

The Value of Objects: A Case Study in Material Culture

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This essay attempts to investigate the different aspects and meanings of an object and the ways in which they play a part in determining its value. By looking at examples of leading value theories and later understanding them through a specific case study, I will illustrate the complexities of the process by which an object becomes valuable.

Each object is perceived and categorised differently by its evaluator, its owner and its viewer, in a way that is related to the knowledge of its past and the social context in which it is examined. James Clifford explains this through his research on ethnographic objects, by identifying four groups of categories which classify as art objects.² He starts by separating between aesthetic cultural artefacts and collectible commodities, the prior represents art objects and the second, cultural objects. His theory continues to a distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity and between masterpieces and artefacts. Objects, in his opinion, can transfer from one category to the other in the following instances; an item of historical value can be promoted to the category of fine art. Such items include religious artefacts, however this causes a change of value. This occurs when an object is removed from its place of worship and into a museum. The social context of the object changes and in its new surroundings it becomes identified immediately with its creator and its apparent aesthetics, instead of its cultural use and sometimes ethnographic character relating to a religious ritual.³

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² James Clifford, On Collecting Art and Culture, in *Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp.215-251), pp. 220-224.

³ Clifford, pp.226-227.

In similar to Clifford's concept of objects removed from their original past context, Christopher Tilley in his essay on material culture, investigates the interpretation of objects from the past.⁴

Tilley argues, based on Saussure's theory, that an object can be a non-verbal signifier of a concept and the meaning given to it is a modern interpretation of the object. Based on the reader's social, political and moral values, the object can receive meaning and become a signifier. Although it came from the past, the object actually resides in the present and its meaning is written appropriately by today's reader.⁵

The meaning of an object is central in Ian Hodder's theory.⁶ He places the object at the centre of cultural exchanges and describes three types of meaning that apply to each object at a given time. First, the object is a part of the material world and thereby holds information and can take part in any kind of exchange. Therefore, the object can have a value based on its function and the effect it has on the world surrounding it. Secondly, the meaning of an object is coded in social structure. It can be communicated symbolically, depending on its place within the social context. Last, Hodder explains the meaning itself. It is created by the object's historical past and the associations relating to it.

Alois Riegl, an early 20th Century theorist, addresses the question of the value of a work of art within its historical context. Riegl challenged existing 19th Century theories by re-evaluating the social place of an object within historical situations.⁷ He suggests in his theory that art historic periods, as divided by the Romantic art theory, ought to be treated as a part of one historical development. No period should be pre conceived as higher than another as all are equal elements in one coherent process. Although Riegl did recognize the aesthetic elements of an art object which are subjectively evaluated, he pointed out the need to identify the historical value of each object within an historical structure.⁸

⁴ Christopher Tilley, *Interpreting Material Culture*, in *Interpreting Objects and Collections* ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 68.

⁵ Tilley p. 74.

⁶ Ian Hodder, *The Contextual Analysis of Symbolic Meaning in Interpreting Objects and Collections* ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York, Routledge, 1994) p.12.

⁷ Henri Zerner, *Alois Riegl: Art, Value and Historicism*, *Daedalus*, 105/1 (MIT Press, Winter 1976) p.177-188.

⁸ Zerner, p.186.

In his late work on modern monuments, Riegl distinguishes between ten types of value given to objects divided by him into categories.⁹ Every object can fit into more than one category at a time. The categories include: contemporary value and historical value, artistic value and functional value, the value as commemoration. Value becomes a significant part of the history of an art object and has an effect on the way in which objects are perceived.

