

GURLITT: STATUS REPORT
«**Degenerate Art**» – **confiscated and sold**

November 2, 2017, to March 4, 2018

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1. General information

Duration of the exhibition

02.11.2017 – 04.03.2018

Team of curators

Dr. Nina Zimmer, Director Kunstmuseum Bern – Zentrum Paul Klee

Dr. Matthias Frehner, Director of Collections Kunstmuseum Bern – Zentrum Paul Klee

Dr. Nikola Doll, Head of Provenance Research Kunstmuseum Bern

Prof. (em.) Dr. Georg Kreis, Historian, Universität Basel

Simultaneously at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn

Gurlitt: Status Report. Nazi Art Theft and its Consequences

November 3, 2017 – March 11, 2018

The patrons of the exhibition are

Federal Councillor Alain Berset, Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (EDI), Switzerland

Minister of State Monika Grütters, Member of the German Bundestag and Federal Government
Commissioner for Culture and Media, Federal Republic of Germany.

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2. The exhibition

«The Gurlitt Art Trove»

Starting November, a sampling of works from the Gurlitt art trove will be shown to the public for the first time in the double exhibition *Dossier Gurlitt*.

The exhibitions in Bern and in the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn are presenting a first, preliminary survey of the Gurlitt art trove. Much controversy arose when the discovery of this collection was first made known to the public in November 2012.

The legacy of the German art dealer and museum director Hildebrand Gurlitt (1895–1956) was initially presented in the media as lost Nazi treasures. However, very quickly other issues became more pressing: Where did these artworks originally come from? Under which circumstances did Gurlitt acquire them? How could holdings of this kind and number, of which experts were at least aware, remain in obscurity after Hildebrand Gurlitt passed away in November 1956?

Today we know that the Gurlitt art trove comprises over 1,500 works of art and that their owner was Cornelius Gurlitt (1932–2014), Hildebrand Gurlitt's son. The works were discovered in his Munich apartment in November 2012 and later also in his house in Salzburg. It came as a great surprise when Cornelius Gurlitt bequeathed his collection to the Kunstmuseum Bern Foundation and made the museum the sole recipient of an extensive collection of artworks from the legacy of his father. There is no clear answer to the question why the Kunstmuseum Bern was made beneficiary of these acquisitions from the 1930s and 1940s, and we can only speculate as to the reasons. However, the Gurlitts did have connections to Bern through business contacts with galleries and auction houses.

Survey of the trove

With the discovery of the art trove, numerous works by artists resurfaced that had been defamed by the Nazi regime as «degenerate» and whose whereabouts were a puzzle following their confiscation from German museums. Now a sampling of these works is the focus of an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern. The art trove comprises predominately works on paper, that is, gouaches, watercolors, color woodcuts, drawings, and prints. The holdings that have survived provide us with valuable insights into the trends and areas in art that shaped Hildebrand Gurlitt's understanding of art, documenting also his preferences and interests as a collector. Gurlitt's socialization in art was molded by modern art trends in Berlin, the Secession artists in the circles of Max Liebermann and Lovis Corinth. The largest part of the exhibition, however, is devoted to modernist movements that originated in the city Hildebrand Gurlitt was born in, namely Dresden: they include the artists' group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) and new objectivity and verism, of the latter especially the work of Otto Dix, but also George Grosz and Max Beckmann.

Due to the background of Nazi cultural politics, *Dossier Gurlitt* and the goal of a survey of the collection means that the circumstances involved in compiling it and Gurlitt's activities as an art dealer can not be ignored. The art trove yet again focuses our attention on questions concerning the history of art dealing under a dictatorship and how the responsibility for these actions is shared by those working for and with it. Hildebrand Gurlitt belongs to this group as official state art dealer for the confiscated works of «degenerate art» and buyer for the Fuehrer Museum in Linz.

«Degenerated Art»

With the exhibition *Degenerated Art – Confiscated and Sold* we seek to address the issue of regimes ruled by injustice using art as an instrument for their own purposes. It will elucidate how state-organized looting of art and cultural property was a vehicle of political and racist persecution that targeted minority groups in Germany and in the German occupied territories. The confiscation of over 20,000 paintings, sculptures, and prints from German museums in the «degenerate art» campaign is paradigmatic for the destructive operations of this regime against a free culture. It left huge gaps in the collections of German museums and played a decisive influence in the lives of the artists who suffered under its persecution.

