

# AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AiA Art News-service



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### Peter Doig v Pete Doige: a case of mistaken artistic identity?

The artist is being sued for \$5m by a corrections officer who says he bought a work by Doig for \$100 in the 1970s

by [VICTORIA STAPLEY-BROWN](#) | 10 August 2016



The desert landscape signed "Pete Doige 76"

The artist Peter Doig is currently defending himself in [an unusual authentication case](#) involving a work created by an incarcerated young man—alleged to be him—in the 1970s. Robert Fletcher, a retired corrections officer from Canada, has brought a \$5m lawsuit against the artist for denying that he painted a work owned by Fletcher. The Chicago-

based art dealer Peter Bartlow, who intended to sell the work for Fletcher, is a co-plaintiff. The pair also wants the courts to officially authenticate the work in question, a desert landscape scene in acrylic on canvas, signed “Pete Doige 76”, which they say is the quintessence of the artist’s style.

“This has become about much more than Peter’s painting,” Gordon VeneKlasen, who sells Peter Doig’s work at Michael Werner Gallery in New York, [told the New York Times in July](#). “It’s about authorship. It’s about being forced to put your name on another artist’s work.”

A friend of Fletcher’s spotted the work at his home five years ago and prompted his research into Peter Doig, whose works often sell for around \$10m. Fletcher claims that he knew Doig in the 1970s, first as an art student at Lakehead University in Ontario, and that he watched Doig paint the work when he was a corrections officer and Doig was an inmate for a drug-related offence at the Thunder Bay Correctional Center north of Toronto. He was also Doig’s parole officer, he says, helped him find a job, and purchased the painting from him for \$100.

Doig, meanwhile, says that he lived with his parents in Toronto during this time, and was neither a student at Lakehead University nor incarcerated. He alleges that the work was made the late Peter Edward Doige, whose sister, Marilyn Doige Bovard, says he was both a Lakehead University student and a Thunder Bay Correctional Center inmate. Bovard’s sworn affidavit says her brother took art classes while incarcerated and that she believes he painted the work.

The plaintiff and defendant [reiterated these claims on the stand](#) as the case opened at the United States District Court for Northern Illinois in Chicago on Monday, 8 August, and the plaintiffs’ lawyer questioned Doig over his working method for hours. The presiding Judge, Gary Feinerman, determined that there is sufficient evidence for a trial. He will rule on the case after further testimony, expected to last about a week, according to the New York Times.

In a statement [quoted by the New York Times in July](#), Doig’s dealer VeneKlasen said that in this particular trial, “the artist and the dealer have the resources to carry on this fight, but I wonder about all the artists who might not. Do they simply acquiesce and let inauthentic works into the market if they are the product of a similar attempt at bullying and rampant greed?”