

PAN

AMSTERDAM

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



A Chinese Porcelain Plate with Green and Red Grapes, a Pewter Plate and Knife Capped by a Horseshoe, with Nuts, Medlars, a Pear and Glass of Wine on a Table Top

signed with initials I. (?) S. F. in the center right next to the grapes, and inscribed on the pewter plate with a coat of arms of a rosette and crown in between the initials M and N
oil on copper

14 5/8 x 20 3/8 inches (37.2 x 51.7 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Duits, Ltd., London by April 1939, from whom sold to

Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam, June 1939 (as Sebastian Stosskopff), from whom acquired by

Jacob "Jaap" Polak, Amersfoort / Amsterdam, June 1939

Confiscated by the Dienststelle Mühlmann, 1941, following the occupation of The Netherlands, from whom acquired by

Hans Posse on behalf of Adolf Hitler for the Führermuseum in Linz, April 1, 1942 (as Sebastian Stosskopff)

Altaussee Salt Mines, Altaussee, Austria, no. 2421, code name Peter Luger (as Sebastian Stosskopf), where recovered by

The Monuments Fine Arts and Archives section of the Allied Forces (The Monuments Men), and transported to Munich Central Collecting Point, Munich, October 10, 1945, no. 10555 (as Sebastian Stosskopf, previous owner listed as Dutch Art Gallery), from where returned to

Amsterdam, July 31, 1946

Restituted to Jacob Polak, March 1949

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's Parke Bernet, New York, December 6, 1973, lot 138, illustrated (as Osias Beert the Elder), where acquired by

Newhouse Galleries, Inc. New York, by 1974 (as Jan Soreau)

Richard Green, London, by 1975 (as Jan Soreau)

Galerie J. Kraus, Paris, by 1976 (as Isaak Soreau)

Private Collection, Germany, by 1984

Anonymous sale, Auktionshaus Metz, Heidelberg, December 5 – 10, 2009, lot 299

De Jonckheere, Paris, Brussels, Geneva, by 2010 (as Isaac Soreau)

Anonymous sale, Christie's, New York, May 23, 2024, lot 15 (as Isaac Soreau)

EXHIBITED

The Hague, Koninklijke Kunstzaal Kleykamp, Tentoonstelling van Oude Schilderijen der Collectie N. V. Kunsthandel P. de Boer, June 8 – July 3, 1939, no. 90 (as Sebastian Stosskopf)

London, Richard Green, Annual Exhibition of Old Master Paintings, Summer 1975, no. 12 (as Jan Soreau)

Frankfurt, Historisches Museum, George Flegel 1566 – 1638 Stilleben, December 18, 1993 – February 14, 1994, no. 163 (as Isaak Soreau)

LITERATURE

Tentoonstelling van Oude Schilderijen, Collectie N. V. Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 1939, no. 90, illustrated (as Sebastian Stosskopf)

Lt. S. L. Faisons Jr., Strategic Services Unit, War Department, Art Looting Investigating Unit, Consolidated Interrogation Report No. 4, Linz: Hitler's Museum and Library, December 15, 1945, attachment 64 (as S. Stosskopf, from Count Pollak, 1943)

Jean Vlug, Report on Objects Removed to Germany from Holland, Belgium, and France during the German Occupation in the Countries, Report of Stitching Nederlands Kunstbesit, Amsterdam, December 25, 1945 (as Stosskopf, from Collection Polak, Amersfoort, 1943)

Apollo, April 1974, p. 21, illustrated in an advertisement for Newhouse Galleries, New York (as Jan Soreau)

Annual Exhibition of Old Master Paintings, Richard Green, Summer 1975, p. 29, no. 12, illustrated (as Jan Soreau)

Première exposition, Galerie J. Kraus, Paris, September 1976, no. 9, illustrated (as Isaak Soreau)

G. Schurr, "In the Paris Galleries", in The Connoisseur, CXCIV, January 1977, p. 70, illustrated (as Isaak Soreau)

Connaissance des Arts, May 1977, illustrated in an advertisement for Galerie. J. Kraus, Paris, for Pictura Maastricht (as Isaak Soreau)

Edith Greindl, "Isaac Soreau" in Les Peintres Flamands de Nature Morte au XVIIe Siècle, Dereume, Belgium, 1983, p.

