honour of attending the transfer of three paintings and an original picture frame to the heirs of the Jewish art dealer Abraham Nijstad at the Collection Centre Netherlands (CC NL) in Amersfoort. The Committee was also present at the ceremonial return of the painting 'The Angel at the Tomb' to the heirs of Joseph Henri Gosschalk in Dordrecht. This painting will remain on display at the Dordrechts Museum.

It was a privilege for the Restitutions Committee to be present alongside the families of the heirs at these important occasions of recognition and restitution.

Abraham Nijstad

Abraham Nijstad (1895-1960) was a respected art dealer who supplied artworks to the *Sonderauftrag Linz* under duress. His involvement was a matter of survival and often misunderstood after the war.

After discovering several works on the *Herkomst Gezocht* (Origins Unknown) website, the Nijstad heirs submitted a restitution request to the Dutch State. The request concerned seven paintings

from the NK Collection (Netherlands Art Property Collection).

Following extensive research by the Restitution Expert Centre (NIOD), the Restitutions Committee found it highly plausible that Abraham Nijstad was the original owner of three of the seven paintings and had lost possession thereof involuntarily during the occupation as a direct result of circumstances connected to the Nazi regime:

- **Bergmeer met hert en en vogels (Mountain Lake with Deer and Birds)** by A.D. Hondius
- **Landschap met molen (Landscape with Windmill)** by A. Schelfhout
- **Imaginaire haven aan de Middellandse Zee (Imaginary Mediterranean Port)** by A. Storck

Recommendation: <https://www.restitutiecommissie.nl/en/recommendation/nijstad/>



*Imaginary
Mediterranean
Port by A. Storck*

Photo:
© Netherlands
Cultural Heritage
Agency)

Joseph Henri Gosschalk

Joseph Henri Gosschalk (1875–1952) was a Jewish artist, collector, restorer, and art dealer who suffered greatly during the war. In post-war correspondence with the Netherlands Art Property Foundation (SNK), Joseph Gosschalk wrote that the majority of his art collection had been looted. Wartime ordeals had however severely affected his memory. Consequently, he was only able to describe a few of the artworks that had been lost and only in limited detail.

The Restitutions Committee concluded that it is highly plausible that the painting *The Angel at the Tomb* (The Resurrection of Christ) by Benjamin

Gerritsz Cuyp (1612–1652) had originally belonged to Gosschalk. It was also found sufficiently plausible that Gosschalk had lost possession of the painting involuntarily during the occupation as a direct result of circumstances connected to the Nazi regime.

The heirs have expressed their wish for the painting to remain on display at the Dordrechts Museum.

Recommendation: <https://www.restitutiecommissie.nl/en/recommendation/gosschalk-iii/>

Gosschalk heirs at the Dordrechts Museum

NK2107

photo: © Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency



BENJAMIN GERRITSZ. CUYP

DORDRECHT 1612 - 1652 DORDRECHT

De engel bij het graf, ca. 1630-1649

olieverf op paneel | bruikleen erven Gosschalk ter nagedachtenis aan hun oudoom J.H. Gosschalk, die dit bezit tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog onvrijwillig als gevolg van het naziregime heeft verloren, 2025

Toen Jezus' graf 's morgens werd bezocht, beefde de aarde. Als een bliksemflits verscheen een sneeuwwitte engel, die de grafsteen wegrolde. 'En de bewakers werden door vrees bevangen en werden als doden', vertelt het bijbelverhaal. Een Rembrandt in hetzelfde thema was Cuyps uitgangspunt.

The Angel by the Tomb, c. 1630-1649

oil on panel | on loan from the Gosschalk heirs in memory of their great-uncle J.H. Gosschalk, who lost this property involuntarily during the Second World War as a result of the Nazi regime, 2025

When Jesus's tomb was visited in the morning, the ground shook. A snow-white angel appeared like a flash of lightning and rolled back the tombstone. 'And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men', as the Bible story recounts. Cuyp's inspiration was a work by Rembrandt with the same subject.



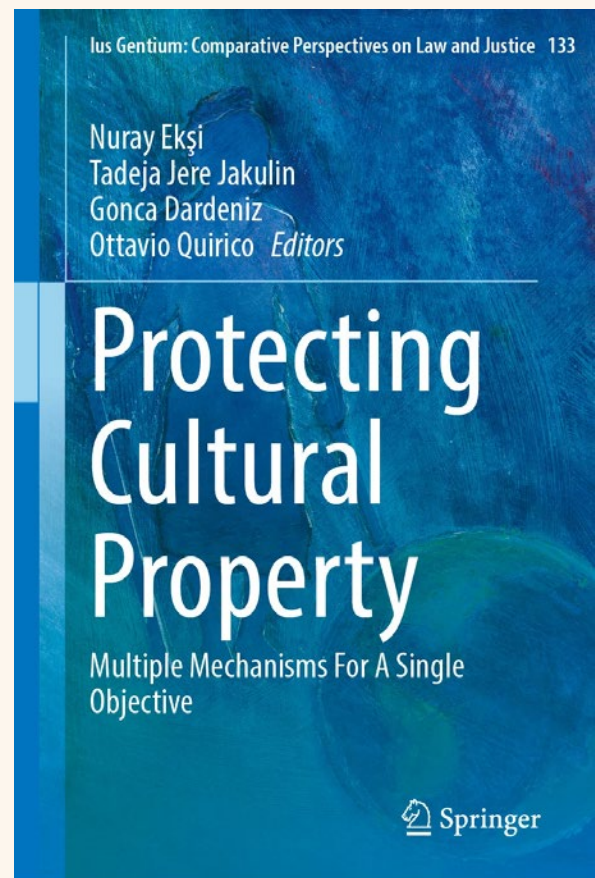


Reflections on 18 years as Secretary to the UK Spoliation Advisory Panel by Mark Caldon

It is now more than 80 years since the Second World War ended in Europe. The restitution of art looted by the Nazis is a worldwide concern, extending far beyond the isolated instances of returning specific artworks to individual families. It represents an opportunity to acknowledge historical injustices, make amends for past wrongdoings, and fundamentally reshape future relationships between nations and those who were wronged. This was recognised in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and its role to provide a space for all the world's nations to gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity. Despite those intentions, a cruel war is being fought once again in Europe and we can only hope for a speedy and just resolution.

The success of our committees is a testament to the power of friendship, international cooperation, and a shared commitment to driving change. There are likely still many thousands of artworks that are yet to be identified. It is important that we continue to search for Nazi-looted art as a way to not only make right the injustices of the past, but also protect the legacy and story of these artworks and set a precedent for how such cases are handled in the future, whatever that future may look like.

