

Crime on the High Seas - Is your Booty Worthless?

Posted by Steve Berman on Sep. 8, 2008

As children, we've all marveled at stories of pirates on the high seas, walking the plank and discovering lost treasure. The idea of leaving the mainland to submerge yourself in an adventure full of foreign lands, new treasures and experiences is too hard to resist.

Back to reality and current day and those adventures take place on cruise ships. It's a traveling city on water providing new adventures and different experiences around every corner and on every floor of the ship.

A popular part of the cruise experience is high-end art auctions. Vacationers can view and bid on the 'real deal' - Picasso, Rembrandt, Salvador Dali and more! These dealers promise originals at great prices that will only grow in value.

Now think back to the pirates - does that sound like empty promises of unfound fortunes? We think so!

In fact, we think the cruise ships, art dealers and financiers are in on a scheme together - much like the pirates setting a trap to steal the booty of wealthy sea travelers.

This week we filed a lawsuit against Holland America, Park West Gallery and GE claiming the companies engaged in a scheme and knowingly defrauded passengers. The lawsuit alleges the companies sold forged artwork at high-prices, an act worthy of the plank if you ask us.

Since Park West sold the artwork we believe they were aware the pieces were fake. Secondly, both Holland America and GE made money on the art sales and according to what we've been hearing have been doing so for years - we believe they knowingly let the practice continue in an effort to boost revenue.

GE is involved because the company runs a GE Money division. It provides private-label credit cards with very high limits so passengers can purchase art onboard.

Anyone who purchased artwork on a cruise from Park West is eligible to join the suit. The art pirates have been trolling for years and we're confident thousands have been affected and ripped off by the alleged scheme.

While we don't know how much the companies have made off the art sales we do know that half of Park West's revenue comes from at-sea sales and the company made \$300 to \$400 million in 2007 alone. That is a lot of unauthentic art walking off the ship.

As the case develops, we'll make updates to our blog and Web site. If you have questions about the case or parties included please feel free to contact us.