

PROSECUTION BY ASST. U.S. ATTORNEY AND DOUBLE EAGLE CHRISTOPHER HUNTER LEADS TO CONVICTION IN HIGH-PROFILE INTERNATIONAL ART HEIST

--BY MELISSA BEECHER, SENIOR STAFF WRITER

AUGUST 2008 -- A recent prosecution by alumnus and Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Hunter, which led to the conviction of the head of an international ring of art thieves, was the culmination of a nearly year-long investigation that reportedly spanned three countries and involved the collective efforts of five national and international law enforcement organizations.

French national Bernard Jean Ternus pleaded guilty to conspiracy to transport stolen foreign commerce: four paintings taken from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nice, France. The charge stems from an August 2007 armed robbery that has been described as "brazen," since it reportedly took just 10 minutes for five men to steal paintings valued at \$6.3 million in broad daylight.



The masked thieves made off with four masterpieces, including "Cliffs Near Dieppe" by Claude Monet (shown at left), "The Lane of Poplars at Moret" by Alfred Sisley, "Allegory of Water" and "Allegory of Earth" both by Jan Brueghel the Elder.

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice; © Musée d'Orsay, Paris -- Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926). Cliffs Near Dieppe, 1897.

Hunter - who received a bachelor's degree in political science from the University in 1995, a JD degree from BC Law School in 1998, and now works in the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida - prosecuted the case with the help of investigators from the FBI, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, French National Police and Spanish National Police.

According to ABC News reports of the case, Hunter commended "the close cooperation [that resulted] in the simultaneous apprehension on two continents of numerous subjects and the recovery of all four stolen masterpieces. These agents and officers showed, once again, that art theft does not pay, and those who try to sell stolen art will be caught and prosecuted," he said.

Trial Attorney Scott Lawson of the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section of the Department of Justice also worked with Hunter on the case.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Ternus admitted to attempting to sell the stolen paintings to undercover FBI agents and French National Police. During a complex series of meetings that spanned Florida, Spain and France, Ternus and his associates orchestrated a €3 million (Euros) deal with undercover agents.

Several of the meetings were videotaped and numerous conversations were recorded, Hunter told the Associated Press.

The thieves were arrested on June 4, 2008 and the stolen art was recovered from a van in Marseilles, France.

In addition to conspiracy, Ternus pleaded guilty to visa fraud.

U.S. Attorney Alexander Acosta lauded the investigation and conviction.

"This investigation is a model of cooperative law enforcement in the fight against sophisticated international organized crime networks," Acosta said. "Thanks to the combined efforts of American, French and Spanish investigators works by Monet, Sisley and Breughel have been returned to their rightful owner."

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