





(Cover)

Vincent Van Gogh
Vase with Twelve Sunflowers,
1888, third version: blue green
background

*Oil on canvas, 91 × 72 cm, Neue
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Famously
Anonymously

DAFEN DOES
VAN GOGH

“

There are some good ones among them, but one can see that most of them are done sloppily.

”

– Van Gogh, on reproduction

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Dafen is a small city, a suburb outside of the 10 million strong Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen, China. It is known colloquially as the “Artist Village,” and officially as the “Dafen Oil Painting Village.” Workers and visitors are greeted at the village gates with a bronze statue of a massive hand holding a paintbrush up to the sky. The village produces 60% of the world’s supply of cheap replica (but hand crafted) oil paintings, exporting some 5 million paintings per year, most of them copies of European Old Masters and modernist (Cubist, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist) painting. Between 8,000 and 10,000 artists work in Dafen, with many producing 20-30 copies per day – the town is populated by artists who have graduated from Chinese art schools, but who haven’t been able to make their mark in the contemporary art scene. The streets in Dafen are lined with artworks and with artists working on new paintings. One can buy a Van Gogh, a copy of Mona Lisa or perhaps a painted Warhol (itself an odd comment on the idea of originality in Dafen as Warhol himself eliminated painting, preferring to make multiple prints in an attempt to blend art with commodity).

The process of Western paintings being copied in China and resold (either in China or the west) is not a new thing – in the nineteenth century thousands of paintings, many of them copies of European paintings or European-style portraits were exported from China, specifically from the port city of Guangzhou. Nevertheless, the scale of what is now happening is new. Dafen has been described alternately as a “sweatshop for artists,” “The McDonalds of the Art World,” an inheritance of art tradition, an important training school, a “model of cultural development” and a piracy workshop. The village has existed since 1989, founded by Hong Kong businessman Huang Jiang, who arrived with 26 artists to what was then a rural outpost, looking for a



Van Goghs in Dafen

Image courtesy of David at randomwire.com

place where he could fulfill an order of 10,000 oil paintings for US retailers including K-Mart and Wal-Mart. Since then, Dafen has expanded rapidly, as has the market for paintings, many of which end up in hotels, retirement homes, hospitals and private homes in the Global North.

For the exhibition *Famously Anonymous: Dafen Does Van Gogh*, curated by as a part of VAH/VAS3385: Introduction to Museum and Curatorial Studies, students worked with artists from Dafen, as well as artists in Salt Lake City, Utah; Xiamen, China; and London, Ontario. Each was asked to paint a replica of Van Gogh’s painting 16 *Sunflowers*, the most copied painting in the world, and the most popular painting in Dafen. In curating the exhibition, students tackled questions such as what is an original and what is a fake? How is price determined outside of the art market (where “real” Van Gogh paintings sell for upwards of \$100 million)? And what, aside from \$100 million, is the difference between an original-fake, that is, an original copy of a work painted by hand by an artist, and the original painting?



Stacks of Paintings

Image courtesy of David at randomwire.com

The image of Dafen as a factory employing artist-workers to mass-produce reproduction paintings contrasts markedly with Western perceptions of the artist as an individual genius. However, the popularity of the copied paintings in Western markets suggests that not all buyers or art lovers value originality in the same way. As art critic Philip Tenari notes,

“Dafen, perhaps not surprisingly, has proved itself highly susceptible to narration (in both the mainstream media and the art press) and

to incorporation into bigger-picture discourses about both the state of art and the state of China.... The twin images of anonymous Chinese workers slaving away to make objects of every sort and of avaricious Chinese pirates copying the fruits of Western ingenuity loom large in the global collective unconscious at the moment, so such slippage seems almost inevitable.”

Early coverage of Dafen (from 2002-2006) sought to find sweatshop labour conditions behind the production of copied paintings. But when the appalling circumstances sought by Western journalists were (largely) not found, media instead began to focus on how Dafen might undermine “real” artists, or on how the way in which the paintings were produced was somehow questionable. In many cases, Dafen painters paint entire works, but there is also a fascination with a possible “assembly line” approach to painting. In an exposé published in the *Financial Times* in 2005, investigative reporter Alexandra Harney wrote, “Li Guangqing dips his brush into a blob of green paint. With quick strokes, he paints a corner of a piece of canvas, then shifts to the left and paints an identical block of colour on another piece of canvas. He repeats this process eight and sometimes 10 hours a day, six days a week. Mr Li is a ‘painter-worker’, the term coined for the thousands of young men and women in southern China who churn out paintings in bulk here each year. Like their counterparts hunched over machines in the garment and microwave factories, painter-workers have been trained in one simple, repetitive task.” The industrialization of art is seen to be shocking, and a 2006 article in the *Economist* argued that

“In an echo of China’s conquest of industries from clothes to toys to electronics, they are turning painting

into a mass-market industry, destroying their competitors with unmatched low prices.”



Beckham in oil
Image courtesy of David at randomwire.com

Reporters from the West tend to be very curious about the feelings of the painters who, in their view, are forced into copying works rather than pursuing the more “noble” cre-

ation of original works. Questions of authenticity, originality and intellectual property abound. The painters quoted are obviously used to answering these questions – they talk about how they would run out of ideas if they always had to paint their own works and how they are giving pleasure to people who would otherwise not be able to access original art. Beneath this catering to Western reporters is a very different approach to copying. While Western reporters tend to use words like fake, knockoff and piracy, Chinese artists and gallerists use the word replica, and see the works as original – they are not mass-produced. As Winnie Wong notes in her forthcoming book on the topic, while Western journalists suggest that the village artists engage in plagiarism at best and brazen copyright violation at worst, local officials argue that the skills of the imitators allow for high art to be democratized and shared with global consumers. Further, given that almost all art in the world is accessed through copies – photos in books and magazines, images on the Internet – the works in Dafen fall somewhere in between.

