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Saving Adele: A History of the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I

Ariel A. Furman

Collin College, ariel.furman01@gmail.com

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Individual Research Project

Research in progress for HIST 1302: United States History II

Faculty Mentor: Kyle Wilkison, Ph.D.

Nothing ruins an enriching intellectual experience quite like having it assigned. Consequently, Honors History 1302 students began by identifying their own passions and interests. They then chose topics of immediate and abiding personal interest and produced research projects that reflected that energy and commitment. Their research probed a marvelous variety of historical topics from culture, medicine, science, politics, and economics. They researched and wrote about anti-fascist American comic books during World War II, disturbing historic treatments for the mentally ill, advances in applied physics in motor vehicles, a sophisticated analysis of church and state in a NYC mayoral race, and one wonderfully-written explanation of credit-default swaps and the Great Recession. Ariel Furman's splendid paper reflects the best of these freshman endeavors. The author-scholar carefully recounts the serpentine path of Gustav Klimt's "Woman in Gold" from the complex art world of nineteenth-century Austria, through mid-twentieth-century Nazi predations, on to resolution via twenty-first-century international law.

Ariel Furman

Kyle Wilkison

HIST 1302

3 March 2018

Saving Adele: A History of the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*

“The truth is rarely pure and never simple.”
—Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Introduction

There are heirlooms, and then there are heirlooms. This particular one had the world watching. The *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* was stolen by the Nazis, and it was only half a century later that her relatives would be reunited with it, after a long and fierce struggle. Through legal manipulations, the modern Austrian government continued to promote Nazi-era tactics to evade the restitution of property to its inheritors. The history of this painting is a poignant reminder that human nature can be easily manipulated and incited to do unspeakable evil. This is the story of a painting that people fought over and lied about, but perhaps most of all, it is the story of a scarred humanity.

Adele Bloch-Bauer

Adele Bloch-Bauer was born in Vienna in 1881 as Adele Bauer, the youngest daughter of Bavarian immigrants Moritz Bauer, the general director of the Vienna Bank Association and the president of Oriental Railroad, and Jeanette Bauer (nee Honig). Adele was described later in life as inquisitive, difficult, opinionated, and a patron of the arts, literature, and social causes—or as her niece Maria Altmann would say of her, “a

modern woman living in the world of yesterday” (O’Connor xviii). As such, she longed for a formal higher education, but because this was not done at the time, she married instead at the age of eighteen. After her marriage, she created a strict curriculum for herself, including subjects such as medicine, science, art, politics, and literature. She met her future husband, Ferdinand Bloch, at her sister’s 1898 wedding, where he was the groom’s brother. Seventeen years her senior, he fell in love with the young Adele immediately. Ferdinand was a sugar baron, inheriting the business from his father and building it into a solid and stable monopoly. His passion, however, was for neoclassical porcelain. The Bloch and Bauer families were some of the most cultured and influential members of their society, and as non-observant Jews, considered themselves Austrian before anything else.

Adele would be immortalized in a painting known as *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* by the painter of the hour, Gustav Klimt. There is much speculation as to whether they had an affair, and while there is no evidence either way, she was his only model to be painted twice. Klimt was a known seducer, reportedly fathering fourteen illegitimate children (Hughes). While she did not marry her husband, Ferdinand, out of love, they maintained a deep and mutual respect for each other throughout their lives and had much in common as patrons of the arts. Finding Vienna society gossip uninteresting and superficial, Adele began to host weekly intellectual salons for the *creme de la creme* of Viennese intelligentsia, inviting prominent composers, writers, politicians, and philosophers into her home (Müller and Tatzkow 158-159; Kirsta).

Family

Adele was the youngest of seven children. After the death of her fourth and last brother, Eugene, in 1915, she and her sister Marie-Therese (Thedy) asked their husbands to amalgamate their names. Beginning in 1917, they appeared as the Bloch-Bauers. Adele was very close to Thedy and her five children: Luise Gutmann, Robert Bentley, Leopold Bentley, Karl David Bloch-Bauer, and Maria Altmann. It would be Maria, the youngest, who would fight for the Klimt portrait of Adele. Unlike Thedy, however, Adele had no living children. Two were stillborn, and a little boy died several days after birth (Müller and Tatzkow 158).

