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CHICAGO (AFP) — The daughter-in-law of pop art pioneer Viktor Vasarely surrendered her French passport Friday after being accused of stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars in art work from a storage facility in Chicago.

Michele Taburno-Vasarely insists that the paintings she tried to take actually belong to her and accuses the gallery owner who was storing them for her of trying to steal them.

"He stole everything and all I wanted to do was get them back," the diminutive 61-year-old told AFP after leaving a Chicago courtroom.

Prosecutors asked a county judge to postpone her case until July 16 and said they intended to seek a grand jury indictment on felony theft charges.

The judge agreed and Taburno-Vasarely surrendered her passport, which prosecutors later realized had expired a year ago.

Taburno-Vasarely was discovered trying to move the bubble-wrapped paintings into an adjacent storage unit on July 20.

She was arrested and spent two nights in a detention facility before being released on a 125,000 dollar bond Sunday.

The gallery owner, Thomas Monahan, said he had been storing thousands of pieces for Taburno-Vasarely but became concerned about their provenance when he heard of an inquiry currently under way in France.

His lawyer advised him to hold onto the works until rightful ownership could be established. Taburno-Vasarely's lawyer said he had no right to do so and accused him of trying to sell the work without permission.

Vasarely's family was awarded custody of much of his work in a 1995 decision that a foundation he established in 1971 is currently trying to overturn.

Nearly all of the 1,300 original works and 18,000 silkscreen prints donated to the foundation have disappeared.