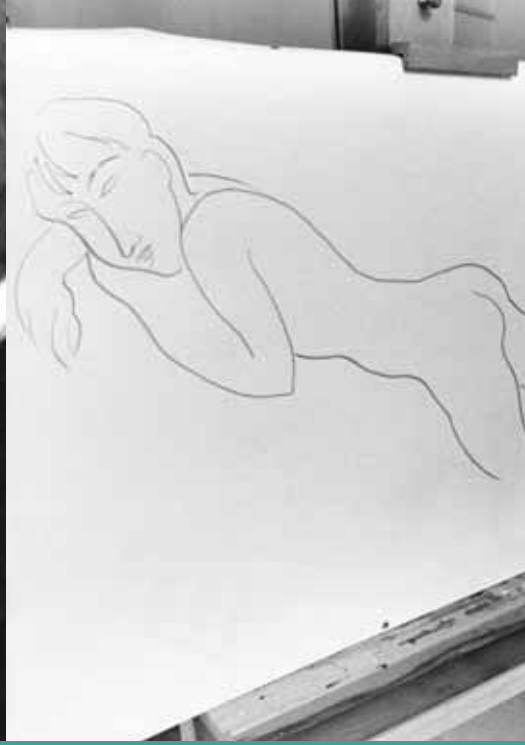
Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker

Hillstrom Museum of Art



Elmyr de Hory, creating a drawing with figures in the style of Modigliani, Picasso, and Matisse, photographed by Pierre Boulat for a February 6, 1970 *Life Magazine* article, at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza

Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker

February 15 through April 18, 2010
Opening Reception February 15, 7 to 9 p.m.
Public Lectures

Jonathan Lopez, Sunday, February 28, 2010, 3:30 p.m.
Mark Forgy, Sunday, March 21, 2010, 3:30 p.m.

Lectures are free and open to the public, and will be presented in Wallenberg Auditorium, Nobel Hall of Science on the Gustavus Adolphus College campus.

Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker is supported by a generous grant from the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation.

The majority of the photographs of works lent by Mark Forgy are by Robert Fogt Photography.

On the cover:
Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1975, oil on canvas, 21 x 14 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Hillstrom Museum of Art
gustavus.edu/finearts/hillstrom

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The exploits of numerous infamous art forgers have been widely recounted, and one of the most fascinating and notorious cases has to do with Hungarian-born Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976). After an early life of privilege that included art studies in Budapest, Munich and Paris, de Hory's situation was turned upside down by World War II, during which he was imprisoned thrice, his family's estate was taken, and his father died in Auschwitz. It was almost by accident, and related to his penurious circumstances following the war, that de Hory began offering works he had created in the style of other artists as genuine works by those artists. A wealthy acquaintance visiting his Paris studio in 1946 noted a drawing he had made in the manner of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and offered to buy it. De Hory did not explicitly say that the drawing was by Picasso, but he sold it to his friend knowing she believed it to be so. This started a career that would ultimately result in hundreds or perhaps even over a thousand of his paintings and drawings—fakes of modern masters that also included Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), and others—being accepted into museums and prominent collections in the U.S. and abroad.

Mark Forgy, who formed a close friendship with de Hory in the final years of his life, has lent works that the artist gave or bequeathed to him. Some of these were done in the manner of other artists but signed with de Hory's own name, while others were in his own style. After a chance meeting in 1969, Forgy became an assistant and friend to the artist, living with him in his home on the Spanish island of Ibiza until his death by suicide in 1976. Forgy came on the scene just after de Hory's story was becoming known. A few months before the two men met, a book titled *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time* appeared, written by Clifford Irving (just a short time before creating his own forgery, the spurious biography of Howard Hughes). Irving's study led to articles about de Hory in *Look* and *Life* magazines (December 10, 1968 and February 6, 1970, respectively), as well as to a BBC documentary titled *Elmyr: The True Picture?* in 1970, and *F for* Fake, a 1972 film by the great Orson Welles about de Hory and the nature of faking. Interest in de Hory has continued, especially since many believe that his fakes—maybe as much as 90% of his output, according to Irving—are still unrecognized in significant private and public collections. A recent film by Norwegian Knut Jorfald titled *Masterpiece or Forgery? The Story of Elmyr de Hory* (1997) will be joined by a new documentary to be released in 2011, *Chasing Elmyr*, which is being directed and produced by filmmaker Jeff Oppenheim and which draws from Forgy's recently written memoirs.

In addition to around seventy paintings, drawings and prints by de Hory from Forgy's collection, the exhibition will also include a large portrait of de Hory and his brother Stephen as young children, painted by Hungarian Philip de László (1869-1937), the highly popular portraitist whose other clients included Pope Leo XIII and many European royals and aristocrats. Also on view will be genuine works by two of the artists de Hory

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frequently forged (Matisse and Modigliani), lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, plus a fake Matisse from the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum, to which it was donated for study purposes as a recognized de Hory forgery. The exhibition is supported with a generous grant from the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation.

The Hillstrom Museum of Art is grateful to the Schmidt Foundation not only for this grant, but also for its record of supporting programs, events and activities designed to benefit the city of St. Peter, Minnesota and the region. The Museum also thanks the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Saint Louis Art Museum for the loan of works from their collections. And the Museum thanks, especially, Mark Forgy and his wife Alice Doll, for sharing works from the Forgy Collection, and for sharing Forgy's experiences with de Hory.

Elmyr de Hory with Orson Welles, photographed in 1972 by Richard Drewett, producer of the 1970 BBC documentary *Elmyr: The True Picture?*, at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza

Related programming presented in conjunction with *Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker* includes two public lectures. The first is by prominent art critic and writer Jonathan Lopez, author of the 2008 bestseller *The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren* (3:30 p.m., February 28, Wallenberg Auditorium, Nobel Hall of Science). Lopez will discuss van Meegeren (1889-1947), who ranks with de Hory as one of the most recognized art forgers and who is known for his fakes after the Dutch seventeenth-century painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). A second public lecture will be given by Mark Forgy, considering his relationship with de Hory and the aesthetic implications of faked works of art (3:30 p.m., March 21, Wallenberg Auditorium, Nobel Hall of Science).

