

Provenance in Progress: Analyzing *Off the Map*: The Provenance of a Painting at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University

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Abstract: This article introduces readers to a Nazi-era provenance exhibition that took place at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in the fall of 2021: *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*. Featuring a recently attributed portrait by Joseph Wright of Derby, the exhibition presented research on its history of ownership through a variety of methodologies, including archival findings and conservation. The painting and its known provenance are discussed here, as well as how the exhibition became an opportunity to hold constructive conversations related to the many socio-political events that have shaped our world, and art museums, over the past few years. Conceived of prior to the pandemic and the powerful movements for justice that occurred during this time, the exhibition content did not directly address the current cultural climate. This paper critically analyzes *Off the Map* and considers ways that curators of provenance may wish to conceptualize future installations that cover not only object biographies, but also interrelated topics such as racism, colonial-era legacies, and whiteness. In acknowledging the role of Nazi-era provenance exhibitions in today's conversations around social justice, museums can engage wider audiences and tell richer stories that offer transparency on how racism has affected a work's provenance over time.

Keywords: Provenance; exhibition; Nazi-era; Joseph Wright of Derby; anti-racism

In 2013, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans bequeathed the oil painting *Portrait of an Artist* (fig. 1) to the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. The work came into the collection as by the 18th-century French artist Joseph Siffred Duplessis (1725-1802), and was a rare gift to enter the museum's holdings, which consist primarily of modern and contemporary art. Beginning in late 2014, the painting became the subject of extensive provenance research and, in 2021-2022, the focus of an exhibition at the Nasher Museum

titled *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*.¹ The exhibition was a case study that emphasized specific aspects of provenance work that contributed

1 <https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/off-the-map-the-provenance-of-a-painting/>, <26.07.2022>. This project involved the help of countless colleagues and collaborators. At the Nasher Museum, many thanks go to Ruth Caccavale, J Caldwell, Alan Dippy, Rachel Goodwin, Adria Gunter, Melissa Gwynn, Ryan Hessel, Bryan Hilley, Wendy Hower, Brad Johnson, Patrick Krivacka, Amanda Kuruc, Julia McHugh, Lee Nisbet, Julianne Miao, Liz Peters, Marshall Price, Ellen C. Raimond, Trevor Schoonmaker, Sarah Schroth, Stephanie Wheatley, Kelly Woolbright, Doug Vuncannon, and Aaron Zalonis. Ruth Cox deserves special mention for her conservation work on the painting and generous participation in the exhibition video. Additional thanks to David Beaudin, Laura Moure Cecchini, Merritt Hampton, Chris Harris, Annika Hossain, Beth Semans Hubbard, Sabrina Hurtado, Mary Trent Jones, Nancy Karrels, Ian Kennedy, Joe Lucas, Mackenzie Mallon, Mimi O'Brien, James Duke Biddle Trent Semans, Abby Schlesinger, and the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University. The exhibition was supported by The Mary Duke Biddle Foundation and The Samuel H. Kress Foundation. As always, sincere gratitude to Enrico Boarati and my family for their support.

to learning the ownership history of a single painting: attribution, archival research, physical evidence, and conservation. Its presentation within the Nasher's 'Incubator' gallery was meant to share rarely observed behind-the-scenes work with the general public, as well as to introduce the field of provenance research to the student body.



Fig. 1: Joseph Wright of Derby, attributed, *Portrait of an Artist*, mid-late 18th century. Oil on canvas, 29 1/8 x 24 1/2 inches (74 x 62.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Bequest of Mary D.B.T. Semans in memory of her mother, Mary Duke Biddle; 2013.3.1.

With the installation's protracted timeline due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the occurrence of significant and widespread social justice movements in the United States during the same period, curatorial thinking surrounding *Off the Map* developed in new and unexpected ways.² Though the content – conceived of prior to the pandemic – remained the same, it became imperative that discourse surrounding the exhibition not ignore the current cultural moment. Making scholarly provenance research relevant to a wider audience during a period of intense social and political upheaval became the foremost challenge of this exhibition as it went on view in September 2021. It did not stand alone in

² The exhibition was postponed from the summer of 2020 to the fall of 2021. Related programming was extremely limited due to uncertainties caused by the pandemic.

these efforts, as museums around the world tackled the many burdens placed on them after March 2020 and shifted course, whether through exhibitions, programming, or web and social media content.³ In the end, the challenges surrounding the exhibition became an opportunity – an opportunity to look beyond traditional museological discourse and to demonstrate how one work in the collection could act as a lodestar for inquiry and rich explorations of topics on the minds of many museum visitors today.

The goals of this paper are thus threefold: to introduce *Portrait of an Artist*, heretofore unpublished, to the wider public; to share its provenance and presentation within *Off the Map*; and to investigate how such an exhibition might serve as a space for conversations related not only to provenance itself, but also to pressing topics such as racism, systems of power, and social justice that are fundamentally intertwined. Nazi-era provenance research – an indispensable facet of ethical collections care – offers a model for close examination of object transfers over time and for critical analysis of a work's existence within a specific museum collection. In considering the unconscionable theft and destruction that took place during the period of National Socialism, museums in the United States can expand this perspective to investigate object biographies both prior and subsequent to the period of Nazi spoliation and provide nuanced narratives of oppression related to the US's own history of colonialism and slavery. By extension, the current rise of antisemitism in the US similarly begs curators to examine how Nazi-era research links to the current socio-political climate, and how this topic might manifest itself within museum spaces so as to remind visitors of its dangers. It is hoped that this article will provide a prompt for considering how provenance fits into today's conversations around revised epistemologies for museum display and the present cultural climate, within which we might ultimately ask: what racist acts have changed the trajectory of a particular work of art?

³ See, for example, Shirley Li: American Museums Are Going Through an Identity Crisis, in: *The Atlantic*, November 28th 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/11/american-museums-are-going-through-identity-crisis/617221/>, <25.07.2022>.

The Provenance

In accordance with suggested practices outlined in the Association of Art Museum Directors' *Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Spoliation of Art during the Nazi/World War II Era (1933-1945)*, published in 1998,⁴ the American Alliance of Museums' *Standards Regarding the Unlawful Appropriation of Objects During the Nazi Era (1999/2001)*,⁵ and the *Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art (1998)*,⁶ the Nasher joined museums around the world more than a decade ago in contributing information related to the widespread confiscation of art during World War II. I began research on *Portrait of an Artist* in 2014. At the time, the only known facts were that the painting had been bequeathed to the museum by longtime arts patron and member of the Duke family Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans (1920-2012) after inheriting it in 1960 from her mother Mary Lillian Duke Biddle (1887-1960).⁷ Working primarily at the Nasher and in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University, which holds a rich archive of the Duke-Semans papers, I pieced together a modest yet intriguing provenance for the painting from 1931 to the present day. As information surfaced over the next six years, the idea for an exhibition came to my mind as a way to share these findings and to present the topic of provenance to the Nasher's varied university and community audiences.

