



***United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York***

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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY SECURES FORFEITURE  
OF MILLION DOLLAR ITALIAN PAINTING "LEDA ED IL CIGNO"**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JAMES T. HAYES, JR., the Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Homeland Security Investigations in New York ("ICE HSI"), announced today that the painting "*Leda ed il Cigno*" (*Leda and the Swan*) (the "Painting") by Italian Renaissance painter LELIO ORSI was ordered forfeited to the Government as property brought into the United States in violation of customs laws. The Painting depicts the seduction of Leda by Zeus, who, according to Greek mythology, came to earth disguised as a swan.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said: "We are gratified that we have secured the forfeiture of this important work of art and that it will now be returned to the Italian government. We are committed to working with our law enforcement partners to recover stolen property and return it to its rightful owners."

Special Agent-in-Charge JAMES T. HAYES, JR., said: "These are precisely the types of treasures that ICE HSI's Cultural Property Art and Antiquities unit was established to identify and investigate. Having ICE agents specifically trained in conducting investigations of illicitly trafficked cultural property and art has provided our agents with the necessary tools to identify violations, conduct criminal investigations and, ultimately, return stolen objects of a nation's cultural heritage to their rightful owners."

According to the forfeiture complaint filed in Manhattan federal court in December 2008:

The Painting was sold to an individual who imported it into the United States via John F. Kennedy Airport in Jamaica, New York on November 29, 2006, by means of false declarations as

to its country of origin. United States law requires the filing of a Customs Entry Summary for any artwork being imported into the United States. The artwork's country of origin must be included on that Customs Entry Summary. In December 2006, a Customs Entry Summary was filed indicating that the Painting's country of origin was Great Britain.

After the Painting was illegally imported into the United States, it was auctioned and sold at Sotheby's New York on January 24, 2008, for more than \$1 million. After the sale, the purchaser rescinded the purchase after learning of the pending Italian criminal investigation.

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The Painting was forfeited to the United States on January 11, 2011, after the U.S. District Court dismissed a claim to the Painting filed by a private corporation in Madeira. The Painting was sold at auction in 2008 for more than \$1 million, but the sale was later rescinded. The Painting was subsequently seized in June 2008 by ICE HSI pursuant to a seizure warrant, and has been held in an appropriate facility since that time. The Painting will be repatriated to the Republic of Italy in accordance with its request.

The forfeiture arose out of an Italian criminal investigation conducted by the Office of the Public Prosecutor at the Ordinary Court of Rome in conjunction with the Unit for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Italian National Police. Italian laws for the protection of Italy's historical and cultural heritage prohibit the exportation of objects of artistic, historic, or cultural significance without first obtaining an export license from the Ministry of Italian Culture. In the case of the Painting, Italian authorities verified that the Italian government had not issued the requisite export license authorizing the legal exportation of the Painting from Italy. Property that is stolen abroad and later brought into the United States is subject to forfeiture. In March 2008, the Public Prosecutor's Office for the Court of Rome filed a mutual legal assistance request with the United States seeking assistance in the investigation and seizure of the Painting.

Mr. BHARARA praised the investigative work of ICE HSI and the Unit for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Italian National Police in bringing this matter to a successful conclusion. Mr. BHARARA also thanked the Offices of the ICE and Department of Justice Attachés at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, the

and the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs

Assistant U.S. Attorneys JASON HERNANDEZ and BARBARA A. WARD are in charge of the forfeiture.

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