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Netherlands restitutes two works to heir of Holocaust victim

Dutch Golden Age paintings from Dutch national collection are returned

By Pac Pobric

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Amsterdam Town Hall by Gerrit Berckheyde

The Dutch minister of Culture, Jet Bussemaker, has ordered the restitution of two pictures from the national collection of the Netherlands to the heir of a Holocaust victim. The Dutch Golden Age paintings, *Amsterdam Town Hall* by Gerrit Berckheyde and *View of a Dutch Harbour with Figures* by Adam Willaerts, will be returned to the unnamed claimant, who was represented by the Toronto-based Mondex Corporation during the investigation.

The pictures belonged to the Jewish collector Sam Bernhard Levie and his wife Sara de Zwarte until they were sold in 1940. The painting by Berckheyde went to the gallery D.A. Hoogendijk & Co and the picture by Willaerts was sold through a dealer to W. A. Hofer, who bought art for Hermann Goering. An investigation by the Dutch Restitutions Committee found that Levie was likely forced to sell the paintings; in the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Levie and de Zwarte were deported and later killed in the Sobibór death camp in occupied Poland in May 1943.

In assessing the case, the committee grappled with whether Levie could have been categorised as an “occasional dealer” of art, which would have put greater restrictions on the claim. In 1951, a former landlord of Levie’s said that he sold art out of an office in Amsterdam. While it is clear that Levie worked as a salesman, the committee could not confirm that he traded art.

Officials were also unable to confirm whether Levie “had free control of the proceeds” from the sale of the works, in which case the claimant would be obliged to make a payment for the restitution. According to a statement released by the committee, “the situation in which Levie found himself at the time of the sales are sufficient reason for assuming there was no free control of the purchase sums”.

Clarification: Sobibór was run by the German Nazi regime, it was not a Polish death camp. We are sorry for any distress this unintentional slip may have caused.