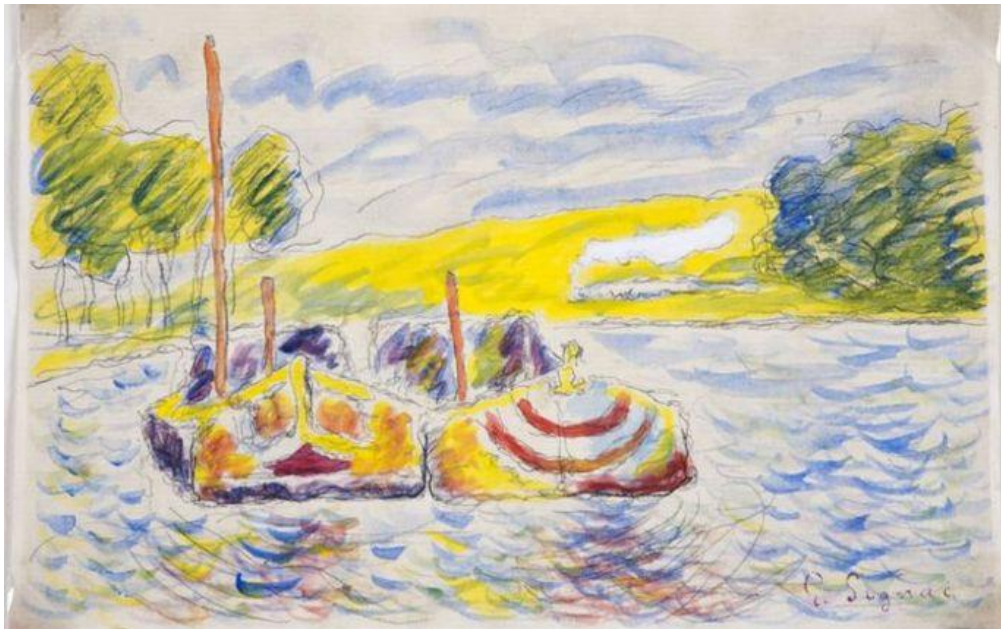




[ART & CULTURE](#)

Ringling exhibition features works by art forgers

[BRADENTON](#) | 18 MAY 2014 - 06:03AM GMT | [AUTHINT MAIL](#)



Ringling exhibition features works by art forgers .

Hans van Meegeren, Elmyr De Hory and Eric Hebborn created paintings beautiful enough to merit exhibition at The Ringling.

But they weren't just fine artists. They were also con artists.

Van Merregern, De Hory and Hebborn, along with John Myatt and Mark Landis are the subjects of a traveling exhibition called "Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art [World](#)." It opens Friday and runs through Aug. 3.

They were five of the most notorious [art](#) forgers from the 20th century. Myatt and Landis are still living.

They recreated paintings by the such artists as Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani and Henri Matisse, and they recreated them so meticulously that their forgeries could fool the world's top experts.

"Most of them are quite accomplished artists, at least technically speaking," said Chis Jones, the Ringing's assistant curator of exhibitions. "Some of these artists felt as though they could sell their own work for a few hundred dollars, or they could paint a Vermeer and sell it for thousands of dollars."

The exhibition approaches the forgers in the same way a more traditional exhibition would approach a more legitimate artist, Jones said. It looks at their work in the context of their lives and their motivations.

And their motivations were diverse. One was an accomplished painter of realistic portraits, but lived at a time when the art world revered only abstract works.

Another had a code of ethics and would only sell to art experts and would never try to dupe a naive patron.

One of the most intriguing forgers, Jones said, is Landis, an American who is still living. He never faced charges, even after his forgeries were discovered.

"He wasn't prosecuted because he never sold his paintings," Jones said. "He donated them to museums. Apparently he just enjoyed everyone being so friendly to him when he made these donations.'

Landis would usually give his forgeries to smaller museums that were especially thrilled to get donated works by famous artists.

In some cases, the forgers had grudges against the art establishment, whom they blamed for their lack of success. They would study what specific experts looked for in an authentic painting and try to fool them.

When the 17th century Dutch painter Vermeer came into vogue around the turn of the 20th century, some art experts theorized that there must be a trove of early undiscovered works hidden somewhere.

Forgers filled the demand by creating faux Vermeers, and the experts were so excited that their predictions had been verified that they eagerly authenticated them.

"There is a gap between the supply and the demand," said Colette Loll, "and that gap is where the forgers thrive."

Loll is the curator of the exhibition, which opened in Massachusetts and will travel to three more cities after it leaves Sarasota.

She also runs a Washington, D.C., company called Arts Fraud Insights that works to detect and expose fraudulent works of art.

Loll allows that there's something intriguing, even titillating, about these forgers and their work, but she said that the exhibition's purpose is serious.

"My intent is not to glamorize the forgers," she said. "I consider art forgery a cultural heritage crime."

The number of forgeries in the high end art world is surprising to most lay people, she said. The usual estimate is that about 40 percent of the paintings sold are fakes.

Many large and prestigious museums unwittingly display forgeries, and multi million dollar art fraud scandals have destroyed centuries old art dealerships.

"The exhibition brings to light the ways that many, many art experts get it wrong, sometimes spectacularly so," she said.

Some of the forgeries in the exhibition are excellent, she said, and others aren't. The most successful forgers know how to exploit their victims' trust, pride and greed.

The forgers in this exhibition would have a harder time today, she said, because technology gives experts new tools to subjectively evaluate paintings. But modern forgers are still able to succeed.

"Unfortunately, the techniques stay one step ahead of the technology," she said.

In Massachusetts, the exhibition attracted a wide audience including people who don't frequently visit museums.

It also made international news: Loll was interviewed about the exhibition by Al Jazeera and by a Russian TV news network.

One of the public's favorite elements of the exhibit is an interactive display that shows original paintings and forgeries.

"We ask you to use the knowledge you've gained in the exhibition to determine which one is the fake," she said.

There's an element of glamor in the lives of these forgers, she said. They take great risks and sometimes make a lot of money.

But she points out that these five artists are in an exhibition of frauds because they were eventually discovered.

"Life does not end well for these people," she said.

But the mass appeal of the exhibition probably has more to do with its daring subject matter and less with its academic implications.

"It's the four Fs," Jones said. "Fakes, fraud, forgers and fun."