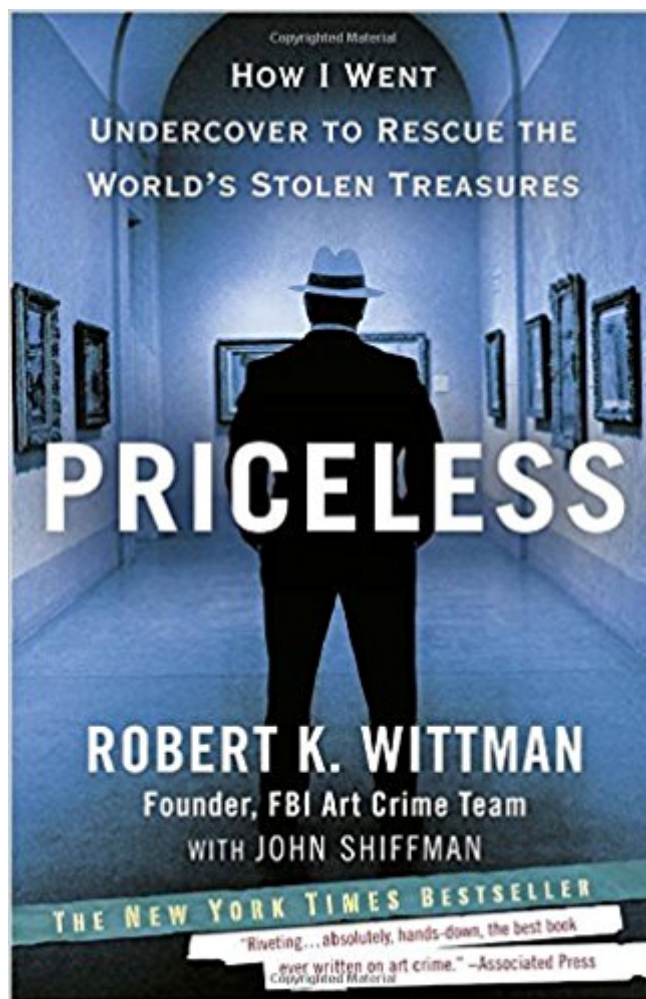


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Priceless: How I Went Undercover To Rescue The World's Stolen Treasures



Synopsis

The Wall Street Journal called him “a living legend.” The London Times dubbed him “the most famous art detective in the world.” In *Priceless*, Robert K. Wittman, the founder of the FBI’s Art Crime Team, pulls back the curtain on his remarkable career for the first time, offering a real-life international thriller to rival *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

Rising from humble roots as the son of an antique dealer, Wittman built a twenty-year career that was nothing short of extraordinary. He went undercover, usually unarmed, to catch art thieves, scammers, and black market traders in Paris and Philadelphia, Rio and Santa Fe, Miami and Madrid. In this page-turning memoir, Wittman fascinates with the stories behind his recoveries of priceless art and antiquities: The golden armor of an ancient Peruvian warrior king. The Rodin sculpture that inspired the Impressionist movement. The headdress Geronimo wore at his final Pow-Wow. The rare Civil War battle flag carried into battle by one of the nation’s first African-American regiments. The breadth of Wittman’s exploits is unmatched: He traveled the world to rescue paintings by Rockwell and Rembrandt, Pissarro, Monet and Picasso, often working undercover overseas at the whim of foreign governments. Closer to home, he recovered an original copy of the Bill of Rights and cracked the scam that rocked the PBS series *Antiques Roadshow*. By the FBI’s accounting, Wittman saved hundreds of millions of dollars worth of art and antiquities. He says the statistic isn’t important. After all, who’s to say what is worth more --a Rembrandt self-portrait or an American flag carried into battle? They’re both priceless.

The art thieves and scammers Wittman caught run the gamut from rich to poor, smart to foolish, organized criminals to desperate loners. The smuggler who brought him a looted 6th-century treasure turned out to be a high-ranking diplomat. The appraiser who stole countless heirlooms from war heroes’ descendants was a slick, aristocratic con man. The museum janitor who made off with locks of George Washington’s hair just wanted to make a few extra bucks, figuring no one would miss what he’d filched. In his final case, Wittman called on every bit of knowledge and experience in his arsenal to take on his greatest challenge: working undercover to track the vicious criminals behind what might be the most audacious art theft of all. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Former FBI agent Wittman, who created the agency's Art Crime Team and pursued a lifelong interest in antiques and collectibles, goes undercover to hobnob with infamous art thieves. The ineffective, the stupid, the clever, and the dangerous; Wittman befriends them all, in order to betray them, a fact that causes him a certain amount of angst. Among other challenges are bumbling agency bureaucrats and government turf wars when attempting to recover stolen art abroad. A fatal car accident that Wittman was involved in early in his career shaped his perspective: "I understood that because someone made a mistake in judgment, it didn't make him evil. My newfound ability to see both sides of a situation-to think and feel like the accused-was invaluable." Wittman keeps the narrative interesting, and reveals himself as something of a renegade: "Under the FBI's strict undercover rules, you're only supposed to work one case at a time. I never followed that rule." Keep the lies to a minimum, he advises, and avoid working in your home town. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Almost every case he recounts has enough intrigue and suspense for a Hollywood screenplay."--The Washington Post "Genius... Riveting... Should be a TV series."--Los Angeles Times "A rollicking memoir... investigative details dazzle... PRICELESS can read at times, not unpleasantly, as if an art history textbook got mixed up at the printer with a screenplay for THE WIRE."--The New York Times "Riveting... superbly crafted... absolutely, hands down the best book ever written on art crime."--Associated Press "I can't think of a better title for a book than this one, PRICELESS. Because this non-fiction story is priceless, a spellbinding narrative of an FBI agent's journey into the crazy murk of what is perhaps the most fascinating

criminal activity of all, high-stakes art theft into the millions upon millions. --Buzz Bissinger, New York Times bestselling author of FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS and coauthor of SHOOTING STARS "Entertaining...crime buffs will receive a painless education while they enjoy a lively account of art thieves and the man who pursued them." --Kirkus Reviews

