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Press release on the Art Database of the National Fund for Victims of National Socialism

23 May 2006

From fall this year the National Fund of the Republic of Austria will be providing an online art database as an additional forum for identifying restitutionable art objects. The National Fund is currently cooperating with federal museums and museums of the City of Vienna to take further preparatory steps to publish the art and cultural objects that must be examined for questionable provenance on grounds of art restitution legislation.

In 1998/99 the National Fund received the statutory mandate to sell art objects transferred to it from public ownership and use the proceeds to benefit the victims of National Socialism. This applied to objects held in federal museums and collections and in the museums and collections of the City of Vienna, whose acquisition occurred in conjunction with the Nazi regime but for which no eligible recipients could be found. As the provenance research in the various museums and collections has not yet been completed, no objects have been transferred to the Fund as yet.

In order to make good use of the time until the research has been completed the National Fund will – before selling the objects and using the proceeds to benefit the victims of National Socialism – publish the objects that will be transferred to it in an online database to make the accessible internationally. As such, it will give possible entitled recipients the opportunity to get back art objects of which they had had no prior knowledge before they are sold by the National Fund. The database will also contain objects where it is still unclear whether their acquisition should be declared questionable. Their publication in the art database is also intended to support the provenance researchers in their work to help clarify whether an object may be eligible for restitution.

At the moment the cooperating partners of the National Fund from the field of public collections are being informed about the functions and technical requirements of the art database. The first steps towards realizing the digital “gallery” were taken in summer 2005 when the National Fund began to initiate collaborations with these institutions. In fall 2006 the bilingual art database overseen by the National Fund shall be made available online and, as such, accessible to an international public.