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Woman charged with paint vandalism at Washington National Cathedral

by Michael Winter by USA Today

Washington police arrested a 58-year-old woman after two chapels in the Washington National Cathedral were defaced with green paint Monday afternoon.

The arrest follows similar vandalism Friday to the Lincoln Memorial and a statue near the Smithsonian Castle on the National Mall. Police are testing paint samples to determine whether the three incidents are connected.

Police charged Tian Jiamel, who has no permanent address, with one count of defacing property.

U.S. Park Police investigators questioned her Monday night. Two police officials told *The Washington Post* that federal police had been seeking an Asian female who was possibly homeless.

Cathedral officials discovered wet paint strewn over the Bethlehem Chapel's organ console and casework about 2 p.m., leaving them to believe the vandalism was recent, according to spokesman Richard Weinberg. The chapel was closed, District of Columbia police were called, and the cathedral was searched.

Officials later discovered that the Children's Chapel in the nave had also been splashed with green paint, and they closed the entire cathedral for several hours. Jiamel was arrested in the Children's Chapel.

The cathedral is still recovering from a rare 2011 East Coast earthquake that damaged the nave's vaults.

Weinberg said a crew worked on cleanup Monday night. The estimated cost of paint removal and repair is \$15,000.

The Bethlehem Chapel is on the basement level, the oldest part of the cathedral. It contained the original burial site of President Woodrow Wilson, who died in 1924. His tomb was moved to the cathedral's main level in the 1950s.

Across from the Smithsonian Castle, a statue of Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was defaced with green paint Friday, the day the Lincoln Memorial was vandalized, the U.S. Park Police said Monday.

The granite base of the statue was painted with a series of unintelligible symbols. It wasn't clear exactly when the vandalism occurred.

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WUSA-TV also reported on witnesses to the Lincoln Memorial vandalism who have photos and may have been the first to spot the fresh green and white paint early Friday.

Jamie McDaniel of Stafford, Va., said she saw soda cans and bottles filled with paint.

Crews have removed 90 percent of the paint, a National Park Service spokesperson said. The cleanup began with the gentlest methods possible. "Incrementally stronger products" will be used until all traces of the paint are gone, the spokesperson said.

The cleanup could take several more days.

[Michael Winter writes for *USA Today*.]

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