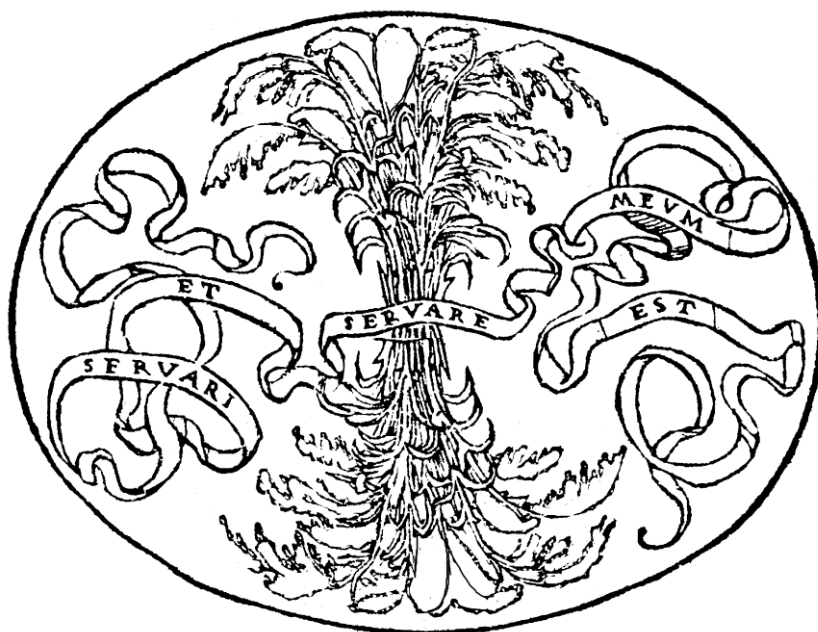


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CONTENTIOUS MUSEALISATION PROCESS(ES) OF JEWISH ART COLLECTIONS IN CROATIA*

Soon after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (the 10th of April 1941), alongside a number of anti-Jewish laws and rules¹, an array of legal regulations for the protection of cultural heritage was decreed². These regulations were also used as a 'legal basis' for the appropriation of artworks in Jewish ownership. This legal framework was created by the State's Ministry of Religion and Education, and the National Conservation Institute in Zagreb. According to the *Provision on the prohibition of removal and exporting ancient artistic, cultural, historical and natural monuments from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia*, it was «prohibited to remove, and especially export from the territory of the State any ancient artworks, cultural, historical and natural monuments, without the knowledge and approval of the Ministry of Religion and Education»³. Moreover, «all national government and religious institutions» were encouraged to safeguard their (ancient) artworks, cultural, historical and natural monuments⁴. The same pertained to private persons and all their artworks, even those that «have a specifically familial and personal character»⁵. If any institution or private person could not properly care for an artwork or natural monument, they were obliged to submit them to «one of Croatia's national museums»⁶. Any neglect or lack of maintenance would be punishable by a prison sentence and financial penalty. On the basis of this provision, the Conservation Institute passed a decree according to which «all objects of artistic, cultural, historical and natural value that are currently in personal ownership [...] must be inspected, catalogued and, in case of their improper protection, transferred to a suitable institution»⁷.

In line with this decree, the Institute published a *Warning to owners of antiques*, in which it explains the purpose of this kind of cataloguing: «Owners of these kinds of objects can freely, and without fear, allow their cataloguing and inspection, as they will remain in their ownership. Therefore, not only will the owners suffer no damage, but they will become better informed about the value of their possessions and instructed in the ways in which best to preserve them»⁸. Also, the publication stresses the inviolable right of ownership over the artworks: «Even in case the owner is not able to care for the object himself, and submits it to the care of a Croatian national museum, he will remain the owner of the object, and will be able to take it back to his home in better circumstances»⁹. Finally, «owners of antiques» are warned «not to avoid the cataloguing process, but to cooperate with the Institute's representatives and facilitate their assignment»¹⁰.

The Conservation Institute requested a police agent from the Police Directorate in case an owner should «elude and procrastinate the cataloguing process through various

* Research for this paper has been carried out in the framework of the HERA project 15.080 TransCultAA (Transfer of Cultural Objects in the Alpe Adria Region in the 20th Century, see <http://www.transcultaa.eu>). This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649307. Translation into English by Janja Čulig.

