

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Break: Provenance

May 26 and 29

Mia

**Provenance: the history of ownership
of an artwork**

Mia has over 90,000 artworks.

Do visitors ever wonder “how did Mia get all this art?”

What responses have you given to that question?

How do museums acquire artworks?

How do museums acquire artworks?



- Keri Ataumbi and Jamie Okuma, *Ring*, from Pocahontas jewelry set, 2014, Gift of Funds from the Duncan and Nivin Macmillan Foundation
- Italy, *Knife and fork*, late 16th century, Gift of Funds from The Decorative Arts Council with Proceeds from The 2008 Antiques Show And Sale

How do museums acquire artworks?



- Aliza Nisenbaum, *Morning Security Briefing at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, basement door open onto the Guard Lounge Pet Wall*, 2017, The Mary Ingebrand-Pohlad Endowment For Twentieth Century Paintings.

How do museums acquire artworks?

The images ran in the Minneapolis Sunday Tribune in 1958 as part of a feature on local collectors.



(Right) Kirchner, *View of Zurich*, 1926, Bequest of Bruce B. Dayton

(Below) Modigliani, *Little Servant Girl*, c. 1916, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Maslon

<https://new.artsmia.org/stories/once-at-mia-a-masterwork-at-home/>



collections.artsmia.org/art/10458/little-servant-girl-amedeo-modigliani

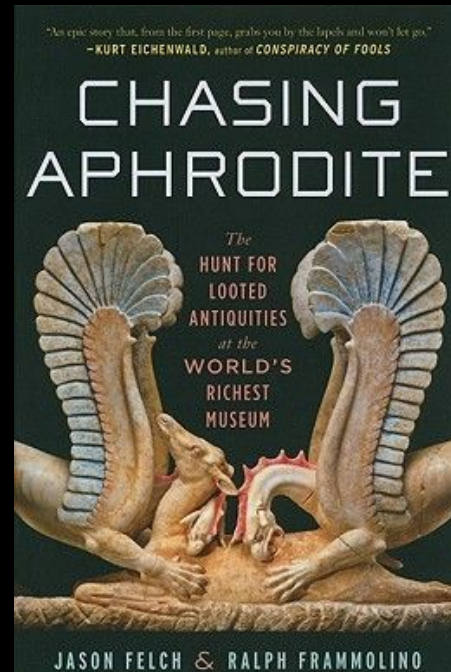
View more

Accession Number	59.30
Medium	Oil on canvas
Country	Italy
Century	20th century
Provenance	Gaston Bernheim, Paris, France. Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, France. André Lefevre. Jos Hessel, Paris, France. (sale, Paris, Hotel Drouot, June 1, 1932, no. 39, repr.) Lefevre Gallery, London. [1] James Archdale, England. Duncan MacDonald, London, England. (sale, July 7, 1948); (Dalzell Hatfield Gallery, Los Angeles, California by 1948). Fanny Brice, Los Angeles, California, by 1951. [2] Samuel H. and Luella R. Maslon, Palm Springs, California and Wayzata, Minnesota; gift to MIA in 1959. [1] Lefevre owned half interest in the painting with Hatfield. Stock no. 153/47. [2] According to the Minneapolis Star Tribune article (1959), "The painting was purchased in California 10 years ago from the collection of the late Fanny Brice." The work was still in the collection of Brice when she loaned it to MoMA in 1951.
Rights	No Copyright - United States
Classification	Paintings
Object Name	Painting
Wikipedia	Cite this information
Metadata	Click here to see the machine readable

Provenance: the history of ownership of an artwork

Issues with provenance have caused numerous scandals for museums.