Art forgery has existed for nearly as long as art has been prized, and past examples include faking of Greek sculpture in the Roman era, plus instances when Italian Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo (1475-1564) as a young apprentice replaced drawings by his teacher Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494) with copies, and when he buried a marble sculpture he had carved of a *Sleeping Cupid* (now lost) so that it would look more ancient, prior to it being sold as an antique.

An expansion of the art market starting in the nineteenth century brought with it more extensive occurrence of art forgery. One of the earliest fakers who has been studied in great depth is Giovanni Bastianini (1830-1868), a stonecutter turned sculptor who admired the style and realism of Italian portrait sculpture from the fifteenth century, emulating it in his busts of famous historical figures. These accomplished works were marketed by a Florentine dealer named Giovanni Freppa, and recent assessments of the role of both Freppa and Bastianini has tended to implicate both as deliberately defrauding those to whom the works were sold, whereas it previously had been generally believed that Bastianini, at least, was innocent and that it was without his knowledge that his works were marketed as Renaissance objects. Bastianini's sculpture has been discussed in an essay by the prominent art historian John Pope-Hennessy, a highly critical commentator who grudgingly admitted admiration for some aspects of Bastianini's works, calling his bust of *Lucrezia Donati* (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), an "extremely pretty work."

Alceo Dossena (1878-1937), another Italian, also created sculpture that included pastiches of Italian Renaissance works, though he also made works in the style of ancient Greece. Sometimes called the "king of forgers," Dossena himself revealed the truth about his fakes through court action against dealers who were selling them as genuine old works and giving him only a small amount of the proceeds. Dossena's story was outlined in a 1987 study by David Sox titled *Unmasking the Forger: The Dossena Deception*.

One of the most celebrated art forgers of all time was Han van Meegeren (1889-1947), the Dutch artist who died shortly after his fakes of Vermeer came to light. Van Meegeren, in the aftermath of World War II, had been

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LENDER'S STATEMENT

Mark Forgy, Elmyr de Hory's longtime friend and protégé, and author of a forthcoming memoir, *The Forger's Apprentice: Life with the World's Most Notorious Artist,* has lent most the artworks on display in this exhibition. He offers here his personal perspective:

Portrait of Mark, 1969, oil on canvas, 22 ½ x 18 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

While hindsight often affords us a clearer perspective on history, even after the passing of almost thirty-five years since the death of the twentieth century's foremost art faker, Hungarian-born artist, Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), many questions persist over the fate and whereabouts of his prodigious output. Relatively few of his works have surfaced since his illicit twenty-year career ended in 1967. Elmyr's illegitimate masterpieces in public and private collections under the names of a number of the great Modernists may continue resting undisturbed, perhaps forever. The tremors of scandal in the mid 1960s have long settled, and incentive to challenge the authenticity of such artworks has diminished with time, especially given their enhanced market values.

The works on view at the Hillstrom Museum of Art constitute the first public exposure and most comprehensive exhibition of Elmyr's artwork in North America. Many of the works are in the manner of those artists from the School of Paris, such as Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), and others, paid homage to in Elmyr's fabulous frauds. Elmyr shared a bond with those artists, who worked mainly in the first half of the twentieth century, and who stemmed from the same figurative training. This provided a stylistic familiarity and a comfort zone that eased Elmyr into his illicit career. It was a life-changing epiphany when one of his drawings was mistaken by an acquaintance for a work by Picasso, wholly unexpected and surprising, although he thought there was little difference between his own artistic foundations or visual expression and that of these artists, many of whom he personally knew.

This exhibition also offers an intimate look into work uniquely in Elmyr's own style, including oil paintings, drawings in pencil or pen and ink, and watercolors, some from his sketchbooks. Many of these are portraits of friends, acquaintances, or those whom he thought had "interesting faces." Elmyr's classic training is displayed here in his draftsmanship; but it was his sense of connection to others that provided the spark that guided his art, and his related humane instincts that drew people to him, converting them to friends and admirers along the way.

Elmyr de Hory and Mark Forgy, photographed c.1971 on Ibiza by de Hory's lawyer Arnold Weisberger

Between 1969 and 1976, I formed a close friendship with Elmyr, working as his live-in secretary, gallery director, and confidante. I was privy to his world and its array of characters that seemed to spring from the mind of Lewis Carroll. I truly thought I had fallen down a rabbit hole on the Spanish Mediterranean island of Ibiza. Elmyr's villa became my private finishing school, and he was determined I should garner a European education, learn languages, art, and culture, and acquire the social graces appropriate to a "young gentleman." Elmyr became my mentor, and I was a vessel for his knowledge that gushed like a severed artery. It was this up-close and personal view of Elmyr that made me realize that the man whom I knew didn't square with his rogue image.

Here, no attempts are made to deceive, but simply reveal another aspect of an artist whose skill was the genesis of an extraordinary saga and career.

