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A Paris Court Has Sentenced Two Rodin Dealers for Counterfeiting Reproductions by the French Sculptor

The case has dragged on for nearly two decades.

Eileen Kinsella, April 23, 2019



Rodin's *The Kiss* (1901–04). Courtesy of Tate.

American businessman and art dealer Gary Snell was found guilty in a Paris appeals court last week and given a one-year suspended sentence for selling unauthorized casts of original molds by the late French sculptor Auguste Rodin, the AFP reports. Meanwhile, Snell's business associate, Parisian dealer Robert Crouzet, received a four-month suspended prison sentence and both men were ordered to pay a total of €500,000 (\$562,000) in damages and interest to the Musée Rodin, which controls the production of the artist's work.

When the artist died in 1917, he bequeathed the contents of his studio and the right to produce casts based on his plaster molds to the French state for a museum. Today, the Musée Rodin gets a portion of its funding from the sale of sculptures created from the original molds, but it says that some of those molds never made it to the museum and were instead snapped up by Snell and his former company, Gruppo Mondiale, according to AFP,

The charges were first brought against Snell, who is now in his 70s, in 2001. He was prosecuted for publishing and marketing works attributed to Rodin without revealing that they were reproductions made from plaster casts that came from the Rudier foundry, where Rodin worked while he was still alive.

Gruppo Mondiale allegedly produced some 1,700 bronzes drawn from 52 works by the artist, selling for an average selling price of €40,000 (\$60,300)—or about €68 million (\$76 million) total.

The case has been postponed numerous times. In November 2014, after an initial trial, the Paris Criminal Court found it could not conclude whether the sculptures were manufactured, exhibited, or sold on French territory and that the lawsuit was therefore not in its jurisdiction. But the prosecution appealed and was able to secure a new trial.

Snell's attorney, Christian Beer, told the *AFP* his client was "ruined" by the case and is considering an appeal.



Culture minister Monika Grütters has allocated €1.9 m this year to provenance research for artefacts that entered museum collections during the colonial era © Olaf Kosinsky / Wikimedia

The German government says it has allocated €1.9m this year to provenance research for artefacts that entered museum collections during the colonial era, with the funds to be administered by the German Lost Art Foundation.

An eight-member committee including Bénédicte Savoy, the co-writer of a [report urging French museums to repatriate works taken without consent from African countries](#), will select grant recipients on the basis of applications from German museums, a statement from Culture Minister Monika Grütters said. Other members of the panel include Albert Gouaffo of the University of Dschang in Cameroon, Barbara Plankensteiner of the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology, and Ulrike Lindner of Cologne University.

Grütters says that colonial history has for many decades been a “blind spot” in Germany. “Provenance research of items with a colonial context is an important contribution to a closer examination,” she said in the statement.

The report by Savoy and the Senegalese economist and writer Felwine Sarr, presented to French President Emmanuel Macron in November, argued that the complete transfer of property back to Africa should be the general rule for works taken in the colonial period. It also added fuel to a debate in Germany over how to handle colonial-era artefacts in museums that began in 2017, when Savoy abruptly resigned in frustration from the advisory board of the Humboldt Forum, the new showcase for Berlin’s non-European collections which is to open this year in a reconstruction of the royal palace in the centre of the city. One of her complaints was a lack of attention to provenance research.

The main focus of the Magdeburg-based German Lost Art Foundation is to allocate funding for museums to investigate their collections for Nazi-looted art, and that “core task” will remain unaffected by its new responsibilities, Grütters’ statement said. The foundation also oversees research into art seized from Germany at the end of the Second World War and, in 2017, announced plans to investigate looting by the Stasi in communist East Germany.