Claus Grimm, "Isaac Soreau" in Glück und Glas zur Kulturgeschichte des Spessartglases, Bayerischen Staatskanzlei, Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte, Munich, 1984, pp. 344, 346, no. 6, illustrated (as Isaac Soreau)

Kurt Wettengl, "Isaac Soreau" in George Flegel 1566 – 1638, Stilleben, Historisches Museum, Frankfurt, 1993, pp. 284, 286, no. 163, illustrated (as Isaac Soreau)

Gerhard Bott, "Isaac Soreau" in Die Stillebenmaler Soreau, Binoit, Codino, und Marrel in Hanau und Frankfurt 1600 – 1650, CoCon – Verlag, Hanau, 2001, pp. 107, 112, 188, fig. 95, no. WV.JS49, illustrated twice (as Isaac Soreau)

Birgit Schwarz, Hitlers Museum, Böhlau Verlag, Wien, c. 2004, pp. 142, 144, no. XXI/15, illustrated (as Sebastian Stosskopf)

"Isaac Soreau", in Tableaux de maîtres anciens, De Jonckheere, Paris, Brussels, Geneva, no. 35, illustrated (as Isaac Soreau)

This is the history of a painting coveted since its emergence almost 100 years ago by collectors and leading dealers as well as the greatest art thief known – Adolph Hitler. The earliest provenance begins in April 1939 with Duits, Ltd. in London. They specialized in Dutch and Flemish old master paintings. Established in 1836 in Dordrecht, and relocated to Amsterdam in 1875, by 1938 they had left The Netherlands altogether.[1] By June 1939 this work had been acquired by Kunsthandel P. de Boer for a summer show in The Hague of old master paintings held at the Koninklijke Kunstzaal Kleykamp (a large white villa that was the cultural center used for exhibitions and auctions, seized by the Germans in 1941, and completely destroyed by the Royal Air Force in 1944).[2] In the accompanying catalog it was recorded as by Sebastian Stosskopf, an Alsatian painter who apprenticed with Daniel Soreau and inherited his studio in 1619. This is the attribution the painting carried throughout the war.

The still life in all likelihood must have been acquired at the exhibition by Jacob "Jaap" Polak of Amersfoort and Amsterdam, which in retrospect seems like a sanguine gesture for a Jewish industrialist as the German invasion of The Netherlands began less than one year later on May 10, 1940. By the end of the war three-quarters of the Dutch Jews were dead, the highest percentage of a country's inhabitants in Western Europe. As the principal of Dutch foreign policy had been neutrality for a century, a strategy that had kept them out of World War I, the Jews along with the rest of the Dutch population were shocked and totally unprepared when the German invasion came.[3] Jacob Polak was the owner of Polak Frutal Works in Amersfoort, a producer of perfumes and flavorings, and a known client of Kunsthandel P. de Boer who collected Netherlandish paintings particularly portraits and still lifes. Fortuitously when the war broke out he along with his wife Eefje Alexander were on a trip to Paris and were able to flee to Portugal. By 1940 the Polaks had made it to America.[4]

In 1941 the Dienststelle Mühlmann came to Amersfoort for this still life along with four other paintings from the Polak collection.[5] The Dienststelle Mühlmann was a faux art dealership set up by the Austrian art historian Kajetan Mühlmann in order to create a system for the disposal of confiscated works. In order to give the theft of art treasures in The Netherlands a semblance of legality, the works were no longer seized by looting parties but brought in by Security Services (SD) and the Reichskommissariat für Feindliches Vermögen (Reich Commissariat for Enemy Assets) as well as collaborating art dealers at reduced prices. For the Dienststelle Mühlmann this resulted in a lucrative business in which 15% commission was charged on all sales of works that had at most been acquired for nominal amounts. Their clients included the entire Nazi elite, with only Hitler and his intermediaries being exempt from the 15% fee. A number of these works were also sold at various auction houses.[6]

On April 1, 1942, Hans Posse purchased the Polak painting from the Dienststelle Mühlmann on Hitler's behalf for the planned Führermuseum in Linz. In June 1939 when Hitler appointed Posse as his "special representative for Linz", Posse was the director of the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. He was given almost unlimited funds for the Linz project and often traveled to The Netherlands in search of acquisitions. His diaries reveal "an almost obsessive dedication to Linz" which only ended less than a year after the purchase of the "Stosskopf" on December 7, 1942 when he died from oral cancer.[7]

The purported Stosskopf is next recorded stored in the salt mines above Altaussee in Austria which functioned as the

largest repository for Nazi-looted art. Hitler's Linz collection intended to form the Führermuseum, the museums of Munich and Vienna's treasures, and top collections from Austria were all in these mines in what was "possibly the largest collection of Western art ever assembled." Further the most valued treasures were also stored in Altaussee including Hubert and Jan van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece, Michelangelo's Bruges Madonna as well as Vermeer's The Art of Painting and The Astronomer.[8]

The war ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. When the Monuments Men ("The Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section of the Allied Forces) arrived 8 days later on May 16th to the village of Altaussee it was held by only a handful of American infantry soldiers. What they discovered when they reached the mine was that as a result of 76 bomb blasts all 137 tunnels of the mine had been sealed by the retreating Nazi troops. It took until June 14th to clear all the passageways to find miraculously that not one piece of artwork had been irretrievably damaged. Packing began ten days later when news was received that the mine would fall into the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Anything left in the mine would be handed over to Stalin. In all 80 truckloads left Altaussee with a total of 6,577 paintings. The removed works were taken to the Munich Central Collecting Point, which was housed in the former Nazi headquarters, one of the largest buildings left standing after the war,[9] and it is there that this still life's arrival was recorded on a restitution card dated October 10, 1945, no. 10555. The colossal task of identifying, inventorying, packing and separating into country of origin the recorded works again fell to the Monuments Men.[10]

On July 31, 1946, this painting was returned to Amsterdam. Amsterdam occupied for 5 years by the Nazis, was a city in shambles at the end of the war with hundreds of thousands of their population missing or dead, yet by the spring of 1946 the Rijksmuseum had started organizing exhibitions of returned works in the hope of reuniting them with their owners.[11] In March 1949 the "Stosskopf" was returned to Jacob Polak now living in America.

