

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium are recruiting a

Researcher – PhD Student (m/w/x)

(project BRAIN 2.0: ProvEnhance – WP3: Provenance research, 2023-2027)

Context

The PhD project is part of the larger research project *ProvEnhance: Enhancing the provenance data of the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) since 1933. Scientific study, digital valorization and narrative in context*. It is a 4-year research project funded by the BRAIN 2.0 program of the [Belgian Science Policy PPS](#) (see [project page](#)), coordinated by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium with as partners the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), the Technische Universität Berlin (TU) and the Belgian State Archives / CegeSoma (see below for more information about the partner institutions).

Since the 1990s, the study of the provenance of works of art has become increasingly important in Europe and the Western world, in an ethical context determined by questions of restitution and empowerment for remembrance work. Following the Washington, Vilnius Forum and Terezin Declarations, Belgium, as many countries in Europe, through a special commission, studied around the year 2000 the issue of restitution of property looted from Jews during the Second World War in depth, using then available archival sources and research on institutions involved (see *Rapports Commission Buysse 2001*). However, twenty years later, the international provenance research and societal landscapes have evolved and there is an increasing awareness of the mechanisms of loot.

The project ProvEnhance aims to lay a global scientific and methodological frame for provenance research in Belgium for artworks acquired around WWII. As a real case-study, it will systematically study and enrich the provenance data of artworks entered in the collections of the RMFAB from 1933 on, concentrating on the pre-, war and postwar periods, but possibly extending until the 1990's for subsets of acquisitions that could have a story related to the (pre)war-period. Another objective of the project is to improve transparency by displaying the research results in the digital and physical museum environment.

The PhD-research position is part of the work package "Provenance Research on the RMFAB Collection as a -study for Belgium" (WP3). It will provide the opportunity for the PhD candidate to examine in the context of an in-depth and systematic research the provenance of objects that entered the MRBAB's collection in various ways (e.g. purchase, donation, exchange) during the National Socialist and in the postwar era, or even later if they have a story possibly related to the (pre)war-period. A corpus of artworks from the art collection of the RMFAB (paintings) will be initially prioritized following a risk analysis based on WWII provenance research's international standards and practices, and a screening of all the RMFAB acquisitions. After a general sample analysis, the researcher will systematically verify provenances and validate them through historical and archival research, using RMFAB sources (material study, collection data, archival and relevant library materials) and sources from public and private archives, at least in Belgium and Germany.

The PhD-student will benefit from the extensive knowledge and network of the project partners and be integrated in current provenance research initiatives and cooperation projects in the academic and museum sector in Germany and Europe. A connection to the international association Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e.V. offers networking opportunities as does the participation in the (inter-university) doctoral colloquia or the participation in or independent organization of international workshops and conferences at the two partner universities in Brussels and Berlin.

The PhD research will be conducted under the co-supervision of the ULB and the TU Berlin: the successful candidate will be enrolled as a PhD in both universities and defend a doctoral thesis at the end of the 4-year research.

Job duties

- To research the provenances of a selection of paintings preserved at the RMFAB and the museum's purchasing policies and practices, in the framework of the ProvEnhance project as described above and write a doctoral thesis on a topic relevant to the project
- The commitment to spend parts of the project period in Germany or to make regular longer stays in Germany for the archival research and the participation in conferences, workshops and the PhD student activities
- To contribute to the scientific activities and academic outputs of the project such as conferences and publication of article(s), including the organization of and communication about these activities through appropriate channels
- To participate in the project management and reporting, with regular feedback to the project team on progress
- To collaborate with the other project researchers, a.o. in structuring and sharing the provenance data on the RMFAB collection and art market during WWII
- To collaborate with other museum departments according to the project needs, e.g. the curators, the mediation and communication teams, etc.
- To collaborate with international research networks on provenance
- To participate to the university PhD program requirements (both ULB and TU Berlin)
- To support the project advancement through other administrative tasks as well as other duties that may be reasonably requested

Profile

- Master's Degree in Art history, History, Digital Humanities, Cultural Studies, Cultural Management or Law, or any other disciplines related to the project
- Strong interest and possibly research experience in Provenance Research or European Art Market history (20th century). A familiarity with Belgian history during WWII is an asset
- Fluency in French and excellent knowledge in German (at least excellent reading skills) as well as a professional command of English; knowledge of Dutch is an asset
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Excellent information literacy skills or willingness to learn quickly (use of research and historical databases, bibliographic management tools)
- Proficiency in the use of Microsoft Office / Microsoft 365, Internet usage and social media communication
- Self-motivated with ability to meet deadlines and to work on own initiative
- Excellent organizational skills, ability to work in team
- Ability to write project reports and make presentations to diverse groups

- Availability to work both at the RMFAB in Brussels and at the TU-Berlin (duration and times to be discussed)

Conditions of service and compensation

We offer a two-years renewable contract as Scientific assistant (SW 1 – scientific career grade 1) at RMFAB, combined with a PhD position at the ULB and TU Berlin (with obligation of long or regular stays in Berlin during the project).

