

Auctions

Stolen Egon Schiele Drawing, Now Restituted, Could Make \$1.9 Million at Auction

The heirs of collector Fritz Grünbaum have won back other Schieles from American Museums.

[Brian Boucher](#) February 21, 2025

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An Egon Schiele drawing that was stolen by the Nazis from Austrian Jewish cabaret performer Fritz Grünbaum will soon come to auction at Christie's London, after the owner's heirs successfully lobbied for the work's return.



Egon Schiele, *Knabe in Matrosenanzug (Boy in a Sailor Suit)* (1914). Courtesy Christie's.

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Christie's London will offer the 1914 drawing *Knabe in Matrosenanzug (Boy in a Sailor Suit)*, estimated at £1 million to £1.5 million (\$1.3 million to \$1.9 million), as part of a March 5 auction of works from the 20th and 21st centuries.

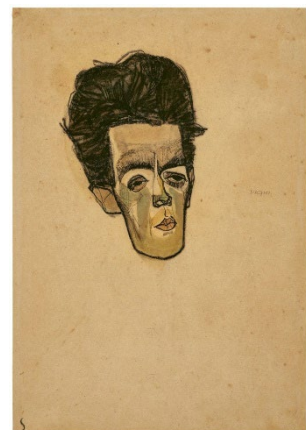
Christie's [lists the work](#) as coming from a private collector in Germany who bought it at Sotheby's London in 1992. Per the Artnet Price Database, it fetched £390,000 (about \$599,000).

In early 20th-century Vienna, Grünbaum built a collection of over 400 works, which the Nazis seized when they annexed Austria in 1938. Grünbaum was murdered at the Dachau concentration camp in 1941; his wife Lilly was killed at the Maly Trostenets camp near Minsk the following year.

Born in 1880, Grünbaum studied law but later became a successful cabaret performer, writer, and an actor who appeared in several films as well as in performances at Vienna's Simpl theater.

The son of an art dealer, he amassed holdings that included some 80 Schiele works as well as Russian icons, etchings by the likes of Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt van Rijn, and Post-Impressionist and Modern works by giants such as Käthe Kollwitz, Max Liebermann, Camille Pissarro, Auguste Rodin, and Paul Signac. The collector earned the enmity of the Nazis, among other reasons, for [an onstage quip](#) during a blackout, when he said, "I can't see a thing, not a single thing; I must have stumbled into National Socialist culture."

"We are grateful that Fritz Grünbaum's ownership of this superb work of art has been restored to history and that proceeds from this auction will help the Grünbaum Fischer Foundation support underrepresented performing artists," said Timothy Reif, one of the collector's heirs, in press materials. "This is another moment to celebrate the memory of our family member who was a brave artist, art collector, and opponent of Fascism." The German consignee will donate proceeds to Kinderoase, a charity project for children, say press materials.



1 Egon Schiele, *Selbstbildnis* (1910). Courtesy of Christie's New York.

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Reif, along with fellow-trustee of the Grünbaum estate, had [filed suits](#) against New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art for other Schiele works in 2022, and [sued three American museums](#) (the Art Institute of Chicago, the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Ohio's Oberlin College) for other Schiele drawings in 2023. The Allen and the Carnegie Museums [returned the works in question](#) last year. They [recovered another](#) from the heirs of a private collector, also last year.

Christie's New York [sold three Schieles](#) from Grünbaum's collection, all for prices above estimate, at its 20th century evening sale in November 2023; three others sold in an Impressionist and Modern [works on paper sale](#) that month.

The Grünbaum estate previously published [a call for information](#) on *Boy in a Sailor Suit* that quoted several publications in laying out its itinerary, saying that it was sold at Vienna's Würthle Gallery in 1925.

Per Christie's, it went to Klipstein and Kornfeld of Bern in 1956 and a Manuel Gasser of Brunegg and Zurich before being auctioned in 1980 at Bern's Kornfeld auction house. The buyer, London's Fischer Fine Art, sold it that same year to an unnamed collector in Switzerland, who sold it at Sotheby's to the current owner.