ART ASHES

February 2, 2026

The Honorable Charles Grassley Chairman,
Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate
United States Senate Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dick Durbin, Ranking Member,
Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Durbin,

ART ASHES ("Art Restitution To Assist Survivors of the Holocaust Emergency Services") is a nonprofit Foundation that provides financial assistance to families for provenance and historical research to identify objects stolen during the Holocaust, and to enable the rightful owners or heirs to build the factual and legal cases necessary to negotiate or litigate return of their families' looted art. In acknowledgment of the many Holocaust Survivors still living, Art Ashes asks successful claimants to donate a portion of the sale proceeds to nonprofit organizations assisting the tens of thousands of Holocaust Survivors unfortunately living in poverty today.

We deeply appreciate your and your colleagues' swift mark-up and passage of the 2025 Holocaust Expropriated Art Recovery Act ("HEAR Act")(S. 1884). The bill will eliminate non-merits obstacles to survivors' and heirs' claims to recover Nazi-looted art. And, we applaud your intensive investigation into the continuing concealment of Holocaust victims' assets in the hands of Swiss banks, and are looking forward to the hearing this Tuesday.

In addition to the overriding imperative of documenting the true extent of complicity in the Nazis' unprecedented thefts from the Jewish people, there are other critical common factors between the goals of the HEAR Act and the Committee's investigation into the Swiss banks collaboration with the Nazis. First, the holders of looted art have engaged in decades of deceit and concealment in the face of government and judicial processes in which their good faith cooperation was essential and assumed. Second, the remedies of the HEAR Act presuppose the ability of families to locate artworks currently being hidden, and there is we believe strong evidence that looted art has been concealed in Swiss bank vaults as well as in museums, galleries, and private collections.[1]

Events in the past decade have exposed looters' and traffickers' use of Swiss banks to conceal Holocaust victims' art. When the cache of more than 1400 works of art were confiscated

[1] "Even though there is more transparency with regard to bank accounts, the bank vaults and customs-free ports are still havens for stolen property. After the war, a lot of stolen art was moved from Bavaria and Austria to Liechtenstein and Switzerland." Michele Laird, "A race against time Swiss urged to provide missing links to Nazi looted art," *Swissinfo* 7 November 2013, quoting Professor Jonathan Petropoulos.

from German collector Cornelius Gurlitt's Munich apartment in 2012, the ensuing investigation showed that he and his father Hildbrand Gurlitt, who was one of Hitler's official art looters, used Swiss banks to hold parts of their collections. As recounted in one article, a Zurich bank manager admitted to an investigative journalist that the bank held "the collection of a Nazi art dealer," and another "banker in Geneva said 'It's an open secret the Swiss vaults are absolutely filled with art and artefacts that have been . . . illicitly got . . . by Gurlitt and others." Dalya Alberge, "Swiss banks staches of looted art an 'open secret," *The Sunday Times*, August 30, 2015.[2]

A recent book and documentary covering the career of Bruno Lohse, Goring's primary agent for confiscating Jewish owned artworks in Paris, has also exposed looters' and traffickers' use of Swiss bank vaults to store looted works. The book is *Göring's Man in Paris*, *The Story of a Nazi Art Plunderer and His World*, Jonathan Petropoulos, former research director of the U.S. Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States. As a review of the book explains:

> Lohse became Göring's agent in Paris, charged with helping Adolf Hitler's number two to amass his vast store of stolen art. He oversaw operations at the Jeu de Paume, where the Nazis stored art looted from Jews by the infamous Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce (known as the ERR).
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> Like many key Nazi looters, Lohse escaped conviction after the Second World War, although he did spend several years in prison, in Nuremberg and in France. On his release in 1950, living in Munich, he became part of a shadowy network of former Nazis who continued to deal in looted art, largely untroubled by law enforcement or public attention.
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> It was a Zurich bank vault that catapulted Lohse back into public view in 2007, just weeks after his death at the age of 95. The Swiss prosecutor seized a vault controlled by Lohse in the Zürcher Kantonalbank. Its contents included *Le Quai Malaquais, Printemps* (1903), a painting by Camille Pissarro that the Jewish family from whom it had been looted in Vienna had been trying to trace for 70 years. . . .