Wage scale SW10 or SW11 (SW11 if at least 2 years of recognized scientific seniority).
Salary (gross amounts adapted to the current index, regulatory allowances not included)
between : €49.000 and €58.000 per year.

A budget for research-related travel will be available as well.

Work place

Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Museum street 9, 1000 Brussels.
Possibility of working partly from home.

Working hours

Monday to Friday; duties might involve working outside normal office hours or even at weekends (for on-call duty).

The contract will start on 1 September 2023.

Advantages

The Museum is an equal opportunity employer, supports a diverse workplace and offers a competitive benefits package including:

- possibility of acquiring a bilingualism premium
- extensive training offer (to be followed during working hours)
- free hospitalization insurance
- free commuting by public transport
- possibility for a bicycle allowance
- various social benefits
- easily accessible by public transport
- company restaurant at democratic prices
- sliding working hours in a 38-hour week.
- possibility of teleworking after internship period
- interesting benefits and offers thanks to the Benefits@Work card
- taking over years of seniority in the public sector
- corporate discount in the museum shops

Application Instructions

Candidates are invited to submit their application in English consisting of:

- a cv, including a detailed list of course marks/grades of bachelor and master studies
- a letter of motivation stating the candidate's qualifications and reasons for applying
- a writing sample (published article, MA thesis, ...)
- the contact information of two reference persons (including information on relationship with the applicant).

Interviews with a selection of the applicants are scheduled in the month of July.

Closing date for receipt of applications: 30.06.2023 via aude.alexandre@fine-arts-museum.be (ref. ProvEnhance PhD WP3)

Interested?

More information

...about the project and the position?

Aude Alexandre or Ingrid Goddeeris - project coordinators

Phone 02/508.33.98 or 02/508.33.20

mail : aude.alexandre@fine-arts-museum.be

... about working conditions at RMFAB?

Mr Jeremy Abdissi

Phone 02/508.32.89

Email : jeremy.abdissi@fine-arts-museum.be

... about the partner institutions:

RMFAB

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium form the oldest art museums of Belgium and are situated in the heart of Brussels. The Museums have both a scientific research and public service mission. They preserve and study the collections comprising more than 22.000 works of art (paintings, sculptures, and drawings dating from the end of the 14th century to today). About 2,500 of these works are on display, spread over the Old Masters Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Magritte Museum, the Fin-de-siècle Museum, on the main site, and two artist's studios turned into museums off-site: the Constantin Meunier Museum and the Antoine Wiertz Museum. The RMFAB also manage the largest library in Belgium specialized in art history as well as many important historical archives from artists, artist's associations, art critics or art dealers and documentary files. Part of the museums' mission is the transmission of knowledge through the organization of temporary and permanent exhibitions for the widest possible audience and the publication of catalogues.

More info: <https://fine-arts-museum.be>

ULB

The Université libre de Bruxelles was founded in 1834 and currently has over 35,000 students. With its 12 Faculties, all of which include bachelor's degree, master's degree, advanced master, and PhD programmes, ULB is truly a complete university. ULB has a world-renowned research programme. Prizes it has won over the years include 4 Nobel Prizes in science, 2 Nobel Peace Prizes, 1 Fields Medal and

several Francqui Prizes and Marie Curie Prizes. ULB is open to the outside world, international and cosmopolitan. A little over 30% of our students are foreigners (Europe and outside of the EU). The philosophy of ULB is based on free inquiry and critical thinking which postulates independence of judgement and rejection of arguments of authority. Our University contributes to its social, societal and scientific missions by combining high-level teaching and research
More info: <https://www.ulb.be/>

TU Berlin

TU Berlin has a long and rich tradition and is recognized globally as an excellent research university. Her goal is to continue to develop science and technology for the benefit of our society. The members of the university are wholly committed to the principle of sustainable development which tackles contemporary challenges without further burdening future generations. Research and teaching are inseparably linked.

Using innovative, technology-oriented and holistic methodologies TU is contributing to the shaping of a better future. It is against this background that research and teaching in the natural, planning and engineering sciences are inextricably linked with the humanities and social sciences. All our research and teaching activities serve civilian purposes exclusively.

More info: <https://www.tu.berlin/>

Belgian State Archives / CegeSoma

The Study- and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society is the Belgian expertise centre for the history of 20th century conflicts and the fourth operational direction of the Belgian State Archives. CegeSoma conducts fundamental historical research, develops public history projects, conserves archives and documentation and is engaged in societal debate. Its priority lies with the history of the First- and the Second World War, including their causes, their longer term consequences and impact, the issues of collective memories and broader social debat regarding their legacies. CegeSoma holds a specialized library on the history of 20th Century conflicts in general and the Second World War in particular. CegeSoma has collected archives on the history of the Second World War and its aftermath in Belgium in particular of private persons and organizations having played a key role during the Second World War (as the Devisenschuttkommando). CegeSoma has moreover an extensive photo collection, which is for a large part digitized. The Belgian State Archives, of which CegeSoma is a part, keep the archives of ministries and official institutions, including these institutions tasked with dealing with the legacy of the Second World War in Belgium.

More info: <https://www.cegesoma.be/en/>