



US RETURNS GERMAN ART

ONE OF THE MOST widely-traveled collections of paintings in the world is scheduled to be back again in its home country of Germany by next spring.

For generations this collection — scattered all over Germany during the war, reassembled, sent to the United States, exhibited across the nation and now partially returned — had been reposing quietly and safely in the former Prussian State Museums in Berlin. The paintings were organized by the kings of Prussia in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries although acquisitions were made until the end of the war.

The museums, until they were destroyed by war, comprised one of the greatest museum complexes in the world. They contained nearly 3,000,000 objects of art. Not all of these, of course, were of great importance. Many formed parts of the so-called study collections of artifacts, from excavations, gatherings of ethnological material and so on.

Nevertheless, their best works compared favorably with those in the Louvre and the Vatican. They were especially rich in materials from the northern European countries — Holland, Belgium and Germany — but they also had great masterpieces from the Renaissance and earlier of Italy and France, as well as magnificent collections of Egyptian, Assyrian, Oriental, Greek and Roman antiquities.

DURING THE WAR Hitler believed that to evacuate this material would be a sign of weakness. He in-

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sisted that the museums keep their precious objects in Berlin up to the very end. As early as November 1943, the heavy air raids began to damage the buildings, so places within the city which were considered safe were selected for the more important objects. During the next two years, the group of eleven buildings was repeatedly hit by high explosives and by fire bombs and on March 11, 1945, one of the vaults in which many precious objects were kept in the so-called Old Mint Building, was destroyed by a high explosive bomb which had remained dormant in the masonry for some time. Finally it was decided to evacuate as much as possible to places of safekeeping outside the city.

The staff of the museum worked steadily day and night for about two months, most of the time under fire from aircraft, and moved the vast wealth of the museums to mines and other repositories in the country. One of the biggest repositories was the Merkers mine in Thuringia, where

Arrival of the art at the Wiesbaden Collecting Point is shown in the above photographs. (left) Comdr. Keith Merrill, in charge of the transportation, checks each crate. (center) Armed MP's guard the transfer. (right) A case of paintings is moved into the collecting point with great care.

most of the pictures were placed. Vast quantities of other objects went to Grasleben near Helmstedt and a number of other places.

Because of Hitler's unrealistic policy of providing late and haphazard protection, more than 350,000 objects, including a number of very important ones, were destroyed. Part of this destruction occurred after the occupation of Berlin when careless and curious people set the interior of the anti-aircraft tower in the Friedrichshain on fire. About 1,500,000 objects remained in Berlin, and although in complete confusion, they were safe.

BETWEEN the occupation of Berlin and May 1946, however, the Soviet Trophy Commission systematically removed some 800,000 or 900,000 of these objects.

Of those which were evacuated westward the British authorities recovered from Grasleben and elsewhere almost 70,000. These objects, consisting mostly of ethnological items and prints and drawings, are now safe in the Celle Castle, north of Brunswick in the British Zone. The task of making complete inventories and caring for these objects, which were packed in hundreds of boxes, has occupied the British MFA&A officers for the past three years and represents a great responsibility which they are willingly undertaking.

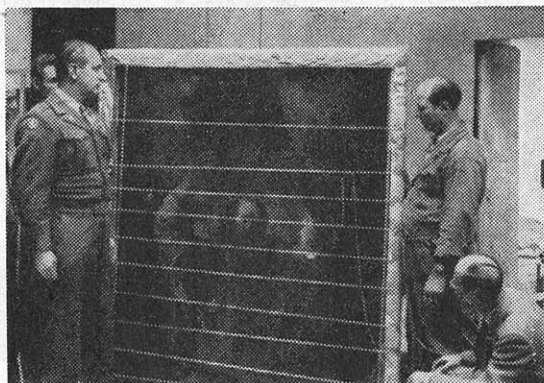
Another 200,000 objects were found by the MFA&A officers attached to the advancing US Third Army at the Merkers mine. Although smaller in number than the other groups discovered,

this cache was probably the richest and perhaps even equal in value to all the rest put together. Since the mine was not a good repository for things of such great beauty and value, they were promptly evacuated to a collecting point established by MFA&A in one of the buildings of the University of Marburg, and later were moved to Wiesbaden or Munich.