Mark Forgy

Elmyr de Hory (1906 – 1976)

(compiled by Mark Forgy)

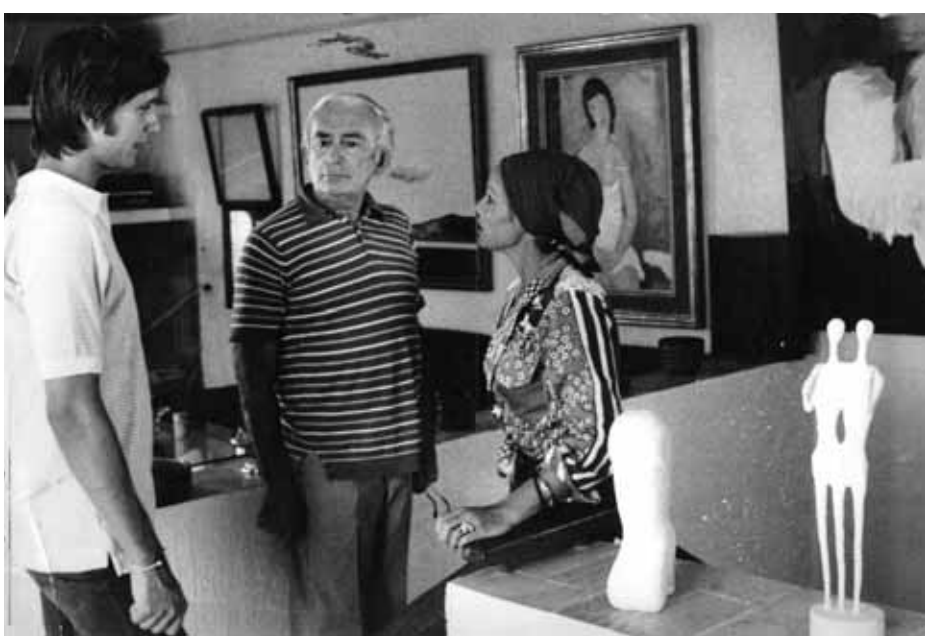
Right: Philip de László (1869-1937), *Portrait of Elmyr and his Brother Stephen*, c.1910-1912, oil on canvas, 48 x 32 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

1906 Born in Budapest, Hungary.

1924-1928 Received formal art training at the Akademie Heimann in Munich, Germany, and Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, France.

1926-1939 Made Paris his home.

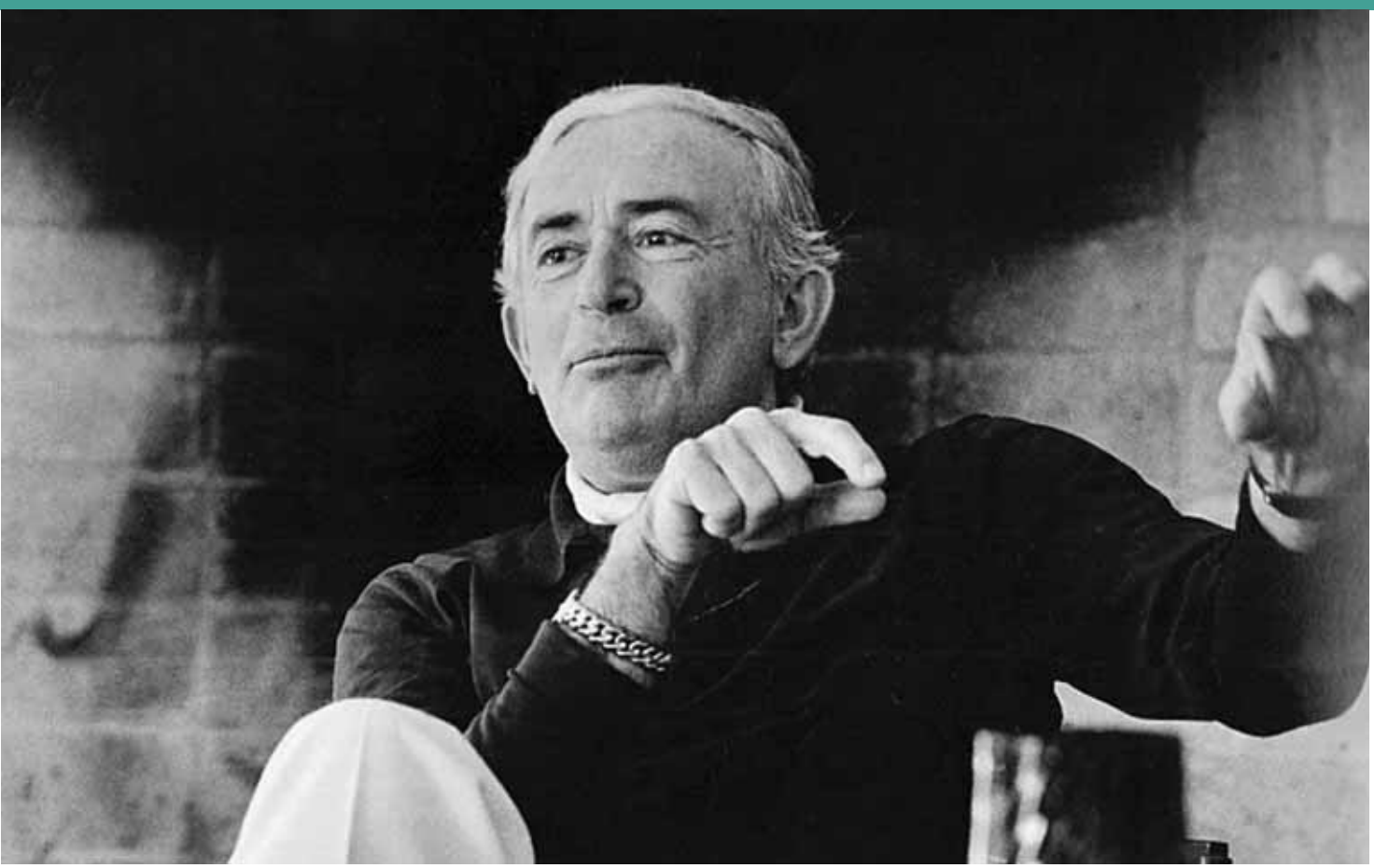
1939-1946 Returned to Budapest at the outbreak of World War II. He was arrested by the Nazis for associating with a British reporter whom they believed to be a spy and sent to an internment camp, released, and then rearrested. He was sent to another prison camp outside Berlin. The Gestapo broke his leg during interrogation, then sent him to a hospital for treatment. He escaped and returned to Budapest with the help of friends in Berlin. Once more he was captured, this time by the invading Russian troops; he was saved from a "death march" only by family connections with an influential Russian general. In the aftermath of the war he returned to Paris, a refugee without the family wealth he previously enjoyed. He struggled to re-establish himself, as an artist. One day a titled English woman came to his studio and saw pinned on the wall a drawing she mistook for a Picasso. He didn't disabuse her of her assumption, and by accident discovered a talent that launched a new career.



