

Press release

11 November 2013
page 1 of 2

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“Schwabing art trove”: Provenance of treasures to be researched alongside criminal proceedings – suspicious works being publicised at www.lostart.de

Joint press release by the Bavarian State Ministry of Justice, the Bavarian State Ministry of Education, Science and the Arts, the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media:

We are working as quickly and transparently as possible to find out where the works of art come from which were discovered in the “Schwabing art trove”. The Federal and State Ministries involved have agreed in the interests of possible owners to take a broad-based approach to the provenance research, making use of the “Degenerate Art” Research Centre of Freie Universität Berlin and running parallel to the criminal proceedings of the Augsburg public prosecution office. The restitution issues arising from the Schwabing art trove in connection with Nazi-confiscated and looted art cannot be adequately resolved by criminal proceedings alone. That is not the job of criminal proceedings.

The federal and Länder authorities have agreed to put together a qualified task force of at least six provenance research experts without delay. Dr Ingeborg Berggreen-Merkel has been charged by the federal and Bavarian authorities to head the task force, which will be coordinated by Berlin-based specialist provenance research office the AfP (Arbeitsstelle für Provenienzrecherche/-forschung). Dr Berggreen-Merkel was formerly Deputy Chair of the Board at the AfP as well as Deputy Minister of State to the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The AfP is funded by the Cultural Foundation of the Länder, and its main task is to help public museums and institutions in Germany identify cultural property in their collections which was confiscated from the legitimate owners during the Nazi era.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Federal Office of Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues, and the Free State of Bavaria will all provide specialists for the provenance research task force. This will

11 November 2013

page 2 of 2

ensure it can make use of the expertise of all the federal and Länder authorities involved.

Current information from the Augsburg public prosecution office suggests that, not counting those which clearly have nothing to do with “degenerate art” or Nazi confiscation, there are around 970 pieces among the artwork seized which need to be investigated. Of these, around 380 works belong to the category of so-called “degenerate art”. Approximately 590 pieces need to be investigated for possible confiscation under the Nazi regime.

In order to ensure transparency and to advance the provenance research, an initial 25 works of art where confiscation by the Nazis is particularly strongly suspected are being listed today on www.lostart.de. The Koordinierungsstelle Magdeburg, which runs the internet database, will keep the list continuously updated. The Koordinierungsstelle Magdeburg, run jointly by the Federation and the Länder, is Germany’s central service for documenting and returning cultural treasures and will be available to answer any questions about the documented objects. Questions about the criminal proceedings should be directed to the Augsburg public prosecution office.

Aware of Germany’s responsibility for resolving issues related to Nazi crimes and in deference to the 1998 Washington Conference Principles and the 1999 Joint Declaration by the Federal Government, Länder and National Associations of Local Authorities, we are thus ensuring transparency and due attention to issues of ownership and cultural history, without hindering the proper conduct of the Augsburg public prosecution office’s criminal investigations.