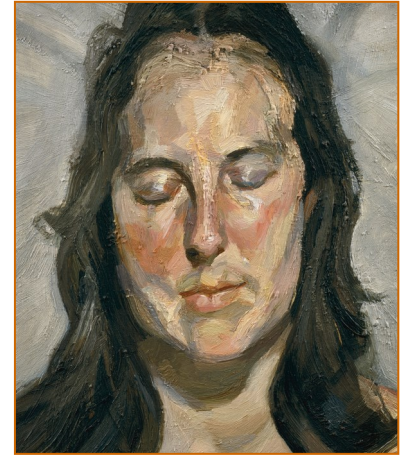


What to do with stolen paintings?

Actual art heist

In 2012, seven paintings were stolen from the Kunsthal Museum in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Before dawn, thieves familiar with the security system deactivated it for a few minutes, broke the lock on an emergency door without triggering alarms, and left in 96 seconds carrying wide backpacks stuffed with these modernist works:

- *Harlequin Head*, Pablo Picasso, 1971
A spikily personal treasure with the comic desperation of his late works
- *Waterloo Bridge*, London, Claude Monet, 1901
An impressionist painting that depicts a foggy city of twilit urban romance
- *Charing Cross Bridge*, London, Claude Monet, 1899–1905 series
One of a series of 37 paintings depicting a misty, impressionist bridge
- *Reading Girl in White and Yellow*, Henri Matisse, 1919
A dazzling play of brilliant surfaces that suggest feeling through color
- *Girl in Front of Open Window*, Paul Gauguin, 1898
A fascinating portrait of beauty and cultural differences in a peasant girl
- *Self-Portrait*, Meyer de Haan, ~1890
A Dutch artist who created portraits of working class Jews
- ***Woman with Eyes Closed***, Lucian Freud, 2002 (upper right)
A beguiling picture of a woman with warm multicolored flesh



The subterranean world of stolen art

The paintings were registered internationally as stolen, making them impossible to sell legally at auction. In total, the works were worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but for curators and art lovers, their loss would be irreplaceable. Stolen art has its own subterranean existence in the world of organized crime, one rarely as romantic as in thrillers. Instead, art theft is often a massively destructive crime. The art might be used as collateral in illicit business deals or destroyed because it was mishandled. A painting by Picasso is too exhaustively cataloged to be sold; it might be stashed and left to rot. The Romanian thieves in the Kunsthal case were arrested, but the paintings were never recovered.

Jennifer Higdon and Jerry Dye crafted an opera that is a fictionalized account of the theft and its aftermath. The creators imagine how the police, the media, and the museum's curator are desperate to find the culprits. In hopes of avoiding detection, the thief (Thomas) has abandoned the stolen masterworks with his mother, Mona. The real-life mother, Radu Dogaru, reasoned that if the art no longer existed, her son could not be prosecuted, so she initially told police that she burned the works. She later recanted that claim, but the fate of the paintings is still unknown.

The unknown aspects of the actual art heist are reflected in the creators' choice to craft three different endings to the opera and to ponder these questions: *Would a mother sacrifice anything to save her son? What is the value of art in society and to humanity? What happens when you steal it, or remove it?*

Woman with Eyes Closed Synopsis

A chamber opera in twelve scenes, based on an actual 2012 theft of art from a museum in Rotterdam.

Duration: 75 minutes

Seven priceless paintings have been stolen from the walls of a museum in the dead of the night. The police, the media, and the museum's curator are desperate to find the culprit. In hopes of avoiding police detection, the thief (Thomas) has carelessly stuffed the stolen masterworks in a suitcase and abandoned them with his unsuspecting Mother, Mona.

In her son's absence, the reclusive Mona investigates the contents of the suitcase discovering both the severity of her son's crime as well as the innate beauty of each masterpiece. One painting in particular (Lucian Freud's *Woman with Eyes Closed*) awakens something deep inside Mona, shaking her to the very core. The painting bears a striking resemblance to Mona's Mother, an amateur artist who died when Mona was a child. The circumstances surrounding her Mother's death have reverberated throughout Mona's life.

The police investigation continues to escalate, bringing an Inspector to Mona's front door. Though Mona lies to the Inspector, successfully sending him on his way, she also knows that her flimsy deception is merely a temporary fix. The police already have evidence connecting Thomas to the crime. It's a matter of time before he is apprehended. Mona must act quickly.

Night falls. Mona sleeps. As she dreams, the Freud painting comes to life. Inside a liminal state, Mona and her Mother briefly reunite. Inside this memory, the two women examine the past. They navigate the pain and compromise of a life half-lived, a life starved for color, expression, and connection. Together, they unearth the past trauma that continues to define Mona's future.

With the dawn comes many burning questions: Can Mona save her son, save herself and save these priceless paintings while simultaneously preserving the memory of her Mother?

Woman with Eyes Closed is a new opera about creation, destruction, and the art of letting go.

Synopsis courtesy of the creators



Reflection (self portrait) (1985) by Lucian Freud – Artchive

Reflection (self portrait) is an evocative artwork by artist Lucian Freud, created in 1985. The medium of this expressive piece is oil on canvas, and it falls within the Expressionism movement.

Characters

Mona Lack

contralto

A single mother in her 40s.

Curator

mezzo-soprano

Intelligent, esthete, dedicated to her work in the museum.

Inspector Lorde

bass

Shrewd, no-nonsense veteran of the police force.