Following the work's creation in the late 1760s to early 1770s, five owners and two exhibitions of the painting have come to light, all situated within Europe and the United States between 1931 and

2013. To date, there is no explicit information that reveals the work was looted (current data suggests it was brought to the US by a German refugee), but critical data is still missing for the period between 1932 and 1940. Despite the unclear provenance, the exhibition still offered an example of the intensive labor that is necessary to perform due diligence in regard to Nazi-era objects. Though a provenance research project may not be conclusive, the data gained remains vital to the museum's archive and contributes knowledge to the field. Presenting artwork with gaps in its provenance within an exhibition still publicly demonstrates best practices, makes information available to other researchers, and adds transparency to the process.

Since at least 1931, when the earliest found mention of the work was published, *Portrait of an Artist* has been attributed to Joseph Siffred Duplessis (1725-1802). Duplessis was celebrated during his lifetime for his fashionable portraits of the French upper class. He studied in Rome in the 1740s under Pierre Subleyras (1699-1749), exhibited frequently in the Salon de Paris, and eventually became official painter to King Louis XVI. Listed as lot 62 in the April 24-25 sale at the Berlin auction house of Hermann Ball/Paul Graupe, the Duplessis painting was titled *Bildnis eines jungen Malers (Portrait of a Young Painter)*.⁸ It sold for 3.200 Reichsmark and came from the collection of Hans Wendland (1880-1965), a longtime German dealer and collector residing in Lugano, Switzerland. Wendland would later go on to become a key figure in quasi-official looted art transactions throughout Europe during World War II. Though he was not a principal actor in Nazi spoliation, he associated with those who were and profited greatly from their dealings. In 1946, he was the subject of a detailed interrogation report compiled by the United States' Office of Strategic Services Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU).⁹ As the subject of an ALIU report, Wendland is often considered a 'red flag name' in provenance

4 Association of Art Museum Directors: Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Spoliation of Art during the Nazi/World War II Era (1933-1945) [04.06.1998], <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Report%20on%20the%20Spoliation%20of%20Nazi%20Era%20Art.pdf>, <26.07.2022>.

5 American Alliance of Museums: Unlawful Appropriation of Objects During the Nazi Era [11.1999-04.2001], <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/unlawful-appropriation-of-objects-during-the-nazi-era/>, <26.07.2022>.

6 Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues: Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art [03.12.1998], <https://www.state.gov/washington-conference-principles-on-nazi-confiscated-art/>, <26.07.2022>. These documents were made available in the exhibition space, along with a student-researched provenance bibliography.

7 When the work arrived at the Nasher it was untitled. For unknown reasons it obtained the moniker *Portrait of a Young Sculptor*. In 2017, this was changed to *Portrait of an Artist*, a better reflection of the content. Object file 2013.3.1, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

8 https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/ball-graupe1931_04_24/0001/image, <26.07.2022>. Auct. Cat. Berlin (Herman Ball / Paul Graupe, April 24th-25th 1931): Die Sammlung Dr. Hans Wendland. Lugano, Berlin 1931.

9 As cited in Nancy H. Yeide / Konstantin Akinsha / Amy L. Walsh: The AAM Guide to Provenance Research, Washington, D.C. 2001, 296: Detailed Interrogation Report, unnumbered, and Roberts Commission Subject Files: RG239/Entry 73 Subject Files/Box 82, NARA Location: 350/77/2/07.

research – one that merits further attention.¹⁰ According to the report, Wendland was forced to liquidate most of his assets in the early 1930s due to the economic depression and a settlement resulting from a divorce with his first wife. Significantly, Wendland sold the Nasher's painting a few years before the period of Nazi spoliation (1933-1945).

It is still not known how Wendland acquired the work himself. Due to his dealings with actors of the Nazi-era art trade during the war, most literature addresses his maneuverings from 1933 onwards.¹¹ He had a complex and ongoing relationship with Paul Graupe (1881-1953), before the war and after, so it is appropriate to assume his sizeable collection would be sold through Graupe's auction house in 1931.¹² Beginning in 1926, Wendland owned a large estate in Lugano where he held his collection before its sale in Berlin. He also collaborated with the German art dealer Friedrich Gottlieb Reber (1880-1959), also living in Lugano, until about 1930.¹³ Esther Tisa Francini briefly notes Wendland's job as an attaché of the German Embassy in Moscow in 1918, and his relationships with Karl Haberstock and Theodor Fischer (other 'red flag' names) as early as 1920, when he established an office in Basel.¹⁴

Only eighteen months after this sale, the painting resurfaced at auction at the Estate of James Simon sale, held by Rudolph Lepke's *Kunst Auctions Haus* in Berlin on November 29th 1932 (lot 41). This time, the Duplessis painting was titled *Bildnis eines*

jungen Künstlers (Portrait of a Young Artist).¹⁵ It sold for 3.650 Reichsmark to an unknown buyer, and is listed as having a carved gold frame (Geschnitzter G.R.).¹⁶ James Simon (1851-1932) was a celebrated Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist. A cotton industry magnate, Simon also harbored a great love for philology and antiquities. He owned a considerable art collection and donated more than 10.000 objects to Berlin's state museums. His legacy was expunged by the Nazis and resurrected only recently in 2019 with the creation of the James Simon Gallery on Museum Island in Berlin. It remains unclear as to how *Portrait of a Young Artist* entered his collection. By 1931, the family textile company, Simon Brothers, had gone bankrupt and Simon was no longer purchasing art.¹⁷ One hypothesis is that an acquaintance gave the work to him in celebration of his eightieth birthday in the fall of 1931.¹⁸ The Lepke auction house was 'aryanized' after 1933 and became a depository for the sale of Jewish art collections such as Simon's.¹⁹

The Duplessis then appeared eight years later in the United States in the collection of Dr. Ernst Schwarz (1884-1957). Schwarz, the son of a rabbi, was born in Arnsberg (Germany) and received degrees in both chemistry and law. Working as manager of the I.G. Farben office in Frankfurt am Main, Schwarz fled to the US in 1934 with the rise of the Nazis and was appointed president of Agfa Anso Corporation that same year.²⁰ He was based in Binghamton (New York) until 1939, when he be-

10 Yeide / Akinsha / Walsh 2001 (see FN 9), 293-296. In this case, Wendland's 'red flag' status refers to his dealings during the war but not necessarily the period immediately prior to it, when he acquired and sold the Nasher painting.

11 See, for example, Chapter 6 of Anne Michele Rothfeld: *Unscrupulous Opportunists. Second-Rate German Art Dealers as Nazi Functionaries During World War Two*, Dissertation. American University, Washington, D.C. 2016.