Gustav Klimt

Gustav Klimt is known today as one of the finest of Austrian artists, but when he was born in 1862 to a desperately poor family, it seemed he was destined to a life of few opportunities. His Czech father, Ernst, was an uneducated gold engraver who struggled to make ends meet, and his Viennese mother, Anna, had once hoped to be an opera singer, but her dreams did not come true. Klimt's home life was depressing and hungry. School was a terrible ordeal for him—he skipped one year solely because his pants were too ragged to attend. However, he loved to draw, sketching everything he could: from his tired mother to the neighbor's cat. In order to feed their large family, Klimt and his brother would help their father in his workshop, where he worked long, hard hours (O'Connor 14).

At the age of fourteen, Klimt enrolled in the new School of Applied Arts in Vienna, where he immediately distinguished himself. His brother soon enrolled in the school as

well. By the time he was eighteen, Klimt had already been painting imperial commissions—well-paid government projects that gave him important publicity and name recognition—and his family desperately relied on his prospects. Klimt was simply soaring as he, his brother, and another artist formed a successful company and were eagerly sought after. Then, in 1892, tragedy struck with the death of his father who, on his deathbed, begged Klimt to care for his mother and siblings. That same year, his brother and business partner, Ernst, also died, leaving behind his young widow and small daughter. In a world where only the strong survived, Klimt had to provide for them all (O'Connor 15).

Klimt began painting differently, experimenting with Symbolism and Japanese influences, and became known for his elegant, erotic art, as well as for leading the Secessionist and Art Nouveau movements, groups that pulled away from traditional artwork and chose instead to paint as their inspiration struck them. As his style changed and his revolutionary role as an artistic rebel became cemented, he began looking for patrons with modern tastes, many of whom were self-made Jewish businessmen, rather than government commissioners, who regarded his art as obscene. Klimt is best known for his portraits of wealthy Jewish women of Viennese society, women who were fighting narrow mindsets in society and were thinking about new and often controversial ideas instead (O'Connor 10, 23-25).

One such woman was Adele. When Ferdinand commissioned a portrait of his wife in 1903, Klimt was more popular than ever, although some patrons may have wondered about the wisdom of leaving their daughters and wives alone with the known

seducer nicknamed “the King.” The painting cost an incredible sum of money: 4,000 crowns, “a quarter of the price of a well-appointed villa” (O’Connor 42). That December, not long after Klimt began working on Adele’s portrait, he visited the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, where he saw the golden Byzantine mosaics of Justinian and Theodora, works dating back to the sixth century. Indeed, Klimt was at the height of his “golden phase” during the making of the portrait. He finished Adele’s painting in 1907, with some art critics saying that his preparations were more intricate and precise than for any other work, although all of his paintings were extremely meticulous and detailed. It was lauded to a great degree, though there were, of course, those who critiqued it as “brass” and gaudy (O’Connor 42, 45-46, 58; Müller and Tatzkow 159).

Painted with silver and gold leaf, Adele’s portrait is striking to the eye as its enveloping glow draws immediate attention. She wears a gold patterned dress that melts back into a similarly-hued background. Rising from this glory, Adele emerges. Although the background is highly stylized, with bursts of intense colors that frame her body, Adele’s face and hands are extremely realistic, as if photographed. Her cheeks are flushed, her lips are slightly parted, and she holds her arms in an awkward position: she had a disfigured finger she was deeply conscious of, which Klimt disguised with the unusual position displayed in the forefront of the painting. Around her neck, she wears a diamond choker that is prominent despite the gold that surrounds it. The portrait is opulent, but Adele remains pensive, returning a measured and guarded look to her audience (*The Portrait*; Stamberg).

During WWII, approximately fourteen stolen Klimt paintings were held at Schloss Immendorf castle in Austria. As the allies approached in 1945, twenty-seven years after Klimt's death, the castle was intentionally set on fire by SS officials. The Klimts and many other priceless paintings were destroyed forever (O'Connor 194-195).

Adele Bloch-Bauer's Death and Will

In 1925, Adele died unexpectedly of meningitis after going into a coma. She was only forty-three years old. Ferdinand was devastated and turned her bedroom and salon into a shrine for her, filled with the Klimt paintings and freshly-cut flowers. After Adele's death, Ferdinand continued collecting art, but he also donated several works, some per her last wishes. However, he kept most of the Klimt pieces. Adele had stipulated that after her death her books be left to the Vienna People's and Worker's Library. She bequeathed 50,000 Czech korunas each to the Vienna Kinderfreunde (Friends of the Children), a workers association, and to another association called Die Bereitschaft (Readiness), which was committed to social work and awareness. In her will, she wrote, "I ask my husband to leave my two portraits and the four landscapes by Gustav Klimt to the Österreichische Galerie [in the Belvedere Museum] in Vienna after his death" (Müller and Tatzkow 162). This one seemingly-simple sentence would be the spark to an international, decades-long debate about one of the most famous works of Nazi-stolen art (Müller and Tatzkow 161-162; O'Connor 71).

