

JENŐ VIDA

(1872–1945)

by *Andrea Dunai*

Executive Summary

Jenő Vida (1872–1945) was one of Hungary’s most prominent Jewish industrialists, philanthropists, and art collectors during the interwar period. As chairman and CEO of the Hungarian General Coalmine Company (MÁK Rt.), Vida played a central role in Hungary’s industrial modernization, particularly in the electrification of the country and the strategic development of bauxite-based cement production. His economic influence was matched by his extensive public service and charitable engagement, most notably as chairman of the Pest Jewish Community Orphanage, which he led through the political and economic crises following the First World War.

Vida was also a significant private collector of Hungarian art. His Budapest villa at 13–15 Bérc Street housed an extensive collection of paintings by leading Hungarian masters, including Mihály Munkácsy, László Paál, László Mednyánszky, Pál Szinyei-Merse, and others, as well as valuable carpets and furniture.



Image: Jenő Vida (1872-1945) - Source: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár

Following the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, Vida and his family were among the first prominent Jews arrested. While most family members survived the war in hiding, the seventy-two-year-old Jenő Vida was deported to Auschwitz, where he died on January 5, 1945.¹ His villa was requisitioned by the SS as well as police forces, and its contents were looted.

After the war, a substantial part of Vida’s art collection was traced to Vienna and returned to Hungary through Allied restitution mechanisms. Nevertheless, due to bureaucratic obstruction, shifting postwar legislation, and the family’s forced emigration, most of the artworks were ultimately nationalized by the Hungarian state. The collection displayed in the Bérc Street villa included numerous works by Mihály Munkácsy, that would later become central to postwar restitution disputes. Only a small portion was returned decades later, while the majority remain in Hungarian public collections without acknowledgment of Vida’s fate as a Holocaust victim.

¹ Jeni Vida entry in The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/names/5787248>, accessed January 24, 2026.

Biographical Background

Jenő Vida (Weil) was born on August 30, 1872, in Budapest, Hungary, to Dávid Weil and his mother Berta Weil nee Schulhof. His upbringing was modest and marked by poverty.

By 1890, Jenő Vida began his training as a merchant and eventually graduated from the Budapest Commercial Academy. After completing his studies, he began his career as an apprentice at the Grünwald and Partners distillery, on whose behalf he often traveled to the East to create a market for Hungarian spirits.

By the early twentieth century, he had risen to the top ranks of Hungary's industrial elite as chairman and chief executive officer of the Hungarian General Coalmine Company (MÁK Rt.). During his leadership, the company identified the strategic importance of bauxite for cement production and expanded into new industrial fields at a time when electrification was spreading across Hungary.

During Vida's professional peak years, Hungary underwent a period of electrification: power supply companies were being established one after the other, and Vida played a key role in their foundation as well. In recognition of his achievements, Regent Miklós Horthy awarded him the title of Royal Chief Economic Adviser in 1922 and he was appointed a permanent member of the Upper House of Parliament.² With an annual income of 10 million Pengő, Vida was among the wealthiest individuals in the country and a trusted member of Horthy's inner advisory circle. Vida's professional and public work, as well as his charitable endeavors, received widespread public recognition during the period of national consolidation.



Image: Miklós Horthy (1930)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Mikl%C3%B3s_Horthy#/media/File:Horthy_Mikl%C3%B3s_1930.jpg [public domain]

Alongside his professional career, Vida was deeply involved in Jewish communal life. In 1914, he was elected chairman of the orphanage of the Pest Jewish Community, an institution housing approximately 1,500 boys.³ Vida assumed leadership at a time of crisis, marked by World War I, revolutions, and economic collapse. The endowment sustaining the orphanage had lost much of its value, and community donations had sharply declined. Through sustained financial support and

² Dr. Éva Ravasz, *Emlékezés Vida Jenőre* [Remembering Jenő Vida] (1872-1945), "Bányászati és Kohászati Lapok – Bányászat," 1-7 (2008): 26-28.

³ *Magyar Hírlap*, 3 December 1929, p. 8.

administrative leadership, Vida led the institution out of crisis. Chief Rabbi István Schmelczer later described him as “the right man in the right place.”⁴ Vida’s financial support was so significant that the school was eventually named after him.

Art Collecting and Cultural Environment

In the late 1920s, Jenő Vida and his wife Irén Krishaber,⁵ born in 1878, built a two-story villa at 13–15 Bérc Street in Budapest. They moved in with their daughter Gabriella, their son Paul, and their respective spouses as well as their grandchildren. Jenő Vida’s son-in-law, István Perényi (1892-1987)⁶ served as the managing director of the Hungarian General Credit Bank.