I was pleased to contribute recently to a publication, *Protecting Cultural Property*, which seeks to apply a multi-dimensional approach to the subject and which includes contributions from experts in law, archaeology, history, and conservation science. Special attention is given to the work of the committees, with contributions from the UK and from the Commission for the



Compensation of Victims of Spoliation (CIVS). I would recommend the book for anyone with an interest in this subject.

Book cover featuring the title “Protecting Cultural Property: Multiple Mechanisms for a Single Objective” and the editors Nuray Ekşi, Tadeja Jere Jakulin, Gonca Dardeniz and Ottavio Quirico

As I retire from public service in March 2026, I do so with a strong sense of fulfilment. It has been an honour and a privilege to have played even a small part in this undertaking, and I am very pleased with the progress we have achieved together.

Mark Caldon MBE

Despite having a modest number of claims compared with the other committees, the UK has sought to have an impact through the promotion of best practice, hosting a major international conference at the National Gallery in 2017 and then more recently at the V&A Museum. The Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Act 2009 and amendment in 2019, allowing the restitution of Nazi-looted art by national museums were also important milestones throughout this period.

I will continue to watch and offer support from the wings, comfortable in the knowledge that this important work is being left in the hands of committed and passionate colleagues who will apply their energy to the continuation of the journey.



The forgotten composer Walter Benedikt – An art restitution case from the Austrian National Library

Based on research conducted by the Commission for Provenance Research, the Art Restitution Advisory Board of the Republic of Austria (in accordance with Section 3 of the Federal Law on the Restitution of Art Objects and Other Movable Cultural Property from Austrian Federal Museums and Collections and Other Federal Property) recommended the restitution of 20 music manuscripts and four printed music scores to the legal successors of the musician Walter Benedikt.

Walter Benedikt was born in Vienna on 19 March 1896 as the only child of Max Benedikt (1867–1931) and his wife Pauline, née Hoffmann (1870–1903). After completing his commercial training at the Vienna Commercial Academy, Walter Benedikt joined his uncle Julius Benedikt's company, founded in 1903, as an open partner in 1923. The company Julius Benedikt, which traded in hides and skins, was based at Franzensbrückenstraße 22 in Leopoldstadt, Vienna's second district, Walter and his family also lived at this address. On 14 June 1925, he married Alice Rosa Ehrenfest, born in Vienna on 27 October 1902, the daughter of Moritz and Jenny Ehrenfest, in the Vienna City Temple. Their daughter Eva was born on March 22 of the following year, and their daughter Lilly was born on 31 July 1928.

After Julius Benedikt's death in 1928, Walter became the sole owner of the company. He also worked as a commercial agent. Alice Benedikt



Old books with marbled covers and labels bearing the inscriptions. One 'M.S.39117, the other 4°' and 'M.S.39118 - 4°'

Photo ©: Sabine Loitfellner

worked in her husband's company, doing book-keeping and secretarial work.

In addition to his business activities, Walter Benedikt was an amateur musician: In 1914, as an

18-year-old student at the Vienna Commercial Academy, he made his debut as a conductor with his own composition, a hymn entitled “Das schwarz-gelbe Band” (The Black and Yellow Ribbon). A “Gavotte for String Orchestra” which he composed premiered at a concert of the Charity Academy of the Vienna Commercial Academy in February 1915, and was reported on in the *Neue Freie Presse*:

“Students of the Vienna Commercial Academy organised [...] a concert in the middle concert hall of the Konzerthaus in aid of the widows and orphans of soldiers who fell in the war. [...] The performances of the chamber orchestra, conducted by Professor Dr. E. Stolz, were excellent [...] and included a composition by Walter Ben-

edikt, a student of the Vienna Commercial Academy, , which was received with great applause.”

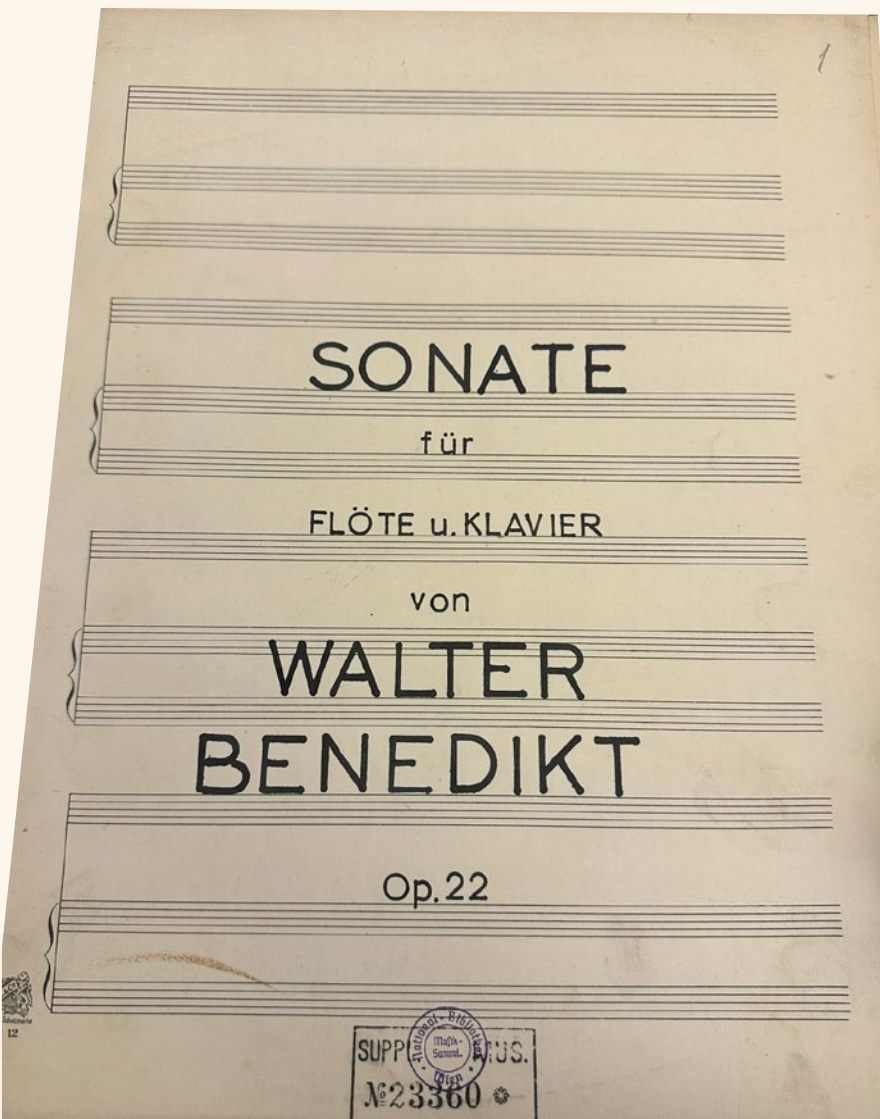
According to his own account, Walter Benedikt received his musical training from Wilhelm Sonnenberg, a member of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the State Opera Ensemble, and from the pianist Roderich Bass, among others. Many of his compositions were performed in concert halls and broadcast on radio concerts (such as Radio Vienna); he also performed as a pianist and flutist on various occasions. From 1922 to 1924, he worked as a substitute at the State Opera and was also a member of the Hakoah Orchestra.

