


Exhuming Inventory. The (Re)Discovery of Paintings' Provenance. A Strasbourg History

Constance Jame 

Abstract: Based on provenance research at the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Strasbourg and supported by the French Minister of Culture, this article looks at the different contexts in which artworks were acquired between 1940 and 1945. Whereas Tessa Rosebrock's research in 2004 focused on the acquisitions made by the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen between 1940 and 1944, this new research complements Rosebrock's findings and uncovers two major sources of enrichment for the collections during this period. On the one hand, alongside official acquisitions made by the Generaldirektion, the museums were entrusted with the management of artworks from the sequestration of the property of "enemies of the people and the Reich". Despite some restitutions being conducted immediately after the war, several artworks with an encumbered provenance remained in the collections. Moreover, in the post-war imbroglios, artworks from the Neue Reichskanzlei in Berlin, found in a castle in Germany in 1945 by a French Army Captain, were deposited in Strasbourg. Their provenance had been forgotten until today. This article focuses on these two contexts and explains the research methodology employed. Methodologically, this discovery is the result of an interest in works whose provenance remained unknown and which were inventoried retroactively during the mid-2000s. By comparing the inventories with registers in French and German archives, it has been possible to determine the provenance of these artworks. In addition, the article demonstrates the importance of considering the paintings in their materiality as a historical source.

Keywords: Strasbourg; Burg Wildenstein; looted art; World War II; France

In 2023, the city of Strasbourg applied for a call for projects from the French Ministry of Culture to carry out an audit of the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain's collections. The aim of this research project was to assess the probability of Nazi spoliation with regard to the paintings acquired by the city's museums between 1933 and 2022. This research is in line with the French law introduced on July 22nd, 2023 on the restitution of cultural property looted in the context of the anti-Semitic persecutions perpetrated between 1933 and 1945.¹ Inspired by other European countries, such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, this law is based on the Washington

Principles of 1998. As Elisabeth Furtwängler and Mattes Lammert pointed out in the introduction to the edited volume *Kunst und Profit. Museen und der französische Kunstmarkt im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, French museums are just beginning to research the provenance of their collections acquired during this period.² Nevertheless, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen began an audit of the provenance of its collections already in 2022. At the same time, a symposium held at the Musée du Louvre showed the progress regarding provenance research made by a number of museums, including the Musée du Louvre and the Musée de la Musique at the

¹ Law n°2023-650 of the 22nd of July 2023: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000047874541>, <05.06.2025>.

² Elisabeth Furtwängler / Mattes Lammert (eds.): *Kunst und Profit. Museen und der französische Kunstmarkt im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Berlin / Boston 2022, 30.

Philharmonie de Paris.³ Researchers in France were already working on these issues, but the fact that museums and the Ministry of Culture have taken the matter into their own hands, notably with the creation of the *Mission de recherche et de restitution des biens culturels spoliés entre 1933 et 1945* (M2RS) in 2019, shows the recent commitment to this problem. Some positions for provenance researchers have meanwhile been created in museums, such as in the Musée de la Musique at the Philharmonie de Paris and the Musée d'Orsay.⁴ Starting in 2024, the Ministry of Culture has also been subsidizing short-term missions to carry out an initial audit of their collections along the lines of the research carried out in Rouen to support museums conducting provenance research. These missions, led by independent researchers, are supervised by the M2RS and aim to establish an initial inventory of the artworks that could potentially have been spoliated by the Nazis. In this context, I carried out provenance research for the museums of the city of Strasbourg.

The Situation in Strasbourg

Over and above the ministerial timetable, the importance of carrying out this audit for the museums of Strasbourg is reflected particularly in three cases. In 2000, the museums of Strasbourg returned the Gustav Klimt painting *L'Accomplissement* to the heirs of Karl Grünewald (1887-1964), a Jewish collector living in Vienna. In 2001, a lawyer submitted a request for the restitution of Alessandro Magnasco's *Nonnes filant*. The painting had been bought in 1942 by the Strasbourg museums from the Paris art dealer Joseph Oscar Leegenhoek (1906-1997). It came from the collection of Federico Gentili Di Giuseppe (1868-1940), an Italian Jewish collector living in Paris, whose collection was looted by the Nazis during the occupation of France. The painting was kept by the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg following an agreement with the former owners. In 2003, the request for the return of Canaletto's *Vue de l'église de la Salute depuis l'entrée du Grand Canal* by the heirs of the Viennese industrialist Bernhard

Altmann (1888-1960) was presented to the Strasbourg museums.⁵ Following this, Fabrice Hergott, the director of the Strasbourg museums, decided to commission the art historian Tessa Rosebrock to investigate the provenance of this painting, which had been purchased by the Strasbourg museums from Othon Kaufmann (1905-1993) and François Schlageter (1904-1997), a couple of German collectors, living in Strasbourg since 1946.⁶ In this context, Rosebrock was tasked to carry out an initial audit of the works acquired between 1940 and 1944 by the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen under the directorate of Kurt Martin (1899-1975).⁷ Her research rendered it possible to give an overview of the acquisitions made during this period, and in particular, thanks to the examination of archival sources in Karlsruhe, Paris, Koblenz, Berlin and Strasbourg, to identify at least some of the art dealers from whom Martin had acquired these works. However, as Tessa Rosebrock recommended in the conclusions of her report, further research should be carried out to establish in what contexts and from whom these dealers in turn had purchased the works.

