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London art register backs Hunt Museum

By MAIRÉAD NI CHAOIMH

ALLEGATIONS that the Hunt Museum collection contained Nazi loot were rejected outright this week by the London-based Art Loss Register.

The organisation said that the Gort Furniture Collection, which is housed at Bunratty Castle, contained no stolen or missing artefacts.

The Gort Furniture Collection, which John Hunt Snr helped to assemble, comprises over 400 items of furniture, tapestries and other art from the 16th and 17th centuries.

A comprehensive study was carried out on all items and Sarah Jackson of the Art Loss Register said: "To the best of our knowledge none of the objects from the Gort collection have been registered as stolen or missing on our database of stolen and missing art, nor has a claimant reported any item from the collection to us as a loss between 1933 and 1945."

It was alleged in a letter



Virginia Teehan; still in discussions

sent to President McAleese over a year ago that items in the Hunt Museum and the Gort Furniture Collection could have been Nazi loot. The Gort collection is the largest display of late mediaeval European furniture in the country.

"We are very pleased, but not surprised," said Brian O'Connell, chairman of Shannon Heritage. "I would hope that the reputation of these collections has not fallen due to unsubstantiated claims. Big collections the world over sometimes have discovered they have innocently acquired items of improper provenance," he said.

The Gort collection will

be displayed on the Internet by the end of the year.

Carrying out an audit was something Shannon Heritage had planned to do regardless of outside allegations, said Mr O'Connell.

Meanwhile, a team appointed to investigate similar Nazi loot claims at the Hunt Museum in Limerick city resigned last month after a dispute over how the inquiry should be funded.

Royal Irish Academy president Michael Ryan said that they would not be carrying out an inquiry because they "never interfere with the internal affairs of an organisation".

However, he said that they were helping in the setting up of one.

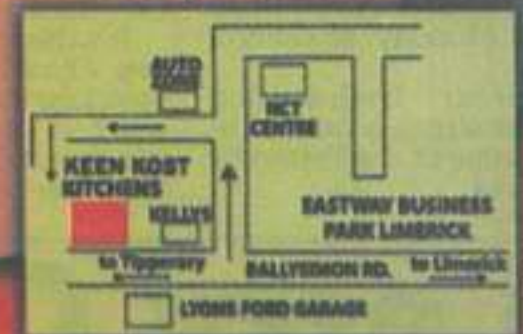
"We are currently putting together a group of individuals with expertise in the area and facilitating the creation of a group who will work independently. Once things get started it is straight forward," he said.

Hunt Museum director Virginia Teehan said the museum was "still in discussions" with the RHA and that she was feeling "very optimistic".

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