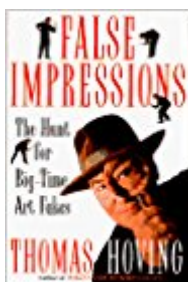


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# False Impressions: The Hunt For Big-Time Art Fakes



## Synopsis

The former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art takes a close-up look at the world of art forgery, from ancient times to the present day, sharing anecdotes about some of the costliest, most embarrassing forgeries ever, as well as the motives of the fakers. 50,000 first printing. Tour.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Take care if you're planning to buy a Renoir landscape or a Manet?there are art fakers who can convincingly simulate the former in two hours, the latter in three, according to Hoving in this wry guide to the world of art forgeries. Hoving (Making the Mummies Dance), former director of New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, devotes the first several chapters to a chronological history of art faking; some readers may find this section too detailed and anecdotal. The livelier part of the book involves Hoving's reminiscences about his experiences as a student at Princeton, his apprenticeship at the Met and his sleuthing to detect art fakes. He covers such intriguing topics here as forgers who have "tricked them all," what makes an ideal fake-buster and the "sin" of labeling genuine artifacts as fakes. Noting that art forgery is as old as art, the author warns that "the art world we are living in today is a new, highly active, unprincipled one of art fakery," which he attributes to "raw commercialism" and the "get-rich quick attitude of the times." But Hoving, who enjoys showing off, leads us to believe that with him on the case, no fraud is safe. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The former Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art here discloses shocking details of major art

forgeries and the intricate chicanery of con artists who have duped the world's most prestigious art institutions, art experts, and collectors. Hoving (*Making the Mummies Dance*, LJ 11/1/92) traces the earliest art deceptions from the time of the Phoenicians, through ancient Roman forgeries of Greek artifacts and the innumerable crucifixion relics of the Middle Ages, to the phony sculpture, paintings, documents, coins, ivories, and gems created now largely for profit. Besides greed as the prime motivation, Hoving also tells wonderful tales of revenge by disgruntled employees aimed at the elitist, arrogant personalities that pervade the art world. As a "fakebuster," Hoving uses his sense of connoisseurship and gut reaction to distinguish originals, which he believes convey a lofty humanity that fakes lack. Museum lovers will find it disconcerting to learn that still undetected frauds are prominently on view. Recommended for general and museum collections. Joan Levin, MLS, Chicago, Ill. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Tom Hoving had a long career in art. He worked at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the world's great art museums, and was its director for a while. In his work there and elsewhere, he came across many fakes, forgeries, and copies, many but not all of which he recognized. He prides himself as a "fakebuster," and he seems to have been a good one. He was asked, for example, to give his opinion on the famous and, as it turns out, fake Greek kouros (an ancient Greek sculpture of a naked youth) at California's Getty Museum. He looked at it and asked the curator "Have you paid for this?" No answer. So he went on, "If you haven't, don't; if you have, try to get your money back; and if you're paying on time, stop paying." The Getty didn't, but Hoving tells other stories like this one, only occasionally showing himself in anything other than the best possible light. Some of the book is difficult to follow but most of it isn't. His writing is competent but not really compelling, but the stories he tells often are compelling. He is surprisingly candid with his opinions about a large number of people who have worked in the art world. He clearly isn't totally objective, but the book is a fascinating look behind the scenes of the world of art. It is a must-read for any student of art history; anyone interested in art in galleries and museums will likely find it worthwhile. (The book was published in 1996; Hoving died in 2009.)

Disturbing revelations about forgeries and fakes in the art world. Hoving's writing style is a bit gossipy, but, in the end, hugely informative about the history of successes and failures of forgers and their nemeses, the fakebusters. An easily readable book. However, to say that I enjoyed it leaves out one important fact. I was left with the unsettled feeling that almost everything I see in museums, art galleries and auction houses may be forged no matter what the medium. *Caveat Emptor*, a book

written by Ken Perenyi, an American forger, opened my eyes to the questionable authenticity of many paintings, but Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, brings me to an even deeper level of doubt.

True or not? This is basically the topic of this complex book, written by someone who knows - ex-director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Thomas Hoving. I liked the book for various reasons - it is very readable, very full of information of different kinds, but also somewhat biased. I suppose as an art critic, and as a "fakebuster" it is very hard not to keep any bias at all against something that you consider to be false, which is the point of being such a rare sort of professional. With that preamble, it was good to find out what tools are there to decipher the forgeries from those that are not, and to my surprise the most important and effective tool is the expert's own vision! His "gut sense" so to speak. Scientific analysis is all good, but never sufficient, the last word is after the actual human. Furthermore, we get a full history on the forgeries from the ancient times, and a few surprises concerning bogus pieces in the modern times. That's very entertaining indeed. And of course, what would a good "fakebuster" be without a few good chapters on his own career as such? And here we find enormous amount of very interesting information from author's own experiences. To conclude, there is almost no way to tell a good piece from an awesomely conducted forgery, that's bad news. The good news is that to tell a fake one needs actually very little: fakes are often times decrepid and silly, with the features that make them stand out, but which evade the eye for the reason of them being so obvious - one should learn to find those. With that I, converted by the author have become very sceptical of any art, and I'm sure for a good reason. I've been browsing various antiques mostly on the Web for a while now - a good few years. Using the author's method I started to look at all of it anew, and the result my friends was horrifying. There is a lot of unreal stuff out there, so do not fool yourself by saying to yourself "I got this thing first, and this is the only thing out there, and I am the only one in possession!!" - this is a sure way to trip. Extreme hunger produces greed and speed, which are the enemies of a good acquisition in the area where the experts who are much much much more knowledgeable than you and me make mistakes. So let us be open-eyed and open-minded, and be willing to cut a slack for a slice of reality that tells us, "there's very little known, and you are a guest, so act like one" - something that the Chinese call "ke-chi", or "The air of the Guest".

This book could have been one of the best books I read this year. The topic is very interesting, and I learned a huge amount from reading it. In fact, when I first read it, I thought it was a 4 1/2 star book.

But later I changed my mind. In looking back at the book, what I most immediately recall about it are two things: 1. The writing is stodgy and detracts from the tale. 2. The author can't make up his mind who his audience is or what kind of book he is writing. Sometimes, the book seems to be written for someone like me who doesn't know a whole lot about art and the business of art. In some parts of the book, there are lots of background details to help a reader make sense of what is going on. However, in other parts of the book, he just writes like he assumes you share his common vocabulary. This makes it difficult for me to follow those parts of the book. By the same token, I expect that a person who found these parts of the book interesting and useful would find the explanations in the other parts tedious and useless. This book can't decide if it is a memoir of the author's life, a history of his career, or a book about art forgery. It would have worked better had it been more focused. Having made these complaints, I must say that the book was interesting and packed with useful photos to help me make sense of some of the content. In addition, the topic of the book is interesting, and I am glad I read it. I'm just sorry, because I think it is a book on the verge of being a better book than it is, and I hate to see potential come up short.

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