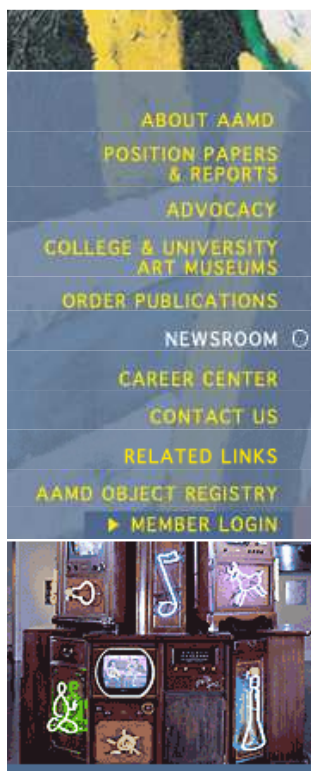




ASSOCIATION OF ART MUSEUM DIRECTORS



AAMDNEWSROOM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Linda Williams, SAM Public Relations
(206) 654-3166
LindaW@SeattleArtMuseum.org

PRESS STATEMENT

SAM to Return Matisse Odalisque to Rosenbergs

SEATTLE, June 14, 1999 - The Seattle Art Museum announced today that it will return the painting, *Odalisque* (1928) by Henri Matisse, to the heirs of Paul Rosenberg. The museum reached its decision at a special meeting of its Board of Trustees today, following a thorough and independent investigation into the painting's past ownership. That process concluded last week with the release of a report on the painting's provenance. The investigation was conducted by the Holocaust Art Restitution Project (HARP), a Washington, D.C.-based independent research organization that provides Holocaust victims with the best possible information on the origins and ownership of valuable works of art that disappeared or changed hands during World War II.

As an institution that holds its works in the public trust, the Seattle Art Museum needed to fully research the claim that the Rosenbergs filed in October 1997 before determining a course of action. Today's decision marks the end of a research effort that began in early 1998, when SAM asked HARP to conduct a thorough, scholarly and impartial investigation of the painting's provenance.

"This report confirms the Rosenbergs' claim and we are pleased to return *Odalisque* to its rightful owners," says Mimi Gardner Gates, Seattle Art Museum's Director. "By our action today, the Seattle Art Museum is drawing a clear ethical line. Since day one, SAM has been committed to doing the right thing."

The Seattle Art Museum received *Odalisque* in 1991 from donors who purchased the painting in 1954 from the New York gallery Knoedler & Co. With the conclusion of HARP's research, the evidence now indicates that *Odalisque* was one of the paintings that the Nazis stole from Paul Rosenberg, a prominent Jewish art dealer in Paris at that time, and that it was never returned to him.

The museum also will ask U.S. District Court Judge Robert S. Lasnik, who is presiding over a pending lawsuit involving *Odalisque*, to ratify SAM's decision by ruling that the Rosenbergs have legal title to the painting.

"We are confident that the court will bless our decision and remove any doubts about the legitimacy of the Rosenbergs' claim to title," says Gates. Gates noted that SAM will return *Odalisque* despite the Knoedler Gallery's insistence that the Rosenbergs have no right to the painting.

"At every opportunity, the Knoedler gallery has declined to offer evidence in support of its assertion that the Rosenbergs' claim is invalid," Gates continues. "Given HARP's conclusion, we were not willing to wait any longer to make our decision. This has been a difficult and time-consuming, but necessary process. We regret the time it took to confirm *Odalisque*'s true ownership, but it was essential to conduct the research as thoroughly as possible to do the right thing for all parties involved."

The research indicates that *Odalisque* was stolen in 1941 from the vault where Rosenberg had stored 162 paintings, and was then moved into storage at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris. The following July, a German art dealer based in Paris apparently acquired *Odalisque* in exchange for a French Renaissance painting. There was no further proof of its whereabouts until July 1954, when the New York art gallery Knoedler & Co. apparently acquired it from Paris' Galerie Drouant-David. Later that year, the Knoedler gallery sold *Odalisque* to Seattle-area residents Prentice and Virginia Bloedel, who later bequeathed the painting to Seattle Art Museum.

According to HARP president Ori Soltes, HARP's research was essential to confirm that the painting stolen from Paul Rosenberg was the same painting in SAM's collection and not one of many other Matisse works with similar titles and subjects. In addition, HARP had to

confirm that this painting was not among stolen works that Rosenberg or his family recovered before his death in 1959.

"We now believe that the painting belongs to the Rosenberg family and that Paul Rosenberg never recovered or had the opportunity to recover Odalisque," says Soltes of HARP. "The Seattle Art Museum, as a custodian of the public trust, had good reason to promote the research that has led to these conclusions, before determining what to do with the painting."

The museum will continue litigation against Knoedler, contending that the gallery in its 1954 transaction with the Bloedels breached warranties of title, did not have clear title to Odalisque and fraudulently or negligently misrepresented the painting's provenance. SAM is asking Knoedler for compensation of Odalisque's full, present market value, which has not yet been determined.

"Now that the museum has confirmed the Rosenbergs' claim to title, we will continue to pursue our claims against Knoedler vigorously," says Gates. "The museum has a duty to our public, including museum donors, to hold Knoedler fully accountable for the loss to our permanent collection resulting from Knoedler's improper sale to the Bloedels."

Copyright © 2011. Association of Art Museum Directors