



ARTWORK STOLEN OVER THREE DECADES AGO RETURNED TO OWNER

November 17, 2010

BOSTON, Mass. - The last of seven pieces of valuable artwork, stolen on Memorial Day in 1978 from a home in Stockbridge, were returned to their owner today by authorities.

In November of 2008, retired Massachusetts attorney, ROBERT R. MARDIROSIAN, of Falmouth, was sentenced to seven years in prison following a jury conviction on August 18, 2008, for possession of stolen goods. The case arose from the theft of seven pieces of art from a Stockbridge home in 1978 – the largest burglary from a private residence in Massachusetts history.

Upon the U.S. Supreme Court's rejection of Mardirosian's last appeal, the government is returning two paintings by Jean Janssen, titled *Woman Seated* and *Boy*, which are the last of the seven paintings stolen from the home of Michael Bakwin. The FBI had obtained these paintings from a Swiss friend of Mardirosian. The other five paintings, *Portrait d'une Jeune Fille* and *Portrait d'un Jeune Homme* by Chaim Soutine, *Maison Rouge* by Maurice Utrillo, *Flowers* by Maurice de Vlaminck, and a still life by Cezanne that later sold for \$29.3 million at Sotheby's, were previously returned to Bakwin.

The evidence at trial showed that, on Memorial Day weekend in 1978, seven pieces of valuable artwork, including the Cezanne painting, *Bouilloire et Fruits*, were stolen from Bakwin's Stockbridge home. Mardirosian, now retired, practiced law for years in Massachusetts prior to his retirement. He had secretly held the stolen paintings since shortly after the 1978 theft, when the alleged thief, David Colvin, whom Mardirosian represented in another case, left them with him. Colvin was shot and killed in 1979.

Mardirosian maintained possession of the stolen artwork in Massachusetts until 1988, when he moved the paintings out of the United States and eventually to a Swiss bank for safekeeping. Mardirosian sought to profit from the stolen paintings by, among other things, demanding a finder's fee of \$1 million. Mardirosian was able to keep his possession of the paintings secret by working through lawyers and others in London and Switzerland, as well as a Panamanian shell company he created just for the paintings, Erie International Trading Co. (Erie).

Mardirosian attempted to move the stolen paintings to London for sale. However, an investigation by the Art Loss Register (ALR) determined that the artwork was stolen. ALR is a London-based company that maintains a comprehensive database of stolen artwork. Auction houses, such as Sotheby's, retain ALR's services when performing due diligence on artwork to be auctioned.

ALR alerted the rightful owner that his stolen paintings had surfaced and ultimately, on October 15, 1999, brokered an "agreement" between the owner and Erie – Mardirosian's Panamanian shell corporation – whereby Erie handed over the most valuable painting, the Cezanne, in exchange for the owner's relinquishing all claims to the remaining six pieces of artwork. At the time, the remaining six paintings were valued at approximately \$1 million. Two months later in December, the owner auctioned the Cezanne through Sotheby's in London for \$29.3 million.

Mardirosian later sought to sell the remaining six stolen paintings in 2003. Mardirosian arranged to have the paintings brought to a Swiss bank for valuation and authentication by Sotheby's. In April 2005, Mardirosian arranged for four of the six paintings to be sent to Sotheby's for transport from Geneva to Sotheby's in London - after which the owner filed a lawsuit seeking to void the 1999 "agreement" with Erie.

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United States Attorney Carmen M. Ortiz and Richard DesLauriers, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation - Boston Field Division, made the announcement today.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Art Theft Unit with assistance from the Art Loss Registry. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jonathan F. Mitchell and Ryan M. DiSantis of Ortiz's Economic Crimes Unit.

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