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## Note to Forgers: Don't Forget the Spell Check

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When angry collectors started suing Knoedler & Company for selling dozens of multimillion-dollar forgeries, the gallery's former president, Ann Freedman, insisted that she and her colleagues had had no reason to think that any of the paintings were counterfeit.

"If Ann Freedman had any questions about these works, she and her husband would not have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in them," her lawyer, Nicholas A. Gravante Jr., said of the paintings attributed to modern masters like Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock.

Now, newly released documents in a continuing civil case show that at least one of the works bought in 2000 by Ms. Freedman herself contained a prominent clue that something was awry. The artist's signature was spelled incorrectly: Pollok instead of Pollock.

Knoedler, which closed in 2011 after 165 years in business, sold \$63 million worth of [fakes](#) over a 15-year period. All of them were provided by [Glafira Rosales](#), a Long Island dealer who pleaded guilty to fraud last fall, and [painted by the same man](#), who has since fled to China. He and two other co-conspirators have been

indicted, but federal prosecutors have not accused Knoedler or Ms. Freedman of any wrongdoing.

Photo



Top, the signature on a forgery sold by Knoedler. Above, Pollock's signature on an untitled 1951 ink on paper work.

Ten clients have sued the gallery and its former president, however, contending that they knew — or should have known — that the works were phony.

The “Pollok,” a 12-inch-by-18 inch drip painting in Pollock's classic style, was dated 1949. One of 40 works supplied by Ms. Rosales to Knoedler, it was sold directly to the Freedmans for \$280,000 in 2000, according to gallery records.

Luke Nikas, a lawyer for Ms. Freedman, said in an email that a conservator had concluded the work was genuine. “It is absurd to believe that Ms. Freedman would have paid nearly \$300,000 for the work, asked a world-renowned expert to examine the work, hung the work openly in her apartment for over a decade,” he wrote, “if she knew the work was a forgery or if she purchased the work to keep it hidden from critical eyes.” The Freedmans bought two other Rosales works, one attributed to Motherwell for \$20,000 in August 2000, and another attributed to Rothko in April 1997 for \$160,000 (paid for through a trade), Knoedler records show. Ms. Freedman also owned a share of another Rosales painting, one where Pollock's name was spelled correctly.

That supposed Pollock, sold to Jack Levy, a Wall Street executive, for \$2 million in 2001, was later returned to the gallery after Mr. Levy submitted the painting to an expert panel convened by the International Foundation for Art Research, which concluded it could not authenticate the work.

After Ms. Rosales's guilty plea, [Ms. Freedman told an interviewer](#), “I am as shocked as everybody, more shocked, as I am the central victim.”

John Cahill, a lawyer for a Knoedler customer who paid \$4 million for a fake, was skeptical of her response.

“Freedman, Knoedler and their so-called ‘experts’ claim not to have seen forgeries even when it was literally (mis)spelled out for them,” he wrote in an email.