

Lawyer: East End laborer didn't steal art

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The day laborer accused of stealing \$600,000 worth of art from six exclusive East End homes did sell some of the paintings -- but he never stole them, his attorney said Wednesday.

Defense attorney Michael Brown of Central Islip said Angel Palencia, 24, of Medford got the paintings, some worth as much as \$140,000, from a man who was probably the real thief. Neither that man, who sold them to Palencia for as little as \$200 each, nor Palencia, had any idea of their true value, Brown said.

As Suffolk prosecutors have said, Palencia resold the paintings for relatively little money to antique and secondhand shops in Nassau County, Brown said in an interview outside Suffolk County Court in Riverhead.

He acknowledged that Palencia did some work in two of the houses that were burglarized, but Brown said the homeowners were there at the time.

Assistant District Attorney Nancy Clifford said of Brown's defense: "It flies in the face of all the credible evidence that we've developed." She said Palencia had at least one accomplice whose identity is not known.

They have said that Palencia, probably working with at least one other person, stole paintings, lithographs, silver and a stamp collection from homes in East Hampton, Southold, Shelter Island and Southampton over the winter.

Southold Town police arrested him last month after an art dealer there grew suspicious of paintings he was trying to sell, prosecutors said then.