The course of Hildebrand Gurlitt's career as museum director and art dealer imparts an idea of his association with the dictatorship. His support of modernist artists early in his career was his undoing. He was fired from his position as director of the Hamburger Kunstverein and later as director of Museum Zwickau because he exhibited and purchased anti-war pictures, expressionist, abstract, and veristic art, that is, art that was ruthless in its portrayal of reality. With the power of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) constantly growing, museum directors like Gurlitt came increasingly under pressure. By means of targeted campaigns, Nazi followers and members of the NSDAP affiliated Militant League for German Culture succeeded in promoting social hostility toward contemporary art. By equating it generally with artistic decadence and social decline they equally discredited art and democracy.

The inauspicious conflation of political propaganda and contemporary art was not invented by the Nazis. As early as the close of the nineteenth century, realism and impressionism were addressed in numerous writings as manifestations of cultural and social decline on account of their stylistic variety and tendency toward abstraction.

The exhibition *Degenerated Art – Confiscated and Sold* engages also with these defamatory crusades, which reached their peak in the Nazi «degenerate art» campaign of 1937/1938. We have consequently given a lot of space to the artists whose lives were affected by vilification and persecution. Documents and writings from Hildebrand Gurlitt's estate paint a likeness of the art dealer as a historical figure that is full of contradictions. They likewise palpably illustrate the contiguity of defamation, (forced) sales, and looting.

Where do the artworks of the Gurlitt art trove originally come from?

The goal of a survey set the cornerstones for the conception and presentation of the exhibition. One of the challenges was to give the works of art enough space to do them justice and not to overshadow their aesthetic value through historic contextualization. The key to solving this problem was the provenance information that provides a lucid picture of the biographical relevance of the works that goes beyond their pictorial semantics.

In a «Studio Provenance Research » our visitors have the opportunity of learning about a subject that again has acquired international urgency. What the work of provenance researchers involves and the problems they face and must solve can be observed in a selection of artworks from the Gurlitt legacy.

3. Chronology of the «Gurlitt Art Trove»

September 2010

The Bavarian Public Prosecutor's Office started an investigation against Cornelius Gurlitt on suspicion of tax evasion following a customs inspection on the train from Zurich to Munich.

February/March 2012

Cornelius Gurlitt's Munich apartment was searched and the artworks discovered in it confiscated.

November 3, 2013

A report in the news magazine *Focus* made the «Schwabing art trove» public. Many of the works were believed to be Nazi plunder. It turned out that the information on the size and value of the cache of artworks was greatly exaggerated.

November 2013

The Federal Republic of Germany and the Free State of Bavaria set up the «Schwabing Art Trove Taskforce.» This international team of specialists began with the research on the provenances of the artworks. In the following weeks the works confiscated from Gurlitt were published in the database www.lostart.de.

February 2014

Cornelius Gurlitt was represented by a court-appointed custodian and a team of lawyers. His legal representatives announced that further artworks had been found in Gurlitt's house in Salzburg.

April 2014

Cornelius Gurlitt signed an agreement with the Free State of Bavaria and the Federal Republic of Germany on the further procedures to be taken in regard to the art trove. In it he agreed to have the provenance of the artworks investigated by the «Schwabing Art Trove Taskforce» and gave his consent to returning the works that proved to be Nazi-looted art to the descendants of the rightful owners.

May 6, 2014

Cornelius Gurlitt died aged 81 years in Munich. On the following day, on May 7, 2014, the Kunstmuseum Bern Foundation was informed that Hildebrandt Gurlitt had appointed it as his sole beneficiary in his last will and testament.

November 21, 2014

Ms. Ute Werner, Cornelius Gurlitt's cousin, contested the will.

November 24, 2014

The Kunstmuseum Bern decided to accept the legacy after six months of consideration.

March/April 2015

The Probate Court in Munich decided that Cornelius Gurlitt's last will and testament was valid. Ute Werner filed a complaint on behalf of part of the family.

May 2015

Two works in the legacy could be restituted to their rightful owners: Max Liebermann's painting *Two Riders on the Beach* was returned to the descendants of David Friedmann. Henri Matisse's painting *Odalisque* was restituted to the descendants of Paul Rosenberg.

January 14, 2016

The «Schwabing Art Trove Taskforce» submitted its final report. Subsequently the investigation of ownership and origins of the artworks was taken over by the project «Gurlitt Provenance Research» of the German Center for Lost Cultural Property.

December 15, 2016

The Higher Regional Court in Munich rejected Ute Werner's appeal against the decision of the Probate Court in Munich and acknowledged the Kunstmuseum Bern as the legal beneficiary. With this decision the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn could intensify their preparations for the planned exhibitions.

February 20, 2017

Adolph von Menzel's drawing *Interior of a Gothic Church* was returned to the descendants of Elsa Helene Cohen.

May 2017

Camille Pissarro's painting *La Seine, vue du Pont-Neuf, au fond le Louvre* was restituted to the heirs of Max Heilbronn.