A new restitution claim shook the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg, leading in 2017 to the return of *Paysage avec Argus et Mercure* by Lucas Gassel and *Paysage avec des animaux* by Roelandt Savery to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Although the spoliation in 1938 was documented, the arrival into Strasbourg's museums and therefore parts of the provenance record of these two paintings remained unknown at the time of their restitution. In each of these cases, provenance research has been carried out, enabling the origin of the paintings to be traced and proving that they had been looted. However, the case of the two paintings belonging to the Kunsthistorisches Museum also illustrates the difficulty of carrying out such research when it comes to tracing the object's

3 La recherche de provenance: Enjeux et méthodes, symposium at the Musée du Louvre, February 2nd 2022.

4 I refer here only to the provenance researchers' jobs concerning cultural property looted by the Nazis.

5 Thanks to an agreement with the heirs, this painting could be kept in the collections of the Strasbourg museums.

6 Fabrice Hergott: Du Klimt au Canaletto. Une expérience strasbourgeoise, in: Tessa Rosebrock (ed.): Kurt Martin et le musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg. Politique des musées et des expositions sous le IIIe Reich et dans l'immédiat après-guerre, Paris / Strasbourg 2019, XXI-XXIV.

7 Tessa Rosebrock: Die Straßburger Museen in der Zeit von 1940-1944. Rückführung, Ankauf und Bergung von Kunstwerken unter Kurt Martin und der Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen, research report, musées de Strasbourg, Strasbourg 2004.

biography. These examples, as well as the report of the audit carried out for the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, show that in French public collections, beyond the MNR works (Musées Nationaux Récupérations),⁸ there are still works whose acquisition during the National Socialist period remains vague or even problematic, because they passed through the hands of individuals now identified as having participated in the spoliation of collections.

In addition, the various restitution cases concerning the Strasbourg museums demonstrate the need to extend provenance research also on artworks acquired after 1945. Thus, *L'Accomplissement* by Klimt had been acquired from an Alsatian artist in the 1950s by Hans Haug (1890-1965), director of the museums.⁹ By contrast, Canaletto's painting came from a private collection of major donors to the Strasbourg museums, Kaufman and Schlageter. They had acquired the work in good faith from Hermann Voss (1884-1969) in 1949.¹⁰ This work turned out to have been looted from Altmann, probably at the time of the "Anschluss" in March 1938. As a result, artworks may have continued to circulate on the art market or to remain in private collections, without their history during the National Socialist period (1933-1945) being questioned or studied. Furthermore, despite the research carried out by Rosebrock in 2004, the accessibility of archives, the overall development of research, the increase in publications on the subject, and the emergence of new tools such as databases by now offer new avenues and means of research, enabling further results to be obtained.

8 After the war, some of the works recovered in Germany were not returned to their owners. A total of 2.000 works were selected for their artistic value and placed on deposit in various museums in France. Museums had the duty to continue research in order to identify the owners to whom these artworks belonged. These works were named MNR and had their own inventory number. See Thibault de Ravel d'Esclapon / Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds.): *Reconsidérer les MNR. Perspectives historiques et juridiques sur la spoliation entre 1933 et 1945 puis la restitution d'œuvres d'art*, Paris 2025.

9 Hans Haug was the director of the Strasbourg museums before the Second World War. Following the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in June 1940, he had to leave his position in November 1940 and then was expelled of the region in February 1941. He was replaced by Kurt Martin, director of the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe since 1934. Haug retrieved his position as director of the Strasbourg museums on 25th November 1944 and held it until 1963. See Bernadette Schnitzler: *Les années de guerre (1939-1945)*, in: Bernadette Schnitzler (eds.): *Hans Haug, homme de musées. Une passion à l'œuvre*, Strasbourg 2009, 147-169.

10 Hermann Voss (1884-1969), an art historian and director of collections in Dresden, was responsible for the prefiguration of the Linz museum.

Already in 2018, David Zivie, head of the M2RS, clearly mentioned in the title of his report for the French Minister of Culture, Françoise Nyssen, that "traces remain in registers".¹¹ In September 2024, the report *La réparation par la France des spoliations de biens culturels commises entre 1933 et 1945* by the Cour des Comptes reiterated the urgent need to continue this research, eighty years after the end of the National Socialist regime and the German occupation of France.¹² This is shown by some of the results of my research presented in this article which have also been forwarded to the Strasbourg museums.¹³

Methodology and Corpus

Commissioned from September 2024 to February 2025 as an independent researcher, my work consisted of identifying artworks whose provenance could raise questions regarding their object history between 1933 and 1945. Although the city of Strasbourg administrates eleven museums, this research focused only on the collections of the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain,¹⁴ based on a corpus of works previously established by the curators of the two museums. Some of the works were also in the Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame, as the collections had been transferred from one museum to another over the decades. At the same time, archives holding relevant sources had to be identified at regional, national and even international level. The aim of the project was to carry out an audit, which consisted of conducting an initial study to determine whether there were any indications that works in the collections had a link to Nazi persecution. This initial research was intended to help refine the two corpuses proposed by the museums by identifying

11 David Zivie: 'Des traces subsistent dans des registres...' *Biens culturels spoliés pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale: Une ambition pour rechercher, retrouver, restituer, et expliquer*, Report for Madame Françoise Nyssen, Minister of Culture, Paris 2018.

12 Cour des comptes: *La réparation par la France des spoliations de biens culturels commises entre 1933 et 1945. Restitutions et indemnisations*, Septembre 2024, https://www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/2024-09/20240924-Reparation-par-la-France-spoliations-biens-culturels-entre-1933-et-1945_1.pdf, <14.01.2025>.

13 Due to a confidentiality clause, this article will not examine specific cases and some paintings illustrating the article will not be identified.

