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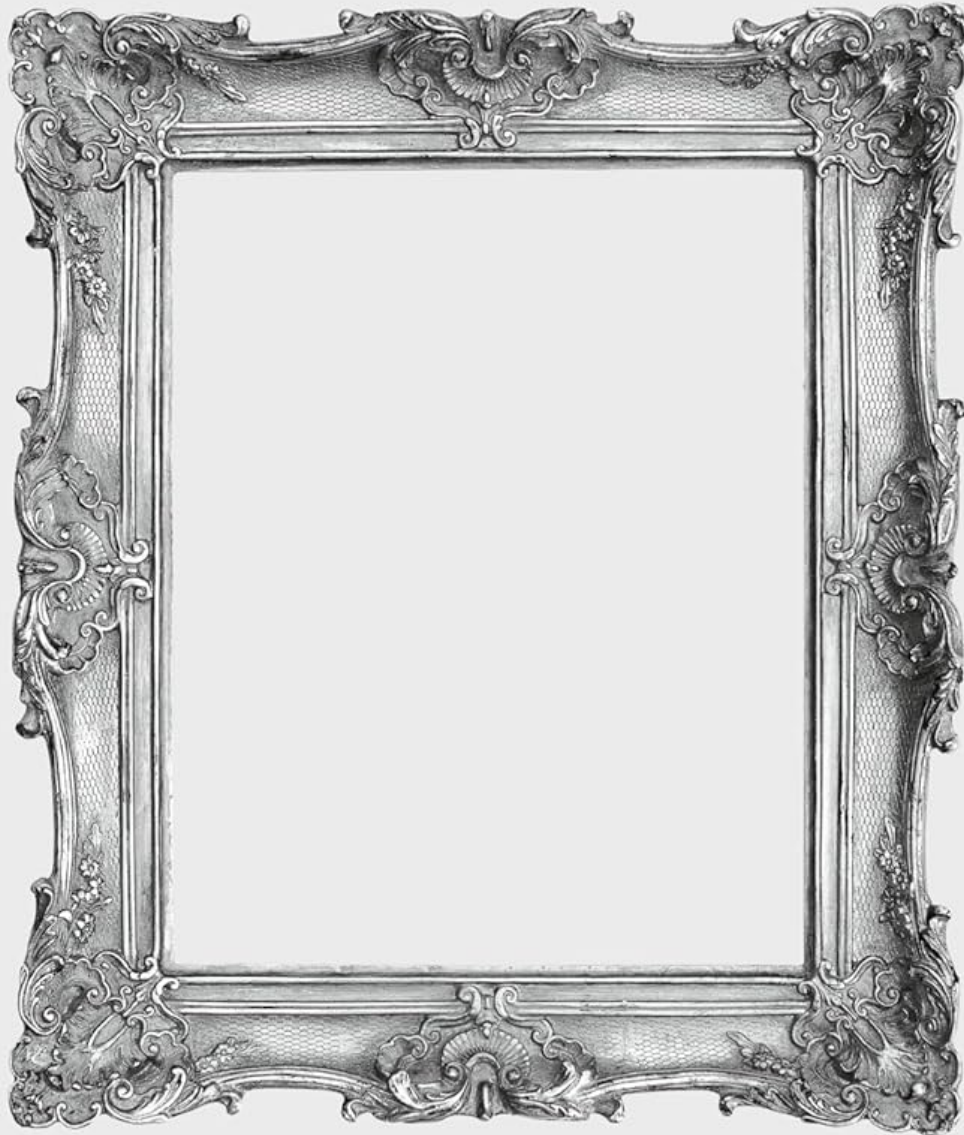
Lost

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1 Lost

The following pages take you through several accounts of art heists in which the stolen artworks have never been recovered, the crimes never solved. There is much conjecture and supposition about every case, as experts and amateurs alike speculate and scrutinise the facts. Frequently, stolen artworks assume celebrity status once the theft is made public, and so they become 'hot potatoes' and the unscrupulous thieves cannot move them on. It is likely then, that many of the works have been damaged, destroyed, lost or hidden beyond reach. There is not always an obvious reason for particular artworks to have been stolen. Often, they are not the most important works in a collection. While many of us may have the idea that artworks are stolen to order for rich James Bond-type villains, this is rarely the case. It is often rather that many are stolen as bargaining tools by criminals for their colleagues in jail. However, there are many different reasons for such heists, some of which may never be known or understood, and as you will see, many of the stolen works simply disappear without trace. Read on for some of the most incredible, sometimes mind-boggling, often perplexing and infamous art heists of all time.

