



Arte, Individuo y Sociedad

ISSN: 1131-5598

ais@ucm.es

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
España

Charney, Noah

Pablo Picasso, art thief: the "affaire des statuettes" and its role in the foundation of
modernist painting

Arte, Individuo y Sociedad, vol. 26, núm. 2, 2014, pp. 187-198

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Madrid, España

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=513551291001>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

Pablo Picasso, art thief: the “affaire des statuettes” and its role in the foundation of modernist painting

Pablo Picasso, ladrón de arte: “el caso de las estatuillas” y su papel en la fundación de la pintura moderna

NOAH CHARNEY

Professor of Art History, American University of Rome and Founder and President, ARCA
(Association for Research into Crimes against Art)
nlcharney@gmail.com

Recibido: 28 de agosto de 2012

Aceptado: 23 de enero de 2014

Abstract

When the *Mona Lisa* was stolen in 1911 by the Italian handyman Vincenzo Peruggia, both Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire were brought in by the Paris police for questioning. They were innocent of having stolen the *Mona Lisa*, but they were in fact guilty of having stolen other art from the Louvre—for in Picasso’s dresser lay hidden several ancient Iberian statue heads that had been stolen from the Louvre in 1907 by Apollinaire’s secretary, Honore-Joseph Gery Pieret, almost certainly on commission from Picasso himself, who may also have assisted in the theft. Picasso’s involvement in art theft is little known, even though the so-called “affaire des statuettes” made international headlines in 1911. The theft did influence Picasso’s art and rise of Modernism, for the stolen statue heads were integrated into Picasso’s famous paintings, *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), which is widely considered to be the first great work of Modernism. This article tells the complete, true story of Picasso and Apollinaire’s involvement in art theft, and the “affaire des statuettes.”

Keywords: Picasso, art theft, Apollinaire, *Mona Lisa*, affaire des statuettes.

Charney, N. (2014): Pablo Picasso, art thief: the “affaire des statuettes” and its role in the foundation of modernist painting. *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*. 26 (2) 187-197.

Contents: 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Discussion, 4. Results, 5. Conclusion, Acknowledgments, References

Resumen

Cuando la *Mona Lisa* fue robada en 1911 por el ladrón italiano Vincenzo Peruggia, Pablo Picasso y Guillaume Apollinaire fueron llevados por la policía de París para ser interrogados. Ellos eran inocentes de haber robado la *Mona Lisa*, pero en realidad eran culpables de haber robado otro tipo de arte del museo del Louvre, en el armario de Picasso se escondían varias cabezas antiguas de estatuas ibéricas que habían sido robadas del museo del Louvre en 1907 por el secretario de Apollinaire, Honoré -Joseph Gery Pieret, casi con toda seguridad el propio Picasso colaboró en la comisión del delito, ya que podría haber ayudado en el robo. La participación de Picasso en este robo de arte es poco conocida, a pesar de que el llamado “affaire des statuettes” estuvo en los titulares de los periódicos internacionales en 1911. Pero este robo tuvo influencia sobre el arte de Picasso y el auge del modernismo, ya que las formas de la estatuas robadas se integraron en el famoso cuadro de Picasso, *Les Femmes d’Alger*

d’Avignon (1907), que es ampliamente considerado como la primera gran obra de la modernidad. Este artículo cuenta la historia completa y verdadera de la participación de Picasso y Apollinaire en el robo de arte de las estatuillas del llamado “affaire des statuettes.”

Palabras clave: Picasso, robo de arte, Apollinaire, Mona Lisa, affaire des statuettes.

Charney, N. (2014): Pablo Picasso, ladrón de arte: “el caso de las estatuillas” y su papel en la fundación de la pintura moderna. *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*. 26 (2) 187-197.

