

Mother and son suspected in \$1m jewel thefts

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French magistrates are investigating a woman and her son who are suspected of stealing more than \$1 million worth of jewellery in robberies across Europe, a judicial source says.

Police began a massive hunt for the pair after a woman and a man, posing as wealthy Middle Eastern buyers, stole a 5.5 carat diamond ring worth 635,000 euros (\$1.2 million) at jewellers Cartier in Paris in November.

The 55-year-old woman, wearing a headscarf, asked to see several rings and replaced one of them with a copy.

The pair was arrested in northern France on Friday and have admitted to some crimes, the source said. Being placed under investigation is a formal step ahead of possible charges.

The judicial source says several jewels have been recovered, but not the Cartier ring. The source added that the pair had admitted to thefts in Germany and Spain.

Martin Winckel of the International Jeweller Security network in Germany said he had traced a string of similar thefts, starting with the robbery of a 210,000 euro (\$413,000) ring from Tiffany's in Frankfurt.

"She is the best," he said, referring to a woman seen on internal store cameras who had managed to switch rings.

"Stealing 5.5 carat rings during a sales conversation means she's extremely experienced and professional."

He says jewellery thieves are increasingly taking advantage of a borderless Europe to expand their hunting grounds.

-Reuters

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