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San Jose Mercury News (California)

October 5, 2009 Monday

## **Herhold: A curious case of art theft**

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**SECTION:** NEWS; Local; Columnists; Columnists

**LENGTH:** 908 words

Eleven days ago, two Pebble Beach men reported an extraordinary art theft that has become more extraordinary as the news has dribbled out. The pair told Monterey County sheriff's deputies that thieves had broken into their expensive rental home and taken more than \$60 million of art, including works by Jackson Pollock, Rembrandt, Matisse and Miro.

If the owners' estimates were correct, the theft may be second in value only to the famous 1990 heist at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, where thieves posing as police tied up two guards and escaped with works by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Degas. That theft, which has never been solved, has been pegged at \$300 million.

But an odd reaction has come from the art world. In my reporting, I've detected skepticism about aspects of the crime, particularly about the lack of insurance and the finding of a ransom note a few days after sheriff's deputies combed through the house.

"No one in their right mind brings a collection like that to a private home without security," said Thomas McShane, an ex-FBI agent who has written a book about art theft and contends that the Pebble Beach report raises red flags. "You have to have those works in a secure facility. You're jeopardizing the integrity of the art by leaving them around unsecured."

The men who reported the theft, Angelo Benjamin Amadio, 31, and retired oncologist Dr. Ralph Kennaugh, 62, both recently arrived in California from Boston and describe themselves as "business partners." They told deputies that thieves apparently climbed through an unlocked window at their \$5 million rental home on Sunridge Road, a stucco-and-stone villa with a view of the ocean.

Amadio, who once ran a puppy business in Boston, was quoted as saying the thieves had also taken a laptop with records of the art and its origins. He told reporters that the collection was uninsured or largely uninsured because the cost would have been prohibitive. Amadio said very few people even knew the art had been moved to Pebble Beach.

Then, a week ago, came a bombshell. The men announced that a ransom note which included a death threat had been found in the home, apparently missed in the initial search. The sheriff's department put out a release saying the disclosure of this evidence to the media might have compromised the "integrity of the investigation." A round of finger-pointing ensued.

Initially, the number of stolen pieces was numbered at 13, which happened to be the same number of works stolen in the Gardner museum heist. Later, the two men increased that number to 30, saying they had discovered new pieces missing in a complete inventory. The 4-by-7 foot Pollock alone was reported to be worth as much as \$20 million.

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Why the skepticism from the art community? I talked to **Mark Durney**, who maintains the blog Art Theft Central ([www.arttheftcentral.com](http://www.arttheftcentral.com)), which carefully follows worldwide art thefts but has yet to report on the Pebble Beach heist. Durney does not accuse the men of misleading detectives. But he says the experts he's talked with see a number of curious aspects to the case.

Durney points out that it's unusual, though not inconceivable, that a collection worth as much as \$80 million would have been as little known as this one was. He also notes that the Pollock, which has gone unnamed in news reports about the theft, has never been put up for auction or public sale, so it's hard to judge its value.

And last, he joins ex-FBI agent McShane in noting that it wouldn't make sense for collectors of this caliber to go without insurance, particularly when they are moving art. Durney says the estimates of yearly premiums for a collection like the Pebble Beach one run less than .2 percent less than \$160,000 per year for an \$80 million collection.

I couldn't reach Amadio and Kennaugh, although I drove down to Pebble Beach and left my business card on their door. I did talk with their attorney, Vicki St. John, who told me that the pair had invited insurance experts to give them quotes. "I know they (the quotes) were more than they wanted to pay," St. John said.

She added that her clients "had no idea of what things were currently worth." So it is possible that a major collection assembled by Kennaugh over 30 years simply wasn't assessed properly. Because I'm a diligent reporter, however, I should mention the puppies.

In his years in Boston, Amadio ran a company called Manx Puppies, which offered to ship thoroughbred puppies to buyers. A site called Ripoff Report ([www.ripoffreport.com](http://www.ripoffreport.com)) lists a number of complaints about the way he dealt with customers.

One of those complaints came from a woman who listed her name only as "Valerie" from West Hills, CA. She said Amadio in 2007 sold her a flea-infested dog with a genetic defect that forced her to spend \$5,000 on hip replacement surgery. "He guarantees his dogs but he never contacts you once you get one," she wrote.

A rebuttal note on the Web site, apparently from Manx Puppies, dismissed Valerie's complaint as "false and malicious." The Monterey Herald quoted Amadio as saying that 99 percent of the complaints were lies. Attorney St. John said no customers had ever submitted a warranty claim to the company.

I'll end it there. The puppies arguably have nothing to do with the art. But this case still has unanswered questions. If it were a stock, the art world would be selling it short.

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**LOAD-DATE:** October 7, 2009

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** Two Pebble Beach residents say this painting by Miro was stolen from their rented home.

Stolen drawing described as 'Dutch Woman' by Vincent Van Gogh

Two Pebble Beach residents say this painting by Miro was stolen from their rented home.

Two Pebble Beach residents say this drawing by Renoir was stolen from their rented home.

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper