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ARTNEWS

FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office Seek Return of Rococo Painting Allegedly Looted by Nazis in Ukraine

BY Maximiliano Durón POSTED 03/21/19 5:20 PM



Attributed to Pierre Louis Goudreaux, *A Loving Glance*, n.d.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan will seek the return of an undated painting attributed to Pierre Louis Goudreaux, a 18th-century student of the Rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard that was looted during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine.

The painting in question has gone through various name changes throughout its history, according to an investigation by the FBI. When it first entered the collection of the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of the Arts in Kiev in 1924, as a bequest by collector Vasili Aleksandrovich Shchavinskii, the work was titled *A Family Portrait* and attributed to Fragonard. (After it entered the Khanenko's collection, the museum's deputy director conducted further research into its creation and reclassified it as being made "after Fragonard.")

While many artworks were removed from museums and displayed in private residences for top Nazi officials during World War II, the painting, which was on display throughout the 1930s, was never listed in any ledgers as being among those transported from the Khanenko, the FBI claims. And while the Khanenko moved some works in order to protect them from wartime damage, the painting was allegedly not among those transported for that reason. After the occupation of Ukraine ended in 1944, the work was listed as missing under the name *An Amorous Couple*. In 1998, it was included in a catalogue of looted works and added to the German Lost Art Foundation's database.

In January of 2013, Doyle Auctions in New York catalogued the work with the title *A Loving Glance*. It was said to have been in a London private collection before entering a Massachusetts private collection in 1953. It then became property of the Spanierman Gallery in New York, according to a provenance listing in Artnet's price database. Sometime around early 2013, the Khanenko requested the restitution of the work.

According to the lawsuit, which was filed on Thursday in U.S. District Court, the work is currently in the possession of an unnamed New York auction house, but the suit is being filed *in rem*, meaning that the lawsuit is against the asset in question (the painting, in this case), and that no legal action is being taken against the owner of the property.

"The occupying forces during World War II believed they had the right to surround themselves with the spoils of their invasion, to include art work that didn't belong to them," William F. Sweeney Jr., of the FBI, said in a statement. "The FBI New York Art Crime Team works diligently to restore these paintings and artifacts to their rightful owners because the some of the wounds of that dark time can be mended even decades later."

Correction 03/22/2019, 6:10 p.m.: *An earlier version of this article misstated that the lawsuit claimed that Doyle Auctions was still in possession of the painting. The lawsuit says that an unnamed New York auction house is in possession of the work; Doyle is not named in the suit. The post has been updated to reflect this.*