

Political Passivity on Nazi Art Thefts

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Looting of art by the Nazis has few historical precedents. According to one estimate, approximately 650,000 artworks were stolen and, of these, it is estimated that 110,000 are still missing. The total value of the art treasure is estimated to between 10 and 30 billion dollars.

It is worthwhile keeping these figures in mind when reading the article in the most recent *Fokus* regarding the protracted dispute over the *Blumengarten* painting between the heirs of the German-Jewish businessman, Otto Nathan Deutsch, and the Modern Museum in Stockholm.

The so-called Washington Principles regarding the way in which art stolen during the Nazi era would be returned to the original owners were signed 11 years ago. Sweden was represented there by, among others, Pär Nuder who was the then under-Secretary of State under Göran Persson.

This summer, as EU chair, the Czech Republic is arranging a second conference at which the effects of the principles will be discussed. The other day I called an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who explained that the issue of Sweden's participation had been moved up in the hierarchy to the political leadership. The next call went to the Press Secretary close to Carl Bildt who promised to sort out issues regarding the composition of the Swedish delegation and who would be in charge of it.

Since then, silence. And this is the same pattern in contacts with the Ministry of Culture.

The reason why they are not calling back is probably because there is not much to report. This passivity is striking when compared to the US State Department which arranged a preparatory meeting in Washington a few weeks ago.

In a letter to Minister of Culture Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, attorney David Rowland, who represents the *Blumengarten* heirs, writes that the next step in the dispute with the Modern Museum may be to raise the issue in Prague. Judging from the indignation which has been heard for months from the groups engaged in the issue of Nazi looting of art, I do not think that will be necessary. *Blumengarten* will no doubt be one of the specific subjects of discussion this summer. And the Swedish Government does not appear to have started thinking about who is going to go and present Sweden's interpretation of the Washington Principles.