¹ See GOLDSTEIN 2001; KOLANOVIĆ 1996.

² See JURANOVIĆ-TONEJC 2009-2010.

³ LEGAL PROVISION 1941.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Decree, Mai 17, 1941. Ministarstvo kulture Republike Hrvatske – Uprava za zaštitu kulturne baštine, Središnji arhiv, Zbirke starije građe / The Administration for the protection of cultural heritage at the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG, 1941, 1-300, 84/1941.

⁸ Warning to owners of antiques. MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG, 1941, 1-300, 90/1941.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

excuses»¹¹. Under the pretext that «it is precisely these private collections that, with their more copious financial means, usurp important artworks and historical objects»¹² from museums, the Conservation Institute and the Croatian National Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb requested the establishment of more control over seized/appropriated and confiscated objects. This was in order to prevent «objects from being used for lesser purposes than their being deposited in a museum for eternal preservation for the people»¹³. Furthermore, permission was sought very carefully for the inspection of former Jewish houses and apartments under German and Italian jurisdiction, «even though no one suspects that the Germans or Italians would ever touch these objects»¹⁴.

An array of documents kept in the archives of the Ministry of Culture confirm that the most important Jewish private collections in Zagreb were catalogued during the months of May and June of 1941. Announcements about the commencement of the cataloguing process and its duration have been preserved, with a footnote on the delivery of a notarized copy of the list¹⁵. However, an original list of the catalogued objects is a rare find¹⁶.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to trace certain lists of private Jewish collections, that is, reveal the fates some collections faced during the Second World War. An especially valuable source of archival material for this research is found in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb. A *Report on the implementation of the legal provision* from July of 1941 provides information about the provision's desired effect – the surrender of objects from private collections into the hands of museums during the cataloguing process¹⁷. However, this effect was not achieved to a large extent, which prompted the conclusion that «favourable results could not be obtained in Zagreb at this time»¹⁸. Meanwhile, by that time, objects from the collections, or «remains», of some deceased, absent or displaced owners were delivered to the Croatian National Museum of Arts and Crafts¹⁹. The collection of the deceased grand industrialist, Artur Marić, is emphasized as the most important intake²⁰. However, the pace of the transfer of objects to the Museum of Arts and Crafts was unsatisfactory, regardless of the fervent attempts to accumulate artworks from private collections into the Museum's holdings. A telling example of these attempts is the collection of the Jewish connoisseur and coin collector, Hinko Lederer. His collection was kept in the Gypsotheque of the City of Zagreb, and «steps were

¹¹ Conservation Institute to Police Directorate, a request for assistance, Zagreb, May 23rd, 1941. MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG, 1941, 1-300, 87/1941.

¹² Ancient artworks, cultural, historical monuments in private collections, Conservation Institute to Ministry of Religion and Education, Zagreb, May 10, 1941. MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG, 1941, 1-300, 82/1941.

¹³ Letter by Božidar Murgić, high official at the Ministry of Education on behalf of the Conservation Institute and the Croatian National Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb, May 26th, 1941. Hrvatski državni arhiv / The Croatian State Archives, The Božidar Murgić Collection of museum activities from 1920's till 1940's, HR-HDA-1149, box 1.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ See Receipt of cataloguing process in the apartment of Ervin Weiss. MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG, 1941, 1-300, 89/1941.

¹⁶ Lists of the catalogued objects from the collections of Camilla Radovan, Nazorova 56, Albert Deutsch Maceljčki, Jurišićeva 24/II, and Julije König, Palmotićeva 18/I are preserved. MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG-DGKU, 1941, 1-300, 93/1941, 94/1941, 120/1941.

¹⁷ See Report on the implementation of the legal provision on the prohibition of removal and exporting ancient artistic, cultural, historical and natural monuments from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, LXXVIII-135. Z.p. 1941, Zagreb, July 26, 1941. HR-HDA-1149, box 1.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ See Order for transfer of artworks from the apartment of Julije König in Zagreb to the Museum of Arts and Crafts, July 21st, 1941. Hrvatski državni arhiv, Ministarstvo narodne prosvjete Nezavisne Države Hrvatske / The Croatian State Archives, Ministry of National Education of NDH, HR-HDA-216, box 1454.