14 All the Strasbourg museums are managed by one director, Émilie Girard.

the works or batches of works concerned in order to recommend future research. The audit aimed at the categorization of the works for the purpose of prioritizing future research.

To propose a methodological approach similar to that used by the team that carried out the audit at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen,¹⁵ the works were first divided into five categories. Based on the study of the works' files and relevant archives, the artworks thus have been categorized according to their priority for future research. This priority was defined with regard to hypotheses put forward during my own research as to the urgency of clarifying the provenance of these works during the National Socialist period.

For the Musée des Beaux-Arts, a corpus of 309 paintings acquired between 1933 and 2022, including donations and bequests, was drawn up. The following works were excluded from the list: works that were not paintings; paintings that were only of local and regional interest, in particular portraits of Alsatians; anonymous paintings; donations made by Alsatian families; and paintings whose economic, artistic or historical value was considered to be lesser. For the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, a provisional corpus of 171 works was defined, relating to works produced before 1945. In addition to the categories of works omitted by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain also excluded works donated or purchased from the artist or his/her descendants. These exclusions were necessary because of the limited time dedicated to this research. However, this selection does not fulfill the objective of checking for evidence of cultural property confiscated as a result of National Socialist persecution. As this article will show, some of the excluded objects considered as 'less valuable' have appeared to be suspected of being looted. Adding to these works, there were 14 paintings in the collection of the

Musée de l'Œuvre Notre Dame. Several works were added to these lists because their provenance was unclear, or even strongly suspected of being the result of spoliation. This was done by examining works inventoried retroactively in the collections whose provenance remained unknown.¹⁶ One of the audit's goals was to check whether works other than those proposed for study should be part of the provenance research to be carried out for the period between 1933 and 1945. These additions were made by comparing the registers of retroactive inventories¹⁷ and the registers concerning acquisitions by the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen (registers at the Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe), those of sequestrations (lists in the Generallandesarchiv in Karlsruhe and in the Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin holding archives of the Office des Biens et Intérêts Privés, and the Archives de la Ville et de l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg) and that of the works recovered from Burg Wildenstein in 1945 by the French Army (archives of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs in La Courneuve). 47 works have been added to the list, including 27 in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, ten in the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, three in the Cabinet des Estampes et des Dessins and seven in the Musée Historique.

Although the audit did not cover the collections of the Cabinet des Estampes et des Dessins and the Musée Historique, the archives consulted enabled me to identify certain works now in their collections. I have therefore decided to include these works in order to demonstrate the need to extend this audit and provenance research to the collec-

15 Researchers Marie Duflot, Hélène Ivanoff and Denise Vernerey-Laplace, who were in charge of the audit for the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, have adopted the method presented in the *Leitfaden Provenienzforschung*, the provenance research manual published in 2019 by the German Lost Art Foundation in order to provide recommendations and a methodology for carrying out research into looted cultural property. See Marie Duflot / Hélène Ivanoff / Denise Vernerey-Laplace: Rapport d'audit des collections du musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, January 22nd 2024, https://mbarouen.fr/sites/default/files/upload/synthese_des_recherches_oeuvres_spoliees_musee_des_beaux-arts_de_rouen.pdf, <29.05.2025>.

16 In France, museums labelled as "Musée de France" are required by law to carry out a comprehensive inventory check of their collections every ten years. This process is known as the "récolement décennal". The main goal is to verify the physical presence and condition of each object in the museum's inventory. During this inventory, museums may discover objects present in their collections but absent from inventory records. These items are retroactively inventoried, with numbers corresponding to the date of registration rather than their (often unknown) original acquisition date, due to missing provenance.

17 At the Musée des Beaux-Arts, an inventory check has been carried out in 2008. 223 objects have been retroactively inventoried. At the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, when the museum opened in 1974, 1.131 works have been inventoried retroactively. Then, in 2002, 270 works have been inventoried retroactively; in 2003, 298 works; in 2004, 131 works; in 2005, 107 works; in 2006, 33 works; in 2007, only one work; in 2008, 63 works; in 2009, 18 works; in 2010, 879 works.

tions of the other museums in Strasbourg.¹⁸ In all, the audit covered 541 works. During research, three particular provenance contexts were identified: works purchased by the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen between 1940 and 1944; works sequestered by the Nazis in Alsace; and works recovered in 1945 from a deposit at Burg Wildenstein (near Donaueschingen). This article focuses on the last two contexts, since Tessa Rosebrock, as mentioned above, had already carried out a major research project in 2004 for the museums of Strasbourg on acquisitions during this period.

Works Sequestered by the Nazis in Alsace

In addition to the official list of purchases compiled by the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen between 1940 and 1944, the collections of the Strasbourg museums were enriched by the objects seized from “enemies of the people and the Reich”. The decree of 13th July 1940 set up a body to manage the seized property, the “Treuhänder für das Volks- und reichsfeindliche Vermögen”, headed by Walter Spaeth (1898-?), the “Treuhänder” (trustee), an SS non-commissioned officer working for the Mulhouse police force.¹⁹ The offices were located at “Pioniergasse 4 (Eska Gebäude) – Bau 16”, and in 1942 were moved to “59 Ruprechtsauer Allee”.²⁰ “Enemies of the people and the Reich” included people from countries with which Nazi Germany was at war, Alsatians who belonged to the families of French nationals before 11th November 1918 and who were therefore not “Volksdeutsche” (people of German origin living abroad without German nationality), Jews, and so-called “Französlinge”, i.e. people who considered themselves to be French.²¹ This organization has handled more than 12.000 items, including paintings, furniture, books and cultural goods.²²

