



**Stern Cooperation Project (SCP) Conference des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte, Online-Tagung am 16. Februar 2022 um 14.00 Uhr**

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

[Anreden]

Allow me to extend my warm greetings to you from Düsseldorf!

It is an honour for me to say a few words to you at the beginning of this conference.

This conference marks the conclusion of the Stern Cooperation Project. My special thanks go to all those involved for their valuable work over the past roughly three and a half years.

The research primarily focused on the Stern family of art dealers – a Düsseldorf family. In this respect, people from Düsseldorf and Düsseldorf city history have always been the subject of this project as well.

Max Stern and the members of the Stern family were respected citizens of our city. However, they became victims of the Nazi regime of terror from 1933 onwards. They suffered terrible injustice in our city during the National Socialist era. They were persecuted and deprived of their rights. They fled Germany and lost their base of life.

Germans as perpetrators as well as Düsseldorf citizens both incurred heavy guilt during this time. In Düsseldorf, we are aware of this fact. Today, we know of the responsibility to face and account for this history. And not least against the background of currently increasing anti-Semitism, we wish to learn from this dark chapter of our history.

As far as possible, we want to make amends, and we wish to commemorate the Stern family in a lasting way. This is the least we can do.

An important contribution to this was made by the exhibition "Entrechtet und beraubt. Der Kunsthändler Max Stern" ("Deprived of rights and property. The art dealer Max Stern") held at the Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf, which came to a close a few days ago.

The biography of Max Stern, his expulsion from Germany and the liquidation of the family art dealership as enforced by the Nazi regime were focal points of the successful exhibition.

Despite a difficult initial situation, this show was the first in Germany to commemorate the life and work of Max Stern.

It has always been of primary importance to the City of Düsseldorf to transparently share scientific results and to enter into a discourse.

On the one hand this concerns provenance research on works sourced from the Stern Gallery in Düsseldorf's museum collections. All information concerning this has been online since December 2017. And on the other hand, it concerns extensive research results on the biographies of the Stern family and the history of their art business.

In the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition published in German and English, and following a detailed appreciation of Max Stern's life and a review of his German-Jewish family history, numerous special topics are also illuminated in detail.

For example the publication looked in detail at the programme of the art dealership founded by Julius Stern, the father of Max Stern. The networks cultivated by the Sterns with professionals and institutions and their successful customer loyalty were described. These allow detailed insights into the Stern gallery business and its interdependence with the Rhenish art trade.

This once again demonstrates how deeply rooted the Stern family was in Düsseldorf. All the more inconceivable are the reprisals, up to and including forced closure, that the Stern gallery and dealership experienced from 1933 onwards.

These reprisals were also intensively studied, and they are reflected in descriptions of the Sterns' eighth art auction, which was "inhibited" by the NSDAP in 1933. The accompanying catalogue also sheds light on the fate of Hugo Heinemann, one of Stern's best clients. In addition of course, the publication also focuses on Auction 392 held at Lempertz in 1937.

An examination of the family's endeavours to establish a new art dealership in London in the form of West's Galleries, and the struggle of Max Stern and his relatives for reparations via the German courts, have also been documented and classified.

With this, and with a conference and symposium, intensive research work has been performed in Düsseldorf and carried out in parallel with the exhibition.

The city has also set itself the task of permanently commemorating the Stern family and keeping alive the memory of others persecuted during the Nazi era. For this purpose a column is to be erected in the immediate vicinity of the former gallery at Königsallee 23 to 25. Planning and coordination are currently underway, and as a result we can expect the column to be erected soon. Max Stern thus remains part of the culture of remembrance that we cultivate very intensively in Düsseldorf.

The City of Düsseldorf has also done significant work in the area of provenance research. With a corresponding department, we see ourselves as pioneers within the municipal landscape. The first director, Jasmin Hartmann, has done much in establishing this office, and in her new function as head of the Coordination Office for Provenance Research in North Rhine-Westphalia she'll be taking part in today's conference.

It is important to me to emphasise that we in Düsseldorf take action based on the results of provenance research, and also return cultural property which was seized as a result of persecution.

A current example is "Die Füchse" ("The Foxes") by Franz Marc. We've returned the painting, which had been in municipal possession for decades, to its rightful owners, in this case to the heirs.

This example demonstrates that Düsseldorf faces up to the issue of restitution and respects the international agreements. We stand by the Washington Declaration and we take the Advisory Commission seriously.

In the case of "Die Füchse", I was completely certain from the beginning that we would follow the recommendations of the Advisory Commission.

I'm glad that we decided to go this way, despite controversial debates in the public arena, and even despite criminal charges.

We in Düsseldorf have accepted responsibility and have been able to make amends for at least a small part of the injustice suffered. – We will continue to proceed in this way in future cases, and it's something that I will make sure of.

Once again, I would very much like to extend my gratitude to the Stern Cooperation Project (SCP) for the extremely important work that has been carried out over the past years.

I wish today's conference every success.

I also sincerely hope that we shall continue to exchange both ideas and information about Max Stern and about aspects of restitution.