

In the early morning hours of March 18th, 1990, while virtually every other Bostonian lay drunk in gutters or passed out in their beds, two men dressed as Boston Police officers conned their way into the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum by telling guards they were responding to some type of disturbance. The men spent a total of 81 minutes inside the museum, and made off with thirteen (13) works of art currently valued at over \$500 million. In 2013, on the 23rd anniversary of the heist, the FBI announced that they knew who committed the crime. But they won't name names. And the whereabouts of the artwork remains a mystery.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee
Rembrandt



A Lady and Gentleman in Black
Rembrandt



Self Portrait
Rembrandt



THE GARDNER HEIST

A Guide to the art world's biggest unsolved mystery



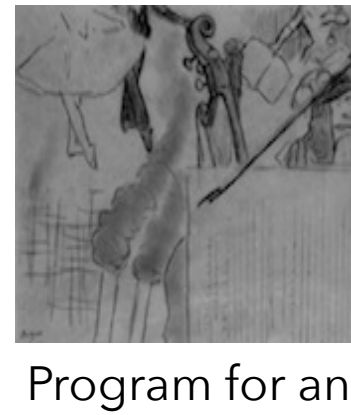
La Sortie de Pesage
Edgar Degas



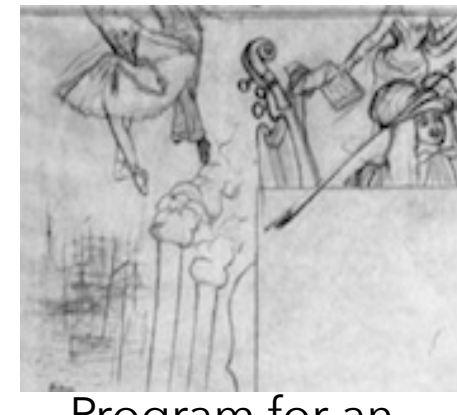
Cortège aux Environs de Florence
Edgar Degas



Three Mounted Jockeys
Edgar Degas



Program for an artistic soiree 1
Edgar Degas



Program for an artistic soiree 2
Edgar Degas



Ancient Chinese Ku
Shang Dynasty



Eagle-shaped finial
from Napoleonic flag



Landscape with Obelisk
Govaert Flinck



Chez Tortoni
Édouard Manet



The Concert
Johannes Vermeer

"What is it like to be a stolen painting- ... Think of how bored they get, stacked in the warehouse somewhere ... Only criminals know where they are... Why have we been stolen? they ask themselves. Who has benefitted? Or do they hang admired in some sheikh's sandy palace, or the vault of a mad Manila tycoon?"

Excerpts from the poem "Stolen", by John Updike, published in the New Yorker on April 14, 2003

PERSONS OF INTEREST

ROBERT V. GENTILE

Gentile is an organized crime figure with ties to Robert Guarente and others. Said Gentile's lawyer of his client: "He doesn't know anything about art, he's never been to an art gallery in his life, couldn't tell a Rembrandt from an Elvis painting."

Notable because: His Manchester, CT home was searched as recently as 2012 and he was questioned by a grand jury in 2011. Robert Guarente's widow told investigators that her husband had given Gentile a painting that he kept rolled-up in a tube since the 90s. Gentile spent 10 months cooperating in an effort to avoid jail time for drug charges in CT.



ROBERT "BOSTON BOB" LUISI, JR.

Luisi headed a Boston crew linked to the Philly mob. About a decade ago he began serving a 15 year prison sentence.

Notable because: He provided both Robert Gentile and Robert Guarente with ties to Philadelphia organized crime.



DAVID HOUGHTON

Houghton was not a lifelong criminal, but he had ties to Bobby Donati and Myles Connor, among others. He had a history of art theft. According to Connor, Houghton took part in robberies with both Connor and Donati. He died in 1992 of natural causes.

Notable because: According to Myles Connor, Houghton said of the Gardner robbery -- "That was us" -- referring to himself and Donati.

