

Looted Léger Returned

MINNEAPOLIS—One of several claims against American museums by the heirs of a French Jewish collector has finally been resolved. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts restituted Fernand Léger's *Smoke over Rooftops* (1911) to the heirs of Alphonse Kann in October, after more than a decade of research proved the work was looted by the Nazis.

"From the beginning we said that if this was indeed their painting and it was looted, we would return it," says museum director Kaywin Feldman.

The Paris-based Kann Association, comprising eight of Kann's heirs in France, first contacted the MIA in 1997. After Kann fled France in 1939, the Nazis transferred most of his 1,200-piece collection to the Jeu de Paume museum. But for unknown reasons, says MIA curator Patrick Noon, who directed the research, some objects—including the Léger—were left in Kann's house.

Those works were auctioned on November 5, 1942. The Galerie Louise

Leiris in Paris purchased the Léger and in 1951 sold the painting to a Minneapolis businessman, Putnam Dana McMillan, via the New York-based Buchholz Gallery. McMillan be-

queathed it to the MIA ten years later.

The museum conducted research in Paris, Koblenz, and Washington, D.C., to determine whether that particular painting—Léger created several like it—had belonged to Kann. Noon says that limited evidence emerged until a separate lawsuit filed by the Kann Association forced the Galerie Louise Leiris to open its archives. Researchers then discovered that Louise Leiris had documented the purchase of *Smoke over Rooftops* the day after the auction.

"By the end of 2001, we had solid



▲ Fernand Léger's *Smoke over Rooftops*, 1911.

proof that this was our painting," says Alain Coblenz, the Kann Association's attorney.

But in 2002, when newly uncovered documents suggested that Kann had

been compensated for the painting before he died, in 1948, the museum's team decided to continue its research. The MIA called off the investigation in September. "We had to come to a resolution," Noon told *ARTnews*.

The Kann Association, which has secured about 15 restitutions since 1997, continues to pursue other cases, says Coblenz. As a result of the Léger claim, the MIA is researching its entire collection. "Now we make sure we don't have any other issues to be concerned about," says Noon. —**Joelle Seligson**

'A Negotiation among Gentlemen'

CLEVELAND—The Cleveland Museum of Art has agreed to return to Italy more than a dozen objects that the Italian government proved had been looted or handled by "bad actors," in the words of

CMA director Timothy Rub.

Rub and Giuseppe Proietti, secretary general of Italy's Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities, signed an agreement in November.

The museum promised to return 14 objects in exchange for the long-term loan of 13 as-yet-unspecified works "of equal esteem and historical relevance," according to the ministry. Italy also agreed to collabo-

rate on at least one exhibition and other cultural exchanges with Cleveland.

In 2007 Italy presented the museum with a list of 42 objects about which it had questions. Both sides later agreed to whittle the list to 14 objects that Italy could prove had been looted, stolen, or handled by traffickers.

Maurizio Fiorilli, the Italian state lawyer who negotiated the agreement, says the evidence came from a 1995 raid on a Geneva warehouse, which led to the conviction of Italian art dealer Giacomo de Medici. Information uncovered in the raid and subsequent investigations has been used to repatriate scores of objects from American museums.

The works Cleveland will return include an Apulian volute krater from the fourth century B.C.; a red Etruscan duck askos, a vessel for liquids, from about 350 B.C.; and a Greek donkey-head rhyton, or drinking cup, from about 475 B.C.

The museum also will give Italy a Late Gothic processional cross stolen

from a church near Siena after World War II and acquired by the museum in 1977. Staff believe the museum has legal title to the cross, but agreed to return it on moral grounds.

Rub says the agreement stipulates that the CMA acted in good faith and is not at fault for acquiring the antiquities. Fiorilli praised the museum, saying the accord was reached through "a negotiation among gentlemen."

But a possible sticking point remains. The ministry and the CMA agreed to analyze two works in the museum's collection: a bronze winged victory chariot ornament and the controversial sculpture *Apollo Sauroktonos*. The museum attributes the Apollo, which it acquired in 2004, to the ancient Greek sculptor Praxiteles. Italian authorities dispute the museum's claim that the sculpture was excavated at least 100 years ago.

Fiorilli would not comment on whether Italian authorities will contact other American museums. —**Steven Litt**



▲ **Donkey-Head Rhyton**, ca. 475 B.C., will be returned to Italy.