²⁰ Report on the implementation of the legal provision on the prohibition of removal and exporting ancient artistic, cultural, historical and natural monuments from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, LXXVIII-135. Z.p. 1941, Zagreb, July 26th, 1941. HR-HDA-1149, box 1.

taken» to transfer it to the holdings of the Museum of Arts and Crafts, «since only national museums were qualified to preserve these kinds of collections», as we learn from the report on the implementation of the legal provision²¹. This is how a sort of collecting point for ‘safeguarding’ confiscated private artworks was established in Zagreb during the Ustasha Regime, well before the end of the war when the Allied Forces established Collecting Points e.g. in Germany.

A reconstruction of the arrival of certain Jewish collections to the Museum of Arts and Crafts during the Second World War is challenging, since the Museum’s archived documents on storage are closed for research. However, inquiries into documentation from the Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia and the Ministry of the Treasury, the Office for Nationalized Property, have revealed a clearer picture of the systematic implementation of musealisation methods of nationalized artworks²². Despite thorough categorizations of sections within the *Form for the mandatory registration of property*, carried out on the basis of the *Statutory provision regarding compulsory reporting of Jewish property and enterprises* from July 5th 1941²³, the form field for registering artworks was not planned²⁴. Therefore, these were registered under the number XI (Furniture, foodstuffs, clothing, and other household assets) only in rare cases (if at all)²⁵. Some forms have notes written on them, or inserted separate sheets of paper, that add information about the cataloguing process of artworks, or about the end of the process and the sealing of the collection on behalf of the Museum of Arts and Crafts and the Conservation Institute²⁶. In rare cases, the transfer of artworks into the holdings of the Museum is evidenced²⁷. This is a valuable source of information about the storage of artworks during the first half of 1941.

The second *Statutory provision regarding nationalization of Jewish properties*, implemented on October 30th 1942, which regulated the complete confiscation (‘nationalization’) of the entirety of Jewish property²⁸, undoubtedly contributed to the even greater accrual of artworks from Jewish collections by the Museum of Arts and Crafts, whose representatives even received written approval to «inspect, catalogue and take over the objects from the holdings and repositories of the National Treasury’s Office of Nationalized Property, that considering their value, fall under the said legal provision»²⁹.

An appeal for the assignment of additional space to the Museum of Arts and Crafts, under the explanation that «the current space is filled with accumulated cases of acquired material in such a quantity that all exhibition rooms needed to be turned into storage areas»³⁰, indirectly tells us of the volume of artworks delivered to the Museum at the time. Moreover,

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² See HR-HDA-216; Hrvatski državni arhiv, Ministarstvo državne riznice NDH. Odjel za novčarstvo, državnu imovinu i dugove. Ured za podržavljeni imetak (PONOVA) / Ministry of the NDH State Treasury, the Office for Nationalized Property (Ponova), HR-HDA-1076.

²³ See BRANDL 2016.

²⁴ See Forms for the mandatory registration of property, carried out on the basis of the Statutory provision regarding compulsory reporting of Jewish property and enterprises from June 5th, 1941. HR-HDA-1076.

²⁵ See Information about the sealing of the collection of Albert Deutsch Maceljčki by the Museum of Arts and Crafts. Albert Deutsch Maceljčki, Form of mandatory registration of Jewish property, June 23rd, 1941. HR-HDA-1076, box 665.

²⁶ See Zora Marić, Form for the mandatory registration of Jewish property, June 25th, 1941. HR-HDA-1076, box 686.

²⁷ See Receipt by the Museum of Arts and Crafts about the transfer of Melanija Löwy’s paintings to the museum, June 16th, 1941. Form of mandatory registration of Jewish property, June 28th, 1941. HR-HDA-1076, box 686.

²⁸ See BRANDL 2016.

²⁹ The City Government of Zagreb informs the Ministry of National Education on the decision of the State Treasury about artworks. HR-HDA-216, box 1454.

³⁰ Appeal for the assignment of additional space, Museum of Arts and Crafts to the Ministry of Education, June 15th, 1942. HR-HDA-216, box 1454.

some objects from Jewish collections were also used as decoration for various offices and government bodies of the Independent State of Croatia³¹. Considering their direct transfers and frequent changes of location, the fates and histories of these objects are much harder to reconstruct.