"Wittman's memoir, PRICELESS, is a fast-paced, gripping narrative of stolen national treasures and those who traffic in them. An undercover lawman armed with wit and adrenalin, Wittman exposes the darkest corners of the art world and brings to justice the dangerous criminals who lurk there." --Laney Salisbury, co-author of PROVENANCE: HOW A CON MAN AND A FORGER REWROTE THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART "In one riveting sequence after another, Robert Wittman reveals the art world's underbelly as it has never been seen, through the eyes of an undercover agent whose investigative acumen is matched only by his art-history chops. A true page-turner." --Benjamin Wallace, New York Times bestseller author of THE BILLIONAIRE'S VINEGAR

"With suspense, intrigue, and candor, FBI agent Robert Wittman takes us inside the secret world of stolen art as he goes undercover to solve some of the most notorious art thefts of our time." --Ronald Kessler, New York Times bestselling author of THE BUREAU and IN THE PRESIDENT'S SECRET SERVICE

"PRICELESS is a gem of a story, part James Bond, part art history. If Robert Wittman didn't already exist, Dan Brown would have made him up." --George Anastasia, New York Times bestselling author BLOOD AND HONOR, THE LAST GANGSTER and THE SUMMER WIND "More realistic than THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR, more entertaining than CATCH ME IF YOU CAN. It's hard to believe one undercover FBI Agent rescued so many cultural and national treasures.....but it's all true." --Jack Garcia, former FBI undercover agent and New York Times bestselling author of MAKING JACK FALCONE

"PRICELESS is a rare and riveting journey into the little-understood world of art crime. Wittman is a brilliant professional who sees both the big picture and all of its nuances, Wittman fascinates with tales of his daring adventures as an FBI undercover agent. Demonstrating candor, humor, integrity, and sensitivity, Wittman strips away the myths, bares the truth, and tells it like it is. He and PRICELESS are both precisely that--priceless!" --Andrea Kane, New York Times bestselling author of DRAWN IN BLOOD

From the Hardcover edition.

I don't normally write reviews, but this book is worth a special mention. I like learning new information in an entertaining way. This book fulfills that need. We learn about the history of the

artifacts that Mr. Wittman went undercover to try to recover, along with the techniques necessary to catch the bad guys. The story takes us to exotic locales and we meet fascinating characters along the way. I think it would enhance the book if it were illustrated. It would be easy to add pictures of the stolen items that Mr. Wittman tried to recover. If you enjoy art history or true crime stories, I recommend that you read this book!

I heard this guy interviewed on NPR and immediately got the book. The heists and investigations he recounts are riveting; many are familiar from news stories. I was astonished at the pathetic security implemented at major galleries around the world. In many cases the thefts were childishly easy, including one escape on a bicycle. His writing style is very solidly in the "There-I-was up to my neck...." mould, which gets pretty tedious. One chapter begins with "I reflected on all I had accomplished in my long career....." so he's not short on ego. He could have benefited from a ghost writer but it's still a great read.

The author, former FBI Art recovery expert, deftly weaves a little art history into great tales of intrigue as he recounts his adventures in the shadows of the world of art thieves.

Former FBI agent Robert Wittman calls on his professional experience, his personal passions, and his unique cultural upbringing to bring to the reader a well-crafted account about how a one-time salesman joined the FBI in his 30's to become the godfather of the FBI Art Team. Every chapter or so tells of a different case he worked, combining the case itself with his own personal history, in order to bring the reader a very personal, although not overly sentimental, account of the crimes he solved and how he solved them. The nice part is that Wittman is honest, to the point, and not afraid to show his own flaws. In other words, he doesn't write himself as a hero worthy of adoration. Instead, he describes his own perspectives, successes, and failures in a way so humble that the reader can't help but identify with him. It is well-written. It is easy to read. It is a great story of one man set against the backdrop of cultural history. A fantastic book.

The fascinating, under-appreciated job of recovering stolen art and other valuable cultural or historic objects is related in this memoir. The author also discloses some disappointing FBI politics that hinder the agents' work.

I love the old masters, their paintings, their stories. When someone steals an original, I take it as a

personal affront. Of course, it's also an affront to everyone who gives a hoot about cultural heritage. The well-written book is a 'page-turner' and is believable. Personally, I don't care for fiction stories, and this book isn't.

I enjoy reading about attempts to recover stolen art. The history, the series of events leading up to the crime; they are what make me keep reading these stories. Admittedly, stories such as these are filled with recovery attempts which form the bulk of the written material and often are little more than dead ends. Robert Wittman's memoir isn't free of such quagmire to recover these stolen works of art. What makes his account entertaining is the point of view he is able to provide. The authors do a great job of breaking up the recovery attempts for the Gardner pieces, walking the reader through Mr. Wittman's cases, leading up to his retirement. This book does not come across as stuffy, and due to his involvement via the FBI, he is capable of offering the reader an unique perspective. By far, this is one of the best books of this subject matter that I've read in a long time. Highly recommended to anyone who may be interested in reading about such things, or for others already passionate about the subject of art crimes.

Interesting book, but some of the chapters are a lot more interesting than others. The writing isn't consistent, but the presence of the author is, so there is continuity, but not consistency. Still, I finished the book and was interested in most of the chapters. The book is divided up according to the different projects -- a chapter for each "project."

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