

MANDY PATINKIN: Our story begins in March 1933, less than two months after Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

Two men face each other across a desk. One is Hans Lachmann-Mosse, the German-Jewish head of one of the country's largest newspaper publishers. The other is a Nazi officer.

Between them rests a gun...the Nazi's gun...and it's facing Hans Lachmann-Mosse.

ROGER STRAUCH: That was my step-grandfather, Hans Lachmann-Mosse.

MANDY PATINKIN: Roger Strauch has been listening to versions of this story his entire life.

ROGER STRAUCH: A Nazi officer came to the newspaper's office. And he put his revolver down on the table. And he said, It's your Jews or your assets

MANDY PATINKIN: At this moment, Hans is more clear-eyed than most about the danger posed by the Nazis, not just to German Jews but to everything the Mosse family stands for: liberal democracy, an open society, and freedom of the press. Your Jews or your assets plays on repeat in Hans' mind.

You see, the Mosse family's rich. They own several newspapers and an art collection that's the envy of Berlin...Including a beautiful bronze sculpture called *Three Dancing Maidens*. It was commissioned by the family patriarch back in 1901...by the man who made the Mosse name into what it is. But now...that name is a liability.

The Nazis will eventually force all Jews in Germany and Austria to register their assets in order to steal them. But that won't be till a few years from now. The Mosses are an early target – a sign of their power and influence in Germany.

MATTHEW SHAER: You sign over everything that you own, all your real estate, all your art. You sign it all over to us.

MANDY PATINKIN: Journalist Matthew Shaer.

MATTHEW SHAER: And in exchange, implicitly. You'll leave with your lives.

MANDY PATINKIN: Hans has a lot to consider, and the gun on his desk means he has to think fast.

ROGER STRAUCH: That deal was not necessarily a good or fair deal. But what other choice did he have?

[OPENING THEME]

MANDY PATINKIN: Welcome to Exile - a podcast from LBI, the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. I'm Mandy Patinkin. When everything is taken away, then what? From LBI's archives, untold stories of Jewish lives in the shadow of fascism.

Today, the Mosse family. And their fight to get their legacy back - including the sculpture so dear to the Mosse patriarch - *Three Dancing Maidens*.

All Jews were targets of the Nazis, but the Nazis especially hated - and maybe even feared - the Mosse family.

MATTHEW SHAER: It's not just a Jewish family, but it's a powerful Jewish family with deep roots in the culture of Berlin and the culture of the country. You're looking at a family that loves art and holds salons and serves as a mouthpiece for a brand of liberal politics that the Nazis were terrified of. This is going to be target number one. Right? Of course it is...

MANDY PATINKIN: The rise of the Mosse name starts in 1867 with Rudolf Mosse. Journalist Matthew Shaer wrote about the Mosses for the Smithsonian.

MATTHEW SHAER: The patriarch of the family, Rudolf Mosse, who had come from relatively humble beginnings, had made his way to Berlin, had started in advertising, and then had built this massive newspaper fortune.

MANDY PATINKIN: Roger Strauch is a Mosse descendant.

ROGER STRAUCH: That publishing empire included The New York Times of Germany, the *Berliner Tageblatt*.

MANDY PATINKIN: The *Berliner Tageblatt* was the newspaper of record. It played a major role in shaping Germany's cultural and political conversations.

MATTHEW SHAER: If you're going to a pre-Internet time and you think about how people got their politics or how people understood the world. It was all through newspapers.

MANDY PATINKIN: The *Berliner Tageblatt* had one of the largest circulations in all of Germany. Everyone from the butcher to the politician read it. The Mosse newspaper took a liberal line, especially in the 1910s and 20s.

MATTHEW SHAER: When we're thinking about the liberalism of the Mosse family and how to define it and how to think about it. We're thinking of, at a fundamental level, support for democracy.

MANDY PATINKIN: Rudolf Mosse - the founder of it all - was devoted to the country where he built his wealth.

Rudolf was proud to be Jewish. For instance, the Mosse Group also published the *CV Zeitung*, the newspaper of the leading Jewish civil rights organization in the country.

ROGER STRAUCH: But he was also, quite frankly, even a prouder German. He most certainly did appreciate the opportunity he had to build something from nothing, and that he did so within the country that he was so proud to be a part of.

MANDY PATINKIN: And that German pride could be seen in his art collection - as he became a supporter of the arts.

MATTHEW SHAER: In the Jewish Museum in Berlin, there's this small painting which shows the Mosse family in Renaissance garb. And when we think about the Renaissance era and we think about paintings or portraits like that, we think of the patrons of the arts and the Mosse family was like that, that's how they saw themselves and that's how they were.

