

WESTMONT

Divine Farce: Local scientist helps investigate art fraud

By Annie Reed

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A British art collector, a Caribbean cruise line, Salvador Dali, fraud and a half-million dollar scam.

Sounds like the elements for a James Bond flick, but it's actually the real-life tale of a recent art scam detailed in a new documentary featuring a local scientist.

The documentary titled "Divine Comedy? Divine Tragedy? Or Divine Farce? The Great Park West Dali Half Million Dollar Swindle," follows an investigation into the authenticity of a Salvador Dali print set sold to a British couple on a cruise ship.

Joseph Barabe, a scientist at the **McCrone Group** in Westmont, was invited to join Dali art experts from around the world to investigate the piece in a New Jersey warehouse in early December.

Barabe, of Oak Park, is a senior research microscopist who has worked with the Fine Arts Registry before to determine the time period of materials used in various works of art.

"When we find something is a fake or a forgery, we try to get it out of the market as soon as possible," Barabe said. "Rich or poor, nobody can afford to be robbed."

After the day-long investigation, Barabe concluded that the materials used to make the prints themselves "were authentic examples of fine art printing," but the group as a whole came to a less pleasant conclusion for the British couple.

Though the British couple originally paid \$483,828 for what they believed was an as-issued complete set of Dali's interpretation of Dante's "Divine Comedy" on woodblock prints, the experts concluded that it was actually valueless.

Dali's signature was deemed a forgery and the set of 100 prints was compiled from different sources, not an as-issued original.

Teri Franks, CEO of Fine Art Registry, which produced the documentary, said by shedding light on this case, "We're bringing a little order to the world of art."

"(The art market) is the last unregulated frontier," Franks said. "It's the wild, wild West. There are multi-billion dollar losses every year. (By exposing these cases) it will

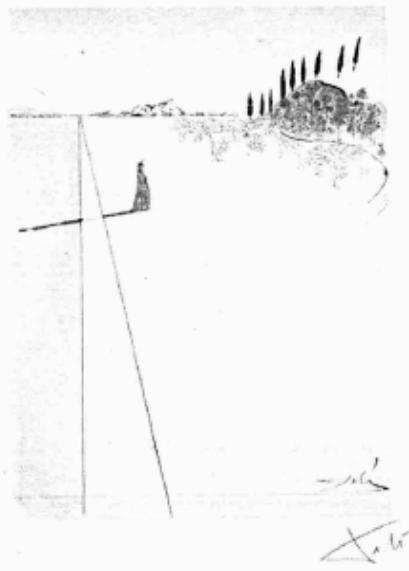
help level the playing field for the art world. We just want to rid the world of art crime. Films like this will make a difference."

The British couple filed a lawsuit against the Michigan-based Park West Gallery art gallery, which sold the Dali set. The lawsuit is ongoing.

Frank said Barabe and the McCrone Group may again be consulted in the investigation in the future for possible DNA analysis and finger print contamination.

On the Web

The documentary can be viewed in a 30-minute version and a 10-minute short summary at fineartregistry.com.



A Salvador Dali woodprint from his 100-piece interpretation of Dante's "Divine Comedy." The print set was bought by a British couple aboard a cruise, but a team of investigators, including a local scientist, determined it was not an original complete set and the Dali signature on it was a fake, therefore rendering it valueless.



Photos courtesy of the Fine Art Registry.

Joseph Barabe, a microscopy researcher with the McCrone Group in Westmont (right), looks at a Salvador Dali print through a microscope to determine its authenticity Dec. 8 in a New Jersey warehouse.