



Summary

Truth IS stranger than fiction!

The Art Thief chronicles one of the most outrageous crime sprees in history: In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Stéphane Breitwieser stole from more than 200 museums and galleries across Europe, amassing a collection worth an estimated \$2 billion. He never resorted to violence – his audacious thefts all occurred during daylight hours, most with the aid of his girlfriend, Anne-Catherine Kleinklaus, who served as lookout. And unlike nearly every other art thief, Breitwieser did not steal for money. He displayed his treasures in a secret lair where he and his girlfriend could admire them. Yet even more astounding than his crimes is the spectacular events that brought everything crashing down.

The Art Thief, based on a series of exclusive interviews with Breitwieser, the first he has ever granted to an American journalist, details a riveting story of love, crime, and an insatiable hunger to possess beauty at any cost.

Visit michaelfinkel.com/books/the-art-thief for photos of artwork referenced in the book.

Courtesy of the author's website



About the Author

Michael Finkel is also the author of the New York Times bestseller "The Stranger in the Woods: The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit," about a highly intelligent man who lived alone in the forest of Maine for 27 years, as well as the book "True Story," about Finkel's bizarre and unhealthy friendship with a murderer, which was adapted into a 2015 major motion picture produced by Brad Pitt and starring James Franco and Jonah Hill.

Finkel has reported from more than fifty countries across six continents, covering topics ranging from the world's last hunter-gatherer tribes to conflicts in Afghanistan and Israel to the international black market in human organs to theoretical physics.

In the line of reportorial duty, Finkel has skied off the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, set sail on a Haitian refugee boat, joined a cult in Colorado, been in a car that was run over by a tank in Afghanistan, climbed into an active volcano in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and crossed the Sahara Desert on the back of an open truck. His work has appeared in National Geographic, GQ, The Atlantic, Esquire, Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair, and The New York Times Magazine.

He lives with his family in western Montana and southern France.

Discussion Questions

- How was Breitweiser's love of art different from the average art enthusiast? Can you relate to his passion? Is there a piece of art that you particularly love?
- The author discusses Stendhal syndrome as a possible reason for Breitweiser's thefts. Do you think this is a valid disorder or a reason for Breitweiser's actions? What about kleptomania?
- How did Breitweiser's upbringing affect his adulthood and his relationship with art?
- Discuss Breitweiser's set of self-imposed ethics and how he considers himself different from other thieves.
- Talk about Breitweiser's methods of stealing artwork. Were there any particular methods that stood out to you? Should he be admired for his ingenuity? Do you agree with him that these were victimless crimes?
- Discuss Breitweiser's relationship with Anne-Catherine and her role in the thefts. How do her attitudes towards theft compare with Breitweiser's? How and why does her relationship with Breitweiser change over time?
- Were you surprised by the art museums' security systems (or lack thereof)? What, if anything, could they have done to thwart Breitweiser or other thieves?
- Do you think Breitweiser's behavior would have changed if he had been given a more severe punishment the first time he was caught? Why or why not?
- Talk about the relationship between Breitwieser and his parents--and their actions and attitudes after he was caught. What motivated each of them to act as they did? What do you think you would do as a parent in this situation?

Discussion Questions (continued)

- Do you feel that the punishments decided by the courts for Breitweiser, Anne-Catherine, and Breitbarth's mother fit their crimes? Would you have sentenced them differently?
- Do you think museums will change the way they share art with the public after learning about what Breitweiser did? If so, do you think their actions will ultimately have a positive or negative effect on how the public is able to view and enjoy art?
- Do you think Breitweiser can ever be rehabilitated? Why or why not?