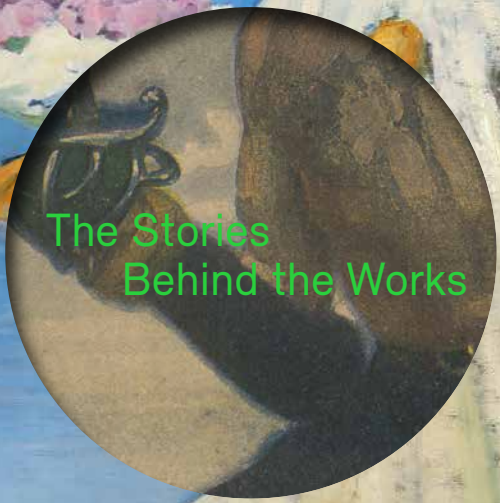
Provenance Research



The Stories Behind the Works

AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE


The Stories
Behind the Works

Provenance Research

The Stories Behind the Works

Edited by
Werner Heegewaldt, Doris Kachel and Anna Schultz
on behalf of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE

Provenance Research

Nazi Art Loot?

War Losses and "Homecomings"

Art in the Crossfire of GDR Politics

Preface

Claudia Roth, Member of the German Bundestag
Minister of State for Culture and the Media

Not all that long ago, the term "provenance research" was only familiar to art historians. That has completely changed. Where cultural assets and collections came from and who previously owned them are questions that have become a central focus of the social and cultural policy agenda.

This change and the development of provenance research into a new discipline of historical assessment were set in motion by the "Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art" which were drafted in 1998. Since then, a new consciousness in dealing with cultural goods has arisen in the sphere of culture and the arts among policy-makers and the public. Almost all museums, collections, archives and libraries today regard investigating the history of their holdings as an integral part of their work. And the seriousness and transparency of their efforts in this regard are an equally integral part of the way these institutions are regarded.

A key task of cultural policy is to create appropriate conditions for the continued support of these important efforts. Funding from the German Lost Art Foundation for provenance research projects plays a central role. I am pleased that this support from the German Lost Art Foundation has enabled systematic research into the origins of the Akademie der Künste's collection of paintings and sculpture. The results of this research have been incorporated into the present exhibition, which also goes beyond the crucial task of addressing Nazi confiscated art. The Akademie's broad range of holdings makes it possible to shed light on the Prussian Academy of Arts' war-related losses and the confiscation of cultural assets in the German Democratic Republic.

Although these historical contexts are vastly different and cannot be compared, they have one thing in common: the histories of the acquisition and loss of art and cultural objects are, sadly, often stories of violence, war, persecution and the need to flee. In this context, provenance research performs a valuable service, above all by documenting the often forgotten or suppressed life histories and ultimate fates of the owners of those objects, particularly under the Nazi regime but also in the German Democratic Republic, so that their histories and fates can be made visible and given the recognition they deserve.

But provenance research provides the greatest insight when its findings are made available to the largest possible audience in a transparent and easily understood form. That is why I am so pleased with this Akademie der Künste exhibition.

Successfully presenting various aspects of provenance research helps enable an informed discussion of the social and political issues related to the way we deal with lost cultural objects today. This discussion is necessary. The tasks of investigating the ownership of Nazi-looted art, agreeing on the proper way to address colonialism's legacy, and of dealing with unresolved issues related to the confiscation of cultural assets in the German Democratic Republic are not finished. These research projects are rewarding not alone because of the results they yield but also because they can help us understand what is involved in provenance research and how complex, time-consuming and demanding it can be. And how, despite intensive efforts, it is sometimes impossible to come up with definitive answers. This awareness can, in turn, help to better understand and increase trust in decisions on individual cases of restitution as well as broader cultural policy decisions on dealing with lost cultural assets.

We must approach history with open and informed minds, and we must seek the whole truth of history if we wish to protect the democracy we now have. This is all the more crucial at a time when a bitter war of aggression is being waged in Ukraine, accompanied by revisionist and cynical propaganda spread by the Putin regime. This war seeks to destroy not only the people and cities of Ukraine but also its cultural heritage.

I hope this exhibition of the Akademie der Künste attracts a large number of visitors and that it serves as a model and inspiration for other cultural institutions to research the provenance of their holdings and invite the public to explore the history and the "stories behind the works".

Introduction

Werner Heegewaldt
Director of the Archives

There is, at present, intense discussion about who owns the colonial legacy in European museums. This demonstrates once again how important it is for cultural institutions to clarify the origins of their holdings and to make the results of this process public. The West African Benin bronzes and the Luf boat from the South Pacific are eloquent proof that what is at stake is more than just legal issues and questions of ownership. At heart, it is about the very significance of art and the act of clarification and acknowledgement; ideally, this will also involve atoning for historical injustices. Works of art and cultural assets help forge a sense of identity, and correspondingly their ownership is of great emotional significance. This is true not only for the cultures in which the works were created but also for the people they belonged to and their descendants. It is also true, of course, for museums, collections, and the individuals responsible for preserving and presenting them. One challenge facing provenance research is the task of investigating stories — either buried or suppressed — of where the artworks came from and who owned them, and of restoring these to consciousness. It is precisely because the loss of works of art is often associated with war and repression that it is so important for those involved to gain clarity about these stories. This applies not only to the legacy of colonialism but also to Nazi-looted art and expropriations of artworks in East Germany, even if the situation and the issues involved are quite dissimilar. Only through explicit knowledge about a specific case can an assessment be made and the legal, historical and political arguments properly weighed.

Since the 1998 publication of the "Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art", provenance research has become a key concern for all collecting institutions. In an unprecedented move, this legally non-binding yet potent agreement put the onus on institutions to identify works of art confiscated during the Nazi era and to find just and fair solutions to mediate between former and current owners. At the same time, the research involves a critical probing of the cultural institution's own past. This requires scrutiny not only of the collections' historically developed sense of identity but also of the political context in which acquisition decisions were taken and whether such decisions still hold water today.

Dramatic reports about Nazi-looted art or works of art from a colonial context routinely create a media splash, generating considerable publicity. They have accustomed people to provenance research. However, the complexity of this area of research and the questions and problems it generates are generally only a matter for experts in the field. The exhibition *Provenance Research* seeks to make this subject accessible to a broad cross-section of the public. It aims to show how challenging it is to make balanced and sensible statements about who owns a work and to whom it belongs, as well as to sound out the options for legal and moral manoeuvring and negotiation. This is the only way to make different takes on issues comprehensible and to obtain social acceptance for restitution-related decisions. New knowledge that has come to light about the origin of paintings, books, archival materials and objects from the collections at the Akademie der Künste provided the starting point. These findings, which allow visitors to view well-known works from new perspectives, suggest that the knowledge produced in the process of provenance research promises to do a great deal more than just clear up questions of ownership. The research results provide important information about the genesis of the works, the biography of the artists and the Akademie's acquisition policy. Above all, though, they keep alive the memory of people who owned the objects and for whom they held meaning and significance. There are three very different areas of focus here connected with the origin of works of art and their history of ownership: the identification of Nazi-looted art in the Akademie der Künste's holdings and the role played by the Akademie during the Nazi era; the search for the Prussian Academy of Arts' collections that were lost during the Second World War; and finally, scrutiny of the efforts made by the East German state apparatus to obtain works of art whose value could be exploited. The exhibition draws on compelling examples to elucidate the methods of detective work involved, securing, and recounting the "history and stories behind the works". In many cases, these stories are the product of arduous research work that is nonetheless fascinating, a process in which a range of different leads are pursued, and the pieces of the puzzle are put together to create a "biography" of the work that may well contain gaps. The exhibits include a book from philosopher Walter Benjamin's lost library that has been rediscovered; the collections of art critic Alfred Kerr that the Gestapo confiscated; a sketchbook from the estate of Max Liebermann; oil sketches by Carl Blechen that were believed to have been lost; and the bequest of painter and Akademie president Otto Nagel comprised of his own works and his substantial art collection that aroused greed within GDR cultural politics circles after the artist's death.

One example of how provenance history can reveal a different approach to understanding art is found in the figure of *Urania*. The monumental 18th-century sculpture greets guests as they enter the exhibition. As a symbol of the fluctuating fortunes of the artists' community and the art in its possession that was destroyed in the war or went missing, the statue is returning to the Akademie as a loan for the first time. It originally graced the old Akademie building on Unter den Linden as part of a complex sculptural programme. Today it normally stands in Heinrich-von-Kleist-Park in Schöneberg, peppered with wounds caused by shrapnel and the ravages of vandals. Visitors to the park are given no information about where the work came from or its original purpose.

This publication sets out to delve deeper into the exhibition's thematic content and provide important background information on the objects. Twelve "highlight" features profile the main exhibits, explaining the story of their origins and detailing the sequence of owners in the particular chain of provenance. In the process, it becomes apparent that, in many cases, the fruits of the research only represent a snapshot view and that certain questions remain unresolved. The selection of object biographies is supplemented by essays on the key issues raised by the exhibition. Doris Kachel presents the work of the provenance research department at the Akademie der Künste. Anna Schultz illustrates the degree to which the Second World War represented a rupture in the Art Collection and shows what the consequences of this were. The essay "The Painter Otto Nagel's Estate: Of Dear Comrades and Disappointed Hopes" by Ulf Bischof,

Archive box with index cards on works by artist Otto Dix, AdK, Berlin, Otto Dix Archive

a specialist in art law, looks at one particular case from East German history. Philosopher Stephan Grotz, a passionate book collector, is responsible for a most unusual find: a work being presented to the public for the first time in our exhibition. In conversation with Erdmut Wizisla, director of the Walter Benjamin Archive, he talks about the discovery of a book from Benjamin's lost library, a "rarity of the highest quality". Cypriot artist and filmmaker Marianna Christofides tackles the subject from a different perspective. Her large-scale, mixed-media installation deals with various objects in the exhibition. The drawings on display and Anneka Metzger's explanatory remarks provide an initial impression of her artistic approach. The unsettling images from the Khanenko Museum in Kyiv show the acute threat facing art and cultural assets in Ukraine. Russia's war of aggression has given an alarmingly topical significance to the challenge of protecting cultural property. When we embarked on our relationship with our colleagues in Kyiv, we had the idea of initiating a joint project on drawings by the painter Eduard Daege — a former director of the Prussian Academy of Arts — located in Kyiv and Berlin. Anna Schultz's essay gives an account of the lost collections of the Prussian Academy. More than 75 years after the Second World War, the Khanenko Museum has now again been forced to move all its holdings to a more secure location to save them from destruction.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the successful realisation of the exhibition and this publication: the sponsors from the Gesellschaft der Freunde der Akademie der Künste (Society of Friends), the Arbeitskreis selbständiger Kultur-Institute e. V. and the Stiftung Preußische Seehandlung for their generous support, which was mercifully free of bureaucracy; the private and institutional lenders who loaned works to the exhibition; the designers at Rimini Berlin for the attractive graphic layout; all the many people who contributed texts from very different perspectives; and finally the numerous colleagues from the Akademie for their involvement in this joint project, including the editors, registrars, conservators, as well as those working in the exhibition department and the archives.

A special word of thanks to the two curators, Doris Kachel and Anna Schultz, and to the exhibition architect Hanna Dettner. Together, they planned and realised the exhibition with great panache and no little creativity. The result demonstrates that provenance research is a constant source of stimulating new questions, which, by its very nature, thrives because it is a "work in progress".

Provenance Research

A Muse Gone Astray

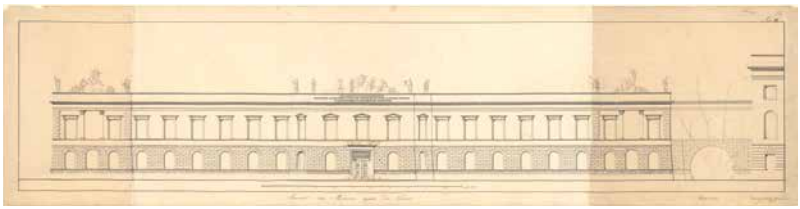
1

Anonymous 18th century Berlin sculptor, *Urania*, sandstone, 210 × 90 × 50 cm, Bezirksamt Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Heinrich-von-Kleist-Park, Berlin

When you look at *Urania*, it is clear that she has been through a lot. More than 300 years ago, she was part of an allegorical ensemble beautifying the eaves of the Marstall on the grand boulevard Unter den Linden, where she sat between Apollo and her fellow muses. The Academie der Mahl-, Bild- und Baukunst (Academy of Painting, Pictorial Arts and Architecture) had moved into the building when it was founded in 1696. There were stables for some 200 horses beneath the space used for teaching and drawing, and these rooms enjoyed all the noise and smells you would expect from such a setting: *Pro musis et mulis* (For the muses and the mules), as philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's reportedly jibed. *Urania*, the muse of astronomy, was far removed from the mundane activities of everyday life. Unlike the allegorical depictions of painting or sculpture, for example, she did not make a direct reference to the work of the art academy; she pointed to cosmic inspiration and, specifically, to the rear section of the building, where Berlin's first observatory was housed.

When a catastrophic fire almost completely destroyed the building and Prussian Academy's collections in 1743, *Urania* defied the flames. The sandstone sculptures were relocated to the avant-corps of the new academy building. In 1904, the academy had to make way for the new building for the Staatsbibliothek (State Library). It moved to the

The ensemble of figures on the building at Unter den Linden 38, 1902



Martin Friedrich Rabe, *Ansicht der Fassade zu den Linden mit Übergang zum Universitätsgebäude*, c. 1816, pen-and-ink, pencil on paper, 31 × 124 cm, AdK, Berlin

Palais Arnim on Pariser Platz, which had been rededicated for the purpose. However, the sculptures could not be accommodated there and remained behind, with some finding a new home in the library courtyard. Most of them were destroyed or damaged during the Second World War, and those that survived were scattered around the city. Today, some can be found in Schillerpark in Wedding and at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) in Charlottenburg, but most of them have disappeared without a trace. The figure of *Urania* was relocated to Heinrich-von-Kleist-Park, although visitors are given no indication where it came from or its original function. Parts of the celestial globe that her right hand rests on can still be made out, but her body is covered with the pockmarks left by shrapnel and vandalism. She has been sprayed with graffiti, and her nose and a few fingers are missing. In conjunction with the exhibition, *Urania* is returning to the Akademie for the first time—as a symbol of the instituion's colourful history and the art that was damaged, lost or destroyed during the war. **Anna Schultz**

Provenance

- **After 1743** Installed on the reconstructed academy building following the Marstall fire
- **1902** Dismantling of the Prussian Academy of Arts building at Unter den Linden 38
- **1910** Seven of the ensemble's sandstone figures are moved to the Concert- und Sportpark Botanischer Garten, Potsdamer Straße (now: Heinrich-von-Kleist-Park)
- **1945** *Urania* is salvaged from the park and installed by Georg Pniower

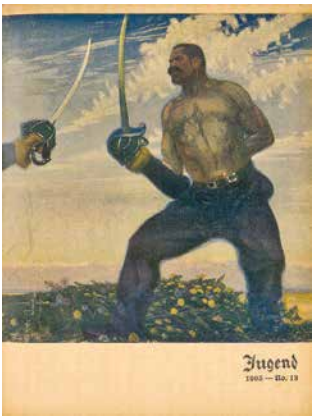
From *Der Fechter* to *Schwarzer Pierrot*

2

Fritz Erler, *Schwarzer Pierrot*, 1908, oil on canvas, 206 x 198 cm, AdK, Berlin

For a long time, no one had any idea that there was a remarkable story behind *Schwarzer Pierrot* (Black Pierrot). Provenance research first revealed the secret: when Fritz Erler finished work on this monumental painting in 1904, it showed a warlike swordsman with raised sabre making a lunge at an unknown opponent. Eager for publicity, the artist, who was editor of the magazine *Jugend*, arranged to have his painting illustrate the cover. A label on the stretcher frame reveals that the picture was shown at the ninth exhibition of the Berlin Secession. It was also included in a group exhibition presenting the work of the Munich artists' association "Scholle". The critics' response to the painting was scathing.

Until recently, art history researchers have worked on the assumption that the unpopular *Fechter* had been lost, perhaps even destroyed. No one suspected Erler had painted over his work in 1908 for a carnival celebration, transforming *Der Fechter* (The Fencer) into a Black Pierrot holding a bouquet of flowers. The painting, which was now described as "grandly ornamental" and "burlesque", soon passed into the hands of the Brakl gallery in Munich, which lent it to the Kölnischer Kunstverein in carnival-loving Cologne in June of the same year. Erler had an intense interest in theatre and created scenography



Cover of the magazine *Jugend: Münchener illustrierte Wochenschrift für Kunst und Leben*, vol. 1, no. 18, depicting Fritz Erler's painting *Der Fechter*

for *Faust* and *Hamlet*—his set designs were also exhibited at Brakl. His enthusiasm is expressed in his painting, where the elegant Pierrot capers on a narrow stage. It would seem, however, that this depiction does not portray a particular actor or any specific role. In her exhibition text, Jeanne-Ange Wagne deals with Erler's perplexing decision to make his Pierrot dark-skinned.