The Times

March 12, 1938, was the Anschluss, a day Nazi Germany annexed a supine Austria and Maria Altmann recalled people throwing flowers on the street in anticipation

of the coming Nazi soldiers. As a leading Jewish industrialist and firm supporter of the current government, Ferdinand's was a name already known to the Nazis, and as a result, he was the first of the Bloch-Bauers to flee Vienna, estimated to be on March 15 of the same year. His nephew, Leopold, had already been arrested as a hostage in order to forcefully take shares of Ferdinand's sugar factory. Then in his seventies, Ferdinand first escaped to Czechoslovakia, then to Paris, and finally to Switzerland. He stayed at the Hotel Bellerive au Lac on Lake Zurich; these luxurious and expensive accommodations were likely chosen for him in order to make up the revenue lost by the fall in tourism. After all, Switzerland did not consider him a political refugee and barred him from working (Müller and Tatzkow 163-164).

The Nazis confiscated Ferdinand's personal belongings and "Aryanized" his corporate equity, and he was helpless to respond in any way. One property was taken over by the German Railroad, and the other was "gifted" to the governor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Konstantin von Neurath. In April, he was charged by several districts of the Financial Office of Vienna for evading taxes. The expected cost was 700,000 reichsmarks and was later increased to 1.4 million RM. In May, there came an immediately executable appropriation permit of his property. This allowed the Nazis to proceed with "legally" confiscating Ferdinand's artworks and porcelain collection (Müller and Tatzkow 164).

Ferdinand died alone and heartsick just a few months after World War II ended in 1945. He left half of his estate to one niece, Luise, who, along with her two children and her husband, Viktor, would survive in occupied Yugoslavia in terrible conditions, only to

have Viktor shot by the new Communist government for being a “war criminal and collaborator” with the Nazis (O’Connor 200). At this time, Viktor had been jailed with his family alongside political prisoners. The other half of Ferdinand’s estate was split between nephew Robert (who would later change his last name to Bentley) and niece Maria. In his last will, he voided all earlier wills, and it was only discovered after the war that he had nothing left: it had all been appropriated (Muller 167).

Theft of Painting: From Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer to Woman in Gold

After the Anschluss, Nazi lawyer Erich Führer took control of the vast Bloch-Bauer estate. Starting in early 1939, he began to convert Ferdinand’s holdings into cash, finishing in 1943. Supposedly representing Ferdinand, he invited prominent museum curators and guests to an “art inspection” in Ferdinand’s old home in Vienna, and several of the works were claimed by Hitler for the planned *Führermuseum* in Linz, which was never built. Erich Führer notified Ferdinand of the bargain transactions that were taking place, pretending to act as a responsible advisor. Ferdinand still had a trusting belief in justice and wanted the paintings to end up on public display in an Austrian museum. However, in the summer of 1940, Ferdinand wrote to Führer, opposing the way his art was sold, protesting the pathetically low bargain prices, and arguing that Führer had no rights to sell the works:

I fail to understand and can hardly believe the way things are proceeding. I divested you of any power to represent me or act on my behalf on February 8 of this year. What, then, gives you the right to sell my pictures? The estimated value of the pictures was more than 40,000 [RM], although their true value is much

higher. You have acted on your own authority, doing me an extraordinary amount of harm, and I must now reserve the right to hold you responsible for all damages incurred. You have furthermore failed to inform me of the above-described transaction—something I cannot understand in the least. That you have moreover kept the so-called sales price for yourself, without telling me about it—words fail me. (Müller and Tatzkow 166)

After the Anschluss, and Ferdinand's subsequent exile, Hitler wanted to purchase Ferdinand's exquisite antique porcelain collection. However, he eventually decided not to, at which point it was auctioned off for truly pathetic prices. In 1941, Führer settled a deal with Ferdinand's former art advisor, now the director of the Österreichische Galerie, Bruno Grimschitz. In exchange for Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (then "Aryanized" into *Portrait of a Woman Against a Gold Background*) and another Klimt, Grimschitz gave Führer *Schloss Kammer am Attersee III*, a Klimt painting that had been donated by Ferdinand in 1936. An illegitimate son of Klimt (and a staunch supporter of the SS), Gustav Ucicky, bought the painting. Führer then sold several other Klimts to various galleries. Secretly, he kept eleven paintings from the Bloch-Bauer set for himself, along with the entire library, which he later claimed Ferdinand had gifted to him (Müller and Tatzkow 167).

