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## ♦ Collecting

### How to foil art burglars at home

by CAITLIN RANDALL

**T**HE THIEVES struck at night. Bypassing security at the main gate, burglars in two 4x4 vehicles crashed through a distant perimeter fence and drove cross-country to the 17th-century manor house. Police said they knocked down a heavy wooden door and plundered the house in less than 20 minutes while alarms sounded. They escaped with masterpieces estimated at \$150 million, although the police and the owner haven't divulged figures.

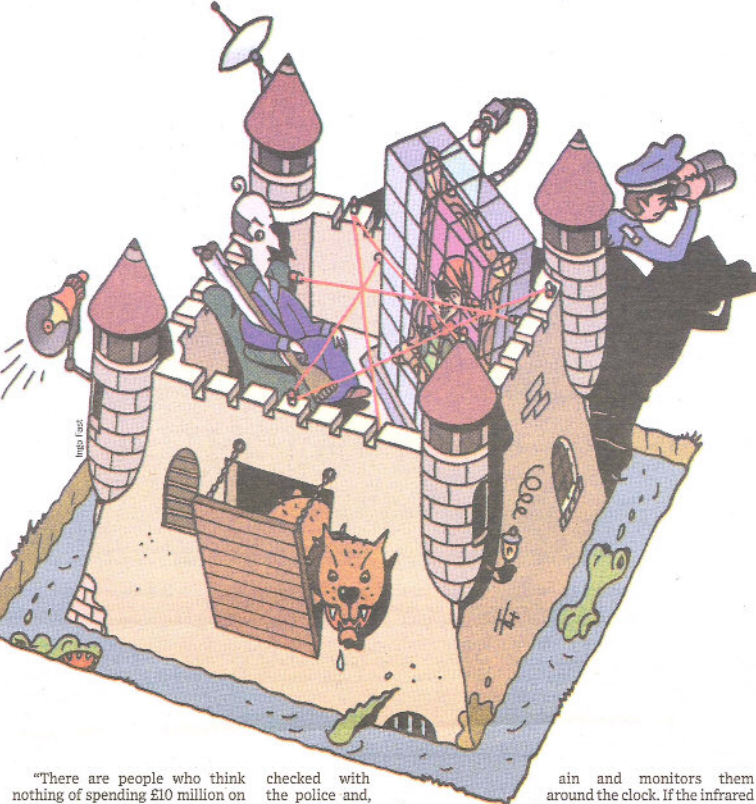
The February raid in southwest England was Britain's biggest home heist since 2003—when a da Vinci was snatched from a castle in Scotland. That time, two men posing as visitors overpowered a guard and walked away with a painting valued at an estimated \$65 million. Knowing they had 15 minutes before the alarms brought a swarm of police, the thieves walked out the main door and drove off. The painting, "Madonna with the Yarnwinder," has never been traced.

Estimates from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and Interpol put the value of fine art and cultural property stolen world-wide at around \$6 billion a year, a figure that includes big-ticket items taken from museums. It is usually the high-profile museum thefts that make headlines, but most art objects—more than 80%—are stolen from people's homes, according to Scotland Yard.

Thieves may be daring (on an estate in south-central England, robbers rowed across an Elizabethan moat in a nighttime raid) or dumb (one thief fled the scene in a taxi, leaving behind the frame of a million-dollar Picasso with his fingerprints all over it). But art thieves know there is slim chance they will be caught and every possibility they will turn a good profit. "Thieves now appreciate that they can get good money for art and antiques without much chance of getting caught," says Detective Sergeant Vernon Rapley, head of Scotland Yard's Art and Antiques Unit.

The recovery rate world-wide for stolen art is around 10%, according to the FBI, but the London-based Council for the Prevention of Art Theft says a mere 3% of artwork stolen from English country estates is ever recovered. Lesser-known stolen artworks can slip through the cracks at auction houses or be sold at fairs or on the Internet, or works can disappear into the underworld to be used as alternative currency for criminals financing drug or arms deals. "Forget 'The Thomas Crown Affair,'" says Detective Rapley, referring to the film about a glamorous art thief. "This is a grotty crime that supports international networks involved in all kinds of criminal activities."

Museums have been fighting back with increasingly sophisticated gadgetry. But private collectors often rely on antiquated alarm systems, poorly trained guards or the idea that someone in the house will scare the thieves away. "Stealing from a private home is much easier [than a museum] and requires less planning," says Will Geddes from the London-based International Corporate Protection (www.icpgroup.ltd.uk).



"There are people who think nothing of spending £10 million on a painting, but struggle to part with £20,000 to protect it," says David Allison, managing director of asset-protection firm Octaga in Hereford (www.octaga.co.uk). He says one potential client had library walls covered with paintings, including a John Constable. "There was virtually no security—a house alarm that didn't work and a golden retriever," he says.

Here are some guidelines from these and other experts on how to protect your home from art thieves.

#### Get advice

Art-risk consultant Dick Ellis of the Art Management Group (www.artmanagementgroup.com) says first, get professional advice on all aspects of security, from alarm systems to specialty art insurance.

Depending on the size and value of the collection, protecting the artwork usually means hiring a security firm to conduct a risk assessment. A good consultant will tailor a plan to the collection and the client's lifestyle. Costs vary tremendously but can run from a few thousand pounds to £500,000 a year for a high-tech system and an on-site, full-time staff to man it.