Catherine Hickley, "The Nazi art dealer who supplied Hermann Göring and operated in a shadowy art underworld long after the war," *The Art Newspaper*, 7 January 2021.

According to a different review of *Göring's Man in Paris*:

> In 2007, the Zurich prosecutor's office opened vault number 5 of the Zürcher Kantonalbank. But something felt off; the vault was huge, more like a closet than a safe deposit box. What they found inside, though, was beyond

[2] The article quotes the Swiss Bankers Association: "It is an often cited myth that assets related to Nazis are stashed in Swiss bank vaults [but] there has never been any proof." *Id.* The Judiciary Committee's entire undertaking refutes that statement as far as the vast scope of Swiss banks' holding of looted Jewish assets from the Holocaust, and the examples about Gurlitt and Lohse here underscore the need for further investigation into stolen artworks as well as bank accounts.

> anything they expected: a haul of looted paintings, hidden away for decades. These masterpieces traced back to a man who once held the keys to the Nazis' stolen treasures, the art dealer who plundered Europe for Hermann Göring, Bruno Lohse. . . . Between 1983 and 2004, Lohse hid at least 14 paintings in the Zurich vault, selling them through unknown auction houses and galleries. [Munich art dealer Peter] Griebert, his sole representative since 1988, accessed the safe at least 20 times between 2003 and 2007."

Javier Abel Miguel, "Bruno Lohse, Art Dealer of the Third Reich," *Daily Art Magazine*, 28 April 2025.

Professor Petropoulos further documents that "Lohse's safe in the Zurich Cantonal Bank contained a landscape by seventeenth-century Dutch artist Jan Meerhout, a work that had been stolen from Jewish collector Alphons Jaffé in the Netherlands during the war." The picture, titled A View of the City, had been seized by the Nazis in 1941, "found its way to Hitler," who gave it as a birthday gift to his adjutant Julius Schaub. Lohse had purchased the Meerhout from Hjalmar Schach, the former Reich minister of economics and president of the Reichsbank in 1968. *Id*., at 166-67. "Both Schaub and Schacht lived in Munich until their deaths and comprised part of the cohort of former Nazis who made the Bavarian capital the center of a larger transnational network that trafficked in plundered art. In short, the two looted artworks found in the Zurich bank vault used by Lohse provide glimpses of a larger picture." *Id*., at 167.

The State Department's 2020 Report pursuant to the Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST Act) re "[t]here remains much art in Switzerland that has not yet been researched, but in the decentralized Swiss system, many museums and art collections are under the purview of the cantons rather than the federal government or are maintained by private organizations and private individuals." State Department Just Act Report, 2020, at 180.

The current scandal with the Zurich Museum (Kunsthaus Zurich) over the independent report by historian Raphael Gross into the art collection of Emil Buehrle, is another red flag highlighting the need for Congressional investigation into Nazi looted art in Switzerland. *See* "Inquiry finds 'tainted' Bührle art collection needs much more provenance research," *SWI Swissinfo.ch*, July 17, 2024 ("This collection is historically particularly tainted, on a scale that is possibly unique in Switzerland, . . ."There is a historically very clear connection between the persecution of Jewish collectors by the Nazis and the Bührle collection.").

The Swiss government last week announced that it had finally, after several years of discussion, established a "restitution commission" to enable claimants to have a "neutral" body make recommendations on Nazi looted art claims. Such a commission, even if it operates fairly, would only address claims that are known. We respectfully urge that the Committee's ongoing enquiry – including at your upcoming hearing - ask representatives of the Swiss bank about knowledge of (or lack thereof) the location of stolen art in the custody of Swiss banks and in Swiss Free Ports.

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A pledge by the Swiss banks to provide a full accounting to Congress on the issue of Nazi looted art in their possession now or in the past would help fulfill the United States' and international community's commitment to documenting the true reality of the Nazis' campaign of theft and murder against the Jewish people, and enable Holocaust survivors and heirs to recover their family legacies.

Sincerely,

Joel Greenberg, President