

NAZI ART THEFT: STILL UNSOLVED

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INTRODUCTION

by Max Amichai Heppner

Nazi thievery still lives! Beneficiaries of Nazi loot got up this morning surrounded by stolen goods, as they have done every morning for 60 years, apparently unhindered by guilt over the venue of their possessions. Art stolen from my father's dealership should have been recovered long ago, but this hasn't happened, despite my family's broad connections in the art world and despite contacting every imaginable agency involved in recovering stolen art. Even though my father, mother, and now myself have worked on recovery attempts for decades, we have not recovered six valuable paintings by well-recognized classical artists that the Nazis openly stole. They also managed to grab a marble bust for which my grandmother, a statuesque woman, was the model.

I'm writing this book to get your help in finding and recovering this stolen art. I want to unmask the people who deceitfully or naively still enjoy the fruits of Nazi art theft. I appeal to anyone who may have seen the pilfered art to come forward--openly or anonymously--so we can put to rest my sense of outrage that Nazi theft still flourishes.

I invite you, right now, to take a look at the Reference Section of this book, which I've placed right after this Introduction--not in the back, which is the usual place for references. You'll see photographs of the looted, unrecovered art with specific background information on each from my father's business records. Whether you are an art collector or just the friend or neighbor of one--or if you visit museums, I ask you to please look sharp. Help me write the unfinished final chapter of this book--to complete the overall theme which shows how ordinary people can successfully foil rapacious Nazis.

When you start reading the main part of my story, you'll see how my father resisted the Nazi art thieves from the day they first burst into our home looking for loot. And how my father's resistance continued until the day he drew his last breath. He kept us alive throughout the Nazi era, that was his first priority. Once he was sure he had saved his little family from the gas chambers, he began the mission to preserve and restore what he could of his once flourishing art business. Sadly, he died before he could achieve any results. So you can see why I won't rest until I complete his mission.

REFERENCES

The four photographs of classical art reproduced below were professionally made around 1940 by Mr. A. Bijl, Hoofdweg 73, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, who was the official photographer for my father's art business. These four paintings were taken from the showroom in my family home at Noorder Amstel Laan 113 III Amsterdam-South about November 1941. They were inventoried for confiscation by the Amsterdam police on "orders from higher authority," placed under official seal, and carried off by Nazi collaborators.

Stolen Art Alert: Jan van der Heyden, "View of a Castle."
International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR), November 1986

INTRODUCTION

(by Max Amichai Heppner)

I'll be straight with the reader from word one. I am writing this book with ulterior motives. One motive is to recover art stolen from my father, Albert Heppner, a successful dealer specializing in Dutch Seventeenth Century Art. Even before they attempted to kill us, the Nazis schemed to steal the entire inventory of my father's business and all the other assets he had.

My father valiantly confronted the Nazis to preserve his business. Despite his best efforts, however, he was able to rescue only the major part of the intended art loot. The Nazis managed to get away with six valuable paintings by well-recognized classical artists. They also managed to grab a marble bust for which my grandmother, a statuesque woman, was the model.

This stolen art should have been recovered long ago, but this hasn't happened, despite my family's many connections in the art world and despite contacting every imaginable agency involved in art recovery.

In other words: *Nazi thievery still lives!* The beneficiaries of the loot got up this morning surrounded by stolen goods, as they have done every morning for 60 years, apparently unhindered by guilt over the venue of their possessions.

So I'm writing about my father's battle against the Nazi thieves in major part to unmask the people who to this day continue to enjoy the fruits of Nazi art theft. Specifically, I appeal to anyone who may have seen the stolen art to come forward—openly or anonymously. I need the help of my readers to recover what rightfully belongs to me.

I invite you right now to take a look at the Reference Section of this book, which I've placed right after this Introduction—not in the back, which is the usual place for it. You'll see photographs of the looted, unrecovered art with specific background information on each from my father's business records.

I direct your attention to it with a fervent plea: If you are an art collector or just the friend or neighbor of one—or if you visit museums—please keep your eyes peeled for my lost art. You will help write the unfinished final chapter of this book about how ordinary people can successfully foil rapacious Nazis.

I have a second motive in writing: I want to counter the canard that says: “The Jews who went through the Holocaust never lifted a finger in their own defense. They went to their doom like sheep to the slaughterhouse.” I want to show how that's certainly not true for my family.

So I'm sharing how my father resisted the Nazis from the day they came into power. And how his resistance continued until the day that Father drew his last breath. Once he was sure he had saved his little family from the gas chambers, he went to his death on a mission to preserve and restore what he could of his once flourishing art business.

REFERENCES

(By Dr. Albert Heppner)

I here by declare that the photographs reproduced below were professionally made by A. Bijl, Hoofdweg 73, Amsterdam, who still has the negatives. The photographs and the descriptions that follow are of four paintings taken from the showroom in my apartment at Noorder Amstel Laan 113 III Amsterdam-South. They were inventoried for confiscation by the Amsterdam police about November 1941 on “orders from higher authority” and were placed under official seal.

Number 1 was taken from my showroom early in 1942 by the Erwyter transport company on orders of the Rijkscommissaris, authorized by an order signed by Miss Begeer. Under official regulations in force at the time, all the confiscated pieces should have been paid for at my Liro [Lippman-Rosenthal and Co.] account, but to my knowledge no payment has ever been made.

The stolen paintings are:

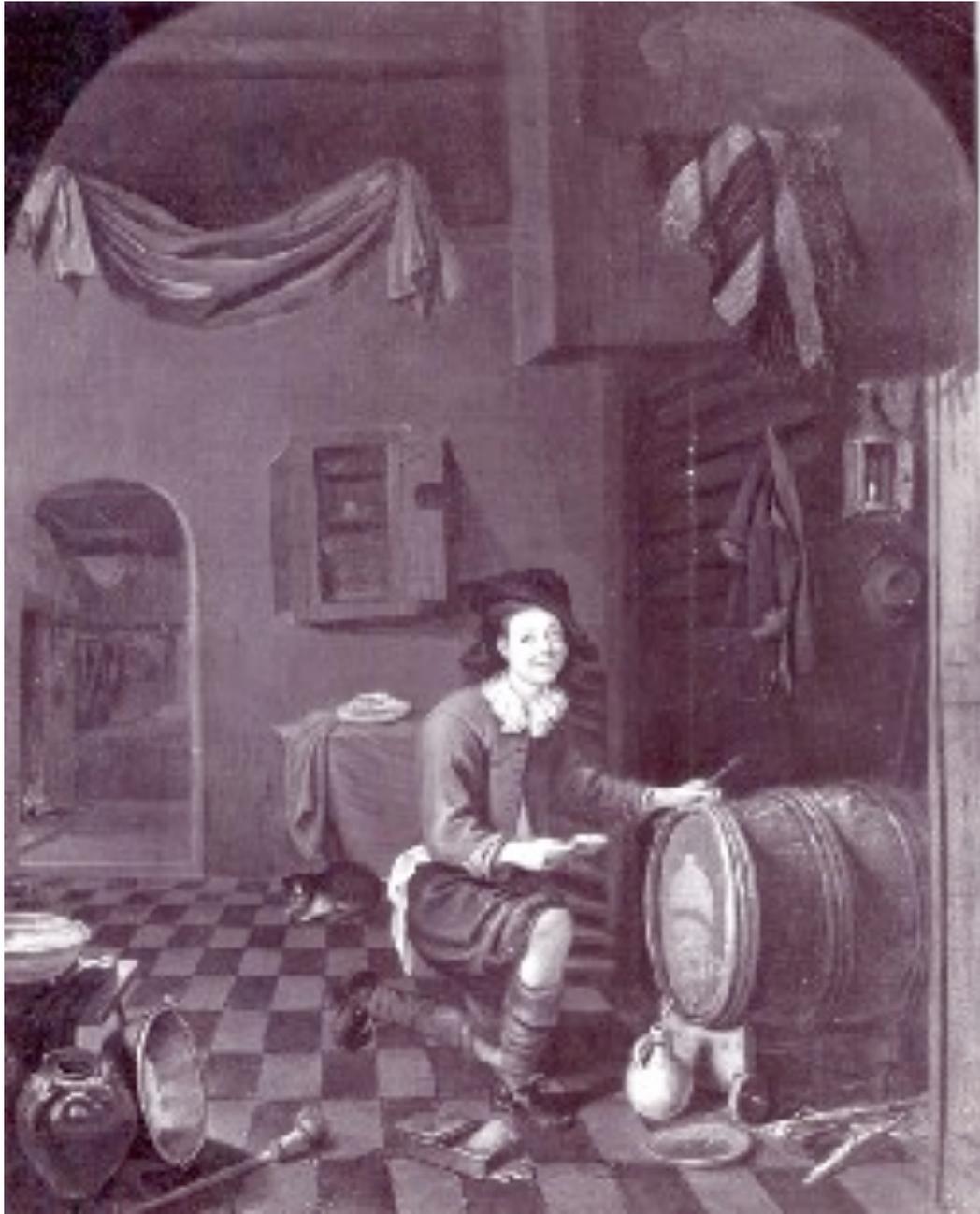


1. Jan Van der Heyden. **View of a Castle.** Scene with an immovable bridge over a city canal surrounding the castle. Castle has a large, square tower. A vehicle appears on the bridge and a small boat on the canal. Panel, about 45 x 42 cm. Source: Auctionhouse Dorotheum, Vienna. Expertise by Dr. Robert Eigenberger. Cost price: Hfl. 8,212.50. Projected sales price: Hfl. 12,000.