In contra to Riegl, Georg Simmel discusses the relationship between the object and its owner.¹⁰ An object represents a collective and can trace social relationships such as social movements and transformations. Objects are exchanged with money which is considered equal to the potential for exchange. Arjun Appaduari focuses on Simmel's theory when defining politics as the connection between an exchangeable element of an object and its value.¹¹ The value of an object is not inherent, but rather a result of an opinion of a subject on it. A desire for an object and the way in which it is treated is the basis of Simmel's description of an economic object. The subject of desire is exchanged economically and thus the value of the object is determined. The demand for an object plays a role in the value of an object and it takes into consideration both the possible sacrifice made by the subject and his gain of obtaining it.¹²

My research concentrates on a case study of the cultural objects labelled 'unidentified' that were kept in the Central Collecting Points at the end of the Second World War by the Allied Forces. They remained unclaimed after many other art objects had been allocated back to countries they were removed from.¹³ These objects, of different media, quality and size were amassed by the Allied forces in the British, French and American occupied zones across Germany. As correspondence from the period reveals, these items were considered of unknown Jewish ownership. Several Jewish organizations identified the need for the creation of a unique policy for their treatment and took part in the process that led to their eventual removal from Europe.

⁹ Zerner p.187.

¹⁰ Kurt H. Wolff, Georg Simmel, 1858-1918: A Collection of Essays with Translations and a Bibliography (Columbus, the Ohio State University Press, 1965).

¹¹ Arjun Appaduari, Commodities and the Politics of Value, in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), pp.76-91.

¹² Appaduari pp.76-77.

¹³ A debate exists over the question of whether the division of the objects based on the allied force's allocation policy was justified.

Did these objects become signifiers for perished Jewish communities? Did they become a remembrance for their owners? Could one object become a representative for a community? These are a few of the questions that are raised in the following pages.

Collecting Points Filled with Cultural Objects

Upon their discovery and removal to local warehouses, the American military forces came to the realization that they were unprepared to handle such a large amount of property. Firstly, the military government found itself understaffed to handle the identification of the objects recovered, and secondly, finding appropriate warehouses for the items was a difficult task. Even once the objects were removed from their temporary repositories and kept under military supervision, the staff found it difficult to prevent thefts.¹⁴

Four Central Collecting Points were established across the occupied American zone in Germany: in Marburg, Wiesbaden, Munich and Offenbach. The staff in each Central Collecting Point was formed of American military representatives and locals, who were able to assist with the registration and inventorying of the objects. In June 15, 1946, the Marburg Central Collecting Point was closed down and its remaining objects were transferred to Wiesbaden.

Objects in the collecting points were assembled together according to their use and media. Each of the remaining three Central Collecting Points became specialized: the central repository for books, manuscripts and archives was kept in the Offenbach Archival Depot, the majority of works of art were kept in the Munich Central Collecting Point and over 16,000 Jewish ritual objects were kept in the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point.¹⁵

In November, 1947, a restitution law was introduced in the American occupation zone.

¹⁴ National Archives, Plunder and Restitution: Findings and Recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States and Staff Report (December, 2000). <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/pcha/PlunderRestitution.html/html/StaffChapter5.html> (October 16, 2014).

¹⁵ National Archives Records Administration, Records concerning the central collecting points <http://www.archives.gov/research/microfilm/m1948.pdf> (September 30, 2014).

Restitution Law, no. 59 designated an organization to investigate and take responsibility for the allocating process of the remaining unclaimed Jewish property. The Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO), incorporated in May, 1947, received the appointment and commenced on an organized research of Jewish property of economic value that was confiscated and nationalized during the Nazi regime.¹⁶ The JRSO was given the authorization to handle Jewish property and prepare claims for the distribution of relief to Jewish survivors and communities. Its responsibilities, as described in the certificate of incorporation, were to '[...] acquire, receive, hold, maintain and distribute for purposes of Jewish relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, resettlement, and immigration, the property of Jews, Jewish organizations, cultural and charitable funds and foundations, and communities which were victims of Nazi or Fascist persecution or discrimination.'¹⁷

The variable types of property, the short time devoted to research and preparation of claims and the lack of expertise of the JRSO staff, made it clear that the remaining cultural property ought to be treated separately. In January 29, 1949, a second Jewish organization, called the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), received the trusteeship for the unidentified Jewish cultural property and the responsibility to redistribute it between Jewish institutions which perpetuate Jewish art and culture.¹⁸ Stemming from the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction and initiated in 1944 by the Jewish historian, Salo Baron, its early aims were the reconstruction of Jewish cultural life in Europe. In 1945, Baron expressed a concern to the American military governor in Germany, regarding the treatment of Jewish cultural objects by unprofessional American soldiers and received the trusteeship for Jewish cultural property.¹⁹

¹⁶ The Commission was headed by seven representatives of Jewish organizations which included: the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Conference, the American Jewish Committee, the World Jewish Congress, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction. National Archives, Plunder and Restitution: Findings and Recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States and Staff Report (December, 2000). <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/pcha/PlunderRestitution.html/html/StaffChapter5.html> (October 16, 2014).

