Alfred Flechtheim is well-known today, remembered as an early promoter of the avant-garde; while his contemporary, Walter Westfeld, remains largely unknown. Yet their stories are similar. Both men were art dealers in or near Düsseldorf during the National Socialist period, who were abruptly forbidden from membership in the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts because of their Jewish heritage, and thus from practicing their trade. Both men lost control of their businesses. A contemporary study of their gallery holdings is complicated in each case by a lack of extant documentation. Nevertheless, while Flechtheim emigrated to England, Westfeld remained in Germany; he was arrested, tried, and sent to Auschwitz, where he was killed. The case study of Boston’s “Portrait of a Man and Woman in an Interior,” which Westfeld handled at the precise time of his gallery’s closure, is less a chronicle of the painting itself than it is the story of Westfeld. It is included here as a point of comparison to the story of Alfred Flechtheim, demonstrating that there is no single answer to the complicated question of what happened to Jewish art dealers and their businesses in Nazi Germany – nor to the legacy issues they present for us today.

In June, 2011, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) concluded a financial settlement with the heirs and the estate of Walter Westfeld for Eglon van der Neer’s “Portrait of a Man and Woman in an Interior” (see fig. below). This 17th-century Dutch panel has been in the Museum’s collection since 1941. I first spoke about the painting and its ownership by Westfeld in 2004, after receiving information from Fred Westfield about the life and career of his uncle Walter (1889–1943?), a Jewish art dealer from Wuppertal and later Düsseldorf. Since that time, archival research in the U.S. and Europe has yielded sufficient information to construct a framework for Walter Westfeld’s life and career during the Nazi period. However, we still have only a few fixed points in the provenance of the MFA painting, and we cannot be certain precisely how it left Westfeld’s possession. Nevertheless, the research has demonstrated that it must have been given, sold, or lost during a time when Westfeld was living outside the laws of Nazi Germany due to racial persecution, and thus was very unlikely to have been the subject of a voluntary transaction. This essay will briefly outline the points that led to this conclusion.

The MFA painting depicts a couple in a domestic interior, surrounded by signs of their affluence, such as a marble floor and columns flanking the fireplace; walls embossed with gilded leather; a Turkish carpet draped over the table; and a picture of Venus and Cupid over the mantel, which was for many years painted over with a landscape.
Eglon van der Neer signed his panel in the lower right. Because of its distinctive details and the secure attribution afforded by the signature, this painting’s provenance can be traced as far back as 1802, when it appeared on the Paris art market. It is described in five different French sale catalogues between 1802 and 1845, and was sold at the posthumous auction of Desiré van den Schriek of Belgium in 1861. Some of this nineteenth-century provenance was known when the Museum purchased the work in 1941 from Silberman Galleries of New York. Exactly when and how Silberman acquired it, however, is still not certain; dealer Abraham Silberman, when pressed for information, would only reveal that it had been “brought to this country by a refugee some time ago.”

The MFA learned soon after acquiring it that the Portrait had recently been owned by the art dealer Robert Lebel (1901-1986) of Paris. Having fled to the United States during World War II, Lebel visited the MFA on October 8, 1943, and told the curator of paintings that he had owned the work during the mid-1930s. Curator W. G. Constable noted in a handwritten memorandum that “Robert Lebel (art dealer, formerly of Paris, later with Julius Weitzner), stated in interview Oct. 8, 1943, that c. 1937 he sold this picture to Walter Westfeld, then of Düsseldorf.” Lebel’s statement that he had owned the work is corroborated by a description of the MFA panel in the catalogue of an exhibition held at his Paris gallery in December, 1934. A photograph of the MFA painting can also be found in Lebel’s photo archive; the photograph is annotated on the back in Lebel’s handwriting: “Eglon van der Neer.” Constable’s 1943 memorandum continues:

Paintings, Drawings and Etchings, New Haven/London 2001, pp. 279-280, cat. no. 359. This area of overpaint was removed by MFA conservation staff in 1963.

