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### **Nazi-Looted Cranach Painting Comes on Loan to M&G**

A Nazi-looted painting, significant for its role in art restitution history, is now on display at the Museum & Gallery at Heritage Green until June 5.

Titled “Madonna and Child in a Landscape,” the painting belongs to the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) and is being loaned to M&G at Heritage Green as part of the exhibition “The Art of Sleuthing.” The piece was painted by the world-renowned German Renaissance artist, Lucas Cranach the Elder. M&G director, Erin Jones said “We are very excited to have the opportunity to share not only a beautiful example of Cranach’s brush, but a painting that has a powerful, inspiring story to tell.”

John Coffey, deputy director for art and curator of American and Modern Art at NCMA, shared the painting’s history with M&G for the exhibition’s feature on Nazi-looted art. According to Coffey, the painting came to NCMA in 1984 at the death of Mrs. Marianne Khuner, a Jewish WWII refugee and art collector. As is often the case with Old Master paintings, it came with little to no paperwork detailing its ownership history. (*Listen to talk Coffey talk about this painting and story* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmdtEbhz5s> )

In 1999, the World Jewish Congress, representing the Hainisch sisters living in Vienna, sent a letter to NCMA stating that the Nazis had stolen this Cranach from the Hainisch’s great-uncle, Philip von Gomperz. They believed it had been in the possession of the Nazi Governor of Vienna, Baldur von Schirach, a close associate of both Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering.

“This letter from the World Jewish Congress was sort of a clarion call for us,” said Coffey. “It was the first instance where an object in our collection had been challenged as having being stolen by the Nazis.” Coffey described how tenacious research the letter sparked on the part of NCMA to determine whether or not their Cranach was indeed the same painting stolen from von Gomperz. This extensive research was necessary because Cranach had painted multiple versions of “Madonna and Child.”

The moment of truth came when a photograph of von Gomperz’s Cranach was discovered and a detailed comparison revealed that NCMA’s work was the same one. On the basis of this clear evidence, NCMA returned the painting to the sisters. Unlike many museum predecessors, NCMA did not take the matter to court. Instead, they expressed interest in purchasing the Cranach from the Hainischs so that it might become a permanent part of the NCMA collection.

In gratitude for the unusually gracious manner in which NCMA restituted the painting, the sisters sold the painting to NCMA at half of its estimated value. The painting now serves as an illustration both of cultural injustice and amicable art restitution.

Jones said that the timing of this loan is also significant. In a certain sense, the coming of the restituted Cranach is a celebration of cultural justice. “We specifically negotiated to have the Cranach displayed



during this month because March is the month that Hermann Goering went to trial at Nuremberg,” said Jones.

Goering was the Nazi general largely responsible for the extensive art looting that took place across Europe during WWII. Thousands of families, many of whom were Jewish, were stripped of their family heirlooms to satisfy Nazi greed. Many of these heirlooms hung on the walls of the homes and office of the Nazi elite, including Goering’s. At his Nuremberg trial, Goering was convicted for multiple crimes against humanity and sentenced to death. He committed suicide before his execution.

**“Madonna and Child in a Landscape” will be on display at M&G at Heritage Green beginning Tuesday March 1, and will be on loan through June 5.** The Museum & Gallery at Heritage Green is open 10 a.m.- 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 2-5 p.m. on Sunday.

More information about the artwork’s story can be found at <https://youtu.be/MmdtEbhzz5s>.

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