In April of 1942, Ferdinand wrote a letter to an artist he had mentored, Oskar Kokoschka (whose art was considered degenerate by the Nazis) saying, "They took everything from me in Vienna... Maybe I will get back two portraits of my poor wife (Klimt) and my portrait" (Müller and Tatzkow 167). When Ferdinand passed away in

1945, he already knew that his late wife's portrait was hanging in the Belvedere. The museum justified this by pointing to Adele's will, written in 1923. However, in 1926, Ferdinand had already clarified matters when he explained that although he was the legal owner of the Klimt paintings, not Adele, he still planned on following her wishes. Yet, as he watched the chaos and horror of WWII unfold around himself and his family, it is understandable that he chose not to follow through with the sentiment (Muller 167-168).

Maria Altmann in America

In December of 1937, Adele's youngest niece, Maria, married Fritz Altmann, an aspiring opera singer. Less than two weeks after their Paris honeymoon, they were evicted from their luxurious new apartment and placed under house arrest for no apparent reason. A mere five months after their wedding, Fritz was arrested and eventually sent to Dachau as a hostage in order to force his protective brother, Bernhard, who had turned their mother's home knitting business into an international company, to sign over all of his assets. He signed. Fritz was little more than an emaciated skeleton when he returned home to his wife (O'Connor 114-131). Immediately after Fritz's release, Bernhard contacted him and Maria, telling them he had organized a way out and to be ready to run. Taking with her Adele's diamond earrings, the only piece that remained of Ferdinand's wedding gift (the Gestapo confiscated her valuables, giving Adele's famous diamond necklace depicted in her portrait to Hermann Goering's wife for her birthday), Maria and Fritz fled with the pretext of going to the dentist. They were supposed to be home by 5:00 pm. To get out, they

needed to take a flight to Cologne, in Germany. Since Austria and Germany were now united, they would be able to do so without paperwork, which was of paramount significance because Fritz had no documents. The couple had a terrifying moment when, after the plane's propeller had already been started, it was shut down, and officials boarded the plane to speak with the flight crew about weather delays (O'Connor 130-132).

Once there, they walked to the house of a Dutch farmer named Jan Honnef, whose land ran along the German border. Jan Honnef and his son, Josef, guided refugees to the border, where they were met by other guides and led to safety. At the border, Maria misheard Jan's whispered instructions and tripped headlong over the barbed wire, certain that she had given them away. Fritz calmly stepped over the fence and helped his wife up. They were led to a small hotel, where Bernhard had already made arrangements for them, then took the train to Amsterdam, where they boarded a plane to Liverpool (O'Connor 132-133).

It was a miracle that they had escaped and survived, and they could hardly believe it themselves. The Nazis were furious when they discovered their escape. Bernhard had managed to move his family, friends, and many factory workers out of Austria, and as a result, the Nazis lost their most valuable hostages. Maria and Fritz were among the last to flee with the aid of the Honnefs. Not long after the Altmanns' escape, the Honnef operation was discovered, and Jan was sent to a Polish concentration camp. He survived, although Josef, who was later sent to Auschwitz, did not (O'Connor 134).

In 1942, Maria and Fritz moved to California, becoming citizens three years later. Maria opened a small clothing boutique and Fritz became Bernhard's West Coast distributor, singing at social events. They had four children (O'Connor 225).

Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I's Rediscovery

Postwar Vienna was struggling to fabricate an excuse for its part in the Holocaust. People were reinventing their pasts, and the stench of secrets blanketed the once-exquisite city. In 1948, the new director of the Belvedere, Karl Garzarolli, had contacted and chastised his predecessor, Bruno Grimschitz, regarding the mess of the Bloch-Bauer Klimts, although the rebuke was for the lack of legal documentation, rather than for the way the paintings had been obtained. Neither Adele's nor Ferdinand's will allowed for the paintings to be sold, and no one had consulted Ferdinand on the matter. It was glaringly obvious to Garzarolli that Adele's last wishes had been disregarded (O'Connor 215-216).