¹⁷ Jerusalem, Central Zionist Archive (A444/217).

¹⁸ Jerusalem, Central Zionist Archive (A370/970).

¹⁹ Robert Liberles, Salo Wittman Baron: Architect of Jewish History, (New York, NYU Press, 1995) pp.238-239

As a result, in November 1947 the JCR was founded by the leaders of eight Jewish organizations.²⁰ Soon after its establishment, the JCR became the JRSO's agent for the handling of Jewish cultural objects, their identification and restitution.²¹

In addition to the existing Central Collecting Points' staff, the JCR, found it essential to invite experts who could assist in cataloguing and in evaluating Jewish cultural objects. Representatives of Jewish cultural institutions were already taking part in the leadership of the JCR, for example: Dr. Salo Baron of Columbia University, New York, Rabbi Leo Baeck, of the Leo Baeck Institute, and Professor Gershon Scholem of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.²² Other Jewish writers, historians and art historians from American and Israeli institutions were also invited to take part in the redistribution process, to name a few: Hannah Arendt, who was acting as the executive secretary of the JCR, Shlomo Shunami of the National Library, Jerusalem, Rabbi, Dr. Bernard Heller of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, and Mordechai Narkiss, the director of the "Bezalel" Museum, Jerusalem.²³ Each one of the experts represented a field of knowledge in Jewish cultural history such as: Jewish Art, Jewish ritual objects, Jewish books and archives.

Evaluation of the Unidentified Cultural Objects

Director of the "Bezalel" Museum, Mordechai Narkiss, had been a promising young scholar in Poland when he decided to immigrate to Palestine in 1920. He settled with his wife in Jerusalem, where he attended the "Bezalel" Art School as a student. His close relationship with the founder of "Bezalel", the artist Boris Schatz, resulted in Narkiss' appointment as director of the "Bezalel" Museum in 1925. It was during that year that Nahum Sokolov, secretary of the World Zionist Congress, declared that "Bezalel" will become the national Jewish museum and the central Jewish museum of the Jewish people.

²⁰ The eight organizations were: The World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Conference, the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, the Council for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Jews from Germany, Hebrew University and the Synagogue Council of America.

²¹ Jerusalem, Central Zionist Archive (370/970).

²² Both men served as vice-presidents of the JCR.

²³ More on the participation of Jewish scholars in the work of the JCR see Dana Herman, *Hashavat Avedah: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstructions Inc.* (Montreal, McGill University, 2008), pp.187-196.

Narkiss, who was inspired by Schatz's Zionist perspective, compared the creation of the museum to the building of the temple by King Solomon - an eternal building that symbolizes the permanency of the Jewish people.²⁴ Though he was already establishing connections abroad as well as a Society of Friends of the "Bezalel" National Museum, Narkiss only became an official state representative after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

In March 1949, Joshua Starr, executive secretary of the JCR, sent a letter of invitation to Narkiss, requesting his assistance in the evaluation of objects in the Central Collecting Points. He was also invited to select objects that would be shipped to Israel based on the decision to divide unclaimed cultural objects between growing Jewish communities outside of continental Europe. Since 1943, Narkiss had been pushing an effort to salvage Jewish cultural objects from Europe by bringing them to Israel. He travelled to Europe twice between the years 1945-1948 and kept in touch with colleagues and Jewish communities in Europe as the representative of the national museum of Israel, "Bezalel".²⁵ 1949 marked the first time Narkiss found himself as an official representative sent on a mission on behalf of the newly established government of the independent Jewish state.