After the annexation of Austria to the National Socialist German Reich, the members of the Benedikt family were immediately subjected to persecution as Jews. In May 1938, Walter Benedikt registered himself and his family with the emigration department of the Jewish Community of Vienna and announced his intention to emigrate to the United States, where several of his cousins already lived.

On 15 July 1938, Walter and Alice Benedikt each filled out their “List of Jewish Property as of 27 April 1938.” Under point IV “g) Items made of precious metals, jewellery, luxury items, works of art and collections”, Walter summarised a value of RM 2,875, and Alice estimated RM 6,066 for “jewellery according to the estimate of the sworn appraiser Alois Kosian”. A detailed list of the

Title page of a handwritten score with the text ‘SONATA for FLUTE and PIANO by WALTER BENEDIKT, Op. 22’ on music paper.

Photo ©: Tamara Loitfellner



items was not drawn up or is not included with the property declarations. The couple commissioned lawyer Alfred Maril to handle their property matters. Walter Benedikt surrendered his business licenses in accordance with the decision of the Leopoldstadt district administration dated 25 June 1938, and on 23 August 1938, the company Julius Benedikt was deleted from the commercial register for sole proprietorships. The Benedikt family left Vienna on 3 August 1938, and less than two weeks later, on August 16, boarded the S.S. Duchess of Richmond in the northern French port city of Cherbourg, bound for Quebec, Canada. Upon arrival, they crossed the border into the United States, arriving at Detroit, Michigan on 25 August 1938.

While the Benedikt family was trying to establish a new home in Galesburg, Michigan, Walter Benedikt found work in a music store and Alice Benedikt worked as a machine operator.

In December 1942, they were baptised in Philadelphia and changed their surname to “Benedict”. In his new home, Walter Benedict became a member of the New York Flute Club, where he performed in concerts and composed and performed flute pieces. Walter Benedikt had arranged for the removal of his household effects to the USA through the Bäuml shipping company. The application for an export permit, which is only one page long, is dated 27 October 1938, and lists “4 oil paintings, 1 graphic, various reproductions, 1 cello, 1 lute, 1 guitar, 2 violins, 1 saxophone, 7 carpets and various rugs, various glassware, silverware, porcelain, knick-knacks, etc. “, although musical manuscripts of Walter Benedikt’s own compositions are also likely to

have been included in the removal goods. In July 1939, the removal goods were still in Vienna, as there were discrepancies in the correspondence between Alfred Maril and the Berlin Moabit-West tax office regarding the payment of the so-called “Jewish property tax”, which Alice Benedikt had been ordered to pay in the amount of RM 4,600. Maril tried unsuccessfully to pay off the tax bill with proceeds from the repurchase of insurance policies. In February 1941, the Vienna Gestapo headquarters applied for the revocation of the citizenship of all four family members; on 15 April 1941, the Gestapo issued a provisional seizure order for all their assets. At the same time, the lawyer Stefan Lehner was appointed as asset manager and liquidator. On 10 June 1941, the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police in the Reich Ministry of the Interior ordered the revocation of the German citizenship of Walter and Alice Benedikt, whereupon the assets were finally confiscated in accordance with RGBL I p. 480 and RGBL. I p. 1235.

In addition to bank accounts and proceeds from the repurchase of insurance policies, shares and securities were also liquidated and transferred to the coffers of the German Reich. In April 1943, Lehner finally reported that the disposal of the household effects had been completed:

“Vugesta holds the net proceeds of RM 7,610.81 for the movable property of Walter Israel Benedikt under account number 181/5at its disposal.”

Vugesta – the “Gestapo Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants” – had already transferred the net proceeds to the Chief Finance Administrator of Berlin-Brandenburg on 28 August 1942. It can also be proven that items worth RM



Portrait Walter and Alice Benedikt, ca.1938

© familysearch.com (US Naturalization Records)

4,561.35 were auctioned at the Dorotheum, while RM 2,376.90 was obtained from “deposit sales” and RM 1,921.50 from various “private sales”. Asset manager Lehner received 2% of the net proceeds from the Vugesta liquidation as a fee.

After 1945, Walter Benedict attempted to recover his property, which he succeeded in doing in the case of a detached house in Neuhaus im Triestingtal in Lower Austria that had once belonged to him and had presumably served as a summer residence for the family. The purchase agreement of July 1939, according to which the house had been sold to a neighbour through Benedict’s lawyer Maril, was declared null and void in 1948 and, according to the findings of the Restitution Commission Vienna/Foreign Senate at the District Court of Wiener Neustadt, returned to the Benedict family. It is not known whether Benedict or his family were aware of the expropriation of the household effects by Vugesta or learned that

music manuscripts and printed sheet music had been transferred to the National Library as described below. In any case, there is no corresponding correspondence with Austrian or American authorities. Walter Benedict died in New York on 23 October 1948; his death certificate states his occupation as “composer + musician”. In the 1960s, his widow Alice, who remarried in 1952, received compensation for professional losses from the so-called Hilfsfonds (Auxiliary Fund); she died in New Jersey in October 1990.

In the course of their exploitation by Vugesta, the music prints and manuscripts from Walter Benedict’s estate were incorporated into the holdings of the National Library and inventoried alphabetically under the inventory codes “P 1941” and “P 41”. The objects were originally classified as “anonymous”, with Walter Benedikt merely regarded as the author of the pieces. However, it can be assumed that he was not only the com-

poser of the pieces, but also the owner of the sheets—the manuscripts 23351–23370 Mus. Hs. contain numbers from a catalogue of works apparently compiled by him, but its total scope and details are unknown (listed are operas numbered 1, 5, 12, 16, 21, 22, and 25). Some of these pieces were performed by Benedikt himself at concerts or broadcast on radio in the 1930s, as contemporary newspaper reports from 1914 onwards attest. In addition to handwritten notes and instructions for playing, some of the sheets bear Benedikt’s signature, which he placed under the compositions. He set poems to music and wrote the corresponding lines of verse by hand under the notes. The two printed music sheets, 39014–39015 M.S., contain Benedikt’s handwritten annotations, as well as paste-overs and corrections. The two marches were mentioned in concert reports and announcements in daily newspapers and were broadcast in radio concerts in the 1930s.

