



Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age

By Jonathon Keats

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According to Vasari, the young Michelangelo often borrowed drawings of past masters, which he copied, returning his imitations to the owners and keeping originals. Half a millennium later, Andy Warhol made a game of "forging" the Mona Lisa, questioning the entire concept of originality.

Forged explores art forgery from ancient times to the present. In chapters combining lively biography with insightful art criticism, Jonathon Keats profiles individual art forgers and connects their stories to broader themes about the role of forgeries in society. From the Renaissance master Andrea del Sarto who faked a Raphael masterpiece at the request of his Medici patrons, to the Vermeer counterfeiter Han van Meegeren who duped the avaricious Hermann Göring, to the frustrated British artist Eric Hebborn, who began forging to expose the ignorance of experts, art forgers have challenged "legitimate" art in their own time, breaching accepted practices and upsetting the status quo. They have also provocatively confronted many of the present-day cultural anxieties that are major themes in the arts. Keats uncovers what forgeries--and our reactions to them--reveal about changing conceptions of creativity, identity, authorship, integrity, authenticity, success, and how we assign value to works of art. The book concludes by looking at how artists today have appropriated many aspects of forgery through such practices as street-art stenciling and share-and-share-alike licensing, and how these open-source "copyleft" strategies have the potential to make legitimate art meaningful again.

Forgery has been much discussed--and decried--as a crime. *Forged* is the first book to assess great forgeries as high art in their own right.

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Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age By Jonathon Keats Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #603660 in Books
- Published on: 2013-01-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 5.70" h x .90" w x 8.40" l, .70 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 208 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Field Guide To 20th Century Art Forgers: by Jonathon Keats

Riccardo Riccardi and Alfredo Fioravanti

For nearly half a century, the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibited several counterfeit statues of Etruscan warriors incompetently crafted by Riccardo Riccardi and Alfredo Fioravanti, two boys from a small town near Rome who had no idea what authentic Etruscan artifacts looked like. Despite the skepticism of outside experts, the oddly proportioned figures were kept on view in order to avoid institutional embarrassment, enshrining for several generations an arrestingly strange Etruscan aesthetic that never existed in ancient days.

Jean Charles Millet

The grandson of the Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet, Jean Charles Millet exploited the family name – and a stencil Jean-François had made for signing his paintings – by employing a deaf housepainter named Paul Cazot to copy his grandfather's canvases by the hundred. Charged with forgery, Millet defended himself in French court by saying he sold his fakes only to Americans and Englishmen, arguing that he couldn't be blamed for their ignorance. Eventually he was convicted, but only for passing bad checks.

Yves Chaudron

Following the theft of the Mona Lisa in 1911, Leonardo's masterpiece was illicitly offered for private sale to six different collectors, each of whom received a copy painted by Yves Chaudron. The con worked because the collectors had all heard about the missing original, but each had to keep his illegal purchase secret. It would have been the perfect crime, if only it were real. Later research has shown that Chaudron himself was a fake, fabricated by the *Saturday Evening Post* journalist Karl Decker, a forger's forger.

Han van Meegeren

The eminent art historian Abraham Bredius believed that Vermeer once went through a religious phase, and that paintings from that period would eventually be discovered. Han van Meegeren helped Bredius to prove his theory by fabricating a Vermeer on a Biblical theme and having it submitted to Bredius for authentication. Though van Meegeren's painting bore no resemblance to authentic Vermeers in terms of content or quality, Bredius declared it a masterpiece. On the strength of that endorsement, van Meegeren made more 'Vermeers'. And the more of them he made, the more convincing all of them became as the growing body of work changed how people viewed Vermeer's actual paintings.

Lothar Malskat

Hired to restore a Gothic church in the West German town of Lübeck in the 1950s, the art conservator Lothar Malskat exceeded expectations by discovering a whole cycle of medieval frescos. Only after two million postage stamps had been printed to celebrate the find did Malskat reveal that he'd made the murals himself, modeling his Biblical figures on school friends and movie stars. Even after the trial, the Lübeck government debated keeping the paintings, loathe to give up the town's newfound popularity with art enthusiasts. Some

of the murals remain in place today, six decades after the scandal. Guidebooks don't mention they're fakes.

