

Agent Rescues Stolen Paintings

Post 3/11/80
Of Sidney Holtzman,
Who's Happy and Not

By Paul Richard

The FBI yesterday announced that one of its New York agents—posing as a shady connoisseur with a \$50,000 bankroll and international connections—had recovered 10 paintings stolen in 1977 from the father of Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.).

Is the artscam's beneficiary delighted with the Bureau's efforts? Well, not exactly.

"I'm very angry with the FBI," said New York attorney Sidney Holtzman. "Their announcement has made me a burglary target for the whole world. I'd call it sheer stupidity."

Holtzman objected to the fact that in phone calls to the press, Terry Roberts of the FBI's New Rochelle office reported that one of the paintings was labeled "Jean Honore Fragonard." (Paintings by that famous French 18th-century master today might fetch as much as \$1 million. One sold at auction for \$875,000 in 1961.)

"Is my little picture by the hand of Fragonard? I'd be delighted if it were, collector Holtzman said.

The FBI said it also had recovered "an original Picasso bronze," a 15-inch-high woman's head that, it said, was worth \$75,000. How does the Bureau know that the work is a Picasso? "We're not art experts," said agent Roberts. "The suspect who tried to sell it identified it as a Picasso."

A man identified as Joseph Michael Pinto of Greene, N.Y., and described by Roberts as "one of the biggest men I've ever seen—he's 6-foot-8 and 275 pounds," was arrested in Monroe, N.Y., on Feb. 22 when he allegedly attempted to sell the 10 Holtzman pictures and the bronze for \$50,000 to an undercover agent. "The agent," Roberts said, "posed as a connoisseur knowledgeable in art, and also able to transport art to foreign

See RECOVERY, B2, Col. 6