The two music prints containing two pieces composed by Adolf Jensen were also catalogued under “P. 41” in the National Library and bear a stamp “WALTER BENEDIKT WIEN”.

Based on the land registry documents for Walter Benedikt’s holiday home in Neuhaus an der Triesting, which were created after the end of the war in the course of the restitution proceedings, the

search for Walter Benedikt’s descendants could be started quickly. The Austrian Foreign Ministry and the consulates in New York and Los Angeles also provided valuable assistance in obtaining the necessary estate documents and deeds in the USA. The first calls to Walter Benedikt’s surprised descendants in Los Angeles and New York and the news of the impending restitution of their grandfather and great-grandfather’s music manuscripts were met with warmth and joy. Thanks to the fortunate coincidence of a long-planned trip by the Vice-Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, who is responsible for cultural affairs, the musical manuscripts were handed over by him personally at the Austrian Cultural Forum New York (ACFNY) on 10 September 2025. For the first time in over 80 years, in a moving ceremony performed by musicians engaged by the cultural centre in New York, some long-forgotten pieces of music from Walter Benedikt’s musical manuscripts, which had just been sent to New York, were played. Fortunately, Walter Benedikt had passed on his musical talent to his descendants.

As part of the handover ceremony, the American flautist Robert Cart recorded some of the rediscovered flute sonatas and subsequently made the first recordings of these works available on streaming platforms under the title “A Voice Reclaimed”.

Tamara Loitfellner

Bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research



As part of the handover ceremony, the American flutist Robert Cart recorded some of the rediscovered flute sonatas and subsequently made the first recordings of these works available on streaming platforms under the title “A Voice Reclaimed”.

Photos: © BMWKMS/Fuhrer

Handing over procedure, Vice chancellor Andreas Babler and the granddaughter of Walter and Alice Benedikt





The Luise Simon Case

The Simon case was brought to a highly positive conclusion by the Commission for Provenance Research at the end of 2025, albeit, for a different reason. The process lasted more than twenty years and involved multiple investigations into the provenance of various objects, several reviews of the facts and decisions on restitution, and finally an extensive search for heirs across three continents.

Luise Simon, née Deutsch, was born in Vienna in 1860 and was married to the publisher, art collector and co-founder of the Theater an der Wien, Josef Simon (1854–1926); through her sister, Adele Strauss, she was also connected to the family of the famous composer Johann Strauss, known worldwide as the creator of the ‘Danube Waltz’. The couple had two children, Margarethe and Hans. The family was persecuted by the Nazi regime but managed to flee to Switzerland in 1939. All their possessions, including furniture and various collections of art objects, but above all manuscripts, sheet music and scores, remained in Vienna, were expropriated and utilised by various Nazi authorities. Among other items, Josef Simon’s musical estate found its way into the Vienna City and Provincial Library, which, following lengthy negotiations, returned it or rather purchased it from the heirs in 1952.

Luise Simon, who lived to see the end of Nazi rule whilst still in Switzerland, died there in 1946. Her descendants, who lived in Great Britain, Mexico and South America, began researching the whereabouts of the family’s former property and sent enquiries to Austrian federal authorities, regional authorities and museums. The way in which the

authorities in question have handled the enquiries and dealt with the family is nothing less than a sad example of the continued injustice towards those persecuted by the Nazis in Austria after 1945.

At the Albertina, there were at least two objects from the formerly vast collection of Josef Simon and his widow Luise: a watercolour by Anton Romako and one by Friedrich Schilcher. However, negotiations with the descendants subsequently focused solely on Schilcher’s curtain design for the Theater an der Wien. Although the provenance of the watercolour was not disputed by the museum’s management at the time, the restitution was nevertheless thwarted and delayed. The drawing was restituted, but at the instigation of the museum management, an export ban was imposed on it – the descendants sold it to the museum for 40 US dollars. Romako’s drawing remained unaddressed.

The Art Restitution Act, which came into force in 1998, opened up the possibility of re-examining the case. In 2001, the Commission for Provenance Research compiled extensive dossiers on the two watercolours and submitted them to the Art Restitution Advisory Board. The Board recommended the return of the Romako watercolour in early 2003; at the end of that year, it was returned to Luise Simons, a granddaughter living in the United Kingdom. The Schilcher watercolour could not be returned at that time due to a legal restriction (as it had been repurchased by the museum in 1950, it was not subject to art restitution); this was possible only following an amendment to the law, so



Friedrich Schilcher, design for the Theater an der Wien, with the theater curtain in the background

that ultimately, in 2019, the return of the Schilcher watercolour could also be recommended.

This very belated return – eight decades had passed since the expropriation, 70 years since the disgraceful refusal to restitute the works in the 1950s, and 20 years since the enactment of the Art Restitution Act – is difficult to comprehend and justify from today’s perspective; still it did at least have one positive side effect: Through extensive research, the descendants living in various countries of exile were identified and brought together. Ultimately, there were two living heirs in Mexico, one in Argentina and two in the UK, who were supported and put in touch with one another by the Commission for Provenance Research. The five heirs – all great-grandchildren of Luise Simon – agreed to jointly accept the object and subsequently sell it to the Theater an der Wien. This is particularly fitting given the

fact that Friedrich Schilcher’s work is the curtain design for the theatre – the very design that still adorns the curtain today. The theatre has agreed to display the painting publicly, recounting both the history of the object and that of the family.

From the perspective of provenance research, this brings a distressing case of art restitution to a close; one which particularly sheds light on the Republic’s inglorious handling of such matters after 1945. Nevertheless, the fact that the family was ultimately found and reunited through research into the object and the subsequent tracing of its legal succession represents a heartening and touching aspect – and, as is well known, there are not many such instances in historical research into Nazi looting.

