“Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World”

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The works may look familiar, but they are not what they appear to be.

The exhibition “Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World” examines the careers of five of the most notorious art forgers from the 20th century until the present. Pieces produced by the five talented con artists will be on display May 23- Aug. 3 in the galleries of The Ringling.

The forgers created imitations of works by artists including: Charles Courtney Curran, Honoré Daumier, Philip de László, Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani and Pablo Picasso.

“Intent to Deceive will provide visitors with a glimpse behind the curtain of the dark side of the art world,” Steven High, executive director of The Ringling said. “This exhibition tells an important story that we are excited to share.”

There are 60 works of art in the show including some of the original pieces that the forgers copied. The exhibition also features some of the tools the forgers used to create their imitations.

“This exhibition is unique because it is organized around the individual forgers in an attempt to explore what motivated them to produce their deceptions,” Chris Jones, associate curator for exhibitions at The Ringling said. “We get a feel for their personal narratives and points of view and that provides a fascinating context for the works themselves. Ultimately what is most provocative about the exhibition for me is that it forces us to really examine our notions of authenticity and authorship and how those notions fundamentally inform both our experience of art and perception of its value.”
The art world has yet to develop a foolproof system for authenticating works. The current system relies on the three-tier approach of connoisseurship (an expert authenticating that the work reflects the artist’s style and technique), provenance, (tracking the history of the artwork’s ownership, location and documentation) and technical analysis (using equipment to verify that the work is from its reported age).

The forgers featured in the exhibition used their knowledge of this system to create works and back stories that fooled authenticators.

About the forgers:

**Hans van Meegeren (1889-1947) “Forging Dutch Masters”**

Frustrated by his own art career, Hans van Meegeren sought fortune and recognition through forgery. He became one of the first media celebrity forgers of the 20th century. He began producing forgeries in the 1920s, but it was not until the mid-1930s that he had mastered his craft. Van Meegeren developed a technique to mimic centuries old dry paint by mixing Bakelite plastic into his paints and then baking the work. This allowed his forgeries to pass the forensics test of the era and produced the craquelure pattern consistent with older works.

Van Meegeren created an “early religious period” for Dutch Master Johannes Vermeer. In 1937, Dutch art expert Abraham Bredius declared that Van Meegeren’s “The Supper at Emmaus” was an authentic Vermeer. Van Meegeren later sold a forged painting “Christ with the Adulteress” to Nazi leader Hermann Goring.

Van Meegeren went to trial in 1947 for collaborating with the Nazis, which could lead to a death sentence. His unique defense was a confession of producing forgeries, which included demonstrating his techniques to the court. Convicted of forgery and fraud, Van Meegeren died before serving his prison sentence.

**Elmyr De Hory (1906-1976) “A Master of Deception”**

Elmyr de Hory was a living forgery. Upon moving the United States after World War II, he created a persona of a disposed Hungarian aristocrat selling his art collection. In reality, he was a struggling artist born to middle class parents in Budapest, Hungary.

After his own art career failed to provide his desired life style, De Hory turned to forgery. He sold more than 1000 forgeries into the art market during his 30-year career. De Hory would produce his works on 19th century canvases that he purchased at flea markets and artificially age the works with commercial varnishes.
Much of his success was due to his collaboration with the con man Fernand Legros. This partnership dissolved in 1967 when the sale of more than 40 works to Texas millionaire Algur Meadows were revealed as fakes.

De Hory achieved fame in his time through Clifford Irving’s 1969 biography “Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time” and the 1972 Orson Wells film “F for Fake.” Facing extradition to France to stand trial for his crimes, De Hory killed himself in 1976.

**Eric Hebborn (1934-1996) “From Restorer to Forger”**

Eric Hebborn used his talent as a draftsman and expertise of historic paper to forge art that tricked prominent art experts. His use of period paper and period application methods made his work nearly impossible to detect through forensic analysis.

Hebborn focused on the Renaissance and Baroque periods for his forgeries. He started with the drawings of Nicholas Poussin after being told his work resembled Poussin’s by art historian Sir Anthony Blunt.

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Arts, Britain’s most prestigious art school, Hebborn’s drawing skills were not in demand by the mid-20th century art market. He turned to forging as an act of revenge against art expert and dealers. Hebborn never sold to amateur collectors.

Hebborn was caught when it was noticed that works credited to different artists were on identical paper. He documented his career as a forger in his memoir “Drawn to Trouble.” Hebborn completed a second book about his career deceiving art experts, “The Art Forger’s Handbook” in 1996. He was murdered shortly after its publication. The case remains unsolved.

**John Myatt (1945-) “The Art of Genuine Fakes”**

John Myatt needed a way to support his two children. He placed an ad in a local newspaper offering “Genuine Fakes for $510-$680.” Con artist John Drewe sold one of the fakes through Christie’s Auctions for $102,000, and a partnership formed.

Myatt forged works by more than 200 modernist painters, and Drewe created the false documents and sold the works. The partnership lasted for seven years, until dealers become suspicious of Drewe’s seemingly endless supply of works. Myatt was arrested in 1995, and in return for his cooperation in the case against Drewe, Myatt received a reduced sentence.
By 2005, Myatt became a famous artist in his own right. His paintings now sell for as much as $40,000, and he is the host of the BBC series “Fame in Frame” where he paints images of celebrities into the copies of famous artworks while explaining his techniques.

Mark Landis (1955-) “Mysterious Donor”

Mark Landis does not fit in with the other forgers because he was not motivated by monetary gain or a desire for revenge.

For the past 30 years, Landis posed as a philanthropist seeking to donate famous works as a way to honor his deceased parents. To avoid detection, Landis has falsified documents, created aliases and even has posed as a priest. Unlike the other forgers, Landis used plain materials purchased from his local art store and attempted to make them look aged though staining them with tea or pigment.

Even though law enforcement was aware of his forging career, criminal charges were never pursued because Landis never attempted to benefit financially from his deceptions and the burden of authentication falls on museums for authentication.

Poor health appears to have brought his career as a forger to an end.

New York Magazine published a profile on Landis in 2013. He is the subject of the documentary “Art and Craft,” which will debut at film festivals this year.

About The Ringling

The Ringling is the State Art Museum of Florida. Affiliated with Florida State University, it is one of the largest university arts complexes in the nation. It features the John and Mable Ringling’s winter residence, Ca’ d’Zan, as well as a Museum of Art, a Circus Museum, and an eighteenth-century Italian theater, all situated on a beautiful sixty-six acre estate on the shores of Sarasota Bay. The Museum of Art is world-renowned for its collection of Old Master paintings, which includes works by artists such as Paolo Veronese and Diego Velasquez. It has become synonymous with the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens, whose Triumph of the Eucharist series is displayed in two of the most awe-inspiring galleries to be found anywhere in America. In 2011, the Ringling opened Joseph’s Coat, a Skyspace by created by artist James Turrell. This extraordinary installation is the cornerstone of a program known as Art of Our Time, which showcases the talents of today’s leading visual and performance artists. The Circus Museum documents the rich history of the American circus.

It houses a wealth of circus artifacts, as well as the world's largest miniature circus. The Historic Asolo Theater is an active performance space, presenting the best in theater, music, dance, and film. The Ringling estate features an extensive variety of native and exotic trees, as well as the oldest rose garden in Florida, founded by Mable Ringling.