3 The nineteenth century sale history of the painting includes the auctions of “W.,” February 17, 1802, Rue de Bouloy, Paris, lot 27; an anonymous seller, May 17, 1824, Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, lot 48; the Duc de Morny, April 27, 1841, G. Benou, Paris, lot 17 (unsold) and again on February 25-26, 1845, Hôtel des Ventes, Paris, lot 63 (to Cousin for 1,505 fr.); Désiré van den Schriek, April 8-10, 1861, Louvain, lot 68 (to Laneuville for 3,500 fr.). Ferdinand Laneuville, an expert at the Schriek sale, was evidently buying for the Comte Duchâtel, though this painting does not appear in subsequent sales of the Duchâtel collection.

4 “[T]he Eglon van der Neer painting was never in any collection in the United States. The painting was brought to this country by a refugee some time ago, and I wish I were able to supply you with more information.” Letter from A. Silberman to W. G. Constable, June 3, 1942, Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.935. Attempts to ascertain from whom Silberman acquired the painting have not been successful. The gallery first offered the painting to the MFA in June, 1941, and W. R. Valentiner in Detroit authenticated it by means of a photograph on May 15, 1941. It seems likely that the gallery had purchased it that spring.

5 Robert Lebel was an art expert and dealer based in Paris before and after World War II, who spent the war years in the United States. During the 1930s, he worked closely with James St. Lawrence O’Toole of the Reinhardt Galleries, New York. Lebel traveled back and forth regularly, arriving in New York, for example, in 1928, 1936, and twice in 1939, when he brought his wife and son with him on September 5. He returned to Europe and re-entered the U.S. from Lisbon on July 15, 1940. During the war, Lebel worked as a speaker on Anti-Vichy radio destined for France, became a naturalized citizen in 1944, and returned to Paris after the war.

6 Where Lebel had acquired the painting remains a matter of conjecture, although between 1861 and 1934 the work was probably in a French-speaking area. Curator W. G. Constable noted the presence of a “much damaged label” on the back of the painting (no longer extant) that read: “Neer/B ... Ciesse/.../pour la...” and a piece of paper held in the frame that read “Mr. de B” and the number 211. MFA, Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.935.


8 Many thanks to Eric Turquin of Paris for furnishing this information.
"Westfeld was arrested by the Nazi [crossed out] German government in 1938, sent to a concentration camp, and his property seized. This was sold by the German govt. through Lempertz, auctioneer, of Cologne, some time before the fall of France. Whether the picture had previously been sold by Westfeld, or was in the sale, Lebel does not know."

What Lebel did not explain – or at least, what went unrecorded – is that Walter Westfeld, born in 1889, had also been an art dealer. In 1920, he had opened a gallery bearing his name in Elberfeld (later Wuppertal), which originally specialized in Düsseldorf school painters, works on paper, and Oriental carpets. Because of his Jewish heritage, Westfeld would be forced to close his gallery in 1936, more than two years before his arrest in 1938.

Robert Lebel was a close enough colleague of Westfeld’s that he communicated with members of his family after they escaped Nazi Germany, settled in Tennessee, and anglicized their name to Westfield. A few weeks after his visit to the MFA, on October 25, 1943, Lebel wrote to Dietrich Westfield, Walter Westfeld’s brother:

“A week ago I went to Boston on a mission and I took an hour off to visit the Museum. There, I saw something which I believe you should know. The Museum has recently purchased a painting which I sold to Walter around 1935–1936. It is an interior with a man and a woman seated, by Aert [sic] van der Neer, signed. You might remember it. Walter had it at the Kleucker Gallery, and also, at a time, in Amsterdam.”

In this letter, Lebel recalls the date of the sale to Westfeld being a year or two earlier than he had previously, and he provides a critical detail about the painting’s history: it was not only at one time in Amsterdam, but it had also been at the Kleucker Gallery.

