



Department of Justice

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District of Delaware

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FORGED WYETH AND MESOPOTAMIAN ANTIQUITIES SEIZED **Assistant U.S. Attorney to Receive National Award**

David C. Weiss, United States Attorney for the District of Delaware, announced today the seizure of a fraudulent Andrew Wyeth painting from a New York auction house, and the seizure of Mesopotamian antiquities from a California antiquities dealer. The seizures resulted from two separate investigations.

Forged Andrew Wyeth Painting Seized.

In July of this year, the United States Attorney's Office, the FBI Wilmington Resident Agency, and the FBI Art Crime Team seized a forgery of Andrew Wyeth's "Snow Birds". The fraudulent painting is shown below.



The fraudulent painting had been placed for sale at a major auction house in New York. Initial estimates placed its value at between \$300,000 and \$500,000. Before any auction began, questions arose as to its authenticity. Using meticulous records of the original painting kept by the Andrew Wyeth office at the Brandywine River Museum, Mary Landa of that office was able to identify discrepancies showing that the painting was a skillfully executed forgery. Landa notified the U. S. Attorney's Office and the painting was seized. The party selling the fraudulent painting denies any wrongdoing, and has agreed to forfeit his interest in the painting to the United States government. The fraudulent painting is being forfeited to remove it from the stream of commerce.

The actual "Snow Birds" painting was painted by Andrew Wyeth in 1970. Mr. Wyeth died in January 2009.

United States Attorney David C. Weiss said, "This investigation demonstrates our commitment to addressing the problem of the illicit sale of fraudulent art, a multi-million dollar criminal enterprise. Recovery of such fraudulent art is a major objective of our law enforcement partner, the FBI Art Crime Team and the FBI's Wilmington office, whose investigative efforts I applaud. This is the second fraudulent Andrew Wyeth painting we have been able to remove from commerce. We hope this action will help protect the legacy of an important American cultural figure. I commend Mary Landa and the Andrew Wyeth office at the Brandywine River Museum for bringing this matter to the attention of the FBI Art Crime Team. Our office will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute art crime in the future."

Iraqi Artifacts Seized

In July of this year, the United States Attorney's Office, the FBI Wilmington Resident Agency, and the FBI Art Crime Team seized a multitude of ancient artifacts originating in Mesopotamia, in present day southern Iraq. The artifacts are pictured below.



Most of the seized items are cuneiform tablets which were used in Mesopotamia for record keeping. The tablets were made by using a reed stylus to write in the cuneiform script on softened clay, which was then hardened.

Three of the seized artifacts are inscribed foundation cones that were embedded in temple walls to dedicate the building to a divinity.

The artifacts were looted from present day Iraq by persons unknown and smuggled into the United States unlawfully. The government of Iraq asserts ownership over them. The U.S. Attorney's Office learned that these artifacts were held by an antiquities dealer in California, who was offering them for sale, and the artifacts were seized. The California dealer has surrendered any right he had in the artifacts, which have been forfeited to the United States government to be removed from the stream of commerce.

United States Attorney David C. Weiss said, "This investigation is the result of the joint efforts of this office, the FBI Art Crime Team, and the FBI's Wilmington office. Along with the FBI, we are committed to addressing the problem of looting and smuggling of cultural property. Artifacts like these represent the history not only of the source country, in this case Iraq, but the history of all mankind. When artifacts are looted, archeologists lose context, which is critical in piecing together the puzzle of the past. We hope that this seizure will help repair at least some of

this damage. Our office will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute cultural property crimes in the future.”

Assistant U. S. Attorney to Receive Award

Assistant United States Attorney David L. Hall has been selected to receive one of four of the nation’s 2010 Saving Antiquities for Everyone (SAFE) Beacon Awards.

The SAFE Beacon Award recognizes “outstanding achievement in raising public awareness about our endangered cultural heritage and the devastating consequences of the illicit antiquities trade, which fuels the looting of ancient sites and destroys our ultimate non-renewable resource: the intact evidence of our undiscovered past.” This year’s Beacon Award winners are described as “unsung heroes” who have “collectively rescued millions of dollars worth of stolen or smuggled art and cultural property.”

AUSA Hall is being honored for his work as the Special Prosecutor of the FBI’s Art Crime Team in protecting cultural heritage by combating the illicit trade in antiquities and art. Hall is cited by SAFE for his work “valiantly prosecuting international art crimes cases”.

SAFE is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that creates educational programs and media campaigns to raise public awareness regarding the importance of preserving cultural heritage worldwide. SAFE is a coalition of professionals in communications, media, and advertising working alongside experts in the academic, legal and law enforcement communities. SAFE has no political affiliations.

The cases are being prosecuted by David L. Hall, Assistant United States Attorney. For further information, contact United States Attorney David C. Weiss or Assistant United States Attorney David L. Hall at (302) 573-6277.

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