



# INTERPOL

## FACT SHEET

### *Stolen works of art*

Illicit trafficking in works of art and cultural property affects developed and developing countries alike and results in the irreparable loss of cultural heritage. It is an international crime that transcends borders, as stolen items are often moved among countries. The illicit trade in works of art is driven by the demand of the art market, improvements in transportation and political instability in certain countries. At the same time, it generates huge profits for the criminals involved, who are often operating in networks with links to other criminal activities.

#### ► GLOBAL TOOLS AND SERVICES

INTERPOL provides a number of tools that facilitate the global exchange of information on criminal events involving works of art, the details of the artworks and the criminals involved. We serve as a central repository for this data, providing analysis to identify emerging trends in art thefts such as the proliferation of counterfeit, fake or forged works; or the use of the Internet for selling works of dubious background.

Amongst the tools and services available to law enforcement, cultural agencies and the public are:

- **Website alerts and media releases** – issued as a public appeal to help locate or gather information about certain stolen works of art;
- **Posters** – the INTERPOL Most Wanted Works of Art posters depicting items that have recently gone missing are published twice a year;
- **Unclaimed items** – unknown items seized by police are listed on our website to help identify their legitimate owners;
- **Experts group** – INTERPOL coordinates a multidisciplinary experts group on stolen cultural property, which serves as an advisory body for the Organization. The group meets annually to make recommendations for preventing the illicit trade in cultural objects;
- **Member country support** – INTERPOL offers targeted support to our member countries to help them protect their cultural heritage. For example, we can send assessment missions to countries in crisis to review the situation and provide expertise. Such missions were sent to Iraq in 2003 and Egypt in 2011.

#### ► WORKS OF ART DATABASE

In 1995, INTERPOL created a Stolen Works of Art database to centralize information on stolen items and circulate that information globally. At the end of 2014, the database contained around 45,000 records submitted by 129 countries, with more than 34,500 searches carried out that year. More than 2,800 stolen items recorded in the database have been recovered since its creation.

Object ID is the international standard used for describing cultural objects. Based on simple, non-technical vocabulary which can be understood by specialists and non-specialists alike, it is used to describe items entered in the INTERPOL database.

The Stolen Works of Art database is accessible to law enforcement officers via INTERPOL's secure global police communications system. Since 2009, authorized members of the public can also access the database. To date, 1,893 users from 88 countries – representing customs, state authorities, cultural institutions, art professionals and private collectors – have been given public access rights to the database.

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### ► PROJECT PSYCHE

To further increase the contents of the Stolen Works of Art database and to facilitate queries of the information it contains, INTERPOL and the Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage launched Project Psyche (Protection System for Cultural Heritage) in 2012.

Funded by the European Commission, Project Psyche aims to:

- Implement a formatted message system that enables member countries to directly insert data;
- Develop a service to transfer data directly from existing national works of art databases;
- Integrate an image comparison system to speed up searches;
- Develop training activities including e-learning courses, seminars, publication of a handbook to provide guidance and best practice examples.

### ► PARTNERSHIPS

The illicit trafficking in works of art cannot be detected or prevented without the close cooperation of law enforcement, customs and the art industry worldwide. INTERPOL thus maintains active collaboration with other international organizations and agencies including UNESCO, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Council of Museums and the World Customs Organization.

We work with our partners to hold joint training sessions, conferences and workshops to share knowledge and best practices, and we encourage active participation in our experts group. We integrate data on stolen cultural items compiled by our partners, particularly UNESCO, directly into our database, and disseminate other partner information to our member countries, for example lists of cultural experts or of "at risk" objects.



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#### ► CONTACT INFORMATION:

Contact us via our web site. For matters relating to specific crime cases, please contact your local police or the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in your country.

► **Twitter:** @INTERPOL\_HQ

► **YouTube:** INTERPOLHQ

► **WWW.INTERPOL.INT**