Mathias Lichtenwagner, Bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research



Provenance research and restitution by the Waidhofen an der Ybbs Museum Association

In autumn 2024, the bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research was contacted by the Musealverein Waidhofen an der Ybbs (Waidhofen an der Ybbs Museum Association) with a request for assistance in researching the provenance of some objects in its collection. The association, which as a private organisation is not obliged to conduct provenance research or restitutions, decided to take this step on its own initiative. The Commission for Provenance Research, which is responsible exclusively for federal collections in accordance with the Austrian Art Restitution Act, endeavours to support private provenance research with its expertise within the scope of its capabilities.

Alfred Lichtenschopf, a retired doctor who serves as a board member of the museum association, recounts the history of the collection, his research and the path to the restitution decision.

Waidhofen an der Ybbs has one of the oldest municipal museums in Lower Austria. The museum association was founded in 1905, and in the same year the small collection was presented in a two-room museum. Very soon after its opening, the local history museum moved to the building located at Oberer Stadtplatz, where it was housed until 2007. Since 2007, the museum, now called the 5-Elemente Museum, has been located in Rothschild Castle.

From the very beginning, the Waidhofen Museum Association has been characterised by its extensive collecting activities. The museum and the museum association currently own over 13,000 objects. Last year, all the objects were inventoried and made available online via the DIP catalogue of Lower Austrian museums.

Both the museum and the museum association have experienced dark and difficult times. The Nazi era in particular, with the seizure and “Ary-

anisation” of Jewish property, left a legacy of guilt that also affected our museum holdings. Our situation is unique due to the fact that Waidhofen Castle and the forest areas from here via Hollenstein, Göstling and Langau to the Styrian border were once owned by the Rothschilds. Waidhofen Castle was the administrative centre of these estates. As a result of Austria’s annexation to the National Socialist German Reich, the Rothschild family was forced to flee. The owner of the castle, Louis Rothschild, was able to leave Austria only after 14 months of Gestapo imprisonment and after the family had renounced their remaining assets. The Waidhofen estates, including the castle and its art collection, were seized and “aryanised” in April 1938.

The castle housed an impressive collection of paintings and a wealth of other art objects such as antique furniture, tiled stoves, weapons, etc. Some of these were restituted. The Federal Mon-

uments Authority – which had been involved in the expropriation of art objects during the Nazi era – did work that should not be underestimated after 1945.

Now back to our museum. During the digitisation process, we found ten objects in our collection that had entries with comments such as “from the Rothschild estate”, “formerly in the castle”, “previous owner Rothschild” and “from the Rothschild Atschreith estate”. These objects include two tiled stoves, a chamber pot with the coat of arms of Baron Albert Rothschild, two old rifles, a clothes iron, a Gothic lamp, an iron cash box, a

Baroque door lock and a Gothic cabinet. We were able to find an entry only for the acquisition of the chamber pot. The museum association paid 500 euros for it.

What should be done with these objects? Can we be sure that these objects should not be returned to the Rothschild family?

A discussion ensued among the board members, with some controversial arguments being presented. Of course, there were also fears that beloved objects that had long been in the museum association’s possession would now be lost, so to speak.



W. Ward, Engraving

The visit of a journalist from Bayerischer Rundfunk, who was researching the Rothschilds' possessions in Waidhofen, tipped the scales. The members of the board decided to get to the bottom of things. We sought professional help from the Commission for Provenance Research at the Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport. Pia Schölnberger and Lisa Frank took on our case. They showed us where we could do our research. We consulted the Rothschild family files in the restitution materials in the archives of the Federal Monuments Authority, which is managed by the Commission's bureau, and found the inventory lists of the art objects seized from the Rothschild castle and also where the art objects had been taken until their restitution.

The two tiled stoves and the Gothic cabinet could be clearly identified as former Rothschild property, thanks to original photographs and inventory lists. It can be assumed that these and other objects listed with a reference to their Rothschild origin in the inventory came into the Republic of Austria's possession with the 1949 transfer agreement for the Rothschild estate in Waidhofen, which states: "Mr. Louis de Rothschild transfers ownership of the above-mentioned estates to the Republic of Austria, which accepts them— as they stand – with all easements, real estate and other registered and unregistered rights and obligations registered in favour of and encumbering these properties, with the buildings erected on

them and with all livestock and equipment and supplies, appurtenances and fundus instructus, as Mr. Louis de Rothschild is entitled to own and use them after the restitution."

During the research process, Inge Janda, an advisor to the association, discovered that, in addition to the objects mentioned above, there are two engravings in our depot, both of which were engraved by W. Ward. Both engravings can be clearly identified in a photograph of the interior of the castle taken around 1920. In addition, one of the engravings is listed in the so-called Central Depot for Seized Collections in Vienna and in an annotated catalogue of the seizures from 1939 under the number LR 737. We can therefore definitively identify both engravings as belonging to Louis Rothschild. It was clear to us that these two engravings should be returned to their original owner. We contacted the Rothschild Foundation. The long history of the Rothschilds and their connection to Waidhofen is already described and honoured in our museum.

We are very pleased that we have now clarified the provenance of the museum objects that were formerly owned by the Rothschild family. It was a journey that was not always easy, one that was sometimes intensely debated in our small museum, but one that has brought us clarity and certainty and has become part of our museum's history.

Alfred Lichtenschopf



A grey area for the CIVS: looted cultural property in private hands

Since the Law of 22 July 2023 and the Decree of 5 January 2024, the CIVS has assumed a central role in the restitution of looted works of art, particularly those held by national museums (MNR) or forming part of public collections. However, given its historical mandate to provide redress for material spoliations resulting from the antisemitic measures implemented during the Occupation, the CIVS is also required to compensate the heirs of owners whose cultural property was looted during the Second World War.

Compensation is paid from public funds voted by Parliament and is assessed based on the value closest to the date of the spoliation. Generally, less favourable to claimants than restitution, both symbolically and financially, such compensation often supplements partial indemnification previously received from Germany under the BrüG law.

Identifying and valuing looted works is a complex task entrusted to the M2RS experts within the Ministry of Culture. Furthermore, the deliberative panel is sometimes facing additional challenges

when it appears that the looted property was not destroyed, continues to circulate on the art market, or has been identified in private collections over which the authorities have no power of compulsion.

In such situations, several questions arise:

- Should such works be recommended for restitution despite the legal impossibility of enforcing it?
- Should compensation be granted immediately on the grounds that restitution cannot be secured?
- Or should claimants be referred to the competent French or foreign courts?

