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Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery Searched in Art Smuggling Case

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Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery

Police have searched Moscow's renowned Tretyakov Gallery as part of an investigation into art smuggling, Russia's Investigative Committee said.

The search Tuesday came on the heels of a detention at Vnukovo airport in southern Moscow of a man accused of trying to take art works out of the country with accompanying documents understating their value, the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

The man presented papers at the customs checkpoint indicating that the five paintings he was trying to carry across the border were valued at 180,000 rubles ($3,560), while their actual value was believed to be more than 1.9 million rubles, the statement said.

The Investigative Committee did not specify whether the Tretyakov Gallery was suspected of providing the documents understating the paintings' value. But the LifeNews web portal, which reportedly enjoys close ties with Russia's security agencies, reported that the documents were allegedly signed by Russian Culture Ministry officials working at the

gallery.

The head of the gallery's early 20th century art department, Tatyana Yermakova, whose office was among those searched during the Tuesday raid, has denied the museum's involvement in any wrongdoing, LifeNews reported.

The paintings that the man had allegedly tried to smuggle included paintings by a number of late-19th and early 20th century artists, including Valentin Serov. But the museum had no involvement in any paperwork for the export of Serov's works, because they are more than 100 years old and therefore banned from leaving Russia, Yermakova was quoted as saying.

Other art works have received proper export clearance from the Culture Ministry, occasionally against the museum's objections, she said, LifeNews reported.

"We tried to prohibit from being taken out of the country one work by [painter Pyotr] Konchalovsky, and we prohibited it, but a year later it was taken out, bypassing us, absolutely legally," Yermakova was quoted as saying. "The Culture Ministry has given permission for exporting it."

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