

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JOHN TLUMACKI

Visitors to the Gardner Museum stare at the frame that formerly held Rembrandt's "Storm on the Sea of Galilee."

# Priceless loss not hopeless

*Year after year, people disappear, ships sink, valuables vanish and strange objects appear in the sky – often without plausible explanation. This is the second of a weekly summer series about unsolved mysteries around New England.*

By Brian MacQuarrie  
GLOBE STAFF

**T**he empty frames hang in expectation, but the exquisite paintings that filled their gilded borders remain unrecovered – and untraced – more than six years after their stunning theft from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

A priceless Vermeer, an invaluable Rembrandt and 11 other items snatched from the museum on St. Patrick's night in 1990 could be as close as a Boston warehouse or as far as an

overseas estate.

The biggest art theft in US history remains as difficult and complex a case as FBI agents in Boston can recall. Thousands of dead-end leads and the questioning of dozens of potential suspects have not produced the prize.

The paradoxical result: Investigators and art lovers are as confident as ever that the paintings will be found.

Ask Tom Cassano, an FBI supervisor, if the art will be recovered. The instantaneous answer: "Oh yeah, it's just a matter of time."

Ask Anne Hawley, the Gardner director, if she thinks she will see her beloved paintings again: "I do."

And ask Constance Lowenthal, who heads a New York art foundation, where the paintings might be hidden: "They're in

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