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Father, son get back \$2.8m they paid for fake art

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They win lawsuit against gallery, art collector over 13 paintings

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A Malaysian businessman and his father yesterday won their lawsuit to get back \$2.8 million they paid for 13 paintings, supposedly the works of renowned Indonesian artists, which turned out to be fakes.

Mr Denis Latimer, 52, who runs a construction company, and his father, Paul, 75, bought seven of the paintings from Singapore-based Dahlia Gallery for more than \$700,000. But these were assessed by an expert to be imitations worth at most US\$9,131 (S\$12,300).

The remaining six works were bought from Malaysian art collector Quah Beng Hoe for \$2.1 million.

Mr Denis Latimer said one of the gallery owners had put him in touch with Mr Quah.

The Latimers sued Mr Quah and the gallery for breach of contract, seeking the deals to be voided and the purchase price refunded.

They also sued the gallery owners, alleging that Mr Koh Hwee Khoon and Ms Pang Sau Mei had misrepresented the authenticity of the six paintings sold by the gallery.

Yesterday, the High Court ruled in favour of the Latimers.

Justice Kannan Ramesh awarded them damages and also ordered the 13 paintings to be returned to Mr Quah and the gallery.

The judge said Mr Koh, an artist with years of experience in Indonesian art, must have known the paintings were imitations. He found Mr Koh liable for fraudulent misrepresentation and Ms Pang liable for negligent misrepresentation.

Mr Denis Latimer, represented by Rajah & Tann lawyer Avinash Pradhan, said justice had been served.

In October 2011, he chanced upon Dahlia's exhibition booth at the Art Expo Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

Two paintings caught the eye of his companion, Mr C. J. Thomas, who had been helping him build an art collection for investment.

Mr Koh described them as Balinese Women At Sanur Cottage by Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur and Prayer, 1971 by S. Sudjojono.

The two men said they believed Mr Koh when he said the works were genuine and valuable. Mr Latimer paid US\$100,000 for them.

Ms Pang subsequently sent photos of three more paintings.

When Mr Thomas viewed the pieces at the gallery, Mr Koh showed him a stamp on the back of the frame of one, described as Morning Prayer, 1973 by Affandi, saying it was from a museum specialising in the artist's works. Mr Latimer bought the three paintings for \$300,000 in December 2011.

In March 2012, he bought two more works, including Rojak Seller by Lee Man Fong for \$270,000. When Mr Koh said these were from Mr Quah's collection, Mr Latimer dealt with Mr Quah for the remaining six works.

Mr Koh claimed the seven sold by the gallery were from a private collector named Zheng Jianzhi, but the judge said there was not a shred of evidence this person existed.