

## THE GREATEST ART FORGERS

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Elmyr de Hory (Hungary, 1906-1976), *Odalisque*, 1974, oil on canvas, in the style of Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954), collection of Mark Forgy, photograph by Robert Fogt

- **Who are the greatest art forgers?** These days everyone is competing to be "the greatest art forger" as the title brings with it book deals and the ability to sell their own work for a high price. Who painted this? **Matisse or is it a forgery?** We find out later.
- I guess the greatest art forgers are **those we don't know about** whose work remains in galleries and private collections undetected. Therefore, the forgers I am going to talk about are those that were caught because they intended it or through some mistake.
- There are hundreds probably thousands or forgers back through history whose names are lost and so I will focus on those from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries **but I will begin with a brief summary of forgery through history...**

### NOTES

- Roman sculpture [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_sculpture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_sculpture)

- Michelangelo <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo>
  - Han van Meegeren (1889-1947)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han\\_van\\_Meegeren](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_van_Meegeren)
  - Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976)  
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  - Tom Keating (1917-1984)  
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  - Eric Hebborn (1934-1996)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric\\_Hebborn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Hebborn)
  - John Myatt (b. 1945) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Myatt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Myatt)
- 
- Max Brandrett (b. 1949)  
[https://en.everybodywiki.com/Maxamillian\\_Brandrett](https://en.everybodywiki.com/Maxamillian_Brandrett)
  - Ken Perenyi (b. 1949) <https://www.kenperenyiart.com/>
  - Anthony Tetro (b. 1950), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony\\_Tetro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Tetro)
  - Wolfgang Beltracchi (b. 1951)  
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  - Shaun Greenhalgh (b. 1961)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawn\\_Greenhalgh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawn_Greenhalgh)
  - Robert Driessen (b. 1962)  
<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/art-forger-robert-driessen-reveals-how-he-made-giacometti-fakes-a-893132.html>  
one of the wealthiest forgers in the world
  - <https://www.canvasgallery.com/blog/most-notorious-art-forges/> (Top Five)

- A non-fungible token is a non-interchangeable unit of data stored on a blockchain, a form of digital ledger, that can be sold and traded. Types of NFT data units may be associated with digital files such as photos, videos, and audio. Something is fungible if each one is practically identical, pound coins or fungible because we regard them as all the same. Fungible things are divisible- if I give you two 50p pieces it is the same as a £1 coin. Slight differences between fungible items do not matter. A unique serial number on a bank note does not change its value. A dirty note is worth the same as a mint note. Non-fungible items are unique, verifiable, scarce and indivisible. Imagine you lose a friend's dog and buy another one that looks the same - is that OK? Dogs are non-fungible. Non-fungible things have a unique identity that affects its identity and its value. Even the best forgeries have a value that is a fraction of the original because a famous creator adds a unique fascinating history, an aura. Non-fungible tokens bring real-world value into the digital space. NFTs have provable ownership (only you have the password) and you can sell it, transparency as all transactions are stored and visible so someone else knows you are the unique owner, interoperability, because tokens are now defined by a common standard so can be used by different organisations (while you remain the owner) (See [https://enjin.io/blog/nft-beginners-guide?utm\\_source=google\\_ads&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=UK\\_generic\\_nft&gclid=Cj0KCCQiA64GRBhCZARIsAHOLrI1xhKAdrGGnk-HV2a-Qz5B1-EoV2iYd5J1d1p1Qel73BjLT0i8tvaMaAlgnEALw\\_wcB](https://enjin.io/blog/nft-beginners-guide?utm_source=google_ads&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=UK_generic_nft&gclid=Cj0KCCQiA64GRBhCZARIsAHOLrI1xhKAdrGGnk-HV2a-Qz5B1-EoV2iYd5J1d1p1Qel73BjLT0i8tvaMaAlgnEALw_wcB) )
- Art works could be protected by including the artist's DNA, Do paintings already include the artist's DNA from skin cells?
- In 1996 the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Thomas Hoving stated that 40% of all art in museums is fake.

Camille Corot painted 3,000 paintings, 5,000 of which are in the United States. The Museum of Elne (Pyrénées-Orientales) indeed holds the rope, with 60%. As for the Mimara Museum in Zagreb, almost all of the 3,754 works are allegedly counterfeit.

<https://www.vwart.com/post/counterfeiters-art-or-scam-the-met-has-40-fakes-part1>

- <https://www.vwart.com/post/50-of-art-in-circulation-is-fake-2>
  - 50 % of art in circulation is fake <https://www.vwart.com/post/50-of-art-in-circulation-is-fake-3>
  - Bona fide copies made for personal use or by a museum.
  - 3D printed copies made in the future could be perfect?
  - Walter Benjamin, aura, copies so good the original no longer has value
  - Warhol silk-screen prints
  - Tate carpet artist, instruction from making copies
  - Dali approved copies/works
  - Recast Degas Little Dancer after his death.
  - Recent case in London art market, selling shares of a painting amounting to over 100%
- [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fraudster-inigo-philbrick-blames-drugged-up-london-art-scene-for-his-crimes-3kbrzgwkh?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Best%20of%20Times%206%20April%202022&utm\\_term=audience\\_BEST\\_OF\\_TIMES](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fraudster-inigo-philbrick-blames-drugged-up-london-art-scene-for-his-crimes-3kbrzgwkh?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Best%20of%20Times%206%20April%202022&utm_term=audience_BEST_OF_TIMES)

### **WELL-KNOWN FORGERS**

Britain's No. 1 Art Forger Max Brandrett: *The Life of a Cheeky Faker*, a new book on Amazon £10

1. John Myatt 200 forgeries Matisse Braque Picasso Giacometti  
Monet Renoir
2. Tom Keating

3. Han Van Meegeren - Vermeer \$60 million equivalent
  4. Elmyr de Hory 1,000 forged paintings Modigliani Degas Picasso Matisse
  5. Wolfgang Beltracchi
  6. Tony Tetro
  7. Greenhalgh family forged \$11 million worth over 17 years
  8. Walter Keane took credit for his wife's work
  9. Michelangelo
  10. Reinhold Vasters
  11. Robert Driessen
  12. Yves Chaudron
  13. Ely Sakhai
  14. Guy Ribes
  15. Fernand Legros
  16. David Stein
  17. Mark Landis (did not commit a crime)
  18. David Bowie invented Nat Tate as a famous artist
  19. \$5 million worth sold on eBay by two Americans, a Spaniard and an Italian 2008
  20. German forgery ring conned Steve Martin out of \$49 million for a fake Campendock
  21. Salvador Dalí, who signed at the end of his life a large number of blank sheets is likely to make fun of the market for art.
- This is what Guy Ribes, a talented and prolific art forger, said about his working method: "I put myself in the artist's shoes. When I painted a Picasso, I was Picasso. When I painted a Chagall, I thought like Chagall. To make the illusion perfect, Guy Ribes never copied anything: he created paintings that did not

exist. "Many artists work in series. They produce 20, 30, or 50 almost identical designs. I slipped one in the middle. Obviously, this requires a perfect knowledge of the painter and his technique. I had to determine the year, the month, and even the day of manufacture of the painting I was inventing, locate the place where it was supposed to have been made, know what state of mind the artist was in, what materials, and pigments he was using. The research sometimes took me several months.

<https://www.vwart.com/post/counterfeiters-art-or-scam-the-met-has-40-fakes-part1>

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art\\_forgery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_forgery) mentions
  - Ken Perenyi
  - John Myatt

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- The notes are based on information found on public websites including Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If a talk uses information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced either at the beginning of each talk or in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are based on an exhibition use the booklets and book associated with the exhibition.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License.
- If I have forgotten to reference any work then please let me know

and I will add a reference or delete the information.

Unknown artist, so-called "Lely's Venus":  
Aphrodite surprised as she bathes.  
**Roman copy** of the Imperial era after an  
Hellenistic original, 2nd century AD  
(copy), marble, height 112 cm, British  
Museum



Unknown artist, so-called "Lely's Venus": Aphrodite surprised as she bathes. **Roman copy** of the Imperial era after an Hellenistic original, 2nd century AD (copy), marble, height 112 cm, British Museum, Room 23

- Copying famous artists has always taken place and goes back to the earliest works we have some information about. This is a later **Roman copy of a Greek original of Aphrodite**. To judge by the **number of copies** that have been found this Crouching Venus was very popular.
- So why did the Romans copy the Greeks. It is because they considered the Greeks better artists. Which raises the question, "didn't that bother them?". The answer is 'no' because the Romans valued manly qualities, bravery, valour, toughness and so on but not artistic ability. They liked statues but had no problem in copying Greek originals.
- All the ancient statues you see are misleading including the famous Parthenon frieze as we now **believe all ancient sculptures, Greek and Roman were brightly coloured with lifelike details such as eyelashes added**. The desire to create lifelike statues is understandable. Less easy to understand is **why we like plain, white marble**. It goes back to the Renaissance and their discovering of Roman statues that had become

white as the pigment had faded over time.

