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FOR CURIOUS  
MINDS



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## Episode #199

# The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

### 5th Oct, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is the start of another three-part mini series, this time on Art Theft.

[00:00:32] In today's episode we are going to talk about some of the greatest art thefts of all time, from what actually happened, who the thieves were, if indeed they were ever caught, the reactions to the theft, and we will talk about some of the reasons why people steal art, because it certainly isn't always as simple as "they want to make money".



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

[00:00:58] Then, in part two we are going to talk about the greatest, or at least most **prolific**<sup>1</sup>, art thief of all time, a Frenchman called Stephane Breitweiser.

[00:01:10] Between 1995 and 2001 he stole at least 236 different pieces of art from museums, **estimated**<sup>2</sup> to be worth around a billion Euros. The strangest thing about it? He didn't seem interested in money **in the slightest**<sup>3</sup>, and kept all of the art for himself.

[00:01:31] And then finally, in part three we will talk about what was until recently the biggest art theft of all time, of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Shortly after midnight on St Patricks Day of 1990, two men dressed as policemen, complete with **fake**<sup>4</sup> moustaches, turned up at the museum saying they had come to investigate reports of a **disturbance**<sup>5</sup>. They **tied up**<sup>6</sup> the guards, and 81 minutes later they left the building with artwork valued at around \$500 million dollars. The crime has still never properly been solved.

[00:02:14] So, I hope you'll enjoy this mini-series.

[00:02:18] Let's jump right into it.

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<sup>1</sup> producing a great number of something or having repeated an activity many times

<sup>2</sup> roughly calculated or judged

<sup>3</sup> at all

<sup>4</sup> made to look real

<sup>5</sup> illegal activity

<sup>6</sup> made them unable to move by tying a rope or cord around them



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[00:02:21] The first art theft in history is thought to have taken place in the year 1473.

[00:02:28] If you were a [witness](#)<sup>7</sup> to it, it would have looked more like an act of [piracy](#)<sup>8</sup>, because it happened in the North Sea, and involved a sea captain from Danzig, in modern-day Poland, [boarding](#)<sup>9</sup> a ship [en route](#)<sup>10</sup> to Italy, and taking the ship's belongings.

[00:02:48] This included a [trptych](#)<sup>11</sup>, a three-part painting of The Last Judgment by Hans Memling, the first ever piece of art recorded as “stolen”.

[00:02:59] If you have listened to the last episode, on pirates, you will be familiar with the idea of a [privateer](#)<sup>12</sup>, someone who was given special permission by the authorities to [engage](#)<sup>13</sup> in acts of [piracy](#).

[00:03:14] The art thief, or pirate, was a man called Paul Beneke, and he was acting on behalf of the Hanseatic League. He was a [privateer](#).

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<sup>7</sup> someone who sees an event happening

<sup>8</sup> the act of attacking ships in order to steal from them

<sup>9</sup> getting on

<sup>10</sup> on the way

<sup>11</sup> a piece of art, consisting of 3 panels or parts

<sup>12</sup> someone who was given special permission by the authorities to attack and steal enemy ships

<sup>13</sup> involve himself



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[00:03:25] The ship was an English ship, the Hanseatic League was at war with England at the time, and therefore this was considered to be a [legitimate<sup>14</sup>](#) theft.

[00:03:36] The people who had [commissioned<sup>15</sup>](#) the painting, who just so happened to be linked to the Medici Bank, protested the theft, but to this day the painting has never been returned to Italy, and currently hangs in the National Museum in Gdansk.

[00:03:54] This might be the first recorded art theft, but it's unusual for an art theft, because it was [primarily<sup>16</sup>](#) an act of [piracy](#), they took other items as well, this piece of art was only just one of them.

[00:04:09] When it comes to “modern” art theft, or at least art theft in the past hundred years, the reasons for the theft do not typically involve international piracy.

[00:04:20] They [broadly<sup>17</sup>](#) fall into five different categories.