Since November 2017

The Kunstmuseum Bern and the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn are showcasing the works from the Cornelius Gurlitt legacy for the very first time, so the public has access to the works and can learn about the history of the people involved.

4. Short Biographies of the Members of the Advisory Board

Esther Tisa Francini

The historian Esther Tisa Francini (born in 1972) has been responsible for the Archive and Provenance Research Department at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich since 2013. Since 1998 she has been dealing with the history of the international, and above all, Swiss art market, Nazi looted art, and the trajectories of non-European artworks. Together with Anja Heuss and Georg Kreis, she wrote the groundbreaking publication «Fluchtgut – Raubgut. Der Transfer von Kulturgütern in und über die Schweiz und die Frage der Restitution (Flight Goods – Stolen Goods. The Transfer of Cultural Goods into and via Switzerland and the Question of Restitution)». She curated the exhibition *Von Buddha bis Picasso. Der Sammler Eduard von der Heydt* (From Buddha to Picasso. The Collector Eduard von der Heydt) (2013 in Zurich, 2015 in Wuppertal), and in 2016 she managed the show *Dada Afrika. Dialog mit dem Fremden* (Dada Africa. Dialogue with the Other) (cooperation project, Zurich and Berlin in 2016, Paris in 2017/18) together with Michaela Oberhofer and Ralf Burmeister.

Gilbert Lupfer

Gilbert Lupfer (born in 1955) studied art history, history, and empirical science of art at the University of Tübingen and the FU Berlin. He gained his doctorates in 1995, qualified as a professor in 2002, and has been an adjunct professor of art history at the TU Dresden since 2007. Since 2002 he has been employed at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Dresden State Art Collections). In 2008, he was put in charge of the provenance research project «Daphne» and since 2013 he has been heading the Department of Research and Academic Cooperation. On 1 April 2017, he was appointed academic chairman of the Stiftung Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste Magdeburg. He has contributed publications on topics such as 19th and 20th century architecture, museology and museum history as well as provenance research.

Uwe M. Schneede

Uwe M. Schneede (born in 1939) studied art history, literature, and classic archaeology at the universities of Kiel and Munich. He is a professor emeritus of modern art history and was the director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle until his retirement in 1991. From 2008 until 2014 Schneede was the chairman of the advisory board of the Department of Provenance Research as well as the academic chairman of the newly established Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste (German Lost Art Foundation) in Magdeburg from 2015 until 2017. «Die Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert: Von den Avantgarden bis zur Gegenwart» (The History of Art in the 20th century: From the Avant-gardes to the Present) (2010) and «Museum 2000 - Erlebnispark oder Bildungsstätte (Museum 2000 – Amusement Park or Educational Institution)» (2000) are among Uwe M. Schneede's numerous publications. He curated an array of exhibitions and published the accompanying catalogues such as *1914. Die Avantgarden im Kampf* (1914. The Avant-gardes at War) at the Bundeskunsthalle.

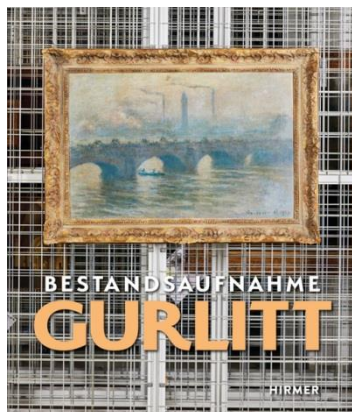
Hermann Simon

After obtaining his Abitur at a grammar school with Latin and Greek on his curriculum, Hermann Simon (born in 1949), studied history and orientalia at the Berlin Humboldt University. He went on to do a postgraduate degree in Prague and a doctorate in Berlin. From 1975 until 1988 Hermann Simon was employed at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin State Museums) before being appointed founding director of the Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin- Centrum Judaicum (New Synagogue Berlin Foundation – Centrum Judaicum), which he headed until 2015. His publications are dedicated to numismatic topics and the history of Jews in Germany. He managed numerous exhibitions and published the accompanying catalogues. He is the editor of the series «Jüdische Miniaturen (Jewish Miniatures)» and «Jüdische Memoiren (Jewish Memoires)».

