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Looted Art and the Art Market (Brussels, 11–12 Jun 26)

Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Jun 11–12, 2026
Deadline: Jan 31, 2026

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Looted Art and the Art Market: Nazi Art Theft in Belgium, Europe, and its aftermath.

We invite scholars, researchers, and cultural professionals to submit proposals for papers to be presented at the international conference organised in the context of the Belgian federal research project ProvEnhance (Enhancing the provenance data of the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) since 1933. Scientific study, digital valorisation and narrative in context).

Anchored in a dual research approach, the ProvEnhance project simultaneously examines the trajectories of a selection of artworks from the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium and the roles of participants within the Belgian art market between 1933 and 1960, situating both within the broader dynamics of cultural dispossession and the post-war approach. Integrating provenance research, art market studies, and data science, the project—and by extension this conference—advances an interdisciplinary framework for analysing the movements of cultural objects and their connections to actors and power structures shaped by the Nationalist Socialist era and its aftermath.

While the conference has a broad international scope, submissions linked to the Belgian context—including case studies, institutional practices, or regional histories, based on Belgian traces in archival sources— are especially encouraged. However, the organisers welcome contributions from all disciplines that aim to foster (interdisciplinary) dialogue and advance research in the fields of Nazi-era provenance research and art market studies, museum collections, and the actors involved in cultural dispossession in the context of National Socialism.

Conference Themes:
Submissions are welcome on topics including, but not limited to:
- Contextual Histories and Mechanisms of Expropriation
Studies on the legal, political, and social frameworks that facilitated the seizure, forced sale, dislocation or loss of cultural property under the Nazi regime.
- Challenges in Nazi-Era Provenance Research
Methodological, ethical, and practical issues in tracing ownership, restitution processes, and the role of archives and documentation.
- Museum Collections and Provenance
Investigations into institutional collections and their acquisition practices, with a focus on objects with problematic or unclear provenance acquired from 1933 onwards. This might illuminate historical practices and networks as well as current acquisition policies for museum collections against

the backdrop of National Socialist art theft.

- Valorisation and Outreach in Museums

Methods, challenges and ethical questions in the mediation of objects from museum collections that are linked to the context of Nazi injustice.

- The Art Market: Frameworks, Actors, and Networks

Research on the structures and dynamics of the Belgian and international art markets in the period 1933-1960. Topics may include art dealers, collectors, intermediaries, and their interactions with i.e. occupying forces, museums and post-war restitution authorities or the military justice system. Contributions on the legal, political, cultural and/or institutional contexts governing the Belgian and international art trade, spoliations, and restitutions. Analyses of market mechanisms, such as pricing, and the economic dimensions of wartime and post-war art transactions.

- Continuities in the Belgian and International Art Market

Research into actors such as art dealers or museum staff involved in both the process of dispossession as well as the post-war systems for the repatriation and restitution of seized cultural property. Insights into art market participants who were active before, during, and after World War II, and who may have benefited from a network and/or collection of cultural objects established before and during the National Socialist regime.

- Provenance and Art Market Data, Research, and Infrastructure

Frameworks for structuring and managing provenance and art market information, including gaps and uncertainties through data modelling, ontologies, controlled vocabularies, and other standardised formats. Topics may also address digital and collaborative environments for encoding related data, the application of FAIR and linked open data principles, and the use of platforms such as Wikidata and other open infrastructures to support provenance and art market research.

- Digital Methods for Provenance Research and Art Market Studies

Contributions that examine the application of visualisation, data analysis, and machine learning techniques to explore provenance and art market dynamics. Topics may include automated archival data extraction, entity recognition and linking, network and geospatial analysis, deep learning or natural language processing for revealing patterns, connections, and insights within provenance and art market data.

Practical information & submission guidelines:

The conference will take place from June 11 to 12, 2026 in Brussels, at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. The conference language is English.

Proposals for contribution can be submitted as abstracts (maximum 300 words), accompanied by a short biography (maximum 200 words) in a single file via email with the subject 'CFP ProvEnhance' to: provenance@fine-arts-museum.be.

The deadline for submitting proposals is January 31, 2026. Notifications for accepted presentations will be sent by March 1 at the latest.

Scientific Organizing Committee:

Aude Alexandre (RMFAB), Fenya Almstadt (RMFAB), Ingrid Goddeeris (RMFAB), Prof. Meike Hopp (TU Berlin), Dr. Mattes Lammert (Universität Zürich), Alexandre Leroux (RMFAB), Dr. Dirk Luyten (Belgian State Archive / CegeSoma), Prof. Kim Oosterlinck (RMFAB), Prof. Anne-Sophie Radermecker (ULB), Eléa De Winter (ULB).

Reference:

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