MANDY PATINKIN: Rudolf Mosse acquired a vast collection. He had a Rubens painting and works by the influential German-Jewish impressionist Max Liebermann. But Rudolf's pieces mainly focused on German realism.

To Rudolf, his collection had a special meaning. It symbolized the hard fought rise of German Jews during this time. In the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. It sealed the deal in terms of his belonging in German culture. It meant he had arrived.

One of Rudolf's most prized pieces was *Three Dancing Maidens*.

MATTHEW SHAER: The sculpture is part of a fountain. And its girls, their arms connected and they're dancing. And they form the periphery of the fountain

MANDY PATINKIN: It's a beautiful sculpture. Dynamic. Joyful. You want to link arms with the three maidens and join their dancing circle.

MATTHEW SHAER: Mosse wanted it to be big because he wanted it in his courtyard of his palace in Berlin.

MANDY PATINKIN: Nineteen years after he commissioned *Three Dancing Maidens*, Rudolf Mosse died in 1920. His publishing empire and his art collection passed into the hands of his daughter, Felicia, and his son-in-law, Hans Lachmann-Mosse, who added his wife's prestigious last name to his own. The same Hans who would come face to face with the Nazi officer and his revolver.

That's when he was forced to swallow a bitter pill. And when he saw first hand that his family's belonging was conditional. The rug could be pulled out from under them and from under all German Jews... at any moment.

Hitler had been railing against the press long before he became chancellor of Germany.

Lügenpresse - or lying press - was a well used Nazi slur. And the Mosses were a prime target.

MATTHEW SHAER: It's very hard to envision or imagine a greater threat to the growing power of the Nazi Party than the Mosse family

MANDY PATINKIN: In 1925, Hitler described the content of their newspapers as "clamour." And he mocked the idea that the Mosse-owned *Berliner Tageblatt* was an important national paper.

In a speech in 1930, Hitler drew a line in the sand between the Nazis and the Mosse family. He said that if Germany were to think democratically like the Mosse family's main newspaper then, in a few decades, the German race would be extinct.

So when the Nazi officer sat down across from Hans Lachmann-Mosse in March 1933, put his gun on the desk and explained that Hans would be handing over his businesses and his art for the safe passage of his family...yes, it was an act of plunder...But it was also an ideological statement.

In May 1934, a year after that dreaded encounter that changed the lives of the Mosses forever, the Nazis were to auction the Mosse art collection. Hans was furious. He penned a letter - now in the LBI's archives - to his daughter.

He wrote: "The Collection is to be auctioned on the 28th of this month, and, to my horror, this will also include things that have not even been handed over. As in all matters, we will surely get short-changed since we cannot appeal to the German courts."

Like the German-Jewish culture that blossomed in pre-Hitler Germany, the Mosse art collection was scattered to the wind and partially destroyed. After the war, photos show the ruins of the grand Mosse palace. *Three Dancing Maidens*, the sculpture that stood in the courtyard - and symbolized so much for Rudolf Mosse - is nowhere to be seen.

For a long time, the Mosse family, now living in the United States, had no avenue to get back what the Nazis stole. But they never forgot what they were forced to leave behind. It wasn't until the 1990s, after the reunification of Germany, that German Jews were able to get some of their property back, including the Mosse's. But not their vast art collection. Mosse heirs are still trying to track down each piece - one at a time.

ROGER STRAUCH: I assembled a team of people, who would help me do the really hard work to find the art.

MANDY PATINKIN: Roger Strauch - a Mosse descendant.

ROGER STRAUCH: And then prove its provenance and its relationship to the Mosse family and in particular, be able to legally prove that it belonged to the Mosse family and that it was illegally confiscated by the Nazis 90 years ago.

MANDY PATINKIN: The Mosse heirs and their investigative team work with the German government and German institutions to help find their art. And in some cases - successfully. The Mosse family managed to get some of their pieces back or properly attributed as belonging to them.

But a piece the family is still trying to track down - the one commissioned by Rudolf Mosse all of those years ago - is *Three Dancing Maidens*. And they're not the only ones.

On a visit to New York, an investor named Wally Mersereau is strolling through Central Park. It's the year 2000. He stops to admire a sculpture of three dancing girls set on top of a fountain. In fact, Wally admires it for the next decade, every time he makes his way to New York.

During one of those trips, he decides he wants to know more about the fountain he loves in Central Park. The one that makes him happy every time he sees it. So Wally does a deep dive. He learns that the original was commissioned by a man named Rudolf Mosse in Germany back in 1901.

