



AiA Art News-service



NBI: Nine face possible charges in major art forgery case

Nine people are suspected of involvement in selling fake classic paintings for sums of up to 10 million euros after Finland's police completed their preliminary investigations into one of the biggest suspected counterfeit art crime rings in the country's history. The case is now headed to the prosecutor's office.



An NBI photo of a seized suspected fake painting, which alleged forgers reportedly tried to pass off as one by Finnish painter Reidar Särestöniemi. Image: Keskusrikospoliisi

Police in Finland have wrapped up a preliminary investigation in what could be one of the largest cases of suspected counterfeit art crimes in Finnish history.

Investigators say the cases hinge on two key individuals who are suspected of systematically selling fake pieces of art for up to 10 million euros.

The NBI said it carried out some 27 separate preliminary investigations, which eventually led investigators to suspect nine individuals of having committed crimes, many of whom are known in the art and auction business. There are also some 30 plaintiffs involved in the case.

Matisse, Schjerfbeck, Thesleff

The individuals are suspected of having sold forged paintings signed with the names of big-name domestic and foreign artists like Henri Matisse, Helene Schjerfbeck and Ellen Thesleff.

The alleged forgery-related crimes were committed in various parts of the country. The case is now headed to the prosecutor's office in Inland Finland, and the first part of the case is expected to be dealt with in November.

The NBI says it has been carrying out a comprehensive investigation of counterfeit art in the country since 2009.

Some 220 paintings have been submitted to the Finnish National Gallery for examination in order to verify their authenticity, including works by Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Thesleff and Reidar Särestöniemi.

The majority of the examined paintings were found to be fakes.