

# Ronald S. Lauder Reaches Agreement on Klimt Painting With Jewish Heirs

Mr. Lauder agreed to the restitution and repurchase of the painting from the relatives of an art collector who fled Europe in 1943 to avoid Nazi persecution.

**By Colin Moynihan**

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Ronald S. Lauder, the billionaire cosmetics heir and art collector, will continue to own a well-known painting by Gustav Klimt, which he has held for 50 years, after agreeing to the restitution and repurchase of the work from the heirs of a Jewish woman who had owned it before World War II.

Terms of the purchase, which followed several years of research into the painting's history, were not disclosed.

Mr. Lauder first bought the work, "The Black Feather Hat," created in 1910, from a Manhattan gallery in 1973, and it has been displayed in several exhibits at the Neue Galerie, which Mr. Lauder founded. In 2007, it was featured on banners hung in Manhattan to promote the museum's show on Klimt that opened that year.

The painting had once been the property of Irene Beran, who had it until at least 1934, when she lived in the city of Brno, which is now part of the Czech Republic. She later fled Europe, fearing Nazi persecution.

Mr. Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, and the heirs said in a statement that, despite ample research, the painting's "whereabouts" between 1934 and 1957 — when it resurfaced in an exhibit in Stuttgart organized in part by Friedrich Welz — remained unclear.

That gap in the painting's provenance and its overlap with a period in which the Nazis plundered art throughout Europe was a motivating factor in Mr. Lauder's decision to move forward with this restitution, as was the family's suffering in the Holocaust, according to his representatives.

"Having been an ardent advocate for the restitution of artworks stolen and dispossessed" during World War II," Mr. Lauder said in the statement, "I felt it was critical to recognize the family's previous history with this work despite the lack of concrete documentation regarding how this painting left the Beran collection."

The work, a portrait of a pensive woman wearing a wide-brimmed hat, is seen by some as a marked departure from the highly decorative paintings, many incorporating gold leaf, that Klimt had created at the beginning of the 20th century.

Mr. Lauder opened the Neue Galerie in 2001 to exhibit early 20th-century Austrian and German art, and the Klimt painting was exhibited during one of its first shows, “New Worlds: German and Austrian Art 1890-1930.” Most recently, the work was displayed at the museum during an exhibit of Austrian masterworks that closed in 2020.

In 2018, Mr. Lauder agreed with the Beran family heirs to begin reviewing the work’s history. According to the statement, research found that Ms. Beran had owned the painting as early as 1928 and that it had become part of the family’s collection years earlier through her father-in-law, Alois Beran. Ms. Beran and her husband, Bruno Beran, fled Europe in 1943, traveling first to Canada and then moving to New York in 1947.

The statement described the Beran heirs as “confident that Irene would be delighted to know that ‘The Black Feather Hat’ found a home in New York, a city that had, at an important juncture in her refugee life, also been Irene’s home.”

Ms. Beran’s mother and Mr. Beran’s brother, Philip, to whom Ms. Beran had been married before the war, remained in Europe and did not survive. Family members said that both had been taken by the Nazis to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in what is today the Czech Republic and had subsequently been murdered.

***A correction was made on Feb. 11, 2023: Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this article gave an incorrect location for the exhibit where the painting resurfaced in 1957. The exhibit was in Stuttgart, not Salzburg. The article, relying on mistaken information from a source, also gave an incorrect date for when Ms. Beran and her husband left Europe. They left in 1943, not 1941.***

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section C, Page 4 of the New York edition with the headline: A Klimt Painting Is Restituted to Its Jewish Heirs