

THE ART NEWSPAPER

US Attorney reveals more Abstract Expressionist fakes found in Queens

Letter filed with New York court hints at new evidence in the government's criminal investigation of art fraud case

By Laura Gilbert
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When it was discovered that one artist painted the more than 60 works peddled as Abstract Expressionist originals by the Long Island dealer Glafira Rosales, the revelation seemed incredible. As it turns out, the scheme to sell the fakes appears to be even larger than previously thought. In a letter submitted to the New York judge overseeing seven civil lawsuits brought by collectors who bought some of the paintings, the Manhattan US Attorney's Office discloses for the first time the results of an FBI search in August 2013 of the Chinese artist Pei Shen Qian's Queens home. A "substantial amount of evidence" was found there, the letter reveals, including more "abstract expressionist paintings, brushes, paints, canvases, and many other materials used to create the fake paintings". The government has so far identified 63 forgeries that Rosales brought to the New York galleries Knoedler and Julian Weissman.



The FBI found a "substantial amount of evidence" including "abstract expressionist paintings, brushes, paints, canvases, and many other materials used to create the fake paintings" at the Queens home search the Queens home of the Chinese artist Pei Shen Qian

The letter also makes clear that the government's criminal investigation into the art fraud is ongoing. To keep its findings secret, the letter was filed under seal on 24 January, before becoming part of the public record on 6 February. The lawyers involved in the civil suits brought against Rosales, Knoedler and the gallery's former director Ann Freedman say they did not know more paintings had been found until the letter was unsealed.

The US Attorney's office filed the letter in an attempt to halt pretrial hearings in the civil lawsuits involving the collectors John Howard and Domenico and Eleanore De Sole, because the expert testimony in those cases could "prematurely release information about the government's investigation". Jamie Martin of the Massachusetts-based company Orion Analytical, who examined the paintings at issue in Howard's and the De Soles' lawsuits, has also done forensic analysis for the government on the works found in Queens. As a result, "Martin has additional evidence that the paintings are fake and that Qian created them, but only Martin and the government have that evidence", the letter states. The judge, however, denied the US Attorney's request.

Howard and the other collectors allege Knoedler and Freedman knowingly sold them fakes. Knoedler and Freedman deny any wrongdoing. Knoedler sold its last painting acquired through Rosales in 2008 and the gallery shuttered in 2011.

Rosales pleaded guilty to tax evasion and money laundering last September, and admitted that the paintings she brought to Knoedler and Weissman are fakes. No one else has been charged in the



government's criminal investigation, and the US Attorney did not respond to inquiries. Despite Rosales' admission and the government's charges, the authenticity of the works is still being argued in the civil suits.

"There's no conceivable basis for anyone to believe they're real," says John Cahill, Howard's lawyer. "To the victims, it adds insult to injury that the defendants not only sold fakes and did not return the money, but are making them spend money" to prove the works are fake.

In the lawsuits, Knoedler and Freedman have so far not acknowledged that the paintings Rosales brought to the gallery are fakes. "We haven't seen the evidence in the government's possession and haven't been able to depose Rosales," says Freedman's lawyer Luke Nikas. "That's not to say that down the road we won't stipulate the works are fake."