

Charged as artful cadger

By **BARBARA ROSS**
and **LEO STANDORA**
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

An upper East Side art dealer was painted as a scoundrel yesterday for allegedly fleeing his boss out of \$568,000 in money, artwork and antiques.

Harvard-educated James Sansum, 36, was charged with grand larceny, falsifying business records and tax fraud, crimes punishable by up to 15 years behind bars.

Manhattan Assistant District Attorney Daniel Castleman said Sansum betrayed the trust of his longtime benefactor, Helen Fioratti, while managing her art gallery, L'Antiquaire & The Connoisseur Inc., at 36 E. 73rd St.

From May 1999 to June 2001, Sansum allegedly dipped into gallery funds for such luxuries as \$23,000 worth of Gucci garb and more than \$15,000 for health club and tanning sessions and a personal trainer.

He also is accused of snatching 25 pieces of Fioratti's art and antiques two years ago and using them to stock his own gallery — James Sansum Inc., on Lexington Ave.

A quick study

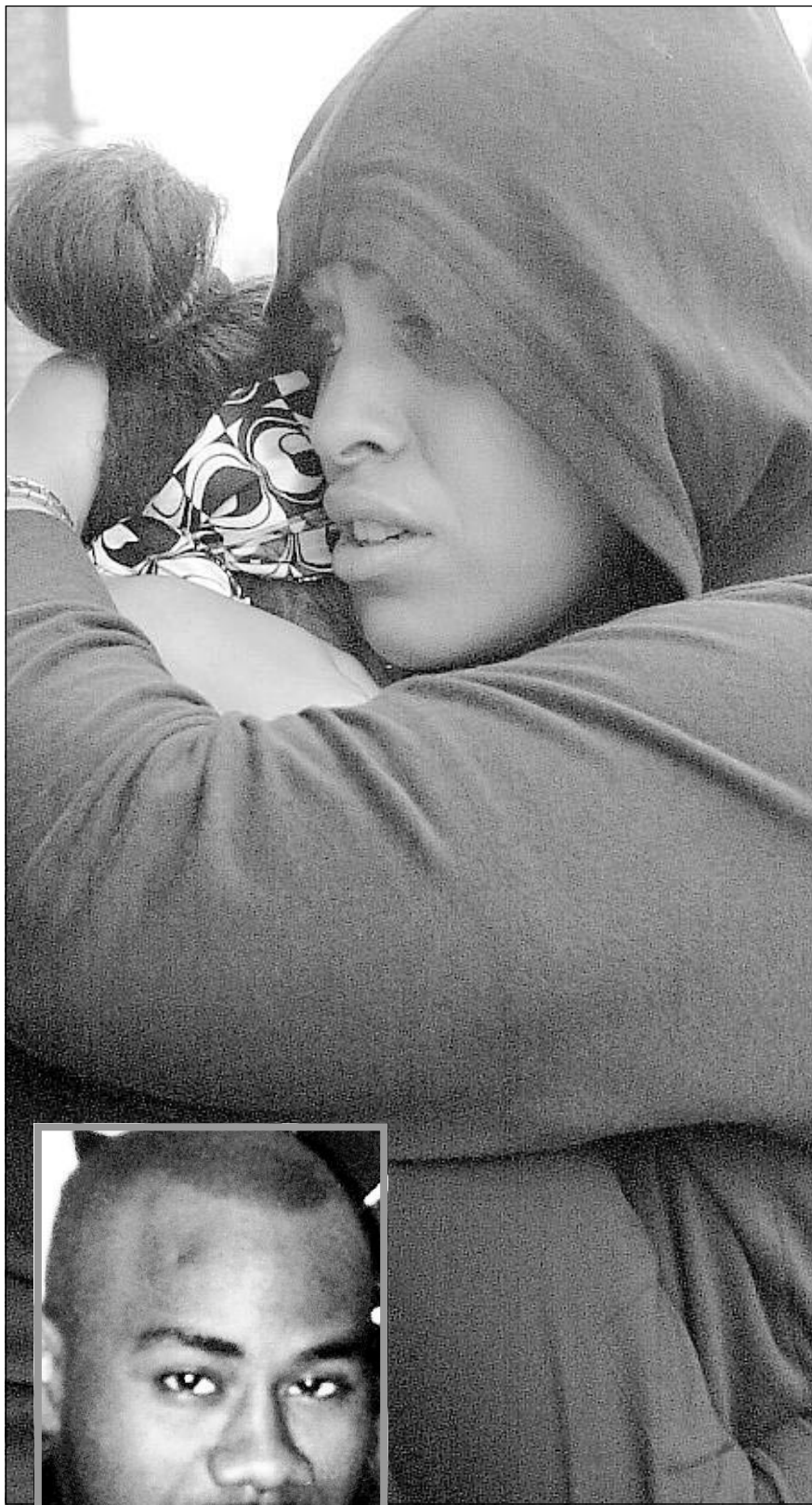
Prosecutors said Fioratti hired Sansum in 1989 after he graduated from Harvard, where he had met her daughter, Arianna.

