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The National Bestseller now available in paperback!

THE GARDNER HEIST:

The True Story of the World's Largest Unsolved Art Theft

By Ulrich Boser

“Boser has produced a captivating portrait of the world’s biggest unsolved art theft.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“A vivid portrait of the high-stakes world of art crime.”

—*The Associated Press*



March 18, 2010 is the 20th anniversary of the Gardner Heist!



Shortly after midnight on March 18, 1990, two men broke into the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston and stole \$500 million worth of art, including one Vermeer, three Rembrandts, and five Degas. It is the largest art heist in history; it is the biggest burglary in American memory. But after thousands of leads—and a \$5 million reward—not a single painting has been recovered. In **THE GARDNER HEIST: The True Story of the World’s Largest Unsolved Art Theft** (Harper Paperbacks, On Sale Date: 3/9/2010 ISBN 13: 9780061451843, \$14.99), writer Ulrich Boser tells the story behind the caper and reveals new and startling information about the identities of the thieves. Using eyewitness accounts, exclusive interviews, and newly discovered FBI files, Boser provides powerful evidence that mobster David Turner was behind the robbery.

THE GARDNER HEIST takes readers deep inside the art underworld. Boser examines why criminals swipe precious masterpieces—and how museums fail to adequately protect their works. Art theft has boomed over the past few decades, and the illegal trade in stolen paintings and sculptures has become one of the world’s largest black markets; experts believe it’s a \$6 billion business.

Famed art detective Harold Smith worked the Gardner heist for years, and after his death, Boser decided to pick up where he left off. Armed with little more than a pen and notepad, Boser explored Smith's unfinished leads and came across a remarkable cast of characters. There's the brilliant, rock 'n' roll art thief who swears that he knows who committed the robbery; the golden-boy gangster who professes his innocence in rhyming verse; the Irish-American mobster James "Whitey" Bulger who is second only to Osama bin Laden on the FBI's Most Wanted list; and the Boston heiress Isabella Stewart Gardner, who stipulated in her will that nothing should ever be changed in her museum, a provision followed so closely that the empty frames of the stolen works still hang on the walls. In his spellbinding story, Boser describes how he grew increasingly obsessed with the case and eventually discovered new information about the identities of the men who looted the museum. After uncovering a wealth of convincing evidence—including an eyewitness who saw the criminals before they entered the museum—Boser fingers mobster David Turner as the person most likely to have been behind the heist. Once hailed as the Teflon gangster of Boston's South Shore, Turner is currently serving a 38-year prison term for armed robbery; he has never been charged with the museum theft.

THE GARDNER HEIST moves beyond the Boston museum robbery, and Boser details the growing practice of trading looted paintings for drugs and guns; discusses why only about 5 percent of stolen art is ever recovered; and debunks art crime myths such as the idea of an art-loving millionaire who snaps up stolen paintings for his own private collection. In a story of obsession and loss, of art and greed, of mobsters and socialites, **THE GARDNER HEIST** might be as compelling as the stolen masterpieces themselves.

ULRICH BOSER is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and has written for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Smithsonian*, *Slate*, and many other publications. His work has received various awards and citations; *Washingtonian* magazine recently named him a "writer to watch." A former contributing editor at *US News & World Report*, Boser is the founding editor of *The Open Case*, a criminal justice web magazine and online community. For more information about the Gardner case, please visit www.theopencase.com/gardner. For more information about Ulrich Boser, please visit www.ulrichboser.com or contact me.

Tour dates

Ulrich Boser

THE GARDNER HEIST

West Palm Beach, Florida

February 18 and 19, 2010

Norton Museum of Art
1451 South Olive Avenue
West Palm Beach, FL 33401-7162
Noon

Hanover, New Hampshire

March 5, 2010

Hood Museum of Dartmouth College
Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire
(603) 646-2808
4:30 p.m.

Vero, Florida

March 15, 2010

Vero Beach Museum of Art
3001 Riverside Park Drive
Vero Beach, FL
(772) 231-0707
4:30 p.m.

Winchester, Massachusetts

March 16

Book Ends
559 Main Street, Winchester, MA
(781) 721-5933
7 p.m.

Boston, Massachusetts

March 17, 2010

Sumerset Club
42 Beacon Street, Boston, MA,
(617) 227-1731
5 p.m.

Boston, Massachusetts
March 18, 2010

Blackstone's of Beacon Hill
46 Charles Street
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 227-4646
7 p.m.

Scituate, Massachusetts
March 19, 2010

Front Street Book Shop
Scituate, MA 02066-1329
(781) 545-5011
7 p.m.

