

Julius Böhler Art Gallery, Munich**Inventory description**

Ownership: Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich.

Name of Record Group: ZI München/Photothek, Archiv Julius Böhler.

Quantity: 7,831 photo folders, 29,922 object index cards, 3,790 customer index cards.

Inclusive Dates: 1903–1993.

Acquisition: 2015.

Provenance: Florian Eitle-Böhler, Starnberg.

Historical Overview:

Julius Böhler (1860–1934) was born in Schmalenberg near Sankt Blasien in the Black Forest. Initially active in the peddler trade, he soon specialized in the itinerant trade of antiques – in particular furniture and sculpture, later also paintings (Old Masters) and arts and crafts. In 1879, he moved from Allensbach in Baden to **Munich**, where he opened a retail store in 1880. Böhler was not formally trained as an art dealer, but acquired the necessary knowledge on the job. He quickly gained a high reputation among collectors and museums and became a successful art dealer. Due to his close business connections with the Prussian museum administration, he received the title of "Royal Prussian Court Antiquarian" from Emperor Wilhelm II in 1895. In 1906, the Bavarian Prince Regent Luitpold appointed him "Royal Bavarian Court Antiquarian." His exceptional position in the Munich art business was also reflected in the acquisition of the property at Briennerstrasse 12, where by 1905 Böhler built, according to plans by Munich's star architect of the time, Gabriel von Seidl (1848–1913), a prestigious and splendid building in the Italian palazzo style with twenty exhibition rooms.

After the turn of the century, the sons of the company founder pushed ahead with business expansion. The eldest son **Julius Wilhelm Böhler** (1883–1966) joined his father's business as a partner in 1906 after training as an art dealer in Paris and London. The youngest son **Otto Alfons Böhler** (1887–1950), a partner since 1910, founded the **Kunsthandlung Böhler und Steinmeyer** in **New York** in the same year. For this purpose, he joined forces with the art dealer Fritz Steinmeyer (1880–1959), originally based in Cologne. The branch in New York mainly offered goods on consignment from Munich.

The Munich Gallery was one of the first art trading houses in Germany and achieved its strongest growth in the years before the First World War. In 1919 Julius Wilhelm Böhler, who remained a partner of the Munich house until 1954, moved to Lucerne, where he received Swiss citizenship in 1935. From 1928, the Munich headquarters was run by his son **Julius Harry Böhler** (1907–1979), together with his uncle **Otto Alfons Böhler** and the art historian **Hans Sauer mann** (1885–1960), who had joined the

company in 1916 and was a partner from 1922 to 1956. Fritz Steinmeyer joined the company as a silent partner in 1926. After the collapse of foreign business during the First World War and capital losses as a result of inflation, the company again took a significant boost from 1925. This was largely due to the increase in foreign sales. But even in the boom years from 1927 to 1929, sales did not reach the business volume of the pre-war period. The company's founder Julius Böhler retired as a shareholder in 1930. The world economic crisis caused major losses in the balance sheet from 1930 to 1934. It was not until 1936 that consolidation took place, well above the level of the early 1920s. And this despite the decline in foreign business, which was severely curtailed with the start of the Second World War.

In **1919**, **Julius Wilhelm Böhler** initiated the founding of **Kunsthandel AG** in **Lucerne** together with **Fritz Steinmeyer**. Both took over the management of the company. The Munich headquarters took a stake in the company's share capital from 1925. At the same time, they formed a community of interest for close cooperation on the international art market, like joint purchases and exchanges of goods. With the world economic crisis, the Lucerne company also temporarily fell into the red.

At the beginning of the 1920s, **Julius Wilhelm Böhler** re-established business contacts with American art collectors that had been interrupted by the war, in particular with the American circus magnate and art collector John Ringling (1866–1936). Beginning in 1925, he advised and assisted the American in building his art museum in Sarasota, Florida. At the beginning of **1928**, together with **Fritz Steinmeyer** and with Ringling's participation, he then founded the company **Böhler & Steinmeyer Inc.** in **New York**, in which Kunsthandel AG in Lucerne and Julius Böhler Art Gallery in Munich held shares. The first business year closed with an exorbitant profit, but due to the world economic crisis the company fell into the red from 1931 and went into liquidation in 1933.

