

I. Press release

Brussels, Thursday 10 February 2022



Our collection in question

#museuminquestions



Restitution of a looted painting and opening of two thematic rooms at the Royal Museums of Fine Art

On Thursday 10 February 2022 at 11 a.m., a painting stolen from a Jewish couple during the Second World War has been returned.

After years of research, and after the launch of a website dedicated to looted art works, the owners of the painting "Flowers" (1913) by the expressionist painter Lovis Corinth have finally been identified. The painting was stolen from the Jewish couple Gustav & Emma Mayer by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) in Belgium during WWII. The work was recovered by Leo Van Puyvelde after the liberation of Brussels and transferred to the Department for Economic Recovery, which entrusted it to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) in 1951. Seventy-one years later, the painting by Corinth has officially been returned to the descendants of the Mayer couple by the RMFAB, in the presence of Thomas Dermine, the State Secretary in charge of Scientific Policy, on Thursday 10 February 2022. Dermine said: "This return of a painting that was stolen from a Jewish family during the war is a very strong signal. A signal that, even decades later, justice can prevail." Michel Draguet, general director of the museum, added: "This is an important symbolic moment, charged with emotion. Of course, it is moving to see an art work leaving the museum's collections, but we are also extremely happy and touched to see this painting finally in the hands of its rightful owners."

At the same time, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts opened two new exhibition rooms. One of them contextualises the subject of cultural goods looted during the Second World War, a wider and more complex matter than the case of the Corinth painting. The other room sheds scientific light on the topics of colonialism and diversity. At the heart of this room is a masterpiece by Rubens and a copy by Constantin Meunier whose titles have just been

modified. The question of changing art work titles is central here. The Royal Museums want to be a think tank for the museum of tomorrow, by emphasizing its contribution of scientific research, one of the museum's primordial missions, to the contemporary debate.

Launched in the autumn of 2021, the *Museum in Questions* campaign will therefore continue to focus on current societal topics. The public is invited to take part in this debate and to share their views on social networks: @FineArtsBelgium #MuseumInQuestions.

II. Quotes

“Our country’s colonial heritage, the fate of Jewish property looted during World War II, the place of women in the history of art, the manner of representing them and the violence inflicted on them over the years, questions of ecology and our relationship to nature... All these are questions that lead us to examine not only the art works themselves, but also the titles we attach to them. All questions that we need to pose in order to sketch out solutions with which to recompose a humanism that is open to the other, respectful of differences.”

Michel Draguet, General Director of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

“The museum in its societal role is also a place of memory and knowledge. Scientific research is the foundation of this knowledge which allows us to question and construct our own narratives, to inform the public by sharing this knowledge and thus to provide a basis for informed social debate.”

Inga ROSSI-SCHRIMPF, Director Collection & Research at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

“Lovis Corinth's *Flowers* do not only bear witness to the plundering of Jewish property, but also to *Entartete Kunst* [degenerate art].”

Francisca VANDEPITTE, Curator Modern Art at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

“The colour of the title: an exclusive Rubens becomes an inclusive Rubens.”

Joost VANDER AUWERA, Curator Old Masters at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

“This return of a painting that was stolen from a Jewish family during the war is a very strong signal. A signal that, even decades later, justice can prevail. It is also an opportunity to remind people of the horrors to which nationalism and the far right can lead. This message is particularly important today, as political currents – that sell inward-looking attitudes as a solution to all problems – are becoming increasingly popular amongst electors across Europe and the world. To repair is to remember and to remember is to avoid the return of the worst.”

Thomas DERMINE, State Secretary for Economic Recovery and Strategic Investments, in charge of Scientific Policy

IV. Practical information

Rooms are open to the public from 10.02.2022

www.fine-arts-museum.be

@FineArtsBelgium

#museuminquestions

Address

Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

Old Masters Museum [rooms 51 & 60]

3 rue de la Régence | 1000 Brussels

Hours

Tuesday > Friday | 10:00 > 17:00

Saturday > Sunday | 11:00 > 18:00

Closed: Monday | 1 & 11 November | 25 December | 1 January | 1 May

+ exceptional closure [high-level international event] on 15-16-17 February 2022

Fees

Access included in the "Collections" ticket

€ 15

Adult

€ 10

Senior [+65 ans]

€ 5

Student [- 26 ans]

Person with a physical or mental disability / accompanying person

€ 0

-19 years / teachers / friends of the RMFAB / press / ICOM

Two visitor guides [available on paper or electronic version] are provided