[00:04:25] Firstly, financial [gain<sup>18</sup>](#). People think they can steal works of art, sell them, and make money from them.

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<sup>14</sup> allowed by law

<sup>15</sup> placed the order for

<sup>16</sup> mainly

<sup>17</sup> generally, widely

<sup>18</sup> an increase in wealth



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[00:04:32] Of course, you might be thinking, but there are some serious [complexities](#)<sup>19</sup> when it comes to stealing art to sell.

[00:04:41] You can't steal a piece of art that is too well known, because it becomes too "hot", and is very hard to [get rid of](#)<sup>20</sup>.

[00:04:49] The police, galleries and insurance companies will offer large [rewards](#)<sup>21</sup> for information that can lead to the return of stolen art, so you have to be very careful with who you tell that you have a piece of art available for sale.

[00:05:06] Secondly, the second category is, people who steal art as a sort of insurance policy, a [Get Out of Jail Free card](#)<sup>22</sup>. Often art thefts are organised by organised crime gangs for specifically this reason.

[00:05:24] If a criminal has a valuable piece of stolen art in their possession, and they are caught by the police for a completely [unrelated](#)<sup>23</sup> crime, drugs trafficking or

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<sup>19</sup> difficulties

<sup>20</sup> become free of

<sup>21</sup> money given for some special service

<sup>22</sup> something that is used as an insurance in order to avoid an unpleasant situation, like going to jail. (A reference to the board game Monopoly, in which this card allows players to leave the jail space without missing a turn.)

<sup>23</sup> not connected, different



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murder, let's say, they can offer to return the piece of art in return for [immunity](#)<sup>24</sup>, in return for their freedom, or at least in return for a reduced prison [sentence](#)<sup>25</sup>.

[00:05:47] In many cases the police will offer [immunity](#), or reduced [sentences](#)<sup>26</sup>, for information that can lead to the return of famous works of art, and organised criminals know this all too well.

[00:06:01] So, if you are familiar with the game of Monopoly, a stolen work or art functions as a sort of [Get Out of Jail Free card](#).

[00:06:11] Number three, our third reason, also includes organised crime gangs, and is that stolen art is used as a [substitute](#)<sup>27</sup> for money in drugs or weapons deals. A piece of stolen art, especially very famous stolen art, such as a Van Gogh, has a well-known value, millions, even tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. It can then be used as part of a drug deal traded between [parties](#)<sup>28</sup>, instead of money.

[00:06:41] Or, it is used as a [collateral](#)<sup>29</sup> for a loan to buy drugs or weapons. If you need, let's say, \$10 million dollars to pay for a drug shipment, you might find someone who

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<sup>24</sup> a situation in which someone is protected from legal action

<sup>25</sup> punishment for someone who has been found guilty of a crime by a law court

<sup>26</sup> punishment for people who have been found guilty of a crime by a law court

<sup>27</sup> the use of something instead of something else

<sup>28</sup> groups of people who form the different sides of an agreement

<sup>29</sup> something used as security for the payment of a loan



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will lend you the money until you can pay them back, but they will keep your stolen Van Gogh or Caravaggio until you pay them back in full.

[00:07:03] Indeed, it is often during [raids](#)<sup>30</sup> of drug gangs that high-profile stolen art is discovered, indicating that this motive might be more common than most people think.

[00:07:16] Our fourth category is what we might call a sense of [patriotism](#)<sup>31</sup>, or duty. These thefts are a little less common, but there are instances, as we will hear about shortly, where someone believes a piece of art to have been stolen, or at least not in its [rightful](#)<sup>32</sup> place, and therefore steals it and returns it to its owner.

[00:07:40] Of course, this is still theft, and even though the motive might be a little less terrible than the previous ones, it still most certainly still counts as theft.

[00:07:50] There is also the related category of stealing artwork from another country for [supposed](#)<sup>33</sup> cultural reasons, for example the Elgin Marbles that were taken from Greece and now sit in the British Museum, but luckily this is not so much an issue anymore.