Image: Dohány Street Synagogue in Pest, built in 1854–1859 by the Neolog Jewish community. One of the largest synagogues in the world, today it serves as the main synagogue of Budapest, ca. 1870. <https://encyclopedia.vivo.org/media/726> (accessed January 13, 2026)



Image: The villa today - Source: CC BY-SA 4.0

The villa embodied the family’s secure bourgeois prosperity, showcasing Jenő Vida’s deep appreciation for paintings. By the interwar years, works by French Impressionists, post-Impressionists, and Old Masters had become largely unaffordable for Hungarian collectors. Like many of his contemporaries, Vida therefore focused on Hungarian art, assembling a collection that reflected national artistic achievement. The walls were adorned with paintings by major Hungarian artists, including Munkácsy, Paál, Benczúr, Szinyei Merse, Székely, and Mednyánszky. Antique Persian and Aubusson carpets covered the parquet floors, while baroque-style furniture and decorative objects filled the

⁴ Dr. Izsák Schmelczer, *A hatvanéves finárvaház* [The sixty-year-old orphanage], “Magyar-Zsidó Szemle,” 47 (1930): 15-18.

⁵ Entry for Jenone Vida, Holocaust Survivors and Victims Database, https://secure.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=5954712, accessed January 12, 2026.

⁶ István Perényi in MyHeritage Family Trees, <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-1-OYYV6KIKS2WQB6IDJTOYOZ45L6G4UZQ-1-250/istvan-perenyi-in-myheritage-family-trees>, accessed January 13, 2026.

rooms. From the terrace, the family enjoyed a panoramic view of the Danube and the city below.

Escalating Persecution



Image: Hungarian Slave Labor Service 1939. Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történeti Fénykeptár, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/photo/hungarian-labor-service>, accessed January 13, 2026.

In 1939, following the enactment of Hungary's Second Anti-Jewish Law⁷, Vida's son Paul emigrated to Argentina with his wife and young daughter. In 1941, after the Third Anti-Jewish Law⁸ came into force, Jenő Vida resigned from his position as chairman and CEO of the Hungarian General Coalmine Company, although he remained a member of a parliamentary committee in the Upper House.⁹

Despite this resignation, his continued public presence drew the attention of the German authorities. In April 1943, German ambassador Dietrich von Jagow¹⁰ sent a telegram from Budapest to Berlin expressing dismay that Jews such as Vida were still serving on parliamentary committees, noting that "the Hungarian government does not intend to follow the line we represent in the Jewish question."¹¹

⁷ Act 1939: IV "Act on the Restriction of the Economic and Social Advancement of Jews".

⁸ Act 1941: XV "Act on marriage and racial protection provisions".

⁹ Dr. Éva Ravasz, *Emlékezés Vida Jenőre [Remembering Jenő Vida]* (1872-1945), "Bányászati és Kohászati Lapok – Bányászat," 1-7 (2008): 26-28.

¹⁰ <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz38885.html>, accessed January 13, 2026.

¹¹ Antal Czettler, *Magyar ellenállás a német „végső megoldás” tervével szemben 1942-1943-ban* [Hungarian Resistance to the German Plans for a "Final Solution" in 1942-43], "Magyar Szemle," 5-6 (1999): 66-91. To access the document, see: MNL OL (Hungarian National Archives) XIX-L-2-o 41.box.

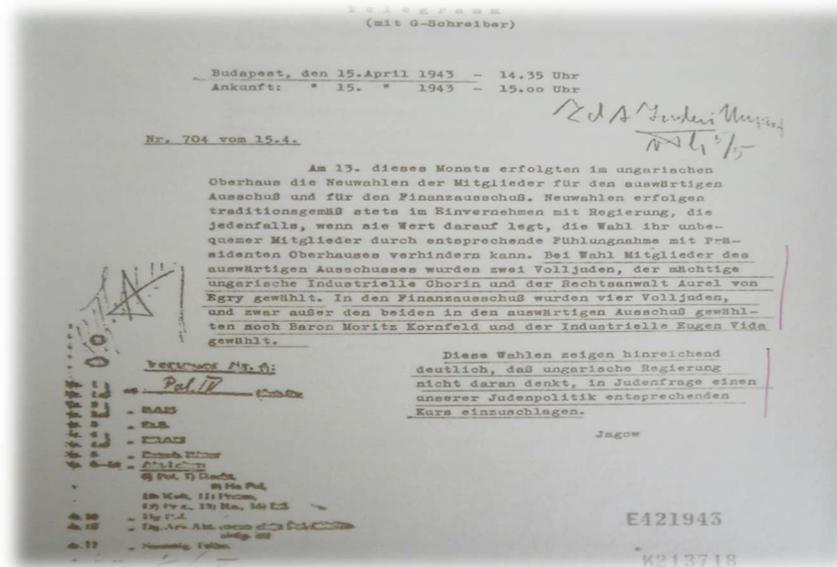


Image: The telegram - Source: MNL OL XIX-L-2-o 41.b.

