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Paintings by El Greco line the walls of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog's Budapest study in this photo from the 1910s.

Reclaiming Lost Treasures

The vast Herzog art collection, seized in Budapest in 1944, has been dispersed from North Carolina to Warsaw. The family is trying to recover its heritage

BY KONSTANTIN AKINSHA

Last September the heirs to a great Hungarian art collection lost during World War II won the right to proceed with a lawsuit in a United States court against the state of Hungary. David de Csepel and the other heirs of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog, who died in Budapest in 1934, are claiming 44 paintings by such artists as Lucas Cranach the Elder, El Greco, Zurbarán, and Courbet, valued at more than \$100 million.

Those pictures are now in museums in Budapest. The Herzog heirs have tried since the 1990s to claim them in Hungarian courts, without success. In 2010 they filed suit in U.S. District Court in the District of

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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST (2)



Claimed by the Herzog heirs: *Holy Family with Saint Anne*, ca. 1605 (above), and *Saint Andrew*, ca. 1610 (right), both visible in the photo opposite and now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.



Columbia against the Republic of Hungary and four Hungarian institutions. Last September Judge Ellen S. Huvelle rejected a Hungarian motion to dismiss the suit.

Artworks looted during and after World War II often have tangled histories, but the Herzog treasures have traveled a road more twisted than most. Their seizure in a Budapest suburb, in 1944, was cause for national celebration. On May 31 of that year, the Hungarian magazine *Magyar Futár* (Hungarian Courier) published a few pages of photo-journalism without parallel in the Axis press. The photos featured artworks that had been seized from Jews in Budapest by the Hungarian Nazis and their allies. The German Nazis never publicized their confiscations of Jewish property, but in Hungary theft from Jews was seen in a different light.

The article reported the confiscation of the Herzog art collection, the property of a famous Hungarian Jewish family. The artworks had been hidden in cellars in Budafok, on the outskirts of Budapest, to protect them from the Allied bombardments that had shaken the capital since 1943.

The photographs showed gleeful members of the State Security Surveillance, nicknamed the Hungarian Gestapo, posing with canvases by El Greco and other Old Masters they had found in the cellars. In charge was the notorious Inspector Péter Hain, head of the Security Surveillance, and secret agent of the German Gestapo.

Photographers and journalists were invited to observe the police breaking into the heavy chests containing the artworks. Dénes Csányi, director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, was at the scene, compiling an inventory of the unpacked paintings. Proudly he stated that the "Mór Herzog

collection contains treasures whose artistic value exceeds that of any collection in the country. . . . If the state now takes over these treasures, the Museum of Fine Arts will become a collection that ranks second only to Madrid."

The Herzog treasures were taken first to the Hotel Majestic on the Sváb Hill in Buda, which housed not only the Hungarian Gestapo but also the Sonderkommando Eichmann, a special group of SS personnel under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann that had arrived in Budapest on March 19, 1944, to carry out the "final solution" of the Hungarian Jewish problem. According to some sources, Eichmann liked the confiscated paintings so much that he kept some for himself. Then the collection was sent to the Museum of Fine Arts.

The Hungarian press improved on the subject of art treasures saved from "Jewish profiteers." *Magyar Futár* published a cartoon showing a painting attributed to Goya called *The Topers* (now in the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh). It was entitled "The Drinkers' Joy" and captioned, "It was Goya who created us, but only now do we find ourselves among the goys. Let's drink to this." The collection that had once been a pride of Budapest was truly "liberated" from its Jewish owners.

Baron Mór Lipót Herzog (1869–1934), the owner of the collection, belonged to a family whose rapid rise reflected the emancipation and enrichment of Hungarian Jews in the 19th century. His grandfather, Adolf Herzog, came to Budapest from Baranya County around 1836 and established a firm involved in tobacco and wool consignment. Adolf's success was only moderate, but the business



Members of the Hungarian secret police pose with Herzog pictures found in a cellar hiding place, including Goya's *The Toppers*, now in the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh.



Fischhorn Castle, in the Austrian Alps, was crammed with treasures looted by the Nazis from Poland and the Netherlands as well as objects from the Herzog collection.



Hitler was a guest at the 1944 wedding of SS General Hans Fegelein, Fischhorn Castle supervisor, to Gretl Braun, the sister of Eva Braun, the führer's mistress and, briefly, wife.

grew after 1862, when his son Péter took over the company. A shrewd investor, Péter was able to profit during the economic crisis of 1873 and soon owned the largest flour mill in Pest. He received a patent of nobility from Emperor Franz Joseph in 1886.

By the end of the century, the Herzog firm virtually monopolized the trade in Balkan and Turkish tobacco in Central Europe and was diversifying into the chemical and coal industries. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia, in 1878, the Herzogs built chemical plants and invested in tobacco plantations in the new protectorate. After 1900 the business took another turn, with the establishment of one of the major commercial banks in Hungary. The Herzogs became barons in 1906.

Baron Mór Lipót Herzog, who inherited this financial empire, became a passionate art collector. He acquired applied arts and sculpture, but his true pride was his picture gallery, where artists of the Early Renaissance and Flemish primitives shared space with Cranach, Bassano, and Tiepolo, 17th-century Dutch painters, and French Impressionists.

The core of the collection was Spanish. Under the influence of his tutor, Marcel Nemes, a Jewish coal trader from Transylvania turned art dealer and collector, Herzog developed a passion for El Greco and started to collect his works just at the moment when the artist was being rediscovered by European art circles. He also bought canvases by Zurbarán, Goya, and Pedro Machuca, amassing one of the largest collections of Spanish art in Europe.

By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the Herzog palace, on Andrassy Street, was so crammed with art that there was no space for anything else—the collection had exiled its owner. The family mansion had become the family museum. Only two habitable rooms remained in the huge building, one of them occupied by Herzog's sister and the other his study, which was a sanctuary dedicated to El Greco. The family had to rent another house nearby for their living quarters.

After Mór Lipót Herzog's death in 1934, the collection, consisting of about 2,500 works of art, was inherited by his widow and, after her death in 1940, by their three children, Erzsébet, István, and András. Foreseeing the coming storm, András tried to send the art treasures abroad, hoping to lend them for the duration to the National Gallery in London, but, notwithstanding the support of the gallery's director, Kenneth Clark, the Hungarian government prohibited the loan arrangement.

In 1942, András, as a Jew, was drafted for service in a forced labor battalion on the Eastern Front, where he perished in 1943. In 1944, when Hungary was occupied by the Nazis, Erzsébet and her daughter were allowed to emigrate to neutral Portugal as a result of a notorious deal made by SS Colonel Kurt Becher, who had been sent to Budapest not to eliminate Jews but to extort money from them. Becher approached several Jewish industrialists and offered to save their lives in exchange for all their assets. Erzsébet was permitted to leave the country, but her husband, Alfonz Weiss, remained an SS hostage and was liberated only after the war ended. István was arrested and already in transit to Auschwitz when he was rescued at the last moment by his wife.

As the Red Army approached the city in the winter of 1944, the contents of the Museum of Fine Arts and the masterpieces confiscated in Budafok were hastily packed up and loaded onto a train bound for the West. At the Austrian border, the train was intercepted by American troops. The paintings were transported to the Central Collecting Point in Munich and later restituted to Hungary.