In **1928**, with the participation of the art dealers **Heinrich and Heinz Steinmeyer**, a branch office (**Julius Böhler KG**) was founded in **Berlin**, which was, however, closed in 1936.

After World War II, **Julius Gustav Böhler** (1929–2010), the grandson of the company's founder, joined the firm as a partner in 1956 and became sole owner after the death of his father Julius Harry in 1979. The company continued to maintain its position as one of Munich's most important art dealers. However, in 2004 – after 124 years – the headquarters in Munich were closed.

Still family-owned, Julius Böhler Art Gallery continues its tradition in **Starnberg** near Munich under the management of **Florian Eitle-Böhler**, specializing in European sculpture, Kunstkammer objects, and high-quality applied arts from the early Middle Ages to the 19th century.

Archival Description:

1.) **7,831 photo folders** with photographs taken by professional photographers (exact dates unknown, approx. 1903 to 1993). About one third of the photo archive documents the artworks traded by Böhler and contains a considerable number of original expert reports and appraisals.

2.) **29,922 object index cards**, including 15,925 index cards (33,135 scans) of the Munich headquarters (M-System, 1903 to 1993), 8,401 index cards (16,496 scans) of Kunsthandel AG Lucerne, founded in 1919 by Julius Wilhelm Böhler and Fritz Steinmeyer (L-System, 1919 to 1975), and 5,596 index cards (11,890 scans) of the commission merchandise (K-System, 1920 to 1993). These card indexes document not only the objects (artists, titles, dimensions, techniques, materials, etc.) and the names of the persons and institutions involved (sellers, buyers, share-partners, etc.) but also contain references to trading activities, prices, provenances, restorations or secondary literature.

3.) **Customer card index** of **3,790** international collectors and dealers, museums and foundations. They often contain details of many transactions between the customers and the art dealer.

Processing Information: in progress since 2019 (WissKI database).

Access: only on demand.

Restrictions: the records might contain restrictions due to the right of personality.

Condition Information: good, but strong traces of use.

Related Material:

- [Record Group Böhler \(03 Unternehmen, F043 Julius Böhler\)](#), Bayerisches Wirtschaftsarchiv (BWA), Munich
- [Record Group Böhler, Kunsthaus, München](#), Deutsches Kunstarchiv im Germanischen Nationalmuseum (DKA), Nuremberg
- Record Group Steinmeyer, Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale Kunstmarktforschung (ZADIK), Cologne

Literature:

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- **Ebert, Anja:** „... so wär’s schon sehr nett wenn Sie recht bald wieder kommen könnten“. Die Geschäftsbeziehungen von Henri Heilbronner und Julius Böhler in der NS-Zeit, in: Anja Ebert, Timo Saalmann, Anne-Cathrin Schreck (ed.): Gekauft – Getauscht – Geraubt? Erwerbungen des Germanischen Nationalmuseums zwischen 1933 und 1945, Nuremberg 2017, p. 38–43
- **Goodman, Simon:** The Orpheus Clock. The search for my family's art treasures stolen by the Nazis, Scribe UK, 2015
- **Hopp, Meike:** Kunsthandel im Nationalsozialismus. Adolf Weinmüller in München und Wien, Cologne [u.a.] 2012
- **Hopp, Meike:** Art Trade Palaces – Galleries of art dealers as architectural task and their reception in Munich around 1900, in: Journal for Art Market Studies, 2, 2018
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- **Winkler, Richard:** Jüdische Kunstsammler als Kunden der Kunsthandlung Julius Böhler in München 1890–1938. In: Landesstelle für die nichtstaatlichen Museen in Bayern (ed.): Verantwortung wahrnehmen. Kulturgutverlust, Provenienzforschung und Restitution (Museumsbausteine 11), Munich / Berlin 2007, p. 89–101
- **Winkler, Richard:** Der Archivbestand der Münchner Kunsthandlung Julius Böhler im Bayerischen Wirtschaftsarchiv. In: Archive in Bayern 3 (2007), p. 39–48

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