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## Austrian Authorities Catch Six Dealers Attempting to Sell Fake Picasso Paintings

The suspects maintain they believed the works to be authentic.

[Alyssa Buffenstein](#), November 9, 2016



Police director Dr. Franz Prucher, Interior minister Mag. Wolfgang Sobotka, and General Franz Lang with a forgery. Photo courtesy Bundeskriminalamt.

Posing as art buyers, the Austrian authorities have arrested a ring of dealers selling forged paintings by Pablo Picasso, according to a statement released by the *Bundeskriminalamt* (criminal intelligence service) on Monday.

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The authorities received a tip at the beginning of the year about an Austrian-Slovenian group selling forged Picassos, using a room at a hotel at the Vienna airport as home base. The suspects were caught by undercover police, attempting to sell five Picasso forgeries for around €10 million (over \$11 million) each. Police obtained a catalogue of works for sale with prices as high as €72 million (\$79.7 million).

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A forged Picasso painting confiscated by Austrian authorities. Photo courtesy Bundeskriminalamt. Police could not rule out the possibility that the suspects were armed, so they were ambushed by the Austrian counter-terrorism unit EKO Cobra.

Five Austrian citizens were arrested, and further investigations discovered 14 forgeries of paintings by Picasso and Emil Nolde in their possession. Slovenian authorities were notified about the sixth suspect, who was then found to have been holding 66 artworks by 40 artists, including Gustav Klimt, Claude Monet, and Wassily Kandinsky, in his apartment.

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All suspects maintain they believed the works to be real, and that they had no intent to defraud buyers. The paintings were all signed, adorned on the back with stamps from respected galleries, accompanied with certificates of authenticity, and information about their provenance.

No information is available at this point about who made the paintings and whether the suspects have placed forged works with buyers prior to the arrests.