



Dallas, TX (October 22, 2009)

Based on new evidence about the systematic looting of art from Jewish owners in the course of hostilities in Europe during World War II, a pair of famous paintings on display at SMU's Meadows Museum created by Spanish master Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1618-1682) of Seville's Patron Saints [Justa](#) and [Rufina](#), estimated to be worth more than \$10 million, are believed to have been stolen from the Rothschild family in Paris in 1941. The Nazi ERR (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg) code evidencing Rothschild ownership is still visible on the stretcher bar of one of the paintings; it appears to have been rubbed off the other. The Monuments Men Foundation, recipient of the 2007 National Humanities Medal for its work preserving the legacy of these unknown heroes, which it received from the President of the United States at a White House ceremony, is continuing its research to document conclusively whether both paintings were properly restituted to the rightful owners prior to donation to the Meadows Museum.

These paintings, among tens of thousands looted by the Nazis, were later transported to Germany and Austria where they were discovered in the closing days of the war by the Monuments Men, a small group of men and women – museum directors, curators, artists, architects and librarians – who volunteered for service in an unprecedented effort to protect the great cultural treasures of western civilization from the destruction of the war and theft by the Nazis. This group, empowered by President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower, formally known as the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section (MFAA), counted among its key members Lt. James J. Rorimer (future director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), Private Lincoln Kirstein (future founder of the New York City Ballet), and Lt. George Stout (future director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), among others.

Robert M. Edsel, Founder and President of the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to completing the mission of the Monuments Men, and author of a newly released book, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (Center Street, 2009), commented: "The Monuments Men Foundation is proud to announce that after more than two and a half years of effort, University officials at SMU/Meadows Museum have now publicly acknowledged the correct provenance of these two paintings by Murillo, and more importantly, have now, by recognizing the Nazi theft of the artwork on the museum's website, contemporaneously endorsed the "best practices" guidelines of both the American Association of Museums (AAM) and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). This is a milestone achievement for the Monuments Men Foundation in fulfilling this portion of its Mission Statement by encouraging all museums to comply with the commonly accepted guidelines concerning objects possibly looted by the Nazis. While we congratulate University officials on taking this important step, we underscore the importance of their completing provenance research on the entire collection and publicizing

those results. Additionally, we hope they will promptly follow the recommendations of the AAM concerning placement of the information about the Murillos' Nazi provenance on the AAM's [Nazi-Era Provenance Internet Portal](#), which was specifically designed to enable those victims of the Nazis' looting to have the fairest chance possible to locate and recover their belongings. During World War II, two Monuments Men who believed in that concept died during combat trying to protect works of art from the destruction of the war and theft by the Nazis. It is no less relevant today than it was 65 years ago." Mr. Edsel added: "The Foundation's research to confirm that these important paintings were properly restituted to the rightful owners prior to their acquisition by Mr. Meadows in 1972 continues."

The established procedures of the AAMD, of which the Meadows Museum is a member, make specific reference to the work of the Monuments Men during and after World War II "to facilitate the identification of works that were stolen by the Nazis and not restituted" and to "ensure continued transparency in the acquisition and presentation of collections". (To view that document, see [AAMD Letter](#)). The AAM has similar guidelines. Collectively, the guidance of AAMD and AAM constitute the best practices for museums to follow in dealing with objects that may have been subjected to Nazi art looting or other forms of theft during the Nazi era. These guidelines call on museums to research the provenance of works of art in their collections that could have been looted and to publish the results of their research, preferably on the Internet, so it can be widely accessible. The United States government signed the Washington Principles in 1998 and the Terezin Declaration just this year, to emphasize this country's commitment to just and fair handling of artwork that could have been subject to Nazi looting.

