

Two New Rooms at the Louvre for Stolen Paintings Recovered after WWII

As part of the renovations of the rooms that house French and Northern European painting on level 2 of the Richelieu wing, the Musée du Louvre has dedicated two rooms to works recovered in Germany after the Second World War. A selection of 31 paintings marked “MNR,” the French initials for *musées nationaux récupération* (National Museums Recovery), is now on display in two designated rooms along with texts that raise awareness among visitors about this issue. An additional 76 paintings are presented throughout the museum’s permanent collections along with a specific text indicating where they came from.

Between 1940 and 1945, approximately 100,000 objects of all kinds (including many artworks) were looted in France by the Nazis, mostly from Jewish families, or sold under duress and transferred to Germany. The *Commission de Récupération artistique*, a French commission for the recovery of artworks, was created in 1944 to retrieve these stolen goods and return them to their rightful owners. Thanks to the commission, active until 1949, more than 61,000 objects found their way back to France. Of those, more than 45,000 were returned to their owners at the demand of the victims themselves or their direct heirs.

Unclaimed works were, for the most part (approximately 13,000), sold, and the administration kept 2,143 objects, which were registered in special inventories labeled “MNR.” The Musée du Louvre houses 1,752 MNR works in its collections, including 807 paintings. Of those, 296 are in the museum itself while the rest were sent to different museums on long-term loans around France.

Currently, a working group set up by the French Ministry of Culture who works with the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation (CIVS), created in 1999, is in charge of tracking the provenance of these works, in order to determine which were spoliated and which were not. If a work was spoliated, the group tries to identify its rightful owner at the time of the confiscation so that it may be returned to the appropriate beneficiaries. When it comes to paintings, more than 50 works have been returned since 1951.

The complete catalogue of these paintings was published in 2004: *Catalogue des peintures MNR*, by Claude Lesné and Anne Roquebert. The catalogue is also available online, thanks to the **Rose-Valland site** (<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/mnr>).

Press release

New room openings

December 9, 2017

Richelieu wing, level 2



Wybrand Simonsz. de Geest the Elder, *Portrait of a Twelve-Year-Old Child*, oil on canvas. MNR 424 © Musée du Louvre / A. Dequier - M. Bard

The Louvre’s Department of Paintings continues to pursue major renovations in its rooms, begun in 2015. It is the largest undertaking of its kind since the Grand Louvre project of the 1980s and 90s.

The 36 rooms dedicated to French painting (Primitive to the 17th century), and Germanic and Dutch schools (Primitive to the early 17th century), reopened to the public on December 9, 2017. Some 500 works had been removed and examined to determine their state and undergo conservation treatment, have their frames restored, be photographed, etc. The rooms were brought back to standards in terms of climate control, the walls painted, their exhibition layout slightly modified, and the hangings revised.