



# **Convicted Art Forger Explains How It's Done**

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In New York City, federal prosecutors have charged an art dealer named Glafira Rosales in connection with \$80 million worth of forged art.

These are not copies — they're paintings that look like they're in the style of famous artists. The painter has not been charged in the case.

But John Myatt, an artist who also made forgeries of the great masters, was caught and charged. He has been described by Scotland Yard as one of the 20th century's biggest art frauds.

Like the artist in the New York case, Myatt made imitations of masters from Ben Nicholson to Le Corbusier that fooled auction houses such as Sotheby's and museums including the Tate Modern.



John Myatt is an artist and a convicted forger. (Castle Galleries)

To make forgeries, Myatt would go to a museum and look at a painting to take it apart technically.

"I would create a new painting, not copy the one I had looked at, but using the same methods, the same techniques, based very much on the way my target artist did it," Myatt told Here & Now. "It didn't dawn on me for a while that I was a crook, and then when it did, I didn't like it."

Myatt was charged and imprisoned for his forgeries.

When he was released, Myatt said he was "absolutely determined not to paint again."

But as fate would have it, the police officer who led the case again Myatt rang him and asked him to make a family portrait and an imitation Ben Nicholson painting.

It led to Myatt's current pursuit: "genuine fakes" — where he paints in the style of great masters.

"Six months after I had come out of prison, I got something like over 10,000 pounds in the bank and I earned it legally," Myatt said. "And I was very proud of that."

### JEREMY HOBSON, HOST:

Well, in New York City, federal prosecutors have charged an art dealer named Glafira Rosales in connection with \$80 million worth of forged art. These are not copies. They're paintings that look like they're in the style of famous artists. The painter has not been charged in the case, but we're joined now by a man who was charged and served time for art forgery. John Myatt is described by Scotland Yard as one of the 20th century's biggest art frauds. He's with us now from Stratffordshire(ph), England. John, welcome.



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JOHN MYATT: Thank you very much.

HOBSON: So your forgery career began quite honestly. You advertised your ability to paint genuine fakes, and then things got a big dodgy. Tell us what happened.

MYATT: That's right. I was working with a number of customers, really, over a three or four-year period. I needed to stay at home. I have to give up my teaching job. I was taking care of a couple of youngsters. So the advert, genuine fakes from 250 pounds was - brought in a lot of customers. But one customer in particular kept on coming back and coming back and coming back. And after about three years, he called me up one day and said, you know, that last little cubist painting you did for me, you sold me for 250 pounds. I've just taken in into - I think it might have been Christie's. I'm not sure. Could have been Sotheby's. And they have valued it at 25,000 pounds.

HOBSON: Wow. Because they thought it was the real thing?

MYATT: Yeah, they did. They look at it and they authenticate. But he didn't sell it through the auction house. But having got the certificate from the auction house to say that in their opinion it was authentic, he was then able to sell it through the trade.

HOBSON: Which got you hooked. Over the next years, you knocked off a Chagall, a Klee, a Nicholson. How did you do this?

MYATT: The way I work, even still today, is I would go to my local museum and take the children in, you know, sit in a coffee bar for a while. And then I would sit down and I could kind of hypnotize a painting. And I'm trying to flash back in my mind to the blank canvass and then try and see how that particular artist had done what he or she had done. And then I would create a new painting, not copy the one that I'd looked at, but using the same methods, the same techniques, based very much on the way that my target artist had done it originally. But, of course, I was not using oil paint. I never - I don't like oil paint. And I always use a mixture of basic house paint and acrylic.

HOBSON: And in the end, you created over 200 works, sold about \$3 million worth. You fooled even the Tate Modern in London, Christie's, Sotheby's. Did you ever feel about what you were doing?

MYATT: Oh, yes. Well, it didn't dawn on me for a while that I was a crook, and then when it did, I didn't like it. And I wanted to get out of it and get out of it in one piece, if you know what I mean. Well, I'm talking to you today, and I got a good business, really, if you like, selling genuine fakes. But I don't look back on that as my finest hour, by any means.

HOBSON: Well, tell us about that. You did go to jail. You got out. And now you are back to painting again genuine fakes.

MYATT: Yes. Well, I came out of prison - they were very good to me in prison, and they let me out early. And I was determined, absolutely determined never to paint again. It's nothing but trouble. And I've only been back home for about two hours when the telephone rang. It was the policeman who'd led the case against me and arrested me actually. He said, what are you doing? And I tell him I'm off to try and get a new job. And he said, oh, don't be silly, John. Would you like to paint my family portrait?

#### (LAUGHTER)

MYATT: And also, I'd like a Ben Nicholson. And I know quite a couple of the barristers, who worked on the case, they would like a memento of the case. And leave it all to me. I'll handle it all for you. I was like, oh, good Lord. And anyway, in, I think, about six months after I'd come out of prison, I got something like over 10,000 pounds in the bank, and I've earned it legally. And I was very proud of that.



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HOBSON: Just don't get carried away this time, all right?

(LAUGHTER)

MYATT: You know, that is something I can actually guarantee you will never happen again.

HOBSON: John Myatt is a British artist, who was in jail for art forgery and he's now out and painting genuine fakes, as he calls them. John, thank you so much for joining us.

MYATT: Thank you.

HOBSON: And, Meghna, I said he was from Stratffordshire. He is actually from Staffordshire. Stratffordshire doesn't appear to a real place, although it sounds real.

(LAUGHTER)

MEGHNA CHAKRABARTI, HOST:

No. And neither is it a genuine fake.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAKRABARTI: It's the real deal.

HOBSON: From NPR and WBUR Boston, I'm Jeremy Hobson.

CHAKRABARTI: I'm Meghna Chakrabarti, in for Robin Young. This is HERE AND NOW. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright NPR.