

New York State  
**BANKING**  
DEPARTMENT



# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **PAINTING SOLD UNDER NAZI DURESS RESTORED TO HEIRS OF RIGHTFUL OWNER**

New York N.Y.: The Holocaust Claims Processing Office (HCPO) today announced the restitution of the painting "Madame La Suiere" by Albert von Keller to the heirs of its original owner. This is the fourth work of art successfully restituted to the estate of Alfred Sommerguth with the assistance of the HCPO over the past three years. It was sold by Mr. Sommerguth under duress on February 7, 1939 at the Hans W. Lange auction in Berlin.

"The Holocaust Claims Processing Office has again succeeded in tracking down art once thought permanently lost," said Benjamin M. Lawsky, New York State Superintendent of Financial Services. "For nearly fifteen years, this office has tirelessly served Holocaust survivors and their families to obtain a small measure of justice."

Alfred Sommerguth, director and co-owner of the tobacco company Loeser & Wolff, was an official of the Ministry of Interior in Berlin in charge of city planning when the Nazis came to power. In the late 1930s, Sommerguth was forced to register all of his assets with Nazi authorities including his art collection of 106 assorted Renaissance masterpieces and Impressionist works. Evading internment at a concentration camp, Mr. Sommerguth fled Germany to Cuba in 1941. He eventually moved to New York, where he passed away in 1950.

After extensive research, Rebecca Friedman of the HCPO discovered the painting at the Zürich Kunstgesellschaft in Switzerland. Upon notification, the Museum collaborated extensively with the HCPO and with Cornelia Muggenthaler and Joel Levi, representatives of the Sommerguth heirs. The painting will remain in the collection as a donation to the Zürich Kunstgesellschaft with its provenance indicating that Sommerguth was deprived of the painting by the Nazis in 1939.

The HCPO is a unique joint venture of the New York State Banking Department and the New York State Insurance Department. It was created in 1997 to help Holocaust victims and their heirs recover lost assets, such as dormant bank accounts, unpaid proceeds of insurance policies, and artworks stolen or sold under duress. It is the only government entity in the world that provides such comprehensive services free of charge or commission. To date, the HCPO has helped return over \$157 million in assets to victims' families while also retrieving 56 works of art for them, 40 since 2006.

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