

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 explores Breitwieser's deepening obsession with art as he continues his spree of thefts, now focused on specific types of artwork that captivate him beyond the mere thrill of the crime. Initially, his interest spanned a wide array of objects, from medieval weaponry to bronze pieces, as he sought out treasures that caught his eye in the moment. However, as time passed and his experiences grew, he found himself more drawn to particular genres of art. Anne-Catherine and Breitwieser frequently spent time together in their attic, contemplating the reasons behind their attraction to certain pieces. They engaged in thoughtful discussions with Meichler at the frame shop, refining their understanding of what made a piece worthy of their attention. Over time, Breitwieser realized his inclination toward northern European works from the 16th and 17th centuries, signaling a more refined and intentional approach to his criminal actions. His preference for these specific pieces represents not only a deepening of his art thefts but also a shift in his understanding of what art means to him.

The question of why Breitwieser developed such a specific affinity for certain types of art is a complex one, as it defies easy explanation. Unlike the essential survival needs addressed by Darwinian principles, art plays a role in human culture that transcends basic existence. It demands resources and attention but does not serve immediate survival purposes, challenging traditional survival instincts. Across cultures, however, art has persisted, suggesting that it holds significance beyond the tangible. Some theorize that art emerged as a form of social or sexual signaling, especially as humans evolved beyond the immediate struggle for survival. This creative outlet, once survival pressures were alleviated, allowed humans to explore and express themselves in ways that connected them to their environment and to one another. The birth of art, thus, could be viewed as a byproduct of human evolution, representing an escape and a

reflection of the human need to express ideas, emotions, and ideals.

Art, in its varied forms, remains deeply subjective, influenced not only by personal preferences but also by broader cultural contexts. Sociological research has shown that there are patterns in the kinds of art that people are drawn to, including landscapes with trees and water. This aligns with the universal human connection to nature, as blue, the color of the sky and water, is the most universally preferred. Furthermore, studies in neuroscience have revealed that the medial orbital-frontal cortex plays a significant role in our perception of beauty, helping to explain why certain images and pieces of art resonate more with us than others. This scientific insight into how the brain processes beauty helps to ground Breitwieser's emotional responses to the artworks he steals, demonstrating that the appreciation of art is far from random. It is deeply rooted in the way our brains are wired, creating a connection between the visual stimuli of art and the emotional responses they provoke.

Breitwieser's love for specific art forms, particularly oil paintings, reveals his attachment to certain techniques and historical periods. He is drawn to the luminosity and vibrancy created by the use of flaxseed oil, a key material in Renaissance painting. The quality of the materials used during the Renaissance era is something that Breitwieser finds particularly significant. It is a contrast to the more muted and less dynamic styles found in southern European works. His preference for works by lesser-known artists speaks to a desire for art that isn't influenced by the commercial pressures placed on the big names of the art world, such as Titian or Leonardo da Vinci. Breitwieser values what he perceives as the authenticity and purity of smaller works, produced without the constraints of patronage or mainstream acceptance.

One of Breitwieser's most intriguing interests lies in cabinet paintings, small-scale works that were often created for private enjoyment rather than public display. These artworks, which were easily concealable, represent a moment in history when craftsmanship and personal expression were at their peak before the industrial revolution. Breitwieser is also drawn to objects such as tobacco boxes and wine goblets, admiring the meticulous craftsmanship that went into their creation before

mass production took over. For him, these items symbolize the pinnacle of human creativity, made during a time when artistry was painstakingly handcrafted rather than automated. His attic, filled with these stolen artworks and antiques, serves as a personal tribute to a lost era, an era of unparalleled beauty and craftsmanship. It is here, among these relics, that Breitwieser finds a sense of fulfillment, as each item tells a story of artistic achievement and human ingenuity. The objects in his collection are more than just stolen goods—they are a reflection of Breitwieser's complex relationship with art and his desire to possess not just the artwork, but the history and the emotional connection that it represents.

