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VMFA TO RETURN PAINTING LOOTED BY NAZIS TO DESCENDANT OF RIGHTFUL POLISH OWNERS

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Portrait of a Courtier, 16th century, by Jan Mostaert (Flemish, circa 1475-1555); oil on panel; 16-1/2 by 12-3/4 inches; Gift of Mrs. A. D. Williams. (Photo by Katherine Wetzel, © 2005 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has determined that a painting that has been in its collection since 1949 was confiscated in 1941 from its rightful owners in Poland by Nazi forces.

VMFA's trustees today voted to deaccession and transfer the painting to the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, which is acting on behalf of Adam Count Zamoyski, the representative of the rightful owners' descendants. The painting will be deposited on behalf of the family in the Princes Czartoryski Museum in Krakow, Poland.

"VMFA has made the proper and fair decision in deaccessioning the painting and returning it to Poland," says VMFA's director, Dr. Michael Brand.

Dr. Boguslaw Winid, chargé d'affaires at the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C., says, "We are extremely grateful to VMFA for its efforts to address the issue of looted and displaced works of art, conducted according to the highest standards of scholarship and in the spirit of upholding the principles of public trust, openness and transparency. The Polish government and art community perceive this decision as yet another important step in the process of reconstituting our national cultural heritage."

The painting, by Flemish artist Jan Mostaert (circa 1475-1555), is a small 16th-century oil-on-panel portrait measuring 16½ by 12¾ inches. It was given to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts by Mrs. A. D. Williams of Richmond in 1949. Mrs. Williams died in 1950, and, following her husband's death in 1952, the portrait was delivered to the museum. She had purchased the portrait in March of 1948 from Newhouse Galleries in New York.

The painting is known to have had at least three distinct titles. *Duc de Burgundy*, *Portrait of Charles VIII* (Charles VIII, who also held the title Duke of Burgundy, ruled France from 1483 to 1498) and *Portrait of a Courtier*.

Mostaert was court painter to Margaret of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands, and is known to have made portraits of her courtiers. Many of his paintings were destroyed during the Great Fire of Haarlem in 1576, and little more is known of the details of his career.

The portrait is known to have been in the Czartoryski family collection in the Goluchów Castle Museum in Poland as early as 1890. The castle was built around 1650, but in the late 19th century the Czartoryski family re-envisioned it not only as a residence but also as a museum. The portrait is listed in an 1890 inventory of the museum and in Goluchów Castle Museum guidebooks published in 1913 and 1929. Nothing further is known about its provenance.

In 1939, aware that war loomed, Duchess Maria Ludwika Czatoryska transferred the portrait, along with 18 crates of the castle's other most-valuable objects, to Warsaw, where they were hidden.

In 1941, the Nazis learned of the secret location of the Goluchów collection and confiscated it. In 1942, the portrait was catalogued and photographed by the Nazis. VMFA has fully examined the extensive documentation received from Polish archives and has compared the 1942 photograph to the painting now in its collection, and they match, according to Karen Daly, VMFA's senior assistant registrar and administrator of Nazi-era provenance research.

Following the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the painting was transferred by SS *Obersturmführer* Benno von Arent to the castle of Fischhorn in Austria. Nothing further is known of the portrait's whereabouts until it surfaced in 1948 at Newhouse Galleries. A spokesman for the gallery has told VMFA researchers that it has no records regarding the painting. When the gallery sold the painting to Mrs.

Williams, the provenance was indicated as "An important European Collection."

In the late 1990s, VMFA began to intensively research works in its collections that had provenance gaps during the Nazi era. The renewed emphasis on the issue followed guidelines issued by the American Association of Museum in 1998 and the Association of Art Museum Directors in 2001.

As part of the museum's ongoing Nazi-era provenance research project, VMFA staff researched the Mostaert painting in the fall of 2004 and subsequently found an entry on the Polish Embassy's on-line catalogue of wartime losses that directly corresponded to the portrait. The on-line catalogue included a digital reproduction and description of the portrait, which it documented as having been missing since 1941.

VMFA wrote to the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in October of 2004 to inform officials there of its findings regarding the painting by Mostaert.

Charlotte Minor, president of the VMFA board, said, "The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts board of trustees appreciates the assistance of the Polish Embassy in the return of this painting to the Czarotorski family."

The portrait is the second to be deaccessioned and returned to its rightful owners by VMFA. In May of 2004, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts board of trustees voted to deaccession a 16th-century French painting, "Portrait of Jean d'Albon," and return it to the heirs of the late Austrian collector Julius Priester, from whom it is believed to have been stolen by the Gestapo in 1944.

VMFA, the World Affairs Council of Greater Richmond and the Virginia Holocaust Museum will present a panel discussion, *Redressing History: Museums and the Nazi Legacy of Looted Art*, on Oct. 6, 2005, at 6 pm in the VMFA auditorium. Admission is free, although tickets must be obtained in advance by telephoning 804.340.1405. Additional details on the panel discussion are available on the museum's Web site at www.vmfa.state.va.us.

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