Fioratti let him live rent-free in an apartment over her gallery while he learned the art world ropes, then put him in charge of the business while she traveled the world on high-end interior decorating jobs, they said.

The alleged swindle was uncovered in the spring of 2001, when Arianna Loreto, who lives in Italy with her husband, visited New York and found artwork and valuable books missing from her mother's gallery.

When Fioratti returned to the city from Kuwait, where she was working for the royal family, she questioned Sansum about the eye-popping expenses — and didn't like his answers, Castleman said.

Driver didn't brake



No skid marks where four died

By **RUTH BASHINSKY** and **MICHELE McPHEE**
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

The driver's foot never touched the brake.

The police probe of a horrific crash in Queens that left four people dead and two others in a coma has been hindered by the lack of skid marks from the speeding car.

"The driver never used the brake," said Officer Gennara Everleth, a police spokeswoman. "We have been unable to determine the exact speed because of the lack of skid marks."

But witnesses told investigators that whoever was driving the packed Toyota Camry down Jackie Robinson Parkway early Monday was topping 100 mph. The impact sent the driver and six passengers flying.

Yesterday, detectives were trying to question Yulanda Thompson, 23, of Rosedale, Queens, about a desperate phone call she got from one of the victims seconds before the car crashed into a tree and burst into flames. "These people are drinking and going crazy," the passenger, Diony Richiez, 20, told the woman. "They are bugging out."

Thompson told the Daily News yesterday, "I just wish everyone came out in one piece and that this never happened. Diony was such an angel, I know he will go to heaven."

Meanwhile, Richiez's stepbrother, Lenny Castro, 23, and their close friend Enges Caro, 24, remained unconscious and hooked to ventilators at Jamaica Hospital. Both were in critical condition.

Richiez died alongside Alexis Guzman, 28, and Mayra Del Rosario, 23, and another man believed to be the driver. Police have not been able to identify him.

A family's agony

Family members of the comatose friends have kept a bedside vigil in the intensive care unit since the accident. Yesterday, Castro's mother took an emergency flight from the Dominican Republic to pray over one son, as her husband stayed on the island to plan the funeral for Richiez — held last night in Corona.

"Looking at the car wreck, it's a miracle that Lenny survived," said his cousin Richie Richiez, 18. The family doesn't want to tell Lenny yet about Diony because he might be regretful and blame it on himself."

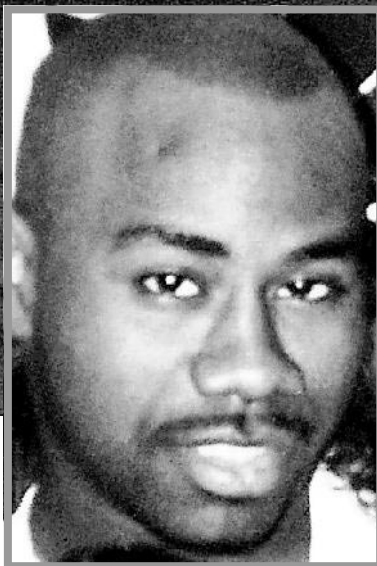
Another cousin of the brother said the family is grateful Lenny may survive.

"The burden is taken off of us because Lenny is going to be all right," said Justo Gonzalez, 17. "We thought Lenny wasn't going to be all right."

The family also retained an attorney to determine who owned and who was driving the car, and whether any establishments served them alcohol.

"We are going to look into the road conditions themselves," said Larry Elovich, the family's attorney. "There have been a number of accidents on the Jackie Robinson Parkway, and we wanted to look into the road design itself to see if that contributed to the accident."

With **Melissa Grace**
and **Tamer El-Ghobashy**



GRIEVING Mourners embrace yesterday in Corona, Queens, where funeral of car crash victim Diony Richiez (l.), 20, was held.

JOHN TRACY

A church visit turns assault rap to ashes

Going to church may have saved a Queens man from going to prison, prosecutors said yesterday.

Duver Castrillon, 20, was charged in a March 5 attack on two teens who were stabbed and robbed. But the charges were dropped yesterday after Castrillon proved he was in church for Ash Wednesday at the time of the crime.

"It was almost divine intervention," said his lawyer, Scott Bookstein. "If instead of going to church to get ashes he went to get pizza, there's a good chance he'd be sitting in jail awaiting trial."

Castrillon — who still had ashes on his forehead when his mug shot was taken — told prosecutors he was at the Blessed Sacrament Church in Jackson Heights,

Queens, several blocks from the crime scene. He also gave details about the church service only someone who had been there would know, his attorney said.

Charges against a second defendant, Jonathan Torres, 19, also were dropped when family members and an off-duty cop testified Torres was with his grandmother at the time of the attack.

The men, both of Jackson Heights, were arrested the night of the attack and charged with gang assault and other charges that could have put them behind bars for 50 years.

The victims, Eduardo Paredes, 18, of Woodside, Queens, and Orlando Bianco, 19, of Brooklyn, are still recovering.

Scott Shifrel