

https://www.taosnews.com/news/boulder-police-unsure-whether-theft-of-taos-society-of-artists-work-was-crime-of-opportunity/article_2c858390-8dea-11ed-923f-9f3717035aea.html

Boulder police unsure whether theft of Taos Society of Artists' work was 'crime of opportunity' or 'calculated'

'We haven't had a case like this in recent memory'

By Rick Romancito For the Taos News

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Five pieces of artwork valued at more than \$400,000 were reportedly stolen Dec. 14 from a truck parked at a hotel in Boulder, Colorado, according to a Jan. 3 press release from Boulder Police Department. Investigators aren't yet certain whether the truck was randomly targeted or if the theft was planned.

Three of the artworks were by members of the Taos Society of Artists: Eanger Irving Couse, Ernest Martin Hennings and Joseph Henry Sharp. The TSA is group of artists who are **credited with founding Taos as an art colony when they settled here after 1898.**

“This has created quite a buzz in our art world,” said Davison Koenig, executive director and curator of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos. “We even had Bonhams Auctions contact us.” Bonhams is a worldwide network of “auction houses consigning and selling fine art, collectables, motoring, furniture, wine and more,” according to its website.

Koenig said he understood the artwork was being transported from a Bonham Auction House and “they were just on their way somewhere. I don't have any idea [where]. Could be private owners, could be galleries.”

“The paintings by Couse, Hennings and Sharp were all sold by auction house Bonhams in Los Angeles this past November as part of a sale of works in the collection of G. Andrew Bjurman,” according to a Jan. 5 story in Artforum. “The de Kooning was en route to a Colorado couple, who had also purchased one of the other stolen paintings.”

Koenig said the stolen art included an E.I. Couse, and a J.H. Sharp painting “stolen from the truck, both scenes of Taos Pueblo. It is doubtful these pieces will materialize in Taos, however we hope folks will keep an ear to the ground in the

event they should surface. Truly a cultural loss should these painting not be recovered.”

The five artworks listed by Boulder police are “View of the Taos Pueblo” by Joseph Henry Sharp (9.75 by 13.75 inches), “Laguna Pueblo” by Ernest Marin Hennings (10 by 14 inches), “Untitled Madrid Series #3” by Elaine de Kooning (8 by 9 inches), “Burnett’s Barn” by Jane Freilicher (40 by 60 inches), and “Taos Pueblo at Night” by Eanger Irving Couse (9 by 12 inches).

The Boulder Police statement said “a company transporting several pieces of artwork across the country stayed the night at a hotel in the 5300 block of South Boulder Road. The next morning, they discovered that an unknown person(s) had cut the padlock on the truck and stolen several pieces of artwork and tools.”

Boulder Police Public Information Officer Dionne Waugh said the reason it took law enforcement three weeks to alert the public of the theft was because “detectives were following up on different leads. And, we had some other cases going on at the same time. This was just the timing of when we decided to put it out to the public.”

Theft of artwork is a rarity, but it does continue to happen. “More often, thieves spot a vulnerability in a museum’s security system, steal the art, and find out later that it is harder to move than they previously thought,” an Aug. 24, 2020 Artnet News article states. Some thieves have been known to try and sell artworks to museums or ransom works to an insurance company. Then, the article adds, some try to sell it on the black market.

FBI art crime specialist Christopher McKeogh told Artnet News an “investigator’s greatest fear [is] that a thief may panic or grow frustrated and destroy a priceless work of art.”

Waugh said “that’s definitely what we’re trying to figure out, [whether] exactly if the person knew what they took or were they just breaking into a vehicle to get goods to sell. The detective (R. Montano-Banda) is working with a couple of different

agencies to figure [that] out. He's researching art theft to see how people would sell such art. And, we truly don't know if this was just a crime of opportunity or if it was calculated more than that. That's why we're asking for the public's help ... It definitely is unusual. We haven't had a case like this in recent memory."

Koenig added, "It's a real tragedy if those...I mean, the biggest concern is that they destroy the work or do something with it because they can't sell it, right? And that would just be a real tragedy."

Anyone with information about this crime is asked to call Detective R. Montano-Banda at (303) 441-1906 reference case 22-12364.