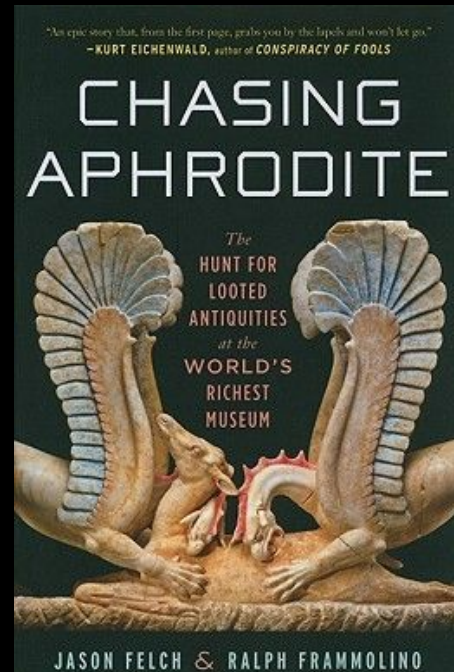
(2005-2006) “A scandal surrounding the looting of ancient artifacts deepened ...when it emerged that 350 items worth \$100 million held by one of America's leading museums are of dubious provenance.”



<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/19/arts.usa> and

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/the-curator-who-vanished/2015/08/19/d32390f8-459e-11e5-846d-02792f854297_story.html

Why might a curator knowingly purchase a looted artwork?



“The palace at Nimrud was excavated between 1845 and 1851 CE by Sir Austin H. Layard working on behalf of the British Museum. This panel was ...acquired at that time for private and public collections in the United States....”



Assyrian, *Winged Genius*,
c. 883–859 BCE (from
Nimrud)

2015, destruction of
Assyrian reliefs in Nimrud
by Isis militant.

Issues with provenance have caused numerous scandals for museums.

The coffin of Nedjemankh (detail) was returned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art to Egypt in early 2019.

The art dealer supplied fake provenance records including a forged Egyptian export license dated 1971, but according to an investigation, it appeared that the coffin had been stolen from its homeland in 2011.

<https://www.artnews.com/artnews/news/african-art-repatriation-american-museums-12750/>



**SAVE CULTURE
END TRAFFICKING**



Cultural property is being stolen...



<https://icom.museum/en/resources/red-lists/>

What guidelines do museums follow?

The UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property is an international treaty. The treaty was drafted to combat the illegal trade in cultural items, and was signed on November 14, 1970.

Per AAMD: “Member museums **normally** should not acquire a Work unless provenance research substantiates that the Work was outside its country of probable modern discovery before 1970 or was legally exported from its probable country of modern discovery after 1970.”

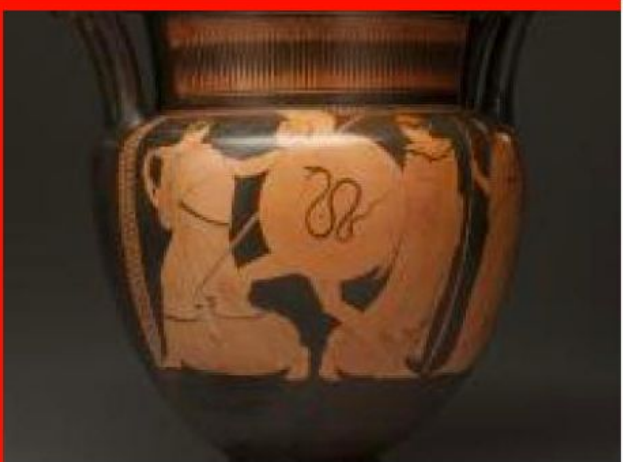
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO_Convention_on_the_Means_of_Prohibiting_and_Preventing_the_Illicit_Import,_Export_and_Transfer_of_Ownership_of_Cultural_Property and <https://museum.cornell.edu/provenance-research>

Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) object registry


Association of Art Museum Directors

About Standards & Practices Advocacy Our Members For the Media Museum Careers **Object Registry**

Object Registry



New Acquisitions of Archaeological Material and Works of Ancient Art




Resolutions of Claims for Nazi-Era Cultural Assets

[Browse Objects / More Info](#)

Object Information

[Back to List](#) [Print](#)



Accession Number:	2012.64a.b	Country of Origin:	Egypt	Provenance Information:	1990's, private collection Dr. Georges Goreux, Mons, Belgium, acquired through exchange; 2008, private collection Mr. Gaston Montigny, Jemeppe, Belgium; February 2012, dealer
Object Title:	Pair of Clappers	Object Type:	Musical Instruments		
Measurements:	24 x 7.5 x 1 cm (9 9/16 x 3 x 7/16 in.)	Object URL:	https://collections.artsmia.org/index.php?record_id=1459		