12 For this relationship, see Thomas Buomberger: *Raubkunst-Kunstraub. Die Schweiz und der Handel mit gestohlenen Kulturgütern zur Zeit des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, Zurich 1998, 218-222. Special thanks to Annika Hossain for her translations. See also Lynn H. Nicholas: *The Rape of Europa. The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, New York 1994, 165. Paul Graupe (1881-1953) was a German Jewish dealer (also a 'red flag' name) who did frequent business with Wendland and was later responsible for liquidating several Jewish art collections until he had to flee Berlin himself in 1937.

13 Yeide / Akinsha / Walsh 2001 (see FN 9), 284.

14 Esther Tisa Francini: *From Berlin to Ascona. German Collectors in Southern Switzerland, 1920-1950*, in: *American Association of Museums* (ed.): *Vitalizing Memory: International Perspectives on Provenance Research*, New York 2005, 96-103, here: 99. Francini emphasizes the need for further research on Wendland.

15 https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1932_11_29/0005_<26.07.2022>.

16 G.R. standing for "Gold Rahmen". See Auct. cat. Berlin (Rudolph Lepke's Kunst Auctions Haus, November 29th 1932): *Nachlass Dr. James Simon*, Berlin 1932.

17 To name just a few sources on Simon, see Bernd Schultz (ed.): *James Simon. Philanthropist and Patron of the Arts*, Munich / Berlin / London / New York 2007; and Olaf Matthes: *James Simon - Die Kunst des sinnvollen Gebens*, Berlin 2011. Simon is also included in Leonard Barkan: *Berlin for Jews. A Twenty-First Century Companion*, Chicago 2016.

18 Special thanks to Olaf Matthes and Leonard Barkan for their thoughts on how or why Simon may have acquired the painting.

19 See Barkan 2016 (see FN 17), 143.

20 John E. Lesch (ed.): *The German Chemical Industry in the Twentieth Century*, Dordrecht 2000, 126. Anso produced photographic equipment in the US starting in 1842 and merged with the German company Agfa in 1928. In 1939, it became General Aniline and Film Corporation. Unfortunately, no details about Schwarz's flight to the US have surfaced.

came a US citizen,²¹ and was known as an amateur photographer and art collector.²²

It remains unknown how Schwarz came to acquire *Portrait of an Artist*, though, having been in Germany at the time of the Simon sale, a direct purchase from the estate is not beyond possibility. Two photographs and their inscriptions from the Frick Photoarchives on view in *Off the Map* presented valuable information on the painting's whereabouts in the US during the 1940s.²³ The images' versos note the 1932 Simon sale, its exhibition at Schaeffer Galleries in New York in 1940 and the Milwaukee Art Institute in 1942, and its publication in *The Art News* and the *Milwaukee Journal*. They note the photographs were gifts from *The Art News* ("Feb. 5, 1942") and from the owner ("Collection of Dr. Ernst Schwarz, May 6, 1948"). The information provided by these records, catalogued under "Duplessis" in the Frick's artist files, gives a potential link between the Simon sale and Schwarz, and establishes Schwarz as the owner of the painting until at least 1948. Though many questions linger, these archival documents were instrumental in establishing the presence of the work in the US during a portion of World War II and the era of Nazi spoliation.

In April 1940, Schaeffer Galleries of New York held a loan exhibition of self-portraits with works dating from the 1500s to the 1800s. Organized to benefit the College Art Association's Publication Fund, it included 36 works by Dutch, Flemish, German, English, American, Italian, Spanish, French, and Belgian artists. The Duplessis painting was included (no. 26 on the checklist) and listed as a loan

by Dr. Ernst Schwarz.²⁴ This is the first mention of the painting as a self-portrait, "a subject which has not been presented in this country heretofore...."²⁵ Hanns and Kate Schaeffer established Schaeffer Galleries in Berlin in 1925, which they managed until 1939. Following their permanent move to the US in 1933, the couple opened a New York branch that operated between 1936 and the early 2000s. Specializing in "Old Master paintings," Schaeffer Galleries was located at 61 East 57th Street and changed venues several times before moving to its final location at 983 Park Avenue, where it remained for 50 years.²⁶ In September 1942, Schaeffer Galleries merged with the dealer Mortimer Brandt, though it is unclear how long the partnership with Brandt lasted.²⁷

In the fall of 1942, *Portrait of an Artist* appeared at the Milwaukee Art Institute (now the Milwaukee Art Museum) for an exhibition titled *Six Centuries of Portrait Masterpieces*. The show, according to the original checklist, included 51 works of art owned by private collectors, dealers, and public institutions. As mentioned by the local press, "the exhibition [served] a primary purpose on the Art Institute's recently adopted educational plan to promote a wider enjoyment and understanding of art in the community."²⁸ Director George Burton Cumming curated the exhibition and selected works from outside of Wisconsin that had never before been displayed in the region. Lent by the Frick Art Reference Library, an original checklist on view in *Off the Map* listed the Duplessis painting as a self-portrait on loan to Milwaukee from

21 Anonymous: Schwarz Becomes Citizen. German-born Head of Agfa-Ansco Takes Oath at Binghamton, in: *New York Times*, September 2nd 1939, 8.

22 William Lawton: Ex-Head of Ansco Interested in Arts, in: *Press & Sun Bulletin*, December 5th 1957, 6. Schwarz also published a book of his own photography: *Ernst Schwarz: Pictorial America*, Binghamton, New York 1937.

23 Frick Art Reference Library Photoarchive files: Joseph Siffred Duplessis, Call no. 500. For more information on provenance research at The Frick Art Reference Library, see Louisa Wood Ruby / Samantha Deutch: *Transforming Research Methodologies. The Frick Art Reference Library's Collaborative Approach*, in: Jane C. Milosch / Nick Pearce (eds.): *Collecting and Provenance. A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Lanham, Maryland 2019, 61-72.

24 Robert Goldwater: Artists Painted by Themselves. Self-Portraits from Baroque to Impressionism, in: *The Art News* 38 (1940), Artists by Artists: Special Number for the College Art Association Self-Portrait Exhibit, 7-14, here: 23 f. The Duplessis is reproduced on page 11. See also Edward Alden Jewell: Self-Portraits Put On Exhibition. Baroque to Impressionism is Title of Benefit Current at the Schaeffer Galleries, in: *New York Times*, April 2nd 1940, 23.

25 Press release, Schaeffer Galleries papers, box 187, f. 6. Getty Research Institute.

26 See The Frick's Archives Directory for the History of Collecting in America, <https://research.frick.org/directory/view-Item/494#Schaeffer>, <26.07.2022>. See also the Schaeffer Galleries papers at the Getty Research Institute, an invaluable resource for dealer documentation.

27 Anonymous: New Gallery Merger, in: *New York Times*, September 30th 1942, 28.

28 Anonymous: Rare Portrait Paintings in Special Fall Exhibit at Milwaukee Art Institute, in: *The Thirty Minute Review*, October 1st 1942, no page. The Duplessis is reproduced with an anonymous blurb about the exhibition in *The Green Sheet of The Milwaukee Journal*, October 12th 1942, 1.

