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Hranice Museum and Gallery
Attn: Mr. Marek Suchánek, Head of the Museum and Gallery
Mr. Plachý, Director
Masarykovo nám 71
753 01 Hranice
CZECH REPUBLIC

Dear Mr. Suchánek and Mr. Plachý,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the heirs of Stefan Heller who filed an art claim with the Holocaust Claims Processing Office ("HCPO") of the New York State Department of Financial Services. We are working together with the Heller heirs (the "Heirs") to locate and recover art works from Heller's extensive art collection, which was lost due to Nazi persecution.

Our office was created in June 1997 by the State of New York to provide assistance, free of charge, to Holocaust victims and their heirs seeking to recover assets that were lost, stolen or "sold" under duress due to Nazi persecution prior to and during World War II. The HCPO has successfully helped original owners and current possessors of looted art reach mutually agreeable solutions by engaging in open discussions about lost objects' ownership history. As a government agency, we rely on moral persuasion as articulated in the applicable international principles on Nazi-confiscated art.

In the course of our research, we learned from your website that at least one painting from Stefan Heller's collection is with the Hranice Museum and Gallery. I believe our colleague Jana Jiraskova, Director of the Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of WW II Victims, may have already contacted Mr. Suchánek regarding the Heller family and she was informed there are at least three paintings which were part of the Heller collection.

To better understand the Heirs' firm commitment to seeing that the works of art once belonging to Stefan Heller are returned to them as the rightful heirs to such works of art, please permit me to provide you with some personal and historical background on Mr. Heller.

Born on April 12, 1898 in Hranice, Stefan Heller ran the family's textile factory, *S. Hellera vdova a syn*, in Hranice where he resided with his family. An extremely prosperous business, *S. Hellera vdova a syn* was founded by Stefan's grandfather Max Heller in 1869, and its products were sold at home and abroad, including the Middle East, and Asia. The factory facilities included a spinning and weaving mill, large warehouses, and a laundry room. Heller and his wife Luise (Louise) Heller geb Stross (February 5, 1904 - February 11, 1988) had two daughters, Heidi (Hedwig) (November 17, 1933 - February 26, 2014), and Eleanor (Eleonore) (July 28, 1935 - January 19, 2016). [see Exhibit E, F, G, H & J]. Stefan, much like his parents, was an avid art and antiques collector.

After the German occupation of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, the factory was Aryanized and the government appointed *Treuhänder* Karl Juratsch controlled the business operations. Given the Nazi appropriation of his factory, Stefan knew he would be unable to keep his family safe. At the end of April 1939, under the guise of a family vacation, he fled with his wife and daughters to Italy. Shortly thereafter, the Heller residence was handed over to the *Treuhänder* and, in December 1939, an auction of the Heller property took place on the premises. According to Gestapo representative Mr. Traub and Mr. Juratsch, by the time the auction was held "...the most valuable objects belonging to the Jew Heller had already been given to a museum". [see Exhibit A, B & C].

Little was known of the fate of the art collection, with the exception of two works that were returned to the family after the war, a portrait of Stefan Heller and a still life oil painting. According to family lore, the Hellers' household staff was able to hide these two paintings and returned them to the family after the war. Notwithstanding Stefan's efforts to reclaim his business, it was nationalized in 1948. [see Exhibit C]. The family never received compensation for Stefan's art and antiques collection from the German and Czech governments.

As I am sure you are aware, governments and the art community at large have identified the need to address the matter of Holocaust-era looted art. This is clearly articulated by the 1998 Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets and the resulting eleven principles (the "Washington Principles") developed to guide the resolution of issues to stolen art. These principles, which were endorsed by the Czech Republic, encourage current possessors to identify art work that was confiscated, looted, or sold under duress in Nazi Germany

between 1933 and 1945 and to return these items to pre-war owners and their heirs. In particular, the Washington Principles provide:

"VIII. If the pre-War owners of art that is found to have been confiscated by the Nazis and not subsequently restituted, or their heirs, can be identified, steps should be taken expeditiously to achieve a just and fair solution, recognizing this may vary according to the facts and circumstances surrounding a specific case."

In 2009, the Washington Principles were reaffirmed by the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related issues of 2009.

In light of the misappropriation of the Heller art collection and their other belongings during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and the applicable principles governing Holocaust-era looted art, noted above, the HCPO requests your cooperation in restituting the three works of art to the Heller heirs, who are direct lineal descendants of Stefan Heller. [see Exhibit E]. The heirs are Heller's grandchildren Glenn and Claudia Reed, the children of Heidi Reed geb Heller; Francesca Lucka nee Bizzaro, the daughter of Eleanor Bizzarro geb Heller; and the great grandchildren Andrew and Rebecca Reed, the children of the late Evan Reed, son of Heidi Reed. [see Exhibit I & K - O]. Andrea Bizzaro, the only other child of Eleanor Bizzarro has relinquished her rights to her sister Francesca Lucka.

The HCPO is also currently working with Mrs. Pavla Obrovská at the Moravská galerie v Brně to finalize the return of four paintings seized from the Heller collection currently held by the Moravian Gallery. They have been very cooperative in negotiating a settlement that not only returns the paintings to the family but also honors the history of the family.

I hope that through a forthright and amicable dialogue the HCPO can help to resolve this matter, and I look forward to working together to achieve a prompt and just resolution. Thank you in advance for your kind cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Connie Walsh

Connie Walsh

cc: Jana Jiraskova