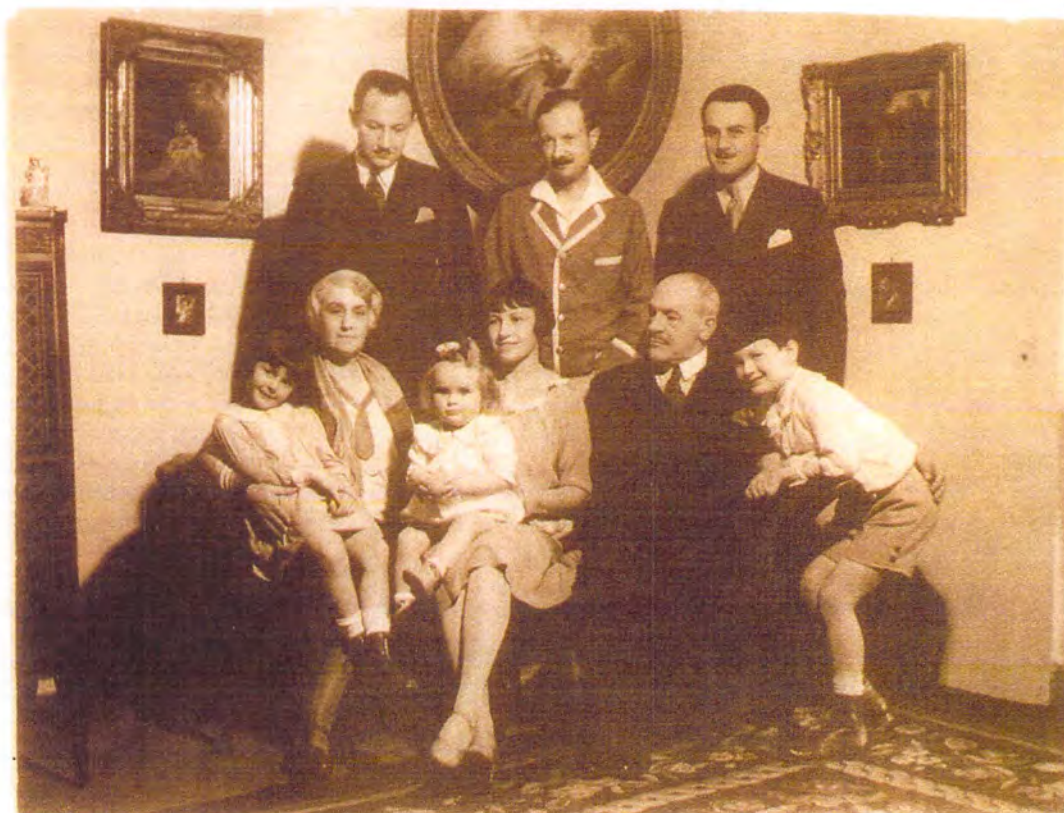
But only a fraction of the Herzog treasures were restored to the family. Most of the best pictures remained in the hands of the state. On the eve of the Communist takeover of 1948, family members tried to smuggle what had been returned to them out of the country, but they were apprehended, giving the state a pretext to confiscate the lion's share of the collection. Csánky's prophecy was at least partially fulfilled: the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest may not have become the world's second-best collection of Spanish art, but it vastly enriched its holdings with paintings confiscated from Jews by the Nazis and subsequently nationalized by the Communists.

It didn't become clear until long after the war ended that only part of the Herzog collection was on the train dispatched to the Austrian border in 1944 with the contents of the Museum of Fine Arts. Some pictures from the collection were discovered in the late 1980s in the secret depository of the Art Museum in Nizhnii Novgorod, in central Russia. Among them were canvases by El Greco, Goya, and Renoir.

How did these pictures end up in Russia? Russian researchers claim that they were confiscated by Red Army personnel in Germany, but Hungarian experts have presented convincing evidence that the Red Army looted bank vaults in Budapest and in them found numerous Jewish collections, which they transported back to Russia.

But hundreds of artworks that disappeared in Budapest during the bloody winter of 1944–45 are still unaccounted for. They weren't found in the secret depositories of Russian museums, and they have not resurfaced on the Russian or the international art market. What happened to them remains a mystery.