1. Introduction

In September 1904 the young Cubist painter Pablo Picasso attended the opening of a new room at the Louvre that featured Iberian art from the museum’s permanent collection. As a proud Spaniard, Picasso was thrilled by the ancient art he saw on display, sculptures that had an air of the simplified abstraction of Cycladic figurines, and yet were millennia old, and which were the original, most authentic art of Picasso’s homeland. The statues were perhaps not artistic masterpieces, but they were important pre-classical archaeological specimens. Not, perhaps the most obvious choice for something to steal, and yet they would be stolen. It was noted at the time of their disappearance that they were of no real financial value, roughly-carved and of basic materials (primarily limestone), nor were they particularly rare. Their interest was archaeological and related to the history of the pre-Roman inhabitants of what is now Spain and Portugal, the Iberians—a tribe that was only recently coming to scholarly attention at the time (Pottier, 1911).

These statuettes would, however, prove of central importance to the evolution of Modern art due to Picasso’s interpretation of them. A glance at the works in question confirms what Picasso would glean from his admiration of them—they might as well be Picasso sculptures, for their amorphous form suggestive of a human head, and yet grotesquely and beautifully broken into general shapes that implied eyes, braided hair, and lips, but which were more geometric than naturalistic.

One statue head in particular struck Picasso so strongly that he would recall it vividly in an interview more than fifty years after its theft (Dor de la Souchère, 1960). The statue had a long, arched nose, prominent lips (with a slight overbite), a hair style which we would now call a “Caesar,” brushed from the back to the front and, most striking of all, enormous, over-sized ears, perhaps with dangling earrings, or else dramatically elongated lobes. These Iberian statue heads were not small trifles—those discussed in this article weighed approximately seven kilos each.

Picasso’s visit to that exhibit, just a year after he had moved from Spain to Paris, proved important for 20th century art history, as Picasso would use these Iberian statuettes as models for the faces of the prostitutes he painted in his 1907 masterpiece, *Les Femmes d’Alger*, considered by many to be the first great abstract painting and the very foundation of Modernist painting (Apollinaire, 2005).

But that visit to the Louvre was also intimately linked to the 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa*. For in 1911 Pablo Picasso and his close friend, the Polish-born poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, were brought in for questioning by the Paris police on suspicion of having stolen the *Mona Lisa*. In fact they were innocent of the *Mona Lisa* theft, but they were terrified nonetheless—so much so that Picasso, under oath, de-

nied having ever before seen Apollinaire. Picasso and Apollinaire were petrified of the police not because they had stolen the *Mona Lisa*, but because they had stolen something else from the Louvre: a pair of ancient Iberian statue heads that they had first seen at the Louvre exhibition.

2. Methodology

This paper is an attempt, in a readable and informative way, to relate, for the first time in its entirety, the story of Picasso’s involvement in the *affaire des statuettes*. It is particularly timely, considering the recent release (Fall 2012) of a Spanish film that fictionalizes the incidents surrounding the *affaire des statuettes* (*La Banda Picasso*). For this paper, I have consulted a variety of extant secondary sources, as well as primary sources when available, largely contemporary newspaper articles. I have endeavored to make the history come alive by way of a dynamic narrative, all the while keeping the scholarship sound and thorough. The paper seeks to show that Picasso and Apollinaire were both not only fully conscious of the fact that the Iberian statuettes were stolen, when Picasso made the purchase of them from Gery Pieret, but that one or both of them were likely involved in the actual removal of the statuettes from the Louvre. Though the conclusion is circumstantial, rather than definitive, it is thorough enough to conclude, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Picasso was criminally involved in the acquisition of goods stolen from the Louvre museum. The approach to this paper combines the author’s training in art history and criminology to produce what I believe is both new and conclusive.

3. Discussion

What would become known as the “*affaire des statuettes*” began with the introduction of a Belgian con man, secretary, soldier and later a cowboy, by the name of Joseph-Honoré G  ry Pieret. G  ry Pieret was working as a personal secretary for Apollinaire, at the time, a renowned journalist, modern art critic and poet. G  ry Pieret was also a compulsive art thief, although the fact that art was his target may have been circumstantial, rather than a primary motivator. He took to stealing from the Louvre museum regularly.