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<sup>30</sup> surprise attacks

<sup>31</sup> love and loyalty to one's country

<sup>32</sup> proper or just

<sup>33</sup> accepted as true by some, but highly doubtful





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[00:08:08] And our final, fifth category is what we might call “personal theft”, theft because someone wants to enjoy a piece of art all to themselves. This might take the form of an art thief being **commissioned** to steal a particular piece of art for someone else, or in the case of Stephane Breitweiser, as we’ll hear about in part two, of the collector doing the stealing himself.

[00:08:35] This has the advantage of fewer people typically being involved, because you aren’t trying to negotiate with other people, but the end result is the same - a piece of art has been taken from its **rightful** owner, and is essentially removed from society.

[00:08:53] So, there we have the main reasons why art is stolen, and who benefits from it.

[00:09:00] With this in mind, let’s look at some of the greatest, most famous, and most interesting art thefts of all time.

[00:09:10] On a quick linguistic note, a word often used for art theft is a “**heist**<sup>34</sup>”. It’s a strange word, because it only really applies to robberies of very valuable things, such as art, jewels, or money from a bank. It’s usually used for **violent**<sup>35</sup> robberies, but a **heist** doesn’t always have to involve violence.

[00:09:35] Ok then, our first **heist**, and this is definitely a **heist**, was in Paris’s Musée Marmottan, in 1985.

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<sup>34</sup> Robbery of very valuable things

<sup>35</sup> using force



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[00:09:45] On October 27th of 1985, shortly after the museum had opened, two men, acting perfectly normally, walked up to the museum's front desk, bought tickets, and went inside.

[00:10:01] The museum was **by no means**<sup>36</sup> full, but there were plenty of other visitors inside.

[00:10:07] Because it was open to the public, the alarm system had been disconnected - it was only turned on during the evening, when the museum was empty. There were guards and plenty of visitors during the day, so there was no need to keep the alarm system turned on.

[00:10:24] All of a sudden the men pulled out guns, and forced the guards and 40 visitors to the floor.

[00:10:33] At least three other men **burst in**<sup>37</sup>, and in the next five minutes the men **proceeded**<sup>38</sup> to **meticulously**<sup>39</sup>, very carefully, remove 9 of the 100 masterpieces on the museum's walls.

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<sup>36</sup> not at all

<sup>37</sup> enter suddenly and without warning

<sup>38</sup> continued

<sup>39</sup> very carefully



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[00:10:47] According to [eye witnesses](#)<sup>40</sup>, they knew exactly what they were doing, and only removed the most valuable paintings in the museum.

[00:10:56] What did they steal?

[00:10:58] 5 Monets, including one called Impression, Sunrise, the painting that gave its name to the Impressionist movement.

[00:11:06] The art world waited [anxiously](#)<sup>41</sup> for clues as to their [whereabouts](#)<sup>42</sup>, but it wasn't until five years later, in 1990, in a villa on the Mediterranean island of Corsica that the paintings were found.

[00:11:22] It seems that the thieves had been unable to successfully sell the paintings, they were simply too hot, too famous, for any art dealer to take them.

[00:11:33] Our second [heist](#) is really two for the price of one, it's about a work of art that has been stolen twice, or at least two versions of it have been stolen on two different occasions.

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<sup>40</sup> people who saw the event happening

<sup>41</sup> in a way that shows worry or nervousness

<sup>42</sup> the place where they were



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[00:11:47] You probably know the painting, you've probably seen Edvard Munch's The Scream. Munch actually did four versions of the work, two in paint and two in [pastel](#)<sup>43</sup>. Both of the paint versions have been stolen.

[00:12:03] The first version was stolen in 1994 from the National Art Museum in Oslo, just before Norway was set to host the 1994 Winter Olympics.

[00:12:15] The painting had been moved to the ground floor. Munch was Norway's most famous artist, and The Scream his most famous work.