Momma

lyric soprano

Painting/Woman—the physical embodiment of Lucian Freud's painting, *Woman with Eyes Closed*.

Thomas Lack

tenor

Mona's son, in his 20s.

Instruments

The Chamber Ensemble makes use of new music extended techniques, to reflect the different artistic styles of the painters.

C Flute/Alto Flute in G

Piano

Bass Clarinet in Bb

2 Percussion

Horn in F

1 Violin

Trumpet in Bb

1 Viola

Trombone

1 Cello

Contrabass

Locations

Interior and exterior of a museum

Mona's yard and house in autumn

The Curator's private space

Meet composer Jennifer Higdon



www.jenniferhigdon.com

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1962, Jennifer Elaine Higdon spent ten years in Atlanta, Georgia before moving to Seymour, Tennessee. Her father exposed his children to different types of art, but not formal musical training. She taught herself to play the flute and played the instrument in high school and at Bowling Green State University. Because of her lack of formal training, Higdon struggled to catch up. She said of beginning college, "I didn't know any basic theory, how to spell a chord, what intervals were, and I had zero keyboard skills. I basically started from the very beginning. Most people at school were far more advanced than I was, and I had an extraordinary amount of catching up to do."

Higdon worked hard, was a resilient student, and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Bowling Green State University, an Artist Diploma from The Curtis Institute of Music, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. She has been awarded honorary doctorates from the Hartt School and Bowling Green State University.

Dr. Higdon is now acknowledged as a major American composer of contemporary classical music. She has received the Pulitzer Prize for Music for her *Violin Concerto* and three Grammy Awards for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Her popular orchestral work, *blue cathedral*, is the most performed contemporary work in the repertoire. Higdon's list of commissions is extensive, including for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, which premiered her *Tuba Concerto* in 2018. Her first opera, based on Charles Frazier's 1997 novel, *Cold Mountain*, premiered to acclaim in 2015.

Meet librettist Jerry Dye



[Jerre Dye - IMDb](#)
[Author Profile - Jerre Dye](#)

Jerre Dye is a Chicago-based playwright, opera librettist, director, and actor. He is the recipient of the Bryan Family Foundation Award for Drama from the Fellowship of Southern Writers. His many skills extend beyond writing—Puppeteer, Canoeing, Roller Skating, Trampoline, Weight Lifting, Clowning, Host, Licensed Driver, Mime, American - Minnesota Accent, American - New York Accent, American - Southern Accent, Australian Accent, British - Cockney Accent, British - Geordie Accent, French Accent, Irish Accent, and South African Accent.

Dye's plays include *Distance*, *Cicada*, *Short/ Stories*, *Threads*, *The New Adventures of Hansel and Gretel*, *Wild Swans*, *Sid and the Magic Box*, and an adaptation of Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* with IRIS Orchestra. Dye's opera librettos include *Ghosts of Crosstown* at Opera Memphis (featured at OPERA America's new works sampler); *Parksville Horror*, a filmed, episodic, virtual reality opera for Opera on Tap in New York City; *The Falling and Rising* for the U.S. Army band and chorus; *Chautauqua Stories* for Chautauqua Opera, *By/In* for Opera Memphis; *Taking Up Serpents* for Washington National Opera; and commissions from Opera Philadelphia and the Napa Valley Arts festival.

In addition to Jennifer Higdon, Dye has collaborated with composers Kamran Ince, Robert G. Patterson, Jack Perla, Zachary Redler, Kamala Sankaram, Sam Shoup, and Nathaniel Stookey. With all of his partners and in all of his written work, Dye crafts brilliant language to explore fascinating issues.

Portraitist Freud

Lucian Michael Freud (1922– 2011) was a British painter and draftsman who specialized in figurative art. Born in Berlin, he was the son of Jewish architect Ernst L. Freud and the grandson of Sigmund Freud. After Lucian Freud's family moved to England in 1933 to escape Nazism, he became a naturalized British citizen and served with the British Merchant Navy during WW II.

Freud's early work was influenced by **surrealism**, but his later work tended toward **realism**. Now known as an important 20th-century English portraitist, he was a private and guarded man whose paintings are mostly of friends and family. Freud worked from life studies and asked his models to sit for extended sittings. For Freud's portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, the monarch did a series of sittings in St. James' Palace for 19 months. For *Woman with Eyes Closed*, Freud painted Henrietta Hudson, who met the painter while she was working at the Royal Collection where she oversaw the painting of the queen. Henrietta tragically died of cancer at age 39; her eyes are closed in the painting because she was undergoing chemotherapy. Freud's portraits are often somber and thickly **impastoed** (thickly painted, creating texture and dimension on the canvas). The works are noted for their psychological penetration.



Photograph of Lucian Freud painting *Queen Elizabeth II*, 2001
© David Dawson / Bridgeman Images

How will it end?

In addition to *Woman with Eyes Closed*, here are other works with multiple endings:

The Mystery of Edwin Drood

A musical by Rupert Holmes based on the unfinished Charles Dickens novel; the audience votes to determine the ending

Shear Madness

A play by Nora Ayckbourn; the audience decides who the culprit is

Accidental Death of an Anarchist

A play by Dario Fo; audience participation allows for different outcomes

Clue

A 1985 movie of the board game; three endings were shipped to theaters

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Which one of these three endings will you see?

- Mona returns all the paintings but one (the Freud)
- Mona returns all the paintings
- Mona leaves with a suitcase (does it have the paintings?), but we see her burning the Freud

For more information on Pittsburgh Opera's education programs, please contact:

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