In Dafen, price is regulated by several conditions. First, there is the quality of the copy. A near identical copy of a Van Gogh painting will sell for more than one where the colours don't match. Further, customers can request changes – perhaps an Ingres portrait, but with a face to look like one's wife or lover. The word "original creation" is popular in Dafen – the highest priced works are those "in the style of" – a Van Gogh or a Da Vinci that does not actually exist anywhere but Dafen, and that is sold under the name of the Dafen artist. It is an original painting in the sense that a new artist's hand is visible in the work – it is not a perfect copy. There is a distinction between content and labour, with Western commentators tending to position authenticity in the content and Chinese workers and commentators positioning it in the act of painting.

In 2004, Dafen Village was designated as a National Model Cultural Industry Site by the Chinese government, an honorific meaning the town had been noticed and held up as exemplary of cultural development. Since attaining this title, the government has also begun to encourage artists in Dafen to produce "original" works. These works are then meant to be displayed in a government-funded museum in Dafen (the Dafen Louvre, ironically enough) where "fakes are not shown." Interestingly though, according to one news report, the gallery can never find enough work. The original works don't sell and the artists prefer making money to participating in what appears to be a bizarre attempt to add a layer of "real art" to what is otherwise perceived to be fake. And the boundaries are not always secure – most of the reproduced works are bought by Westerners, the originals by Chinese purchasers.

This final fact clearly illuminates one of the problems with attempting to define originality and separating the Chinese artists from the Western ones. What we also found in this project was a remarkable fascination with Dafen. This included supporters of the class project, but also, on a larger scale, a number of contemporary artists who have worked in Dafen, producing large-scale art works for the Western biennale and gallery circuit using (usually with credit), work by Dafen artists. For example, Berlin-based artist Leila Pazooki curated/created the exhibition Fair Trade, an art work/exhibition that included the results of a painting competition from Dafen and an exact replica of a room from the National Gallery, London. Like Pazooki, students in VAH/VAS3385 questioned the ways in which art is valued by the global art market, adding inevitably to the "narration" of Dafen, but also to projects that would question the unthinking attitudes by which certain works are considered art, and other not.

ⁱ There are a number of other artist villages in China. See, for example, Peter Hessler. "Chinese Barbizon: Letter from Lishhui." *New Yorker* 85.34 (October 26, 2009), p. 69.

ⁱⁱ Martin Paetsch. "China's Art Factories: Van Gogh from the Sweatshop." *Der Spiegel Online* (August 23, 2006): <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,433134,00.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ivan Gaskell's "Spilt Ink: Aesthetic Globalization and Contemporary Chinese Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2012, pp. 8-9; Milton Esterow. "The Many Faces of George Washington." *ARTnews* (October 1, 2009): <http://www.artnews.com/2009/10/01/the-many-faces-of-george-washington/>.

^{iv} John Seed. "The Ghosts of Chairman Mao and Andy Warhol Haunt a New York Art Auction." *Huffington Post* (May 27, 2010): http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-seed/the-ghosts-of-chairman-ma_b_590907.html; Rebecca Livermore. "China: Knockoff and Piracy Capital of the World." *Yahoo Voices* (January 17, 2008): <http://voices.yahoo.com/china-knock-off-piracy-capitol-819291.html>.

^v Le-Min Lim. "China's Factory for Fake Art Tried to Beat Slump." *Bloomberg* (September 24, 2008): <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a4.SEBCP0Pw8>.

^{vi} Philip Tinari. "Original Copies: The Dafen Oil Painting Village." *Artforum* (October 2007), np.

^{vii} 24 Hour Museum Staff. "Fulham Palace Examines Chinese Art-Copying Sweatshops." *Culture24* (August 17, 2007): <http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/art49820>.

^{viii} Alexandra Harney. "China Takes Artistic License with the World's Masters." *Financial Times* (September 22, 2005): <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3f1a6952-2ba2-11da-995a-00000e2511c8.html#axzz22b5HVQ00>.

^{ix} The Economist (no author) "Business: Painting by Numbers: China's Art Business," in *The Economist*, 2006, p. 64.

^x Le-Min Lim. "China's Factory for Fake Art Tried to Beat Slump." *Bloomberg* (September 24, 2008): <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a4.SEBCP0Pw8>.

^{xi} Winnie Wong. *After the Copy: Creativity, Originality and the Labor of Appropriation: Dafen Village, Shenzhen, China* (1989-2010). Dissertation. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, September 2010. Forthcoming from University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 20.

^{xii} Winnie Wong. "Framed Authors: Photography and Conceptual Art from Dafen Village." *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 7.4 (July 2008), pp. 32-43.

^{xiii} Paetsch, 2007.

^{xiv} Tinari, 2007.

^{xv} For more on China's relationship to creative and cultural industries, see Michael Keane. "Brave New World: Understanding China's Creative Vision." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 10. 3 (2004), pp. 265-79.

^{xvi} Lim, 2008; ARTINFO. "Dafen Art Village, part II: Original Art Struggles in Shenzhen Copy Town." *Artinfo* (March 5, 2012): <http://artradarjournal.com/2012/03/05/original-art-struggles-in-shenzens-dafen-copy-village-interview/>.

