

# AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AiA Art News-service

## The Telegraph

### Banned eBay forger back to his old tricks

An art forger was banned by the auction site a year ago - but is still selling his work under a different name and making thousands of pounds

375

216

0

40

631

Email



David Henty in his Brighton studio with a replica of a work by Jack Vettriano Photo: Christopher Pledger



By [Robert Mendick](#), Chief Reporter

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A year ago David Henty, a master forger, was banned from eBay for life for selling thousands of fake paintings on the internet auction site. That ban has failed miserably.

An investigation by The Telegraph shows Mr Henty remains as prolific – and as profitable – as ever. His fake paintings sold on the online auction site have earned him at least £15,000 since the start of the year.

In that time, Mr Henty has sold about 130 paintings

– almost all of them forgeries churned out at his seaside home in Brighton, which enjoys views over the Channel.

Mr Henty currently has 16 paintings for sale including an oil painting purportedly by Sir Winston Churchill. The literary agent in charge of Churchill's estate said the forgeries were "very distressing".

Since the turn of the year, Mr Henty has sold paintings on his latest eBay site supposedly by 56 different artists, including the likes of Augustus John and Walter Sickert, as well as less famous but nevertheless renowned painters.

Other targets for his forgery include famous amateur painters, such as Churchill and Noël Coward, and notorious celebrity painters such as Ronnie Kray, the gangster, and Rolf Harris, the entertainer who was jailed last year for child sex abuse crimes.

Confronted by The Telegraph, Mr Henty boasted of the ease with which he has evaded eBay's

in-house fraud policing unit.

"eBay claimed to have banned me for life but it's easy to get new sites," Mr Henty said. "Don't tell eBay but it's very simple to get back on. You don't even need to buy a new computer. All you have to do is change the IP address on the same computer."

His original eBay identity was shut down by the auction company after he was exposed by this newspaper a year ago. But all Mr Henty did was open a new site – this one under the pseudonym "diamond-antiques2014" – and carry on selling his fakes.

Under contact details, diamond-antiques gives the seller's name as "David Diamond" and an address in Brighton where Mr Henty's daughter lives. The email address begins V90GH, which is the same as the personalised number plate on his open top sports car and in recognition of his skills as a counterfeiter of van Gogh's work.

His biggest seller in the past six months was a painting purportedly by Duncan Grant, a member of the Bloomsbury group of artists, writers and thinkers, which included Virginia Woolf.

Mr Henty sold the signed oil painting under the heading "Duncan Grant Ballet Dancers 1934", for £1,260 at the end of April. In its description on eBay, he wrote: "Beautiful spontaneous painting of the ballet, I bought this from a collector of the Bloomsbury artists, there are no gallery receipts with the painting, I think it has been

in private hands for years, I am very reluctantly offering the painting as after Duncan Grant”.

In fact, Mr Henty knew it could not have been by Grant because he painted it himself. The picture he sold is a fake and worthless but bidders on eBay are lured in with the possibility it could be by Grant and therefore worth a lot more.

“I didn’t say it was a genuine Duncan Grant,” Mr Henty said, adding: “I have got another ‘Duncan Grant’ downstairs.” Last month, he sold an oil painting that he said might have been by the Canadian modern artist Jean-Paul Riopelle, who died in 2002. Mr Henty’s version sold for £550 at the end of May but just as he went to send it off, he realised the paint was still wet. “I noticed a globule of paint in the corner was still soft,” he said. “I had to bake it quickly. I used a hair dryer on it for half an hour. “It went off to Italy and the guy who bought it was really happy with it.”

Mr Henty adds authenticity by purchasing wooden plaques, which are inscribed with the names of the artists he is copying, including one on a Churchill painting that sold for £361 at the beginning of May. “The plaques cost £10 each and help them sell. It’s all about the branding. If you have a really nice painting, the plaque adds a nice, real touch,” said Mr Henty.

Of The “Winston Churchill oil painting” sold in May, Mr Henty wrote: “Oil painting on canvas. Initialled w.s.c. Plaque on the front bears his name. Never been out of the frame, offered in original condition. One of two Middle East scenes I purchased from a private collection. The other I shall be listing soon. I have tried to provenance them but unfortunately it is not that easy, Churchill gave lots of paintings away, and there is no record of them. So reluctantly I am selling as after Sir Winston Churchill.”

The sale of fake paintings on eBay has caused huge concern because poor quality forgeries harm an artist’s reputation and create doubt and uncertainty in the art market over whether paintings are genuine or false.

Gordon Wise, the agent in charge of Churchill’s literary estate, said: “This does terrible damage to Churchill’s reputation as an artist. These pictures are not of high quality and are not remotely representative of his work. This is very distressing. “The Sir Winston Churchill Estate has never been happy about people taking advantage of his name for commercial purposes. To see somebody do this for their own benefit is very distressing.”

Mr Henty, 57, was jailed in the Eighties for his part in a forged passport scam. A keen amateur artist, he turned to art forgery in 2009 when he realised he could not make a living selling paintings under his own name.

Last summer, when Mr Henty’s fakery was brought to the attention of eBay, the company acted swiftly, shutting down his website along with seven other accounts, all based in Brighton, to which he was connected. At the time eBay said Mr Henty “will not be permitted to sell on eBay again”.

This week a spokesman said: "We have previously removed several eBay accounts linked to Mr Henty as these accounts were in breach of our policies.

"Counterfeits are not tolerated on eBay, and we make significant investments annually to ensure we're the most trusted way to shop. Both eBay and PayPal work closely with the law enforcement authorities. If a buyer is worried that an item may not be genuine, we ask them to look up the item number and the seller's user ID from their purchase history and report it to the police.

"Once reported to the police, eBay and the police work in partnership to investigate the item and the seller."