

Gardner Museum on mend a year after heist

■ GARDNER

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cause notoriety makes the items difficult to sell or display.

The terms of Gardner's will require that her vision of Venetian palazzo remain unchanged, so the art works cannot be replaced by others. Each missing piece is identified with a terse typewritten card that grimly notes, "Stolen March 18, 1990."

While longtime patrons find the absence of works jarring, the casual visitor might not notice anything amiss beyond empty painting hooks and the outline of a missing frame on faded green tapestry. Yesterday, patrons wandered through the sun-streaked, fragrant three-story courtyard as strains of Mozart drifted from the second-floor Tapestry Room. The ambience of the Fenway Court on a Sunday in 1991 replicated the fin de siècle aura of its opening 88 years ago.

The theft has left museum trustees and staff more determined to pursue an ambitious program to bring the museum into a new era, according to Hawley, who was hired just six months before the burglary to inject a shot of energy into the sleepy institution.

"We were at a watershed moment anyway, but the theft made it sharper," said Francis W. Hatch Jr., president of the museum's Board of Trustees. "We are not going to be whole until we get all the paintings back in their accustomed places, but this has been an interesting and useful experience for all hands. I think the museum is better for it."

13 works worth more than \$200m

Museum officials say the value of the masterpieces stolen last year from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is incalculable, but the rough dollar estimate is in excess of \$200 million.

The missing works are:

- "The Concert," an oil on canvas by Jan Vermeer.
- "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," an oil on canvas by Rembrandt.
- "A Lady and Gentleman in Black," an oil on canvas by Rembrandt.
- "Self Portrait," an etching by Rembrandt.
- "Landscape with an Obelisk," oil on an oak panel by Govaert Flinck.
- "Chez Tortoni," an oil on canvas

by Edouard Manet.

■ "La Sortie Du Pesage," a pencil and watercolor on paper by Edgar Degas.

■ "Cortege Aux Environs de Florence," a pencil and wash on paper by Degas.

■ "Program for an Artistic Soiree," charcoal on white paper by Degas.

■ "Program for an Artistic Soiree," another version of the previous work, in charcoal on buff paper by Degas.

■ "Three Mounted Jockeys," black ink, white, flesh and rose washes on medium brown paper, by Degas.

■ A Chinese bronze beaker from the Shang Dynasty and a finial from a Napoleonic flag.

CHRIS BLACK

"It took the wind out of everyone's sails," said James L. Terry, another trustee. "But we are picking ourselves off the floor and getting re-energized."

Since the theft, the museum has raised \$700,000 in a multimillion-dollar campaign to create a climate control system to regulate the humidity of the flowering courtyard and slow the deterioration of the paintings and statuary. Also, Hawley has replaced the senior curator, the music director and the chef for the garden cafe.

The security system, much criticized at the time of the theft, has been upgraded, although officials will not provide any details for security reasons. The museum now carries insurance; a new lecture series on unique interpretations of Gardner art works began in January; and the museum membership of 1,500 marks a 50 percent increase in one year.

The first anniversary of the theft is being marked by a special exhibit of Italian Renaissance drawings, medals and books. The exhibit includes drawings by Michelangelo,

rare portrait medals and two early illustrated editions of Dante's "Divine Comedy."

"Rather than focus on the negative, we wanted to focus on the positive," Hawley said.

Hawley said she plans to make the special exhibit a regular attraction to better feature items from the extensive collection. But progress is a controversial word for Gardner patrons because the museum is supposed to be a snapshot in time and a reflection of Gardner's eclectic personal tastes. Trustees once had a bitter battle over replacing candlelight with electricity. Gardner supervised the design and construction of the building, collected the art work and arranged each piece so that the museum feels more like a home than an art gallery.

Museum trustees, however, told Hawley that they wanted the museum to capture Gardner's spirit, not be her tomb. To that end, Hawley said she intends to introduce an educational component and give the music program an international twist.

While history would suggest that the blank spaces will remain empty for a long time, "I hope and pray they come back," said Gillenwater, who has made inquiries on her own to locate the works. "But I wouldn't be surprised if it is not in our lifetime."

"It is like any other trauma," said Terry. "The way to heal is to move forward. But the museum has an enormous spirit. It was a wonderful relief to walk into the place and know the essential central character is still there. It certainly hasn't taken away from the soul of the place."