The Jewish gallery owner Heinrich Thannhauser acquired the *Schwarzer Pierrot* for his Moderne Galerie in 1910. It has not yet been ascertained how long the work remained in his possession—whether he quickly found a buyer or his son Justin was obliged to sell it to finance his flight from the Nazis. It is also unclear when and under what circumstances the work became part of the Art Collection at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. We cannot rule out the possibility that the painting was seized as a result of Nazi persecution, nor can a seamless provenance chain be verified, so the work has been categorised as "questionable and requiring further research". **Anna Schultz**

Provenance

- **1904** Submitted by the artist to the ninth exhibition of the Berlin Secession under the title *Der Fechter*
- **until 1908** Fritz Erler, Munich
- **1908** Overpainted to produce *Schwarzer Pierrot*, commissioned by the Neuer Verein, Munich, for the 1908 carnival celebrations
- **1909** [Brakl's] Moderne Kunsthandlung, Munich (run, until 1909, by Franz Josef Brakl and Heinrich Thannhauser)
- **until 1910 or later** Moderne Galerie, Munich (Heinrich Thannhauser)
- **(presumably) 1952** transferred from the Magistrate of Greater Berlin to the Nationalgalerie, Berlin
- Returned to the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Fig. 1 Rudolf G. Bunk, *Tanzende Paare*, back of the painting *Porträt Hanns Meinke*, 1936, oil on canvas, 79.5 × 55 cm, AdK, Berlin

The Traces Left by Time

Provenance Research in the Archives of the Akademie der Künste

by Doris Kachel

A label on the back of a painting, a stamp in a book, a photograph of an interior, an entry in an inventory book—clues to the provenance of artworks and cultural artefacts have been handed down in a variety of ways (fig. 1). Provenance researchers are always on the lookout, constantly seeking answers. Every detail may be relevant, every note might become significant, and every visit to the archives can potentially supply a new clue. Thrilling discoveries don't merely illuminate the history behind an object; they also reveal expropriations. Once established, provenances can call attention to injustices. Every provenance story documented and recounted also preserves the memory of people who owned or traded a work of art or were compelled to give it away. Artworks and cultural artefacts draw on ideas that can fuel the imagi-

nation. They are regarded as a source of identity, not just by collecting institutions but also by the people who once owned them and by their descendants. Provenance research at the Akademie der Künste is more than a self-imposed obligation. It is a means to counteract forgetting.

The aim of such research is to reconstruct the path of ownership as seamlessly as possible, tracking the details of how an object has changed hands from the time it was created to the present. Complex analytical methods combined from various disciplines are applied. A thorough investigation of the object is vital, coupled with research drawing on archives, databases and the relevant literature. Although distinguishing features like labels, stamps, inscriptions, and numbers can often be found on the object itself, these must first be deciphered. Provenance can be verified based on an institution's internal sources, such as inventory books and purchase files, or through external sources, including records kept by organs of the Nazi state, papers and documents archived in artists' estates or by museums and files relating to restitutions. Intensive research on the individuals and institutions connected with an object's biography is essential to determining its whereabouts at different times, periods of ownership and the fateful events surrounding acts of persecution. The process also involves examining exhibition and publication histories and a thorough check of catalogues raisonnés and auction catalogues. Establishing a work's identity is often crucial in facilitating research endeavours: this must be done as specifically as possible, using databases, relevant literature, exhibition and auction catalogues. Ideally, this yields an unbroken chain of ownership. This is by no means a straightforward undertaking. It is not uncommon for the titles of works to have changed. It is also possible for there to be several versions of a painting or sculpture, and there may be variances in the sizes and measurements listed. All the research results are documented in detail in an object dossier.

Provenance researchers are, however, more than just "museum detectives". They conduct their studies as part of a professional network — Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e. V., for example — whose reach extends beyond museums to include universities and the art market. Most research cases require cooperation between lawyers, restorers, art dealers and archivists. The areas covered by provenance research — each governed by a different legal framework — now fall into the following categories: "Nazi loot", "cultural goods and collections from colonial contexts", and "expropriation[s] of cultural assets in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR". The complex issue of "war-related transfers of cultural property" is also a concern for many public institutions.

Provenance research is one of the key tasks undertaken by the Archives of the Akademie der Künste, which hold the estates of over 1200 artists as well as a library and an extensive art collection dating back to 1696. The archives are considered one of the most important collections of modern art and culture. What began as a collection for display and teaching purposes designed to be used to train artists, was coupled with works received as endowments and representative works bestowed by members of the Akademie. An extensive library was also created. These holdings, along with the Akademie's administrative records, form the basis of the archives, although significant losses were incurred as a result of a devastating fire in 1743 and the ravages of the Second World War. The political division of Germany after 1945 led to the establishment in Berlin of two new academies—one in the East and one in the West—which each began acquiring artists' estates and making provisions for the parts of the collection from the Prussian Academy of Arts that had been delegated to them. While the art collection was in the hands of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste (German Academy of Arts)—which had been founded in 1950 and was renamed the Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (East German Academy of Arts) in 1974—the historical archive and the presidential library went to West Berlin, where they were managed by the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts), founded in 1954. The two academies and their archives merged in 1993.

Fig. 2 Aristide Maillol, *Büste des Malers Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, 1907, plaster, 41 × 25 × 25 cm, AdK, Berlin

The holdings were combed for the first time between October 2017 and January 2021 as part of a comprehensive, systematic check to identify cultural assets seized due to Nazi persecution, with a particular focus on Jewish property. The German Lost Art Foundation gave its support to a research project analysing the provenance of 223 paintings and 170 sculptures from the Art Collection, works created before 1945 that had come into the Akademie's possession after 1933. At the end of the project, 283 works of art were categorised as "definitely not suspicious" because they could be clearly identified as the property of the Akademie der Künste before 1933

or as accessions derived directly from artists or their estates. The provenances covering the period 1933–1945 are still incomplete for 54 paintings and 53 sculptures. These include artworks of unknown authorship and works where nothing is known about the circumstances of the acquisition, such as purchases and gifts for a particular archive collection. In provenance terms, these objects were categorised as "possibly questionable" and "questionable and requiring further research". A general-purpose traffic-light system has been put in place here to cover objects that have been investigated. It consists of the following four groups: "definitely not suspicious" (green), "possibly questionable" (yellow), "questionable and requiring further research" (orange) and "probably suspicious" (red). The "possibly questionable" category applies to works whose provenance between 1933 and 1945 has not been clearly accounted for, with gaps in the provenance chain.

Works that are classed as "questionable and requiring further research" are entered in the Lost Art database. Included here are objects that can be shown to have been last owned by a victim of Nazi persecution between 1933 and 1945 or whose sale was brokered by individuals or dealers with proven involvement in Nazi cultural looting. This indicates a connection to acts of expropriation arising from Nazi persecution.

At the end of the project, seven works from the Art Collection were included in the Lost Art database (fig. 2). Based on current research, there are as yet no instances of "probably suspicious" objects. Two sculptures and one painting could not be located and are regarded as lost. Following the project, a sketchbook by Max Liebermann was identified as potential Nazi-looted art. An estate stamp from 1935, decisive for any valuation, was discovered during research. This finding shows that the drawings and prints also deserve a systematic review.

A permanent position was established in 2021 to carry out provenance research in the archives, focusing on locating and identifying works of art and cultural assets seized as a result of Nazi persecution that are now in the holdings of the Art Collection, the library and the archival departments. The aim after that is to apply the "Washington Principles" to find a just and fair way of resolving matters with the rightful heirs or legal successors. The archival and library estates of personalities working in the arts, including many who were persecuted, sometimes contain objects, books and works of art whose provenance is unclear and needs to be investigated. Research is also being carried out in connection with expropriations of cultural assets in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR, and data is

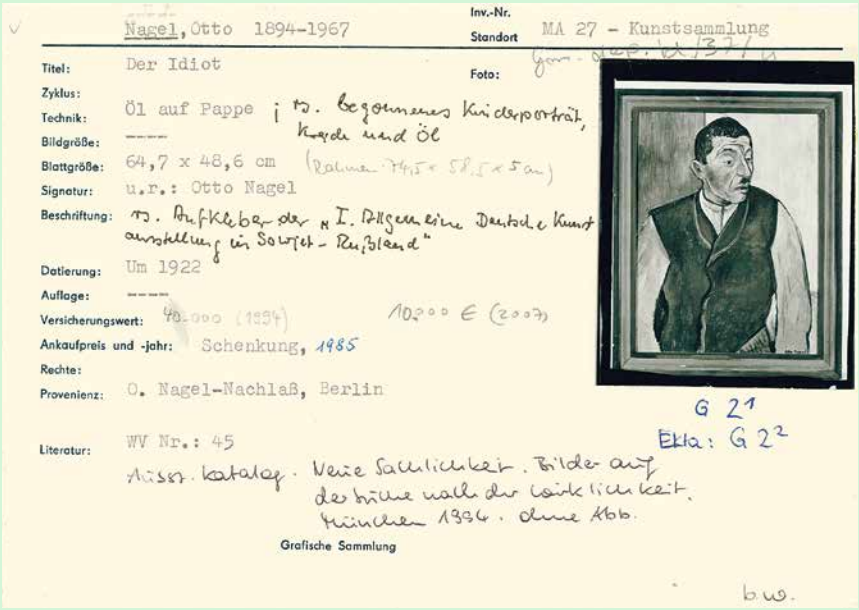

Nagel, Otto 1894–1967
Inv.-Nr.
Standort MA 27 – Kunstsammlung
Titel: Der Idiot
Foto:
Zyklus:
Technik: Öl auf Pappe
Bildgröße: ----
Blattgröße: 64,7 x 48,6 cm
Signatur: u.r.: Otto Nagel
Beschriftung:
Datierung: Um 1922
Auflage: ----
Versicherungswert:
Ankaufpreis und -jahr: Schenkung, 1985
Rechte:
Provenienz: O. Nagel-Nachlaß, Berlin
Literatur: WV Nr.: 45
Grafische Sammlung
G 21
Ekta: G 2²

Fig. 3 Inventory index card for Otto Nagel's painting *Der Idiot* (*Kranker Mann*), AdK, Berlin

being compiled on the war-related transfer of objects. A further task involves checking the provenance of any new acquisitions.

The results of these studies will gradually be made public via the archive database and published online in the Akademie der Künste's digital collections. International Provenance Research Day was instituted in 2019. The Akademie's archives take part in this annual event, offering tours of the repositories, with specific attention paid to provenance, accompanied by a focused look at the Art Collection holdings. Since 14 April 2021, a selection of twelve paintings and sculptures have been presented in the Akademie's "digitales Schaufenster" (digital display case).[1] The rediscovery of extensive card indexes of works by artists Hans Baluschek and Heinrich Zille in the Art Collection's repository was the subject of an online article posted in 2022.[2]

The Akademie's archives are involved in ongoing digitisation projects, in part to provide tools to facilitate provenance research. For example, the Art Collection's inventory card index of all its works—a listing of acquisition sources which sometimes lists details of previous ownership—was retro-converted in 2014 (fig. 3). These records stem from the two academies (in East and West Berlin) and were thus created after 1950 and 1954, respectively. After the founding of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste in East Berlin, inventory books were also created based on different genres, although the earliest of these

only dates back to 1961. For the Akademie der Künste in West Berlin, founded in 1954, the main source of new accessions came through the acquistion of archives. This meant that no inventory books were compiled for the works of art but rather a simple card index providing a fragmentary record.

In addition, the archival records of the Prussian Academy of Arts have been available in digital form since late 2016, providing an excellent resource with which to investigate art and cultural history in Germany and Berlin and conduct provenance research. The Akademie der Künste's 216 historical catalogues on major exhibitions and special exhibitions from the period 1786 to 1943 were digitised and published online in 2019.[3] The rare catalogues contain precise details of the artworks that were exhibited and in some cases sold, as well as information about the works' owners or lenders, which are significant in many cases. These are helpful resources frequently used in provenance research. They also play an extremely important role in reconstructing the collection's holdings. In some cases, artworks on display entered the Akademie's collection.

Another important resource is the 2005 catalogue of works owned by the Prussian Academy of Arts that were lost during the war.[4] Such works are also published in the Lost Art database. The catalogue focused on the paintings, sculptures, drawings, medals and records that had been lost or misplaced due to previous structural changes that were not relocated after the war. The compilation is instrumental as a basis for identifying war losses and reconstructing the core collection.

Provenance research not only sheds light on seizures of art and cultural assets, it also delivers a range of information about the origin of an object. Among other things, it can provide a key to understanding works, yield information about an artist's biography or elucidate a museum's collection policy. A case in point here is the small sculpture of a fox terrier by German sculptor Renée Sintenis and its connections with the writer and politician Johannes R. Becher, who was East German Minister of Culture and president of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. A photograph of Becher's study and an entry in the inventory reveal that the bronze was kept on his desk, where it was used as a paperweight. The animal sculpture, which is now in the Art Collection, was presented to Becher by the artist, along with a billy goat in bronze. For a time, Sintenis was a member of the Presidential Council of the Cultural Association (Kulturbund), which was constituted on 8 August 1945, and she knew Becher as a result. In 1955 she was elected to the newly established Akademie der Künste in West Berlin and remained a member until her death in 1965.

Sintenis had previously been a member of the Prussian Academy of Arts but was expelled in 1934. In another example, a preserved fragment may be found on the back of a painting, as is the case with Rudolf G. Bunk's portrait of Hanns Meinke. A 1935 photograph of Bunk in his studio shows the uncut painting *Tanzende Paare* (Dancing Couples) leaning against the wall in the background (fig. 1). Presumably, the artist reused the canvas because he was short of materials, recycling the back of the canvas for his portrait.

Provenance clues need to be ferreted out and interpreted to enable us to tell the exciting stories behind the works and safeguard them for posterity.

1 https://digital.adk.de/provenienzforschung/
2 https://www.adk.de/de/archiv/news/?we_objectID=63952
3 Bibliographic overview of all digitised Prussian Academy exhibition catalogues (https://www.adk.de/de/archiv/projekte/images/Bibliothek/Preussische_Ausstellungskataloge_Gesamtliste.pdf?m=1654168884&
4 Akademie der Künste (ed.), *Kriegsverluste der Preußischen Akademie der Künste: Kunstsammlung und Archiv, Archiv-Blätter* 12, Berlin, 2005.

Back of Johann Georg Grimm, *Felsige Küste*, 1872–1887, oil on cardboard, 50 × 75 cm, AdK, Berlin

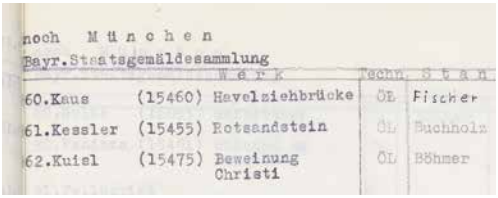
“1 Kaus (for me)”: The “Recovery” of Max Kaus’ *Havelziehbrücke*

3

Max Kaus, *Havelziehbrücke in der Mark*, 1931, oil on canvas, 74.5 x 90.5 cm, AdK, Berlin

In November 1936, at the opening of an exhibition at the Prussian Academy of Arts, education minister Bernhard Rust announced that museum holdings would be “purged”. Within six months, thousands of modern artworks in German museums had been confiscated by the Nazis as part of the “Degenerate Art” campaign—including, on 25 August 1937, the painting *Havelziehbrücke* by Max Kaus (1891–1977).

In 1938, just two years after the Munich Pinakothek acquired the painting, it was removed from the collection, consigned to the book and art dealer Karl Buchholz to be sold on commission and subsequently handed over to Bernhard A. Böhmer. Both belonged to the small group of art dealers tasked by the Nazis with liquidating the confiscated works of art. The idea was not necessarily to destroy the works but to pillory them in exhibitions; most were then sold in exchange for foreign currency. The “Law on the Confiscation of Products of Degenerate Art”, passed on 31 May 1938, retroactively legitimised the uncompensated expropriation of works in public collections that had been “secured”. As a result, it was impossible, even after the war, for German museums to reclaim the works confiscated from their holdings. In many cases, their whereabouts are unknown.



noch München
Bayr. Staatsgemäldesammlung

	Werk	Techn.	Stan
60. Kaus	(15460) Havelziehbrücke	ÖL	Fischer
61. Kessler	(15455) Rotsandstein	ÖL	Buchholz
62. Kuisl	(15475) Beweinung Christi	ÖL	Böhmer

Excerpt from Harry Fischer's List of "Degenerate Art", 1941–42, with entries on the sale of *Havelziehbrücke*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Label from the Galerie Ferdinand Möller on the back of the painting dating from 1933

The Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda kept a register of "degenerate art", which listed the sale of *Havelziehbrücke* through the Galerie Fischer auction house in Lucerne on 28 June 1941. It is more likely, however, that Böhmer managed to acquire the work for himself, as it came to the Akademie der Künste in East Berlin in 1981 via the estate of artist Friedrich Schult. Böhmer and Schult both lived in Güstrow and were joint administrators of Ernst Barlach's estate after 1938.