<https://aamd.org/object-registry/new-acquisitions-of-archaeological-material-and-works-of-ancient-art/1037>

Artworks purchased or looted by the Nazis



Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I by Gustav Klimt, 1907

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Adele_Bloch-Bauer_I

Artworks purchased or looted by the Nazis: Benedetto da Rovezzano's *Saint John the Baptist*, 1505



<https://new.artsmia.org/stories/honoring-the-monuments-men-art-saviors-of-world-war-ii-with-a-self-guided-tour-at-the-mia-part-i/>

Artwork purchased or looted by the Nazis



*By 1901, Personal collection of the Marchesa Serafini of Florence.

*By 1923, Collection of Michiel Onnes van Nijenrode of Groningen, Netherlands.

*In 1923, sold at auction to Dr. Otto Lanz of Amsterdam. Upon his death in 1935, his widow inherited his collection.

*In 1941, the bust and the rest of the Lanz collection were sold to Hitler for 2 million Swiss francs. In 1945, Allied forces recovered art bought and stolen by the Nazis.

*In 1946, the Lanz Collection was repatriated to the Netherlands Art Property Foundation in Amsterdam.

*In 1951, the foundation sold the Lanz Collection at auction and the Rovezzano bust was bought by Lanz's son Georg G. Lanz.

*In the 1970s and 1980s, the bust was held in a number of private collections in Switzerland and in France.

*In 2012, dealer Guy Ladrière showed it publicly in his gallery, where it was bought by dealer Sam Fogg.

*The Minneapolis Institute of Arts reserved the sculpture during the preview of the TEFAF art fair in Maastricht on March 14, 2013.

<https://artdaily.cc/news/62450/Rare-Renaissance-bust-by-sculptor-Benedetto-da-Rovezzano-acquired-by-Minneapolis-Institute-of-Arts#.Xsf5SBNKigQ>

When an artwork is considered for acquisition, rigorous research is performed to ensure that all available information about the artwork is known, including:

- Its past and current ownership**
- Documented proof of an artwork's legal export from its source country**
- Any outstanding ownership claims on the artwork**
- Whether it is a sacred object currently venerated by a cultural or religious group**

Managing Mia's Collection

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL new.artsmia.org/art-artists/managing-mias-collection/researching-provenance-at-mia/. The page header features the Minneapolis Institute of Art logo and navigation links: TICKETS, CALENDAR, DONATE, EXHIBITIONS, ART + ARTISTS, VISIT, PROGRAMS, SUPPORT, ABOUT, and SHOP. A red banner at the top of the content area reads: "In consideration of the health and welfare of visitors, volunteers, and staff, Mia is temporarily closed to the public. [Learn more here.](#)"

The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled "Managing Mia's Collection" and contains a list of links: BUILDING THE COLLECTION, RESEARCHING PROVENANCE, DEACCESSIONING ARTWORKS, and DECOLONIZING THE COLLECTION. The right column is titled "Researching Provenance at Mia" and contains the following text:

Researching the artworks in our permanent collection is an integral part of our mission. Establishing the history of ownership for objects in Mia's collection helps ensure that the museum may legally and ethically own them.

Provenance Research

Provenance research is a complex and arduous process, often undertaken by curators or scholars to determine the history of ownership of an artwork. It usually involves examining an artwork for labels or markings that may indicate the movement of an artwork from one owner or location to another. Extensive research is often necessary, as well, using photo archives, registrar records, and correspondence from collectors, art dealers, and scholars. Auction and exhibition catalogues can be rich sources of ownership information, occasionally providing biographical insights.

When reviewing such documents, it is necessary to be careful and critical, as gaps in ownership are often encountered. It is not unusual for an artwork to have a long period in its ownership history in which the work is unaccounted for. The attribution of an artwork may change over time, creating confusion in tracking documentation. Additionally, owners may request anonymity at the time of a sale, auction houses or art dealers may not wish to reveal their sources, or important archival resources may have been lost or destroyed in natural disasters or during wartime. Indeed, it is quite rare to establish a full provenance history for a work of art. If an artwork has a gap in its provenance, it does not mean we should believe the work was looted.