[This painting is recognized as a first-class masterpiece and has a well-documented history. I still have a catalog listing as: "416. Kunstauktion, Gemälde Alter und Neuer Meister, Wien, Dorotheum, 20-22 Oktober 1932.]



2. Isaak [sic] Koedijk, **Youthful Wine Drinker** beside a wine barrel in a large room. Canvas, about 100 x 70 cm. Source: Rosendaal Art Dealership, Amsterdam. Cost price: Hfl.900. Projected sales price: Hfl. 1,500.



3. Francisco Pacheco, **Portrait of a Bishop**, figure (bareheaded) with a pointed beard and a simple white collar of which the crest is placed on the backside of the canvas. Dimensions, 54 x 46 cm. Source: Auction House Mak, Amsterdam. Cost price: Hfl. 52.40. Projected sales price: Hfl. 1,000.



4. Herman Saftleven. **A marine scene**, depicting a sea with rough waves with ships. Signed: HSL. Panel, about 60 x 40 cm. Source: Albert Schmidt, Amsterdam. Cost price: Hfl. 575. Projected sales price: Hfl. 950.

The stolen sculpture: Bust of Frieda Krämer

Declaration of Max Amichai Heppner:

This photograph is of Mrs. Frieda Cornelius Krämer, my grandmother, the model for a sculpture taken from our home in Amsterdam-South, Noorder Amstel Laan 113 III, latest in August 1942, by Nazi looters.

The bust, by an unknown artist, is white marble, about 20-24 inches in height. Fashioned on commission from the sitter's husband, Jakob Kramer, my mother's father, in Munich, Germany, about 1928. [No photograph is available of the sculpture itself.]

PROLOGUE

(by Max Amichai Heppner)

When Father fought back against the Nazis, he didn't fight with guns. He had none. And since his days in the German Army in 1918 at the end of World War I, he hated the sight of guns. Instead, he fought back with what we Jews call *Seychel*, loosely translated as “using your noggin.” Father was smart enough to anticipate most moves the Nazis made against him and his family, and he generally succeeded in foiling the Nazis throughout the time he had the misfortune of having to deal with them.

Father succeeded first off by successfully hiding his family—my mother and me—from certain death in Nazi gas chambers. More remarkably, he also succeeded as an inventive business man, taking his art dealership underground and preserving it from Nazi art thieves.

Foiling these thieves, who tried to grab every valuable piece of art they could get their hands on, was no mean accomplishment. Art theft was a major preoccupation for the Nazis. They prided themselves on their acquisitions, from the most petty Nazi bureaucrat all the way up to the ministers of Government and the Führer himself. Hitler kept his own enviable collection of masterful art near his side until his final moments in his bunker at Berchtesgarden.

Art theft was not random. It was carefully organized and orchestrated by State-run institutions, as my family's story attests. The time and place of this story starts in Berlin, Germany, where my father established his business in the 1920's, and ends in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where my parents had fled to escape earlier persecution and theft in Germany.

At the time the thieves first came to list and haul away my father's inventory of valuable art, we were living in Amsterdam, and I was just seven years old. Even so, I can remember these raids quite well, because my father worked from home and his showroom was the sitting room in our apartment. Our home was located on a wide avenue on the edge of Amsterdam's new Jewish neighborhood.

I witnessed the theft with my own frightened eyes, even though I didn't really know about everything that was at issue. All I knew was that my family's space was being invaded and our family's possessions were being stolen. Of course, later I learned that the Nazis also were scheming to take our lives.

Although my memories are vivid, they are limited in scope. I'm presenting my Father's more adult view based on a manuscript he drafted during the months after Holland was liberated in 1944. Unfortunately, with his story still unfinished, Dr. Albert Heppner suddenly died, leaving the rest of the story for me to finish.

Here is how Dad began.

HOW I GOT INTO THE ART BUSINESS

(by Dr. Albert Heppner)

My father, Max Heppner (1866-1917), had a fashionable art-import business in the main commercial district of Berlin. He proudly exhibited a certificate of official patronage by the Imperial House of Germany near the door of his fancy establishment. From the time I was a lad, I heard about the international art trade, and it was only natural I'd want to enter this field myself.

I didn't want to just sell art, however; I wanted to know everything there was to know about the history of what I was selling and the artists who created these pieces. So, after a brief stint in the German military, at age 18, I went to the venerable Heidelberg University and majored in art history. I continued my studies clear through the doctorate level, in part at the University of Munich and at the University of Berlin, where I did my doctoral thesis.

Only then did I attend to the business end of the art field and searched out a good place to do an apprenticeship. I looked to the Netherlands for that because in college I had increasingly specialized in the art of the Golden Age of Holland that bloomed in the Seventeenth Century. I was fortunate to be accepted into the well-known and well-connected firm of Dr. Jacques Goudstikker, one of the top art dealers and collectors in Holland at the time.

So in 1924, I packed my student's trunk and a few books and moved to Amsterdam. Working under Dr. Goudstikker was a joy and an inspiration. He led me from painting as an art form to painting as means to look into the soul of the artist and

sense his captivation with his subject. We went on trips into the country and were stirred by the same views that had fascinated master painters like Rembrandt and Jan Steen. Through Goudstikker's eyes, land and landscape painting, people and portraiture became one.

When my one-year apprenticeship ended in 1925, I returned to Berlin and, two years later, married Irene Kramer, whom I had met while studying at the University of Munich. In the next six years, I built up a nice dealership for myself, trading in art by the old Dutch master painters I had come to love so intensely. I also started writing--and selling!--articles on Dutch seventeenth-century art to art periodicals.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE DUTCH

While living and working in Berlin, I kept up with my business contacts and new-found friends in Holland. One of them was Frans Burbach, a young student accountant, who married Ans van der Woord, with whom I had established a platonic friendship during my apprenticeship.

During occasional visits to Amsterdam, I got to know both of them better, and I got into long, involved conversations with Frans, notably about politics, whenever I could drag him away from his study books. He worked a full day as a bank clerk and went to accounting school at night, a rare undertaking in those days.

Increasingly, we discussed the worsening political situation in Germany. Even as late as 1932, I remained optimistic about the future, while Frans could see nothing but doom on the horizon.

At first, I felt Hitler wouldn't get far with his ranting style of politics.

"Let's assume he will win the next election, which is highly doubtful," I said to Frans. "Then, to hold the country together, the Nazis would have to drop their divisive tactics of hate. Certainly, there is no chance that a civilized country in the middle of Europe would adopt an official, overt policy of anti-Semitism. There are half a million Jews in Germany, for Heaven's sake. What can Hitler do? Throw us all out? Don't be ridiculous, Frans. Decent people wouldn't stand for it."

I was wrong. Hitler won the next election and his first move as Chancellor was to declare April 1, 1933, a day of boycott against all Jewish shops and businesses in the Reich. Plenty of lawless people responded to his invitation to mayhem. That surprised me. In reaction to this lawlessness, decent people did . . . nothing! That horrified me.

The evening paper that April Fools Day told that gangs of hoodlums had beat up Jews in various parts of the country. There was not one word of editorial outrage expressed about these stories. There was not a single report of a hand of protection extended by long-time neighbors of the victims, not even to protect them from outright murder.

My wife, Irene, found one newspaper article with a small paragraph saying that in the eastern city of Breslau, the police were taking away the passports of Jewish citizens. She read the paragraph to me aloud and said: "Let's get out before they start taking up passports here in Berlin, too."

"Frightening, isn't it?" I said. "You probably are right. We in Berlin can't expect to be treated any better than the Jews in Breslau. But if we're going to leave, I'll need a

few days to arrange things. I need to unframe my paintings and pack them. I'll have to look for a way to ship out our furniture."

"Someone else can take care of our paintings and furniture, but no one else can travel to Holland for us," Irene said practically.

