

REPORT

on

The Workshop of the ESLI Provenance Research Training Program

Athens, Greece, June 2-5, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The Provenance Research Training Program (PRTP) of the European Shoah Legacy Institute is a unique educational program aimed at providing knowledge on Nazi-era provenance. The curriculum of this program allows participants to explore in an international and interdisciplinary context topics that are underserved or ignored in academic institutions. The PRTP stimulates professional development not only in research on Nazi-era cultural property but also research on the history of ownership of cultural and artistic objects displaced by mass conflict, acts of persecution, and crimes against humanity in general.

Leading art historians, international lawyers, heads of the restitution bodies, archivists, and senior governmental officials responsible for restitution of art share their knowledge with the participants. According to one PRTP alumna, attending the workshop was *“both enlightening and helpful; the guest speakers covered a wide variety of topics, the discussions were lively and interesting, and the smaller group discussions really allowed us to get direct feedback and answers from different individuals.”*

The PRTP workshop creates an environment in which people from different countries, backgrounds, and walks of life come together to improve their theoretical knowledge and practical skills in provenance research, to network and share information with peers, and to support the development of this exciting and highly needed profession.

This one-of-a-kind international workshop offers lectures, small group discussions, and official get-togethers with local dignitaries, as well as guided visits to significant cultural and artistic sites and a representative sampling of the host nation’s culinary attributes.

LOCATION SELECTION

Each PRTP workshop takes place in a different country because provenance research on movable cultural property is by its nature an international matter. The inaugural workshop in June 2012 was held in Magdeburg, Germany, the center of provenance research in Germany and thus an appropriate place to launch the Program in regard to

Europe as a whole. Since then, workshops have been held in Zagreb, Croatia, and Vilnius, Lithuania.

The fourth workshop of the PRTP was convened on June 2-5, 2014, in Athens, Greece. This latest workshop was organized in conjunction with the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union of 2014. The Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Museum of Greece served as co-hosts of the workshop. All sessions of the workshop were held at the Acropolis Museum and we would like to express our deep gratitude to the staff of the Acropolis Museum for their assistance.

INSTRUCTORS

The PRTP workshop is a place where the world's leading experts on provenance come together to share their knowledge and experience.

- **Anne-Marie Carstens**, Visiting Professor of Law, Law Center, Georgetown University; Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State;
- **Rose Lerer Cohen**, international specialist in genealogical research;
- **Patricia Kennedy Grimsted**, Research Associate at the Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University;
- **Marc Masurovsky**, Director of the Provenance Research Training Program, European Shoah Legacy Institute;
- **Eleni Pipelia**, archeologist, Directorate for Documentation and Protection of Cultural Goods, Greek Ministry of Culture;
- **Victoria Reed**, Mona Sadler Curator of Provenance, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA;
- **Heinz Schödl**, Deputy Director, Bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research, Austria;
- **Irina Tarsis**, Esq., attorney and art historian, Director of the Center for Art Law, New York, NY.

Our participants had a chance to meet in the informal environment and to talk with our special guests:

- **Zanet Battinou**, Director, The Jewish Museum of Greece;
- **Evelien Campfens**, Director of the Dutch Restitutions Committee;
- **Douglas Davidson**, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, U.S. Department of State;
- **Wesley Fisher**, Director of Research, The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany;
- **Hannah Lessing**, Secretary General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism;
- **Panos Panagiotopoulos**, Minister of Culture and Sports of Greece;
- **Halyna Senyk**, Executive Director, European Shoah Legacy Institute;
- **Photini Tomai-Constantopoulou**, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE PRTP WORKSHOP IN ATHENS

Each applicant was asked to submit an application form, a curriculum vitae, a background statement, two letters of recommendation, and an essay explaining his/her reasons for participating in the workshop.

The Selection Committee was comprised of the PRTP director (Marc Masurovsky) and the workshop instructors (Irina Tarsis, Victoria Reed, and Agnes Peresztegi, the last being unable to attend the actual Athens workshop due to personal and professional matters).

The Selection Committee ranked each applicant with a numerical score to provide an objective indicator of applicants' eligibility to participate in the program. Final selection was made with a balanced approach to all applicants' submissions.

In order to attract as many applicants from Greece and neighboring countries as possible, the PRTP offered tuition waivers to all successful applicants from those nations.

The participants in the Athens workshop came from a wide range of occupations and disciplines: *attorneys, undergraduate and graduate students in art history, archaeologists, museologists, curators from the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports,*

a member of the Greek delegation to IHRA, a senior representative from the Greek government, a librarian from Berlin, fine arts consultants of auction houses, investigators, art historians, and independent researchers.

