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Linz restitutes Nazi Looted Art Again

Linz – The City of Linz will return Nazi Property to its lawful owner once more. At issue are six paintings by the Vienna painter Anton Romako (1832 to 1889) which were owned by the Jewish doctor Oskar Reichel (1869 to 1943) and are now in the collection of the Lentos Art Museum.

The Romako paintings are between 26.5 x 21,5 cm and 139x89.5 cm in size. Three are portraits. In recent years, Romako paintings have achieved prices of up to 48,000 EURO in auctions. The six paintings came into the city's possession between 1953 and 1956. They were bought from the Berlin art dealer Wolfgang Gurlitt. Since 1999 experts have been researching the provenance of the paintings because many works of art sold by Gurlitt had been found dubious.

The paintings belonged to the Jewish doctor and businessman Oskar Reichel from Vienna. He had a large art collection which he was forced to sell after the Nazis had assumed power. Reichel died in May 1943 in a Vienna old people's home after his wife Malvine had been deported to Theresienstadt in January 1943. None of his three sons, one of whom was deported to Lodz in 1941 and murdered, had children. In 1998 the favourite niece of the youngest Reichel son inherited the works, a doctor who lives in Germany.

The restitution of the paintings from the Lentos museum which is operated by the city of Linz is based on laws of the Austrian Federation and the Land. The paintings will nevertheless stay at the Lentos, because the doctor concluded an agreement to this effect with the city of Linz. As the lawful owner of the paintings she is entitled to sell the Romakos. But the city has a right of first refusal whenever she receives an offer to sell.

The Lentos is not the first museum to retribute Romako paintings to the owner. In 2006 the Vienna Museum restituted four Romakos and in 2010 the Federal Restitution Council recommended that the Leopold Museum return works by Romako. In December 2011, the Albertina Museum was asked to hand over six paintings by Anton Romako to the lawful owner.

Since 1999, the city of Linz has restituted four works of dubious provenance. These included Egon Schiele's painting "City on a River" (Krumau), which the lawful owners sold in June 2003 for 18 million Euro, and Gustav Klimt's "Portrait of a Woman" (Ria Munk III) which was sold for 22.67 million Euro in June 2010.

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