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Chicago judge rules Peter Doig ‘absolutely did not paint’ disputed work

The ruling brings the value of the painting at the centre of the long-running case back to nil

by [DAN DURAY](#) | 23 August 2016



The desert landscape signed "Pete Doige 76"

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The Chicago federal judge Gary Feinerman ruled on Tuesday that the artist Peter Doig “absolutely did not paint the disputed work” at the centre of a

long-running lawsuit.

The suit was brought by the retired Canadian prison officer Robert Fletcher, who claimed a painting he bought in the 1970s from an inmate at Thunder Bay Correctional Center for \$100 was made by a young Doig. The artist denies he painted the desert landscape, and Fletcher sued him in 2013, saying his disavowal negatively affected the value of the work, which Fletcher had wanted to sell at auction. Fletcher wanted the court to authenticate the painting as Doig's work and for the artist to pay \$7.9m in damages for scuttling the sale.

Feinerman's ruling was not unexpected: the work in question was signed and dated "Peter Doige, 76" by a man who, according to the artist Doig's lawyers, died in 2012. In 1976, Peter Doig was 16 or 17 years old and living with his parents in Toronto. Explaining his decision, Feinerman said this was clearly [a case of mistaken identity](#).

The ruling brings the painting's value back to nil. Doig's work in the past has sold for as much as \$26m at auction.

"I have rarely seen such a flagrant example of unethical conduct in the US courts nor a case that inflicted such needless burdens on a defendant," Matthew S. Dontzin, the lawyer for Doig and his gallerist Michael Werner said in a statement. "Artists should be grateful to Peter for having the ethical and financial fortitude to fight tirelessly to ensure that justice prevailed in today's verdict."

William F. Zieske, lawyer for the plaintiffs, Fletcher and the Chicago art dealer Peter Bartlow, who offered to help him sell the painting, did not respond to a request for comment at the time of publication. But Zieske told the New York Times that they have not yet decided if they would appeal, adding: "I still think the painting may be authentic."