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Crime Reports Plunge, With One Brazen Exception

By MICHAEL COOPER

With the city's attention fixed on the worst attack in its history, it is none too surprising that other crime news has fallen by the wayside. But it was nonetheless remarkable that a signed Picasso could be reported stolen in broad daylight from a Madison Avenue art galley and go largely unnoticed.

Andrew Fabricant, the director of the Richard Gray Gallery, said that he was on the telephone around noon on Monday when he heard someone enter the gallery, which is on the fourth floor of a building at 1018 Madison Avenue near 78th Street. Mr. Fabricant said that when he looked into the gallery about 10 seconds later, the person was gone, along with "Young Nude Man at the Mirror, Playing a Pan Flute, and Child," a 1923 ink on paper drawing by Picasso.

"This was so brazen and so fast," said Mr. Fabricant, adding that the drawing was worth about $320,000. "You feel like you were looted at a time when a lot of people are contemplating other issues."

But for the most part, it appeared that even many criminals were contemplating other things last week. Aside from the attack on the World Trade Center — which officials said was such a singular catastrophe that it should be considered in a special category by itself — reported crime in the rest of the city fell by 34 percent last week compared with the same week a year ago, police officials said.

"Besides the attack, I can't remember a slower week for a long time," said a Brooklyn police detective. "I'm pretty sure it's because, literally, everybody was in a state of shock over what happened. People saw what happened, and they know that innocent people died, that it could happen to anybody at any time. They took time out and started reflecting. That's what I truly believe it was."



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

Checking identifications before drivers cross the Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan.

From Sept. 10 through Sept. 16, crime reports dropped in every borough compared with the same period last year, according to preliminary police statistics. Reports of grand larceny were down by 49 percent, reports of rapes dropped by 40 percent and reports of burglaries fell 37 percent.

Only the number of homicide reports rose: apart from the mass murder at the World Trade Center, there were 14 killings reported last week, up from 11 during the same week in 2000.

There were still scattered incidents that might have been considered newsworthy on any other week, like a Brooklyn man who found what appeared to be a charred human skeleton in a building he had recently bought, and a woman who was sexually assaulted in Claremont Park in the Bronx on Monday morning.

Some police activity seemed to stem from the attacks. The police were called to investigate an unusually high number of what were apparently bias incidents directed at Arab-Americans and Muslims: threatening e-mail messages to a mosque in the Bronx, excrement and anti-Arab graffiti found on a door in Brooklyn, slurs directed at a news vendor from Jordan in Queens, graffiti about "terrorists" on the door of a chicken store run by an Arab-American in Lower Manhattan.

And five men who call themselves Black Israelites — long a fixture in Times Square, where, clad in flowing robes, they shout anti-white slogans at puzzled tourists — were arrested on Sunday evening on West 42nd Street on charges that they were inciting a riot by making "anti-American" remarks, the police said.

It was unclear yesterday if the men were part of the same group of Black Israelites that sued the city in 1998 after the Giuliani administration revoked its permits for amplified sound. Their case, which was taken up by the New York Civil Liberties Union, was settled out of court in 1999 for $59,000.

Donna Lieberman, the interim executive director of the civil liberties union, said she was troubled by news of the arrests and noted that it is unconstitutional to arrest people for inciting to riot unless they are inciting people to an imminent unlawful action. "The Constitution is still in place, the First Amendment lives, and arresting people for their opinions did not fly before Sept. 11 and should not fly now," she said.

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