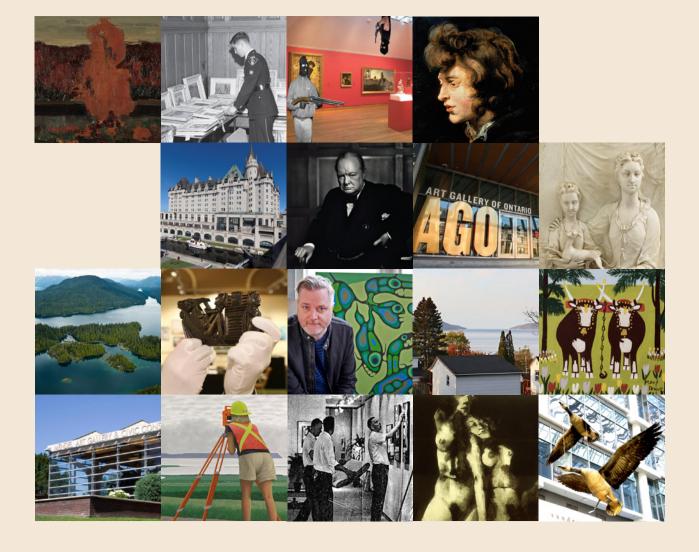
OCTOBER 21, 2022

STEALING THE SHOW ART CRIME IN CANADA

Last week's publication of The Great Canadian Art Fraud Case: The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson Forgeries by Jon S. Dellandrea had us take a look at this case and some of the most notorious art crimes in Canadian history.





It's been said that "a work of art should be like a well-planned crime," but the opposite may be just as true. The long lineup of crimes committed against art in Canada possesses cinematic, albeit horrifying, qualities. Stealth operations have been conducted both in the middle of the night and in broad daylight in such places as a museum, a luxury hotel, a busy train station, a shopping mall, and even a private cottage, some of which have never been solved. Paintings, photographs,

and sculptures have been robbed, vandalized, forged, and subject to moral infringement. The pain and shock of these art crimes linger. As collector Kenneth Thomson told the CBC after five ivory portraits dating back to the 17th century were mysteriously stolen and then returned, the theft "was the single most traumatic event in his life after the loss of loved ones."

Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

<u>1962–63</u> GROUP OF SEVEN FORGERY CASE



Thomas Chatfield in the manner of Tom Thomson, *Untitled*, n.d., Collection of Jon S. Dellandrea.



OPP Cadet James Redpath stacking paintings recovered as part of the art fraud case in 1962.

With its bursts of autumn colours and loose brushwork, this Canadian landscape painting by Oakville artist Thomas Chatfield does not merely capture the spirit of the iconic landscapes of Tom Thomson (1877–1917) and the Group of Seven, it also represents one of the most sensational forgery cases in the history of Canadian art. Chatfield was among a number of artists who emulated the style of Thomson and the Group as part of their own studies in landscape, but unbeknownst to them, mercenary dealers added signatures, plaques, frames, and even dirt to age their appearance and began selling them as Thomson and Group of Seven pieces. The forgeries culminated in a major criminal investigation and court case in 1962–63, a fascinating story that is explored in Jon S. Dellandrea's new book <u>The Great Canadian Art Fraud Case</u>.

Learn more

1972

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS HEIST



Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of Coolopolis Montreal.



Peter Paul Rubens, Head of a Young Man, n.d., Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Fifty years ago, on September 4, 1972, three masked men broke into the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) by rappelling down a rope from a skylight that was under repair. Once inside, they bound security guards and launched a messy and violent plunder that, despite its disorganization, resulted in the largest-ever art heist in Canadian history. After tripping an alarm, the thieves fled with fifty-seven items, including paintings by luminaries such as

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863). The chaos continued when the robbers demanded a ransom for the works. One piece was returned during the bungled negotiations, but as Simon Lewson in the *Walrus* describes, eventually the MMFA "gave up on the paintings and quietly billed their insurer." Dubbed the "Skylight Caper," the case, which should have a more prominent place in our cultural imagination, remains unsolved.

Learn more

2021-22

THEFT OF SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL PORTRAIT AT THE CHÂTEAU LAURIER







Yousuf Karsh, *Sir Winston Churchill*, 1941, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

Sometime between December 25, 2021, and January 6 of this year, someone walked into the Château Laurier hotel in Ottawa, took a famous portrait of Winston Churchill by the esteemed Canadian photographer <u>Yousuf Karsh</u> (1908– 2002) off the wall, and replaced it with a fake. The operation was so smooth that it took more than eight months for anyone to notice. The powerful portrait, known as "The Roaring Lion," is one of Karsh's best-known works and, according to the artist, "one of the most widely reproduced images in the history of photography." Still, a photograph of a politician—however famous—with more than one copy is a surprising target for an art crime. Experts suspect that the stolen piece may have already been sold on the illegal market and that the theft was likely an inside job. As CTV News reported, "if only the walls could speak."