After the Second World War and with the establishment of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, a redistribution of artworks from the storage of the Museum of Arts and Crafts to other museum institutions was organized, according to their type and kind. Considering the reluctance of other institutions to research their own histories, the backbone of this research of the provenance of artworks are the paintings of Old Masters from the Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb. During the post-war period, until the 1960s, the Gallery's holdings received around fifty previously 'disinherited' artworks through various channels. In 1947 cultural objects and artworks from the storage rooms of the Museum of Arts and Crafts were transferred to the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, that is, the Old Masters' paintings to the Strossmayer Gallery³². The greatest number of artworks comes from the collection of Robert Deutsch Maceljiski.

In 1947 a large number of artworks arrived also from the warehouse of the Commission for the gathering and protection of cultural monuments and antiquities, the so-called KOMZA, which were marked solely by the Commission's inventory number. KOMZA was founded by the Ministry of Education of the National Republic of Croatia on June 28th 1945, on the basis of the Cultural Monuments and Antiques Protection and Conservation Act, and the legal provision for gathering, preserving and the distribution of books and other cultural, educational, and art objects that became national property³³. Namely, all enemy property was considered to be national property – including the property of absent persons and sequestered assets forcibly taken by the occupying government. KOMZA's mission was to collect information about objects with historic characteristics, and extract those objects of artistic value. Experts from Zagreb's museums who made up the KOMZA, presided over by Vladimir Tkalčić, Director of the Museum of Arts and Crafts at the time (who had also held this function during the NDH regime), wrote minutes and reports containing the names, objects and addresses of former owners, as well as the total number of confiscated assets. In some cases, it was possible to trace the provenance of artworks of Jewish heritage. For example, the paintings *Coronation of the Virgin* and *Horse-shoeing* came into the holdings of the Strossmayer Gallery with KOMZA number K III-7/1945³⁴. Under this administrative marking cultural and historical objects from the villa in Tuškanac 15, Zagreb were listed by the representatives of the Commission in June 1945³⁵. The villa once belonged to Oskar Fröhlich, whose home was during the NDH regime the residence of general Slavko Kvaternik³⁶.

³¹ See Albert and Matilda Deutsch request to see those state buildings where they think their confiscated artworks are, July 1945. Hrvatski državni arhiv, Zemaljska uprava narodnih dobara Narodne Republike Hrvatske / The Croatian State Archives, Territorial administration of national property, HR-HDA-313, box 377.

³² See Handover protocol of paintings and other art objects from the Museum of Arts and Crafts and the depository of the Commission for the Gathering and Protection of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities (KOMZA) to the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts and to the Strossmayer Gallery. Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1947, 500-1462, 762/1947; Archive of the Strossmayer Gallery, (1944-1952), 1948.

³³ See Government Presidency to City People's Committee, April 3rd, 1946. HR-HDA-313, box 5. See also CROATIA DELEGATION STATEMENT 1999.

³⁴ Juan Soreda, *Coronation of the Virgin*, oil and tempera on panel, 170,2x110,5 cm, Zagreb, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters, inv. no. SG-377, Pieter van Bloemen, *Horse-shoeing*, oil on canvas, 45,6x54,3 cm, Zagreb, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters, inv. no. SG-147.

³⁵ See MK-UZKB/SA-ZSG-KOMZA, 7/45.

³⁶ See The authorized person on behalf of absent Oskar Fröhlich, Form of mandatory registration of Jewish property, June 28th, 1941. HR-HDA-1076, box 670.

Apart from the redistribution of artworks from the holdings of KOMZA and the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the Strossmayer Gallery received artworks of Jewish heritage on several other occasions. An interesting example is the collection of industrialist Ervin Weiss, a Jew who converted to Catholicism in the year 1925 before his marriage to Branka née Huth³⁷. It seems that his art collection managed to remain preserved in the couple's apartment in Boškovićeve Street 2/1 during the NDH regime. After the war in 1945, the art collection had already been protected, and quickly gained the status of a private collection of public interest; this ensured the protection of comprising art objects, as well as the preservation of the apartment as a whole and also prevented residential authorities from assigning a new tenant to the apartment³⁸. However, in the year 1949, the property of Ervin Weiss was sequestered and then confiscated and distributed to several museum institutions in Zagreb. Fifteen paintings of Old Masters were given to the Strossmayer Gallery in the year 1952³⁹.