At the bottom of the right column, there is a button labeled "Ask Mia".

How to Read Provenance

<https://new.artsmia.org/art-artists/managing-mias-collection/>

“The museum has completed an assessment of the European paintings and Judaica acquired by Mia since 1932 to determine whether any artworks currently in the collection may have been stolen during this period.”

<https://new.artsmia.org/art-artists/managing-mias-collection/>

Acquired in 1961 as a bequest of Putnam Dana McMillan. He had purchased it a decade earlier from a gallery in New York. In 1997, the Kann Association contacted Mia to claim this painting had been looted by the Nazis from the collection of Alphonse Kann. In 2008, Mia returned the painting.

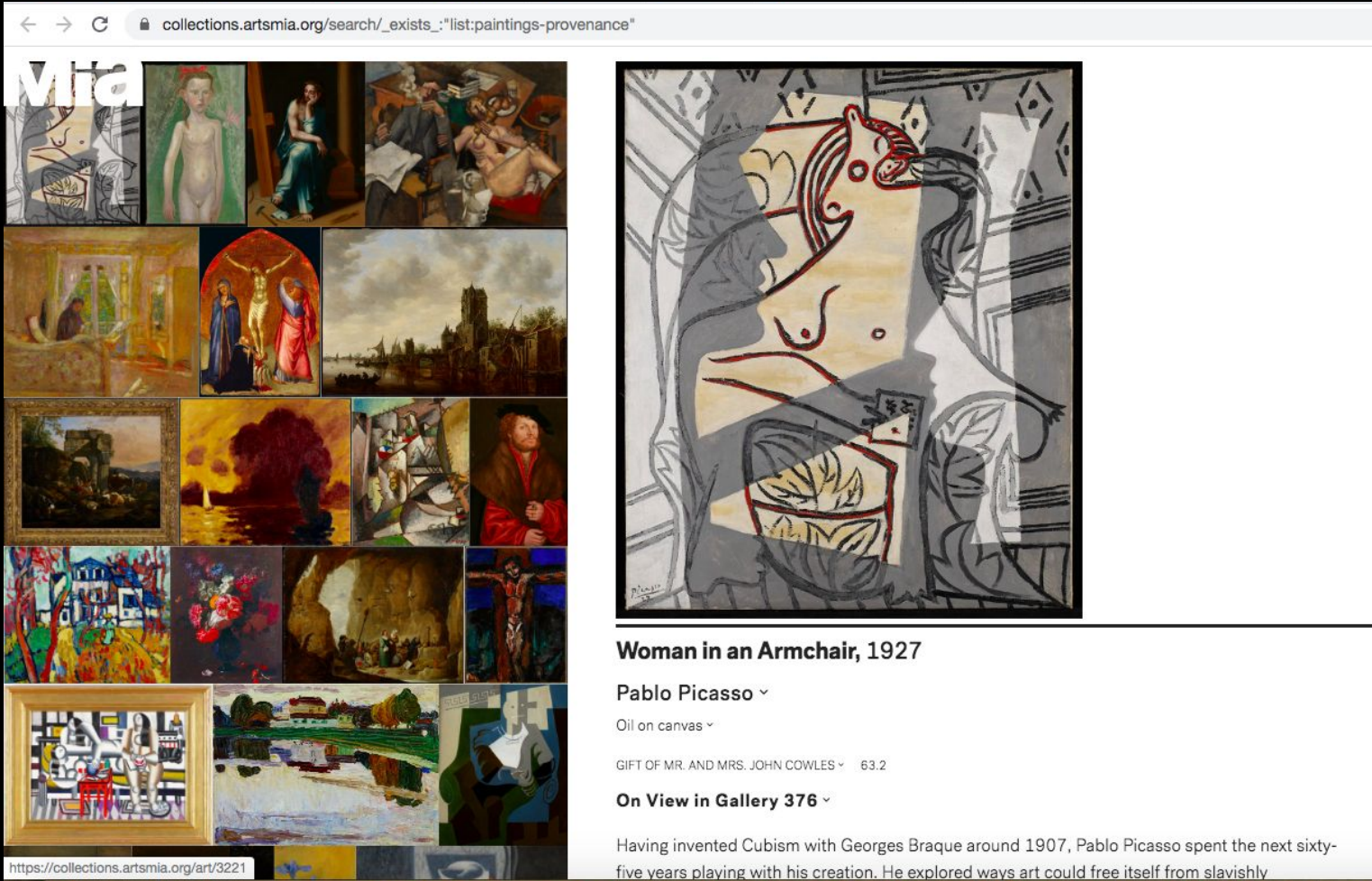
Fernand Leger, *Smoke over Rooftops*, 1911



