

## Fake paintings from China flood market, stain artist's soul

**BYLINE:** MIKE TIERNEY

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Inside a rustic two-story Kennesaw log cabin that evokes Napa Valley wine country, Thomas Arvid spends his days pouring reds and whites into tall glasses, placing the bottles or accouterments alongside them on a table . . . then **painting** that scene on canvas.

It's a labor of love -- and money. Big money. In the unpredictable art universe, some well-heeled oenophiles who can afford cases of Silver Oak or Chateau Margaux spend thousands on Arvid's richly detailed still lifes to hang on their walls.

So it was with a mixed sense of disgust and gotcha that Rob Preiditsch, vice president of marketing for Arvid's company, entered a small art gallery called Gold Coast on Thursday in Lake Geneva, Wis., and found 146 "original" Arvids of five separate sizes -- each apparently replicated. Prices were advertised at between \$19.99 and \$59.99.

Thursday's seizure of allegedly phony Arvids was the largest but hardly the first, and it represents the latest skirmish in a war being waged by the arts community against **fakes**. It fears that fraudulent **paintings** are flooding the **market**, emanating mainly **from China**, where an explosion of cheaply paid art school graduates are copying well-known works.

Preiditsch noted that Thursday's haul bears resemblance to contraband discovered in New York and Atlanta and traced to **China**.

Tagging along with Preiditsch were three U.S. marshals with a temporary restraining order issued by a judge on the basis of copyright infringement. A hearing on the civil matter is scheduled Oct. 11.

"In the art world," Preiditsch said, "there are a lot of ethically challenged people."

Messages left for store owner Sam Pappas seeking comment were not returned.

Violation of intellectual property rights is more widely publicized in the spheres of music, videos and computer software. Now painters are increasingly joining the fray.

"We're part of a larger fight," Preiditsch said. "We're another player in this game."

The crackdown effort is nothing new for Arvid, 41, who has been re-creating epicurean episodes for six years.

Since 2003, his aides have scoured the annual Artexpo Atlanta at the Georgia World Congress Center in search of knockoffs. Not until the show two weeks ago, Preiditsch said, were they able to shut down a booth stocked by copycats.

A member on Arvid's staff of 15 was hired exclusively to police the Internet for shams. She usually spots six to 10 a month on eBay alone, Preiditsch said.

"It never ceases to amaze me," said Arvid, a Detroit native born Thomas Arvid Smith. "You finally come up with something that's different, producing your own work, and the next thing you know, others are producing your work for you. It gets frustrating."

The scope of Thursday's confiscation "took my breath away," Arvid said. "Those 146 pieces . . . that about equals the body of my lifetime work."

His legitimate compositions are circulated in more than 40 galleries around the United States, Canada and Japan. Now, he said worriedly, "If there's 146 in this gallery, there's a lot more someplace else."

Most often, Arvid's camp hears about bogus **paintings from** devotees, who tend to get bent out of shape upon noticing a likeness selling for a pittance of the price they paid. His originals, about 10 produced yearly, have sold for as much as \$65,000. Many spawn up to 460 limited edition reprints, which go for \$1,000 to \$3,000 apiece.

On closer inspection, a fan might conclude an item is a pale duplication and alert Arvid. The imitators "are just taking my idea and throwing it down really fast," said Arvid, doubly offended at the impreciseness of the forgeries.

The hunt has become a distraction, he admitted. He requires eight weeks to complete a single commission and, with a four-year backlog, no longer accepts personal requests. Still, he said, "We will continue to police this."

At least Arvid has an enviable means to relieve stress while at the job. On occasion, he sips while he strokes.

## Photo

FRANK NIEMEIR / Staff

Kennesaw artist Thomas Arvid and wife Vanessa live in a log cabin that evokes California's Napa Valley wine country.

## Photo

Thomas Arvid

"Eight Empties" epitomizes the work of Kennesaw artist Thomas Arvid, who specializes in **paintings** that feature wine.