

MDA News

Matisse painting stolen by Nazis returned to British Jewish charity

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Matisse painting stolen by

French Culture minister Christine Albanel has returned a painting by French artist Henri Matisse, which was stolen by the Nazis during WWII from its Jewish owner, to a British charity that supports a network of medical emergency service in Israel.

The 1898 oil painting, named "Le Mur rose, de l'hôpital d'Ajaccio" ("The pink wall, from Ajaccio's hospital") was stolen by the Nazis from the family of Harry Fuld, a German Jew who made his fortune in telephones, and kept by Kurt Gerstein, a Nazi officer responsible for delivering Zyklon B - the poison used in the gas chambers - to Auschwitz and other camps.

Fuld senior, who owned a telephone manufacturing company, died in 1932 and left his art works to his son, who fled Germany in 1937, leaving the collection behind.

Following Gerstein's surrender to French authorities in April 1945 and after the painting had been recovered by French police three years later, it has ended up at France's national museum of modern art where it has been since 1949.

Harry Fuld died in 1963 and for reasons unknown willed his estate to Gisela Martin, a woman who has remained something of a mystery in this saga. She in turn left her estate to the British branch of Magen David Adom, a charity group, when she died in Switzerland in 1992.

This explains why the French Culture minister officially returned the Matisse on Thursday to Stuart Glyn, chairman of Magen David Adom UK.

"It's a remarkable and in some ways slightly creepy story," Glyn said.

The Matisse is worth a "a good six-figure sum," but will first be displayed in a museum, said Glyn. He said he is in discussions with museums in Germany and Israel.

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The charity is also trying to recover other parts of the Fuld collection, which included 12th-century Buddha statues, 16th-century Italian masters, furniture and other art, Glyn said.

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Magen David Adom UK, a company limited by guarantee (company number 5718138)
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