Dietrich Westfield would already have known that the name Kleucker was inextricable from the closure of Walter Westfeld’s art gallery. On August 29, 1935, a decree from the “Reichskammer der bildenden Künste” (Reich Chamber of Fine Arts), Berlin, forbade Westfeld from membership because he was Jewish, and thus from continuing to work as an art dealer. Westfeld’s lawyer appealed in September, and the Reich Chamber responded that it would re-examine his application. In the meantime, on September 15, 1935, the so-called Nuremberg Laws were passed and Jews were no longer considered German citizens; that autumn, exhibition notices for the Galerie Westfeld disappeared from the art periodical “Weltkunst”. On May 16, 1936, the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts definitively denied Westfeld’s application for admission. The Galerie Walter Westfeld was de-registered on May 27, 1936. At that time Westfeld moved to Düsseldorf, having received permission to sell off his stock through the Galerie August Kleucker there.

The Galerie Kleucker had only just opened in Düsseldorf at Blumenstrasse 21 in February or March, 1936. August Kleucker had known Walter Westfeld since 1921, and in fact worked for him for approximately twelve years before becoming an independent art

9 The opening of the gallery was noted in Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt 56, n. F. 32, Nr. 9 (November 26, 1920), p. 182.
10 Letter from Robert Lebel to Dietrich Westfield, October 25, 1943, MFA, Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.935.
12 Gestapo notice of June 11, 1936, Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 58, 20737.
13 Declaration by Walter Westfeld, Düsseldorf, Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 58, 20737.
14 Exhibition announcements for the Galerie Kleucker first appear in “Weltkunst” in March, 1936.
dealer in 1933. With the permission of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, from mid-October through mid-December, 1936, Kleucker (who was not Jewish) sold off Westfeld’s gallery stock in Düsseldorf. In the period that followed the liquidation, Kleucker also was authorized to take over any remaining inventory to sell on a commission basis.\footnote{Statement by August Kleucker to the police, September 4, 1937, Landesarchiv NRW, Ger. Rep. 114, Nr. 4280.}

Lebel’s statement that Westfeld had the MFA’s Eglon van der Neer portrait “at the Kleucker gallery” is borne out by an exhibition announcement in the May 17, 1936 issue of “Weltkunst”. A brief article about the Düsseldorf art market notes that the Galerie August Kleucker was exhibiting paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and “among the genre paintings is […] a company scene by Eglon van der Neer.”\footnote{“Aus dem Düsseldorfer Kunsthandel,” Weltkunst 10, no. 19–20 (May 17, 1936), 3. “Unter den Genrebildern fällt […] eine Gesellschaftsszene des Eglon van der Neer auf.”} A description such as this is, on its own, too vague to identify with any single painting. However, Eglon van der Neer is a relatively obscure artist, and it seems unlikely that there was more than one “company scene” by him on the Düsseldorf art market at this time. More important, this exhibition at the Galerie Kleucker was otherwise made up of paintings that belonged to Walter Westfeld. Some idea of the works of art Westfeld owned prior to the closure of his gallery can be gleaned from exhibition announcements published earlier in the 1930s. For example, in March, 1935, the Galerie Westfeld was exhibiting works by Monticelli, Rousseau, and Watteau, the very same paintings that would reappear in the Galerie Kleucker exhibition announcement of 1936.\footnote{K. H. B. “Ausstellungen,” Weltkunst March, 1935 notes a show of 18th and 19th century paintings at the Galerie Westfeld that included “eine grosse kräftige Landschaft von Theodore Rousseau […] der Kopf eines Pierrots von Watteau” and paintings by Monticelli. The 1936 exhibition at Kleucker also included “zwei Bilder von Th. Rousseau […] einen malerisch impulsiv hingestrichenen Kopf des 18. Jahrhunderts (Watteau),” and works by Monticelli.} Other paintings mentioned in the 1936 “Weltkunst” announcement, such as works by Achenbach, Bonington, Courbet, Feuerbach, and others can be found in a later inventory of Westfeld’s possessions, drawn up in 1937.\footnote{Many of the paintings included in the 1936 Klecker announcement can be plausibly identified with paintings on the list that Westfeld provided in October, 1937, Landesarchiv NRW, Ger. Rep. 114, Nr. 4280, where attributions are downplayed and descriptions often vague. For example: “Seestücke A. Achenbachs” (list B.4, “Achenbach, Seestuck mit Boot”); Bonington, “Architekturbildchen mit Staffage” (list B.20, “Bonington zugeschrieben (?) Hauser am Strand”); “Grosser Wasserfall von Courbet” (list A.5, “Courbet, Felsengrotte mit Wasserfall”); “eine Römerin Feuerbachs” (list B.176, “Italienische Schule Feuerbach(? Kopf einer Italienerin”), and the “Kopf des 18. Jahrhunderts (Watteau)” (list B.617, “Schule Watteau, Männerkopf”). The 1936 notice mentions works by Burnier, Constable, Daubigny, Díaz, Isabey, Monticelli, Rousseau, Schleich, Spitzweg, and others whose names reappear on the 1937 list.} Thus it is almost certain that the “Company Scene” also belonged to Westfeld and is identical to the painting Lebel had owned, which is now at the MFA.

