

Press release

Between Definite and Dubious. Sculptures and Their Histories (Acquired 1933–1945)

4 May to 5 November 2017

Press preview: Wednesday, 3 May 2017, 11 am

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

(Frankfurt am Main, 12 April 2017) This spring, the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung will take a look back at a chapter in its history that has rarely been a focus of attention to date: the Nazi period and the acquisitions made during those years. From 4 May to 5 November 2017, with the aid of twelve selected objects, the exhibition “Between Definite and Dubious. Sculptures and Their Histories (Acquired 1933–1945)” will offer insights into the history of the museum in the years 1933 to 1945 and tell the stories of the people intimately linked with the twelve works. Since 2001, the Städel Museum has been examining its collections with regard to artworks whose owners were deprived of them in connection with Nazi persecution. It was thus one of the first museums in Germany to embark on this task. In the spring of 2015, its provenance research activities were expanded through the addition of a comprehensive project supported by the German Lost Art Foundation and the city of Frankfurt am Main: the systematic examination of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung holdings. The special exhibition will now present this initiative’s current research results by way of a tour through the sculpture collection’s three main departments – Antiquity, Middle Ages and Renaissance to Neoclassicism.

The exhibition will tell the eventful stories of collectors such as Harry Fuld, Maximilian von Goldschmidt-Rothschild or Carl von Weinberg, who maintained close ties to the Liebieghaus for many decades, but also of personages meanwhile all but forgotten, for example Oswald and Alice Feis. At the same time, it will look at the sometimes contradictory actions of the museum’s employees, particularly Liebieghaus director Alfred Wolters, during the National Socialist era. A concentrated overview of the Liebieghaus history with a special focus on the period from 1933 to 1945 will serve as an introduction. The show will also address such issues as lawful and unlawful art acquisitions in Germany and abroad, personnel policy, the closure of the museum due to the war, the placement of its collection in external storage, war losses, and the restitution agreements of the post-war period. The twelve selected objects stand for various acquisition forms and the related courses of action. Within this context, the exhibition will also present its most recent, as-yet-unpublished provenance research findings to the public.

The research and exhibition project is being carried out with support from the German Lost Art Foundation and the city of Frankfurt am Main.

“Provenance research is a moral obligation, and meanwhile a vital aspect of museum work. By addressing itself to this task and presenting the current research results in an open and transparent manner, the Liebieghaus is accepting its historical and social responsibility as a museum”, comments Liebieghaus director Dr Philipp Demandt about the exhibition taking place on his initiative.

“The histories of the objects are closely intertwined with the histories of the people involved. The commemoration of the former owners – but also the awareness that every object today on view in a museum, gallery or private collection has a history of its own – form the basis of the exhibition and of our provenance research”, adds the exhibition’s curator, Dr Eva Mongi-Vollmer.

“Between Dubious and Definite. Sculptures and Their Histories (Acquired 1933–1945)” represents a contribution to cultural memory on many levels – in reconstructing and communicating historical processes, calling attention to questions still unanswered and formulating new ones, and interpreting and assessing the research results.

Since May 2015, the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung has been systematically examining the origins of all objects in its holdings acquired after 1933. The aim is to determine whether there are works among them that entered the collection from Jewish ownership as a consequence of Nazi persecution. In the years 1933 to 1945, the Liebieghaus acquired altogether 471 objects. Today, 152 of them are still in the collection, the others having been returned to their rightful owners immediately after World War II in compliance with Allied restitution law. A further 230 works have made their way into the Liebieghaus holdings since 1945. The research project being carried out by Dr Iris Schmeisser (project head) and Anna Heckötter (research assistant) is also concerned with reappraising the history of the institution itself and its purchasing policy in the years from 1933 to 1945, as well as the cultural-political context of the immediate post-war period and the restitutions carried out at that time. The project has moreover undertaken to reconstruct the biographies of the Jewish private collectors and previous owners and their relationships to the Liebieghaus – an aspect that has hardly figured in research on the history of the collection to date, if at all.