In the first decade of the 20th century, to remove objects from the Louvre museum was not particularly difficult to do. Although alarms had been invented, they were not widely used until after the First World War, and the objects on display at the museum were not protected by alarms. Nor, in many cases, were they even fixed in place. Most statues were simply laid out on tables, without locks or glass vitrines to discourage curious hands. As previously mentioned, although the enormous museum, once the French royal residence in Paris until Napoleon and his art advisor, Dominique-Vivant Denon, converted it into a public art museum had over four-hundred rooms displaying art, it only employed around two-hundred guards. Objects disappeared from the Louvre with enough regularity that Parisian newspapers frequently commented on the poor security and, on more than one occasion, lamented in

print that one day all of this lax security would lead to the disappearance of the *Mona Lisa*. These comments would prove tragically prescient.

By his own admission, Géry Pieret began stealing from the Louvre in March 1907, though evidence suggests that he began some time earlier. Another Iberian statue head was stolen in November 1906, and the theft was featured in the newspaper *Le Matin* (10 November 1906). That article mentions the low financial value of Iberian statue heads in general, stating that the thief might be “a possessive and discreet collector who has no interest in money, but keeps [the statues] in the most secret part of his apartment getting drunk on their beauty in solitude.” That a criminal collector must be behind art thefts is a suggestion that the media, regularly touted, though there are very few known historical instances of it being the case. This would prove to be one of those very few exceptions.

The thief who stole this statue head may well have been Géry Pieret—indeed it seems odd that two separate thieves should target the same out-of-the-way objects which were both unwieldy and of relatively little resale value. Géry Pieret made regular visits to the museum, often taking a souvenir with him on his way out, and clearly enjoying himself. In fact he stole with such confidence and frequency that he once told his girlfriend, Marie Laurencin, “Marie, I’m off to the Louvre this afternoon. Can I bring you anything you need?” She thought he meant something from the shopping arcade adjacent to the Louvre museum (Esterow, 1966).

On 29 August 1911 *Paris-Journal* published a large photograph across their front page (*Paris-Journal*, 29 August 1911). It showed an Iberian bust of a female. The article headline read: “A Thief Brings Us a Work Stolen from the Louvre.” But this was not the *Mona Lisa*, the masterpiece on everyone’s mind. It was instead the statue heads. The same issue contained a letter, penned by Géry Pieret under the rather melodramatic pseudonym of Ignace D’Ormesan, which explained his side of the story, boasting his illegal exploits, including his boast that he had smuggled the statue heads out of the museum under his coat, stopping en route to ask a museum guard for directions to the nearest exit.

Géry Pieret had stolen art from the Louvre on multiple occasions, including multiple statue heads. The female sculpted head about which his letter was written was stolen in 1911, and it bore the Louvre museum identification number AM880. This was, at the very least, the third Iberian bust stolen by Géry Pieret. His letter explained that he had stolen two others, one male and one female bust, on two separate visits to the Louvre on back-to-back days, not to mention a work of Egyptian plaster and who knows what else. He said that he then sold these stolen objects to unnamed friends in Paris, one of whom was a painter.

It would turn out that the “unnamed friend” was Pablo Picasso. The two other busts in question were still in Picasso’s possession.

To be precise, they were hidden in his sock drawer.

Was the Louvre indeed so poorly protected as to have been the victim of multiple thefts over the course of years? The answer was yes. A number of French newspapers published articles on various “disappearances” from the Louvre in 1906, including an Egyptian statuette and an Iberian bronze statue of a female that had only been

acquired by the museum a few months prior, which may or may not have been the work of Géry Pieret (*Le Matin*, 10 November 1906). But while Géry Pieret, was seeking notoriety for his own activities, he inadvertently implicated two celebrity artists in the theft of the *Mona Lisa*: Picasso and Apollinaire (*Paris-Journal*, 12 September 1911). Police knew of his former association with Apollinaire, having briefly worked as the poet’s secretary (what we might today called a Personal Assistant), and therefore his public proclamation of having stolen from the Louvre prompted the police to interview his former employer.