Mr. Edsel first became curious about the two paintings in 2006 after completing research for his first book, *Rescuing Da Vinci* (Laurel Publishing, 2006), a photographic telling of the story of the Monuments Men. Having discovered two archival photos which included images of these two paintings by Murillo, Mr. Edsel wondered how it was possible that two paintings he knew to be at the Meadows Museum could have had a Nazi provenance when there was no mention of it in the Meadows' records. In 2006, Mr. Edsel hired one of the nation's leading provenance researchers, Ms. Patricia Teter, from the Getty Research Institute. Ms. Teter has more than 16 years of experience focused on provenance issues, of which the past six have concentrated on Nazi looting. In March 2007, believing that the Meadows' provenance for the paintings was incorrect, Mr. Edsel and Ms. Teter sought to confirm their documentation by examining the paintings, which occurred on April 30, 2007. To the surprise of Meadows Museum officials, who readily made the paintings available for examination, the Nazi ERR code was visible on the stretcher of [Saint Justa](#) it appeared that the Nazi ERR code had been rubbed off the same position on the stretcher of [Saint Rufina](#). Mr. Edsel subsequently provided a copy of the research that his team had compiled to Meadows Museum officials. In keeping with the [Mission Statement of the Monuments Men Foundation](#), Mr. Edsel also brought to the attention of University officials the importance of observing the AAM/ AAMD and Washington Principle guidelines governing the identification of works of art stolen by the Nazis, particularly those concerning the need to research the provenance of works of art that could have been subject to Nazi looting, and then publishing those research results. He urged them, and other University officials, to make a joint announcement about these findings to serve as a source of encouragement for all museums to comply with these important guidelines. The Meadows Museum's recent update to its website now makes a definitive statement in support of those guidelines.

In recent months, as Mr. Edsel was completing research for his newly released book about the Monuments Men, he discovered that one of the key figures, Monuments officer Lt. James J. Rorimer, was the person who actually located one of the two stolen Murillo paintings, [Saint Justa](#). In his book, Mr. Edsel quoted Rorimer's reaction to finding the painting by Murillo, along with 157 other stolen works, at a Nazi restoration studio in Buxheim, Germany: "There are few museums in the world that could boast a collection such as the one we found here. Works of art could no longer be thought of in ordinary terms—a roomful, a car load, a castle full, were the quantities we had to reckon with." The other Murillo painting, [Saint Rufina](#), along with thousands of other priceless works of art including Michelangelo's *Bruges Madonna* and Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*, was found by Monuments Men Robert Posey, Lincoln Kirstein, and George Stout at a salt mine in Altaussee, Austria that stored many of the works of art destined for Hitler's planned "Führermuseum".

In addition to his work as an author and as the President of the Monuments Men Foundation, Mr. Edsel was also the co-producer of a documentary film entitled *The Rape of Europa*, based on the definitive book about Nazi looting by scholar Lynn H. Nicholas. Mr. Edsel is also the publisher of *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice* (Laurel Publishing, 2009), the definitive catalogue of the painting collection of Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, by scholar Nancy H. Yeide. Mr. Edsel is a graduate of Southern Methodist University (1979), served as a Meadows Advisory Board member from 2003-2005, and has been a financial donor and lender to the Museum prior to these developments. He played an instrumental role in the passage of a Resolution by both Houses of Congress, on June 6, 2007, which for the first time recognized by the United States the service of all 350 or so Monuments officers from 13 nations. In November 2007, Mr. Edsel and the Monuments Men Foundation made a donation to the National Archives of the "Hitler Albums", two albums of photographs of works of art stolen by the Nazi looting agency, the ERR, and then presented to Hitler. Both of the Hitler Albums had been in the possession of the estate of an American soldier who took them from Hitler's home in Berchtesgaden in early May 1945. Chief Archivist of the United States, Professor Allen Weinstein, characterized the Hitler Albums as "one of the most significant finds related to Hitler's premeditated theft of art and other cultural treasures to be found since the Nuremberg trials." Mr. Edsel is a recognized expert on the history of the Monuments Men and frequently speaks on this subject including recent presentations at the Art Institute of Chicago and the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. (To see his full biography, see [Board of Trustees](#) – to learn more about the Monuments Men Foundation, visit [the web site](#))

About the Monuments Men Foundation

The Monuments Men Foundation was founded to gather information and raise public awareness about the 350 or so men and women from thirteen nations, many of whom were museum directors, curators, and educators, who protected monuments and other cultural treasures from the destruction of World War II. By 1945, these heroes of civilization tracked, located and later returned more than 5 million artistic and cultural items stolen by Hitler and the Nazis. The Foundation intends for their rich legacy to serve as a beacon for the preservation of such treasures in future armed conflict; to finish the task of locating and returning some of the hundreds of thousands of stolen and still missing works of art and documents to the victims of the greatest theft in history, and to encourage all museums to comply with the Washington Principles and American Association of Museums' guidelines concerning provenance research during the Nazi era. If you have information about the Monuments Men or others who helped

save civilization's greatest treasures during the war, or possess works of art or documents you believe were stolen or "liberated" during the war, please contact the Monuments Men Foundation at information@monumentsmenfoundation.org.