^{xvii} Lim 2008; ARTINFO, 2012.



Salt Lake City Painting, Bart Markman
 Canvas Replicas, Salt Lake City, Utah, Vase with Twelve Sunflowers After Van Gogh, 2013



Vincent Van Gogh, Vase with Twelve Sunflowers, 1888, third version: blue green background
 Oil on canvas, 91 × 72 cm, Neue Pinakothek, Munich, Germany, reprinted with permission, [copyright information: The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH]



Thrift Store, Image of Van Gogh's iconic work for sale at a thrift store
 Image courtesy of Sophie Quick

From Pop Stars to Paintings

A Scrutinizing Look at the History of Art Forgeries

Jagdeep Raina

The famous quote uttered by Picasso,

“ Good artists copy, great artists steal, ”

has become quite familiar in the art world. It is a saying that has shifted to popular culture and has embedded itself into a larger cultural context. The quote gains further significance because in a work by British artist Banksy, he has crossed out Picasso's name and blatantly stole the quote for himself. It is said that history repeats itself but with technological advancement and increased security in museums, how are art forgeries still able to enter the art world? One way forgers are able to trick the art world with forgeries is by appealing to the desire, of historians, dealers and collectors, to find lost or undiscovered works. Art

forgeries do not only occur in the art world and are not only of famous paintings. Forgeries occur in popular culture as well as in other productions such as jewelry, luxury apparel, films, literature and music. Forgeries, fakes and copies are able to traverse many different mediums.

There is no beginning moment of when the history of art forgery began. It dates back over two thousand years, moving alongside the history of art. In *Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art*, Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo address the question of why forgeries have been prominent in the history of art production and unravel the mysteries of this phenomenon. While the motivation behind forgeries has proved to be complex, they have all been linked to one common thing: profit. Salisbury notes that in ancient Rome, classical Greek sculptures became a status symbol and Roman's would try to increase the supply of genuine pieces, resulting in the production of many copies. Today it is believed that “90 percent of ‘original’ Greek statuary was made by Romans.” The creation of the fake Greek sculpture is what marks the beginning of art forgeries in the art world. Salisbury further explains how the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century clandestine workshops operating across Europe would produce forged paintings in the style of such masters as Michelangelo, Titian, and Ribera. Most interestingly, even to this day these forgeries continue to surface.

The role of the forger in that time period is fascinating because famous artists themselves soon began taking on the role of painting copies. Salisbury gives the notorious example of how the young Michelangelo painted a work in the style of his master Domenico Ghirlandaio, passing it off as an original after doctoring the panel with smoke to make it look older. Michelangelo was also noted for sculpting a sleeping cupid and successfully selling it off as antiquity. It is key to note that this pattern of famous artists steal-

Banksy
Image courtesy of
Maria Litsas

“THE BAD ARTISTS
IMITATE, THE GREAT
ARTISTS STEAL.”

~~PABLO PICASSO~~
BANKSY

ing and creating forged artworks is a truly foreshadowing thought when reflecting on contemporary artists and the notion that maybe forging art is what truly defines greatness within an artist. Continuing with famous forgers, Salisbury references artist Pablo Picasso. In a 1940's interview, a dealer asked Picasso whether he would put his signature on an unsigned painting. Picasso said that he would even after finding out the painting was not his. However, Picasso triumphantly stated that by signing his name on the canvas the painting would become his, which he did. This is important to note because it complicates the role of the art forger even more. It has allowed society to see them as either "beloved outlaws, or vilified them as philistine rogues". In both cases of Picasso and Michelangelo, who belonged to different eras of the art world, the idea of forgery is the same. To steal artwork or copy for ones own personal gain is evident in the psyches of both of these canonical artists. It allows us to realize that with forgery, whether concerning the artists or the forgers, there is a powerful obsession with profit and fame that stems from it.

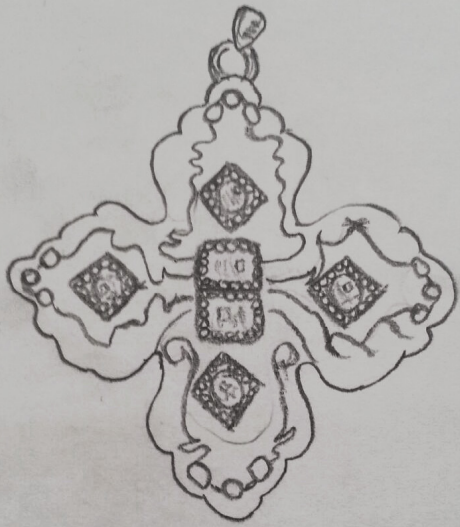
As time continued to pass and change, so did the ways in which art forgeries appeared. Salisbury addresses how the twentieth century is a pivotal example in the ways in which forgery began to become more inventive, cunning, and unpredictable. Failed artist, Han Van Meegeren was a key figure in the development of forged paintings and new ways of making copies appear more authentic. Some of his techniques included using badger-hair brushes so that not a single modern bristle could be found within his forged paintings. Meegeren also began grounding his pigments in oil of lilac, giving them a unique resin mixture that allowed the paint to have an enamel-like surface. Finally, he baked the canvas in the oven for two hours to harden the paint. Salisbury explains how the 1930s-1940s were groundbreaking decades for Van Meegeren, who earned millions for his forgeries. He deceived all of the leading experts, mu-

seum directors, and collectors of the day. While Han Van Meegeren may have been an important staple forger early on in the 20th century, it was John Drewe who is questionably the most notorious and manipulative forger. Drewe completely turned the art world upside down and rewrote the history of modern art.

