Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art, Laney Salisbury, Aly Sujo, Penguin Group (USA) Incorporated, 2010, 0143117408, 9780143117407, 327 pages. The true story of one of the twentieth century's most audacious art frauds. Filled with extraordinary characters and told at breakneck speed, Provenance reads like a well-plotted thriller. But this is most certainly not fiction. It is the astonishing narrative of one of the most far-reaching and elaborate cons in the history of art forgery. Stretching from London to Paris to New York, investigative reporters Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo recount the tale of infamous con man and unforgettable villain John Drewe and his accomplice, the affable artist John Myatt. Together they exploited the archives of British art institutions to irrevocably legitimize the hundreds of pieces they forged, many of which are still considered genuine and hang in prominent museums and private collections today.


Literary Masters Dashiell Hammett, Richard Layman, 2000, , 217 pages. Examines Hammett's life, discusses the historical context of his works, and examines his short stories and novels, including "The Maltese Falcon."


Proust, Roger Shattuck, 1974, Literary Criticism, 187 pages.

The Ephemeral Museum Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition, Francis Haskell, 2000, Art, 200 pages. In this illustrated book, an eminent art historian examines the intriguing history and significance of the international art exhibition of the Old Master paintings.

Forged Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age, Jonathon Keats, Mar 28, 2013, Art, 197 pages. Forged explores the notion of art forgery from ancient times to the present.

Fakers, forgers & phoneys famous scams and scamps, Magnus Magnusson, Nov 28, 2006, Law, 416 pages. In "Fakers, Forgers and Phoneys", Magnus Magnusson masterfully explores the shadowy world of deception and counter-feiting. Through the 16 case studies in this intriguing ....

The art forger's handbook, Eric Hebborn, 1997, Art, 200 pages. An experienced art forger reveals the secrets of faking Old Master drawings and paintings, discussing the inks, papers, pens, and colors of the great artists of the past and ....

Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women, Christina Hoff Sommers, 1994, Social Science, 320 pages. Challenging currently accepted beliefs that have spurred the feminist movement, a heated examination challenges the integrity of feminist efforts and cites flaws in the common ....

The farm, Louis Bromfield, 1933, Fiction, 346 pages. For other editions, see Author Catalog.

The Girl with the Gallery Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market, Lindsay Pollock, 2006, Art, 483 pages. How one provocative, trail-blazing dealer, Edith Halpert, transformed the business of art dealing and shaped the legacy of modern American art.

Museum of the Missing A History of Art Theft, Simon Houpt, 2006, Art, 192 pages. Houpt offers an intriguing tour through the underworld of art theft, where the stakes are high and passions run strong. Not only is this volume beautifully written and lavishly ....

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Starred Review. A decade-long art scam that sullied the integrity of museum archives and experts alike is elegantly recounted by husband-and-wife journalists Salisbury and Sujo. In 1986, when struggling painter and single father John Myatt advertised copies of famous paintings, he never imagined he'd become a key player in one of Britain's biggest art frauds. Myatt soon met John Drewe, who claimed to be a physicist and avid art collector. Soon Drewe, a silver-tongued con man, was passing off Myatt's work as genuine, including paintings in the style of artists like Giacometti and Ben Nicholson. When buyers expressed concern about the works' provenance, Drewe began the painstaking process of falsifying records of ownership. Posing as a benefactor, Drewe even planted false documents in the archives of London's Tate Gallery, but suspicious historians and archivists eventually assisted Scotland Yard in bringing him to justice. Salisbury and Sujo (who died in 2008) evoke with flair the plush art world and its penetration by the seductive Drewe as well as the other players in this fascinating art drama. (July 13)

