



Consulate General  
of the Republic of Poland  
in New York

**6 February 2014**

**HSI and Manhattan US attorney return Nazi-German looted painting to Poland**

NEW YORK —More than seven decades after being stolen by the Nazis, the “Saint Philip Baptizing a Servant of Queen Kandaki” by German painter Johann Conrad Seekatz is back in the hands of its rightful owner, the National Museum in Warsaw, Poland. At a ceremony today at the Polish Consulate in New York, U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York (SDNY), returned the painting to Poland’s Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski.

“We are deeply grateful to return this cherished to our partners from the Republic of Poland,” said HSI New York Special Agent in Charge James T. Hayes, Jr. “Homeland Security Investigations will continue to work tirelessly to track down objects stolen during World War II and return them to their rightful owners.”

“Decades ago, during World War II, this Johann Conrad Seekatz painting was removed from its home in a national Polish museum by Nazi forces,” said U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, Southern District of New York. "Since then it has crisscrossed the globe, but today, we are very pleased to finally be able to return this national treasure to the country and its people."

“I am very happy that another painting that was registered as a Polish wartime loss comes back to Poland today. Unfortunately, due to our tragic history, the database of Polish wartime losses is still enormous. However, the Polish government attaches a great importance to this issue as it’s one of our key priorities. Using this opportunity, I would like to thank the United States’ authorities involved in this difficult process for their close co-operation with my services that deal with wartime losses at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. It is our common success.” said Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski.”

Ambassador of Poland in Washington DC Ryszard Schnepf expressed his gratitude to ICE HSI and to U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York for their tremendous engagement. He also thanked Mr. Marek Skulimowski, former Deputy Consul General of Poland in New York who was instrumental in the restitution process. Consul General of Poland in New York Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka added her thanks and reminded about the huge human and material losses Poland suffered during the war.

Shortly before his death in 1768, Seekatz created the painting. In December 1879, the National Museum in Warsaw received the painting from the Warsaw School of Fine Arts. In 1909, the Warsaw museum had the painting erroneously identified and listed as “St. Phillip Baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch” by Dutch painter J.C. Saft.

In September 1939, during World War II, German forces looted in Poland numerous works of art including the painting from the National Museum in Warsaw.

In June 2008, HSI NY special agents were notified by the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland that several national treasures of their cultural heritage looted during World War II were being offered for sale in the United States.

HSI NY agents met with Polish officials who provided supporting documentation to assist in the identification and recovery of the looted Polish work of art. HSI agents initiated an investigation and identified that the painting came into the possession of Doyle New York Auctioneers and Appraisers in or about October 2006 and was sold under its erroneous name for approximately \$24,000 USD to Rafael Valls Gallery in London, United Kingdom.

An expert from the National Museum in Warsaw, delegated by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, examined the painting in London with the full cooperation of the Rafael Valls Gallery and it was determined to be the same painting that was looted from Warsaw in 1944. In April 2012, HSI received an evaluation of the painting from the Ministry that the painting was identified as its true name by the German artist Johann Conrad Seekatz. Polish officials confirmed it was the same painting previously attributed to the artist J.C. Saft and registered as a Polish wartime loss of the National Museum in Warsaw in on-line database that the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage runs. It is accessible also in English at <http://kolekcje.mkidn.gov.pl/>.

On July 12, 2012, after learning the painting was stolen, it was seized by HSI agents from the London gallery by stipulation order with the assistance of the U.S. Attorney's Office SDNY. The painting was returned to New York from London leading to today's repatriation to the Republic of Poland.

In 2010 and 2011, ICE repatriated to the government of Poland a Polish army pre-1939 Regimental Standard (Banner) and two Julian Falat paintings, "The Hunt" and "Off to the Hunt" also known as "Before Going Hunting in Rytwiany." All these items were looted during WWII by the German-Nazis, illegally imported into the United States and later seized by HSI New York special agents.

In addition, in a separate brief ceremony Consul General of Poland in New York Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka handed over the Minister of Culture and Polish Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski memorabilia of Polish actress Elizabeth Czyżewska, who died in New York in 2010 and was buried at the cemetery Powązki in Warsaw. The winner of the "Golden Mask" in a poll on the most popular television actress left the manuscripts, screenplays of films and photographs that illustrate her artistic and private life.

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