ROBERT "BOBBY" DONATI

Donati was a Revere, MA native with ties to organized crime. In September 1991, Donati was found dead (stabbed 28 times, throat slashed) in the trunk of his Cadillac. It was revealed years after his death that he was working as an informant to the Massachusetts State Police. His killing remains unsolved. Myles Connor claims he was told that Donati was one of the two Gardner thieves.

Notable because: He was an early suspect and may have cased the museum in the 70s. Also, he was found murdered and may have been working as a State Police informant.

MYLES CONNOR III

Connor is a Milton, MA native with convictions for bank robbery and narcotics as well as a long and storied history as an art thief. His band (Myles & the Wild Ones) opened for Sha Na Na in the 70s. Connor was never an official suspect, but claimed that he cased the museum with Bobby Donati in 1974. Since the '90 heist he has told investigators and reporters that he can assist in facilitating the return of the stolen art. A federal judge once called Connor "rotten to the core". As recently as 2012, Connor was arrested after stealing someone's cell phone while brandishing a pellet gun.

Notable because: He has a long history of art theft and has made repeated claims he can help return the art.

WILLIAM P. "BILL" YOUNGOWORTH III

Youngworth is an ex-con and former antiques dealer from Randolph, MA. He was in a Memphis jail the night of the heist, so he's not a suspect. But he has said he "knows who took the masterpieces and how to get them back". Youngworth claims the stolen art "found its way" to Joe Murray, a convicted drug smuggler and gun runner for the Irish Republican Army. He even met with museum employees and was given \$10,000 in "good faith money" after he promised to broker the return of the paintings.

Notable because: He has a history of successfully brokering the return of stolen items, including the "Great Seal of Massachusetts" - a stolen pre-Revolutionary war artifact. He took Boston Herald reporter Tom Mashberg on a blindfolded wild goose chase to view what he claimed was one of the paintings.

ROBERT GUARENTE

Guarente was an organized crime figure with a criminal history dating back to the 1960s. He died in 2004. Guarente had ties to the Philadelphia mob through Robert Luisi.

Notable because: His widow Elene Guarente told investigators that in approximately 2003, Guarente gave Robert Gentile a painting he had kept rolled up in a tube since the 1990s.



ANTHONY "CHUCKY" CARLO

Carlo is an ex-con with organized crime ties, including to Robert Guarente. His Worcester, MA home was searched in October 2011.

Notable because: He claims to have helped broker the return of art stolen in the 1970s. Also, he's alive.



GEORGE REISSFELDER

Reissfelder had a long criminal history and was a frequent presence at Merlino's Dorchester auto shop. He was a friend of Robert Guarente, the organized crime figure now said to be central to the most recent investigation. Reissfelder died in 1991 (allegedly) of a cocaine overdose.

Notable because: In 1990, Reissfelder told his prison lover that the stolen paintings were in a Maine safe house.

JOE MURRAY

Murray was convicted of gun running and drug smuggling in the late 1980s. According to Bill Youngworth, Murray paid \$300,000 to take possession of the stolen paintings sometime after the theft, at which point they may have gone to the Irish Republican Army through Murray's connections. It couldn't have been too long after though, since Murray was shot in Maine in 1992 -- allegedly by his wife during a domestic dispute. His death came not long after he had informed a former FBI agent that he had information on the stolen artwork.

Notable because: He had ties to the IRA and had a house in Belgrade Lakes, Maine which may have been used as a safe house at one point.

STEPHEN ROSSETTI

Rossetti is an ex-con with organized crime ties. He's currently in prison for a 1999 armored car depot robbery he committed with Turner and Merlino. His uncle was Ralph Rossetti (East Boston crime family patriarch) and his brother Mark Rossetti was a captain in the New England mafia. Rossetti is Robert Guarente's nephew.

Notable because: Extensive criminal history and family connections in the underworld.



CARMELLO MERLINO

A longtime Quincy, MA resident, Merlino was one of the original suspects. He led a criminal organization out of his Dorchester auto shop TRC Auto Electric. Merlino met with investigators regarding Gardner in the 90s and claimed he could help broker the return of the art. In 2002 he was sentenced to 47 years for a planned bank vault robbery. Merlino died in prison in 2005.

