

Gold lunar module replica stolen from museum still missing

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In this July 24, 1969, file photo, the Apollo 11 command module lands in the Pacific Ocean and the crew waits to be picked up by U.S. Navy personnel after an eight day mission to the moon. A solid-gold replica of the Apollo 11 lunar module stolen in July 2017 from an Ohio museum honoring the late astronaut Neil Armstrong has yet to be recovered, a year later. (AP Photo/File)

It's been just over a year since a thief broke into the Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Ohio and stole an 18-karat gold replica of the Apollo 11 lunar module and other artifacts that have yet to be recovered or

suspects arrested.

The replicas created by Cartier were given to Neil Armstrong, the first person to step onto the [lunar surface](#), and to fellow astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins in Paris following their historic 1969 moon voyage. The theft from the Armstrong museum in Wapakoneta prompted fears that it would be melted down for its gold value, which remains around \$40,000.

The 5-inch-tall (12.7-centimeter) [replica](#) given to Aldrin sold at auction last November for nearly \$150,000.

Wapakoneta Police Chief Calvin Schneider, a native son of Armstrong's birthplace in western Ohio, called the theft was a "body blow." He said an FBI analysis of evidence gathered after the theft last July could prove helpful in tracking suspects.

"Once we get something back from the lab, we might be closer," Schneider said.

The museum's interim director, Brittany Venturella, said the [lunar module](#) was one of more than 2,000 artifacts on display or stored at the museum.

Joseph Gutheinz Jr., a former NASA investigator who has helped recover valuable moon rocks brought back from space, called the [theft](#) a "shame." He maintains that those involved were likely not sophisticated thieves and likely had it melted down for its gold value. The auction house that sold the replica given to Aldrin said it weighed 1.8 pounds (0.8 kilograms), or about 29 ounces.

What struck Gutheinz is that the thieves did not steal a large moon rock from the museum that would have far more value on the black market

and would be easier to sell.

"To walk by that to go for something else is incredible," he said.

Wapakoneta is about 90 miles (145 kilometers) northwest of Columbus. Armstrong died in 2012 at the age of 82.

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