To his surprise, Wally also finds out that other versions of the fountain exist - including another two just as big as the one in Central Park. And all three look like Rudolf Mosse's fountain - and were created by the same sculptor.

MATTHEW SHAER: The ones that are full size are the ones that ended up in Central Park in New York, in a park in Antwerp, and then the one that's in the courtyard of the Burg Schlitz castle

MANDY PATINKIN: The Burg Schlitz - now operating as a hotel isn't far from Berlin. It looks like a fairy tale castle.

MATTHEW SHAER: It is really beautiful and it overlooks all these rolling hills. And in the back is a forest with paths through it. And that's where the fountain is...

MANDY PATINKIN: So, to recap, there are three fountains that look like the one that once stood in Rudolf Mosse's palace - the Central Park one, the Antwerp one, and the Burg Schlitz one. Could any of these be the fountain commissioned by Rudolf Mosse himself?

While Wally Mersereau's investigation is happening, the Mosse family is also searching for Rudolf's fountain. And eventually, the two investigations collide - in 2017 - when Wally shares his findings with the Mosse family. Here's what we know from those two investigations.

MATTHEW SHAER: So what happens is this really interesting process of elimination.

MANDY PATINKIN: Turns out the New York fountain went directly from the sculptor to the estate of an affluent lawyer, and from there to Central Park. It hasn't moved since. So this one isn't the Mosse fountain. The Antwerp fountain was erected around 1910 and has never left Belgium. This isn't the Mosse fountain either. That leaves the one at Burg Schlitz in Germany. Where did it come from?

MATTHEW SHAER: The castle where the sculpture ended up, had originally been built as the summer palace for a 19th century count. And then it had passed into the hands in the thirties of this guy, Emil von Stauss, who was a really close friend of Nazi leadership, specifically of Hermann Göring.

MANDY PATINKIN: Hermann Göring was one of the most powerful figures in the Nazi Party and later convicted of war crimes.

MATTHEW SHAER: And so there is a direct connection there, right, between the Nazi leadership and the residence where this sculpture ended up.

MANDY PATINKIN: So was this the Mosse fountain? Was it sold to a well-connected Nazi sympathizer and brought to his castle?

MATTHEW SHAER: With the other ones, again, you could say, okay, I know exactly where this came from. I can trace it back. But with this one the provenance is fuzzier. One of the people that Wally Mersereau finds is a forester. He's an older guy who by the time I started reporting this story, was long since dead. This guy says, okay, you know, I remember being told that it came from the home of a publisher. So all of that lines up, right? That makes sense, that's a good connection to the Mosse family.

MANDY PATINKIN: But broken telephone isn't enough for Roger and his team of researchers - called MARI - the Mosse Art Research Initiative. What also turns MARI's attention to Burg Schlitz are auction papers...Nazi auction papers from the 1930s.

MATTHEW SHAER: And when the investigators and MARI are looking over the auction catalogs, what they find is a notation for a fountain, which is sold for the equivalent, astonishingly, of about \$22 US. \$22 US, you know, almost 100 years ago, but still not that much. Anyway, this is almost certainly the fountain that had belonged to Rudolf Mosse. And that timing lines up to when it goes to this house, this grand hotel in the German countryside.

MANDY PATINKIN: In 2011, the castle hotel at Burg Schlitz is purchased by a man named Armin Hoeck. He and his wife are award-winning hoteliers.

MATTHEW SHAER: These kind of restitution cases, often what happens is if it's a museum or even if it's a private individual, people come around pretty quickly because

they say, Oh, I have art that belongs to somebody else that has somehow ended up in my possession. I'm going to do my best to give it back or at least open up this conversation. What happens with Armin Hoeck and his hotel is sort of the opposite.

MANDY PATINKIN: Hoeck has only spoken publicly about the Mosse family's claim on *Three Dancing Maidens* a handful of times. In April 2016, Nordkurier, a local German newspaper quoted him as saying that it was first necessary to prove that the fountain at his hotel was, in fact, the same one that belonged to the Mosse family. He said he'd be the last person to turn a blind eye if there was ironclad proof of the sculpture's provenance. He then added, quote, "But I will do everything to make sure that this fountain stays at Burg Schlitz."

What's written on the Burg Schlitz hotel website is that the fountain originally stood in the courtyard of a department store in Berlin - the Wertheim. But there's no evidence for this, and there's no record of the sculptor ever producing a copy of *Three Dancing Maidens* for this store.

Speaking to his local newspaper again, this time a few months later in September 2016, Hoeck says that Mosse descendants and their lawyers are out for money and, quote, "they won't get it."