Learn more

2004 IVORY MINIATURES STOLEN FROM THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO



Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



David Le Marchand, Portrait of Anne, Countess of Sunderland, with her Daughter Anne, c.1710, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Not all art thefts happen under cover of night. It was a busy Saturday afternoon in 2004 at the Art Gallery of Ontario when five ivory portraits, worth \$1.5 million, were brazenly taken from their locked glass cabinet. The portraits, which were presented on loan from collector Kenneth Thomson, were by esteemed ivory carver David Le Marchand (1674–1726) and included *Portrait of Anne, Countess of Sutherland, with her Daughter Anne*, c.1710. Two weeks after the theft, all five portraits were returned as mysteriously as they were taken, dropped off at a legal firm downtown. "Thomson said the theft was the single most traumatic event in his life after the loss of loved ones," notes a CBC article on the recovery of the precious artworks.

<u>Learn more</u>

Late 19th–Early 20th Century

REPATRIATION OF STOLEN HAIDA GWAII ARTIFACTS



Haida Gwaii, British Columbia.



Buxton Museum's Bret Gaunt with a repatriated argillite sculpture, courtesy of the *Buxton Advertiser*.

One of the most egregious forms of cultural violence enacted in this country was the state-sponsored theft of sacred objects from Northwest Coast and Western Subarctic Indigenous communities through the Potlatch Ban, a devastating piece of legislation that outlawed Indigenous ceremonies in Canada from 1884 to 1951. Author Gerald McMaster describes the ban as "a total assault on Haida culture," and many of the objects that were confiscated by the Canadian government were then displaced to national and international collections. Several items from the Haida Nation ended up in a museum in Buxton, Derbyshire (UK), where collections officer Bret Gaunt (right), while reflecting on their holdings, contacted Nika Collison, executive director of the Haida Gwaii Museum, to initiate the process of returning the artifacts, highlighting the urgent importance of community-centered cultural restitution in our country's journey towards reconciliation.

Learn more

Share this newsletter with friends who love Canada's art, or invite them to sign up here for our weekly dispatch.

2005 NORVAL MORRISSEAU FORGERY CASE



Barenaked Ladies guitarist Kevin Hearn with the painting *Spirit Energy of Mother Earth*, photograph by David Leyes.

When Barenaked Ladies guitarist Kevin Hearn purchased the painting *Spirit Energy of Mother Earth* from Toronto's Maslak McLeod Gallery for \$20,000 in 2005, he thought it was the work of the legendary Anishinaabe artist <u>Norval</u> <u>Morrisseau</u> (1931–2007). After Hearn loaned the piece to the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2010 for an exhibition, he was told that experts believed it was a forgery. As the shocking 2019 documentary <u>There Are No Fakes</u> by Jamie Kastner recounts, Hearn sued Maslak McLeod Gallery, and an investigation into the provenance of the painting during the court case led to the discovery of a longstanding Thunder Bay art forgery ring, which Kastner says is reliant on "the exploitation of Indigenous people" and "could be the largest art fraud scam in Canadian history."

Learn more

2020-21

STOLEN MAUD LEWIS PAINTINGS



Smith's Cove, Nova Scotia.



Maud Lewis, *Team of Oxen in Spring*, 1960s, Collection of CFFI Ventures Inc. as collected by John Risley.

The quiet hamlet of Smith's Cove in Nova Scotia was recently shaken up when two paintings by <u>Maud Lewis</u> (1901–1970), Canada's best-known folk artist, were stolen from a cottage sometime between September 2020 and May 2021. Similar in subject matter to the painting on the right, the pair of works are worth an estimated \$80,000 today. Their late owner, Van Davis Odell, bought them for \$5 each from Lewis herself in the early 1950s, and hung them on the wall of her cottage, where they remained for more than six decades—until the woman who has rented the property for several years noticed one day that they were missing. The RCMP's investigation is ongoing.

Learn more

2005 VANDALISM OF ALEX COLVILLE PAINTINGS AT MENDEL ART GALLERY



Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon.



Alex Colville, *Surveyor*, 2001, Collection of Sprott Securities, Toronto.

In January 2005, the exhibition *Alex Colville: Return* was drawing to a close at Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery after a two-year national tour when, on its last day, someone used a sharp object—possibly a paper clip—to deliberately mar two of the preeminent Maritime artist's paintings, *Surveyor*, 2001 (right), and *Woman with Revolver*, 1987. Although there were security guards monitoring the exhibition space, the gallery did not have any video surveillance in place. Alex Colville (1920–2013), who is acclaimed for his meticulously rendered realist canvases, was shocked by the vandalism of his art. "Why would someone attack something that I think isn't meant to do any damage?" he said. "To me, this is some kind of insanity."

