

More artworks discovered in Salzburg: Second Act in the Gurlitt case

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The affair surrounding Cornelius Gurlitt, son of Nazi art dealer Hildebrand Gurlitt, has taken a new turn. The occasion is the discovery of 238 more pictures that were hidden in Gurlitt's Salzburg house and comprise mainly impressionist masterpieces.

According to a press release from Gurlitt's lawyers, the newly discovered find includes oil paintings and watercolours by Monet, Corot, Renoir, Manet, Courbet, Pissaro, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Liebermann, Cézanne and Nolde, as well as drawings by Pablo Picasso and Edvard Munch and silver vessels, woodcuts, ceramic bowls and bronze, marble and works in iron by Auguste Rodin. It is evidently the more valuable part of the collection, which the 81-year-old Gurlitt has kept hidden since the death of his father. Around 1,400 works of art had been found in his Munich apartment in early 2012, most of which were looted by the Nazis.

The work found in Munich came to light by chance thanks to a customs inspection and subsequent tax investigation, and only became known to the public last autumn in a report by *Focus* magazine. This time, Cornelius Gurlitt has taken the initiative and on February 10, 24 and 28, authorised an inspection of his house in the Salzburg residential district of Aigen by his legal team. According to his lawyers, this revealed, "surprisingly", first 60 and then another 178 pictures that were inventoried by unnamed art historians and taken to an unknown place.

The inspection took place without the participation of the Austrian judicial authorities, as the spokesman of the Salzburg state attorney Marcus Neher confirmed. The Austrian police, customs and tax authorities were also not involved. Neither was the Berlin Task Force—appointed by the German government—informed, which has been investigating the provenance of the works found in Munich since last year.

On the official Gurlitt web site, it says the Salzburg pictures and works of art are to "be protected from burglary and theft". Gurlitt's spokesman, Stephan Holzinger, declared that they wanted these exhibits to be examined by

"independent" experts regarding any possible suspicion of being looted art by the Nazis. "According to a preliminary assessment based on an initial viewing", they maintained, "such a suspicion is not confirmed".

This statement is more than dubious. To recall: Gurlitt's father Hildebrand was one of the four art dealers chosen by Hitler and Goebbels, who in 1937 were entrusted with the sale abroad of works in German museums confiscated as "degenerate art" to recoup foreign currency. During the war, Hildebrand played an important role in the occupied territories of France, Belgium and Holland. He collaborated with the infamous Operations Staff Reich Leader Rosenberg (ERR) and participated in the theft of art for the planned Führer museum in Linz, and for the private art collection of Hermann Göring.

After 1945, Hildebrand Gurlitt went unscathed through a de-Nazification process and was soon a successful and respected art dealer. After his death in 1956, his family received the extensive collection he had acquired through Nazi art thefts and seizure actions, and was able to make a good living from it. It was probably the daughter, Benita Renate, who in autumn 2007 sold August Macke's "Woman with a Parrot in a Landscape" for the record price of €2.4 million at the Berlin auction house Villa Grisebach.

Last year, the find in Munich triggered heated discussions internationally and in Germany. After protests against the state attorney's nearly two-year's secrecy concerning the art find, some of the pictures were published on the Internet, and initial steps taken to return them to the descendants of Jewish families and collectors from whom they had been stolen.

But since the beginning of the year, the wind has shifted. Cornelius Gurlitt, depicted in the media as a "traumatised" old man who does not understand the world anymore and who only wanted to live in peace with his pictures, is being advised by a high-calibre team of consultants who aggressively represent his claims of ownership. Back in December, the court appointed attorney Christoph Edel as his legal guardian, who then took on three further attorneys

and spokesman Stephan Holzinger this year for his team.

They have since functioned as a focal point for claims for restitution, organised press conferences and published Gurlitt's views on the website www.gurlitt.info. In the latest press release of March 26 concerning the pictures "secured" in Salzburg, they claim that their client, Gurlitt, wanted to return suspected stolen pictures to their Jewish owners. They say they want to win the support of renowned international experts in provenance research, but to do so on their "own initiative". The state task force in Berlin, active for months, was not mentioned at all.

