

A Note on the Reporting

In the section titled "A Note on the Reporting" from *The Art Thief*, the author recounts their extensive journey into the life of Stéphane Breitwieser, one of the most prolific art thieves in modern history. This journey began in 2012 when the author first reached out to Breitwieser with a simple letter asking for an interview. At the time, Breitwieser had distanced himself from media engagements, particularly with American journalists, and had not spoken publicly for several years. The author was left in suspense for a long period before receiving a brief response, which initiated a slow but steady exchange of letters and built a level of trust between them. The slow pace of communication added to the mystery surrounding the figure of Breitwieser and set the stage for an eventual in-person meeting.

In May 2017, after five years of exchanging letters, Breitwieser agreed to meet the author in person, but only on his own terms. He insisted that no recordings be made during their time together, ensuring complete privacy during their discussions. The author traveled to Strasbourg, then to the small town of Saverne, where they shared a meal at Taverne Katz, a quaint Alsatian restaurant. Initially, Breitwieser was guarded, aware of nearby diners, but as the evening wore on, he became more relaxed, revealing parts of his life and thoughts on the crimes he had committed. Despite the initial reserve, the conversation took on a deeper, more candid nature as the evening progressed, setting the stage for future interviews in more private settings, including hotel rooms where Breitwieser could discuss sensitive matters away from public scrutiny.

As their rapport developed, the author began to gain a deeper understanding of Breitwieser's obsession with art. In a hotel room, Breitwieser immediately recognized a print by Jean Tinguely on the wall, showcasing his deep understanding and appreciation of the art world. His connection to art was not merely intellectual—it was

visceral. This connection was reflected in his criminal activities, as the author witnessed firsthand his skills in theft when Breitwieser demonstrated his ability to surreptitiously take the author's laptop during their conversation. Their meetings spanned more than forty hours, and with each session, the author gained increasingly valuable insights into the mind of a man who, despite his crimes, seemed to view art as something that transcended ownership and money.

The investigation also led the author to visit the sites where Breitwieser had committed his infamous art thefts, each one providing a chilling reminder of the meticulousness involved in his crimes. In 2023, the author attended Breitwieser's trial, where he faced charges for selling stolen art. This trial marked a significant moment in the investigation, offering a glimpse into the legal consequences of Breitwieser's actions. Throughout the investigation, the author conducted interviews with family members, legal professionals, and art experts, piecing together the various facets of Breitwieser's life and crimes. This revealed a complex character, a man whose love for art and obsession with possession drove him to steal valuable works for reasons other than monetary gain.

Breitwieser's actions stand in stark contrast to the traditional motivations of art thieves, who are typically driven by financial gain. Instead, Breitwieser's motivations stemmed from a deep, almost compulsive love for art, placing him in a unique category among art criminals. His obsession with collecting beautiful works of art—whether they were in a museum, a private collection, or a public space—mirrored the behavior of bibliomaniacs, individuals driven by a need to collect rare and precious books, not for profit but out of a deep appreciation and possessiveness. The chapter delves into this unique perspective, offering a nuanced view of art crime and its intersection with personal obsession. The author uses this lens to challenge conventional views of art theft, highlighting the emotional and psychological factors that can lead a person to commit such crimes. The result is a deeply engaging exploration of a fascinating character, whose love for art led him down a dangerous and illegal path that would leave a lasting mark on the art world.