- We know the Romans valued certain Greek sculptors, Phidias was regarded as one of the greatest sculptors of all time and often imitated his style in their own art.
- So it is inevitable that Greek sculptures imported to Rome were claimed to be by some famous Greek sculptor—Polykleitos, Phidias, Praxiteles, Myron and so on—in other words, forgeries.

### NOTES

- Some of the most famous Greek sculptors were:
  - Polykleitos 480-420BC set the standard for Greek sculpture but only Roman copies remain
  - Phidias 430BC, credited with the statue of **Zeus** at Olympia one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
  - Praxiteles 395-330BC, the first to sculpt the female nude, **Aphrodite of Cnidus**.
  - Myron 450BC, best known for his bronze statues, his most popular work was **Discobolus**.

### REFERENCES

Roman sculpture [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_sculpture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_sculpture)  
<https://www.rct.uk/collection/69746/aphrodite-or-crouching-venus>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lely\\_Venus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lely_Venus)



Marcantonio Raimondi (1470/1482–1527/1534), after Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Christ Among the Doctors*, 1514, engraving on paper, image 28.6 × 20.2 cm, The Clark Museum, Massachusetts

Marcantonio Raimondi (1470/1482–1527/1534), after Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Christ Among the Doctors*, 1514, engraving on paper, image 28.6 × 20.2 cm, The Clark Museum, Massachusetts

- Forgery has always been with us. **Dürer's work was frequently forged** and he brought the **first art-specific lawsuit in Venice** against the well-known artist **Marcantonio Raimondi** (pronounced 'mark-antonio ray-mondy'). Dürer won the case but Raimondi was allowed to continue copying Dürer's work as long as he did not use his monogram (CLICK) here, as this was thought to be passing off his work as that of Dürer.
- Let us look at a very well-known Renaissance sculptor who engaged in forgery of a different type, not an individual artist but a rare type of art...

### NOTES

- Marcantonio Raimondi was trained by Raphael (1483-1520) and continued reproducing his work after his early death aged 37. Raimondi is well known for being briefly imprisoned for producing a set of erotic drawings in 1524. During the Sack of Rome in 1527 he was forced to pay a heavy ransom and fled in poverty.

## **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrecht\\_Dürer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrecht_Dürer)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcantonio\\_Raimondi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcantonio_Raimondi)



Sculptor unknown, *Statue of Eros Sleeping*, possibly Hellenistic (c. 3rd Century BC – early 1st Century AD) or a first class Roman copy, bronze, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Sculptor unknown, *Statue of Eros Sleeping*, possibly Hellenistic (c. 3rd Century BC – early 1st Century AD) or a first class Roman copy, bronze, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- In Renaissance Italy classical sculpture was a rare and highly valued form of art.
- During the Renaissance artists **learnt their craft in large workshops by copying the works of their master**. In other words copying a great artist well was seen as a **sign of artistic ability not as fakery**. However, as today, there is a difference between honest and open copying and selling a work and claiming it by an artist other than the one that produced it
- **When he was 21 in 1496 Michelangelo carved a marble statue of Sleeping Eros**. Unfortunately it is now lost but this is the type of statue he would have copied. Like a good forger he then **aged the marble** to make it look ancient and **sold it to Cardinal Raffaele Riario** (pronounced 're-ARE-re-oh'), grandnephew of Pope Sixtus IX, and a well-known collector.
- Before the ruse was discovered Michelangelo **carved his famous Pietà**

(1498-99) and went from being unknown to **being famous across Rome**. So, when the **statue was discovered to be a fake** the Cardinal returned it to the dealer who **had no trouble returning the money and selling it as the work of the now famous Michelangelo**. Luckily for Michelangelo the **Cardinal was not angry** about being deceived and he became Michelangelo's first patron in Rome.

- We do not know **why Michelangelo did it** but the motivation could have been similar to that of many artists today. **Annoyed at being unrecognised, aware of their skill and disdainful of the competence of dealers and buyers** they create works to demonstrate their ability and show how incompetent the so-called experts are at judging art. A motivation we will come across again and again.

## **NOTES**

- When originally made the Pietà was not in its current location but in a chapel in St Peter's that has since been demolished. According to Giorgio Vasari, shortly after its installation, Michelangelo overheard someone say or ask if it was the work of another sculptor, Cristoforo Solari (c. 1460-1527). Michelangelo came that night and carved his name on the sash running across Mary's chest, the only piece that he ever signed.

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<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-michelangelo-got-his-start-by-forging-antiquities>

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/michelangelo-art-forgery-742172>

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/how-a-forged-sculpture-boosted-michelangelos-early-career>



William Hogarth (1697-1764), *The Harlot's Progress Plate 1*, 1732, 31.8 x 38.9 cm, etching and engraving, British Museum



Counterfeit of the first plate of William Hogarth. *The Harlot's Progress*, printed by John Bowles, engraving, 1732

Counterfeit of the first plate of William Hogarth (1697-1764). *The Harlot's Progress*, printed by John Bowles, engraving, 1732

William Hogarth (1697-1764), *The Harlot's Progress Plate 1*, 1732, 31.8 x 38.9 cm, etching and engraving, British Museum

- We have moved on over two hundred years. You will recognise this is as the first plate of **William Hogarth** (1697-1764), ***The Harlot's Progress*** and you might also notice it is **reversed**. It is a forgery and this is the original (CLICK).
- Hogarth was so angry about the large number of forgeries of his work that he appealed to Members of Parliament who passed the **Engravers' Act of 1735**. This was the first law to specifically protect artworks. As a result of Hogarth's efforts it is known as the **Hogarth Act**.

### NOTES

- America passed its first copyright law in 1790 but it was only for map, chart, book or books and the protection only lasted for fourteen years.

### REFERENCES

<https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item:2605218/view>

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- John Myatt (b. 1945)
- Max Brandrett (b. 1949)

- So, forgery has been **rife down the centuries** but I wanted to look at the work of **well-known forgers of the last hundred years** and ask who is the greatest art forger?
- (CLICK) I have selected twelve, six in this talk and six in Part 2 and I deal with them in **order of their birth date**.

## NOTES

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Van Meegeren (1889-1947) at work on *Young Christ in the Temple*, source: WikiCommons

Van Meegeren (1889-1947) at work on *Young Christ in the Temple*, source: WikiCommons

- Henricus Antonius, known as 'Han' van Meegeren (10 October 1889 – 30 December 1947). He was a Dutch painter and portraitist and his story is one of the most exciting. He came close to being sentenced to life imprisonment or possibly even the death sentence as a traitor to, instead, achieving worldwide acclaim and fame.
- This is a photograph of him in his studio in 1945 and behind him is *Young Christ in the Temple*, a very significant work for him as we shall see.
- In his youth he developed a love for Dutch Golden Age painting and took up painting but **critics found his work derivative and tired**. This created extreme resentment and like many other forgers he set out **not solely to make money** but to **show the world his skill** and to **prove the lack of expertise in the art market**. To do this he decided to create **new works in the style of the Dutch masters** and his forgeries were accepted as the **real thing and highly praised**.

## **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han\\_van\\_Meegeren](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_van_Meegeren)



Caravaggio (1571–1610), *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1601, 141 × 196.2 cm, National Gallery

*The Supper at Emmaus* forged by Han van Meegeren, 1937

*The Supper at Emmaus*, forged by Han van Meegeren, 1937  
 Caravaggio (1571–1610), *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1601, 141 × 196.2 cm, National Gallery

- In 1937 he created perhaps his most successful forgery *Supper at Emmaus* in the style of Vermeer.
- He painted it when he was living in the south of France and it was **accepted as a real Vermeer by the experts**. In fact, **Abraham Bredius** (1855-1946) pronounced 'braid-ee-ous'), one of the most important Dutch art scholars at the time was asked to look at *The Supper at Emmaus* and he wrote that it was "**the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft . . . quite different from all his other paintings and yet every inch a Vermeer.**"
- This must have pleased van Meegeren enormously as it proved how skilful he was and how ignorant the so-called experts were.
- Today, no one can understand why it was accepted as a Vermeer as it **doesn't look like a Vermeer**. However, he presented the works as an early undiscovered Vermeer painted during his religious phase. In my talk on Vermeer I show his early work including *Christ in the House of*

*Martha and Mary* which he painted when he was 22 (c. 1654-56) and the resemblance is closer than it is to later Vermeers.

