

# Museum welcomes Hunts' vindication

Welcome for work of Evaluation Group

by Marie Hobbins

THERE is no proof that John and Gertrude Hunt, whose unique art collection is housed in Limerick's museum named after them, were Nazis, or that they were involved in any kind of espionage or trafficking in looted art.

This week, the Hunt Museum is celebrating the independent review of Dr Lynn Nicholas, who worked for several years in the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC and who is the author of The Rape of Europa, winner

assessment of the work carried out by the Royal Irish Academy's Hunt Museum Evaluation Group, the museum notes Dr Nicholas' conclusions.

"There has been much talk about moral obligation during this inquiry. It is, of course, important to recover and return items unlawfully taken during World War II, but it is equally obligatory, in the pursuit of justice, to protect people and institutions from unproven allegations".

The report establishes that the Simon Wiesenthal Centre

ters in this file prove a connection between the Hunts and Emil B. Hrlé. This is entirely mistaken - the name used, four times in one letter, is Buhl, not B. Hrlé and the individual described certainly bears no resemblance to the extremely rich collector and armaments manufacturer Emil B. Hrlé. This is a grossly serious error of fact and mistaken identity".

The report states that the file contains three letters to the Swiss dealer Alexander Von Frey, but establishes no transactions between Mr Von Frey and the Hunts and no references whatsoever to any dealings by the Hunts through Mr Von Frey or any other party to anyone peddling Nazi loot.

"The allegations made by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre caused inexplicable pain to the Hunt family and severely damaged the reputation of John and Gertrude Hunt, and given the serious nature of the allegations made and the sensational manner in which they were publicised, it is alarming to learn that the only basis for these unfounded allegations is this single file," the report states.

"Furthermore, it is very difficult to understand why the Simon Wiesenthal Centre did not reveal this file immediately - if the documentation were revealed,



the file could have been independently examined, as is now the case," it adds.

The report commends the Hunt Museum for setting up a website and making valiant efforts to allow third parties to query the provenance of any individual item in the Museum's collection.

"Having canvassed the web-based catalogue far and wide in the

international community, not one institution, agent or person has come forward with a single query or claim over the provenance of any item in the collection - there are more than 2,000 items fully catalogued and photographed on the website and we have had over a quarter of a million visitors to this website since it was established two years ago,"

said a Hunt Museum spokesperson.

"Although no foundation has been discovered in regard to the allegations made against the late John and Gertrude Hunt, and no questions have been raised about the ownership of any Hunt Museum artefacts, so serious and damaging were the allegations that the museum fully concurs with the opinion expressed by Lynn Nicholas that the existing provenance research project be continued and that further research be carried out into the records of individual dealers.

"We owe this to John and Gertrude Hunt, to their children Trudy and John (now deceased) and their families and to the legacy they have given the State. We also owe this to The Hunt Museum and to the government agencies, private individuals and other bodies who have financially aided the Museum.

"We would like to thank the Royal Irish Academy and most especially the Royal Irish Academy's Hunt Museum Evaluation Group, who agreed to carry out this work, despite a distinct lack of co-operation from those making the accusations

- The Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

The Royal Irish Academy Hunt Museum Evaluation Group was appointed following the publication in February 2004 of a letter by Dr Shimon Samuel, international liaison director, Wiesenthal Centre Paris, to President McAleese. In this letter, Dr. Samuels requested that the title, Museum of the Year be withdrawn from the Hunt Museum, which it had received a few months before. The

letter also made allegations about the origins of the Hunt Collection and the business activities of John and Gertrude Hunt.

At that time, Dr Samuels alleged "sources" had indicated that John and Gertrude Hunt had "intimate business relationships with notorious dealers in art looted by the Nazis." Dr. Samuels declined to identify which dealers but said work was on course in compiling documentation.

**'This file does not provide any evidence for claiming that John and Gertrude Hunt were Nazis or were dealing in objects looted by the Nazis'**

of the National Book Critics Circle Award.

The review deals with allegations made by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Paris, in an open letter to President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in February of 2004, that the late John and Gertrude Hunt had dealt in Nazi looting and which questioned the ownership of items in the Hunt Collection, which is now gifted to the Irish State.

Welcoming the publication of independent

based its allegation against the Hunts, who lived for years in Lough Gur, on a single army intelligence file held at the Military Archives in Dublin

"This file does not provide any evidence for claiming that John and Gertrude Hunt were Nazis or were dealing in objects looted by the Nazis, although in a press release issued in June 2006, Dr Simon Samuels from the Simon Wiesenthal Centre states that let-



A Garda motorcycle outrider supports the Special Olympic Flame of hope as it made its way through Limerick last week. The torch run was welcomed to Limerick by Mayor, Ger Fahy, en route to Shanghai, China.

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