Schaeffer and Brandt, Inc.²⁹ In addition to the Duplessis, three other paintings that had also been in the Schaeffer Galleries self-portrait exhibition two years prior were included in *Six Centuries*.³⁰

The question remains as to why Schaeffer and Brandt lent the Duplessis to Milwaukee when Schwarz was presumably still the owner, having given the photograph of the painting to The Frick in 1948. Curiously, Schwarz is listed as the lender of four other paintings to the show. Did Schwarz bring the painting from Germany to the US in 1934? Did he lend it to the Schaeffer show, then put it on consignment with Schaeffer and Brandt, who lent it to Milwaukee in 1942? It is also possible that the Schaeffers acquired the work in Germany, brought it to the US, sold it to Schwarz, and that the work then passed between the two for several years.³¹ The painting entered the collection of Mary Lillian Duke Biddle by 1955, two years prior to Schwarz's death.³² By January of that year, *Portrait of an Artist* hung over the mantel in the living room of Pinecrest manor in the Forest Hills neighborhood of Durham, North Carolina, as evidenced by several Kodacolor photographs in the Duke-Semans papers.³³ The Duke family purchased Pinecrest in 1935. It was a Tudor manor designed by George Watts Carr and originally built for James O. Cobb in 1927.³⁴ Between the 1930s and 1950s, Mary Lillian Duke Biddle made extensive additions and

renovations to the house with her New York-based interior designer Karl Bock.³⁵ It was one of a handful of residences the family owned at this time, including 1009 Fifth Avenue in New York City and Linden Court, an estate in Tarrytown, New York. Upon Mary Lillian Duke Biddle's death in 1960, the painting passed to her daughter, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans, and remained at Pinecrest. In 2013, the work officially entered the Nasher Museum's collection, as requested in Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans' will.

How the Duke family came to acquire the painting is still unknown, but the most likely scenario involves Mary Lillian Duke Biddle or Karl Bock purchasing it from a gallery in New York City between c.1948 and 1955 to decorate one of their three residences.³⁶ Receipts from the family papers on view in *Off the Map* signal their early history of purchasing such paintings from New York galleries, though no receipt or invoice for the Duplessis has survived.³⁷ Inscriptions and stickers on the back of the painting and stretcher offer frustratingly few leads on the work's journey, though two labels from shippers W.S. Budworth & Son of New York and Noonan-Kocian gallery in St. Louis (Missouri) provide at least

29 The Frick Art Reference Library: Milwaukee Art Center, *Six Centuries of Portrait Masterpieces*, 1942. Frick Book Stacks, Call no. E M648 Ar 7 1942.

30 Self-portraits by Maurice Quentin de la Tour, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, and Paul Gauguin, all lent by Wildenstein & Company, were in both the Milwaukee exhibition and the Schaeffer Galleries show.

31 This confusion may be resolved once more in-depth research into the Schaeffer Galleries papers, halted by the pandemic, can resume.

32 Mary Lillian Duke Biddle was the granddaughter of Washington Duke (1820-1905), who began the family's tobacco business, and the daughter of Benjamin Newton Duke (1855-1929), vice president of the American Tobacco Company, founder of Duke Energy, and primary funder of Trinity College after it relocated to Durham, North Carolina in 1892. Trinity College became Duke University in 1924. The Duke-Semans family has been a significant supporter of the Nasher since it opened in 2005. They have loaned and gifted numerous works of art, provided funding for exhibitions and a lecture series, endowed positions, and more.

33 See the collection guide, <https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/semans>, <26.07.2022>. I am indebted to the Duke-Semans family for providing me access to certain restricted files within their papers and for their constant support of the research and exhibition.

34 See <https://www.opendurham.org/buildings/1050-w-forest-hills-blvd-pinecrest>, <26.07.2022>.

35 See the Karl Bock Papers, Sec. A Box 13 items 1-23 c.1, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

36 Correspondence dated 1966 between Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans and Schaeffer Galleries reveals that she did buy at least one work of art from the gallery, a Boucher "Girl" in 1964. Schaeffer Galleries papers, box 135 f. 5. Getty Research Institute. Other galleries the Duke-Semans family purchased from include Edouard Jonas, Ehrich Galleries, Frederick Bucher Galleries, Hirshl & Adler Galleries, French & Co., Inc., M. Knoedler, Jacques Seligman & Co., and Parke-Bernet, among others, though research has not linked the painting to any of these dealers either. In general, Mary Lillian Duke Biddle purchased many 18th-century French paintings and sculptures.

37 Payment letter and receipt from the Ehrich Galleries for John Hoppner painting, August 15th 1916. James H. and Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans Family Papers, Box 1, folder 1 and invoice/receipt from Edouard Jonas of Paris, Inc. for a showcase and François Hubert Drouais painting, April 5th 1932, Box 1, folder 6. James H. and Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans Family Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.



Fig. 2: Installation view, *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*, September 23rd, 2021–February 6th, 2022. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

some information.³⁸ Diaries, photographs, calendars, wills, and many correspondences consulted in the Duke-Semans papers revealed much about the family's travels, social engagements, and extensive philanthropy. In the end, however, the provenance discovered to date leaves work to be done on the periods both immediately following the work's creation as well as after its first known mention in 1931. A Nazi-era spoliation exhibition centered on a painting for which approximately 160 years of its 250-year history are unknown may have generated some confusion. The gaps in provenance for *Portrait of an Artist*, particularly during the crucial period of 1932–1940, are unsatisfyingly cavernous. Despite these issues, it was critical to present the painting within the context of Nazi-era looting so as to explain the reason for the research in the first place – without this specific period in history and its related atrocities, the research may never have

taken place. It may be assumed that the painting's presence in the US is almost certainly the result of someone's (Schwarz's or the Schaeffers') immigration from Europe due to the rise of National Socialism in Germany. The work's patchy provenance still offers partial stories we can tell, providing multiple access points for understanding a complex, interdisciplinary field. As Lynn Nicholas notes, "Today a full provenance must take into consideration the total context of a work as it moves through time, and the resulting narrative is often as fascinating a social and historical document as the work of art itself."³⁹ Even if the story cannot be "full," it is still beneficial as a document of the lives touched by an artwork and the circumstances of its journey.

The Exhibition

Off the Map presented the painting's known journey within four sections that each addressed different paths of inquiry in provenance research (fig. 2). The framework for *Off the Map* benefited from conversations with colleagues and research into recent exhibitions in the US focused on the same

38 W.S. Budworth & Son operated from 1867 to 1979. See Picture-Packers, in: *The New Yorker*, May 9th 1936, 16. Noonan-Kocian, originally run by Arthur A. Kocian and Joseph Noonan, opened in 1893 and closed in 1971. Many attempts to locate the gallery's papers have been unsuccessful. See Julie A. Dunn-Morton: *Art Patronage in St. Louis, 1840–1920. From Private Homes to a Public Museum*, Dissertation. University of Delaware. 2004, 94, 131; and Greg Johnson: *When the Art World Came to St. Louis. The Noonan-Kocian Art Company at Tenth & Locust*, in: *NextSTL*, September 5th 2013, <https://nextstl.com/2013/05/when-the-art-world-came-to-st-louis-the-noonan-kocian-art-company-at-tenth-locust/>, <26.07.2022>.