Why did Westfeld exhibit his paintings at the Kleucker Gallery in May, 1936? This was the very month when his own gallery closed, but still several months before the official selling off of his stock. Charges that would be brought against Westfeld and Kleucker in 1940 alleged, and it seems correctly so, that the Galerie Kleucker had opened in Düsseldorf with the collaboration of Westfeld; the gallery was operated by him and Kleucker together; and in fact the gallery served as a means for Westfeld to continue to work clandestinely (and thus illegally) as a dealer after his own gallery was shut down.
The state attorney general would furnish documentation suggesting that Westfeld and Kleucker falsified transactions and even customers in order furtively to run a business whose stock came almost entirely from Westfeld, allegations borne out by the fact that the exhibitions at Galerie Kleucker were demonstrably made up of paintings Westfeld owned. Both men vehemently denied these allegations under questioning, yet in 1944, Dietrich Westfield confirmed that his brother had “put his employee, Mr. Kleucker, in charge of selling part of his possessions under the name of ‘Gallery Kleucker’ at Düsseldorf.” It was certainly clear by the spring of 1936 that Westfeld would no longer be able to earn a living running his own business. He and Kleucker then began to exhibit his paintings—including the van der Neer Portrait—for sale through this new gallery, and would continue to do so even after the official liquidation of gallery stock ended in December.

Their activities did not go unnoticed for long. On July 26, 1937, an anonymous letter was sent to the criminal police of Düsseldorf stating that the “Jew Walter Westfeld” conducted business daily as an art dealer under the name of Galerie Kleucker, and that all of the pictures at the gallery belonged to Westfeld. As part of the investigation, Westfeld was ordered by the Gestapo to submit a list of his holdings of cultural assets. On October 15, 1937 he provided a 45-page list of works of art still in his possession. A short list of his “household effects” comprising his personal collection preceded a much longer list of “the remaining inventory of my former gallery, which until now cannot be sold and should be liquidated gradually. They are, after the close-out of my gallery and the de-registration of my business, in any event my private property” and included works that were still with Kleucker. Nowhere on this long list is there a painting attributed to Eglon van der Neer. It is entirely possible that the MFA painting had left Westfeld’s possession already by October, 1937. It is also possible that the painting was still in his possession, but was deliberately listed in such a way that it could not be securely identified (that is, with a misleading attribution or description); or, being a relatively valuable painting, he may still have owned it, but left it off the list entirely.

Thus the paper trail for the MFA painting ends in May, 1936, with the exhibition announcement in “Weltkunst”, and does not pick up again until the work was offered to the MFA by Silberman Galleries in 1941. Although it is not possible to determine precisely what happened to the “Portrait of a Man and Woman in an Interior” during those five years, it is possible to outline the paths the painting might have taken, that is, when and...

