Investigators Say Chicago's Art Institute Is Holding onto 'Looted Art'

The museum asserts it is the rightful owner of an Egon Schiele drawing that New York investigators say in a new court filing was stolen by the Nazis.

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"Russian War Prisoner," a drawing by Egon Schiele that investigators say was looted by the Nazis.Manhattan District Attorney, via Associated Press

New York investigators trying to seize a drawing from the Art Institute of Chicago filed an exacting 160-page motion on Friday accusing the museum of blatantly ignoring evidence of an elaborate fraud undertaken to conceal that the artwork had been looted by the Nazis on the eve of World War II.

While the court papers, filed by the Manhattan district attorney's office, did not accuse the museum of being party to the fraud, they said it had applied "willful blindness" to what the investigators said were clear indications that it was acquiring stolen property.

The drawing, "Russian War Prisoner," by [Egon Schiele](#) was purchased by the Art Institute in 1966. It is one of [a number of works](#) by Schiele that ended up in the hands of museums and collectors and have been sought by the heirs of Fritz Grünbaum, a Jewish cabaret entertainer from Vienna who was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp. The institute paid about $5,500 for the drawing, which has been valued by investigators today at $1.25 million.

In a statement, the Art Institute said it had good title to the work by Schiele, an Austrian Expressionist, and would fight the district attorney's attempt to seize it.

"We have done extensive research on the provenance history of this work and are confident in our lawful ownership of the piece," the museum said, adding: "If we had this work unlawfully, we would return it, but that is not the case here."

But the investigators said in their court filing that the institute's "failure" to vet the work properly "undercuts any arguments that AIC were truly good-faith purchasers."

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