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Wolfgang Beltracchi, German Forger, Max Ernst, Heinrich Campendonk



Wolfgang Beltracchi German Master Art Forger Completes Jail Term

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The German master forger Wolfgang Beltracchi, who was convicted of creating 14 fake works of art purported to be by the likes of Max Ernst and Heinrich Campendonk, has been released from prison. Yet the number of work that the forger was convicted of creating is a mere fraction of the 300 works that Beltracchi and his wife claim to have created over their 35-year forgery career. Around 60 of his works are thought to have been subsequently identified.

But the forger did not create copies of pre-existing masterpieces, instead he dreamt-up works in the style of mostly impressionist and modern greats over a 35 year period. The couple then sold the paintings out of a fictitious collection that his wife said belonged to her grandparents, and had been hidden during World War Two. The pair only officially confessed to forging 14 works; yet in the years since, German experts have been able to track down around 60 suspected Beltracchi fakes.

Key to the master forger's success was his meticulous research, Beltracchi and his wife even lab tested of most pigments used in his paintings. That is, with the key exception of a tube of white paint that, unfortunately for Beltracchi wasn't marked as containing titanium white pigment but, in fact, did. Since Heinrich Campendonk wasn't around when titanium white came around, Beltracchi was discovered. Finally in October 2011, the forger was sentenced to six years in jail.

According to the DPA, which confirmed Beltracchi's release on Friday, the forger was freed on January 9, 2015, a little over three years after being convicted in October 2011. He now reportedly resides in the small Rhineland city of Bergisch Gladbach, near Cologne.

Though initially sentenced to six years behind bars, the judge allowed for Beltracchi's pre-trial detention phase to count towards his time served, which means that beltracchi is currently on probation.

Beltracchi's paintings are now registered "in the style of" the artists that the forger copied for his own financial gain, and carry a much lower price tag than what an original might fetch. Most works have reportedly sold in the \$30,000 to \$45,000 range. However, one piece in Beltracchi's first gallery show under his own name at Galerie Christine Brügger in Bern carried a price tag of \$148,151.