After the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, the persecution of Hungarian Jews, and of Vida’s family specifically, accelerated: Vida’s family was among the first prominent Jewish families targeted. According to family testimony, the Gestapo arrived at the Bérc Street villa on March 21, 1944, and the family was given one hour to leave. They were “permitted” to take only a handbag or two and subsequently transported to the internment camp at Kistarcsa.¹²

All family members except Jenő Vida were later released and survived the remainder of the war in hiding, sheltered by Christian relatives and acquaintances. The seventy-two-year-old Vida, however, was deported to Auschwitz. He died there shortly after the camp’s liberation in 1945.¹³

Around March 21, 1944, Colonel-General Otto Winkelmann, commander-in-chief of the German SS and police forces in Hungary, quartered himself and his staff in the Vida villa on Bérc Street.



Image: Vida’s house – original condition –Source: LAB B Rep. 025-08 Nr. 2813/1959 1

¹² Alexandra Lohse, “Kistarcsa,” Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos: Hungary, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1353/document.3830>, accessed January 13, 2026.

¹³ MNL OL XIX-J-12 1.box.

From their base in the Vida family villa, Winkelmann and his team played a key role in the deportation of Hungarian Jews until September 1944. During the siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944–45, Winkelmann and his staff fled the city.¹⁴

When surviving family members returned in the spring of 1945, they found the villa damaged and looted. Furniture was dismantled, upholstery removed, drawers missing from desks, the *Bösendorfer* piano broken, and children’s beds left without mattresses.¹⁵

Postwar Claims and Restitution Efforts

In November 1945, István Perényi, Jenő Vida’s son-in-law, submitted a claim to the Government Committee for Hungarian National Property Relocated Abroad. The family’s attached inventory listed sixty paintings, including works by Munkácsy, Mednyánszky, Szinyei, Paál, and Mészöly.¹⁶



Image: Vida’s house – original condition –Source: LAB B Rep. 025-08 Nr. 2813/1959 2

Concurrently, the Hungarian government requested the extradition of Winkelmann, who was at the time imprisoned in the American Zone, to testify in the trials of Hungarian war criminals. In the course of his preliminary interrogation, Winkelmann was also questioned about Bérc Street and reportedly admitted that the paintings had been packed by Jewish forced laborers and transported to Germany around Christmas 1944. He stated that the shipment had reached Vienna, where Captain Schmidt handed the paintings over to a museum and received a receipt.¹⁷

¹⁴ https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03328/00013/pdf/EPA03328_szazadok_2015-1_001-032.pdf, accessed January 21, 2026.

¹⁵ MNL OL XIX-J-12 1.box.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ ÁBTL (Historical Archives of State Security Services) 3.1.9. V-146008.

By the summer of 1946, the Hungarian Restitution Mission, led by László Varvasovszky, had been operating in Vienna. The mission focused on tracing and recovering Hungarian property that had been taken to Austria during the final month of the war. By 1946, most of the museums in the Austrian capital had reopened to the public, eager to welcome visitors long deprived of culture.

