

Presseinformation

Museum am Rothenbaum

Rothenbaumchaussee 64 | 20148 Hamburg
Germany | www.markk-hamburg.de

Information sheet on the head of a Buddha statue owned by the Berlin art collector Johanna (Hansi) Share, widowed Ploschitzki

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Jana C. Reimer, Provenance research on Nazi-looted property



Foto: Paul Schimweg © MARKK

Object description: Head of a Buddha figure (fragment)
Provenance: probably China [recorded as India on arrival at the museum]
Period of manufacture: 14th-17th century (or later)
Material: Marble, color pigments; mounted
Dimensions: Height: 45 cm, width: 17 cm, depth: 22 cm
Weight: 20 kg

Depiction of a Buddha, fragment of a full-body sculpture. The head shows some of the so-called “beauty features” of the Buddha, such as three neck folds, long earlobes, the shining forehead mark urnā and the cranial outgrowth ushnīsha. The lack of other attributes makes a more precise identification difficult. It is possible that the founder of the religion himself, Gautama Siddharta, is depicted here after attaining Buddhahood. Images of Buddhas are venerated as role models in temples and on domestic altars. The size of the head indicates that the statue was located in a temple.

The exact origin and dating of this head statue have not yet been investigated in depth.

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Restitution case Hansi (Johanna) Share, nee. Fehr, widowed Ploschitzki, née Zender
Born 1887 in Berlin, died 1981 in Los Angeles, CA, USA.

Biographical information Johanna Hansi Share

The art collector Johanna "Hansi" Ploschitzki lived in Berlin with her husband Hermann Ploschitzki and two daughters. Hermann Ploschitzki was co-owner of the later Karstadt department store in Potsdam. After his death in 1932, his assets passed to Johanna Ploschitzki as his first heir. This included the villa in Berlin Dahlem, which they had designed together at the end of the 1920s, and an extensive and prominent art collection. After the transfer of power to the National Socialists in 1933, Johanna Ploschitzki and her family were affected by National Socialist persecution due to their Jewish origins. In 1936, the Reich Press School was housed in the Dahlem villa. The house no longer exists today. A second marriage in 1933 to the Swiss painter Julius Wilhelm Fehr was divorced in 1934 and Johanna Ploschitzki again took the surname she shared with her daughters. Between 1935 and 1939, Johanna Ploschitzki appears to have traveled to the USA several times, where she stayed permanently from 1939, as did her daughters. Also in 1939, Johanna Ploschitzki married the entrepreneur Leon M. Share in Los Angeles, California, her third marriage, and now went by the name Hansi Share. In 1945, she received US citizenship and lived in Los Angeles until her death in 1981. At the beginning of the 1940s, Hansi Share set up a successful doll studio there, "Monica Dolls Studio", where she made dolls with real hair. Friedrich Kahn, who knew Hansi Share from her time in Berlin society in the 1920s, reported on the young company in the newspaper "Aufbau" in 1945.

National Socialist expropriation in the port of Hamburg in 1941

After finally leaving for the USA, Hansi Share's belongings, which were intended for shipment, remained in nine lift vans in the port of Hamburg. As in many similar cases, Hansi Share's belongings were confiscated by the Secret State Police in 1941 and the Hamburg bailiff Heinrich Bobsien was instructed to auction off the art, furnishings and household items they contained. The extensive minutes of the auction held at the Drehbahn in Hamburg at the beginning of December 1941 are kept in the Hamburg State Archives and document the individual items and the names of the buyers, including art dealers, private individuals and museums. For the then Hamburg Museum of Ethnology (now the MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum), its then director Franz Termer used special official funds to acquire a book collection for the library and seven art objects from East Asia - including the head of a Buddha statue.

Restitution proceedings in 1948 and Hamburg restitution in 1951

In November 1948, the Berlin lawyer Dr. Helmut Ruge, representing Hansi Share, initiated restitution proceedings at the Central Office for Property Administration in Bad Nenndorf. The overall proceedings lasted until the 1960s, and in December 1950 the Restitution Office in Hamburg ordered the restitution of the objects owned by Hansi Share that had been purchased by Hamburg museums in 1941. In February 1951, the Museum für Völkerkunde also handed over six Chinese ceramics from the Tang Dynasty and the surviving book collection to Hansi Share. The Buddha head, however, remained in the Hamburg museum depot.