[00:12:24] In a time when tourists would be [flocking](#)<sup>44</sup> to Oslo, it was only right that this masterpiece should be seen by as many people as possible. The gallery's security team protested. The ground floor is always the least secure place in a gallery, as it's accessible from the street, it's busy, and it's easy to make a [swift](#)<sup>45</sup> [getaway](#)<sup>46</sup>, to [rush out](#)<sup>47</sup> to a car quickly.

[00:12:51] The security experts proved to have been right.

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<sup>43</sup> a soft coloured material that is used to draw pictures

<sup>44</sup> coming together in great numbers

<sup>45</sup> quick

<sup>46</sup> the act of escaping, usually after committing a crime

<sup>47</sup> escape very quickly



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[00:12:54] At 6:30 in the morning of 12th February, 1994, two men placed a ladder against the wall, climbed up to the window, [smashed](#)<sup>48</sup> it, climbed into the room and 50 seconds later they were climbing down the ladder with The Scream under their arms.

[00:13:14] They even had the time, and perhaps the [audacity](#)<sup>49</sup>, to leave a postcard in the gallery with the message, “Thanks for the poor security.”

[00:13:24] Because it was such a famous painting—and would therefore be impossible to sell on the black market—and at such an important time for Norway, it was assumed that someone was trying to make a political [point](#)<sup>50</sup>.

[00:13:38] Anti-abortion activists claimed it was them, and that they would return the painting in exchange for being able to show an anti-abortion advert on Norwegian TV.

[00:13:51] This turned out to be a complete lie, they weren’t involved at all.

[00:13:56] The real thieves were eventually found after a police [trap](#)<sup>51</sup>. They had tried to demand a million dollars in [ransom](#)<sup>52</sup> from the gallery, but it was refused.

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<sup>48</sup> broke with force

<sup>49</sup> the situation of being fearless and confident in a rude way

<sup>50</sup> argument or idea

<sup>51</sup> a plan for tricking a person into being caught

<sup>52</sup> a large amount of money that is demanded in exchange for something



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[00:14:08] **Undercover**<sup>53</sup> detectives pretended to be art dealers interested in buying the work for \$250,000. The thieves **took the bait**<sup>54</sup>, and they were arrested one month after the theft.

[00:14:22] The second Scream theft, of a different Scream, by the way, was a lot more **brazen**<sup>55</sup>, a lot more violent.

[00:14:30] It happened 10 years later, this time from the Munch Museum in Oslo. Men **rushed**<sup>56</sup> into the museum's floor with machine guns, **threatening**<sup>57</sup> to shoot the staff. Minutes later they had escaped with two Munch paintings: The Scream and Madonna.

[00:14:47] Luckily the paintings were recovered a couple of years later, but there still isn't clarity on exactly why they were stolen.

[00:14:56] Again, they would have been far too famous to sell on the black market, and the current theories about the reason they were taken are to be used as a **ransom**, so they could **extort**<sup>58</sup> money, perhaps as **collateral** for drugs or weapons deals, or even to

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<sup>53</sup> working in secret, using a false appearance

<sup>54</sup> believed them to be true, fell into the trap

<sup>55</sup> fearless and without shame

<sup>56</sup> moved very quickly

<sup>57</sup> saying that they were going to

<sup>58</sup> get something by unfair means



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**distract**<sup>59</sup> the Norwegian police from the investigation of the murder of a Norwegian police officer.

[00:15:21] It seems that The Scream just isn't a very lucky piece of art.

[00:15:26] Our third art **heist** was in Mexico, and **just goes to show**<sup>60</sup> that you don't need to be a professional art thief to end up in a list of great art thefts.

[00:15:38] The location for this theft was Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology and History, in Mexico City.

[00:15:47] On Christmas Eve of 1985, while the museum guards were drunk, 124 Mayan, Aztec, Miztec, and Zapotec **artefacts**<sup>61</sup> were stolen from the museum.

[00:16:00] The alarm system was **faulty**<sup>62</sup>, and so the guards didn't realise these **artefacts** were gone until too late.

[00:16:08] These **artefacts** were **priceless**<sup>63</sup>, **irreplaceable**<sup>64</sup> pieces of Mexican history.