The flush of press brought on first by the *Mona Lisa* theft and now by the uproar caused by the publication of Géry Pieret’s letters frightened Picasso and Apollinaire. Both men at the very least knew that they were in possession of stolen art (the two Iberian busts) and, most likely, that they had both commissioned the statue thefts, and had been involved in them.

The fear of being caught with stolen Louvre property was so great that Apollinaire made the dangerous and perhaps foolish decision to personally return the two statue heads that had been stolen in 1907. He left them at the *Paris-Journal* office on 5 September 1911. The next day the newspaper published an article about their return, featuring photographs of the statuettes along with the excuse provided by the unnamed owner: “One would not think that such unrefined objects could have been part of the Louvre collection...seduced by the relatively low price, he purchased them” (*Paris-Journal*, 6 September 1911). So-called “primitive” art, like these Iberian sculptures, were not admired at this time, and would have had little market value, aside from a niche of collectors like Picasso himself.

Seeing their photographs in the paper, Louvre curator Edmond Pottier recognized the two statue heads as entries AM1140 and AM1141 in the Inventory of Mediterranean Antiquities kept by the museum (Pottier, 1911). Pottier immediately contacted the newspaper, and was told that the statues had been brought in by “...an honorable individual, who had purchased the two heads for a small amount of money, and who had grown concerned after the rumors in the press about the thefts of the Iberian statuettes, and thinking that he might, without realizing it, have purchased stolen objects, he brought them in to the newspaper” (Pottier, 1911).

The paper told the police of the identity of the “honorable individual,” which led them directly to Apollinaire’s door. It is unclear why it fell to celebrated art critic and poet Apollinaire to return the statues in person, for it was certainly Picasso who had possession of the stolen sculptures. Of the two, Picasso was the more domineering, the alpha dog in the relationship, and so the frightened Picasso might well have bullied Apollinaire into delivering the statues alone. Apollinaire did know the editors of *Paris-Journal* through his work as a journalist, and so might have thought that he could rely on their discretion and assistance. But why would Apollinaire not have simply sent the statues to the offices of *Paris-Journal*, by post or by messenger, rather than bringing them in person? In addition to imprisonment, as a foreigner, Apollinaire (like Picasso) faced the possibility of deportation from France, which would certainly have been of serious consequence to Apollinaire. One might argue that Apollinaire’s involvement in this affair indirectly brought about his premature death during the First World War, as we will see.

On September 7, Apollinaire was arrested under several accusations, half of them true. He was accused of harboring the thief of the Iberian statue heads, of which he was guilty. But the Paris police, grasping for a positive headline to offset the lack of progress on the *Mona Lisa* case, threw in another charge that was based on no apparent evidence: that Apollinaire was also involved in the theft of the *Mona Lisa*.

The police needed a scapegoat, and Apollinaire was an ideal choice, in that he appealed to the xenophobia of the French at the time. He was born in 1880 in Rome as Wilhelm Albert W³odzimierz Apolinary Kostrowicki, his mother a member of the minor nobility of Poland. His father was most likely Francesco Flugi d'Aspermont, a Swiss Italian aristocrat, who left soon after Apollinaire's birth. Apollinaire grew up speaking French, was educated in Monaco, and lived most of his life in Paris, in love with France and the French language and later considered to be one of the greatest francophone poets. But he was a foreigner and, in a country where the madness of the Dreyfus affair was a fresh memory, he was an ideal scapegoat. Right-wing publications attacked him—his biggest crime from their perspective was not having been born French. One may wonder why the actual thief was not demonized—in this period, as we will discuss later, the idea of a gentlemanly thief was romanticized, based largely on the novels, in France, of Maurice LeBlanc. As a Belgian, G ry Pieret was foreign but Francophone, and therefore not nearly so foreign as Picasso and Apollinaire who may have spoken good French but who would have drawn the xenophobia of many of the French at this time.

In police custody, Apollinaire vehemently denied involvement in the thefts of either the statue heads or the *Mona Lisa*. He did however admit that he knew the man who had stolen the statue heads. He had housed Joseph-Honor  G ry Pieret during the thefts, employing him as a personal secretary but dismissing him from service soon after the thefts took place. This was how the police first became aware of the name G ry Pieret, who was quickly recognized as the author of the pseudonymous letters to *Paris-Journal*.

