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Trial begins (and goes on hold) for suspected Russian avant-garde forgers

Wiesbaden-based men accused of selling 18 fakes

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This picture, purportedly by Kazimir Malevich, is kept in the basement of the federal police in Wiesbaden. Its authenticity is being investigated. © DPA

Three members of a suspected Russian avant-garde art forgery ring are facing trial today, 10 February, in Wiesbaden, Germany. Itzhak H., 68, and Moez Ben H., 42, have been charged with fraud for selling 18 forgeries as genuine works by artists such as Kazimir Malevich, Alexei Jawlensky, Alexander Rodchenko and Natalia Goncharova. The suspected forgeries were allegedly sold through SMZ Gallery in Wiesbaden, which Itzhak H. co-owned and Moez Ben H. managed. A 41-year-old man, Adenande Ben H., the brother of one of the accused, has also been charged for assisting them.

Itzhak H. and Moez Ben H., who deny the charges, have been in custody since June 2013 after German police officers confiscated 1,000 works from apartments, offices and storage facilities across Germany, though the trial is now only limited to 18. The group is said to have links to Israel where police believe the forgeries were made.

UPDATE The trial was put on hold shortly after it began after the defence team said it was given too short notice about a change in the proceedings, requesting a one-week postponement. The court's decision has not yet been announced.