

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, November 28, 2018

Conclusions of the Specialist Conference “20 Years of Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future”

An international conference dedicated to assessing the implementation of the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art since their adoption in 1998 was held in Berlin, Germany on November 26-28, 2018. The approximately 800 participants included leading international specialists, institutions, Holocaust survivors, and their descendants. They examined the implementation of the principles, which have played a central role in restituting Nazi stolen property worldwide. Organized by the German Lost Art Foundation, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) and Kulturstiftung der Länder, the cultural foundation of the German states, the conference focused on the future, further development, and measures for improvement.

Gilbert Lupfer, the executive board member for research at the German Lost Art Foundation, is convinced: “Provenance research is an important part of our historic responsibility and a natural component of museum, library, and archive work on collections, outreach, and education. This research helps institutions honor their commitment to passing on the restitution of Nazi injustice to future generations.”

Hermann Parzinger, president of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, emphasized that a large number of cases have been processed in the past 20 years – each one with its own background. “We have a responsibility to examine our collections systematically. At the same time, we are obligated to take a detailed look at each individual case. Each one teaches us something different about our history – and this opens new approaches to research. But above all, we are learning about the fates of the people who were disenfranchised during the Nazi regime and the lives of their descendants. Each new conversation increases our understanding of the fate of these families,” he said

As Markus Hilgert, Sgeneral secretary of the Kulturstiftung der Länder, said: “To rectify and acknowledge the injustice that was perpetrated against Jewish citizens by forcibly confiscating their cultural property during the National Socialist dictatorship, the collections need to be made transparent and completely digitized. Provenance must be comprehensively and carefully researched. This includes holding dialogs among equals with the victims’ descendants, and a willingness to retribute unjustly dispossessed cultural goods.”

As a result of the conference, the German Lost Art Foundation will provide financial support for searches for previous owners or their heirs. And to make it easier for descendants to search for lost cultural goods, they will be competently advised and mentored. In response to conference feedback, the foundation will develop a research database to improve the documentation of research results. It will also help standardize terminology (e.g., NS-Raubgut = Nazi plunder) and interconnect the actors involved in international provenance research.

To implement the additional effort called for by the conference participants, it will be necessary to increase the number of permanent positions in institutions that preserve culture: museums, libraries, and archives. This will guarantee the sustainability of provenance research in those institutions. Public institutions must improve transparency and accessibility by completely digitizing their collections. And in turn, public institutions were urged to integrate the results of their provenance research into the outreach and educational work of museums, libraries, and archives.

On November 28, exactly five days after the day in 1998 on which the Washington Principles were adopted, the 20 Years Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future conference in Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt with 800 participants ended.

A video of the entire conference will soon be uploaded to the German Lost Art Foundation website. Selected interviews with participants are available on the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz website.

Attached: Conclusions of the 20 Years of Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future conference.

German Lost Art Foundation
civil law foundation
Press Office
Humboldtstraße 12 | 39112 Magdeburg

Telefon +49 (0) 391 727 763 24
Telefax +49 (0) 391 727 763 6
presse@kulturgutverluste.de
www.kulturgutverluste.de

Results of the Specialist Conference

“20 Years of Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future” held on November 26 to 28, 2018 in Berlin

Since the Washington Principles were adopted in 1998, many countries have successfully implemented a number of different measures to trace and restitute property confiscated by the Nazis. Due to the complexity and dynamics of the subject matter and as a result of the “20 Years of Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future” conference, a lot remains to be done. In detail:

1. What has already been accomplished?

Focusing on German activities, the measures include adopting the “Joint Declaration with the Länder and the national associations of local authorities regarding the tracing and return of Nazi-confiscated art, especially Jewish property” related to implementing the Washington Principles in Germany one year after their adoption, launching the Lost Art Database (2000) online, and creating the guidelines on how to proceed (*Handreichung*) (2001). The following activities must also be mentioned with regard to structural optimization: expansion of the mandate of the office coordinating lost art (2002), establishment of the independent advisory commission on returning cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property (2003), the Coordination Office for Provenance Research (2008), the Schwabing Art Trove taskforce as a result of the Gurlitt case (2013), and the German Lost Art Foundation (2015).

Statements on the German Lost Art Foundation’s work:

- The foundation funded a total of 273 projects with around 24.5 million euros from 2008 to spring 2018 as part of the financial support of projects related to provenance research. More than 113,000 cultural items from museums and over 785,000 books and historic prints were examined as part of these projects. Numerous museums, libraries, and archives carry out provenance research on their own holdings without support from the foundation.
- Since 2015, the foundation has also supported private applicants.
- The Lost Art Database currently contains more than 169,000 objects described in detail and several million objects entered in lost and found announcements from over 1,950 domestic and foreign institutions and people. It includes entries of “flight assets” registered as Nazi-confiscated property.
- The foundation is working on a research database that will make all relevant information (for example, from the supported projects or about the Schwabing Art Trove) available and researchable from a central location, including the option to connect to other databases.
- As of 2019, the foundation will also provide financial support for the search for heirs.
- It will also establish a help desk as the first point of contact for affected parties in restitution cases.

2. What still needs to be done?

Museums, libraries and archives

- Sponsors of museums, libraries, and archives should actively live up to their responsibility for the further and continuous implementation of the Washington Principles.

- The sponsors of cultural institutions should create new permanent positions to safeguard provenance research for the long term.

Digitalization/ Transparency

To create transparency, institutions dedicated to preserving culture should digitalize all of their collections and make them available through generally accessible databases and their own websites.

Process mentorship

- Potential claimants must receive competent advice and mentorship from the moment they register their claim to the point when a fair and just solution is negotiated.
- Institutions must receive support in their search for rightful owners or their heirs.

Terminology and networking

- Terminology (e.g., *NS-Raubgut* = Nazi-confiscated property) must be standardized.
- The institutions involved in provenance research and restitutions – and their databases – in individual countries must be better interconnected using the latest technology.
- Best practice examples must be compiled on a national and international level and communicated to the public.

Fair and just solutions

- Fair and just solutions in the spirit of the Washington Principles can also be found for objects whose provenance is not complete.
- A suitable statistical overview of all measures to identify Nazi-confiscated property and the successful negotiation of fair and just solutions must be developed and published.
- Clearly identified, unclaimed Nazi-confiscated property, especially from Jewish owners, should not remain in public or other private hands. Its special role in the history of the Holocaust must be taken into account.

Mediation

- Existing mediation commissions whose goal it is to find fair and just solutions quickly must be continuously adapted to take further developments into account.

Education

- Future scientists in the area of provenance research must be supported more intensively and specifically.
- The Nazi confiscation of art and cultural property must be researched and documented further and more intensively; findings should be communicated to a broad audience in order to guarantee the transfer of knowledge to future generations.
- Museums and other institutions dedicated to preserving culture must focus more on integrating the subject of Nazi-confiscated property in their exhibitions and educational programs.

Private individuals

- The moral obligations set out in the Washington Principles should be accepted by private individuals and the art trade as the central interface of trading art, including possible Nazi-confiscated property.

Legislators

- Legislators must verify whether and, if necessary, how the concerns of the Washington Principles can become even more enshrined through suitable legal measures.

Progress

- Progress in implementing the Washington Principles should continue to be monitored at regular intervals as part of international conferences.