Alfred Bader fonds

Chemistry and Art
More Adventures of a Chemist Collector

Adventures II -
A Double Theft

FILE COPY

Dr. Alfred Bader
924 East Juneau Avenue
Astor Hotel - Suite 622
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Ph: 414 / 277-0730
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e-mail: baderfa@execpc.com

April 1, 2004

Ms. Chantal van Schuylenburch
c/o Editor Peter R. de Vries
P.O. Box 30400
1202 NH Hilversum
HOLLAND

Dear Ms. van Schuylenburch,

I called you this morning and one of your associates gave me your address.

Enclosed please find a copy of the article entitled "*Double Theft, Triple Trouble*" that appeared in the Queen's *Alumni Review* in the summer of 2003.

I have also enclosed copies of my letters to Mr. A.A. Smit, the Commissioner of Police in Amsterdam. I never received any replies.

Please let me know if you need further details.

With best wishes I am

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.

FILE COPY

Dear Ms. van Schuylenburch,

Thank you for your interesting e-mail of today. I spoke with Dr. Willem Russell yesterday and gave him my permission to share all the information with you.

The story of the three stolen paintings was published in the Queen's University *Alumni Review* Summer 2003 issue and if you will e-mail me your exact address I will air mail you a copy which illustrates the three paintings that were stolen.

One of these was found by a wonderful scoutmaster in Amsterdam on the very evening of the theft. His name is Bert Vos and his phone number is 20 683 0645.

The other two paintings were kept by the Amsterdam police for three years and then sent to auction. All the details and photographs are given in the article which I will send you. Incidentally, before the publication of that article I wrote to Mr. A.A. Smit, the Commissioner of the Amsterdam police, to make certain that he had no objections to any of the details given. I had no reply.

If you would like to speak with me personally please either call me in my office at 1-414-277-0730 where I am during working days between 8AM and 5PM. Or you can call me at my home at 414-962-5169.

I will be happy to send you whatever further details you may need.

With best wishes,
Alfred Bader

Alfred Bader Fine Arts
Astor Hotel - Suite 622
924 E. Juneau Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202
T: 414-277-0730
F: 414-277-0709

Chantal van Schuylenburch wrote:

> Dear mister Bader,
>
> The reason I send you this email is because I work for a Dutch televisionprogram about crime. The program is called *Peter R de Vries, crimereporter*
>
> Recently we heard about your story concerning 3 the stolen paintings in 1994 in Amsterdam. I must say that this is a very interesting story and in my opnion the Dutch police have made a lot of mistakes.
>
> As I have heard the Dutch authorities never gave you any compensation. That seems definatly wrong and out of order.
>
> Anyway, maybe our program can be of some meaning in this conflict. The only thing is that I need to see the whole file on this case. We have had contact with your solicitor Mr. Russel. He needs your permission to give us a copy of the file. Therefore I would like to ask you to get in contact with Mr Russel about this.

Furthermore I was wondering if you can give some more information about the 3 paintings. I was told that one of them is back in your hands. What about the other two? And wich paintings are we actually talking about? Can I find them in an artbook? And if yes, wich one?

I hope you can get in contact with me and with mister Russel soon.

Chantal van Schuylenburch

c/o

Editor*Peter R. de Vries, misdaadverslaggever (crimereporter)*

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DR. ALFRED BADER CBE
2A Holmesdale Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex TN39 3QE
England
Phone/Fax: 01424-222223

November 10, 2003

Mr. A. A. Smit
Commissioner of Police
Amsterdam Politie District 3
Postbus 2287
1000 CG Amsterdam
THE NETHERLANDS

Dear Commissioner Smit,

P. 15 of the enclosed describes your actions.

You should be ashamed of yourself.

Sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.