I let her words sink in. "Holland" she had said, as if it were a foregone conclusion we would go there. And she was right. Holland was a hospitable, harmonious corner of Europe that stayed out of wars and provided a refuge for persecuted peoples. Of course, that was the place to run for safety.

So I telephoned Frans to get his take on the situation in Germany and the prospects of finding refuge in Holland.

"You still think they're going to follow through on all that Jew-hatred they spout?" I asked Frans.

"They have gotten it into their heads that they can solve their troubles by making trouble for Jews," he answered soberly. "And the trouble they have in mind isn't just a rumble like the one you saw in Berlin. They'll kill you. Get out quick, while you can. Ans and I will help you."

"How can you help, Frans?" I replied, trying to be realistic. "There's a depression on. People are out of work. You have a job, you're lucky. You have a home. I'd be jobless and homeless if I came to Holland."

"Just come. It'll work," Frans said simply.

"I'm worried," I said. "People have trouble affording bread and cheese. Who is going to have money to buy art from an émigré?"

“Albert,” Frans replied in his modulated, patient tone of voice. “You’re trying to talk sense in the midst of chaos. Come first. Then worry about setting up your art dealership.”

I saw his point. But moving still required planning and preparation, such as getting money out of the country. Already there were severe currency restrictions.

MAKING PLANS AND MOVING OUT

From my international trading, I had considerable experience with the vagaries of the postal service. If I packed art work carefully and took it personally to the post office to send it insured, it often disappeared or arrived damaged in the country where it was supposed to go. However, if I wrapped a package indifferently and casually dropped it into the mailbox, it arrived intact, regardless of its value.

So when I was thinking of ways to circumvent currency restrictions, I grabbed some prints that hadn’t sold, pasted thousand-mark notes inside the matting, wrapped them loosely, and mailed them third class to Frans in Holland. Every one of these parcels arrived safely, untouched by the censor!

The next day, I concentrated on getting cash from my savings at the bank, and I managed to get that to Holland with the help of a neighbor Walter von Sauer. I hadn’t counted on help and was rushing around when Walter passed me in the street. I almost rushed by him without even tipping my hat.

“Albert, what’s the hurry?” he said as he grabbed my arm.

“I am running around like crazy to get my hands on some cash,” I said. “We’re leaving the country.”

The words just tumbled out of my mouth, and suddenly they frightened me. Walter von Sauer was a bank official. Possibly, he could help me. Even more possibly, he was a man I shouldn’t talk to without weighing my words. It had come to that! You had to be careful talking to friends and neighbors.

But von Sauer acted instinctively, too. He had me write a check to him and said, “I’ll get this money to Holland for you. I’ll make it seem official business.”

It worked out, and the von Sauers kept supporting us, even helping us pack things and on our last day, driving us to the railway station in their car.

The train was thoroughly searched by Nazi police before it crossed the border. But we had valid passports and the searchers didn’t discover the last bit of cash Irene had sewed into her travel blanket. They stomped out, and soon we saw the last of Germany.

SETTLING INTO LIFE IN THE NETHERLANDS

When we stepped out of the train in Amsterdam, the familiar canals that ring Central Station were glistening in sunshine. Sunshine! In the rainy month of May, yet. Holland seemed to put out a welcome mat for us refugees arriving in search of a new life.

As I had expected, starting over in a new country was no picnic. Holland, like the rest of the world, was in the midst of a deep depression. Housing, nonetheless, was at a premium and hard to find. Numerous relatives distracted us from our own needs by

wanting our help in leaving Germany. And on top of all that, we discovered that my wife, Irene, was pregnant. What a mess to bring a newborn child into!

Shortly after the doctor told Irene she was expecting, I received a telegram. I feared another disaster in Germany, but it turned out the telegram had come from Holland to Germany and back. I wondered who in Holland knew me, wanted to reach me urgently, but didn't know I was in the country.

I ripped open the envelope. The message started with an apology, and it ended with the signature of a certain Mr. Van Dongen, a curator of a small museum in Amsterdam. Slowly the message between apology and signature started making sense. It came back to me that I had contributed several paintings to an exhibition at the man's museum. With everything else going on, I had forgotten about that loan. Now it seemed, the curator had run into a technicality about shipping the canvases back to Berlin. He asked for instructions. Here my paintings were in Amsterdam!

I raced to the phone and, interrupting his formal greeting, I cried: "Please tell me quick. Do you still have the paintings?"

He didn't know what I was talking about. How could he! I let myself calm down and started over by identifying myself and my concern. It turned out that the paintings were still in Amsterdam and Van Dongen would keep them for me.

"They'll bring you luck, you'll see," our landlady said when I told her the story. "There's a Dutch proverb that says, every baby is born with a silver daalder in its mouth. It seems that this baby is delivering! Sell one of Van Dongen's paintings and you'll give that baby a good start in life." Well, I thought, maybe so.

ADVENTURES IN TRANSFERRING THE BUSINESS

Hearing about the Van Dongen paintings gave me another idea. Maybe I could salvage something from my stock of paintings still in our old home in Berlin. I asked around in Amsterdam and found a mover by the name of Buch who was willing to take on the ticklish operation I had in mind. I asked him what he would do about documentation.

“You ask me about papers, Dr. Heppner?” Buch replied. “Who worries about papers at a time like this?” He laughed. “I’ve found that no one questions a moving man. Many house thieves, in fact, do quite well by just backing a moving van to the door of a house they want to rob while the occupants are away. No one in the neighborhood lifts a finger even when they see every stick the family owns being carried out the door into a moving van.”

We agreed on a price for the trip--a base fee if he had to return empty and a hefty bonus if he came back loaded. He made a successful run, and he telephoned me elatedly. He said I would have all my furniture and he would have his bonus.

I met Buch and his van in front of a townhouse with a small studio I had just been able to rent. His crew was just unloading all my goods onto the sidewalk. The stairwells in that old packing house were too narrow to carry up any loads, so the furniture had to be hoisted from the sidewalk into a window with a rope and pulley.

Buch separated himself from the work and came over to shake my hand.

“Congratulations,” I said warmly. “I can’t believe my eyes. It seems you got it all.”

“Right you are, doctor,” he said, all smiles. “I told you, no one bothers a mover. I saw a few Brown Shirts around but they ignored me. All I left was a few odds and ends that weren’t worth moving. Like some bags of old clothes, some old paintings on the wall, and . . .”

“Old paintings!” I interrupted. “You didn’t bring my *paintings*!?! You blithering idiot. You nincompoop. You could have left everything else if you would only have brought my paintings. They are my lifeblood. And you stand here on your two lumpy feet and tell me you left them behind. Dunderhead!”

“Dunderhead yourself,” Buch yelled back. “Here I pull off this dangerous run into Berlin--and don’t get me wrong, plenty of movers have had trouble. And then you have the guts to yell at me over a couple of old paintings! Here, ”he said, “handing me an end of rope. You can hoist this junk in the window yourself. I’m walking off this job.”

I yelled back and of course he yelled some more, too. When our anger boiled off, I pointed out to him more civilly why the paintings he had left behind were so important to me. I explained that I did business from my home and that the paintings were valuable stock in trade. And I apologized. Of course, I should have clarified that before he ever undertook the run.

Buch apologized also. He said he understood why it was hard for me to keep all my ducks in line and agreed to make another trip to Berlin to try to rescue those paintings.

While he hurried to hoist the rest of my furniture into the window, I got out my active folder from my business files and made a list for Buch of every painting he should look for. He had been right to call me an idiot. I should have prepared that list for him before he left town the first time. Now I even gave him a folder of photographs to go by.

As I leafed through the photographs, I came across a Boecklin landscape that still hung with my paintings but belonged to my friend Dr. Weidmann in Berlin. No use trying to send that canvas back and forth, I thought. So I told Buch to leave it, and I planned to wire Weidmann to meet Buch while he was loading to take his painting home.

Buch was right about me. I had trouble keeping my ducks in line. In the midst of worrying about everything else, I forgot to wire Weidmann.

When Buch came back—and yes, he made a second successful run—I noticed the Boecklin landscape missing, and even then I didn't remember that I had planned to have Weidmann pick it up while Buch was loading the rest to take to Amsterdam. I only saw it was missing and without thinking, I picked up the phone, called Weidmann, and reported his property stolen.

In turn, he called the police. They broke into my old apartment and got furious when they found everything missing except the very painting that Weidmann had reported stolen.

Weidmann was beside himself when he phoned me about it. He was convinced I had been out to make big trouble for him. I tried to calm him down and explain the situation, but it was no use, and I am deeply sorry to this day about the way I let him down.

In the next few weeks, we straightened the furniture in our new place and hung the paintings in the little downstairs studio I planned to use for a showroom. Slowly, life took on a semblance of normalcy.

