

Celebrated art forgeries coming to Springfield Museums

By Ray Kelley, The Republican

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SPRINGFIELD – Flying first class with a personal security guard from the Boijmans Van Beuningen in the Netherlands to the D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts, “Head of Christ” is getting the five-star treatment a 17th century masterpiece deserves.

Surprising, since the oil painting is a 20th century fake.

The imitation Vermeer was produced by notorious art forger Han van Meegeren 75 years ago. It will be shown this month in the United States for the first time as part of the exhibition “Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World.”



Head of Christ, circa 1939. Han van Meegeren; Oil on canvas, relined.

Two other van Meegerens, “The Girl With the Blue Bow,” once credited to Vermeer, from the Hyde Collection in Glens Falls, N.Y., and “The Procuress,” from the Courtauld Gallery in London will be on exhibit at the D’Amour Museum from Jan. 21 through April 27.

Eighty forgeries will be displayed including 15 works by Hungarian forger Elmyr de Hory, whose shadowy career was celebrated in the Orson Welles’ essay film “F For Fake.”

Colette Loll, an art investigator who organized the exhibition with the nonprofit group

International Arts & Artists, said in a telephone interview from Colorado that forgers are typically motivated by greed and their lives fascinate the public.

“There’s the intrigue, Forgers have been around since Greek and Roman times,” Loll said. “People love hearing about the experts getting it wrong and some rogue thumbing his nose at the art industry.”

Loll, founder and director of Art Fraud Insight, has lectured at the Smithsonian Institution and Interpol Headquarters. She trains federal agents in forgery investigations for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Cultural Heritage Protection Program.

While art fraud is often romanticized, it is a serious matter in the art world, Loll said.

The Dutch-born van Meegerens was seen as a folk hero after World War II for having duped Nazi leader and art lover Hermann Gvring. Later, van Meegerens was revealed to be a swindler who conned buyers out of more than \$30 million.

On trial just months before his death in 1947, van Meegerens said his decision to become an art forger was “spurred by the disappointment of receiving no acknowledgements from artists and critics... I determined to prove my worth as a painter by making a perfect 17th-century canvas.”

Following its run in Springfield, “Intent to Deceive” will travel to the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Fla.; the Canton Museum of Art in Ohio; and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.