Did Eichmann or Becher take stolen art out of Budapest as it was besieged by the Red Army? There is no direct proof that Nazis looted Hungarian Jewish art treasures from the bank vaults and other places of safekeeping in which they had been deposited by Jews using gentile names. The



The Herzog family, ca. 1930–31. Standing, left to right: Alfonz Weiss de Csepel, András Herzog, István Herzog. Seated, Baroness Herzog with Martha Weiss de Csepel, Erzsébet (Herzog) Weiss de Csepel with Mary Weiss de Csepel, Baron Herzog, Gabriel Weiss de Csepel.

possibility has been fiercely denied by Hungarian art experts, who want to put the crime entirely on Soviet troops. However, recently discovered documents prove that the last page of European Holocaust history still contains many unanswered questions.

Some of those questions may be answered if a record of what happened during the war at Fischhorn Castle is ever found. The castle, perched above a lake in the Austrian Alps, a 90-minute drive from Salzburg, was founded in the 13th century and has changed owners many times over the years. During World War II it was used as both a satellite concentration camp of Dachau and an SS "stud farm." Hermann Goering spent his last night of freedom there before he surrendered to American army forces.

During the last years of the war, the stud farm was run by SS Obergruppenführer Hans Fegelein. A member of Hitler's

inner circle by virtue of his marriage to the sister of Eva Braun, the führer's mistress (and, briefly, wife), Fegelein was a protégé of interior minister Heinrich Himmler, one of the most powerful of Hitler's henchmen. With Himmler's permission, Fegelein turned the ancient castle into a collecting point for treasures delivered by high-ranking SS officials. Gold, jewelry, and artworks were secretly transported to the remote castle.

Fischhorn also became a manufacturing facility for forged identification documents, which the Nazis planned to use if they lost the war. Fegelein himself had such a fake document in his pocket when he was arrested in Berlin in the last days of the conflict trying to escape to Sweden with a large amount of cash and jewels. He was taken to Hitler's bunker, summarily court-martialed, and shot.



Courbet's *The Castle of Blonay*, ca. 1875, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, is also claimed by the Herzog heirs.

The aura of mystery surrounding the castle led to suspicions that the Nazis hid looted treasures in the area of Fischhorn. In 1945, the American Office of Strategic Services was seriously involved in looking for the loot, with the help of maps suggesting that Himmler's truck loaded with gold had been submerged in the nearby lake.

But the American occupation authorities in Austria paid no attention to the treasures in the castle. In the first months after the war, Fischhorn was secured by soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Division. Later the 506th Airborne Infantry Regiment housed hundreds of displaced persons there, whose movements were not restricted. The halls and cellars were virtually unguarded, although they were crammed with art treasures looted from Poland, as well as objects from the Netherlands, part of the Linz Collection,

which had been amassed for the museum Hitler planned to build after the war, and more than 200 paintings from Hungary.

When Evelyn Tucker, the representative in Austria of the Allied Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives task force, visited the castle, she found that the cellars had been breached and that GIs, displaced persons, and local villagers were able to wander in and out. According to MFA&A reports, DPs not only ransacked artworks but also burned antique furniture looted from the Belweder Palace in Warsaw. It is impossible to estimate how many artworks were stolen or destroyed because inventories of the Fischhorn holdings were never found.

In May 2008, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe negotiated the restitution of a 13th-century Limoges enamel processional cross from the collection of Countess Isabella Dzialynska (née Czartoryska), seized by the Nazis in Warsaw in 1941. It was stolen from the Fischhorn depository after the war and found in 2004 in the nearby town of Zell am See. However, not all of the lost treasures of Fischhorn were spirited away by villagers, GIs, or displaced persons.

In 1945 Lieutenant Bohdan Tadeusz Urbanowicz was liberated from the POW camp for Polish officers at Murnau and went to Salzburg to help the Americans cope with thousands of Polish nationals marooned in Austria. According to his memoirs, Urbanowicz, a trained artist, was told by a DP that large quantities of Polish treasures were stored in Fischhorn Castle and were being looted by Americans and Austrians. Alarmed, he passed on the information to Polish officials, and in September 1946, he was appointed by the Polish culture minister as his country's representative for the recovery of looted cultural property in the American zone of occupation in Austria.