No response

DR. ALFRED BADER CBE
2A Holmesdale Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex TN39 3QE
England
Phone/Fax: 01424-222223

A Chemist Helping Chemists

November 1, 2002

Mr. A. A. Smit
Commissioner of Police
Amsterdam Politie District 3
Postbus 2287
1000 CG Amsterdam
THE NETHERLANDS

Dear Mr. Smit,

The enclosed essay will be published as part of an anthology.

As it refers specifically to you please let me know whether it contains any factual mistakes.

The actions of the Amsterdam Police seem to me so close to dishonest that I cannot tell the difference.

Sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.

No response

Dr. Alfred Bader
2961 North Shepard Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

(414) 962-5169

January 15, 2003

Mr. Boris Castel, Editor
Queen's Quarterly
Queen's University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6
CANADA

Dear Boris,

Last autumn Isabel and I met a delightful Queen's graduate in Sussex, Sara Beck, Arts '92, who wrote "Oh, Why Can't the English...?" in the last *Alumni Review*.

Sara showed me a number of her essays, all of them dealing with her life in South Africa, and I found these really well written and interesting. You might like to consider publishing some of these in the Queen's Quarterly and eventually I hope that the Queen's McGill Press will be the first to publish Sara's collected essays.

You probably know my autobiography, *Adventures of a Chemist Collector,* published by Weidenfeld in 1995. I have begun to work on a sequel which will perhaps be entitled *More Adventures of a Chemist Collector*. So far I have only written a few chapters and I enclose one of these, *A Double Theft*. Might this be suitable for publication in the Queen's Quarterly? If so, I would of course send you photographs for Figs. 1-3. I presume that if your answer is yes you would not mind the chapter appearing later in *More Adventures*. . .

With all good wishes I remain

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.

QUEEN'S
Quarterly

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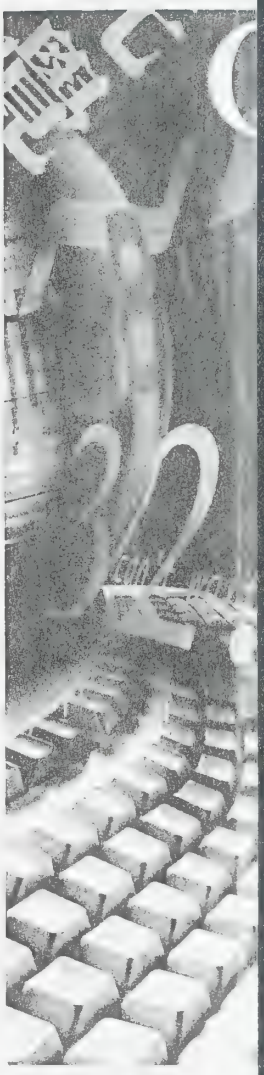

When Sara Beck, Arts'92, began teaching high school in a small town in southern England, she soon realized what Professor Henry Higgins of *My Fair Lady* fame was bemoaning when he sang...

"OH, WHY CAN'T THE ENGLISH...?"

Everyone said it was like "carrying coals to Newcastle Or, for those of you not familiar with English idiom it was like importing freezers to Nunavut, cattle to A berta, or blackflies to Northern Ontario. Full points for enthusiasm, but the endeavour was somehow... *flawed* in its basic logic.

In September 2001, I traveled to England to take a post at a high school in the town of Bexhill, about 15 km from the University's International Study Centre at Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex, England.

Yes, armed with my Queen's education (and buttressed b a BEd from the U of T) I went to teach English to the English

There were all sorts of things about this escapade that were basically flawed. The fact that I was hired on the strength of a five-minute telephone interview three days before school broke for the summer holidays should have told me something. The fact that there was a staff turnover of nearly 30 per cent the year I joined should have been another clue. And the dark, menacing stain on the ceiling of my classroom heralded the dark, fetid puddle that filled the centre of the floor by the first week in October, once the autumn rains had started. I was forced to wander the school corridors in search of a teaching space, and ultimately to beg each week for refugee status in a humanities or religion portable. My drama studio was turned into a math classroom the week before I arrived, and so I also had to beg for a space to teach drama.