39 Lynn H. Nicholas: Introduction, in: *Collections. A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 10 (2014), 249–254, here: 253 f.



Fig. 3: Introductory text and Attribution section in *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*, September 23rd, 2021-February 6th, 2022. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

topic.⁴⁰ While many exhibitions from the past several years have centered on a variety of works within a museum collection, I wanted to hone in on one painting as a means to offer a ‘deep dive’ into the myriad ways of learning more about a singular object’s biography. Installed in the center of the gallery, *Portrait of an Artist* acted as the main axis around which subcategories orbited, each spatially linked to each other, but always connected to the central work. The sections of Attribution, Timeline and Nazi-Era Spoliation, Hidden Clues, and Conservation, as well as a visitor interactive, provided spaces within the 600 square-foot Incubator gallery in which to discuss why Nazi-era provenance research matters through a non-exhaustive display of how such research may be performed. Generous loans, extensive graphic design, ephemera, and audio/visual material came together to create an intimate setting for learning and reflection.

The section on Attribution (fig. 3), presented adjacent to the introductory text, asked visitors to consider the question of authorship in determining the course of an artwork’s trajectory over time. As noted, when the painting arrived at the Nash-

er in 2013, it was thought to be by Joseph Siffred Duplessis. Following consultation with many 18th-century scholars, the painting was reattributed in 2016 to Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797), a better-known British contemporary of the French artist.⁴¹ The painting’s palette and brushwork, as well as certain aspects of its subject, including the clothing, pose, and setting, all tie the oil on canvas to Wright, whose variability in style, prolific portraiture career, and interest in the antique are evidenced in *Portrait of an Artist*. The sitter faces the viewer in a dimly lit, closely cropped area where he confidently sits in Van Dyckian dress. He holds a sheet of paper upon which he has drawn the sculpture behind him – the Belvedere Antinous, seen from behind in a dark niche in the painting’s right background. Though the young artist’s identity remains obscure, a self-portrait of Wright has been ruled out based on the age of the sitter as well as

40 Special thanks to Nancy Karrels and Mackenzie Mallon for their kind assistance and advice. See also Nancy Karrels: Exhibiting Provenance in the University Museum. A Case Study, in: Milosch / Pearce 2019 (see FN 23), 87-99.

41 A Wright attribution was first suggested by scholar Ian Kennedy. Great appreciation also goes to Thierry Bajou, Lucy Bamford, Matthew Craske, Donato Esposito, Guillaume Faroult, Martin Postle, David Solkin, Peter Stewart, Angus Trumble, and Jonny Yarker for their various insights into the painting based on digital images.

Wright's existing self-portraits.⁴² Because a precise correspondence with one of Wright's many recorded paintings has yet to be made, *Portrait of an Artist* remains "attributed". Loans of a signed Duplessis *Portrait of an Artist* (1787, oil on canvas, 29 3/16 x 23 1/4 inches [74.1 x 59 cm]) from the Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a late Wright self-portrait (c. 1780, oil on canvas, 24 x 28 3/4 inches [61 x 73 cm]) from the Yale Center for British Art made possible a rare comparison of the artists' styles within the space of a few feet.

The Timeline and Nazi-Era Spoliation section described the context for Nazi-era provenance research and presented primary source documents, such as newspaper articles, photographs, and auction catalogue reproductions, to demonstrate *Portrait of an Artist's* known biography (fig. 4). Originals and facsimiles displayed in vitrines, along with a handbook of label text, printouts of full-length copies of articles, and a vinyl wall timeline with images, made visible the otherwise abstract notion of archival research.⁴³ Loans from The Frick Art Reference Library and the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke evidenced the importance of the archive for provenance research and its critical links to sub-categories of provenance, such as genealogy and geography. The primary sources also served as a way to acknowledge the inherent difficulties of performing provenance research; gaps clearly remain and often confusion, rather than clarity, abounds. As we know, it is the exception rather than the rule that a researcher is able to tie together the entire provenance for a work of art (hence the title *Off the Map*). Just as the exhibition presented detailed information outlining a particular narrative about the painting, it also acknowledged the unknown, lost, and forgotten facts tied to its existence, as well as the ongoing nature of the research. In a university context, such 'untidy' or incomplete examples

42 It is thought that at least eleven self-portraits of Wright exist. See Judy Edgerton: Joseph Wright of Derby. Self-Portrait in a Fur Cap, in: Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies 18 (1992), 112-123, 183-184; and Benedict Nicholson: Joseph Wright of Derby. Painter of Light, London 1968. It is more likely that this image is of a pupil of Wright's, such as Richard Hurlstone, or an artist in his circle. Thanks to Lucy Bamford for this suggestion.

43 See Karrels 2019 (see FN 40), 97, on the importance of interpreting provenance graphically versus textually as a means of engaging audiences.



Fig. 4: Timeline and Nazi-Era Spoliation section in *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*, September 23rd, 2021-February 6th, 2022. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

of research exhibited within the laboratory-like space of the Incubator gallery were meant to be refreshing and normalizing.

The Hidden Clues portion of the installation focused on information about the painting found on the physical object itself (fig. 5). A mounted vinyl reproduction of the back of the painting's frame was inset with its former stretcher, removed during recent conservation. Side panels provided annotations to the various inscriptions, labels, and marks on the back, offering a practical means of indicating and deciphering the clues that may remain on the back of a work of art. Though *Portrait of an Artist* holds few (currently) useful marks in a biographical sense, the diagrammatic nature of this section encouraged visitor interaction and illustrated how provenance research is often comparable to detective work, with all the dead-end rabbit holes involved therein. With the painting in close proximity to this graphic, visitors could also note the physical changes a work of art experiences over time.

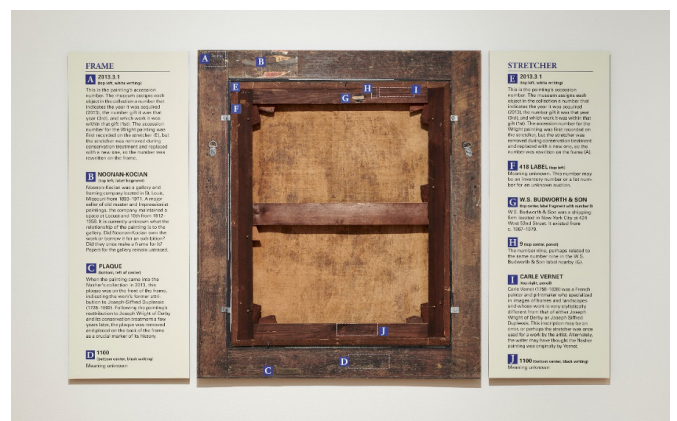


Fig. 5: Hidden Clues diagram in *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*, September 23rd, 2021-February 6th, 2022. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.



