

THE FATE OF *THE WOMAN IN GOLD*

When the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938, the Bloch-Bauer assets were seized and Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer was forced to flee the country to Switzerland. After futile attempts to recover his property, Ferdinand indicated in his final will that he wished to bequeath his entire estate, including his five Klimt paintings, to his nephew and two nieces, one of whom was Maria Altmann.

In 1938, Maria Altmann herself fled Austria with her husband and settled in California. For 60 years, she lived and worked there, with little chance of reclaiming her family legacy. However, in 1998, following the public release of documents showing that Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer did not intend for the Belvedere in Vienna to be the repository for the five Klimt paintings in his collection, Maria Altmann requested the return of these works under the Art Restitution Law. Her claim was rejected by the Austrian government. She then filed suit in California, in a case that was eventually brought before the United States Supreme Court.

Finally, the Austrian government and Ms. Altmann agreed to binding arbitration. She was represented by the American lawyer Randol Schoenberg. In 2005, the panel hearing the case determined that the five Klimt paintings were legally bound to be returned to the Bloch-Bauer heirs. At that point, the Neue Galerie President and Co-Founder, Ronald S. Lauder, purchased *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* for the Neue Galerie, where it is the centerpiece of the collection. We remain indebted to the late Ms. Altmann and her family for arranging the acquisition of this masterwork by the Neue Galerie.