

From Refugees to Restitution: Nazi Looted Art in the UK(Cambridge, 23-24 Mar 17)

University of Cambridge, Mar 23-24, 2017

Deadline: Oct 15, 2016

Bianca Gaudenzi, Cambridge

From Refugees to Restitution: The History of Nazi Looted Art in the UK in Transnational and Global Perspective"

In recent years, the subject of looted art and the restitution of cultural property has come to the fore of historical enquiry and public consciousness alike. While popular recollections of this politically sensitive subject often display a certain lack of historical accuracy, a growing number of historians, art historians and legal scholars have devoted their energy to investigating the nuances and complexities of the phenomenon across time and space. Parallel to this, experts based at local, national and international institutions such as ministries, museums, auction houses, archives, galleries or even private collectors have started adopting measures designed to prompt the art world to adopt fair practices for identifying, recovering and restituting looted art. The field, however, remains rather compartmentalized along national, institutional and professional lines and still displays a marked tendency to focus on specific cases or collections. Instead much could be gained by studying the phenomenon in a broader comparative perspective and by exploring the tangible links to some of the central themes of 20th-century history: revolution, persecution, displacement, war, migration and genocide.

The aim of this conference is to identify and address the historical continuities and specificities of the history of looted art and restitution in the overlapping contexts of 20th- and 21st-century British, European and World history as well as to assess its scope and relevance in light of present-day good practices and restitution policies in place in the UK and beyond. We seek contributions investigating the history of Nazi looted art and its restitution in order to gain a deeper understanding of these processes as political and cultural practices as well as to assess and foster the development of fair practices in art trade and restitution in transnational and global perspective.

The UK case offers a particularly telling example in this respect: persecuted by the Nazis, large numbers of refugees emigrated from Central Europe during the 1930s, including many collectors, artists and art dealers who fled to the UK and effected very significant changes to the country's cultural landscape. At the same time, Nazi-looted art objects are to be found in UK collections that are either unrecognized as such, disputed or in the process of being returned. Whilst keeping a comparative perspective based on examples and policies in other countries, the focus of the conference will be on collectors, dealers and artists that were persecuted by the Nazis and fled to the United Kingdom.

We welcome papers on the following themes:

- Changing definitions of “looted art” and of “restitution”, their periodization and links to political history: criteria, motifs and limitations
- Historical and legal interpretations of the interplay between spoliation, displacement and forms of cultural genocide
- The (trans)national art world and restitution: the impact on museums, galleries, art dealing and collecting practices
- Identity and restitution: cultural property, international/national/local power structures and identity politics
- National policies, decision-making processes and the development of international cooperation - including the work of both private and public actors
- Public debates and cultural representations of restitution claims: the factors that contribute to their visibility and their impact on the public discourse
- Looted art as a space of memory and memories of restitution: the legacy and use of institutional as well as collective restitution debates
- The emotions of material culture: The emotional qualities of looted and restituted art as symbols of Objektkultur
- The development of fair restitution practices and how/if they could be applied to different national and institutional contexts
- Resources available to scholars and professionals in the field, with a particular emphasis on research resources in the United Kingdom

The conference language is English. Papers will be pre-circulated in mid-March 2017. Please send a proposal of max 400 words, accompanied by a short CV, to Bianca Gaudenzi and Julia Rickmeyer (thelootedartconference at gmail.com) by 15 October 2016.

Organisers: Bianca Gaudenzi (University of Cambridge/University of Konstanz)
Julia Rickmeyer (Sotheby's London)

Dates: Thursday 23 – Friday 24 March 2017

Location: Newnham College, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DF

Reference:

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