

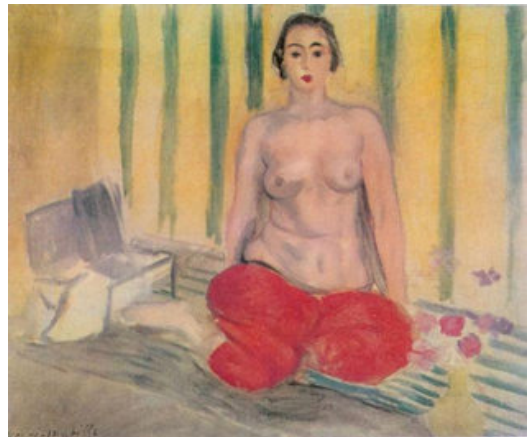
The Miami Herald 

Two sent to prison in plot to fence Matisse masterpiece in Miami Beach

A Miami man and Mexican woman were sentenced to prison for trying to fence a stolen Matisse masterpiece to FBI undercover agents in Miami Beach.

BY JAY WEAVER, January 22, 2013

A man and woman who teamed up to fence a stolen Matisse masterpiece last summer for \$740,000 to FBI undercover agents in Miami Beach were handed prison sentences Tuesday. A federal judge sentenced Pedro Antonio Marcuello Guzman, 46, of Miami, to about three years and Maria Martha Elisa Ornelas Lazo, 50, of Mexico City, to about two years for attempting to sell "Odalisque in Red Pants." It was stolen from a Venezuelan museum a decade ago. In late October, Marcuello pleaded guilty to conspiring to transport and sell stolen property and related charges, and Ornelas pleaded guilty to one conspiracy charge.



"Odalisque in Red Pants" by Henri Matisse

According to court records, FBI undercover agents posing as buyers tracked down the Henri Matisse painting - valued at \$3.7 million - and made arrangements to buy it from the pair. Ornelas brought the 1925 masterpiece through Miami International Airport to a hotel in Miami Beach in July

The missing painting had been swapped for a forgery at the Caracas Contemporary Art Museum. The museum purchased the piece in 1981 for more than \$400,000. It was on loan for a short time to a Spanish exhibit in 1997. In December 2002, the museum reported it stolen. A few months later, museum leaders told the public about the theft.

While the theft itself remains unsolved, Marcuello told the FBI it was an inside job, supporting museum director Rita Salvestrini's suspicions that the painting was taken by someone with access to the museum.

Investigators from Venezuela, Spain, France, Britain, Interpol, and the FBI pursued an array of leads, according to published reports.