

Recommended Procedures for Providing Information to the Public about Objects Transferred in Europe during the Nazi Era

Introduction

These recommended procedures have been formulated by the American Alliance of Museums pursuant to an agreement reached in October 2000 between the Alliance, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), and the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States (PCHA). The PCHA was created in June 1998 to study and report to the President on issues relating to Holocaust victims' assets in the United States.

Provisions of the Agreement

Under this agreement the parties concurred (a) on the desirability of expanded online access to museum collection information that could aid in the discovery of objects unlawfully appropriated during the Nazi era, (b) on the need to identify the categories of objects for which this information should be made available, and (c) toward those ends, that every museum should:

- 1) Identify all objects in its collection that were created before 1946 and that it acquired after 1932, that underwent a change of ownership between 1932 and 1946, and that were or might reasonably be thought to have been in continental Europe between those dates (hereafter, "covered objects"). In the event that a museum is unable to determine whether an object created before 1946 and acquired after 1932 (a) might have been in continental Europe between 1932 and 1946 and/or (b) underwent a change of ownership during that period, it should still be treated as a covered object;
- 2) Make currently available object and provenance (history of ownership) information about covered objects accessible online; and
- 3) Give priority to continuing provenance research on those objects as resources allow.



The parties also agreed on the creation of a search tool on the Internet that would assist claimants, claimants' advocates, and researchers in accessing information on covered objects in museum collections.

For practical and historic reasons, the Alliance, AAMD, and PCHA agreed that the initial focus of research and online postings should be on European paintings and Judaica¹. Other covered objects in collections should be dealt with in a similar manner as resources allow.

Previously, some museums had provided online information only about objects with an incomplete provenance or a provenance containing a problematic name. The agreement calls for a more inclusive approach that PCHA, the Alliance, and AAMD believe is the best way for museums to aid the discovery process.

Development of Recommended Procedures

In December 2000, the Alliance convened a task force of museum professionals and other experts to advise staff on developing procedures for posting object and provenance information on museum Web sites and to consider mechanisms for making this information accessible from a single Internet site. The task force also addressed the issue of access to such information from museums without online collection information.

The task force identified 20 categories of information about covered objects that museums should compile and make available. Any additional information a museum is able to make available could further assist the process of discovery. The task force also developed the concept of a Nazi-era Provenance Internet Portal to assist users in conducting searches.

The Alliance views these procedures as consonant with the fundamental mission of museums to document and publish their collections and recognizes that, because of the Internet's global reach, posting collection information online should be a goal. Museums are encouraged to construct online searchable databases in which the posting of information about covered objects should be a priority.



Recommended Procedures

1) Making Object and Provenance Information for Covered Objects Accessible

The following 20 categories of object and provenance information are key for aiding potential claimants in identifying or ruling out a specific object. Museums should make this information accessible, organizing it according to their own standards. Museums should also include an explanation of how to interpret their provenance listings.

Museums should identify objects that fit the definition of Judaica contained in this document even if such objects have not been classified as Judaica in their databases. Museums should provide currently available information immediately, adding to it as time allows.

| Category | Comments |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Artist/Maker | To include artists' names, alternate names, and previous attributions. |
| Nationality of Artist/Maker | --- |
| Life Dates of Artist/Maker | --- |
| Place or Culture of Object | Only if artist unknown. |
| Object Title or Name | To include alternate titles. |
| Date of Work | To include approximate date, if specific date is unknown. |
| Medium/Materials | --- |
| Measurements | --- |
| Date of Acquisition | --- |



| | |
|--|---|
| Accession Number | --- |
| Object Type | Painting, sculpture, decorative arts, etc. |
| Subject Type | Landscape, portrait, mythological subject, historical, religious, genre, Judaica, etc. |
| Signature and Marks (obverse) | To include signatures, inscriptions, and marks; for paintings, what appears on the front |
| Labels and Marks (reverse, frame, mount, etc.) | To describe marks and labels (prior to 1960) on the reverse of an object (including frame, mount, etc.). Indicate if images are available. |
| Description | To contain description of object (its content, subject, etc.). Museums should make this a priority. |
| Provenance | To contain, at the minimum, known owners, dates of ownership, places of ownership, method of transfer (sale, gift, descent, etc.). To include, if known, lot numbers, sale prices, buyers, etc. To include information on unlawful appropriation during the Nazi era and subsequent restitution. Museums should ensure that provenance information is understandable and organized chronologically. |
| Exhibition History | --- |
| Bibliographic History | --- |
| Other Relevant Information | To contain anything about the object that would be useful in identifying it for this purpose. If the object fits the definition of Judaica contained in this document, so state. |
| Image | An image is key to identifying an object. Museums should make every effort to include an image with their records. |