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<sup>59</sup> make them stop giving attention to something

<sup>60</sup> shows, proves

<sup>61</sup> objects of great historical or cultural value

<sup>62</sup> not working properly

<sup>63</sup> so valuable that their price cannot be calculated or measured

<sup>64</sup> so special that they cannot be replaced



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[00:16:15] El Universal newspaper had a headline reading, "Whoever ordered the robbery of the Anthropology Museum robbed from us all".

[00:16:25] It was a theft from the nation.

[00:16:28] Fingers were soon pointed.

[00:16:30] Were the CIA or the FBI involved? Who could possibly have ordered such a theft not just from the museum, but from the country of Mexico, a theft from the Mexican people?

[00:16:43] Bags were searched at the airport, foreign museum [curators](#)<sup>65</sup> were told to keep a lookout for these goods, and the hunt was on.

[00:16:52] Three and a half years later, the [culprits](#)<sup>66</sup>, the guilty people were discovered.

[00:16:58] It wasn't a foreign government, a [sophisticated](#)<sup>67</sup> criminal gang or a professional art thief.

[00:17:04] The thieves were two young men, two university [dropouts](#)<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> the people in charge of a museum

<sup>66</sup> the guilty people

<sup>67</sup> having great experience and knowledge

<sup>68</sup> people who have left university before having completed

their studies





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[00:17:09] They had reportedly visited the museum 50 times, made detailed plans of the building, and then climbed over the fence, [crawled](#)<sup>69</sup> through an air conditioning [duct](#)<sup>70</sup>, the tunnel that pumps air through a very large building, and escaped with these [invaluable](#)<sup>71</sup> goods.

[00:17:29] They had tried to sell the items for as much as \$1 billion dollars to drug cartels, but never managed. They were caught three and a half years later, and fortunately most of the [artefacts](#) have been returned.

[00:17:44] Now, our fourth and [penultimate](#)<sup>72</sup> theft is interesting not just for the theft, but for what happened after it.

[00:17:53] It involves paintings by the English artist J. M. W. Turner, a Romantic painter best known for his landscapes and expressive pictures of the sea.

[00:18:06] These paintings were normally kept at London's Tate Gallery.

[00:18:11] In 1994, two Turner paintings were [on loan](#)<sup>73</sup> at the Schirn Kunsthalle gallery in Frankfurt, Germany.

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<sup>69</sup> moved forward on the hands and knees

<sup>70</sup> a passage that carries air in and out of buildings

<sup>71</sup> of great value, priceless

<sup>72</sup> second from the last

<sup>73</sup> borrowed for a period of time



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[00:18:20] After the gallery closed for the day, three men had remained behind, hidden in the gallery.

[00:18:26] When the gallery opened the following morning, the Turners were gone.

[00:18:31] Fortunately, these paintings were insured by the Tate Gallery for the sum of £24 million. This meant that if they were stolen or destroyed, the insurance company would pay The Tate £24 million as [compensation](#)<sup>74</sup>.

[00:18:49] So, when there was no sign of the paintings, and all police [avenues](#)<sup>75</sup> had been [exhausted](#)<sup>76</sup>, The Tate received £24 million, around €30 million Euros, as [compensation](#) from the insurance company.

[00:19:04] The Tate got the money, but [relinquished](#)<sup>77</sup> the ownership rights to the paintings.

[00:19:10] This meant that if the paintings were found, the insurance company would be able to sell them.

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<sup>74</sup> money that is paid in exchange for something lost or damaged

<sup>75</sup> ways of approach or research

<sup>76</sup> completely used up

<sup>77</sup> gave up, abandoned



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[00:19:17] The insurance company offered a \$250,000 reward for the paintings, but **to no avail**<sup>78</sup>, there was no sign of it.

[00:19:27] But, where it gets interesting is that four years later The Tate bought back the rights to the paintings from the insurance company for £8 million.

[00:19:40] The gallery believed that one day the paintings would be rediscovered, and if and when they were rediscovered, it wanted them back.

