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Smithsonian and Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation Announce German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program

Multiyear Exchange Program Is the First of Its Kind

The Smithsonian and the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), two of the world's largest museum, education and research complexes, have established a new research exchange program. The German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program for Museum Professionals (PREP) will, for the first time, bring together museum professionals from both sides of the Atlantic who specialize in World War II-era provenance research for a three-year, systematic exchange (2017–2019). Provenance research is an integral part of curatorial practice that documents the chain of ownership of an object from its creation to the present.

While American and German museum professionals often deal with similar questions regarding WWII-era provenance, no exchange platform for the systematic study of methods and outcomes exists. PREP will reflect on the efforts made by institutions in Germany and the U.S. to systematically research the provenance of their collections, compare approaches and enable museum professionals to learn from each other. The program will bring together a total of 60 grantees in six host cities to bridge that gap and widen the scope of WWII-era provenance research, which has given priority to painting, sculpture and Judaica, by including Asian art, decorative arts and works on paper. [Applications](#) for the 2017 program are open from today until Nov. 18.

PREP partner organizations will include [the Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) in New York, [the Getty Research Institute](#) in Los Angeles, the [Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden](#) (Dresden State Museums) and the [Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte München](#) (Central Institute for Art History in Munich). The new [Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste](#) (German Center for Lost Art in Magdeburg) will be a consultative participant in the program.

The [Smithsonian Provenance Research Initiative](#), which enables WWII-era provenance research at the Smithsonian, will lead and direct the U.S. program and, in Germany, the program will be coordinated by the [Zentralarchiv \(Central Archives\) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin](#), [Preußischer Kulturbesitz](#) (National Museums in Berlin).

“We are delighted to partner with the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation/National Museums in Berlin on this new program,” said Richard Kurin, the Smithsonian’s Acting Provost and Under Secretary for Museums and Research. “PREP will enhance the skills and networks of our researchers and enable us to better share our provenance-research methods and data with other scholars and the public we serve.”

“Provenance research is an important issue to institutions on both sides of the Atlantic,” said Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. “Networking thus far has been carried out informally and intermittently; however, it is immensely important in order to research more efficiently. With PREP, we want to establish a network that enables long-term and sustainable collaboration between American and German researchers and museums and raise public awareness about provenance research. We are delighted to partner with the prestigious Smithsonian Institution on this important endeavor.”

German and American participants will gather twice a year—once in Germany and once in the U.S.—for weeklong workshops involving roundtables, symposia and meetings with their counterparts in the host city’s museums and archives. Each event will be designed to increase mutual comprehension of each other’s infrastructure and approach, and draw from the other nation’s training, resources, and methodologies. PREP participants will address the current and future practices of provenance research, sharing of records and methods for international dissemination of findings. They will identify, share and explore important research topics and resources in both countries. The workshop participants will facilitate the mentoring of the next generation of museum professionals who will engage in this work.

PREP will also explore the development of shared technology platforms and publish an online guide to WWII-era German/American provenance-research resources to expedite research on art losses in the National Socialist era. In each of the six host cities, the PREP program will include an educational program open to the public.

Major support for PREP comes through a German government grant funded by the German Program for Transatlantic Encounters, with additional financial support from Germany’s Federal Commission for Culture and Media and the program’s six key partners.

About the Smithsonian Provenance Research Initiative

In 2009, the Smithsonian founded its institution-wide [Provenance Research Initiative](#) (SPRI) to expand its commitment to World War II-era provenance research on works of art in its collections. SPRI has ongoing projects with the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art, which

recently launched the [Asian Arts Provenance Connections Project](#), the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of American History and the Archives of American Art. Through international scholarly exchange, SPRI fosters new partnerships, projects and training programs with other institutions to better share its resources, collections and research findings with the world.

About the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation

With its museums, libraries, archives and research institutes, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz ([Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation](#)) is one of the most important cultural institutions in the world. Its outstanding collections include all areas of worldwide cultural traditions: from archaeological and ethnological objects by way of the visual arts to literature and music. The combination of art and culture with science and research is an unmistakable hallmark of the foundation. The foundation supports in-depth scholarly and educational work, and the Central Archives of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) is a critical resource for provenance research.

Note to reporters: For interviews with Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, contact Ingolf Kern, director of the Department of Media and Communications at Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, at Pressestelle@spk-berlin.de.

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