The police had not a shred of evidence linking Apollinaire to the *Mona Lisa* theft and, with the thief still at large, were not overly interested in who stole a couple of Iberian statues. The press and the public would rail against them until the *Mona Lisa* was recovered, and it soon became clear that Apollinaire had nothing to do with that affair.

The day after the papers reported Apollinaire's arrest, *Paris-Journal* received another letter from G ry Pieret (who was safely abroad in Brussels), who declared that Apollinaire was innocent, claiming that he alone had been responsible for the theft of the statue heads. It was clear that, while G ry Pieret sought notoriety and was shameless about his own involvement in the affair, he held no grudge against Apollinaire, and tried actively to distance his former employer from the thefts.

One of the statue heads, which had been stolen in 1911 and returned along with the first letter by G ry Pieret, had been stashed in Apollinaire's apartment. But the other two statues, those returned by Apollinaire, had been in Picasso's possession since their theft in 1907. We know that Picasso kept them hidden among his clothes because his lover at the time, Fernande Olivier, had noted in her memoir how she always found it odd that, of all of the artworks in Picasso's collection, most of which

were displayed prominently around his apartment and studio, only these two statue heads remained resident at the bottom of his wardrobe. She wrote, that Picasso “took great care of his [1907] gifts, and kept them buried in a wardrobe” (Olivier, 1933).

When Apollinaire was questioned in custody, he was compelled to reveal the link to Picasso in the Louvre theft, which led to Picasso being questioned. The two were interrogated separately, and neither represented himself with honor. Picasso was so frightened, particularly of being deported back to Spain, that he denied having ever seen Apollinaire, at that time his closest friend (Richardson, 1997).

Le Matin had noticed that, fresh from the Dreyfus Affair, the police had chosen to divert attention from their own failure to locate the *Mona Lisa* (which, it must be recalled, was the real prize that had been stolen) by focusing on a foreigner who had merely known the thief of far less important objects (Richardson, 1997). Of course Apollinaire and Picasso had nothing to do with the *Mona Lisa* theft, and so they were set free. But damage had been done.

4. Results

The entirety of this escapade was printed in *Paris-Journal*, from daily updates on the investigation of both the *Mona Lisa* theft (which was proving thoroughly unfruitful for the police), and the so-called “affaire des statuettes.” Géry Pieret mailed in letters that were printed, and even Apollinaire, once released after six days in custody, would publish a sort of public memoir of his time in custody at the Santé prison, and gave an interview to *Le Matin*, an attempt to set the record straight and clear his name. Apollinaire, renowned art critic, went on to explain how the stolen statues would influence the history of art. He wrote, in a 1915 letter, “I tried, in 1911 and in 1907 or 1908, to convince Picasso to return the statues to the Louvre, but his aesthetic studies urged him to keep them, and from that Cubism was born” (Apollinaire, 2005).

Without naming Picasso, Apollinaire also said that “one of my painter friends” had purchased the two stolen statues in 1907 without having known that they were stolen (Jacquet-Pfau, Christine and Michel Décaudin, 1987). He claimed that Géry Pieret brought the statues to the “painter friend [who]...without imagining that the objects had been stolen, [Picasso] bought one of the two sculptures for the price of 50 francs. Since [Picasso] refused to buy the second sculpture, Géry Pieret kindly gave it to him” (*Le Matin*, 13 September 1911). Picasso had a two-for-one stolen art deal on his hands.

However, we know that those same statue heads had been admired by Picasso during the exhibition he attended in 1904. He could not have been ignorant of the fact that they came from the Louvre and were therefore stolen. Most likely, Picasso had commissioned their theft, and he may have participated in it.

