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Inside the FBI: The Art Crime Program

On this episode of Inside the FBI, we'll learn more about the Bureau's role in investigating and recovering missing art and cultural property.

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Transcript

[The episode opens with a mid-tempo musical track with a pulsing rhythm, reminiscent of a clock ticking.]

Ellen Ferrante: What do paintings by Monet, Rembrandt, and Dali... an original Charles Dickens novel... Stradivarius violins... a gold ring from the 1952 World Series... and 13th century Native American ceramics have in common?

They're all examples of missing art and cultural property that the FBI investigates under its Art Crime Program.

Since its inception in 2004, the program has helped recover more than 20,000 items valued at over \$900 million.

In this episode, we'll learn more about the FBI's role in investigating and recovering missing art and cultural property.

I'm Ellen Ferrante, and this is Inside the FBI.

[The Inside the FBI Jingle kicks in. It's a bright and driving track]

[The music changes to a bright, up tempo track with a bit of a bassline]

Ferrante: Art and cultural property crime leads to billions of dollars in losses every year. And art crime can involve a number of illegal activities, like theft, fraud, looting, and trafficking of art across state or international lines.

The FBI established its Art Crime Program to help combat and investigate these crimes. Composed of special agents, this team works with subject matter experts domestically and abroad. Kristin Koch, the supervisory special agent and program manager of the FBI's Art Crime Program, further explains what we mean by "art crime."

Kristin Koch: Art crime encompasses not just what you would think of someone stealing a painting from a museum, which is something we certainly investigate. But it also includes investigations of frauds and forgeries, antiquities trafficking, and violations of NAGPRA and ARPA, which are the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the Archeological Resources Protection Act.

Ferrante: One case that Koch helped investigate demonstrates the complexity in art crime investigation. In this instance, law enforcement learned that someone in Boston was selling fake Andy Warhol paintings to an art dealer out in Los Angeles.

Koch: Through investigating that case, not only did we find that he had sold some fake paintings to the dealer in Los Angeles, but he had sold some fake paintings to a number of other individuals, including an individual in France, another individual in Massachusetts, and the paintings that he was using to make the fakes, he had basically stolen from a friend of his that was living in Korea.

So, we ended up charging interstate transportation of stolen property, but as a theft by conversion, a money laundering case, and a wire fraud case in that particular instance. And what was interesting about it specifically was one, I got to learn a lot about the artist that he had created these fakes from or had people create fakes from, as well as being able to work with a scientific laboratory that did analysis specifically on fine art and antiquities.

[The music changes to a similar track without the bassline]

And there was a large international aspect to this case involving a victim in Korea, a victim in France, a gallery in Germany, and a witness that was also located in Germany.

Ferrante: So, how does the FBI get involved with investigating these types of crimes? As Koch explains:

Koch: Many art crime matters involve violations of federal law. The art crime market worldwide is a tens of billions of dollar[s] industry every year in the illicit market. And the illicit market is