Learn more

1965 ROBERT MARKLE CENSORSHIP COURT CASE



Photo from a Toronto Star article on the



Robert Markle, Lovers III, 1963, courtesy

removal of paintings from the Dorothy Cameron Art Gallery, Toronto, 1965, photograph by Reg Innell. of the CCCA Canadian Art Database.

The 1960s are remembered as an era of sexual liberation and "free love"—yet in May 1965, the morality police arrived at the group exhibition *Eros '65* at Toronto's Dorothy Cameron Gallery and seized seven works that were allegedly obscene. Five of them were from Hamilton-born artist Robert Markle's (1936–1990) Lovers series, including the painting on the right. Dorothy Cameron was convicted of exhibiting obscene artworks and closed her gallery. Defending the widely respected art dealer and her exhibition, art critic Harry A. Malcolmson wrote in the *Toronto Star* on May 29, 1965, "As this is written, there has not been a single individual, club, institution of any political or religious persuasion that has publicly protested of pornography at the Cameron Gallery Eros show."

Learn more

1982

TORONTO EATON CENTRE VIOLATES MICHAEL SNOW'S MORAL RIGHTS



Michael Snow, *Flight Stop*, 1979, Toronto Eaton Centre.



Close-up view of Michael Snow's *Flight Stop*, 1979, photograph by Doug Taylor.

Celebrated as a leading figure in new media and Conceptual art, Michael Snow (b.1928) made legal history when he successfully sued the Toronto Eaton Centre for violating his moral rights. At the centre of the lawsuit was Snow's sculptural installation *Flight Stop*, 1979, consisting of sixty flying geese breaking formation to land at the mall's south entrance. Made with a combination of fibreglass forms and photographs of a single goose, the famous work is seen by thousands of people every day. Snow sued the Eaton Centre in 1982 after Christmas decorators tied ribbons around the necks of the geese and refused to remove them. His precedent-setting victory preceded the formal recognition of moral rights in the 1988 amendment to the Copyright Act of Canada.

> Read more in ACI's <u>Michael Snow: Life & Work</u> by Martha Langford

Our entire collection of newsletters can be found on the ACI website, for you to read, share, and enjoy.

PAST NEWSLETTERS





Twitter

@artcaninstitute





Image Credits: [1] Thomas Chatfield in the manner of Tom Thomson, Untitled, n.d. Collection of Jon S. Dellandrea. [2] OPP Cadet James Redpath stacking paintings recovered as part of the art fraud case in 1962 York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, Toronto, Telegram fonds (ASC60921). [3] Heist at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts on September 4, 1972. Courtesy of Coolopolis Montreal. [4] Peter Paul Rubens, Head of a Young Man, n.d. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Photo credit: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. [5] Château Laurier hotel, Ottawa, 2014. Photograph by John A. Brebner. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. [6] Yousuf Karsh, Sir Winston Churchill, 1941, gelatin silver emulsion texture enhanced, 27.8 x 21.7 cm. Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (e010751643-v6). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc. © Estate of Yousuf Karsh. [7] Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photograph by Ryan Chow. Courtesy of the Varsity. [8] David Le Marchand, Portrait of Anne, Countess of Sunderland, with her Daughter Anne, c.1710, ivory, 19.1 x 12.7 x 3.8 cm. The Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.29216). Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario. © Art Gallery of Ontario. [9] Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. Courtesy of the BBC. Photo credit: April Orcutt. [10] Buxton Museum's Bret Gaunt with a repatriated argillite sculpture. Courtesy of the Buxton Advertiser. [11] Barenaked Ladies guitarist Kevin Hearn with the painting Spirit Energy of Mother Earth. Photograph by David Leyes. Courtesy of Cave 7 Productions Inc. [12] Smith's Cove, Nova Scotia. Courtesy of Smiths Cove Cottages. [13] Maud Lewis, Team of Oxen in Spring, 1960s. Collection of CFFI Ventures Inc. as collected by John Risley. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. [14] Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon. Photo credit: The Canadian Press / Ho. [15] Alex Colville, Surveyor, 2001, acrylic polymer emulsion on hardboard 36 x 62.3 cm. Collection of Sprott Securities, Toronto. © A.C. Fine Art Inc. [16] Photo from a Toronto Star article on the removal of paintings from the Dorothy Cameron Art Gallery, Toronto, 1965. Photo credit: Reg Innell / Toronto Star File Photo. [17] Robert Markle, Lovers III, 1963, tempera, 89 x 58.5 cm. Courtesy of the CCCA Canadian Art Database. [18] Michael Snow, Flight Stop, 1979, Toronto Eaton Centre. Collection of the artist. [19] Close-up

view of Michael Snow's Flight Stop, 1979. Photograph by Doug Taylor. Courtesy of Taylor on History.