



# **Rockwell Heist: The extraordinary theft of seven Norman Rockwell paintings and a phony Renoir-- and the 20-year chase for their recovery from the Midwest through Europe and South America**

*Bruce Rubenstein*

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In 1978 seven Norman Rockwell paintings and a supposed Renoir, later discovered to be a forgery, were stolen from Elayne Galleries in St. Louis Park. It is still the biggest theft in Minnesota history, and no one was ever convicted for the crime. This is the story of the theft, the investigation, and the twenty-year quest to return the art to its rightful owners.

The FBI suspected an inside job. Was it the scrappy working mother who owned the gallery? The owner of one of the paintings, who had a checkered past? Was a band of well-known and very talented Minneapolis burglars involved? And what about organized crime, which had the channels and expertise to fence the works or to hold them hostage? Tantalizing threads tied the case to the theft of another stolen forgery in New York City. But a sting operation fell short, and the trail for recovering the works ran cold. The bureau's search for the paintings stopped, and it closed the case in 1987.

Gallery owner Elayne Lindberg and her daughter Bonnie, motivated in part by their desire to clear Elayne's name, continued the hunt. Their story moves to shady connections and the international trade in stolen art, through Portugal, Argentina, Las Vegas, and Brazil, before its final dramatic resolution.

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