Washington, D.C.
June 8, 2010

Katzen Arts Center
4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016
202-885-ARTS
10 a.m.

Omaha, Nebraska
November 8, 2010

Joslyn Art Museum
2200 Dodge Street
Omaha, NE 68102-1292
(402) 342-3300
11 a.m.

Praise for THE GARDNER HEIST

HARPER

“Boser has produced a captivating portrait of the world’s biggest unsolved art theft.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“A vivid portrait of the high-stakes world of art crime.”

—*The Associated Press*

"Boser has done a public service in exposing the real world of art theft: It isn't about glamour and culture — it's about greed, violence and irreparable, maddening loss."

—*USA TODAY*

“Ulrich Boser presents his solution to the [Gardner] mystery.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Boser’s book on it has the feel of a speedy ride down a mountain road spiked with hairpin turns. Boser deftly steers readers through a cast of characters ranging from the highest of brow (museum curators and art experts) to the lowest imaginable (thuggish, bottom-feeding gangsters) ...”

—*Christian Science Monitor*

“Boser cracks the cold case of the art world’s greatest unsolved mystery.”

—*Vanity Fair*

“I’m a sucker for a good caper, and there was never a bigger one than the theft of masterpieces from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston, in 1990. *The Gardner Heist*, by Ulrich Boser, tells the full, if maddeningly inconclusive, story of the crime and the investigation.”

—**Jeffrey Toobin, *The New Yorker***

“In *The Gardner Heist*, author Ulrich Boser offers a tantalizing whodunit as he embarks on an exhaustive search for the stolen masterpieces.”

—*Boston Globe*

"The theft has roiled many imaginations, including that of Ulrich Boser."

— *The New York Times*

"The book is a thrill... the mystery remains unsolved, but the case is reinvigorated in its retelling by a man who fully appreciates the value of the masterpieces and the magnitude of the criminal conspiracy that carried them away in the night."—*The Guardian (UK)*

“Artfully done... Grade: A Minus.”

—*Boston Herald*

"The empty frames serve as testimony of the museum’s loss; Boser’s book, meanwhile, serves as tribute and as oddly satisfying thriller."

—*The Onion’s A.V. CLUB*



An interview with Ulrich Boser, author of THE GARDNER HEIST

HOW DID THE THIEVES ROB THE MUSEUM?

Shortly after midnight on March 18, 1990, two men dressed as police officers arrived at the side entrance of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. The men told the night guard that they were investigating a disturbance and were buzzed inside. The thieves then bound the guard and his partner, and for more than an hour, they looted the galleries, stealing a dozen masterpieces including five Degas, three Rembrandts, and a Vermeer.

HOW VALUABLE ARE THE STOLEN PAINTINGS?

The Gardner robbery is the world's largest art heist. It is the biggest burglary in American history. The thieves stole Rembrandt's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, the Old Master's only seascape. The robbers swiped Vermeer's *The Concert*, one of only 36 paintings by the Dutch artist. The missing masterpieces are the Holy Grail of the art world. Experts believe that the paintings might be worth as much as \$500 million dollars. The Gardner museum offers a \$5 million reward for their return.

WHO WAS ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER?

Isabella Stewart Gardner was one of the foremost art patrons of the 20th century. A spirited, society woman, she purchased masterpieces by Rembrandt, Botticelli, and Velazquez, and her collection eventually grew to include the only Cellini bronze in the country, Raphael's stunning *Count Tommaso Inghirami*, and perhaps the finest Italian Renaissance painting in the world, Titian's *Europa*.

In 1903, Gardner built a Venetian-style palazzo to house all of her treasures, and the museum itself is a work of art, with soaring balconies, intimate galleries, and a dazzling courtyard. Gardner wrote in her will that nothing could ever be changed in her museum—not the Michelangelo prints, not the locket of Robert Browning's hair—and today the frames of the stolen paintings still hang on the gallery walls.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THE CASE?

In December 2004, I began working on a story for *US News & World Report* about Harold Smith, one of the world's most successful art detectives. He had recovered lost Renoirs, exposed forged Da Vincis, and cracked the country's largest gold robbery. Smith worked the Gardner heist for years. But within weeks of our meeting, Smith died of skin cancer, and after his death, I decided to pick up where he left off and search for the lost paintings.

DID YOU SOLVE THE CASE?

I did not solve this case. Not even close. Indeed, in the twenty years since the Gardner heist occurred, not a single person has been arrested, not a single painting has been recovered.