Elmyr de Hory with Ursula Andress and Mark Forgy, photographed c.1970 at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza

1946-1947 After successful forays in England, Holland, Switzerland and Scandinavia selling "Picasso drawings," he flew to Rio de Janiero, spending a year in South America.

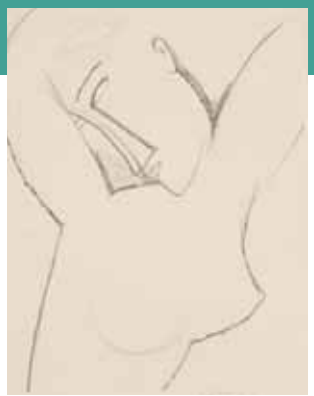
1947-1959 Went to New York on a three-month tourist visa and stayed illegally for twelve years. Here the scope of his illicit output greatly increased, and he began selling his works to galleries and museums throughout the United States. In the mid 1950s, he formed an uneasy alliance with Fernand Legros, who became his point man for sales. At Legros' urging, he began doing more oil paintings, to "maximize profits."



Elmyr de Hory, photographed by Pierre Boulat for a February 6, 1970 *Life Magazine* article, at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza

1959-1967 Returned to Europe after deciding to dissolve his business partnership with Legros, whom he was convinced was pocketing the lion's share of the profits from picture sales. In the early 1960s, he discovered the quaint Mediterranean island of Ibiza, deciding it was where he finally wanted to settle down. An accidental encounter while visiting Paris reconnected him with Legros, who had established himself in Paris as an art dealer on profits gleaned from his work. His former partner charmed him back into a business arrangement and the sales kept pace with a burgeoning worldwide art market. In 1967, Legros placed a number of his works in an auction outside of Paris. A purported Vlaminck 1906 oil painting was found to be not thoroughly dried. The ensuing scandal signaled the end to Elmyr's career as the most successful art forger of the twentieth-century.

1967-1976 In 1968, he was interned for two months in jail on Ibiza, not for art forgery, which was difficult to prove, but for "consorting with criminal elements, having no visible means of support, and homosexuality." He was expelled from the island for twelve months after his release. Two months after his return to Ibiza, I met him, in the fall of 1969. In this period, he became a bad-boy media darling, especially after the release of Clifford Irving's bestselling biography *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*. The world press made him a popular folk hero for exploiting the fallibility of art experts and the rampant profiteering of the art market. By 1969, his reputation helped him launched a new career, selling his own work as well as works in the styles of others signed with his own name. As he finally enjoyed a long-awaited recognition of his talent as an artist in his own right, his former partner, the devious and harmful Legros, could not abide his success. Legros consequently orchestrated demands for Elmyr's extradition from Spain on trumped-up charges, culminating in the Spanish government's decision to extradite him to France. Elmyr had reason to believe that Legros would have him killed if he ever went to prison in France, and, rather than awaiting that fate, he committed suicide on December 11, 1976.



Caryatid, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1970
Pencil on paper
10 ⅝ x 8 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Caryatid, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1971
Pencil on paper
16 x 10 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Drawing of Roman Bust in the Vatican Museum, 1973
Pencil on paper
9 ¼ x 6 ⅛ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Drawing of Roman Bust in the Vatican Museum, 1973
Pencil on paper
9 ½ x 6 ⅝ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Fauve Landscape, in the style of Maurice de Vlaminck, c.1968
Oil on canvas
25 x 31 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Ghost Rider, c.1971
Oil on canvas
24 ½ x 16 ⅞ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Guitarist, in the style of Georges Braque, c.1970
Pencil on paper
10 ¼ x 15 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Head of a Woman, in the style of Pablo Picasso, c.1974
Pencil on paper
15 x 10 ¾ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Horses and Rider, c.1972
Oil on canvas
35 x 28 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Il Santo, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1970
Pencil on paper
10 ⅜ x 8 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Landscape, in the style of Paul Cézanne, c.1970
Watercolor on paper
7 ⅝ x 10 ⅛ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Landscape, in the style of Paul Cézanne, 1971
Lithograph on paper
23 x 17 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Landscape, in the style of Paul Signac, 1971
Lithograph on paper
18 x 23 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Landscape, in the style of Maurice de Vlaminck, 1971
Gouache on paper
19 ½ x 25 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Landscape with Horse and Rider and Seated Figure, c.1973
Oil on canvas
27 ½ x 35 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Man in the Blue Hat, c.1963
Watercolor on paper
15 ½ x 12 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Man Playing Chess, c.1963
Crayon on paper
11 ½ x 16 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Man with Green Hair, c.1964
Watercolor on paper
20 ½ x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Nude, in the style of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, c.1974
Colored pencil on paper
19 x 12 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Nude Male Figure, 1969
Pencil on paper
13 x 13 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Nude Man, 1968
Ink on paper
11 ¾ x 6 ¼ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Nude Woman, in the style of André Derain, 1968
Ink on paper
11 ⅛ x 8 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Nudes on Horseback, c.1972
Watercolor on paper
14 x 16 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Odalisque, in the style of Henri Matisse, 1974
Oil on canvas
19 x 23 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Orchestral Scene, in the style of Raoul Dufy, c.1971
Watercolor on paper
22 ½ x 28 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

