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EUROPE'S NEWS IN ENGLISH

Italian police recover two stolen paintings attributed to masters Rubens and Renoir



Photo: Vincenzo Pinto/AFP.

The paintings, said to be worth millions, were stolen from two gallery artists by an Israeli con artist posing as a rabbi in Monza, northern Italy, in April 2017.

The two stolen paintings have been identified as '[Holy family](#)' by 18th century French painter Pierre-August Renoir and 'Girls on the lawn' by 15th-16th century Belgian painter Peter Paul Rubens. Two gallery owners were the victims of the theft.

Both works of art were recovered together by the Monza police in the province of Turin following a 17-month investigation.

"We now have to confirm that the attributions are correct," said Major Francesco Provenza, commander of the Monza's police unit for the protection of cultural heritage, in an [interview](#) with Italy's TGR. Experts will now analyze the paintings to confirm their authenticity, before they will be returned to their rightful owners.

The paintings had been stolen in an elaborate scam involving at least eight different con artists, the police confirmed. At least one had posed as a Jewish rabbi with diplomatic immunity and offered the respective gallery owners €26 million for the paintings before stealing them. The theft took place at a rented office in Monza, above the Albanian embassy [according](#) to Repubblica and [local daily](#) Il Giornale di Monza, on April 20th, 2017.

According to Provenza, police received a tip-off about the whereabouts of the paintings. Four Italians and a Croatian national have been arrested, while three other 'foot soldiers' involved in the armed theft have also been identified. One has been arrested.

Corriere della Sera [identified](#) the man behind the theft as Nenad Jovanovic, a 44-year-old Croatian national, who had deceived the two gallery owners from Sardinia and London's Fulham Road, into believing he was a rabbi with a diplomatic passport – under the name Samuel Abraham Lewy Graham.

Earlier this month, Italian police – working with EU partners – [seized 25,000 Greek and Roman archaeological items worth over €40 million](#).

Some 250 officers in Italy, Spain, Britain and Germany simultaneously swooped on 40 houses in that operation – the culmination of a four-year investigation led by the Italians, the European police agency said.

Italy has a police unit dedicated to recovering stolen art work. Three fifteenth-century paintings which were [stolen from the Prince of Luxembourg's Tuscan villa by Nazi forces](#) in 1944 were also found in Italy in 2016.