

Too little, too late

Audio Greta Fattal 1:

I didn't want to go to Vienna at all. Once even the director of Christie's was here in Tel Aviv. She persuaded me to come to Vienna for a day and a half. She said she would fly together with me, pick me up and that I could fly business class. But I repeatedly refused. Then I received a letter from Hofrat Gross saying they would really like for me to come. I thought about it, but if I was to go to Vienna, then it should not be for more than a day and a half: the day of my arrival, another day at the auction and then I would fly back.

They agreed to this and I came to Vienna. They were really lovely. They sent me a car with a lady and a gentleman who showed me all kinds of things that he didn't need to show me, because I knew the way from the airport to Vienna. We all stayed at the Hilton, all the people who participated in the auction. In the evening this lady wanted to take me directly to the Museum of Applied Arts. But I was too exhausted.

Audio Greta Fattal 2:

The lady said it would be an early morning the next day. She said, "I'll see you downstairs at eight for breakfast." Then she came back and took me to the museum over there and showed me all the rooms where the things were stored before the auction. I had also been invited to the Kultusgemeinde by Hofrat Gross, the head of the Jewish Community. They'd wanted to give me the paintings personally. In the meantime I had been at the auction and I was deeply touched. Because with each painting it felt like a knife to the heart, and each time I thought: God knows who this once belonged to? Or who that once belonged to?

Audio Greta Fattal 3:

And next to staff there were lots of elderly Jews who had come to the auction. They thought they might be able to purchase something to remember their friends or relatives. But the prices went up incredibly. The people at Christie's did such a fantastic job. They really made the maximum profit and the auction a great success. They all worked so hard. I must say, hats off to Christie's.

In the afternoon we went to the Kultusgemeinde by taxi. Hofrat Gross told me, "We have a very large vault and that's where your paintings are. We can't leave such valuable paintings lying around downstairs." And then he took me up to see the paintings. There was a photographer with us. I looked at the paintings and it was horrible. They were so rotten, so moldy. They smelled so bad, like death. It was horrible.

Audio Greta Fattal 4:

There was an art historian with us, too. She says, "Don't just turn away from the paintings like that, once they're restored they'll be absolutely fantastic." Then I say, "Yes, these are the paintings I remember, but they really aren't. That's not what they looked like. They are exactly the same drawings, but it is just horrible what they have done to them."

Then the art historian says to me, "Listen, if you have a good restorer, he will bring the paintings back to their original state." And that's true. So the Jerusalem Museum stepped in and had somebody work on them. Then someone from the Tel Aviv Museum. I must say, it's quite fantastic what they've

done. They made the paintings come alive again. It probably cost a lot of money, but it was well worth it.

Audio Greta Fattal 5:

My father was a passionate collector of paintings. These two hung side by side in the living room. There were many paintings in the living and dining rooms that had sliding doors between them. We were especially interested in these particular paintings because they showed the sea. We were also attracted to how the Dutchmen tended to their fishing and how people dressed in those days. That was really something. To us, it was like a dream. And because the ceilings were so high the paintings didn't seem as big as they are here with this low ceiling. The rooms in the old buildings in Vienna were indeed very big, that was quite standard.

Audio Greta Fattal 6:

When we were children the sea was so far away to us. It seemed so unlikely that we would ever see it. Sometimes, for very long periods at a time, my brother and I would sit in front of these paintings and say, "What would we do if we could go swim in the sea or go aboard a boat like that?" And, of course, being children we imagined all sorts of things. Children have such a lively imagination. But I don't remember exactly what I thought back then. I only recall these paintings so vividly because we sat in front of them so often.