2) Nazi-era Provenance Internet Portal

It is the view of the Alliance that museums should control the research, presentation, and maintenance of information about covered objects in their collections. This allows museums to organize their information according to their own standards and provide all relevant introductions, explanations, and avenues for inquiry.

In order to expedite searches for information about covered objects in museum collections, the Alliance will launch a search tool called the Nazi-era Provenance Internet Portal. The Portal initially will allow users to search by the artist/maker and the nationality of the artist/maker (or of the object if the artist is unknown). Additionally, users will be able to learn which museums contain covered Judaica. The Portal will provide the user with basic information contributed by museums about objects that fit the search criteria as well as links to further information controlled by those museums. The Portal ultimately will have the capacity to allow users to search on additional categories of information, such as object type and description of the object.

Museums should submit to the Alliance a set of descriptive data about covered objects in their collections. This information will constitute the registry. It will be the responsibility of the museum to update this information whenever there are changes, additions, or deletions.

a) Submitting Information to the Portal Registry

The information that the Portal will use to assist searchers will be housed in a database. It will contain, for each museum, basic contact and URL information (if applicable) and an indication as to whether the museum's collection contains any covered Judaica. An associated searchable object registry will house object descriptive information that will be provided by museums in phases. In the initial phase, this will be artist/maker, nationality of artist/maker, and culture/nationality, if artist is not known. In later phases museums will be asked to add title, object type, and searchable free-text descriptions. In addition, museums without online collection information will be asked to supply one PDF file for each covered object. A link will be created from the object registry to the PDF file. Instructions for converting a document to Adobe PDF will be available from the Alliance.

Information about museums and their covered objects may be entered directly onto the Portal's Web site or submitted electronically. Whether a museum's registry records are linked to its Web site or to a PDF, the museum will receive a password giving access through the Alliance's Web site to the data it contributes. Museums will be responsible for updating and adding to these data. Instructions for submitting data to these tables will be available from the Alliance.



Museums should strive to provide the 20 categories of information listed above either in their online collection information or in their PDF files.

b) Searching the Portal

When a search is conducted, the Portal will return the registry information for all objects that match the search criteria and either: (a) links to the Web site of each museum where more information about these objects can be found or (b) links to each PDF file that contains more information about these objects.

The Alliance will employ an enhanced search facility developed by the Getty based on the Union List of Artist Names® to increase the precision and recall of searches on the artist name by accommodating various spellings and making the searcher aware of related artists and artists who share the same name.

Commitment of the Alliance

Because of the urgent need to create a search tool for covered objects, the Alliance has committed to developing and managing the Portal for three years. However, in recognition that a project of this technological complexity falls outside the range of the Alliance's customary activities and services, after three years the Alliance will seek to transfer the project to a more appropriate organization.

To address any issues that may arise regarding the Portal, the Alliance will establish an independent commission to guide this effort. This independent commission will be appointed by the Alliance Board of Directors and will include museum professionals and experts from outside the museum field. Significantly for the museum community, claimants, and researchers, it is envisioned that the commission will continue when the portal is transferred to another organization.

For more information contact:

American Alliance of Museums
1575 Eye Street N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
nepip@aam-us.org

ⁱ The term "Judaica" is most broadly defined as the material culture of the Jewish people. First and foremost this includes ceremonial objects for communal or domestic use. In addition, Judaica comprises historical artifacts relating to important Jewish personalities, momentous events, and significant communal activities, as well as literature relating to Jews and Judaism. Many museums also have acquired material of everyday life that expresses a uniquely Jewish identity.