In this Newsletter we present information on Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) activities regarding cultural goods in the Netherlands that were stolen, confiscated, or sold under duress before or during World War II. We also refer to other information of interest offered by organizations we closely work with, such as the Restitutions Committee and the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

God appearing to Abraham at Sichem painting to be returned to Herman Hamburger heir

At the same time, State Secretary Gunay Uslu decided in November that the painting God verschijnt aan Abraham te Sichem (God Appearing to Abraham at Sichem) by Nicolaes (Claes) Moeyaert, should also be restituted. Thereby adopting the recommendation of the Restitutions Committee. Research has shown that the Jewish art dealer and collector, Herman Hamburger, had acquired the work by Moeyaert in 1936. Because Hamburger remained abroad during the occupation, the German authorities declared his property in the Netherlands to be ‘foreign assets’. This enabled the Dienststelle Mühlmann, a German looting organisation, to obtain the artwork in 1941 through a forced sale. The Dienststelle Mühlmann sold and then delivered the painting to Germany for Hitler’s Führermuseum. After the war the painting was recovered to the Netherlands and included in the Netherlands Art Property Collection (NK Collection). Here you can read the Herman Hamburger recommendation and the press release of the Restitutions Committee (in Dutch).

Watercolour to be returned to heirs of Jacob Lierens

In November the State Secretary for Culture and Media, Gunay Uslu, decided to return the watercolour De tantes gaan op reis (The aunts go on a journey) by Alexander Hugo Bakker Korff (1881) which is in the National Art Collection, to the legal successors of Jacob Lierens. Uslu therefore followed the recommendation made by the Restitutions Committee that considered it sufficiently likely that the Jewish art collector, Jacob Lierens (1877-1949), involuntarily lost possession of the watercolour as a result of circumstances directly related to the Nazi regime. The Committee reached this conclusion further to an investigation by the Expertise Centre for the Restitution of Cultural Goods and World War II (ECR) which showed that the watercolour owned by Lierens was auctioned on 8 July 1941. It is likely that its sale was related to measures taken by the occupying forces against Jewish citizens and was prompted by a need for survival. As a result of these measures Lierens was unable to continue his business himself and was deprived of income and assets, forcing him to sell part of his art collection.

Here you can read the Lierens II recommendation and the press release of the Restitutions Committee (in Dutch).

Book selection

The RCE has one of the largest book collections in the Netherlands in the field of cultural heritage. The themes of looting, recovery and restitution are also covered, of course. A number of books now less readily available in the trade are also part of this collection, such as Betwist bezit (Disputed ownership) by Eelke Muller and Helen Schretlen and De plunderaars (The Looters) by Anders Rydell. A series of books in this field will shortly be added to the collection, including: Roof (Robbery) and Berooid (Destitute), both by Gerard Aalders, and Monuments Man by James J. Rorimer. The RCE library is open to all during the opening hours of the building at Smallepad 5, in Amersfoort.
In Pursuit of Provenance
In Pursuit of Provenance is a monthly blog about the provenance research carried out on objects from the Netherlands Art Heritage Collection (NK Collection). This collection consists of objects which were returned to the Netherlands after World War II, such as paintings and works on paper, as well as furniture and ceramics, among other things. By giving a major boost to the research we hope to find new provenance details. The September blog describes an oak allé vine cabinet, October is devoted to the painting Gezicht op Rhenen (View of Rhenen) and November is about a spruce wood chest.

Cultural Goods 1933-1945
Thesis prize
The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands will be awarding a prize in 2024 for the best master’s thesis in the field of Cultural Goods and World War II. This incentive prize for research talent in the field will enable finalists to fund a development path of their choice. A sum of € 3,000 is attached to the first place and € 1,000 to the second and third places. Information can be found on our website about the judging criteria and method of submission.

Restitution policy 25 years on
We are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Netherlands’ restitution policy on cultural objects and World War II this autumn. The RCE is marking the occasion with a number of activities. These were launched on Wednesday 6 September with a meeting in the Glazen Zaal of the Portugese Synagoge in The Hague (Glass Hall of the Portugese Synagogue). More will follow in 2024, when RCE will be organising four roundtable discussions in the spring about the restitution policy in practice, covering themes such as legal redress and the future of provenance research. We will conclude with a symposium in September 2024. For further information and registration details please keep an eye on our website.