Fig. 6: Conservation and interactive sections in *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*, September 23rd, 2021-February 6th, 2022. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

The fourth section of *Off the Map* was Conservation (fig. 6), which covered *Portrait of an Artist's* conservation treatment in 2018/2019. Performed by Ruth Cox in Durham (North Carolina), the treatment involved cleaning the painting, patching areas of paint loss, and relining and restretching the canvas, among other procedures. This portion of the exhibition noted the role of conservation in potentially revealing evidence about a work's provenance that may lie below the surface. Indeed, Cox's study of the artistic process, brushwork, and pigments supported an attribution to Wright. A video of Cox on view in the exhibition produced by the Nasher informed viewers about her conservation work as well as 18th-century European artists' tools and processes. The fourteen-minute video (available on the Nasher's website) went into greater detail than a label could, gave additional behind-the-scenes content, and underlined the complexity of the physical object, as likewise presented in the Hidden Clues section nearby.⁴⁴

The history of ownership of *Portrait of an Artist* as presented in *Off the Map* offered multiple points of entry through a variety of mediums. Though limitations such as time, space, and institutional

44 For the future of provenance research and conservation's role, see also David Newbury / Louise Lippincott: Provenance in 2050, in: Milosch / Pearce 2019 (see FN 23), 101-109, here: 102. "Conservation is also playing a greater role in the provenance of objects [...] Recognition that the object itself carries the signs of its life history is essential to the work of provenance, and it is increasingly difficult to see provenance as the only domain of authenticity and legal ownership." The 19th-century Louis XV-style frame accompanying *Portrait of an Artist* also received conservation treatment. On Wright's frames, see Paul Mitchell: Exh. cat. London (Tate Gallery, February 7th to April 22nd 1990) / Paris (Grand Palais, May 17th to July 23rd 1990) / New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art, September 6-December 2nd 1990): Wright of Derby. Edited by Judy Egerton, London 1990, 273-287.

resources necessitated the inclusion of certain aspects of provenance research and the exclusion of others, *Off the Map* sought to push back against the perception of anonymous provenance research as "a mere compilation of easily obtainable information."⁴⁵ Like several of its predecessors, the exhibition included social narratives in order to emphasize the humanity attached to a physical object upon which we place great value.⁴⁶ Interactive cards also offered visitors the opportunity to put on their detective caps, look closely, and even take home a card to write the provenance of an object they own and will one day pass down (figs. 6-7). After a pandemic year many people mostly spent at home among possessions, it was hoped that an exhibition centered on the history of ownership of an object would allow visitors the opportunity to reflect on what certain objects mean to them as well. By occupying space within a museum gallery, the subject of provenance was given integrity. Its multiple, convoluted layers were afforded room to exist and 'to breathe', sharing information but also inviting new relationships to form between the painting and visitors to the space. As Jane C. Milosch notes, "When museums share the complexities of the processes and expertise needed to generate provenance research findings, we show respect for the public... When we introduce these stories, together with connoisseurship, we cultivate the public's appreciation for what an art museum can uniquely do – teach the power of art by engaging with the objects."⁴⁷

45 Christel H. Force: Intellectual Property and Ownership History, in: Milosch / Pearce (see FN 23), 17-36, here: 29. It is hoped that *Off the Map* addressed some issues surrounding anonymity and the problems related to the cursory nature of published provenance as outlined by Force in this compelling chapter.

46 See also MacKenzie Mallon's exhibition *Discriminating Thieves: Nazi-Looted Art and Restitution*, on view at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, January 26th 2019-January 26th 2020, <https://www.nelson-atkins.org/discriminating-thieves-nazi-looted-art-restitution-opens-nelson-atkins/>, <26.07.2022>; and *Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art* at The Jewish Museum, New York, curated by Darsie Alexander and Sam Sackeroff, on view August 20th 2021-January 9th 2022, <https://thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/afterlives-recovering-the-lost-stories-of-looted-art/>, <26.07.2022>.

47 Jane C. Milosch: Provenance: Not the Problem (The Solution), in: Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals 10 (2014), 255-264, here: 257.

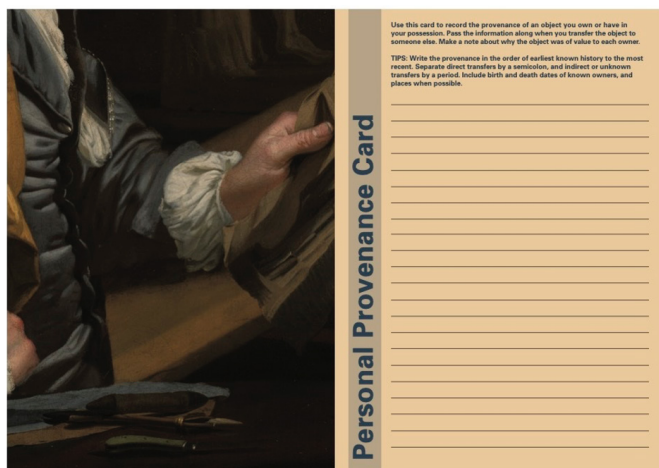


Fig. 7: Personal Provenance Card for in-person visitors to *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting*.

Digging Deeper

It is among these complex processes of researching and presenting an object's history that we might consider alternate ways of addressing and exhibiting provenance research. Such approaches blend with other art historical methodologies (e.g.: social art history, iconographic studies, the artist's biography). They also allow for engaging with topics related to the current socio-political moment, including the effects of slavery and colonialism, structural racism, and white supremacy, to name only a few. With the content of *Off the Map* solidified prior to the pandemic and the social justice movements that swept the US in 2020 and 2021, critically analyzing the exhibition following its installation was essential. The show revealed behind-the-scenes research but what, precisely, was exposed? As Smithsonian Secretary and museum director Lonnie G. Bunch has stated: "It's crucially important for museums to open the veil of how they do the work they do so that even they understand the complicit biases they carry."⁴⁸ How might the stories told in *Off the Map* provide a means of analyzing inherent biases, racism, and hidden histories of underrepresentation? What value lies in dissecting the content and installation of an exhibition on provenance, and what lessons can be learned for future projects?

48 Beth Py-Lieberman / Brian Wolly: Lonnie G. Bunch III to Become the Smithsonian's 14th Secretary, in: Smithsonian Magazine, May 28th 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/lonnie-bunch-named-smithsonian-secretary-180972291/>, <26.07.2022>, as quoted in Mike Murawski: Interrupting White Dominant Culture in Museums: Art Museum Teaching. A Forum for Reflecting on Practice [31.05.2019], <https://artmuseumteaching.com/2019/05/31/interrupting-white-dominant-culture/>, <26.07.2022>.