- At the time he painted it some experts believed Vermeer had traveled to Italy so van Meegeren **based the design on a painting of the same subject by Caravaggio**. (CLICK) This painting. In fact, as van Meegeren knew, this was an idea strongly argued by **Bredius so the scholarly link to Italy caught him hook, line and sinker**.
- Before starting **van Meegeren took enormous trouble, he spent six years learning how to create a work that passed all or nearly all the tests of a 17th century painting**. He **bought 17th century canvases** and cleaned them of all paint. He bought **raw materials and ground and mixed his pigments** exactly as they had done in the 17th century. He bought **badger hair brushes** that we know Vermeer used. But he used **Bakelite** (phenol formaldehyde) as it was the only way he could find to harden the paints to make them look as if they were 300 years old. He mixed the pigments with lilac oil to prevent them fading when he **baked the canvas at 100-120°C to further harden the paint and he then rolled the canvas over a cylinder to crack it and he filled the cracks with India ink to look like 300 years of embedded dirt**. The **Bakelite** was one of the things that gave him away and possibly saved his life.



*Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery*  
Han van Meegeren, after Vermeer  
1942

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



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

- During the war he sold another Vermeer forgery (CLICK) *Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery* to a **Nazi art dealer who sold it to Hermann Göring**. Towards the end of the war **Göring hid over 6,000 looted artworks in a salt mine** and **after the war the Allies discovered what they thought was a Vermeer, this one, and van Meegeren was charged with aiding and abetting the enemy**.
- **Threatened with the death penalty** he decided to confess and told them he had painted it but then **no one believed him**. So with the court's agreement he **painted another picture in the style of Vermeer in front of witnesses**. Between July and about November/December 1945, and in the presence of reporters and court-appointed witnesses, he painted his last forgery, of *Jesus among the Doctors*, also called *Young Christ in the Temple* which we saw earlier in the photograph. He was found guilty of forgery and was transferred to prison but when the facts came out he became a national and then an international hero for fooling the Nazis.

- He appealed his sentence and was allowed home but **died before he could be sent to hospital.**
- There is a final twist. He filed for bankruptcy and even though he had bought many properties his estate amounted to the equivalent of only \$60,000. The properties and the bulk of the illegal proceeds he had transferred to his wife and they had then divorced although they continued to live together. Throughout the trial he maintained she had no knowledge of his forgery and many believed him. Her involvement was never proven and she kept the proceeds and lived to the age of 91.
- Many consider Van Meegeren the greatest forger because of the fame he achieved worldwide for **fooling the Nazis.**



Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976)

- **My second candidate** for the greatest forger is **Elmyr de Hory** (1906-1976, pronounced 'ell-meer duh hoary') a Hungarian forger who **sold thousands of forgeries to art galleries around the world**. He claimed to be an aristocrat but later researcher found that was a lie and his parents were middle-class and he was born Elemér Hoffmann.
- He was born in Munich to a Jewish family and **trained as an artist** but he found it **difficult to sell his work** during the Great Depression of the 1930s and was arrested for various minor crimes.
- During the war he was arrested as he was Jewish and a homosexual and was severely beaten in prison but managed to escape from hospital and return to Hungary. I should say at this point that this is his version and historians have not been able to verify it from historic records and so it may be invented or elaborated.

### **BIO:HORY**

- Elmyr de Hory (April 14, 1906 – December 11, 1976) was a Hungarian-born painter and art forger, who is said to have sold over a thousand art forgeries to reputable art galleries all over the world.
- He was born in Munich to a middle-class Jewish family although he

claimed he was an aristocrat. His parents did not divorce as he later claimed.

- He began his **art training in an artists' colony in Romania and then an art school in Munich. In 1926 he moved to Paris and studied under Fernand Léger.**
- Having trained in classical painting the avant garde art movements made his work look out of date and the Great Depression made earning a living difficult for many artists. During the 1920s and 30s he was arrested for various minor crimes.
- He returned to Hungary at the start of the Second World War and he claims he was **imprisoned for befriending a British journalist and spy.** He was released but then imprisoned by the Nazis for being both Jewish and a homosexual. He was severely beaten and sent to hospital but he escaped and managed to return to Hungary. He claimed that both his parents had been killed and their estate confiscated but records show his mother and brother survived. There is no official record of any of these events.
- After the war he returned to Paris and tried to make a living as an artist but discovered he had an ability to copy other artists. He sold a pen-and-ink drawing to a British woman who thought it was a Picasso and for the next twenty years his financial problems were solved. He justified his crime by arguing his buyers were getting a beautiful picture at a knock down price and they thought they were getting a bargain.
- He started selling to art galleries across Europe arguing that the works were part of his families former estate or that he had acquired them from the artist when he was in Paris in the 20s and 30s.
- In 1947 he travelled to Rio de Janeiro still selling fakes but also

painting his own work although it did not bring in nearly as much money. He moved to America where he spent the next twelve years travelling from city to city. He expanded his forgeries to include Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani and Auguste Renoir. Galleries were starting to become suspicious so he started to sell by mail order.

- In the mid-1950s an astute curator noticed the Matisse, Modigliani and Renoir he offered her looked very similar in style and she alerted other museums and galleries.
- In 1955 an art dealer in Chicago discovered he had been sold a fake and pressed charges. He fled to Mexico City where he was arrested for being involved in the murder of a British man. The police and then the lawyer he hired tried to extort money from him so he 'paid' the lawyer using one of his forgeries and fled to America. He discovered galleries were selling his forgeries for far more than they had paid him. In total it is estimated then \$50 million worth of de Hory forgeries changed hands.
- He was now wanted by the FBI so he switched to painting his own work but it brought in little money. He got fed up with the low income lifestyle and went to Washington D.C. to try his luck one more time. A disastrous relationship with a picture dealer led to him attempting suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. He was found and his stomach pumped in hospital and on his release he fell in with a young man called Fernand Legros. De Hory and Legros's accounts of what happened next differ substantially. By this time de Hory was using many pseudonyms and was a wanted man for many crimes in many countries across Europe and the Americas. Legros claims he was misled into believing De Hory was an impoverished aristocrat while De Hory claims Legros travelled around selling his forgeries and taking half or more of the proceeds. Legros met someone who became his lover and De Hory returned to Europe.

- In Paris he met Legros and his lover and they agreed to pay de Hory a flat monthly fee of \$400 in exchange for all his forgeries and this enabled de Hory to live comfortably in Ibiza.
- De Hory claimed that he never signed any of his forgeries with the name of the artist he was imitating, an important point as it is not a crime to copy an artist. It is possible Legros added the signatures after collecting them from de Hory.
- In 1964 de Hory, now 68, tired of forgery and his work suffered so many galleries began to notice the fakes and alerted Interpol. Legros sent de Hory to Australia for a year to keep him out of the way. In the US a Texan oil magnate who had bought 56 forged paintings was so furious he demanded someone be arrested and Legros and his lover were arrested in Ibiza living in de Hory's house.
- De Hory escaped but tired of a life on the run and returned to Ibiza where he was arrested and charged not with forgery but homosexuality for which he received two months in prison. The police could not prove he had ever actually painted a forgery on Spanish soil.
- By this time de Hory was an international celebrity and Clifford Irving, wrote his biography *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*. De Hory appeared in several television interviews and was featured with Irving in the Orson Welles documentary *F for Fake* (1973). In the documentary Welles presents the art world as full of trickery and duplicity and presents de Hory as just another aspect of the art business. In the rebellious 1960s de Hory had become an anti-establishment folk hero.
- In the 1970s he again tried to make a living selling his own work and he did gain some official recognition but his fame never translated into sales. The French authorities wanted to extradite

him and when. De Hory heard they had been granted permission he took an overdose and died in the arms of his then lover, Mark Forgy on the way to hospital. Forgy's biography *The Forger's Apprentice: Life with the World's Most Notorious Artist* (2013) may well be the most accurate account of his life.

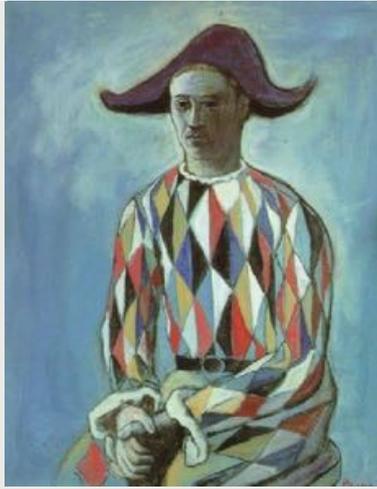
- After his death a market developed for fake "Elmyrs" which flooded the market.

