



Newsletter

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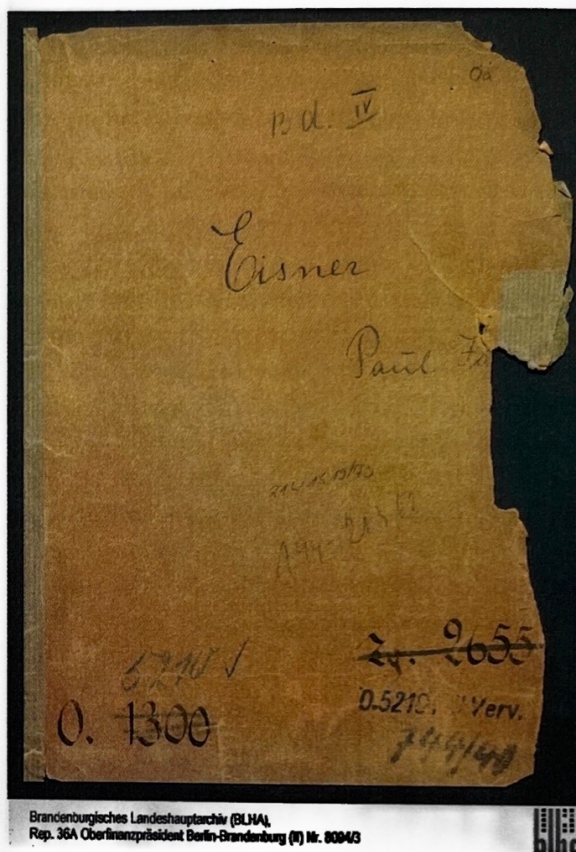




The OFP Project at the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv in Potsdam

Since 2020, the so-called OFP Project has been researching 42,000 files of the Nazi Vermögensverwertungsstelle of the Oberfinanzpräsident (OFP) Berlin-Brandenburg at the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv in Potsdam. The files are assigned to victims of Nazi persecution by name. They document how the Nazi state liquidated confiscated property, in most cases of Jews living in the administrative district of Berlin-Brandenburg, for the profit of the state treasury. The focus of the research project is on art and cultural assets mentioned in the files. They were confiscated by the Gestapo (Secret State Police) and sold by the financial authority in auctions and free-hand negotiations. Nowadays they are often found in museums and public institutions because the legal predecessors of these institutions were able to profit from the plundering of the Jews during the Nazi era. One goal of the OFP Project is to identify the locations of Nazi looted art and to inform both the representatives of the former proprietors and the legal successors of the museums and public institutions about our research results. The end of the project is expected to end in mid-2023.

In order to identify locations of cultural property looted as a result of Nazi persecution and to reconstruct the loss of art ownership, a DMS (document management system) is being used, that is being developed by the OFP Project at the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (Brandenburg State Archives). It enables computer-based detection of art robbery in the files. The use of the DMS was preceded by an intensive process of basic research into the workings of the Vermögensverwertungsstelle (Property Liquidation Office). It was necessary to investigate the systematic working methods of the financial authority. The knowledge of how art treasures were selected, how auctions and negotiated sales were hierarchically organized, and how the accounting to the state treasury was handled made it possible to define search categories and to program the tool to search specifically for profiteers. Profiteers of the Nazi art robbery who appear regularly in the files as "buyers" are, for example, the Reichs-



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HISTORICAL FILE COVER

kanzlei, the Auswärtige Amt (Foreign Office) and middlemen for the Führer-Museum Linz planned by Adolf Hitler, furthermore the Reichsluftfahrtministerium (Reich Aviator Ministry) for Hermann Goering, the Reichsfinanzministerium (Reichs Ministry of Finance) and the State Museums in Berlin. In addition, numerous local art dealers who were registered at the Reichskulturkammer (Reich Chamber of Culture) and state authority employees are annotated. Private persons are hardly annotated as direct buyers of high and medium quality art objects in the files. They do, however, appear in the recorded negotiations for the sale of so-called household goods to war-affected persons. During the whole project, basic research will be further advanced and the DMS will be adapted to new

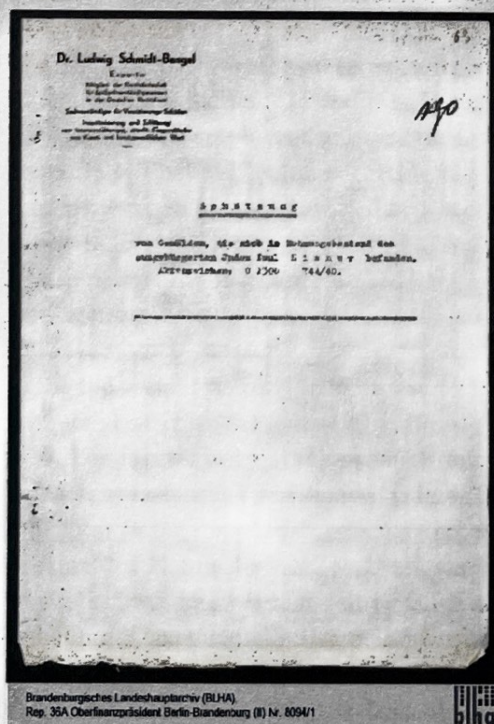


knowledge and requirements. The OFP Project aims to use new modern methods to analyze a mass source in a structured way and create a resilient result on the Nazi art robbery.

