Methods in Provenance Research


Collectors’ Marks

Marks, such as stamps and inscriptions, can help determine ownership over time.


Ris-Paquot. 1893. Dictionnaire encyclopédique des marques & monogrammes, chiffres, lettres initiales, signes figuratifs, etc., etc.; contenant 12,156 marques. Paris: Henri Laurens. (Freely available online)

Freely Available Databases & Websites for General Provenance Research

Commission for Looted Art in Europe (CLAE)

CLAE is an international non-profit organization which researches, identifies, and recovers looted property (see lootedart.com). The Commission’s website provides news concerning recent restitutions, as well as many links for further information on provenance.
**Getty Provenance Index**
Inventories of art and archives, sales catalogs, transactions, and public collections. German sales catalogs from 1930-1945, focusing on the period of Nazi looting during WWII, are a work-in-progress.

**IFAR Catalogues Raisonnés**
This database from the International Foundation for Art Research, provides references to catalogues raisonnés—scholarly compilations of artists’ bodies of work—both published and in preparation. The site also includes a guide for provenance research with many useful links.

**WWII Provenance Research**
The following resources can be used to research how works of art were looted, stolen, and dispersed during and after World War II.

**Books**


Books on Lost Works From Specific Countries or Collections

Austria

Belgium

France

Germany


Netherlands


Freely Available Databases

Art Database of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism [Austria]
Information on art and cultural objects presently located in museums and collections of Austria which may have been, according to the latest provenance research, seized under the National Socialist regime.

Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg [France/Belgium]
The Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Roseberg(ERR) was a Nazi “Special Task Force” formed to appropriate cultural property during WWII. This database accounts for those art objects with remaining photographs and registration cards from one operation in which the ERR plundered French and Belgian collections and brought them to the Jeu de Paume building in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris for processing before shipment to Germany.

Holocaust-Era Assets Records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
A finding aid to the records at the National Archives, College Park, Maryland, as well as bibliographies and digitized materials.

LootedArt.com
A registry of cultural property looted from 1933–1945. In addition to many useful links and breaking news, this site includes an information database of law and policy documentation, reports and publications, archival records, and an object database of looted, missing, and/or identified objects.

Lost Art-Datenbank
A German database of artworks that were confiscated by the Nazis from 1933 to 1945.
Mission de recherche et de restitution des biens culturels spoliés entre 1933 et 1945 (M2RS)
A department of the French Ministry of Culture, M2RS conducts research, raises awareness, and addresses individual cases of dubious provenance.

Nazi-Era Provenance Portal
A searchable registry of objects in US museum collections that changed hands in Continental Europe during the Nazi Era (1933–1945)

New York State Holocaust Claims Processing Office
Investigates claims on behalf of Holocaust victims and their heirs seeking the return of assets to their original owners.

This website lists over one hundred works still missing from the collection of Adolphe Schloss as of July 1, 1997. Includes images, descriptive information, and cross-references to the Répertoire de biens spoliés.

Search Tips
Locate other titles in the Met libraries by doing a KEYWORD search in the library catalog for any of the following terms. Enclose phrases in quotation marks. (Example: “art thefts”)
— Art thefts
— Art treasures in war
— World War, 1939–1945 — Art and the war

Have a question?
Reach a reference librarian at watson.library@metmuseum.org or use our virtual chat service, Ask a Librarian, Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm, from the Watsonline homepage.

*Visitors must be onsite at The Met Cloisters or The Met Fifth Avenue to access this resource. Met staff, volunteer tour guides, interns, and fellows may access onsite or remotely.

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