For the sake of brevity, we might concisely approach these questions here from three different angles, each specifically related to this exhibition, but certainly relevant to other projects as well: the Nazi-era and antisemitism today, racism as it relates to the artist's biography and the subject matter of *Portrait of an Artist*, as well as questions of patronage and power. I would like to reflect on *Off the Map* in these ways and offer it as an additional kind of case study – one for critically evaluating the content and installation of a Nazi-era provenance exhibition and how the act of doing so might allow it to take part in a larger “model of a braver future.”⁴⁹ As urgent discussions in the museum field, such as those initiated by The Empathetic Museum, Decolonize This Place, #MuseumsAreNotNeutral, and #Changethemuseum, call for meaningful interruptions of white dominance, it will be imperative for institutions to identify how provenance exhibitions play a role in these conversations, and how they might “open the veil” to provide more accessible and equitable histories of art.⁵⁰

To begin with, the basis of a provenance exhibition centered on the Nazi-era necessarily relates to the topic of ongoing antisemitism. How might we rethink provenance exhibitions that by nature focus on the physical object to generate knowledge and awareness of antisemitism – not only regarding past persecution and atrocities, but also those patterns of discrimination and exclusion still occurring today? With the growth of neo-Fascism in the US and online social networks advocating for groups like the National Alliance and the National Socialist Movement, neo-Nazi rhetoric is

49 Christina Olsen: Museums Need to Be Braver. Here's How College and University Art Galleries Can Offer the Sector at Large a Roadmap for Reinvention, in: artnet [18.07.2022], <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/college-and-university-art-galleries-roadmap-for-reinvention-2148092>, <21.07.2022>.

50 Exhibitions related to other types of objects, such as African collections, have been tackling issues related to social justice and repatriation in exciting ways. See, for example, *Wish you Were Here: African Art and Restitution* at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, curated and researched by Laura De Becker, Bridget Grier, Timnet Gedar, and Ozi Uduma, ongoing, <https://umma.umich.edu/exhibitions/2021/wish-you-were-here-african-art-and-restitution>, <26.07.2022>. Here, I hope to contribute possibilities as they relate to an 18th-century painting within the very specific context of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.



Fig. 8: Odili Donald Odita, *Flower*, 2020. Woodcut on Hahnemühle copperplate, artist's proof 5/7, 30 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches (77.47 x 77.47 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist in honor of Dr. Eugene Washington and Mrs. Marie Washington, 2021.18.1.

ubiquitous.⁵¹ How could the current state of neo-Nazism in the US impact curators' thinking on the presentation of Nazi-era objects? What additional pedagogical methods can sensitively demonstrate how such objects exist on a continuum of antisemitism throughout history and into the 21st century?

One method could involve making connections between a variety of objects in the museum's collection in order to provide a broad framework for such a discussion. Whether in the galleries or online, visually bridging related content offers many didactic possibilities and inspires powerful thematic associations.⁵² Linked with other works, such as Odili Donald Odita's *Flower* (fig. 8), that reference Nazi symbolism (i.e. a swastika) and the toxic effects of Trump-era neo-fascist rhetoric, *Off the Map* might have pulled the conversation about *Portrait*

51 E.g., white supremacists who participated in the deadly Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia carried flags with the Nazi swastika and shouted "Jews will not replace us." See Mark Morales / Steve Almasy: Jury finds Unite the Right defendants liable for more than \$26 million in damages, in: CNN [23.11.2021], <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/23/us/charlottesville-unite-the-right-trial-deliberations-tuesday/index.html>, <26.07.2022>.

52 This has become common practice in US museums, including the Nasher. See also the North Carolina Museum of Art's #NCMAinterchanges. Labels and social media posts can achieve this goal, as well as virtual exhibitions. See, for example, the virtual exhibition created for *Graphic Pull: Contemporary Prints from the Collection*, curated by the author in 2020, and available at: <https://nasher.duke.edu/virtual/?exhibition=graphicpull/>, <26.07.2022>.



Fig. 9: Marianne Manasse, *Farm Workers on the Back of a Truck*, 20th century. Oil on Masonite, 24 x 30 inches (61 x 76.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jan G. Milner, 1997.3.1.

of an Artist and provenance into the present. Highlighting imagery by artists persecuted by the Nazis, such as German Jew Marianne Manasse's painting *Farm Workers on the Back of a Truck* (fig. 9), makes a similarly compelling, visual tie between *Off the Map* and those directly affected by Nazi-oppression. The Nazi-era is relevant to US museums not only as it relates to issues of ethical collecting, but also for its influence on the history of art and creative production throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. Utilizing the museum's own collection to make such connections requires minimal resources and can hold powerful teaching potential, particularly at a university art museum. Undoubtedly, looking to history and Holocaust museums, both in the US and abroad, may also provide creative solutions, such as digital content, interviews, community participation, and artist interventions.⁵³ The most successful US installations on Nazi-era provenance will now need to address neo-Nazism both to remind and to inform (particularly younger generations) about the human and cultural costs it ideologically entails. Overall, I hope these prompts will inspire thoughtful consideration of interpretive means in similar exhibitions, in the US as well as abroad, that engage visitors and assist in making connections between antisemitism and racism of the past and present.

53 For an example of contemporary artist commissions in this context, see *Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art* at The Jewish Museum, New York (see FN 46).

The study of neo-Nazism and World War II-era looting is also germane to US museums in that it serves as a powerful reminder of the many dark histories of oppression that reside within many collections. In the US, it acts as yet another call for reckoning with the past and its connections to, for example, colonial-era England within which Joseph Wright of Derby lived and worked. In *Off the Map*, the realities of white supremacy and white dominant culture were very apparent. Walking into the Incubator gallery, one was quite literally surrounded by a sea of white faces (figs. 1-4, 6-7). Only after the exhibition was installed did it become clear exactly how many greeted the visitor, from the artist in *Portrait of an Artist*, to its loaned companions, to figures within the timeline and images of the painting reproduced on the interactive.⁵⁴ Upon entering the space, visitors faced the Wright painting, given pride of place in the center of the room. Its subject, a European male artist, holds a drawing of a small replica of the Belvedere Antinous, a Roman copy of a Greek statue, behind him.⁵⁵ With three images of white males on one canvas, *Portrait of an Artist* offers a multi-layered reflection on the supremacy of the white male artist and figure throughout the Western canon. One needs only to look to the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768, a generation older than Wright) upon whose theories about ancient Greek art much art historical scholarship of the past two centuries has been based.⁵⁶ Attributed to a white male artist, the painting and its subject immediately center the conversation of its history on whiteness, not only within the art historical canon, but also more broadly within systems of value and the history of collecting in general.