RUMBLINGS OF WAR

I didn't expect war to break out when it did. The politics of Europe seemed to just be bumbling along. The Nazis were gobbling up one piece of neighboring real estate after the other without any serious interference. Hitler arrogated a manifest destiny to expand as he wished into Central Europe.

When I received an invitation to attend a major art exhibit in Geneva, Switzerland, in the summer of 1939, I deliberated a moment about the politics of Europe, then decided that nothing much would change soon. Why not take a vacation? In the six years since I left Berlin, I had gone on some business trips, but no real time off. I thought going to Switzerland would be fun for all three of us in the family. Irene could again do some hiking in the Alps, which she had so enjoyed when she was a teenager. Our son Max was getting to an age where he might enjoy meeting people from a different culture. And I myself was especially excited. The Swiss exhibit included some rare treasures

from the Prado in Madrid, which had been sent to Geneva for safekeeping during the Spanish Civil War.

I found the Prado treasures every bit as good as I had expected. I also found friends and relatives from Germany who'd escaped to Switzerland, and I enjoyed seeing them again.

Meanwhile, I kept an ear cocked to international developments, although I didn't expect things to explode soon. But they did.

As I was leaving the Swiss National Fair in Zurich one fine afternoon, the radio blared news of the Nazi invasion of Poland. I knew that this would soon affect the rest of Europe. If we wanted to get home at all, we had to pack and run.

I was determined to do go back to Amsterdam. I had just moved my family and business to a new apartment, and I didn't want to abandon either. I thought that if war came, I could weather it as safely in neutral Holland as in neutral Switzerland.

Of course, I heard voices that told me different. Since I had entered Switzerland as a tourist on a German passport, friends said, I was in an enviable position. I'd left Germany before passports were stamped with a "J" to signify the holder was Jewish, and so the Swiss Government might well let us stay. They let no one do so with a "J" passport—they were taking no more refugees.

If I'd had a crystal ball, I might have followed the advice to stay. I had no crystal ball, so I kept my own counsel. We took the first possible train back to Holland—one of the last to go, I later found out. The Dutch were sealing their borders in expectation of war.

We got home, more stressed than usual from a vacation, but without any ill aftereffects. I waited to hear about a declaration of war from England and France, but nothing like that happened. Hitler was still free to expand German territory as he pleased.

Nonetheless, I had faith in the oft-repeated assurances from Germany that it would observe the neutrality of the Low Countries—The Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

THE NAZIS INVADE HOLLAND

My faith in these promises was misplaced. One dark day in May of 1940, Nazi tanks brazenly poured over the Dutch border. At first I saw this as the beginning of their end. I thought that since the integrity of the entire Western line of defense was threatened, the Western powers would quickly spring into action.

I knew the military lineup. Together, the invaded Low Countries and their two big-power Allies could match the Nazis division for division and defeat the enemy on their own soil in fairly short order. However, the Brits and the Frenchies stayed home and the Nazis bombed the abandoned Dutch into surrender. Our remaining hope to escape from them now lay with the Americans.

My brother-in-law Max, who had lived with us for some time after he fled from Germany to Holland, had departed for the United States relatively recently, and he had advised us to file for a U.S. visa as a means of escape in case the worst happened. I had

made that application. Since the worst did indeed seem to be happening, I rushed to the American consulate to see what could be done.

The moment the consulate came into view, I saw this solution as hopeless. Hundreds of people were blocking the street, with policemen trying to get them to leave. I approached one of the officers, who told me the consul had locked the gates!

The policeman suggested I forget about formalities and get to IJmuiden, the nearby Dutch harbor on the North Sea, as quickly as possible. There was a rumor that rescue ships from Britain were coming to pick up refugees there.

I decided to take his advice, but public transportation had become entirely unavailable. I rushed home and telephoned around to see whether some taxi driver would be willing to drive to the harbor, war or no war. My friend Han van der Smagt finally helped find me a driver who'd do it, and soon we rushed off toward our last chance for freedom. We encountered nothing unusual on the road, but as we approached the harbor, a Dutch soldier stopped us.

"The harbor has been bombed flat," he shouted at the driver as he set up a roadblock right in front of the cab. "We're under attack. To proceed is suicide."

Smoke billowed from the docks. There was no choice but to turn around.

Some friends had moved faster and found boats to cross the English Channel. But it was no panacea. For example, my dear friend and former boss, Dr. Jacques Goudstikker, had managed to get himself, his wife, and his newborn child on board a rescue ship. Once the ship had crossed the Channel, however, debarking was delayed.

Dr. Goudstikker, bored by the wait, went on deck to smoke a cigarette. As he paced the deck, he missed seeing a hatch that had been left open and fell to his death in the ship's hold. Later, I heard that his widow and baby arrived alone and penniless in the United States.

Most of my friends who remained behind were hopeless about the future. Several people committed suicide. I didn't see it their way. Even if the Nazis were bent on killing me, I wasn't going to do them a favor and save them the trouble of pulling the trigger.

LIVING UNDER NAZI OCCUPATION

I did what I could to prepare for a future under Nazi eyes. First, I set out to destroy all papers, letters, documents, and magazines that could in any way be thought incriminating or offensive. I came up with quite a pile. I tried to stuff some down the toilet, but it plugged up. I fished them out of the toilet and put them in the stove. Wet as the papers were, they wouldn't burn. So I hauled them off and dumped them in a canal near the edge of the city where we often had taken evening walks.

I next turned my attention toward safeguarding my business stock. Valuable paintings seemed altogether too enticing a prize for any enemy to lay eyes on. First, my friend Frans Burbach offered me the use of his attic and agreed to store my stock of paintings, including some that I had been keeping for my sister. I didn't feel that storing them in his attic was any safer than storing them in mine, and looked for a better option.

My friend Dr. William Mautner then introduced me to a Dutch count, a Mr. Van der Feer-Ladder, who owned a castle-like villa near Baarn, a dozen miles out of town. He agreed to help me and offered storage in the wine cellar of his huge villa. I was glad to take the offer, since Van der Feer was a member of the Dutch nobility, and I sensed the Nazis would be hesitant to steal from his castle.

I didn't want to involve any outsider in the risky job of actually moving the paintings. Working alone, I carefully took my paintings out of their frames, rolled them, and wrapped them in soft material. Then, with a bundle of rolls under my arms, I took the train to Baarn.

That fateful trip is one I'll never forget because the risk I was undertaking was so at odds with the charms of nature that spring day in 1940. I passed blooming flowers and budding trees filled with chirping birds even while my heart was pounding in fear that someone might stop me and deprive me of my valued possessions.

The trip went off without a hitch, however, and for a time it seemed that the precaution of hiding my paintings was unnecessary. The Nazis didn't aggress on private property, Jewish or Gentile, and instituted no persecutions and few restrictions.

Business, which had come to a standstill during the invasion, resumed quite lively. This was certainly true in the art field. People who ordinarily wouldn't be interested in art objects suddenly were buying big because they didn't trust the currency to hold its value. And the occupiers, far from acting like thieves during that year, patronized Dutch dealers and paid them good prices for their wares.

I myself wouldn't think of dealing with Nazis, of course. Dutchmen brought me enough business, and I traded to my heart's content. I couldn't get my hands on enough paintings to satisfy the demand, so I branched out more into drawings and etchings. I learned quite a bit.

Still, I kept open a wary eye. This prosperity, I feared, might not last. I remembered the crazy optimism that arose after Hitler came to power in Germany. My uncle, Adolf Heppner, who also was in the art business, wrote me from Berlin that I had been a fool to leave town. Business was booming and he hadn't seen prosperity like this in years. How well I knew that Uncle Adolf's dream of prosperity soon turned into a nightmare.

START OF THE CONFISCATIONS

The tenor of the occupation changed in 1941, roughly at the start of the year. The exact time is hard to pinpoint because the change in Nazi policy was gradual. Confiscations were carefully couched so as not to seem unbearable. They openly conducted their actions and made them look like charity drives to support the war emergency.

Each action sounded like a one-time event. It was made to seem that if you cooperated just one more time, nothing untoward would follow. Things always came down to the final argument: "Why risk all you have--even your freedom--to save . . . whatever." In this way, the Nazis got away with theft and oppression without any resistance.

The first confiscation that affected me personally was a call for precious and

semiprecious metals: Gold, silver, copper, nickel, and lead. To support the idea that the call-up was for “the war effort” again, art objects were exempted, and so were wedding rings. So we didn’t worry about these items, and we decided to save the rest by burying the stuff.

As an apartment dweller, I owned no ground, so I made an arrangement with my friend Han van der Smagt to bury items on the confiscation list. Together, we cheerfully interred our table silver, brass candelabras, copper kettles, and the like in his backyard garden. We even devised a way to try to preserve my golden pocket watch from decomposing during its interment.