When Böhmer committed suicide in 1945, Schult went to his house and other storage facilities in Güstrow and put the works that had been labelled "degenerate" in safekeeping, preventing them from being seized by the Red Army. His diary entry on 28 May 1945 reads, "In the Grenzburg … 1 Kaus (for me)." **Doris Kachel**

Provenance

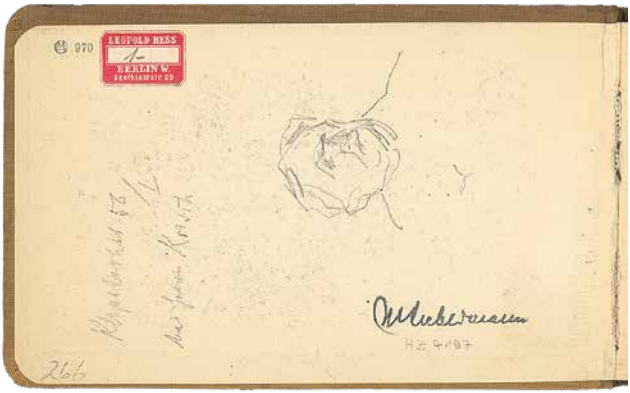
- **1931–18 May 1935** Max Kaus, Berlin
- **March–April 1932** Exhibition *Märkische Flußreise*, Galerie Ferdinand Möller, Berlin
- **July–September 1933** Exhibition *30 deutsche Künstler*, Galerie Ferdinand Möller, Berlin (on consignment)
- **18 May 1935–25 August 1937** Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (Bavarian State Painting Collections), Munich (purchased in the exhibition *Berliner Kunst* in Munich, presumably directly from the artist)
- **25 August 1937** Confiscated as part of the "Degenerate Art" campaign (EK-Nr. 15460) by the German Reich, Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP), Berlin
- **24 November 1938–1939** Buch- und Kunsthandlung Karl Buchholz, Berlin (**18 January 1939**, on consignment; returned to the RMVP)
- **11 March 1939–28 June 1941** Bernhard A. Böhmer, Güstrow (on consignment)
- **28 June 1941 until May 1945** Acquired by Böhmer presumably for himself through the Galerie Fischer in Lucerne
- **1945–1978** Friedrich Schult, Güstrow (probably inherited from the Böhmer estate)
- **1978–1981** Inherited by Erika Schult (widow of Friedrich Schult, travels to West Germany)
- **Since 1981** Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, now the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Remnants of
Alfred Kerr's estate
library, AdK, Berlin

Nazi Art Loot?

Nazi-Looted Art?
Max Liebermann's Sketchbook

4



Max Liebermann, estate stamp in *Skizzenbuch mit Zeichnungen von Gartenlokalen am Wannsee*, 1930–1933, chalk and pencil on paper, 12.5 × 18 cm, AdK, Berlin

In a relaxed pose, Max Liebermann can be seen drawing in a slim sketchbook in the studio at his home on Pariser Platz. The 1932 photograph captures the moment the artist's creative process is fully flowing without providing a view of the drawing he is working on. There is a magic about the fleeting recording of a visual motif that viewers cannot help but become aware. This glimpse of the personal connection between artist and sketch proved alluring for many collectors. It is not surprising that some pages are missing from the sketchbook with drawings of beer gardens at Wannsee. We may assume that Liebermann himself removed the pages, which he then sold or gave away. The book was acquired for the Akademie der Künste's Art Collection in September 2005 at a sale of the Hans-Georg Karg Collection through the Hampel Fine Art auction house in Munich.

Inside the front cover of the slim sketchbook, we can see a distinctive stamp with Liebermann's signature in facsimile. After his death on 8 February 1935, his widow Martha Liebermann put this estate stamp on all the artist's unsigned works. She worked together with art historian Erich Hancke to organise the artist's estate. The Liebermann family suffered a tragic fate under the Nazis. As president of the Prussian Academy (1920–1932), Liebermann was respected and honoured in the Weimar Republic, but in May 1933, six months after being named honorary president, he felt compelled to announce his resignation publicly and thus forestall his expulsion

Max Liebermann in the studio at his home on Pariser Platz, 1932

from the Academy. In the autumn of 1935, Martha gave up the house on Pariser Platz and moved into a flat; she was forced to surrender all her property and assets. In 1938 her daughter emigrated to the United States together with her family. In 1943, shortly before being deported to Theresienstadt, Martha took her own life. The Gestapo sealed off her flat, and the Liebermann inventory and art collection were registered on confiscation lists—including "3 sketchbooks".

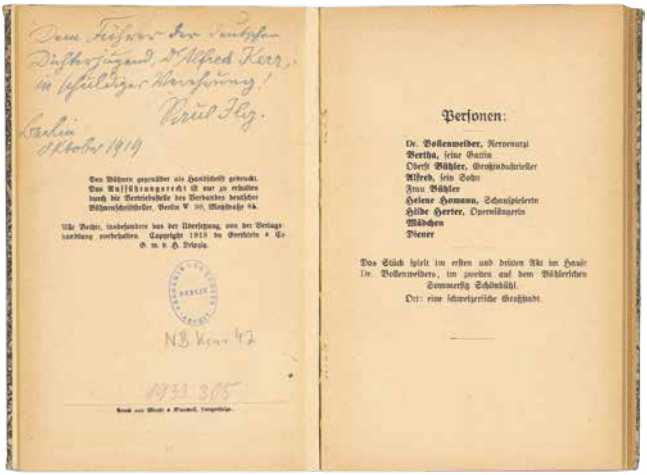
The sketchbook in the Akademie's holdings was verifiably in Martha Liebermann's possession in 1935. There is no substantiated information to indicate who owned it in the period up to the 1970s. This suggests that it was confiscated by the Nazis. **Doris Kachel**

Provenance

- **Until 8 February 1935** Max Liebermann, Berlin
- **After 8 February 1935** Martha Liebermann, Berlin (widow of the artist)
- **Spring 1935** Possible sale to Prince Johann Georg of Saxony, brokered by Max Lehr, or retained by Martha Liebermann **until 10 March 1943** ("3 sketchbooks" on the confiscation list associated with Martha Liebermann's flat inventory)
- **Since the 1970s** Private collection in Northern Germany
- **Until 15 August 1988** Private collection
- **15 August 1988** Galerie Pels-Leusden, Berlin
- **15 August 1988–2004** Sammlung Hans-Georg Karg (The Karg Collection), Bad Homburg and Gut Sossau in Gräbenstatt
- **22 September 2005** Hampel Fine Art Auctions, Munich, lot 52
- **Since 22 September 2005** Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Alfred Kerr's Lost Library

5



Paul Ilg's 1919 dedication to Alfred Kerr in his work *Der Führer*, Leipzig, 1918, AdK, Berlin

Alfred Kerr (1867–1948) was one of Germany's most influential theatre critics during the Weimar Republic. In February 1933, he was obliged to leave Berlin in a hurry. As a Jew and an outspoken critic of the Nazis, he found himself in mortal danger. Kerr reportedly left behind a magnificent library containing some 5000 to 6000 books, among them literary historical and bibliophilic treasures in several languages, some with dedications by well-known authors. Kerr cherished the hope that he could have key books sent on, which were more important to him than "stained-glass paintings and wooden chests". However, all his property was confiscated and put up for auction. In a letter written from Prague on 1 March 1933, Kerr advised his wife, Julia, to seek out the assistance of the antiquarian bookseller Martin Breslauer and have him broker a fire sale of the books: "Say ... they include a large number of plays put on by the Freie Bühne theatre club (Max Halbe, etc.)—along with some lesser works."

In 2007, various newspapers reported that Kerr's lost library had resurfaced. A purchase notification in the Prussian State Library's 1933 annual report was instrumental in tracing the holdings. The historian Karsten Sydow was able to furnish proof that 166 books the library had acquired previously belonged to Kerr. Of these, only 88 have survived; 78 books went missing in the chaos unleashed by the Second World War. In early 2008, the remaining works—all dramas—were returned to Kerr's daughter, Judith Kneale-Kerr, by the Stiftung

Alfred Kerr in his library, 1932

Alfred Kerr's estate library at the AdK, Berlin, 2022

Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). She mandated that the books go to the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, where Alfred Kerr's artistic estate is housed. One of these books is the 1918 play *Der Führer* by Swiss author Paul Ilg (1875–1957). Although the title now has entirely different connotations, the book is about a psychoanalyst who is supposed to give guidance to a poor young actress and her well-to-do admirer Alfred (!). In October 1919, Ilg gave his play the following dedication: "To the guiding light [*Führer*] for Germany's young poets, Dr Alfred Kerr, with all due reverence!" **Elgin Helmstaedt**

Provenance

- **1918–October 1919** Paul Ilg
- **October 1919–late March 1933** Alfred Kerr, Berlin and Lugano (fire sale)
- **31 March 1933–17 January 2008** Preußische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (inventoried as an antiquarian purchase)
- **17 January 2008** Returned from the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin State Library) – Preußischer Kulturbesitz to Judith Kneale-Kerr, London
- **Since 8 July 2008** Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Rediscovered—A Book from Walter Benjamin's Lost Library

Erdmut Wizisla in Conversation with Stephan Grotz

Erdmut Wizisla: I'm talking with Prof. Stephan Grotz, a collector who has unearthed something spectacular. His fortuitous discovery is being made accessible to the public for the first time in our exhibition. Consequently, this is a conversation with a lender whose willingness to present his find is a boon for which we are most grateful. Prof. Grotz, in professional terms, you're not primarily a collector. What do you do when you're not collecting?

Stephan Grotz: First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you here. My main work is at the Catholic Private University (KU) Linz in Upper Austria, where I'm an academic philosopher. I hold the chair for the history of philosophy, having arrived there after teaching positions at the universities in Regensburg and Mainz.

EW: Thanks very much. You've discovered a book from Walter Benjamin's lost library. As director of the Benjamin Archive, I go weak at the knees just saying that sentence. How did this happen? Did you know straight away that the book had once belonged to Benjamin? What's it actually about?

SG: The circumstances surrounding the discovery of this book are actually quite mundane. I was sitting in the kitchen one evening. My children had invited over some friends and fellow students. Things had gotten lively and I had nothing better to do than to browse the online offers of antiquarian booksellers. I wasn't actually looking for Benjamin but rather came across a book written by Erich Auerbach. Initially, it was Auerbach who I was interested in, and I looked to see what new items were on offer. The description of the book read, "Dedication to Walter Benjamin by Erich Auerbach." Of course, I was immediately transfixed. There was also a photo to go with it and the dedication looked like Auerbach's writing. So, I thought, it isn't a fake, and I went ahead and ordered the book. At the same time, I sent an email to the vendor, an elderly woman who'd previously run an antiquarian bookshop, asking her where she'd found the

book. She wrote back to me to say she couldn't remember and had purchased it years, or even decades ago, in a bookshop in Dresden.

EW: Just thinking about it can drive you crazy. We might need to provide a brief explanation here for the people reading this—Benjamin's library has been lost. When he left Berlin in 1933, he couldn't immediately take anything with him. Later, he managed to get a fair few of his books out of Berlin. He didn't have anywhere to put them in Paris, so Bertolt Brecht offered him shelf space for the books in his house in Skovsbostrand. When Brecht and his family had to leave Denmark, the books were sent to Paris and delivered to Benjamin's last flat, on Rue Dombasle. After that, they disappeared without a trace. The Gestapo searched the flat and confiscated Benjamin's papers. Benjamin's library may also have been removed. We just don't know—no one does. Some researchers have made a vain attempt to follow these leads. A number of works have survived: Benjamin's collection of children's books, which were in the possession of his wife, Dora, and are now housed at the University of Frankfurt; some specimen copies in his estate; and a few books in Moscow, where part of his estate is held. However, Benjamin's library is nowhere to be found. Which is why it is so sensational that one of the books has resurfaced. Why and what does it mean? I have just outlined its importance for research on Benjamin, but what does it mean in a more

Erich Auerbach, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1929, private collection

general sense? You're a collector, with a heightened awareness of what is lost, what has been lost. What does it mean when something suddenly shows up that is an authentic part of this library?

SG: For one thing, it is definitely a spectacular event for bibliophiles—this book is a rarity of the highest quality. Auerbach dedications are rare enough in themselves and seldom feature in his early works. On top of that, it is a very famous book and the person it is dedicated to is Walter Benjamin. There are also some marginalia in this book that Benjamin wrote himself. The antiquarian told me that it might include some handwritten notes by Benjamin. She said she was unable to verify this and asked if I would be kind enough to write to her if it were indeed the case. She was very interested but not convinced to begin with that it was anything spectacular, that the book was more or less unique. And then there is the scholarly aspect, in the broadest sense of the word, based on the annotations, which show us Benjamin as the reader of an important book. We can, as it were, look over his shoulder as he reads this work.

EW: Let's take a more in-depth look at the book in question. What is it about? What does it tell us about Benjamin's reading process?

SG: The book itself is written by an author, Erich Auerbach, who would later become famous the world over. Auerbach began his career in the 1920s at the Prussian State Library in Berlin, where he probably came into contact with Walter Benjamin. Sometime later he wrote a manuscript on Dante's *Commedia* titled *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* [later published in English as *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*], and this is the book we're talking about. It was the basis for Auerbach's habilitation and provided him with an entrée into the academic world, securing him the Chair of Romance Philology at the University of Marburg. This copy of the book is, as I said, dedicated to Benjamin. We were already aware that Benjamin had this work on his radar, as it is entered in the list of books he had read. It may not itself be the book that garnered Auerbach an international reputation. That happened later, when he was in exile in Turkey, after he published his celebrated work *Mimesis*, which is still in print today, in its 25th or 26th edition, I believe. This made Auerbach world-famous—especially in recent decades, when he received posthumous recognition—and drew attention to his other writings. For one thing, it is a book about Dante, which appeals to medievalists, to specialists whose works centre on the Middle Ages from both philosophical and literary angles. For another, in this work Auerbach

shows himself to be an author who has mastered the sophisticated art of making radical assessments about specific problems that may perhaps have an esoteric aspect too. What does it actually mean that literature is an art of imitation? This is a question that he wrestles with in the book on Dante.

EW: Auerbach has a great affinity for Benjamin, the interest in the incidental, in details and in discovering a glint of gold amid the detail. In your book, you warn against placing too much value on this truly spectacular find.[1] The nice thing is that you present it in a matter-of-fact way, so that we always have a sense of the vibrancy, the resonance associated with the reappearance of the book, the rarity of it happening. However, in a few places Benjamin's entries in the book make us aware of a dialogue. It's not about influence, bolstering an Auerbach-Benjamin constellation, seeing the book as a sign of a special friendship between them, a tit for tat or anything like that. Instead, it's a precise reading, which you have demonstrated very nicely. I was particularly impressed by what you did with the unobtrusive marginal note on *Nadja*. Perhaps you could say a bit more about that?

SG: Yes, there are a total of nine marginalia to be found in this Auerbach book. Some of them are several lines long, but, as you said, there is only one small note on *Nadja*, referring to Benjamin's


Walter Benjamin freundschaftlich
zugeeignet.
Nov. 1928. E. A.

ERICH AUERBACH

DANTE ALS DICHTER
DER IRDISCHEN WELT

BERLIN UND LEIPZIG 1929
VERLAG WALTER DE GRUYTER & CO.

Erich Auerbach's dedication to Walter Benjamin, 1928, in his book *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1929, private collection

well-known essay on Surrealism. Benjamin uses it in a bid to squeeze juice from a passage in Auerbach's book on Dante. His intention is to show that troubadour poetry, which is one of the primary influences on Dante's work and is discussed by Auerbach here, can be directly correlated with the most recent movements at the time—in particular, with André Breton's novel *Nadja*. It would go too far to ponder this in detail right now. But, it is astonishing that by reading Auerbach in the context of the personal concerns that were bothering him at the time, Benjamin also performs an act of appropriation, and a productive one. He does not simply use it as an academic reference—along the lines of "I find my thought processes corroborated by another author". Rather, he takes Auerbach's words and descriptions further, pushing them into areas that Auerbach himself did not envisage. That is what is so productive about it. For one thing, Benjamin exposes himself to the reading of the book—which is about Dante and not really about modern literature or modern phenomena at all—and appropriates it under the banner of Surrealism. The upshot of this is that it is, quite literally, an autonomous reading. It stands on its own turf, developing its own individual perspective. You can't say that Benjamin misunderstands Auerbach here. He understands him very well and sees structural similarities he can make personal use of and apply to his own line of thought and philosophy.

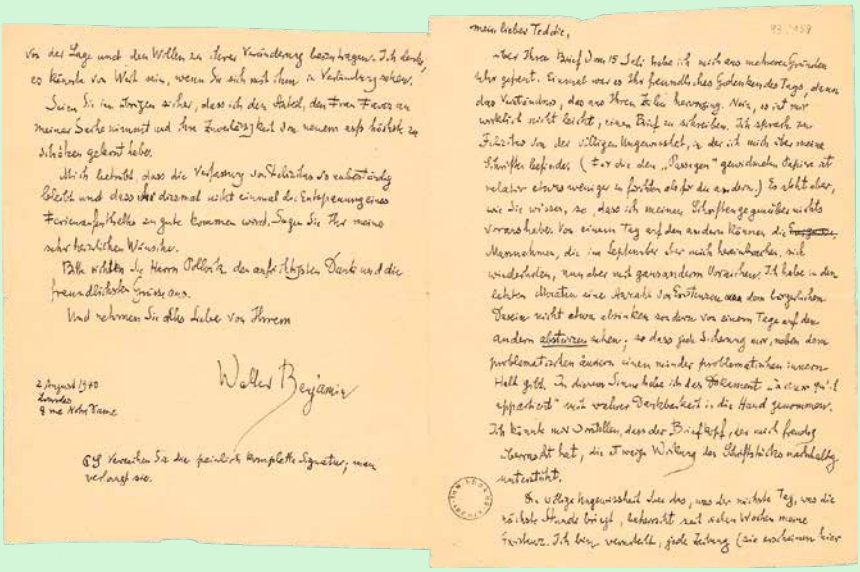
EW: I think that accurately describes Benjamin's reading and working habits in general. They reflect his ability to jump across time, to discern the present in bygone eras, to detect flashes of topicality, as Benjamin says in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte (On the Concept of History)*, while also engaging in a more artistic process. His style is one that combines art and science, not working things through to the end, not aiming for completeness or historicist specificity but rather for the "firm, apparently brutal grip" that he once noted.