John Drewe is the infamous con man that successfully infiltrated the archives of the British Art world, rewrote art history, and faked the provenances of hundreds of paintings. Drewe took on the role of many different personas and was able to sneak himself into the elite British art world. Drewe convinced struggling artist John Myatt to paint hundreds of works for Drewe. Myatt worked in the style of countless different artists such as Giacometti, Braque, Dubuffet, Chagall, Matisse and Nicholson. Myatt's technical talent and personal struggles made him the ideal target for Drewe. After Myatt finished the paintings, Drewe would infiltrate the archives of the art world, legitimize the fake paintings with false provenance and destroy the authenticity of the archives in the process. Drewe's story illustrates the potential long-term damages of art forgery.

And so this pattern continued throughout the centuries. The early forgeries of sculpture and painting eventually lead to the production of copies in other art mediums such as luxury apparel and jewelry. While countless Renaissance paintings were forged, fake renaissance jewelry was also a commodity that was entering the market. In *"Fool's Gold and Gems,"* author Paula Weideger addresses forged Renaissance jewelry and the process of tarnishing these jewels for forgery. In the 19th and first half of the 20th Century, the fake Renaissance jewels were in high demand. But in 1979 when the reports confirmed that the Renaissance jewels were fakes, the market collapsed. English scholar Charles Truman visited The Robert Lehman collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to examine the Renais-

Renaissance Jewelry
Image courtesy of
Alexandra Fergusson



sance and Medieval Jewels, in which he owned forty-nine of them. Truman came to the conclusion in 2007 that thirty-four of them were fakes. Truman further concluded that Renaissance and Medieval fakes would continue to be uncovered with further study and technological advancement.

As mentioned earlier, forgeries are not only found in the art world or historical and museological institutions but also enter the everyday consumer market. In *Fake? The Art of Deception*, author Mark Jones looks at how luxury apparel is also an item undergoing forgery, such as replications of clothing and brand names. However, the interesting thing to note is that, with this type of forgery, the consumer usually is aware that their purchase is not authentic or original but in fact a fake. Jones talks about this notion through luxury apparel, stating that,

“ wherever there is a
market...the counterfeiter
is at work. ”

Jones shows how luxury apparel is another instance of forgeries. Fakes of apparel are created because the prices of the original items are limited to a particular demographic and yet desired by many. The buyer of fake apparel is aware that the items are not genuine but the authenticity of the object is not what makes the apparel desirable, rather, it is the status imbued in the image of the item. Through the black market of luxury apparel, Jones exposes another side of art forgery, that of the consumer's desire for possessing a forged artwork. The importance remains to be the possession of an object, which presents a false status or appearance. It shows how much human emotions and desires are involved in both the production and consumption of forgeries.

From Roman sculptures and modernist paintings to Renaissance jewellery and luxury apparel, we shift our attention to an example of forgery and copying in popular culture. Although there are many instances of fakes, forgeries and copies in popular culture, one of the most memorable examples come from the pop singer Lady Gaga. During the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards, the pop singer wore a dress that was made entirely of raw beef, which has now been referred to in popular media as the meat dress. Gaga explained following the awards ceremony that the dress was her way of expressing the sentiment of fighting for what you believe in as well as expressing her disgust for the US Military's "Don't ask Don't tell Policy." While this may have been her intention, she neglected to credit the art historical reference that came decades before her appearance at the awards. Gaga and the media did not address that the meat dress, in fact, was a concept that had already been done by Canadian artist Jana Sterbak back in 1987. The work by Sterbak, titled *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, was constructed by fifty pounds of raw beef stitched together. The work had several conceptions including a photograph of a model



Gaga Meat Dress

Image courtesy of Maria Litsas



Flesh Dress

Image courtesy of Alexandra Fergusson

wearing the flesh dress as well the dress was exhibited hanging on a hanger or seamstress' dummy. Sterbak stated that Vanitas: *Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* addressed issues concerning women, fashion, consumption and the body. The concept of a dress made of flesh was stolen by Gaga. Ashley Seadore addresses this issue in her article, "Lady Gaga's Meat Dress and the Question of Authenticity." Seadore talks about how the originality of the dress was seized from Sterbak and the credit of creation shifted onto Gaga. Seadore further explains that "if you Google 'meat dress,' Lady Gaga occupies most of the search results, along with her banal, generic and self-serving...explanation." The originality and meaning of Sterbak's work is lost and replaced in popular culture or at least in search engines. Seadore discusses how Gaga may have made monumental steps towards pop tracks full of empowerment but her position as an artist is questionable. Gaga as an artist is either a clumsy attempt at originality or, perhaps, a successful attempt at forgery.

However, it is interesting to note that the originality of Sterbak's Vanitas: *Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* could also be questioned. In 1983, the Irish punk band The Undertones released an album titled, *All Wrapped Up*. This album features a model wearing raw meat covered with layers of plastic wrap. This album was released four years before Sterbak created her meat dress. Writer Elizah Leigh claims that the use of flesh in art, fashion and music dates back to The Beatles' 1966 album *Yesterday and Today*. The album art has the four smiling musicians posed as butchers surrounded by decapitated baby dolls and butcher cuts. The album was received controversially just as Sterbak's work had in the art world. Like Sterbak and Lady Gaga, The Beatles had their own political reasons for using raw flesh in their work: they were making an anti-war statement. This repeated use of meat by artists and singers illustrates the vast ways works of art, ideas and images are recycled, appropriated, copied and forged.