During the 1950s, the Strossmayer Gallery received several 'leftover' sequestered Jewish artworks – a painting by Jacopo Palma Jr., *The Entombment of Christ*, which the Jewish Eduard Polak gave to the Bishop of Rijeka during the war for safekeeping, and paintings of former owner Eugen Kaufmann from Donja Dubrava in Međimurje, which the owner deposited in the Croatian National Bank before the war, and which remained there after the war, since their owner «was taken by the occupier in 1944»⁴⁰.

Despite discussions on «the resolution of the legal question about the so-called storage of nationalized artworks»⁴¹ taking place as early as 1945, it was over a decade later that a settlement was reached on «what to do with those artworks [...] that owners had abandoned during the occupation, and that were stored in museums, galleries, and other institutions»⁴². At the incentive of the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the National Secretariat for Legal Administration of the Croatian People's Republic published an announcement on April 9th 1958, based on the *Legal provision for managing property left behind by its owners during the occupation, and assets taken from them by the occupier and their helpers* in 1946⁴³. This announcement stated that: «Accordingly, if close relatives of the deceased or missing owner of the abandoned property have not started the inheritance process (for which the deadline is one year), the objects in question will become national property, disabling any successor from successfully starting an inheritance process in the future in order for those objects to be returned to them. Therefore, there is no impediment for museums and other institutions that have stored artworks abandoned by their owners during the occupation to list those objects in their inventories, as they have become national property»⁴⁴.

Only a small part of the almost endless sea of objects of Jewish moveable cultural heritage originally in private collections was presented as an example of expropriation process, which enabled the transfer of these artworks into the holdings of the former Croatian National

³⁷ See Ervin Weiss to Directorate of the Ustasha Police, May 28th, 1941; June 18th, 1941. The Croatian State Archives, Directorate of the Ustasha Police. Jewish section. HR-HDA-252, box 3.

³⁸ More in PASINI TRZEC 2018.

³⁹ Handover protocol of paintings from the collection of Ervin Weiss according to list of his property of March 3rd, 1949, and no. 330/50 to the Strossmayer gallery, January 19th, 1952. Archive of the Strossmayer gallery, 1952.

⁴⁰ More in PASINI TRZEC–DULIBIĆ 2017.

⁴¹ Modern Gallery to the Ministry of Education, Zagreb, August 20th, 1945. Hrvatski državni arhiv, Ministarstvo prosvjete Narodne Republike Hrvatske / The Croatian State Archives, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Croatia, HR-HDA-291, box 58.

⁴² Protocol on how to treat cultural objects left by their owners during the occupation, Council of Culture and Education to various cultural institutions (archives, libraries, museums), April 21st, 1958. Hrvatski državni arhiv, Savjet za prosvjetu, nauku i kulturu Narodne Republike Hrvatske / Croatian State Archives, Council of Culture and Education, HR-HDA-1599, box 97.

⁴³ More in ANIC 2007; MATICKA 1992.

⁴⁴ Protocol on how to treat cultural objects left by their owners during the occupation, Council of Culture and Education to various cultural institutions (archives, libraries, museums), April 21st, 1958. HDA-1599, box 97.

Museum of Arts and Crafts. This transfer that took place in both war time and in post-war circumstances, led to the distribution of these artworks, which were nationalized, thus becoming 'national property', to other museum institutions, with Old Master paintings ending up in the holdings of the Strossmayer Gallery.

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ABSTRACT

Based on archival research conducted in the framework of the TranscultAA project the author presents the mechanisms of disempowerment and dispossession, that is, the seizing of artworks from the private collections of Jewish families in Zagreb during the regime of the Independent State of Croatia and reveals the complex context of the musealisation of those artworks after the Second World War.

Grazie ai risultati delle ricerche archivistiche condotte nell'ambito del progetto HERA TransCultAA, l'autore affronta il tema della confisca delle collezioni d'arte di famiglie ebraiche a Zagabria durante il regime dello Stato Indipendente di Croazia, satellite e alleato delle dittature nazi-fasciste. L'articolo descrive quindi il complesso processo di musealizzazione delle opere confiscate che avrà luogo dopo la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale.