



Sie befinden sich hier: [Startseite](#) > **Processing Nazi Art Theft in Munich from 1938: Restitution of Nine Works of Art of the couple Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn**

Processing Nazi Art Theft in Munich from 1938: Restitution of Nine Works of Art of the couple Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn

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Bavarian State Minister of the Arts Bernd Sibler returns together with the Bavarian State Painting Collections, the Bavarian National Museum and the State Collections of Prints and Drawings, Munich, works of art, which were confiscated by the Gestapo, to the community of heirs from Europe, Asia and Africa: "Ethical duty, to deal with the provenance of museum inventories thoroughly, profoundly and conscientiously"

MUNICH. Bavarian State Minister of the Arts Bernd Sibler returned together with Prof. Dr. Bernhard Maaz, General Director of the Bavarian State Painting Collections, Prof. Dr. Frank Matthias Kammel, General Director of the Bavarian National Museum, and Dr. Kurt Zeitler, Deputy Director of the State Collection of Prints and Drawings, Munich, nine works of art, which belonged to the Davidsohns, to Hardy Langer, representative of the community of heirs.

Due to extensive research, the three museums were able to reconstruct the provenance of five paintings, three color-prints and a wood panel with ivory reliefs, the context of the confiscation and their remaining after 1945. They also found the heirs in London, Zimbabwe and Tel Aviv.

In November 1938, Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn were the victims of one of the biggest Nazi art thefts of the Gestapo due to their Jewish ancestry. The looted works of art came to the so-called Central Collecting Point, located at the Königsplatz, and found their way into the possession of the three museums via the Treuhandverwaltung von Kulturgut in Munich in 1955.

Bernd Sibler, State Minister of the Arts, stated: "Provenance research is more than just a duty of our museums. It is our ethical duty, to deal with the provenance of museum inventories thoroughly, profoundly and conscientiously and to make it transparent. Past events cannot be undone, but we can send a visible sign for our deep and serious interest to process the inhuman crimes of the National Socialism. It goes without saying that the Free State of Bavaria returns works of art which were seized as a result of persecution."

Hardy Langer, representative of the heirs, stressed: „The community of heirs consisting of the Langer family from Mannheim and Bielefeld and the Sela and Elasar family from Israel, the Dannheisser family from South Africa and the Moses family from London heard with great interest that the artworks of the Davidsohn family were found and that the Free State of Bavaria wanted to return these objects. It is very illuminating for the community of heirs to find out about the fate of the former Davidsohn family and to be able to commemorate them. We would like to thank Dr. Andrea Bambi and her entire team for the years of work and commitment to reestablish clarification and justice."

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Maaz, representing the three museums, added: "The provenance research team of the Bavarian State Painting Collections, which has been substantially increased over the last years, also provides other museums with its knowledge. An example is this restitution procedure. I am pleased that we could complete this long and difficult research project and that we could return all the objects affected. The research findings also show that the research tools and methods of this discipline are really mature now."

Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Israeli religious community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, stated on the occasion of the restitution: „I am glad to see the Davidsohn collection finally return to the hands of the heirs of its rightful owners, almost a lifetime after it was looted by the National Socialists. From the legal and particularly the moral norms of our country follows an obligation to retribute looted artworks to their original owners wherever possible. The State of Bavaria is meeting this obligation today in an exemplary manner, and I hope that it will continue to live up to its historical responsibility, especially as provenance research continues to deliver results."

- Photos of the restitution ceremony for media use will be available for download on Monday, August 5, from around 14:00 at this link:

<https://www.picdrop.de/agebert/Nationalmuseum> (Passwort: 05082019)

- You can find further information on provenance research in the annual activities report of the Research Association for Provenance Research in Bavaria (see <https://provenienzforschungsverbund-bayern.de/> ; p. 93 and 104)

- Images of the works of art can be found under:

<https://cloud.bstgs.de:8080/sharing/DVIXoKIh>

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Inhalt

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