In these cases, the CIVS conducts all necessary investigations and to reach an equitable solution, depending on whether restitution appears reasonably attainable. It adopts an evolving, case-by-case approach, as illustrated by four recent cases:

The Dutch Landscape by Van Goyen (17 May 2023, 24416 BCM R)



In an initial opinion, the CIVS awarded compensation for several paintings deposited by the Germans at Nikolsburg Castle, with the exception of a landscape by Van Goyen. It noted that negotiations were under way between the current owner and the heirs with a view to restitution. However,

following a request for reconsideration prompted by a letter from counsel stating that the negotiations “had failed and were over”, the Commission nevertheless held that there were no grounds for compensation, as all available legal remedies for restitution had not yet been exhausted.

Still Life with Flowers by Édouard Vuillard (31 January 2024, Application 24699 BCM – REST II)



A Parisian art dealer was forced to terminate his lease and sell his paintings before taking refuge in the southern zone. He sold several works to the art dealer Raphaël Gérard, who then resold them to Marie Gillhausen, a German art dealer living in Munich, through the same Franco-German “consortium” of intermediaries who received commissions.

While a Sisley painting was recovered after the war from a niece of Marie Gillhausen and returned to France as an MNR, *Still Life with Flowers* by

Édouard Vuillard remained untraceable until it reappeared at a Sotheby’s auction in London, where it failed to sell. Investigations established that it belonged to Mrs X, the great-niece of Marie Gillhausen.

Although the CIVS received a restitution request that it could not enforce, it nevertheless recommended that the painting, having been sold under duress, be restituted by Mrs X to the heirs, or alternatively surrendered to the French administrative authorities for the purpose of restitution.

The Port of Moret by Alfred Sisley (29 April 2025, 23412 BCM V,)

In an initial recommendation, the Commission awarded the heirs a global sum as a supplementary payment for a group of paintings that the owner believed had been placed in safekeeping at the Argentine Embassy in Paris during the Occupation. The paintings were stolen from there. However, the CIVS reserved its position regarding *The Port of Moret*, by Alfred Sisley after a representative of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs indicated at the hearing that, the painting was listed as “looted during the Second World War; private collection”, in a catalogue raisonné published in 2021. Further investigations were

requested from the M2RS, which established that the work could not be located, but that among the documents consulted by the authors of the catalogue raisonné was a letter dated 1975 from a Parisian collector. Based on this collector’s name, the CIVS conducted additional research in the State property archives regarding the composition of his estate and its transfer upon his death. As these investigations proved inconclusive, the Commission concluded that a reasonable prospect of restitution could be ruled out, proposing additional compensation based on the M2RS’s valuation.



Portrait of a Princess Holding a Bouquet of Roses by Louis Tocqué (24 July 2025, 24606 BCM)

The investigation established that a painting from the 18th-century French School, depicting a Portrait of a Princess Holding a Bouquet of Roses, in an old frame, had been looted from a Paris apartment whose owner died in 1941. Compensation under an insurance policy covering the painting was paid pursuant to the Brüg law. The work was subsequently identified in a negotiated sale on the American market on 8 December 2021 at John Moran Auctioneers in Monrovia, California.

To facilitate any potential claims by the heirs against the current owners, the Commission determined that the painting depicting a Portrait of a Princess Holding a Bouquet of Roses, in an old frame (100 × 60 cm), by Louis Tocqué, French School of the 18th century, sold in the United States in 2021, constituted looted property belonging to their ancestor.

Since 2021, the CIVS has been bringing a selection of its recommendations to the attention of researchers and the families of victims by publishing them on its website.

The Heritage Code (Articles R115-9, R115-10 and R451-25-1), effective from 1 February 2024, sets out the conditions under which recommendations issued under the Law of 22 July 2023 must be published on the CIVS website.

Information enabling the identification of the natural persons mentioned in a recommendation is redacted where its disclosure would likely infringe the right to respect for the private lives of those persons or their relatives.

The CIVS is an advisory commission. It issues recommendations that the decision-making authority to which they are addressed may choose to ignore.

The above recommendations can be downloaded online at the following address:
<https://www.civs.gouv.fr/fr/avis-publies>





Cases Revisited

The Spoliation Advisory Panel is not currently considering any active claims, but felt it would be of interest to recall an earlier case that the Panel provided a recommendation on.

REPORT OF THE SPOLIATION ADVISORY PANEL IN RESPECT OF FOURTEEN CLOCKS AND WATCHES IN THE POSSESSION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON,

Published 7th March 2012

On 24 January 2011, Mr Eric Koch of Toronto, Canada, submitted a claim to the Spoliation Advisory Panel for six clocks in the collection of the British Museum (the Museum) which had belonged to his late mother, Ida Netter, formerly Koch.

All six clocks had been obtained in the same way by the British Museum. They had been sold by the late Mrs Netter in a Christie's sale in London which took place on 20 June 1939. They were purchased then, or shortly afterwards, by Malcolm Gardiner and acquired from him by Courtenay Adrian Ilbert (1888–1956). The Ilbert collection was acquired in 1958, following the death of Mr Ilbert, by the Museum with the help of donations from Sir Gilbert Edgar CBE and others. Subsequently, the Museum drew to the attention of the Panel the fact that the collection also included eight watches which it had acquired in the same way from the collection of Courtenay Adrian Ilbert and which had been in the Christie's sale of 20 June 1939.

The claimants' case was in part derived from disclosures made by the British Museum on its website, following its own research. Eric Koch is

the son of Otto Koch, who died in 1919. Otto Koch had been a partner in the jewellery firm of Robert Koch in Frankfurt, founded by his father of that name in 1879. The firm was continued by Louis Koch, younger brother of Otto. Otto's widow Ida, who was a "sleeping partner" in the firm, married Emil Netter in 1930. He died in 1936. The firm was "Aryanized" in 1938 under the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime. Ida Netter's share of the proceeds was placed into a blocked account to which she had no access. Otto Koch had been a collector of watches and clocks, which she inherited. She managed to bring to England some 161 watches and clocks. There is some uncertainty as to how this was achieved. The claimants believe that an employee of the firm assisted their mother in extracting these items from Germany. In any event, they were then the subject of the sale by Christie's in June 1939.

The Claimants Case

The claimants subsequently argued that the British Museum "...has possession of the 14 pieces solely due to my mother's persecution by the Nazis. She had a large, valuable collection of clocks and watches until she was forced to emigrate and leave her assets behind. To have the means to live in London, she auctioned off the part of the collection that she managed to transfer out of Germany".

The British Museum's Case

The then Director of the British Museum, Mr Neil MacGregor OM, informed the Panel that the Museum had acquired the clocks and watches as described above. The original sale by Christie's was on the basis that the timepieces were the "Property of a Lady". The Museum learned that the vendor was Mrs Ida Netter only when the late Mr John Leopold, then Curator of Horology, ascertained this from Christie's in 1993. The items form a small part of the Museum's horological collection.