On behalf of Maria's brother, Robert, an attorney and old friend of the Bloch-Bauers named Gustav Rinesch began to investigate a way to reclaim the Klimts. Garzarolli ordered officials to delay Rinesch's requests. The Belvedere told Rinesch that Adele's will gave the paintings to them. They, however, refused to actually show him the will, purportedly because it was misplaced. Instead, they offered a deal in which the Bloch-Bauers would officially "donate" the Klimts to the museum in return for lesser artworks and a quarter of family antique pieces that had been blackmailed off the family during the war. Rinesch thought it was a fantastic deal and he finalized it without the

consent of the family, mentioning in a letter to Robert that museum officials became far friendlier after the deal was agreed upon (O'Connor 216-217).

The Bloch-Bauers were not the only family to be treated unjustly in their claims. Austrian officials dismissed property claims of many exiles, demanding proof of ownership—proof that had been destroyed, stolen, or lost long before. While in Europe, many art owners could claim that they had purchased works “in good faith”; this became increasingly more complicated in the United States where buyers were expected to prove that they had responsibly researched a piece’s history (O'Connor 220, 224). After an art scandal regarding the painting *Portrait of Wally*, which had been stolen during WWII, made world news, Viennese aristocrat and muckraking journalist Hubertus Czernin decided to take a closer look into the origins of the artworks hanging in Austrian museums. He diligently combed through archives that could only be copied by hand before finally striking gold. In February of 1998, Czernin published his first article, and it was precisely what officials had so desperately tried to avoid. The Nazis had carefully categorized and documented their appropriated possessions, and it was coming back to haunt them. Hidden away was information about pillaged art. Buried in secret files was evidence that Austria had knowingly and willingly stolen art, through whatever means necessary. These documents, among others, showed that *The Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* had never been donated at all. Instead, it had been officially, even legally, looted. In addition, museum authorities knew where more stolen art and proof of its macabre past was. The information was out, and there was an uproar (O'Connor 224-225).

Trial for Painting

In October 1998, Austria joined other countries in Washington in an international conference known as the Washington Principles regarding Nazi-stolen property and agreed to investigate the origins of its museum selections. In December of the same year, Austria passed an Art Restitution Act, which specified that uninvestigated property losses, as well as unjust reparations, should now be corrected. As soon as Maria learned about this, she hired Randol Schoenberg, the grandson of famous composer Arnold Schoenberg, as her lawyer to represent her in getting five Klimt paintings (including Adele's portrait) back. They began to work with Czernin (Müller and Tatzkow 169; Kirsta, Par 22).

Then, in 1999, they found Adele's will. Even more incriminating, the letter from Erich Führer "donating" Adele's portrait to the museum was signed "Heil Hitler." Despite the evidence, the Beirat, the Vienna Advisory Council on art restitution, was against returning the Klimts, advising the restitution of a mere sixteen drawings of Adele and twenty pieces of Ferdinand's porcelain. Maria sent a letter to the Beirat, writing that we "are keenly aware of the Gold Portrait's importance as a national treasure. Once the Beirat decides to recognize our legal right to the paintings, we would then be in a position to work out a way with you that leaves the portrait in Vienna" (O'Connor 233). Maria was asking for acknowledgement of the theft. She received no response. Austria rejected Maria's claims to the painting, justifying itself with Adele's will. Until that moment, Maria had been interested in an out-of-court settlement with the Belvedere. Yet, being ignored pushed her to file suit in 2000 in Austria for the return of the

paintings. However, Austrian courts demanded an extraordinary \$1.8 million deposit fee, which Schoenberg was able to negotiate down to \$500,000. Nonetheless, Maria could not afford such exorbitant sums. They dropped the case in Austria. Instead, they filed suit in Los Angeles (O'Connor 235).

In May 2001, Los Angeles federal judge Florence-Marie Cooper ruled that Maria's case could move forward. It would take four years of litigation before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June of 2004 that an American claim could be made against a sovereign nation such as Austria through an exception to the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act ("United States"). Maria was eighty-eight years old at the time. On behalf of her siblings' descendants (the heirs of Ferdinand), in order to speed up the court proceedings, Maria decided to participate in a risky out-of-court arbitration with a panel of Austrian legal experts. The decision of the panel would be final (O'Connor 238, 249-250, Muller 170-171).