[00:19:49] It had already received the £24 million as **compensation** for the loss, so it used part of this **compensation** to buy back the rights.

[00:20:01] The thieves were caught and sent to prison in 1999, but they had **disposed of**<sup>79</sup> the paintings, they were now being held by someone else.

[00:20:11] The Tate ended up being contacted by a German lawyer, who said that he could arrange for the return of the paintings for 10 million Deutschmarks, about €5 million Euros at the time.

[00:20:25] Eight and a half years after the theft, after **extensive**<sup>80</sup> secret **negotiations**<sup>81</sup>, the paintings were finally returned.

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<sup>78</sup> with no success

<sup>79</sup> sold or given them away

<sup>80</sup> of great extent or length

<sup>81</sup> a discussion between different groups in order to reach an agreement



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[00:20:33] The Tate had to pay around €5 million Euros to get the paintings back, but given that it had received a payment of £24 million, The Tate Gallery ended up actually making quite a lot of money from the sale.

[00:20:48] When you take into account the money it made from investments on the insurance [payout](#)<sup>82</sup> and the increase in the value of the Turner paintings, it's estimated that the gallery made almost €50 million from the theft.

[00:21:04] You certainly don't think about art galleries making money when they are robbed, but in this case The Tate certainly did. Ok then, our fifth and final theft is of a painting that you will definitely have heard of. The Mona Lisa, or La Gioconda to the Italian and Spanish listeners.

[00:21:25] You may well know that today The Mona Lisa hangs in the Louvre gallery in Paris. It is [safe and sound](#)<sup>83</sup>, and is visited by 30,000 people every single day.

[00:21:36] It's one of the most famous paintings in the world, and part of its [fame](#)<sup>84</sup> actually comes from the fact that it was stolen.

[00:21:45] The theft happened 110 years ago, in 1911.

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<sup>82</sup> a large amount of money that is paid

<sup>83</sup> unharmed and safe from danger

<sup>84</sup> the state of being known



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[00:21:50] An Italian [handyman](#)<sup>85</sup> named Vincenzo Peruggia had been hired to work at the Louvre. His main job was creating glass protective [coverings](#)<sup>86</sup> for paintings, such as the Mona Lisa.

[00:22:03] At 7am on Monday 21st August, 1911, he entered the museum through the workman's entrance. The museum was closed to the public on a Monday, but there was nothing unusual about museum staff entering.

[00:22:21] Indeed, Mondays were when you could get work done without [disrupting](#)<sup>87</sup> the public.

[00:22:27] But Peruggia had not come to work, he had come to steal.

[00:22:33] He made his way to the room where the Mona Lisa was, took it out of its frame, [wrapped](#)<sup>88</sup> it under his white worker's coat, and simply left the building.

[00:22:45] The theft wasn't even discovered until 24 hours later. Multiple workers had seen that the Mona Lisa wasn't in its frame, but this was nothing unusual - paintings were taken away for [restoration](#)<sup>89</sup>, study, or taken out [on loan](#) to other galleries all the time, and people assumed that this was what had happened to the Mona Lisa.

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<sup>85</sup> a man whose job is to repair and make things

<sup>86</sup> things used to protect something else

<sup>87</sup> interrupting or causing a problem

<sup>88</sup> covered

<sup>89</sup> the process of keeping something to its earlier good condition



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[00:23:11] Of course, there were no alarms, no [CCTV<sup>90</sup>](#), or any of the technology that we have today.

[00:23:18] When the theft was discovered, it was all over the newspapers, and really [propelled<sup>91</sup>](#) The Mona Lisa to the [fame](#) that it enjoys today. If it had never been stolen, it would have been significantly less famous.

[00:23:33] The hunt was on. Where was the Mona Lisa? Had it been taken to the UK, to Italy, even to the United States?

[00:23:41] In fact, for almost the entire time it was stolen, the Mona Lisa never left Paris.