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19 The court charges date to January 3, 1940; see Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 20, 737. Most of the paintings in the exhibition “Meisterwerke der Malerei des 18. Jahrhunderts” (Galerie August Kleucker, Düsseldorf, September 1937) can be found on Westfeld’s October 1937 list. Also see “Spitzweg: Sonderausstellung” (Galerie August Kleucker, March 15-April 15, 1938), in particular cat. no. 14, “Vision,” said to be in the collection of Karl Nicolaus, Munich, but later auctioned off in the sale of Walter Westfeld’s possessions.
20 Letter from Dietrich Westfield to the Director of the MFA, February 6, 1944, MFA, Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.955.
22 “Restbestände meiner früheren Galerie, die bisher nicht verkauft werden konnten und allmählich liquidiert werden sollen. Sie sind nach erfolgter Auflösung meiner Galerie und nach Abmeldung meines Gewerbes ebenfalls mein Privateigentum.” Several appendices comprise lists of “Konvolute” or bundles of ostensibly lower-value paintings. Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 58, 20737.
23 The only item that might be identified with the MFA work is B. 613, by an unknown artist, “Interieur, Mann und Frau, RM 25.” Given the vagueness of the description, however, it is not possible to definitively make this identification. Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 20, 737.
how it could have left Walter Westfeld’s possession following the closure of his gallery, and made its way to American soil.

The first possibility is that the painting, after being exhibited at the Galerie Kleucker in May of 1936, was sold to or through Kleucker. This could have been by means of the official selling off of Westfeld’s gallery stock (whether the painting was designated stock, or was retained by Westfeld as personal property, is unknown), or it may have been in one of the many transactions that took place outside the sales sanctioned by the Reich Chamber. Either way, no detailed records of these sales through Kleucker survive. Another possibility is that Westfeld sold it independently of Kleucker. By his own admission, after the closure of his gallery, he continued to sell his collection of paintings in order to survive. He did not report these sales to the government, and did not keep records of his activities.

The painting may also have been taken abroad. When Lebel wrote to Dietrich Westfield in 1943, he stated that Walter Westfeld had the Eglon van der Neer painting “at a time, in Amsterdam,” though he did not specify when or where, or whether it returned to Germany afterward. Westfeld had been accused in 1937 – in the same letter to the police alleging that he ran the Galerie Kleucker – of selling works of art in the Netherlands. He did take assets, including money and valuable carpets, to Amsterdam and kept some paintings (a small number, perhaps around twelve) there as well.

Albert Salomon (1886 or 1887–1973), a banker from Amsterdam and friend of Westfeld’s who immigrated to the United States in 1939, wrote to Dietrich Westfield in 1941 that Walter’s paintings and valuables in Amsterdam were in the safe of a bank, apparently the Rotterdamse Wisselbank. But by 1946, he reported:

“Mr. van Haastert, [a lawyer] whom you know from Amsterdam, had found a way to acquire these pictures for himself, along with my own things […] In the meantime, a Dutch lawyer […] initiated criminal proceedings against Haastert, and has already ascertained that my own things as well as these pictures were turned into cash by van Haastert through the agency of an untrustworthy second-hand furniture dealer.”

Whether the van der Neer “Portrait” was among these paintings is not known; these assets are undocumented and remain untraced.

24 Westfeld and Kleucker did not keep detailed records, and Kleucker would later report that all of his papers were destroyed, presumably during the war (letter from August Kleucker to Dietrich Westfield, January 31, 1947, MFA, Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.935).
26 On his dealings in Amsterdam, see the court charges (January 3, 1940) in Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 20, 737. On August 6, 1947, Mr. W. S. Wolff de Beer wrote to Dietrich Westfield that Albert Salomon’s attorney could not provide any information about which paintings were in Amsterdam, only that they were about twelve in number.
27 Letter from Albert Salomon to Dietrich Westfield, August 6, 1946, MFA, Art of Europe Department, curatorial object file 41.935. “Den Ihnen von Amsterdam her bekannte Herr van Haastert hat­te sich ebenso wie meine eigenen Sachen so auch in den Besitz dieser Bilder zu verschaffen gewusst […] Inzwischen hat ein holländischer Anwalt […] ein Strafverfahren gegen Haastert eingeleitet und schon soweit festgestellt hat, dass meine eigenen Sachen wie auch diese Bilder von van Haastert durch Vermittlung eines wenig vertrauenswürdigen 2ten Hand Möbelhändler zu Geld gemacht wor­den seien.”
In 1938 Westfeld and his colleague Robert Lebel, then in Paris, also undertook a large-scale smuggling operation, selecting and shipping to France hundreds of works of art that Westfeld owned for eventual sale abroad. Despite the fact that this activity was the focal point of the court charges brought against Westfeld after his arrest, no comprehensive list of the paintings he sent to France survives. It seems less likely that the MFA painting left Germany in this way; if it had, Lebel should certainly have known about it, and offered additional information to the MFA, if not the Westfield family, after seeing it in Boston in the fall of 1943. However, it is not entirely certain how forthcoming Lebel was, and the possibility exists that he himself had something to do with the painting reaching New York and perhaps its sale to Silberman.\(^\text{28}\)