As the curator, Bernadette Schnitzler, explains, from the “Treuhänder für das Volks- und reichsfeindliche Vermögen” an expert commission for cultural property was set up to “ensure its safety, but also to carry out a selective sorting among the works seized”.²³ Kurt Martin was appointed “Staatlicher Bevollmächtigter für das Museumswesen im Elsass” (Governmental delegate for the Alsatian museums) to carry out this task. In this capacity, he could decide to earmark objects for inclusion into museum collections.²⁴ According to Rosebrock, “from 1941 onwards, Martin hired three collaborators to inventory and ‘safeguard’ Alsatian art assets, dealing exclusively with goods belonging to ‘enemies of the people and the Reich’. They were Paul Weigt [1881-?],²⁵ Georges Heintz²⁶ and a certain Roth. Weigt, the antiquarian and expert, particularly distinguished himself in this work, so that Martin soon delegated the task to him completely.”²⁷

The recovered items were then grouped together at Le Bon Marché, originally a shop, located at 42 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Vins in Strasbourg (Figure 1).²⁸ This building was damaged during the war. Here, Heintz and Roth drew up inventories of goods, particularly those that might be of interest to museums. It was not only works of art that were seized. Those persons targeted found themselves dispossessed of all their property. Post-war restitution files provide a wealth of information on this subject.²⁹ For example, the restitution request of Baron Albert Louis de Dietrich (1861-1956) includes an inventory of his possessions at his Leonardsau villa carried out by a notary, Maître Grunenwald in

18 In parallel with my research, Barbara Gatineau, head of the documentation center of the Strasbourg museums, carried out provenance research on the decorative art objects held mainly at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg.

19 A similar administration has also been set up in Moselle.

20 The French street names have been Germanized by the Nazis. The “Pioniergasse” had been the rue des Pontonniers, and the “Ruprechtsauer Allee” had been the allée de la Robertsau.

21 Bernadette Schnitzler: Les spoliations de biens culturels en Alsace annexée (1940-1944) – des mesures générales à quelques cas concrets, in: Cahiers alsaciens d’archéologie, d’art, et d’histoire 49 (2006), 183-198.

22 Jean-Marc Dreyfus: Le pillage des œuvres d’art en Alsace annexée, in: Dreyfus / Ravel d’Esclapon 2025 (see FN 8), 14.

23 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 188.

24 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 189.

25 His date of death is unknown. He died after 1967, since his name is still mentioned in the Karlsruhe directories.

26 According to Bernadette Schnitzler, Georges Heintz and his wife committed suicide after the Liberation of Strasbourg. See Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 190.

27 Tessa Rosebrock: Kurt Martin et le musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg. Politique des musées et des expositions sous le IIIe Reich et dans l’immédiat après-guerre, Paris / Strasbourg 2019, 90.

28 I thank Barbara Gatineau for this information.

29 Unlike in the rest of France, in Alsace, these restitution claim files are now kept in the Alsace departmental archives (Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin) among the Office des Biens et Intérêts Privés archives in Strasbourg. However, for anyone researching in these archives, it is important to note that in 1970 some of these restitution claim files were destroyed, the archives having chosen to keep only the most important ones. To the best of my knowledge, no copies of these destroyed files exist.

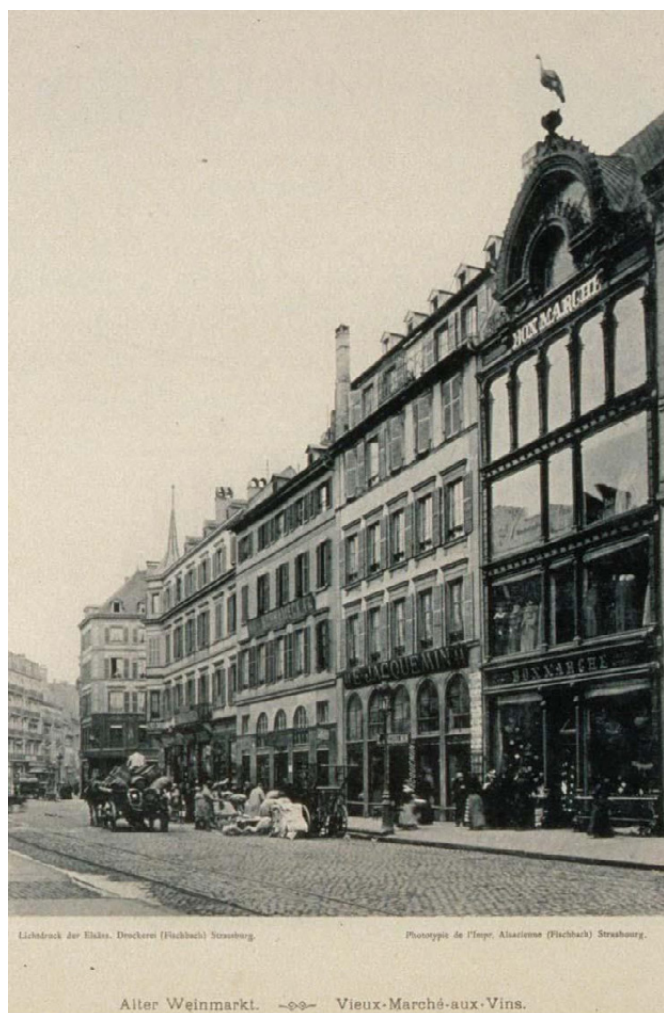


Figure 1: Le Bon Marché, rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Vins, 1900, Strasbourg.