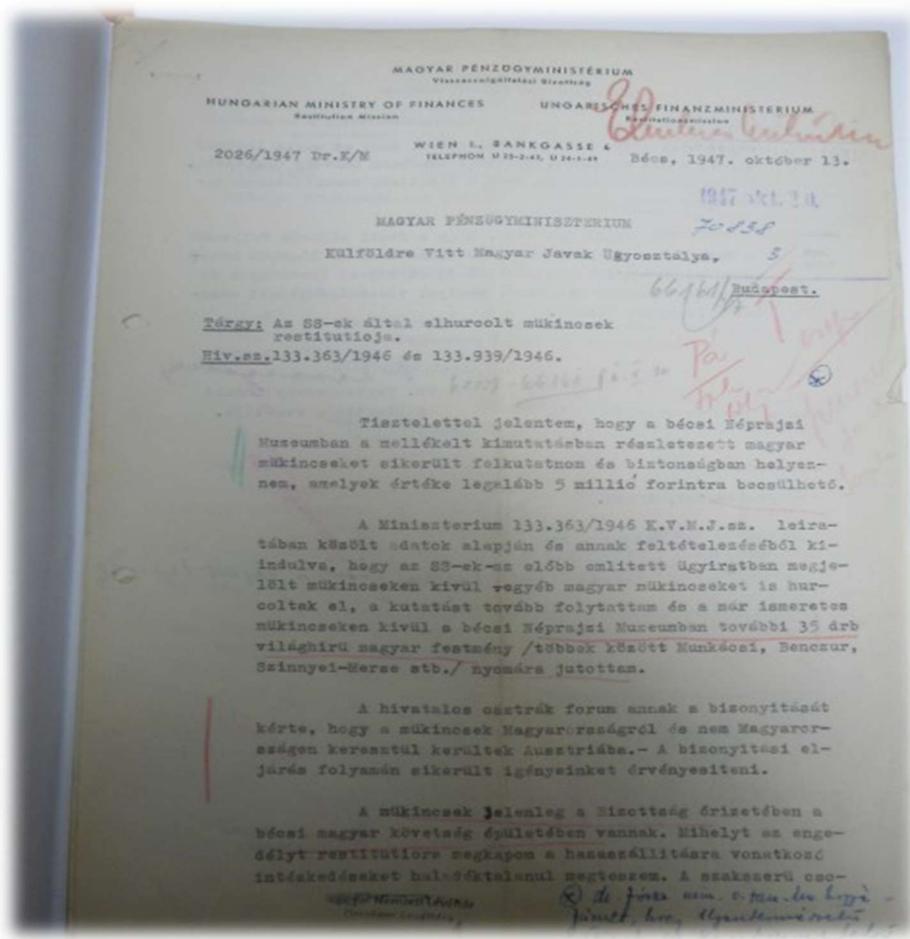


Image: Varvasovszky's letter to Budapest – Source: MNL OL XIX-L-20-r 62/2. b. 1

The consignment from Bérc Street, which Winkelmann had mentioned, could have ended up in any of these institutions. At the same time, the Allied Military Government of Austria had already issued a decree requiring museums to declare artefacts that had not entered their collections through legal purchase or donation.

According to Hungarian sources, Vienna's Museum of Ethnology, located in Vienna's Hofburg, had a substantial list to report. From 1942 onwards, the building served as one of the Gestapo's principal book depots and also as a storage site for valuables looted in the occupied Crimean

Peninsula, among them centuries-old textile relics belonging to the Crimean Tatars and Karaites.¹⁸

The Museum informed Varvasovsky's team that certain Hungarian artefacts were also in its possession. According to their report, three crates containing 37 oil paintings, along with some drawings and sculptures had been taken over from a private collection in Budapest by SS troops. In January 1945, the crates—labeled “*Höhere SS u. Polizeiführer in Ungarn*”—were left outside the museum building and due to exposure to the elements, several paintings suffered damage from moisture. The museum offered no further details.

¹⁸ <https://oezv.volkskundemuseum.at/periodical/zoom/125613>, accessed January 12, 2026.

On October 23, 1947, the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) announced that valuable Hungarian art treasures looted by SS troops had been recovered.¹⁹ The Restitution Mission's inventory listed 55 paintings, as well as various decorative or furnishing items. Many works were marked with the name Jenő Vida—likely written on the reverse side—while others were identified as missing from the Ernst Museum in Budapest. The remaining pieces could not be identified. Varvasovszky estimated the total value at 5 million Hungarian Forints. He arranged for the professional repackaging of the items and submitted the official restitution request to the appropriate Austrian and American authorities.²⁰ The permit for return was granted by early May 1948.

On May 15, 1948, a Budapest-based freight forwarder arrived in the village of Rajka (Ragendorf) on the Hungarian-Austrian border, acting on behalf of the Ministerial Committee for Artworks Relocated from Public and Private Collections. He loaded the located art objects from the Vienna Museum onto his trailer and transported the shipment to the capital. The returned crates were opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest on May 21 and 22, 1948, where the objects were catalogued and labeled with serial numbers from 1 to 55. In the inventory compiled by art historians, 21 paintings were identified as belonging to Jenő Vida. Among them were Mihály Munkácsy's oil paintings *Narrative* (130 x 96 cm) and *The Death of Mozart (Requiem)* (43 x 61 cm).²¹

According to official procedures, the Ministry of Finance was subsequently tasked with determining the fate of the restituted items. If the owner himself or his rightful heir appeared at the hearing, asserted his claim for the paintings, and paid the required shipping and customs fees, they would most likely be able to reclaim and take possession of the canvases.¹⁴ However, difficulties arose concerning the former residents of Bérc Street.

