

# Swift-Find Looted Art Project

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*Swift-Find is a global on-line registry of valuables that is committed to helping with the identification and recovery of Nazi-Era looted art. The Swift-Find Looted Art Project is an extension of the Swift-Find service and contains the largest online international database of looted cultural property that can conduct searches in real time. The information is accessible to the public from the Swift-Find looted art project website at [www.lootedartproject.com](http://www.lootedartproject.com). There is no charge to use the Swift-Find looted art project website for those who are legitimately searching for looted objects including museums, government agencies and claimants. The commercial section of Swift-Find charges third parties for searching the database. The costs are listed on the Swift-Find website at [www.swift-find.com](http://www.swift-find.com).*

## I. Background

Several agencies have commendably put information online, but because of both funding and technological limitations, many of these websites have been unable to reach their full potential. The Swift-Find Looted Art Project is a significant step forward in helping to identify and recover looted cultural property due to the amount of data we search and website's advanced features.

Swift-Find receives information about looted items from government agencies, auction houses, museums, relevant on-line databases and services, and original owners. There are currently over 30,000 searchable Nazi-Era looted objects in the database along with access to several thousand more objects. We have been working with individuals and agencies that have information about looted items, but have either not published their research online or only done so in a limited fashion, to enter their information into the Swift-Find looted art database. This allows the cumulated information to be available from a single site.

Swift-Find is also working with Sotheby's who are providing us with thousands of looted objects that they have gathered over the years that have not been digitised. These include wartime auction catalogues from large auction house such as Paul Graupe and Hans Lange. Once these are entered into our database, it will be the first time that they will be accessible to a large audience.

It is important that the information Swift-Find acquires is available to as wide an audience as possible. The more people that have access to the data, the more likely it will be for someone to spot a potentially looted object. Also, the more information that is on our database, the more likely it will be to create a match of a looted object with an object that someone is looking for. This is one of the key features of the Swift-Find database.

## II. Database Features

Swift-Find's database has the ability to match data on looted objects with known whereabouts and unknown ownership with

data on looted objects with unknown whereabouts but known owners. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the database is that it's constantly being automatically checked against objects for sale by dealers and auction houses.

The Swift-Find database also has a proprietary, highly effective visual matching technology that allows comparison, search and retrieval of photographic images. For instance, if a stolen painting merely features in the background of a black and white family photo from 1920, this will usually be sufficient for it to match the picture against a similar one on the database – even if the photograph is at an angle or the picture is partially obscured. The same applies to three dimensional items such as sculptures or religious artefacts.

A number of additional innovative features distinguish Swift-Find from the other databases which include:

- A global registry of looted objects that will be available in four languages: English, German, French and Italian
- Comprehensive product listing including categories for Judaica
- Quick and easy registration for claimants
- The ability to alert the appropriate authorities in real-time when a looted item is identified.

Because of these features, Swift-Find offers the best chance of identifying a looted object if it comes up for sale and of helping individuals and families search for objects that may have been taken from them during World War II.

When we created the website, we wanted to make sure we designed a site that both seasoned researchers and computer novices can easily use. Although we believe we found the right balance, we're constantly working to improve our site and welcome all feedback.

## III. How the database works

We try to make it as easy as possible for claimants and their families enter information. In many cases, claimants have contacted us directly and we walk them through what they need to do to enter data. We ask that claimants fill in a simple form and then we send them a username, password and reference number. People can ac-

cess this form by going to [www.lootedartproject.com](http://www.lootedartproject.com) and then clicking on the 'Report It' link on the top horizontal navigation. From there, they click on the 'Report It Looted' link. This will take them to a page with a form to fill in. We spent a lot of time developing the form and making sure that it's not difficult or daunting to fill in, but comprehensive enough to make sure that the claim is legitimate.

## IV. Report It Looted Form

The form is divided into six sections and includes questions designed to help jog claimants' memories and best describe the circumstances of looting. In order to ensure that the form is not too overwhelming, there are only eight fields that are required. The form includes the following sections:

- Original Owner Information
- Object Acquisition Information
- Looted Object Information
- Previous Claim Information
- Previous Research Information
- Proof of Ownership and Documentation

We also ask people entering claims to provide us with an e-mail address so that we can send them their log-in details. The completed form is then vetted by the Swift-Find staff who send claimants a username, password and unique reference number along with a set of instructions. They can then fill in the information themselves directly on the website. If there are large amounts of data, we can either help with the data entry or do it for them, but what's nice is that this is a very quick and easy way to let claimants enter data themselves.

## V. Adding objects

Claimants can log into the system by going back to [www.lootedartproject.com](http://www.lootedartproject.com) and clicking on the 'Sign-In' link on the upper left corner. They will then enter their username and password and click the Sign-In button on the screen.

They will then be brought to their portfolio screen where they can register as many items as they wish. In order to add an item, they click on the 'Add Item' button on the top left corner. They can either enter items by category or choose from an alphabetical list of items. Swift-Find has 23 main categories that range from *Art and Antiques* to *Religious Artifacts*. Once they have selected a category, they can narrow down their choices with options that we provide for them. For example, if they click on *Art and Antiques* as their main category, they can then choose *Pictures*, and then *Drawings*. They are then asked to fill in fields to describe the items. These fields are taken from the Getty Object ID, the international standard for describing cultural objects.

If users have any questions, there are helpful buttons that they can click on which will help to guide them. There is also an animated online demonstration which gives an overview of entering objects if further instructions are needed. After they finish

entering an object, they click on the 'Done' button at the bottom of the screen. This takes them back to their portfolio page where they can either enter another object by clicking on the 'Add Item' button again, or they can report the object as looted.

## VI. Reporting objects as looted

After people have entered their objects, they can then report them as looted. In order to do this, they go back to their portfolio and select the tick boxes to the left of their items in order to activate the 'Report It' button at the bottom of the screen. When they click on the 'Report It' button, they are taken to a screen where they can report their objects as looted. There is a Police Reference Number field, which is where they can enter the Swift-Find reference number provided to them by email. This marks the objects as looted.

## VII. Conducting a Search

Searches in the Swift-Find database can be conducted via text, serial number or image. There is also a list of tips to help users optimise their search. Serial number searches are straightforward and need to be exact matches. Text searches are open fields that let the user type in keywords to describe the item. For image-based searches, users can upload an image of an item by clicking on the 'Browse' button and selecting the image to be used.

After typing in a search item, such as 'Tintoretto' in the text field, they will see the results pages, listed by 10 results per page. They can then click on an item to get more details, including full object, provenance, bibliographical and exhibition information if it is available. The more keywords that are used to describe an image, the more detailed the results. For example, a search on the name 'Tintoretto' returns 42 results and a search on the name 'Hatvany' returns over 100 results, but a search on 'Tintoretto Hatvany' returns just two results.

If there is any kind of match with looted art, Swift-Find staff will be notified and pass the information on to the correct authorities. For example, if a search was conducted on behalf of a dealer or auction house, we would provide the dealer or auction house with the possible match. If a match came up on an item a claimant was looking for, we would either notify the claimant directly or we would notify the organisation operating on behalf of the claimant. Swift-Find does not get involved with research and recovery issues.

## VIII. Conclusion

Swift-Find officially launched the Looted Art Project in June. Although we have amassed a large amount of information, we also know it is just the beginning and there is still a great deal of work to be done. There is more data to accumulate and we would like to work with as many data providers as possible. Eventually, we would like to turn the Looted Art Project website into a resource for the community. However, it is only with the continued cooperation of museums, government agencies and the art market that we will be able to make a real difference in identifying and recovering looted art. ■

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