"We take into account travel schedules, associates, staff, where the collection is located and if it's moved for presentation," Mr. Allison says. In one instance, a client with a collection valued at nearly \$30 million paid around \$65,000 for a sophisticated alarm system with antitamper devices, fitted to an extensive collection of art and antique books.

A good firm will offer references and credentials that can be double-

checked with the police and, in the U.K., with professional accreditation organizations such as the British Security Industry Association, the National Security Inspectorate or the Security Industry Authority.

#### Build a system

"Your first line of defense is physical protection," says Detective Rapley. If you are on an estate, lower the height of the front gate to keep out large vans, and use perimeter fencing and movable driveway bollards.

AMG's Mr. Ellis—who was formerly the head of Scotland Yard's Art and Antiques Unit and led the recovery of Edvard Munch's "The Scream" when it was stolen in 1994 from the National Gallery in Oslo—tells clients to use landscaping to create hidden barricades known as Ha Ha walls. Originally used to keep livestock out of the formal gardens of country estates, Ha Ha walls are drop-offs of about a meter dug into the earth to form a barrier from the oncoming side—high enough to knock out a car's axle—without interrupting the view from the house.

Next, mix and match security devices so that alarms are triggered well before thieves enter the house. Motion wires along a fence, buried cable detection systems and passive infrared heat sensors can all be connected to alarms. These devices cost around £15,000.

"To really secure a property, you need to detect intruders before the security is breached," says Derek Bray at Camera Security Services Ltd. in Wiltshire (www.camerasecurity.co.uk). His company supplies CCTV equipment to homes in Brit-

ain and monitors them around the clock. If the infrared detectors are triggered, operators can use zoom lenses to track the burglars and a loudspeaker to scare them off. The service, which is directly linked to the police, costs around £12,000 a year.

#### Control access

Next issue: get control over who is coming and going. Clive Stevens, managing director at Euronova in Bristol (www.euronova.co.uk), a firm that specializes in asset-protection devices, says a good security firm will run a background check on staff, part-time help and even short-term construction crews. Mr. Geddes says ICP charges £1,000 to £10,000 to conduct background checks on clients' staff. Mr. Allison often recommends a discreet, live-in residential security team. "These are one or two very highly trained individuals that blend into the background," he says. "We try and match the personality of the team to the lifestyle of the client, so their presence is as unobtrusive as possible."

#### Go for the gizmos

Antitouch sensors, infrared alarms, embedded microchips, tilt alarms—the gadgets are out there, it is just a question of determining which ones are right for your collection. "You really need professional advice or you could end up with something totally inappropriate," Mr. Ellis says. Tablet-size electronic trackers can send a signal to a cellphone, a pager or a monitor service and can be traced anywhere in the world. But the trackers have to be attached to a painting's frame, not canvas, and most thieves are quick to separate the

two. Among the more intriguing gizmos is an invisible marker from Smartwater (www.smartwater.com) that can be painted into the nooks and crannies of a sculpture or on the back of a canvas. The marking liquid contains a chemical code unique to that sample, which is recorded in a computer database. The police, using ultraviolet scanners, can easily track the art back to its original owner once it has been recovered. The cost of a fine-arts kit is £79 a year.

"You need a balance between overt security—CCTV cameras, guards, lights and visible alarms—and covert security—tracking devices, digital motion detectors," says Mr. Geddes.

#### Find insurance

Piers Watson, an independent art adviser with art consultancy Watson Westmorland Ltd. in London (www.watsonwestmorland.com), recommends insuring with specialists. Companies that specialize in art, such as AXA Art Insurance and Hiscox Insurance, are better placed to assess the value of a piece. Hiscox says fine art is underinsured by as much as 80% of its value. Keep your valuation up-to-date with the market. Most specialist insurers will update their policies every few years to reflect fluctuations in art prices.

#### Take pictures

Photographs can be crucial to recovering your property if it's stolen. "Make sure they are clear, in color and show a variety of views," says Sarah Jackson at the Art Loss Register, the world's largest database of stolen art and antiques, with a list of 170,000 missing, stolen or looted artifacts (www.artloss.com). "Take closeups of inscriptions, markings, damage or repairs, including the back of the canvas and the underside of antiques." Also write a description of the artwork, including the name of the artist and the date, dimensions and information about the materials. Put the information in a safe place along with the photos.

#### After thieves hit

First, go to the police. In Britain the theft will be logged onto the Art and Antiques Stolen London Art Database (www.met.police.uk/artandantiques/recovered\_items.htm). Interpol and the FBI have their own databases and can also be notified (www.fbi.gov, see major thefts/art theft; www.interpol.int/Public/PropertyCrime/Default.asp).

Next, lodge the details with a private database, which provides search services and helps with recovery. It costs £20 to list with the Art Loss Register, and users agree to pay a finder's fee of 15% to 20% of the value of the artwork if it is recovered. Registration with the online registry Swift-find is free (www.swift-find.com).

In the end, don't give up hope. "Sometimes it's a matter of decades," says Ms. Jackson at the Art Loss Register. This was the case with Cézanne's "Bouilloire et Fruits." Stolen from a home in Boston in 1978, the canvas was discovered in 1999 when the Art Loss Register was tipped off that it was on its way to the U.S. from Russia. The still life was returned to its owners, and that year it sold at auction for nearly \$30 million.