

## Press release



State Secretary Thomas Dermine hands over the painting by Lovis Corinth to solicitor Dr Imke Gielen. Photo credit: © John Thys | AFP

### “Justice can triumph”

#### Once again a successfully restituted painting is consigned to Van Ham

On 10 February 2022 the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels for the first time restituted a painting from their collection: Lovis Corinth’s *Still Life: Red and Pink Roses in a Vase on a Tablecloth (Flowers)* from 1913. Now this outstanding painting by the German Expressionist, which used to belong to the Jewish business couple Gustav and Emma Mayer in Frankfurt am Main, will be called up during the Spring sale at Van Ham. Van Ham thus once again demonstrates its special commitment to restitutions, whereby justice can be achieved even after years of eventful history.

The German-Jewish couple Gustav and Emma Mayer ran a successful company in Frankfurt am Main. They recognized the threat posed by National Socialism in time and eventually fled to Brussels via Italy in 1938. Owing to the expenses of emigration, the Reich Flight Tax and the Jewish Property Tax, hardly anything was left of the Mayers’ property. A Frankfurt shipping company was able to transport their art collection, comprising about 30 works, to Brussels, where it was stored. After 14 months in Belgium, the Mayer family went to the UK in August 1939 – a few days before the outbreak of the war – settling in Bournemouth. They never again saw the paintings they had left behind in Brussels – they were looted from the storage and confiscated by a special Nazi unit led by Hitler’s henchman Alfred Rosenberg between 1942 and 1943. After the end of the war, the painting was recovered by the art expert Leo Van Puyvelde, a member of an Allied committee for the protection and restitution of cultural property. Since the original

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# VAN HAM

owner could not be determined at the time, the flower still life was handed over to the Royal Museums in Brussels in 1951.

Some 80 years after the theft by the Nazis and after years of research, the painting by Lovis Corinth has now been restituted to the heirs of the Mayers. It is the first restitution by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels of an artwork that was stolen from a Jewish family during World War II. "This restitution – the first one by the Museums of Fine Art – sends out a strong signal: justice can triumph, even after decades," said Thomas Dermine, Belgium's State Secretary in charge of museums. The restitution of the painting, he stated, also constitutes "an opportunity to remind people of the horrors" to which nationalism and right-wing extremism can lead. "To repair means to remember, and to remember means preventing the return of the worst."

As early as 2016, the Mayer family, represented by the law firm Trott zu Solz Lammek and Prof. Fritz Enderlein, contacted the Belgian museums, eight years after these had set up an online database with 27 works of undetermined origin in their collections in order to track down their owners. Dr Imke Gielen, a lawyer at the Berlin law firm Von Trott zu Solz Lammek, called it a historic day for the family. "They are extremely pleased that at least one of the missing paintings was identified after 80 years and can now be restituted." Concerning the sale of the painting, Gielen said: "Van Ham has assumed the role of mediator in restitutions many times and built up an excellent reputation through its sensitivity and sense of responsibility. This surely helped convince the heirs of the Mayer family to consign the painting to Van Ham."

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## Restituted work by Lovis Corinth at Van Ham



### Lovis Corinth (1858–1925)

*Still Life: Red and Pink Roses in a Vase on a Tablecloth (Flowers)* | 1913 | Oil on canvas | 81.5 x 65.5 cm  
Signed and dated on the right, above the edge of the table: Lovis Corinth 1913 | Model frame

**Estimate: €250,000 – 350,000**

#### Provenance:

- Kunstsalon M. Goldschmidt & Co, Frankfurt a. M.
- Art Collection Gustav and Emma Mayer, Frankfurt a. M. (acquired by the aforementioned between 1916 and 1921)
- Confiscated in Brussels by the operations staff of Reichsleiter Rosenberg (looting organization for cultural goods of the NSDAP, from 1942/43)
- Office de Récupération Economique (after 1944)
- Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (from 1951, inv. no. 6605)
- Descendants of Gustav and Emma Mayer (received on 10.2.2022 through restitution of the aforementioned)

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#### Van Ham – About us

Van Ham Kunstauktionen, founded in 1959, is a family run business, managed in the second generation by Markus Eisenbeis. Annually, approximately 20 internationally renowned auctions take place in the fields of Modern Art, Post War & Contemporary Art, Fine Art, Decorative Art, Fine Jewels & Watches and Art & Interior. With 40 curated Online Only auctions in 2021, Van Ham is the market leader in Germany. In the same year, Van Ham achieved the highest annual result in its history with around 40,1 million Euros. Regularly achieved auction records make Van Ham one of Germany's leading auction houses.

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