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Peter Sachs wins battle for £4m poster collection seized by Nazis

David Charter, Europe Correspondent

Seventy years after they were seized by the Gestapo on the orders of Joseph Goebbels, a treasure trove of rare art posters has been ordered to be returned to the family of the Jewish enthusiast who collected them.

Peter Sachs, 71, won a test case at Berlin's administrative court over a poster which belonged to his father of a red bulldog for a satirical magazine, despite opposition from the German Historical Museum.

The museum must now hand back the entire collection of about 4,000 designs, valued at €4.5 million (£4 million). The posters cover exhibitions, cabarets, films and products, as well as political propaganda, amassed by Hans Sachs from the first four decades of the last century.

The court ruling enforces the spirit of an agreement, known as the Washington Declaration of 1998, in which guidelines were set for the return of artefacts stolen by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Some institutions have been loath to let collections go without a fight and the German Historical Museum argued that Hans Sachs, Peter's father, forfeited ownership by accepting compensation for the posters in 1961 on the assumption that they had been destroyed. The museum is likely to appeal.

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Peter Sachs, whose father survived the war but died in 1974 without seeing his collection again, has been fighting for their return for more than four years.

Although the court did not agree that he owned a second item in the test case, a 1932 poster for Die Blonde Venus starring Marlene Dietrich, it established the

principle that every poster once owned by his father was rightfully his.

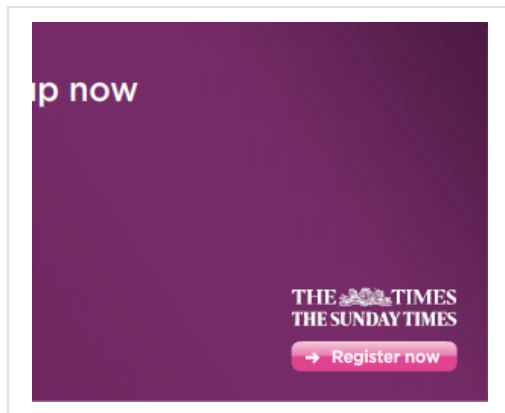
"Needless to say I am delighted," said Mr Sachs, who lives in Florida, after the ruling. "It was my father's passion, and it is my legacy in a way."

Matthias Druba, his lawyer, added: "It is a shame we did not get the Blonde Venus but in the end what is more important is that the general question has been answered clearly in our favour: Peter is the rightful owner and he has a claim to get them back; we could not want more."

Born in 1881, Hans Sachs was a dentist who began collecting posters while in high school. By 1905 he was Germany's leading private poster collector and later launched the art publication *Das Plakat* - The Poster.

After the Nazis came to power, the collection caught the eye of Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, who wanted it for a museum, and it was seized in the summer of 1938.

A few months later in November 1938, during the Kristallnacht pogrom against the Jews, Hans Sachs was arrested and thrown in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp north of Berlin. When he was released about two weeks later the family fled to the United States.



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After the war Hans Sachs assumed the collection had been destroyed and accepted compensation of about \$38,000 from West Germany in 1961. He learnt five years later, however, that an East Berlin museum had part of the collection. He wrote to the Communist authorities about seeing the posters or even bringing an exhibit to the West, but to no avail.

The collection was given to the German Historical Museum in 1990, after communism fell. Peter Sachs said that he only learnt of the existence of the collection in 2005, and began fighting for the return of the posters.

Returned loot

The Nazis looted more than 20 per cent of the art in the countries they occupied during the Second World War. Thousands of items are yet to be returned

In 2006 Maria Altmann successfully sued the Austrian Government for the return of five Gustav Klimt paintings stolen from her uncle Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer

In 1999 a stolen Van Gogh painting, L'Olivette, worth £3.3 million, was returned to a British woman named Gerta Silberberg

Britain awarded £175,000 to the family of the art collector Arthur Feldmann whose drawings were seized by the Gestapo and later stored in the British Museum

Sources: Times archives, US National Archive, news.bbc.co.uk

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