After the deadline for the call-up lapsed, I expected that sooner or later, the Nazis would come checking to see why I hadn’t declared anything but a couple of pieces of junk. Sure enough, one day we saw a house-to-house search party come to our block unannounced.

Even though my stuff covered by the confiscation was out of the house, the search still worried me. The confiscation edict was open to interpretation, my logical mind told me. For example, how would inspectors differentiate between household utensils, which were included in the call-up, and works of art, which were exempted? I had decided to keep some bronze statuettes and plaques that weren’t really art and had only sentimental value. Would the inspectors agree they were "art"? Or would they insist they were “utensils.” It would all depend on whether the people making the distinction were looking for trouble.

The search of our apartment was conducted with Prussian thoroughness. The man

in charge turned out to be an acquaintance, Mr. Mensing, Jr., owner of the auction house of Muller and Cie., which specializes in objects of art.

When I saw Mensing come through the door with a sheaf of official looking documents in his hands, I looked at his face for a sign of where he stood. He neither said nor did anything out of the ordinary--his approach was totally professional. But he let drop a hint of support when he chided me for having put too low a value on my statuettes, which we both knew wouldn't bring in a nickel on the art market.

Still, Mensing's inspection had the potential for harm. His duties required him to list not only the value of items included in the call-up, but also objects of art that I had in the house, even though at the moment they were exempt from confiscation. I was glad that early on I had taken the precaution of moving my business stock out of the apartment.

The raiders announced they'd be back the next morning. Before they came, Irene and I reviewed our possessions to make sure we had none that should have been declared, and we concluded that we were in the clear. But when I heard the boots of the officials stomping up our stairs, I suddenly remembered that I had a silver medallion lying on my dresser. It was a commemorative coin for the 450th anniversary of the birthday of Albrecht Dürer, so it might be considered either an object of art or just a plain coin.

To be on the safe side, I whispered to Irene to ditch it while I went to answer the door. When she picked up the coin, Irene also found a gold fountain pen we hadn't declared. She quickly put the medallion behind a wall panel in the living room and she tossed the pen out the window.

She blanched when immediately upon entering the apartment, the inspector in charge stepped toward the window. “What a lovely view you have from here,” he said. Was that mock friendliness? Had he noticed her tossing out the fountain pen? Apparently, not.

He didn’t go into this any further, and apparently he had just been making pleasantries. The inspectors poked into all our drawers and cabinets, and they seemed to find nothing offensive. Then they brought out consent forms for us to sign and gave us itemized receipts for the metal objects they would be taking away.

I looked at the forms. Everything was listed neatly. Except, there was no mention of my photographic equipment. Obviously, the searchers wanted that equipment for themselves.

The next day, yet another search party came to check on the work of the original group. They wore the uniform of the Amsterdam Municipal Police and were not at all hostile. The sergeant in charge seemed genuinely sorry to be involved in this kind of work, but there obviously was nothing he could do to escape the assignment. He asked to see our receipts.

“It’s a pity, sir, that it has come to this, and believe me, I am sorry.” He paused. “Good luck, sir . . . I mean with all of your, ahem, troubles.” Then, quietly, they left.

After that, a single official, another Dutch policeman, came by. He said he needed to make sure the other police had done a professional job. For the Nazis, no search was thorough enough.

TRADING WITH FAKE RECORDS

Meanwhile, I kept trading, and the count with the big mansion in Baarn who hid my inventory was extremely good about my coming and going to and from his place. One day, Mr. Van der Feer saw me carrying in rolls of canvases and stopped to chat as I was preparing to stow them in his cellar.

"Isn't it quite a bit of work to unframe your painting for storage and then reframe them for sale?" he asked with concern.

"Yes, it is quite time-consuming," I said. "But if we want to hide paintings in your wine-cellar, that still seems the safest procedure."

"True," he said. "But I doubt that anyone would bother paintings I hang in my house. Why don't you just hang new stuff you bring in right on my bare walls. You could then keep most items you trade in their frames the whole time."

"That's a helpful offer," I said. "We'll try it that way next time I come."

Mr. Van der Feer became interested in how and where to hang my paintings and we had a good time decorating his mansion. And it did turn out to save me a lot of time.

I also had been spending more time than I liked juggling my books to confuse any nosy inspectors. One day, my old friend, Dr. Heinz Gottschalk, a rare book dealer who had escaped from Berlin to Amsterdam on the same train as I, stopped by for a chat and looked over my shoulder at my bookkeeping.

"Heavens, you're doing a lot of paperwork," he said. "Looks like that's pretty complex."

"Sure," I said. "Nothing seems to be as simple as it was before."

"Let me see the secret system you worked out," he said. "I am facing the same problems you do."

"Let me walk you through an example," I answered. "See this Simon de Vlieger landscape? I bought it an art auction in Delft in January. At that point, it got recorded in a plain and open record, see?"

"Right."

"Good. So the next week, I took it into hiding in Baarn and I covered its disappearance by an invented sale to a dealer in Rotterdam. You recognize the name?" I asked. Gottschalk nodded.

"Meanwhile," I said, "I had an excellent photograph made of the painting, which I used to interest a customer in Utrecht. Look at the dates. It only took about 10 days. Now I had to have the painting reappear on my records during the time I needed to deliver it.. So, I entered another fake transaction to get a painting--any painting--from another dealer. Then I made a fourth entry to show that I sold the supposedly newly acquired piece to my customer in Utrecht."

"That at least doubles your bookkeeping," Gottschalk observed.

"True," I said.

"Time aside, I see another disadvantage," Gottschalk said. "Your system lacks credibility. Anyone taking a careful look would see too much trading activity for the amount of stock you have on hand at any one time."

"That could be," I agreed.

"I have an idea to cover both drawbacks, Albert," he said. "Why don't you buy

some cheap paintings--or even copies of real works--and hang them openly in your apartment. Give the cheap stuff a title to match a real painting in your secret hideaway, and your records won't have to be more complex than if you kept everything in the open."

"Good idea," I said. "I'll adopt it." And I immediately started handling my new acquisitions that way.

END OF MY BUSINESS OPERATIONS

The first step the Nazis took to close me out of the art world was indirect. It resulted when Nazi authorities converted all museums and libraries into "Halls of Culture" to promote Germanic art and Aryan industry. Of course the Halls of Culture were closed to Jews, which meant that I could hold no more gallery lectures and do no more research in reference rooms.

Next, they cut off the major source of new art for my business by barring Jews from public auctions. Still, that didn't close me out completely. The formal end to my career came in an edict that forced me out of the Art Dealers Association.

The Art Dealers Association long predated the Nazis. Belonging to it helped me do business since it was an excellent way to maintain contacts in the art world and exchange information. True, there were maverick dealers who seemed to operate effectively without a membership, but most serious dealers belonged.

The Nazis saw the association as an ideal method for gaining control. They forced all members to sign affidavits declaring, among other things, that all four of their grandparents were non-Jewish. Obviously, known Jews like me couldn't qualify, and I

didn't even bother to pick up that affidavit. By imposing one regulation after another, the Nazis eventually co-opted the Association completely. It became like a Medieval guild, where membership was a privilege and lack of membership meant exclusion from business.

Of course, on the sly, I continued dealing in art with trusted friends even after I lost my membership. I was fortunate to have my showroom at home, and was able to continue even after Jewish dealers with fancy downtown showrooms were closed down. But they came for my home-based business in due time.

They came at a poor time for me. Sure, my secret storehouse which held most of my genuine stock, saved me from financial ruin, but at the time of the raid, I had quite a few genuine pieces on my wall. My business was humming and I had to have good stock ready for delivery to customers. So along with a nice hoard of fakes and copies, the raiders also managed to get away with six really good pieces I was about to sell. However, my losses would have been greater if my wife, Irene, hadn't done some fast thinking at the time of the raid.

That day, I had gone on business to The Hague, defying the ban that kept Jews from using public transportation. Irene answered the door when the Amsterdam Municipal Police knocked politely and announced they were coming to inventory my art collection. Irene noticed right away that these men were the same good-natured types that had patrolled our neighborhood for years, and they were not at all happy about their mission. Daringly, she decided to feel them out about how loyal they might be to the new regime they were forced to support.

It didn't take long before the officers let their sympathies come to the surface. In fact, from the first, the sergeant in charge seemed to stumble over his words from embarrassment.

He said: "I was sent by the, uh, you might say, *authorities*, if you know what I mean, to, well, *see about* your husband's paintings." He cleared his throat. Then stopped.

"Are you going to confiscate them?" Irene asked boldly.

"Oh, no," the sergeant said quickly. "That's not our job. We just make lists of what you have and then the, uh, *authorities* decide what to do next." He paused again. Then added, "I can tell you, though, that this, uh, *inventory* can take quite some time. As we work our way through your place, we might not be able to see what's going on in the other parts of the apartment."

