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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 06, 2015

Thursday's release of new surveillance video in the Gardner Museum heist investigation has again raised questions about a guard who has been thought to be a victim in the ordeal.

The video shows a night watchman, who the Globe has learned was Richard Abath, open the museum's side door

and grant unauthorized access to an unidentified man shortly before 1 a.m. on March 17, 1990 — 24 hours before Abath opened the door to two men disguised as police officers who allegedly handcuffed and duct-taped Abath and his colleague before robbing the museum of 13 pieces of prized art.

The footage has raised suspicion among law enforcement officials that perhaps Abath allowed the man inside as part of a dry run of the heist.

But [Abath in an interview with the Globe just two years ago](#), denied any involvement in the crime.

“I totally get it. I understand how suspicious it all is,” Abath told Globe correspondent and author Stephen Kurkjian in an article published in March 2013. “But I don’t understand why [investigators] think ... I should know an alternative theory as to what happened or why it did happen.”



Newly video released of Gardner art heist

The footage appears to show a guard give a man unauthorized access to the museum 24 hours before the notorious theft.

What the video shows

Decades after the heist, police focus on guard

Investigators for years figured that Abath had simply made a poor decision by allowing the alleged disguised robbers inside.

A then-23-year-old Berklee College of Music dropout and a member of a struggling rock band, Abath was moonlighting as a security guard. He has admitted that, at that time in his life, he regularly drank alcohol and smoked pot and also sometimes took LSD and cocaine. He said sometimes showed up for his midnight shift at the Gardner drunk or stoned, but that on the night of the heist he was completely sober.

But in recent years, law enforcement officials have taken a closer look at Abath.

Abath told the Globe in 2013 that he first realized that investigators were reconsidering him as a possible accomplice four years earlier when FBI agents asked to meet him at a coffee shop in Vermont, where he lives.

“After 19 years of not hearing a word from the people charged with the task of solving the Great Museum Robbery, they popped up; they wanted to talk,” Abath wrote in a manuscript of a book he was writing at the time and shared with the Globe. To his surprise, one agent told him, “You know, we’ve never been able to eliminate you as a suspect.”

Abath said authorities told him they had been closely monitoring his bank accounts for years.

As of the 2013 interview, Abath was living with his wife in a modest apartment outside of Brattleboro, where he moved in 1999.

A woman at the apartment turned away a Globe reporter this morning, saying Abath did not live there.

Yet investigators believe Abath’s partying lifestyle at the time of the heist could have led him to meet the kind of people who might carry out such a crime, and they’ve pointed out that studies show a vast majority of museum robberies have been inside jobs.

Abath also made other curious moves prior to the heist. He had just given his two-week notice to quit the security job, and on the night of the robbery, about 20 minutes before the thieves came to the door, Abath quickly opened and shut the door just before he replaced his partner at the security desk.

Abath told the Globe that was his way of double-checking that doors were locked.

“I don’t know what the others did, but I was trained to do it that way,” he told Kurkjian.

And he said he later allowed the men inside because they looked like officers.

“I know I wasn’t supposed to let strangers into the museum after hours, but no one told me what to do if the police showed up saying they were there to investigate a disturbance,” Abath said. “What was I supposed to do?”

Questions have also arisen about why Abath's footsteps were the only ones picked up by motion detectors in a first-floor gallery where one of the paintings was stolen, even though the thieves tripped detectors in other areas. And the frame of one of the stolen paintings was found by police on the chair of Abath's boss near the security desk.

"They wanted to know if I had taken the painting and stashed it somewhere," Abath told the Globe two years ago.

"I told them as I've said a hundred times before and since, I had absolutely nothing to do with the robbers or the robbery," Abath told Kurkjian, who has written a book about the Gardner case titled, "Master Thieves: The Boston Gangsters Who Pulled off the World's Greatest Art Heist."

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