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Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Harlequin*, 1969



Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Hommage à Modigliani*

Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Harlequin*, 1969

Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Hommage à Modigliani*

- After the war he **went to Paris to earn a living as an artist** and it was there that he found he could copy the styles of famous painters. In 1946 he sold a pen-and-ink drawing to a **British woman who thought it was a Picasso** and as he was in **dire straights financially** he went along with the misunderstanding. He began to sell other 'Picasso' works around Paris claiming he was a displaced Hungarian aristocrat selling his **family's art collection** or that he had acquired them from the artist when he was in Paris in the 20s and 30s. So, for the next twenty years his financial problems were solved. He **justified his crime** by arguing his buyers were getting a **beautiful picture at a knock down price** and they thought they were getting a bargain.
- In 1947, **he travelled to Rio de Janeiro** still selling fakes but also painting his own work although it did not bring in nearly as much money.

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Elmyr de Hory with one of his Matisse-style drawings in 1969



Elmyr de Hory's *Odalisque* in the style of Henri Matisse, 1974

Elmyr de Hory with one of his Matisse-style drawings in 1969

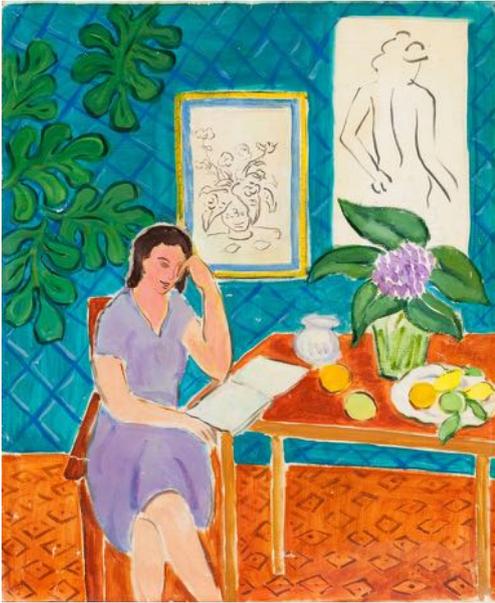
Elmyr de Hory's *Odalisque* in the style of Henri Matisse, 1974

- **He then moved to America where he spent the next twelve years travelling from city to city.** He expanded his forgeries to include **Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani and Auguste Renoir.**
- An **art dealer in Chicago** discovered he had been sold a fake and pressed charges and the FBI started to investigate.
- **He fled to Mexico City** where he was arrested for being involved in the murder of a British man. The police and then the lawyer he hired tried to **extort money from him so he 'paid' the lawyer using one of his forgeries and fled back to America.** He discovered galleries were selling his forgeries for far more than they had paid him. In total it is estimated then **\$50 million worth of de Hory forgeries changed hands.**
- It is said he could turn out a **passable Matisse in about an hour** and it is Matisse forgeries that he is most associated with although, as we have seen, he forged many other artists.

- When galleries became suspicious he **started to sell by mail order using a long-list of pseudonyms.**

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Elmyr de Hory, *Woman at a Table*, in the style of Henri Matisse, c. 1975



Henri Matisse, *La Liseuse Distracte (The Inattentive Reader)*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 73 × 92.4 cm. Tate

Elmyr de Hory, *Woman at a Table*, in the style of Henri Matisse, c. 1975

Henri Matisse, *La Liseuse Distracte (The Inattentive Reader)*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 73 × 92.4 cm. Tate, London

- His manner of painting was becoming recognisable and **the FBI were searching for him**. He went to the East Coast where he formed an association with an art dealer that ended in disaster. He suffered from depression and overdosed on sleeping pills but was rushed to hospital and his life was saved. By this stage he was **wanted in France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Mexico, the United States and Canada** for a wide range of crimes ranging from theft, embezzlement and forgery.
- In 1964, aged 58 he began to tire of fleeing round the world and his painting began to suffer to the extent that many experts began to recognise his forgeries and alerted Interpol. He **fled to Australia** for a year. In 1968 tired of a life in exile he **returned to his house in Ibiza** and was arrested and found **guilty of homosexuality** and spent two months in prison. He was **never charged with forgery** in Spain as they could not prove he ever created a forgery in that country.

- **By then he was famous** and he told his story to the journalist and **novelist Clifford Irving**, who wrote the biography *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*. He appeared in several television interviews and was featured with Irving in the Orson Welles documentary *F for Fake* (1973).
- In 1976 he realised he could not escape the law any longer. A friend told him France, which then had no extradition treaty with Spain, had a long last obtained permission to **extradite him** and he took an **overdose of sleeping pills** and this time **he died on the way to hospital**.
- He never made much money selling **his own work** in his lifetime but after his death a market developed for fake "Elmyrs". The head curator of the "Fake?" Exhibition at the British Museum made a significant comment, "**It is the misfortune of fakes that they are almost always defined by what they are not, instead of being valued for what they are.**" [1]
- He could claim to be the world's greatest forger because of the volume his work, the range of countries he operated in and his sheer chutzpah (pronounced 'houts-pah') or audacity.

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**Tom Keating** (1917-1984) with a model, unknown photographer, 1960s, resin print, 124 mm x 165 mm, National Portrait Gallery

Tom Keating (1917-1984) with a model, unknown photographer, 1960s, resin print, 124 mm x 165 mm, National Portrait Gallery

- My next candidate is the British artist Tom Keating who came from a poor family and started out as a **house painter like his father**. After the Second World War he went to art college and **became an art restorer**. He tried to sell his own work but was unsuccessful and had to work as a house painter to make money. He then met **an art restorer called Fred Roberts who was less ethical than other restorers**. When Keating **criticised the British artist Frank Moss Bennett (1874-1952) Roberts challenged him to paint something better**. Keating produced a painting in the style of Bennett and was so pleased with the result that he signed it with his own name but unknown to him Roberts changed it to Bennett's signature and sold it.
- When Keating found out he said nothing and continued painting copies of other artists. He started teaching an art class and **met 16 year-old Jane Kelly when he was 46**. They became lovers and she began to help him sell the forgeries.

## BIO:KEATING

- Thomas Patrick Keating (1917-1984) was an English art restorer and forger who claimed to have faked over 2,000 paintings by over 100 artists.
- He was born into a poor family in Lewisham, south London, and his father earned very little as a house painter.
- Keating started work when he was young in a number of jobs before joining the family business as a house painter before enlisting as a stoker in World War II. After the war he went to Goldsmiths College, University of London. He dropped out after two years as although his technique was praised he was not regarded as original enough.
- He worked through college as a part-time art restorer and from what he learnt on the job he began to restore paintings for a living while continuing to paint houses. He tried, unsuccessfully to sell his own work and then to prove to himself he was as good as his heroes he started to paint in the style of Samuel Palmer.
- **Keating met an art restorer called Fred Roberts who was less ethical than other restorers.** When Keating criticised a painting by the British artist Frank Moss Bennett (1874-1952) Roberts challenged him to do better. Keating painting a number of copies and then painted a new painting in the style of Bennett and signed it with his own name. Unknown to Keating Roberts changed it to Bennett's signature and sold it to a West End gallery although when Keating found out he said nothing.
- In 1963 he opened a school to teach teenagers painting. At one of his classes the 46 year-old Keating met the 16 year-old Jane Kelly and they became lovers and business partners. He painted nearly twenty fake Samuel Palmers which Jane Kelly took to specialist galleries for auction and in 1962 he forged a Edgar Degas self-portrait. Four year later they moved to Cornwall

where they started an art restoration business.

- Keating considered himself a socialist using forgery to disrupt what he believed was a corrupt art business of critics and dealers lining their own pockets at the expense of naive collectors and impoverished artists. He added what he called 'time bombs' to his work, bold statements under the paint in lead white which would jump out if any X-ray was taken. He also added anachronisms and used modern pigments deliberately. Modern copyists use similar methods to avoid accusations of forgery. He also added a layer of glycerin under the paint so that when it was eventually cleaned it would dissolve and the paint layer would disintegrate.
- As well as Samuel Palmer he painted in the style of François Boucher, Edgar Degas, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Thomas Gainsborough, Amedeo Modigliani, Rembrandt, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Kees van Dongen and many others.
- In 1970 an auctioneer noticed he was selling thirteen Samuel Palmers depicting the same theme. Geraldine Norman of *The Times* got involved and had them tested scientifically and published an article declaring them to be fake. She discovered they had been painted by Keating and visited him at home where he talked about his work as a restorer and ranted about the corruption in the art market. She wrote another article about Keating alleging forgery and he said, "I do not deny these allegations. In fact, I openly confess to having done them". Keating was not resentful of her exposing him as he felt she was respectful of him as an artist. He estimated there were over 2,000 of his forgeries in circulation but refused to list them as he wanted to undermine the market.
- He and Kelly were arrested and tried and argued in court he was innocent because he never intended to defraud. He was badly injured in a motorcycle accident then contracted bronchitis

exacerbated by a heart condition and doctors believed he would die and so charges were dropped. Kelly pleaded guilty and was sent to prison and shortly after his health improved and he was asked to appear on a television show explaining how to paint like an old master.

