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Art Collector Tied to Gulbenkian Family Faces U.K. Theft Charges

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Angela Gulbenkian Photographer: Bruno Simão

Angela Gulbenkian, a German collector who caused a stir in the art world over a pumpkin sculpture, was charged in London on allegations of theft.

Gulbenkian was charged with two counts of theft, one relating to the sale of a sculpture between April 2017 and December 2018, London police said in a statement. The thefts total 1.1 million pounds (\$1.4 million), according to an official at Westminster Magistrates Court where she has a summons to appear May 28 after being charged through the mail.

Gulbenkian hasn't seen the charges and hasn't been arrested, Steve Cohen, a lawyer in New York who represents the art collector, said in a phone interview. She denies any allegations of theft and will plead not guilty, he said.

Gulbenkian, who married into oil baron Calouste Gulbenkian's family, enmeshed herself in Europe's art world. One moment, the 37-year-old was posing for photos with the artist Ai Weiwei. The next she was brokering million-dollar art deals.

The criminal case is separate, but linked to a civil suit involving Gulbenkian and the sale of a 179-pound, yellow polka-dotted pumpkin sculpture by Yayoi Kusama. An art adviser, Mathieu Ticolat, based in Hong Kong, alleges that his firm paid Gulbenkian \$1.375 million for the pumpkin, according to papers filed in the High Court in London. Gulbenkian said she represented the anonymous seller. Ticolat contracted to buy the Kusama sculpture on April 5, 2017.

Ticolat's firm says the pumpkin never arrived. After months of discussions, he filed the civil suit, which included a motion to freeze Gulbenkian's assets, which the judge granted. In November, the court entered a default judgment against her after she failed to file a defense.

In July, she told Bloomberg she was surprised by the civil lawsuit and had offered to arrange for the seller to deliver the Kusama sculpture to the buyer before proceedings were brought. Cohen said he wasn't aware if Gulbenkian planned to challenge the default judgment.

The former Angela Maria Ischwang grew up in Munich, where her mother runs an optometry business. She moved to London in the early 2000s and later married Duarte Gulbenkian, a soccer agent and Calouste's great-grandnephew.