

NOF Mock Trial Fact Pattern:

State of Harwick

V.

Celeste Dunn

CHARGE	DEFENDANT	PLEA
Grand Theft of Cultural Property (Felony, Class A) Value exceeding \$100,000	Celeste Dunn, Age 28 Freelance Art Authenticator Former Gallery Employee	Not Guilty

On the evening of November 8th, 2025, the Harwick Gallery of Modern Art hosted its annual donor gala — a black-tie event attended by patrons, local officials, and arts community members. Among the works on display was "The Amber Hour," a celebrated oil painting by early-20th century artist Elias Voss, appraised at \$420,000 and listed as the gallery's most valuable permanent holding.

At 11:15 PM, gallery staff discovered "The Amber Hour" was missing from its frame in the East Wing. Security was immediately notified, and the building was placed on lockdown. All guests were interviewed before being permitted to leave. No painting was found on the premises or in any vehicle on site.

Security camera footage (Exhibit 1) captured Celeste Dunn — a freelance art authenticator and former gallery employee — entering the restricted storage area behind the East Wing at 9:47 PM. The storage area is not part of the public gallery and is accessible only by key card. Gallery access logs (Exhibit 2) confirm that the key card used was registered to Theo Marsh, a current gallery technician. Marsh stated he did not lend his card to anyone and was unaware it had been used.

Celeste Dunn had worked at the Harwick Gallery until being dismissed eight months prior. Gallery Director Oswald Crane stated that Dunn's contract was terminated following what he described as "repeated unprofessional conduct." Three months before the gala, Dunn sent Crane a formal email (Exhibit 3) asserting that "The Amber Hour" was not an authentic Voss original but a reproduction, and demanding the gallery correct its public attribution. Crane's reply dismissed her concerns and warned her against making further contact with gallery staff or donors.

When interviewed by police, Dunn admitted to entering the storage area using Marsh's key card but denied taking the painting. She stated she had entered to photograph the painting's reverse side — the back of the canvas — because she believed evidence of the forgery was visible there, and that she intended to bring the documentation to cultural property authorities. She further claimed the painting was already gone when she arrived in the storage area. The painting has not been recovered.

The State argues Dunn had clear motive — a personal grudge against the director and financial interest in exposing the gallery — as well as opportunity and means. The Defense maintains Dunn is a whistleblower who never stole the painting, that the true thief used the chaos of Dunn's presence as cover, and that the gallery's own potential fraud deserves scrutiny. Celeste Dunn now stands trial. She pleads Not Guilty.

Witness Statements

Prosecution Witness 1: Detective Lena Park

Harwick Police Department — Arts and Property Crimes Unit

"My name is Lena Park. I am the lead detective assigned to the theft of "The Amber Hour" from the Harwick Gallery of Modern Art.

The evidence against Celeste Dunn is straightforward: she was captured on camera entering the restricted area at 9:47 PM — during the precise window in which the painting disappeared. She used an access card she had no authorization to possess. She had been formally barred from contacting gallery staff. And she has a documented, bitter dispute with the gallery's leadership.

Dunn claims she was there to photograph the painting's back for forgery documentation. But she provided no photographs. She had no camera on her person when searched. If she truly went there to document evidence, why does she have nothing to show for it?

I will acknowledge that we did not conduct an independent investigation into the forgery claim itself. Our mandate was the theft, and the evidence pointed clearly to one individual. Whether or not the gallery has separate issues to answer for does not change what Celeste Dunn did that night."

Prosecution Witness 2: Oswald Crane

Director, Harwick Gallery of Modern Art

"My name is Oswald Crane. I have served as Director of the Harwick Gallery for fourteen years, and I can tell you that what happened on November 8th was an act of theft and personal vendetta.

Celeste Dunn was terminated from this gallery for cause. During her time here, she developed a troubling pattern of challenging the provenance of works she had no authority to question, creating conflict with donors, and undermining curatorial decisions. Her termination was professionally and legally appropriate.

Her allegation that "The Amber Hour" is a forgery is baseless. The work was authenticated by two independent experts prior to its acquisition. The fact that she sent a threatening email and then appeared at our most important public event of the year — using a stolen access card — speaks for itself.

I am aware that some people find it convenient to question the gallery's integrity in order to distract from what actually happened. I welcome any legitimate review of our acquisition practices. But that is a separate matter entirely from the fact that a valuable and irreplaceable work of art was taken from this institution, and Celeste Dunn was the only unauthorized person in that room."

Witness Statements

Defense Witness 1: Petra Sousa

Independent Art Authenticator; Professional Colleague of Defendant

"My name is Petra Sousa. I have worked as an independent art authenticator for eleven years, with a focus on early-20th century European works. Celeste Dunn and I have collaborated on several authentication projects, and I consider her one of the most meticulous professionals in our field.

Approximately six weeks before the gala, Celeste contacted me about "The Amber Hour." She described specific technical concerns: inconsistencies in the craquelure pattern — the network of cracks that develops in aged paint — that she believed were inconsistent with the work's claimed age. She also mentioned unusual uniformity in the canvas weave, which can indicate a modern reproduction. She was not speculating. She was methodical and troubled by what she had found.

I advised her to document the back of the canvas if she could gain access, because that surface often carries the clearest evidence of forgery — stamps, labels, and aging patterns that are very difficult to fake.

I want to be clear: I never personally examined "The Amber Hour." Everything I know is based on what Celeste described to me. I cannot confirm her findings from my own observation. What I can say is that her concerns were technically grounded, not the product of a grudge."

