



BY HELAINE SEIDMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Christopher Moore in his New York art reproduction studio with paintings from the films "The Thomas Crown Affair" and "Meet Joe Black."

The Movies' Fake Masterpieces

MOVIE ART, from *GL*

When Rubeo needs a canvas for a movie set, he most often turns to Moore, who runs Troubetzkoy Paintings Ltd. in New York.

"Moore is very, very good—the best," Rubeo says. "He is a singular reference, everyone wants him."

The walls in Moore's snug East Side gallery are a testament to the recent art-in-film rage. From rug to roof, they are loaded with reproductions painted by artists in his New York and Paris ateliers for dozens of recent films, including "Thomas Crown," "Bowfinger," "Wild Wild West," "The American President," "A Perfect Murder," "Out of Sight," "Meet Joe Black," "Age of Innocence" and "You've Got Mail."

Reproducing a big-name, recognizable masterpiece can cost \$15,000. Artists' estates and museums may charge from \$500 to \$5,000 to show a single "original" work in a film. Sometimes Moore secures movie rights with the proviso that the duplicate works be destroyed after filming.

The Renoiresque "Massive Bottom" was painted by Serguei Ivalov, a regular from Troubetzkoy's stable of artists, especially for the auction scenes in "Mickey Blue Eyes," the movie that opened last week featuring Hugh Grant as an art dealer turned mobster.

Moore and others say it was 20th Century Fox's 1987 "Wall Street" that demonstrated to many filmmakers the powerful subliminal impact of art. The film's showy, greed-is-good, big-canvas paintings helped set the tone for Michael Douglas's voracious stockbroker Gordon Gekko.

"That was a very key film," says Theodore H. Feder, president of New York-based Artists Rights Society, which represents the intellectual property interests of some 20,000 artists and estates worldwide. Requests for permission to reproduce works in films have steadily increased since "Wall Street" and have tripled in the last two or three years, Feder said.

This summer's "Thomas Crown," the second museum caper of the year, following "Entrapment," with Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones as art thieves, also set a standard primarily by creating so many quality reproductions.

Rubeo and Moore created faux museum gal-

eries and Crown's lush, decidedly un-kitschy Manhattan apartment. Comparable to New York's Frick mansion, the apartment is a pantheon to many of the art-historical biggies since the 17th century: Sargent, Turner, Renoir, Gauguin, Rodin, Modigliani and Magritte, among many others.

"When paintings are used with a certain touch—you can almost feel the scene," said Rubeo, the Academy Award-winning designer, recalling his favorite art-saturated moment.

In it, the two romantic leads in "Thomas Crown" finally make love on the sweeping marble staircase in Crown's swank Manhattan digs. The slope of their arched backs, the smooth curves of the sculpted female nude in the foyer and the sensuous dark painting of Adam and Eve overhead cohere into an elegant and electric scene.

Craig Eliason is an art historian at Rutgers University who created the "Art Historians' Guide to the Movies" Web site. He argues: "The use of art is becoming more sophisticated . . . astute."

Still, casting the perfect painting for a role on the silver screen can be tough. The art world and filmmaking world do not always see eye to eye on what art is or how it should be used, inviting intense criticism from art historians, behind-the-scenes haggling with artists and multimillion-dollar lawsuits for those who misappropriate their images.

In some of the most public sparring to date, the estate of Pablo Picasso sued Fox for copyright infringement after director James Cameron featured "Les Femmes d'Alger" in the colossal hit "Titanic." In the film, Kate Winslet delights in her newly purchased paintings, including the Picasso and a Monet and a Degas, all of which presumably go down with the ship.

"It's ludicrous," said Feder, who represents the Picasso estate.

"It was really the most famous work of Picasso and people know it's been hanging in the MoMA for 60 years," he said, referring to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. "Ridiculous."

The case was eventually settled amicably, with Fox paying an amount neither party would reveal as part of the out-of-court agreement.

Art does not pass into the public domain until

70 years after an artist's death if he or she died after 1978. The work of artists who died prior to that enters the public domain 95 years after the works are first reproduced in a book, magazine or elsewhere.

In a local case, the Washington National Cathedral and the late sculptor Frederick E. Hart sued Warner Bros. in 1997 over its movie "Devil's Advocate" for allegedly appropriating and debasing a bas-relief Hart had carved for the tympanum over the cathedral's main portal.

They claimed that in one of the film's culminating scenes, nude figures on a reproduction of Hart's "Ex Nihilo" sculpture come to life and writhe lustfully.

Video and cable versions of the film were altered, using a swirl of steam to shroud the offending scene. As part of the settlement agreement, monetary compensation has not been revealed.

"It gets really ugly," said Debra Padrick, director of theatrical production and clearance at Warner Bros. The artists and estates "want to know every exact scene, who is in the scene, what is being said."

"They are very difficult."

To avoid sticky deals and art-historical missteps, some studios lean toward the use of works created by living artists, many of whom they know personally.

Art gave Stanley Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut" much of its killer good looks. The scene-stealing contemporary canvases were painted by one of Kubrick's most beloved artists—his wife, Christiane Kubrick.

"I always think it's more interesting to try and convey real art instead of reproductions and see what happens," said Chris Keledjian, who is responsible for clearing art for Universal Pictures. Such artists are not nearly as fussy, she said.

In Universal's "Bowfinger," the recent comedy starring Steve Martin and Eddie Murphy, a somewhat unknown Northern California artist was tapped for a single painting. Not only was William Maul not fussy, he is relishing a career boost. In recent weeks he has been offered work on an independent film and a television show.

"It's a small painting," the 45-year-old Maul said of his kitschy canvas, inspired by a 1960s horror movie. "It's amazing that it gets seen—the power of that media is so strong."