I was asked, in the five-minute interview, if I could teach drama as well as English, but I wasn't told that I would be the only drama teacher in the whole school. Nor that I would have no support, guidance, props, costumes, scripts, makeup, lights, rehearsal space, or even a copy of the syllabus from which I was supposed to prepare two classes of students to sit a nationwide written exam. It's a good thing I knew something about acting because I was faking it big time.

I worked 70- to 80-hour weeks, and still did not accomplish everything that I was supposed to. Then, there was the fact that I was given an English class of 28 kids, 18 of whom had documented learning or emotional/behavioural disorders. I struggled to cope with this class for two months, but when I burst into tears after a lesson for the third time my department head took pity on me. He took over that class and gave me, instead, a class of 20 kids – all of whom had learning or behavioural disorders.

I sighed with relief the last day of school. I'd made it without a single fight breaking out in any of my lessons. And no students had stabbed me in the backside with a compass. None had pushed me to the floor in a rage, thrown bleach at me, or threatened to kill me. None had told me to go back to

Dr. Alfred Bader
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

(414) 962-5169

March 30, 2004

Dr. Willem Russell
P.O. Box 87400
Amsterdam 1080 JK
HOLLAND

Dear Dr. Russell,

I enjoyed speaking to you early this morning and now enclose copy of the manuscript of the article which appeared in the Queen's University *Alumni Review* about a year ago.

I cannot put my hand on the article itself at the moment, but when I find it I will send you a copy. The text, of course, is the same.

I would very much like to talk to the reporter whom I would also like to speak to that wonderful scoutmaster in Amsterdam, Bert Vos, whose telephone number is 20 683 0645. My travel schedule to Europe is as follows:

Milwaukee to England	June 8
Vienna	June 10-14
Prague	June 15-17
Munich	June 18-22
Bexhill-on-Sea, E. Sussex, England	June 22-July 23 (except for a week in Cambridge and London from July 2-9)

I can be called in my office between 8:30 AM and 5 PM every working day at 1-414-277-0730 or after that, at home at 1-414-962-5169.

The reporter may ask me whether I consider the Police Commissioner or the Police dishonest. My answer would be that they are so close to

dishonest that I cannot tell the difference. Would this be considered libelous under Dutch law?

With many thanks for your help and with all good wishes I remain

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.

A DOUBLE THEFT

Isabel and I arrived at Amsterdam's Central Station on Saturday afternoon, November 12, 1994, and while waiting for the tram to take us to our hotel, I went to the tourist office to pick up a map of the city, leaving Isabel with our luggage, two suitcases and my briefcase. When I returned minutes later, the briefcase was gone. A swarthy, bearded man had distracted her attention by asking a question about trams while a woman grabbed the briefcase.

The case contained many photographs and papers, American and English money, traveler's checks, checkbooks, two pieces of jewelry and three small paintings which I had planned to discuss with Dutch art historians.

We rushed to the police in the Voorburgwal nearby and Martin Te Pas, the very pleasant officer, took the details. He told us that the money was certainly lost, but the paintings might be recovered.

From the hotel we called two old friends, one in London to ask for help with alerting the London bank about the blank checks, the other a friend and art dealer in The Hague, Saskia Jungeling, to ask for advice about the paintings.

All three paintings were 17th century. I had purchased the smallest (Fig. 1) at Sotheby's in London the previous July. A sketch of a man, I believe by Gonzalez Coques, the Antwerp portraitist, ca. 1635 might seem the most valuable to the thieves because it was in an elaborate carved gilt frame with an 18th century label on the back stating that it was by Anthony Van Dyck. Thieves may not know of the unreliability of 18th century attributions.

The other two paintings, both on panels, I had purchased from London dealers just days before. One depicted Rembrandt's mother (Fig. 2) in the manner of Dou, and probably by a Rembrandt student of around 1630. It was in a padded envelope, unframed. The other, also unframed, was just in a plastic folder, between my papers. The seller had suggested that this study of a man might be by Willem Drost, a well-known Rembrandt student, an attribution I found difficult to believe. But as it was certainly mid 17th century and of fine quality, I liked it immensely and thought it the best of the three lost paintings.

