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Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age

Jonathon Keats

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Jonathon Keats : Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Crock: Art As Questioning by an Indolent EliteBy Niccolo DonzellaThe impulse toward elitism in art has always been powerful. The branch of this endeavor aimed at persuading the non-elite, especially the middle class, that it is simply incapable of appreciating art has been not only powerful but wildly successful. Starting in the mid-19th century, it has managed to wipe out even the concept of a popular market for new or avant guard art. In poetry, for example, book sales, minimal as they are, are largely the result of class reading assignments in literature courses. The professors write to and for the professors; Hallmark owns the rest.The

forgers portrayed in the book share particular traits. They tend to be people from modest educational and social circumstances who mastered difficult artistic techniques just in time to see them rendered obsolete by modernism and the nihilism that followed. They found demand for these services largely, if not exclusively, in the field of restoration, which in all cases led to falsification. Citing revenge as both motive and justification, they each established careers as gifted forgers, thieves in strictly legal terms. Justification typically is expressed as resentment or envy of an elite characterized by knowledge, money, or both. "Yes, I have cheated them, and they deserved to be cheated. That is my art." But the crimes of these forgers pale in comparison to the post-modern artists we meet in the book. Relieved of the need for mastery of technique, they are free to concentrate solely on justification. And as Keats demonstrates in the third section of the book, it is all so easy to accomplish. All that is required is to assume the pose of the interlocutor. You simply explain whatever it is you are doing as "raising questions" about whatever subject matter comes to hand. For example, Keats describes a project by Sherrie Levine in which she photographed pages of a book containing photographs by Walker Evans. According to Levine, this is not what it seems to the uninitiated, the laziness of someone with nothing original to say, but, rather, "A picture of a picture is a strange thing and it brings up lots of contradictions." In such vague and sophomoric fashion, elite artists are said to be questioning society about such things as the "boundaries of art," the nature of attribution, "the relationship between past and present," or "the boundaries between subject and object" -- practically anything except, of course, the ability to compose an original photograph. Thus, they shift the burden of meaning from themselves to viewer. It is up to you to prove your worthiness by finding or assigning meaning to the naked act of photographing a photograph. The artist's job is to ask some vague question. If you cannot answer it, and thereby make a case that the act means something, you have proven once again why art is for the elite. It's a perverse form of the emperor's clothes with the emperor in on the ruse this time. But the fraud of post-modernism really shines when Keats introduces us to a cadre of shallow thinkers posing as artists. J.S.G. Boggs draws facsimile bank notes that, we are told, "leverag[e] the absurdity of art to question the sanity of finance." Really? Define finance? Explain how its "sanity" is in question? What does "the absurdity of art" mean and what does that have to do with finance? It's all just gibberish, lazy and shallow pleas to those who equate finance with evil and don't want to think more about it than that. If bankers and governments are upset about the practice, that is enough. And then we come to street art. Someone defaces a billboard and it "provokes pertinent questions: Who owns a city's visual space, the corporations who can buy it or the public who lives in it.?' By this anarchist logic, someone might feel justified in spray painting one's automobile, on the ground that it is part of a publicly-owned visual space. Or one's house. Or one's face. Hacking is also art, again, because somehow it questions things. Someone highjacks a public WiFi spot and alters newspapers to reflect the political views of the hackers. Or hackers create a fake website purporting to represent the views of the Vatican, again, altered to reflect the political views of the hackers. The fact that the viewers were not asked to participate is apparently of no importance. What matters is the transmission of a political message characterized as questioning something or other. I suspect the Chinese Communist government may be way ahead of the hackers on this one. Finally, we are invited to view genetic research as related to art -- someone generates frog steaks from a living frog and then serves them with the frog in attendance. I confess that I am simply not up to the task of seeing what is being questioned here except good taste, much less why this is art. I embrace my exclusion from this particular elite. In sum, the stories of the six forgers are interesting and worth reading. Ultimately, I am not persuaded that their frauds constitute heroic acts of vengeance. They set out to deceive, they studied the most effective way of doing so, and they accomplished much in that regard, often muddying the waters of art history in the process. I do not agree with Keats that these acts have raised important questions about such things as attribution, culture, and the rest of it. Rather, they have raised questions about the security of markets and the reliability of certain indicia of authenticity. Producing a convincing painting in the style of an established master does not, to my mind, question the value or originality of that master. Rather, it plays to greed, arrogance, and the qualities that made that master respected in the first place. The question raised, it seems to me, is what the elites who have replaced those technique-driven forms with what has come after have to show for the effort. The book's answer to this question is, perhaps, well-summarized by the following passages: "This avant guard tendency to ponder and parse what it means to be free, rather than acting on that freedom in any new way, is ubiquitous." "The readymade liberated artists to incarcerate themselves in their own hall of mirrors." 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not What It Seems By Charles W. Strong From the title, you would expect to find this book arguing that those forgeries that can deceive connoisseurs and experts into believing that they are the work of great artists are the great art of our age. (Not an original idea at all.) And in the short chapters looking at the work of six forgers, he hints at this, but these are just stalking horses for Part Three where his real message is spelled out: "The fact that anything can be categorized as art does not make everything artistically interesting." Anything can be categorized as art? That makes the term meaningless. He appears to champion "purposeful purposelessness" that "calls everything into question." He trots out the usual names and concepts, Marcel Duchamp (who believed that art was whatever the artist said it was), Andy Warhol, Dada, Conceptual Art, deconstruction, graffiti "artists," etc. He also tries to drag the forgers into this potpourri, perhaps because they were sabotaging the traditional art record, and all of this is in the name of "forging a new art." One wonders what he thinks a great work of traditional art actually is or does. And why would a reasonable

