

# Private spat may be prompting duo's negotiations with museum

## ■ ART THEFT

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hind their public embrace, their private spat may be driving negotiations over the possible return of the Gardner masterpieces. It may explain why Connor, after years of silence, may be willing to talk to federal authorities about the Gardner theft in a meeting set for today.

Youngworth's lawyer rejects the scenario. "I do not believe Mr. Youngworth would hold anything over Myles' head," said Howard Lewis. "From my discussions with Mr. Youngworth, they're very good friends."

Connor, sources say, wants his valuables back — and helping to strengthen Youngworth's bargaining position with authorities may be the price he has to pay.

Connor has a history of stealing precious artworks and securing the return of others in exchange for lenient treatment for himself. That track record gives Connor credentials with federal officials. Sources say that as a condition for returning to Connor his belongings, Youngworth has asked the infamous inmate to vouch for Youngworth's credibility on the Gardner heist.

It's unclear how much Connor knows about the Gardner theft — and how much he has told Youngworth. But people who know both men say that Youngworth, who has a record of forgery and making false claims, could use some backup. "He's an amateur at best," a Connor confidant said of Youngworth.

In return for information on the Gardner theft, Youngworth has sought immunity from prosecution, the \$5 million reward offered by the Gardner, and Connor's release from the remaining three years of his federal sentence. Youngworth is scheduled to appear in a state court tomorrow morning in connection with pending gun and drug charges.

Youngworth first stepped forward to help broker the return of the Gardner artworks last month after he was indicted on the gun and drug charges. From prison, Connor then publicly offered to join Youngworth in facilitating the works' return.

Later that month, Boston Herald reporter Tom Mashberg wrote an account of being taken to a warehouse in the northeast and briefly shown by flashlight what may have been one of the Gardner's priceless paintings, Rembrandt's "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee."

In the underworld of art theft, Youngworth, 38, is said to regard Connor, 54, as his longtime mentor. Sources say they met when Youngworth was only 17. Connor's son has worked for Youngworth and lived with him in Randolph last year.

Connor pleaded guilty to the 1974 theft of Andrew Wyeth paint-

## Gardner confirms hiring attorney for discussions

By Ric Kahn and Matthew Taylor  
GLOBE STAFF

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and William P. Youngworth III of Randolph have hired lawyers to open discussions over the return of millions of dollars of the museum's missing art, a spokeswoman for the museum said last night.

The spokeswoman, Joan Norris, said the museum yesterday retained former Superior Court judge and US magistrate Rudolph F. Pierce, of the Boston law firm Goulston and Storrs.

Youngworth, who faces unrelated drug and gun charges, has also hired a lawyer to represent him in the impending discussions, Norris said. Norris said she did not know the name of Youngworth's lawyer, but the Boston Herald identified him as criminal defense attorney Charles W. Rankin.

Lawyers from both sides will meet in the coming days, Norris said, adding that museum officials now believe that the painting shown to a Herald reporter was either "an extremely good copy or it was the Gardner painting."

Norris said Gardner officials came to their conclusion after questioning reporter Tom Mashberg during a 90-minute meeting.

Norris would not speculate on when the paintings might be returned, but in a national television interview last night, an ABC news reporter said a trustee from the museum had said the paintings could be returned within a matter of weeks.

On last night's episode of the ABC News program "Nightline," Youngworth, an antiques dealer, said he is the only one who can lead authorities to the 13 stolen works of art.

With his associate, Myles J. Connor Jr., still imprisoned on art theft charges, Youngworth told the ABC News program "Nightline" in a taped segment that he, Youngworth, was the person now in a position to help recover the masterpieces. He said he would assist in return for am-

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nesty, Connor's release, and millions in reward money.

Both Youngworth and Connor were in prison at the time of the museum heist in 1990.

ABC News investigative correspondent Brian Ross said he was rebuffed when he asked Youngworth to back up his claim — for example, by allowing a viewing of one of the purported stolen masterpieces that Boston Herald reporter Tom Mashberg has said he saw last month.

"He said it was too dangerous to do again," Ross said yesterday in a telephone interview yesterday.

Ross added that Youngworth told him that the paintings were moved after a "one-time peek" at Rembrandt's "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee" was given to Mashberg, who also was interviewed for the show.

Ross said Youngworth told him he used the Herald as a buffer — instead of delivering proof of authenticity, such as a paint chip, to authorities — for fear of being arrested on the spot.

moved them out of state and would not disclose their whereabouts.

"Youngworth stored a lot of stuff for Myles," said a source close to Connor. "He better have Myles's stuff or there will be a problem."

*Ric Kahn of the Globe staff contributed to this report.*