

August 30, 2018

Remarks on the Return of
Deux Femmes Dans Un Jardin by Pierre Auguste Renoir

(September 12, 2018)

Today it is my distinct honor and pleasure to be able to restore to its rightful owner, a painting looted by the Nazis during the Second World War. The painting, titled *Deux Femmes Dans Un Jardin*, was painted in 1919 by Pierre Auguste Renoir, one of the masters of the French impressionist movement. *Deux Femmes* was looted from the private collection of Alfred Weinberger and his wife Marie during the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1941. Since that time, the painting has changed hands numerous times, making its way around the world, until it arrived here in New York. And today, after three quarters of a century, we are finally able to return this work to its rightful owner, the Weinbergers' sole remaining heir, Ms. Sylvie Sulitzer, who is able to join us today from her home in Paris.

The work itself, painted in the last year of Renoir's life, is a fine example of Renoir's late landscapes. By the early 1910s, the artist was suffering from severe rheumatoid arthritis and had relocated with his family to Cagnes, where, despite searing pain in his joints, Renoir continued to paint—sometimes with a brush tied to his hand because he could not otherwise hold it. This would have been one of the last works that Renoir completed before his death.

Alfred Weinberger was an avid and prominent art collector in pre-war Paris. He acquired *Deux Femmes*, along with a number of other Renoir artworks, from the dealers Renou & Colle in 1925 (who, themselves, had acquired the works from Renoir's estate). At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Weinbergers fled Paris to Aix-les-Bains in the French Alps, storing their collection of artworks at the Bank Morgan & Cie in Paris.

On December 4, 1941, during the Nazi occupation of Paris, the Weinberger collection was seized by the Nazis, and on September 10, 1942, the collection was transferred to a depot at Jeu de Paume, a pre-war museum in Paris controlled by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (the "ERR").

The ERR, the Nazi division created in order to "study" Jewish life and culture as part of the Nazi's propagandist mission against the Jews, confiscated artworks and other cultural holdings of the enemies of the Reich on a massive scale. Incredibly, the ERR meticulously registered and identified the artworks that it plundered,

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including providing detailed descriptions of those works, and even photographing them, leaving behind a detailed record of the works that they stole.

This turned out to be a blessing for surviving victims like the Weinbergers. After the War, Alfred Weinberger spent decades trying to recover his property. He registered his claim to *Deux Femmes*, among other works, with the French restitution authorities in 1947, and with the German restitution authorities in 1958.

Since 2010, Ms. Sulitzer—Weinberger’s granddaughter—has actively sought to recover the stolen works from her grandfather’s collection.

Through our investigation, my Office has learned that *Deux Femmes* resurfaced after the war at an art sale in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1975. It subsequently found its way to London, where it was sold again in 1977, and then appeared again at a sale in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1999. Ultimately, *Deux Femmes* turned up at Christie’s Gallery here in New York, where it was put up for auction by a private collector in 2013. It was then that Ms. Sulitzer learned of the pending sale and made a claim to the work as part of her grandfather’s collection. After an investigation by my Office and the FBI, the purported owner of the work voluntarily agreed to relinquish its claim to *Deux Femmes*, and, as a result, we are able to return the painting to Ms. Sulitzer today.

The FBI’s Art Crime Team played an important role in investigating Ms. Sulitzer’s claim, and securing its voluntary return. One reason that we hold these events upon the return of missing or stolen artworks is to celebrate these agents’ dedication and proficiency, and to get the word out to the public that the FBI’s team is ready and willing to right the wrongs of history.

On behalf of the Office, I thank the FBI for its outstanding work on this and so many matters of importance to the District, and take pride in our long-standing and continuing partnership with the Art Crime Team in support of its mission.