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## **Leopold Museum reaches Agreement with Heirs of Looted Art**

The Leopold Museum has reached an agreement with the heirs regarding two works of art that were purchased during World War II. The paintings by Anton Romako will remain in the museum. The heirs receive a voluntary payment.

The Leopold Museum has reached an agreement with the heirs of the original owner of another two paintings that are in the possession of the private foundation. It was announced today, Monday, at a press conference in Vienna that an agreement was reached with the heirs of Moric Eisler with regard to the works "Greillenstein Castle" and "Duchess of Kuefstein with Easel" by the Austrian artist Anton Romako. The private foundation undertakes to make a "voluntary payment", the amount of which is subject to a confidentiality agreement, as the chairman of the foundation, Helmut Moser, stressed.

The art collection of the building contractor Eisler had been seized by the Gestapo during the Nazi occupation. Subsequently, collector Rudolf Leopold purchased both paintings on the art market. The Michalek Commission, installed by the Ministry of Culture to assess the findings prepared by provenance researchers, had recommended the return of the paintings last November.

Board member Andreas Nödl considers the agreement that was reached between the Leopold Museum and the heirs of Moric Eisler regarding the two Romano paintings the positive outcome of "lengthy efforts". The settlement means, in his view, that the foundation and the heirs to "can speak in unison of a fair and just solution". The settlement which was signed yesterday, Sunday, by the foundation and the heirs' lawyer, Filip Marco, provides for "the recognition of the moral-ethical claims of the heirs" in addition to the payment of money.

This recognition would take the form of an accompanying text when the paintings are exhibited. This text would explicitly point to the history of the paintings and the art collector Eisler. The paintings "Greillenstein Castle" (1885/86) as well as "Duchess of Kuefstein with Easel" had made their way into the free art trade after they had been seized by the Gestapo. "Greillenstein Castle" came into the possession of a medical doctor based in Linz. In the 1980s Leopold Rudolf purchased the painting from the Vienna art dealership of Giese & Schweiger. Leopold purchased the "Duchess of Kuefstein with Easel" already in the 1950s from the art dealer Wolfgang Gurlitt. Both works were given to the private Leopold Museum Foundation upon its creation in 1994.

In November last year, the Commission headed by former Minister of Justice Nikolaus Michalek had recommended the return of both paintings. This commission installed by Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied assesses files established by independent provenance researchers – however, since the Leopold Museum is not owned by the Federal State, but a private institution, it does not fall within the ambit of the Restitution Act. Therefore, it lies in the sole discretion of the foundation's board to follow the Commission's recommendations.

At today's press conference, Filip Marco, the lawyer, was pleased with the "amicable agreement", which had been difficult because the Restitution Act was not applicable to the Leopold Museum. The monetary payment will be distributed among the four heirs according to their respective share in the estate. Nödl explained that an agreement was reached with the heirs about the estimated value of the paintings, a certain percentage of which would be paid out. In the eyes of Diethard Leopold, the son of the collector who deceased last year, the settlement is "a settlement just as I imagine it should be." After all, "it is a very good feeling because the bottom line is that the paintings will stay here."

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