We were exhausted after our phone calls from the hotel, took sleeping pills and had nightmares about robberies and paintings. But at least we were physically unharmed and one couldn't but admire the teamwork of the thieves!

Miracles still happen. At 8:00 the next morning Saskia, our friend in The Hague, called us to tell us of a phone call she had received at midnight from a man in Amsterdam who had found many of the photographs and papers and one painting. At first we thought that he might be one of the thieves trying to exchange paintings for more money. That this was ludicrous soon became clear when we met Bert Vos later that morning. He had been returning to his home along tramline 17, several miles from the station, at 11:15 the night before, when he noticed a pile of papers and 8" x 10" photographs lying in the gutter between two dustbins. Closer inspection convinced him that this was not rubbish, so he scooped up the pile and took it to his simple third story apartment, spread out the papers and photographs to dry, read some of the papers, discovered the non-Drost

painting of a man and my telephone list. He called my son in Milwaukee but reached the answering machine; he then phoned the police and then the Rijksmuseum because he had seen a letter from Dr. Filedt-Kok to me but of course at midnight, he talked only to a guard. Then he noticed one Dutch phone number, that of Saskia, who knew of our loss and cautioned him not to dry the painting on panel on a radiator.

The miracle is not that we got our papers and the painting back, but that a person would do what Bert Vos did. Just think of it: A man living alone, going to the enormous trouble – at midnight – to examine the papers, make those phone calls around the world – and try to dry out all that material. And at first he refused compensation. Only when I insisted did he accept, to use it for his Boy Scout troop. And of course we invited him to be our guest in Milwaukee. When I fell asleep the night of our misfortune, I thought that I never wanted to be in Amsterdam again. Now I knew that we wanted to go back, if only to get to know Mr. Vos better. And we so enjoyed his visit to Milwaukee and have been back to Amsterdam several times.

The thieves had taken the study of Rembrandt's mother out of its envelope which they threw away with all the other papers. But, they overlooked the study of a man (Fig. 3) and the panel had not suffered. We took it to the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Dokumentatie (RKD) in The Hague and discovered that the painting came from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and had been sold in Berlin in 1935. Abraham Bredius, the greatest Rembrandt expert of his day, had considered it to be a genuine Rembrandt and given it No. 226 in his catalogue of the master's work. When I first saw it in London, I remembered seeing another, certainly inferior, version in the Johnson Collection in the museum in Philadelphia. Today these sketches are no longer thought to be by Rembrandt, but ours is certainly by one of his ablest students, painted in the 1640's.

At the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Frits Duparc, its Director, compared it with a portrait of a man in a helmet by Carel Fabritius, then on loan from the museum in Groningen. There certainly is similar handling of paint.

When I showed my panel to Dr. Filedt-Kok, he said "how nice – the poor man's Rembrandt." And when I showed it to Professor Josua Bruyn, the retired head of the Rembrandt Research Project, he agreed with my dating, but thought we might never be able to ascertain the name of the very able student. Perhaps, but I will try. And in the meantime, I think of it as my Bert Vos panel.

Naturally we reported the theft to Christie's and Sotheby's in Amsterdam to the RKD and to the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR) which published the theft, illustrating both paintings in the IFAReports and the Art Loss Register. And then we waited and hoped.

The break came four years later, on December 23, 1998, when Dr. Rudi Ekkart, the Director of the RKD, faxed me that a collector in Utrecht, Dr. Matthias M.B. Schilder, had bought my Rembrandt's mother at a small auction in Amsterdam and had then brought the panel to the RKD for identification. Drs. Jan Kosten, the Rembrandt school specialist at the RKD, had shown it to be the stolen painting.