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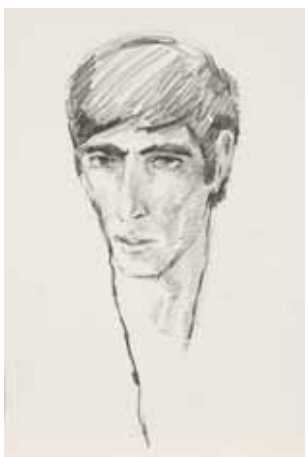
Picador, in the style of Pablo Picasso, c.1968
Pencil on paper
20 ½ x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy



Portrait of a Local Bartender, c.1970
Pencil on paper
13 ½ x 6 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Man, c.1973
Pencil on paper
13 x 9 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Sitting Woman, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, 1971
Pencil on paper
26 ½ x 18 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1974
Crayon on paper
17 ⅜ x 12 ¼ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, 1971
Pencil on paper
16 ½ x 15 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1974
Pencil on paper
20 x 16 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1975
Oil on canvas
21 x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Woman, in the style of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, c.1968
Pencil on paper
8 x 6 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Young Man with a Book, 1974
Pencil and gouache with a blue wash background on paper
17 x 12 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of a Young Man with Ascot, c.1974
Pencil on paper
12 x 10 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Ernesto, c.1964
Watercolor on paper
20 ½ x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of James Goodbrand, c.1963
Oil on canvas
10 ⅛ x 8 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of James Goodbrand, c.1963
Watercolor on paper
15 x 11 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Juan, with inscription, 1974
Pencil on paper
17 x 13 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Juan, without inscription, 1974
Pencil on paper
17 x 13 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Howard Hughes, c.1972
Pencil on paper
16 x 11 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Mark, 1969
Oil on canvas
22 ½ x 18 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Mark, c.1970
Pencil on paper
9 ¾ x 7 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Mark, c.1972
Pencil on paper
9 x 6 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Portrait of Mark, 1970
Oil on canvas
18 x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Profile of a Man, c.1963
Pencil on paper
11 ½ x 16 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Reclining Male Nude, c.1969
Pencil on paper
11 ½ x 15 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Regatta, in the style of Raoul Dufy, 1971
Lithograph on paper
19 x 26 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Regatta, in the style of Raoul Dufy, c.1974
Oil on canvas
19 x 25 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

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Scene of Ibiza Town, c.1968
Watercolor and gouache on paper
11 ¼ x 15 ⅝ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Seated Figure, in the style of Georges Braque, c.1972
Pencil on paper
15 ¼ x 10 ¾ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Seated Nude, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1968
Oil on canvas
25 x 31 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Seated Nude, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1970
Pencil on paper
17 ⅝ x 11 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Small Portrait of Mark, c.1971
Pencil on paper
8 x 5 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Spanish Woman with Flower in Her Hair, in the style of Kees van Dongen, 1971
Lithograph on paper
22 ½ x 19 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Stylized Face, in the style of Hans Erni, c.1974
Watercolor on paper
11 ⅛ x 10 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Three Nudes, c.1972
Oil on canvas
23 x 17 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Three Nymphs, c.1975
Ink on paper
24 x 20 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Two Heads of Women, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1973
Pencil on paper
13 x 19 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Two Nymphs, c.1975
Ink on paper
19 x 15 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman at a Table, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1975
Oil on canvas
25 x 20 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman in Red Interior, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1970
Oil on canvas
27 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman in Three-Quarter Profile, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1975
Ink on paper
11 ½ x 9 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman Resting Head on Her Arm, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1975
Ink on paper
14 ⅝ x 17 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman with Blonde Hair, c.1964
Watercolor on paper
20 ½ x 14 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman with Eyes, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1975
Pencil on paper
28 ½ x 21 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Woman with Hat, c.1970
Pencil on paper
6 ⅝ x 7 ⅜ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Women at the Seaside, c.1970
Pencil on paper
21 ½ x 25 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Young Girl, in the style of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1971
Lithograph on paper
18 x 23 inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Young Man in Yellow Sweater, c.1963
Watercolor on paper
13 ½ x 17 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), after Henri Matisse
Portrait of a Girl, undated
Pen and ink on paper
20 ½ x 15 ⅞ inches
Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of The Main Street Gallery

ADDITIONAL WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Henri Matisse (1869-1954)
Woman with Folded Hands, 1918-1919
Pen and india ink on paper
10 ⅝ x 14 ⅞ inches
Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, John DeLaittre Memorial Collection
Gift of funds from Mrs. Horace Ropes

Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920)
Portrait of Madame Zborowski, c.1917-1920
Graphite on white wove paper
13 ⅛ x 10 ⅝ inches
Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of David M. Daniels

Philip de László (1869-1937)
Portrait of Elmyr and his Brother Stephen, c.1910-1912
Oil on canvas
48 x 32 ½ inches
Collection of Mark Forgy

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Elmyr de Hory, painting in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, photographed c.1974 in his studio at his villa La Falaise, Ibiza

Top, right: *Portrait of a Woman*, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1975, oil on canvas, 21 x 14 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

accused of being a Nazi collaborator when it was discovered that he had sold what was believed to be a Vermeer depiction of *Christ and the Adulteress* to Hermann Goering, the Nazi Reichsmarschall who was second in command to Hitler. Van Meegeren's trial was a rather sensational and sometimes comical affair that included him demonstrating to the court that he could, indeed, paint in the style of Vermeer.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the frequency of forgery and of exposed fakers increased, to the point where it almost seemed that every decade or two produced another well-known forger who became a kind of picaresque anti-hero. Englishman Tom Keating (1917-1984) began as an art restorer and turned to forging artists like Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) with a wish to fool experts and to draw attention to the precarious and ethically challenged nature of the art market. He left messages hidden in the undercoating of some of his paintings, knowing they would later be read in X-ray, and he deliberately inserted into his work anachronisms, in image detail or in use of modern materials, all for the sake of embarrassing the art establishment. Later in life Keating hosted a television program about the techniques of old master painters, a subject in which he had a clear expertise. His story was told in a 1977 book he wrote with Geraldine and Frank Norman, titled *The Fake's Progress: The Tom Keating Story*.