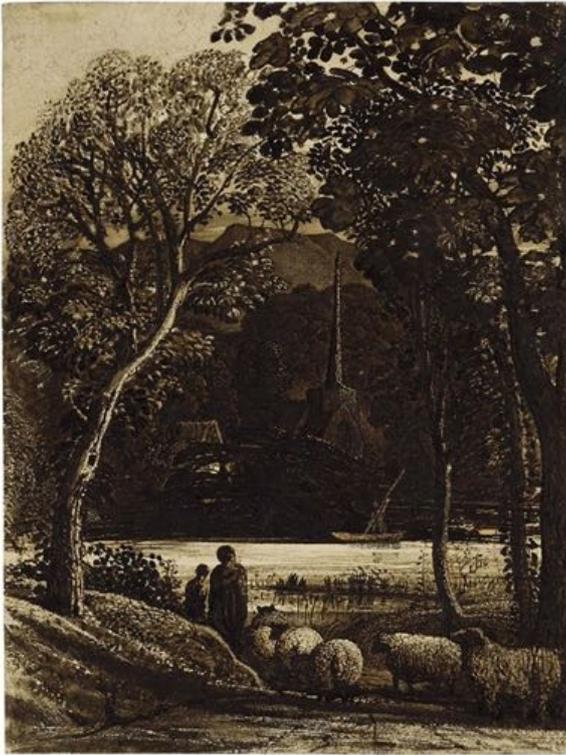
- He published his biography and the public warmed to him as a lovable old rogue. Years of breathing in the chemicals used in art restoration led to lung problems which eventually killed him in 1984, aged 66.
- In his lifetime many art collectors, such as the ex-heavyweight boxer Henry Cooper collected Keating's work under his own name and after his death his work became increasingly valuable and collectable. Today his work sells for tens of thousands of pounds and a market has developed in fake Keatings.

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Tom Keating (1918-1984), 'Sepham Barn - 1831' after Samuel Palmer, pen and ink, watercolour, gouache and gum arabic, 26 cm x 33 cm. Photo: Bonhams

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *A Church With A Boat And Sheep*, c. 1821, 18.5 x 13.5 cm, sold for \$2m (£1.4m) at Sotheby's New York in 2018 to a private buyer

Tom Keating (1917-1984), 'Sepham Barn - 1831' after Samuel Palmer, pen and ink, watercolour, gouache and gum arabic, 26 cm x 33 cm. Photo: Bonhams  
Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *A Church With A Boat And Sheep*, c. 1821, 18.5 x 13.5 cm, sold for \$2m (£1.4m) at Sotheby's New York in 2018 to a private buyer

- The artist he loved and specialised in was Samuel Palmer seen on the left and on the right is a watercolour in the style of Palmer.
- Keating considered himself a **socialist using forgery to disrupt what he believed was a corrupt art business of critics and dealers lining their own pockets at the expense of naive collectors and impoverished artists.**
- He added what he called '**time bombs**' to his work, bold statements under the **paint in lead white** which would jump out at you if an X-ray was taken. He also added anachronisms and used modern pigments deliberately. Modern copyists use similar methods to **avoid accusations of forgery**. He also sometimes added **a layer of glycerin** under the paint so that when it was eventually cleaned it would dissolve and the

paint layer would disintegrate.

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Tom Keating, fake Samuel Palmer



Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *The Lonely Tower*, before 1881, watercolor, gouache, and gum arabic on board, The Huntington Library

Tom Keating, fake Samuel Palmer

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *The Lonely Tower*, before 1881, watercolor, gouache, and gum arabic on board, The Huntington Library

- Art dealers in London's Old Bond Street were fooled by the imitations and Keating went unnoticed from the early 1960s until 1976 when an auctioneer noticed he was selling **thirteen Samuel Palmers depicting the same theme.**
- This is an example of one of his forgeries (CLICK) and this is a genuine Palmer.
- **Geraldine Norman of *The Times* newspaper decided to investigate** and had the paintings tested scientifically and published an article declaring them to be fake. She discovered they had been painted by Keating and **visited him at home** where he talked about his work as a restorer and ranted about the corruption in the art market.
- **She wrote another article about Keating alleging he was a forger** and he replied not by suing *The Times* but by agreeing. He said, **"I do not deny these allegations. In fact, I openly confess to having done**

**them**". Keating was not resentful of her exposing him as he felt she was respectful of him as an artist.

- At a new conference in 1976 he estimated there were **over 2,000 of his forgeries in circulation**, including those of French Impressionists and the English painter John Constable, but refused to list them as he wanted to **undermine the market**.
- He and Kelly, who by then had divorced, were both arrested and tried. She pleaded guilty and he argued he was **innocent because he never intended to defraud**. He was then badly injured in a motorcycle accident and contracted bronchitis exacerbated by a heart condition and doctors believed he would die and so **charges were dropped**. Kelly was sent to prison and shortly after charges were dropped his health improved and he was asked to appear on a television shows explaining how to paint like an old master.

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Claude Monet, *Poppy Field*, 1873, 65 x 50 cm, Musée d'Orsay



Tom Keating (1917-1984) after Claude Monet

Claude Monet, *Poppy Field*, 1873, 65 x 50 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Tom Keating (1917-1984) after Claude Monet

- He painted in the style of many Old Masters including François Boucher, Edgar Degas, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Thomas Gainsborough, Amedeo Modigliani, Rembrandt, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and many others such as Monet here. This probably a Monet you have seen before, it is called *Poppy Field*. But which one is by Keating and which by Monet?
- (CLICK), the Keating it is on the right. Monet painted the picture on the left in 1873 when he was living in Argenteuil. It was exhibited at the first Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1874. The young woman with the sunshade and the child in the foreground are probably the artist's wife, Camille, and their son Jean. Monet has structured the painting on a strong diagonal linking the two figure groups with lines of poppies. The large foreground and the relatively small figures creates a strong impression of openness and the potentially weak empty foreground is avoided by the strong diagonal.
- In my view, **Keating has a weaker sky** with less believable clouds, the house on the distance intrudes too much and the **figures are swamped**

by the overly brightly coloured field. But you might prefer the Keating.

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Tom Keating (1917-1984), After Degas, dance rehearsal

Tom Keating (1917-1984), After Degas, dance rehearsal, Tennants auction house, Yorkshire sold for £380 in 2021

- Here is a fake Degas that sold at auction recently for £380 as a work by Keating. Of course, it is difficult to know these days whether you are buying a fake Keating. The price suggests that this is a fake Keating.
- As I said, Keating **Painted 'give aways'** in all or most of his pictures. For example, he might write a **rude comment in lead white** underneath the painting knowing that if it were X-rayed the lead white comment would show up strongly.
- He published his biography and appeared on television and the public warmed to him as a lovable old rogue. As I mentioned, he suffered from lung problems probably caused by years of breathing in the chemicals used in art restoration and that eventually killed him in 1984, aged 66.
- **In his lifetime** many art collectors, such as the **ex-heavyweight boxer Henry Cooper collected Keating's work under his own name** and after his death his work became increasingly valuable and collectable. Today his work typically sells for **tens of thousands of pounds which is why a market has developed in fake Keatings.**
- Tom Keating could be the greatest forger because of the volume of his

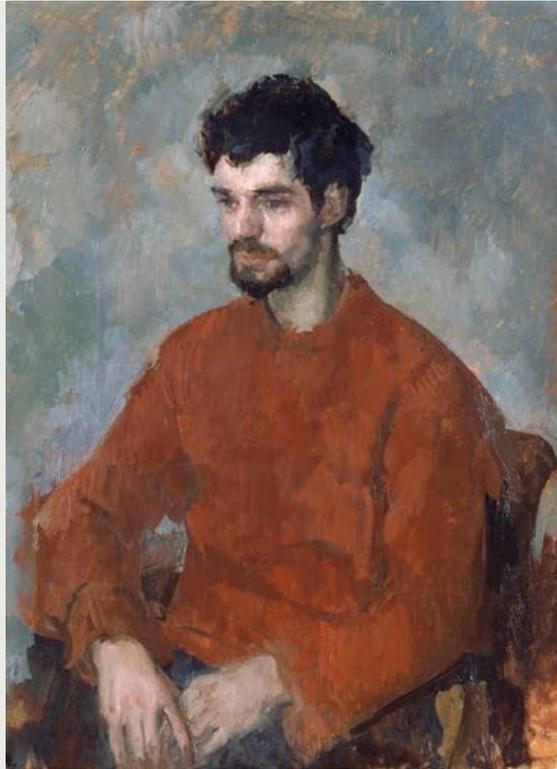
work (2,000 forgeries by 100 different artists) and the fact that his own work he was collected in his lifetime.