¹⁹

https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/pdfview2?file=static/documents/MTI/Magyar%20T%C3%A1virati%20Iroda/Napi_Hirek/1944-1948/HU_MNL_OL_XXVI_A_14_b_0069_1947_10_23.pdf#search=&page=14&rnd=27604087044436364, accessed January 12, 2026.

²⁰ Andrea Dunai, *Janak sorsa. Az 1944-45-ben Magyarországról elvitt értékek nyomában*. [The Fate of Goods: In Search of the Assets Removed from Hungary in 1944–45], Budapest, 2019.

²¹ Ibid.

Thwarted Restitution



Image: Mihály Munkácsy, The Death of Mozart – Source: Wikimedia Commons [public domain]

In the spring of 1947, Jenő Vida's surviving relatives left Hungary with a valid tourist passport to Latin America.

Prior to their departure, fully complying with the relevant regulations, they notified several authorities about the disappearance of the paintings, leaving no grounds for any omission to be attributed to them.

After their passport had expired, they did not return to Hungary: instead, they settled in Argentina before moving to Brazil. Their legal representative in Budapest, solicitor László Czeyda-Pommersheim, acted on their behalf.

At the negotiation in November 1948, the committee appointed by the Ministry of Finance rejected the transfer of ownership, contending the paintings in question had not been included in the inheritance proceedings conducted after Jenő Vida was declared dead, and thus were absent from the bequest inventory. The committee did not find any grounds to object that decision. Thus, the officials instructed the lawyer to new inheritance proceedings—however, this required authorization from the relatives residing overseas. Czeyda-Pommersheim reportedly made several attempts to contact them, but no responses were received to his airmail letters.²² In Hungary, which, at the time, was rapidly shifting toward communism, telephone calls to the “imperialist West” were risky and uncommon.

²² MNL OL XIX-L-2-r 71.box.

Years passed, authorities were incorporated into new administrative bodies, and new laws were enacted. Moreover, the later a case was reopened, the slimmer the likelihood of a favorable decision for the applicant.

The situation worsened and subsequent legislation, including Act XXVI of 1948 and Government Decree No. 4.359/1949, deprived Hungarians living abroad illegally of their citizenship and thus enabled confiscation of their property. By 1952, the paintings were declared state property and remained in the Museum of Fine Arts and other public collections.²³

Czeyda-Pommersheim made one more attempt at restitution of the family's looted property in January 1950, this time with the successor organization, the Ministerial Commission of Endangered Private Collections, which was then responsible within the administrative hierarchy of authorities for Vida's paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts. The lawyer proposed that the artworks be treated as temporary deposits of the Vida family held by the museum. After consulting several other institutions, the Commission concluded that the relatives living abroad had violated the laws of the Hungarian People's Republic, abused the trust of the Hungarian authorities and therefore should be deprived of their Hungarian citizenship".²⁴

The case of the paintings was revisited in March 1952 at the Ministry of Finance. Their arguments against relinquishing the looted paintings was straightforward: since the heirs had "not yet filed their claim with duly substantiated documents," the paintings were declared the property of the state treasury,—which, in practice, meant the Ministry of Public Education, the authority in charge of the national art collections. However, this decision had no practical impact: the artworks remained where they had been, in the exhibition halls or storage rooms of the Museum of Fine Arts.²⁵

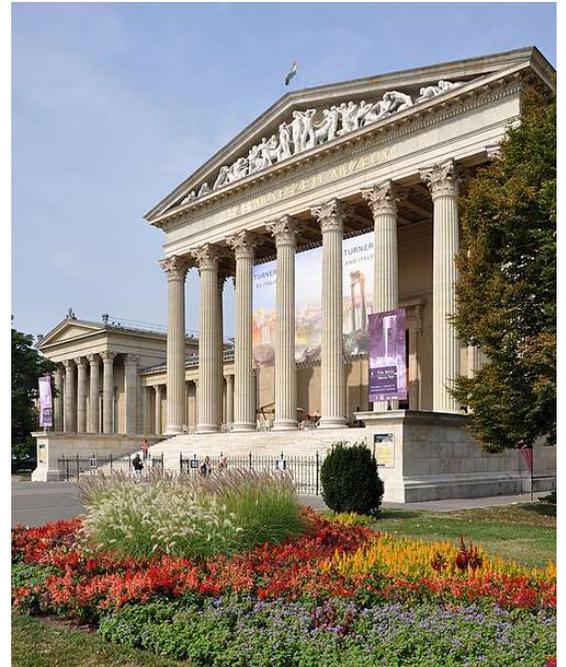


Image: Budapest (Hungary): Museum of Fine Arts, image by Marc Ryckaert.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Budapest_Fine_Arts_Museum_R01.jpg

²³ For more information, see for example: <https://wagnerlaw.hu/deprivation-of-hungarian-citizenship-between-1930-and-1990/>, accessed January 25, 2026.