And at that, Irene said, the sergeant gave her a barely noticeable but very real wink.

Of course, this could be open to interpretation. On the one hand, he might be indicating that he would close his eyes if she wanted to make a painting or two disappear. On the other hand, he might be WARNING her not to do anything underhanded because he couldn't protect her against the serious repercussion that might ensue.

Irene went into the kitchen and told the inspectors she was going to fix them a snack. She remembered advice she had heard from her mother when she was young. "When in doubt about dealing with men, distract their minds by filling their stomachs."

While Irene was puttering about in the kitchen and assessing the situation, she

kept a wary eye on what the police were doing. She was surprised by what she saw.

The sergeant took a small picture off the wall in the sitting room that I was using as my showroom. He examined the picture from all sides, then stepped into the hallway and put it down outside a clothes closet. Then he motioned his men into the living room at the far end of the apartment and sat them down to do some paperwork. To Irene, it looked like the sergeant was prompting her to hide the painting they had taken down by shoving it into the clothes closet.

Irene decided to signal back, giving them a chance to correct her if she misunderstood their meaning. Deliberately, carefully, she made several trips down the hall past the painting, and every time she passed it, she nudged it a bit closer to the closet door.

The police acted as if they noticed nothing. So Irene made one last pass by the picture and dropped a coat over it. Then she opened the door to the closet, and pushed the piece to the far end.

With a beating heart, she waited for the policemen's reactions. She knew this was a painting I was about to sell and that she was saving a real art work, not one of my fakes.

The police, who had been lounging in the living room, came alive the moment Irene emerged from the closet and started into their real inventory work as if nothing had happened.

Irene went back to the kitchen and pattered some more with the snack she was fixing. When she brought it out, the police eagerly stopped work even though they had barely begun. Irene set the table for them in the dining room, and she decided to sit with

them and watch for some more hints about what they might allow her to do. She didn't have long to wait before the sergeant took the opportunity.

“There isn't, ahem, any need for you to stay here while we do our work,” he said kindly. “If you need to consult someone about our, ahem, *inventory*, you can do that.”

Irene stayed cautious. She just smiled enigmatically and continued snacking alongside the police. Then she got another surprise.

The police said they needed a nap after eating all this good food, and they stretched out in easy chairs and on the sofa of the sitting room and went to sleep. Irene purposely banged around as she took the dishes back to the kitchen, and the men shifted drowsily, but gave no sign of waking up. So Irene followed up on the sergeant's veiled suggestion, and decided to work a scheme to save some more of the other good paintings we had prepared for sale.

She slipped out of the apartment and went down the avenue to a pay phone in the center strip and telephoned me in The Hague. When she reached me, she quickly told me what was happening and suggested I try to quickly sell some of our genuine paintings. She knew I was conferring with some dealers and suggested that I ask them to help me out.

“I'll tell the police you don't own these paintings anymore, so they won't have to be part of your inventory,” Irene said. “And then, when you come home, you can back up my story and show them the receipts.”

I knew two canvases I might be able to sell quickly. One was a Dusart landscape, and my friend, Mr. Schuurin, immediately volunteered to buy it from me, even though

he took the risk that I might never be able to deliver it. Mr. Stocker, a friend from Amsterdam also on business in The Hague, bought the other one, a canvas by Brucker.

Irene stayed on the phone till I could confirm the sales, and that took a bit of time. But when she returned to the apartment, the police were still napping. They awoke a short time later, stretched, and while they reached for their notebooks, Irene mentioned, as if she'd just thought of it, that two paintings still on the wall were not owned by me.

The sergeant showed Irene the forms he was filling out to make sure that he had it correct about which paintings weren't mine, and then continued working. At the end, he took down all the paintings, and put them all in a linen closet. Then he sealed the closet with the official seal of the City of Amsterdam.

Actually, the police had done something even more helpful than just passively letting Irene undermine their work. The sergeant came back the next day when I was home and explained he wanted to make sure that I understood how the inventory was conducted. As we talked, he silently took my hand and led me to another hall closet. There, in a dark corner, he had hidden away another small landscape. He winked one eye, crossed a finger over his lips, and meanwhile chatted away about the inventory as if nothing else was happening.

The sergeant had chosen well. I had forgotten that I had kept that little piece at home, and it was one of my genuine paintings.

Of course, the police inventory was just the beginning of an elaborate process the Nazis had devised to confiscate all the art that was held by Jewish dealers. The process was intended to look "professional," so they instituted their own "dealership," called

Omnia Treuhandgesellschaft, as a cover for their larceny. A Dr. Müdelmann, who was well schooled in art, was put in charge, and qualified appraisers were hired to make sure the authorities knew the provenance of what they were stealing. They even hired a lawyer, Dr. Hans Heumann, to take charge of making the confiscations look legal.

Omnia sent an art expert by the name of Dr. Bernard Degenhart along with Dr. Heumann to evaluate my own collection. I had met Degenhart years ago when we both wrote on Dutch art for the periodical Pantheon. I couldn't fathom how professionals like him could prostitute themselves to work for these Nazi thieves. There was much Degenhart could have done to help me under the circumstances because he had the right connections and knew the bureaucracy. But he went strictly by the book.

He listed the exact market price of each painting on the Omnia forms, and wasn't even pleasant about it. I did notice a slight bit of embarrassment when I opened the door for him and he had to look me straight in the face. But he didn't lift a finger to make things easier for me.

Degenhart didn't even try to make it easy for me when we explained that two of the paintings on the inventory weren't mine and had been sold. Irene showed him the notation, and he roughly tore the paper out of her hands.

"These are official documents," he growled. "What do you mean, 'sold'?" he continued, looking at me. "Why did a painting you sold hang on your showroom wall right beside the ones you have for sale?"

"Sold recently," I said. "I was just waiting for the buyers to pick them up."

"Tough luck for them, then," Degenhart said. "By the rules, if something hangs

on a Jewish wall, it is Jewish property.” His voice turned more ominous. “Look man, I’ll tell you something. If you Jews want to play hanky panky with the constituted authorities, you’re putting your own head on a serving plate—I can guarantee you that. Now leave me alone. I have work to do.”

After he left, I decided I wouldn’t leave things at that. I called Omnia and said Mr. Schuurig wanted to take home the painting I had sold him. Schuurig also called and bravely backed me up to the authorities. The two of us managed to prevail, and Omnia sent a policeman to give the painting to Schuurig.

I knew the Nazis were thorough operators, but they surprised me with their deep-going interest in what they were stealing, with a specially covetous eye cast on my Jan van der Heyden **View of a Castle** landscape. On the heels of the police and Degenhart, they sent around two more Omnia hirelings to assess my inventory and eye the Van der Heyden.

I was dumbfounded when one of the Nazi inspectors checking on Degenhart turned out to be Dr. Edward Plietzach. I had known him for years as a man of talent and expertise, a scholar and a respected authenticator with first-class credentials. He had been in business with Wilhelm van Bode and later headed the fashionable Berlin firm of Van Diemen.

And now? Now he was working out of the chancellery in The Hague, attached to the personal staff of Dr. Seijs Inquart, the Nazi’s puppet Governor of Holland. And to my further amazement, I sensed that this turncoat not only ran with thieves, but was involved in the same underhanded business as Degenhart—stealing from the officially confiscated

works of art.

The Nazis took great pains to cover up that they stole, and to do so, they first looted and then co-opted the venerable Dutch-Jewish financial house, Lippman-Rosenthal and Co., popularly known as the Liro. Like all loot, my stock was properly valued and then recorded in an account set up for me at the Liro. The Nazis insisted publicly that they eventually would pay cash to liquidate the Liro accounts. Of course they never did, but for a time, we could withdraw a minimal monthly amount to cover our living expenses.

When Dr. Plietzak and his companion, Dr. De Grayter took special interest in my Jan van der Heyden landscape valued by Degenhart at Hfl 12,000, they seemed to be removing it from the list that was to go to the Liro.

“What’s going on with the Van der Heyden?” I asked Plietzak.

“I have a client who is especially interested in this piece, Dr. Heppner,” he said, as if he were buying instead of stealing.

“I am afraid it isn’t available,” I said, picking up his businesslike tone. “It already was designated by the Amsterdam police for delivery to a favorite client.”

We sparred around like this for a while, until I convinced myself that I’d never see even a paper payment at the Liro for the stolen Van der Heyden. In the end, Plietzach just brashly crossed it off the list.

“Just a moment,” I said, taking one last jab at him. “If you’re taking this piece out of a room of sealed stock, I need a receipt. Otherwise I might get into real trouble.”

“Not needed,” he said gruffly. “I’ll send a van ‘round to pick it up,” he added,

and stalked out.

