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The Mondrian Case: Provenance Dossier Supports the Position of the City of Krefeld

The City of Krefeld had the provenance of four paintings by the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) comprehensively investigated. The paintings with the titles *Tableau No. VII*, *Tableau No. X*, *Tableau No. XI* (all 1925), and *Composition IV* (1926) belong to the holdings of the Kunstmuseen Krefeld.

Descendants of the Mondrian heir Harry Holtzman demand the return of the works of art. They claim that the works were misappropriated at the time, and that this fact has been kept under cover for decades.

The City of Krefeld took these accusations seriously and thoroughly reviewed the facts of the case. To these ends, the city commissioned the scholars Dr. Katja Terlau and Dr. Vanessa-Maria Voigt to conduct comprehensive provenance research. The results of this research are now available. A summary is attached to this communication. According to this research, there is every indication that the works by Mondrian are legitimately in the possession of the City of Krefeld.

The findings of the scholars support the position of the City of Krefeld.

“We have made it clear from the very beginning that, in the public interest, we bear responsibility for the paintings. They are part of a public collection and are accessible there to the citizens of the City of Krefeld and the entire public. The dossier confirms our position that there is no claim for restitution to the descendants of Harry Holtzman in the United States. Everything speaks for the fact that the paintings came to Krefeld by legal means,” explains Mayor Frank Meyer.

The legal counsel of the City of Krefeld, Prof. Dr. Peter Raue, also sees his legal assessment of the case confirmed by the dossier: “The opposing party has thus far been able to present little more than speculation and unsubstantiated suspicions. The provenance dossier now provides us with a solid factual basis on the history of the pictures and their further path over the past almost 100 years. Although the investigation does not provide any evidence in the legal sense—this was not to be expected due to the fact that the events took place a long time ago and that the sources are at times difficult to assess—we now have solid, conclusive facts that support our legal assessment. For me, there is no doubt that the artworks have been legally acquired by the museum and belong to the collection of the Kunstmuseen Krefeld.”

Irrespective of the fact that all indications speak for a lawful acquisition of the property, the claims of the heirs are statute-barred. Peter Raue comments: “For this reason, the opposing party has repeatedly tried in the past to put moral pressure on the City of Krefeld. As the dossier once again underscores, however, any alleged connection with the Washington Principles and Nazi-confiscated art is far-fetched.” ◀