person looking back at the history of art believe that it is a sort of attenuated, graphic philosophizing in conundrums? Since I've read both Eric Hebborn's "Drawn to Trouble" and "The Art Forger's Handbook," I turned to the chapter devoted to him to see how Keats handled his career. I found his recital curiously slanted. To take just one example, Graham Smith, a vindictive ex-lover is cited to support a dubious claim, and then an ambiguous recollection by Geraldine Norman is cited as further support. Now, there is no doubt that Hebborn was both narcissistic and dishonest, but that has little to do with Keats' handling of the source material, and it makes me wonder about his handling of the other chapters. I would give this two or three stars if it weren't for Part Three, but I don't think that it deserves more. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great until the last part of the book, when it gets a bit cosmic. By C. Eidsvik Hoving and other experts put the percentage of artworks that are fakes as being very high. In a capitalist market in which folks with a lot of money and the urge to pretend to have taste are waiting for a taking, a lot of remarkable counterfeiting is to be expected. Keats does a great job of using the crafts of forgery to help us understand how originality works and how imitations can carry a lot of information and be very, very useful.

According to Vasari, the young Michelangelo often borrowed drawings of past masters, which he copied, returning his imitations to the owners and keeping originals. Half a millennium later, Andy Warhol made a game of "forging" the Mona Lisa, questioning the entire concept of originality. *Forged* explores art forgery from ancient times to the present. In chapters combining lively biography with insightful art criticism, Jonathon Keats profiles individual art forgers and connects their stories to broader themes about the role of forgeries in society. From the Renaissance master Andrea del Sarto who faked a Raphael masterpiece at the request of his Medici patrons, to the Vermeer counterfeiter Han van Meegeren who duped the avaricious Hermann Göring, to the frustrated British artist Eric Hebborn, who began forging to expose the ignorance of experts, art forgers have challenged "legitimate" art in their own time, breaching accepted practices and upsetting the status quo. They have also provocatively confronted many of the present-day cultural anxieties that are major themes in the arts. Keats uncovers what forgeries--and our reactions to them--reveal about changing conceptions of creativity, identity, authorship, integrity, authenticity, success, and how we assign value to works of art. The book concludes by looking at how artists today have appropriated many aspects of forgery through such practices as street-art stenciling and share-and-share-alike licensing, and how these open-source "copyleft" strategies have the potential to make legitimate art meaningful again. Forgery has been much discussed--and decried--as a crime. *Forged* is the first book to assess great forgeries as high art in their own right.

.com A Field Guide To 20th Century Art Forgers: by Jonathon Keats Riccardo Riccardi and Alfredo Fioravanti For nearly half a century, the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibited several counterfeit statues of Etruscan warriors incompetently crafted by Riccardo Riccardi and Alfredo Fioravanti, two boys from a small town near Rome who had no idea what authentic Etruscan artifacts looked like. Despite the skepticism of outside experts, the oddly proportioned figures were kept on view in order to avoid institutional embarrassment, enshrining for several generations an arrestingly strange Etruscan aesthetic that never existed in ancient days. Jean Charles Millet The grandson of the Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet, Jean Charles Millet exploited the family name and a stencil Jean-François had made for signing his paintings by employing a deaf housepainter named Paul Cazot to copy his grandfather's canvases by the hundred. Charged with forgery, Millet defended himself in French court by saying he sold his fakes only to Americans and Englishmen, arguing that he couldn't be blamed for their ignorance. Eventually he was convicted, but only for passing bad checks. Yves Chaudron Following the theft of the Mona Lisa in 1911, Leonardo's masterpiece was illicitly offered for private sale to six different collectors, each of whom received a copy painted by Yves Chaudron. The con worked because the collectors had all heard about the missing original, but each had to keep his illegal purchase secret. It would have been the perfect crime, if only it were real. Later research has shown that Chaudron himself was a fake, fabricated by the Saturday Evening Post journalist Karl Decker, a forger's forger. Han van Meegeren The eminent art historian Abraham Bredius believed that Vermeer once went through a religious phase, and that paintings from that period would eventually be discovered. Han van Meegeren helped Bredius to prove his theory by fabricating a Vermeer on a Biblical theme and having it submitted to Bredius for authentication. Though van Meegeren's painting bore no resemblance to authentic Vermeers in terms of content or quality, Bredius declared it a masterpiece. On the strength of that endorsement, van Meegeren made more 'Vermeers'. And the more of them he made, the more convincing all of them became as the growing body of work changed how people viewed Vermeer's actual paintings. Lothar Malskat Hired to restore a Gothic church in the West German town of Lübeck in the 1950s, the art conservator Lothar Malskat exceeded expectations by discovering a whole cycle of medieval frescos. Only after two million postage stamps had been printed to celebrate the find did Malskat reveal that he'd made the murals himself, modeling his Biblical figures on school friends and movie stars. Even after the trial, the Lübeck government debated keeping the paintings, loathe to give up the town's newfound popularity with art enthusiasts. Some of the murals remain in place today, six decades after the scandal. Guidebooks don't mention they're fakes. Elmyr de Hory The storied life of Elmyr de Hory, master forger of paintings by Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, is known primarily through a biography written by Clifford Irving in the late 1960s, a source that is

questionable not only on account of de Hory's characteristic self-mythologizing; including a make-believe aristocratic upbringing; but also because of his biographer's next project: Irving's attempted forgery of Howard Hughes's memoirs. The combination of myth and mystery has made de Hory's known forgeries so highly collectable in their own right that de Hory copies are often now forged.

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

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

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

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