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PRESS RELEASE

SPK Restitutes Works to Oppenheim Heirs

Eleven works that were part of Margarete Oppenheim's collection until 1936 have been identified in the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) and the Skulpturensammlung (Sculpture Collection) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin). A fair and just solution, based on the Washington Principles, has been found for these works, which came into the museums' possession in a variety of ways. Of the eleven pieces returned, the SPK has bought back five for the two museums.

Hermann Parzinger, President of the SPK: "I would like to thank the heirs of Margarete Oppenheim for the fair and just solution that we have agreed together. The issue of identifying and returning Nazi-confiscated art is still an important task for the SPK today, almost twenty years after the formulation of the Washington Principles, and I am happy about every case that is clarified. This is why we address the question of the origins of objects not only in the daily work of the curators, but also in the framework of in-depth, systematic provenance research projects."

Imke Gielen, of the law firm von Trott zu Solz Lammek, and David Rowland, from the law firm Rowland & Associates, who are representing the heirs, said: "We too believe that the agreed solution is a just one and we would like to thank the SPK for its fair approach. We welcome the Foundation's unceasing endeavors to clarify the provenance of the works of art in its collections."

Margarete Oppenheim (1857–1935, née Eisner, wid. Reichenheim) was married to the chemist and industrialist Franz Oppenheim until his death in 1929. She owned one of the largest and most valuable art collections in Germany. It contained numerous Impressionist paintings as well as works in porcelain, majolica, faience, and silver, and small sculptures. Both Margarete and her heirs belonged, on account of their Jewish descent, to the category of people who were persecuted by the National Socialists.

As early as 1933, Margarete Oppenheim had left instructions that the art collection be duly auctioned by the executors of her will at the "time that seems most suitable" to them and that the proceeds should be added to her estate. The auction was held in May 1936 at Böhler's auction house. It

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INGOLF KERN
DR. STEFANIE HEINLEIN (Stv.)

Von-der-Heydt-Straße 16–18
10785 Berlin

Telefon: +49 30 266-41 14 40
Telefax: +49 30 266-41 28 21

pressestelle@hv.spk-berlin.de
www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de



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may safely be assumed that the executors, who, just like the primary and alternate beneficiaries of the will, were Jewish, had not chosen this point in time freely, but were compelled to do so by external circumstances. The sale is therefore to be classified as resulting from persecution. The then Schlossmuseum produced the auction catalog at its own expense. The production of a catalog without remuneration was not unusual at the time and was often associated with the expectation that the museum would be given objects in return.

The museum acquired a total of 24 objects at the auction, of which ten still exist. In the same year, three further objects were inventoried; these are marked in the files as legacies or estate of Margarete Oppenheim. Two of them are still in existence. In the course of the research, the Kunstgewerbemuseum identified two more items from the Oppenheim collection. These had been loaned to the museum during Margarete's lifetime and they subsequently remained there without ever having been purchased. The agreed solution takes into account all of the different aspects of the case.

The restituted and repurchased pieces are two works of the Danube School that are of great historical importance (a lamenting Virgin Mary and a St. John from a crucifixion group by the monogramist 'IP') and three eighteenth-century porcelain pieces from the Meissen and Frankenthal manufactories. **Press images:** www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/newsroom/presse/pressebilder.html

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) has taken a proactive and responsible approach to the issue of dealing with Nazi-confiscated cultural property. It has already managed to agree fair and just solutions in more than fifty different restitution cases. Altogether, it has returned more than 350 works of art and over 1,000 books to the beneficiaries. In most cases, this was the result of a restitution claim. However, as provenance research covers an increasing portion of its collections, the Foundation is also able to approach potential beneficiaries on its own initiative. In doing so, its actions are always guided by the Washington Principles and by the Joint Declaration issued by the German Federal Government, the federal states, and the local authorities. More at:

www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/schwerpunkte/provenienzforschung-und-eigentumsfragen/eigentumsfragen/umgang-mit-ns-raubgut.html