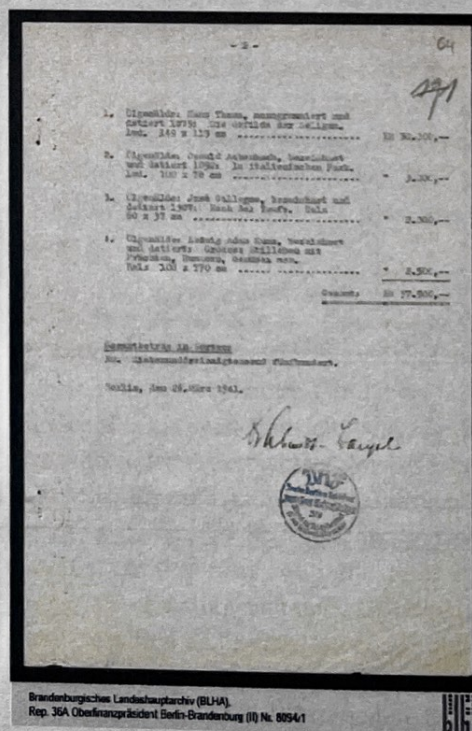
The Vermögensverwertungsstelle

At the end of 1941, the Vermögensverwertungsstelle officially succeeded the Ausbürgerungsabteilung (Emigration Department) of the Finanzamt Moabit-West and took over 100 percent of its employees. The new authority was responsible for the liquidation of the confiscated property of Jews and so-called Reichsfeinde (enemies of the Reich) in the administrative district. From mid-1941 onward, the Vermögensverwertungsstelle has successively taken over from its predecessor authority thousands of cases of so-called emigrants that had not yet been closed. These were Jews who had fled Germany. The Vermögensverwertungsstelle took action on the basis of

laws and ordinances issued by the Nazi state, as well as official decrees and service instructions issued by the Reichsfinanzministerium - whenever so-called Jewish property was to be confiscated and transferred to the Nazi-state. The activities of the employees of this financial authority are carefully recorded in the files, because these were administrative procedures. In the files, the researchers at the OFP Project have to deal with the highly effective processing of official regulations by experienced and established finance officials - who had already worked in the authorities under different political systems (Empire, Weimar Republic, National Socialism) - and with their successors, for whom professional advancement was assured. The files of the Vermögensverwertungsstelle prove that the employees of this financial authority were bureaucrats who, unimpressed by the consequences of their actions, carried out official regulations. Documents, archived in Potsdam, also transfer the ways in



ESTIMATION OF THE FOUR PAINTINGS





which the employees of the authorities participated in the plundering of the Jews, which had become a state principle since 1938.

With the establishment of the Vermögensverwertungsstelle, two departments were created that were responsible for the systematic liquidation of the remaining property of Jews. One department was responsible for handling the assets of deportees under registry signature O 5205. The other department was responsible for the administration of the assets of refugees under the register number O 5210, which were held in storage by forwarding companies. The last mentioned department will be discussed in more detail in this essay.

A Case Study: O 5210-744/40 – Paul Jakob Eisner

From 1941, the Nazi financial authorities were primarily concerned with liquidating the confiscated so-called removal goods of emigrants, which had been stored in forwarding agencies for years. Thousands of files that had been created by the Finanzamt Moabit-West under the registry signature O 1300 were continued from mid-1941 by the Vermögensverwertungsstelle under the registry signature O 5210.

The files of the Vermögensverwertungsstelle document the bureaucratic procedures initiated by the Nazi authority's employees to liquidate complete the property left behind by Jews. The identity of the former owners was meaningless in this process. In order to obtain information about the lives of the persons in whose names the files were established, other historical sources must be consulted. This also applied to the case study presented here:

In the file named to Paul Jakob Eisner (1886-1965) the earliest activity of the financial authority are dated 1938. The former general manager of Hahnsche Werke Aktiengesellschaft was forced to flee Germany in 1937 after being expelled from the company's board of directors. Hahnsche Werke Aktiengesellschaft was an association of steel and rolling mills that employed about 3,500 people in the 1920s. During the Nazi period it was "Aryanized" and taken over by Mannesmann-Röhrenwerke. With the loss of his position, Paul Jakob Eisner was deprived of his existence.

The property he left behind after his escape was confiscated by the Gestapo in 1939. The inventory of his apartment at Große Querallee in Berlin was stored at the Gustav Knauer forwarding company. A four-volume file in the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv in Potsdam reports on the liquidation of his movable and immovable property. After his expatriation in 1940, the financial authorities began to liquidate Eisner's so-called removal assets in 1941.

When the removal goods were brought to the auction room of the Finanzamt Moabit-West on Kottbuser Ufer on March 1941, four paintings had to be sorted out. They were valuable cultural property and so-called art treasures had to be handed over to the art auctioneer Hans W. Lange. The expert Ludwig Schmidt-Bangel had carried out the first estimation of the paintings at the financial authority. Among the four paintings was a *Large Still Life with Fruits, Lobsters, Vegetables, etc. Wood. 108 x 170 cm* made by Ludwig Adam Kunz. It was listed under item 4 and estimated at 2500 Reichsmark.

The auctioneer Hans W. Lange sold the four paintings on May 19, 1941. He had reformulated the art-historical apparatus for each painting in his auction catalogue. The still life by Ludwig Adam Kunz was offered under catalog number 37: *Large Still Life with Fruits, Copper Bowls, a Dead Peacock, lobsters and hunted heron. Wood. H. 106cm, br. 167cm*. The work realized 1100 Reichsmark, which was paid into the state treasury by the auctioneer.

Contextual research in the database of the Deutsches Historisches Museum discovered that the still life had entered the Linz collection under No. 1951 via the art dealer Maria Almas-Dietrich, who regularly acquired art objects from confiscated Jewish property for Hitler. After World War II, the painting was registered by the Allies under No. 11772 in the Collecting Point Munich. At that time, no indications were found to whom the painting had once belonged. It was therefore classified as "ownerless good" and given to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where it is now known as the *Still Life with Lobsters and Fowl, Oil : Wood. 106x170 cm* under B53.07.4702.