Elmyr de Hory

The storied life of Elmyr de Hory, master forger of paintings by Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, is known primarily through a biography written by Clifford Irving in the late 1960s, a source that is questionable not only on account of de Hory's characteristic self-mythologizing – including a make-believe aristocratic upbringing – but also because of his biographer's next project: Irving's attempted forgery of Howard Hughes's memoirs. The combination of myth and mystery has made de Hory's known forgeries so highly collectable in their own right that de Hory copies are often now forged.

Tom Keating

Frustrated as an artist, Tom Keating set out to prove the art world's stupidity by forging drawings and paintings by past greats ranging from John Constable to Amedeo Modigliani, in many cases including what he called "time bombs" – such as underpainting messages in lead white that would be revealed by x-rays – to flaunt the paintings' fraudulence years after they'd been bought. The British public embraced his anti-elitist cause following his eventual confession, garnering a large audience for his TV series teaching everybody how to paint like the masters: his ultimate revenge.

David Stein

After he was convicted of counterfeiting modern masters including Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall in the late 1960s, the French art forger David Stein began signing his own name to his fakes, and even having some of them featured as movie props in *The Moderns*. It was ideal cover for his ongoing illicit production of forgeries essentially identical to the paintings for which he was taking public credit.

Konrad Kujau

Konrad Kujau made his living defrauding neo-Nazis and nostalgically fascist Germans by supplying them with memorabilia falsely attributed to Hitler, including nude paintings of Eva Braun, pages from an opera, and ultimately the Fuhrer's personal diaries, which were duly published in *Stern*. Many who were duped seem to have known it, deeming the money they gave Kujau a small price to pay for 'evidence' of Hitler's culture and humanity.

Eric Hebborn

Counterfeiting drawings and paintings by old masters from Rubens to Brueghel, Eric Hebborn delighted in boasting about his achievements, publishing a handbook sharing his techniques for faking pigments, and claiming that numerous works in public collections were his creations. While some were, others he identified as fakes were genuine, though no amount of scholarship has fully overcome the taint of doubt.

Review

"[A] succinct, intelligent, and very readably summary." --*New York Review of Books*

"For some time and in a wide variety of media, Jonathon Keats has been revealing himself to be one of the most witty, penetrating and deeply contemplative minds of this young century. In careful and skeptical depth, his work searches and researches the unrevealed truths that lie behind many things we take for

granted. In this bold, typically irreverent work, Keats asks a basic and impertinent question: Can any legitimate artwork match the public impact and significance of a scandalous forgery? Whatever we decide, in the end we are aware that we've been in the midst of that rarest of presences these days: a wholly original mind capable of expressing itself with clarity, precision and humor."--Stanley Bing, columnist, *Fortune Magazine*

"Jonathon Keats's playfully learned volume is not only a history of modern art-faking but also a philosophical investigation of creativity and repetition in our era. It won't tell you how to forge, but it may convince you that you should." --John Dorfman, editor-in-chief, *Art & Antiques*

"According to Jonathon Keats, 'Forgers are the foremost artists of our age.' To which I might add, 'Keats's new book is about to become the foremost text on the compelling world of fakes and forgeries.'" - Richard Polsky, author of *The Art Prophets and I Bought Andy Warhol*

quote "it's a thoroughly engaging read, and there's plenty of trivia here for even the most well-read history buffs as Keats charts the march of art forgery throughout history. I feel like this is the book that'll kick off a thousand art history class discussions. As it should." *San Francisco Book Review*

"A compelling look at six forgers, their cunning techniques, and how the art world was fooled by them." *Sunday Times (UK)*

"this engaging polemic will edify and entertain many art enthusiasts." **iLibrary Journal**

"There are many books on art appreciation. Jonathon Keats has written the first one on art forgery appreciation. Keats not only presents a rogues's gallery of history's greatest forgers. He also poses--in lively and engaging prose--provocative questions about the nature of creativity and originality as well as providing many uncomfortable insights about the art market."--Dana Gioia, Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California and former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts

About the Author

Jonathon Keats is a critic, journalist and artist. He is the art critic for *San Francisco Magazine*, and has contributed art criticism to *Art & Antiques*, *Art + Auction*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Artweek*, and *Salon.com*. His arts writing has also appeared in *Wired Magazine*, *ForbesLife Magazine*, *The Washington*

Post, and *The Christian Science Monitor*. He is most recently the author of *Virtual Words: Language on the Edge of Science and Technology* (OUP). His conceptual art has been exhibited at venues including the Berkeley Art Museum, the Hammer Museum, and the Wellcome Collection.

Users Review

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Joshua Sigmund:

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Tiffany Hernandez:

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