

Ex-St. Louisan Being Questioned In Theft Of 3 Cezanne Paintings

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A former St. Louis art and antiques dealer, once suspected of involvement in the burglaries at the St. Louis Art Museum early last year, is one of several Chicago dealers being questioned closely in connection with the theft of three paintings by Paul Cezanne from the Art Institute of Chicago. The theft was discovered Dec. 27.

The former St. Louisan, who moved to Chicago several years ago, is described by police here as an associate of Russell Byers, who is believed to have masterminded the first break-in last year at the St. Louis museum Jan. 29.

A prominent law enforcement official here said the Chicago dealer is believed to have functioned as a conduit for Frederic Remington's "Bronco Buster," stolen in the January break-in and later anonymously returned. Since he moved to Chicago, he is believed to have received and sold many art works and antiques stolen here.

The Chicago theft was not the work of a hit and run burglar such as John A. Crenshaw, who last fall pleaded guilty to the St. Louis break-ins. The three Cezannes, valued at \$3 million, vanished from a storeroom where they had been placed in early November while the corridor where they customarily hung was being redecorated.

The missing oils include a portrait of Mme. Cezanne in a yellow armchair, painted between 1893 and 1895, a still life of apples on a tablecloth, 1886-90, and a landscape of a house by a river, 1885-90.

"Because the Art Institute's vault was full and the redecoration was not expected to take long," explained Commander William Murphy, chief of investigators assigned to the case, "the paintings were put in a storeroom.

"But the job took longer than expected. On Nov. 28, a curator took some foreign visitors to the storeroom to see the paintings. Then on Dec. 27 a maintenance man noticed an empty frame. He called a curator and the loss of the three was discovered. "We can't pinpoint it better than that," Murphy said.

However, a 28-year old shipping clerk had been seen leaving the storeroom Dec. 22 with a large package wrapped in brown paper, subsequent investigation revealed.

The clerk, Laud Pace, was seen leaving three hours before he customarily reported for work. An employee of the Institute for eight months, Pace quit on Dec. 28 after police went to his apartment and found a large piece of Plexiglas, a sheet of plastic wrapping material and an expensive art book that contained illustrations of and information about two of the missing paintings.

He was arrested and charged with stealing the paintings from the Art Insti-

tute. Police also found a short story that Pace apparently had written about a burglary at a large metropolitan museum.

Murphy said Pace, who has no police record, has been questioned daily since his arrest and has refused to take a lie detector test about the burglary. Murphy said the large piece of plexiglass is not precisely the size of the bundle Pace had been seen leaving with, "but the sizes were close enough."

The former St. Louisan being questioned in connection with the theft was indicted here in 1972 for allegedly planning a jewel robbery that took place in the Central West End. The charge was dropped when the state's chief witness subsequently refused to testify.

"We were after that guy for years," a law enforcement official here said. "Although we were never able to nail him, maybe that's why he moved his operation out of St. Louis."