Forgery is not always the work of individuals such as Lady Gaga, John Drew or Van Meegren. Forgers also come in the form of galleries, companies and corporations. In 2011, after 165 years of business, the famous Knoedler Gallery located in New York City closed its doors. Its closure began when news leaked that fake paintings were being supplied to the gallery. In an article about the demise of the prestigious art gallery, writer Patricia Cohen explained how the famous Upper East Side Gallery had been dependent on profits made by a mysterious collection of artwork for over twelve years. This mysterious collection of artwork has now become a federal forgery investigation. The investigation was triggered by a lawsuit filed by Domenico and Eaeonor De Sole, who in 2004 paid 8.3 million for a painting they believed to be by Mark Rothko, now realizing it is nothing more than a fake. Cohen writes how the Rothko is one of approximately forty works by a mysterious dealer, Glafira Rosales, whose collection of modern art has no documented provenance. Rosales' provenance story shifted from work that came from an old family friend; to work that was acquired in the 1950s by Alfonso Ossorio, a painter and friend of Pollock's; to claiming that the work came from his father. Having sold millions of dollars worth of forged paintings without any real provenance, the gallery was forced to shut down.

Undertones
Image courtesy of Alexandra Fergusson

ⁱ Salisbury, Laney, and Aly Sujo. *Provanence: How A Con Man and A Forger Rewrote The History of Modern Art*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Salisbury, 234.

ⁱⁱⁱ Salisbury, 240

^{iv} Weideger, Paula. "Fool's Gold and Gems."

^v Jones, Mark, Paul Craddock, and Nicolas Barker, eds. *Fake? The Art of Deception*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990.

^{vi} Jones, 13

^{vii} Seadore, Ashley. "Lady Gaga's Meat Dress and the Question of Authenticity"

^{viii} Leigh, Elizah. "Lady Gaga Meat Dress The Latest In A Long Line Of Fleshy Fashion Getups."

^{ix} Cohen, Patricia. "Lawsuits Claim Knoedler Made Huge Profits on Fakes."

Who's the Fairest of Them All

The Viewer's Experience with Forged Artworks

Sofia Herrarte

“Suspicion is the companion of mean souls.”

– Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

When a viewer approaches a canonical work at a museum, they may look at it for the briefest moment and take a few photographs to document their twenty-second encounter. The memory of this work may linger in the viewer's mind for a few seconds longer until faced with another canonical work, which will consequently replace the mental image of the previous artwork. After the viewer finds oneself once again in front of another work, this process of aesthetic recognition, conceptual connection, and mental substitution repeats itself. Hence, the viewer's journey through the museum is a mechanical exercise of memory and knowledge, which ends as soon as they leave the museum.

However, the viewer's aesthetic exercise through the museum shifts radically when faced with a work that has little or no connection to their previously acquired knowledge. Even though the work may resemble something the viewer has seen before, it contains elements that seem unfamiliar or foreign to the viewer's own remembered image of the artwork. The unfamiliarity or varied qualities or missing characteristics of the work may arise a certain level of suspicion in the viewer. This suspicion forces the viewer to question the artwork and reevaluate the context with which the viewer had framed this image before. Is this artwork the same artwork that I have seen before? Or is it a copy of

the original? Or maybe it is a new one, which resembles the one I first saw?

All of these questions frame quite perfectly the issue of aesthetic forgery. In *Forgery and Appropriation in Art*, Darren Hudson Hicks argues that the problem of forgery cuts “into the heart of issues in the ontology of art.” The problem of forgery is not disjoint from art, rather, it is an issue located at the intersection between the definition of art and aesthetic ethics. In other words, forgery is closely linked to the process of creating art and the way in which art includes the viewer in the aesthetic process. Therefore, when a viewer finds oneself before a forged artwork, their preconceived definitions of what art is are challenged. Furthermore, the viewer is unable to classify this forged artwork into a proper category. This unclassifiable work provides no valid aesthetic context. The viewer is left with a growing sense of suspicion and an unresolved dilemma. How am I supposed to catalogue, understand or interpret this image?

