

RESTITUTION**Further restitution to the heirs of Fritz Grünbaum**

The drawing by Egon Schiele was last in the estate of a native of Vienna and was to be auctioned at Sotheby's. This did not happen

Olga Kronsteiner

July 29, 2024, 08:00



Egon Schiele's "Seated Female Nude" (1918) has now been restituted and will be auctioned at Christie's in the fall.

Courtesy the Manhattan District Attorney's Office

On the restitution front, the heirs of Fritz Grünbaum can chalk up another success for themselves: On Friday, a drawing by Egon Schiele was handed over to them at the New York District Attorney's office: The *Seated Female Nude* from 1918 shows Edith, the artist's wife, and was once part of the art collection of the Austrian cabaret artist, who was murdered in the Holocaust. This collection included a total of around 80 works by Egon Schiele, which were sold by Grünbaum's sister-in-law via the Swiss art trade in the 1950s. Among the buyers were well-known industry figures such as Rudolf Leopold and Otto Kallir, who imported some of the works to the USA to sell them at his Galerie St. Etienne, which he founded in exile in New York in 1939.

The now restituted drawing was purchased there in 1961 by a certain Helene Papanek for 4,000 US dollars, as the *New York Times* reports. The Papanek family was born in Vienna and was well known in socialist circles in this country. As an educator, Ernst Papanek was involved in the Viennese school reform in 1919, and was later active as a regional chairman of the education committee and a Social Democratic councillor in Vienna (1932-1934). Together with

his wife, a specialist in neurology and psychology, he belonged to the circle around Alfred Adler. When Papanek was sentenced to death after the February battles in 1934, he emigrated to Czechoslovakia. He reunited with his wife and two sons, who themselves had to flee Nazi persecution, in Paris in 1938. Together, the couple ran four homes for Jewish refugee children there for two years. In 1940, the Papanek family managed to escape from France via Portugal to the USA at the last minute with the help of the French resistance.

Forgotten icon

At the height of his career, Ernst Papanek, according to his biographer Lilly Maier "a forgotten icon of Austrian pedagogy, Viennese School", was appointed Professor of Pedagogy at the City University of New York in 1959. He died in 1973 during a visit to his hometown of Vienna, his wife in New York in 1985.

They had given the Schiele drawing to one of their sons as a gift in 1969: Gustav "Gus" Papanek, a renowned development economist, President of the Boston Institute for Developing Economics and Professor Emeritus of Economics at Boston University, who died in 2022.

According to information available to the STANDARD, the drawing was originally to be auctioned at Sotheby's in London at the request of the descendants. In the course of due diligence, the auction house's experts came across the website of Grünbaum's heirs, who listed all the works of art they believed had been "stolen" from the collection by the Nazis. Among them was this drawing, which Otto Kallir had acquired at the Kornfeld Gallery in Bern in 1956.

In a recent press release, the public prosecutor's office in New York emphasized the Papanek family's willingness "to cooperate fully throughout the investigation". It remains unclear why the District Attorney's Office nevertheless issued a seizure order on April 5 for the *Seated Female Nude*, which was apparently still at Sotheby's in London at the time.

Planned auction

The work, like all ten Schiele works restituted by American institutions and private collections since December 2022 as a result of the lawsuits filed by Grünbaum's heirs, will now be auctioned at Christie's in the fall.

With regard to the lawsuits brought against the Republic of Austria, the Albertina and the Leopold Museum concerning a total of twelve Schiele works, no decision has yet been made on the jurisdiction of US courts. From the point of view of Austrian provenance research, this is not a case of restitution, as Fritz Grünbaum's collection remained in the family's sphere of control. (Olga Kronsteiner, 29.7.2024)