It will come as no surprise that further evidence makes clear that Picasso certainly knew that the statue heads he purchased from Géry Pieret had come from the Louvre. The Italian painter Ardengo Soffici, who met with Picasso in Paris in 1905, noted that Picasso frequented the Louvre, where he loved to “pace around like a hound in search of game, between the rooms of the Egyptian and Phoenician antiquities” (Soffici, 1931). We also now know that Picasso knew Géry Pieret reasonably well

in 1907, having surely met him through their mutual friend, Apollinaire. In letters between Géry Pieret and Apollinaire, Picasso is frequently mentioned by name and, as if that were not enough, in April 1907 Picasso received a postcard from Géry Pieret (Caizergues, Pierre and Hélène Seckel eds., 1992). A note in Géry Pieret’s correspondence mentions that in April 1907 he actually owed Picasso some money for a painting he had commissioned from him—of this, Géry Pieret wrote to Apollinaire from Brussels that he “would have paid [Picasso] generously when he returned [to Paris] (Stallano in Decaudin ed., 1995).

So, there is no question that Géry Pieret knew Picasso reasonably well, and that Picasso would surely have known the origin of the two statue heads offered to him for purchase in 1907. But could Picasso have really been surprised by Géry Pieret’s offer? Or might Picasso have actually commissioned the theft? How deep was his involvement?

5. Conclusion

A common popular misconception about art crime is that most art thefts are commissioned by criminal collectors, like Doctor No in the James Bond film. In reality, only a negligible percentage of known art thefts throughout history have been commissioned by a collector—that is to say, someone who desired an artwork for his private personal collection and hired a thief to steal it for him. There are perhaps two dozen such cases confirmed, which is an insignificant number when one considers that every year there are around 50,000 art objects reported stolen worldwide. Criminologists and art police rightly tend to downplay the popular misconceptions perpetuated through film and fiction, largely in an effort to shift the perception of art crime away from *The Thomas Crown Affair* and to emphasize its severity, its extent, and the involvement of organized crime and terrorist groups. But this case is one of the few exceptions to the rule, an instance when truth does follow popular misconception. In the *affaire des statuettes* we seem to have one of the famous exceptions to the rule that collectors do not commission art thefts. The criminal collector, our Doctor No, in this case appears to have been Pablo Picasso.

The curator of the Iberian room at the Louvre, the aforementioned Edmond Pottier, noted that at the end of 1907 most of the statue heads were placed in museum storage (Pottier, 1911). That means that Géry Pieret may have had to descend into the labyrinth of the Louvre’s art storage in order to steal the third head, which he took in 1911. It should be noted that the Louvre’s collection is so enormous that only an estimated one-third of its collection is on display in the enormous museum, with two-thirds packed in storage.

Picasso was a regular visitor to the Louvre and a passionate admirer of Iberian art, which he felt was the root of all Spanish art. It is inconceivable that he would not recognize the statue heads presented him by Géry Pieret. Most of Picasso’s extensive art collection was on open display in his home. Why were only these stolen statues hidden away in a wardrobe, if Picasso did not know that they were stolen? It is also beyond plausibility that Géry Pieret would randomly choose to steal a pair of statues that were so ideally suited to Picasso’s tastes, and then happen to offer them

to the Spaniard. In a court of law, a prosecuting attorney would argue that these coincidences placed it “beyond reasonable doubt” that Picasso put in a request for these particular statues, thereby effectively commissioning the theft.

Compelling evidence also comes from Picasso himself, in an interview he gave decades later, in 1960, when the whole *affaire des statuettes* must have felt lifetimes behind him. He stated, “Do you remember that episode in which I was involved? When Apollinaire stole some statuettes from the Louvre? They were Iberian statuettes...well, if you look at the ears of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, you’ll recognize the ears of those sculptures” (Dor de la Souchere, 1960). Should we believe this statement that “Apollinaire stole some statuettes?” Does this mean that Apollinaire actually did the stealing, or merely facilitated the theft? Or was Picasso, now in his old age, trying to deflect the blame from himself, instead pinning the crime on his old friend, now long-deceased?

That Picasso bought statues he knew had been stolen from the Louvre is beyond doubt. We have also proven beyond reasonable doubt that he selected the works to be stolen, thereby commissioning the theft. But could Picasso or Apollinaire have been involved with the actual act of theft?

