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Provenance Research on nine works of art from Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn

The couple Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn lost five paintings, three color-prints and a wood panel with ivory reliefs in the course of persecution by the NS regime in 1938. Due to extensive research, the Bavarian State Painting Collections, the Bavarian National Museum and the State Collection of Prints and Drawings, Munich were able to reconstruct the provenance of the artworks, the context of the confiscation and their remaining after 1945. They also found the heirs in London, Zimbabwe, Tel Aviv, Mannheim and Bielefeld.

- The Confiscation of artworks of the family Davidsohn in 1938

Two weeks after the November pogrom, the Gestapo confiscated about 2,500 cultural assets from 70 Jewish households in Munich and the surrounding area, amongst them the household of the family Davidsohn. Before the confiscations, Museum staff and other players in the Munich art world explicitly informed the Gestapo about the locations of artworks. That was the beginning of one of the biggest art thefts in the NS times [see Jan Schleusener: Raub von Kulturgut, München 2016], which is closely connected to the persecution of Jews and their systematic looting.

On November 25, 1938, the Gestapo seized the above-mentioned works of art in the apartment of the Davidsohns in the Widenmayerstraße 45 in their presence. Auctioneer Ludwig Schrettenbrunner, a convinced National-Socialist and recipient of the Blood Order, estimated the value of every single piece of art. While the Gestapo minuted the art collection typewritten, moving trucks were waiting outside of the apartment. The victims did not receive copies of the minutes, which were signed by former Gestapo chief of Würzburg and SS Hauptsturmführer Josef

Gerum. The cultural assets were first brought to the Maximilianeum and in 1940 offered to the museums of the Bavarian capital. Objects that could not be sold were stored in so-called Bergungsdepots.

In September 1939, the Davidsohns were evicted from their apartment and subjected to physically strenuous forced labor. The last stop in Munich of Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn was the transit camp Berg am Laim [convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross]. From there, they were deported to Theresienstadt on July 16, 1942. Julius Davidsohn was murdered there on August 11, 1942, his wife Semaya Franziska Davidsohn on April 24, 1943.

- Restitution efforts after 1945

After the end of the war, the looted works of art were brought to the Central Collecting Point, located at the Königsplatz. The Jewish Restitution Successor Organisation (JRSO), representative for the murdered couple, made claims for restitution in December 1948. Beginning March 1950, also the lawyer Siegfried Neuland represented the unknown heirs of the Davidsohns. In July 1952, the JRSO assigned any claims to the Free State of Bavaria on the basis of a global agreement. That is how the State of Bavaria was authorized to return the objects. Lawyer Neuland strongly criticized this process, since absurdly the State as plunderer was now authorized to retribute. The Chamber of Reparation of the Munich District Court declared the complaint inadmissible, since the claims were not filed within the given time limit. That is why there have been five paintings at the Bavarian State Painting Collections, a wood panel with ivory reliefs at the Bavarian National Museum and three color-prints at the State Collections of Prints and Drawings, Munich, since 1955. Because of the loss due to persecution, which is clearly proven in the report of the museums, Bavarian State Minister of the Arts Bernd Sibler supported the restitution to the legal heirs on the basis of the Washington Principles and the Joint Declaration on the Washington Principles between the German Federation, the Länder (Federal States) and the National Association of Local Authorities in May 2019.

- Tracing heirs 2016-2018:

After the violent death of the couple, the cousins (and/or their children) of Semaya Franziska Davidsohn were entitled to the inheritance. Two cousins survived the

holocaust in Germany. Five other cousins emigrated to England, to the USA, to Israel and to former Rhodesia, today's Zimbabwe, due to persecution. After two years, the search for heirs was successfully completed, also with assistance of independent heir searchers. The current community of heirs is represented by Hardy Langer, who will receive the works of art representative for the other heirs.

Sources and literature on the persecution fate of Julius and Semaya Franziska Davidsohn:

- Jan Schleusener: Raub von Kulturgut, München 2016, S. 196-199.
- Alfred Grimm: Der entthronte Triton und Schillers „Glocke“ im Relief. NS-Raubkunst par excellence: zwei Fallbeispiele aus dem Bayerischen Nationalmuseum. In: aviso 3 | 2015, S.21-23.
- Projektunterlagen Vanessa Voigt, Horst Kessler, Ilse von zur Mühlen zum Fall Davidsohn, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Registratur, Archiv.
- Biographisches Gedenkbuch der Münchner Juden 1933-1945, Hg. v. Stadtarchiv München, München 2003, S. 252-253.
- Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Dokumentation, Dok.199, Mappe 3.
- Beschlagnahmungsakte, StadtAM, Stadtmuseum 104.