²⁴ MNL OL XIX-L-2-r 71.box..

²⁵ Ibid.

Jenő Vida's Collection On Public View in Hungary

Shortly thereafter Vida's Munkácsy paintings became a source of pride beyond the museum's walls. From July to August 1952, the works of the great Hungarian master were displayed in the *Műcsarnok*, Hall of Art. Four paintings from Jenő Vida's collection: "*Visitors to the Baby*", "*On the Dusty Road*", "*Two Families*" and "*Before Christ Pilate*", which had originally been lent for a temporary Munkácsy exhibition in February 1944, weeks before the German occupation, were now on display once more, albeit catalogued as a gift from the Financial Institutions Center in 1950.²⁶ Indeed: archival records from the Financial Institutions Center indicate that the Museum's director had received the canvases "offered as a gift" (sic!) from the Center's warehouse in April 1950, noting that these works had been sequestered under the government decree of 1949 concerning property abandoned by dissidents.²⁷

The two other Munkácsy paintings brought back from Vienna—both well known—were likewise featured in the exhibition. Regarding the painting "*Mozart's Death*" the catalogue stated: "By the Min. Comm. of Artworks from Jenő Vida's Collection". This brief, punctuation-free provenance implies that the postwar authority donated the painting to the museum. However, this is highly unlikely, as this institution had ceased to exist by autumn 1948 and the painting's inventory number shows it only entered the Museum of Fine Arts' collection in 1950. The other work, titled the "*Narrative*" also became part of the Museum's collection in the same year, but in this case as a gift from the Financial Institutions Center,²⁸ as the authorities arbitrarily transferred valuable canvases from private collections back and forth at will. In this fierce bureaucratic maneuvering, the fact that Jenő Vida was a victim of the Holocaust was never acknowledged.

While the Vida-Perényi family was engaged in establishing a new life in São Paulo, Brazil—living under considerably more modest circumstances than in pre-war Budapest—their former villa on Bérc Street was taken over by the Budapest District I Real Estate Management Company in February 1955. The property was subsequently "leased" to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Office of Supply for the Diplomatic Corps. The Ministry of Interior Affairs was duly notified of the arrangement. During the handover, an individual who had lived in the building in 1944 stated that he had personally witnessed "a department of the Gestapo accumulating a large number of valuable possessions on the premises."²⁹ He further recalled that a shelter had been constructed to safeguard these objects, but the entrance had been hit by a bomb prior to the siege of Budapest, after which no attempt had been made to uncover or reopen it. This testimony was considered sufficient for the Ministry of Interior Affairs to launch an investigation into the Gestapo's "former connections." The fact that the Gestapo was not identical with the SS, some of whose members were occupants of the villa in 1944, was deemed irrelevant by the authorities. One of the so-called "collaborators" revealed

²⁶ Munkácsy Mihály kiállítás, Műcsarnok, 1952. július–augusztus. [Catalogue, Munkácsy Exhibition in Hall of Art]. Műcsarnok, Budapest, 1952.

²⁷ MNL OL XIX-L-20-j 114.box.

²⁸ Catalogue.

²⁹ ÁBTL O-11541/2.

that the shelter had been built under German supervision by Jewish forced laborers and miners—the latter formerly employed by Jenő Vida's company. It was alleged that some 200 workers devoted their efforts to this endeavor and dug down 10 meters. The archives of the German unit stationed in Vida's house were reportedly transferred underground at that time.

The Ministry began to consider whether it would be worthwhile to open the pit using a deep drilling rig. This, however, appears never to have taken place—or at least no record of such an operation has survived. One of investigators took dozens of photographs of the house and the street, while another visited the Tatabánya mine, where no one could recall the construction of any such shelter. The state security authorities closed the dossier on the Gestapo agents—and partly on Jenő Vida's former villa—in March 1962.



A Bérc utcai villa kertjében törmelék fedi a feltételezett titkos pincelejáratot
[Debris covers the suspected secret basement entry in the garden of the Bérc Street mansion]
Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára (ÁBTL) [State Security
Services History Archives (SSSHA)], 3.1.5. O-11541-2-002.