Notable because: His underlings included suspect David Turner as well as Guarente's nephew Stephen Rossetti. He also had ties to Whitey Bulger.

CHARLES PAPPAS

Pappas was a drug trafficker with ties to organized crime. He was also friends with David Turner. Pappas was involved in the cocaine trafficking ring that operated out of Carmello Merlino's auto shop.

Notable because: He was murdered in 1995 after he began cooperating with the Mass. State Police and implicated best friend David Turner in various crimes.

WHITEY BULGER

Bulger ran organized crime in Boston for decades with the FBI wrapped around his little finger. He became a fugitive in 1995 when he was tipped off that an indictment was imminent. He was captured in 2011 and is currently in prison awaiting trial. It's unclear how much of an actual suspect Bulger is or was.

Notable because: Even if he wasn't directly involved, he probably knew about the heist and/or got a cut.



DAVID TURNER

Turner is a Braintree native and was one of the initial suspects, questioned early on by the FBI regarding the Gardner heist. Turner is suspected in multiple murders. Turner was convicted (along with Merlino and Rossetti) in the 1999 armored car depot robbery. He is slated to be released from prison in 2025.

Notable because: Around the time of the robbery, he bought a condo next door to one in which Whitey Bulger often stayed. He is suspected in the murder of his best friend Charlie Pappas, who was a State Police informant.



KEY

to persons of interest



Currently incarcerated.



Dead.



Home was searched.

Connected, either as friends or "business" partners.

WARNING: This document contains slight exaggerations, satire and (attempted) jokes. If you can't tell which are which, Chartgirl recommends Google.

DISCLAIMER: As far as we know, the individuals named in this chart have not been charged in connection with this crime. Lots of them with other crimes, but not this one. So, innocent until proven guilty.

TIPS? Know where the art is? Want to tell someone but haven't found the right person yet? Email me: chartgirl@chartgirl.com

A HANDY GUIDE TO THE MANY STORY ANGLES

If you're not from Boston, refer to the out-of-towners KEY below.

The Unimaginative Approach

The truth is, it's just really unlikely you're ever gonna beat the Boston Globe at this story. And you'll never beat the Herald's willingness to get into a car blindfolded with God knows who. So sticking to the basics doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But if you insist ... Lead with the new stuff. The FBI knows who committed the crime but still doesn't know where the paintings are. Include the fact that the paintings were offered up for sale in Philadelphia about a decade ago, and the fact that a grand jury convened in 2011. Don't forget the \$5 million reward being offered by the museum and the obvious links to the mid-Atlantic and Boston mobs. Also throw in a couple of paragraphs on Whitey Bulger and how drunk people in Boston are on St. Patrick's day for good measure. Speaking of St. Patrick's Day, it's actually amazing ALL Boston crimes aren't committed in the late night hours of St. Patrick's Day.

The Media's Role in Cracking the Case Angle

You know what the media loves? Covering the media. In 1997, Boston Herald reporter Tom Mashberg was driven (blindfolded) by ex-con Bill Youngworth and shown what appeared to be Rembrandt's Storm on the Sea of Galilee. The Herald ran the headline: "WE'VE SEEN IT!" But testing from paint chips showed that probably hadn't seen IT. Then, in 2004, two Polaroid photos (allegedly) depicting the tiny Rembrandt self-portrait were mailed to ABC News' offices in New York. Again, an interesting lead but nothing panned out. And don't forget that back in 1994, the museum received an anonymous letter in which someone offered to help return the paintings in exchange for immunity plus \$2.6 million. The letter proposed that the museum could signal its willingness to move forward by arranging to have The Boston Globe insert the number "1" into the paper's printed foreign currency exchange listings. The Globe complied, but the letters stopped coming. Has anyone considered how many Boston Globes you could buy with this art? I don't mean individual copies of the paper. I mean the actual newspaper.