Aly Sujo, who passed away in October 2008, and Laney Salisbury were a husband-and-wife team of investigative reporters, who, together and individually, covered the arts, entertainment, and foreign news for Reuters and the Associated Press. Salisbury is co-author of The Cruelest Miles. She lives with her daughter in upstate New York. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An expertly written, carefully researched and exciting story of the criminal mastermind John Drewe who meticulously created extensive faked provenance to support his sales of hundreds of modern paintings forged by his accomplice artist John Myatt. The single criticism I have is that, although this book has lengthy descriptions of numerous faked Giacomettis, Nicholsons, Bissières and Sutherlands, there is not included a single photograph of any of the forgeries or of any genuine works to compare them with, nor are there any photographs of the forged provenance documents. And, although Drewe and Myatt's appearances are described in great detail, not a single photograph of either is included. Anyone reading this book would want, and expect, to see exactly what these paintings looked like and exactly how closely they resemble the genuine ones. The verbal descriptions are excellent, but they are no substitute for photographs. It is inexplicable why none are included. Fortunately, a Google Image search for "John Drewe" or "John Myatt" provides a number of examples of the faked paintings, as well as photographs of Drewe and Myatt (Myatt looks more distinguished to me, and Drewe less, than suggested by the book) and even some of the faked documents supporting the forgeries.
I picked this book up because I enjoy reading non-fiction and know little about the art world-- and my knowledge of "provenance" is limited to the explanations given on antiques roadshow. After reading the editorial review on how well researched the book is, I expected this to be a weighty, but rewarding read. But after the first few pages I was surprised how hooked I was-- the story is utterly compelling, a real page turner. I love how the authors described the characters, not only through the documents they consulted and interviews they conducted, but also through a fascinating psychological analysis on what may have driven their behavior. The book also provided a glimpse of how galleries, dealers, collectors and museums really operate-- I was surprised at the behavior of the "experts" in the art world-- all of which was detailed in a matter fact manner that led the reader to draw their own conclusion. I started this book on Saturday, read it straight through Sat night and finished Sunday because I just had to know what happened next, it's that kind of book.

Provenance is a finely paced, tense look at the art world and one of the most massive art frauds perpetuated in recent history on reputable galleries and museums. The story runs from 1986 to 1995 and spans several countries. It reads with the flavor of a mystery and recounts how con man John Drewe's efforts resulted in over 200 forged paintings--some of which evidently are still hanging!

Salisbury and Sujo have meticulously researched their subject and the book is like a fast paced thriller as we watch John Drewe manipulate and draw into the hoax, a struggling artist and parent to become a master forger. And then we follow Drewe as he cons galleries into accepting the works as genuine with an authentic provenance. One of the most fascinating aspects of the story is how Drewe faked the provenances from fabricating restoration records and receipts to manufacturing fake catalogues for art shows that never took place!

"Provenance" is the account of one of the greatest cons in the history of art. About 240 forged paintings were produced, many selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and netting overall about 2 million pounds over nine years. Many are still considered genuine and hang in prominent places. The authors reveal that museums not only display art, but also assemble and maintain a chain of ownership for the works of the authors they display; funding this effort, however, is difficult and became key to the fraud detailed in the book.

The action begins with a museum reception for Dr. John Drewe, professor of nuclear physics and art connoisseur, who has just donated two 'valuable decades-old' paintings to the museum. Dr. Drewe is accompanied by his 'research assistant' John Myatt, who is shocked to realize that he had just finished painting the valuable donated paintings. Myatt strongly protests to Drewe that the subterfuge will certainly be discovered by the museum's curators, and gets Drewe to withdraw the donation on the grounds that he'd just learned of potential problems with their documentation. Dr. Drewe instead substitutes a $20,000 donation, with promises of another $500,000 later for the museum's provenance work. The point of Dr. Drewe's generosity was to gain access to the museum's records.

Dr. Drewe and Myatt had met four years prior when Drewe responded to Myatt's ad for reproductions. Myatt had just been abandoned by his wife, along with with two babies in diapers, and was short of money. Dr. Drewe commissioned a copy, and their relationship grew over time. Meanwhile, world art prices began soaring.

If you've ever been had by a con man, as I once was at a cash machine in Salem, Mass., you know the odd aftermath of emotion. First, you're befuddled, then enraged and finally consumed by visions of revenge. But there's another sentiment that can sneak up on you. I was reminded of it while reading Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo's well-crafted tale of British con artist John Drewe. I'd expected to despise the psychopath at the center of what Scotland Yard called the biggest art fraud of the 20th century. But somehow, from the first page, he got me to drop my guard. Drewe, for all his odious ambitions, is ingenious, persuasive, even brilliant. As I was pulled deeper into his deceptions, I couldn't help admiring this creep. Likewise, I understood how I came away from that cash machine years ago envious of a guy who could put together a wildly complicated fiction that was credible enough to squeeze $20 out of me.
In "Provenance," Salisbury and Sujo untangle Drewe's elaborate scheme that put more than 200 counterfeit works on the market between 1986 and 1995. What's fascinating about his story is his inventiveness in faking the paintings' provenances. Drewe ginned up receipts for prior purchases; he created catalogs for exhibitions that never took place; he even fabricated records for restoration work that the supposedly decades-old paintings had required over the years. In a master stroke, he smooth-talked his way into the archives of the Tate Gallery, where he inserted some of his phony documents into the files. Experts rummaging about in the archives to certify a work's authenticity would find much to lead them astray.

