

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **LOOTED, BUT FROM WHOM?**

30 November 2006 – 25 February 2007

**The exhibition *Geroofd, maar van wie?* ('Looted, but from whom?') will be open from 30 November 2006 to 4 February 2007 in Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam. The exhibition will consist of a selection from the large number of 'stolen' works of art that were returned to the Netherlands after the Second World War without it being clear in many cases who the rightful owners were. Now, this selection will be used to tell the story of intensive searches started by the Origins Unknown Agency (*Bureau Herkomst Gezocht*) with a view to returning these works to the often Jewish private owners or their heirs. Searches that were successfully completed over time, but that often also remained open-ended. Admission to the exhibition is free.**

#### **Previous history**

The thirty-six paintings and the few other items on display in the *Geroofd, maar van wie?* exhibition were chosen to illustrate the work of the Origins Unknown Agency. The agency was established in 1998 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) with the objective of finding out who the original owners were of the thousands of works of art that ended up in Germany during the Second World War because they had been sold, stolen or confiscated, and that were brought back to the Netherlands again after the war. The Dutch State was able to return some of the works of art to the rightful owners after 1945. The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (*Instituut Collectie Nederland*) still preserves more than 4000 pieces in its custody today, on behalf of the State, in the so-called 'Netherlands Art Property Collection' (*'Nederlands Kunstbezit collectie'*, otherwise known as the 'NK collection' from the Dutch).

#### **Stark contrast**

Many of the paintings depict charming scenes: a winter landscape, a still life, seascapes and Arcadian landscapes. This is in stark contrast to the history of these works. Investigations into the provenance of these paintings showed in some cases that they had been in the hands of Hitler or Goering. How the works came to be in their possession, or who owned the works before them, is often not known. To date it has therefore not been possible to successfully complete the search for the rightful owners of the works of art that will be exhibited in Hollandsche Schouwburg.

#### **Hollandsche Schouwburg**

Between 1892 and 1941 Hollandsche Schouwburg was a theatre where Dutch-language plays were performed. In October 1941 the building was 'renamed' Joodsche Schouwburg under duress from the German occupiers. Only Jewish artists were allowed to perform there for an exclusively Jewish audience. From July 1942 onwards the Nazis used the theatre as a deportation centre for Jews. Nowadays Hollandsche Schouwburg is a national monument dedicated to the memory of the

Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust. The fact that 'stolen art' will be displayed in precisely this monument in an attempt to restore the art to its rightful owners gives the exhibition an extra dimension.

### **Search**

The exhibition *Geroofd, maar van wie?* is an appeal to the Dutch public to make one last contribution to these works being returned to their rightful owners. The key to resolving the search could well be in the memory of a visitor to the exhibition because the final deadline for submitting claims for the restitution of items of cultural value is approaching: claims can be submitted until 4 April 2007.

The results of the general investigation carried out by the Origins Unknown Agency will be presented in book form and on CD-ROM on 29 November 2006. Visitors to the exhibition can also view all the paintings from the NK collection online in Hollandsche Schouwburg.

The *Geroofd, maar van wie?* exhibition was compiled by Hollandsche Schouwburg (which is managed by the Jewish Historical Museum) in collaboration with the Origins Unknown Agency. Thanks are also due to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage for their part in making the exhibition possible.

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Note for the editors:

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