"Unfortunately for you", wrote Dr. Ekkart, "according to the Dutch civil code a work of art that had been bought in good confidence (and in this case even in a public auction) longer than three years after the theft is the legal possession of the buyer." "But", Dr. Ekkart continued, "the present owner, who is a very reliable and rational man . . . is willing to sell it to you for a reasonable price according to the market value".

Just what was the market value?

Two days before the theft, in 1994, I had bought the painting from a gallery in London, Whitfield Fine Arts, for £3200. Dr. Schilder had bought it, Lot 1420 in the De Eland auction on June 25, 1998 (i.e., 3-1/2 years after the theft) for a hammer price of Hfl 600, paying a total of Hfl 762.

Professor Werner Sumowski had written to Dr. Schilder that he considers the painting to be one of the best copies of a lost original by Rembrandt. Another copy is in the Mauritshuis (RRP C-41).

A dealer in Amsterdam had offered Dr. Schilder Hfl 20,000 and now he concluded that "Hfl 35,000 is a correct price . . . its value would go up easily to Hfl 50,000 in just a few years as was suggested by an art dealer, who advised me not to sell the painting now".

Naturally I asked Dr. Ekkart whether he still considered Dr. Schilder a very reliable and rational man and I remonstrated with Dr. Schilder, ". . . you would like thirty five thousand guilders: for a painting which I had purchased in November 1994 from a London gallery (known for its expertise but not its low prices), Whitfield Fine Arts, for £3200, less than a third of the price you are asking. The second point, selling my painting, you have considered, but that may not be as easy as you think. Knowing the facts, a truly good person will not buy it, and a really knowledgeable person will not either, because he can never get completely clear title. The silver lining is that I now know where the painting is. My worry is not that you will not return it. I can live without it, as I own many better Rembrandt School paintings. Rather, my worry is that you will not return it, but that neither you nor anyone else will really enjoy looking at it for a very long time. That would be a pity. Also, it would be a loss of a very interesting study piece to my University's museum, to which my wife and I are leaving our collection. What do I suggest? Certainly not that you just return my painting without compensation. Then you would be the second victim of the thief, and of the almost unbelievable police carelessness. Think about it, and let me know your reaction entirely at your convenience".

My friend, Dr. Otto Naumann, had suggested that I take counsel with an able Amsterdam lawyer, Dr. Willem Russell, himself an astute collector. Dr. Russell discovered that both stolen paintings had been offered for sale at the auction house De Eland in February 1995, but the consignor had demanded so high a reserve that they did not sell and were returned to him. Shortly thereafter, they were seized by the police from a Moroccan drug dealer and kept by the police in their lost and found storeroom for the next three years, without anyone checking their own police reports or with IFAR. And then the police sent both paintings to De Eland again where they were sold without reserve on June 25, 1998!

Dr. Russell tried very hard to persuade the Amsterdam police to compensate me, to no avail. They did not even offer to give me the money they had received from the auction house. And Dr. Russell advised me that suing the Amsterdam police would be far more costly than the value of the paintings.

At the time, the American ambassador to Holland was a very able art historian, Dr. Cynthia Schneider, to whom I related these facts. She responded most kindly April 1, 1999, "Your letter of March 24th regarding the theft of several of your paintings in Amsterdam distressed me more than you might have imagined. As a scholar of Dutch

art, recently named American Ambassador to the Netherlands, your name is extremely well known to me. Before assuming my post I was an Associate Professor of Art History at Georgetown University; I received my doctorate at Harvard under Seymour Slive. We have many friends in common, from Bill Robinson to Walter Liedtke to Seymour himself. In any case your story is indeed a distressing one. I will do everything I can to investigate the situation, and I will get back to you with information as soon as possible."