- By the way, he met and worked with the forger **Max Brandrett** who was 32 years younger and I will talk about him later.

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Peter Greenham (1909-1992),  
*Portrait of Eric Hebborn*, c. 1959,  
Royal Academy



Peter Greenham (1909-1992), *Portrait of Eric Hebborn* (1934-1996), c. 1959, Royal Academy

- He was a **British painter and art forger** and later an author. Hebborn is now perhaps best known for the manner of his death. **On January 8, 1996, he was found lying in a street in Rome, his skull crushed with a blunt instrument.** He died three days later in the hospital on January 11, 1996.
- He was born in Kensington, west London and it is said his mother beat him constantly as a child. When he was just eight he set fire to his school and was sent to a reformatory although his sister denies this. The teachers there encouraged his painting and he first exhibited his work when he was 15.
- He was a student at the Royal Academy School of art between 1954 and 1959. Peter Greenham, who painted this portrait, was a teacher at the school and **Hebborn was a star pupil.** This sensitive portrait was probably painted in Hebborn's final year and Greenham presented it as his Diploma Work upon election as an Academician in 1960. [1]
- At the Royal Academy **Hebborn won many significant prizes including**

**the most prestigious, a two-year scholarship to the British School in Rome.** There he met many international artists and dealers as well as the British art historian and Soviet spy **Sir Anthony Blunt.** Blunt told him two of his drawings **looked like Poussins** and that **sowed the seeds of his forgery career.**

- Even though he was a Royal Academy prize winner the art world **spurned his work which** led to him becoming bitter and he sought to show the experts were incompetent and undermine what he thought was a corrupt market.

### **BIO:HEBBORN**

- Eric Hebborn (20 March 1934 – 11 January 1996) was an English painter, draughtsman, art forger and later an author.
- He was born in Kensington, west London and it is said his mother beat him constantly as a child. When he was just eight he set fire to his school and was sent to a reformatory although his sister denies this. The teachers there encouraged his painting and he first exhibited his work when he was 15.
- He attended art schools before attending the royal Academy where he won many prizes including a two-year scholarship to the British School in Rome. There he met many international artists and dealers as well as the British art historian and Soviet spy Sir Anthony Blunt. Blunt told him two of his drawings looked like Poussins and that sowed the seeds of his forgery career.
- On his return to London he worked for an art restorer where he was told not just to restore but to alter and improve the works. This led to Hebborn being asked to "restore" works by famous artists on a blank canvas. They fell out and parted but while visiting antique shops in London he learnt a lot about paper and its history which led to him acquiring blank sheets of paper and his first forgeries.
- His first forgery was a drawing after Augustus John and he

started to sell to galleries in London including Christies.

- Hebborn decided to settle in Italy with his lover Graham Smith and they opened an art gallery there.
- He began to copy the style of old masters such as Mantegna, Van Dyck, Poussin, Tiepolo, Rubens and Jan Breughel. Art experts declared his paintings authentic and brilliant and they sold for tens of thousands of pounds through art auction houses, including Christie's and Sotheby's. Most of the work he created was his own subject drawn or painted in the style of the Old Master.
- In 1978 a curator at the National Gallery of Art, Washington noticed that two drawings by different artists that he had purchased from a well known art dealer, Colnaghi, were drawn on exactly the same paper. Another work on the same paper was discovered and the art dealer said that all three had been purchased from Hebborn.
- Colnaghi did not go public for 18 months and even then did not name Hebborn. One well known author on fakes and forgers (Alice Beckett) said, '**...no one talks about him...The trouble is he's too good**'. Hebborn changed his style and continued to create at least 500 more drawings between 1978 and 1988. Amassing a profit estimated to be more than \$30 million.
- In 1984 Hebborn announced in the press that he had forged many works, feeling he had done nothing wrong. In his autobiography *Drawn to Trouble* (1991) he criticised the art world and denigrated so called experts who were too eager to go along with the crime.
- On 8 January 1996 shortly after the publication of the Italian version of his autobiography he was found lying in a street in Rome suffering from massive head injuries and he died in hospital three days later.

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Master Forger



- Eric Hebborn (1934-1996)
- This is part of a 45 minute documentary on YouTube of Eric Hebborn (1934-1996). It features an interview with Eric Hebborn at his home in Italy.
- You can hear how bitter he is and of course, many artists have been knighted including Sir Anthony van Dyck, Sir Godfrey Kneller, Sir James Thornhill, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir Thomas Lawrence, Sir David Wilkie, Sir Edwin Landseer, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and just this year Sir John Akomfrah (pronounced ah-KOM-frah') and Sir Grayson Perry.



Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, 1618-20, 223 × 196 cm, Museo del Prado



Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, before 1621, 24 × 20.9 cm, preparatory drawing in pen and brown ink with brown wash, British Museum



Forged preparatory drawing by Eric Hebborn

Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, 1618-20, 223 × 196 cm, Museo del Prado

Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, before 1621, 24 × 20.9 cm, preparatory drawing in pen and brown ink with brown wash, British Museum

Forged preparatory drawing of the painting by Eric Hebborn

- After he left the Royal Academy he stayed in Rome and **started to produce thousands of drawings, paintings and sculptures** in the style of the Old Masters many of which were later sold as original works. This is an example, the genuine van Dyck painting is on the left, the genuine van Dyck preliminary sketch is in the middle and the forged drawing by Hebborn is on the right. He hoped dealers would know about the first two genuine works and assume his forgery was an earlier van Dyck preliminary sketch, and he was right, they did.
- He decided to **settle in Rome with his lover Graham Smith** and they opened a **gallery together**. He produced many forgeries in the style of Old Masters such as Mantegna, Poussin, Tiepolo, Rubens and Jan Breughel. **Art experts declared his paintings authentic** and brilliant

and they **sold for tens of thousands** of pounds through art auction houses, including **Christie's and Sotheby's**. Most of the works he created were not copies but his own subject or, as here, a variation, drawn or painted in the style of the Old Master.

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Claude Lorrain (1604/1605–1682), *Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca or The Mill*, 1648, 152.3 × 200.6 cm, National Gallery



Eric Hebborn in the style of Claude Lorrain

Claude Lorrain (1604/1605–1682), *Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca or The Mill*, 1648, 152.3 × 200.6 cm, National Gallery

Eric Hebborn in the style of Claude Lorrain

English: Arcadian scene, the connection with the biblical story of Isaac and Rebecca is Claude's inscription on the tree stump in the centre. Another version without the inscription is called 'The Mill' (now in the 'Palazzo Doria Pamphili' in Rome).

- In 1978 an observant curator at the National Gallery of Art, Washington noticed that two drawings by different artists that he had purchased from a well known art dealer, **Colnaghi, were drawn on exactly the same paper**. Another work on the same paper was discovered and the art dealer said that all three had been purchased from Hebborn.
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- In 1984 Hebborn announced in the press that he had forged many works, feeling he had done nothing wrong and in his autobiography ***Drawn to Trouble*** (1991) he criticised the art world and denigrated so called experts who were too eager to go along with the crime.
- He was unapologetic and following his untimely death a forger's manual he had been working on was published, titled ***The Art Forger's Handbook*** (1997, posthumous)
- Shortly after the publication of the Italian version of his autobiography he was found lying in a street in Rome suffering from massive head injuries and he died in hospital three days later. An investigation of his death in 2015 by *The Guardian* newspaper found he had **links to the mafia** and after his death his flat was ransacked. His death was never investigated by the police in Rome who put it down to him tripping and hitting his head on the kerb.
- *The Guardian* describes him as **the greatest forger of modern times and he seems to have amassed a larger fortune than most**. His work continues to sell, at an auction in 2015 234 works by Hebborn sold for over £50,000.

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Eric Hebborn copy



Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *The Portrait of Henri Leroy*, detail, Fogg Museum, Harvard University

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *The Portrait of Henri Leroy*, detail, Fogg Museum, Harvard University

Eric Hebborn copy

- One final point before leaving Hebborn, in his book ***The Art Forgers Handbook***, he offers a challenge to art experts, a side-by-side comparison of his forgery of *The Portrait of Henri Leroy* by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, and the authentic drawing.
- Hebborn says in the book, "**seek the hesitant line of the copyist, as opposed to the strong, sure line of Corot**".
- (CLICK) He eventually identifies the one on the right as the original and adds, "**how poor my version is, how faulty the construction, how harsh the modelling, and all sorts of ghastly errors which escaped your notice before**".
- He then suggests you look at the original in the Fogg Museum. He has the last laugh on the experts because if you do you will find (CLICK) the original **is in fact the one on the left**.