Obernai, between 13th and 17th April 1940.³⁰ The items seized ranged from paintings and fine furniture to utensils, tools, ladders and beds. As part of my research, I was interested only in works of art and artefacts, but more research is needed to identify the persons targeted by these sequestrations, the type of goods seized, the persons involved in these seizures, the buyers of these objects and the overall extent of post-war restitutions.

The Baron de Dietrich's file, which also contains receipts for returned goods, shows that many of the sequestered objects were then acquired by the museums. For example, a receipt dated 5th June 1946 clearly states that these objects were returned to him by Hans Haug, the liquidator of the Generaldirektion der Oberrheinischen Museen, and that these objects came from the German sequestration and had been purchased from the latter by the Generaldirektion. In her research, Tessa Rosebrock

clearly identified that in 1942 alone Martin spent 1.500.000 Reichsmarks to enrich the collections of the museums of Alsace, in particular by buying objects from sequestration, which he termed as "cultural assets linked to our soil".³¹ After the war, Martin stated that he had acquired these objects in order to protect them and "prevent them from being transferred to Germany".³² Notably, he is said to have opposed Hans Posse,³³ who was responsible for building up the collections of the "Führermuseum" in Linz by acquiring works from the occupied countries. Martin is said to have made it clear that there were no major works to be found among those acquired from the property of the "enemies of the people and the Reich" in Alsace.³⁴

Haug defended Martin's policy in a letter to the Chairman of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, Albert Henraux (1881-1953), on 8th December 1944.³⁵ Haug and Martin, who had a good relationship before the war, remained in contact during the occupation of France, Martin considering himself to be merely the acting director.³⁶ As the case of Baron de Dietrich illustrates, works that had been sequestered and integrated into the Strasbourg museums between 1940 and 1944 were subsequently returned. During her research in the archives of the Musée Historique of Strasbourg, Bernadette Schnitzler also found a list of works repatriated from the former Strasbourg "Heeresmuseum"³⁷ (an army museum created in collaboration with the one in Berlin in 1942 by Kurt Martin and opened on 3rd May 1944 to present the military history of the Upper Rhine region, using works from the "Treuhänder") and returned to their owners on 20th April 1947.³⁸ When Haug returned to

31 Rosebrock 2019 (see FN 27), 90-91.

32 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 189.

33 Birgit Schwarz: Hans Posse, in: RAMA – Répertoire des acteurs du marché de l'art en France sous l'Occupation (2021), <https://agorha.inha.fr/detaill/137>, <16.01.2025>.

34 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 187.

35 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209SUP / 382, Letter of Hans Haug to the Director of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, Albert Henraux, Strasbourg, 8th December 1944.

36 Schnitzler 2009 (see FN 9), 157; Rosebrock 2019 (see FN 27), 190-201, 213.

37 Regarding the history of the "Heeresmuseum" in Strasbourg, see Bernadette Schnitzler: Le "Heeresmuseum", un projet de musée de l'Armée en Alsace annexée, in: Cahiers alsaciens d'archéologie, d'art, et d'histoire 50 (2007), 185-194.

38 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 192.

30 Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, Strasbourg, 631 D 4/4. I thank Barbara Gatineau to share this file with me.



Figure 2: Back of a painting with the inscription “TREU”, Strasbourg museums.

his former position as museum director, he sought to return goods acquired from the sequestration. This appears to have been one of his primary tasks between 1945 and 1949. For Schnitzler, “the scale of the task was enormous because of the number of these works: several thousand items, engravings, paintings, earthenware, sculptures, pewter, pieces of furniture, books, drawings, watercolors, scattered in various external museum depots”.³⁹ According to Schnitzler, this enormous task of identifying the owners in order to return the works seems to have been completed in June 1949.⁴⁰

However, during my research, 16 works have been identified as coming from the sequestration of the property of “enemies of the people and the Reich”, and 10 were identified as hypothetically coming from these sequestrations. The identification

of paintings from sequestration in museum collections was therefore a discovery. It was achieved in different ways. In the list of works in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, some were identified as stemming from “ancien séquestre israélite” or “Treuhänder du Bon Marché”.⁴¹ In addition, certain paintings whose provenance was reported as unknown were marked with “TREU” on the back (Figure 2). Based on previous research, particularly by Tessa Rosebrock,⁴² but also by Bernadette Schnitzler and Jean-Marc Dreyfus,⁴³ Barbara Gatineau, head of the documentation center of the Strasbourg museums, and I were able to reveal that the mark or mention “TREU” referred to the “Treuhänder für das Volks- und reichsfeindliche Vermögen”, i.e. the “property of enemies of the people and the Reich”.

Some of the paintings could be verified. The pencil mark “TREU” is clearly inscribed on their reverse sides, as are sometimes numbers referring to the lists kept in the Karlsruhe archives. These lists have enabled us to identify some of the former owners. Furthermore, in order to compile a comprehensive list of the works that may have come from these sequestrations and are still present in the collections of the Strasbourg museums, we need to extend our research to the collections of other museums. Barbara Gatineau was simultaneously working on the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. In addition, Florian Siffer, associate curator and head of the Cabinet des Dessins et des Estampes, and Sylviane Hatterer, associate curator at the Musée Historique, identified further objects that might be involved. Hence, this research is still in progress as it is methodologically complicated and also quite tedious. The methodological approach used by Gatineau and myself consisted of drawing up a list of works inventoried retrospectively and comparing this list with the lists of works from sequestration, which are held in the General-landesarchiv in Karlsruhe. For some of the works, the vague description only allowed us to guess that they might have come from the “Treuhänder”. In the case of the latter works, more detailed research will be needed to confirm or reject this hypothesis

41 Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg, inventory book of the museum.

