

## Contents

### **Introduction**

- Today I am talking about forgery – the creating and selling of works of art falsely attributed to others. This needs to be distinguished from copying a works of art for other reasons which has taken place since the beginning of art. For example, the Romans copied works by Greek artists. However, we shall see that the distinction between copying and forgery is sometimes not so clear cut.
- Forgers are often skilled artists who are motivated by more than making money. For example, they are frustrated artists who see forgery as a way of proving the art world cannot distinguish poor art from good. That is why I talk about the genius of art forgery in recognition of the skill involved. Forgery is one of the few crimes that involve world-class skill and that is why the forger is often held in respect.
- I will only be talking about painting and sculpture, not other forgeries such as: Thomas Chatterton's 15<sup>th</sup> century poetry first 'forged' when he was 12, James Macpherson's invention of the ancient Scottish Gaelic poet Ossian (pronounced 'OSS-ee-an'), the many alleged 'authors' of Shakespeare's work, Konrad Kujau's (pronounced 'KOO-jauw') forgery of the Hitler Diaries, the strikingly modern looking Vinland map with its orthographic projection that was alleged to be a pre-Columbian map showing part of America, the Turin Shroud, a late 14<sup>th</sup> century linen cloth alleged to be the shroud in which Christ was wrapped and the Piltdown Man, a skull created by Charles Dawson that he claimed was the missing link between ape and man.

- Many of these works are so obviously forgeries that one wonders how people were deceived. I think the reason is that at certain points in history particular groups of people have belief systems that the forgeries reinforce giving rise to positive feelings. Putting it another way people would rather be deceived than have the truth cause them anxiety. It is summed up by the Latin phrase *Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur* ("The world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived.").

### **The Early History of 'Forgery'**

- It has always gone on. But why do I put 'forgery' in quotes. We shall see that copying other artists was a form of respect and a demonstration of skill. A few early examples provides an interesting route into the motivations of artists who forge works and it explains why I have called this talk 'The Genius of Art Forgery'.
  - Laocoon, a Roman copy
  - Durer forgery, Copy of Durer's *Life of the Virgin* series by Raimondi
  - Michelangelo *Eros Sleeping*
  - Mona Lisa in the Prado is from Leonardo's studio, copy or crime?

### **Forgeries in Major Museums**

- All museums and galleries have forgeries, but we must consider the institution's pride. The National Gallery 2010 exhibition 'Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries' showed the humour in the subject. Usually though it is denied. John P. Getty has had more than most. Its acquisition budget was \$100 million when the British Museum was £100,000. It acquired forged and looted work. In 1985 it bought an Archaic kouros for \$7-12 million which was thought even then and even by his own staff to be a modern fake. There are only 11 authentic kouroi in existence. They are idealised statues used as grave markers. It has flaws in the marble and Hellenistic statues were abandoned if flaws were found. Six Old Master's drawings were found to be forgeries probably by Eric Hebborn, a master forgery we will return to later.
- Raphael
- Chester Dale Van Gogh
- Icilio Joni (1866-1946) fools Bernard Berenson with his 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Sienese School 'masterpieces'. He created new works in their style which fooled experts. He preferred Duccio, Lorenzetti and Fra Angelico. One in the Met. Kenneth Clark first exposed the fraud using the latest scientific analysis. Joni had a forgery academy. He was proud of his skill, stylistic mimicry and technical ability to artificially age a work. It was not the money but a practical joke and a demonstration of his skill. He published his memoirs detailing all the forgeries and it is said a consortium of local collectors offered to pay him not to publish.
- The pride of nations – Van Gogh debates revisited. *Study by Candlelight* forgery or authentic, we still don't know.

**Motivations** – genius, pride, revenge, fame, crime, opportunism, money and power. But it often comes down to some combination of money and pride.

- There are many motivations across the art world. Art historians dream of finding a lost masterpiece. Deception depends on wishful thinking. Pride is the driving force for experts and institutions. Pride also drives authentication boards to discredit authentic works.
- Finding overlooked treasures
  - Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*. Raphael *Madonna of the Pinks*, c. 1506-07, National Gallery Leonardo, *Salvator Mundi* but not *La Bella Principessa*?
- The collector's pride versus the connoisseur's pride
  - The American Leonardo *La Belle Ferronnière* is the one in the Louvre a copy? In the 1920 court case Berenson claimed a 'sixth sense' for authenticity. It was a class war. Science did not come in until 1932.
- The artist's pride
  - Salvador Dalí and the other Dalí, Antoni Pitxot ('picksoot'). A whole industry of fraudulent Dalí prints. He is the second after most forged artist after Picasso. 12,000 fake Dalí prints were seized during one investigation. Pitxot was a friend of Dalí and an award-winning artist. It is thought he took over from Dalí as the latter's powers waned. Was this fraudulent? Haven't artists always used studios that often produced the majority or all the work.

### **Famous Forgers**

- William Sykes and Jan van Eyck
- Jef van der Veken, restorer or forger?
- Salvador Dalí and Antoni Pitxot
- Han van Meegeren
- Eric Hebborn the most skilful of all forgers
- Leonardo La Belle Ferronnière an argument among experts and a law suite
- Shaun Greenhalgh in a shed out back
- Tom Keating
- Provence: John Myatt and John Drewe

### **Detecting Forgeries**

- Science and Provenance
  - Van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*
- Authentication and Connoisseurship - Authentication Committees
  - The artist's legacy the Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988, aged 28, heroin overdose, 'bas-KEY-are') door and Bruno B versus the Warhol Foundation. Famous artists are now authenticated by committee. In the case of Basquiat they declared a door he painted for his heroin dealer to be a

forgery perhaps for moral reasons. Andy Warhol *Red Self-Portrait* was one of ten silk-screen prints used on the cover of his catalogue raisonné yet still the committee declared all ten were forgeries. Their reasons was that Warhol was not present when the silk-screens were printed but this reason would potentially invalidate many prints of the Old Masters such as Durer and Rembrandt.

- Digital technology: friend or foe?

### **References**

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<https://www.christies.com/features/7-things-to-know-about-artist-signatures-8365-1.aspx> Artist signatures and forgery

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<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/legal-art-forgery> Legal art forgery

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-forgers-grifters-conned-art-generations> 9 famous forgers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA5Kr1qhSyg> video on scientific techniques for analysing a forgery, not 1300 but after 1830s because of pigments used

<https://youtu.be/1xPYxroE6P8> 50 minute video on fake Van Gogh *Sunflowers*





## THE EARLY HISTORY OF ‘FORGERY’



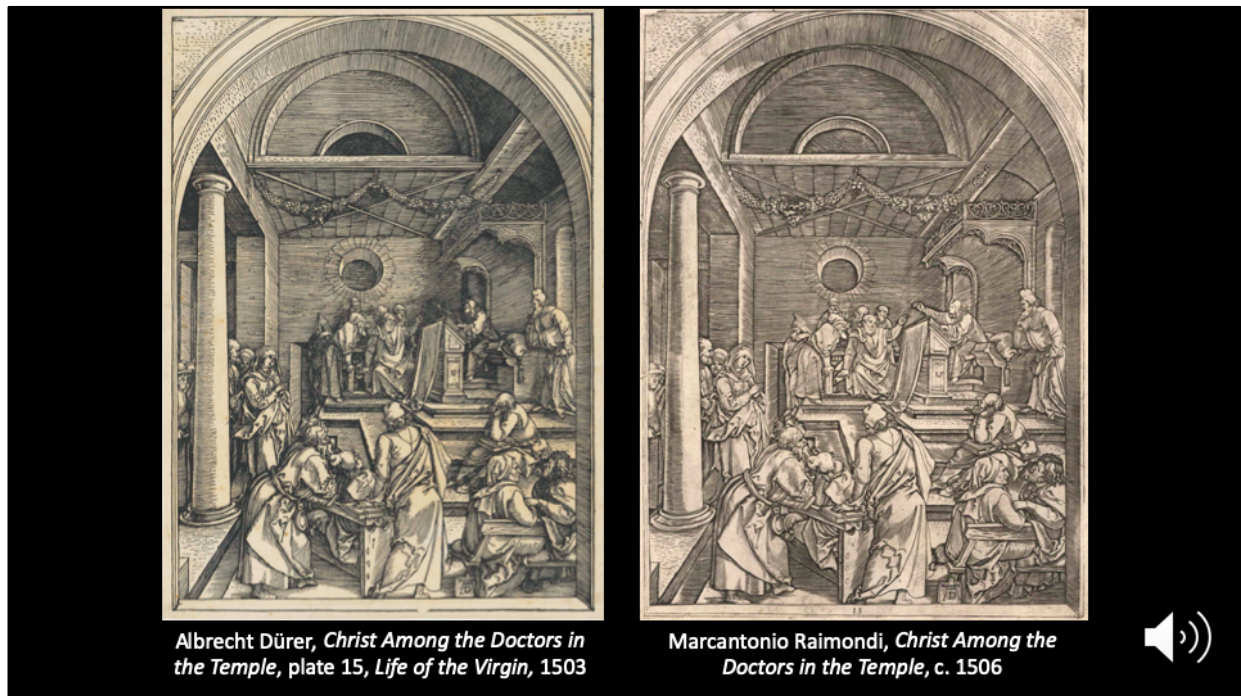
### The Early History of ‘Forgery’

- It has always gone on. But why do I put ‘forgery’ in quotes. We shall see that copying other artists was a form of respect and a demonstration of skill. Apprentices were taught to copy the work of their master so they could assist in the production of ‘genuine’ works by the master. A few early examples provides an interesting route into the motivations of artists who forge works and it explains why I have called this talk ‘The Genius of Art Forgery’.
  - Laocoön, a Roman copy
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  - Michelangelo *Eros Sleeping*
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Laocoön (pronounced 'lay-ok-oh-on' or 'lay-oh-con') and his sons, also known as the Laocoön Group, marble, early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. copy after a Hellenistic original from ca. 200 BC., found in the Baths of Trajan, 1506, height 2.4 m., Vatican Museum

- I start with this famous sculpture showing Laocoön and his sons being strangled by a sea serpent. According to legend Laocoön was Trojan priest who was killed by the gods because he tried to warn the Trojans about the danger of accepting the gift of a wooden horse from the Greeks giving rise to the expression 'beware of Greeks bearing gifts'.
- This sculpture was discovered in 1506 and is a Roman copy of a Greek original. The Romans regarded the Greeks as superior in the arts and Greek statues were regarded as the best examples of the art.
- The Greek original is now lost and may have been bronze. When I say the Romans it could have been Greek craftsmen as the Romans employed Greek sculptors. They also imported Greek sculptures and there were Romans trained to create sculptures in the Greek style. We believe Greek originals were often bronze but most sculptures that have survived are marble because the value of bronze in warfare meant that it was melted down and so few examples have survived.
- Incidentally the other thing to bear in mind is that classical statues were painted to look more naturalistic. Anathema to the modern viewer schooled in the aesthetic of pure white classical marble statues.



Albrecht Dürer, *Christ Among the Doctors in the Temple*, plate 15 in *Life of the Virgin*, 1503  
 Marcantonio Raimondi, *Christ Among the Doctors in the Temple*, c. 1506

- At the time the Laocoön was dug up in the Baths of Trajan in Rome contemporary artists were also engaged in copying.
- Albrecht Dürer was reported to have been enraged by Marcantonio Raimondi's "copying" his compositions and misleading use of his monogram. Dürer won a court case in Venice against Raimondi, which only prevented him from using Dürer's name and monogram. Prior to the court case Raimondi was said to have sold his copies of Dürer's series *Life of the Virgin* as original work by the master. However, the court ruled that Raimondi should not be blamed for being skilled as an artist and that Dürer should be flattered that his work was considered important enough to copy. Dürer returned to Nuremberg unhappy with the result and when he published *Life of the Virgin*, he included a warning to potential forgers.
- Some aspects of the court's ruling still apply today. In today's court Raimondi's copy would be an infringement as it is a substantially similar copy and his inclusion of the monogram would be considered 'passing off' and a violation of trademark law.
- Raimondi was a well-known Venetian artist and engraver of the period and is known for producing some of the earliest pornographic engravings including 'I Modi' (*The Ways*) also known as *The Sixteen Pleasures*. The original edition was completely destroyed by the Catholic Church and only later fragments, which themselves are copies, remain.



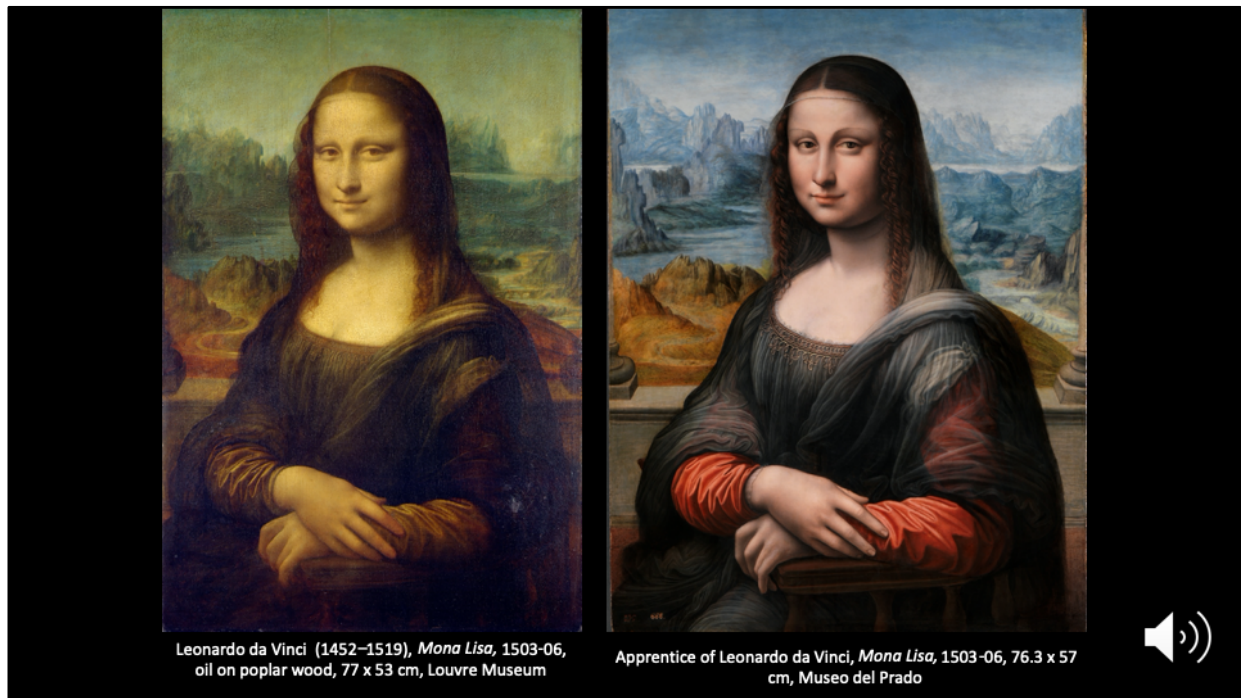
Anon, *Sleeping Eros*, Hellenistic Greek, 3rd–2nd century B.C., 41.9 × 35.6 × 85.2 cm, 124.7 kg, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- This is one of the few bronze statues to have survived from antiquity (we believe) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Statues of sleeping Eros were extremely popular in the Greek and Roman periods although we don't know their exact role.
- In 1496, Michelangelo, who was only 21 and little known at the time, set out to produce a fake Roman marble statue. His first biographer, Paolo Giovio (1483-1552), wrote **"Michelangelo achieved the highest glory in sculpture when he made Eros of marble and afterwards kept him buried in the ground for some time, and then presented the light again, but already with those spots and marks that he acquired, as well as with other minor imperfections that were intentionally applied to her in such a way that Eros looked like an ancient one. Then he sold it for a great price through an intermediary to Cardinal Riario."**
- Like the majority of the works of the old masters Michelangelo's statue is now lost so I am showing a genuine Greek bronze of the same subject.
- The Cardinal discovered the statue was a fake and returned it to the dealer. However, Michelangelo was not arrested because the Cardinal admired the skill demonstrated by the forgery. At the time, a test of a young artist was their ability to produce works that were indistinguishable from the work of the old masters. The dealer easily sold the work to Cesare Borgia. In 1502 Eros was presented as a gift to Isabella d'Este in Mantua, where the

statue took pride of place as an original Michelangelo as by then Michelangelo had become famous and his works valuable and desirable.

- Michelangelo produced other forgeries. His biographer, Vasari, who admired him above all other artists wrote in words of admiration, **“He copied the drawings of the old masters so beautifully that his copies could not be distinguished from the originals, he subtly toned and aged paper.”** How many works today of this period are actually copies made by Michelangelo?
- Why was copying admired? Because it demonstrated technique and skill and this was regarded as the essential prerequisite to becoming an artist. The other ability required by an artist was imagination.





Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), *Mona Lisa*, 1503-06, oil on poplar wood, 77 x 53 cm, Louvre Museum

Apprentice of Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503-06, 76.3 x 57 cm, Museo del Prado

- The words ‘fake’ and ‘forgery’ are often used interchangeably but they have distinct definitions. A forgery is an object made in fraudulent imitation of something else and a fake is an original painting that has been altered, for example, by adding the signature of a famous artist. In court a forger is tried for fraud.
- But there are many **non-criminal reasons** why a work of art might be misattributed. **Copying art** has always been the way a young artist learns his or her trade. The copy of the Mona Lisa in the Prado is an example. Recent analysis shows the underdrawings are similar to those under the original. For this and other reasons it is now thought that it was **painted in Leonardo’s studio** by someone with access to the original. Renaissance studios were filled with apprentices and assistants and commissions were often fulfilled largely by apprentices with the master supervising and painting or correcting the most difficult parts, such as hands and faces.

### Notes

- In the UK the Fraud Act 2006 distinguishes between three types of fraud—fraud by false representation, fraud by failing to disclose information, and fraud by abuse of position. False representation is ‘any representation as to fact or law ... express or implied which they know

to be untrue or misleading'. In all three types of fraud, for an offence to have occurred, the person must have acted dishonestly and with the intent of making a gain for themselves or anyone else or inflicting a loss (or a risk of loss) on another.



Raphael (1483-1520), *The Three Graces*, c.1517-18, red chalk over some stylus underdrawing, 20.3 x 25.8 cm (sheet of paper), Royal Collection



Raphael (1483-1520), *The Three Graces*, c.1517-18, red chalk over some stylus underdrawing, 20.3 x 25.8 cm (sheet of paper), Royal Collection

The attribution of his red chalk drawings is difficult, but this drawing has never been questioned.

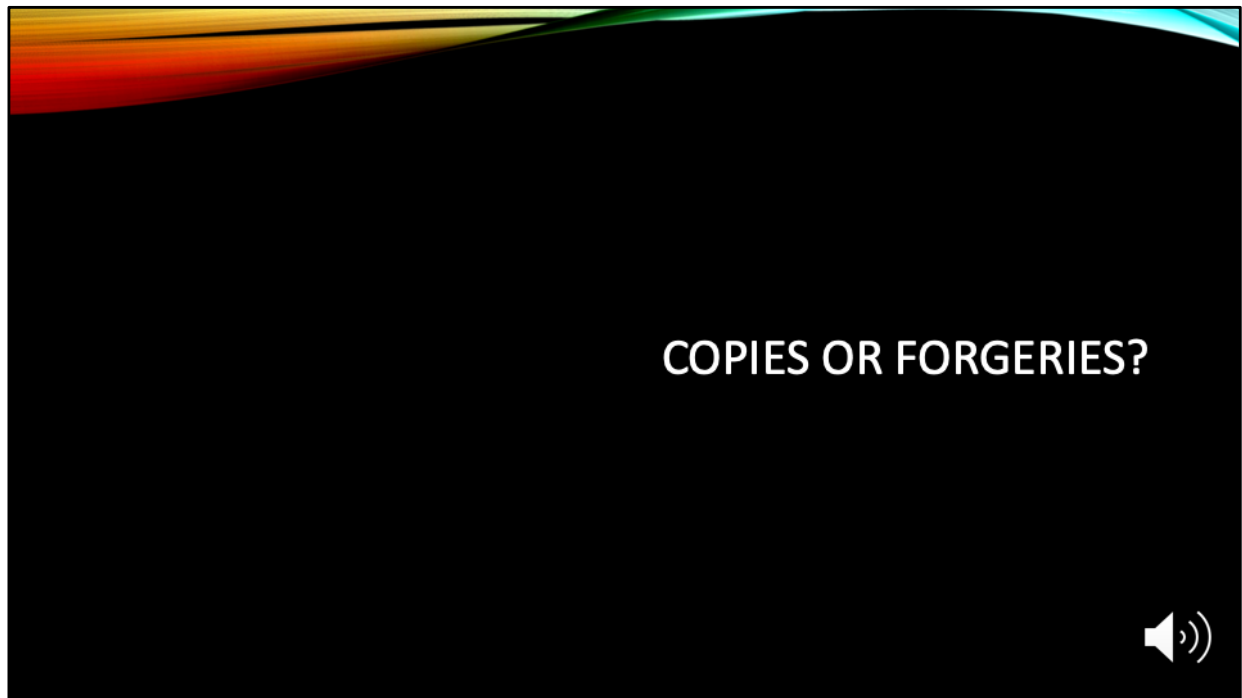
- A final example illustrating the difficulty of attribution.
- Raphael, along with Leonardo and Michelangelo is considered the third great artist of the Italian High Renaissance and in Victorian Britain he was considered the pre-eminent artist. He was born in Urbino in 1483 and was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II in 15-08/9.
- “Around 1517 Raphael’s assistants frescoed the vault of the garden loggia of Agostino Chigi’s villa in Rome, now known as the **Villa Farnesina**. This is a study, from a single model in three consecutive poses, for the **Three Graces pouring a libation in the Wedding Feast of Cupid and Psyche**. Though Raphael executed none of the frescoes himself, drawings such as this show that he was closely involved in their design.
- ...
- The red chalk studies for the project present perhaps the most difficult **problem of attribution** in the whole of Raphael’s oeuvre. The issue is confused by highly competent **drawings by members of the studio**, by the existence of **good copies after lost originals**, and by the workshop practice of taking offsets which, as seen here at upper right, can blur some of the lines of the originals. Further, there seems to be no difference in function between the life studies attributable to Raphael himself and those by his assistants,



implying that Raphael must have been involved in preparing at least some of the scenes at this routine level. The present study, probably from a single model in three consecutive poses, is one of few studies for the project that have hardly ever been disputed as the work of Raphael himself.” (Royal Collection website)

### **References**

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/27/collection/912754/the-three-graces>



We have reached the point where you might be wondering if it is possible to distinguish between a 'genuine' copy and a forgery. Even major museums have this problem. Let us look at a few examples.

### Forgeries in Major Museums

- All museums and galleries have forgeries, but we must consider the institution's pride. The National Gallery 2010 exhibition 'Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries' showed the **humour in the subject**. Usually though it is denied. The **John P. Getty Museum** has had more than most. Its acquisition **budget was \$100 million when the British Museum was £100,000**. It **acquired forged and looted work**. In 1985 it bought an **Archaic kouros for \$7-12 million** which was thought even then and **even by his own staff to be a modern fake**. There are only 11 authentic kouroi in existence. They are idealised statues used as grave markers. It has **flaws in the marble** and Hellenistic statues were abandoned if flaws were found. Six Old Master's drawings were found to be forgeries probably by Eric Hebborn, a master forgery we will return to later.
- Edgar Degas's *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (Tate Modern and elsewhere).
- Chester Dale's 'Van Gogh' (discussed later)
- Icilio Joni (1866-1946) fools Bernard Berenson with his 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Sienese School 'masterpieces' (discussed later). He created new works in their style which fooled experts. He preferred Duccio, Lorenzetti and Fra Angelico. One in the Met. Kenneth Clark first exposed the fraud using the latest scientific analysis. Joni had a forgery academy. He was

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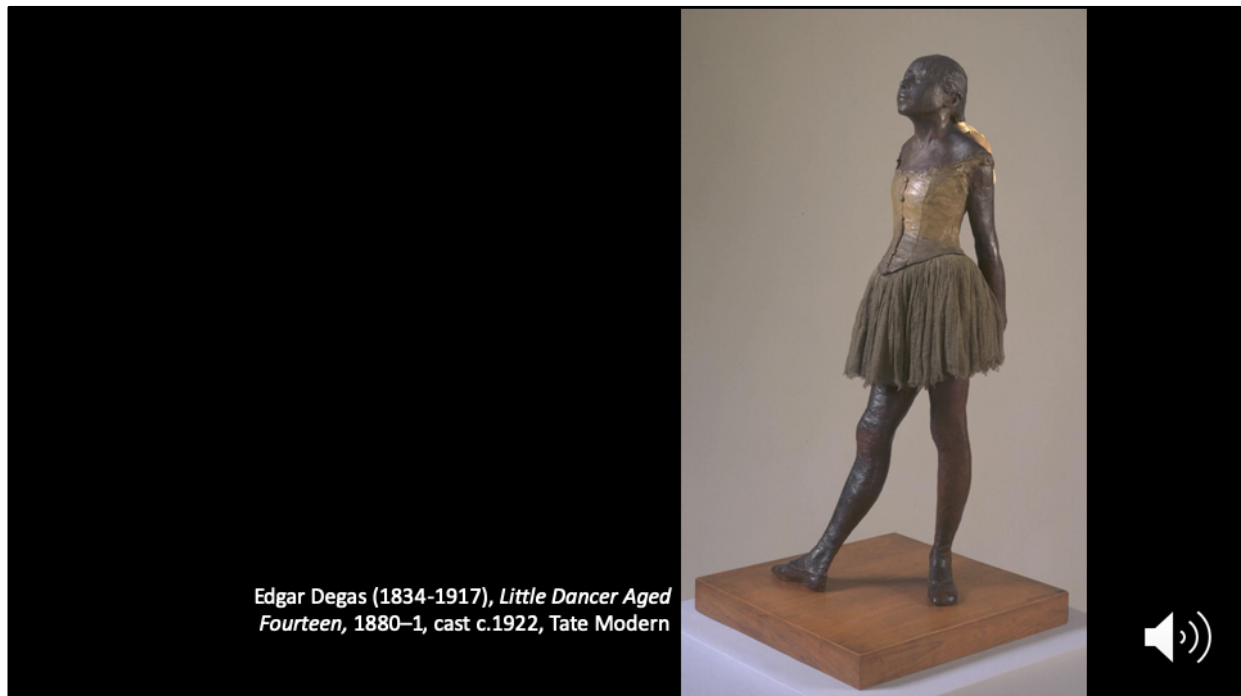


Title: Kouros  
Artist/Maker: Unknown  
Culture: Greek  
Place: Greece (?) (Place Created)  
Date: about 530 B.C. or modern forgery  
Medium: Dolomitic marble  
Object Number: 85.AA.40  
Dimensions: 206.1 × 54.6 × 51 cm (81 1/8 × 21 1/2 × 20 1/16 in.)



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- In 1985 the John P. Getty museum bought an Archaic kouros for \$7-12 million which was thought even then and **even by his own staff to be a modern fake**. There are only 11 authentic kouri in existence. They are idealised statues used as grave markers. It has flaws in the marble and Hellenistic statues were abandoned if flaws were found.
- In addition, six Old Master's drawings were found to be forgeries probably by Eric Hebborn, a master forgery we will return to later.

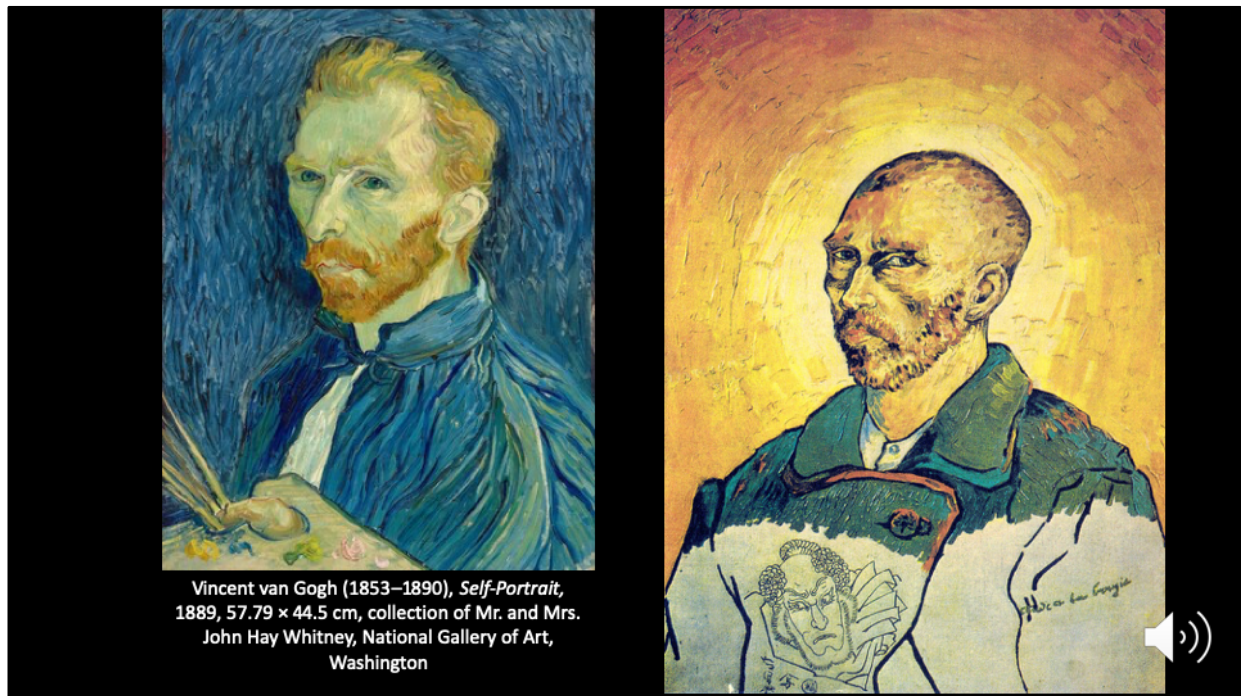


Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, 1880-1, cast c.1922, Tate Modern

- Copies, replicas, reproductions and pastiches are often produced as legitimate works but become forgeries when sold as something they are not. For example, the Degas, *Little Dancer Aged 14* (1880-81) in the Tate is not the original produced by Degas but a copy cast in c. 1922. There is no dishonesty and the Tate bought it knowing its history.
- There are **72 surviving sculptures** all cast by Hébrard on behalf of the Degas heirs in an edition of twenty-two, twenty for sale and one each for Hébrard and the heirs, plus a bronze master cast, making a total of twenty-three. Each cast is incised with an Arabic number from 1 to 72 identifying the sculpture, and the twenty sets for sale are also marked with a letter from A to T. The casts of the *Little Dancer aged Fourteen* are not numbered and were thought for many years to have been **cast in a smaller edition**. The original waxes of this and all the Tate's other sculptures by Degas now belong to Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon in Washington, DC. It was purchased by the Tate, with a contribution of £6000 from the Art Fund, from Puvis de Chavannes through Marlborough Fine Art.
- Similarly, many objects in Tate Modern are copies:
  - the Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* is a copy made by Duchamp in the 1970s.
  - A number of Man Ray objects at the Tate were made by Man Ray in the 1960s and 70s as the original had been lost, for example, *Indestructible Object* (a metronome with a picture of an eye pasted on it) 1923, remade 1933, editioned replica 1965,

*Cadeau* (a flat iron) 1921, editioned replica 1972 and *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse* (*The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, a sewing machine wrapped in a blanket tied with string) 1920, remade 1972.

- Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913 originally plaster, first bronze cast 1925-26, two more cast in 1931, two further casts in 1949, two further casts were made in Brazil in 1972 and one of these is owned by the Tate. In 1972 a further eight copies were made not from the plaster version which had been sold to Brazil in 1952 but from one of the bronze versions.



Formerly attributed to Van Gogh, *Study by Candlelight*, c. 1888, private collection of William Goetz

- “**William Goetz**, a very famous twentieth century Hollywood producer and film executive, was a well-known art collector. **In 1947/8 he purchased** a splendid work of art that was **attributed to the Dutch post-impressionist painter Vincent Van Gogh**. The painting, known as *Study by Candlelight*, was secured for \$50,000 (approximately £32,601) and everything about it seemed legitimate. The art deal was highly regarded and the work itself was **verified by a Van Gogh expert.**” (Cadogan Tate website)
- Willem Sandberg, Director of the **Stedelijk Museum** in Amsterdam **declared it to be a counterfeit** piece **William Goetz threatened to sue** him and Amsterdam for “willful, vicious, uncalled for, and slanderous statements.” The city of Amsterdam distanced themselves from the controversy by declaring Sandberg had made the statement entirely outside his duty as a director of the Stedelijk.
- The strange Japanese kabuki character is drawn in ink not painted and the strange Japanese kabuki character. The phrase ‘Etude a la bougie’ (‘Study by candlelight’) has no accents as in ‘Étude à la bougie’.
- In 1994 Christie’s asked the museum in Amsterdam for an opinion and they replied “There is no reason to accept the painting representing Vincent Van Gogh by candlelight as an authentic work by the artist.” without even having seen the piece.
- A study in 2012/13 found it had been painted over a still-life of books and shapes and

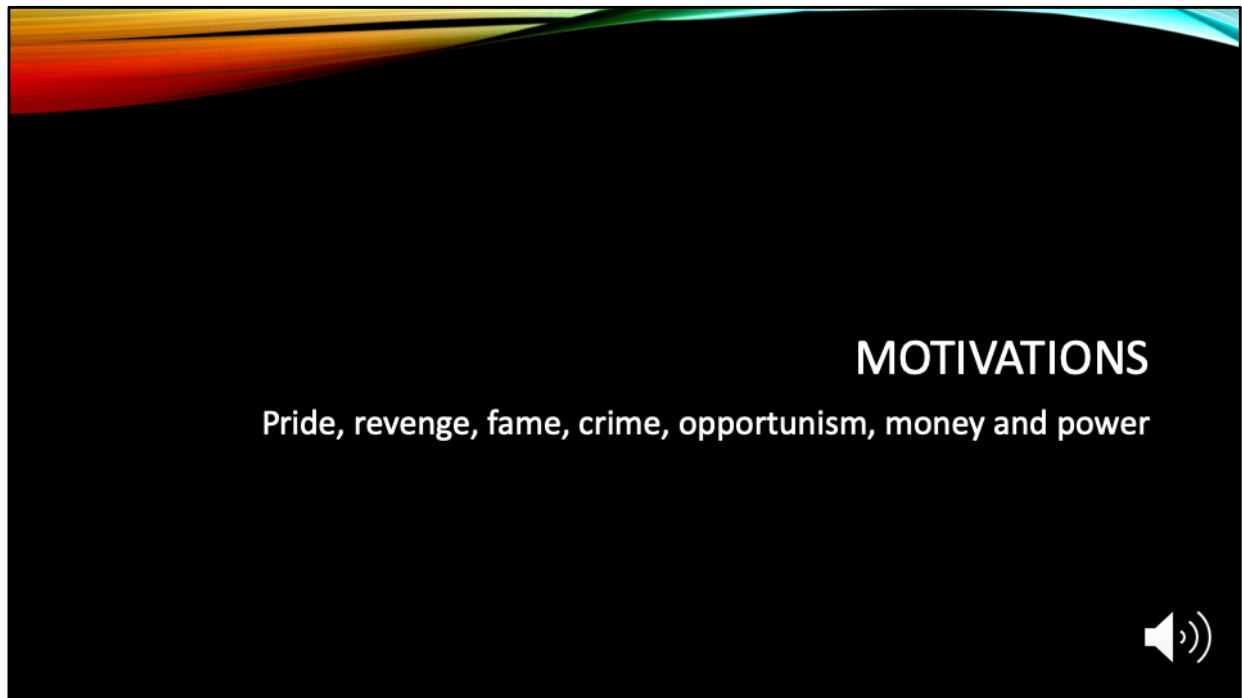
analysis of the pigments showed that they were all consistent with those available in 1888. However, the colours used don't match those by van Gogh when he lived in Arles. The brushwork does not exhibit van Gogh's fluidity and the Japanese kabuki character is clumsily drawn.

- As a point of comparison I have placed it alongside a genuine van Gogh self-portrait.
- The painting is still owned by the Goetz family who refuse to show it in public.

### **References**

<https://www.cadogantate.com/en/news/real-van-gogh-unsolved-art-world-mystery>





### **Motivations**

- Having established the difficulty and in some cases impossibility of establishing authenticity let us look at forgers. People who for various reasons create a work which they or an accomplice sell as a work by another, more famous artist. It might be thought that the reason people forge works is for money but we shall see the motivations are often much more complex.
- Motivations include pride, revenge, fame, crime, opportunism, money and power. But it often comes down to some combination of money and pride.
- There are many motivations across the art world. Art historians dream of finding a lost masterpiece. Deception depends on wishful thinking. Pride is the driving force for experts and institutions. Pride also drives authentication boards to discredit authentic works.

### **Contents of This Section**

- Making a name for oneself by finding overlooked treasures such as,
  - Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*
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  - *La Bella Principessa*?
- The collector's pride versus the connoisseur's pride
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Science did not come in until 1932.

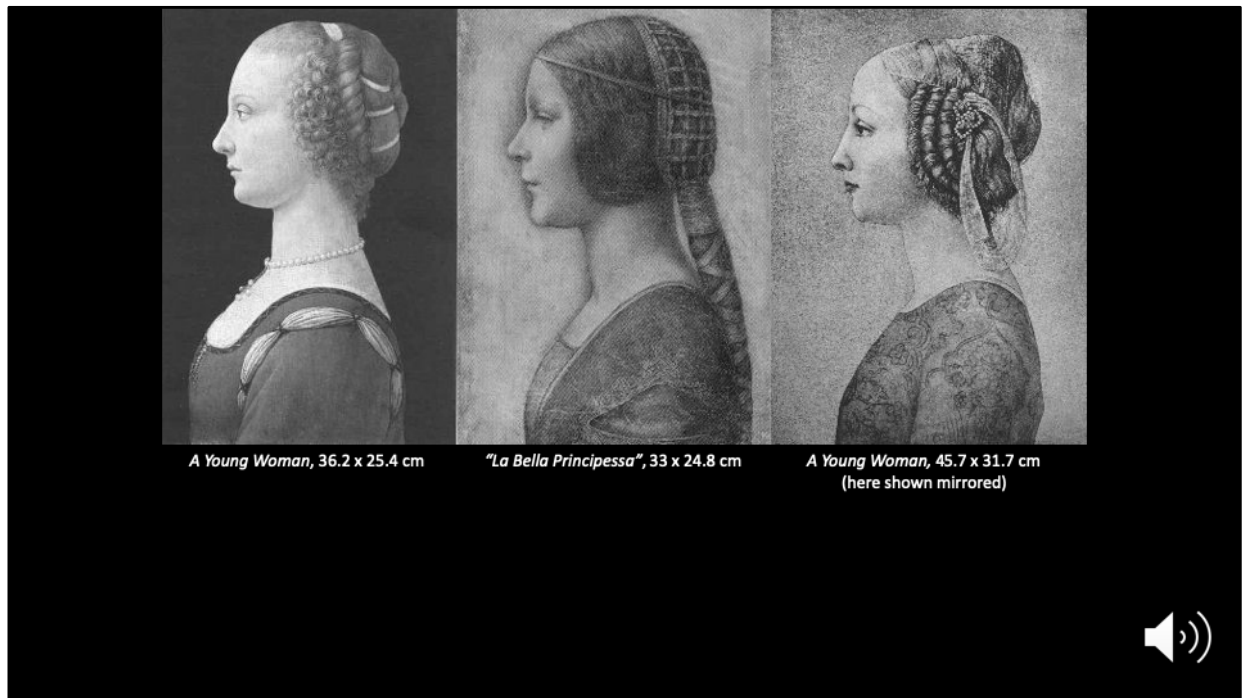
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Uncertain, disputed attribution to Leonardo da Vinci, *Bianca Sforza* (disputed), 1495-6 (disputed), trois crayons (black, red and white chalk), heightened with pen and ink on vellum, laid on oak panel, 33 × 23.9 cm, restored, private collection

- “*La Bella Principessa* (English: “**The Beautiful Princess**”), also known as *Portrait of Bianca Sforza*, *Young Girl in Profile in Renaissance Dress* and *Portrait of a Young Fiancée*, is a portrait in coloured chalks and ink, on vellum, of a young lady in fashionable costume and **hairstyle of a Milanese of the 1490s**. Sold for just under **\$22,000** at auction on January 30, 1998 at Christie's Auction in New York City, the portrait was catalogued as early **19th-century German work**. In 2007, Peter Silverman, purchased the portrait from a gallery on East 73rd Street, owned by Kate Ganz. Peter Silverman believed that the portrait was possibly from an older period, potentially dating back to the Renaissance period, and some experts have **since attributed it to Leonardo da Vinci**. In 2010 one of those experts, **Martin Kemp**, made it the subject of his book co-authored with Pascal Cotte, ***La Bella Principessa: The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci.***” (Wikipedia)
- The evidence for Leonardo is the style, high quality, corrections (‘pentimenti’), left-hand hatching, the sitter’s hair-style and the use of three chalks first pioneered by Leonardo, a palm print in the chalk associated with Leonardo. There is also some evidence that it was torn from a book now in the National Library of Poland which was given to Galeazzo Sanseverino.

- The knotwork ornament of the caul is similar to patterns explored by Leonardo in other works.
- By a process of elimination Kemp concluded it was a portrait of Bianca Sforza who married Galeazzo Sanseverino, a patron of Leonardo, in 1486 when she was 14. She died within months of her marriage possibly from an ectopic pregnancy.
- The attribution has been challenged by many scholars because of the lack of provenance prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, unusual given the fame of Leonardo and the Sforza family. The use of vellum which Leonardo had only used once before and the lack of cracking of the surface ('craquelure'). The use of left-handed hatching was common by forgers of Leonardo. The palm/finger print evidence has been questioned. One scholar describes it as a "**screaming 20<sup>th</sup> century fake**".
- One expert claimed Leonardo did not represent **eyelashes** which is incorrect as they are shown in authenticated drawings by Leonardo in Windsor.



A Young Woman, 36.2 x 25.4 cm

"La Bella Principessa", 33 x 24.8 cm

A Young Woman, 45.7 x 31.7 cm (here shown mirrored).

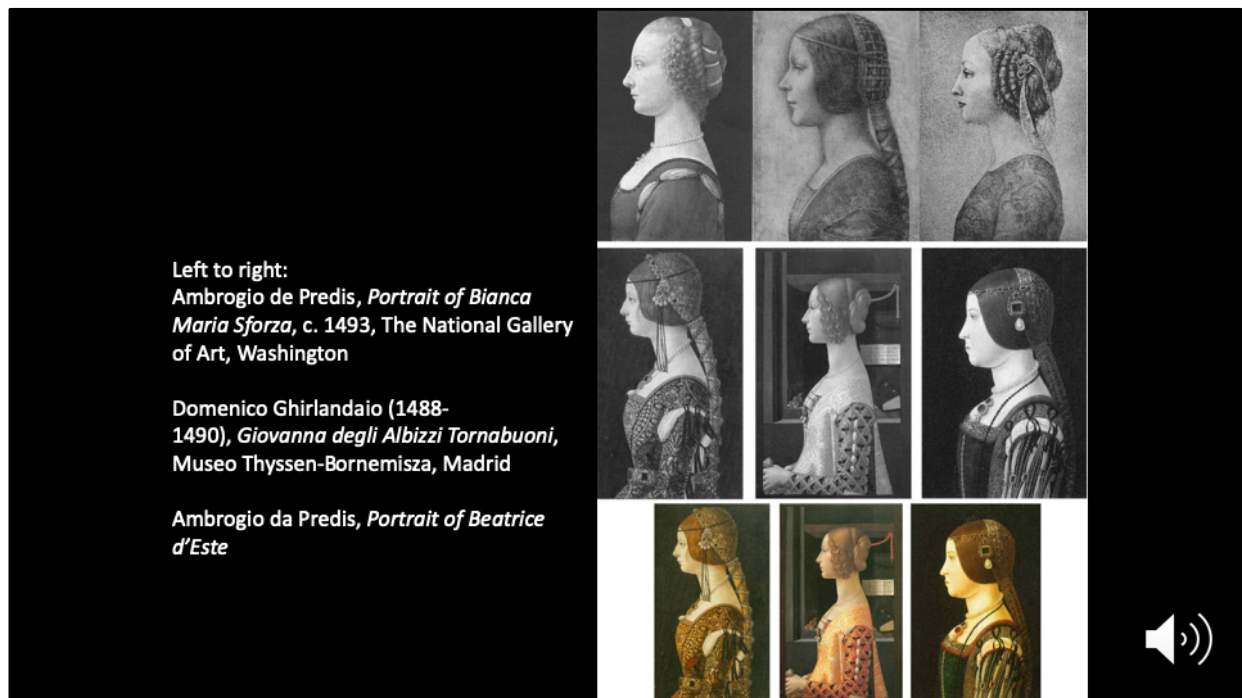
- Let us look at the artwork from a difference perspective.
- The portrait on the left, **A Young Woman**, was bought in 1936 by the Detroit Institute of Arts as by Leonardo da Vinci or Andrea del Verrocchio. The attribution was made on the strength of the similarity of the curls to a Leonardo painting (*Ginevra de'Benci*). The picture is now described as **"an Imitator of Verrocchio"**. David Alan Brown (*Virtue and Beauty*, 2001) described it as **"a probable forgery by its anachronistic materials and unorthodox construction"**. "Probable" because: **"after a recent technical examination, the picture turns out to have been painted on photographic paper applied to a wood panel that was repaired before it was readied for painting. And at least one of the pigments employed – zinc white – is modern..."**. The photographic paper and the zinc white make this a 20<sup>th</sup> century forgery.
- The world-famous drawing that was dubbed "La Bella Principessa" by Professor Martin Kemp is insured for \$150 million and lives in a "secure vault in Zurich".
- The portrait on the right, **A Young Woman**, was attributed to Piero Pollaiuolo by Bernard Berenson the American art historian, in 1945. The picture has **since sunk without trace** perhaps explained by a general comment—**"such portraits were highly sought after by later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collectors, encouraging a market for copies, fakes**

*and over-ambitious attributions”.*

- Problems with “*La Bella Principessa*”
  - It is made in mixed media (three chalks, ink, ‘liquid colour’) which Leonardo never used elsewhere. It is on vellum which Leonardo never used elsewhere (he was a strict vegetarian).
  - The ‘look’ of the woman is not typical of the period and looks too modern. Examining and comparing the look of a work is the essence of traditional connoisseurship. This breaks down to the initial impact followed by a detailed microscopic examination of the fluency and strength of the lines.
  - It has no provenance, and no one previously suggested it was by Leonardo. It was described as ‘German School, early 19<sup>th</sup> century’.
  - It has been rejected by scholars in New York, London and Vienna.
- One conclusion is that it is not a portrait of Bianca Sforza by Leonardo da Vinci but a twentieth century forgery or pastiche Leonardo or possible ‘German School, early 19<sup>th</sup> century’.

### **References**

- <http://artwatch.org.uk/problems-with-la-bella-principessa-part-i-the-look-2/>



Bottom two rows,  
 Ambrogio de Predis, *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza*, c. 1493, The National Gallery of Art, Washington

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1488-1490), *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Ambrogio da Predis, *Portrait of Beatrice d'Este* (tentatively attributed by Kemp)

- Finally, let us look at some genuine works by Leonardo.
- In the bottom two rows are what we believe to be bona fide works. They are highly individuated, richer works with distinctive features. The top three works appear to have been created to convey a prettiness that is essentially modern.
- **Finally, the well-known art forger Shaun Greenhalgh** (pronounced 'green-haltch') wrote in his autobiography *A Forger's Tale* that he produced the **drawing in 1978** when he was 18. It was forgery based on a **portrait of Sally**, a girl with whom he had worked in the late 70s **at the Co-op** butchery. He remembered buying the vellum from an antique shop close to his family's council house in Bolton. It was part of a 1587 land deed. He first practised the drawing on cartridge paper, then he mounted the vellum on an oak board from an old Victorian school desk lid, taken from the storeroom of Bolton Industrial Tech, where his father, George, worked as a cleaner. He had used just three colours, black, white and red, gum arabic earth pigments that he then went over in oak gall ink. Leonardo was left-handed

so Greenhalgh turned the painting and hatched strokes from the profile outwards. When it was finished, Greenhalgh, he took the picture to an art dealer in Harrogate, where **he offered it for sale – not as a forgery, but as a homage. The dealer** criticized its quality and **paid just £80**, an amount that barely covered the materials, let alone the labour.





Follower of Leonardo, *La Belle Ferronnière*, before c. 1750, private collection

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), *La Belle Ferronnière*, 1490s, 63 x 45 cm, Louvre Museum

- Let's look at another Leonardo to illustrate pride, in this case the collector's pride versus the connoisseur's pride
- **Leonardo's *La Belle Ferronnière* has hung in the Louvre for centuries** but in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century an **American soldier from Kansas** called Harry Hahn **claimed he owned the original**. He and his wife claimed they had received their (very good) version as a **wedding gift** from a relative whom they would not name. In 1919 they **tried to sell** their version as the original Leonardo for \$225,000 but the sale fell through. The influential British art dealer **Sir Joseph Duveen** declared the **Kansas version a copy** without having seen it. The **Hahn's sued Duveen** for \$500,000 and the court case revolved around the ability of experts to determine a forgery. **Duveen employed** the American **connoisseur Bernard Berenson**, the **connoisseur of connoisseurs**. He claimed a magical 'sixth sense' for authenticity and many believed him. The same applies today as rigorous scientific analysis is relatively unusual prior to a sale and buyers rely of the word of experts.
- **The trial was in 1920** before any form of scientific analysis took place and before the importance of provenance had taken hold. The trial became a **class war** between the **socially elite experts against the working-class Hahn family**. The **jury could not decide**, the Hahns wanted a retrial but Duveen paid them \$60,000 in an out of court settlement to stop it dragging on.

- In 2010 the Hahn version **sold at auction described as by a follower of Leonardo** and painted 'before 1750'. It sold to an anonymous buyer **for \$1,300,000** against an estimate of \$500,000.
- According to Jonathan Meades, **museum curators and art forgers are two of a kind**: they're both vain and self-deluded and the duped party in a forgery is not all that duped, he is mutely complicit with the swindler. He added "The almighty Joseph Duveen, a man for whom the handle 'compromised' is woefully insufficient, asserted that the version of Leonardo's 'La Belle Ferronnière' owned by a provincial American soldier, Harry Hahn, was a fake. He was probably correct; but he reached this conclusion on nothing other than the evidence of a monochrome photograph. He had not seen the actual painting."
- 'A painting by a follower of Leonardo da Vinci, which was once thought to be done by the Renaissance master himself, sold at auction for \$1.5 million, three times its estimate price. Sotheby's said the work, "La Belle Ferronniere," which was the subject of a slander trial in the 1920s, two books and which had been locked away in a vault for decades, sparked spirited bidding during the auction of Important Old Master Paintings and Sculpture that totalled \$61,599,250. "Everybody was interested in its history ... The fact is, **at the end of the day it was beautiful**. It shone through everything to be just a very potent, moving picture and the buyer had no interest in the speculation or in whom the artist was," George Wachter, Sotheby's co-chairman of the Old Master Painting Worldwide, said in an interview. **"He just loved the painting**. He thought it was a powerful, beautiful work of art," he added about **the private collector** who bought the portrait thought to be of **Lucrezia Crivelli, who was a mistress of Ludovico Sforza**, the Duke of Milan. Another version of the painting, which experts and scholars believe was done by Leonardo da Vinci, hangs in the Louvre in Paris. The painting was given to Harry Hahn, an American serviceman during World War One and his French bride as a wedding present. It was thought to have been done by Leonardo and authenticated by a French art expert. After he returned to the United States in 1920 and tried to sell the painting to the Kansas City Art Institute, a leading art dealer, Joseph Duveen, said it was a fake and the deal fell through. Hahn's wife sued Duveen for slander in a case that riveted the art world. The jury failed to reach a verdict and Duveen eventually settled out of court, paying \$60,000. Experts believe the portrait must date before 1750 because it contains lead-tin yellow, a color that was used in paintings up until the late 17th century. "It was about wanting the painting, not about speculation," said Wachter, adding he was pleased with the results of the overall sale. "I felt very pleased with the way the market responded to it. It was extremely successful," he said. Wachter described the art market as very potent and strong and with many new private collectors. "People are looking to buy good art. It is price sensitive. They know what they

want and they know at what price they want it," he explained. "It is a controlled, discriminating market."" (Daily News)

### **References**

- <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/05/museum-curators-and-art-forgers-are-two-of-a-kind-theyre-both-vain-and-self-deluded/>



Paul Ygartua, *copy of La Belle Ferronnière*, 2018

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), *La Belle Ferronnière*, 1490s, 63 x 45 cm, Louvre Museum

- To add yet another layer. This is a copy painted in two days by the artist Paul Ygartua. He does not usually copy other artists but painted it to make a point.
- The point is that a skilled artist can paint copies that are close to the original and if the materials used are sourced from antique sources and the pigments are those used at the time then it becomes very difficult to identify a copy. That is why provenance has become so important in today's market.



Antoni Pitxot (1934-2015) and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) in front of a work by Pitxot.

### The Artist's Pride

- Salvador Dalí and the other Dalí, **Antoni Pitxot** (written in Spanish as 'Pichot' and pronounced 'pee-cho'). A whole industry of fraudulent Dalí prints. He is the second after most forged artist after Picasso. **12,000 fake Dalí prints** were seized during one investigation. Pitxot was a friend of Dalí and an award-winning artist. It is thought **Pitxot took over from Dalí** as the latter's powers waned. Was this fraudulent? Haven't artists always used studios that often produced the majority or all the work.
- Dalí is the second most frequently forged artist (behind only Picasso) and is known to have signed blank canvases to be filled in later by other artists. He also authenticated forgeries in his style by other artists (it seems that he genuinely believed them to be his), and he may have sanctioned forgeries of his own work in exchange for a share in the profits.
- "The life of Antoni Pitxot (born 1934) is inseparable from that of his great friend Dalí. Both he and Dalí were born in Figueres in Catalonia, Pitxot a generation after Dalí, and both owned property in Cadaques. Their families were close friends and Dalí was the earliest supporter of the young Pitxot's work. Pitxot was an award-winning artist himself whose work often features surreal allegories of memory, as does Dalí's. Pitxot would go on to co-design the Dalí Museum, which was built in 1968, and became the museum's director after Dalí's death. Pitxot received the Gold Medal of Merit in Fine Arts from the King of Spain in

2004 for work produced under his own name. However, a conspiracy theory begins in **1966, when Pitxot moved in to Dalí's villa full-time**. Their close personal, artistic and geographical relationship led some individuals familiar with Dalí to believe that Pitxot began painting as Dalí around the same time, sanctioned by Dalí as his own artistic powers started to wane.

- There is a clear financial motivation for an artist to keep producing saleable work, especially someone like Dalí who was well-known to be **obsessed with money**. Fellow Surrealist André Breton jokingly noted that an anagram of Salvador Dalí is "Avida Dollars" ("crazy for dollars"), and Dalí developed carpal tunnel syndrome from signing his autograph so often, knowing that each autograph could be sold. But **Dalí was already wealthy**, with a steady income from prints of his work, so any decision to secretly allow a pupil to produce works in his name was surely as much about **pride—refusing to admit that he had lost his artistic mojo**—as it was about money. But this raises the question: if Pitxot was working on behalf of Dalí, making "Dalí" paintings, **are these paintings still forgeries? Or are they fakes, since Dalí may have signed the canvas**, thereby making authentic a painting by someone else? Certainly, the artist is not losing out, as in most forgery cases. But does this action become criminal when a collector or museum buys a painting under the belief that it is a Dalí original?
- In principle, such a piece has been offered under false pretences and its value is decreased. But **throughout the history of art most artists have kept—and continue to keep—studios**. The master artist would supervise all works produced by the studio but there have always been paintings made "by" an artist—produced from their design and in their studio—that the artist himself has never actually touched. This was not something that artists sought to hide or cover up. It was understood that the master artist would be actively involved in the actual painting only in proportion to what a commissioner was willing to pay. Isn't the situation with Dalí merely an extended example of the studio system at work? **Pitxot was simply acting as Dalí's assistant**, with Dalí's studio producing paintings that were labelled as "by Dalí," even though the actual amount of time he spent painting them may have been negligible.
- The main objection to such an interpretation is the **question of deceit**—which in itself may be a case of pride. Perhaps Dalí was reluctant to admit that he was painting less and assigning his projects to his assistant, preferring to maintain the illusion of continued prolificacy even as his skills deteriorated. But although these works may have a tint of disingenuity about them, it is difficult to claim that they are either fakes or forgeries." (*Art Space*, 6 Jan 2016)





### **Famous Forgers**

- I have been discussing the forger as a skilled artist who sets out to fool the buying public. There are other ways to create forgeries. There are also people who discover a piece and try to pass it off as something it is not either by directly lying or by subtle suggestion. There are also people who know a work is a fake but sell it as an original anyway. Some people use the word fake to mean a copy and the word forgery to mean to deliberately mislead to make money.
- I would now like to look at seven of the world's leading forgers.
  - William Sykes and Jan van Eyck
  - Jef van der Veken, restorer or forger?
  - Han van Meegeren
  - Eric Hebborn the most skilful of all forgers
  - Shaun Greenhalgh in a shed out back
  - Tom Keating
  - Provence: John Myatt and John Drewe



Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464),  
*Madonna with Child*, 1450s, oil on oak panel, 36 x  
 27 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts Tournai



Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464), *Madonna with Child*, 1450s, oil on oak panel, 36 x 27 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts Tournai, Belgium

- The first is Jef van der Veken who was a restorer but the question is, did he go even further and create complete works of art and present them as by famous artists?
- This painting is attributed to Rogier van der Weyden (or workshop), with extensive restoration and additions by Jef Van der Veken during the first part of the 20th century. This painting formed part of the Renders Collection which was sold to Nazi leader Hermann Göring during World War II. The painting is therefore often referred to as the "Renders Madonna".
- The painting was originally part of a diptych and the two halves were separated probably because the Madonna was so badly damaged but the other part was acceptable. Renders asked Jef van der Veken to restore the painting and he used his 'hyper-restoration' technique. Recent research show he scraped off the bottom part of the painting and repainted it. The restoration is so good the join cannot be detected even by a trained expert. He also repainted entire areas to unify the painting and he mimicked the cracking ('craquelure') using various techniques.

#### **Jef van der Veken**

- Jef van der Veken (1872-1964) Belgian art restorer, copyist and art forger.
- Before World War II restorers tended to paint with a free hand with the aim of returning a



damaged work back to as close to its original state as possible. Today conservators try to prevent deterioration and when damaged portions need to be filled it is done in such a way that the restoration work can be clearly seen. So early restorers became skilled in reproducing the work of the masters and some have been behind forgery schemes.

- The most famous is **Jozef (Jef) van der Veken** (1872-1964) a conservator at the Royal Fine Arts Museum of Belgium. He was born in Antwerp and became a restorer, copyist and art forger. He mastered the technique of reproducing the works of the **Early Netherlandish painters**. Early on he was an amateur Surrealist painter and one of the most highly respected conservators. He was trusted with restoring some of the greatest works of the Early Netherlandish School including this Rogier van der Weyden *Madonna and Child*. **In 1999 it was x-rayed** and subjected to infrared spectroscopy to identify the pigments used and it was **found to be primarily the work of Van der Veken** rather than Van der Weyden. The discovery prompted an exhibition in 2004 and 2005 called 'Fake or Not Fake' exploring the limits of what constitutes acceptable restoration.
- Van der Veken became a consultant to a wealthy Belgium banker Emile Renders and helped him **assemble a collection of Early Netherlandish** paintings. **The Nazi leader Hermann Göring bought the entire collection in 1931 for 300 kg of gold** (about £11 million at today's prices). The collection included many forgeries and heavily 'restored' works by Van der Veken including a Hans Memling painting that Göring loved so much that it was one of the few he took with him when he attempted to flee the Allies. Göring was captured and tried at Nuremburg and found guilty. He committed suicide by taking a cyanide pill the night before he was to be hanged.



Han van Meegeren (1889–1947), *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1937, 118 x 130.5 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Han van Meegeren, *Half Naked*, pastel, 47 x 62 cm

Han van Meegeren, *Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery*

- Han van Meegeren (Henricus Anthonius van Meegeren, 1899-1947) was a great Vermeer forger who set out to take revenge on the art world, but his work nearly took revenge on him.
- As a child he was enthusiastic about the paintings of the Dutch Golden Age and he set out to become an artist. Art critics found his work to be tired and derivative (**see pop-up**) and van Meegeren thought they had **destroyed his career**. He decided to prove his talent by forging paintings of some of the world's most famous artists, including Frans Hals, Pieter de Hooch and Johannes Vermeer. His **most successful forgery was *Supper at Emmaus***, created in 1937 while living in the south of France. This painting was hailed as a real Vermeer by famous art experts such as Abraham Bredius. Bredius acclaimed it as "the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft" and wrote of the "wonderful moment" of being "confronted with a hitherto unknown painting by a great master". The total his forgery made for him was equivalent to about **\$60 million** today.
- After World War II he was accused of high treason for selling a painting by Vermeer called ***Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery* to Hermann Göring**. Göring acquired thousands of masterpieces by theft or purchasing them at a steep discount from desperate individuals.

Göring favoured Teutonic artists such as Memling, Van Eyck and Vermeer. Meegeren's defence was that he was in fact a forger and had painted it himself. Art critics knew his own work and did not believe he could have produced a Vermeer of this quality.

- Of course, **the first thing that strikes anyone seeing a Meegeren Vermeer today is that it look nothing like a Vermeer.** They are clunky and of religious subjects and no current Vermeer's of religious subjects are known. Bedius and others were convinced that Vermeer had gone through an early phase when he painted religious subjects before van Meegeren painted one to apparently prove his theory correct.
- At the trial Bedius said that it was impossible for anyone to have painted the Vermeer. His reputation was a stake but on the other side Meegeren's life was also at stake. To make matters worse for himself Meegeren did not explain what he had done for a month. Then, realising his life was at stake he shouted **'Fools, you think I sold a priceless Vermeer to Göring, There was no Vermeer. I painted it myself.'**
- Meegeren explained that he only used the same pigments as Vermeer would have used and he had developed a special recipe for the oil paint that combined with a quick drying oven produced the same cracking seen on a painting hundreds of years old.
- **No one believed him** until one of the presiding officers suggested **he paint a copy of a Vermeer in the court room.** The haughty Meegeren replied **'To paint a copy is no proof of artistic talent. In all me career I have never painted a copy! But I shall paint you a new Vermeer. I shall paint you a masterpiece.'** And so he did proving himself a master forger and in the process **he went from a traitorous Nazi collaborator to a folk hero who had fooled the Germans.** He became known as 'the man who swindled Göring'. As an extra twist Göring was told the painting he so loved was a forgery just before he committed suicide.



Eric Hebborn, after van Dyck, a forged preparatory sketch for Van Dyck's *Crowning with Thorns*, c. 1950-70, ink on paper, 26 x 28.5 cm, British Museum



Anthony van Dyck, *Crowning with Thorns*, 1618-20, 225 x 197 cm, Prado

Anthony van Dyck, *Crowning with Thorns*, 1618-20, 225 x 197 cm, Prado

Eric Hebborn, after van Dyck, a forged preparatory sketch for Van Dyck's *Crowning with Thorns*, c. 1950-70, ink on paper, 26 x 28.5 cm, British Museum

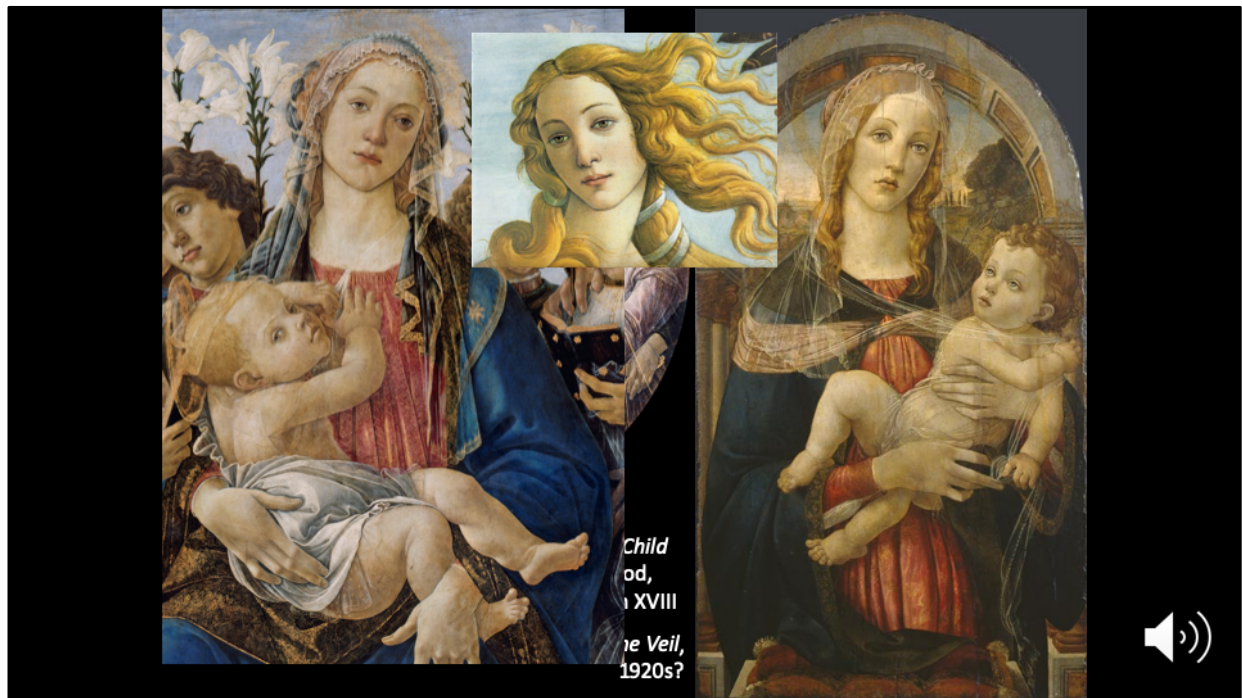
### Eric Hebborn (1934-1996)