[00:23:48] Peruggia kept it in his apartment, first in a cupboard, then under the [cooker<sup>92</sup>](#), then even in a [trunk<sup>93</sup>](#) with a fake bottom.

[00:23:57] He had tried to sell it multiple times, but the world's eyes were on it, and no dealers would take it.

[00:24:05] Eventually he contacted an art dealer in Florence, claiming that he wanted to bring this [priceless](#) work of art back to Italy. It was a work by Leonardo Da Vinci, one of

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<sup>90</sup> Closed-circuit television, a system of cameras put for security reasons

<sup>91</sup> pushed forward

<sup>92</sup> a large device that is used to cook food

<sup>93</sup> a large box for storing or keeping things



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Italy's best known painters, and he said he wanted to bring it back to the country where it deserved to be.

[00:24:25] He set up a meeting with the Florentine art dealer, who had brought along the [curator](#)<sup>94</sup> of the Uffizi gallery in Florence.

[00:24:35] When Peruggia produced the painting during the meeting, the police were [promptly](#)<sup>95</sup> called.

[00:24:40] Peruggia was arrested, and unlike the Hans Memling [triptych](#), the first recorded stolen piece of art that still hasn't been returned to its rightful owner, the Mona Lisa was safely returned to The Louvre.

[00:24:56] OK then, there we have it, five of the greatest art thefts of all time.

[00:25:02] The Impressionist masterpieces from the Musée Marmottan in Paris, the double theft of the two Screams, the Mexican amateur thieves who pulled off one of the biggest thefts of all time, the two Turners and the example of how being robbed can actually make you money, and of course the Mona Lisa.

[00:25:22] As a reminder, this is part one of a three-part series, in parts two and three we will be going deeper into the stories of both the greatest, or at least most [prolific](#), art thief of all time, Stéphane Breitweiser, and the greatest, or perhaps just most

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<sup>94</sup> the person in charge of the museum

<sup>95</sup> immediately



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

[intriguing](#)<sup>96</sup>, art theft of all time, the robbery of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

[00:25:47] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:25:51] In particular, I'd love to know your thoughts on the [severity](#)<sup>97</sup> of art theft. It's often considered a [victimless](#)<sup>98</sup> crime, and art thieves tend to get relatively short prison [sentences](#). But is it really [victimless](#)?

[00:26:07] Are we, the public, the normal people, actually the victims of it, because these pieces are removed from public display, and if so, what should be done about the criminals who commit these crimes?

[00:26:21] I would love to get your thoughts. You can head right into our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](http://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:26:32] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:26:38] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

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<sup>96</sup> unusual and very interesting

<sup>97</sup> seriousness

<sup>98</sup> without causing harm to people





## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Prolific</b>	producing a great number of something or having repeated an activity many times
<b>Estimated</b>	roughly calculated or judged
<b>In the slightest</b>	at all
<b>Fake</b>	made to look real
<b>Disturbance</b>	illegal activity
<b>Tied up</b>	made them unable to move by tying a rope or cord around them
<b>Witness</b>	someone who sees an event happening
<b>Piracy</b>	the act of attacking ships in order to steal from them
<b>Boarding</b>	getting on
<b>En route</b>	on the way
<b>Triptych</b>	a piece of art, consisting of 3 panels or parts
<b>Privateer</b>	someone who was given special permission by the authorities to



The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

attack and steal enemy ships

**Engage**

involve himself

**Legitimate**

allowed by law

**Commissioned**

placed the order for

**Primarily**

mainly

**Broadly**

generally, widely

**Gain**

an increase in wealth

**Complexities**

difficulties

**Get rid of**

become free of

**Rewards**

money given for some special service

**Get out of jail free card**

something that is used as an insurance in order to avoid an unpleasant situation, like going to jail. (A reference to the board game Monopoly, in which this card allows players to leave the jail space without missing a turn.)