But as part of my research, I uncovered new evidence that implicates Boston gangster David Turner and shows that he was most likely one of the thieves who robbed the museum. I discovered FBI files that describe how Turner's crime boss, Carmello Merlino, twice tried to return the paintings in exchange for a reduced prison sentence. I spoke to the last witness to see the thieves before they entered the museum and he described one of the thieves as having "Asian eyes," and Turner fits that description. And when I confronted Turner with the evidence, he appeared to brag, telling me that I should put his face on the cover of my book. Turner is currently serving a 38-year jail term; he has never been charged with the museum theft.

HOW ABOUT WHITEY BULGER? WAS HE INVOLVED?

Bulger was the most powerful gangster in Boston at the time of the heist, and there are a number of highly respected art detectives who believe that he may have taken control of the paintings after the robbery. Some also believe that Bulger may have given the stolen paintings to gangsters in Ireland and that the paintings have been stashed somewhere along the western coast of the island. I spent years looking into the lead and even made a trip to Ireland to look for Bulger and investigate the Irish connection. But I did not find any hard evidence that Bulger was involved, nor did I find evidence that he was not involved. Just a lot of rumor and speculation.

SO WHERE ARE THE PAINTINGS TODAY?

I don't know. But if I were to speculate—and this is definitely speculation—I believe that the thieves most likely stashed the paintings in a safe house somewhere outside of Boston and then lost control of the works. The situation is complicated by the fact that David Turner appears to have killed many of those who participated in the robbery. A government informant once claimed that Lenny DiMuzio was involved in the heist. He was shot to death and stuffed into the trunk of his car, and investigators believe Turner was the triggerman. An FBI source once fingered George Reissfelder for the crime, and in March 1991, he was found dead of a cocaine overdose. Many believe that his death was a target killing.

Perhaps the only thing that's clear is that Turner himself does not have access to the art. Because if he had the paintings, I'm sure that he would have tried to use them to bargain down his nearly forty-year jail sentence for armed robbery.

BUT DON'T YOU THINK SOME ART-LOVING MILLIONAIRE SNAPPED UP THE PAINTINGS?

Experts call this the Dr. No theory of art theft, after the criminal genius of the James Bond film. But the problem is that there is no evidence. None at all. No investigator has ever found a secret stash of stolen paintings in a millionaire's mansion. No investigator has ever caught a burglar who worked on behalf of a real-life Dr. No.

While art thieves are often portrayed as sly and skillful, Pierce Brosnan-types with a passion for Impressionist paintings, the reality is far less glamorous. The people who steal art are largely run-of-the-mill crooks—aging drug dealers, out-of-work bank robbers, ex-cons looking to pay the rent. They want the cash. They steal art because it's easy. And most looted art simply disappears into the criminal netherworld. The canvases are secreted away in basements and attics; they are traded for drugs and guns as a sort of criminal currency. In the end, only about 5 percent of all stolen art is ever recovered.

WHAT WAS THE TOUGHEST PART OF THE BOOK?

The research. No question. I ran down countless leads. I spoke to countless people. I hired private investigators to help me shadow suspects. I visited maximum-security prisons to talk with jailed mobsters. I once flew to Ireland to see if Boston mob boss James “Whitey” Bulger might have the paintings. Blame the art, blame the mystery, but this case has a deep and seducing power. You hear about the heist and the paintings and then, suddenly, without any warning, you're hunting for the art, you're trying to crack the museum riddle. One source called the Gardner case “the crack cocaine of theft.”

WHAT SURPRISED YOU THE MOST?

The size of the art underworld. It's enormous. Criminals regularly steal major paintings—nabbing a Monet or a Warhol or some other work of inestimable value—and the Art Loss Register's database of stolen art has swelled over the years to include 609 Picassos, 181 Rembrandts, and Caravaggio's priceless masterpiece *Nativity with San Lorenzo and San Francesco*. According to experts, the stolen art trade is one of the world's largest black markets, a \$4 to \$6 billion illegal business.

DO YOU THINK THE PAINTINGS WILL BE RETURNED?

I believe that the lost Gardner masterpieces will come back. It might take years, even decades, but soon or later, the paintings will be returned. In the world of art theft, hope springs eternal for good reason—cases often take years to solve. North Carolina had to wait more than 140 years to get back its copy of the Bill of Rights. A thief stole the artifact in 1865, and the work floated around the art underworld for decades until the FBI recovered the canvas in a sting in 2005.

If anyone has any information on the Gardner heist—a lead on the thieves, a sighting of a missing painting—they should call my toll-free Gardner hotline, 1-888-292-9380.