



Thomas Couture

Portrait de jeune femme assise (Portrait of a Young Woman, Seated), c. 1850–1855

Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 60 cm

on recto, centre right, monogrammed in brown: "T. C."

on verso, on frame, upper centre, inscribed in white chalk: "H. Robert Guerrier 2059"; at lower left corner, a handwritten label: "Bne de Gaujal / 431 / Mme Leleu", and the inscription "D.W 2483"

An envelope attached at upper left corner contains a brass plate engraved "Ziem"; that envelope marked by hand: "Schildchen für Ziem Bild"

on stretcher, upper right, inscribed in white chalk "2059"; in red, "D' G."; at right, in white chalk: "DGJ"; at lower centre, in white chalk: "73 x 50"; at lower left: "X"

horizontal stretcher bar, inscribed in black: "6", "5/5"; in blue: "5834"; blued-edged, handwritten label: "327"; in white chalk: "5V"

numerous remnants of red stamps (ten in total)

canvas, upper centre, stamped: "Boulevard Montmartre / DEFORGEs / Md de Couleurs a Paris"

Provenance:

(...)

Georges Mandel, Paris

August 1940: Probably seized by the German authorities

(...)

By latest 28 April 1944: with Raphaël Gerard, Paris (per Gurlitt Papers)

After September 1953: Hildebrand Gurlitt, Dusseldorf (per Gurlitt Papers)

Thence by descent to Cornelius Gurlitt, Munich/Salzburg

From 6 May 2014: Estate of Cornelius Gurlitt

Bibliographical references:

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Primary sources:

Hildebrand Gurlitt and Cornelius Gurlitt Papers:

- Gerard Files: BArch, N 1826/46, fol. 1 ff. List Raphaël Gerard, 28 April 1944, item no. 6
Ibid., fol. 5 ff. List of artworks with Raphaël Gerard, [c. September 1953], item no. 6

Seizure Inventory [Sicherstellungsverzeichnis], 2012, no. SV (Part 2)/097

Agence Roger-Viollet, Paris

Photographs nos. 12167-5, 13514-9, 2590-13

Archives Nationales, Paris:

AJ 38/5894, Déclarations de biens spoliés/Dossier Mandel, no. 804
544AP/75

Bundesarchiv, Koblenz:

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Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives diplomatiques, Paris:

Dossiers individuels déposés à la Commission de récupération artistique, 209SUP/38, no. 45.969,
Succession [Georges] Mandel, Paris

Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin:

Paris 1379, fol. 397, annex 2. Eberhard Künsberg to Auswärtiges Amt, 27 August 1940

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- Catalogues des œuvres de Th. Couture*. Exh. cat., Palais de l'Industrie, Paris, September 1880.
- Exposition des œuvres de Thomas Couture*. Exh. cat., Galerie Levesque, Paris, June–July 1913.
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- Bertauts-Couture, Georges. *Thomas Couture: Sa vie, son œuvre, son caractère, ses idées, sa méthode*. Paris: Le Garrec, 1932.
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Whiteley, Linda. "Art et commerce d'art en France avant l'époque impressionniste," pp. 65–76. In: *Romantisme*, vol. 13, no. 40 (1983). *Souper à la Maison d'Or: Thomas Couture, Jules Desfossé.* Exh. cat., Musée de l'Hotel de Vermandois, Senlis, 12 December 1998–9 March 1999.

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Base Joconde

Base Rose Valland MNR

Bildarchiv Foto Marburg (Bildindex)

Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg: Database of Art Objects at the Jeu de Paume

Database "Central Collecting Point München"

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Getty Provenance Index, German Sales Catalogs

Lootedart.com

Lost Art

Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, Senlis

Musée du Louvre, Paris (Département des Peintures)

Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris (Centre de documentation)

Musée national du Château de Compiègne

Répertoire des Biens Spoliés

Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

Verzeichnis national wertvoller Kunstwerke ("Reichsliste von 1938")

Witt Library, London

Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale Kunstmarktforschung, Cologne

Note:

This painting most likely originated in the collection of Georges Mandel (1885 Chatou–1944 Fontainebleau). Mandel was a French politician and longstanding Member of Parliament, who served in various Ministerial posts during the interwar years.

