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FBI Warns There Could Be ‘Hundreds More’ Fake Postwar Paintings by Forgery Mastermind

The disgraced dealer has been put behind bars, but his fakes are thought to still be circulating in the market.

Caroline Elbaor



Eric Spoutz lecturing at a museum in Los Angeles in 2012. Image Courtesy Instagram.

In a move that reflects just how many fakes Eric Spoutz was pumping into the art market, the FBI's New York Art Crime Team has released a statement warning against purchasing works that could possibly be forgeries.

The Michigan-based art dealer, who was arrested in 2016, functioned under several aliases, including Robert Chad Smith, John Goodman, and James Sinclair, while selling fake paintings he claimed were by Willem de Kooning and Joan Mitchell, among others.

"The New York Art Crime Team believes there may be more victims of Eric Ian Hornak Spoutz who unknowingly bought fake works ... If you believe you are a victim and purchased a fraudulent painting, please call the New York Art Crime Team at (212) 384-1000 or submit a tip at tips.fbi.gov," the statement reads.

So far, the bureau has identified 40 fake works. They fear that many others exist, including some that were sold through New York auction houses, causing for the warning to be released: "There could be hundreds more that were sold to unsuspecting victims."



The disgraced dealer also reportedly donated works to a handful of US museums, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"Spoutz, who also owned a legitimate art gallery, understood the value of provenance. He forged receipts, bills of sale, letters from dead attorneys, and other documents," The FBI's statement reads.

"Some of the letters dated back decades and looked authentic, referencing real people who worked at real galleries or law firms. Spoutz also used a vintage typewriter and old paper for his documentation," it continues.

Spoutz, 32, was convicted in February and sentenced to over three years in prison. He will also be required to undergo three years supervised release, as well as forfeit the \$1.45 million he received in "ill-gotten gains." Finally, he will have to pay \$154,100 in restitution.

Special Agent Christopher McKeogh elaborated on the situation, saying, "This is a case we're going to be dealing with for years. Spoutz was a mill."