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***Images Available Upon Request**

Cincinnati Art Museum to display prized artworks recovered in World War II in ‘Paintings, Politics and the Monuments Men’ July 9–Oct. 3



CINCINNATI— [*Paintings, Politics and the Monuments Men: The Berlin Masterpieces in America*](#) tells the story of how and why some of the world’s most iconic European paintings left Germany immediately after World War II and toured the United States in what became the first blockbuster art exhibition of our time. Walter Farmer, Cincinnati’s own “Monuments Man,” played a central role in this pivotal episode in the history of art and war.

The exhibition can only be seen at the Cincinnati Art Museum from July 9–Oct. 3, 2021.

During the final years of World War II, Allied forces endeavored to protect artworks, archives and monuments of historical and cultural significance across Europe, and they worked to return works looted by the Nazis to their rightful owners in the postwar period.

These efforts were led by the “Monuments Men,” the men and women of the Monuments, Fine Art, and Archives program, established in 1943 under the Civil Affairs and Military Government Sections of the Allied armies. Their ranks included museum curators, art historians, and others trained to identify and care for works of art.

From the rise to power of the National Socialists in 1933 through the end of the war in 1945, Nazi policies and practices resulted in systemic repression of modern artists in Germany, the looting and forced sales of artworks—especially from Jewish collectors—across Europe, and artworks changing hands through other unethical or questionable transactions.

Paintings, Politics and the Monuments Men explores examples of these uses and abuses of art with paintings on loan from the National Gallery of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum. It turns the spotlight on a lesser-known episode in the movement of artworks in this era: 202 sixteenth- to eighteenth-century paintings from the State Museums in Berlin that were recovered by the US Army in a salt mine at the end of the war, and their long and controversial journey that followed. They traveled to the US in 1945 and were exhibited in 14 cities across the country, before returning to occupied Germany and, decades later, back to the rightful possession of the Prussian State and the German people. The paintings’ temporary transfer out of Germany was met with outcry on both sides of the Atlantic, but their exhibition in America was greeted with huge enthusiasm, drawing almost 2.5 million visitors.

At the heart of the exhibition, visitors will see four of the original paintings lent by the State Museums of Berlin, including Sandro Botticelli’s “Ideal Portrait of a Lady,” paired with paintings from the Cincinnati Art Museum’s permanent collection by artists represented in the “202,” such as Andrea Mantegna and Peter Paul Rubens.

cincinnati art museum

The exhibition also addresses “Monuments Man” Walter I. Farmer, who served as the first director of the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point in Germany, where after the war artworks were gathered, documented, and prepared for return to their rightful owners. Farmer was responsible for assembling “Monuments Men” from across Europe to draft the Wiesbaden Manifesto, a document protesting the shipment of paintings to the US. It may have been the only collective act of protest by US officers in World War II. Following the war, Farmer was a resident of Cincinnati and supporter of the arts in the region for almost 50 years.

“This exhibition offers a valuable look into a landmark event in the history of art and twentieth-century geopolitics. The fate of the ‘Berlin 202’ and the broader context of how art was used in the World War II era has affected how we think about ownership and value and cultural patrimony, and how we look at art today. In Cincinnati we are fortunate to have had, in Walter Farmer, a direct link to the decisions and events at the heart of this history, and we have benefited from his role as a teacher, arts professional and patron later in life,” said Peter Jonathan Bell, curator of European paintings, sculpture and drawings at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

An award-winning major publication, produced by the Cincinnati Art Museum with D Giles Limited, accompanies the exhibition and features new scholarship from European and American curators and historians. The publication was organized by Dr. Bell and Dr. Kristi A. Nelson, executive vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Cincinnati, who are also co-curators of the exhibition.

Paintings, Politics and the Monuments Men will be on view in the Thomas R. Schiff Galleries (234 and 235). Tickets for the exhibition are free for museum members and will soon be available to purchase by the general public online at cincinnatiartmuseum.org. All active-duty military members, reserves, retirees and veterans of the United States Armed Forces are invited to receive a complimentary three-month Cincinnati Art Museum membership, available at the museum’s front desk or by calling (513) 639-2966, with which they can see this and other ticketed exhibitions for free. This offer is valid from July 9–Oct 3. Photography is permitted, but no flash. On social media, use the hashtag #CAMMonuments

Paintings, Politics and the Monuments Men was organized with the generous support of the Harold C. Schott Foundation. The exhibition is presented by FEG and additional support is provided by Evolo Design, The Wieler Family Foundation; August A. Rendigs, Jr. Foundation; Marnick Foundation; Lee Carter Family Fund; Jack and Joyce Steinman; and the Charles Scott Riley III Foundation.

The exhibition was originally slated to open in Cincinnati in June 2020 but was postponed due to the pandemic. To ensure community wellness, visitation may be limited and advanced online registration may be required. Visit cincinnatiartmuseum.org for the most current information and hours.

About the Cincinnati Art Museum

The Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the generosity of individuals and businesses that give annually to ArtsWave. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as our members.

Free general admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is made possible by a gift from the Rosenthal Family Foundation. Special exhibition pricing may vary. Parking at the Cincinnati Art Museum is free. Visit cincinnatiartmuseum.org for more information.

Image credit: Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar N. Bradley, and George S. Patton inspect art found in the Merkers salt mine, April 12, 1945, image courtesy of National Archives at College Park, MD