Born Louis Georges Rothschild, Mandel originated from a Jewish family from Alsace. He was a vehement opponent of the Nazi Regime and vowed to refuse the Armistice of 22 June 1940. Accused of being a warmonger and of representing pro-Jewish interests, Mandel was arrested by the French government in French Morocco on 8 August 1940 and sentenced to life imprisonment. He spent the next two years in prison in France, before being deported to the concentration camps at Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. On 4 July 1944, Mandel was returned to Paris, and was executed three days thereafter by the French paramilitary Milice in the Forest of Fontainebleau near Paris.

In August 1940, the "Sonderkommando Künsberg" searched Georges Mandel's apartment at 67, Avenue Victor Hugo in Paris and seized part of its contents. That division was authorised to confiscate archives, libraries and art collections from diplomatic missions in the occupied territories. It is believed that the works thus seized were subsequently deposited in the German Embassy.

On 8 April 1941, Mandel's home was again ransacked, this time by members of the French nationalist party "Rassemblement national populaire" who requisitioned the premises as their party headquarters.

At the time of his arrest in 1940, Mandel lived with the well-known French actress Béatrice Brett (1895–1982). After Mandel's death, Brett served as the executor of his estate, and as the guardian of Mandel's only daughter Claude Rotschild-Mandel (1930–2003), who had survived the Occupation years in hiding.

In the immediate post-war period, Brett contacted the French authorities to recover the artworks seized from the Mandel collection. Brett also compiled an inventory of the apartment at 67, Avenue Victor Hugo. That list, an annotated copy of which is preserved at Archives diplomatiques in Paris, includes one "portrait de femme à l'huile, buste, signé COUTURE".

A note, dated 21 May 1954, was compiled on Mandel's missing artworks by Rose Valland, the French art historian and leading figure in the country's post-war recuperation effort. That list details seven artworks, one of which is described as "1 Thomas Couture (portrait de femme)", with the additional qualification "trou au milieu de la poitrine – réparation apparente". Per Valland, therefore, the Couture portrait owned by Georges Mandel had a hole in the area of the sitter's chest, and showed visible signs of restoration.

Detailed examination of the Gurlitt work revealed a small hole in the canvas, similar to the damage described in the archival material. That hole had at one point been restored with firming agent and is therefore hardly visible today. These technical findings strongly suggest that the Gurlitt work is in fact identical to the painting misappropriated from the Mandel collection.

It is not known when and under which circumstances the Couture painting was removed from the Mandel apartment, or how it was acquired by Hildebrand Gurlitt. A Couture painting described as "Fig. Darstellung" is mentioned in Hildebrand Gurlitt's sale ledgers. Owing to the generic nature of this reference, however, it has not been possible to identify the specific work.

This work was one of over 70 works with the art dealer Raphaël Gerard in Paris in 1944. It is unclear whether at the time Gerard and/or Gurlitt owned or co-owned these works, whether they had been placed on commission, or indeed simply deposited with Gerard. It is conspicuous that an inventory of works with Gerard was drawn up in the very late stages of the war; one possible hypothesis is that Gurlitt placed for safekeeping with Gerard works that he had acquired in occupied Paris, with the intention of moving these objects at a later date.

In 1953, some of these works were shipped to Gurlitt in Dusseldorf, while others remained with Gerard until 1957 (at Gurlitt's cost). The inscription "6" on verso refers to two inventories of artworks with Gerard, one dated 28 April 1944, the other dating from about September 1953. This work is respectively referred to herein as "Portrait de femme brune" (1944) and "Frauenporträt Oel" (1953).

The previous attribution of this painting to the collection of Baronne de Gaujal (based on a handwritten label on verso) could not be substantiated. Detailed examination revealed that the frame is most likely not original to this painting.

The original report on the provenance of this work, as submitted to the Taskforce Schwabing Art Trove, was made accessible at www.taskforce-kunstfund.de as of 14 January 2016. That report was updated by the Gurlitt Provenance Research Project on 22 March 2019.

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