French forger David Stein (1935-1999) was a thief whose activities in forging became known when artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985) happened upon some of Stein's fakes of his works on view in a gallery. That was in 1967, the same year that Elmyr de Hory's faking was revealed. Stein's story is told in his wife Anne-Marie's 1973 book, the amusingly titled *Three Picassos Before Breakfast*.

Eric Hebborn (1934-1996) was an artist who studied at London's Royal Academy. His entry into forging seems to have been suggested when an eminent art historian told him his drawings looked like those of French master Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Hebborn was unmasked when a curator of drawings from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. noticed that two works by different Italian Renaissance artists purchased by the Gallery from the respected London dealer Colnaghi were on the exact same kind of paper. Hebborn confessed to being a forger in 1984, and he made a campaign of describing the greed in the art market that encouraged forgery, and of mocking experts who had been taken in by his many fakes. He published his autobiography, titled *Drawn to Trouble: Confessions of a Master Forger, A Memoir* in 1993. A second book by Hebborn, *The Art Forger's Handbook*, was published posthumously after he was murdered in Rome just after its Italian edition appeared, an unsolved crime that suggests the real dangers that often faced forgers and that led Elmyr de Hory to ask Mark Forgy to serve as his bodyguard in addition to the other duties he fulfilled.

Faking of art is a perennially interesting topic, as evidenced by the popularity of recent books on the subject, including Jonathan Lopez' bestseller cited above and Edward Dolnick's *The Forger's Spell: A True Story of Vermeer, Nazis, and the Greatest Art Hoax of the Twentieth Century* (2008), both dealing with Han van Meegeren. Even more recent is *Provenance* (2009), a book chosen by Oprah Winfrey's *O Magazine* as a recommended summer reading choice. Written by Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo, it describes the activities of a more recent faker, John Myatt (born 1945), a desperate and destitute artist and single father of two who was the creator of over two hundred fakes of artists including Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), and Matisse. These, with the help of slick con man John Drewe, entered the art market in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Myatt spent over two years in prison for his efforts, and his story is also to be told in a

Above: Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Woman with Folded Hands*, 1918-1919, pen and india ink on paper, 10 ⅝ x 14 7/16 inches, lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, John DeLaittre Memorial Collection, Gift of funds from Mrs. Horace Ropes, © 2010 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Top right: Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), after Henri Matisse, *Portrait of a Girl*, undated, pen and ink on paper, 20 ½ x 15 1/16 inches, Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of The Main Street Gallery

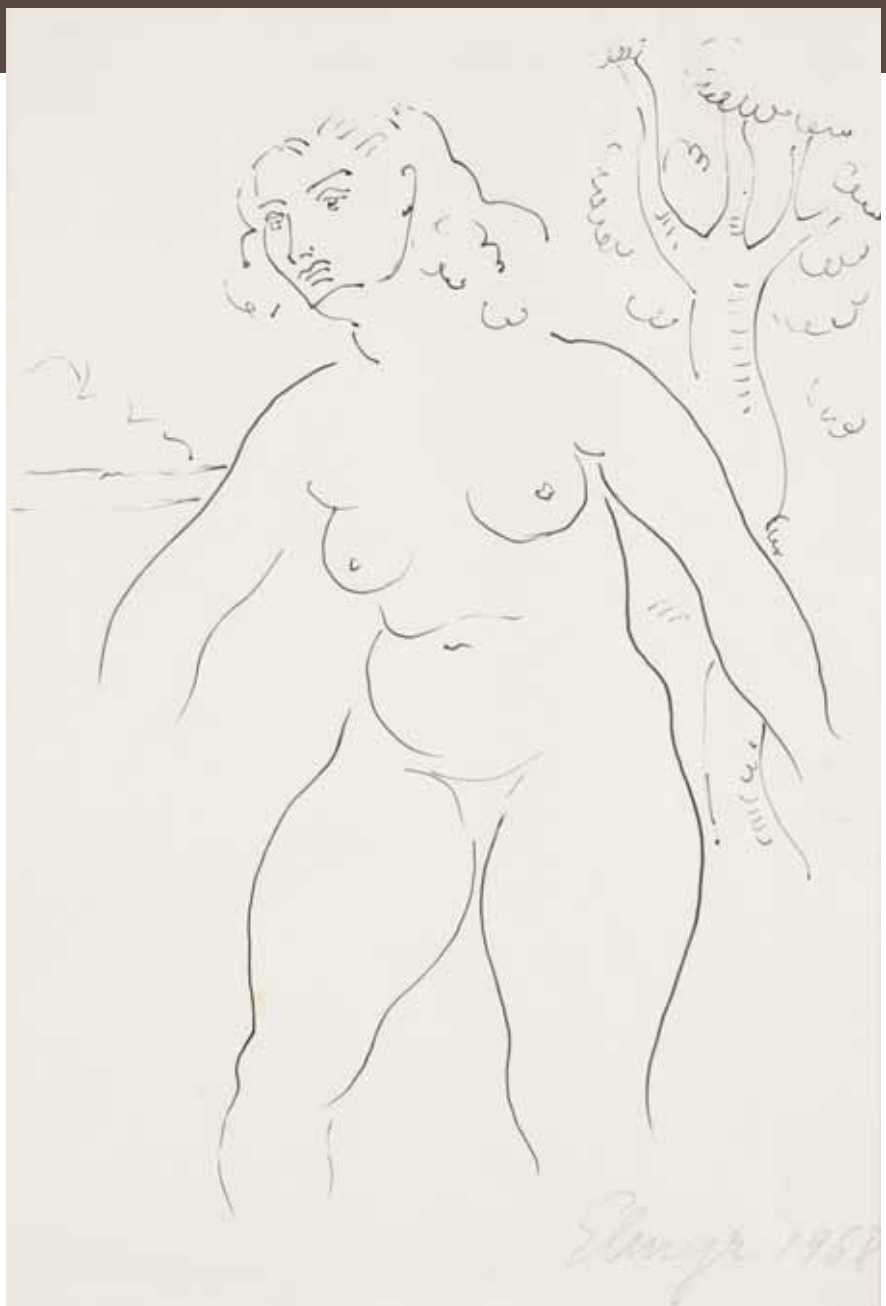
Lower right:*Woman Resting Head on Her Arm*, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1975, ink on paper, 14 ⅝ x 17 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Hollywood film titled *Genuine Fakes*, filming of which is expected to begin soon.

