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VMFA Board of Trustees Votes to Return Nazi-Looted Painting

Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas of Tolentino and Sebastian to be returned to heir of Dutch art dealer Jacques Goudstikker

Richmond, Virginia – The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ Board of Trustees voted today to deaccession *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas of Tolentino and Sebastian* so that it can be returned to Marei von Saher, sole heir of noted Jewish art dealer Jacques Goudstikker. The painting was among a group of more than 1,200 artworks looted in 1940 by Adolf Hitler’s chief deputy, Hermann Göring, commander-in-chief of the German Luftwaffe and one of the most powerful figures in the Nazi party that ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. Göring seized the Goudstikker gallery holdings within weeks of the dealer’s decision to flee the Netherlands by sea with his family in advance of the German invasion.



Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas of Tolentino and Sebastian, mid-1510s, Master of the Risen Magdalen, 15 x 11 ¾ in.

“The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is pleased to return this painting to Marei von Saher, the painting’s rightful heir and owner,” said VMFA Director Alex Nyerges. “It is simply the right thing to do.”

Goudstikker died in an accident on board the ship, while his family reached safety, still in possession of the log books cataloging most of the artworks left behind, including *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas of Tolentino and Sebastian*. After the war, in May 1945, Allied forces found the painting among a group of artworks recovered from Göring’s secret repository in Berchtesgaden, a German town in the Bavarian Alps near the Austrian border. The painting was returned to Dutch authorities in April 1946 with the expectation they would then return it to the Goudstikker family. Instead, the Dutch government sold it to an unknown buyer through Muller & Cie auction house in Amsterdam. It appeared again in another sale at Muller & Cie in 1956 and was purchased by Pieter de Boer and Frederick Mont. It was brought to Newhouse Galleries in New York in 1957 and purchased in good faith by VMFA in 1958.

In 2006, the Dutch government’s Restitutions Committee agreed to return to von Saher all 200 of the Göring-looted artworks still in its possession after the Goudstikker family filed claims for the looted artworks. If *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas of*

Tolentino and Sebastian had still been in the Dutch government’s custody at the time, it would also have been returned to von Saher.

The painting dates from the mid-1510s. Formerly attributed to Lorenzo Costa, it has now been reattributed to the Master of the Risen Magdalen. The work features an enthroned Virgin in robes of red and blue with the Christ child on her lap. Flanking the Virgin and Christ child are Saints Nicholas of Tolentino and Sebastian.

Ms. von Saher has amicably resolved claims to dozens of artworks that were looted from the Goudstikker gallery and subsequently found in private collections and museums. “I would like to thank the VMFA’s Board of Trustees for agreeing to return this painting to me and the VMFA’s staff for their careful attention to the claim,” von Saher said. “It is always gratifying when an institution like the VMFA recognizes the importance of returning Nazi-looted artworks to their rightful owners.”

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The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 40,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, and French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.