<https://new.artsmia.org/art-artists/managing-mias-collection/deaccessioning-artworks/smoke-over-rooftops/>

Artworks with Unclear Provenance 1932-1946

These artworks’
“provenance is unclear
during the crucial years of
1932 to 1946. Mia has
made this information
public...to manage its
collection responsibly and
to participate in the
worldwide effort of
identifying artworks looted
during World War II.”

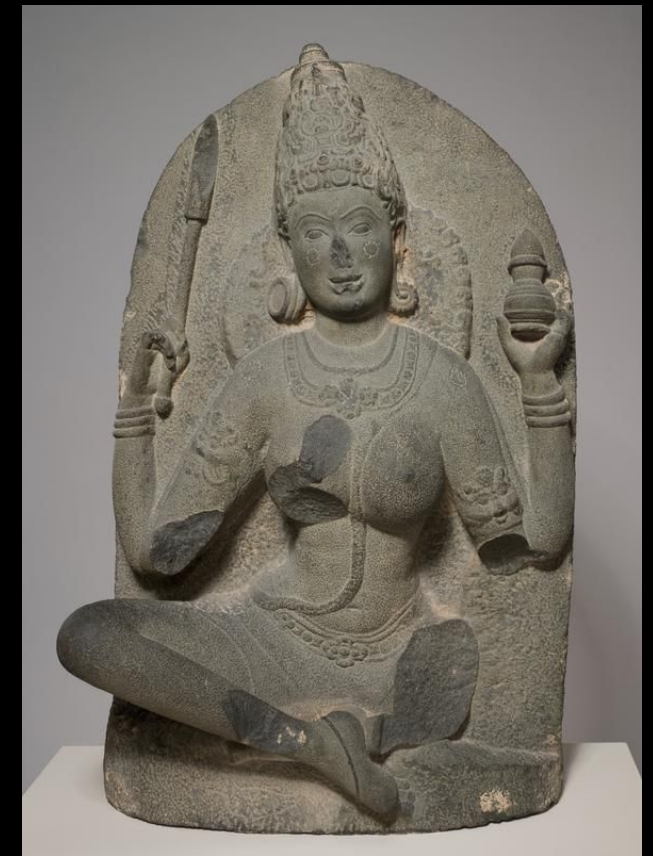


The screenshot shows a search results page on the Mia website. The URL is collections.artsmia.org/search/_exists_:'list:paintings-provenance'. The page displays a grid of various artworks, including a portrait of a woman, a religious scene, a landscape, and a still life. A larger, detailed view of a painting is shown on the right, titled "Woman in an Armchair, 1927" by Pablo Picasso. The painting is a cubist work featuring a woman's face and upper body in a stylized, fragmented manner. Below the painting, the text reads: "Woman in an Armchair, 1927", "Pablo Picasso", "Oil on canvas", "GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. JOHN COWLES 63.2", and "On View in Gallery 376". A paragraph of text below that reads: "Having invented Cubism with Georges Braque around 1907, Pablo Picasso spent the next sixty-five years playing with his creation. He explored ways art could free itself from slavishly".

<https://new.artsmia.org/art-artists/managing-mias-collection/researching-provenance-at-mia/>

What if an artwork or belonging was never meant to be owned by a museum? What are the ethics to consider in holding known looted artworks or belongings taken during times of colonialism?

How would you respond to a visitor who asks how the museum acquired these cultural belongings?



Top: India, *Yogini with a jar*, early 10th century



Left: Edo, *Memorial Head*, 1550-1650; *Water pitcher*, 18th century

Final thoughts or questions?