The ensuing heist is sometimes called 'the Skylight Caper', as the three criminals – wearing ski masks – climbed telephone poles and a tree next to the museum and on to the roof, then they opened an unsecured skylight where the alarm was deactivated because it was awaiting repair. They climbed through, and using a nylon rope, they descended into the building. When one of the three security guards on duty, unaware of the intruders, walked nearby to make a cup of tea, one of the men fired a gun up to the ceiling. Turning, the guard was overwhelmed by the robbers and forced to the floor. The two other guards ran to see what was causing the noise, and before long the robbers had them bound and gagged, too. All three were led off and held together in a lecture hall. While one of the thieves stood watch over them, his two accomplices spent half an hour stealing 18 paintings and 39 figurines and pieces of jewellery. Once they had helped themselves to what they wanted, the thieves tried to escape through the skylight using a system of makeshift pulleys, but this took too much time, so instead they used one of the guard's keys to escape through the garage. However, when they left with their first load, one of the thieves triggered the side door's alarm. So, panicked, the men stuffed the jewellery into their pockets and made off with only half of the paintings, running out of the back door and fleeing down the road.

First space for art

By 1972, due to various political, social and economic changes, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) – founded as the Art Association of Montreal in 1860 and the first space in Canada created solely for the exhibition of art – was facing financial difficulties and needed to reduce its outgoings. It changed from being a private institution to a semi-public non-profit organisation, and many discussions ensued over how it could be refurbished to meet the



Exterior of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) in Quebec.

requirements of the late 20th century. After much deliberation, those in charge decided that the museum would close in 1973 for a three-year renovation project.

In the period leading up to the closure, security in some areas of the building was not as stringent as it had been, and the thieves took advantage of this. The alarm which sounded as they escaped through one of the museum's side entrances, meant they left several of the items they had intended to take and fled with a slightly lighter load. Meanwhile inside the museum, the guards were struggling to free themselves and, eventually, an hour after the robbery ended, one managed it. At around 3am, he called the police. Unfortunately, the security guards were unable to provide much information as the intruders had been masked. They did note however, that two spoke French and one English. News of the robbery and the names of the stolen works were



Inside the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing the empty frames from which the artworks were stolen.

kicked open the security director's office, and ripped open the video recorders, then proceeded to remove any visual record of their faces or movements inside the museum. In a final, spiteful act, they placed the empty frame of the Manet painting on the security director's chair. This was probably meant as an insult all those in authority who ran the museum, to anyone who cared about art, and as a sign of their arrogance in pulling off the heist.

After 81 minutes, the two men left the museum. They left the building and emerged on to Palace Road once again, climbed with their 13 stolen works of art back into the waiting car, which then sped off. None of the artworks and artefacts have been seen since.

Suspects

Lack of evidence meant that the case was too difficult for the police to solve, and the trail went cold. Four years later, demands were sent to the Gardner Museum's director, asking for a \$2.6 million (£2 million) ransom. It was a fraction of the combined value of the works, so the museum directors agreed and followed the ransomer's instructions, by publishing a coded message in the Boston Globe newspaper, but they never heard anything again.

It is unlikely the thieves were commissioned to steal specific works of art: those they seized were not the most valuable in the gallery. Instead, the selection seems to have been random and opportune. When some artworks proved hard to remove, they were abandoned and others taken. Often more valuable works were hanging alongside them, but these were ignored. Furthermore, stealing to order is quite rare: of the many art thefts reported each year, police and art historians consider only a few dozen to have been commissioned in this way. In the absence of a specific gang or individuals, there have been many theories of who stole



CHAPTER 18

The French Crown Jewels

At around 9:30am on 19 October 2025, about 30 minutes after the Musée du Louvre in Paris had opened, four masked thieves used a stolen furniture lift to reach a second-floor window on the Seine-facing façade and climbed through to the Galerie d'Apollon. This gilded gallery houses France's historic crown jewels.