

**Panel Title:** The Influence of Scholarship and the Media on Art Crime

**Abstract:** Academia and the media are critical to raising awareness of cultural heritage and promoting protection of cultural property. The effectiveness with which scholars and journalists provide knowledge and information on the visual arts has also influenced the illicit market in fine art and antiquities. This panel will examine how scholarly and general knowledge of the market value of artworks abets art crime. The talks will provide historical perspectives on crimes against individual works of fine art and collections of antiquities. Case studies will illustrate how scholarly and popular understandings of the value of art incite fraud and theft. The scale of precipitating offenses ranges from orchestrations of thefts of individual artworks to nationwide looting. The talks will provide for a rich discussion on how misuses and misunderstandings of the value of artworks motivate offenses.

**Erik Nemeth**, [www.culturalsecurity.org](http://www.culturalsecurity.org)

**“The Influence of Scholarship on the Strategic Value of Art”**

Art historians and archaeologists have gained influence in wartime art crime. The influence derives from the evolving strategic value of wartime plunder over the past century. In World War II, traditional wartime plunder as a rite of military conquest intertwined with the campaign of ethnic cleansing. During the Cold War era, trafficking in antiquities coincided with the covert operations of Western and Soviet intelligence services on the battle ground of the Third World. In the post-Cold War period, security threats of transnational organized crime and terrorism intersect with an increasing relevance of the art market and archaeological sites in foreign affairs. In each of the three wartime periods, scholarship emphasized the protection, and also enabled the plunder, of cultural patrimony. Across the wartime periods, the increasing financial volume of the art market has amplified the voice of art historians and archaeologists in influencing the illicit trade in art.

**Virginia Curry**, Research Associate, ARCA, [www.artcrime.info](http://www.artcrime.info)

**“Scholarship and Entitlement: Theft by Those Most Trusted”**

Art and artifact theft is often considered an opportunistic crime related to the world of security guards and other support employees with facility access. However, the most virulent theft is that which is planned, executed and concealed by those trusted employees who are scholars, facility directors and provided unfettered access to our most precious cultural patrimony. This talk will highlight two FBI cases investigated by the speaker in which the criminals were in fact two of the most distinguished scholars and directors of their facilities and ultimately convicted at trial by jury: The Southwest Museum of the American Indian, now associated with the Autry National Center, in Los Angeles, California, was the victim of a 3.5 million dollar embezzlement scheme by former Museum Director, Patrick Thomas Houlihan. The University of California at Los Angeles was the victim of an embezzlement of an American Impressionist Painting gifted by the artist to the University and stolen by the Department Chairman of Graduate Counseling and Awards and the money from the sale then laundered by third parties.

**Mark Durney**, Research Associate, ARCA, [www.artcrime.info](http://www.artcrime.info)

**“Understanding the Motivations Behind Art Crime and the Effects of and Institution’s Response”**

In their verdict in February 2003, the judges in the canton of Gruyères said of infamous art thief Stéphane Breitwieser, “His taste for art was not base or materialist. It was above all the love of art and not money or the act of stealing that drove him to take these works.” How could this suicidal Frenchman, who was a self-proclaimed “professional of plundering,” have stolen over a billion dollars worth of art, and yet retained his day job as a waiter while never attempting to profit from the sales of the stolen objects? Utilizing a variety of case studies throughout history, this paper examines the motivations behind art thieves who are fascinated by “the idea of owning a Renoir at the age of twenty”; forgers who simply seek to deceive the art establishment; and those who even hold art hostage. Additionally, by building on the work of Dr. Simon Mackenzie of the University of Glasgow this addresses the decisions cultural institutions face after being victimized by art crime and how their response, whether highly publicized or discreet, affects the security of the art community.

**Noah Charney**, Director, ARCA, [www.artcrime.info](http://www.artcrime.info)

**“Art Theft and the Media: The Inspiration and Abetting of Art Theft by the News Media”**

In 2008, a painting attributed to Caravaggio was stolen from a museum in Odessa, Ukraine. The story made international headlines and televised news stories, many of which described the stolen painting as a “\$100 Million Caravaggio.” In fact, the painting, once attributed to Caravaggio, was proven in 1993 to be only a reasonably competent 17th century copy, worth a few hundred thousand dollars at most. Because journalists love to quote the astronomical values of artworks, and because they did not conduct research to learn whether the authenticity of the work was verified, the media provided “proof” of the authenticity and value of the stolen painting that the thieves could flaunt to colleagues. As most stolen art has an estimated black market value of 7-10% of its legitimate auction value, the media's enthusiasm resulted in a stolen painting with as much as a \$10 million black market value, when in actuality it should be worth perhaps five figures on the black market. Further, with numerous historical examples dating back to the 19th century, reading of such high-profile, successful, and valuable art thefts inspires criminals to steal art. From the 1876 theft of a Gainsborough by Adam Worth to the 1960-61 thefts of Picasso and Cezannes by the Corsican Mafia, and on to more recent thefts, at the Van Gogh Museum and in Odessa, this paper will examine how the media has historically, inadvertently, inspired and aided art thieves.