Urbanowicz was appalled by the devastation he found at Fischhorn Castle. Broken crates containing artworks were strewn around a yard littered with debris. Dutch 17th-century chairs and chests looted from Holland had been dragged away to furnish DP living quarters in the filthy barracks. Books, documents, and paintings transported from Poland were stacked precariously in the corridors on muddy floors littered with Lucky Strike butts.

Urbanowicz and his few colleagues made a heroic effort to sort out the Fischhorn treasures, to track down stolen objects in the nearby villages, and to reclaim the historic furniture that had been taken to the army billets. The castle contained a range of Polish treasures, from paintings belonging to the National Museum in Warsaw to Chopin's piano and furniture from Belweder Palace, as well as libraries, archives, and artworks from private Polish collections.

When all these things were removed from Poland remains a mystery. Kajetan Mühlmann, the Nazi art historian in charge of confiscating Polish art treasures, rejected responsibility for their transport to Fischhorn and stated that the removal was organized by the SS and led by Fegelein. It is possible that Mühlmann was telling the truth: the absence of the paperwork customary for Nazi removals suggests that the contents of Fischhorn were indeed looted at the last minute by the SS.

In addition to Polish and Dutch art treasures, Urbanowicz found paintings belonging to Hungarian private collections. In his diary, he described in detail his discovery of Mihály Munkácsy's *La Visite* (The Afternoon Visit) packed with other paintings by Hungarian masters from the Herzog collection.

On April 23, 1946, 12 railway cars loaded with treasures from Fischhorn arrived in Warsaw from Salzburg. About 200 paintings from Hungarian private collections had been separated from the Fischhorn loot and left in the Salzburg Property Control Warehouse.

But some paintings from the Herzog collection traveled to Warsaw. There was, for example—as Urbanowicz noted in his diary—a beautiful landscape by Courbet that he had hung on his office wall in the castle. That landscape came from the Herzog collection. A few years ago it was spotted by experts and came to the attention of the Herzog heirs. After long and exhausting negotiations led by the Commission for Art Recovery, Polish authorities agreed to return it to the heirs of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog.

The Courbet landscape is not the only painting that had no connection to Poland and should never have been sent to Warsaw. The National Museum of Poland displays three other works—Veronese's *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, Francesco Vecellio's *Madonna with child and Saint John the Baptist*, and *Landscape with Two Women*, by the Flemish Baroque painter Jan Siberechts—that belonged to the Herzog collection and were confiscated by the Nazis in Budapest in 1944.

Urbanowicz identified these four paintings as belonging to Poland, although Polish national collections had never owned any works by these artists. The Polish culture ministry then certified to the United States Army that the paintings belonged to Poland and requested their return.

Polish museum curators were already aware in the late 1940s that the pictures did not come from Poland; in the National Museum in Warsaw, the paintings that had once graced the Herzog palace in Budapest were described as “acquired in 1945.”

The Polish state has actively sought the return of national art treasures dispersed during World War II and has demanded the restitution of objects from American and European museums, but it remains silent on the subject of these displaced Hungarian paintings.



Works from the Herzog collection now in the National Museum in Warsaw include *Landscape with Two Women* (top), by the 17th-century Flemish painter Jan Siberechts, and Veronese's *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (bottom).

The puzzle of Fischhorn Castle is not yet solved. Archival research during the last decade has failed to turn up Nazi documents shedding light on Hans Fegelein's activities during the last years of the war. It is clear, however, that part of the Herzog collection confiscated in Budapest in May 1944 was sent to Fischhorn. The knowledge gives hope to the Herzog heirs that one day such lost masterpieces as Goya's *Bulls and Matadors* will resurface, somewhere. ■