

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

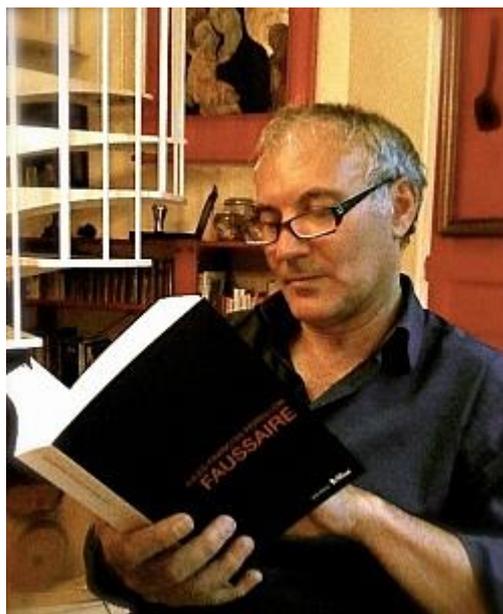
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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Truth is stranger than fiction? New book adds
bizarre twist in tale of Prince of Liechtenstein's
Cranach

French novel about fictional master forger is being studied by French police
for clues



Jules François Ferrillon, the author of Faussaire

“In among the paintings, we’ll slip in a Titian, a Cranach or a Hals. Never a copy, always a version that differs just slightly from the original work.... A mix of various museum pieces”.

No, this is not the confession of a real-life forger, it’s a quote from a fictional character in a French-language novel. *Faussaire* was published last June by the Parisian publishing house L’âge d’homme and tells the story of a supposed master forger called Giordano R.

So what? you might say—art forgery has been a popular subject in fiction since the 19th century. But there are strange parallels between the novel and a case that is gripping the European world of Old Masters.

Faussaire is apparently being scrutinised by law enforcement officers who are investigating claims that a *Venus* attributed to Cranach, and belonging to the Prince of Liechtenstein, is a forgery. The minute technical details of the fabrication of the fakes described in this book have also attracted the attention of the scientists now examining the work at the French museums’ laboratory. The work was seized by a French judge in March—and there are reports that the investigation is widening to include works attributed to Velazquez, Parmigianino and Pontormo among others. In a bizarre twist, as well as references to fakes attributed to these artists, the novel also refers to a “Cranach sold by an English dealer to a Prince of some dubious European country”.

In the novel, Giordano shows the story’s narrator three versions of a painting by Pieter Bruegel dated to 1592. “Every month, Giordano provided a new painting to sell,” the narrator tells us. The forger also creates false provenances, helped by “bogus old receipts”, kept “from his days as a gigolo when he went out with an antiques dealer”.

Giordano always asks middlemen to carry out his transactions for him, but frequently falls out with them, suspecting them of pocketing the profits.

Born in Algiers in 1955, the author of *Faussaire*, Jules-François Ferrillon, studied and taught philosophy, then travelled across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, before becoming an art dealer for a while and is now based in Paris. When questioned about the novel’s story, all he would say—with a roguish smile—was: “Is this book a true story? A trick? Another fraud?” And so we are all left guessing.