



CASH REGISTER

NOTES DANIEL BARNES



Pierre Lagrange

MORE KNOEDLER NONSENSE

FOUR OF the 10 lawsuits in the ongoing **Knoedler Gallery** fraud case have been settled, although the terms remain confidential. The defunct New York gallery is accused of selling fake modernist paintings worth around \$80 million. This case is exceptional in the breadth and depth with which it penetrates today's art world.

Collector **William Lane**, who bought a supposed **Rothko** for \$320,000 through the **Gerald Solomon** gallery, settled in April 2015. More recently, on 4 August, the **Manny Silverman** and **Richard Feigen** galleries settled their suits over an alleged **Clyfford Still** purchased for in excess of \$1 million by **Stephen Robert**. And in July, Californian collectors **Martin** and **Sharleen Cohen**, settled their case over a \$385,000 Rothko bought through the **Michelle Rosenfeld** gallery.

The first lawsuit, filed by hedge-fund manager **Pierre Lagrange** over a \$17 million **Jackson Pollock**, *Untitled 1950*, was settled swiftly in 2012. Lagrange was trying to fund his £126 million divorce, having scandalously left his wife and three children for male fashion designer, **Roubi L'Roubi**. He tried to sell the painting through **Sotheby's**, who ordered forensic tests which revealed a yellow pigment that was not available until 1970. Desperate to raise cash, Lagrange demanded Knoedler's director, **Ann Freedman**, refund him – she reluctantly agreed. Several institutions have been involved, including **Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art**, Kansas City, who exhibited a fake **Richard Diebenkorn** *Ocean Park* series painting. The **Beyeler Foundation**, Basel, bought a fake Rothko, *Untitled (Orange, Red and Blue)*, despite having paid its curator **Oliver Wick** \$300,000 to authenticate it. Furthermore, **Christie's** had to refund \$2.2 million to the buyer of a Knoedler 'Rothko', consigned for sale by **William Lane**.

Glafira Rosales, the dealer who supplied Knoedler with the works, concocted a lurid backstory about their provenance. She told Freedman that

David Herbert of **Sidney Janis Gallery** had acquired them surreptitiously for cash direct from the artists on behalf his married lover, known only as Mr X. Mr X's son did not attempt to sell the paintings until both men had died because questions about provenance would have exposed Herbert's underhand dealing and Mr X's homosexuality. Thus, in 1995, Rosales was suddenly privy to an influx of masterpieces. Whilst dead people make convenient scapegoats, we now know the paintings were made by Chinese artist **Pei Shen Qian**. Freedman continues to litigate the six remaining cases, while Rosales awaits sentencing and Qian remains outside of US jurisdiction in Shanghai.



Victoria Siddall

WILL FRIEZE THAW?

A YEAR AGO, shortly before the opening of **Frieze London**, fair directors **Amanda Sharp** and **Matthew Slotover** announced they were stepping down. **Victoria Siddall**, director of **Frieze Masters**, would take over the London and New York fairs. The move signalled a major change in the constitution of this iconic event, which has run annually in Regent's Park since 2003.

Despite the evolving content of the Focus, Projects and Live programmes, the commercial galleries in the main section remain fairly stable. **Gagosian**, for example, can always be counted on to present an apparently unsellable solo booth. But, with a new director at the helm, perhaps things will be different

and the usual complaints about rampant commercialism or artless homogeneity will be allayed.

The Sharp-Slotover brand crystallised the 1990s invention of the sleek, corporate image of contemporary art by melding spectacle and soaring prices with rigorous criteria and expertly directed PR. But Siddall, despite having worked at Frieze for 11 years, has more charitable sensibilities. She told *Net-a-Porter* in November 2014 that she thinks it's fine that 85% of visitors to the fair do not buy anything because the philanthropic and educational aspects are equally important. Time will tell whether Siddall has been irrecoverably indoctrinated into the brand or whether she will take it in a fresh direction.

SHEIKH DOWN

TWO BROTHERS from Girona, Spain have been arrested following a spectacularly bungled deal involving a fake **Goya** – *Portrait of Don Antonio Maria Esquivel*. Named in one report as **James** and **John Fonte**, they tried to sell the painting, to a purported Middle Eastern 'sheikh' for €4 million, but ran into trouble when they tried to pay his deposit of 1.7 million Swiss francs (€1.5 million) into a Geneva bank – all the notes were photocopies. The brothers had acquired the painting in 2003, paying only a €20,000 deposit on the €270,000 asking price. The balance was conditional on receiving a certificate of authenticity, hopes of which were dashed in 2006 when a Goya expert, acting for Girona Provincial Court, ruled the work to be a fake. The court duly cancelled the brothers' debt and allowed them to keep the painting. The last laugh is with the canny, unnamed 'sheikh' who gave the two Spaniards' criminal aspirations a well-deserved FAIL.

A POLKE IN THE EYE

THE **SIGMAR Polke** Estate has fallen foul of the artist's practice of bypassing his dealers and selling directly from the studio. In 2007, an anonymous Cologne-based collector paid €100,000 for *Propellerfrau*, which, two years



Sigmar Polke

later, Polke reported stolen. On 6 August 2015, the High Court of Cologne ordered the Estate, which had seized the painting, to return it to the collector. Latterly, Polke apparently recalled selling the painting, according to one witness' testimony. Nonetheless, the case dragged on for five years, being considerably complicated by Polke's death in 2010, making it impossible to determine whether Polke was attempting to commit fraud or simply trying to control his market as artists are apt to do.

Aside from the need to make a living, artists are concerned to pursue their individual creative goals by developing a practice and disseminating their work. A somewhat myopic approach to this enterprise might explain Polke's faulty memory, for he was concerned only with the work as a cultural event and not as a traceable economic product. Moreover, it helps to unravel Polke's famously tardy approach to signing works and maintaining accurate archives. Whatever the artistic, aesthetic or intellectual goals of an artist in Polke's position, he is entwined in the market – which plays a crucial role in the ultimate fate of his work. The Polke Estate has learned the hard way how transparently this relationship has to be managed.

TOP 10 FAMOUS PIECES OF ART STOLEN BY THE NAZIS

10. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo *St Justa and St Rufina*
9. Vincent van Gogh *Painter on the Road to Tarascon*
8. Vincent van Gogh *Portrait of Dr Gachet*
7. Gustav Klimt *Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer I*
6. Paul Cézanne *Jeune garçon au gilet rouge*
5. Veit Stoss *Altarpiece*
4. Edgar Degas *Place de la Concorde*
3. Johannes Vermeer *The Astronomer*
2. Andreas Schlüter *The Amber Room*
1. Michelangelo *Madonna of Bruges*

SOURCE: ARTS HISTORY