But even the American ambassador could not persuade Mr. A. A. Smit, the Commissioner of the Amsterdam Police, to be fair. I had written to the police by registered mail on February 22, 1999 (giving all the details) but received no reply. Dr. Schneider wrote to Mr. Smit shortly after that and he finally wrote to me on May 24, 2001 (i.e., two years later!), "Although late, I'll try to answer the questions you asked. But let me start by saying that your version of what happened with your paintings is the correct one. . ." But he made no offer of compensation. Of course I replied, "That being so, why does the Amsterdam Police not reimburse me for the two paintings it recovered and sold through auction?" No response – stonewalling from the police of the city I had thought to be one of the fairest in Europe.

In December 1994 a Dutch paper, *Het Parool*, had written a delightful article about Bert Vos' finding the best of these paintings. On April 10, 1999 the same paper published another article about a Utrecht zoologist asking Hfl 35,000 for the Rembrandt's mother which the police had sent to auction. Another Dutch paper, *De Volkskrant,* published a similar article with a photo of Rembrandt's mother on April 24.

Perhaps these articles and my writing to Dr. Schilder changed his mind. I told him that I had read some of his papers, particularly about ill-treated dogs, and realized that he was an able zoologist, and that I hoped that he would sell me Rembrandt's mother reasonably. What was reasonable? I had bought the painting from Clovis Whitfield for £3200, about Hfl 10,000, would I be willing to pay that? Of course I was, and Dr. Ekkart at the RKD exchanged my banker's draft for my painting which now hangs in our home.

We even visited Dr. Schilder in his home, happily smiling about the past and admiring his 19th century paintings. He gave us the De Eland catalogue of June 25, 1998 listing the two paintings sent in by the police. What a pity that Mr. P.J.C. Trommelen, the director of the auction house, could not tell us who had bought the Gonzales Coques, nor was he in the habit of checking whether paintings were stolen. That of course was unnecessary the second time my paintings were submitted, because the police had sent them. But if he had checked the first time, in 1995, they would have been returned to me.

The Historians of Netherlandish Art published a full page ad (Fig. 4) in their April 2000 issue and, if I live long enough, I may find out about the third and least important painting.

In the meantime the Rijksmuseum has asked me to lend a Sweerts self-portrait and the Rembrandthuis asked for two early Rembrandts and I hesitated, thinking of Mr. A.A. Smit, the Amsterdam Police Commissioner. But should I cut off my nose to spite my face? I enjoyed seeing all three of these paintings in the exhibitions and all have left Amsterdam safely.

Dr. Alfred Bader
2961 North Shepard Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

(414) 962-5169

April 4, 2003

Ken Cuthbertson, Editor
Queen's Alumni Review
Department of Alumni Affairs
Office of Advancement
99 University Avenue
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6
CANADA

Dear Ken,

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Enclosed please find the three photographs and one advertisement which are Figs. 1-4. Enclosed also is a diskette.

With all good wishes I remain

Yours sincerely,

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AB/az
Enc. - 5

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painting of a man and my telephone list. He called my son in Milwaukee but reached the answering machine; he then phoned the police and then the Rijksmuseum because he had seen a letter from Dr. Filedt-Kok to me but of course at midnight, he talked only to a guard. Then he noticed one Dutch phone number, that of Saskia, who knew of our loss and cautioned him not to dry the painting on panel on a radiator.

The miracle is not that we got our papers and the painting back, but that a person would do what Bert Vos did. Just think of it: A man living alone, going to the enormous trouble – at midnight – to examine the papers, make those phone calls around the world – and try to dry out all that material. And at first he refused compensation. Only when I insisted did he accept, to use it for his Boy Scout troop. And of course we invited him to be our guest in Milwaukee. When I fell asleep the night of our misfortune, I thought that I never wanted to be in Amsterdam again. Now I knew that we wanted to go back, if only to get to know Mr. Vos better. And we so enjoyed his visit to Milwaukee and have been back to Amsterdam several times.