I would like to finish by talking about collecting. "To a true collector", writes Benjamin in his talk "Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus" ("Unpacking My Library"), "the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth." By locating a lost work, in your book you have discovered a metaphor that goes even further. You call it "a piece of paradise regained". "There are many kinds of collectors," says Benjamin, and he describes Eduard Fuchs as a pioneer because he established a unique archive. I get the impression that as a collector, you are more of a rescuer. Can you briefly outline what you want to preserve and where you see the threat of imminent loss? Do you think that at some point in the future yet more books from Benjamin's lost library might resurface?

Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin playing chess, Denmark, 1934, AdK, Berlin

SG: My library is a hybrid that combines a working library and a bibliophile's library. In this instance, there has been a very clear intersection of the two—all rolled into one, more or less, in this book. It is a bibliophile's copy, which aroused and continues to arouse my scholarly curiosity. Of course, in addition to the bibliophilic aspect, there's also the sense of wanting to preserve something. But in the early days, when I was a young man, I had no idea that I might have something worth preserving. Initially, I had a purely impersonal interest in authors from the Warburg circle—I had not been introduced to them in class by my academic teachers. But they intrigued me and I got to know them by chance. My interest in the Cassirer publishing house led me to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer and through him I got involved in Warburg's circle. And over time I discovered other authors for myself, people like Hans Liebeschütz, the great Erwin Panofsky, and so many others. I found them interesting and I tried then to get to grips with as many of them as I could. Back then, in Berlin and in Munich—where I studied—there were still some second-hand bookshops that you could comb through on a regular basis and find a few things to buy. This did indeed give rise to a kind of memory work—to put it in rather lofty terms. I don't think this function is confined merely to exhibitions. Memory also implies passing something on "from druid to druid", and I try to pass that on in my teaching and my exchanges with academic colleagues. But I don't think it has any specific bearing on my personal work.

As for the second aspect, if collecting also represents a form of preservation, it means that it is counteracting a kind of loss. For all



Walter Benjamin to Theodor W. Adorno, 2 August 1940, Theodor W. Adorno Archive, Frankfurt am Main

the great benefits it brings, I see this loss manifested in the switch to digitisation that's happening in public libraries. Both in my professional work and as a collector, I have seen that a great deal of what institutions would do well to collect—it is really no exaggeration to say that "a great deal"—is weeded out of public holdings and lands on the antiquarian market. There's such an incredible amount of stuff that ends up there that it becomes very difficult to differentiate *prima facie* between the second-hand book trade—where the ultimate destination is more or less the recycling bin—and the real treasures out there. There is a lot at stake, which is why private collectors should not see themselves as competing with public holdings, as ragmen sifting through what's been ditched, but, in fact, as a complement to them.

And to move on to the third part of your question: Do I think there'll be other finds like this? In one way, that's an easy question to answer—but tricky, too, at the same time. It's easy inasmuch as you can logically say that it's always possible. It's like Hegel's caricature: it is logically possible for the Caliph of Baghdad to become Pope in Rome. There's nothing inconsistent about the idea, and by the same token, it's perfectly conceivable that a book like this will appear again. But is it really possible? At the start of our conversation, you mentioned that the whereabouts of this library is a complete enigma. We can't even say whether the book I found or rediscovered was in fact stolen by the Gestapo in Paris and brought back to the German

Reich or whether Benjamin had left it behind in Berlin. So, from this perspective, the real question is, "Where are the books?" Are they in Paris? None of the routes the books might have taken can be reconstructed or traced. So at this point in time, I would say it's a logical possibility but not a real one—especially as Benjamin didn't mark his books by adding his stamp or putting in ex libris plates, for example. Initially, this book could only be verified on the basis of Auerbach's dedication, because he is mentioned there by name. The handwritten inscription reads: "Dedicated most cordially to Walter Benjamin." This made it quite clear we were dealing with Benjamin. And once you had verified that Benjamin wrote the marginalia himself, it was clear that it was a copy from his library. In this respect, it is a double stroke of good fortune, as it isn't just based on an assumption, but can be verified by a whole range of clear indictations.

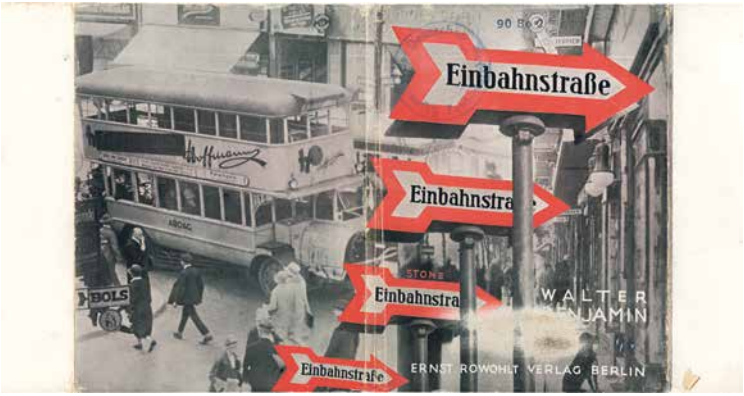
EW: Yes, we are dealing with a find, the special nature of which is only just beginning to unfold. You've made a major contribution and we are very grateful to you for that. And for the fact that you are willing to show your treasure to the public and talk and write about it. Thank you very much for that, Stephan Grotz, and for talking to me today.

SG: No—thank you. It's been a pleasure.

1 Stephan Grotz (ed.), *Walter Benjamins Auerbach: Ein wiedergefundenes Buch aus seiner Bibliothek*, Ottensheim/Donau: Edition Thanhäuser, 2022.

History's Plaything: Walter Benjamin's Berlin Estate

6



Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*, with dust jacket by Sasha Stone and archive stamps from the German Central Archive in Potsdam, Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt Verlag, 1928, AdK, Berlin, Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

On 24 January 1965, sociologist Alfred Sohn-Rethel gave his friend Theodor W. Adorno the surprising news that a "correspondent from East Berlin" had told him that "some of Walter Benjamin's papers have been unearthed in the Gestapo archives there". At the time, the only works known about were manuscripts that Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) had entrusted to Georges Bataille, who worked as a librarian at the Bibliothèque nationale, and papers that Benjamin had on his person when he had to leave Paris in June 1940. The rediscovery encompassed items that Benjamin had been forced to leave behind in his flat. Among them was a 1928 copy of *Einbahnstraße* (*One-Way Street*), a book in which Benjamin, according to his own admission, sought to "grasp topicality as the reverse of the eternal in history and to make an impression of it, the side of the medallion hidden from view".

When Germany occupied France, Benjamin's manuscripts were confiscated from his home by the Gestapo and brought to Berlin, along with other looted property, where they were put in the archives of the Reich Security Main Office. After that, as the conflict neared the capital, the works were transferred to Silesia. When the war ended, the Red Army transported them to Moscow, where they became part of the "Special Archive". The subsequent process of returning cultural properties to East Germany saw the manuscripts moved in 1957 to the Deutsches Zentralarchiv (German Central Archive) in

Walter Benjamin's passport, issued on 10 August 1928 (pp. 2–3), AdK, Berlin, Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

Potsdam. In 1972, they were brought to the Archives of the Akademie der Künste in East Berlin, now considered the responsible institution. This part of Benjamin's estate became a bone of contention between the two publishers, Suhrkamp and Aufbau, throughout the 1960s. The then deputy director of the Akademie, Ulrich Dietzel, described it as "a kind of bargaining chip" in the dispute over licensing and access rights. Benjamin's work thus developed into a political football between East and West. In 1996, it was assigned to the Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur—a body that had the imprimatur of Benjamin's heirs—as part of the Theodor W. Adorno Archive in Frankfurt am Main. Along with two other portions of the estate, these holdings now constitute the Walter Benjamin Archive, which was established at the Akademie der Künste in 2004.

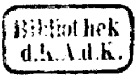
Ursula Marx

Provenance

- **1928–1933** Walter Benjamin, Berlin
- **Between April 1933 and June 1940** Walter Benjamin, Paris
- **After June 1940** Confiscated by the Gestapo (stored in the Reich Security Main Office, Berlin)
- **c. 1944–45** Evacuated to Silesia
- **Spring/Summer 1945** Seized by the Red Army (part of the Moscow "Special Archive"—some of the holdings are still in the Russian State Military Archive in Moscow)
- **Autumn 1957** Transferred to the German Central Archive in Potsdam
- **14 April 1972–1 February 1996** The Literature Archives at the (Deutsche) Akademie der Künste (zu) Berlin
- **2 February 1996** Transferred to the Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur; Theodor W. Adorno Archive, Frankfurt am Main
- **Since May 2004** Walter Benjamin Archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Sammlungsstempel
der Königlichen / Preußischen Akademie der Künste

1
KO: PR: KVNST ACADEMIE
Nachweisbar um 1760



4
Bibliothek / d.K.A.d.K.
Nachweisbar 2. Hälfte des
19. Jahrhunderts

7
KÖNIGL. AKADEMIE
DER BILDENDEN KÜNSTE ·
BERLIN ·
Nachweisbar zwischen
1875 und 1882

2
BIBLIOTHEK /
DER KÖNIGL: /
ACAD:D:KÜNSTE /
ZU / BERLIN
Nachweisbar um 1803

5
DIRECTORIUM U SENAT
D K P AKAD D KÜNSTE
Z BERLIN

8
KÖNIGLICHE AKADEMIE
DER KÜNSTE ZU BERLIN
Nachweisbar zwischen
1875 und 1918

3
BIBLIOTHEK DER KGL.
AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE ·
BERLIN
Nachweisbar 2. Hälfte des
19. Jahrhunderts

6
Bibliothek / der /
K:Academie d.K.
Nachweisbar 2. Hälfte des
19. Jahrhunderts

9
PREUSSISCHE AKADEMIE
DER KÜNSTE · BERLIN ·
Nachweisbar zwischen
1919 und 1934

War Losses and “Homecomings”

Fig. 1 Leopold Zielke, *Conferenz-Zimmer der K. Akademie der Künste*, 1835, watercolour, 36 × 46 cm, AdK, Berlin

Moved. Lost. Reconstructed

The Art Collection of the Akademie der Künste

by Anna Schultz

Today, the Art Collection of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin is primarily a collection of modern and contemporary art. A collection history marked by loss and relocation has made a significant impact. The nature, scope and importance of the Akademie's original art collection can only be partially reconstructed today. This essay attempts to trace lost works by considering archive materials and other sources. Building up an extensive art collection had been a key concern of the artistic community ever since the founding of the Academie der Mahl-, Bild- und Baukunst in 1696. Notes in the files indicate the extent to which the Akademie benefited from bequests and gifts; they also establish that the Senate meetings involved dis-

cussions about bids from artists and collectors as well as proposals from the professors for purchases. Although the prestigious offices and conference rooms in all the locations used by the Akademie were furnished with paintings and sculptures, the collection was primarily used for teaching purposes. In the 18th century, in keeping with the content of the educational programme, it included not only paintings and sculptures but also an outstanding collection of plaster casts, which were copied in the so-called Aktsaal (or "Nude Hall").[1] It also included a first-rate collection of graphic arts, which, in addition to drawings and prints by old and new masters, mostly contained reproductions of artworks from other collections, designed to impart various techniques to up-and-coming artists and served as composition studies. Most of the collection, including all the plaster casts, was destroyed in 1743 when a fire ripped through the Marstall building on Unter den Linden, the royal stables housing the Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Künste und Mechanischen Wissenschaften (Royal Prussian Academy of the Arts and Mechanical Sciences) as well as the Academy of Sciences — and around two hundred horses. Over the next hundred years, the collection replenished itself despite significant financial constraints. It was soon regarded as Prussia's most important institutional art collection. It gained added prestige from transfers from the royal collection, while its growth continued apace with the acquisition of extensive private collections, including the loan of the 52-volume print collection belonging to Count Wilhelm Heinrich Ferdinand Karl von Lepel, which was stored at the Prussian Academy.

In 1831, the Königlich Preussische Akademie der Künste (Royal Prussian Academy of Arts) lost an important part of its collection: a ministerial decree gave orders for the collection of graphic art to be handed over to the newly founded Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings). The only exceptions were works by professors, duplicates from the Lepel collection and prints that were vital for ongoing teaching purposes. The Prussian Academy dragged its feet and extended the handover deadline, implying the extent to which losing the collection was painful for the institution and its members. Nevertheless, these works are not regarded as "lost". The Akademie collection forms the core of today's Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, although unfortunately it is no longer possible to seamlessly determine which works came from the Prussian Academy. A watercolour by Leopold Zielke shows the conference room in the old academy building on Unter den Linden and gives an impression of the rich variety of the collection around 1835 (fig. 1). It is a rare document that vividly shows that the rooms there were not just adorned

with paintings by academy professors but also contained graphic works and sculptures.[2]

The Prussian Academy's intensive collecting activities continued unabated in the second half of the 19th century. Far from easing off, new areas of focus were established, including developing an extensive collection of original photographic images.[3] Paintings, drawings and prints made by professors were used for teaching, with selected pieces by students, such as works by the Rome Prize winners, also included in the teaching collection. In 1907, the Königliche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin (Royal Academy of Arts in Berlin) moved to Pariser Platz whilst the Marstall made way for the new Royal Library building. The new building, the converted private residence of Count Arnim-Boitzenburg and his forebears, did not offer enough space to store works of art, so parts of the collection were sent on permanent loan to the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (now the Berlin University of the Arts), where, over the following decades, they were made available to students. The Prussian Academy at times witnessed some vigorous debates about the holdings stored at the university—for example, when it became public knowledge in 1920 that duplicates had been sold without permission having been obtained for the sale. However, when the Nazis forced the Prussian Academy of Arts to leave its venue on Pariser Platz and relocate to the Kronprinzenpalais in 1937, the institution may have been relieved not to have had to move large parts of the Graphic Arts Collection in the process. The move was necessitated by Albert Speer, who, as General Building Inspector for the Reich Capital, demanded large premises near the Reich Chancellery in which to develop the plan for Berlin as the "world capital".

By 1941, it had become imperative to evacuate the rest of the collection as a safeguard to protect it from air raids. It is difficult to delineate the precise extent of the art holdings back then. Summary lists hastily compiled when the war necessitated the collection's relocation give a sense of the kind of treasures that were stored at the Prussian Academy at the time.[4] In 1941, the first works of art were moved to the flak tower near the Berlin Zoo, although the Prussian Academy gave up on the "Zoo Bunker" as an evacuation site just two years later. Works of art categorised as particularly valuable—including crates of prints by Rembrandt and Wenzel Hollar as well as six crates containing prints by Albrecht Dürer from the Lepel collection—were stored in what was supposedly the safest location in Berlin, a vault in the Neue Reichsmünze (New Mint) on Molkenmarkt. When war broke out, most of the collection was moved to three stately homes in Silesia (Erdmannsdorf/Mysłakowice, Seiten-

dorf/Poniatów and Ullersdorf/Ołdrzychowice Kłodzkie). Works of art housed in the university were sent to a potash salt mine in Hattorf in the Rhön Mountains.[5]

Unfortunately, at the end of the war, it soon became apparent that none of the shelters had provided any great security for the artworks. Parts of the Neue Reichsmünze, where other Berlin institutions had likewise stored works of art, had been destroyed by bombing and fire; many rooms in the basement had been flooded, and unauthorised persons and Allied soldiers had forced their way into the vaults. When Alexander Amersdorffer, First Permanent Secretary of the Academy, entered the room housing Prussian Academy works on 27 October 1945, he was greeted by a dreadful scene: "The whole room presents a spectacle of utter destruction. The entire floor is covered with piles of paper, drawings, photographs and works of graphic art — most of it defiled and much crumpled up and torn. The crates in which the artworks were packed have all been opened, and only a few bits of crates are lying around. Some of the files have also been taken from the shelves and put on the floor. This is also the case with individual sections of the artists' biographies, and there are just some torn fragments lying around."[6] Although there are no concrete figures available, the assumption is that the Art Collection lost at least three-quarters of its art holdings due to the ravages of war and looting. Published in 2005, the catalogue *Kriegsverluste der Preußischen Akademie der Künste* lists around 120 sculptures and 380 paintings that have been lost or destroyed.[7] With no inventory lists available,

Fig. 2 Members of the Literature Section in the small conference room at the Prussian Academy of Arts on Pariser Platz, 1929 (left to right: Alfred Döblin, Thomas Mann, Ricarda Huch, Bernhard Kellermann, Hermann Stehr, Alfred Mombert, Eduard Stucken); the sculpture *Christus an der Geißelsäule* by Gottlob Kirchner can be seen in the background, photograph, AdK, Berlin

however, the Graphic Arts Collection, containing entries for some 1600 drawings, could not be thoroughly itemised, and the cataloguing is patchy. The much larger collection of prints and the holdings of medals not handed over by the Prussian Academy have so far not been catalogued, as the records are full of gaps.

In the 1940s and 1950s, there were already occasional reasons to celebrate the unearthing of lost artworks and grounds for hoping that others would be tracked down and restored to the collection. Shortly after the war, the British occupation police confiscated two oil sketches by Blechen from a Berlin art dealer: the works had been part of the Prussian Academy's holdings and were returned accordingly. Certain works that the Prussian Academy had lent to various institutions before the war were recovered in the post-war period and transferred to a number of different museums. In some cases, they were found decades later in repositories of the Staatliche Museen — once identified, they were given back to the Akademie. However, most of the collection was destroyed or seemed to have been lost irretrievably. At war's end, the bulk of the artworks and library materials that had been moved to the Rhön area in Hessen was returned to Berlin, although not to the Akademie der Künste, which was first re-established in West Berlin in 1954. Instead, they were taken to the Prussian Academy's partner institution, the Universität der Künste (then the Hochschule für Künste), which is not surprising since the university had also instigated and coordinated the move. There was no trace of the works that had been sent to Silesia, so we can only make a stab at reconstructing the routes they took.

