BAYERISCHE STAATSGEMÄLDESAMMLUNGEN

MEDIA INFORMATION
Munich, 20 October 2025

RESTITUTION OF THE PAINTING 'THE VISION OF ST. BERNARD' BY JOHANNES KOERBECKE TO THE HEIRS OF ELLEN FUNKE

The Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen returned the work 'The Vision of St. Bernard' by Johannes Koerbecke to the heirs of Ellen Funke. The work was first listed on the Lost Art Database in 2020 (ID 592322).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE COLLECTION AND THE PERSECUTION OF ELLEN FUNKE

Helene Sophie Victoria Hermine Heintzmann, known as Ellen Funke (1869–1947) of Hamm, was the beneficiary to artworks from the 'Loeb'sche Fideikommiss', a major private collection that dated back to the 19th century. Due to her maternal ancestors' Jewish origins, she was classified as a '*Mischling* of the first degree' under Nazi rule and was, therefore, subject to systematic persecution. The collection was originally assembled by Alexander Haindorf, a Jewish physician and co-founder of the Westfälischer Kunstverein, on the Caldenhof estate near Hamm, together with his daughter Sophie and her husband Jakob Loeb.

The fideicommissum had been dissolved by 1936, by which time the collection was divided among those descendants entitled to inherit who, as Jews or so-called 'half-Jews', subsequently faced persecution. Ellen Funke was one of these entitled persons. Her collection comprised 101 works of art, including 'The Vision of St. Bernard' by Johannes Koerbecke. In 1936, she sold the work to the 'Galerie Stern' in Düsseldorf, evidently in order to obtain the financial means needed for permanent residency in a safe foreign country and to support other members of her family. As such, irrefutable evidence exists to support the supposition that the painting would not have been sold had the Nazis not been in power and that the loss of the painting was as a result of persecution. Ellen Funke is the primary victim; as a consequence, and in accordance with the internationally recognised interpretation of the Washington Principles, restitution is to be made in the first instance to her legal successors.

DIVISION OF THE PAINTING AND ACQUISITION BY TWO MUSEUMS

The work was conceived as a panel painting with images on both sides. The Annunciation was on the front and the Vision of St. Bernard on the back. The art dealer Max Stern divided the panel to create two separate paintings so that they could be sold as independent works. The depiction of St. Bernard on the back was listed in a 1937 catalogue of the P. de Boer art dealership in Amsterdam and acquired by the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in July/August 1938.

The work was acquired as part of an exchange transaction: in 1938, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen handed over a work from their collection – Jan van Goyen's 'Wasserlandschaft' (River Landscape; formerly inv. no. 2015) – to the Amsterdam art dealer P. de Boer and received, in addition to Koerbecke's work, an oil sketch by Carlo Calone (inv. no. 10645).

BAYERISCHE
STAATSGEMÄLDESAMMLUNGEN

THE WELS FAMILY, AS DESCENDANTS, ON THE RESTITUTION

"We found the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and all the staff involved to be open, positive and fully committed. We owe a special thanks to them. The painting is now back in the 'Alexander Haindorf Collection' that we, as descendants, are endeavouring to reassemble, as far as possible. The restitution of the painting in person was a special and moving moment. We clearly felt that all those working at the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen were very happy about returning the painting and were just as moved as we were.
Such a process is often very long and requires the support of experts. We would, therefore, like to express our gratitude here to the specialist lawyer for Nazi-looted art, Dr. Sabine Rudolph."

ANTON BIEBL ON THE RESTITUTION

"The Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and our team of researchers in the newly established Provenance Research Department at the Staatliche Museumsagentur Bayern (State Museum Agency of Bavaria) are committed to the clarification of historical injustices and the restitution of artworks disappropriated during the Nazi era. Through painstaking and scholarly provenance research, lost cultural assets come to light and fair, historically just solutions are made possible," emphasises Anton Biebl, Director of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen.



Johannes Koerbecke (1407–1491)
The Vision of St. Bernard, 3rd quarter of the 15th century
Oak, 94 x 78.7 cm
Inv. no. 10644
Sammlung | Vision des hl. Bernhard

BAYERISCHE
STAATSGEMÄLDESAMMLUNGEN

PRESS DEPARTMENT
Tine Nehler M.A.
Head of Press & Communications
Alte Pinakothek, Neue Pinakothek, Sammlung Schack and Branch Galleries
& Pinakothek der Moderne (Art | Prints & Drawings | Architecture | Design)
Richard-Wagner-Straße 1 | 80333 Munich
+49 (0)162 2621301
presse@pinakothek.de
www.pinakothek.de/en/press

Information on data processing can be found at www.pinakothek.de/en/data-protection