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## AGO returns painting to family following claim by the Commission for Looted Art in Europe

TORONTO — The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and the Commission for Looted Art in Europe today announced the restitution of *Still Life with Flowers* (c.1660), an oil painting on wood panel attributed to Jan van Kessel the Elder which depicts an elaborate floral arrangement set in a basket. The decision to return the work of art was made after research into the painting's provenance proved it had been sold under duress during the German occupation of Belgium.

In March 2020, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe contacted the AGO with a restitution claim made on behalf of the family of the late Dagobert and Martha David of Dusseldorf, Germany. Evidence provided by the Commission was compelling: *Still Life with Flowers*, gifted to the AGO in 1995, did formerly belong to the family who had fled Germany to Belgium in 1939 only to be trapped there, forced to live in hiding under the German occupation and to sell their possessions in order to survive. Following the painting's forced sale in Brussels, it was traded through Amsterdam and Berlin before it was acquired by the dealer Wildenstein & Co. in London, England.

A Canadian purchased the painting (then attributed to Pieter Bruegel) from Wildenstein in the early 1950s, unaware of its past, and donated the work to the AGO in 1995. Research collected at the time of its donation to the AGO led to the artwork's re-attribution. The painting was last on view in 2010. The surviving family members of the AGO donor fully support its return to the original owner.

"We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the AGO, the family of the donor and the Commission for Looted Art in Europe for their joint efforts which have made possible the restitution of the Van Kessel painting," said the family of Dagobert and Martha David. "The painting has great historical meaning and importance to us and is especially significant to our most senior family member, now 95, who remembers this beautiful painting hanging in the family home in Dusseldorf."

“We are very grateful to the AGO for the speed and courtesy with which they addressed this claim despite the very difficult circumstances of the pandemic, and we particularly appreciate their exemplary commitment to restitution of Nazi-looted art. We also thank the family of the donor for their support for the restitution”, said Anne Webber, Co-Chair of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe.

“We commend the efforts by the Commission for Looted Art in Europe to connect us with the rightful owners of this painting. Upon receiving the news, we acted swiftly to expedite its return. The AGO holds works in the public trust, and we are pleased to know that this painting has been reunited with its rightful owners,” said Julian Cox, the AGO’s Deputy Director & Chief Curator.

#### **ABOUT THE AGO**

Located in Toronto, the Art Gallery of Ontario is one of the largest art museums in North America, attracting approximately one million visitors annually. The AGO Collection of more than 105,000 works of art ranges from cutting-edge contemporary art to significant works by Indigenous and Canadian artists and European masterpieces. The AGO presents wide-ranging exhibitions and programs, including solo exhibitions and acquisitions by diverse and underrepresented artists from around the world. In 2019, the AGO launched a bold new initiative designed to make the museum even more welcoming and accessible with the introduction of free admission for anyone 25 years and under and a \$35 annual pass. Visit [AGO.ca](http://AGO.ca) to learn more.

The AGO is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Additional operating support is received from the City of Toronto, the Canada Council for the Arts and generous contributions from AGO Members, donors and private-sector partners.

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## **ABOUT THE COMMISSION FOR LOOTED ART IN EUROPE**

The Commission for Looted Art in Europe (CLAE), is an international, expert, non-profit representative body based in London which negotiates policies and procedures with governments and cultural institutions and promotes the identification of looted cultural property and the tracing of its rightful owners. It represents families from all over the world, acting on their behalf to locate and recover their looted artworks. It has been instrumental in the return to its rightful owners of over 3,500 items of looted property since it was set up in 1999. It also provides a Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945 at [www.lootedart.com](http://www.lootedart.com) to fulfil Washington Principle VI which called for the creation of such a repository of information.

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