

Stolen angels returned to Italian church after three decades

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(Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage via AP)

A British art collector who bought a pair of 17th-century marble angels from a Neapolitan antiques shop two decades ago has returned the winged putti to Italy's art police after learning that they had been stolen from a church.

Italy's carabinieri said the unnamed collector had tried to resell the angels at an antiques shop in Avignon, France, before his planned move from France to Portugal when French police flagged them as possibly stolen goods.

Italy's art police said that the angels were stolen from St. Sebastian Church in Guardia Sanframondi, northeast of Naples, on December 13, 1989. Police said the collector was ignorant of the angels' origin and offered to return them without any legal fight.

They were formally handed over to Italy on October 19 at a ceremony at the French embassy.

In a statement, the carabinieri noted that churches in the area had been subjected to numerous thefts after the 1980 Irpinia earthquake leveled huge swaths of Southern Italy.

They said that another set of angels, also reported as stolen, was recently returned to another Guardia Sanframondi church after they were located in a Milan antiques shop and recognized by the church's pastor. —Associated Press