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The Notorious Collection of Nazi-Looted Art Amassed by Hildebrand Gurlitt Will Travel for a Poignant Show in Jerusalem

The show is called "Fateful Choices: Art from the Gurlitt Trove."

Sarah Cascone, September 6, 2019



Journalists film, take picture and look at the pieces of a art during the press preview of the first masterpieces of the estate of German collector Cornelius Gurlitt at the Museum of Fine Arts Bern (Kunstmuseum Bern) on July 7, 2017 in Bern. Photo credit should read Valeriano Di Domenico/AFP/Getty Images.

The infamous Gurlitt trove—roughly 1,590 artworks that the reclusive Cornelius Gurlitt inherited from his art dealer father, a Nazi collaborator, and kept hidden in his apartment for decades—is coming to Israel. An exhibition of some 100 pieces from the collection, including works by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Édouard Manet, Otto Dix, and Max Ernst, as well as never-before-seen Eugène Delacroix drawings, will go on view at the Israel Museum later this month.

Amassed by Hildebrand Gurlitt, the art collection was discovered by German authorities during a 2012 tax investigation. Given the elder Gurlitt's known work with the Third Reich, the provenance of the works, found in Munich and Salzburg, immediately came into question. How many of them had been sold under duress by Jewish families, or seized outright by the Nazis?

The Israel Museum exhibition, titled "Fateful Choices," marks the first time that works from the Gurlitt hoard have made the trip to Israel. The show will include Otto Mueller's *Portrait of Maschka Mueller*, declared "degenerate" by the Nazis and acquired by Gurlitt in 1941, as well as Dix's *Self Portrait Smoking*, seized by the US Army in 1945 and returned to Hildebrand Gurlitt in 1950. Other works, like Ernst's collage (*Woman Soldier House*), have no red flags that might indicate ties to the Nazis.

“The historical circumstances behind the Gurlitt Art Trove make it our responsibility to expose the works and the story to the public,” said the museum’s director, Ido Bruno, in a [statement](#). “Fateful Choices’ describes the fate of art in Europe in the dark years of the Third Reich regime and generates a profound discussion about the connection between art and ethics, as well as the difference between political preferences and personal taste.”



Sculptures by Auguste Rodin at the exhibition “Inventory Gurlitt” in Bonn, Germany, at the Bundeskunsthalle. Photo by Oliver Berg/picture alliance/Getty Images.

Before Gurlitt’s death, he bequeathed his entire collection to Switzerland’s [Kunstmuseum Bern](#). The museum, which is helping to organize the Israel Museum show, held the first exhibition of the works in a joint presentation with the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, Germany, in 2017 and 2018.

In Jerusalem, the show will address issues of provenance head on—and an ongoing, state-led Gurlitt Provenance Research Project is working to identify any potentially looted works with an eye toward restitution. (There have been six stolen pieces found to date.)

When [the exhibition was announced](#) in October, Monika Grütters, Germany’s federal government commissioner for culture and the media, [told the press](#) that she hoped it would boost efforts to identify Jewish owners of the art.

“We wanted to be open and transparent and to show the German and international public what was effectively in this Gurlitt trove and to make clear the background

history, the art dealing during World War II and the Nazi period,” Rein Wolfs, director of the Bundeskunsthalle and a member of the Israel Museum’s exhibition advisory committee, told the *Times of Israel*. “It’s a lot of questions, and touchy questions of restitution.”

“Fateful Choices: Art from the Gurlitt Trove” will be on view at the Israel Museum, Derech Ruppin 11, Jerusalem, Israel, September 24, 2019–January 24, 2020.