On October 6, 1973, at Sotheby Parke Bernet in New York the painting was sold as Osias Beert the Elder for the substantial price at the time of \$30,000. In all likelihood the purchaser was Newhouse Galleries, as they featured it in an advertisement in Apollo in April 1974. The attribution had been changed to Jan Soreau and it was the first time the painting was catalogued as signed. By 1975 the painting was with Richard Green in London similarly given to Jan Soreau. In 1976 the attribution changed once again to Isaak Soreau when it was featured in the inaugural exhibition of Madame J. Kraus in Paris. Further this painting was included as 1 of only 2 known signed works by Isaac Soreau in Edith Greindl's 1983 important book on Les Peintres Flamands de Nature Morte au XVIIe Siècle after its publication in The Connoisseur in 1977. By 1984 it was back in Germany in a private collection and illustrated that year in Claus Grimm's catalog Glück und Glas as Isaac Soreau. In 1993 it was exhibited at the Historisches Museum, Frankfurt as part of the Georg Flegel show as a work of Isaac Soreau. In 2001 Gerhard Bott in his Die Stillebenmaler Soreau, Binoit, Codino und Marrell in Hanau und Frankfurt 1600 - 1650 confirmed the work as Isaac Soreau. In 2009 it was sold at auction at the Metz Auktionshaus, Heidelberg, and was then with De Jonckheere in 2010 as Isaac Soreau. On May 23, 2024, it was sold at Christie's, New York as by Isaac Soreau.

Although thought to be by Isaac Soreau for the last 48 years we have changed it to Attributed to Isaac Soreau on the advice of Dr. Fred Meijer who wrote on June 3, 2024 "I have never been fully convinced of that attribution, despite the monogram... The handling and composition simply do not match fully autograph works by Soreau - unless that whole unsigned body of work is by a different artist".[12]

Sam Segal and Klara Alen in their 2020 publication Dutch and Flemish Flower Pieces raise further doubts stating "Very little is known about Isaac's life ... Of Isaac's work we know of only one signed fruit piece, which is dated 1638". [13] This of course excludes our painting which they would have known from its numerous publications. Similarly the work's earlier attribution to Jan Soreau is even murkier as he is thought to be a brother of Isaac's of whom almost nothing is known.[14] Nor are the paintings earliest known attributions to Sebastian Stosskopf and Osias Beert the Elder at all viable.

Revelatory in this work's history is the secondary importance of the attribution. What ultimately mattered above all else to those who acquired, stole and published this painting was its inherent beauty. It is a universal truth applicable to all works of art.

[1] "Duits Gallery, Ltd." at National Gallery of Art, nga.gov> provenance – info 25254.html.

[2] Kleykamp, Art Hall at Capriolus on capriolus.nl, 2020.

[3] Pim Griffioen & Ron Zeller, "The Netherlands: the highest number of Jewish victims in Western Europe"; and "The German Invasion of The Netherlands on Anne Frank House at annefrank.org.

[4] Biographical information taken from Three Sarasota collections: Bickel, Macdonell, Polak, Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL, 1955, unpaginated; and Cilly Jansen, "Polak Frutal Works in Amersfoort", Grimmar Archive.

[5] Jean Vlug, *op.cit.*

[6] "Kajetan Mühlmann" in Lexicon der Österreichischen Provenienz Forschung at lexicon-provenienz.forschung.org.

[7] "Hans Posse" in Lexicon der Österreichischen Provenienz Forschung at lexicon-provenienz.forschung.org.

[8] Robert M. Edsel, *The Monuments Men*, Center Street, New York, 2009, p. 383; Jonathan Petropoulos, *Goring's Man in Paris*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2021, p. 104; "Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg: Database of Art Objects at the Jeu de Paume" at www.errproject.com; and Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Reconstructing the Record of Nazi Plunder", 2015, www.errproject.com.

[9] Robert M. Edsel, *op.cit.*, pp. 374, 381-384, 387.

[10] Lyn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europe*, Viking Books, New York, 1995, p. 409.

[11] Jennifer S. Alderson, "Restitution of Nazi – Looted Artwork after World War II: A Dutch Perspective" on jenniferalderson.com.

[12] Dr. Fred G. Meijer in a written communication dated June 3, 2024.

[13] Sam Segal & Klara Alen, "Isaac Soreau" in *Dutch and Flemish Flower Pieces*, volume I, Brill, Hes & De Graaf, Leiden, Boston, 2020, p. 359.

[14] *Ibid*, volume I, p. 359.