Defense Witness 2: Dr. Ansel Bright

Professor of Art History and Forensic Analysis, Harwick University; retained by Defense counsel "My name is Dr.

Ansel Bright. I have spent twenty-two years studying Elias Voss and have authenticated or rejected more than forty works attributed to him. I was retained by the defense to review available photographic documentation of "The Amber Hour."

Based on high-resolution photographs taken during the gallery's 2021 acquisition process, I identified two significant anomalies. First, the varnish layer appears optically consistent with commercially applied modern varnish rather than the irregular, hand-applied varnish typical of Voss's known works. Second, a compositional element in the lower-left quadrant — a specific brushwork technique Voss used in all authenticated works from this period — is absent.

These findings do not prove the work is a forgery. Photographs are not a substitute for physical examination. However, they are sufficient, in my professional opinion, to warrant serious scrutiny of the painting's authenticity.

I am compensated by the defense for my time, and the court should weigh that accordingly. I will also note: if the painting is a forgery, someone at or connected to the gallery has been deceiving donors and the public for years. That possibility was apparently not investigated before charges were filed against Ms. Dunn."

Exhibit 1

HARWICK POLICE DEPARTMENT

Evidence Documentation | Case No. HPD-2025-11-0892

Evidence Item:	Security camera still — Harwick Gallery, Camera 7 (Storage Corridor)
Date / Time:	November 8, 2025 9:47:22 PM
Submitted by:	Det. Lena Park, Arts & Property Crimes Unit
Chain of Custody:	Gallery security system → HPD Digital Evidence Lab → Trial exhibit

[Security Camera Still — Camera 7]

Timestamp: 2025-11-08 21:47:22

Location: Storage Corridor B — East Wing Access



Note: This still is one of 14 frames reviewed by investigators from Camera 7. No footage from inside the storage area is available — Camera 8 (interior storage) was non-operational due to a reported system fault logged at 6:12 PM on November 8, 2025.

Exhibit 2

HARWICK GALLERY OF MODERN ART

Key Card Access Log | November 8, 2025 | Restricted Areas Only

5:02 PM	GBG-0041	O. Crane (Director)	Admin Office / Vault	ENTRY
6:44 PM	GBG-0041	O. Crane (Director)	Admin Office / Vault	EXIT
7:18 PM	GBG-0117	T. Marsh (Technician)	Storage Corridor B	ENTRY
7:31 PM	GBG-0117	T. Marsh (Technician)	Storage Corridor B	EXIT
9:47 PM	GBG-0117	T. Marsh (Technician)	Storage Corridor B	ENTRY ■
9:54 PM	GBG-0117	T. Marsh (Technician)	Storage Corridor B	EXIT
10:08 PM	GBG-0041	O. Crane (Director)	Admin Office / Vault	ENTRY
10:22 PM	GBG-0041	O. Crane (Director)	Admin Office / Vault	EXIT

■ Flagged Entry (9:47 PM):

Card GBG-0117 (Theo Marsh) was used for entry into Storage Corridor B at

9:47 PM. Marsh has confirmed to investigators that he was present at the donor gala in the Main Hall from approximately 8:30 PM onward and did not personally access Storage Corridor B at this time. Marsh reported his card missing on November 9, 2025.

Interior Camera Outage:

Camera 8 (Storage Corridor interior) was non-operational from 6:12 PM onward due to a logged system fault. No footage of activity inside the storage area is available for the evening of November 8, 2025.

Exhibit 3

Email Exchange — Retrieved from Harwick Gallery server and Celeste Dunn's personal account. Submitted to HPD by Gallery General Counsel, November 10, 2025.

From: Celeste Dunn <c.dunn.auth@mailserve.net>
To: Oswald Crane <director@harwickgallery.org>
Date: August 14, 2025 | 10:22 AM
Subject: **Formal Concern: Authenticity of 'The Amber Hour' (Voss, c. 1912)**

Dear Director Crane,

I am writing to formally document a concern raised verbally during my time on staff. Following independent study of photographic documentation from your 2021 acquisition of *The Amber Hour*, I have identified anomalies inconsistent with an authentic Voss original: the craquelure pattern is too regular for oil on linen of the claimed age, and the brushwork in the lower-left quadrant does not reflect Voss's documented technique.

I am requesting that the gallery commission an independent physical examination before the November gala. The gallery has a legal and ethical obligation to its donors and the public. I am available to provide my full documentation at your request.

Regards,
Celeste Dunn

From: Oswald Crane <director@harwickgallery.org>
To: Celeste Dunn <c.dunn.auth@mailserve.net>
Date: August 15, 2025 | 3:47 PM
Subject: **RE: Formal Concern: Authenticity of 'The Amber Hour' (Voss, c. 1912)**

Ms. Dunn,

The Amber Hour was authenticated by two credentialed experts prior to acquisition. Your characterization of its provenance is not supported by any authority recognized by this institution.

Your contract was terminated for documented reasons. Any further contact with gallery staff, board members, or donors regarding our collection will be treated as harassment and referred to legal counsel without further notice. This matter is closed.

Oswald Crane
Director, Harwick Gallery of Modern Art

Note: No further email correspondence between Dunn and Crane was found in either party's records. Dunn did not contact gallery donors or board members following this exchange, per HPD's review of her communications. The gallery did not commission an independent authentication of the painting prior to the November 8 gala.