

Grußwort zur Veranstaltung zum 20-jährigen Bestehen der Beratenden Kommission NS-Raubgut von Prof. Anthony Friend, Anspruchsteller im ersten Verfahren der Beratenden Kommission NS-Raubgut, am 14. September 2023, Jüdisches Museum Berlin

First, I would like to thank the Advisory Commission on behalf of all inheritors and say a few words on this twentieth anniversary of their mandate to return of Cultural Property, seized, or otherwise forced sale, resulting from Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property over the thirteen-year period between January 1933 to May 1945. My family's claim for 4 paintings in the hands of the Federal Government was the first case ever heard by the Commission.

Second, this occasion is an opportunity to appreciate the human experience of restitution of cultural property that is hidden behind the paperwork, research on provenance as well the legal arguments of the lawyers made on behalf of inheritor's claims of events that incurred about 80 years ago when persons involved are no longer alive and where the paper files are either obscure, hidden or gone.

I shall relate the story of the Landesmuseum in Münster when they expressed a strong interest to purchase from the Freund family Carl Blechen's the "*Morgendämmerung*".

Following the Commission's recommendation to return the 4 paintings to the Freund family, the museum's director Hermann Arnold wrote:

"To whom it may concern:

We are informed by the Berlin Authority of unresolved assets that Carl Blechen's painting "Dawn with Ruins," which has been on loan by the Federal Republic of Germany to our museum for more than thirty years is part of a restitution case concerning the former property of Julius Freund.

"The loss of this painting would create a severe gap in our collection of 19th Century German romantic paintings -a main focus of the Landesmuseum where Blechen's extraordinary painting marks a highlight."

While the concern of the Museum was the high cost to purchase the "*Morgendämmerung*" in the open art-market, the Director invited us to Münster to see the painting and talk:

"We also would be happy to invite you to Münster at your convenience to show our house and talk about things personally."

My wife and I arrived from Hannover and were greeted at the door of the Landesmuseum by Herman Arnold and Angelika Lorenz, the curator for German Romantic Paintings. The Museum itself had been closed for several months for restoration.

We entered the building in darkness, all at once a spotlight highlighted "*Morgendämmerung*" on an artist easel. The effect pure theater, if not magic, like the painting itself.

I noted at the back of the picture frame a stenciled label showing my grandfather's name Julius Freund.

"Wie einen Geist im Landesmuseum hörte ich meinen Großvater sagen: 'Dieser Blechen muss hierbleiben'".

Angelika Lorenz wrote later:

"I am often thinking back to our meeting here in Münster and the talks when we had a chance to get to know you and your wife personally. It was more than pleasant and gave us hope for a further stay *Blechen's early masterpiece in our museum*. Meanwhile we re-opened our old museum-you might recall the situation-and displayed the Blechen in a new concept bringing masterpieces of old and new art into dialogue."

The Freund Family was invited again to Münster 1 year later in order to celebrate the occasion of the purchase the "*Morgendämmerung mit Ruine*", which included a classical, period piece, piano recital, talks on the importance of the new acquisition to the Museum, and a fine, German cuisine reception for the guests.

Coincidentally, just at this time, the volcanic eruption in Iceland causing ash cloud in the jet stream, cancelled trans-Atlantic flights. Fortunately, I was in Europe at time and found my way to Münster by train, and therefore could be present, and represent, the Freund Family for this special occasion.

Die Münster Newspaper reported the dramatic story of the "*Morgendämmerung mit Ruine*" as follows:

Die "Romantische Landschaft" hat eine dramatische Geschichte. Als Hitler 1933 an die Macht kam, erkannte Julius Freund schnell, welches Unheil auf seine Familie zukam. Er schaffte seine kostbare Kunstsammlung (darunter Casper David Friedrich's weltberühmter "Kreidefelsen auf Rügen") in die Schweiz und ging mit seiner Familie nach Italien, später nach England. 1941 starb Julius Freund bei einem deutschen Bombenangriff auf London. Um weiter ihren Lebensunterhalt bestreiten zu können, versteigerte sein Frau Clara Bilder der Sammlung in Luzern. Ein Beauftragter der NS-Regierung ersteigerte das Blechen -Bild für ein geplantes "Führermuseum" in Linz.

Since then our journey has led to more returns and I hope that more German museums follow the example of the Advisory Commission's recommendation of 2005.

Thank you for hearing the story of the "*Morgendämmerung*" originally destined for the Hitler Museum in Linz but by chance of historical events, has found its proper home 67 years later in the Landesmuseum in Münster.