In mid-summer of 1945, it was decided that there was a danger in keeping these objects in Germany and a plan was formulated to remove the most important objects to the United States for safekeeping. It should be clearly understood that this plan never contemplated retaining works of art in America, since this would be completely contrary to the principles of international law.

EVENTUALLY it was decided that only a token shipment should be made, since the repairs in the collecting points proceeded faster and with more safety and security than was originally thought possible. In December 1945, some 200 of the finest pictures were selected to be shipped. At the time of the shipment a solemn promise was made in the name of the President of the United States that these pictures, clearly recognized as German property and associated with the entire German nation, would at the proper time be returned.

The pictures were selected with great care to present the cream of the collections of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum and the National Gallery, two of the subsidiary galleries of the former Prussian State Museums. They were examined meticulously, carefully photographed and complete descriptions written of their condition. The descriptions included every tiny crack and blister and damage which had ever been done to these pictures, and all restoration which had been done upon them in the past; exact sizes, materials of which they were made, the conditions of the frames and of the cradling on the back of wooden panels, and every detail which experts felt was necessary for



Rembrandt's "Moses Showing the Tables of the Law" is inspected by Mr. Richard F. Howard (left), author of this article, and Mr. Theodore A. Heimrich (lower right), chief of MFA&A Section, OMG for Hesse.

identification and proper preservation of these paintings.

The actual movement was accomplished with great secrecy and the paintings were accompanied on their journey by Col. Harry A. McBride, administrator of the National Gallery in Washington, Comdr Keith Merrill and Lt. Lamont Morre, who had been connected with their protection from the beginning. There also was a complete armed guard. The paintings went by ship, packed in great boxes, padded, braced and watched-over like eggs.

Upon their arrival at New York, they were transferred again with the greatest of care to the new air-conditioned special picture vaults of the National Gallery in Washington. For the next two years they remained there under the eyes of the experts of that gallery. Only accredited scholars were permitted to see them. The protection of the paintings was considered a sacred trust.

A CONTROVERSY arose in the United States concerning these pictures after it became generally known that they were there. Many persons felt, on one hand, that they should never have been brought to America; many others felt that since they were there they should be placed on exhibition so that they could be seen by the public; a few persons got

the idea that they were German loot and ought to be kept by the United States. But in general museum authorities and others interested in the arts understood that that the pictures were part of the cultural heritage of the Germans and when conditions permitted they should and would be returned.

Last spring it was decided that the time for their return had arrived. The original plan was to return all the pictures at once. However, such an extraordinary public interest was aroused in America concerning these pictures that Congress itself took part in the discussions, and finally a plan was worked out whereby the 50 most fragile would be returned to Germany immediately, but that all of them would be exhibited in the exhibition halls of the National Gallery before any shipment.

NATURALLY every museum in the country that could afford to show such a collection wished to exhibit the rest, and a schedule was made including eight or nine of the great museums of the nation. It was further decided that a second 50 (those which arrived back in Germany at the end of September) would be shipped after three of these exhibitions, while the remaining 100 would be shown throughout the country until the spring of 1949.

This compromise was arranged after experts said that the most fragile wooden panels and canvases could not stand the repeated shipments from place to place, the great changes in temperature and humidity and the other dangers of a traveling exhibition. There were no objections on the part of the experts or authorities to the principle of showing the pictures in the United States, and the compromise was based entirely on the belief that some pictures would be endangered by these journeys.

Wherever possible an admission charge has been made and the gross proceeds are to be devoted to a fund for milk and other food for German

Photography by Miss Eva-Maria Czako
Official Photographer, Wiesbaden Collecting Point



Holbein's celebrated portrait of the London merchant, George Giszze, is on exhibit at the Landesmuseum in Wiesbaden with the masterpieces returned by the United States. (upper right) Dr. Kurt Martin, director of the Karlsruhe Kunsthalle (art gallery), who accompanied part of the US tour as an expert for the Department of the Army, examines a "Crucifixion" by the early Flemish master, Robert Campin, immediately after its unpacking. (lower right) Ruben's "Andromeda" being unpacked at the Wiesbaden Collecting Point following return from United States.



children. The success of these exhibition has been phenomenal. In the National Gallery more than a million persons crowded through to look at them in the five weeks during which they were shown. Similar crowds have gone through the galleries of the Metropolitan in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Before they finish their journeys, these pictures will have been seen by more persons than ever looked at one group of pictures before. And a very considerable fund will have been raised for food for supplemen-

tary feeding of German children. The National Gallery of Art in Washington is holding funds amounting to \$94,638.48, from exhibits of the art collection in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Additional showings will probably bring the total amount to \$150,000.