- Hebborn has been described as **the most skilful of all forgers**. He was a **London painter** who **struggled to find a market for his own work** so he **turned to forgery in revenge against the art world**. He started with the London art gallery Colnaghi who he believed had cheated him by buying some drawings he had acquired at far below their market value.
- Hebborn thought the art world elitist and snobbish and lacked any sort of real expertise. He also won silent praise and made a lot of money as a bonus. From the late 1950s to his death in 1996 he **produced more than a thousand pictures** in a huge range of styles. Like most forgers he **rarely copied** a known work but produced work in the style of the Old Masters.
- He was also an expert at producing **fake provenance**, the touchstone used by experts to authentic a work. As many dealers are not experts in the work of the Old Masters they rely on provenance to convince them a work is genuine.
- He would visit major galleries such as the British Museum and the Uffizi and study the work of the Old Masters. He would then produce preparatory drawings for those works. As the **Old Masters did not keep their drawings** that are comparatively rare and **so there is little expertise of what they should look like**. So when he produced a preparatory drawing for Anthony van Dyck's *Crowning with Thorns* he could sketch a plausible preparatory study.

This was a **form of provenance trap**. By allowing the expert to make the connection between the drawing and the painting he created his own provenance. This formula brought him hundreds of successes including selling his 'Van Dyck' sketch to the British Museum.

- Hebborn wrote several books about his career including *The Art Forger's Handbook* a detailed description of his techniques and methods and the art forger's bible. **His attention to detail is remarkable**. He provides **lists of the pigments** used by famous artists. He explained how to make oil paints that are darkened as if by age, how to **reproduce the craquelure of age**. He understood that **oak gall ink** would **eat through paper** over hundreds of years and produce deep grooves and he would recommend using some **sulphuric acid** to speed up the process. He was also patient, he would **wait a year to allow his oils to dry naturally** before cooking them in an oven at 100-105° C for three hours. **No other forger was as careful, as scientific or as careful**. He studied the latest scientific techniques to understand how to fool them.
- Hebborn was charismatic and entertaining but he mixed with the dark side of the art world and in **1996 he was murdered in Rome**. The murder has never been solved.





Imitator of Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Veil*, 1920s?

Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), *Mary with the Child and Singing Angels*, c. 1477, oil on poplar wood, diameter: 135 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, room XVIII

Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), *Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-86, detail, 172.5 × 278.9 cm, Uffizi

### Icilio Federico Joni?

- I have been discussing the complexity of defining what we mean by a forgery in certain cases. However, there are many clear-cut cases of a forger copying the style of a famous artist for money.
- Tests of this painting revealed that the purportedly ancient **wormholes in the panel had been made with a drill** (they were straight, not crooked) and that the Virgin's robe was painted using **Prussian blue, a pigment not invented until the 18th century**. It is thought that this painting was created in the 1920s by an unknown Italian forger.
- It is interesting that the art historian **Kenneth Clark felt there was something wrong with the work in the early 1950s by eye alone**.
- It has been proposed that the picture is the **work of the Italian restorer and forger Icilio Federico Joni** (1866–1946). However, it bears little resemblance to his usual forgeries which were of 14th- and early 15th-century Sienese paintings. Recently it has been suggested that one of Joni's contemporaries, Umberto Giunti (1886–1970), might have painted the work.



The art critic **Waldemar Januszczak** discussed a faun in an exhibition that he believed was by **Paul Gauguin**  
See <https://youtu.be/g7jRiJxGwog>



- The art critic **Waldemar Januszczak** discussed a faun in an exhibition that he believed was by **Paul Gauguin**

### **Shaun Greenhalgh**

- We have just looked at a fake, but we do not know the artist who produced it. There are many well-known famous, or is it notorious, forgers.
- One I mentioned earlier is Shaun Greenhalgh who described how he got into the business, how he did it and how he was caught in his autobiography *A Forger's Tale*.





Shaun Greenhalgh painting in the style of L. S. Lowry, *Before the Kick-Off*.

- So we see how art critic **Waldemar Januszczak** was **fooled by the faun** by Shaun Greenhalgh (pronounced 'green-haltch'). To give Januszczak credit he admired the skill of Greenhalgh and two years after he got out of prison Januszczak persuaded him to make a copy of an Anglo-Saxon brooch for a TV documentary. The pair subsequently struck up an unlikely friendship. Other commissions soon followed, and as the shed where he produced his forgeries between 1978 and 2006 had been demolished by the police the BBC part-funded Greenhalgh's new workshop. In February he sold three paintings in the style of LS Lowry for £15,800 at auction.
- 'Between 1978 and 2006, this softly-spoken artist **created several hundred exquisite forgeries**. Some **sold to English royalty** (he claims a silver gilt Christ in the 12th-century English style is still part of the Royal Collection), others **to presidents** (a terracotta bust of Thomas Jefferson, owned by Bill Clinton) and **many more to museums**. Greenhalgh's talent was broad: one month he was an Egyptian granite carver, the next an impressionistic sculptor, the next an American watercolourist. Januszczak once described his trickster friend as a one-man Renaissance. But Greenhalgh shrugs off the compliment: "**I don't have delusions of grandeur.**" He says his versatility is a function of what he describes as **his low threshold for boredom**. Tonight he will do his night shift at a local bakery, one of the few places he has been able to find work, thanks to his criminal record. "**I view my life as a**

**failure. I went the wrong way. I could have done something useful. If I could have my time again, I'd like to be a teacher at an art college."** (*The Guardian*, 27 May 2017)



Tom Keating, in the style of Van Gogh, *Van Gogh Smoking a Pipe (in the manner of Van Gogh)*, date unknown, pastel on paper



Tom Keating, in the style of Rembrandt, *The Artist as Rembrandt with Titus (in the manner of Rembrandt)*, date unknown, oil on canvas



Tom Keating, in the style of Van Gogh, *Van Gogh Smoking a Pipe (in the manner of Van Gogh)*, date unknown, pastel on paper

Tom Keating, in the style of Rembrandt, *The Artist as Rembrandt with Titus (in the manner of Rembrandt)*, date unknown, oil on canvas

Two of the many works that Keating later sold under his own name

### Tom Keating (1917-1984)

- **Keating was a loveable British painter** who progressed from art restorer to art forger to TV personality. He grew up in a poor part of London and after World War II **would paint houses for a living while restoring old masters**. His dream was to make a living as an artist but **could not sell enough** for which he blamed the art establishment. He **turned to forgery** to subvert the art world that would not grant him or other young artists entry.
- When he produced a forgery **he would add what he called 'time bombs'** that would **prove a painting was a forgery** but which he was certain would be missed by so-called experts. For example, he would **write text in lead white so that it would show up if the painting was x-rayed** or he would insert a **twentieth century object** in a seventeenth century painting. Some forgers do this so they can claim it was not a forgery as it was obvious to anyone who looked that it was a fake. In Keating's case it was a deliberate trick to fool the experts.
- Keating would not cut corners and stayed **true to the techniques of the Old Master**. Once he boiled nuts for ten hours and filtered the resulting oil to make a binder for his oil pigments.

- One trick was to **search flea markets for old frames** that had an auction stamp on the back. He would buy the frame, look up the original painting it once held and paint a reproduction of the original. He was as successful in watercolour as in oils, which is rare and he would forge everyone from Modigliani to Gainsborough, from Titian to Rembrandt.
- **With his time bombs he knew he would eventually be caught.** In 1970 **13 watercolours allegedly by Samuel Palmer** came up at the same auction and it was reported in *The Times*. Keating confessed to **producing all thirteen** and went on to claim he had **forged at least 100 artists with more than 2,000 forgeries**. They were circulating the art world but none had been detected and the thirteen forged Palmers had not been sold so no crime had been detected. It was another seven years before he was arrested but the charges were dropped because of his ill health. The same year, 1977, he published his autobiography. By 1982 he had recovered enough to present a TV program on Channel 4 in which he taught viewers how to forge. By then collectors were actively seeking out Keating forgeries as they had become valuable in their own right. He died in 1984 and that year Christie's auctioned 204 of his works under his own name.



Alberto Giacometti, *Diego*, 1959

John Myatt, in the style of Giacometti, *Portrait of Samuel Beckett*, 1961

#### Provenance: John Myatt and John Drewe

- Finally I have selected an artist who was actively recruited.
- **John Drewe recruited the struggling artist John Myatt** as his forger in order to **use a new provenance trap** he had devised.
- John Myatt was a farmer's son who studied art and became expert at painting in the style of famous, mostly twentieth century, artists. His **career never took off and he became a teacher**. He separated from his wife in 1985 and stopped teaching to look after his young children. He wondered if he could earn money from his talent and **began to advertise 'Genuine fakes. Nineteenth and Twentieth Paintings from £150'**. He would paint any work requested and sign it with his own name. There was **nothing criminal** in this but he only sold a handful of works, **one to John Drewe**. One day Drewe contacted Myatt to say **Christie's had accepted one of his painting** as a genuine Cubist painting by Albert Gleizes and **sold it for £25,000**. Drewe suggested they work together and Myatt who had never considered crime succumbed to temptation.
- He painted in the style of Chagall, Giacometti, Matisse, Ben Nicholson, Jean Dubuffet and many others. Police estimate he painted over 200 forgeries and **earned about £275,000 as his cut** from Drewe. Myatt made **no attempt to emulate the artists materials, he would use emulsion paint instead of oils** so it was down to Drewe to produce a provenance so

apparently authentic that no one would question the obvious discrepancies.

**Drewe forged letters, receipts and inventory notices from galleries, museums and individuals** no longer in existence or alive. **He then inserted these into real archives.**

- When a work is submitted to an auction house it checks the catalogue raisonné and historical archives. The more background they can find the higher the price. This is because the more provenance there is the more likely the painting is authentic and also the provenance provides a story, a history of the painting that adds to its value. In this case the **catalogue raisonné would not have the work** and so the auction house would carry out further research and **find the documents that had been planted by Drewe**. This approach brought a double benefit, it would prove the provenance and **finding an undiscovered work can make a person's career**. Drewe **planted material in the V&A, Tate and ICA archives** and although they have searched the material he planted it is almost impossible to find. This version of the provenance trap is extremely destructive as it undermines the reliability of the very ground on which all scholarship begins.



