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PIO CONTACT: Dawn Clark
WORK: (717) 221-4458
CELL: (717) 975-7128
EMAIL: Dawn.Clark2@usdoj.gov

Three Members Of Museum Heist Crew Found Guilty Of Conspiracy, Theft Of Major Artwork, And Concealment/Disposal Of Major Artwork

SCRANTON - The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that Nicholas Dombek, age 54, of Thornhurst, Pennsylvania, Damien Boland, age 48, of Moscow, Pennsylvania, and Joseph Atsus, age 48, of Roaring Brook, Pennsylvania, were convicted on February 7, 2025, for conspiracy to commit theft of major artwork, concealment and disposal of major artwork, and interstate transportation of stolen property, as well as multiple related substantive offense, following a four-week jury trial before United States District Court Judge Malachy E. Mannion.

According to Acting United States Attorney John C. Gurganus, Dombek, Boland, and Joseph Atsus were part of a larger nine-person conspiracy which lasted over 20 years and whose goal was to break into multiple museums and other institutions and steal priceless works of art, sports memorabilia, and other objects. Those objects include the following:

- A Christy Matthewson jersey and two contracts signed by Matthewson stolen in 1999 from Keystone College in Factoryville, Pennsylvania;
- "Le Grande Passion" by Andy Warhol and "Springs Winter" by Jackson Pollock stolen in 2005 from the Everhart Museum in Scranton, Pennsylvania;
- Ten (10) World Series rings, seven (7) other championship rings, and two (2) MVP plaques all belonging to Yogi Berra, worth over \$1,000,000 stolen in 2014 from the Yogi Berra Museum & Learning Center in Little Falls, New Jersey;
- Six (6) championship belts, including four belonging to Carmen Basilio and two belonging to Tony Zale, stolen in 2015 from the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York;
- The Hickok Belt and MVP Trophy belonging to Roger Maris, stolen in 2016 from the Roger Maris Museum in Fargo, North Dakota;
- The U.S. Amateur Trophy and a Hickok Belt awarded to Ben Hogan, stolen in 2012 from the USGA Golf Museum & Library;
- Fourteen (14) trophies and other awards worth over \$300,000, stolen in 2012 from the Harness Racing Museum & Hall of Fame in Goshen, New York;
- Five (5) trophies worth over \$400,000, including the 1903 Belmont Stakes Trophy, stolen in 2013 from the National Racing Museum & Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, New York;

- Eleven (11) trophies, including four (4) belonging to Art Wall, Jr., stolen in 2011 from the Scranton Country Club located in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania;
- Three antique firearms worth a combined \$1,000,000, stolen in 2006 from Space Farms Zoo & Museum in Wantage, New Jersey;
- An 1903/1904 Tiffany Lamp stolen in 2010 from the Lackawanna Historical Society in Scranton, Pennsylvania,
- “Upper Hudson” by Jasper Cropsey, worth approximately \$500,000, stolen in 2011 from Ringwood Manor in Ringwood, New Jersey;
- Two antique firearms worth over \$300,000, stolen in 2011 from Ringwood Manor in Ringwood, New Jersey;
- \$400,000 worth of gold nuggets, stolen in 2011 from the Sterling Hill Mining Museum in Ogdensburg, New Jersey;
- Various gems, minerals, and other items stolen in 2017, from the Franklin Mineral Museum in Franklin, New Jersey;
- An antique shotgun worth over \$30,000, stolen in 2018 from Space Farms Zoo & Museum in Wantage, New Jersey;
- Various jewelry, rings, and other items from various antique and jewelry stores in New York, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania.

Five additional co-conspirators pled guilty pursuant to felony informations and are awaiting sentencing. Former co-defendant Alfred Atsus was acquitted of the three counts against him at trial.

After stealing the above-described items, the conspirators would transport the stolen goods back to northeastern Pennsylvania, often the residence of Dombek, and melt the memorabilia down into easily transportable metal discs or bars. The conspirators would then sell the raw metal to fences in the New York City area for hundreds or a few thousands of dollars, significantly less than the sports memorabilia would be worth at fair market value.

Dombek burnt the painting “Upper Hudson” by Jasper Cropsey, valued at approximately \$500,000, to avoid the painting being recovered by investigators and used as evidence against the members of the conspiracy. The whereabouts of many of the other paintings and stolen objects are currently unknown, however, several antique firearms stolen from the Space Farms Zoo and Museum and the Ringwood Manor Museum, both in New Jersey, were recovered by investigators.

The matter was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Pennsylvania State Police, the New Jersey State Police, the New York State Police, the New Jersey State Park Police, the Newport Police Department (Rhode Island), the Fargo Police Department (North Dakota), the Chester Police Department (New York), the Exeter Borough Police Department (Pennsylvania), the Scranton Police Department, the Franklin Police Department (New Jersey), the Village of Goshen Police Department (New York), the Metropolitan Police Department (Washington, D.C.), the West Milord Township Police Department (New Jersey), the Montclair Police Department (New Jersey), the Saratoga Springs Police Department (New York), the Canastota Police Department (New York), the South Abington Police Department (Pennsylvania), the Bernards Township Police Department (New

Jersey), the Salisbury Township Police Department (Pennsylvania), the Montclair State University Police Department (New Jersey), the Lackawanna County District Attorney's Office (Pennsylvania), the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office (New Jersey), the Essex County Prosecutor's Office (New Jersey), the Orange County District Attorney's Office (New York), and multiple other local law enforcement agencies from across the country. Assistant United States Attorneys James M. Buchanan, Jenny Roberts, and Sean Camoni prosecuted the case.

Sentencing is not yet scheduled. The defendants face a maximum penalty of imprisonment for a term of five years for the conspiracy conviction and maximum penalties of ten years' imprisonment for each additional count of conviction, as well as a term of supervised release following imprisonment, and a fine.

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