Drewe could have accomplished none of this without a skilled forger. He found the perfect dupe in John Myatt, a down-on-his-luck artist living alone with his two small kids in a rundown farmhouse in England. For at least Â£150 each, Myatt was turning out "genuine fakes" -- reproductions clearly sold as such -- of works by Monet, Turner and Matisse. His world changed when Dr. John Drewe phoned him. In an upper-class accent, Drewe told Myatt he was a lecturer in nuclear physics and a consultant to the ministry of defense. He would also claim to others to be a descendant of the earl of York, a historian of the Nazi era, an army lieutenant, a weapons expert and a hang glider. None of it was true. Yet blessed with a prodigious memory, Drewe was able to pose convincingly.

Myatt began by painting several pieces for Drewe. One day, Drewe informed Myatt that a friend who worked for Christie's mistook as real a painting Myatt had done in the style of cubist Albert Gleizes. The Christie's expert predicted it could sell for at least Â£25,000 at auction. Then Drewe held up an envelope stuffed with bills, and Myatt realized the sale had already taken place. Drewe said Myatt's take would be half the auction price, a staggering amount of money that would cover shoes for his kids and end his worries about the rent. Desperate, Myatt crossed the line: He reached out and took the money.

For nearly a decade, the pair faked work by artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Ben Nicholson, Georges Braque and Nicolas de Staël. The fraud was perpetuated by eager salesmen, greedy or misguided dealers, inattentive auction houses, unwitting art lovers and gullible archivists. It finally unraveled thanks in part to the keen eye and persistence of Mary Lisa Palmer, director of the Giacometti Association. Scotland Yard detectives went to work and brought Drewe and Myatt to trial. In court, Drewe sat impeccably dressed, popping chocolate bonbons into his mouth.

For all its virtues, this book does contain a con of its own -- a kind perpetuated with avid persistence by the publishing industry. "Provenance" makes a strong case for the havoc wreaked by John Drewe and his shenanigans. But it falls far short of the sweeping promise of its subtitle: "How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art." Enough with the fraudulent subtitles, please.

Provenance is the extraordinary narrative of one of the most far-reaching and elaborate deceptions in art history. Investigative reporters Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo brilliantly...more A tautly paced investigation of one of the 20th century's most audacious art frauds, which generated hundreds of forgeries-many of them still hanging in prominent museums and private collections today.

Chief among those was the struggling artist John Myatt, a vulnerable single father who was manipulated by Drewe into becoming a prolific art forger. Once Myatt had painted the pieces, the real fraud began. Drewe managed to infiltrate the archives of the upper echelons of the British art world in order to fake the provenance of Myatt's forged pieces, hoping to irrevocably legitimize the fakes while effectively rewriting art history.

The story stretches from London to Paris to New York, from tony Manhattan art galleries to the esteemed Giacometti and Dubuffet associations, to the archives at the Tate Gallery. This enormous swindle resulted in the introduction of at least two hundred forged paintings, some of them breathtakingly good and most of them selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many of these fakes are still out in the world, considered genuine and hung prominently in private houses, large galleries, and prestigious museums. And the sacred archives, undermined by John Drewe, remain tainted to this day.
A successful con artist does not break the system. He exploits an inherent weakness in the system which many may not know is at risk. This is exactly what con man John Drewe did to the British art world for nearly a decade in the 1980s and 1990s. In this case, Drewe exploits the heavy reliance on provenance, the documented "life" of a work of art from studio to current owner. Provenances take the forms of sales receipts, correspondence, photographs of works, shipping labels...more An Archival Case Study