The Maine Angle

Some might call this a stretch, but up until this story, the term "Maine safe house" tended to conjure up images of, I don't know, EVERY SINGLE HOUSE IN MAINE. Here goes: In 1991, mob figure and Gardner heist 'person of interest' George Reissfelder told his prison lover that the paintings were being housed in a Maine "safe house". The feds didn't find out about this until a 2008 tip, at which point agents conducted a search, but found nothing. Also, IRA gun runner Joe Murray - who some say took possession of the paintings and/or transferred them to the IRA - was shot at his Maine home in 1992. Is it me or is Maine really coming into its own as a state lately? First that whole Kennebunk prostitution scandal. It's becoming clear Maine has been spending some quality time learning from its tiny but seedy friend Rhode Island?

The Evil Rich Collector Angle

This is a great one. Kind of start by asking the rhetorical question -- does a person rich and greedy and terrible enough exist in this world who would want the art for themselves? Then it's smooth sailing. The Gardner heist was mentioned in an episode of The Simpsons. In the episode, the paintings are found in the collection of the evil rich recluse Mr. Burns. Also, back around 2006, an FBI agent went undercover as a wealthy art collector interested in purchasing several of the stolen paintings after French intermediaries claimed to have access to the paintings which they said were under the control of Corsican gangsters. Or what about back around 2005, when a tip came in that French business magnate Jean-Marie Messier had purchased one or more of the stolen Rembrandts. FBI agents flew to Paris. Come to think of it, maybe there's an evil rich FRENCH angle here. Even better. It's worth noting that in 2011 a French court found Messier guilty of embezzlement in a case unrelated to the art theft. It might make sense to check back in on that one.)

The Political Conspiracy Angle(s)

This is for you, Jay Severin. If Obama wasn't involved, then why hasn't he come out and said so? Is Michelle Obama hiding that finial under those bangs of hers? While you're in the political realm, why not throw a bone to up and coming realist painter George W. Bush... Wait a minute. Sudden interest in painting. Summer house in Maine. Past tendency to associate with wealthy evil types. Holy. Shit.

The Affleck/Damon Angle

It's pretty clear that Ben Affleck and Matt Damon need to make this movie. Forget the fact that we still don't have too much of an idea of what actually happened. They could totally start writing the screenplay now. One way or another, you'll need a bunch of organized crime types, some with histories of art theft and some without. Locations: auto body shop; Maine safehouse; newspaper newsroom; prison cell.

The IRA angle

There have been a bunch of theories floated that mention potential IRA involvement. For example, Joe Murray - who was said to have bought the paintings for the IRA - he was shot in 1992 during a domestic dispute with his wife. (How as an IRA gun runner you don't come out on top in a domestic dispute is beyond me.) There were also some indications at various points that the late U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy might help broker the return of the stolen art. I mean as far as the IRA -- you give me a Boston crime, and I will find you an IRA angle. And really, if you're not talking about the Kennedys, how can you be sure you're talking about Boston?

The Sightings

An FBI agent and a museum employee flew to Japan in the early 1990s after a tip came in saying that the Storm on the Sea of Galilee was on display in the home of a Japanese artist with ties to organized crime. As it turns out, what the tipster saw what nothing more than a reproduction of the painting. (! You could also use Boston Herald reporter Tom Mashberg's blindfolded field trip here.) Also, how amazing would it be if the paintings just turned up on the next episode of Antiques Roadshow? Almost as awesome as if they turns up on Storage Wars. Someone, somewhere, is all of the sudden thinking. Wow, what a coincidence, that uncle I have in waste management who lives outside Philly and has a summer house in Maine. And to that person I say this. When you're at that uncle's house for Easter dinner, check the attic.

KEY FOR NON-BOSTONIANS

The Boston Globe? The Boston Herald? What are these things?:

Newspapers! If the Boston Globe is the New York Times, then the Herald is its feisty little friend the New York Post. The Globe is currently owned by the New York Times, but the Times is selling it.

Jay Severin? Who is this guy?

Jay Severin was an afternoon radio talk show host who made one too many racist comments and got booted wherever it is people like that go when normal society decides its just had enough. He's Ann Coulter + Glenn Beck minus all the, well, success.

Whitey Bulger? Why is that name familiar?

Boston's home-grown version of John Gotti and formerly #1 on the FBI's most wanted list. You might know him as Jack Nicholson from The Departed.