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Forgery-Trial Witness: Paintings 'Had No Soul'

Two art-world experts said the pictures they saw at
Knoedler gallery were phony



Domenico De Sole and Eleanore De Sole, in a file photo, sued after purchasing a fake Rothko painting from Knoedler & Co. PHOTO: JOE SCHILDHORN/BFA

By
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Art dealer Ann Freedman was no scheming fraudster, knowingly selling forged abstract masterpieces; she fell victim to a clever con that fooled her and the rest of the art world, her lawyer told a federal jury Tuesday.

Defense attorney Luke Nikas made those statements in Manhattan federal court, where Ms. Freedman faces [a civil suit brought by two wealthy art collectors](#) who purchased a fake Rothko painting from her former gallery, the now-defunct Knoedler & Co., in 2004.

Domenico and Eleanore De Sole allege that Knoedler and its president, Ms. Freedman, spent years purchasing counterfeit midcentury artworks purportedly painted by artists such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell and passing them off as real to unwitting buyers.



Ann Freedman in April 2014. PHOTO: BENJAMIN LOZOVSKY/BFA

In opening defense statements Tuesday, attorneys for Ms. Freedman and Knoedler argued that their clients believed the artworks were genuine and were victims of Glafira Rosales, a Long Island art dealer who has pleaded guilty to selling forgeries to Knoedler.

Between 1994 and 2008, Ms. Rosales brought dozens of paintings to Ms. Freedman, said Mr. Nikas. “Ann believed this was one of the most important discoveries in art history,” he said.

Mr. Nikas recounted a list of experts who vouched for the paintings and projected excerpts from their correspondence with Ms. Freedman on a large screen in the courtroom. “She believed what the experts told her,” he said.

“Ann believed in it, and the art world believed in it,” he said.