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Do These Paintings Look Familiar? The LAPD Launches a Website to Find the Owners of More Than 100 Lost-and-Found Artworks and Antiques

Among the works are examples by Picasso and Miró, stolen 25 years ago from California homes.

Taylor Dafoe, September 5, 2019



Two stolen paintings recovered by the Los Angeles Police Department.

Twenty-five years ago, a pair of burglars went on a break-in spree across Hollywood and Westside Los Angeles, stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of art and antiques from wealthy homeowners. Though they were apprehended in 1993, the objects remained missing for years.

Until now.

The Los Angeles Police Department recently recovered the trove of stolen artworks—including paintings by Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, among others—and are working to track down the objects' rightful owners.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the LAPD were tipped off as to the whereabouts of the objects when they received a phone call from a auctioneer in southern California this summer. The caller claimed to be in possession of some of the art, which he recognized from a website set up by a police investigative unit.

The tip revived the long-dormant case, officially called “Operation Demetra.” Police obtained search warrants and tracked down more than 100 paintings, antiques, and other stolen artifacts throughout Los Angeles and Orange counties. In addition to the many paintings, they found vintage furniture, old firearms, and documents signed by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Howard Taft.



A stolen painting recovered by the Los Angeles Police Department.

“We are in the process of identifying the specific art, artists, and how much it might be worth,” captain Lillian Carranza, the head of the LAPD’s commercial crimes division, told the *Times*. Carranza said her unit was working with experts at the nearby J. Paul Getty Museum to index the artworks and examine their condition after they were improperly stored for a quarter of a century.

At the time of their arrest in 1993, the two men apprehended in the case were characterized by police as “Armenian nationals.” Authorities released the name of one: Paul Tobeler, who died shortly after completing his multi-year prison sentence. The other, who is believed still to be alive, was left unidentified due to the current investigation.

Police believe the person who provided the artwork to the auction house to be a relative of one of the original suspects, though authorities are currently unsure whether or not this person knew the items were stolen. It is not uncommon for art thieves to sit on stolen objects for years or even decades before trying to sell them, one officer told the *Times*.

The LAPD has encouraged people to visit their [website devoted to the case](#) and get in touch if they recognize any of the goods.