

News

Wiesenthal Centre to issue new Hunt report

Mike Dwane

JEWISH human rights organisation the Simon Wiesenthal Centre will finalise a report on Limerick's Hunt Museum in the coming weeks, it has emerged.

The centre's Paris-based international liaison director, Dr Shimon Samuels, initiated an arts scandal four years ago when he requested President Mary McAleese to suspend the Irish Museum of the Year Award won by the Hunt.

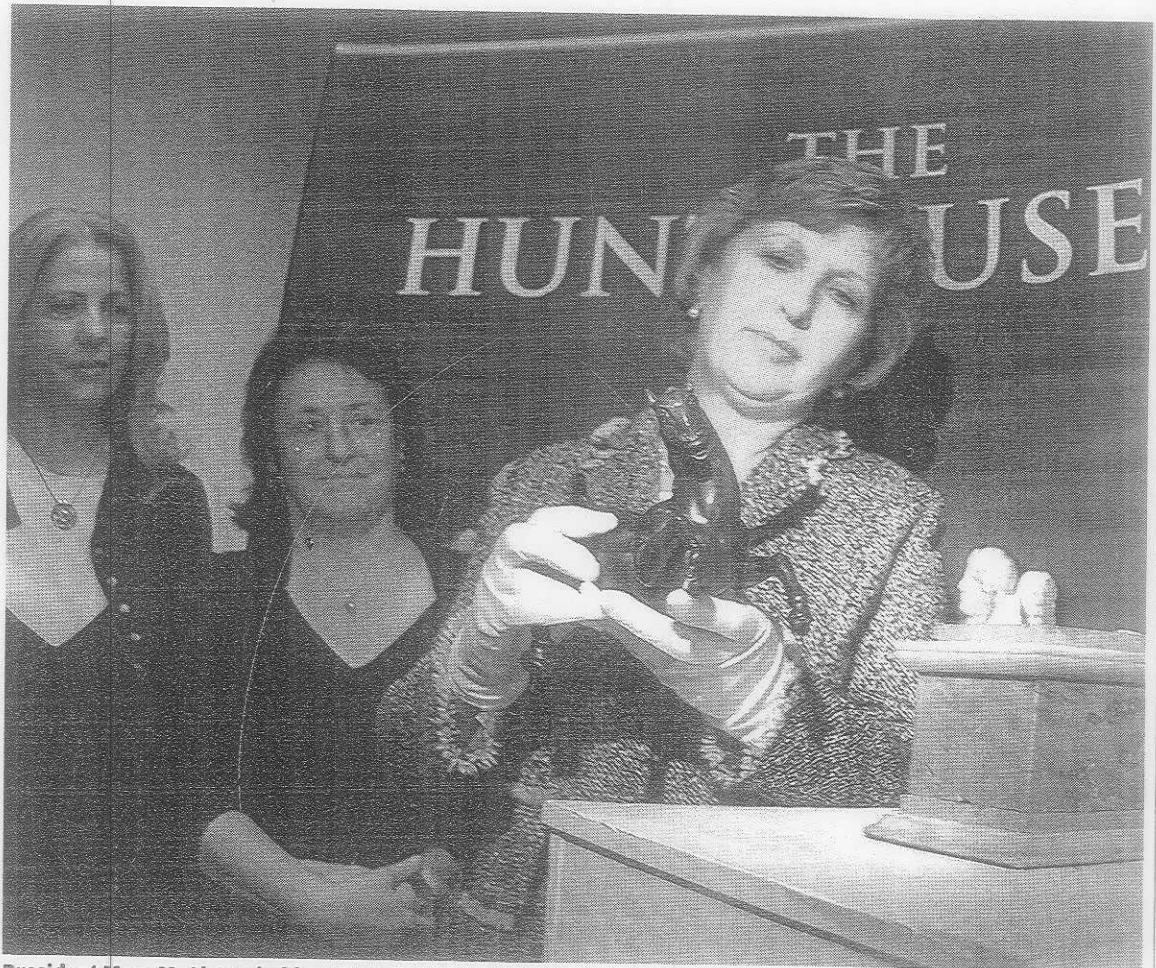
This was because of the museum's benefactors', John and Gertrude Hunt, alleged links with "notorious dealers in art looted by the Nazis".

The allegations were immediately dismissed by the Hunt family, who said their parents were "deeply anti-Fascist" and were able to point to the Hunts' work with the German-Jewish Relief Committee and their efforts to help Jewish friends escape Nazi-occupied Europe during the war.

A number of investigations were undertaken resulting in internationally-recognised art loss expert, American academic Dr Lynn Nicholas, reporting in October 2007 there was "no proof whatsoever" of any connection between the Hunts and the Nazis. She also criticised the conduct of the Wiesenthal Centre.

Dr Nicholas considered a small file on the Hunts in Irish military intelligence archives - which had been held up by those making accusations as a smoking gun - but found no evidence of wrongdoing.

She did recommend further research, however, into archives held by other security agencies and other wartime records.



President Mary McAleese holds a horse by Leonardo DaVinci at the Hunt Museum this year with Virginia Teehan, curator, and Trudy Hunt

PICTURE: DERMOT LYNCH

Three months after the publication of the Nicholas report, President McAleese caused a storm when, on a visit to the Hunt, she said the Wiesenthal Centre's pursuit of the Hunts and its conduct during the previous four years had "diminished the name" of renowned Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, who gave the centre its name.

The good name of the Hunts, in contrast, had not been diminished, the President said in January.

But this drew an instant response from the Wiesenthal Centre, with Dr

Samuels describing her remarks as "uncalled for" and "unfitting to her office".

Both Dr Nicholas and a former inquiry team, set up by the Royal Irish Academy, had requested the input of the Wiesenthal Centre but did not receive a response.

Despite this, Dr Samuels claimed the centre had been "sidelined" during the entire process and in January he said the centre would publish its own report on the matter within three months.

Speaking to the Limer-

ick Leader this week, Dr Samuels said that report was currently being considered by lawyers.

"It is currently being finalised by our legal counsel and I look forward to discussing it with you (the media) although it will first be sent to the Minister for the Arts," he said.

"It is a 160-page report and it is currently being checked for accuracy and potential libels as we want it to be spot on. It should be ready at the end of the month."

Despite reports that the Wiesenthal Centre's docu-

ment would focus on Ireland's wartime record vis-a-vis Nazi Germany and the Jews, Dr Samuels said it would "be looking at the issue concerned".

He declined to go into further detail however saying "you'll just have to wait and see".

Shortly after the scandal broke in 2004, the Hunt Museum began to place every item in the 2,000-artefact collection on its website.

It has yet to receive a single claim of loss from Holocaust survivors or their relatives.