

Some of that old black market

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It's the end of a long day and Bonnie Czegledi has just stepped out of a meeting that went longer than expected. Still, her passions -- for art and for international art law -- come across, not dulled by the demands of her practice.

A long-time artist, Czegledi exhibits her work in her Yorkville office where she also advises buyers and sellers of art on how to stay clear of the illicit art market. The estimated annual value of the black market in art comes to US\$6- billion worldwide, placing it second only to drug trafficking in terms of profits in illegal trade.



CREDIT: Handout

Bonnie Czedegli

"Over the last 10 years, the prices in the art world have skyrocketed and that means there's been an explosion of theft and forgery," she says. "That's where I come in."

It's also why Czegledi travels the globe teaching and lecturing. Her next stop is the Royal Ontario Museum, where she's presenting a series of three lectures, collectively titled Art Crimes. In the first session, happening tomorrow, Czegledi covers the international law that applies to the art world and the trafficking in stolen cultural objects.

"Art theft is not a victimless crime," she says. "Children are victims when they sell their own heritage in order to eat. Nations are victims? The public is a victim when they can no longer see great paintings."

The second lecture examines the estimated 10% to 40% of the art market that is comprised of fakes, with particular attention paid to famous forgers and their techniques. "I teach this not to teach people how to make fakes," she says, laughing, "but rather to educate yourself so you don't become victim to fakes."

The final session looks into Holocaust- era thefts and other cases of wartime robbery, such as the looting of the National Museum of Iraq in 2003.

With a nemesis as daunting as the illegal art trade, why does Czegledi continue to soldier on? "I love educating. I do it like I breathe? It's not for everyone," she says, then laughs again. "Thank goodness."

- Art Crimes begins at the Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Sunday and continues on Feb. 4 and Feb. 11; runs from 2 to 4 p.m. each day. Enrolment is \$135. For more information, call 416-586-5797 or visit rom.on.ca/programs/lectures.