

Stolen, Sold, and re-discovered

The Nazis have chiseled his art collection out of Rudolf Mosse and scattered it all over the world. Now, the Prussian-Foundation gives back eight objects to the heirs.

Rudolf Mosse, the big Berlin publisher had not only built a newspaper-empire within the shortest time, whose liberal, republican flagship was the legendary "Berliner Tageblatt" under Theodor Wolff. Mosse was also a big patron of the arts and sciences and invested millions of Reichmarks in social projects and was the first one to found a pension fund for his employees. He established an exclusive art collection including works by Adolf Menzel, Max Liebermann, Lovis Corinth, Karl Spitzweg, Wilhelm Leibl, and Arnold Böcklin at the Mosse palais located at Leipziger Platz, which was bombed in 1945. A part of the collection adorned castle Schenkendorf, the countryseat of the family in Brandenburg. Again and again, the private collection was exhibited publically; in 1908 also collection catalogues appeared. Ultimately in 1934, the collection as well as the entire assets of the Jewish family was being shattered by the Nazis. The Mosse Family like the Ullstein Family symbol of the hated "Jewish Press," was immediately persecuted relentlessly, because of their belief, but also because of their political stance.

Thus, already in 1933, Erna Felicia Lachmann-Mosse, sole heir of the parental fortune emigrated to France with her husband. Shortly after, without the Mosse's involvement, the Nazis founded, a so-called Rudolf Mosse Foundation GmbH, which sole purpose was to expropriate the family step by step.

Although they called it "transfer" and named a fairly transparent foundation goal, the "support of the victims of the World War," not even the fact that the profits would have to be handed over to the Reich Ministry of Labor was being concealed. Soon, as usual in these years, a bankruptcy was brought up, which allegedly had announced itself already at a much earlier state, and the Mosse group, allegedly due to huge losses, was ultimately forced into insolvency proceedings. Only half a year later, the ominous Mosse Foundation GmbH gave up, because it lacked the allegedly expected profits and now the deprivation was perfect: The Lachmann-Mosse estate was being managed and then "utilized" by a so-called trustee. The NS-State transferred title of real estates to its own institutions, the valuable art collection was mostly being sold in the Rudolph Lepke and Union auction houses, partly also sold individually. To whom and to where it was sold remained in the dark for a long time, but at least the auction catalogues from 1934 are recorded in the looted-art databases.

Already in 1952, a German superior Court ruled in its decision that Felicia Lachmann-Mosse was subject to racial persecution in the spring of 1933 already and had lost legal, economic and actual power of disposition over her personal assets at the time. She was partly compensated, but the valuable piece of land at the Leipziger Platz, located in the center of Berlin, where once again a Mosse-Palais stands today, although a more modest one, was only given back to her heirs in 1992. This was where the border ran during the years of the Berlin-wall.

Not only German museum started to intensively research looted art only after the declaration of the "Washington Principles" in 1998, in many cases it was also only after this that the heirs could conduct a research with a reasonable effort. For many persons subject to looted art, databases like Lost Art in Magdeburg or such relating to the

intrigues of art dealing made it possible to specifically identify and name their lost property for the first time.

Also, Felicia Lachmann-Mosse' heirs, in Germany represented by the Berlin law firm Raue LLP, listed 440 art objects, paintings, sculptures, antiques, furniture, and jewelry at Lost Art only last summer. At the same time, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation found several objects from the Rudolf Mosse collection. Since years, the foundation searches systematically for art with suspicious provenance in all their collections. First clues appeared by chance, when the provenance of two East Asian greyhound statues without any inventory number was being checked, and the trace lead to the Mosse collection.

By now, it is without any doubt that not only two but eight art works are part of the Mosse collection. A few months ago – the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation had just begun to look for potential heirs – it was contacted by the Mosse Art Restitution Project and asked to provide information about two of those art works. The little bundle, among it the “Opferbecken” (“sacrifice basin”), which was being searched for through Lost Art, and the “Eingeweidekrug” (“guts jar”) from the Egyptian Museum, may for the time being remain as a loan in the museums. Besides the two Old-Egyptian exhibits, the objects include a precious Roman sarcophagus, which came to the museum in 1942, a Lion-Sculpture by August Gaul, which the art agent of the Berlin magistrate once rescued from the ruins at the Mosse's bombed premises located at Voßstraße and brought it to the National Gallery, the greyhound dogs, as well as two old Chinese Lions on lotus pedestals.

A lucky coincidence, which was also possible, because provenance research of looted art got more professional over the past years and operates in a global network. In the next weeks, the law firm Raue LLP will negotiate with other museums, where artworks from the Mosse collection have finally been found. President of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation Hermann Parzinger is happy about the uncomplicated agreement and thanks the heirs of the publisher, who “more than anyone else represents the Berlin of the early 20th century,” for the loans. And J. Eric Bartko, head of the Mosse Art Restitution Project, thanks the Prussian-Foundation “for its willingness to compensate.” The institute belongs to the Mosse Foundation, which carries on Rudolf Mosse's legacy as a patron of the arts and sciences with its noble and good deeds.