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Art for das Reich

How Nazi-Looted Art from Belgium was Dispersed Across the World

Geert Sels

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- This reference work contains information that international researchers and art historians can build on
- The author gives lectures around the world, e.g. at Sotheby's and Christie's, at the Zentrum für Kulturgutverluste in Magdeburg and recently at the Louvre
- The book has had an impact on Belgian policy
- It has prompted restitution claims, which in turn forced the Belgian government to act

During World War II, art was plundered on an immense scale. From the occupied territories, the Nazis hauled art off to Germany to build ambitious collections. For the first time, that story is being told for Belgium. How could paintings by Memling, Van der Weyden, Brueghel, Jordaens, and Cranach simply leave the country? After ten years of research, Geert Sels pieces together the puzzle from evidence he found in archives all over Europe.

Through rigorous detective work, he maps out the routes along which the art was taken away. After the war, paintings from Belgium found their way to the Louvre, Tate Britain, the Getty Museum, and the Yale Art Gallery. The Netherlands, France, Germany, and even Russia turn out to still hold art that should have been returned to Belgium. That makes the Belgian story an international one. Other works did come back and now are on display in Belgian museums – but without any effort to trace their rightful owners. Why did that never happen? Unlike other countries, Belgium has remained painfully passive on the issue of Nazi-looted art.***Art for das Reich*** presents an uncomfortable truth and serves as a stress test for government policy.

Geert Sels is culture editor at *De Standaard*, Belgium's leading newspaper. He is also an associate researcher at CegeSoma, the Study and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society in Brussels. For a newspaper series on Nazi looted art, he received 'De Loep,' the award for the best investigative journalism in Flanders and the Netherlands.

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