**Unrelated**

not connected, different

**Immunity**

a situation in which someone is protected from legal action



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

<b>Sentence</b>	punishment for someone who has been found guilty of a crime by a law court
<b>Sentences</b>	punishment for people who have been found guilty of a crime by a law court
<b>Substitute</b>	the use of something instead of something else
<b>Parties</b>	groups of people who form the different sides of an agreement
<b>Collateral</b>	something used as security for the payment of a loan
<b>Raids</b>	surprise attacks
<b>Patriotism</b>	love and loyalty to one's country
<b>Rightful</b>	proper or just
<b>Supposed</b>	accepted as true by some, but highly doubtful
<b>Heist</b>	robbery of very valuable things
<b>Violent</b>	using force
<b>By no means</b>	not at all
<b>Burst in</b>	enter suddenly and without warning
<b>Proceeded</b>	continued



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

<b>Meticulously</b>	very carefully
<b>Eye witnesses</b>	people who saw the event happening
<b>Anxiously</b>	in a way that shows worry or nervousness
<b>Whereabouts</b>	the place where they were
<b>Pastel</b>	a soft coloured material that is used to draw pictures
<b>Flocking</b>	coming together in great numbers
<b>Swift</b>	quick
<b>Getaway</b>	the act of escaping, usually after committing a crime
<b>Rush out</b>	escape very quickly
<b>Smashed</b>	broke with force
<b>Audacity</b>	the situation of being fearless and confident in a rude way
<b>Point</b>	argument or idea
<b>Trap</b>	a plan for tricking a person into being caught
<b>Ransom</b>	a large amount of money that is demanded in exchange for something
<b>Undercover</b>	working in secret, using a false appearance



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

<b>Took the bait</b>	believed them to be true, fell into the trap
<b>Brazen</b>	fearless and without shame
<b>Rushed</b>	moved very quickly
<b>Threatening</b>	saying that they were going to
<b>Extort</b>	get something by unfair means
<b>Distract</b>	make them stop giving attention to something
<b>Just goes to show</b>	shows, proves
<b>Artefacts</b>	objects of great historical or cultural value
<b>Faulty</b>	not working properly
<b>Priceless</b>	so valuable that its price cannot be calculated or measured
<b>Irreplaceable</b>	so special that it cannot be replaced
<b>Curators</b>	the people in charge of a museum
<b>Culprits</b>	the guilty people
<b>Sophisticated</b>	having great experience and knowledge
<b>Dropouts</b>	people who have left university before having completed their studies



## The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

<b>Crawled</b>	moved forward on the hands and knees
<b>Duct</b>	a passage that carries air in and out of buildings
<b>Invaluable</b>	of great value, priceless
<b>Penultimate</b>	second from the last
<b>On loan</b>	borrowed for a period of time
<b>Compensation</b>	money that is paid in exchange for something lost or damaged
<b>Avenues</b>	ways of approach or research
<b>Exhausted</b>	completely used up
<b>Relinquished</b>	gave up, abandoned
<b>To no avail</b>	with no success
<b>Disposed of</b>	sold or given them away
<b>Extensive</b>	of great extent or length
<b>Negotiations</b>	a discussion between different groups in order to reach an agreement
<b>Payout</b>	a large amount of money that is paid
<b>Safe and sound</b>	unharmd and safe from danger



The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time

<b>Fame</b>	the state of being known
<b>Handyman</b>	a man whose job is to repair and make things
<b>Coverings</b>	things used to protect something else
<b>Disrupting</b>	interrupting or causing a problem
<b>Wrapped</b>	covered
<b>Restoration</b>	the process of keeping something to its earlier good condition
<b>Cctv</b>	Closed-circuit television, a system of cameras put for security reasons
<b>Propelled</b>	pushed forward
<b>Cooker</b>	a large device that is used to cook food
<b>Trunk</b>	a large box for storing or keeping things
<b>Curator</b>	the person in charge of the museum
<b>Promptly</b>	immediately
<b>Intriguing</b>	unusual and very interesting
<b>Severity</b>	seriousness
<b>Victimless</b>	without causing harm to people



**English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #199**  
**The Greatest Art Thefts Of All Time**

*We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)*