Investigation: Why the Buddha head was not returned in 1951

The whereabouts of the sculpture in the museum was due to incorrect information on the part of Hansi Share and her lawyer, as well as the museum withholding the relevant clarifying

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information. The copies of the original auction lists available in the files of the restitution proceedings contain a transcription error: Item 626 “old head” had become “old pot” in the copy. The claim for restitution to the museum was formulated accordingly by both the authorities and the lawyers. Represented by the director Franz Termer and managing director Eduard Dennert, the museum had to formally confirm the otherwise correctly listed objects and books. In official correspondence, however, they repeatedly declared the item “old pot” to be “not identical”. The museum file contains an internal review and reference to corresponding complete inventories of the Johanna Ploschitzki Collection for this point in time, but neither Franz Termer nor Eduard Dennert mention the Buddha head in the official correspondence of the proceedings. Instead, the museum management questioned the legality of the restitution claim, referring to the assumed “voluntary nature” of the auction.

Hansi Share and the arduous search for her art collection

The official formal restitution proceedings after 1945 were difficult and arduous for those affected and robbed, if they were able to apply for them at all. They often dragged on for several years. The proceedings initiated by Hansi Share lasted until 1965. It can be seen from Hansi Share's restitution files that Hansi Share was still trying to identify her art collection in 1960 on the basis of the rudimentary information in the auction record. At this time, she was already seeking financial compensation, as most of the artworks were not returned to her. She assumed that the Buddha head, of whose whereabouts in the museum in Hamburg she could not have known, was in place of an item described as a “stone figure” that had been acquired by a private individual. However, the fact that she was referring to precisely this head statue can be seen from a photograph also enclosed with the file. A picture taken around 1930 in her Berlin villa shows the Buddha head in the library there. Hansi Share's notes also contain a further indication of provenance before 1933, a period that has not yet been researched for the Buddha head. She notes that, like many of her other East Asian art objects, she acquired it from the Wannieck art dealership in Paris. In the 1920s, East Asian art was very popular with Western collectors. Often labeled with the origin “Siam” (Thailand), heads of Buddha statues were for sale in large numbers. The Parisian art dealer Wannieck specialized in this area and had connections to the Chinese art market. A case of looted property and reference to colonial contexts would therefore still have to be verified.

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Foto: View into the library of Johanna and Hermann Ploschitzki's Dahlem villa around 1930. The Buddha head is to the left of the fireplace in the picture.

Hansi Share papers, Collection no. 6160, Special Collections, © USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

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As of 2019: Research carried out at MARKK - Provenance research

The question of why and under what circumstances the head of a Buddha figure had remained in the museum was investigated by MARKK from fall 2019, when two curators became aware of the Johanna Ploschitzki Collection and the associated Buddha head during preparations for the MARKK exhibition "Steppes & Silk Roads". Of the seven objects, six were listed in the documentation as having been returned in 1951, but the head was not; it was still in the museum depot. In the following months, the obvious Nazi-looted context and Hansi Share's biography were researched for the exhibition and published in the 2020 catalog. In November 2019, MARKK was contacted for a survey project on public auctions of Nazi-confiscated removal goods in the Port of Hamburg, which was planned at the Bremerhaven Maritime Museum and then funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. The inquiry about the museum holdings concerned led to the auction of Johanna Ploschitzki's household effects also becoming a central topic with reference to the MARKK due to its scope. The exemplary significance of the auction of Hansi Share's property and the subsequent restitution proceedings in the overall context of the restitution proceedings after 1945 was first made clear by the historian Jürgen Lillteicher in his dissertation in 2003. The Nazi-looted history of the Buddha head in the MARKK was finally investigated in depth in 2021 in a long-term provenance research project on Nazi-looted property in the MARKK collections funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. Also in 2021, initial inquiries were made to MARKK by the legal representatives of the Hansi Shares heirs' association, as a result of which restitution proceedings were initiated at the end of 2021 in accordance with the Washington Principles. Formal restitution to the heirs finally took place in 2024.

Further reading:

Kahn, Friedrich. „Hansi Share und ihre ‚MillionenDollarBabeDoll‘“ In: *Aufbau*, 11. Jahrgang, Nummer 23, 8. Juni 1945, Seite 16–17

Kleibl, Kathrin & Kiel, Susanne. *LostLift Datenbank*, Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum – Leibniz-Institut für Maritime Geschichte; <https://lostlift.dsm.museum/>

Lang, Maria-Katharina, Wille, Rahel (Hg.). *Steppen & Seidenstraßen. Ausstellungskatalog MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum*. Hamburg 2020

Lillteicher, Jürgen. *Raub, Recht und Restitution. Die Rückerstattung jüdischen Eigentums in der frühen Bundesrepublik*. Göttingen, 2007