

Berlin, 7. Mai 2018

PRESSEMITTEILUNG

The Weight of History

After its restitution to the Max and Iris Stern Foundation, Weinsberg's Weibertreu-Museum was able to reacquire an artwork of great importance to the history of the city with the support of Kulturstiftung der Länder: "Die Weiber von Weinsberg" (The Women of Weinsberg, 1624) by the painter Gerrit Claesz. Bleker depicts a legendary deed carried out by local women.

With heavy steps, she enters the scene of the picture. The woman's knees buckle under the weight of the big brown bundle on her back. With a solemn gaze, a horseman on a shiny white horse scrutinizes the actions of the approaching woman: it is the King of Germany, Conrad III, who notably furls his eyebrows beneath his helmet's white plume. Unbelievable things are taking place before his very eyes: after a long siege, he was finally able to force Weinsberg Castle near Heilbronn to surrender in December 1140. He allowed the wives of the defeated to take their most precious belongings with them; anything they could carry. But the wives did not carry gold and silver, but their husbands on their backs, who would otherwise have been doomed to die. As a medieval legend of virtue, "The Women of Weinsberg" visualizes feminine loyalty and cleverness in the face of male violence. At the same time, Gerrit Claesz. Bleker's (1592/93–1656) history painting from 1624 extols the moral comportment of a ruler: Conrad III kept his promise and let the men go.



Gerrit Claesz. Bleker, Weiber von Weinsberg, 1624; Weibertreu-Museum Weinsberg; © P+ Fotografie, Agentur für Bildgestaltung / photo: Pierre Gattinger

K U L T U R
S T I F T U N G · D E R
L Ä N D E R

Page 2, press release, 7. Mai 2018

With a clever use of lighting, the Dutch painter lends the historical scene a dramatic quality all its own. Dark and threatening, two knights are placed at the left at the foreground, in the middle the white of the royal stallion, the black armor of Conrad III shines. The path of the women with their heavy load leads toward the left. Weinsberg itself disappears on the hill sketched in the background. Entirely focused on the tension between the two protagonists, the painter only drew this in a detailed manner. The camp and the army are only alluded to vaguely. Famous during his lifetime primarily for his landscape painting, Bleker also mastered the art of drawing, as the figures in his cast of characters show. Born in the Dutch city of Haarlem and probably trained in Amsterdam, the artist belonged to the diverse community of painters in his hometown. Inspired by prints, in his first documented painting he took on the legendary history of the Weinsberg women, a topic mainly received in Dutch painting.

The city of Weinsberg founded Weibertreu-Museum in 1985, to let the story come to life in paintings and other art artifacts. Among the exhibited works was the Bleker painting, which was acquired by the city in 1968. In 2015, the heirs of Max Stern, represented by the Holocaust Claims Processing Office in New York, presented their restitution claim to the museum in Baden-Württemberg; the work had been identified and located in the framework of the Max Stern Art Restitution Project. It was shown that the painting was still in the possession of the Düsseldorf art dealer Max Stern in 1937. Max Stern (1904–1987) had just taken over the family business in 1934. A year later, he received a letter from the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste that forbade him from continuing to practice his profession. Attempts to avoid this fate were in vain. His art holdings were confiscated by the Nazis as a persecutory measure. Via Paris and London, Stern emigrated to Canada, and was initially interred in camps in England and in North America. Eventually he was able to reestablish a livelihood as an art dealer in Montreal. The Max Stern Art Restitution Project, located in Montreal, supported by three institutional heirs – McGill University and Concordia University in Montreal, and Jerusalem's Hebrew University – took up the trail of the individual works that had been confiscated by the Nazis. In the case of Bleker's painting, the parties came to an agreement based on the Washington Principles. After the painting was restituted to the heirs, Weinsberg was able to reacquire the work that is so key to the city's history with the support of Kulturstiftung der Länder, Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, Kunststiftung der Kreissparkasse Heilbronn, Stiftung Würth and Vollert Anlagenbau GmbH.

Johannes Fellmann, Head of Communications
Tel +49 (0)30 / 89 36 35 29, jf@kulturstiftung.de

Kulturstiftung der Länder
Lützowplatz 9, 10785 Berlin

www.kulturstiftung.de

K U L T U R
S T I F T U N G · D E R
L Ä N D E R

Page 3, press release, 7. Mai 2018

Please note the following statements of all institutions involved:

Stéphane Dion, Ambassador to Germany and Special Envoy to the European Union and Europe:

“Today’s restitution of the painting ‘Die Weiber von Weinsberg’ marks another milestone for the Max Stern Art Restitution Project, led by Concordia University in Montreal, as well as for the close and friendly relations between Germany and Canada. It is a testament to the fact that through the dedicated work of individuals, a measure of positive resolution can be brought to this dark period of history. I congratulate all involved and strongly hope the Max Stern Art Restitution Project will continue to receive all possible support in Germany.”

Prof. Dr. Frank Druffner, Acting Secretary General, Kulturstiftung der Länder:

“The Kulturstiftung der Länder is pleased along with all those involved that a fair and just solution was found for this painting that is so important to the City of Weinsberg. Negotiations have shown that a trusting and constructive exchange is the right way to achieve a result that everyone can be satisfied with. This reacquisition is a lovely event in the year when we can celebrate 20 years since the signing of the Washington Principles and the European cultural heritage.”

Stefan Thoma, Mayor, City of Weinsberg:

“The City of Weinsberg’s Weibertreu-Museum was surprised by the submission of this claim to restitution, and it presented us with a great challenge. We are thankful that the city of Weinsberg was able to purchase the work after restitution from the Stern Foundation. The Weibertreu-Museum was thus able to keep a painting that is historically important to Weinsberg and that has been a fixed part of the museum for over 30 years now. The city of Weinsberg would especially like to thank the Kulturstiftung der Länder, the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, and the Kulturstiftung der Kreissparkasse Heilbronn for their generous financial support.”

Dr. Clarence Epstein, Head of the Max Stern Art Restitution Project:

“We are hopeful that the Weinsberg return and exemplary efforts of various state and national partners will compel other German municipalities, museums and collectors to openly address restitution matters.”

Dr. Ronald S. Lauder, Chairman of the Commission for Art Recovery (CAR) and President of the World Jewish Congress:

“The restitution of the painting ‘Die Weiber von Weinsberg’ proves that fair and just solutions are possible when all parties are willing to cooperate. Recently, the Max Stern Art Restitution Project has not received the support it should have across Germany, specifically by the City of Dusseldorf, which treated the important work of the Max Stern Art Restitution Project with disrespect. This must change immediately.”

K U L T U R
S T I F T U N G · D E R
L Ä N D E R

Page 4, press release, 7. Mai 2018

Dr. Martin Hoernes, Secretary General, Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung:

“The businessman and philanthropist Ernst von Siemens established his art foundation above all to help the acquisition of top-notch objects for museums and other collections. Of course, the art foundation also participates when restituted artworks are to be kept in the collections where they are currently found. A joint sense of responsibility for both German history and for maintaining established museum collections guides our support.”