## **REFERENCES**

Eric Hebborn's book, *The Art Forgers Handbook*, is **considered one of the best books on art forgery**



John Myatt (b. 1945), photograph *The Independent*

John Myatt (b. 1945), photograph *The Independent*

- John Myatt (b. 1945) is a British artist who carried out what has been called "**the biggest art fraud of the 20th century**".
- He was born the **son of a farmer** and attended art school where he found **he could paint in the style of other artists**. He initially did this **for amusement** and worked as a songwriter and a teacher.
- **His wife left him in 1985** when he was 40 and he gave up teaching to **look after his children** and made a living **painting in the style of well-known artists**. He advertised his '**genuine fakes**' in *Private Eye* for 'from £150'. In other words a legitimate business selling copies of Old Master—but he didn't realise how good he was. One of his customers was **John Drewe and he sold Myatt's work as genuine works** including one bought by **Christies for £25,000 as a genuine Albert Gleizes** (pronounce 'alber glez', 'e' as in 'egg'). Myatt became an accomplice and painted works in the style of artists including Marc Chagall, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, Matisse, Ben Nicholson and Graham Sutherland.
- In total police estimate he painted about **200 forgeries** and they were

delivered to Drewe in London on a regular basis. They were sold through the major auction houses in London, Paris and New York and only sixty have been recovered.

### **BIO:MYATT**

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- He was born the son of a farmer and attended art school where he found he could paint in the style of other artists. He initially did this for amusement and worked as a songwriter and a teacher.
- When his wife left him in 1985 he gave up teaching to look after his children and made a living painting in the style of well-known artists. He advertised his 'genuine fakes' in *Private Eye* for 'from £150'. One of his customers was John Drewe and he sold Myatt's work as genuine works including one bought by Christies for £25,000 as a genuine Albert Gleizes. Myatt became an accomplice and painted works in the style of artists including Marc Chagall, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, Matisse, Ben Nicholson and Graham Sutherland.
- In total police estimate he painted about 200 forgeries and delivered to Drewe in London on a regular basis. They were sold through the major auction houses in London, Paris and New York and only sixty have been recovered.
- Myatt was arrested in 1995 and argued that they were all painted using emulsion paint and K-Y Jelly (too dry quickly) and so they were easy to spot as copies. He estimated he had made £275,000 and offered to pay it back and help convict Drewe who he had come to dislike. However, the total sale value of his forgeries was over €25 million. Police raided Drewe's gallery (in Reigate, Surrey) and found forged documents he used to authenticate Myatt's paintings. In 1999 Myatt was sentenced to

one year in prison and released after four months and Drewe to six years and he was released after two.

- After his release Myatt continues to paint portraits and 'genuine fakes' which have become popular among collectors, particularly his copies of Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh.
- In 2020 it was announced a film is being made about him called 'Genuine Fakes'. He also has a television show called *Fame in the Frame* on Sky Arts where he paints a famous celebrity in the style of a famous artist. Unlike some other forgers who describe forging as a technical skill Myatt claims to get inside the mind of the great artist and paint with their inspiration.

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John Myatt (b. 1945), *Mountain Village*, a painting in the style of Cubist painter Albert Gleizes (1881-1953)



Albert Gleizes (1881-1953), *Le chemin (Meudon)*, The Path (Meudon), signed and dated 'Albert Gleizes 1911' (lower right), 146.4 x 114.4 cm, sold at Christies in 2010 for £1.8m

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- A painting "in the style of Cubist painter Albert Gleizes [1881-1953, pronounced 'alber glez', 'e' as in 'egg'] that auction house Christie's thought was the real deal and valued at £25K in 1986. It was the first illicit forgery by John Myatt, a man **later described by Scotland Yard as involved in "the biggest art fraud of the 20th century."**
- What gave him away?: His accomplice, the art dealer John Drewe made millions selling Myatt's fakes and when he divorced his wife (Bat-Sheva Goudsmid) she found incriminating documents in their house and exposed the whole operation.

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Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Grand Canal Venice*, 1908, 92.4 × 73.7 cm, Boston Museum



John Myatt (b. 1945), *Santa Maria Della Salute*, 68.58 × 60.96 cm, £3,950

Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Grand Canal Venice*, 1908, 92.4 × 73.7 cm, Boston Museum

John Myatt (b. 1945), *Santa Maria Della Salute*, 68.58 × 60.96 cm, £3,950

- John Myatt was **arrested in 1995** and argued that they were **all painted using emulsion paint and K-Y Jelly** (to ensure quick drying) and so they would be **trivially easy to spot as copies**. He estimated **he had made £275,000** and **offered to pay it back and help convict Drewe** who he had **come to dislike**. However, the total **sale value of his forgeries was over €25 million**.
- Police raided Drewe's gallery (in Reigate, Surrey) and found forged documents he used to authenticate Myatt's paintings. Drewe would **add old gallery stickers** to the rear and he even went on to donate £25,000 to the Tate. This philanthropy gained access to the British Art Archives and he used this to create false authentication for the forgeries.
- In 1999 **Myatt was sentenced to one year in prison and released after four months and Drewe, regarded by the court as the mastermind, received six years although he was released after two.**



John Myatt (b. 1945), *Girl with Puppy* in the style of Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), signed John Myatt

John Myatt (b. 1945), *Girl with Puppy* in the style of Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), signed John Myatt

- After his release **Myatt continues to paint portraits and 'genuine fakes'** which have become popular among collectors, particularly his copies of Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh.
- **This is an 'original fake' that sold for £10,000.** The frame is also fake, it is a moulded copy of an original frame by Thomas Chippendale.



John Myatt's *Portrait of James May* (b. 1963), ex co-presenter of the television series *Top Gear*, in the style of Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) from Series 1 Episode 2 of *Fame in the Frame* on Sky Arts

- In 2020 it was announced **a film is being made about him called 'Genuine Fakes'**. He also has a **television show called *Fame in the Frame*** on Sky Arts where he painted a famous celebrity in the style of a famous artist. Unlike some other forgers who describe forging as a technical skill Myatt claims to get inside the mind of the great artist and paint with their inspiration.
- This is John Myatt's *Portrait of James May* (b. 1963), ex co-presenter of the television series *Top Gear*, in the style of Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) from Series 1 Episode 2 of *Fame in the Frame* on Sky Arts. Apologies for the quality but this is a still from an old television programme.
- Myatt could claim to be the greatest forger because of what **Scotland Yard described as "the biggest art fraud of the 20th century."** Also, watching the programme he comes over as a friendly, sincere and likeable person and he happens to look like a good friend of mine.



Max Brandrett (b. 1949), featuring Caravaggio's, *The Taking of Christ*  
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610), *The Taking of Christ*, c. 1602, 133.5 × 169.5 cm, National Gallery of Ireland

- Finally the person who describes himself as '**Britain's No. 1 Art Forger**'.
- **Max Brandrett** (b. 30 May 1949) was **born in Brighton**, East Sussex and drew cartoon characters as a child. He father was absent and his mother could not provide for the family so when he was five he and his older brother were **taken into the care of Dr Barnardo's children home**. There **his talent as an artist was encouraged** and he was supplied with materials.
- **He left when he was 15** and after a short stay with his mother he left to join a **Chipperfield's Circus as an elephant handler and then Bertram Mills Circus**. He moved to London and sold his paintings and made **money busking**. He **slept rough** and worked in **Lyons Bakery** before travelling around **working in holiday camps**.
- In 1966 he was asked to paint a **portrait of the Kray twins' mother**. The Kray twins were gangsters involved in **murder, armed robbery, arson, protection rackets and gambling** so Brendrett was worried about how it would be received. The twins were happy with the portrait and paid him £200. He started to supply art dealers with forgeries that he had

artificially aged.

### **BIO:BRENDRETT**

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- He met a businessman (Sam Cohen) and the two of them posed as a father and son business engaged in clearing houses. This cover story enabled them to explain how they came across so many old paintings although they always expressed ignorance about their value and they would hide one significant forgery in the middle of a pile of works by unknown artists.
- This approach enabled them to live an lavish lifestyle but his marriage broke up and he started to attract the attention of the police. He unwisely stole a clock and a chandelier from a hotel early one morning but was caught by the police and sentenced to six months imprisonment of which he served three months.
- He went back to live with his mother and then returned to London where he met and started to supply the well-established forger Tom Keating. He was eventually caught and served sent to prison where he taught his fellow prisoners how to paint and

continued to paint forgeries which he smuggled out and sold on his release.