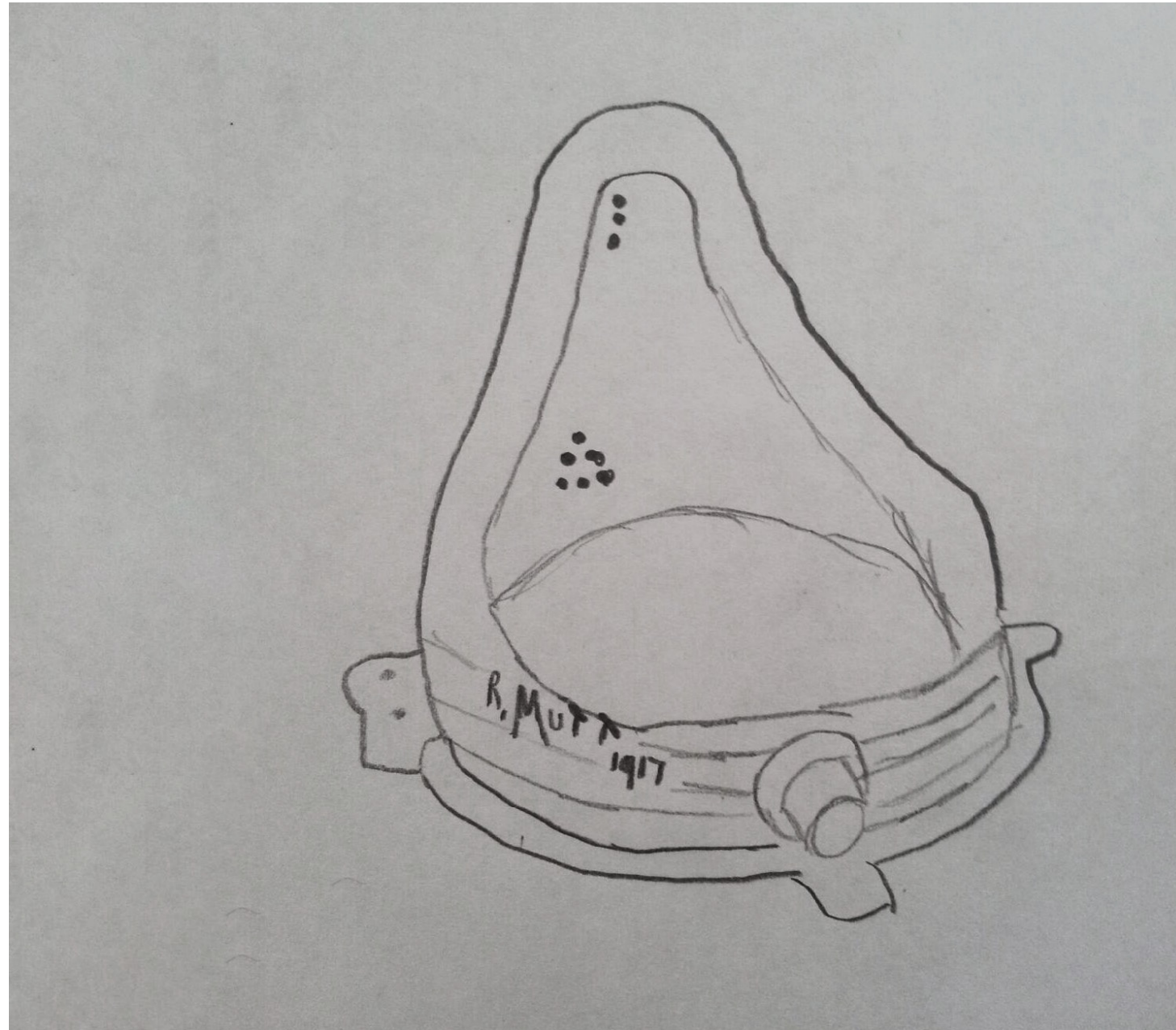
The viewer then embarks on a quest for aesthetic clarification through close observation and an examination of the work's current setting. However, this quest is not as simple and straightforward as it may appear. In *On a Suspicion of Art Forgery*, L. B. Cebik suggests that even though the viewer's suspicion “seeks to see and to see clearly”, it will not materialize unless the viewer has concrete facts and evidence with which to support their suspicion. While looking for traces of aesthetic foul play, the viewer's pleasurable experience of the artwork transforms into relentless technical obsession. The composition and form of the work is no longer of interest. Instead, Cebik explains that the viewer focuses on the technicalities of the work, such as the “dirt in the surface cracks...or the minutiae of brush strokes.” Curators, collectors and art critics mistakenly believe that their strong connection with the art world and

their vast aesthetic knowledge will keep them from becoming victims of art forgery. Nevertheless, forgery challenges aesthetic knowledge and even the most cultivated art connoisseurs can become victims of forgery. Anyone is susceptible to believing a forged work to be authentic, whether familiar with the arts, educated in the arts or working in the arts.

Arthur Danto explains that artists have “honest intentions” when they appropriate some or all of the aesthetic elements of a pre-existing artwork. Further, Danto claims that the artist does not seek to “deceive or pretend or disseminate.” Danto is discussing appropriation art, which is the inclusion of recognizable aesthetic components of a pre-existing artwork into a new aesthetic composition. Writing about reproduction in art, Christina Abood elaborates Danto’s argument by saying that an appropriation artist does not try to pass one’s work as another artist’s work but as one’s own original work. This is the key, and at time contentious, distinction between forgery and appropriation art.

Another art practice significant to the discussion of reproduction in art is the readymade and the notorious example is Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain. Duchamp entered Fountain, a conventional urinal, under the pseudonym ‘R. Mutt’ to the 1917 Independents Exhibition. He appropriated a common object into his artistic production. Duchamp, already an established artist at the time, entered the urinal under a pen name because he knew that without his own signature the artwork would be rejected. His suspicion was correct and the committee rejected Fountain. By using a false name he tricked the programming board into believing that the work was not the work of a serious artist. Ironically, Duchamp was a member of this very board and witnessed the debate surrounding the artistic validity of his work. By presenting a urinal as art, Duchamp interrogated the ontological definition of art. He fabricated both his identity and his artwork

to deceive his colleagues and challenged institutionalized aesthetic values.



Mutt's Urinal
Image courtesy of Maria Litsas

Similarly challenging is Sherrie Levine's aesthetic appropriation, especially her solo exhibition *After Walker Evans* in 1980. For this exhibition, Levine displayed re-photographed photographs of Walker Evans's iconic depression photographs. There was no manipulation of the photographs. Levine's re-photographs appear identical to Evans's original photographs. Certain artworks of the past, which inspire modern artists such as Levine, possess an "aura of meaning [that extends] far beyond their artistic character." This far-reaching aura brings forth canonical artworks, which were stored in the viewer's memory, to the viewer's present consciousness. Hence, the viewer is able to connect and reevaluate the knowledge they possessed before encountering the altered version. According to Christina Abood in "*Reproduction in Art: Forgery, Appropriation, and Multiplicity*," this déjà vu aura is what differentiates appropriation art from forgery. The process of evaluation and discovery is what validates appropriation art as genuine. Unlike Duchamp, Levine did not deceive her public by showing her photographs under a false name. However, art historian Hans Tietze contends that a "lack of deceitful intention does not necessarily preclude the making of what is considered a forgery." Levine's works question traditional aesthetics by presenting exact photographic replicas of Evans' photographs. The viewer may ask, how can we consider an exact copy of a pre-existing photograph as genuine? The artist's intention of questioning the ontology of art may be original but the physical image is not. This image before the viewer is an exact copy of something that visually already exists.

Writing about how we assess forgeries and appropriation art, art historian Tomas Kulka offers two primary approaches: formalism and historicism. The first approach is through formalism, which consists of evaluating an artwork only according to its aesthetic elements. Formalism concerns itself only with the "visual features" of an artwork and

Sherrie Levine/Evans
Image courtesy of
Michael Mandiberg



the "finished product." The formal and physical properties are taken into consideration but the contextual properties, such as the creation process, historic background, or its relation to a larger aesthetic framework, are excluded. Monroe C. Beardley, a formalist theorist, affirms that if the copy and the original do not differ "in any observable qualities" then they have the same aesthetic value. A formalist approach to appropriation or forged art assesses that both Evans' original photographs and Levine's rephotographs have the exact same value. Yet, this approach neglects the historical, creative and social contexts surrounding both images. By addressing only the formal qualities of the works, the viewer isolates the painting and loses the underlying meaning of both Evans' and Levine's photographs.

The second approach Kulka offers is historicism, which asserts that both the copy and the original are individual works because of their different creative and historical contexts. Both the copy and the original are ascribed to a certain kind of production within a specific style and period. The copy and the original are compared to another on a contextual level. Comparison determines how each the copy and the original are to be categorized. But it is clear

that the copy and the original do not belong to the same category because the copy is a replica of the original. The aim of the copy differs from the purpose of the original artwork. Kulka contends that it is absurd to assume that the copy and the original have inherently different styles since both are assumed to be visually indistinguishable.

As Kulka plainly shows in his argument, both the formalist and historicist approach, seem too reductive and narrow to explain how the viewer should approach and interpret the relationship between a forgery and the original artwork. Hence, Kulka proposes what he calls dualism to analyze this relationship. He describes this dualistic approach as having two premises – that of artistic value and aesthetic value – which work with each other to unpack this complicated relationship. He describes artistic value as the “the art-world significance” of the artwork’s innovation. This value shows the impact an artwork has on the larger art tradition and the influence it might have on future aesthetic trends. Additionally, he defines aesthetic value as the “composition, colours, expressions” that the artist used to create the artwork. Kulka’s proposition successfully merges the useful practices of both the historicist and formalist approaches for viewers to assess forged or appropriated work.

Since Kulka’s dualism ignores the non-artistic effect forgery may have on art history, his theory leaves the viewer with an unexplained gap between the copy and the original. This gap consists of the historical and contextual information that brought forth the artwork’s existence. Cebik points out that a work’s context is essential to include in, what he calls an artwork’s “biography,” in the viewer’s evaluation of a work. This biography is a compilation not only of the artwork’s history but also of its creative process and production. Hence, a useful addition to Kulka’s approach may be the relevant historical and creative context. This

context provides the viewer with an informational backbone that supports the viewer after being stricken with the work’s overreaching aura.

Cebik states that “viewing an artwork as a communication between the viewer and the artist” is inevitable. Thus, an aesthetic conversation transpires between the viewer and the forged artwork. Kulka and Abood might infer that every aspect of a forged work is a worthless copy of an original. Still, Cebik’s outlook seems a bit too romantic and optimistic. Hans Tietze strains that the artist is always trying to “compel the beholder to see things as the artist wishes him to.” Tietze’s claim transforms the artist-forgery interaction into an aesthetic struggle in which the artist desperately attempts to deceive the viewer, while the viewer tries to look for either validation or denial of their suspicions. It is up to the viewer to decide whether they will converse or struggle with the work. After the viewer has taken the artwork’s context, technicalities and composition into consideration, the viewer can determine the extent to which this background and analysis permeates one’s experience with the forged work.

Although there are different aesthetic views to approach and decide whether or not a work of art is a forgery or an original, the viewer is the ultimate judge their own experience of the work. The aesthetic qualities of a forged artwork, its connections with the larger canon of artistic tradition, and the setting in which it is presented will influence how far the viewer will converse with the work. Formalists, historicists and even Kulka’s dualistic approach might be quite alarmed by this conclusion. Nevertheless, the viewer’s experience will remain a mystery to all of these theoretical positions.

ⁱ Darren H. Hicks, "Forgery and Appropriation in Art", in *Philosophy Compass* 5/12 (2010), 1047.

ⁱⁱ L. B. Cebik, "On the Suspicion of an Art Forgery", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47/2 (1989), 147.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cebik, 149.

^{iv} Christina Abood, "Reproduction in Art: Forgery, Appropriation, and Multiplicity," in *Eudaimonia: The Georgetown Philosophical Review* 1/1 (2004), 60.

^v Christina Abood, "Reproduction in Art: Forgery, Appropriation, and Multiplicity", 61.

^{vi} Hans Tietze, "The Psychology and Aesthetics of Forgery in Art," *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, 5/1 (1934), 2.

^{vii} Tomas Kulka, "Forgeries and Art Evaluation: An Argument for Dualism in Aesthetics", in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39/3 (2005), 59.