Starr described the variety of objects waiting for evaluation at the collecting points. These included Jewish ritual objects arriving from communities across Europe, many of which had perished. Works of art that remained in the Central Collecting Points after the majority of cultural objects discovered and identified by the allied forces were allocated to the countries they originated from. He ended his letter with an explanation of the JCR's legal status towards the unidentified cultural objects as declared by the JRSO's cultural affairs adviser.²⁶

Between May and August of 1949, 16,000 objects were identified, catalogued, evaluated and packed.

²⁴ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive (4/86).

²⁵ In his letters, Narkiss stresses his Zionist approach, describing Israel as the only true place for the whole of the Jewish people.

²⁶ Theodore A. Heinrich, The JRSO's cultural affairs adviser served in the United States Army from 1943-1950. He joined the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in 1943 and in 1945 started working with the Monuments, Fine Art and Archives (MFAA) Officers. He served as cultural property advisor to the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point and was also involved with the Marburg and Munich Collecting Points.

In his letters home, Narkiss revealed his concern that the objects would be claimed by the Federal government in Germany and by other European countries and would eventually remain in Europe.²⁷ In 1950, after his return from his first visit to the Central Collecting Points in Germany, Narkiss prepared a memorandum in which he tried to explain the problem of salvaging Jewish cultural property. In his opinion, the JCR's authorized responsibility for the handling of Jewish art created an obstacle; as a result of their limited power to deal only with religious and ethnic cultural objects, the "general" art that included, for example, paintings by Rembrandt or Velasquez, which were probably owned by Jews, was given to German institutions. Works of "general" art were stored in both the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point and in the Munich Central Collecting Point, though a plan for their final disposal had not been decided at the time. They were to be removed and kept together in the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, as the Munich Central Collecting Point was to be closed.

One of Narkiss' central assignments was to evaluate the unidentified fine art.²⁸ Approximately one thousand objects were divided by media and assessed: paintings, drawings, graphic art, sculptures and furniture. Few paintings were individually given a high estimate, these included paintings by European artists such as Alfred Sisley, Max Lieberman and other renowned artists working in early 20th Century. Most of the objects examined were not considered museum quality, yet Narkiss suggested that museums could still benefit from them. Perhaps he was referring to small museums such as the "Bezalel" Museum, whose art collection was limited and dependent on donations. 'This was a critical time for the Jewish people', Narkiss wrote, 'and an opportunity to salvage objects of cultural value coming from annihilated Jewish communities'.²⁹

Jewish ritual objects were divided into categories according to the type and condition of each object. Durable objects were selected for shipment to synagogues mainly in Israel and in the United States, but not only. Jewish communities in places like the UK, South Africa and Latin America also received a small selection of the objects.

²⁷ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive (7/110).

²⁸ Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (296d).

²⁹ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

Narkiss suggested to repair items that had missing elements, instead of melting them down, and to sell those that could not be rebuilt to Jews who would be interested in keeping such objects as heritage of the perished Jewish communities.³⁰ Each object was treated by Narkiss in a most serious manner, and in his opinion, every object was important and ought to have been kept for future generations.

In a letter written by Benjamin Ferencz, director general of JRSO, in May 1949 to Eli Rock, executive director of JRSO, he explained the last stages in the closing of the Munich Central Collecting Point. First, he described the removal process of cultural objects from Munich; Remaining paintings, drawings, sculptures, pieces of furniture and graphic art had been evaluated by Narkiss and transferred to the Nuremberg offices of the JRSO from which they would be shipped to New York. These items, most of which were of insignificant value, were presumed to be 'heirless Jewish assets'.³¹ In the following letter written on June 1, 1949, Ferencz confirmed that five crates out of the sixteen packed in the Munich Central Collecting Point would be shipped to the American Joint Distribution Committee in New York. These crates, held the most valuable pieces from Munich and were planned to be sold at auction. The additional crates, as well as several antique furniture pieces would remain in Germany until their shipping destination would be determined.³²

Ferencz made diverse recommendations regarding the eleven crates of leftover paintings. In letters dating from May and June of 1949, he referred to Narkiss who 'is very anxious to have the paintings sent to Israel'.³³ He supported this argument in his second letter by repeating Narkiss' request to send the paintings to Israel and adding that Narkiss 'has been most helpful here and I have no doubt that he would make good use of whatever he receives'.³⁴

The final estimate Narkiss gave this collection of approximately one thousand cultural objects was of \$100,000.³⁵

³⁰ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive: JRSO (1/3).