The subject of art forgery is also considered in recent or upcoming exhibitions. The National Gallery in London has created an exhibit titled "Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries," on view June 30 through September 12, 2010, which will consider fakes, remakes, and copies of old master paintings that have fooled the experts at that institution. And London's Victoria and Albert Museum hosted an exhibition titled "The Metropolitan Police Service's Investigation of Fakes and Forgeries," which was on view from January 23 through February 7, 2010. It showcased the investigative methods involved in detecting and preventing art forgery, and considered some of the varied works of another prominent art forger, Shaun Greenhalgh (born 1961), currently in prison for his role in what Scotland Yard has described as perhaps the most diverse forgery team the world has ever known. Greenhalgh and his associates, including members of his family, faked Egyptian sculpture, Roman silver, medieval church objects, modern sculpture, and works by American Romantic landscape artist Thomas Moran (1837-1926).

Forgers are the subject of a series of recent portraits by American artist Joe Zane (born 1971), who addresses the issue of authenticity in his work and who created paintings in 2006 based on photographs of some of the best known forgers, including not only Elmyr de Hory, but also Han van Meegeren, Alceo Dossena, Tom Keating, David Stein, Eric Hebborn, and John Myatt. Shaun Greenhalgh probably would have made it into this rogues gallery had his efforts come to light a little sooner.

Given the large number of art forgers whose activities continue to be documented, and given that there surely must be other fakers who have not been identified, one naturally wonders how frequently faking occurs.



Top: *Picador*, in the style of Pablo Picasso, c.1968, pencil on paper, 20 ½ x 14 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Right: *Nude Woman*, in the style of André Derain, 1968, ink on paper, 11 ⅛ x 8 ⅜ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Due to the nature of the phenomenon, this is impossible to answer with any certainty, and estimates vary widely. In the catalogue for the 1973 exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts titled *Fakes and Forgeries*, a representative of the Art Dealers Association of America was quoted as stating that only a "very, very small fraction of one per cent of all the art dealings in the United States or in the world, in any one year" involved art fakes. This is in stark contrast to the suggestion made by Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, who in his 1996 book *False Impressions: The Hunt for Big-Time Art Fakes* stated (perhaps with typical Hoving hyperbole) that "there are so many phonies and doctored pieces around these days that at times, I almost believe that there are as many bogus works as genuine ones." He continued by noting that during his fifteen years at the Met, he examined an estimated fifty-thousand works, forty percent of which were fake, concluding that "few art professionals seem to want to admit...that the art world we are living in today is a new, highly active, unprincipled one of fakery." The true extent of forgery probably lies somewhere between those two opposing estimates, but one fears that Hoving's assessment might not be a complete exaggeration, especially since current demand for art remains high, and art forgery always appears where there

is greater demand than supply of genuine art.

Fascination with fakes and forgers is due not only to the astonishing prices often involved in the trading of the art, but also the appeal of the anti-hero faker who manages to fool the so-called experts. Often this is coupled with a life story of the faker that includes unfortunate circumstance, especially in early-career attempts to succeed in a fickle art market and being rejected by an uncaring establishment. An element of revenge or vindication over such treatment frequently occurs in forgers' stories, like those of Han van Meegeren and Elmyr de Hory.

Fauve Landscape, in the style of Maurice de Vlaminck, c.1968, oil on canvas, 25 x 31 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Indeed, many of the details of de Hory's life follow a pattern commonly encountered in the histories of forgers in general. De Hory had a talent that was recognized early and encouraged, but even after rigorous training, he was not successful as an artist. He also had, from early in his life, an appreciation for the finer things in life, and a resulting sense of privilege and entitlement. The coupling of these two elements, along with an emotional need for validation—in de Hory's case, likely due to the aloof and reserved treatment he received from his parents—led to a sense of desperation and an ability to justify the illegal activities that became more and more frequent as he became successful at faking. Forgers often are adept at manipulating others to some degree (though de Hory was also susceptible himself to being manipulated significantly). A growing disdain for the art establishment is another recurrent element, sometimes embraced after the fact, as justification for the forgery. And many successful forgers seem to be able to place themselves in the mindset of the artists they faked. Some of this ability was simply doing the homework and learning intimately about the style, subjects, and career patterns of the artists they forged. This was how de Hory saw his ability, and he called "nonsense" the claims made by fellow forger David Stein that when he was forging Matisse, he "became Matisse." Many of the most famous forgers, including de Hory, were very intelligent and knowledgeable about art and in general, in addition to being talented artists capable of producing admired artwork.

Infrequently, that admiration remains even after revelation of forgery, as when the purchasers of Giovanni Bastianini's bust of *Lucrezia Donati* discovered that it was not a Renaissance work as they had been told, declaring nevertheless pleasure in knowing that a talented artist such as Bastianini was still alive; or in the case of collectors who learned from their dealer that their Modigliani was actually a de Hory fake, then electing not to return it, noting that they bought it not because they thought it was by a certain artists but because they loved and admired it.