On November 15, 1938, Walter Westfeld was arrested for foreign exchange violations – his activities in Amsterdam and Paris forming the crux of the charges against him – and spent the rest of his life in captivity. November 15, 1938, is therefore a plausible terminus ante quem for the Eglon van der Neer painting to have left his possession, since after this date, he had no personal control over the distribution of his assets. The art still in his possession at that time was confiscated by Nazi authorities. The MFA painting was not among the works of art seized from Westfeld in 1938, which were sold at Lempertz, Cologne, in December 1939 in a “forced sale […] of non-Aryan property”.\(^\text{29}\)

After Westfeld’s arrest, he was held in police custody until his trial on January 3, 1940. In July he was convicted of foreign exchange violations, charged a monetary fine of Reichsmark (RM) 300,000, and was sent to Remscheid penitentiary at Lüttringhausen. His sentence there ended on June 3, 1942, when he was transferred back to a police prison in Düsseldorf. On September 29, 1942, he was sentenced to a concentration camp and was deported to Theresienstadt a month later.\(^\text{30}\) On January 23, 1943, Walter Westfeld was sent to Auschwitz. He was declared deceased at the end of World War II.

Following the war, Westfeld’s fiancée, Emilie Scheulen (1896–1990) succeeded in having him classified a victim of Nazi persecution and pursued claims on his behalf for the

\(^{28}\) On the smuggling operation, see Landesarchiv NRW, Gestapo-Akte 20, 737. Lebel was the recipient of the paintings smuggled to France, but no comprehensive list of these works exists and their ultimate fate is unknown. Lebel would later claim to Dietrich Westfield that the paintings he had for Walter Westfeld were seized by the Nazis, and only partially recovered after the war. There is no evidence that Lebel cannot be taken at his word when he said he did not know what had happened to the Eglon van der Neer. However, it is possible that he had business ties to Silberman. Several paintings sold by Lebel that are today in American museum collections (none of which are known to have belonged to Westfeld) also passed through the hands of Richard Goetz (1874–1954), a German-born dealer and collector from Paris. Goetz came to New York in 1939, sailing on the same ship as Lebel in September of that year; he and Lebel were colleagues and evidently shared a stock of paintings. In New York, they shared an address at 18 East 57th Street, and in 1943 Goetz declared, among his assets abroad, about $60,000 to $80,000 worth of paintings “located […] partly at the warehouse of the art dealer Lebel, Paris France.” (National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, Record Group 265, Foreign Funds Control TFR-500 Original Reports, Series A, Box 145). Goetz did business with Silberman; Tintoretto’s “Tarquin and Lucretia”, for example, passed from Lebel to Goetz, and was sold by Silberman Galleries in 1949 to the Art Institute of Chicago. While there are no known archives of Goetz’s activities as a dealer, at least two drawings that remain from his estate have Silberman Galleries labels on the versos.