42 Rosebrock 2019 (see FN 27), 85-99.

43 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21); Dreyfus 2025 (see FN 22), 9-16; Jean-Marc Dreyfus: Les spoliations en Alsace annexée, in: Catherine Maurer / Jérôme Schweitzer (eds.): Face au nazisme, le cas alsacien, Strasbourg 2022, 176-182.

39 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 197.

40 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 197.

of provenance, especially by examining the back of the paintings and any possible marks and/or inscriptions.

The continued presence of certain works stemming from Nazi sequestration in the Strasbourg collections can be explained by the difficulty of tracing the owners of these works, particularly those from the Treuhänder du Bon Marché, since the lists in the Karlsruhe archives do not contain the names of all former owners. In addition, a decree “relating to spoliation measures taken by the enemy or under his control in the Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin and Moselle departments”⁴⁴ of 10th February 1945 stipulates that “spoliated property must be declared within six months, by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, to the Office des Biens et Intérêts Privés (Strasbourg offices)”.⁴⁵ This tight deadline for requesting restitution and/or tracing looted property has probably been a hindrance for some families to find and recover certain works in the Strasbourg collections. Haug himself explains the difficulties he encountered in tracing the owners as follows:

*“At one point, we had to remove all the labels and erase all the names inscribed on a large number of objects stored with us, mixing them with the museum’s objects, in order to avoid them being taken over by the German authorities.”*⁴⁶

My research, however, reveals that many works have remained in the Strasbourg collections, and that their provenance seems gradually to have been forgotten about. The works identified as such might represent only a small fraction of those actually sequestered by the Nazis. Interestingly, Barbara Gatineau and I were able to identify a number of works that had been sequestered, returned and then donated to museums by their owners. The case of Jean-René Stiegelmann (1887-1953) is a good example. Three paintings, whose provenance

was unknown, turned out to come from his collection: *Lisière de forêt dans les Vosges* by Anton Dieffenbach, *Sainte Cécile* by Sassoferato, and *Les fumeurs de pipe* by David Teniers II, known as Le Jeune (Figure 3). By consulting the “Schätzungslisten über kulturhistorisch wertvolle Gegenstände aus ‘reichs- und volksfeindlichem Vermögen’ im Elsass” in the Generallandesarchiv in Karlsruhe, these works were identified as belonging to a certain R. Stiegelmann, who had lived in Schildgasse 1 in Strasbourg.⁴⁷ Thanks to the German land register, this person could be identified as Jean-René Stiegelmann living at 1 rue des Boucliers (French name of Schildgasse 1) in the house known as *zum Hirskorn*.⁴⁸ A file in the Alsace archives shows that he was born in Strasbourg in 1887, worked as a lawyer and joined the Resistance.⁴⁹ Therefore, it seems that the reason for the seizure of these assets was that Stiegelmann had been categorized as an “enemy of the people and the Reich”. At first glance, because of the entry “unknown provenance” in the Musée des Beaux-Arts’s inventory and the identification of these artworks in the sequestration files in the Karlsruhe archives, I had assumed that these paintings, which had been taken from Jean-René Stiegelmann, have not been restituted after the end of the war. However, the restitution file of Stiegelmann in the Strasbourg city archives allowed Barbara Gatineau to conclude that these three paintings had been restituted to their owner on 5th November 1945 (Figure 4).⁵⁰ Artworks restituted by museums were identified in the list with a red cross. Gatineau and I supposed that these paintings had been endowed to the museum by Stiegelmann and that this had not been registered, probably because of the complex situation the museum and its staff were facing in 1945. This example also shows how important it is to compare all the archive files, both the Nazi inventories of sequestration in the German archives as well as the restitution files in the French archives. Further research needs to be done on this.

44 “Arrêté relatif aux mesures de spoliation prises par l’ennemi, ou sous son contrôle, dans les départements du Haut-Rhin, du Bas-Rhin et de la Moselle”, in: Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209SUP/382, Restitution regulations Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin and Moselle.

45 Schnitzler 2006 (see FN 21), 196-197.

46 Archives de la Ville et de l’Eurométropole de Strasbourg, Files 519 W 134, Hans Haug to Dr. Paul Vaucher, Chairman of the Inter-Allied Commission for the Protection and Restitution of Cultural Property, Strasbourg, 17th December 1945.

47 Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, 441-3, No. 1131, 120.

48 Archives de la Ville et de l’Eurométropole de Strasbourg, German land register, 30, case 4.

49 Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, Strasbourg, 844 D 459/27.

50 Archives de la Ville et de l’Eurométropole de Strasbourg, 9MW350.



Figure 5: Back of a painting with a swastika surmounted by an imperial eagle and an inventory number of the Neue Reichskanzlei collection, Strasbourg museums.

In spring 1945, French Army Captain Jacques Despeaux, stationed in Baden-Baden as head of the 5th Bureau of the 14th Infantry Division, was informed of the existence of a depot of works of art in the region.⁵² Following the instructions he had been given, he went to Burg Wildenstein, a castle belonging to Charles Egon V, Prince of Fürstenberg (1891-1973) (Figure 7). As he mentioned in his report to his superiors, Despeaux had two vaults drilled to release the crates eight meters below ground. In view of the large number of crates found, Despeaux wrote that he had discovered a “treasure trove”.⁵³ These crates contained the collection of the Prince of Fürstenberg (owner of Burg Wildenstein), comprising 114 paintings and 13 crates (historical manuscripts, incunabula, objects

52 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209SUP / 370, Letter from Captain Jacques Despeaux to C. Tailliez, Sous-Directeur de l'Enseignement Technique du Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Baden-Baden, 10th May 1945.

