

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

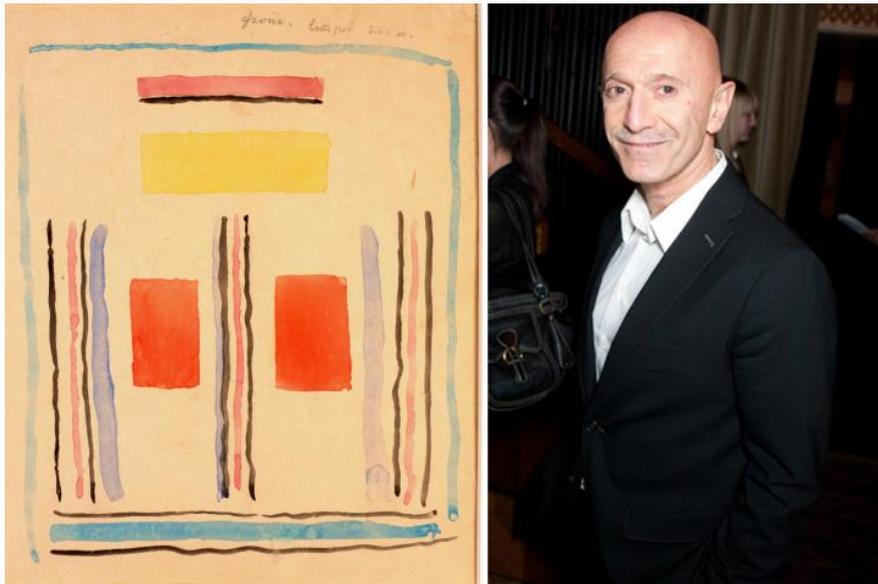
AiA Art News-service



Gallery owner claims art dealer sold him 165 fake pieces: suit

By [Julia Marsh](#)

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Gallery owner Gary Tatintsian with a Kazimir Malevich piece he claims is a fake. Photo: Picasa ; Handout

Russian oligarchs angrily returned 35 pricey artworks to a Manhattan dealer, claiming they were frauds — but the gallery owner says he's the real victim and has filed a \$62 million lawsuit to prove it.

The sensational case is rife with international intrigue, including alleged death threats and accusations that shady Russian businessmen pulled the oldest art scam in the book — the switcheroo.

In his Manhattan Supreme Court lawsuit, New York gallery owner Gary Tatintzian says Connecticut dealer Lev Nussberg sold him the bogus works along with about 165 other fakes starting in 2006.

The unsuspecting Tatintzian then peddled the artwork to Russian businessmen for millions of dollars, his lawsuit says.

But over the next few years, the Russians sent nearly three dozen of the works back to Tatintzian, saying they were fakes and demanding a refund.

Tatintzian, who coughed up the dough, says Nussberg knew that the works were frauds when he sold them to him.

But Nussberg says it was either Tatintzian or the Russians who switched the real works for the fake ones.

A Manhattan jury is set to hear the case in October.

Many of the Soviet Suprematism works are by the renowned, late Russian avant-garde master Kazimir Malevich, whose retrospective is currently at the Tate Modern in London.

Tatintzian has repaid \$3 million to the owners of the 35 returned works — but says he expects the other dozens of pieces of fake art to be sent back to him, forcing him to refund the full amount.

Nussberg has strenuously denied that he peddled knockoffs — and says the returned works were not the ones he sold Tatintzian.

He credits his “many years of devoted and tireless toil” with spurring a “great revival” of the modernists' works.