

Press Release

Dr. Matthias Henkel
Press and Communication
+49(0)30 – 2061487-40
presse@taskforce-kunstfund.de
www.taskforce-kunstfund.de

2 December 2015

Menzel Drawing Identified as Nazi-Looted Art

A Taskforce report has identified the 1874 pencil drawing *Interior of a Gothic Church* by Adolph von Menzel (1815–1905) as Nazi-looted art (Lost Art ID no.: **478264** <http://www.lostart.de/DE/Fund/478264>).

The “Schwabing Art Trove” Taskforce has identified another artwork seized as a result of Nazi persecution.

The hand-drawing by Adolph von Menzel was published on the Lost Art Database (ID no. 478264) under the title *Kirche in Hofgastein* (Church in Hofgastein) because of the inscription on its verso. Research into its provenance has shown that the drawing in question is actually the drawing listed in Gurlitt’s business records as “Got. Kirchen Innere” (“Goth. church interior”).

Using the available sources, the Taskforce has determined with certainty that the work once belonged to the art collection of Dr. Albert Martin Wolffson (1874–1913). Albert Martin Wolffson purchased the drawing in 1903, one of 32 works on paper for which he paid RM 50,000 (RM: Reichsmarks). After his death, the

Hamburg collector's estate devolved to his wife and passed from her to their children, Ernst Julius Wolffson and Elsa Helene Cohen, née Wolffson. Both Ernst Julius Wolffson and his sister Elsa Helene Cohen were among those persecuted by the Nazi regime.

The family of Elsa Helene Cohen's son escaped to the USA in January of 1939. Else Cohen managed to escape and follow her son's family in August of 1941. According to an entry in Hildebrand Gurlitt's business records, Elsa Cohen sold the drawing *Kirche in Hofgastein / Got. Kirchen Innere* along with a group of ten Menzel works to Hildebrand Gurlitt on December 31, 1938 for RM 150.

It can therefore be assumed that the sale took place due to the prominent family's persecution, and was used to help finance their escape to the USA.

According to the business records, the agreed-upon price was RM 150. This price does not seem commensurate with the value of a Menzel hand-drawing at the time. To date, no proof has been found that Frau Cohen actually received the money. Aside from the question of whether payment was received or not, it must be assumed that, given the circumstances, Nazi persecution resulted in the forced sale and expropriation of the work.

The Taskforce has not received a claim for this work. Nevertheless, the Taskforce investigates the provenance of all works in its charge, irrespective of whether a claim has been filed or not.

A fair evaluation of the Taskforce's research findings cannot solely lie in the number of works it identifies as Nazi-looted art.

Expectations must be matched to the actual source material. Researching a work's provenance requires time and often necessitates that the sources are uninterrupted—yet sometimes, despite dogged efforts, the results remain open-ended.

Suspicion of Nazi looting has been ruled out for over 500 of the 1258 artworks found in Munich. For many of the other works found in Gurlitt's inventory, documenting the background without gaps in the chain of custody will likely prove difficult.

Many claims have already been resolved. However, resolving a claim can also mean that the claim proved to be ineligible—in the event, for example, that the Gurlitt work does not match the claimant's lost artwork. At the same time, resolving a claim does not necessarily entail clarifying an artwork's provenance without interruption.

The provisional findings of the Taskforce are being documented in object records. These object records systematically list the specialised literature, catalogues raisonnés, auction and exhibition catalogues, archives and databases that have been consulted, as well as those who have made claims or requested information, in the event such claims exist.

The documentation of this sort that has been prepared for the artworks in the Munich find have been uploaded to the Lost Art Database, and are currently being prepared for publication within the framework of the Taskforce's final report.

As the first stage of systematically processing the works in the Salzburg find that were assigned to the Taskforce in 2015, an internal documentation will be ready at year's end.