³¹ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

³² Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive (7/110). Narkiss mentions that the Americans want to get rid of this task as quickly as possible.

³³ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

³⁴ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

³⁵ Jerusalem, Central Zionist Archive (A370/970).

This evaluation was explained in his report, written on May, 1949, through his belief that museums would welcome such objects into their collections. Further on, he highlighted the most important items: paintings by Sisley, Utrillo, Valminck, Derain and other French artists and mentioned the small number of paintings by Jewish artists in the collection, fifteen. Narkiss' evaluation provoked criticism and therefore, upon their arrival to New York, the cultural objects were re-evaluated by local experts.³⁶

Later that year, the paintings, along with other remaining unidentified objects such as miniatures and wooden sculptures arrived at the Jewish Museum. There, they were examined by director of the Jewish Museum Dr. Stephen Kayser and Dr. Walter Moses, a board member of the Tel Aviv Museum, Israel.³⁷ Together they reached a conclusion that only thirty five paintings were of high value and appropriate to be shipped to Israel, whereas the remaining objects could be disposed of in the United States.³⁸ A memorandum of their meeting of March, 1950 revealed their dismissal of Narkiss' evaluation: 'It has now become apparent that the value placed on the above at the time they were turned over to JRSO in Germany was far in excess of their actual value.'³⁹ Moreover, the correspondence between representatives of the Jewish Museum and the JRSO staff, showed that objects eventually auctioned, were referred to as leftover "junk". The works of art were later re-appraised by a few central figures in the local art market. Eduard M. Warburg⁴⁰ consulted with Curt Valentine, of the Buchholz Gallery, regarding the quality of the unidentified paintings,⁴¹ Warburg suggested three possible solutions for their disposition; to divide them between a Jewish cultural organization in the United States and in Israel, to sell them in order to finance relief programs or to sell them in order to build a new art collection.⁴²

³⁶ Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (296d). Ferencez decided to ship only a portion of the crates to New York due to their high evaluation and since there was still uncertainty regarding the objects that will be delivered eventually to Israel and preferred keeping them in Europe until a decision will be made,

³⁷ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

³⁸ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).

³⁹ Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (296d).

⁴⁰ The youngest son of Felix and Frieda Warburg, who donated the Warburg mansion in New York to the Jewish Museum in 1944. He was board member of the MOMA and a collector of contemporary art.

⁴¹ The Frick Collection Archive, Archives Directory for the History of Collecting in America: <http://research.frick.org/directoryweb/browserecord.php?action=browse&-recid=6067> (November 6, 2014). Valentine was an art dealer working for Karl Buchholz dealership in Hamburg. The gallery was dealing with modern German art and in 1937 he immigrated to New York with a portion of the gallery stock in order to open a branch for the Buchholz Gallery.

⁴² Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (296d).

The second appraiser was a representative of the Knoedler Gallery.⁴³ The Knoedler Gallery evaluator gave the objects a total estimate of \$5,000 - less than 20% of Narkiss' assessment.

Historical or Art-Historical?

The conflict of approaches is eventually expressed through an economic outcome – objects perceived as inappropriate for museum collections were put on sale. The art historic system of evaluation which Riegl criticized as it ignores a coherent historic process and chooses to identify only a few specific works of art by known artists as valuable is dominant between the JRSO leaders and the two museum evaluators in New York.⁴⁴ Narkiss, however, expressed a different view that put the history of the objects as the central element for evaluation. As Clifford explained it, objects can transfer between categories, this allows for an object of historical value to be promoted to a category of fine art.⁴⁵ Narkiss discussed the need to salvage the objects, their past was where their history and value lies and their future should become a form of remembrance. Clifford discusses objects removed from the past in order to be preserved, however once they are removed from their original surroundings their context changes and they become merely fragments of it.⁴⁶ Moreover, Narkiss identified the nuances between categories of objects when he claimed that Jewish art should not have been separated from what he described as “general” art. That was because the collectors of both the Jewish and the unidentified “general” art had presumably been Jewish. Therefore all of the cultural objects have an historical value that reaches back to their owners, whether it is a community or a private individual.

