

# How To Steal Everything

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"So you say you own the Mona Lisa?"

"Yeah. That's right. I own the Mona Lisa."

"How does that figure?"

"I'll tell you the story: I was an art thief for many years. I was good. They didn't ever catch me. But I wasn't just an art thief. What made me such a good art thief, why I studied and practiced my moves so much so that I'd be perfect, was my love of art. I would take these things home and just tremble. I'd mount them on my wall and try out different lightings until I got the right one. Then I would lie down next to them and look at them from the floor. Art gave me such pleasure.

"Well, after some years, I started getting tired of appreciating art all alone. There were other art thieves who knew about what I was up to, and I could trust them not to squeal, but I never invited them to my apartment, because they just wouldn't care. They were in it for the cash.

"Also, I was filling up my storage units with all these pieces. I got a little worried that they'd have the wrong humidity and the paintings would get ruined.

So I decided one day 'Hey, why not share this art with other people? Why not put it in a place where it'll be well-cared for?' So I started putting my art back up on museum walls, for safe-keeping. It was just as exciting to put paintings up on museum walls, I found, as to take them off. All my thieving skills, the stealth, suppression of evidence, planning and timing were still in play.

"Other thieves heard about what I was doing and tried to spite me by stealing my art out of the museums. They failed. I only stole from the best museums, and only to the best museums did my paintings return. So they came to accept my ways."

"I got older and I started getting allergic to adrenaline, so to speak. I was still in it for the art, but the excitement didn't excite me as much any more.

Then, a few years ago, it hit me. Why not cut out the intermediate step of taking the art home and returning it to the museum from whence it came, and not simply take ownership of art and simultaneously declare it stored on the walls of the museum? I was the best art thief of all, I had stolen everything.

"One of the other art thieves, one of the sharper ones, tested my ownership. He said, 'You say you own the Mona Lisa, over there in the Louvre, right?

Prove it to me. Take it down off the wall and keep it for yourself.' But see, the thing he doesn't understand is that the nature of ownership is that you do what you want with your property. I want people to be able to enjoy the Mona Lisa, and I think the Louvre is doing an adequate job. If I did what he suggested, I'd be compromising my ownership by bowing to his greed and cynicism. In that way I'd relinquish the legitimacy of my claim to all art.

"So yeah, I own the Mona Lisa. Just for fun, when I visit Paris I pay the entrance fee and go in and wait and see it. But it's mine. It's right where I want it to be."

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