The first group of the pictures to be returned to Germany arrived on the US Army Transport General Patrick in May, 1948. Accompanying them were again Colonel McBride and Commander Merrill and a guard from Washington Military Post.

During the entire trip across the ocean two soldiers and one officer

were constantly on duty. The pictures were placed in a special room made of plywood, set into one of the hatches of the ship. This room was fitted with electric lights and fans, so that guards could keep watch on the temperature and humidity, and by varying the heat and the fans, could control it. They were padded with hundreds of army blankets and braced in such a way that no movement was possible.

PARTLY because of the alertness of the guards and escorts, this shipment was made without the slightest incident. They were met at Bremen by the chief of MFA&A

for OMGUS, an a special steel baggage car an a sleeper for the escort was moved directly to the shipside so that the pictures were brought with the minimum of difficulty into the car. As they went across the gang-plank each one was photographed showing the seals on the boxes.

They were placed in the baggage car and again padded and braced and the two cars were attached to the regular Frankfurt-Munich train. They arrived in Munich the next day and were met in the rain by the MFA&A officer for Bavaria, Mr. H. S. Leonard, with trucks and an MP escort to take them to the collecting point in Munich. There they were unpacked and again given the most careful examination.

Greatly to the satisfaction of everyone concerned, it could be stated that no appreciable change in their condition had occurred during the entire time that they were away. The restorer of the Bavarian State Museum, the director general of the Bavarian Museum and the entire MFA&A staff, as well as Colonel McBride and Commander Merrill satisfied themselves of this fact. A few days later they were placed on exhibition in the gallery of the Haus der Kunst, operated by the Bavarian State Picture Collection.

At the opening of this exhibition, General Lucius D. Clay, the US Military Governor, pointed out his great satisfaction that these pictures were being returned to Germany and his hope that they would represent one more step in the exchange of the highest cultural ideals between Germany and the United States. The minister president of Bavaria, Dr. Hans Ehard, observed at the ceremony that only a country with high conscience and noble purpose would be capable of such a gesture. Maj. Gen. George P. Hays, Deputy Military Governor, reviewed the adventures of the pictures and pointed out the significance of this return both for international law and international good-will. The pictures remained on exhibition in Munich until Sept. 1 and the Bavarian people crowded to

see them almost to the same extent that people had in the United States.

In THE MIDDLE of September, the pictures were taken to Wiesbaden and given into the custody of the minister president of Hesse who had already accepted the responsibility for the other thousand pictures and 200,000 objects belonging to the former Prussian Museums. They have been placed on exhibition in the Landesmuseum at Wiesbaden together with the second increment, so that about 100 pictures have been on display beginning Oct. 18. They will remain on exhibition there for at least two months.

Once again this exhibition calls attention to the good faith of the United States in returning the pictures, and emphasizes the great responsibility of the government of Hesse in accepting these pictures and other works of art into their trusteeship.

There are considerable difficulties presented by this responsibility. The Prussian state no longer exists, the buildings of the museums in Berlin are badly battered, and political difficulties are obvious. But these objects of art are a major portion of the cultural heritage of all Germany and

Germany External Assets Clarified

An article on German-owned foreign assets, appearing on page 18 of the *Information Bulletin*, Issue No. 142 of Aug. 24, indicated that assets totaling \$25,000,000 have been uncovered by MG investigations since July 1, 1947.

Property Division, OMGUS, points out that this figure is the result of proof of the existence of certain contested cases only, and represents but a small fraction of the total value of German external assets.

It should therefore not be regarded as a total figure for German assets abroad, as might have been understood from a reading only of the headline to the story.

consequently must be treated as a solemn responsibility, in addition to their almost incredible monetary value.

It is difficult to estimate money values of works of art, especially on such a scale, but it has been calculated that in round numbers the responsibility of the Hessian State for works of art coming from the former Prussian State Museums is several hundred million dollars.



Checking the crates of paintings aboard the "General Sulton" as it docked at Bremerhaven are Comdr. Keith Merrill (center) and Mr. Richard Howard (right).
(US Army Signal Corps photo)