A Bérc utcai villa alatti titkos pince feltételezett bejáratai az Antal utca felől
The suspected entrances of secret basement of the Bérc Street mansion from Antal utca]
ÁBTL [SSSHA], 3.1.5. O-11541-2-004.

Photographs - Source: ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11541-2-002-4

Later Developments and Partial Restitution

The Vida family, living far from Hungary, were likely unaware that their paintings had returned to Hungary. Their communications with their legal representative in Budapest had been entirely severed. In an effort to obtain information, they submitted a claim from Brazil seeking either the paintings looted by the German occupiers or equivalent compensation pursuant to the Restitution Law (BRüG) enacted in Germany. This claim was premised on the assumption that the artworks had been transferred to the territory of the former Third Reich.³⁰

The Berlin Compensation Court promptly prioritized the investigation, initiating proceedings by gathering testimonies from witnesses. In 1959, Otto Winkelmann, who was then a local politician affiliated with the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), and approaching retirement, personally appeared in the mayor's office of his northern German residence to respond to correspondence from the Vida family's American legal counsel. His responses bordered on mockery. Initially, he offered a cynical explanation for his detention by Hungarian authorities in Budapest for two and a

³⁰ LAB (Landesarchiv Berlin) B Rep. 025-08 Nr. 2813/1959.

half years following the war. He denied that Vida's villa resembled a "palace," and that its walls were adorned with precious paintings. Furthermore, he asserted that he had compiled an inventory of the villa's furnishings upon taking residence and had provided a copy of this list to Vida's daughter. Secretary of State Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa—whom he claimed was executed by the communists after 1945—had informed him in 1944 that the paintings displayed on the walls, with the exception of a single work by Munkácsy, were all worthless. And so forth. Concerning the paintings, he maintained that they had been removed from the walls by a "Hungarian-German committee" and transported out of the country, along with other museum artefacts, purportedly to protect them from the advancing Russians. He indignantly rejected any allegations of war criminal conduct. He was not questioned about and consequently did not disclose how he had secured his escape from Budapest. The German authorities conducted investigations over many years, and interviewed numerous eyewitnesses, yet they were unable to reconstruct the journey and whereabouts of the collection. Artur Schmidt, a member of the staff, was also a resident of the villa on Bérc Street in 1944.

In 1946, Winkelmann claimed in Budapest that Schmidt had handed over the paintings to a Viennese museum. In a written statement from 1970, Schmidt explained that he and his associates had boarded the steamer *Saint Imre* in Gönyű, at the confluence of the rivers Rába and the Danube, not far from the Austrian border. Schmidt further lamented that the Hungarian authorities had failed to provide him with "items of equipment and facilities necessary for the deployment of military command," consequently, the crew was compelled to take items aboard the ship themselves. According to Schmidt's account, he disembarked at Spitz an der Donau in the first half of May, while Winkelmann bade farewell to the others at Wallsee in Austria. This version appears plausible, as archival records indicate that Winkelmann was arrested on May 20 in nearby Neukirchen. He was shortly thereafter interrogated by the U.S. Counterintelligence Corps (CIC), during which he was described as "cooperative".³¹

³¹ <https://www.fold3.com/image/231907390/winkelmann-otto-page-2-cu-wwii-nuernberg-interrogation-records-1945-1947?terms=neukirchen%2Cwinkelmann&view=info>, accessed January 12, 2026.

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Bürokraten und um persönliches Eigentum der Stabsangehörigen und der dort untergebrachten Kriegsberichter-Einheit gehandelt, die das Haus am 22. oder 23. Dezember 1944 räumten. Aus eigenem Wissen kann ich dazu jedoch nichts aussagen, weil ich dort nicht wohnte und zu der Zeit nicht in Budapest anwesend war.

Ein Abtransport von Möbeln konnte damals - kurz vor Weihnachten - gar nicht erfolgen, da der Ring um Budapest schon fast geschlossen war. Eine Eisenbahnverbindung von Budapest nach dem Westen bestand m.W. schon etwa seit 14 Tagen vor Weihnachten nicht mehr. Wenn sie bestanden hätte, wären nur die Verwundeten aus den Lazaretten abtransportiert worden. Es blieben rd. 30 000 Verwundete zurück, die fast alle von den Russen und ungarischen Kommunisten umgebracht wurden. Aber auch mit Lastwagen konnten keine Wohnungseinrichtungen abtransportiert werden, da dieses bei Todesstrafe verboten war. Das Verbot wurde auf der einzigen noch verfügbaren Straße, der Straße nach Wien, von der Feldpolizei streng überwacht.