Picasso said that Apollinaire had stolen the statues. There is no evidence of that, and since the statement was made casually more than fifty years after the fact, it is difficult to determine how much weight to place on its accuracy. But it is certain that to steal the statue heads would have been difficult to manage if one worked alone. Each head weighs approximately seven kilos. Imagine having to sneak out of a museum while concealing a seven-kilo limestone statue.

Géry Pieret lived in Apollinaire’s apartment at the time, which circa 1911 was in the outskirts of Paris, in Auteil. But in March 1907 Apollinaire lived even further away from the center of Paris, in the village of Le Vesinet. Géry Pieret would have had to not only extract the statue from the guarded museum, presumably hiding it inside an oversized coat, but also transport it across the city of Paris to Apollinaire’s residence. An accomplice must surely have been involved, at the very least waiting outside the Louvre with a vehicle in order to facilitate escape. That same accomplice might have “cased” the museum with Géry Pieret, pointing out the objects to be stolen—for a vague description alone would be insufficient for an unpracticed eye to distinguish which of the many, relatively similar Iberian statue heads to take. For lack of other suspects, that accomplice must have been either Apollinaire or Picasso. If it was Apollinaire waiting in the “getaway” carriage, then that would explain Picasso’s recollection that Apollinaire had stolen the statues. Someone must have helped Géry Pieret commit the crime and escape: either Apollinaire or Picasso or both.

There is a sad coda to Apollinaire’s involvement in the *affaire des statuettes*, first noted by Peter Read in his book on the friendship of the Polish poet and Picasso. The affair may have actually led, albeit indirectly, to Apollinaire’s tragic, premature death. Apollinaire loved France and was devastated by the xenophobic accusations and attacks against him in 1911. Three years later, fate would present him with an opportunity to prove his loyalty to his adopted country.

At the start of the First World War, Apollinaire volunteered for the French army. He died from influenza while hospitalized for a head wound received in action (Read,

1995). He was a part of the 1/3 of Europe who lost their lives before the war wound to a close.

The Iberian statuettes are now back at the Louvre, although not always on display. They played a key role in the history of art, thanks to their cameo in the birth of Modernism in Picasso's 1907 *Les Femmes d'Alger*. And they will forever be remembered for the supporting role they played in the story of the theft of the *Mona Lisa*.

Acknowledgments:

This article is adapted from a chapter in Charney, Noah *The Thefts of the Mona Lisa: On Stealing the World's Most Famous Painting* (ARCA Press, 2011), but it has not been previously published. I am indebted in this article to the art historian Silvia Loretí, who was the first to break the full details of the story of Picasso and Apollinaire's "affaire des statuettes". While scholars such as John Richardson mention the affair, and Picasso's former lover Fernande Olivier recalls portions of the case in her memoirs, Loretí was the first to focus on the issue and dig deeply into the Louvre archives, noting numerous irregularities for the first time. The examination of the Louvre archives is her work and, rather than citing her efforts in the majority of these notes, suffice it to say that the credit for digging up information on this case goes to her and to John Richardson, in his definitive Picasso biography series. Loretí's article ('The Affair of the Statuettes Re-Examined. Picasso and Apollinaire's Role in the Famed Louvre Thefts') was first published in Charney, Noah (ed.) *Art & Crime: Exploring the Dark Side of the Art World* (Praeger, 2009). This article could not have been written without her extensive research, and the credit for discovery of most of the facts is entirely hers. This research is also part of a chapter on *Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger* that is included in her unpublished PhD thesis: Silvia Loretí, "Avant-Garde Classicism, c. 1907-1924", The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2009.

