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## A Los Angeles Man Who Forged Documents to ‘Authenticate’ Fake Works by Warhol and Basquiat Has Pleaded Guilty to Federal Fraud Charges

The US Attorney's Office says Philip Righter, who claims to be an Oscar winner, cost his victims more than \$758,000.

Sarah Cascone, March 11, 2020



Philip Righter, who pled guilty to trying to sell art forgeries, at a 2019 Oscar viewing party at the Beverly Hilton Hotel  
Photo by Amy Graves/Getty Images for Charmaine Blake.

A Los Angeles man named Philip Bennet Righter has pleaded guilty to federal charges of art fraud after trying to sell some \$6 million worth of forged paintings purportedly by major 20th-century American artists such as Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Roy Lichtenstein. Based on his guilty plea, Righter faces up to 25 years in federal prison.

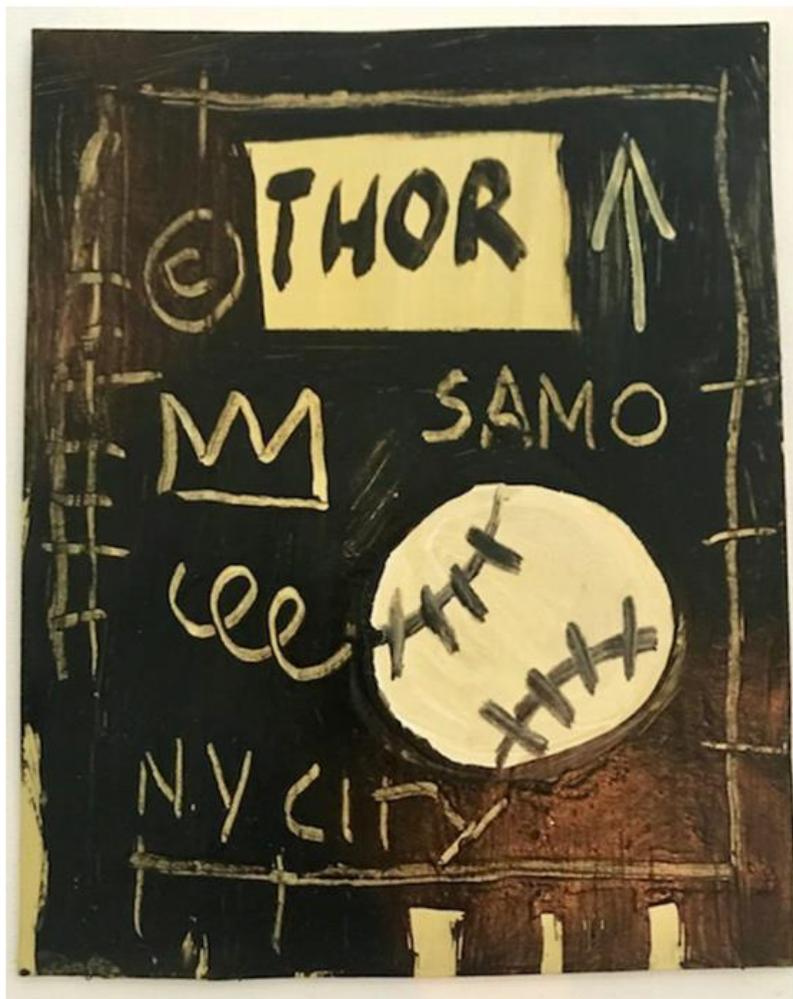
“Hopefully this will send a message from the FBI’s Art Crime Team and the United States Attorney’s Office that these types of cases will be fully prosecuted,” Los Angeles prosecutor Erik Silber told Court House News.

Righter faces similar charges in the southern district of Florida. Last July, he was arrested on charges of theft and allegedly attempting to defraud a Miami gallery out of \$1 million. The first hearing in that case is scheduled to take place today.

The US Attorney’s Office of the Central District of California contends that Righter cost his victims more than \$758,000, and that his fraudulent tax returns have cost the government more than \$100,000.

According to an indictment filed in Florida, Righter bought fake works online through sites like eBay and then forged certificates of authenticity for each piece.

To add an air of legitimacy to the ersatz documents, he bought custom stamps featuring the insignias of artists’ estates, and cited Basquiat’s former dealer, Annina Nosei Gallery, in provenance documents.



A fake Jean-Michel Basquiat painting sold by Philip Righter. Photo courtesy of the US District Court for the Central District of California.

Among the fakes he sold was a \$50,000 canvas said to be a 1983 Basquiat. The online art sales website that brokered the 2016 sale issued a refund when the work was found to be worthless two years later.

Righter also used the fake works as collateral. When he defaulted a \$24,000 loan, his victim tried to sell a purported Basquiat at auction, only to learn it was a forgery.

In his 2015 tax filing, Righter claimed to have donated art to charity, and that thieves had stolen \$2.5 million in art from his home. As a result, he received over \$100,000 in returns.

The Los Angeles police were investigating Righter as early as 2016, when they questioned him about a forged Keith Haring offered to a Miami gallery. Nevertheless, Righter appears to have continued marketing fakes, using a number of assumed names, for at least the next two years. Righter's Instagram account says he is an Emmy, Grammy, and Academy award winner, but IMDB lists his only credit as a producer for a 2016 short film called *The Good Waiter*.