Certainly, in Germany and Poland, private individuals took advantage at times of the somewhat chaotic circumstances surrounding the relocation. Thefts occurred, with works of art sometimes treated as "souvenirs", although in some cases, we can assume that they were taken in good faith to "a place of safety". It is hoped that missing artworks will be found again, not only those stolen from the Neue Reichsmünze, as mentioned above, but also the lost pieces stored in what is now Poland. The present-day owners of works originating from the Prussian Academy can identify them as such based on stamps or inscriptions marking them as Prussian Academy property and can contact us accordingly.[8] There are no

Fig. 3 A portfolio containing handmade drawings by Eduard Daege from the Art Collection of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, that are now located at the Khanenko Museum in Kyiv

consequences to worry about from a legal perspective, and the Akademie der Künste is keen to learn more about contextual questions relating to the collection and is committed, where necessary, to arriving at a fair settlement.

Most of the holdings stored in Silesia fell victim to Red Army forays. Thousands of works were carted off by "trophy brigades" and, to start with, these were considered lost. In 1958, around 1.5 million objects were returned from the Soviet Union to various cultural institutions in East Germany, including the newly founded Deutsche Akademie der Künste (German Academy of Arts) in East Berlin. Among these returns were prominent items from the collection, such as the artistic estate of the draughtsman, sculptor and Prussian Academy director Johann Gottfried Schadow and the reference volumes of prints by Prussian Academy directors Bernhard Rode and Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki. It is still much more challenging to ascertain which works remained in Russia and the states that succeeded the Soviet Union. When the first Russian museums published online catalogues in the late 1990s, staff at the Akademie realised that several paintings, among them works by Anton Graff, were in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.[9] There is also at least one painting originating from the Prussian Academy at the Nizhny Novgorod State Art Museum.[10] We know that there are works from Berlin in Ukraine, too, thanks to information from historian Konstantin Akinsha, who worked at the Khanenko Museum in Kyiv in the 1980s. He could remember transporting a set of portfolios he identified from their labels as Prussian Academy property. Working together with the curators there in an atmosphere of trust, we have now ascertained that the Khanenko Museum has in its holdings a number of books from the President's Library at the Prussian Academy and a significant number of drawings from the estate of Professor Eduard Daege. Here, too, it is impossible to determine with any certainty from which evacuation site the works came. Daege's drawings were moved in crate 115, but the precise route taken by this crate remains unclear.[11]

The extensive Daege collection is particularly noteworthy. In combination with the drawings that remained at the Akademie and another partial collection that is now kept in the archives of the Universität der Künste, it can be used to reconstruct his largely unknown oeuvre and illustrate his teaching methods.

Together with colleagues in Ukraine, the Akademie der Künste is planning a joint digital project relying on in-depth cataloguing to reunite—at least in digital form—the parts of the collection that have scattered. There are also plans for a cooperative research project and a publication, although they are currently on hold owing to

Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the war has necessitated the evacuation of the collection, making it impossible at the moment to work with it in situ. We have friendly ties with our colleagues in the museum and hope that the staff, the museum and all the different parts of the collection will survive the war unscathed and that we can resume our constructive cooperation once this awful period is over.

We were only recently made aware that parts of the Akademie's Graphic Arts Collection that had been stored in Silesia were probably not taken to the Soviet Union but remained in Poland: of the body of Italian prints now held in the National Museum in Wrocław, around half can be identified, based on stamps (Lugt 5410), as belonging to the Akademie der Künste.[12] There is a Prussian Academy stamp on at least one work by Cornelius Bos in the collection of graphic arts in the University of Warsaw Library, and two institutions in Kraków (Polska Akademia Umiejętności and Polska Akademia Nauk) are in possession of works by Virgil Solis and Lucas van Leyden that came from the Prussian Academy.[13]

We may assume that these finds represent the tip of the iceberg and that many more works of art from the Akademie's collections currently reside in Poland. So far, it has not been possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty from which evacuation sites these works came. It has also not yet been possible to properly resolve the question of exactly how and when the various groups of works came into the possession of Polish libraries and graphic arts collections. As collections in Poland become increasingly digitised, with publications appearing as well, there is cause for hope that other works now in Polish museums or libraries can gradually be identified as Akademie property. Here, too, the aim should be to reunite the holdings, digitally at least, to make them accessible to the public and clarify their provenance.

Due to the Second World War, the Akademie der Künste lost the bulk of its archive, library and art holdings. This came about through bomb damage, losses suffered during relocation, confiscation by the Red Army and looting. Today's collection of pre-1933 works is but a fragment that does not fully represent the history and holdings of the institution. Instead, it is only a partial reflection of it. The task facing the Akademie, in parallel with the ongoing search for problematic holdings in its own collections, is both vital and unremitting: to reconstruct the former collection holdings, to research the circumstances in which they were relocated and the routes they followed, and to engage with full commitment in the process of reintegrating works into the Akademie der Künste or making them accessible as digital media.

1 See Claudia Sedlarz, "Die Gipssammlung der Berliner Akademie der Künste von 1750 bis 1815", in Nele Schröder and Lorenz Winkler-Horaček (eds.), *... von gestern bis morgen ...: Zur Geschichte der Berliner Gipsabguss-Sammlung(en),* Rahden, 2012, pp. 29–50.

2 The watercolour features a picture-within-a-picture, in which we can identify, among other works, Friedrich Georg Weitsch's 1790 painting *Bildnis des Pascha Weitsch mit Pudel* (Portrait of Pascha Weitsch with Poodle), which had been regarded as lost during the Second World War. See Akademie der Künste, Berlin (ed.), *Kriegsverluste der Preußischen Akademie der Künste, Archiv-Blätter* 12, Berlin, 2005, pp. 26–27.

3 A major part of the collection of photographic originals can now be found in the archive of the Universität der Künste; see Ulrich Pohlmann, Dietmar Schenk and Anastasia Dittmann (eds.), *Vorbilder Nachbilder: Die fotografische Lehrsammlung der Universität der Künste Berlin 1850–1930*, exh. cat., Münchner Stadtmuseum, Sammlung Fotografie/Museum für Fotografie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Cologne, 2020.

4 The lists of relocated items are now housed in the library of the Universität der Künste.

5 See Britta Kaiser-Schuster (ed.), *Kulturelles Gedächtnis: Kriegsverluste deutscher Museen*, Cologne, 2021, p. 532.

6 Akademie der Künste, Berlin, PrAdK I/131, Bl. 107.

7 Akademie der Künste, *Kriegsverluste* [War Losses].

8 The exhibition focuses on two oil sketches by Carl Blechen and a drawing by Daniel Chodowiecki, citing them as two instances in which works were successfully returned from private ownership.

9 Akademie der Künste, *Kriegsverluste*, nos. 223, 229, 364, 420, 1022.

10 Ibid., nos. 398, 401. Thanks to the research carried out by the Deutsch-Russischer-Museumsdialog alliance, it has been possible to secure the return of a painting by Anton Graff to the Akademie that had come to Dresden as a stray work. See the text by Werner Heegewaldt in this publication.

11 Since the Singakademie archive, which was also put into storage in Ullersdorf during the war, was rediscovered in Ukraine fifty years later, we surmise that these holdings were transported together.

12 See Izabela Żak, *Dawna grafika włoska: Katalog Zbiorow*, Wrocław, 2017, p. 11.

13 We are grateful to Peter Fuehring for the pertinent input he provided. Further details: http://www.marquesdecollections.fr/detail.cfm/marque/12925

A Painting on the Move between Stuttgart and Berlin

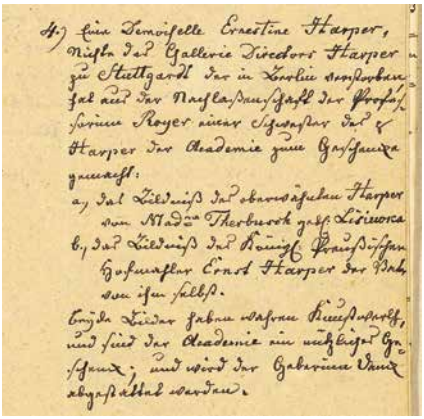
7

Anna Dorothea Therbusch (née Lisiewska), *Portrait of the Painter Adolf Friedrich Harper*, 1761–63, oil on canvas, 72.6 × 57.7 cm, AdK, Berlin

The minutes of a meeting at the Königliche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin (Royal Prussian Academy of Arts) on 27 June 1812 recorded the receipt of two notable works of art: Ernestine Harper had presented the artists' society with a portrait of her uncle, the Württemberg court painter Adolf Friedrich Harper (1725–1806), painted by Anna Dorothea Therbusch (née Lisiewska, 1721–1782), and a self-portrait by her uncle's father, Johann Harper (1688–1746). The quality of the works was promptly confirmed: "Both paintings have genuine artistic value and are a beneficial gift to the Academy."

Therbusch's charismatic portrait of her fellow artist, with whom she may or may not have entertained a "brief gentle dalliance on a balmy spring afternoon", depicts him wearing an elegant, plumed hat and holding brushes and a palette. The work was painted during a stay at the Württemberg court. Therbusch presumably gave it to her sitter and the canvas remained with Harper's family until 1812.

The painting soon became widely known based on its reproduction in an engraving by Christian Schlotterbeck. To shield it from the impact of the Second World War, it was evacuated to the Neue



Note from 27 June 1812 about the acquisition of the painting, AdK, Berlin

Christian Jakob Schlotterbeck after Anna Dorothea Therbusch, *A. F. Harper, Peintre de Paysage de la Cour de Wirtemberg*, 1783, copperplate engraving and etching, 28.6 × 23.7 cm, Kunstsammlung der Veste Coburg

Reichsmünze (New Mint) in 1943, along with other works of art. However, from that point on, the portrait fell victim to looting and was regarded as a war loss. Unbeknownst to the Akademie, it was put up for auction in Stuttgart in October 1950 and acquired by the Landesmuseum Württemberg (Württemberg State Museum). The previous owner was listed in the auction catalogue as an art dealer from Wasseralfingen (Baden-Württemberg). No attempt was made to follow up on the suggestion that a "replica" existed at the Akademie der Künste, so no questions arose about the work's identity. Likely, the nascent East-West conflict and the refounding of two competing academies in East and West Berlin played into the decision not to delve deeper into the work's prior history. It is all the more gratifying that the Landesmuseum Württemberg subsequently resumed its research and alerted the Akademie to the provenance of the work in 2010. After being on permanent display in Stuttgart for decades, its return to the Akademie after 80 years is featured in the *Provenance Research* exhibition. It is the Art Collection's only extant work by Therbusch, an 18th-century artist, who arguably was Berlin's most prominent woman painter. Anna Schultz

Provenance

- **Until 1812** Ernestine Harper (niece of the painter Adolf Friedrich Harper) from the estate of the sitter's sister
- **1812–1945** Königliche/Preußische Akademie der Künste zu Berlin (gift)
- Kunsthändler Wehrfritz, Wasseralfingen (Aalen)
- **20 October 1950** Otto Greiner, Stuttgart (auction)
- **20 October 1950–2010** Landesmuseum, Stuttgart (identified as an item owned by the Akademie der Künste; permanent loan in Stuttgart **until 2022**)
- **Since 2010** Akademie der Künste, Berlin

The “Bogus Lessing”: A Stray Returns to Berlin

8

Anton Graff, *Bildnis des Schauspielers Johann Friedrich Reinecke*, after 1784, oil on canvas, 77 × 62.5 cm, AdK, Berlin

This portrait by Anton Graff (1736–1813) from the Akademie’s Art Collection was long considered lost owing to the incorrect title attributed to it. It depicts the Dresden actor Johann Friedrich Reinecke (1745–1787) but was wrongly entered into the Prussian Academy of Arts’ inventory as a portrait of the poet Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The work was evacuated to the Neue Münze (New Mint) in Berlin during the Second World War, confiscated by the Red Army and taken as war loot to Moscow’s Pushkin Museum in 1946. As part of a Soviet restitution campaign, it was brought to East Germany with numerous other works of art in 1958 and entrusted to the Stadtmuseum Dresden. In 1967, art historian Ekhart Berckenhagen was the first to suggest that Reinecke might be the portrait’s subject, and that it could be the lost painting from the Prussian Academy. Seventy years after the Second World War, research by the “Kriegsverluste deutscher Museen” (War Losses from German Museums) working group—whose focus was on works lost by German museums during the war—finally ensured the return of the stray painting to Berlin. Analysis of the transport lists from Russian archives helped clarify the circumstances surrounding its ownership. The Russian inventory numbers on the back of the painting provided crucial information,

Invitation to the Prussian Academy of Arts' Lessing tribute, 1929, with a reproduction of Graff's *portrait*, AdK, Berlin

Anton Graff, *Bildnis des Schauspielers Johann Friedrich Reinecke*, 1784, oil on canvas, 66 × 54 cm, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie

confirming that it had been taken from the Prussian Academy in Berlin to Moscow. A comparison of the work with another, earlier portrait of the actor by Anton Graff, which had been exhibited in Dresden in 1784, confirmed that Reinecke was indeed the sitter. Today this work is among the holdings of the Staatsschauspiel Dresden. It is not known when the second version came to Berlin. In 2015, a symposium of the Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog (German-Russian Museum Dialogue) alliance provided an appropriate context for the painting's return to the Akademie der Künste.

This case represents a good example of how difficult and time-consuming provenance research can be. The portrait had been shown at the Prussian Academy as a portrait of Lessing on several occasions since 1896 and had also appeared under this title in publications. It is just one of seven works once belonging to the Akademie der Künste that the outstanding 18th-century portraitist painted. Four are still lost, while two remain in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. **Werner Heegewaldt**

Provenance

- **Prior to 1896** Königliche Akademie der Künste [Royal Prussian Academy of Arts] (*Bildnis eines jungen Mannes in rotem Pelzrock, die Arme gebeugt: Angeblich G. E. Lessing*), Berlin
- **1920** Exhibition of portraits at the Preußische Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, Berlin
- **January–February 1929** Preußische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (Lessing exhibition, loan)
- **1943** Neue Reichsmünze, Berlin (evacuated during the war)
- **1945** Seized by the Red Army (relocated after the war)
- **March 1946–1958** Pushkin Museum, Moscow
- **1958–2015** Stadtmuseum/Städtische Galerie, Dresden
- **Since 2015** Akademie der Künste, Berlin (restitution; recorded as a war loss until 2015)

9

An Exceptional Comeback: Peter Ludwig Lütke's Painting *Lago di Nemi*

Peter Ludwig Lütke, *Lago di Nemi*, 1796, oil on canvas, 51.5 × 82.5 cm, AdK, Berlin

"Deleted from the art inventory 9 Nov '56" reads the terse note appended to a directive from the Berlin Senator for National Education dated 23 May 1955, ordering the destruction of a painting of Lake Nemi by Berlin landscape artist Peter Ludwig Lütke (1759–1831). In 1938 the Prussian Academy of Arts loaned the large-format oil for display in one of the reception rooms at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik (Music Academy). It was, however, so severely damaged there during the Second World War that, in the opinion of the Senate, "any restoration would be impossible". Over 60 years later it came to light that sections of the painting had survived.

In October 2019, the Akademie der Künste was given an unexpected tip about a work being offered for sale by an auction house in Düsseldorf. The item in question was an oil painting described in the catalogue as "*Lago di Nemi*, 1790. Monogrammed. Titled and dated". Although the artwork on sale was smaller and showed a only a small fragment of the painting, there was an immediate suspicion that it was the Akademie's painting, which was listed in the Lost Art database. This suspicion was quickly corroborated by provenance research. A key piece of evidence was a black-and-white image from a 1906 exhibition catalogue. A scale projection of the image in the auction catalogue onto this photograph revealed that the details of the two images matched and that the work now offered in Düsseldorf

Montage combining a 1906 photo of the painting with the surviving detail

had been cropped. Clearly, the painting had not been destroyed in 1956 but "rescued" by an unknown hand, severely cropped, relined and put up for sale illegally. The choice of timing for this misappropriation was propitious. By the mid-1950s, the Prussian Academy de facto no longer existed, and its art holdings were distributed across a number of different locations. As the Akademie could verify the provenance of the work, it was able to ensure that Lütke's painting only went under the hammer conditionally. In the negotiations that followed, the Akademie's Art Collection finally recovered the work but had to compensate the former owner. There is nothing unusual about this: there are a great many unknowns in the legal process, and it is generally an expensive business. **Werner Heegewaldt**

Provenance

- **1796– after 1797** Peter Ludwig Lütke
- **1797** Exhibited at the Königliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste und Mechanischen Wissenschaften, Berlin
- **Prior to 1831** Königliche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin
- **1938–1952** Hochschule für Musik, Berlin (loan)
- **23 May 1955** Destruction of the work ordered by the Senator for National Education, Berlin
- **After 1955** Whereabouts unknown
- **2017** Jeschke van Vliet, Berlin auction house, lot 625
- Private collection
- **2019** Düsseldorfer Auktionshaus, lot 608
- **Since 2020** Akademie der Künste, Berlin (reacquisition of the painting fragment)

Carl Blechen: Loot from the Reichsmünze

10

Carl Blechen, *Tiberiusfelsen auf Capri*, 1829, oil on paper on cardboard, 20 × 29.2 cm, AdK, Berlin

No matter how impressive a visual motif is, the probing eye of the provenance researcher is routinely directed first to the back of an artwork. When an art dealer consigned two oil sketches by landscape painter Carl Blechen (1798–1840) to a Berlin auction house in 2018, the staff were struck not only by the outstanding quality of the works but also by the stamps and labels they bore. The stamps cited the Prussian Academy of Arts as the owner. The dealer claimed to have inherited the works and said he had possessed them for more than twenty years. He had a precise idea of their value but did not want the ownership stamps scrutinised.