A comprehensive educational programme will accompany the exhibition. In addition to a digital offering online preparation for a visit to the show, on 29 June there will be an event on “Alfred Wolters: Liebieghaus Director from 1928 to 1949” (working title).

Provenance research at the Liebieghaus

Provenance research carried out at museums is concerned with identifying objects taken from their owners as a consequence of Nazi persecution. It thus assumes the moral responsibility to examine the holdings of public institutions with a view to Nazi stolen art as set forth in the Washington Principles resolved on 3 December 1998 as well as in a Common Declaration of the German Federal Government, the Laender and the National Associations of Local Authorities dating from the following year.

To examine an object with regard to its provenance, however, does not necessarily mean that this provenance can be clarified once and for all and in its entirety at the point in time when the investigations are carried out. Provenance research does not always come to unambiguous conclusions and usually does not provide simple answers, but on the contrary often leaves many questions unresolved. What is more, as every object has its own unique history, there is no such thing as a standardized approach to provenance research. For all of these reasons, the state of research on a given object can change continually. Yet provenance research encompasses far more than the mere reconstruction and clarification of the ownership circumstances of artworks. It is also always fundamentally related to issues of cultural memory – with regard to the persons and individual fates linked with the respective objects as well as the role of institutions in this context.

Between Dubious and Definite. Sculptures and Their Histories (Acquired 1933–1945)

Exhibition dates: 4 May to 5 November 2017

Press preview: Wednesday, 3 May 2017, 11 am

Curators: Dr Eva Mongi-Vollmer (curator), Dr Iris Schmeisser (co-curator), Anna Heckötter (co-curator)

Guided tour service and information: www.liebieghaus.de, info@liebieghaus.de,
buchungen@liebieghaus.de, telephone: +49(0)69-605098-200, fax: +49(0)69-605098-112

Questions and suggestions: +49(0)69-605098-232

Location: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Schaumainkai 71, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri–Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu 10 am – 9 pm, closed Mondays

Special opening hours: 25 May 10 am – 6 pm, 4 and 5 June 10 am – 6 pm, 15 June 10 am – 6 pm

Admission: 7 euros, reduced 5 euros, family ticket 12 euros, free admission for children up to the age of twelve

Advance ticket sales online at: tickets.liebieghaus.de

Liebieghaus

SKULPTUREN
SAMMLUNG

Accompanying programme: “Alfred Wolters: Liebieghaus Director from 1928 to 1949” (working title)
Thu, 29 June, 7 pm

“Aus erster Hand”: “Objekte erzählen Geschichten”, with Anna Heckötter, on Thu, 8 June, and “Von der Geschichte zur Erinnerung”, with Iris Schmeisser, on Thu, 13 July, at 6:30 pm on both days
For further information and the full accompanying programme, visit www.liebieghaus.de.

Accompanying brochure: with contributions by Anna Heckötter, Eva Mongi-Vollmer and Iris Schmeisser. In German, 56 pages, 9.90 euros.

Public guided tours of the exhibition: Sundays 4 pm and on the following holidays: Thu, 25 May, Mon, 5 June, and Thu, 15 June, 4 pm. Participation is included in the admission fee.

Digitorial: The digitorial is being made possible by the Aventis Foundation. Available free of charge at provenienz.liebieghaus.de starting 26 April.

Social media: The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is communicating the exhibition in the social media with the hashtags #Provenienz und #Liebieghaus.

A research and exhibition project sponsored by: German Lost Art Foundation and the city of Frankfurt am Main

Press: Axel Braun (head), Alexandra Hahn (deputy head), Jannikhe Möller, Paula Stuckatz, Städel Museum, Dürerstrasse 2, 60596 Frankfurt, telephone: +49(0)69-605098-268, fax: +49(0)69-605098-188, presse@liebieghaus.de