References

- Archives des musées nationaux, Musée du Louvre, Folders A and B. Paris-Journal (1911).
- Le Matin (1906 and 1911).
- L'Intransigeant (1911).
- Angotti Salgueiro, H. (2000). *Paisaje y arte*. São Paulo: University of São Paulo.
- Apollinaire, G. (2005). *Lettres à Madeleine. Tendre comme le souvenir*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Aulanier, Ch. (1964). *Histoire du palais et du Musée du Louvre*, vol. 9. Paris: Musées nationaux.
- Baldassari, A. (1994). *Picasso Photographe, 1901-1916*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux.
- Barcilon, P. B. et al (2001). *Leonardo: The Last Supper*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Belin, J. (1950). *Secrets of the Sûreté*. London: Putnam.
- Bramly, S. (1996). *Mona Lisa*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Caizergues, P. & Seckel, H. (eds.) (1992). *Picasso Apollinaire. Correspondances*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Catoni, M.-L. (July-October 1990). "Parigi, 1904: Picasso 'iberico' e le Demoiselles d'Avignon," *Bollettino dell'arte*, (July-October 1990). nos. 62-3.
- Charney, N. (ed.) (2009). *Art & Crime: Exploring the Dark Side of the Art World*. New York: Praeger.
- Charney, N. (2010). *Stealing the Mystic Lamb: the True Story of the World's Most Coveted Masterpiece* New York: PublicAffairs
- Coignard, J. (2003). *On a Volé la Joconde*. Paris: Adam Biro.
- Cox-Rearick, J. (1993). *Bronzino's Chapel of Eleonora in the Palazzo Vecchio*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Daix, P. (2003). *Pablo Picasso: dossier de la Préfecture de police, 1901-1940*. Moudon: Acatos.
- Décaudin, M. (ed.) (1995). *Amis européens d'Apollinaire*. Paris: Sorbonne nouvelle.
- Dor de la Souchère, R. (1960). *Picasso à Antibes*. Paris: Hazan.
- Esterow, M. (1966). *The Art Stealers*. New York: Macmillan.
- Jones, J. (2010). *The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel that Defined the Renaissance*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Leighen, P. (1989). *Re-Ordering the Universe. Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Livio, M. (2002). *The Golden Ratio: The Story of Phi, The World's Most Astonishing Number*. New York: Broadway Books.
- MacIntyre, B. (1998). *The Napoleon of Crime: the Life and Times of Adam Worth, Master Thief*. London: Delta.
- Malreaux, A. (1974). *La Tête d'obsidienne*. Paris: Gallimard.
- McLeave, H. (1981). *Rogues in the Gallery*. London: Boson Books.
- Olivier, F. (1965). *Picasso and his Friends*. London: Appleton-Century.
- Olivier, F. (2001). *Picasso et ses amis (1933)*. Paris: Pygmalion.
- Ottino della Chiesa, A. (1967). *The Complete Paintings of Leonardo da Vinci*. London: Penguin.
- Pater, W. & Beaumont, M (2010). *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Oxford University Press.
- Read, P. (1995). *Picasso et Apollinaire. Les métamorphoses de la mémoire 1905-1973*. Paris: Jean-Michel Place.
- Richardson, J. (1997). *A Life of Picasso: 1907-1917 – The Painter of Modern Life*. London: Pimlico.
- Rowland, P. (1999). *Raffles and His Creator: the Life and Works of E. W. Hornung*. London: Nekta Publications.
- Sassoon, D. (2002). *Mona Lisa: the History of the World's Most Famous Painting*. London: HarperCollins.
- Sassoon, D. (2006). *Leonardo and the Mona Lisa Story*. London: Overlook Duckworth.

- Scotti, R. A. (2009). *Vanished Smile: the Mysterious Theft of Mona Lisa*. New York: Knopf.
- Simon, M (1971). *The Battle of the Louvre: the Struggle to Save French Art in World War II*. New York: Hawthorne.
- Soffici, A. (1931). *Ricordi di vita artistica e letteraria*. Florence.
- Vasari, G. (1879). *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*. Florence: G. C. Sansoni.
- Vasari, G. (1998). *The Lives of the Artists*. Oxford University Press. "The Missing Piece: The Truth About Vincenzo Peruggia and the Unthinkable Theft of the Mona Lisa" Writer/Director Joseph M. Medeiros/Executive Producer Justine Medeiros, Midair Rose Productions, © 2011
- Wilkins, K. (February 1997). "Picasso: From Les Demoiselles to Parade," New Criterion.