

Boston Police expect break in Rembrandt portrait heist

By Robert J. Anglin
Globe Staff

A Boston police official yesterday said a break was expected at any moment in the theft at gunpoint of a Rembrandt portrait, said to be worth at least \$500,000, from the Museum of Fine Arts.

"It's just a waiting game right now," Deputy Supt. Leroy Chase said.

"We have had some tips, the validity of which won't be known until ... tomorrow," he said.

Deputy Supt. John Doyle, head of the Boston Police Intelligence Unit, said the thieves were "rank amateurs" and that the investigation would boil down to "routine police procedure."

Nevertheless, four detectives from Doyle's unit, seven men under Chase and 12 FBI agents have been assigned to the case. They are searching for two gunmen and the accomplice who drove the getaway car in the robbery of the museum at high noon Monday.

Their descriptions, supplied by various witnesses, are "fairly good," according to James O. Newpher, special agent in charge of the Boston office of the FBI.

"They are good enough to put together composite drawings, and we have them in the mill. They are not yet completed," Newpher said late yesterday.

There was speculation that the motive may have been ransom of the painting, which museum director Merrill Rueppel said was of inestimable value but worth at least \$500,000.

But neither police nor museum officials yesterday reported any offer to return the painting.

The stolen painting was one of seven Rembrandts in the museum's collection. It is a portrait of the artist's sister. Titled "Portrait of Elisabeth Van Rijn," it was signed by Rembrandt and dated 1632.

The painting was on loan from the family of the late Robert Treat Paine 2d, a leading museum bene-

factor and a descendant of Robert Treat Paine, who signed the Declaration of Independence.

Shortly after 12:30 p.m. Monday, one of the robbers held an unarmed guard at gunpoint while another lifted the oil-on-wood panel portrait off the wall. The two men ran down a marble staircase to the museum's Fenway exit, where another guard tried to stop them. One of the men hit the guard over the head with a pistol butt.

As the thieves ran to a waiting car, one fired three shots. No one was hurt.

Four pieces broken from the portrait's frame were found on the museum floor near the exit. They were apparently torn off when the painting jammed in a turnstile as the men tried to race through.

The car police believe was used in the getaway was found at 4 a.m. yesterday on Station street near Roxbury Crossing. It had been reported stolen earlier by Norwood police, who said it originally bore New Hampshire registration plates.

The vehicle was examined for evidence and dusted for fingerprints.

Authorities also have a rubber glove apparently dropped inside the museum by one of the gunmen, and a spent bullet.

A special circular from the Boston Police Identification Section is being distributed to law enforcement agencies across the nation bearing the following descriptions of the three wanted men:

— White male, about 20 years of age, 5-foot-9, about 140 pounds, with long blond hair, no further description. This subject took the portrait.

— White male, 5-foot-6, about 135 pounds, about 20 years of age, no further description. This subject fired two shots at the museum guard.

— White male, no further description. This subject was the operator of the getaway car.

The descriptions of the three men were being updated last night on the basis of information received from witnesses.



Bridge over pond in Boston's Public Garden is stripped of its surface as workmen undertake task of re-

pairing structure. Span has been a local landmark for over 100 years. (Globe photo by Ulrike Welsch)