

# Restitution of works of art seized during World War II

## Abstract

This thesis, entitled "Restitution of Artworks Seized during World War II," examines the reasons for the Nazi looting of art across Europe during World War II, developments before and during the war, the subsequent fate of lost artworks, international efforts to repair the damage, and the current situation. This thesis looks at the issue from the perspective of the legal framework in each of the countries involved, while showing the real difficulties faced by individuals in trying to recover lost family property. Above all, this thesis is an analysis of a complex legal situation where both international and national law is failing, while showing how flexibility of law and time are key factors in achieving satisfaction.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters and includes a pictorial appendix.

The first chapter explains why the Nazis showed such a strong interest in art collections, how they viewed art, and how the acquired works were intended to serve the Reich.

The second chapter deals in detail with the concept of "degenerate art," which permeates the entire issue and this thesis. It sheds light on Adolf Hitler's specific relationship with art and modern artistic movements, outlines the grand plans of the Nazis and proves that it was not only about ideology, but also and perhaps above all about financing the war. At the same time, this chapter guides us through the legal regulation of art in Nazi Germany.

The third chapter then picks up with the efforts of the Allies in particular, who gradually collected the works that the Nazis confiscated after the war.

The fourth chapter will again summarize the historical context of the issue and look at the problem of reconstructing property rights in situations where these rights are held in good faith by other persons. This chapter is very important because it shows the increasing complexity of restitution as time passes.

The fifth chapter deals with the most important conferences that have taken place on the subject, namely the Washington Conference, the Vilnius Forum and the Prague Conference.

The sixth chapter then summarises the key legislation in the most affected countries and compares the possibilities for individuals to seek reconstruction of their rights.

The seventh chapter then uses several different cases to illustrate the complexity but also the decreasing urgency of the issue.

**Keywords:** restitution, works of art, Nazism, Jews