All together, there were **44 persons** (including specialists and staff) from **11 countries** who participated in the Athens workshop, including two returnees from previous PRTP workshops. People came from **Austria (2), Canada (3), the Czech Republic (1), Germany (3), Greece (15), Israel (1), Italy (2), Kenya (1), the Netherlands (1), Serbia (1), the United Kingdom (1), and the United States (13).**

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

1. The core curriculum

As with previous workshops, the “core curriculum” consisted of a historical overview of cultural plunder during the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and World War II, and the impact of those thefts and misappropriations on postwar societies and the ways in which notions of justice, ethics, restitution, compensation, and due diligence are treated as a result of or in spite of acts of plunder aimed at victim groups and their holdings of artistic and cultural objects. It also addresses legal and moral issues stemming from historical and current requests by individuals or entities for the return of their lost possessions, which are in the hands of individuals or organizations, including government agencies. Last but not least, the “core” includes Jewish cultural property.

Coming to Greece, we expected that there would be an emphasis in our discussion on the thefts of archaeological material illegally extracted from cultural and religious sites across the country during and after WWII. Our strategy was to encourage such discussions while leaving room to inject another history of cultural plunder in Greek cities and towns, the plunder of Jewish homes and businesses during the period of Axis occupation. The case studies on Thessaloniki helped to balance the discussions surrounding illicit extraction and export of antiquities from archaeological sites with the plunder and dispersal of Jewish-owned objects in Thessaloniki, Athens, and other cities across all territories and communities that were an integral part of Greece.

Core faculty also offered presentations on the following general themes:

- 1) history of plunder in Europe with a geographical case study of trajectory of plunder in Paris (Marc Masurovsky);
- 2) what is provenance research and what lessons we have learned from past mistakes (Victoria Reed); and

- 3) review of recent museum history in Germany as well as the ongoing provenance research work for the artworks labeled 'degenerate' by the National Socialist Party (Irina Tarsis).

2. Formal presentations

The Athens workshop included a series of focused presentations that placed special emphasis on cultural plunder in Western Europe, namely Italy (Daria Brasca) and Greece (Maria Kavala, Eleni Pipelia, Patricia Kennedy Grimsted), the postwar treatment of claims for plundered art in an international relations context (Anne-Marie Carstens), and the handling of looted art objects in Austria (Hannah Lessing and Heinz Schödl) and the Netherlands (Evelien Campfens) as seen from the perspective of governmental compensation, restitution, and provenance research organizations and agencies.

Zanet Battinou, Director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, was generous with her time and guided us through her small but extraordinarily rich museum; rich in history, artifacts, and objects that speak to the vibrancy of the Jewish community in Greece before the Nazi onslaught, and to the perseverance of its surviving members to tell the story, preserve and share what is undoubtedly one of the most searing aspects of the Final Solution, since more than 90 per cent of Jews in Greece were annihilated in extermination camps.

Halyna Senyk, Director of the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI), shared her vision of what ESLI is and will be accomplishing in the area of provenance research and due diligence at the European level.

3. Small group discussions

As part of its mission, the workshop experiments with different approaches and methodologies by which to impart content and form to participants. Provenance research is not done in a void, and recognition of important current events and developments is one of the skills to be embraced by researchers in this evolving field. The novelty of the workshop is to bring the discussion of provenance research, the study of cultural plunder, and the examination of due diligence practices in the private and public sectors to different constituencies. Its purpose is to create a safe and respectful environment in which participants, specialists, and staff alike can exchange views and ideas, discuss them, critique them and otherwise share, contribute and listen, learn from one another, and discover different approaches to problem-solving, research, uncover new facts, find

new sources for historical inquiries, and establish networks of support and exchange for their own personal and professional development.

The Athens workshop demonstrated that a structured mix of small group discussions and formal presentations that leave ample time for discussion between participants and specialists proved to be a winning formula. Moreover, with encouragement from the participants to the Athens workshop, a greater emphasis was placed on methodological questions and research challenges, a theme that carried through the entire workshop.

“Working in small groups ... provides indeed the time and possibility to work with the different cases and scenarios. I think that was a great method, pedagogical and effective,” said one participant, while another wished that the workshop had extended beyond a week.

There was a general sense that participants should stay in touch, be apprised of events in the field of provenance research and related topics, continue to share information, and think of ways of developing uniform standards for practitioners in this emerging field. To this end, the PRTP will organize and make available a directory of past participants and instructors to all the PRTP alumni.

The fifth PRTP workshop is scheduled to take place in Italy in December 2014. Half of the program will be devoted to methodology and research and the other half to historical, legal, and other questions relative to the displacement, path, treatment, and ultimate disposition of artistic, cultural, and ritual objects in the post-1945 era.