\(^{29}\) “Zwangsversteigerung […] aus nichtarischem Besitz” (Lempertz, Cologne, sale no. 404, December 12–13, 1939). Works of art were seized from the home of Emilie Scheulen on November 29, 1938; none is identifiable with the van der Neer. Landesarchiv NRW, Ger. Rep. 114, Nr. 119.

damages and losses he had suffered. The postwar restitution files demonstrate that he had significant monetary claims against both August Kleucker and Robert Lebel for the works of art each of them sold, or otherwise held, in his name. Emilie Scheulen also sought financial compensation for the works of art Westfeld had disposed of independently after May 1936, a claim that the compensation office did not honour. She did receive compensation for the portion of the art collection that was auctioned through Lempertz in 1939, after recovering only a small handful of pictures from the sale.31

Between May, 1936 and November, 1938 there are, therefore, several ways in which the Eglon van der Neer “Portrait” might have left Walter Westfeld’s possession. Westfeld might have consigned the painting to August Kleucker or shipped it to Robert Lebel; he might have sold it in Germany; or he might have kept it in Amsterdam, where it disappeared. We do not know. The likelihood that he received proceeds from any of these transactions is tenuous at best. Westfeld’s outstanding claims with both Kleucker and Lebel indicate that he did not receive full payment for his paintings from either of them. Moreover, even if he did sell the painting independently and receive money for it, it would be difficult to state that, under the circumstances, he would have had full control over the income; living outside the law, he was selling his property illegally in order to survive. What we do know, however, is that Westfeld gave or sold the painting during the period after his own gallery closed, when he was participating in activities for which he lost his freedom and eventually his life.

There are still many unanswered questions about the provenance of the MFA painting, but the facts that exist led the Museum to conclude that racial persecution was probably inextricable from its disposal. Based on this likelihood, all parties – the Museum, the Westfeld heirs and estate – agreed that a financial settlement would be a fair and just solution. For years, the MFA has posted a discussion of the painting’s provenance online and in gallery labels, and will continue to do so. By telling the story of the Eglon van der Neer “Portrait” in Boston, we have the opportunity to tell the story, and help to preserve the memory, of Walter Westfeld as well.

31 For Westfeld’s claims against Lebel and Kleucker see Landesarchiv NRW, Ger. Rep. 200, Nrs. 88 and 89; additional claim files are LagV 8/423/10593; LagV 8/2489/13779; Ger. Rep. 200, Nr. 87; Ger. Rep. 200, Nr. 2925; Ger. Rep. 200, Nr. 3147; Ger. Rep. 200, Nr. 2368. Compensation files are held at the Stadtarchiv, Düsseldorf: 0 – 1-32 – 459.0026 and 0 – 1-32 – 459.0027. I am grateful to Dr. Benedikt Mauer of the Stadtarchiv for his assistance with these files.
Walter Westfeld, Kunsthändler in Wuppertal und Düsseldorf: Der Fall des „Portrait“ aus Boston

Abstract


Der Aufsatz gibt einen kurzen Einblick in die Recherchen, die zu dieser Schlussfolgerung geführt haben, und zeigt dabei die verschiedenen Möglichkeiten auf, wie das Gemälde aus dem Besitz Westfelds verschwunden sein könnte. Im Mai 1936 gehörte es ihm nachweislich noch, in dem Monat also, als die Schließung seiner Galerie erzwungen wurde. Doch die Spur des Bildes reißt dort ab und taucht erst wieder auf, als das Werk 1941 dem MFA angeboten wird. Nach der Schließung seiner Galerie verkaufte Westfeld einige seiner Gemälde über oder an seinen Kollegen August Kleucker in Düsseldorf; andere Bilder veräußerte er eigenständig in Deutschland; wieder andere brachte er ins Ausland, einige davon wurden in Amsterdam eingelagert und andere nach Paris geschmuggelt, von wo aus sie in unterschiedliche Richtungen verstreut wurden. Welchen Weg das Gemälde aus dem MFA nahm, ist nicht genau bekannt. Doch selbst wenn Westfeld Geld für das Werk erhalten haben sollte, hatte er wahrscheinlich keine vollständige Kontrolle über die Einnahmen, da er seinen Besitz illegal verkaufen musste, um überleben zu können. Im November 1938 wurde Walter Westfeld verhaftet, den Rest seines Lebens verbrachte er in Gefangenschaft. 1943 wurde er in Auschwitz ermordet. Das MFA erwarb Eglon van der Neers Gemälde 1941 von den Silberman Galleries, New York, ohne Kenntnis seiner Provenienz.