The auction house asked the Akademie about the provenance of the two sketches. Their questions could be conclusively resolved with the help of historical files and the catalogue of lost works published in 2005. Blechen had been a professor at the Prussian Academy and in 1840, directly after his death, the sketches had entered its collection as part of a large cluster of works. It was also possible to get a more explicit sense of the circumstances under which the oil sketches had been stolen. A list of evacuated items indicated that the Prussian Academy had begun moving its most precious works of art—which included numerous paintings by Blechen—to the rooms of the Neue Reichsmünze (New Mint), in March 1943. When, on 27 October 1945,

Carl Blechen, *Mühlental bei Amalfi*, 1829, oil on paper on cardboard, 16 × 10 cm, AdK, Berlin

Back of the oil sketch *Mühlental bei Amalfi*, 1829

staff members were able to reaccess the storage space for the first time since the end of the war, they were greeted by a "spectacle of utter destruction. The entire floor was covered with piles of paper, drawings, photographs and works of graphic art — most of it defiled and much of it crumpled and torn." Thieves took advantage of the chaos that followed the war and tried to dispose of the pilfered works on the black market. Although the British occupation police succeeded in confiscating two more of Blechen's oil sketches from an art dealer in 1946, no trace has yet been found of 24 further works.

With generous support from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, the two oil sketches were repurchased, and a "custody fee" was paid to the dealer. The case was complicated by the passage of time because more than 70 years had elapsed since the end of the war. Under German law, the right of "adverse possession" applies to objects held in good faith for ten years, even if they are stolen. Anna Schultz

Provenance

- **Since April 1841** Königliche Akademie der Künste, Berlin (Carl Blechen estate)
- **March 1943** Neue Reichsmünze, Berlin (evacuated during the war)
- **By 1945 (at the latest)** Listed as a war loss
- **1945–18 November 2019** In private ownership, Berlin
- **Since 2019** Akademie der Künste, Berlin

pp. 62–69 Emptied exhibition spaces at the Khanenko Museum in Kyiv, Ukraine, 2022

Shadowy Contours: The Khanenko Museum in Kyiv

The Khanenko Museum in Kyiv is home to an outstanding collection of European, Asian and Islamic artworks assembled by the collectors Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko. It is housed in their mansion and was bequeathed to the city and its citizens upon their deaths. With the outbreak of the Russian war of aggression, most of the collection had to be moved to a secure location, as it had been once before, during the Second World War. The Akademie is presenting fourteen photographs by Yuri Stefanyak as part of the *Provenance Research* exhibition. They depict the museum rooms void of humans, with shadows of paintings on the silk wall hangings, empty cases and pedestals — the skeleton of a hibernating museum, which, robbed of its treasures, functions as an empty shell. However, the Khanenko Museum remains open to the public as a meeting point, a space for exchange, hope and contemplation. Even though many museum staff had to flee the country and, like other Ukrainian museums, the museum faces public funding cuts,the exhibition halls were being used for interventions by contemporary artists and concerts. At least they were: On 10 October 2022 a missile destroyed the playground in the adjacent park and the pressure from its impact shattered all the museum's windows. Staff are working hard on securing the building, but currently there are neither interventions nor concerts.

The war acutely threatens museums and other cultural institutions in Ukraine. In places where the country's identity is ingrained, they are — despite alleged protection from the Hague Conventions — prime targets. The destruction and looting of museums, libraries, archives and churches by Russian troops are happening on a daily basis. Furthermore, the lack of resources and materials needed for the security, evacuation and safekeeping of cultural assets is proving increasingly difficult.

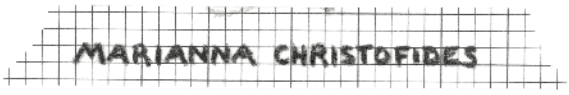
Ukraine Art Aid is raising funds for direct and uncomplicated support of cultural institutions in Ukraine and is calling for donations (www.dug-ww.com). Anna Schultz

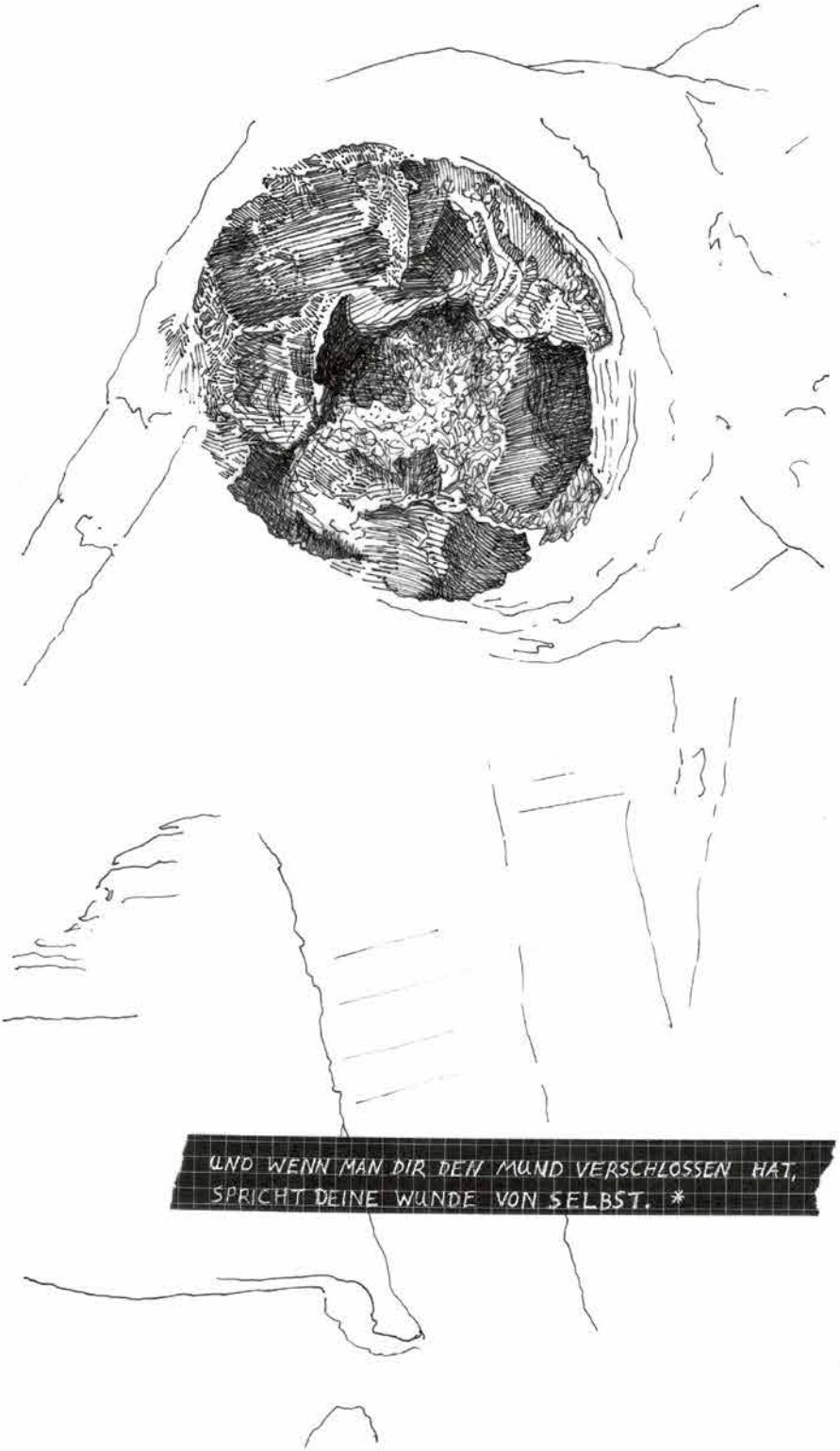
Yurii Stefanyak (b. 1990 in Dnipro) is a freelance photographer working in Kyiv. His work is dedicated to documenting his homeland's cultural life and society.

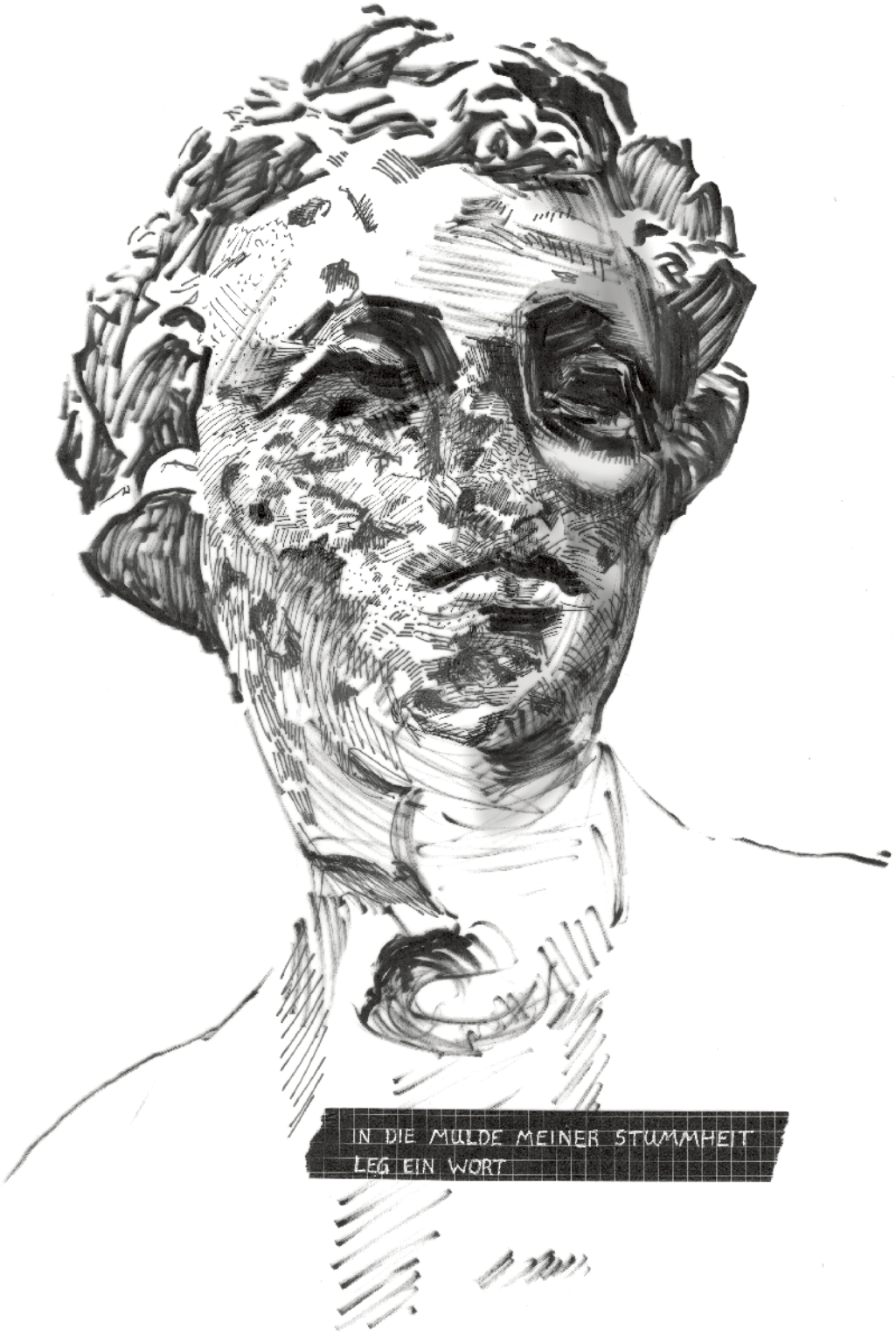

3


100th
УЖУН КУЙ

Berlin sculptor, 18th century, *Urania*, Sandstone
Bezirksamt Tempelhof-Schöneberg von Berlin


MARIANNA CHRISTOFIDES


UND WENN MAN DIR DEN MUND VERSCHLOSSEN HAT,
SPRICHT DEINE WUNDE VON SELBST. *


IN DIE MULDE MEINER STUMMHEIT
LEG EIN WORT


UND ZIEH WÄLDER GROSS ZU BEIDEN SEITEN,
DASS MEIN MUND
GANZ IM SCHATTEN LIEGT. **


* ERIC VUILLARD, „KONGO" (2012)
** INGEBORG BACHMANN, „DIE GESTUNDETE ZEIT" (1953)

Wounds, Gaps and Ruptures

The Material Research of Artist Marianna Christofides

An artist is out and about in Berlin's parks and green spaces. Her wanderings lead her towards allegories, muses and sandstone gods. She finds them in the bushes along the southern edge of one park, at the northwestern tip of another, in the area you walk through to get to the rear section of a building. She runs her hand over surfaces and takes in details. She begins to probe. The figures have contradictory attributions. Not even their names are known for certain. Is it *Apollo*, *Chronos*, *Urania*, *Polyhymnia*? There are also doubts about where they came from and why they were relocated.

"What are they looking at?"

Initially, the artist's forays take her from Kleistpark to Schillerpark to the courtyard of the Berlin University of the Arts. For months, she keeps going back to the sites where the sculptures are installed, observing arms, hands, eyes and mouths in different seasons and different light and weather conditions. She draws outlines and broken edges, comparing them with historical photographs. She films what the figures see. She looks for points of connection.

"What can resonate?"

The statues are itinerant, too: they were taken down from the place they were originally installed—the avant-corps of the Akademie building on Unter den Linden—then hoisted up again, transported and relocated. What is heavy becomes light. What is static is set in motion. The provenance histories get lost in the sea of green. A silent presence perched on new pedestals, the sculptures still tell their stories. Their broken parts, missing fingers and noses, their maimed, sprayed surfaces bear witness to their history, telling of their lost neighbours, vandalism, wind and weather.

"What do their wounds tell us?"

The marks and wounds present riddles: they reveal clues to the past, pointing to historical events that have disappeared from memory and are blind spots. The artist follows up on these clues by putting her finger in the wound. She makes moulds of the broken edges, casting them in bronze. This gives rise to reliefs, landscapes fashioned by fire, lumps of metal, and stone sculptures transformed.

"Whose origin? Whose future?"

The bronze objects also reveal the layers of the artistic narrative. The artist considers the entire history of sculpture's genesis, going back to its geological origin. She expands the radius of her expeditions accordingly. They lead her to the Elbe Sandstone Mountains, to the Niederkirchleite quarries, where the sandstone originated that was used to make the baroque muse. In which geological period was it formed? What were the prevailing historical and political conditions when raw stone blocks were quarried, hewn, lifted and transported? How did stone quarrying develop in the region? A piece of graffiti at the entrance to the disused quarry attracts the artist's attention and puts her on the trail of the Flossenbürg concentration camp nearby. During the Second World War, prisoners of war were compelled to do forced labour in the quarry. In researching the stone, she stumbles upon ruptures in history. Her research connects things that exist in isolation — that are fragmented and scattered. It encompasses the space between the different figures and eras, bringing it to life. The loose ends of the narrative take shape, get lost. The only thing that is certain is that the sculptures will continue to wander ...

Anneka Metzger

Marianna Christofides' mixed media installation *In die Mulde meiner Stummheit leg ein Wort (In the hollow of my muteness lay a word)* evolved from a process of artistic provenance research in which, as part of the exhibition, the artist explores themes and objects from the Akademie der Künste's collections. Besides her focus on the rooftop figures that once adorned the academy building on Unter den Linden — which are mostly lost — Christofides' artistic research was based on the fragmented painting *Lago di Nemi* (Lake Nemi) by Peter Ludwig Lütke, along with two anonymous wooden busts, used as "silent witnesses" that observe and reflect on what is happening. Her large-scale installation combines various sculptural elements — wood, stone, glass and bronze — to create a complex story that opens up associative spaces rather than specifying a coherent narrative. Instead, it is a matter of revealing different layers of time and giving voice and form to the elements. Diana's sacred lake, the *Speculum Dianae*, becomes a mirror (reflecting the moonlight), with the wood of her bow corresponding to the dimensions of the fragmented painting. In the accompanying audio piece, sirens "recreate" the shoreline in song, and a narrator dives into the history of the lake, bringing to the surface the sunken floating palaces of the Roman emperor Caligula as the water level sinks. Christofides regards the human voice as material that gives form to the space. In the poem, she brings together cultural history, materials science, geology, mythology and the findings of climate research, weaving them into a kind of archaic hymn in which the history of Lake Nemi is traced back to antiquity and conceived of as a story of human-wrought exploitation: an invocation, a siren song, an eternally recurring lament.

