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Art withdrawn from auction amid fears paintings were forged

SHANE PHELAN PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDITOR
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A GOVERNMENT watchdog will launch an investigation after nine paintings were withdrawn from auction at the last minute amid fears they were forgeries. The paintings, some of which were expected to fetch up to €30,000, had been due to go on sale yesterday in Dublin. They were said to be by leading Irish artists.

However, they were withdrawn by auctioneer Oliver Gormley when an art expert questioned their authenticity. The withdrawn paintings included seven pieces supposedly by Roderic O'Connor, one painting said to be by Aloysius O'Kelly, and another purportedly by Walter Osborne.

The matter is now set to be investigated by the Property Services Regulatory Authority, which licenses and regulates auctioneers. It is the first time the watchdog, set up last year, has received a complaint about allegedly forged paintings. The paintings had originally been among several lots which were due to be sold by Gormleys Art Auctions at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Blackrock, Co Dublin, yesterday. Owner Oliver Gormley confirmed that the paintings had been withdrawn from the auction after questions were raised by art expert Dominic Milmo-Penny.

"We got these paintings from a vendor. We bought these in good faith," said Mr Gormley. "Somebody has questioned that maybe they are not alright so we have withdrawn them from public sale to be on the safe side. This is purely a precautionary measure."

CHECKED

Mr Gormley said the paintings would now be sent to an expert to be checked out. "On that basis they will either be withdrawn from the market or put back on at a later date," he said. Mr Milmo-Penny, who runs a fine art business in Ballsbridge, Dublin, told the Irish Independent he feared the sale of forgeries on the Irish market was widespread. "It is as common as buying a bus ticket. It is endemic in the industry and has to be exposed," he said.

Mr Milmo-Penny said forgery gangs were highly organised. "Most people have the idea that a forger is a little man in a back room painting. That is not the case," he said.

"What happens in that forgery rings will find a painting, say from 1890, which looks like a Walter Osborne, but may be by an unknown artist and very often signed.



Dominic Milmo-Perry with an original Roderic O'Connor