



MEDIA INFORMATION

Munich, 27 August 2021

THE BAVARIAN STATE PAINTING COLLECTIONS RESTITUTE NAZI-LOOTED ART TO THE HEIRS OF FORMER OWNER SIGMUND WALDES



Johann Sperl, Frühlingslandschaft, c. 1880,
Oil on wood, 36,1 x 15,5 cm, Inv.-Nr. 12572
Photo: Sibylle Forster

The Bavarian State Painting Collections have restituted the painting "Frühlingslandschaft" by Johann Sperl (1840-1914, inv. no. 12572) to the heirs of the entrepreneur and art collector Sigmund Waldes (1877-1961), following a restitution application by the heirs. As part of broader research into its art holdings of National Socialist origin, the Bavarian State Painting Collections conducted intensive research into the provenance of the painting in question. This confirmed the results of research by representatives of the heirs (report by Dr. Irena Strelow), namely that the work was seized from its owner Sigmund Waldes in 1939/41 as a result of Nazi persecution. This 22nd restitution by the Bavarian State Painting Collections following the Washington Declaration of 1998 is not being marked with a ceremonial handover due to the pandemic. This is both at the request of and in agreement with Sigmund Waldes's heirs.

The legal representative of the heirs, Lothar Fremy, stated: "The Bavarian State Painting Collections and the heirs of Sigmund Waldes have gone to considerable effort to find a just and fair solution regarding this painting, which was seized from its former owner due to Nazi persecution. The Waldes heirs are highly grateful to the Bavarian State Painting Collections for the responsible way in which they have dealt with this case."



Minister of Art Bernd Sibler commented: "The Waldes family suffered great injustice under the cruel Nazi regime. They were expelled from their homeland and had to leave their belongings behind due to persecution. With the restitution of the painting 'Frühlingslandschaft' by the painter Johann Sperl, we would like to return a piece of memory and - as far as possible - make amends. I would like to thank the heirs for initiating this process and the Bavarian State Painting Collections for clarifying the provenance of the work."

The Director General, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Maaz , reiterated that: "The Bavarian State Painting Collections are strongly committed to identifying and restituting those works that were unlawfully seized in the past. With every restitution we try to come one step closer to compensating for historic injustice. We still carry the responsibility of collective guilt today, and we combine the ethical demands of the present and the future. While there may still be doubts regarding certain other works of art, and thus the need for further research, we thank the provenance researchers for carrying out the meticulous clarification of this work in close collaboration with the heirs' representatives."

THE FACTS OF THE CASE

Sigmund Waldes was born in Czechoslovakia on November 1, 1877. Around 1904 he settled in Dresden, where he held a managerial position for a branch of the Waldes & Co. metal goods factory, which had been founded a few years earlier by his brother Heinrich and two business partners in Prague. The company developed successfully and, in addition to its headquarters in Prague and Dresden, established branches in Barcelona, New York, Paris and Warsaw. Sigmund Waldes joined the company in 1908 as the fourth partner, and in 1916 he moved into a villa at Kaitzer Str. 30 in Dresden with his wife Ida (née Hirsch) and their children Harry Kurt and Vera. We can assume that the Waldes family acquired a number of art objects to furnish their new residence.

Waldes, who was of Jewish origin, had to emigrate from Dresden to Prague on September 4, 1938 due to growing persecution. He then escaped to the United States via Paris and London. Waldes reached New York in August 1939, where he settled permanently. His wife Ida, his son Harry Kurt and his mother-in-law Ernestine Hirsch followed him overseas; his daughter Vera remained in Europe and joined the French Resistance.

In the wake of his emigration, Waldes's remaining assets in Germany, including his extensive art collection, were seized in January 1939 by the foreign exchange office of the Dresden Chief of Finance. Waldes no longer had free access to them from then onwards. He was pressured into coming to an "agreement" on May 30, 1941, by which his remaining assets were appropriated by the German Reich without compensation. The art works were subsequently sold on behalf of the Reich Ministry of Economics and for the benefit of the Deutsche Golddiskontbank. The Sperl painting was acquired by the Munich art dealer Maria Dietrich for the NSDAP party chancellery at an auction held by the Berlin auction house Hans W. Lange in April 1943. After the war, it was seized by the American military government and transferred to the Munich Central Collecting Point. On the basis of Allied directives, the Free State of Bavaria acquired the painting in 1956 and transferred it to the holdings of the State Painting Collections.

It is thus beyond question that the art collection of Sigmund Waldes was seized due to Nazi persecution. In this case it was more difficult to prove beyond doubt that the Sperl painting from Waldes's collection



BAYERISCHE STAATSGEMÄLDESAMMLUNGEN

and the Sperl painting in the Bavarian State Painting Collections are one and the same. Since little information is available on Sigmund Waldes's art collection and Sperl painted numerous landscapes, it has not been possible to establish this unequivocally. However, as a result of the comprehensive primary research conducted, there are numerous points in favour of the work's identity.

The painting belongs to the complex of topics to which the recently published volume 4 of the series of publications of the Bavarian State Painting Collections is dedicated: Johannes Gramlich, Begehrt, Beschwiegen, Belastend. Die Kunst der NS Elite, die Alliierten und die Bayerischen Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Cologne etc. 2021. There you will find further information on the wide range of ownership transfer processes of those years and decades.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

JOHANN SPERL, 1840 (BUCH NEAR NUREMBERG) - 1914 (BAD AIBLING)

Johann Sperl is among the painters of the so-called Leibl circle. Of humble origin, he studied in Nuremberg at the Allgemeine Kunstanstalt, the Lithographische Anstalt and the Nuremberg Kunstgewerbeschule, where he met Rudolf Hirth du Frênes and Theodor Alt. From 1865 he attended the historical painter Hermann Anschütz's painting class at the Academy of Arts in Munich. In the same year he met the young Wilhelm Leibl, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship. Sperl and Leibl moved into a studio in Munich in 1866 with Alt and Hirth du Frênes, where they worked until 1873. From about 1875 Sperl increasingly concentrated on small-format compositions. In 1884 Sperl moved into Wilhelm Leibl's newly built studio in Bad Aibling. Landscape now became the artist's central motif, and he produced direct nature pieces and views of peasant gardens, including the restituted work. After working in Derndorf, Kutterling and Munich, Sperl returned to Bad Aibling in 1911, where he died three years later.

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