

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Saturday March 23, 2009

Göring's prey

Why Nancy Yeide's book matters to restitution

He considered himself a "Renaissance Man" when it came to his art collection. By that he did not only want to point out his preference for Lucas Cranach, who he paid almost exclusive homage to at the beginning of his collecting activities. During the 1930s his art historical scope was even broader.

Even though Old Masters of German and Dutch origin were forming the basis of his collection, he made space for Italian and French art of the 18th and 19th century in his galleries at his country estate Carinhall. Amongst the exhibited treasures were works by Grünewald and Cranach, Tiepolo's "Alexander the Great and Campaspe in the Studio of Apelles" (now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), Jan Gossaert's "Virgin and child" (now in the Art Institute of Chicago), and four Boucher's which he looted from the Rothschilds (now in the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth).

Contemporary Art, which he gained possession of by confiscating Jewish property, he exchanged for paintings of his liking. "Pianist and chess player" by Matisse (now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington) he handed over for a mythical nude by the less significant Jan van Neck. Van Gogh's portrait of Dr. Gachet, which was taken from the Städel (Museum) in Frankfurt, and "Madame Camus" by Degas he was equally happy to part with. His pride and joy was a Vermeer, which came from the workshop of the art forger Han van Meegeren. Göring let go of more than 100 Old Masters in return.

The bulk of Göring's collection, assembled by plunder, acquisition, exchanges and bestowal by solicitants who he supplied with wish lists, was evacuated from Carinhall at the beginning of 1945. On special trains (Sonderzügen) the works made their way to Berchtesgaden via Veldenstein castle, his Franconian estate. Here they were safeguarded by the American Armed Forces. Göring himself was arrested at castle Fischhorn at Zell am See. Carinhall he had blow up. Still in Berchtesgaden a first list of his collection was being compiled, before it was taken to the Central Collection Point in Munich, and in parts photographically documented. The collection was being estimated at about 1300 paintings back then, which also contained sculpture, arms, furniture, porcelain, ceramics, tapestries.

Nancy Yeide, provenance researcher and head of the department for "Curatorial

Records” at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, is now presenting much higher numbers. During her seven year research, during which she concentrated entirely on the paintings and tirelessly combed through archives on both sides of the Atlantic, she found out that Göring possessed an additional five to six hundred paintings. Some of those were looted from the trains, some were found by German authorities after the Allies closed the Central Collection Point in 1950, some were traded or sold by Göring before the end of the war.

Widely unknown is for instance the fact that next to “Dr. Gachet” he owned another flower still life by Van Gogh and a “Saint Barbara” by Cranach, a portrait which, according to Nancy Yeide has never been published anywhere else before. “Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: The Hermann Goering Collection”, a handsome volume, which is due to be published by Laurel Publishing at the beginning of April, will be the first publication, as Nancy Yeide phrases it carefully, which offers an almost comprehensive documentation of the collection, including paintings which only temporarily were in Göring’s possession.

In the future one or the other paintings, which Yeide did not account for, might still resurface, but she does not count on any huge surprises. But surprises might be possible for individuals in possession of a painting in her book finding out, that it once hung in Carinhall. Because even today Yeide is unable to determine the current whereabouts of a number of paintings, whose provenance until the day of their incorporation into Göring’s collection has now been determined. She does hope though, that especially through the publication of her catalog raisonne a number of mysteries might be solved. Nancy Yeide does not only provide new resources to scholars who can now dare to evaluate the collection as a whole, “Beyond the Dreams of Avarice” could also very well cause new restitution claims.

by Jordan Mejias