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National Gallery of Art Returns World War II-Era Duress-Sale Drawing to Heirs



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, German (1794–1872)
A Branch with Shriveled Leaves, 1817
 pen and black ink over graphite on wove paper.
 Private collection

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art has returned a drawing in its collection, *A Branch with Shriveled Leaves* (1817) by 19th-century German artist Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, to the heirs of Dr. Marianne Schmidl (1890–1942). As a result of compelling new biographical information on Dr. Schmidl and documentation provided by her heirs, the Gallery has concluded the known 1939 sale of the drawing was a direct result of the persecution by the Nazis of Dr. Schmidl, the owner of the drawing. In accordance with the 1989 Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, the Gallery and the heirs of Marianne Schmidl agreed that the drawing should be returned to the family, and that a similar drawing by Friedrich Olivier, *Shriveled Leaves* (1817), also from the Schmidl collection, will remain in the permanent collection of the Gallery with an appropriate acknowledgment, and the Gallery will compensate Dr. Schmidl's heirs for that drawing.

"The Gallery does extensive World War II-era provenance research on the European art in its collection and posts the results of that ongoing effort for the world to see on www.nga.gov. We believe that full disclosure of all available information about works in the Gallery's collection is of vital importance," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

History of the Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Olivier Drawings

The National Gallery of Art acquired the drawings in 2007 from the [Wolfgang Ratjen collection](#)—one of the finest, private European holdings of old master drawings, comprising 185 Italian and German drawings. The Gallery presented exhibitions of the Ratjen Collection accompanied by complete scholarly catalogs in [2010](#) and [2011](#). Despite the Ratjen Foundation's careful research, important details of Dr. Schmidl's life and of the forced nature of the 1939 sale were not generally known at the time of the Gallery's acquisition and subsequent exhibitions of the drawings.

Marianne Schmidl was the daughter of Josef Schmidl (1852–1916) and Maria Schmidl née Friedmann (1858–1934). A Viennese lawyer, Josef was born Jewish but converted to Christianity in 1889; Maria was Christian. Maria was the granddaughter of the artist Friedrich Olivier and Franziska Heller; Franziska's sister was married to the artist Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Thus Marianne Schmidl was Olivier's great-granddaughter, and the great-grandniece of Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld.

Marianne Schmidl grew up in the lively cultural environment of prosperous, middle class, fin de siècle Vienna. She appears to have inherited her mother's strength of intellect and character. In 1910, despite the prejudices against women being admitted to university, Marianne enrolled to study physics and mathematics. In 1913 she switched courses to anthropology and ethnology and developed what was to become a lifelong fascination with Africa. Her research was based on the extensive collections of German and Austrian ethnological museums and culminated in the 1915 publication of her doctoral thesis "Numbers and Counting in Africa," making her the first woman to receive a doctorate in ethnology from the University of Vienna.

After World War I, Marianne Schmidl worked at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin where she began to research African basketry. She worked at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart for three years and thereafter at the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. In addition to her work at the library, from 1926 on she contributed to a research project on African handicrafts for the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna, financed by the Sächsische Forschungsinstitut für Völkerkunde in Leipzig.

In 1933, the year before Maria Schmidl's death and some 17 years after her husband Josef Schmidl's death, Maria expressed her last wishes in a letter to her daughter Marianne. She left the family drawing collection, consisting of numerous works by Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Olivier to Marianne alone.

She further asked that if Marianne found herself in circumstances in which she was forced to sell the works, she should sell them to an art institution if at all possible to ensure their proper care.

In January 1938 Marianne Schmidl was promoted to librarian first class at the Nationalbibliothek. In February 1938 she was granted a six-month medical leave. With the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, public employees were required to submit proof of their Aryan descent. On June 25, 1938, Marianne was informed that at the conclusion of her medical leave she would no longer be allowed to work at the library because of her Jewish heritage.

On September 30, 1938, Marianne Schmidl submitted the required registration of her assets—*Vermögensanmeldung*—on which she listed the value of her "metal, jewelry, luxury items, art and collections." In October she submitted the estimated value of her half of the house she shared with her brother-in-law, Dr. Karl Wolf, husband of her deceased sister Franziska (1891–1925), for which she would be taxed. Throughout 1938 and 1939 Schmidl fought through official channels the various Jewish taxes and her loss of work. Schmidl was by now completely dependent on the financial support of Dr. Wolf. As a non-Jew, Wolf managed to help her keep the family home; however, with no income she had to sell the family collection of Olivier and Schnorr von Carolsfeld drawings. Dr. Wolf brought them to the Viennese dealer Christian Nebehay who recommended selling them through the Leipzig auction house of C.G. Boerner, and he arranged for their transport to Germany. In the sale held on April 28, 1939, the Schmidl collection was sold anonymously as "Collection W." Records from Boerner confirm that the pseudonym was for Marianne's brother-in-law, Dr. Karl Wolf of Vienna.

In the spring of 1942 Marianne Schmidl was deported to Izbica, Poland, along with more than 5,000 Viennese Jews. Izbica was a holding point for the concentration camp Belzec. Schmidl's family received only three messages from her by May of that year, after which she was not heard from again. In July 1942, the German government expropriated her half of the house she shared with Dr. Wolf. She was declared dead in May 1950.

The Gallery first became aware of Marianne Schmidl's tragic fate and the duress attending the sale of her family's drawing collection from restitutions to her family announced by European institutions, including the Albertina in Vienna (2013), the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (2014), and the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden (2015). Subsequent research by Nancy Yeide, head of the department of curatorial records and the Gallery's World War II provenance research expert, confirmed the circumstances of the sale of the drawings by Schmidl. When the Gallery was contacted by one of Marianne Schmidl's grandnephews, on behalf of all of the Schmidl heirs in 2015, he initiated a conversation that resulted in the just, fair, and amicable resolution reached between the parties. In addition to the Schmidl heirs, the Gallery gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the Ratjen Foundation in making this historic restitution and compensation possible.

World War II Resources at the National Gallery of Art

The United States entered World War II less than nine months after the National Gallery of Art was dedicated and opened on March 17, 1941. The conflict had a dramatic impact on the new museum, which sent collections off site along with works of art from other nations for safe-keeping, developed programs and exhibitions for soldiers and war-workers in Washington, and participated in efforts to protect art and monuments in war areas. A number of Gallery officials served as "Monuments Men," during the war and the Gallery itself housed in residence the Roberts Commission, appointed by President Roosevelt in 1943 to promote the preservation of cultural property in war areas.

A wide range of records on each of these subjects is available to researchers online and on site. Finding aids to related personal papers in the Gallery Archives are available at <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/gallery-archives/world-war-ii-resources.html>. To contact a Gallery archivist or to make an appointment, email gallery-archives@nga.gov or telephone (202) 842-6615.

In November 2000, after exhaustive research, the Gallery announced that a painting in its collection, *Still Life with Fruit and Game* (1615/1620) by Flemish artist Frans Snyders (1579-1657), was likely confiscated by the Nazis from the Stern collection in Paris sometime before the German art dealer Karl Haberstock acquired it in 1941. By mutual agreement, the Gallery arranged to return the painting to the authorized representative of the Stern family who learned about the provenance (history of ownership) from the Gallery's website. For more information on the return of *Still Life with Fruit and Game*, visit <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/press/2000/frans-snyder.html>.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag

or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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