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Dear Sir

Consultation: Restitution of Objects Spoliated (sic) in the Nazi Era

I wish to make representations opposing the proposals to permit the removal of works of art from UK galleries and "return" them to the descendants of previous owners.

There is universal abhorrence of the anti-Semitic pogroms of the Nazi party in Germany in the decade from 1935 when many works of art were abandoned, seized or bought at a forced under-value from the Jewish owners. Their restitution, however well intentioned, cannot be justified at the remove of a 70 year time span – it is not a case of restitution to the former owners but to descendants who may not have inherited them in any case. Redemption from the evils of the Nazi era cannot be bought by plundering public art collections any more than the dead of the concentration camps can be spirited back. It is a fact of history.

It is instructive to note the fate of a collection of Klimt paintings which used to hang in the Belvedere Gallery in Vienna for all to enjoy. They were given to an American multi-millionairess, the 90 year old niece of the original owner, who immediately sold one for £73m and sent the rest to Sotherby's or Christie's. This is not an isolated occurrence. I enclose some downloaded pages giving further details.

In summary, all the well-meaning restitution does is to impoverish national collections and gift stupendous wealth to distant relatives of the original owners. The few works in the UK with dubious provenance were bought in good faith and there is no legal or equitable reason to change the law to enable the works to be given away. The "heirs" who stand to make a windfall fortune will be the only ones to not agree.

Yours faithfully



Michael Heaps FRICS

Cc Rt.Hon. Michael Fallon MP