

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024035336577 Miami – Today, a federal judge in Miami sentenced 43-year-old Philip Righter, of California, to five years in prison for running a scheme in which he tried to dupe prominent art businesses, including one South Florida gallery, into spending millions of dollars on forgeries of works by renowned contemporary artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Ariana Fajardo Orshan, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and George L. Piro, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Miami Field Office, made the announcement. Righter's scheme was this: He would buy art forgeries at online marketplaces and auction sites. Once he had the forgeries, Righter tried to make them appear legitimate by creating letters that falsely certified their authenticity. For example, he created letters that appeared to be from "The Estate of Keith Haring" and the "Authentication Committee of the Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat." In fact, they were not. Righter designed and purchased embossers bearing the names of the estate and foundation for Haring and Basquiat. He stamped the forged letters with the custom embossers, trying to enhance the look of legitimacy. Righter forged the signatures of representatives of the estate and foundation on the letters. Righter also created elaborate backstories to establish the "provenance" of the forged artworks. He forged documents to show links between the artworks, Righter's family, a Wisconsin art museum, and a prominent New York City gallery. Righter told one prospective buyer that he had donated a number of his artworks to his Ivy League alma mater, which was a lie. Once Righter had the forged artworks, forged documents, and false stories in place, he offered, directly and through brokers, to sell the forged works to galleries, auction houses, and others. In one instance, after a Miami gallery owner showed interest in some work, Righter (who was in Los Angeles) shipped a number of the forgeries to South Florida, where the FBI ultimately seized them. Righter's asking price for these forgeries: \$1,056,000. He directed the gallery owner to wire the money to Righter's bank account. Agents with FBI's Art Crime Team uncovered Righter's coast-to-coast scheme, which resulted in the filing of two federal cases against him -- one in the Southern District of Florida (the "Miami case") and one in the Central District of California (the "Los Angeles case"). The Los Angeles case was transferred to Miami, where the two prosecutions were consolidated for plea and sentencing proceedings. On March 11, 2020, Righter pled guilty to two counts in the Miami case: mail fraud and aggravated identity theft. (Case No. 19-20370-CR-Cooke). Today, Righter pled guilty in Miami federal court to three counts in the Los Angeles case: wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and tax fraud. (Case No. 20-20164-CR-Cooke). United States District Court Judge Marcia G. Cooke sentenced Righter to five years' imprisonment in each case. The sentences will run concurrently. A consolidated restitution hearing is set for September 30, 2020, at 10 a.m. U.S. Attorney Fajardo Orshan commended the investigative efforts of the FBI's Art Crime Team. Assistant United States Attorney Christopher Browne prosecuted the Miami case. You may find a copy of this press release on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls.