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Ruling: Spielberg rightfully owned Rockwell painting he gave up

April 19, 2010 | 3:34 pm



Given the logic behind a federal judge's ruling this month in Las Vegas, the Norman Rockwell painting that Steven Spielberg voluntarily handed over in 2007 after the FBI listed it as stolen goods never should have been taken down from the film director's wall.

While Judge Roger Hunt didn't say so directly in his April 8 decision, his ruling in [the convoluted case of "Russian Schoolroom"](#) (above) is based on evidence that the FBI must have erred when it put the painting on [its list of stolen artworks](#). The painting, which Rockwell did for Look magazine in 1967, was stolen from a Missouri gallery in 1973. Hunt found that when it resurfaced at auction in New Orleans in 1988, the FBI investigated and decided that ownership had been resolved and the auction was legitimate.

New York art dealer Judy Goffman Cutler was the high bidder in New Orleans, at \$70,400, then sold it to Spielberg, a regular client, for \$200,000 in 1989.

When Jack Solomon, the owner at the time of the 1973 theft, sued Spielberg in 2007 for ownership of "Russian Schoolroom," Cutler stepped in to extricate the film director from the case by swapping another 1960s Rockwell painting, "Peace Corps in Ethiopia," for the rights to "Russian Schoolroom." She took over as the defendant in his place, and Hunt's ruling means the painting is now hers. Spielberg "never should have had to give it up," Gene Brockland, attorney for Cutler, said Monday. "The painting never should have been listed as stolen by the FBI. It was an honest mistake."

But Solomon's attorney, Michael Mushkin, said Monday that "we're kind of stunned" that the judge based his ruling on disputed evidence over whether the FBI had indeed investigated and signed off on the 1988 auction.

Hunt determined that Solomon had learned of the auction and, before it went forward, reached an agreement with the dealer conducting the auction, the seller who had consigned the painting to be auctioned, and the insurance company that had paid Solomon \$20,000 in 1973 to reimburse him for the painting's theft. The FBI checked with Solomon and approved the agreement, the judge found. Mushkin contends that the FBI did not investigate at the time of the auction, and that Solomon never agreed to let the auction go forward. The evidence that the FBI approved the painting to be auctioned is based on "hearsay and documents that are unsubstantiated," Mushkin said, and Solomon will appeal.

"Russian Schoolroom" is back with Cutler, her attorney said, and she plans to display it soon at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., which she co-founded and directs.

-- Mike Boehm

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Photo: "Russian Schoolroom," by Norman Rockwell. Credit: file photo

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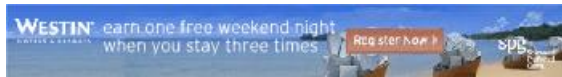
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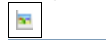
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I've been following this case for awhile---and I have to say that your blog is bogus---Are you merely regurgitating a press release or media advisory? To paint Cutler as a knight on the white horse who rescued STEven speilberg- give us a break!

You might want to do a little more research-- Any journalist with half a brain should be able to see that there are too many unanswered questions--- and a lot of hearsay. (court records are now accessible- go to a law library)

This case is important not only because of the painting, but more significantly because it points another finger at the possibility of the conspiracy theory that J Edgar Hoover and his 'inner circle' were in some way connected to or knew in advance about the assassination of MLK- (look up one of the original articles about this painting that ran in the St Louis alternative paper, RIVERFRONT TIMES) ---

Posted by: haley kay johnson | April 20, 2010 at 07:00 AM

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