

D.A. Bragg: Seven Pieces of Nazi Looted Art Returned to Relatives of Holocaust Victim

SEPTEMBER 20, 2023



Pictured: "Portrait of a Boy"

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr., and Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent in Charge at Homeland Security Investigations, New York, today announced the return of seven artworks to the family of Fritz Grünbaum, an Austrian-Jewish cabaret performer whose art collection was stolen by the Nazi regime. The drawings, all from Austrian artist Egon Schiele, were seized by the Office's Antiquities Trafficking Unit in 2023 from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); The Ronald Lauder Collection; The Morgan Library; The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA); and the Vally Sabarsky Trust in Manhattan. The seven pieces were officially returned to the legal heirs and Trustees of Grünbaum's art collection at a ceremony in the District Attorney's Office.

All seven drawings were seized and voluntarily surrendered by the holding institutions and estates after they were presented with evidence that they were stolen by the Nazis.

"Fritz Grünbaum was a man of incredible depth and spirit, and his memory lives on through the artworks that are finally being returned to his relatives. I hope this moment

can serve as a reminder that despite the horrific death and destruction caused by the Nazis, it is never too late to recover some of what we lost, honor the victims, and reflect on how their families are still impacted to this day. We still have so much to learn from Fritz Grünbaum and these seven pieces that he found to be so beautiful. The Manhattan District Attorney's Office is proud to have played a role in remembering his legacy," said **District Attorney Bragg**.

"District Attorney Bragg, DHS Special Agent in Charge Arvello, and their exceptional teams led by Colonel Matthew Bogdanos have succeeded in solving crimes perpetrated over 80 years ago. Their righteous and courageous collaboration in the pursuit of justice — unique among prosecutors and law enforcement in this entire nation, if not the world — shine a bright light for all to follow. Their names, along with Fritz Grünbaum's, will be forever inscribed in the book of history. We look forward to the District Attorney's continued fairness, objectivity and fearless pursuit of justice in conducting this criminal investigation," said **Judge Timothy Reif, relative of Fritz Grünbaum**.

"These priceless works of art have a history we cannot ignore and collectively tell the story of the realities that were endured by millions during the Holocaust," said **Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), New York**. "Franz Friedrich (Fritz) Grünbaum and his wife, Elisabeth never had the opportunity to be reunited with their treasured art prior to their untimely deaths, but their legacies will now live on. Today, with deep respect, we humbly restore seven of these precious pieces to their rightful heirs, ensuring their profound significance will not be forgotten."

The pieces being returned today include:

- "I Love Antithesis," from the Ronald Lauder Collection, valued at \$2.75 million
- "Standing Woman" from the MoMA, valued at \$1.5 million
- "Girl Putting on Shoe" from MoMa, valued at \$1 million
- "Self Portrait," from the Morgan Library, valued at \$1 million
- "Portrait of the Artist's Wife, Edith," SBMA, valued at \$1 million
- "Portrait of a Boy," the Vally Sabarsky Trust, valued at \$780,000
- "Seated Woman," the Vally Sabarsky Trust, valued at \$1.5 million

All the drawings are portraits of Schiele himself and others, including his wife, Edith. "I Love Antithesis" is one of four inscribed self-portraits he completed while imprisoned in 1912. "Portrait of a Boy" was a preparatory study for the 1910 oil portrait of the son of one of Schiele's first patrons, an important early commission in his artistic career.



Pictured: "I Love Antithesis"

According to evidence presented to the institutions returning the seven pieces, Fritz Grünbaum possessed hundreds of artworks, including more than 80 Egon Schiele drawings. He was captured by the Nazis in 1938 after their invasion of Austria and was forced to execute a power of attorney while he was imprisoned in Dachau in favor of his wife, Elisabeth Grünbaum, who was later compelled to hand over his entire art collection to Nazi officials.

Grünbaum's collection was inventoried by art historian and Nazi-party member Franz Kieslinger and then impounded in the Nazi-controlled warehouse Schenker & Co A.G. in September 1938. All works by Schiele had been declared degenerate and many of the confiscated works were auctioned or sold abroad to finance the Nazi Party. The whereabouts of Grünbaum's Schiele collection was unknown after World War II until they reappeared at a Swiss Auction House, Gutekunst & Klipstein (G&K), in the 1950's.

In 1947, the U.S. State Department was concerned about the influx of Nazi-looted art and specifically warned galleries and museums to be especially vigilant of any art coming to the US during or after the war from Austria, among other countries.

In 1956, the seven artworks reappeared in Bern, Switzerland, and were sold by Eberhard Kornfeld, the owner of G&K, who died in April 2023. During the war, Hitler's personal art curator, Hildebrand Gurlitt, was authorized to sell off degenerate artwork that had been seized by the Nazi government as part of Goebbels's program. Then, in the

decades after the war, Kornfeld established a close business relationship with Hildebrand Gurlitt's son Cornelius, from whom Kornfeld received hundreds of Nazi-looted artworks stolen from Holocaust victims.

In 1956 Kornfeld sold most of Grünbaum's Schiele's to Otto Kallir, the owner of the NYC-based Gallery Galerie St. Etienne, with no provenance whatsoever. Kallir himself knew the artworks had belonged to Fritz Grünbaum because Kallir had seen the artworks in Fritz Grünbaum's Vienna apartment when Kallir had them displayed for an exhibition at Kallir's Neue Gallery in Vienna in 1928. All the drawings were eventually transported into Manhattan and then sold to other private collectors and institutions before being seized by the Office.

Assistant District Attorney Matthew Bogdanos, Chief of the Antiquities Trafficking Unit and Senior Trial Counsel conducted the investigation along with Assistant District Attorney Edward Smith, Investigative Analyst Hilary Chassé, and Special Agents Megan Buckley and Robert Mancene of Homeland Security Investigations.

The District Attorney's Office would like to thank Ronald S. Lauder, the Museum of Modern Art, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Vally Sabarsky Trust, and the Morgan Library & Museum for their assistance and cooperation with our investigation.