53 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370, Letter from Captain Jacques Despeaux to C. Tailliez, Sous-Directeur de l'Enseignement Technique du Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Baden-Baden, 10th May 1945.

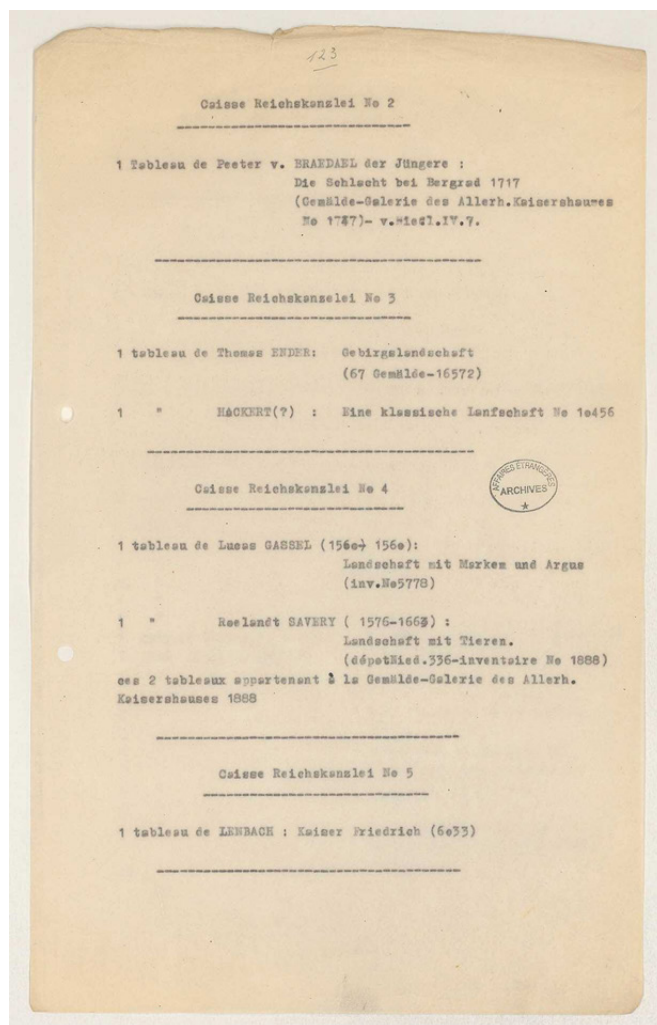


Figure 6: Extract of the list of the artworks found in May 1945 by the French Army Captain Jacques Despeaux at Burg Wildenstein stemming from the Neue Reichskanzlei. Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370.

from Donaueschingen Castle), 20 paintings from the Neue Reichskanzlei, 29 paintings from the Berlin SS, and 17 engravings and paintings from the German Embassy in Paris, sent by the former German ambassador Otto Abetz (1903-1958).

Instead of leaving the works in situ, as was the procedure, he had them transferred to the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg by the French Army lieutenant Speiser. Captain Despeaux explained his choice by his desire not to publicize the discovery so that the Americans would not get involved. As the correspondence in the La Courneuve archives attests, this maneuver was carried out without informing the army's Fine Arts section.⁵⁴ Captain Despeaux wanted to be able to use these works as

54 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209SUP / 370, Letter from Captain Jacques Despeaux to C. Tailliez, Sous-Directeur de l'Enseignement Technique du Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Baden-Baden, 10th May 1945.



Figure 7: Burg Wildenstein, May 1945. Photograph taken by the French Army Captain Jacques Despeaux. Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370.

leverage to regain works of art stolen by the Nazis in France or to use them as compensation for Nazi spoliations. The inventory of these works, signed by Général Touzet du Vigier (1888-1980), the military governor of Strasbourg, attests to their receipt in Strasbourg on 23rd June 1945.⁵⁵

Despeaux' actions were reprimanded, as evidenced by a letter from the Chairman of the Commission de Récupération Artistique on the "Guidelines to be observed when discovering works of art in Germany".⁵⁶ In particular, he stressed that "any collection discovered in Germany, whatever its origin, must be left in situ". He also asked that the matter be kept quiet. Similarly, another letter from Général Louis-Constant Morlière (1897-1980), military commander of the Baden district, stated that "such initiatives are contrary to the spirit and the letter of the S.H.A.E.F.⁵⁷ doctrine" and that it could

harm the policy of artistic recovery.⁵⁸ However, it should be noted that there is a letter contradicting this unilateral decision by Captain Despeaux. Colonel Berchoux (1894-1985), commander of the French Army's 14th Infantry Division, wrote on 19th June 1945 that Brigadier Général Salan (1899-1984) had been kept informed since the start of the investigation.⁵⁹ Following the orders of Général de Lattre de Tassigny (1889-1952), Commander-in-Chief of the French First Army, he himself had ordered the transfer of these objects, first to Donaueschingen, then to Strasbourg. The works were then taken to the Palais Rohan in Strasbourg, which was considered a safe place, where they were to be inventoried.

It still remains difficult to unravel which version is true. However, the decision to transfer the works to Strasbourg led to a number of complications. The Archbishop of Freiburg, Conrad Gröber (1872-1948), asked the French authorities to return

55 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370.

56 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370, The President of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, Albert Henraux, to Captain Jacques Despeaux, Paris, 18th May 1945.

57 The S.H.A.E.F. (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) relates to the inter-Allied command structure, common strategies and efforts.

58 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370, General Morlière to the Army General, Commander of the First Army, Général de Lattre Tassigny, Karlsruhe, 21st May 1945.

59 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370, Report of Colonel Berchoux, [without place], 19th June 1945.