Specifically, an agreement with Marianne Rosenberg and Anne Sinclair, the descendants of the Jewish art collector Paul Rosenberg, concerning the return of the painting "Seated Woman" by Henri Matisse should be concluded soon. But, Gurlitt's team says in conclusion, "We want to reiterate that only a few percent of the collection of Cornelius Gurlitt is, in our legal opinion, under suspicion of being stolen art."

In this context, it is worth noting that at the press conference on March 26, Holzinger announced that the leading advocate of the team, Dr. Hannes Hartung, art theft expert and founder of Themis Law Firm, had been fired at short notice. No justification for this was given.

Following the Salzburg inspection, Hannes Hartung released five paintings for publication and said that in his own review of these works they had not been "confiscated art". These are pictures by Renoir ("Man with Pipe"), Courbet ("Portrait of Jean Journet"), Monet ("Waterloo Bridge"), Manet ("Marine, Temps d'orage") and Liebermann ("bath scene").

Stefan Koldehoff, author of the book "The pictures are among us—the business of Nazi-looted art" (2009), questioned the statement by Hartung in the *FAZ* of February 12, at least with respect to the Monet picture. He points to an exhibition in 1954, organised by the Essen Folkwang Museum in the Villa Hügel, the ancestral home of the Krupp family.

For the time, the exhibition included a surprising number of French Impressionist masterpieces, including up to 36 works from the collection of Hildebrand Gurlitt, who since 1948 headed the Art Association in Dusseldorf. The number 70 in the Essen catalogue may be the picture now found, Monet's "Waterloo Bridge". Even more pictures from that Essen exhibition could belong to the Salzburg find, such as Gauguin's "Landscape with Cows" of 1886.

Hartung's swift assessment of the Salzburg pictures raises many questions. How does he know that the said five works were not extorted or stolen? The register of stolen art on the Internet that he claims to have personally examined is known to be incomplete. Does he know more, is he more

deeply implicated in Gurlitt's affairs than previously known and therefore had to go?

At least one can speculate: elsewhere, Hannes Hartung is dealing with Gurlitt's legacy. For many years, he has represented the city of Munich against Jen Lissitzky—son of the Russian artist El Lissitzky and his wife Sophie Küppers—who is demanding the return of the painting "Swamp Legend" by Paul Klee. Before Munich bought the painting at auction in 1982 for the Lenbachhaus, the picture was in the Hannover provincial museum as a private loan. It was confiscated by the Nazis in 1937 as "degenerate art" and given to Hildebrand Gurlitt for resale. In 1962, it surfaced at the Cologne auction house Lempertz, the same establishment that in 2011 auctioned the "Lion Tamer" by Max Beckmann from the Gurlitt collection ("The pictures are among us", p. 85f).

The lawyer Hartung explains on his web site that it was not "so-called looted art that was confiscated from a Jewish owner amidst the horrors of the Holocaust. 'Degenerate Art' is now traded everywhere and undisputed." Hartung can rely on the fact that the Nazi law "concerning the confiscation of products of degenerate art" was not annulled after 1945, and old Nazi cliques continued to exist not only in the justice department, but also in the cultural realm, who promoted this trade.

The cloak-and-dagger operation in Salzburg shows that there are still many skeletons in the closet in this field. Both the Augsburg state attorneys and Gurlitt's lawyers are trying to cover up the true relations of the art trade and its participants to the Nazi past.

So far, only a small team of journalists from the *Süddeutsche* newspaper and the WDR and NDR broadcasters has been able to view the secret storage location and some of the pictures from the Salzburg house in the company of Gurlitt's spokesman, Stephan Holzinger. The *Süddeutsche* describes this visit on March 27, 2014, under the headline "Prisoners of history", in the style of a police drama: The paintings lie in a concrete room like corpses on the tables, covered with white cloths and with "cobwebs and dust on the frames," including two pictures "face down" because they are "contaminated," according to Holzinger. Since no one else has been able to see the pictures, both the origin and exact number of the Salzburg works remain in the dark.



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