So I decided to play their own game and complained to Omnia about it on the phone. They answered if I had any complaints about irregularities, they'd be happy to send the SS Sicherheitspolizei over to investigate. I graciously declined their offer, but I wrote a letter on December 28, 1941, to both the Omnia and the authorities in The Hague, documenting all the paintings that had been confiscated.

From what I heard, many of the paintings looted from Jews wound up in the private hoard of our phony puppet Governor Seijs Inquart. I got wry mirth out of thinking that if the phony governor had any of my fake paintings on his wall, they'd be a good match for each other.

Except for businesses forcibly taken over by the Nazis, Jews could sell what was left of their businesses. In fact, a new specialty had sprung up to fill this niche. Non-Jewish entrepreneurs took over, usually for a pittance. Since my business now was officially closed, I decided to opt for this possibility. I could make a better deal than most Jewish businessmen because I still had the stock of good paintings hidden in Baarn, not just the shell left after the Nazis were done plundering.

My friend Walter Joachimsthal recommended one of these non-Jewish entrepreneurs, the partners Mr. Willet and Mr. Cornelissen. After a conference about their vision for the future, I decided they would do and we established a new partnership. We called it Wicoram, an acronym made from the first two letters of each active partner's last name and their city of operation, Amsterdam.

Neither Willet nor Cornelissen knew the first thing about art. Willet turned out to

have been a lawyer for a foreign bank that no longer operated in Holland, and Cornelissen was an accountant by trade. So I gave them a quick course on the business end of operating an art dealership; I planned to conduct all professional transactions from behind the scenes.

We rented a first-class showroom for the business on the Heerengracht, a fashionable canal street in the middle of downtown. I noted with wry humor that it was just around the bend from where the Nazis housed the Omnia organization, their own fake art dealership. One fake gave rise to another.

The Wicoram showroom was the fanciest I had ever operated in, and it was ironic that once we had opened for business, I never again dared set foot in that elegant layout. Business was better than ever. Wicoram immediately made enough money to provide a good income for all three of us new partners.

On their part, the Nazis weren't satisfied that they had robbed me of all they could filch. Like all Jewish businessmen, I next was ordered to list all my sources of income and all my assets, and substantiate them. I decided to try to beat them at this game, too. So I enlisted my tried and true accounting firm, Vos and Splint, in a project to prove that I wasn't earning a penny and didn't own a sous.

Vos and Splint assigned a young accountant by the name of Van Rooi to help me cook my books. The young man worked with dedication to make the official deadline. He roughed up and dog-eared the revised records covering past years to give the ledgers the look of having been around a few years. Then he announced with glee suitable for pronouncing me a millionaire that now I didn't own two sticks to rub together.

I wasn't nearly so pleased when Nazi officials called me in for an audit, especially when I saw that the Audit Examiner was a member of the NSB, the Dutch Nazi

party. He'd be likely to know more about Dutch financial affairs than a Nazi from across the border. However, I had memorized the key elements of the transactions that we invented to support the cooked books. I put on a show good enough to convince the auditor that I really was stone broke. In fact, he "took pity" on me and gave me 200 guilders to live on—in return for surrendering my life-insurance policy!

Soon I also had money coming in from an unexpected source that was entirely above-board, even by current Nazi rules. It developed from charity work I'd been doing.

When in the 1930's, the Hitler regime in Germany started driving out scores of Jews who then fled to Holland, the Dutch Jewish Community set up the Jewish Instruction Service to care for and acculturate the refugees. I volunteered to give illustrated lectures featuring an introduction to Dutch life via the life and times of painters and their subjects. The course was popular because the technique went over quite well.

Early in the Nazis occupation, they set up the Amsterdam Jewish Council to handle liaison with the Jewish community. The Council operated the only approved cultural outlet for Jews, and they absorbed the Jewish Instruction Service. The Council had a budget to finance its operations, and the director of the old Instruction Service, Dr. Bier, gave me the job of giving art lectures for pay.

Meanwhile, I still had my hands full maintaining my art dealings—at a safe distance from the showroom my new partners had set up. Understandably, I had some reservations about the total reliability of these partners—after all, our business was on the shady side of legality under the Nazi rules. I kept control by continuing to maintain non-active inventory at the mansion in Baarn.

Early in 1942, this mode of operating faced a threat. Mr. Van der Feer told me it was rumored that the Nazis were planning to billet some officers in the neighborhood. If that came to pass, it might well mean they would requisition rooms in the castle where my paintings were hanging. Hanging paintings right under the noses of Nazi troops would hardly seem wise, so we decided to move them out. But where to take them?

My old friend, Dr. Wil Mautner, suggested a manufacturer of wooden shoes, who had extra storage space at his factory. I had no idea how safe storage in a shoe factory would be, but decided it had to be better than keeping stuff within possible reach of Nazis in Baarn. So I worked out an arrangement with the factory owner.

This time, I didn't risk moving the paintings myself. I asked a non-Jewish, supportive art dealer to send a man around to pick up my paintings and deliver them to their new hiding place.

When, in 1942, the Nazis started actually deporting the Jews they had first robbed, I was fortunate to be nominally an employee of the Jewish Council. As such, I was exempt from deportation—at least for a while. Still, expecting things to get worse, I wanted to have a plan of escape ready.

I saw only two basic ways to do so. One was to cross Nazi lines—on land or by sea—and try to reach safe havens in England, Switzerland, Free France, or Spain. That approach involved a high initial risk. If you traveled by land, you would have to cross at least three borders, and each border was heavily guarded. If you went by sea, you literally were a sitting duck for Nazi patrols who fired on any unknown small vessels.

The other basic escape method was to go into hiding—to “submerge.” I knew of

several Jews who had found shelter with Gentile acquaintances somewhere in the countryside.

This approach generally involved less initial risk, but the subsequent risk was likely to escalate if the Nazis, as expected, would increase pressure on people providing hiding places. Furthermore, I disliked the passivity inherent in hiding; I preferred the definitive, active aspect of fleeing across the border. Sitting useless and vulnerable in some dark hideaway didn't appeal to me.

So, via my friend, Benno Hess, I heard of a gang that smuggled petroleum from Marseilles in Free France to the Nazis in Holland. The gang apparently was willing to smuggle Jews south instead of returning their gasoline truck empty to Marseilles.

This group initially declared itself ready to take us for \$10,000. I expressed some hesitation to pay that much—pointing out that this was equivalent to the value of a new house. In response, they allowed that they would take another family for the same price. I decided to go with that offer and ask my friend Dr. Heinz Graumann, his wife and son to come along. They also were refugees from Berlin, and I knew him from my college days. Once I explained the deal, shaky as it was, they agreed to give it a try.

The gang succeeded in smuggling us out of Amsterdam on public transportation. Once they put us in a “safe house,” they kept dangling the imminent arrival of the tank truck in front of us. Meanwhile, they shuttled us from place to place when the “safe houses” didn't turn out to be so safe. Eventually, Heinz and I confronted them, and they gave up their apparently baseless talk of smuggling us to Free France. Instead we had to settle for what I had wanted to avoid—hiding for the duration of the war.

At the time we broke with the smuggling ring, we had been holed up for two weeks in the bathhouse of an unused summer camp in the Southeast of Holland. We couldn't stay there much longer because people in the nearby town were heard discussing the strange things going on at the camp. We luckily were able to contact a newly organized cell of Dutch resistance fighters to help us out of our predicament. They gave us the names of two farm families near our temporary hiding place who might be willing to house us.

Heinz and I knew practically nothing about these possible hosts. We had nothing to go on to make a pick, so we just put numbers on two scraps of paper and drew lots. I picked number 1, which represented the farm of a certain Harry Janssen.

Picking Option 1 also meant we would move first, so we said a fond goodbye, not expecting to see the Graumanns soon again. Instead, it turned out Option 2 was a false lead, and the Graumanns turned up on the Janssen farm as well two days later. Together, we stayed there through famine, house-searches, and other threats for two and a half years until we were liberated by the advancing Allies.

That this hiding place lasted for so long was amazing, since the Resistance originally had told Harry he need put us up for only a couple of days. However, nothing more permanent panned out, and Harry opted to risk the welfare of his family, including 10 children, for the duration.

Our hiding place turned out to be a small chicken house with a roof so low that Heinz and I, who measure close to 6 feet tall, could stand up straight only on one end. Staying there was not free of charge. Each family paid Harry Janssen 90 Dutch guilders per month.

Money to pay for our keep soon was a real concern for me. The gang of smugglers had held on to the five thousand I had paid them in advance, and I wasn't sure where I could get hold of money once I spent what remained in my wallet.