^{viii} Kulka, 59.

^{ix} Kulka., 68.

^x L. B. Cebik, "On the Suspicion of an Art Forgery", 147.

^{xi} Cebik., 153.

^{xii} Hans Tietze, "The Psychology and Aesthetics of Forgery in Art", 1.

Getting Intimate With Van Gogh

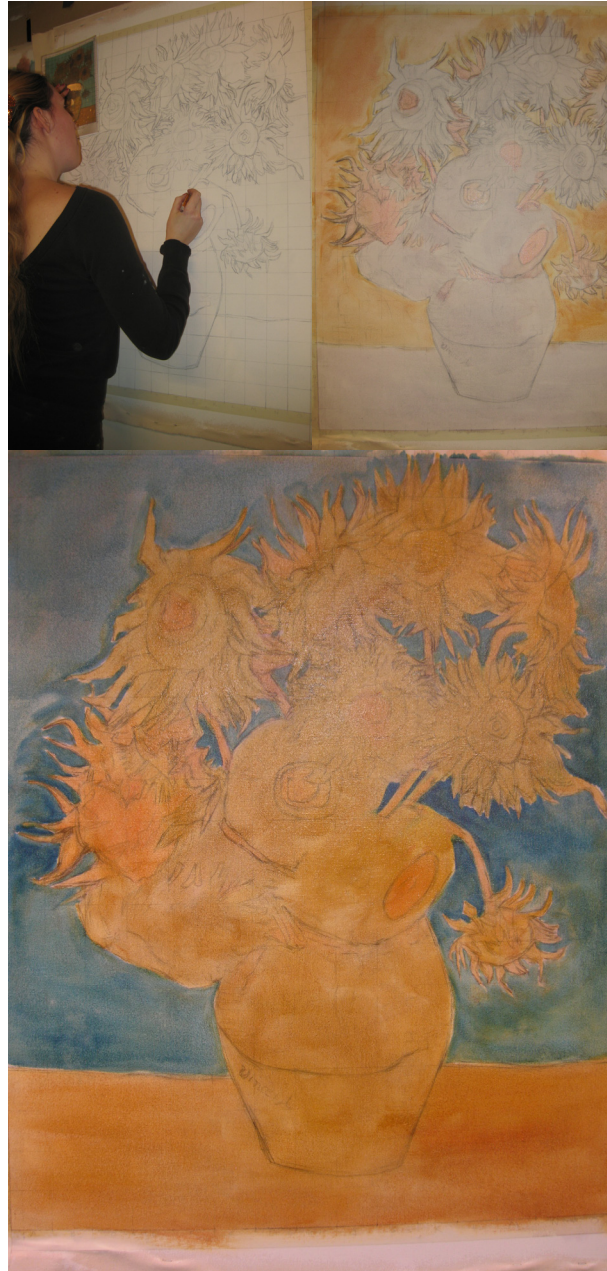
Angie Quick

I have seen van Gogh's sunflowers throughout my life, as a passing image in an art book, a postcard, on television etc. I can say, "that's a van Gogh, those are his sunflowers," yet while I embarked on the process of reproducing Twelve Sunflowers, I discovered a new level of artistic intimacy.

Firstly, I learned the realities of the art print—none of the images I found of Twelve Sunflowers were alike; they varied in colour, at times drastically. Not only did they vary in colour but none measured up in scale to the 'real' size of the painting, a size which in itself began to waiver in minor proportions. I felt a fascinating disorientation; everything added up to one idea, the painting, yet all the documentation and pieces told a story of varying truths. One painting became a dozen different paintings all claiming to be the same thing!

After I resigned myself to inaccuracy and chose the painting I found to be the most 'real,' I settled on a scale and began to grid a print of the painting on my canvas. While sketching the painting, I often felt an absurdity in contriving the free flowing quality in such precise terms. The more I stared at the painting the more I began to see the movement of time captured in a stroke. I laughed at acknowledging that I was going to attempt, in a fraudulent manner, to recreate what inspiration had acquired!

As I began to layer the paint, beginning with my own preferred manner of under painting and transparent layers, I had to transition to an alien mode (for myself) that required a palette knife and impasto medium. I began to build the van Gogh like thick layers and realized that the palette knife (as the name suggests) is a murderous tool – it is aggressive. An aggressive stroke is what was needed to capture these sunflowers, an aggressive movement that I mimicked but did not feel, I moved without feeling. I be-



gan to see the painting through the movement of another's hand. Throughout the process, I felt boredom and excitement – bored at the menial task and excited because there was a curiosity in disassembling another's painting. There is an artistic intimacy in copying another's creativity—it is perverse! I disagreed intuitively many times with choices that were not mine and I followed through with reverence for the sake of validity. What for me became something of an exercise in the realities of art reproduction and painting, will for the viewer become a different kind of puzzle, a 'spot the difference' game or a mere glance of a half forgotten memory, and like that memory – a fraud.

The sunflowers I once knew through a seminal association, I now know intimately. I feel an ownership without creative rights, while simultaneously I feel a dislike for the painting. Through the effort of reproduction, the painting became tasking and the process became akin to sacrilege. I toiled for exactitude and this sense of precision and mechanization spoiled the painting, stripped it of its spark! The reproduction became the practice of a skill without the vision that makes the skill unique. It is this vision that essentially makes this painting important and a testament to inspiration.

Images courtesy of artist,
Angie Quick

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Class Photo

Image courtesy of Visual Arts



*Famously
Anonymously*

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VAN GOGH