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7 indicted in international scheme to sell counterfeit art

Story Highlights

More than \$5 million in counterfeit art was sold, primarily on eBay, investigators said
Government seeking more than \$4 million from five defendants; \$1 million from two
Extradition requested for 2 suspects in Spain and Italy, authorities said
Justice Department: One suspect arrested for threatening police informant

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From Terry Frieden

CNN



WASHINGTON (CNN) -- An alleged scheme involving the production and sale of counterfeit prints by artists including Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali and Marc Chagall resulted in the indictments of four Americans, two Italians and a Spaniard, federal authorities said Wednesday.

More than \$5 million in counterfeit art was sold as part of the scheme, primarily on eBay, the Justice Department said. The "limited edition" prints included forged numbers and signatures, investigators said.

Michael Zabrin, 55, an art dealer from the Chicago suburb of Northbrook, Illinois, was charged in a 10-count indictment, along with Coral Springs, Florida, art dealer Jerome Begis, 61, and the three Europeans.

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[Extradition](#) requests will be filed to bring Oswaldo Aulestia-Bach, 62, of Barcelona, [Spain](#), and Elio Bonfiglioli, 53, of Monsummano, [Italy](#), to the United States to face charges in federal court in Chicago,

authorities said.

Patrizia Soliani, 56, of Milan, Italy, is in the United States and has been released on bond awaiting trial on related fraud charges filed last year.

The government is seeking forfeiture of more than \$4 million from the five defendants. Authorities said the European scheme operated between 1999 and 2007 and involved making the bogus prints in Italy and Spain.

In another, nine-count indictment, James Kennedy, 55, of Northbrook, and Leon Amiel Jr. of New York City, were charged with fraud in the sale of counterfeit prints. The government is seeking a \$1 million forfeiture of their proceeds.

Kennedy is in custody in Chicago », Illinois, where he is being held without bond. He was arrested two months ago in Jacksonville, Florida, for allegedly threatening to injure "an individual who was communicating information to a law enforcement officer in connection with this investigation," the Justice Department said.

In Chicago, U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald called the indictments "significant because they extend across international borders from one end of the supply chain to the other."

Art buyers, he emphasized, should exercise caution. [E-mail to a friend](#)

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