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Michigan art dealer sentenced to 41 months for running Modern art forgery scheme

Eric Spoutz was charged with selling fake works purportedly by De Kooning, Kline and Mitchell, that netted him \$1.45m

by [DAN DURAY](#) | 18 February 2017



Eric Spoutz

The Michigan art dealer Eric Spoutz has been sentenced to 41 months in prison, and three years supervised release, for wire fraud charges related to a scheme to sell forgeries of works purportedly by American Modern artists, the US Attorney's Office announced on 16 February. He was also ordered to forfeit the \$1.45m of "ill-gotten gains" he made off the sales, and to pay \$154,100 in restitution.

"Eric Spoutz used false and fictitious provenance to peddle his forged artwork to unsuspecting buyers, claiming they were masterpieces from Willem De Kooning, Franz Kline and Joan Mitchell," Preet Bharara, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement. "Our Office has a long history of investigating—and prosecuting—those who try to contaminate the art world with fraudulent artwork. Thanks to the outstanding investigative work by the FBI, Spoutz's alleged forgery mill is no longer in business."

Between 2003 and 2015, Spoutz used a complicated series of letters from law firms and galleries, along with sales receipts and in one case a letter bequeathing certain non-existent works to Dartmouth College, which had the FBI combing through files in Hanover, NH. Among the [museum collections Spoutz claims to have placed or given works](#) to are the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Spoutz's victims sprawled across the country as he attempted to shuffle off his wares at one auction house or another, including one unnamed auction site. He did so under a variety of aliases, among them John Goodman, James Sinclair, and, most amusingly, Robert Chad Smith.

"In your certified affidavit you state that the artworks came from your surrogate uncle Chad Smith," one victim writes in an email in the complaint. "Finding Chad Smith anywhere is almost impossible and made worse by the fact that the drummer for the Black Eyed Peas is named Chad Smith and he takes up the first 20 pages of Google... if you would be so kind as to either call me, answer my calls or email to me a way that I can establish who your uncle was I would greatly appreciate it."

No attorney is listed in the complaint and Spoutz did not respond to a request for comment through one of his many email addresses, but [according to the Detroit Free Press](#), he apologised before the sentence was announced and his lawyer argued that a troubled past led him to a life of crime.