In September of 2005, arbitration began. Schoenberg chose one of the panel members, Andreas Noedl; Austria chose the second, Walter Rechberger, dean of the University of Vienna Law School; and the two of them chose the third, Peter Rummel, a distinguished law professor and one-time dean of the faculty of law in Linz. On January 15, 2006, they came to a decision. It had been eight years since Schoenberg had taken up the case. And they had won: the panel unanimously concluded that the paintings should be returned to the Bloch-Bauer heirs and that Austria had no legal claims on the works based on Adele Bloch-Bauer's will (O'Connor 250-252).

Maria explained to the *Los Angeles Times* that she wanted the paintings on public display, “I would not want any private person to buy these paintings. It’s very meaningful to me that they are seen by anybody who wants to see them, because that would have been the wish of my aunt” (Haithman and Reynolds; O’Connor 253). *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* was sold to Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress and owner of the Neue Galerie, in June of 2006 for the (unconfirmed) staggering price of \$135 million or roughly €163.4 million, making it the most expensive painting in the world at the time (“US Dollars”). It hangs in the Neue Galerie New York where the public may view it. The other paintings restituted, *Adele II*, *Hauser in Unterach am Attersee*, *Apfelbaum I*, and *Birkenwald/Buchenwald*, were sold to private collectors for a total of \$192.7 million (O’Connor 253; Müller and Tatzkow 171).

The Big Picture

Although Adele’s portrait has a history worth telling, its circumstances are, unfortunately, not unique. Adele’s story is part of a much larger theft. According to Stuart E. Eizenstat, a senior advisor in the State Department and the man who represented the United States at the Washington Principles, approximately 600,000 paintings were stolen during the Holocaust and at least one-sixth remain missing (Eizenstat). Of forty-four countries represented at the Washington Principles, some, such as Hungary, Poland, Russia, Spain, and Italy, comply with the terms of the international conference in words only, decrying the mass acts of larceny, yet doing little, if anything, to restitute stolen property that remains in their museums (Cohan). Their defenses range from the claim that the art is held in private museums that have no

obligation to be compliant with the Washington Principles (Spain) to not releasing research regarding provenance (Russia and Italy) to maintaining that property left behind by Jews fleeing the country had the right to be nationalized (Hungary) (Cohan).

The ERR (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*) was the Nazi unit in charge of appropriating and destroying artworks. They carefully documented selected pieces, including information about the artist, dimensions, and sometimes photographs, and organized them by the last names of their previous owners. Item cards were then stamped to indicate the next destination, such as Hitler's pride and joy, the planned *Führermuseum* in Linz (which was never built), or Goering's private art collection. "Lesser" works were often sold to finance the Third Reich. Some art pieces were stolen to place in a museum of "degenerate" art; others were hidden away in private collections. Of the works intended for the *Führermuseum*, many were kept deep within salt mines and caves (for their stable conditions, perfect for storing delicate artwork) until they could be hung in Hitler's museum. Ironically enough, the diligent recording of art looting by the Nazis has helped reunite stolen property with its lawful owners, although pieces continue to be discovered and their legal battles for return continue to be fought (Rothfeld).

Antagonistic Feeling in Vienna

After the conclusion of arbitration to return the Klimt paintings, there was a nationwide integrity crisis in Austria, with various plans to "save" the paintings. As the paintings' departure loomed, the Österreichische Galerie was filled with people wanting to see the Klimt portraits. One man even threatened to deface the paintings rather than

let them leave the country, expressing the anger and disappointment many people felt when the government did not try to buy back the paintings. Elisabeth Gehrler, the culture minister at the time, explained why Austria had no hope of purchasing back the paintings: “Seventy million euros [roughly half the price paid for just *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*] amounts to the whole budget for all museums in Austria. This means that we are not financially able to make purchases here” (Kirsta).

Conclusion

The Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I is unusual for Nazi-looted works in that it was returned to its lawful heirs. When Randol Schoenberg and Maria Altmann won the lawsuit for restitution of the paintings, the microcosm of propagators, victims, legal experts, and art lovers was shocked. It was rare that an art restitution case, especially one involving the work of Vienna’s painting master, “King” Klimt, would succeed given that some countries and museums complicit in the thievery simply wanted to forge ahead and dismiss what had occurred. Adele’s portrait is a gripping masterpiece, created by a legend, and has earned its place in art history for its enigmatic past. It represents so much: a woman, a family, a war, and the Holocaust. Maybe, just maybe, it represents some form of justice too. While there is no way that the painting’s return can neutralize or overcome the horrors faced by the Bloch-Bauer family, perhaps its successful restitution may serve as a reminder to the world—to remember.

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