Retable des rois mages by the Master of Messkirch.⁶⁰ In February 1945, the altarpiece had been deposited at Burg Wildenstein by German authorities to protect it from possible war damage. Similarly, the lawyer of Charles Egon V, Prince of Fürstenberg, sent letters to the Chairman of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, accusing the French Army of theft.⁶¹ The crates containing his collections were then returned to him. Moreover, the works sent to Burg Wildenstein in 1944 by the German Embassy in Paris were inventoried by Lieutenant Speiser and Hans Haug and afterwards sent to the Jeu de Paume in Paris.⁶² Some of the owners of these works were identified by Haug, such as Maurice de Rothschild (1881-1957) and the French Jewish art dealer Paul Rosenberg (1881-1959).

However, the search for the owners of the paintings from the Neue Reichskanzlei seems to have been more difficult. I did not find any documents in the archives of La Courneuve, Strasbourg or the museums of Strasbourg which would explain Haug's decision to keep these paintings in the Strasbourg museums. 16 works appear to have remained in Strasbourg, including the two which in 2017 were returned to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Another work, *Die Schlacht bei Belgrad* by Peeter van Bredael, also belonging to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, was stolen in 1977 from the Cercle Européen in Strasbourg, where it had been on deposit since 1962. This leaves 13 works whose provenance prior to their entry into the collections of the Neue Reichskanzlei remains unknown. The difficulty in tracing their provenance is that there appear to be no surviving records of the inventory of the Neue Reichskanzlei's collections. Burg Wildenstein itself appears to have been used by the Nazis as a repository for works of art. It seems that the Fürstenberg family was inclined to support the Nazis.

Charles Egon's V father, Maximilian Egon II of Fürstenberg (1863-1941), supported the Nazi regime since 1933, when he joined the NSDAP and became member of the SA. He held the rank of SA-Standartenführer in 1938. Charles Egon V of Fürstenberg joined the SS in 1938, held the rank of Obersturmführer in 1939, and became a member of the NSDAP in January 1941. The castle also served as a training center for the Hitler youth. It was also home to the philosophy department of the University of Freiburg, headed by the famous Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), himself a supporter of National Socialism and member of the Nazi party. However, the main reason for choosing this location must have been that the Prince of Fürstenberg himself had a large and valuable collection. Thus, it seemed an appropriate place to store works of art in times of war.

Conclusion

The presentation of these two case studies underscores the strong need to pursue ongoing research into Nazi-confiscated artworks in French museums – a field of inquiry that has only recently begun to develop, particularly within regional museums. As discussed above, all these discoveries were made possible through meticulous examination of archival records in both France and Germany. The cross-referencing of these archives, as well as the study of the historical sources themselves, has enabled me to retrace parts of the provenance of several artworks.

Nonetheless, many points remain to be clarified, whether concerning the broader historical context, such as the understanding of the Neue Reichskanzlei collection, or the comprehensive identification within Strasbourg museum collections of the remains of objects seized from “enemies of the people and the Reich”. Provenance research takes time, owing to the wide variety of cases encountered by researchers within museums. Given that this research was conducted over a six-month period, it was not possible to conduct an exhaustive investigation of the entirety of the two museums' collection.

An initial phase was therefore devoted to 541 works, primarily paintings, with the objective of identifying those potentially subject to looting.

60 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209SUP / 370, Deputy Control Officer Jardot, Head of the Fine Arts Office of the Baden Military Government to the President of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, Albert Henraux, Freiburg, 10th August 1945.

61 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370.

62 Archives of the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at La Courneuve, 209 SUP / 370, Hans Haug to Albert Henraux, President of the Commission de Récupération Artistique, Strasbourg, 29th October 1945.

This audit led to the identification of 32 paintings likely to have been looted, and 111 others requiring further research to clarify their chain of ownership between 1933 and 1945, as well as the circumstances of their sales. Although prior research by Tessa Rosebrock had examined acquisitions made by Kurt Martin during the annexation of Alsace, my report concluded that additional research remains necessary to determine the precise conditions under which these works were acquired by the art dealers who sold them to Kurt Martin. Several of these art dealers are now recognized as having played a central role in the spoliation and sale of Jewish collections, such as Kajetan Mühlmann (1898-1958), Martin Fabiani (1899-1989), Maria Gillhausen (1898-1948), Raphaël Gérard (1886-1963), and Hans Wendland (1880-1972).

Due to the limited time dedicated to this research, I was only able to focus on an in-depth study of twelve paintings, as well as on the study of works from the two contexts presented in this article. These partial results raise the question of the format of these research projects, which are mainly carried out in regional museums in France.⁶³ Such research does not yet allow for an exhaustive study of all the objects acquired since 1933. Moreover, my findings highlight the need to expand provenance research to other museums in Strasbourg. Indeed, since 1945, objects have sometimes been transferred from one museum to another, as the study of the works originating from the Burg Wildenstein depot reveals. Similarly, with regard to the remaining objects seized from “enemies of the people and the Reich”, a broader regional approach should be envisaged. Other museums, than those in Strasbourg, could have acquired objects from sequestration. Collaboration with the Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe would also be highly beneficial, given that Kurt Martin made acquisitions on the art market for both the Strasbourg and Karlsruhe museums. In light of these considerations, it is clear that further systematic provenance research is essential.

ORCID®

Constance Jame 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5179-1686>

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⁶³ On this, see Hélène Ivanoff: Les missions de recherches de provenance au prisme des régions, in: ASTRES (6th October 2025), <https://astres.info/2025/10/06/missions-de-recherches-provenance-regions/>, <24.10.2025>.