Unsinnig ist die Behauptung, ich hätte angegeben, bis München hätte ich den Transport verfolgen können, dann aber die Spur verloren. Jeder, der in die damalige Situation kennt, weiß, daß damals derartige "Spuren" schon nach wenigen Kilometern verloren gingen.

Abschliessend bemerke ich, daß aus Anlaß von Ferngesprächen, die von außen mit der eingeschlossenen Besatzung geführt wurden, bekannt wurde, daß eine in Budapest kämpfende Division im Hause Bérc ucca 15 ihren Divisionsgefachtsstand eingerichtet hatte.

Ich weise es aufs schärfste zurück, als Kriegsverbrecher hingestellt zu werden und mir strafbare Handlungen unterstellen zu lassen. Aus der Tatsache, daß gegen mich in Ungarn kein Verfahren eingeleitet und ich im September 1948 den Amerikanern als Kriegsgefangener wieder überstellt wurde, geht einwandfrei hervor, daß gegen mich keine Vorwürfe erhoben wurden.

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den.

Ich habe den Eindruck, daß der Rechtsanwalt Ellenbogen und die Frau Perényi versuchen wollen, auf Grund unwahrer Behauptungen und Angaben von der Bundesrepublik Deutschland unberechtigte Wiedergutmachung zu erlangen. Ich bitte deshalb sehr dringend, meine Angaben nicht dem Rechtsanwalt Ellenbogen in New York, sondern dem Wiedergutmachungsamt in Berlin zum Aktenzeichen 6921/P zuzuleiten.

v. g. u.

Winkelmann

Beglaubigt

Winkelmann
Bürgermeister



Image: Saint Imre in Budapest – Source: Fortepan / Chuckyeager tumblr

The Restitution Court’s attention was drawn to the case of the ship Saint Imre, prompting a request for the contemporary lock records from the relevant Danube ports. Yet, these logs contained references only to the Hungarian vessels “Saint Gellért” and “Saint László.” The testimonies provided by other German witnesses proved to be of no evidentiary value at all. It is regrettable that the judges did not investigate more thoroughly, as the Saint Imre had in fact reached Linz in the winter of 1945.³²

The German experts of the Restitution Court expected to receive from the Hungarian Ministry of Justice Winkelmann’s 1946 testimony regarding his plunder of paintings and other household property on Bérc Street. Instead of the expected documentation, only a brief note was forwarded from Budapest to Berlin, stating that the former general had made no statement on the matter. The uncooperative attitude of the Hungarian officials may be explained by the fact that prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations, no framework for mutual legal assistance existed between the two countries.

³² <https://retour.hypotheses.org/5840>, accessed January 12, 2026.

The West German authorities rejected the application submitted by the heirs of Vida initially in 1972., Following a series of appeals, the Highest Court issued a final ruling of dismissal in 1981. The German authorities did not consider themselves competent to adjudicate the matter. From a legal standpoint, this position was technically correct: under existing law, compensation was to be granted only in cases where the confiscated property had entered the territory of what later became the Federal Republic of Germany and was presumed to remain there. However, proceedings need not have extended over 22 years, had the courts undertaken efforts to locate the canvases elsewhere. After all, it was the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, which ultimately was in the picture.

Many years later, Museum of Fine Arts returned several of the paintings once owned by Jenő Vida. In 2002, the Treasury's Directorate of Property Rights (KVI) decided that the Munkácsy canvases, lent by Jenő Vida to the Museum of Fine Arts for a temporary exhibition in early 1944 and left there after the exhibition's closure due to the German occupation, were to be treated differently from the works restituted from Austria.

On this basis, Gábor Görgey, then serving as Minister of Culture handed over the four paintings to members of the Vida family, who had travelled to Budapest from South America. However, this precedent-setting decision did not extend to the remaining works from the Vida collection.

The museum's public collection maintains that it possesses these paintings in lawful deposit. Of particular significance are the two Munkácsy canvases: "*Mozart's Death*" and "*Narrative*" presently housed in the study repository of the Painting Department of the Hungarian National Gallery.

The paintings are occasionally loaned for temporary exhibitions, yet the accompanying labels make no reference to their complex history, with museum visitors remaining unaware of the fact that they formed part of Jenő Vida's the art collection of the once prominent Jewish collector Jenő Vida, who perished in Auschwitz.



Image: Munkácsy: Visitors to the Baby – One of the returned Paintings - Source: Wikimedia Commons