

US Dept. of Justice investigating if Ganesha idol at Toledo Museum was stolen from India

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Suspected to be illicitly obtained by art dealer Subhash Kapoor.

By Deepak Chitnis

WASHINGTON, DC: A Hindu idol on display at Ohio's Toledo Museum of Art may have been stolen by the person that the museum purchased it from.



The idol in question is a statue of the Hindu deity Ganesha, sculpted out of bronze at some point around the 11th century A.D. The Toledo Museum of Art purchased the idol for its collection in 2006, but now the idol (or one looking remarkably similar to it) has been listed in India as having been stolen, fueling speculation that the piece was illicitly obtained by Subhash Kapoor, the dealer who sold the idol to the museum.

According to local newspaper *The Toledo Blade*, the museum bought the artifact from Kapoor for \$245,000. It is listed as one of 18 religious works of art missing from a small village in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In the ensuing years, Kapoor sold more works of art to the museum — terracotta idols and seven other works of various kinds, all between 2001 and 2010 — although their current status as stolen or legitimate is as yet unknown.

This Ganesha idol, currently on display at the Toledo Museum of Art, may have been a stolen good (photo courtesy of The Toledo Blade).

The museum is currently hanging on to the Ganesha until the matter is resolved, but is cooperating with an investigation by the US Department of Justice. Kapoor is currently on trial back in India for exporting objects out of the country illegally, as well as various forgery and conspiracy charges. And the whole situation is not the first time the Toledo Museum of Art has been a

victim of purchasing stolen goods.

This is not the only recent case involving stolen Indian art being sold to museums by Kapoor. The National Gallery of Australia is in the midst of trying to confirm the origins and return several works of art Kapoor sold them in 2008, including a \$5 million statue of the Hindu Lord Shiva dancing. Kapoor was at the head of a ring that sold several prized artifacts to museums around the world, artifacts which were later found out to have been stolen. The scam goes as far back as 1992, at which point he started fabricating entire ownership histories and certificates of authenticity for stolen works of art.

Over the past two decades, it's estimated that he sold stolen art for as much as tens of million dollars, if not more. Kapoor's girlfriend, Selina Mohamed, was also arrested in the US for her alleged role in the criminal

scheme, and faces significant jail time if convicted.

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