Shlomit Steinberg

The art and theatre historian Shlomit Steinberg (born in 1957) started her career at the Israel Museum in the early 1980s. Since 2014 she has been working there as the Hans Dichand Senior Curator of European art. From 2014 until 2016, Steinberg was a member of the international Gurlitt Taskforce. Her extensive list of publications includes «Orphaned art: looted art from the Holocaust in the Israel Museum» (exhibition catalogue 2008). *License to Paint: French Academic Art in the 19th Century* (2017), *Francisco Goya: Daydreams and Nightmares* (2016), *Looking for Owners: Custody, Research, and Restitution of Art Stolen from France during World War II*, a cooperation project with the national museums of France (2008), and *Orphaned Art: Looted Art from the Holocaust in the Israel Museum* (2008) are among the exhibitions she curated. Chronology of the Gurlitt Art Trove

5. Accompanying volume published for the exhibition



Gurlitt: Status Report

Kunstmuseum Bern: «Degenerate Art» – Confiscated and Sold

Bundeskunsthalle: Nazi Art Theft and Its Consequences

With an introduction by

Alain Berset, The Swiss Federal Council

Monika Grütters, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media

With a preface by

Nina Zimmer, Director Kunstmuseum Bern – Zentrum Paul Klee

Rein Wolfs, Director Bundeskunsthalle

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Birgit Schwarz, Wien

Yehudit Shendar, Jerusalem

Shlomit Steinberg, Jerusalem

6. Supporting program of the exhibition

**Lecture by Bénédicte Savoy,
Collège de France, Paris /
Technische Universität, Berlin**

Wednesday, November 8, 2017, 6 pm

The professor of art history about the topic

«Warum wir es wissen wollen.

Provenienzforschung in historischer Perspektive»

(«Why we want to know it. Provenance

Research in a historical perspective»)

**Lecture by Esther Tisa Francini,
Museum Rietberg, Zürich**

Tuesday, January 23, 2018, 6 p.m.

The Provenance Researcher about the topic

«Entartete Kunst und die Schweiz: Betrachtungen
zu Kunstmarkt und Kunstpolitik»

(«Degenerate Art and Switzerland: Reflections
on the art market and art policy»)

Panel Discussion

Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 6:30 pm

Hildebrand Gurlitt was a committed supporter of
modernism and head of various art institutions in
Germany before he became active for the Nazi
regime.

Nina Zimmer in conversation with today's
directors of these institutions: Eva Birkenstock,
Director Düsseldorfer Kunstverein, Petra Lewey,
Director Kunstsammlungen Zwickau, Bettina
Steinbrügge, Director Hamburger Kunstverein

Studio Provenance Research

By means of case studies, visitors are able to
understand the questions and search paths that
occur while reconstructing an artwork's biography
and thus get to know the challenges of the
provenance research.

Adult education course

Wednesday, November 22, 29, 06 and
December 13 2017, 15 p.m. – 16 p.m.

Second course: Wednesday, January
24, 31. and February 7

14 2018, 15 p.m. – 16 p.m

Bookings required:

Volkshochschule Bern:

T 031 320 30 30, info@vhsbe.ch

PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES

«ARTUR» Kinder-Kunst-Tour

Saturday, November 25 2017,

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Family Sunday

Sunday, February 18 2018, 11 a.m. –
12:30 p.m.

*

WORKSHOP FOR CLASSES

**Moderne Kunst im
Nationalsozialismus**

(Modern Art in National Socialism)

*

* Bookings required:

Tel.: 031 328 09 11 or

vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

GUIDED TOURS

Sunday, 11 am: November 5, 12, 19, 26
December 10, 31, 2017,
January 14, 28,
February 11, 25, and March 4, 2018

Tuesday, 7 pm: November 14, 28
December 5**, 19, 2017,
January 16, 30 **
February 6, 20, 2018

Tuesday, 11 am: January 2, 2018

**with the curator Nikola Doll
Number of participants limited,
no reservation possible

Visites guidées en français

Dimanche 17 décembre 2017, 11h30
Mardi 23 janvier et 13 février 2018, 19h30

Public guided tours in English

Tuesday, December 12, 2017, 7:30pm
Sunday, February 04, 2018, 11:30am

Werkstatt Provenienzforschung

Woher kommen unsere Kunstwerke?
Präsentation aktueller Beispiele aus der
Sammlung des Kunstmuseum Bern
Dienstag, 14. November 2017, 18h – 19h
Freitag, 24. November, 08. Dezember 2017,
09. Februar 2018, 12h30 – 13h30

Atelier de recherches de provenance

D'où viennent nos oeuvres d'art ?
Présentation d'exemples récents de la
collection du Kunstmuseum Bern
Vendredi 02 février 2018, 12h30 – 13h30

Provenance research laboratory

Where did the artworks come from?
Presentation of recent cases from the
collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern
Tuesday, December 12, 2017, 6pm – 7pm

Literary Tour with Michaela Wendt

Sunday, November 26, December 10 2017,
January 21 and February 18 2018,
13 p.m. – 14 p.m.