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## landscapes artists WW.II: Sleuthing for looted paintings

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Sleuthing for looted paintings <<http://washingtontimes.com/staff/deborah-k-dietsch/> Deborah K. Dietsch (<<http://washingtontimes.com/staff/deborah-k-dietsch/contact> Contact) For the past decade, Nancy Yeide has acted as the art world's version of intrepid detective Nancy Drew in hunting the histories of Nazi-looted artworks. Ms. Yeide, 49, who heads the curatorial records department at the National Gallery of Art, began her sleuthing in the museum's collection before searching for the thousands of paintings collected by Adolf Hitler's henchman, Hermann Goering. In learning about the archival resources that document Holocaust-era looting and restitution, it became really evident what had not been done in the field, says the New Jersey-born scholar. There had not been a single, complete inventory of Goering's collection. Her exhaustive research, involving thousands of documents in American and European archives, has resulted in the first comprehensive study of the paintings acquired and traded by the No. 2 Nazi. Published in June, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: The Hermann Goering Collection* (Laurel Publishing) is a painstaking reconstruction of the vast holdings amassed by Goering over a decade. Every known and possible painting in his collection is pictured in the book and accompanied by its history of ownership, known in the art world as provenance. Many people have published 60-year-old lists of looted paintings, but Nancy's book is the only one that has made a proper stab at an inventory of a major collection, says restitution expert Lucian Simmons of Sotheby's. It gives museums and collectors the chance to understand what Goering had and a resource for looking up those pictures. Next to Hitler, Goering was the most voracious collector of artworks plundered from Nazi-occupied lands. He built galleries at his country estate Carinhall outside Berlin to display his loot, which was transported in his private train. Art advisers helped Goering in his transactions and trades of pictures for what he thought were better works. In 1944, he exchanged about 150 paintings for a work by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, but it turned out to be a forgery. Goering saw his collection as the sign of a sophisticated connoisseur - I am, after all, a Renaissance man, he once boasted, but he was more interested in self-aggrandizement than cultural patronage. Quantity was very clearly more important than quality, says Ms. Yeide. The reichsmarschall preferred German, French and Dutch Old Masters paintings and amassed dozens of pictures by the same artists, including some 60 works associated with the German Renaissance artist Lucas Cranach. His taste also extended to schmaltzy landscapes and figurative scenes by contemporary Nazi artists, including Hitler. Unlike his boss, Goering didn't completely shun so-called degenerate modern works but used them as currency for older masterpieces. Among the important paintings he traded away was Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, which sold at auction in 1990 for \$82.5 million. Past books on Goering estimate his collection at 1,375 works based on a well known inventory of recovered loot. However, Ms. Yeide found his holdings more likely included between 1,700 to 1,800 paintings. There was a lot that wasn't evacuated, went missing or was recovered at a later date, she says. At the end of World War II, most of Goering's collection ended up in the small German town of Berchtesgaden where it was secured and inventoried by Allied Forces. Other pieces were sent to another Goering property, Veldenstein in Bavaria. Some works were stolen by the locals from the trains and some recovered by the German government after the war. The challenge was finding the archival records and then comparing the records to see if there were links among them, says Ms. Yeide. Once the documents were located, she discovered some paintings to be attributed to different artists, inconsistently described or duplicated. While researching Gerrit Dou's *Rembrandt's Mother, Peeling Apples*, she found the 17th-century Dutch artist had painted two identical versions of his work. One ended up in a Berlin gallery while the other was purchased in the Netherlands for Goering and then taken by his agent to Spain where it was recovered in 1945. Another obstacle was dealing with the strict rules enforced by different archives. The national archives in London wouldn't let me bring in a pencil with an eraser at the tip so I had to bite the eraser off, Yeide recalls. I got into trouble somewhere else for having lip balm, which I guess they thought I was going to use to mark the documents. One of her primary sources turned out to be in Maryland, 10 minutes from her home - the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park. Without its wealth of documents concerning art looting and restitution, the Goering project would have been impossible, says Ms. Yeide. Stored in the facility are millions of records on Holocaust-era assets, including art, rare books, coins, gold and furniture, all acquired by the U.S. government during and after the war. We have 3,000 to 4,000 boxes of records dealing with art alone, says archivist Greg Bradsher. Ms. Yeide had previously consulted these documents in researching 20 works from the National Gallery's collection that were thought to have been part of the unresolved legacy of Nazi looting. Only one, *Still Life With Fruit and Game* by Flemish artist Frans Snyders had not been legitimately restituted, so in 2000, the National Gallery returned the 17th-century still life to the family of French collector Marguerite Stern. Such efforts to return missing works to their rightful owners have increased over the past decade, making Ms. Yeide's research into World War II provenance more valuable. Stephen Clark of the Los Angeles-based J. Paul Getty Trust estimates 28 claims over Holocaust-related restitution have been resolved by American art museums over the last dozen years. One of those cases came about as a result of Ms. Yeide's research into Goering's collection. In 2002, she discovered a painting by the 18th-century French artist Francois Boucher had been seized by the Nazis from Paris art dealer Andre Jean Seligmann and was hanging in the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. After extensive research to determine the work had not been properly restituted, the museum returned the painting to Seligmann's heirs in 2004. Ms. Yeide has continued to gather clues to the whereabouts of paintings from Goering's collection in the two months since her book was published. People have come to me with information I didn't know, such as the current locations of the portraits of Goering's wives and daughter, she says. By exposing the details of one Nazi art collection, the American University-trained scholar has set the stage for future study of other such holdings. She points to a German scholar's research into art collected by Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's top diplomat. For American and European museums, *Dreams of Avarice* provides a valuable tool for better understanding the unvarnished history of their paintings. But it is only one

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step toward completing the task of identifying and restituting Nazi-looted artworks. The challenge is finding the resources to commit to this work, especially if you are a museum struggling to keep your doors open in this economy, says Mr. Clark. It is also hard to find good people to do this work. They need the skills of a detective and a diplomat. Nancy has both. <http://washingtontimes.com/>

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