

Thoughts Out of Season

Occasional Reviews & Notes
Of Mutual Interest
Compiled by Tim & Terry Forward



Murnau mit Kirche II (1910) Wassily Kandinsky
(Credit: Courtesy Sotheby's)

Kandinsky painting recovered by Holocaust victims' heirs Sets auction record

"Kandinsky's Murnau period came to define abstract art for future generations," Helena Newman, Chairman of Sotheby's Europe and Worldwide Head of Impressionist & Modern Art, said in a statement.

"The appearance of such an important painting -- one of the last of this period and scale remaining in private hands -- is a major moment for the market and for collectors," she said.

Kandinsky was living with his lover Gabriele Münter and fellow artist friends in Murnau, Bavaria, when he painted "Murnau mit Kirche II" -- inspired by the local landscape during a cycling trip. Münter herself wrote an inscription on the painting's stretcher.

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The painting was inspired by a cycling trip in Bavaria. Credit: Courtesy Sotheby's

The painting has a long history. It was sold at auction as property from the collection of prominent Berlin collectors, husband-and-wife Johanna Margarete and Siegbert Stern, after it was finally restored to the family's surviving heirs last year by the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Stern family photographs depict the Kandinsky hanging in the dining room of their family home, Villa Stern in Potsdam. But following the rise of the Nazis in 1933 and her husband's death two years later, Johanna Margarete fled to the Netherlands and was declared stateless.

According to family papers, the Kandinsky -- among other works -- was taken to the Netherlands and assumed to have passed to a dealer who plundered Jewish assets in the occupied country, before Johanna Margarete's deportation and death in Auschwitz in 1944, Sotheby's catalog said. It was later sold to the Van Abbemuseum by another dealer in 1951.

Talking about its history, Newman said the painting's restitution has finally allowed people to "rediscover the place of the Sterns and their collection in the glittering cultural milieu of 1920s Berlin."

The proceeds of the sale will be shared between the 13 surviving Stern descendants and will also fund further research into tracking down their family's extensive art collection, the statement added.¹

¹ Excerpted from:

Hafsa Khalil, Hafsa, " Kandinsky painting recovered by Holocaust victims' heirs." *CNN*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/kandinsky-painting-auction-record-sale-intl-scli/index.html>