The thieves had taken the study of Rembrandt's mother out of its envelope which they threw away with all the other papers. But, they overlooked the study of a man (Fig. 3) and the panel had not suffered. We took it to the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Dokumentatie (RKD) in The Hague and discovered that the painting came from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and had been sold in Berlin in 1935. Abraham Bredius, the greatest Rembrandt expert of his day, had considered it to be a genuine Rembrandt and given it No. 226 in his catalogue of the master's work. When I first saw it in London, I remembered seeing another, certainly inferior, version in the Johnson Collection in the museum in Philadelphia. Today these sketches are no longer thought to be by Rembrandt, but ours is certainly by one of his ablest students, painted in the 1640's.

At the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Frits Duparc, its Director, compared it with a portrait of a man in a helmet by Carel Fabritius, then on loan from the museum in Groningen. There certainly is similar handling of paint.

When I showed my panel to Dr. Filedt-Kok, he said "how nice – the poor man's Rembrandt." And when I showed it to Professor Josua Bruyn, the retired head of the Rembrandt Research Project, he agreed with my dating, but thought we might never be able to ascertain the name of the very able student. Perhaps, but I will try. And in the meantime, I think of it as my Bert Vos panel.

Naturally we reported the theft to Christie's and Sotheby's in Amsterdam to the RKD and to the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR) which published the theft, illustrating both paintings in the IFAReports and the Art Loss Register. And then we waited and hoped.

The break came four years later, on December 23, 1998, when Dr. Rudi Ekkart, the Director of the RKD, faxed me that a collector in Utrecht, Dr. Matthias M.B. Schilder, had bought my Rembrandt's mother at a small auction in Amsterdam and had then brought the panel to the RKD for identification. Drs. Jan Kosten, the Rembrandt school specialist at the RKD, had shown it to be the stolen painting.

"Unfortunately for you", wrote Dr. Ekkart, "according to the Dutch civil code a work of art that had been bought in good confidence (and in this case even in a public auction) longer than three years after the theft is the legal possession of the buyer." "But", Dr. Ekkart continued, "the present owner, who is a very reliable and rational man . . . is willing to sell it to you for a reasonable price according to the market value".

Just what was the market value?

Two days before the theft, in 1994, I had bought the painting from a gallery in London, Whitfield Fine Arts, for £3200. Dr. Schilder had bought it, Lot 1420 in the De Eland auction on June 25, 1998 (i.e., 3-1/2 years after the theft) for a hammer price of Hfl 600, paying a total of Hfl 762.

Professor Werner Sumowski had written to Dr. Schilder that he considers the painting to be one of the best copies of a lost original by Rembrandt. Another copy is in the Mauritshuis (RRP C-41).

A dealer in Amsterdam had offered Dr. Schilder Hfl 20,000 and now he concluded that "Hfl 35,000 is a correct price . . . its value would go up easily to Hfl 50,000 in just a few years as was suggested by an art dealer, who advised me not to sell the painting now".

Naturally I asked Dr. Ekkart whether he still considered Dr. Schilder a very reliable and rational man and I remonstrated with Dr. Schilder, ". . . you would like thirty five thousand guilders: for a painting which I had purchased in November 1994 from a London gallery (known for its expertise but not its low prices), Whitfield Fine Arts, for £3200, less than a third of the price you are asking. The second point, selling my painting, you have considered, but that may not be as easy as you think. Knowing the facts, a truly good person will not buy it, and a really knowledgeable person will not either, because he can never get completely clear title. The silver lining is that I now know where the painting is. My worry is not that you will not return it. I can live without it, as I own many better Rembrandt School paintings. Rather, my worry is that you will not return it, but that neither you nor anyone else will really enjoy looking at it for a very long time. That would be a pity. Also, it would be a loss of a very interesting study piece to my University's museum, to which my wife and I are leaving our collection. What do I suggest? Certainly not that you just return my painting without compensation. Then you would be the second victim of the thief, and of the almost unbelievable police carelessness. Think about it, and let me know your reaction entirely at your convenience".