As Tilley adds in his essay, the objects become the signifiers, as indicated in this specific case study, for a concept of memory and remembrance.⁴⁷ Reading through the relevant correspondence reveals a different use of language.

Upon an expression of an opinion or a decision regarding the treatment of the objects in the Central Collecting Point, JRSO and OMGUS (Office of Military

⁴³ The Knoedler Gallery was founded in 1848 in New York as a branch of the French gallery, Goupil & Cie. In 1857 Knoedler became an independent gallery which made a reputation for dealing with old master paintings.

⁴⁴ Zerner, p.179.

⁴⁵ Clifford, pp.223-224.

⁴⁶ Clifford, pp. 241-242

⁴⁷ Tilley, p.68.

Government United States) staff refer to the objects with adverbs such as “disposal” and “removal”, whereas Narkiss uses adjectives such as “salvage” and “safeguard”.⁴⁸ The semantics serve to express the priorities of each of the experts involved in the identification and evaluation process.

First, Narkiss argued for the memorial value of the objects; the perished Jewish communities and the need to commemorate them by the living remnants of Jews. In his view, Israel, established as the state of the Jewish people, ought to have been treated as the centre for Jewish life by the international community and “Bezalel” as its national art institute. Secondly, coming as representative of a national museum and with a background in art history, he identified the artistic value of the objects and evaluated each accordingly. Moreover, Narkiss often stressed the need for fine art in museums in Israel. Expanding the collections was one of his leading goals and served as motivation throughout his many travels and correspondences with collectors, communities and colleagues abroad. The accumulation of cultural objects, as Narkiss described it, was both for the benefit of the local public and eventually for support of the cultural center he wished to create for the entire Jewish people in Jerusalem.⁴⁹

The JRSO representatives, however, had different guidelines to follow. Military Law no. 59 that designated the organization in 1947, called upon it to find aid for the survivors. Though their work did not concentrate on fine art and cultural property, but rather on real-estate, bank accounts, and other property of high economic value, selling works of art was a plausible direction for raising more funds. As Hodder argues, the potential effect of objects on their surrounding world based on their function and meaning is part of their value. In the Post-Holocaust context this often resulted in monetary exchange that offered fast and necessary support for the survivors. Still, there was a change between the approach towards immovable property, which often resulted in fluid funds and towards cultural property, which caused a debate between the need to raise funds and Narkiss' strategy that called to salvage the objects.

As Simmel suggests, the economic value of an object is determined by demand, sacrifice and gain. In our case, the factor of demand did not result in the market interest in works of art.

⁴⁸ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive (2/3).

⁴⁹ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive (1/3)

The lack of demand derives from a few possible reasons, the key being the fact that the unidentified works of art were kept stored and unpublished in Central Collecting Points due to the absence of information regarding their maker, and the mediocre quality of the works. The factors of sacrifice and gain should also be evaluated differently. Two expert organizations lead by contradictory priorities were responsible for the demand for the objects. On the one side Narkiss, representative of "Bezalel", the national museum of Israel and on the other, the JCR representatives working with JRSO that followed their policy guidelines. The sacrifice that is described by Narkiss refers to the loss of culture, whereas the one behind the JRSO policy was the need for a regular flow of monetary aid. Thirdly, the question of gain could only be speculated at the time. The possible enjoyment and education gained as result of viewing works of art in a museum and the value of remembrance of the previous owners of the objects versus an estimate of the sum that could be reached if the cultural objects would be sold.