MATTHEW SHAER: He's using both arguments at once, right? He's saying they're trying to extort me. But also this is probably not the sculpture. And even if it is the sculpture, I don't really know who it should actually belong to because I just bought the hotel and I just ended up with this sculpture.

ROGER STRAUCH: The owners are not interested in any discussion and they have been quoted in fashion to suggest that they are entirely unsympathetic to the claim and basically have said, owners keepers and losers weepers.

MANDY PATINKIN: And, in this case, "owners keepers, losers weepers" seems to be an accurate reflection of German law.

Germany's agreed to an international declaration that's committed to returning Nazi-looted art. But the principles of the declaration apply to public institutions...and not to private owners.

MATTHEW SHAER: Because the owner of the hotel, Hoeck, is an individual and because he bought the hotel and can plausibly say, okay, I don't know where exactly this sculpture came from. I just bought the hotel. I can't be held responsible for anything else. It really does become a legal stalemate because, yes, he could be put under moral pressure to give back the artwork. That same pressure that would apply to a museum does not apply to him.

MANDY PATINKIN: While reporting this story, Matthew Shaer's requests to speak with the hotel owner, Armin Hoeck, don't get him anywhere. So Matthew makes a last ditch

effort. He takes a trip to Germany to see the fountain for himself and to meet the hotel owner in person.

MATTHEW SHAER: So in 2017, I got up to the hotel and it's this palatial, palatial residence. And there are people sitting outside having drinks, and there's these big gardens, and I went into this big, big, beautiful, open area. And there was the fountain in this clearing. And it was really, you know, after reading about it for so long and seeing photos, it was pretty astonishing to see it in real life, because it is really beautiful. It's very alive.

MANDY PATINKIN: Matthew stands there and admires the fountain. He admires the grounds. He takes some pictures. And then he heads inside the hotel.

MATTHEW SHAER: I went to the front desk and I said, I'd like to speak to Mr. Hoeck about the property. And the woman at the front desk said, About what?

She was standing in front of a counter, behind her was the was the big main office of the hotel, and the door was open a little bit and I could see Armin Hoeck in there. And the receptionist said, He's in a meeting. I could see him in there and he was not on a phone call. He was just typing. And I said, I can wait. And she said, The meeting's going to take a really long time. Can he get back to you? And it was clear that he just was not going to talk to me.

When I got back to the United States, it was weeks of trying to get in touch with him. I had an email address for him. And finally I tried his attorneys and they said, I'm not available to talk, not interested in talking. And that's where things stood. And amazingly, that's where things stand now.

MANDY PATINKIN: We also tried to reach out to Armin Hoeck and received the same response in an email from his staff at Burg Schlitz. It reads: "He's not available for a comment now or in the future. He would appreciate to not be contacted regarding this matter again."

Roger Strauch isn't giving up, not only in the case of *Three Dancing Maidens*, but to recover all of the art expropriated from the Mosses.

ROGER STRAUCH: I took it on. Because, I felt that most importantly, it'd be an opportunity to reestablish the importance of the Mosse name in German history, because there were a lot of efforts to try to push that Mosse name aside

MANDY PATINKIN: Getting these works back isn't just about making sure the Nazis don't win in the end. It's also an act of restoration. Not of art, but of one's place in the past...for the future.

ARCHIVE THROW: The LBI Library and Archives contain extensive materials on generations of the Mosse family and their legacy in Germany and beyond...Like

personal papers of the publisher and philanthropist Rudolf Mosse and other Mosse family members. One of the Mosse newspapers - the CV Zeitung has been digitized in partnership with the University of Frankfurt. Learn more at www.lbi.org/mosse.

TEASER: On the next episode of Exile...

She's spent a lifetime on the frontlines of change.

DON KOLLISCH: She was a bohemian. She was a radical.

URI BERLINER: She always wanted to be engaged.

KATE WEIGAND: She just always had this desire to be a world changer.

But it all started in New York. A young refugee finds community among socialists - who, like her, want a revolution. Though things aren't always perfect.

Eva Kollisch from refugee to lifelong radical...on Exile.

CREDITS: Exile is a production of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Antica Productions.

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Executive Producers include Katrina Onstad, Stuart Coxe and Bernie Blum. Senior Producer is Debbie Pacheco. Produced by Anthony Cantor. Associate Producers are Hailey Choi and Emily Morantz. Research and translation by Isabella Kempf. Sound design and audio mix by Philip Wilson, with help from Cameron McIver. Theme music by Oliver Wickham.

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