

# Verdict, tale of photos twist Gardner case

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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The news of Youngworth's conviction and the photographs altered the landscape surrounding the return of the precious Gardner art, stolen in a bold daytime heist in March 1990.

The Dedham Superior Court jury's verdict against Youngworth came after a bizarre five-day trial, which was delayed for a day after he was injured Monday in a minor car crash in Hyannis with his wife at the wheel. Just before the verdict was read, Youngworth – looking pale and wan – was taken to Norwood Hospital.

## FULL TEXT

Ric Kahn of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

DEDHAM – In a case filled with enough intrigue and hairpin plot twists to fill a novel, William P. Youngworth III – the renegade Randolph antiques dealer who says he has access to art stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum – is headed back to prison for possession of a stolen van.

Meanwhile, a Gardner spokeswoman has confirmed another dramatic development: Officials this week rejected requests from two media outlets that the museum analyze photographs that purportedly show some of the stolen art.

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The Dedham Superior Court jury's verdict against Youngworth came after a bizarre five-day trial, which was delayed for a day after he was injured Monday in a minor car crash in Hyannis with his wife at the wheel. Just before the verdict was read, Youngworth – looking pale and wan – was taken to Norwood Hospital.

Though he said he had suffered a concussion and spent the night in Cape Cod Hospital, Youngworth agreed to go ahead with the trial, which ended yesterday.

Save for his purported role in the Gardner case, the charges against Youngworth would normally be considered routine: receiving a stolen van and illegally possessing rifle and shotgun ammunition.

The charges were filed after police raided his home and antiques workshop in February. An informant told police that he, Youngworth, and others intended to use the van as a backup getaway car in an armed robbery of an oriental rug shop in Brighton.

Then, Youngworth made headlines with a bold claim. He said he had access to the Gardner masterpieces, and could return them with the help of an imprisoned associate, art thief Myles J. Connor Jr.

The offer came with a price. Both men wanted the \$5 million reward and Connor's immediate release from federal prison. Youngworth also demanded that the state charges against him be resolved in his favor.

The demands went unmet.

The five-day trial here was a strange sideshow, featuring charges that police mishandled evidence and that the Youngworths tried to influence witnesses. Still, the jury convicted him of the stolen-auto charge and acquitted him of the charge of illegally possessing ammunition.

The conviction puts Youngworth in jeopardy of being judged a habitual criminal, which would result in his being sentenced to 15 years in prison. A trial on the matter is set for Oct. 14; in the meantime, Judge Elizabeth Butler revoked Youngworth's \$3,500 bail and ordered him held in the Dedham jail as soon as he is released from the hospital.

Youngworth's attorney, Martin K. Leppo, declined to speculate on how the conviction will affect Youngworth's bargaining position.

But news of the photographs could have a significant impact on those negotiations.

Joan Norris, a Gardner spokeswoman, said yesterday that the museum's director, Anne Hawley, rejected separate requests by ABC News and the Boston Herald to examine photos said to show two of the stolen Rembrandt paintings.

Norris said Hawley turned down the offers because both news organizations wanted exclusives on the results of the museum's analysis. "Out of a sense of ethics and fair play, we rejected their offers," Norris said.

Also, Norris stressed that authenticating the paintings through photographs could be difficult and risky. Computer technology exists that allows someone to doctor photos relatively easily – making a snapshot look like the original in its current state, cut edges as well as chipped paint – art specialists say.

Both ABC News and the Herald did not return phone calls requesting comment.

The newspaper and the network did not tell Hawley how they obtained the photos. Both said they had several photos of two Rembrandt paintings, "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," and "Lady and Gentleman in Black."

An ABC senior producer, who spoke to Hawley on Tuesday, said the photos were of poor quality, Norris said. But the Herald editor who contacted Hawley yesterday said the photographs were of excellent quality, she said.

After a front-page report in the Herald that one of its reporters had glimpsed "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee,"

Youngworth said he facilitated the viewing through his connections with those holding the artwork.

Youngworth has met briefly on several occasions with FBI agents and Brien T. O'Connor, the federal prosecutor who is spearheading the investigation. But those sessions ended without progress: Youngworth wanted his demands met before proving that he has access to the art, and officials refused to deal unless they saw the proof first.

In the days before the trial in Dedham, sources familiar with both sides said that all discussions were sidetracked by the trial – and that the verdict could play a key role in how the matter is resolved.

A guilty verdict, the sources had said, might make him more flexible in his demands and lead him to broker the artwork's return in exchange for a lenient sentence. But others had said Youngworth might be so upset by the conviction that he would refuse – at least for the immediate future – to engage in any substantive discussions.

The US attorney's office declined comment on yesterday's conviction. Earlier, however, US Attorney Donald K. Stern said authorities were not willing to engage in any discussions with Youngworth until he was able to show concrete evidence he had access to the artwork.

### Illustration

PHOTO; CAPTION:WILLIAM P. YOUNGWORTH III . . . linked to stolen van.

## DETAILS

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