54 The question of 'Jewish whiteness' is relevant but too broad to address here. See, for example, Ben Ratskoff: "Improbable Spectacles." White Supremacy, Christian Hegemony, and the Dark Side of Judenfrage, in: *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 39 (2020), No. 1, 17-43.

55 As reproduced in Francis Haskell / Nicholas Penny: *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*, New Haven / London 1981, 141 f.

56 "In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty...". Johann Joachim Winckelmann: *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, in: Donald Preziosi (ed.): *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford 1998, 31-39, here: 33. Winckelmann's *Reflections* were translated into English in 1765 and 1767 by Henry Fuseli. For antique sculptures in Wright's paintings, see, for example, Matthew Craske: *Joseph Wright of Derby. Painter of Darkness*, New Haven / London 2020, 95-100.

Furthermore, if we accept this painting as a work by Joseph Wright of Derby and study the artist's biography, we are brought to Liverpool in the late 1760s and early 1770s, when it is believed this work was made. As Elizabeth Barker has noted, several of Wright's patrons at this time had ties to the slave trade, in which Liverpool played a significant role during the 18th century and from which it earned great wealth.⁵⁷ Additional provenance research into the early history of the painting will provide more answers, but knowing the work may have potential links to the slave trade places it in a situation faced by many 'problematic' objects, both historical and contemporary, within institutions around the world.⁵⁸ Viewed in this light, how should the painting be exhibited? How can an installation on provenance address this topic by not merely listing places and dates, but by fully considering the social and historical context from which a work came? As curators grapple with findings related to their museums' past collecting practices and how the colonial era connects to certain works they care for, reserving the resources and developing the proper means to share this information in a transparent manner will be imperative.⁵⁹

As with connecting collection objects, linking provenance exhibitions with other exhibitions on view similarly offers alternate perspectives that counter dominant narratives. For example, I might have tied *Off the Map* to the concurrent exhibition *In Relation to Power: Politically Engaged Works from the Collection*,⁶⁰ curated by Marshall N. Price and Adria Gunter and centered upon many of the themes discussed above. Considered along with Hugo Tillman's *Mrs. Brown Warburton* (fig. 10) or Alex

57 Exh. cat. Liverpool (Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, November 17th 2007-February 24th 2008) / New Haven (Yale Center for British Art, May 22nd-August 31st 2008): Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool. Elizabeth E. Barker / Alex Kidson, New Haven / London 2007, 62 f.

58 Erin L. Thompson: What Do We Do with the Work of Immoral Artists?, in: *Hyperallergic*, November 15th 2021, <https://hyperallergic.com/692727/what-do-we-do-with-the-work-of-immoral-artists/>, <26.07.2022>.

59 See, for example, the Legacies of British Slave-ownership research project at the National Gallery, London, <https://www.national-gallery.org.uk/research/research-partnerships/legacies-of-british-slave-ownership-research-project>, <26.07.2022>. The Museum of Fine Arts Boston offers a good example of online content related to colonial-era objects in its collection, <https://www.mfa.org/collections/provenance/colonial-era-provenance>, <26.07.2022>.

60 <https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/in-relation-to-power-politically-engaged-works-from-the-collection/>, <26.07.2022>.



Fig. 10: Hugo Tillman, *Mrs. Brown Warburton*, 2004. Chromogenic print on Fujiflex paper, 40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Lawrence J. Wheeler in honor of Sarah Schroth on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Nasher Museum of Art, 2014.20.1.

Bradley Cohen's *For a More Just Future* (fig. 11), to name just a few examples, *Portrait of an Artist* might have spurred conversations about generational wealth, white fragility, and the legacies of slavery in the US. At a museum such as the Nasher, which has supported the work of underrepresented contemporary artists since its inception, connecting contemporary art to the provenance research of historical objects only strengthens its mission by unveiling countless histories of marginalized groups and presenting stronger ties between art of the present with that which came before. Linking exhibitions on view at the same time, either virtually, through tours, or in myriad analogue ways, makes the museum's program much more cohesive and accessible.

Finally, the topic of Wright's Liverpool patronage brings us to that of museum patronage today, and how provenance research might also participate in critically evaluating the origins of museum collections. This is vital work, especially for academic art museums in the US that are part of larger historical institutions. Researching *Por-*



Fig. 11: Alex Bradley Cohen, *For a More Just Future*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 44 inches (101.6 × 111.76 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Thomas and Briana Lee, 2020.8.1.

trait of an Artist necessarily involved investigating its arrival into the Duke family and then at Duke University. In recent years, Duke has taken a more proactive stance towards addressing its own complicated past while acknowledging that its guiding principle in this work “must be its commitment to teaching, learning, and scholarship.”⁶¹ Student and faculty projects such as Activating History for Justice at Duke⁶² lay clear the Duke family's profit from an economy founded on slavery (tobacco), its ownership and lease of enslaved laborers, and the university's participation in segregation, for example. The bequest of a painting from Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans to the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University must be studied within the larger context of the family's history as it relates to legacy assets, the ability to collect art, and the power involved in transferring such objects to cultural institutions. Recognizing donors while also evaluating how their prosperity and gifts fit into larger inherently racist systems is a fundamental part of being an ethical museum today, and imperative for those interested in conducting a more comprehensive form of provenance research that exposes even more untold stories.

Though the above topics were not explicitly included in the display of *Portrait of an Artist*, conversations with various Nasher staff, boards, students,

61 See Duke's 2017 Report: Commission on Memory and History, <https://memoryhistory.duke.edu/report/>, <26.07.2022>.

62 <https://www.activatinghistoryatduke.com/>, <26.07.2022>.

and faculty during the run of the exhibition sought to invite a deeper look at the painting's provenance and how it connects to such issues. At a university art museum, discussions about *Off the Map* had the space to morph, develop, and adapt, and included additional topics, such as decentering whiteness and diversity in the field. A tour of the exhibition in with the Antiracist Pedagogy Forum within Duke's Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies further explored themes related to access and the archive, methods of display, and antiracist research, to name just a few.⁶³ Though one exhibition cannot cover everything, *Off the Map* neglected to address many issues that would have made it a more inclusive and relevant presentation of provenance. As shown above, its content was rich for exploring numerous urgent subjects and provided ample curatorial opportunities to shift the field. It is hoped that this examination of the exhibition, written primarily in the winter of 2021, will offer productive insights for future installations on Nazi-era provenance, particularly at academic art museums. Putting a name to one's provenance work in an article, within an exhibition, or on a website, also acts as a small step towards transparency and self-accountability. As institutions look inward and address how they can be dynamic actors in movements for social justice, they must also consider how provenance research plays a role. This is progress in provenance.

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Reference

Molly Boarati: Provenance in Progress: Analyzing *Off the Map: The Provenance of a Painting* at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection* 1 (2022), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2022.1.91522>, 134-148.

⁶³ Thanks to colleagues Hannah Jacobs, Julia McHugh, Pedro Lasch, and Sae Him Park for making this event possible. It took place on November 16th 2021.