The money crunch eased when my faithful friend, Frans Burbach, who had helped me from the moment we arrived in Holland, opened a line of communication from Amsterdam to us in hiding. In fact, he took over my contact with Wicoram, and he even came repeatedly to deliver my share of earnings from the firm.

In the end, our hiding place turned out to be especially well located, because it was at that very spot that the Allies entered Holland to clear the Nazis out. However, the fierce battles going on around us made conditions increasingly chaotic, and my pipe line to money closed again. I paid for our keep with my last guilder early in January of 1945. At that time, it was by no means clear what the future would hold. However, when I wrote out an IOU to Harry for the next month's rent, he returned it to me with a big X scratched through it. We had become good friends, and he couldn't see friends owing each other money.

When things quieted down in the area where we lived, I was plain itching to re-establish some professional contacts living in the now-liberated area of Holland. I searched my memory, and, amazingly, I was able to call to mind the name, street, and town of a man whom I had met only briefly at a professional meeting. It had a nice alliterative sound: Dr. H. van der Tuin, Zuid-Zijde Zoom, Bergen op Zoom. So, in April of 1945, I wrote him a letter.

He answered promptly with a most cordial invitation to come to visit him, and I snapped up the offer. Trains were already running on a limited track across the southern part of the country, and Bergen op Zoom was at the opposite end. I could travel along the entire line, and I felt as if I had wings!

Once there, I was met with flowers and spoiled unabashedly, including a complete Dutch breakfast served in bed the morning after my arrival. Dr. Van der Tuin and I had engrossing discussions about our field of work, and we went on long walks through frosty mornings, talking all the while.

In the course of these talks, he told me that Dr. W.J.A. Visser, the former director of the Eindhoven Museum of Art, now was a captain in the British armed forces stationed in our neighborhood. He had been given the job of recovering and securing looted art that had remained in the Netherlands.

After I returned home, I located Dr. Visser in Eindhoven, a town close to the Janssen farm. So I went in person to see if he had any information on the art that had been stolen from my own showroom. I had prepared an exact description of six valuable confiscated paintings.

Dr. Visser and his associate, Lieut. Dr. A.B. de Vries, had no helpful information for me, but they received me so kindly and the work they did was so much up my alley that I offered them my services as a consultant. They said they weren't sure whether they could hire civilians, and so I said, I'd work for free. They looked into the possibility, but it never panned out.

EPILOGUE

(by Max Amichai Heppner)

At this point, my father Albert's autobiography stopped. As I mentioned earlier, he died suddenly, from liver failure, on June 5, 1945. He was en route to a newly liberated Amsterdam to rescue what he could from his business. The Janssen farm had been liberated on September 24, 1944, while Amsterdam wasn't liberated until May of the next year.

The aftereffects of the Nazi occupation, however, continued. Even non-Jews remaining in Amsterdam after liberation, were in disarray, shock, and on the verge of total starvation. All businesses was in suspension.

Yet Wicoram still existed, and my mother eventually hired lawyers and accountants to dissolve that business and claim her share of the assets. The process took time, energy, and persistence, but by 1950, the matter was settled to the reasonable

satisfaction of all parties, including the Dutch Government, which wanted its share in taxes!!!

Other repercussions still thundered into our lives. For example, Dr. Degenhart, who callously had presided over the looting of the family art dealership, sent my mother an appeal to help in his de-Nazification process. We absolutely couldn't believe this show of gall.

I'll give you a taste of my mother's indignation by translating from her deposition of May 18, 1947, to the art historians who took part in the proceedings:

Dr. Degenhart may have had a touch of embarrassment in his voice when he came to our door and told my husband, "Wir sind ja gewissermassen Kollegen." ["After all, we two are colleagues, you might say."] But despite that, when he was done assessing the paintings put under seal by the police, he refused to renew the seal, nor was he even willing to substantiate that he was the one who had broken it. In so doing, he put us in grave danger. And in the end, it was eminently clear that he was personally involved in the process of stealing our masterpiece landscape, the Jan van der Heyden **View of a Castle**.

Dr. Degenhart claims credit for having saved the famous Lugt Collection from the Nazis. The only risk he ran in doing so was that he could have been accused of being an inept art assessor. His motivation, quite clearly, was that in the event of a Nazi defeat, he could maintain a white hand to cover up his black rump! Meanwhile, I'm sure that ours wasn't the only case in which Dr. Degenhart served on behalf of the Nazis.

I know not everyone is willing to put aside his own interests, let alone risk his life, for love of justice and human decency. (Of course, in

our case, acting with a modicum of humanity wouldn't have run him any risk.) Yes, I understand that not everybody desires martyrdom. What I can't support, however, that he now wants to pose as a true Democrat.

That seems to me an absolute farce.

Mother's effort was in vain. She received a polite letter from the de-Nazification panel, saying that Dr. Degenhart had been given a chance to rebut her deposition and was, in the end, cleared of wrong-doing.

RECOVERING THE LOOT

Father hadn't sat on his hands during the months before it was reasonably safe to go home to Amsterdam. He wrote notes on what he needed to do to re-establish his business, and he completed the first draft of his experiences that now form the main section of this book.

My mother, Irene, who had been intimately involved in the events involved in the confiscations of Father's art work, took up the recovery effort after his death, right at the point where he had left off. She worked closely with the Foundation for Dutch Art Collections, an agency set up specifically to recover art looted from the Netherlands.

However, her only success occurred when she took matters into her own hands. Neighbors in the apartment house where we had lived before fleeing Amsterdam told her that the tenants who followed behind us had a nasty reputation as Nazi sympathizers. This information prompted Mother to suspect that her paintings might still be right there. She asked the police to admit her into the place, and, sure enough, two of the stolen paintings, Herrera's **Fish Still Life** and Breenbergh's **Ruins of the Forum Romanum**, were hanging right there, on the wall. Apparently, the Nazi assessors, who had surreptitiously designated the confiscated paintings for specific Nazi collections, weren't all that interested in these two pieces.

When Mother confronted the new tenants in our old apartment, they said, “Oh, we preserved these possessions for you at great personal danger. We were just going to go to the authorities to try to find the rightful owner.”

Yeah, right! You can imagine how grateful Mother was to these dissimulating Jew haters! She and the police took down the stolen paintings and didn't give their lying keepers another thought.

Mother didn't give up on tracing the remaining four stolen masterpieces. She carefully followed the proceedings involved in liquidating the Nazi art confiscations office, the Omnia. She found some leads, but upon pursuing them, most turned cold. The best trail led to Bavaria—ironically, the German State in which Irene was born. She pursued her quest with the Property Restitution Branch of the U.S. Government in Bavaria; the Bavarian State Art Collection; and the Central Institute for Art History in Munich, Bavaria. Zero! Null! *Nichts!* The trail turned absolutely dead. Mom gave up in 1985, when she reached the venerable age of 81 and was ready to retire.

At that point, I took over the hunt. I covered a wider range including: The State Museum of Prussia's Cultural Center in Berlin, The Rothschild Foundation in Paris, The National Institute for Art Historical Documentation in The Hague, and The Ministry of Finance in Vienna. Most of them sent polite replies but furnished no helpful information.

I was fortunate to enlist the aid of the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR), the organ of the international art community totally devoted to stolen art of any type. As a result, they not only listed the art I'm looking for in the **Stolen Art Alert** of November of 1986, they also featured the, by now, notorious theft of the Jan van der Heyden **View of a Castle** landscape on the cover! Absolutely no response.

I also enlisted Barry Rosen, an Attorney at Sachnoff and Weaver in Chicago. He is the lawyer who brought suit to recover art for the Nick and Simon Goodman family of Los Angeles, in 1997. More than 50 years earlier, their grandfather had been robbed of

the valuable Degas monotype **Landscape with Smokestacks**. Subsequently, he also was killed by the Nazis. Now, in 1997, the stolen painting was discovered in storage at the Chicago Art Institute. Despite the success of this landmark case, my own contact with Rosen led nowhere.

I am now working with the William E. Lee, head specialist in handling Holocaust-related claims in the banking Department of the State of New York, an agency set up specifically to further my type of claim. So far, we've developed a great correspondence, but we not developed one shred of evidence that brings me closer to a resolution.

So, we're back where I started this book. I need your help. I cannot feel good living in a world so callused about the Holocaust that it shrugs its shoulders at those of us who are still being damaged by the perpetrators.

Most of the Nazis who have the blood of my people on their hands have gone to their Maker for their just reward. However, the spoils from their campaign of looting and murder are still held as trophies by their heirs and friends. I am determined to put a stop to this perfidy. I don't so much need paintings and a sculpture returned as I need to prove that murderous crime doesn't pay. I am now 69 years old, and even if I persist as long as my mom, until age 81, I only have 12 years left to work. Help me bring this search to fruition. That's my plea!

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