Works in the exhibition

Marianna Christofides

In die Mulde meiner Stummheit leg ein Wort | *In the hollow of my muteness lay a word*, 2022
Bronze sculptures, metal rails, variable dimensions; sandstone slabs, lashing strap
16 mm film, colour, silent, 4:3, 11 min
Concept, cinematography, editing: Marianna Christofides; collaboration: Bernd Bräunlich
Wooden busts (unknown sculptor, holdings from the Prussian Academy of Arts, AdK, Berlin, Kunstsammlung, Inv. Nr. KS-Plastik 84/56/226 and KS-Plastik 84/56/227)
Bronze-tinted mirror, glass shelving

Speculum Dianae, 2022
Song play, 30:24 min
Lyrics, concept, research: Marianna Christofides
Composition: Chris Dahlgren; vocal arrangement: Almut Kühne; vocals: Chris Dahlgren, Ganna Gryniva, Almut Kühne; guitar, viola da gamba, double bass: Chris Dahlgren
Sound recording/mixing: Malte Giesen, Maurice Omene
Custom-made glass panel, ash wood bow staves, colour

Gemälde von Otto Nagel

3. Junge Arbeiterin. Um 1921/22 WVZ 43 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	35.000,-- M
4. Bildnis Franz Worms. 1922 WVZ 44	30.000,-- M
5. Der Idiot. Um 1922 WVZ 45	30.000,-- M
6. Über den Dächern von Saratow. 1924 WVZ 78	25.000,-- M
7. Wochenmarkt am Wedding. Um 1926 WVZ 108 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	65.000,-- M
8. Anilinarbeiter. 1928 WVZ 120 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	50.000,-- M
10. Gerda. 1933 WVZ 168 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	22.000,-- M
11. Meine Palette. Um 1933 WVZ 170	15.000,-- M
12 Traurige Walli. 1934 WVZ 222 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	25.000,-- M
14. Selbstbildnis vor leerer Staffelei. Um 1936 WVZ 274 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	65.000,-- M
15. Fischerfamilie auf Rügen. 1937 WVZ 280	22.000,-- M
16. Kampf um den Sperlingsberg. 1938 WVZ 338	12.000,-- M
17. Rudi. Um 1939 WVZ 373 (Leihgabe O-N-H)	18.000,-- M
18. Blumenstück. Bromelie. 1937/41 WVZ 435	15.000,-- M
19. Blumenstück. Calla II. 1942 WVZ 438	12.000,-- M
21. Waisenstraße. 1942 WVZ 537	15.000,-- M
22. Trümmerarbeiter. Um 1947 WVZ 576	17.000,-- M
23. Landesminister Rücker. 1949 WVZ 588	15.000,-- M
24. Neulehrerin. 1949 WVZ 589	20.000,-- M
25. Arbeiterstudenten. 1949 WVZ 591	22.000,-- M
26. Mädchenbildnis Sibylle (Unvollendet) Um 1953 WVZ 612	8.000,-- M

List of works taken over from Otto Nagel's estate

Art in the Crossfire of GDR Politics

Fig. 1 Otto Nagel, *Selbstbildnis vor leerer Staffelei*, c. 1936, oil on canvas, 116 × 79.5 cm, AdK, Berlin

The Painter Otto Nagel's Estate

Of Dear Comrades and Disappointed Hopes

by Ulf Bischof

I. The Legal Succession

The son of a carpenter, Otto Nagel was born in Berlin's Wedding district in 1894. He died in East Berlin in 1967, having lived through the imperial era, the Weimar Republic, National Socialism and two world wars. Nagel joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1912, did military service and became a conscientious objector in the First World War. In 1920 he became a member of the Communist Party (KPD) and was temporarily banned from painting under the Third Reich. In 1946 he joined the Socialist Unity Party (SED), later became a member of the Volkskammer legislature, and was president of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste (German Academy of Arts) in East Berlin from 1956 to 1962. He met his second wife, Russian actress Valentina "Walli" Nikitina (1904–1983), in Leningrad in the 1920s. Their daughter Sibylle (d. 2015) was born in 1943. After Nagel's death, his widow campaigned to have the Otto-Nagel-Haus (Otto Nagel Museum) opened on Märkisches Ufer. Her crusade bore fruit in 1973, although not without some friction with the East Berlin authorities; it was was run by Nagel's daughter, art historian Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel, and her husband, Götz Schallenberg.[1]

Nagel's political career certainly paved the way for the opening of the museum. In an internal memo dated 26 July 1971, for example, Politburo member Kurt Hager made enquiries about Nagel's estate because he had received a letter from Valentina Nagel via Soviet ambassador Pyotr Andreyevich Abrassimov.[2] Evidently, she knew how to play the political game and had the requisite contacts. In a letter to the "dear comrades" of the SED Central Committee dated 19 June 1972, she mentioned Erich Honecker's enthusiasm for the planned Otto-Nagel-Haus and then went on to talk about the real problem, the future status of the estate that was to be exhibited: "The contract finally arrived a week ago. But having read it through carefully, I have noticed a few things that are not quite right. Please, please,

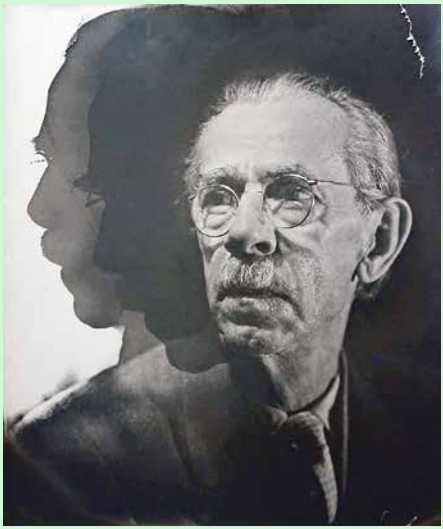


Fig. 2 Edmund Kesting, *Prof. Otto Nagel*, undated, silver gelatin print, 59.7 × 49.6 cm, AdK, Berlin

dear comrades, here is the contract. For example, there was never any discussion of an unconditional handover. My only knowledge of this expression is from the war, in connection with an 'unconditional surrender'. Moreover, a matter like this cannot be handed over to a cultural directorate. ... What is certain is that my husband's artistic estate is available to the German people on permanent loan."[3] She said yes, in other words, to an exhibition and permanent loan, but no to any transfer of ownership to the GDR. The positions hardened. The problem was initially averted, but the issue emerged again with renewed vigour ten years later, after Valentina Nagel's death in 1983, which seemed to mark a decline in the family's political influence. By this time, Sibylle and Götz Schallenberg had given up responsibility for the Otto-Nagel-Haus, and the "usual suspects" from the East Berlin nomenklatura came on the scene: people like legal advisor Wolfgang England from the Ministry of Culture, Werner Schmeichler from the so-called Cultural Property Protection Committee—the estate was declared a protected cultural asset in 1984—and ultimately representatives from the Ministry of Finance as well. Based on this, the goals and target direction seems to have been clear.[4] In 1985, as head of the "assessment committee", Günter Schade of the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) in Berlin-Köpenick was among those who evaluated the estate on behalf of the Ministry of Culture. The estimate the experts arrived at constituted a huge sum: some 2.5 million East German marks.[5] Events could be summed up as follows: the future of the estate was spelt out in a letter from Finance Minister Ernst Höfner to Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel dated 16 September 1985, in which inheritance and property tax were waived in return for the gift of works from the estate worth a sum of 1.6 million marks combined with permanent loans of further works to East German museums.[6] On 17 December 1985, Schallenberg-Nagel made the endowment to the East German Akademie der Künste.

II. As Stipulated by Law

1. Inescapable Taxation

It is a well-known fact that fiscal measures were an expedient means of transferring private art collections into East German state possession, and there will be no further discussion of the matter here. This was often effected via income tax, although property or inheritance tax might also be involved in certain circumstances coupled with the corresponding late payment fines if the tax was levied later, as always happened in such cases. According to historical sources, inher-

itance and property tax were at stake here. It is probable that no formal tax assessment was ever carried out. Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel had potential tax liabilities for the estate of her mother, Valentina Nagel. Her filial status put her in tax class I, but the exemptions were relatively low at 20,000 marks. For estates exceeding 1 million East German marks, the inheritance tax rate was 50 % (and as much as 80 % for anyone who was not a spouse or child of the deceased). If we accept Günter Schade's estimate for the "assessment committee" as a basis, this would have amounted to more than a million for the art collection alone. These were ludicrously high sums, of course, given people's real earning power and the general price structure in the German Democratic Republic. This inevitably meant that tax of this kind was never paid: instead, it was always redeemed through the relinquishment of at least half the estate, based solely on the inheritance tax. Although the tax rates did not correspond to the way the law was understood in West Germany—where ample tax exemptions apply to spouses and children, with rates of taxation under 20 % for the excess value of an estate—tax levels in East Germany did not, with hindsight, contravene the rule of law, even if the intention behind them was clearly political. This conformed with the idea that forty years of GDR tax law could not be rescinded. The only thing that was necessary was for the regular assessment of tax in East Germany to have been carried out solely for this purpose and not for extraneous considerations. In other words, it was not permissible for East German taxation processes to have been used as a means to transfer art collections into state possession. The valuation put on Otto Nagel's estate is in itself questionable. With all due respect for Nagel's oeuvre, the 1985 valuation seems somewhat optimistic, with individual paintings estimated at 35,000, 55,000 or even 65,000 East German marks and the numerous pastels frequently accorded high four-figure sums and more. There is an obvious connection between the value placed on the works and the amount of tax levied, and equally apparent is the conflict of interests that emerges when the state acts as both expert appraiser and transferee with none of the underlying decisions susceptible to judicial review. Here the process of analysis is, in fact, even more complex. Still, the fundamental issue is easy to grasp: Was this a matter of regular taxation or was it instead an instance of tax being used as a means to obtain art?

2. Cultural Property Protection, When It Suits

On the surface, there was nothing suspicious about it, nothing in principle about cultural property protection that violated the rule of law—the measures taken to protect cultural property were a focus of attention in all quarters, both at the time and increasingly so today. However, in a sense, they only existed on paper in East Germany. These measures were deliberately suspended to expedite the state export of cultural objects as a means to generate foreign currency. Although it was never openly expressed, in reality, the state consistently violated its own provisions. This is in part because the protection of cultural property was under control of the Ministry of Culture, which relied for its funding on powerful foreign exchange procurers, who were explicitly allowed to do as they pleased.

Conversely, protection measures were invariably brought to bear when it came to auditing, or indeed making use of objects in private ownership. For the people affected, the combination of inheritance tax and cultural property protection created a situation from which there was ultimately no way out. Most notable here are cases of inheritance involving a foreign country: for instance, when the deceased had lived in East Germany—where the artworks in the estate were located as a result—but the heirs were residents abroad.

Fig. 3 Otto Nagel, *Am Köllnischen Fischmarkt*, 1965, pastel, 45 × 60 cm, AdK, Berlin

The first step was to declare the estate protected cultural property, which meant that the art objects were then blocked, and there was no question of exporting them, at least not for the private heirs living abroad. The second step involved the threat or presentation of an inheritance tax bill. Inevitably, this resulted in the art being made a gift to the state to avoid paying taxes or being sold to it for tax redemption. For the state, it made no difference whether the work was donated or sold. Either way, it got hold of the collection for free, whilst the heirs went away empty-handed. Perhaps the appraisals did not correspond 100 % to the estate's value, but this was neither here nor there to the beneficiaries. It was only necessary for the tax to be set at a sufficiently high rate — based, as in the case of the Nagel estate, on the valuation of the "assessment committee" that had been consulted, whose findings could not be contested — to make it possible for more than half of the art collection in question to be skimmed off. Coveted showpieces were thus secured for the state in any case.

3. Problems with Arguing the Case

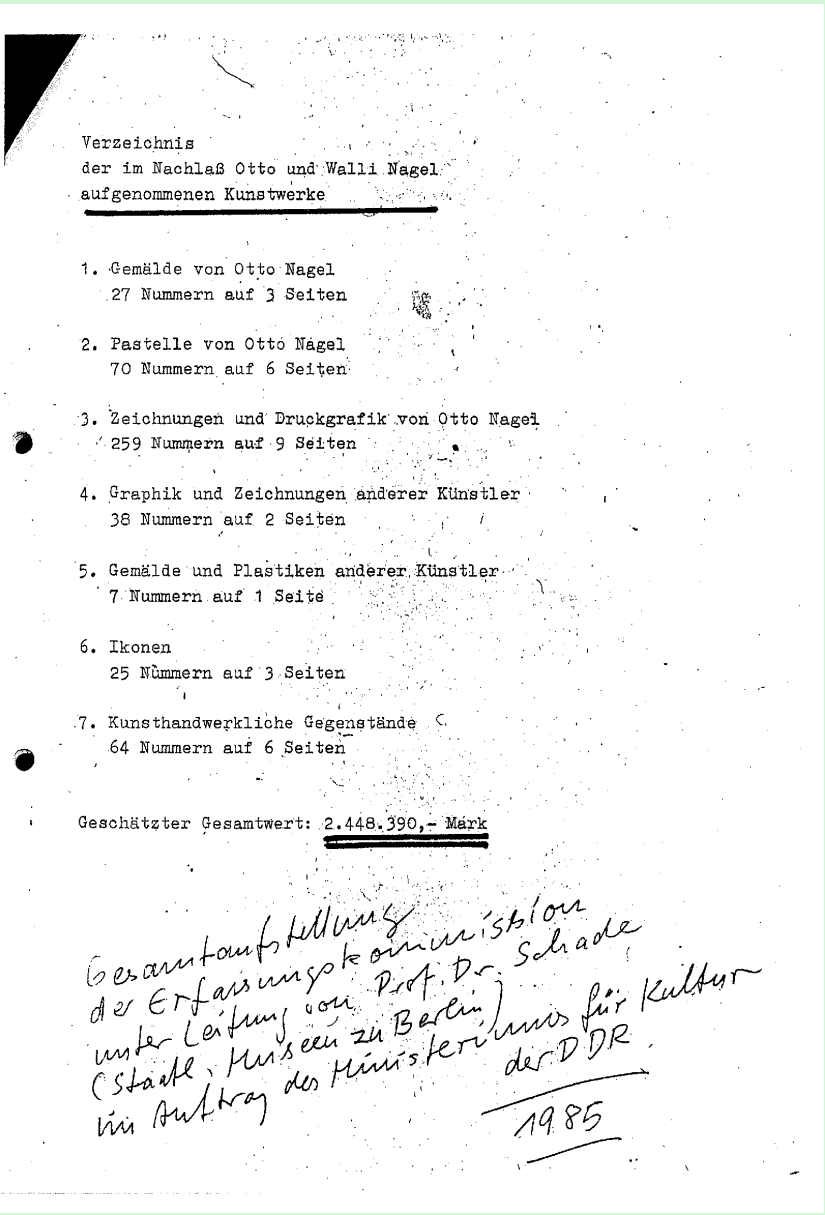
A brief review of the legal situation surrounding reparations for injustices carried out by the Nazi regime shows that after the Second World War, the Allies found that it was impossible for those who had suffered persecution under the Nazis to be charged with the burden of proof to justify their disposal of assets between 1933 and 1945. Consenting to legal action is a subjective matter motivated by an internal decision. How were the victims of persecution or their heirs meant to prove years later that, for example, the decision to sell or indeed donate an art object had been made in circumstances coloured by persecution and a sense of hopelessness? It is impossible to infer the motives for this kind of transaction from the relevant purchase or donation agreement, if any such even existed. Nor was there any need for the person or institution acquiring the item(s) to exert pressure. Accordingly, where restitutions in response to Nazi injustice are concerned, the burden of proof was reversed, and it was presumed, unless proven otherwise, that legal transactions of this kind had been entered involuntarily. It was then the responsibility of the subsequent owner of the asset in question to rebut this presumption.

