



Report of the AAMD Task Force
on the Spoliation of Art during
the Nazi/World War II Era
(1933-1945)

June 4, 1998

AAMD Statement of Purpose: "The purpose of the AAMD is to aid its members in establishing and maintaining the highest professional standards for themselves and the museums they represent, thereby exerting leadership in increasing the contribution of art museums to society."

I. Statement of Principles

A. AAMD recognizes and deplores the unlawful confiscation of art that constituted one of the many horrors of the Holocaust and World War II.

B. American museums are proud of the role they, and members of their staffs, played during and after World War II, assisting with the preservation and restitution of hundreds of thousands of works of art through the U.S. Military's Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section.

C. AAMD reaffirms the commitment of its members to weigh, promptly and thoroughly, claims of title to specific works in their collections.

D. AAMD urges the prompt creation of mechanisms to coordinate full access to all documentation concerning this spoliation of art, especially newly available information. To this end, the AAMD encourages the creation of databases by third parties, essential to research in this area, which will aid in the identification of any works of art which were unlawfully confiscated and which of these were restituted¹. Such an effort will complement long-standing American museum policy of exhibiting, publishing and researching works of art in museum collections in order to make them widely available to scholars and to the general public. (See III. below.)

E. AAMD endorses a process of reviewing, reporting, and researching the issue of unlawfully confiscated art which respects the dignity of all parties and the complexity of the issue. Each claim presents a unique situation which must be thoroughly reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

II. Guidelines

AAMD has developed the following guidelines to assist museums in resolving claims, reconciling the interests of individuals who were dispossessed of works of art or their heirs together with the fiduciary and legal obligations and responsibilities of art museums and their trustees to the public for whom they hold works of art in trust.

A. Research Regarding Existing Collections

¹ The term "restitution", throughout this report, refers to works of art returned to prior owners, or to circumstances where the prior owner agreed to resolve the matter in some other manner.

1. As part of the standard research on each work of art in their collections, members of the AAMD, if they have not already done so, should begin immediately to review the provenance of works in their collections to attempt to ascertain whether any were unlawfully confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era and never restituted.

2. Member museums should search their own records thoroughly and, in addition, should take all reasonable steps to contact established archives, databases, art dealers, auction houses, donors, art historians and other scholars and researchers who may be able to provide Nazi/World-War-II-era provenance information.

3. AAMD recognizes that research regarding Nazi/World-War-II-era provenance may take years to complete, may be inconclusive and may require additional funding. The AAMD Art Issues Committee will address the matter of such research and how to facilitate it.

B. Future Gifts, Bequests, and Purchases

1. As part of the standard research on each work of art:

(a) member museums should ask donors of works of art (or executors in the case of bequests) to provide as much provenance information as possible with regard to the Nazi/World War II era and

(b) member museums should ask sellers of works of art to provide as much provenance information as possible with regard to the Nazi/World War II era.

2. Where the Nazi/World-War-II-era provenance is incomplete for a gift, bequest, or purchase, the museum should search available records and consult appropriate databases of unlawfully confiscated art (see III below).

(a) In the absence of evidence of unlawful confiscation, the work is presumed not to have been confiscated and the acquisition may proceed.

(b) If there is evidence of unlawful confiscation, and there is no evidence of restitution, the museum should not proceed to acquire the object and should take appropriate further action.

3. Consistent with current museum practice, member museums should publish, display or otherwise make accessible all recent gifts, bequests, and purchases thereby making them available for further research, examination and study.

4. When purchasing works of art, museums should seek representations and warranties from the seller that the seller has valid title and that the work of art is free from any claims.

C. Access to Museum Records

1. Member museums should facilitate access to the Nazi/World-War-II-era provenance information of all works of art in their collections.

2. Although a linked database of all museum holdings throughout the United States does not exist at this time, individual museums are establishing web sites with collections information and others are making their holdings accessible through printed publications or archives. AAMD is exploring the linkage of existing sites which contain collection information so as to assist research.

D. Discovery of Unlawfully Confiscated Works of Art

1. If a member museum should determine that a work of art in its collection was illegally confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era and not restituted, the museum should make such information public.

2. In the event that a legitimate claimant comes forward, the museum should offer to resolve the matter in an equitable, appropriate, and mutually agreeable manner.

3. In the event that no legitimate claimant comes forward, the museum should acknowledge the history of the work of art on labels and publications referring to such a work.

E. Response to Claims Against the Museum

1. If a member museum receives a claim against a work of art in its collection related to an illegal confiscation during the Nazi/World War II era, it should seek to review such a claim promptly and thoroughly. The museum should request evidence of ownership from the claimant in order to assist in determining the provenance of the work of art.

2. If after working with the claimant to determine the provenance, a member museum should determine that a work of art in its collection was illegally confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era and not restituted, the museum should offer to resolve the matter in an equitable, appropriate, and mutually agreeable manner.

3. AAMD recommends that member museums consider using mediation wherever reasonably practical to help resolve claims regarding art illegally confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era and not restituted.

F. Incoming Loans

1. In preparing for exhibitions, member museums should endeavor to review provenance information regarding incoming loans.

2. Member museums should not borrow works of art known to have been illegally confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era and not restituted unless the matter has been otherwise resolved (e.g., II.D.3 above).

III. Database Recommendations

A. As stated in I.D. (above), AAMD encourages the creation of databases by third parties, essential to research in this area. AAMD recommends that the databases being formed include the following information (not necessarily all in a single database):

1. claims and claimants
2. works of art illegally confiscated during the Nazi/World War II era
3. works of art later restituted

B. AAMD suggests that the entity or entities creating databases establish professional advisory boards that could provide insight on the needs of various users of the database. AAMD encourages member museums to participate in the work of such boards.

**Addendum
to the Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Spoliation of Art during the
Nazi/World War II Era (1933-1945)**

April 30, 2001

The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States has issued a report dated December 15, 2000. The Commission found that museums are committed to continuing provenance research on works in their collections and to disseminating the information obtained.

Specifically, the Commission acknowledged the commitment of the American museum community that (1) works created before 1946, transferred after 1932 and before 1946, and which were or could have been in continental Europe during that period will be identified and disclosed and all provenance information in the possession of museums regarding those works be disclosed; (2) such provenance information will be disclosed, even where there are no known gaps; and (3) provenance research by museums will be a continuing process with additional information disclosed as it becomes known.

The Commission recognized that provenance research is difficult, expensive and time-consuming, often involving access to records that are hard or impossible to obtain, and that most museums lack the resources to accomplish this.

The Commission further found that the museum community has begun to develop tools to achieve full disclosure and will participate in the process of creating a searchable central registry of Nazi/World War II Era cultural property held by American museums, beginning with European paintings and Judaica.

Consistent with the report of the Commission, the Task Force issues the following addendum to its June 1998 report:

It should be the goal of member museums to make full disclosure of the results of their ongoing provenance research on those works of art in their collections created before 1946, transferred after 1932 and before 1946, and which were or could have been in continental Europe during that period, giving priority to European paintings and Judaica.