- The future of detection – is it getting harder to forge or easier?
- **Detecting Forgeries**
- Science and Provenance
  - Van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*
- Authentication and Connoisseurship - Authentication Committees
  - The artist's legacy the Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988, aged 28, heroin overdose, 'baass-key-AH') door and Bruno B versus the Warhol Foundation. Famous artists are now authenticated by committee. In the case of Basquiat they declared a door he painted for his heroin dealer to be a forgery perhaps for moral reasons. Andy Warhol *Red Self-Portrait* was one of ten silk-screen prints used on the cover of his catalogue raisonné yet still the committee declared all ten were forgeries. Their reasons was that Warhol was not present when the silk-screens were printed but this reason would potentially invalidate many prints of the Old Masters such as Durer and Rembrandt.
- Digital technology: friend or foe?





Rogier van der Weyden, *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*, c.1435–40, oil and tempera on panel, MFA, Boston

**X-ray radiograph** of the Virgin's head from *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*. The halo effect around the head and smudging of the left side of the face indicate that changes were made during the painting

**IR reflectogram** of the Virgin's head from *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*, showing the underdrawing. The changes in position of the facial features indicate that the final position of the head varied from the original intended position.

### X-Ray Analysis

- As an example, The Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), **Boston**, has Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*. In galleries around the world there were **four paintings purporting to be the original composition**, painted around 1435–1440. There has been a long-running debate about which is the original and various techniques have been used to study the paintings. The combination of X-ray radiography with another non-destructive technique, infra-red reflectography (IRR), however, has shown the position of the head changed during the painting, the position of the Christ child, St. Luke's position and angel which was drawn but never painted. **None of the other versions of the painting show any design changes** leading to the wide acceptance that the MFA painting is the original. As Richard Newman of the MFA explains, "There were many design and colour changes made during the course of the painting, which you would only see in the original. He was

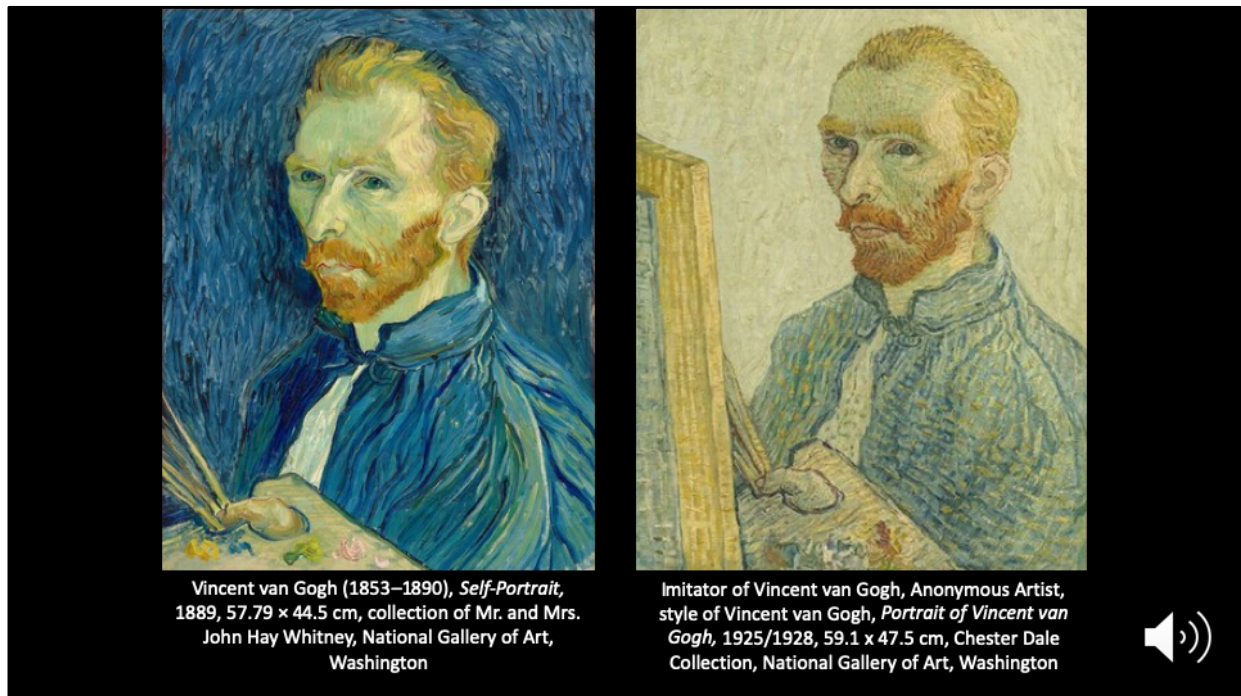
obviously changing things as he went along.”

### **Authentication**

- Connoisseurship. So a forger must paint in the style of the artist well enough to fool someone who has spent their life looking at works by that artist.
- Craquelure is a fine pattern of cracking of the surface materials. Craquelure of different periods and materials exhibit different patterns that can be identified and used to detect forgeries. Cheap tricks such as painting black lines will not fool an expert but there are advanced techniques for creating a cracked appearance..
- Dendrochronology to date wood from its rings. This means the forger must find a wooden panel from the exact period.
- Ultraviolet fluorescence and infrared analysis are used to detect repairs or earlier painting present on canvasses. A clever forger will make changes to the underdrawing and change the position of figures slightly.
- Conventional X-rays are used to examine the underdrawing or to detect an earlier painting. X-ray diffraction (the object bends X-rays) is used to analyse the components that make up the paint an artist used, and to detect changes ('pentimenti'). X-ray fluorescence (bathing the object with radiation causes it to emit X-rays) can reveal if the metals in a metal sculpture or if the composition of pigments is too pure, or newer than their supposed age. Or reveal the artist's (or forger's) fingerprints.
- Spectroscopy to determine the pigments used. The skilled forger will use the pigments of the period that the artist used.
- Carbon dating. The forger must use ancient materials of the period.
- Thermoluminescence (TL) is used to date pottery. TL is the light produced by heat, older pottery produces more TL when heated than a newer piece. This cannot be forged.

### **Future techniques**

- DNA signing. The artist sprays real or artificially created DNA over the surface and a future analysis will detect the exact sequence to authenticate the work. It is possible that in future DNA from the artist, such as skin cells or hair will be analysed to authenticate the work as genuine.
- Micro-carbon dating of the pigment. Radiocarbon dating used to require grams of material but it can now be done using micrograms. The test cannot be fooled and it can be used to date the canvas and the pigment (see **Uncovering modern paint forgeries by radiocarbon dating**
- Laura Hendriks, July 2019, <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/27/13210> ).



Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), *Self-Portrait*, 1889, 57.79 × 44.5 cm, collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Imitator of Vincent van Gogh, Anonymous Artist, style of Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Vincent van Gogh*, 1925/1928, 59.1 × 47.5 cm, Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington

- Authentication since the Twentieth Century: **Connoisseurship, Science and Provenance**
- Since the 1930 **connoisseurship has become increasingly less important** in determining the authenticity of a work although it is **still the starting point** and for many works the end point. Today, the first step is still the expert followed by research to **establish a sound history (provenance) for the work**. If there are any doubts and the work is off substantial value, then the next step is a thorough scientific analysis.
- The **turning point was the 1932 trial of Otto Wacker** (1898-1970) as it was the first trial involving art forgery to use scientific analysis.
- Wacker claimed to be art dealer representing a Russian family forced to sell their collection of some 30 works by Vincent van Gogh. He was brought to trial when a number of buyers found they had been sold forgeries. At the trial **two Van Gogh experts disagreed** about which works should be included in the catalogue raisonné, the definitive list of the works of an artist. As it turned out both were wrong.
- The experts were Jacob Baart de la Faille and H. P. Bremmer.
- The police discovered it was Wacker's brother who was the forger and unfinished 'Van

Goghs' were found in his studio. Later it was found Otto and his father were forgers of Old Masters. Otto was sentenced to a year in prison, he appealed and it was increased to a year and seven months.

- Martin de Wild (1899-1969), a **distinguished chemist was called in to test the oil paints** used in Wacker's Van Goghs. **He found resin and lead mixed with the paint to make it dry faster, chemicals that van Gogh never used.** The pigment analysis led to the dismissal of a very expensive 'Van Gogh' that had been acquired by Chester Dale. However, Dale stubbornly refused to accept his painting was a forgery. He said, **"I know of course that this is a controversial painting, but as long as I am alive, it will be genuine."** He allegedly **hid scientific evidence** and faked provenance **to convince the National Gallery of Art, Washington, to accept the painting.**
- The trial was a turning point as the experts disagreed and the **scientific evidence was regarded as an objective arbiter.**
- Scientific analysis is **expensive** and can be destructive and it is rarely definitive. **It can say a work was not produced but it cannot say an artwork was produced by a particular artist at a particular time.**
- Forgers are aware of the scientific methods and have sometimes laid **'forensic traps'**, the equivalent of 'provenance traps'. For example, a test can determine the age of the material such as an oak panel but **a forger can obtain an ancient panel.**



The so-called Crucifix Gallino displayed at the Bargello, Florence

- Despite all the scientific tests **optimistic attribution** continues particularly if a museum or a **nations history and honour is at stake**.
- The art world **now increasingly relies on provenance** with its associated dangers. It is estimated that **one-half to two-thirds of all pre-modern artworks that we know existed are now lost**. It is unlikely, though that a work that is not mentioned in contemporary documents could suddenly appear. Of Michelangelo's sculpture only a few works are now considered lost. However, optimism ensures that lost works still appear. **In 2008 the Italian state purchased a \$3.2 million carved wooden crucifix attributed to Michelangelo that few experts believe can be his work**. The **wood is of the correct date** and some experts claim that Christ bears a likeness to Christ in the Vatican's *Pieta* by Michelangelo. However, no works in wood by Michelangelo are mentioned in contemporary documents. Another wooden crucifix in the Santo Spirito in Florence may be by Michelangelo but this is unconfirmed. Both figures are naked which is unusual for the time but it is true to the Gospels. An **enquiry in 2009** opened to investigate whether the Italian state should have acquired the work and it **concluded it was probably by Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570)**.
- **Aristotle defined a great work of art as one that is good, beautiful and interesting**. Good in the sense of **demonstrating skill**, beautiful in being aesthetical pleasing or morally uplifting and interesting in terms of the thoughts and emotions evoked by the work. Forgers are



largely failed artists who are often highly skilled but are missing one component of greatness. They forge works to prove themselves, to belittle art experts and to make money.

- There is a Latin saying, *Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur*, which means **"The world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived."** The art market is enormous, it was valued at \$67 billion in 2018. The lives and reputation of many peoples can be made or broken through discovering a lost masterpiece or making a mistaken attribution. Many people benefit from discovering a new or a lost work so the pressure to authenticate a work of art is enormous.