Unlike in the years after 1947, from 1990 on, those affected by the legal reappraisal of the SED dictatorship were obliged to prove that the state had treated them in a high-handed fashion and that the only solution they had seen was to surrender art objects to the state, whether through sale or gift or some form of tax amortisation, etc. — a serious structural flaw in the Property Act passed into law by

the last Volkskammer, which then continued to have an effect after German reunification. It is almost impossible for the individual concerned to furnish this kind of proof. There is no way of knowing from individual cases whether a particular procedure was systematically applied—in other words, whether it primarily involved normal tax operations, for example. In order for a proper assessment to be made, it was necessary for other cases beyond the individual situation to be known about and acknowledged in tandem. In the period after reunification, in particular, the problem was not a focus of concern, quite apart from the fact that, even later on, the courts and the departments responsible for settling unresolved questions relating to property only ever came into contact with such cases sporadically. In most instances, they revolved around real estate, not lost art. Where Otto Nagel was concerned, this led to a rejection of the relevant claims for restitution made by Nagel's heiress Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel in relation to the works in the estate. As stated by the Office for the Settlement of Unresolved Property Issues in 1997, it was suspected that a deal had been made. By their account, Schallenberg-Nagel had been able to sell a house and keep some items in the estate exempt from taxes. In return, she had given away her father's estate, which was intended to serve scholarly and museum-related purposes.[7] When she objected that, given the circumstances, it was naive to assume that the procedures followed had been legitimate, she met with the sardonic response that it was naive, on her part, to evaluate the event under scrutiny separately from the office conducting it. Instead, the entire process had been characterised by an accommodating attitude on the part of the state offices involved.[8] In response to Schallenberg-Nagel's protest, no evidence of coercion could be ascertained in the 1998 objection proceedings—quite the reverse: the endowment agreement concluded with the East German Akademie der Künste supporting the conclusion that it had come about by mutual agreement. The absence of tax documentation made it impossible to reconstruct what happened and to determine whether the value of the estate might have been exaggerated—with the liability for inheritance tax set correspondingly higher than justified; in this respect, the burden of proof lay with Schallenberg-Nagel as the applicant.[9]

III. Honorary Citizen of Berlin

From a legal perspective, the opposing positions cannot and should not be judged here. This would require a more in-depth study of the sources, especially with regard to what prompted the gift to the



Verzeichnis
der im Nachlaß Otto und Walli Nagel
aufgenommenen Kunstwerke

1. Gemälde von Otto Nagel
   27 Nummern auf 3 Seiten

2. Pastelle von Otto Nagel
   70 Nummern auf 6 Seiten

3. Zeichnungen und Druckgrafik von Otto Nagel
   259 Nummern auf 9 Seiten

4. Graphik und Zeichnungen anderer Künstler
   38 Nummern auf 2 Seiten

5. Gemälde und Plastiken anderer Künstler
   7 Nummern auf 1 Seite

6. Ikonen
   25 Nummern auf 3 Seiten

7. Kunsthandwerkliche Gegenstände
   64 Nummern auf 6 Seiten

Geschätzter Gesamtwert: 2.448.390,- Mark

Gesamtaufstellung
der Erfassungskommission
unter Leitung von Prof. Dr. Schade
(Staatl. Museen zu Berlin)
im Auftrag des Ministeriums für Kultur
der DDR
1985

Fig. 4 List of artworks from the estate of Otto and Wally Nagel with their appraisal values, 1985, AdK, Berlin

East German Akademie der Künste, the main people involved and the role they played. However, Otto Nagel's estate does bring the issue clearly into focus. It was not simply a matter of avoiding a tax liability. The real question is whether the gift only came about on the back of threatening tax proceedings set in motion by the fiscal authorities or whether the plan was hatched by the cultural authorities, who stood to profit from the holdings and classified them in parallel as protected cultural property. What alternatives did the people concerned have when confronted with a complete lack of administrative and fiscal jurisdiction? And, most importantly, how were they to prove collusion between the various state actors involved after the fall of the Berlin Wall, based on their interests in acquiring the estate? We do not know of a single case in which the East German tax authorities put in writing — to the extent that any files have survived — that they purposefully levied taxes with a view to transferring art from private hands into state ownership. Although this procedure was common knowledge, it was not openly expressed, or at least not recorded in the files as the intended purpose. As regards the Nagel estate, we do not even know whether there were any formal tax proceedings, which may only have stood menacingly on the horizon after the unexpectedly high valuation of the estate by the "assessment committee". Taking into account the situation prevailing at the time, it is questionable whether the gift should more or less be considered "orderly" or whether it was the consequence of a genuine imbalance of power, unchecked by the rule of law. Is it fair and just if, despite new historical findings in this regard — some of which only became available much later — individuals are still obliged to speak of their hardship at the time? This is especially so for today's generation of heirs, given the state of the records, which are typically full of gaps.

These questions are outstanding and will need to be answered sooner or later. The East Berlin municipal authorities posthumously made Otto Nagel an honorary citizen — his importance to the city meant that this title was still recognised after the lists of honorary citizens of East and West Berlin were amalgamated. The pitfalls of legal reappraisal alone, which encountered excessive hurdles long before in-depth historical reappraisal of this and other cases could be reviewed in context, have been outlined above. And although such treatment should not be reserved for the estates of honorary citizens alone, Nagel's legacy merits critical examination and Berlin is morally obligated to pursue it. The current exhibition at the Akademie der Künste is a first step in this direction.

1 Salka-Valka Schallenberg, "Otto Nagel: Der Künstler — und sein Vermächtnis", in Mathias Deinert, Uwe Hartmann and Gilbert Lupfer (eds.), *Enteignet, entzogen und verkauft: Zur Aufarbeitung der Kulturgutverluste in SBZ und DDR* (Schriftenreihe Provenire, vol. 3, Berlin, 2022, pp. 261 ff.
2 Kurt Hager, internal memo, Central Committee of the SED, 26 July 1971, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.
3 Valentina Nagel, letter to the Central Committee of the SED, 19 June 1972, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.
4 For a detailed account of events, see Schallenberg, *Otto Nagel*, pp. 264 ff.
5 The list of artworks included in the Otto and Walli Nagel estate (excerpt), 1985, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.
6 Minister of Finance Ernst Höfner, Council of Ministers of East Germany, letter to Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel dated 16 September 1985, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.
7 Notification from the Office for the Settlement of Unresolved Property Issues (ARoV) dated 10 January 1997, Az. AROV VI D11 – 60856, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.
8 Ibid.
9 Notification from the State Office for the Settlement of Unresolved Property Issues (LARoV) dated 5 March 1998, Az. LAROV III B — W — 605/97, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Otto Nagel Archive.

“Otto Nagel Estate, Gift, 1985”

11

Hans Baluschek, *Matrosen in der Südsee*, c. 1890, oil on cardboard, 35.7 × 47 cm, AdK, Berlin

“An appreciative H. dedicates the first oil study to his beloved uncle.” This inscription can be found on the back of *Matrosen in der Südsee* (Sailors in the South Pacific) by Hans Baluschek (1870–1935). Why was this study earmarked for his uncle? What was the young Baluschek grateful for, and what is the relationship between his uncle and the motif of the painting?

We learn a little about the artist’s family background in a 1932 edition of the *Schlesische Monatshefte*. E. E. Wille’s article “Der Maler Hans Baluschek und Schlesien” (The Painter Hans Baluschek and Silesia) relates that his father was probably the first civil servant in a family of farmers originally from Ukraine who later moved to the area in and around Upper Silesia, where they settled as owners and tenants of large estates. Born in Breslau (Wrocław), the son of a railway engineer, Baluschek studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Berlin from 1889 to 1894. The oil painting can be dated to around 1890, when Baluschek was a student at the art academy. The artist’s oldest known sketchbook also originated during this period.

Matrosen in der Südsee entered the art collection of the Akademie der Künste der DDR (East German Academy of Arts) in 1985, as recorded in the inventory book: “Otto Nagel estate, gift, 1985”. To offset the threat of exorbitant inheritance tax, hundreds of works from the estate were transferred to the state in 1985. They became the

Back of the oil study with a dedication from Hans Baluschek

property of the GDR, which still begs the question whether the gift can be considered voluntary. With the transfer of the estate, the Akademie received not only works by the artist but also those he and his wife Walli collected, including two oil studies by Käthe Kollwitz and Hans Baluschek. Otto Nagel was friends with both of them. After Heinrich Zille's death in 1929, the three artists jointly looked after the interests of the silent film *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (English distribution title: *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*).

Based on current research, there are two likely provenances. Either Otto Nagel acquired the study directly from Baluschek, or it came from his estate. This may have happened in 1947 when Nagel acquired Baluschek's artistic estate from his widow for the municipal authorities in East Berlin. The identity of Baluschek's uncle has not yet been ascertained. **Doris Kachel**

Provenance

- **Until 1967** Otto Nagel, Berlin
- **1967–1983** Valentina "Walli" Nagel, Berlin (widow of the artist)
- **Since 1985** Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (transfer of the Otto Nagel estate by his daughter in return for remittal of tax liabilities), now the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Gerda, a “Fallen” 15-Year-Old Girl

12

Otto Nagel, *Gerda*, 1933, oil on canvas, 79 × 60 cm, AdK, Berlin

Gerda was painted in 1933, the year the Nazis seized power. As a communist and critical realist painter, Otto Nagel found himself in an existentially precarious situation. In his short autobiography, *Mein Leben* (1952), he describes the position he was in and mentions that he painted very few works during the National Socialist era. In 1964 Gerhard Pommeranz-Liedtke wrote that the artist picked his models from the streets or the courtyards of tenement blocks. By his account, this is how Nagel came upon Gerda, “a girl who had grown up in the hothouse of commercial prostitution and had been delivered into a world of fornication as a child and become enslaved to it”. Art historian Erich Frommhold’s 1974 description sounds as though it is talking about a different portrait of Gerda: “This ‘fallen’ 15-year-old girl … remained a pure child for Nagel—contrary to circumstances, as it were—which accounts for his creation of a truly sublime portrait of a child.” The catalogue raisonné, edited by Nagel’s daughter Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel and her husband, has this to say about *Gerda*: “Also: Seated girl; working girl. The subject is a 15-year-old prostitute.” For many years the painting was owned by Nagel’s widow Walli Nagel, who consigned it a permanent loan to the Otto-Nagel-Haus in Berlin after its founding.

Otto Nagel, *Bildnis eines lesenden Mädchens*, c. 1937, chalk on paper, 60.8 × 50.7 cm, Adk, Berlin

Otto Nagel, *Mädchenbildnis Gerda*, c. 1937, pastel on paper, 59.8 (trimmed at top margin to 56.5 cm) × 46.7 cm, Adk, Berlin

We can only surmise what later became of Gerda by looking at her face as rendered by the artist in pastels some four years later. The portrait of the girl Gerda, *Mädchenbildnis Gerda*, produced around 1937, shows her with short plaits, and all traces of a childish openness are now gone. The set of her lips gives her face, shown in three-quarter profile, a slightly contorted, somewhat dissonant and unhappy expression. Something similar can be found in a Nagel drawing titled *Portrait of a Girl Reading* from the same period.

The *Gerda* portraits are from the parts of the estate assigned in 1985 to the Akademie der Künste der DDR (East German Academy of Arts) in East Berlin. After her mother's death, Nagel's daughter Sibylle Schallenberg-Nagel was obliged to relinquish a large part of his artistic legacy. It was the only way she could escape the fiscal demand for 2.5 million marks to cover GDR inheritance and property tax. **Rosa von der Schulenburg**

Provenance

- **Until 1967** Otto Nagel, Berlin
- **1967–1983** Valentina "Walli" Nagel, Berlin (widow of the artist)
- **Prior to 1985** Otto-Nagel-Haus, Berlin (on permanent loan from the Nagel family)
- **Since 1985** Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (transfer of the Otto Nagel estate by his daughter in return for remittal of tax liabilities), today Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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Cover Fritz Erler, *Schwarzer Pierrot,* 1908

p.1 Fritz Erler, *Der Fechter,* 1904

p.101 Reinhold Begas, *Der gefesselte Prometheus,*
1900, marble, 380 × 195 cm, AdK, Berlin

Back cover Back of Fritz Erler's *Schwarzer Pierrot*
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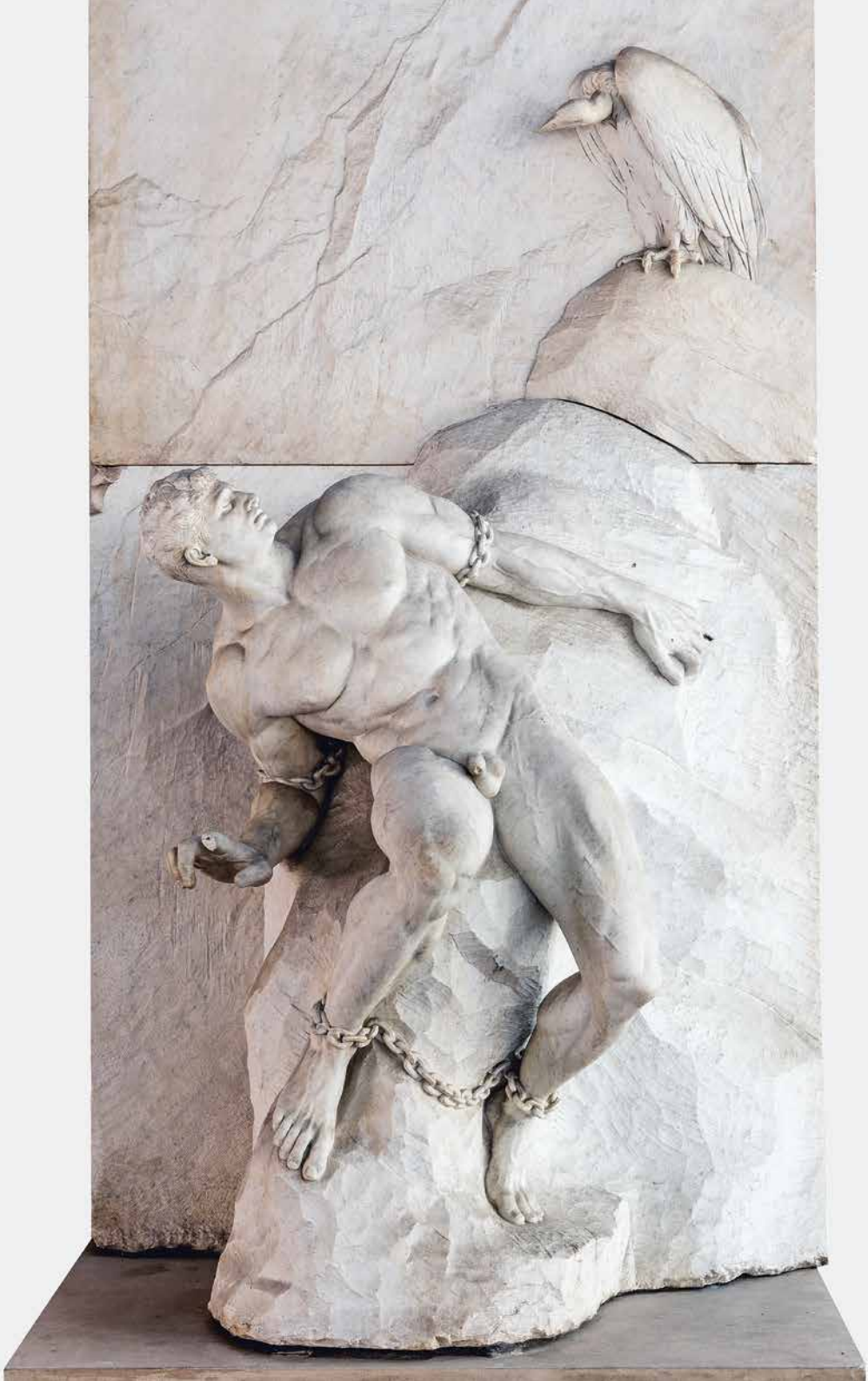

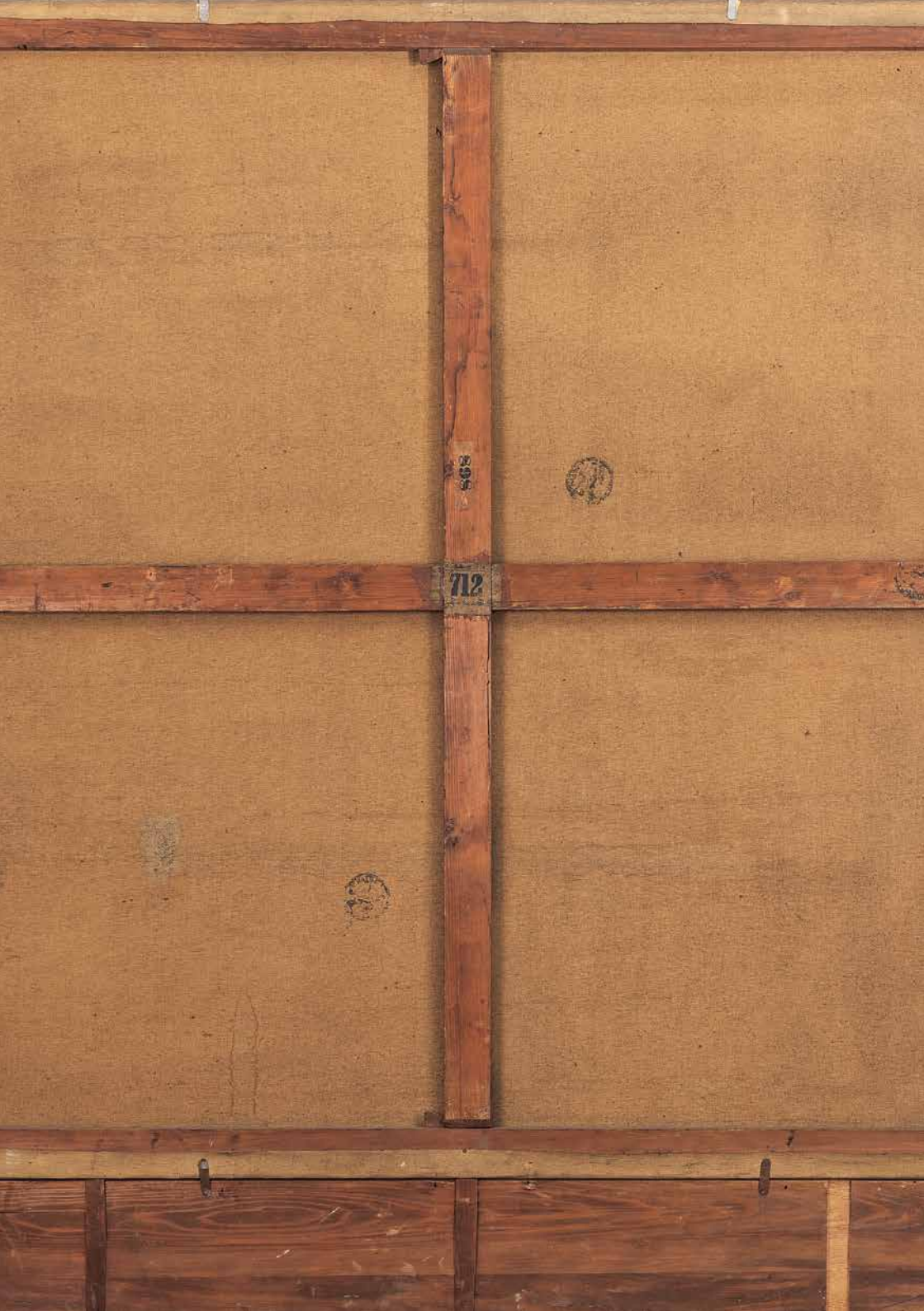
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