

1. Discuss in pairs

Do you know any famous cases of stolen art pieces?

Do you think most museums and galleries are well protected by security systems?

How common do you think art theft is? Do you think it is a profitable nowadays?

2. Read the following introduction. Does it answer any of the questions above? Discuss with a partner.

Famous art thefts

You are probably convinced places like museums or galleries that house famous and priceless art pieces are very well protected. You might picture laser beams connected to sophisticated alarm systems that protect paintings by Van Gogh or Raphael. In reality, this is not the case. Many galleries and museums are underfunded and cannot afford top-notch security. Others are private collections open to the public that only have a handful of valuable items. Their premises, often old mansions, do not have the proper setup for the appropriate security measures. At the same time, stealing art is profitable and the theft often carries lower charges in the penal system than some other illicit activities. All this makes art theft more common than you might think. Illegal trade of stolen art is the third most profitable illicit activity, behind trading drugs and arms. Here are some famous art heists you've probably never heard of.

3. Work in groups of three. Assign each member a section of the article (The Scream theft, The Mona Lisa Louvre Heist, Mona Lisa theft). Read the part you are assigned and restate the information about a famous theft to your classmates. Use the following questions as reference:

- What was stolen?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who stole the art piece?
- How did the theft take place?
- Was the item recovered?

4. Go online and research one of the following heists. Report your findings to your group.

- Isabella Steward Garden Museum Theft
- 2000 Swedish Speedboat heist
- 2010 theft of 5 paintings from Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

The Scream theft

You surely know the famous painting by Edvard Munch, *The Scream*. Art thieves know it too, and they have attempted stealing the art piece on many occasions. For example, in the 1960s, in 1994, and 2004. The 2004 heist was carried out in early morning by two masked men. The Oslo museum was opened at the time, so the robbers threatened the visitors with the pistols they were carrying with them. They grabbed two paintings by Munch (*The Scream* and *Madonna*) and got away in a car that was waiting outside. According to eye witnesses, no alarms or security measures were activated at the time of the robbery. Both paintings were recovered in 2006 by the Norwegian police. Luckily, they were in better condition than expected, although not all the damage done to *Scream* can be repaired. They went back on display two years later.

The Vincent Van Gogh Toilet theft

The Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, UK, has some impressive pieces of art in its collection. Unfortunately, to their shock, on April 23, 2003 the staff of the gallery discovered that some of their most valuable pieces were missing. Three paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Gauguin, valued at \$8 million, simply disappeared with no trace. Nobody knew what happened, when exactly they were taken, how it was possible, and, most importantly, who was responsible. This particular heist is jokingly called the 'toilet theft' or sometimes 'Loo-vre' because the paintings were found soon after in a local public toilet. Next to the slightly damaged art pieces, the police found a note that explained the reasons for the heist. It said that the thieves had not intended to steal these paintings for financial gain, but just to draw attention to the terrible security at the gallery. The police have never located the thieves.

The Mona Lisa Louvre theft

You might be surprised to learn that the famous *Mona Lisa* has also not escaped theft. While it is behind all sorts of protective security systems nowadays, that wasn't always the case. In 1911, a man named Vincenzo Peruggia, who worked at the Louvre as a handyman, made out with the most famous smile in the world. Peruggia hid in the museum until it closed, took the painting out of its protective frame, and waited patiently for the museum to open. In the morning, he easily walked out with *Mona Lisa* under his shirt. Ironically, his daring theft was what made the painting so famous. In an effort to get it back, the museum launched a public campaign and *Mona Lisa* appeared in newspapers across the world. The painting was finally returned to the Louvre when Peruggia was caught in the act trying to sell the stolen art piece to an art dealer in 1913.