JDCRP History:

Assembling Internationally Dispersed Documents

The need for centralized information on cultural objects stolen largely from Jewish owners during the Nazi era has been acknowledged since the end of World War II. However, it was only in 1998, with 44 countries' endorsement of the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, and the development in subsequent years of more advanced computer technology, that this became a real possibility. Initially, the focus was on collecting national registries of Holocaust-era cultural plunder and information on the collections known to be in government museums, but some international sources of information were established. [1]

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the World Jewish Restitution Organization became concerned that sight of the much larger picture of the spread of movable cultural property around the world was being lost, and the decision was made to return to the original archives of the theft, beginning with the records of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), the main Nazi looting agency. This took time to do, but by 2010 identification and scanning of the principal collections of ERR archives were in place. This research led to the open access Database of Art Objects at the Jeu-de-Paume, bringing together, for the first time in searchable form, the original registration cards and photographs of art objects taken from Jews in German-occupied

France and, to a lesser extent, in Belgium. With the international help of numerous archival partners, the database made it possible to see what was taken, from whom, and the fate of the objects for an important part of the vast seizure of cultural property that was integral to the Holocaust. [2]

Interest in the creation of a larger-scale database was spurred by the development of provenance research, important restitution cases, and increasing public interest in looted art, boosted by the 2012 discovery of the Gurlitt trove of artworks from one of Hitler's former art dealers. In 2016, representatives of the main relevant archives and art history institutions in Western Europe and the United States met in Paris to discuss a broader initiative, based on the experience of the Database of Art Objects at the Jeu-de-Paume. As a result, by the end of 2019, the Claims Conference and the Commission for Art Recovery established the Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project (JDCRP) as a separate foundation, headquartered in Berlin. [3]

The project began with an EU co-funded pilot project on the Adolphe Schloss collection, which had been seized by representatives of both Nazi Germany and Vichy France. This work demonstrated digital possibilities for linked archival information to trace the history of the looters and looting agencies and the lives of the owners, as well as the fate of the individual objects. It also showed the need for balance between handling massive amounts of archival data and the examination of individual cases. [4]

The Foundation compiles archival information on the robbery of Jewish-owned cultural assets and enables cross-archival searches for information on the document level. The organization has a comprehensive transnational agenda that includes research and educational material to give context and meaning to the documents, to highlight the scope and impact of the theft, and to foster an innovative entry point into Holocaust education.

The Foundation recaptures vanished histories and reclaims
European Jewish fates from obscurity. In doing so, it helps restore
the history of European Jewish culture and identity, deepening
understanding of the integral role of cultural theft in genocide.