Such admiration, however, more often completely dissolves away after forgery has been revealed, and one of the most fascinating questions in considering fakes is how experts—sometimes the same people who had previously prized the works—later instead see them as quite poor works of art. As stated by David M. Wilson in the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *Fake? The Art of Deception*, held at the British Museum in London in 1990 when Wilson was its director, "...the final question is the one that appears to be unanswerable, although psychologists have tried to explain it: why does an object which is declared a fake lose virtue immediately? This question, which concerns the eye and mind of the beholder, should be pondered by all who read this book or visit the exhibition which it records."

That question—of why the very same drawing or painting can appear beautiful when it is believed to be a genuine work by Matisse but, after it has been revealed as a fake by Elmyr de Hory, is perceived as

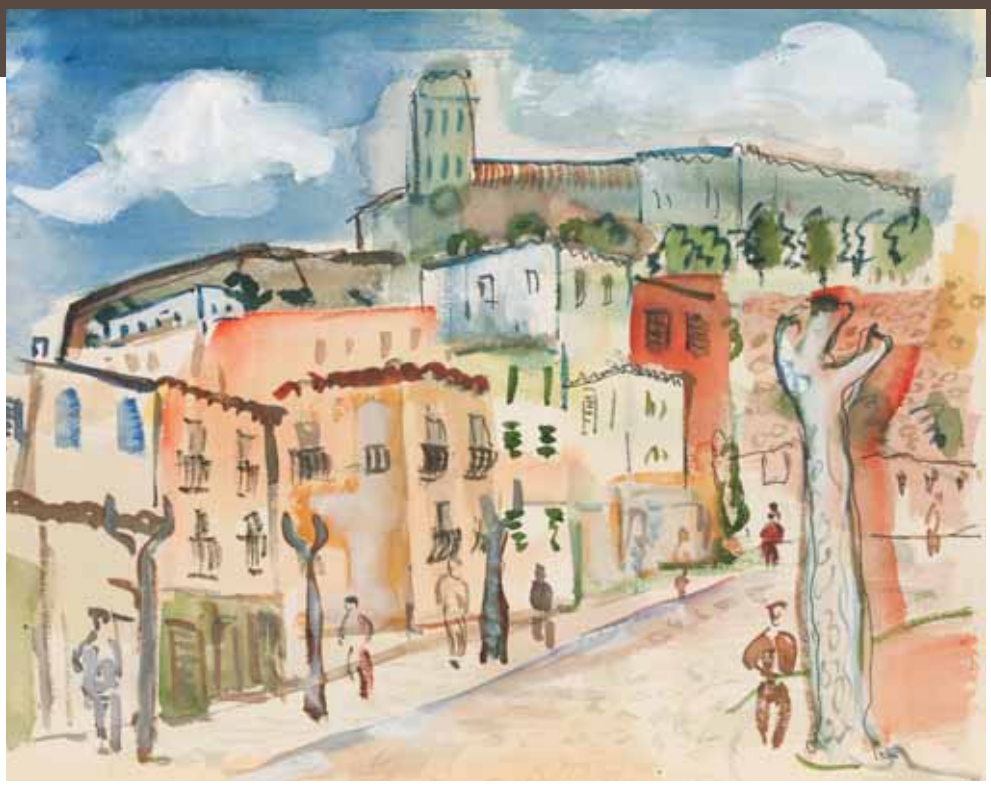
Woman in Red Interior, in the style of Henri Matisse, c.1970, oil on canvas, 27 ½ x 22 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

unaccomplished, dead, and despicable—likely has much to do with the manner in which the human brain perceives. Aesthetic purists embrace the idea of the unaffected, pure eye, and hold that an artwork can and should be judged only by its appearance, without regard to anything outside of the purely visual operation, an attitude termed "aesthetic empiricism." The relatively new field of neuroesthetics, however, has shown that vision is not just in the eye, but is conditioned and affected by the brain. Furthermore, neuroesthetic scientists such as Semir Zeki, professor of neurobiology at University College, London, have suggested that it is likely that a connoisseurship system exists in the brain and probably can soon be located—as was noted in an article by Ann Landi titled "Is Beauty in the Brain of the Beholder?," in *ARTnews* this January. Thus the brain is equipped with an area that assesses, categorizes and groups artworks seen by the eyes, and also, using its collected data, intermediates in how those artworks are perceived. Some of the disdain for a newly-revealed fake artwork comes from the brain shifting its functioning towards the object with the added knowledge about its nature. In other words, the brain, based on the new information it has acquired, changes what is actually seen.

This is, effectively, a more scientific basis or explanation for observations made by art historian and perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007), whose *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (1954) remains a fundamental study on the perception of art. Arnheim has noted, in his essay "On Duplication," in *The Forger's Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art* (Denis Dutton, ed., 1983), that "perception is not a mechanical absorption of stimuli but a search for structure," continuing by stating that the "same painting, considered...a forgery, is not only judged differently but actually seen as a different painting." He further noted, "Once a work is suspected of being a fake, it becomes a different perceptual object."

The point is that, in some significant, physiological way, a fake artwork is not seen in the same way as when it was believed to be genuine. Gertrude Stein famously claimed that "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," but the brain, armed with newly acquired facts, is capable of changing a rose into a weed, a beautiful artwork into a despised and ugly fake. Thus a drawing by Elmyr de Hory that was accepted as a fine example of the draftsmanship of Henri Matisse or Amedeo Modigliani can suddenly, when its true genesis is uncovered, look far less accomplished—perhaps especially to those who have been embarrassed or harmed by the trick. But to those who are removed from the situation, as is the case with most viewers of de Hory's artwork today, it is possible to appreciate the evident abilities of the artist, and to perhaps regret that his talent was diverted from what might have been.

Donald Myers
Director
Hillstrom Museum of Art



Scene of Ibiza Town, c.1968, watercolor and gouache on paper, 11 ¼ x 15 ⅝ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

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Odalisque, in the style of Henri Matisse, 1974, oil on canvas, 19 x 23 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

Hillstrom Museum of Art

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