

# The Boston Globe Theater & art

## Springfield exhibit explores deceit in art world

By [Geoff Edgers](#) | GLOBE STAFF | JANUARY 21, 2014



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WASHINGTON GREEN FINE ART & CASTLE GALLERIES; SCALA; THE SAMUEL COURTAULD TRUST; MFA BOSTON

John Myatt's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" (top left) is a copy of Vermeer's original (top right). Han van Meegeren's "The Procuress" (above right) is a forgery of Dirck van Baburen's 1622 painting (above left).

The phony Matisse is the first thing you see when you walk into the gallery, not far from a fake Picasso and a sham of a Vermeer.

The bright patterning, the simplified forms, the sheen on an earring — they look so real, you might need an X-ray, microscope, or chemical analysis to discover the truth.

Forgeries at the museum? Don't call the FBI in just yet. These paintings are among more than 60 works in an unorthodox exhibition that opens Tuesday at Springfield's D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts.

While museums have historically loathed even whispers of counterfeits, the Springfield show embraces the imitations. "Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World" might be the most authoritative exhibition yet detailing the multimillion-dollar copycat industry, telling the stories of five prominent forgers who painted in a range of styles. The show also features genuine works by such artists as Picasso, Matisse, and Signac alongside the fakes to show how easy it can be for people — even art historians — to get duped.

"Once upon a time, forgeries were the dirty little secrets of the art world," said independent curator Colette Loll, who organized the show. "But they are important cultural artifacts. Forgeries have existed throughout the existence of art. It's one of the oldest professions in the world. As long as there's a thriving art market, there's a thriving forgery market."

The D'Amour exhibition marks the debut of "Intent to Deceive," organized through the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit International Arts & Artists. After Springfield, the exhibition travels to museums in Florida, Ohio, and Oklahoma.

There are high expectations, as Springfield museum leaders view the show as part art exhibit, part detective story. They expect it to draw about 50,000 people over three months, which would place it among the best-attended shows in the museum's history.

And the broader museum community has taken notice, particularly because the cases in "Intent to Deceive" show that even major museums have been fooled by these forgers in the past, including Harvard's Fogg Museum and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The Museum of Fine Arts has a special link to the show. It owns a real version of the 17th-century Dutch work "The Procuress." The fake, copied by forger Han van Meegeren, is part of the D'Amour Museum show. (An added local wrinkle: Vermeer's painting "The Concert," famously stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, shows an image of "The Procuress" in the background.)

Katie Getchell, the MFA's deputy director, understands the fascination with fakes.

"I have friends say to me, 'Things at the museum, are they all real?' " said Getchell. "I think it's great for anyone to do an exhibition that is encouraging and raising awareness about connoisseurship."

Indeed, while the show in Springfield calls attention to the incredible amount of detailed effort that is required to craft a credible forgery, it also makes you think about what goes into creating a true masterpiece. The show is not meant to glorify the forgers, said Julia Courtney, curator of art at the D'Amour Museum. While the show describes how forgers were able to fool art experts at museums, collectors, and auction houses, it also explains the advances that have made it easier to separate the real from the ripoff.

Local institutions have had direct experience with that process. In 2007, in a case widely reported throughout the art world, the Harvard University Art Museums confirmed doubts that a trove of discovered works could have been genuine Jackson Pollocks. Museum investigators determined that some pigments in the paintings did not exist during Pollock's life. The Harvard case is not part of the show, but "Intent to Deceive" does tell the stories of how other questionable works were unmasked.



ROBERT FOGT  
PHOTOGRAPHY

**Hungarian painter Elmyr de Hory's forged Matisse, "Odalisque," is displayed at "Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World" at Springfield's D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts. This version was done in 1974.**

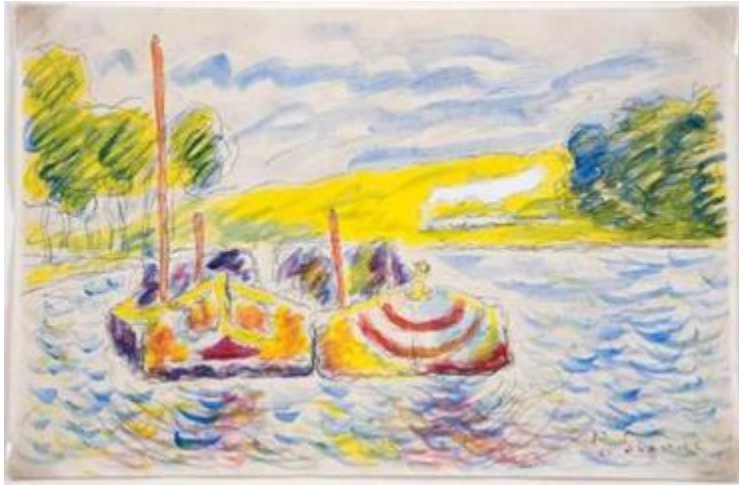
"Technology has allowed more forgeries to be exposed, and I think it's become more accepted that the forgers themselves were [once] able to fool experts," said Courtney. "Now, with forensic science, it's much easier to tell a fake from an original."

Loll should know. She has a master's degree in decorative arts but has also spent decades working as an art-world investigator, training federal agents to track down fakes and lecturing around the world. Later, Loll met the organizers of a 2010 exhibition at the Hillstrom Museum of Art in Minnesota on Elmyr de Hory, the notorious Hungarian painter whose forged Matisse serves as the centerpiece for "Intent to Deceive" and whose story inspired the Orson Welles documentary "F is for Fake."

When Loll approached International Arts & Artists about doing another forgery exhibit, the organization pushed her to expand the show's reach, incorporating not only de Hory but a handful of other forgers.

Of the five featured, three — de Hory, Han van Meegeren, and Eric Hebborn — are dead, and two are living. Mark Landis, a Virginia-born painter who dressed as a Jesuit priest as he traveled the country donating his fakes to various museums, has been profiled in *The New Yorker*. John Myatt — a British-born painter who is said to have forged more than 200 modernist paintings, many of which continue to circulate in the art market — served jail time for his forgeries. In the show, works by Myatt in the style of Matisse, Monet, and Vincent van Gogh are on display.

“A good fake is every bit as interesting as an original,” said Myatt, 68, in a telephone interview from England. “I never tried to copy. What you try to do is invent a painting that Monet or Picasso might have done if they hadn’t had a headache that day.”



SHANNON KOLVITZ

**Another piece in the exhibit, a watercolor by Mark Landis, was done in the style of Paul Signac and is owned by the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.**

Myatt, who served four months in jail in 1999, said he always found it amazing that his forgeries went undiscovered for so long. After all, he did not even use oil, preferring to paint with acrylics.

“The experts are, in fact, human just like the rest of us,” he said. “It was exciting, frankly, when a painting of mine went up in front of the world’s expert of something and he or she authenticated it. I remember thinking, ‘One day, they’ll make a film about all of it.’”

They are, sort of, said Getchell. She noted that late last year, John Travolta was at the MFA for the shooting of scenes in the heist film “*The Forger*.”

Getchell also points to one of the MFA’s prominent fakes, a work by Chinese painter Zhang Daqian. In 1957, the MFA purchased a landscape believing it was the work of 10th-century master Guan Tong. Revealed later as Zhang’s work, the museum featured it in a show on the artist in 2007-08.

“The history of fakes is not very new,” said Getchell. “I think it’s new that the general public is talking about this.”

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