

ART & CRIME

Vasarely Daughter-in-Law Arrested for Theft of Artworks

By ARTINFO

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CHICAGO—The daughter-in-law of Op Art pioneer Viktor Vasarely was arrested Friday after being accused of stealing artworks by Vasarely worth more than \$500,000 from a Chicago storage facility, reports the Agence France-Press.

Michele Taburno-Vasarely, 61, was discovered trying to move the works into an adjacent storage unit along with an accomplice on June 20. She spent two nights in jail before being released on bond.

Taburno-Vasarely told a Chicago court Sunday that the paintings belonged to her and accused the gallery owner who was storing them of trying to steal them. The gallery owner, Thomas Monahan, said he had been storing thousands of pieces for Taburno-Vasarely but became concerned about their provenance when he heard of an inquiry under way in France, where a court hearing is scheduled for September 11, 2008. The hearing will inquire into the removal in the late 1990s of thousands of works by Vasarely from the foundation he established in Aix-en-Provence and of which Taburno-Vasarely previously served as president. Monahan's lawyer advised him to hold onto the works until ownership could be confirmed; Taburno-Vasarely's lawyer said he had no right to do so and accused him of trying to sell the work without her permission.

Prosecutors asked a county judge to postpone Taburno-Vasarely's case until July 16 and said they intend to seek a grand jury indictment on felony theft charges. The judge agreed and asked her to surrender her passport, which had expired.

Vasarely's family was awarded custody of much of his work in 1995, a decision that his foundation is trying to overturn. Nearly all of the 1,300 original works and 18,000 silkscreen prints donated to the foundation have disappeared.