My friend, Dr. Otto Naumann, had suggested that I take counsel with an able Amsterdam lawyer, Dr. Willem Russell, himself an astute collector. Dr. Russell discovered that both stolen paintings had been offered for sale at the auction house De Eland in February 1995, but the consignor had demanded so high a reserve that they did not sell and were returned to him. Shortly thereafter, they were seized by the police from a Moroccan drug dealer and kept by the police in their lost and found storeroom for the next three years, without anyone checking their own police reports or with IFAR. And then the police sent both paintings to De Eland again where they were sold without reserve on June 25, 1998!

Dr. Russell tried very hard to persuade the Amsterdam police to compensate me, to no avail. They did not even offer to give me the money they had received from the auction house. And Dr. Russell advised me that suing the Amsterdam police would be far more costly than the value of the paintings.

At the time, the American ambassador to Holland was a very able art historian, Dr. Cynthia Schneider, to whom I related these facts. She responded most kindly April 1, 1999, "Your letter of March 24th regarding the theft of several of your paintings in Amsterdam distressed me more than you might have imagined. As a scholar of Dutch

art, recently named American Ambassador to the Netherlands, your name is extremely well known to me. Before assuming my post I was an Associate Professor of Art History at Georgetown University; I received my doctorate at Harvard under Seymour Slive. We have many friends in common, from Bill Robinson to Walter Liedtke to Seymour himself. In any case your story is indeed a distressing one. I will do everything I can to investigate the situation, and I will get back to you with information as soon as possible."

But even the American ambassador could not persuade Mr. A. A. Smit, the Commissioner of the Amsterdam Police, to be fair. I had written to the police by registered mail on February 22, 1999 (giving all the details) but received no reply. Dr. Schneider wrote to Mr. Smit shortly after that and he finally wrote to me on May 24, 2001 (i.e., two years later!), "Although late, I'll try to answer the questions you asked. But let me start by saying that your version of what happened with your paintings is the correct one. . ." But he made no offer of compensation. Of course I replied, "That being so, why does the Amsterdam Police not reimburse me for the two paintings it recovered and sold through auction?" No response – stonewalling from the police of the city I had thought to be one of the fairest in Europe.

In December 1994 a Dutch paper, *Het Parool*, had written a delightful article about Bert Vos' finding the best of these paintings. On April 10, 1999 the same paper published another article about a Utrecht zoologist asking Hfl 35,000 for the Rembrandt's mother which the police had sent to auction. Another Dutch paper, *De Volkenkrant*, published a similar article with a photo of Rembrandt's mother on April 24.

Perhaps these articles and my writing to Dr. Schilder changed his mind. I told him that I had read some of his papers, particularly about ill-treated dogs, and realized that he was an able zoologist, and that I hoped that he would sell me Rembrandt's mother reasonably. What was reasonable? I had bought the painting from Clovis Whitfield for £3200, about Hfl 10,000, would I be willing to pay that? Of course I was, and Dr. Ekkart at the RKD exchanged my banker's draft for my painting which now hangs in our home.

We even visited Dr. Schilder in his home, happily smiling about the past and admiring his 19th century paintings. He gave us the De Eland catalogue of June 25, 1998 listing the two paintings sent in by the police. What a pity that Mr. P.J.C. Trommelen, the director of the auction house, could not tell us who had bought the Gonzales Coques, nor was he in the habit of checking whether paintings were stolen. That of course was unnecessary the second time my paintings were submitted, because the police had sent them. But if he had checked the first time, in 1995, they would have been returned to me.

The Historians of Netherlandish Art published a full page ad (Fig. 4) in their April 2000 issue and, if I live long enough, I may find out about the third and least important painting.

In the meantime the Rijksmuseum has asked me to lend a Sweerts self-portrait and the Rembrandthuis asked for two early Rembrandts and I hesitated, thinking of Mr. A.A. Smit, the Amsterdam Police Commissioner. But should I cut off my nose to spite my face? I enjoyed seeing all three of these paintings in the exhibitions and all have left Amsterdam safely.