- At this point he gave up forgery to look after his dying mother and started selling Brandrett originals, particularly horse-racing prints at racecourses. He became active in the Variety Club where he mixed with famous actors. He donated pictures, helped raise money for charity and held art classes.
- In 2021 six oil paintings believed to be by Tom Keating were shown to be by Max Brandrett.
- A biography of Max Brandrett by Anthony Valentine called *Britain's No1 Art Forger - The Life of a Cheeky Faker* was published in 2022.

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Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887-1976), *Group of Six People*, c. 1958, 61 x 50.8 cm



Max Brandrett (b. 1949), *A Group of Six People*, in the style of Lowry, £1,875, reduced from £3,500, 31cm x 41cm, on sale at Room With a View Gallery, Worthing

Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887-1976), *Group of Six People*, c. 1958, 61 x 50.8 cm

Max Brandrett (b. 1949), *A Group of Six People*, in the style of Lowry, £1,875, reduced from £3,500, 31cm x 41cm, on sale at Room With a View Gallery, Worthing

- **This pair caused me some trouble** as the genuine and the fake are easily confused. One on the left is the genuine L. S. Lowry painting sold at Christie's for £146,000 in 2013. There is a letter of authentication attached to the frame from the artist **Mervyn Levy** (1914-1996) who was a **friend of Lowry and wrote his catalogue raisonné**. Note the genuine Lowry is not signed but the fake is signed.
- **Lowry** is one of the artists who is **frequently forged** and Max Brandrett painted many such forgeries. But how did he convince the major galleries?
- **Brandrett met a businessman**, Sam Cohen, and the two of them posed as a **father and son** business engaged in clearing houses. This cover story enabled them to explain how they came across so many old paintings although they always expressed ignorance about their value and they would hide one significant forgery in the middle of a pile of

works by unknown artists.

## **REFERENCES**

Max Brandrett (b. 1949)

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Max Brandrett with some of his work including a copy of Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ*



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610), *The Taking of Christ*, c. 1602, 133.5 × 169.5 cm, National Gallery of Ireland

Max Brandrett with some of his work including a copy of Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ*

Michelangelo Merisi da c, c. 1602, 133.5 × 169.5 cm, National Gallery of Ireland

- By posing as father and son and **expressing ignorance** of what they were offering they were able to fool many of the major auction houses.
- The approach enabled them to live **a fairly lavish lifestyle but they spent everything they earned and when his marriage broke up** he started to attract the attention of the police. **He unwisely stole a clock and a chandelier** from a hotel early one morning but was caught by the police and sentenced to six months imprisonment of which he served three months.
- He went back to live with his mother and then returned to London where he met and started to **supply the well-established forger Tom Keating**. He was eventually caught and was sent to prison where he **taught his fellow prisoners how to paint** and continued to paint forgeries which he smuggled out and sold on his release.
- The photograph on the left shows Brandrett, who was jailed three times for forgery staging an exhibition of his 'fake' work in 2018. They are no longer forgeries as he is not intending to deceive and is selling them as

his own work.

- The **genuine Caravaggio would sell for around £200 million**, maybe more, but you can buy an almost identical Brandrett Caravaggio for **£2,500**.



Max Brandrett, work in the style of  
Jack Vettriano



Jack Vettriano, *Night Geometry II*, 1996,  
owned by Jack Nicholson

Max Brandrett, work in the style of Jack Vettriano

Jack Vettriano, *Night Geometry II*, 1996, owned by Jack Nicholson

- At this point, **Brandrett gave up forgery** to look after his **dying mother** and started selling Brandrett originals, particularly **horse-racing prints at racecourses**. He became **active in the Variety Club** where he mixed with famous actors. He donated pictures, helped raise money for charity and held art classes.
- "For years Max Brandrett fooled the art world with his forged Caravaggios and Lowrys. Now that he has '**gone legit**', however, **forgers are now forging him...**'**You have got to watch these forgers**' [he said]" [1]
- Remember, I mentioned earlier he worked with Tom Keating well in 2021 six oil paintings **believed to be by Tom Keating were shown to be by Max Brandrett**.
- Regarding his life as **Max the Forger**, he says he will 'not do it again' and adds, "**It's ironic to think I spent three years in prison for selling fake paintings and now people are coming to marvel at my work.**"
- He justifies misleading people by explaining "**Those were hard times 35 years ago and we did what we had to do but I wouldn't do it again now. I think now, I'm just looking for respect for the skill**

**involved in what I do."**

- Last year a biography of Max Brandrett written by Anthony Valentine was published, called *Britain's No1 Art Forger - The Life of a Cheeky Faker*. He warns everyone, "**There are so many Lowry and impressionist fakes floating around - you can pick up a good Van Gogh for a few quid abroad.**"

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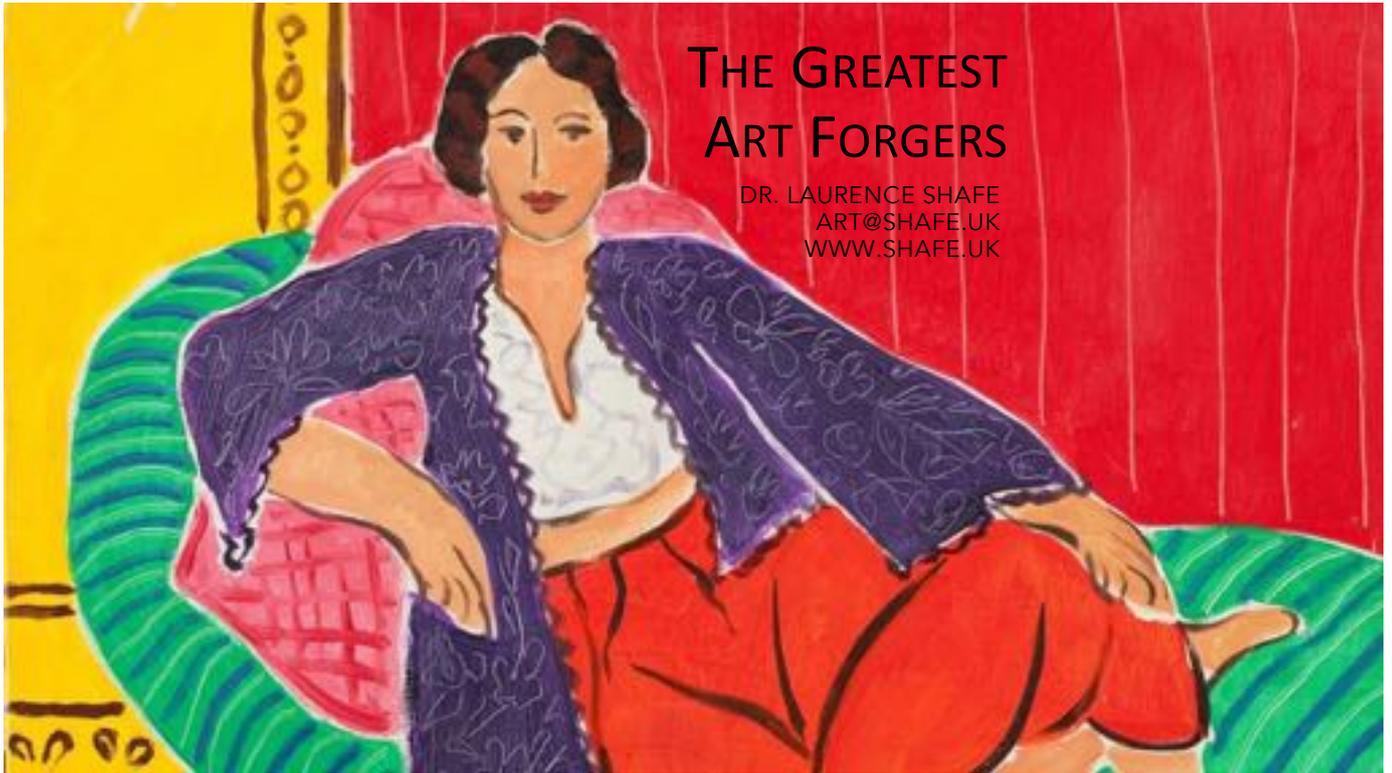
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Elmyr de Hory (Hungary, 1906-1976), *Odalisque*, 1974, oil on canvas, in the style of Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954), collection of Mark Forgy, photograph by Robert Fogt

- That's how I will end, reinforcing Max Brendrett's sentiment—beware of fakes and forgeries.
- You will now recognise this work is not by Henri Matisse but by the Hungarian artist Elmyr de Hory. Forgeries are everywhere and it is easy to be fooled. Only buy paintings you like and you can afford.
- That brings us to the end of Part 1 and in Part 2 I cover another six artists who claim to be the greatest forgers of the 20th century, we shall see.
- For now, thank you for your time and attention.