The Netter collection as a whole had sold for the sum of £2,175 in 1939. The Curator of Horology at the Museum at the time the claim was considered, Mr David Thomson, noted that the hammer prices paid by the dealers who sold on to Courtenay Adrian Ilbert "were not particularly low, having regard to market price fluctuations in that period; and that they sold on to Ilbert at varying mark-ups". The Museum suggested that this was not a sale at an undervalue.

The Spoliation Advisory Panel's Conclusions

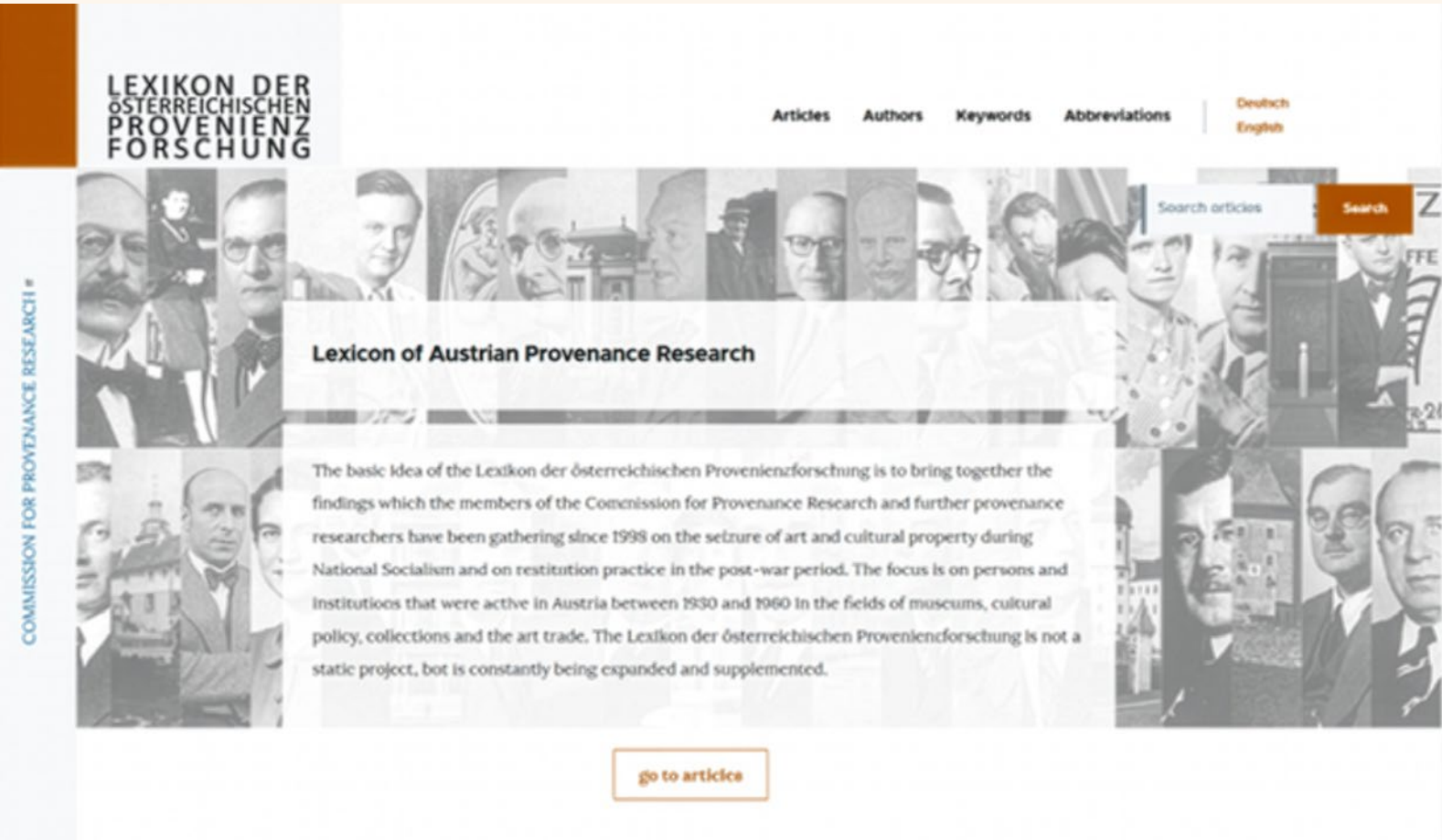
The Panel concluded that while the sale was found to constitute a forced sale, it was at the lower end of the scale of gravity of such sales and importantly that the evidence from the Christie's sale indicated that fair and substantial market value was paid to Mrs Netter as the vendor in 1939. The Panel also concluded that the British Museum owed no moral obligation in this case and despite the impact of the Nazi era on the claimants' circumstances, that this was insufficient to justify a recommendation that the timepieces be transferred to them, or that an ex gratia payment be made to them.

The Panel recommended that be displayed alongside the objects, or any of them whenever they are displayed, their history and provenance during and since the Nazi era, with special reference to the claimants' interest therein.





Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research



Who were Vally Honig (Roeren), Heinrich Rieger, Lea Bondi Jaray, Maria Almas Dietrich, and Kajetan Mühlmann—and what did they have in common? What role did the Central Monument Protection Office (Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz) or the Augustinerkeller play between 1938 and 1945?

These are examples of the people and institutions involved in the systematic expropriation and confiscation apparatus established by National Socialism in Austria between 1938 and 1945: on the one hand, as owners of art and cultural assets who were persecuted for political, religious, or

racist reasons; on the other hand, as perpetrators, co-organisers and actors within those institutions that organised the confiscation, administration and exploitation of these assets, or served as places that usually housed cultural assets displaced due to the war.

Collections of art, glass, porcelain, silver, antiques and books were taken from their owners through seizures, forced sales or involuntary donations—often as a prerequisite for departure or in the course of flight and persecution.

These processes involved a dense network of partly competing authorities and institutions, such as the Gestapo, the Property Transaction Office (Vermögensverkehrsstelle, VVSt), the Gestapo Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants (Vugesta), tax offices, the Central Monument Protection Office, the Vienna Municipal Authority and the Provincial Tax Offices, which orchestrated the confiscation of art and cultural property in collaboration with art dealers, auction houses and transport companies. The respective actors operated within specific institutional scopes of action, while dealers, museums, collections and libraries often benefited from the “Aryanizations” and expropriations. Researching the origins of art and cultural assets that have been in the possession of public institutions since 1933 is now the task of provenance research.

The Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research, initiated in 2018 by the Commission for Provenance Research, is the first continuously expanded online medium that explores provenance research as an independent field of research in terms of concepts, personnel and institutions. As a dynamic online publication, it is closely linked to ongoing research and is aimed at scholars in fields such as provenance research, art and contemporary history, migration history, material studies and memory culture, as well as the general public. In addition, it addresses descendants of formerly persecuted persons, for whom it can serve as a central source for the initial or in-depth reconstruction of individual contexts of persecution

Nicole-Melanie Goll

<https://www.provenienzforschung.gv.at/kommission/>

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and dispossession. The fact that for some time now the lexicon has been published in both German and English has proven to be a significant expansion and internationalization of its target audience.

The Lexicon of Austrian Provenance Research currently comprises 445 source-based entries, editorially supervised by Susanne Hehenberger (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien) and Sabine Loitfellner (Bureau of the Commission of Provenance Research, Vienna). A key distinguishing feature of this lexicon is the visibility it gives to little-researched collectors and owners who were forced to emigrate or were murdered during the Shoah. Another focus of the lexicon is on those actors from the Nazi administration, museums, trade and authorities who participated in or (co-)organised the confiscation of art and cultural property. The lexicon aims to make these individuals visible and, at the same time, to present the structural mechanisms of Nazi art and cultural property confiscation in a comprehensible way by analysing the networks of perpetrators and institutions.

In 2026, Austria will assume the chairmanship of the Network of European Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art. To mark this occasion, the lexicon will broaden its focus to highlight the global dimension of Nazi confiscation of art and cultural property. Therefore, in addition, members of Networks of European Restitution Committees on Nazi-looted Art will be encouraged to publish their research in the lexicon of provenance research.



Projects and Tools

The V&A is the only UK national museum with a full-time curatorial post dedicated to provenance and the history of the museum's collection. This post is currently held by Dr Alexandra Watson Jones, who also co-ordinates the museum's wider Provenance Research efforts. In October 2025, the museum announced an exciting new chapter for the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Galleries, housing objects from the nearly 1000-piece collection of enamel, micromosaic, gold and silver objects which has been on long term loan to the museum since 2008. The major redevelopment of these galleries, due to open in March this year, will include a gallery dedicated to provenance, as part of the V&A's ongoing commitment to exploring the ownership histories of the objects in its care.

As a private collection housed in a public institution, the Gilbert Collection offers insight into the history of private collecting and the art market the Gilberts were collecting in. As children of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, they were acutely aware of Nazi crimes. However, in the 1960s when they began collecting, the art market was largely unregulated in reference to the substantial displacement of artworks during the Second World War when collectors from the 1930s and 1940s, mainly Jewish or those with a Jewish bloodline, suffered Nazi persecution and spoliation. The Gilberts, like their contemporary collectors, bought in good faith and did not recognise this lack of information as a concern. It was only towards the end of Arthur Gilbert's career as

a collector and following the Washington Conference that attitudes towards provenance research changed. Therefore, when the collection came to the V&A, it was unclear who had historically owned many of the works that the Gilberts purchased from the 1960s onwards.

In order to uncover these hidden histories, and identify potentially spoliated objects within the collection, the Gilbert Trust launched a three year project in 2018 dedicated entirely to researching the collection's history (the project previously featured in the May 2020 issue of the newsletter). As well as identifying potentially Nazi-spoliated objects, the research also uncovered other surprising cases of illegal export and acquisition, such as a Hittite (ancient Anatolian) gold ewer which had been illegally excavated and unknowingly purchased in the 1970s. This piece was subsequently repatriated to Türkiye, and a new artwork commissioned to respond to the now-removed object.

The findings of the research into the Gilbert Collection were previously shown in a temporary display *Concealed Histories: Uncovering the Story of Nazi Looting*, which included a selection of objects connected to Jewish collectors and their families who suffered under the Nazis. The redevelopment of the Gilbert Galleries has provided an opportunity to give this work further prominence. It will now be part of the permanent display for the first time. A dual-label interpretation system will allow visitors to explore the complex histories behind the objects displayed, and

flip between two versions that show what was thought to be known about the objects before provenance research was undertaken, and what is known now.

As the UK's first permanent gallery dedicated to spoliation and provenance research, it highlights both the V&A's ongoing commitment to open conversations around the objects in its collections, and the urgent need for spoliation research into museum collections amassed during the 20th century.



As well as ongoing research into the histories of its own collections, the V&A regularly provides opportunities for knowledge exchange; sharing of information and examples of best practice; and training for those undertaking provenance research in how to use available tools and resources.

In November 2025, the museum held a postgraduate study day exploring how to engage with library and archive resources, including practical handling sessions. In April 2026, the V&A will hold a two-day conference titled 'Bibliomigrancy amongst the Ruins: Post-1945 Book Movement', showcasing current research into library collections in Norway, Poland, Germany, Canada and the UK. This will bring together academics and heritage professionals to provide a new understanding of how books moved around Europe in the wake of the Second World War.

The Provenance Research Curator also convenes a regular series of in-house Provenance Research

Seminars, featuring talks by experts from across the sector that allow a deep-dive into specific topics. In October 2025, the V&A welcomed artists Helen Emily Davy and Katharina Mayrhofer for a moving presentation about their collaborative artistic and research practices centred around the restitution of the Wertheimer table. The most recent event, in December 2025, saw Dr Richard Espley (Chief Librarian of the museum's National Art Library) speaking to the need for provenance and spoliation research within library collections, and examples of how archival cataloguing can manipulate or conceal problematic histories.

Finally, the museum has also hosted three placements for doctoral students across 2025-2026. One of these has focused specifically on the topic of Nazi-era provenance within the National Art Library Collections. The outcomes of the museum's student placements are regularly published as blogs on the V&A's website.

The V&A is, however, not the only UK institution dedicated to knowledge exchange and information sharing of tools for spoliation and provenance research. In November 2025, curators from the museum joined colleagues from across the UK at a study day co-organised by the National Gallery and Christie's Auction House. The study day provided a valuable opportunity to share expertise and guidance about investigating the historic provenances of objects in the UK's museums and galleries, as well as providing and strengthening networks through which colleagues can seek advice and professional support in the future.



Bundesministerium
Wohnen, Kunst, Kultur,
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Kommission für Provenienzforschung



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des biens et l'indemnisation
des victimes de spoliations antisémites



Schiedsgerichtsbarkeit
NS-Raubgut

Restitutions Committee

**Spoliation
Advisory
Panel**

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