Eventually, a method for the division of the items was decided by the JCR board. The JCR's decision called to send forty percent to Israel, another forty percent was sent to the United States, where cultural objects were redistributed between Jewish institutions and the remaining twenty percent went to Jewish communities in other countries, for example: to Britain, in South Africa, in Latin America.⁵⁰ This policy took into consideration the two centers of Jewish communities that developed after the Holocaust. Many of the immigrants fleeing Europe and Holocaust survivors arrived to both countries and expended the existing Jewish communities. An unclear number of the cultural objects sent to the United States was auctioned in the early 1950s. The coordination was handled by the Jewish Museum, together with the art dealer H. F. Odell. A variety of paintings, prints and miniatures could be found among the objects that were sold for prices that varied from \$3 to \$100.⁵¹

The question of the custody over the cultural property resurfaced in the summer of 1950, when letters of claimants were re-evaluated by Theodore Heinrich, the JRSO cultural affairs adviser.⁵²

⁵⁰ Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (923a). Michael J. Kurtz, *Resolving a Dilemma: the Inheritance of Jewish Property*, in *Cardozo Law Review* 20/625 (1998-1999), pp. 640-643.

⁵¹ Jerusalem, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, JRSO New York Collection (296b).

⁵² National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, Records concerning the central collecting points (Ardelia Hall Collection), M1947/260, Roll 0022/118.

Heinrich joined the Monuments, Fine Art and Archives Unit of the American Military after studying art and architectural history. He disapproved of the JRSOs decision to put objects on auction and reminded Ferencz that although the objects were unidentified at the time, 'it was recognized that identification might subsequently be established and it was agreed that objects transferred would be held in trust for a period of two years in order to permit further searches to be made.'⁵³ Furthermore, by referring to a claim for a Lucas Cranach painting, he indicated a surprising disagreement with Narkiss' estimates, 'I have only seen photographs but find Dr. Narkiss' evaluation astonishing. I think twenty times this figure would be more nearly right'.⁵⁴ Heinrich's criticism of Narkiss' evaluation strengthens the art-historical approach that highly valued specific artists or periods in the history of art. As Tilley put it, an object that arrived from the past is interpreted by today's viewer. Heinrich identified Cranach, the great 16th Century German painter, and immediately expressed his idea of the value for a master's work. By comparison, Narkiss, who described this painting in his writing saw it as part of a collection that belonged to a perished people and the memory was where its value lied.

Conclusion

Throughout this case study I tried to show some of the complexities in evaluating cultural objects. My chosen example highlights a point of historical crisis that caused a re-evaluation of the value of cultural objects, as result of conflicting priorities. Having said that, the need for the restoration of Jewish culture and the saving of its cultural artefacts for future generations remained central throughout the work of experts, Jewish organizations such as the JCR and others involved in the identification process mentioned in this essay.

In addition to the difficult international political situation at the end of the Second World War, a shift was created from the centrality of European Jewish communities that were now annihilated to the growing Jewish communities of Israel and the United States. The JCR policy regarding the division of cultural property supports this argument.

⁵³ National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, Records concerning the central collecting points (Ardelia Hall Collection), M1947/260, Roll 0022/117.

⁵⁴ National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, Records concerning the central collecting points (Ardelia Hall Collection), M1947/260, Roll 0022/117.

Although working together, Narkiss and other evaluators had incompatible approaches towards the question of value of the unidentified cultural objects. Moreover, suggestions were made based on the use of semantics in relevant correspondence regarding the driving priorities and perceptions of Narkiss and the JRSO and JCR policies. The cultural objects found in the Central Collecting Points became, in the eyes of Narkiss, memories of perished communities and a cultural heritage of his people. He believed such object must be kept for future generations and also pointed out the possibility that their owners could come forward one day.⁵⁵ The JRSO's policy put at its centre the urgency of finding aid for the survivors. Cultural objects, those that were of lesser value and unclaimed could turn into such necessary monetary aid. This resulted in a number of sales that took place in New York in the early 1950's. Objects that were shipped to Israel, however, were kept as part of the "Bezalel" Museum collection and later transferred to its successor, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

⁵⁵ Jerusalem, Mordechai Narkiss Archive, JRSO (1/3).