The text reads more like a thriller than a case study. There is a con and a mark. It is evident early on that Sujo and Salisbury's main source of information was forger John Myatt himself, a hard-working artist who was "set-up." While the opportunity to have a first-hand source is probably titillating, I think these two didn't take the trouble to offer an unbiased view of the story. I noticed that not once are the works called "forgeries" while they are in Myatt's possession. Salisbury and Sujo refer to Myatt's works by the artists whose styles Myatt forges. He delivers "Bisseres" on time, but never the fakes. In fact, the title is the only place in which Myatt is called a "forger" within the text. So even when Myatt delivers his reproductions in the full knowledge that Drewe is selling them off to dealers and auction houses as the artists' genuine works, he is still the victim of this tale. When Myatt becomes disgusted with the blatant refusal of art dealers, gallery owners, and auction houses to perform due diligence by examining suspect works rather than hurrying them through sales, he is practically doing the industry some sort of service by diluting the art world with fakes. So if John Myatt is the victim, the mark, the unsung hero of this tale, why does his web site (www.johnmyatt.com) say "the biggest art fraud of the 20th century" in bold, golden letters across the top of the page? While the work was certainly entertaining, the depiction of Myatt as the courageous, industrious, single-father unwittingly drawn into the seedy world of shady art dealings seems highly stylized.

Much time and text was spent defending Myatt when it should have been spent examining the weaknesses in this system. Weaknesses such as how stolen and forged art sales run the same routes that drugs and illegal arms run; the desperation for funds that allows dealers and auction houses to rush works of questionable authenticity to the auction block; reliance on provenance from archivists who, although may have some knowledge of the art world from the content of their collections, are not subject specialists. A better look at the case from the archival perspective is Rodney G. S. Carter's article "Tainted Archives: Art, Archives and Authenticity" from the journal Archivaria (vol. 63).

Provenance is a core principle of archival science. Despite differing opinions and approaches to the archivist's role in protecting documents for cultural, evidential, and sustaining value, each archivist has a duty to protect the documents entrusted to his or her institution. This seems to be at odds with another archival value: access. For what is the purpose of protecting and preserving documents if no one can utilize the information held within? This is only one of the many seemingly contradictory duties that the archivist undertakes with each acquisition. In this case, protection meant preventing Drewe (and his cohorts) from removing documents AND inserting false documents. Unlike a library whose holdings include individual works, archives hold collections -- series of items that are related by creation. By planting false documents, the integrity of the entire collection has been compromised. The extent of the corruption of these archival holdings may never fully be known.(less)

John Drewe and the skilled painter John Myatt together perpetrated one of the longest-running and most extensive art frauds of the late 20th century, extending from London to America and the continent, and from there around the world. Breathtaking high...more This is a mind-bending walk through The Art of the Con as practiced by con-master John Drewe, simultaneously and serially known as John Cockett, a different Mr. Cockett, Mr. Sussman, Mr. Green, Mr. Atwood, Mr. Martin, Mr. Bayard, and Mr. Coverdale.

John Drewe and the skilled painter John Myatt together perpetrated one of the longest-running and most extensive art frauds of the late 20th century, extending from London to America and the continent, and from there around the world. Breathtaking high-wire stunts of impersonation and art
forgery, archive-diving and modification, provenance creation and solicitation all came to a halt nearly a decade after it had begun when a few of the more than two hundred paintings Myatt had forged and sold came to the attention of New Scotland Yard's chief of The Art and Antiques Squad, Dick Ellis.

The discussion of the fraud holds one kind of fascination; the gathering of evidence and the actual trial holds different thrills. John Drewe was undoubtedly one of the finest liar-performers ever uncovered, and in fact, the con has become known as John Drewe's "performance piece" by insiders and investigators. Drewe kept such an enormous cache of personae in the air at the same time and convinced so many of his rectitude that one would simply love to see him act, as long as his mental acuity was not aimed at one's life savings, nor one's unprotected heart.

While all of this completely absorbing story holds interest for the reader, I especially loved the graceful way it ended. We learn of the take-down, the trial, the sentencing, and the after-trial outcomes. This is a marvelously-told story with lessons for us all. I can heartily recommend the audiobook narrated by Marty Peterson, though I did listen to it on slow speed. At normal speed I was getting so much info I couldn't keep track of names and places.

A terrific history of a crime, Salisbury and Sujo cover all the bases cleanly and entertainingly. They follow the fraud of John Drew, the artist he worked with, some of the art world figures who weren't taken in and several more who were, and eventually the painstakingly crafted police investigation.