



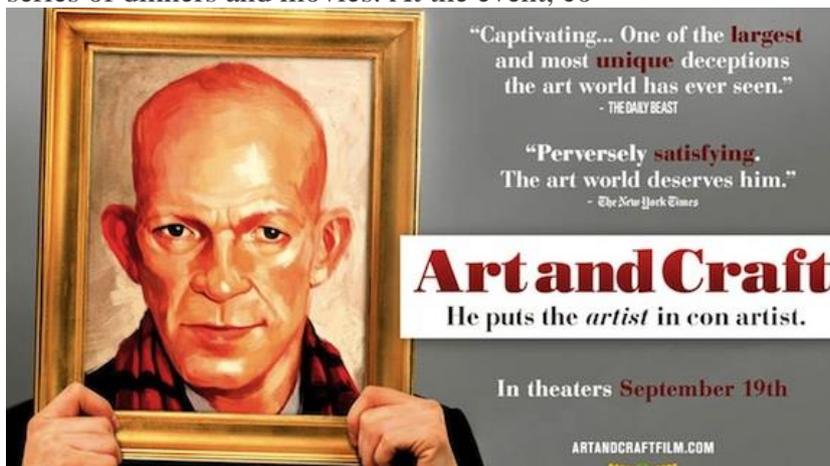
AiA Art News-service



## You've Been Served: "Art and Craft"

by Dennis C. Abrams\*

On the night of Friday, March 13 at New York University School of Law in Lower Manhattan, Center for Art Law held the most recent installment in its "You've Been Served" series of dinners and movies. At the event, co-



hosted by [NYU's Art Law](#)

[Society](#), a modest crowd gathered to share a catered dinner of falafel, a screening of the documentary "[Art and Craft](#)" and a presentation by James Martin, the founder and operator of [Orion Analytical](#). The audience was composed of a healthy mix of those involved law, art and other fields – there were art students, artists, attorneys, conservators, gallerists, law students, restorers and even a computer programmer in attendance.

The film itself, “Art and Craft,” was universally enjoyed by the audience. The 2014 documentary follows Mark Landis (the subject of a Center for Art Law [article](#) in 2011), one of the single most prolific art forgers the world has ever known. What sets Landis apart from other forgers is that Landis does not seek to profit financially from his forgeries but rather donates them to museums and other institutions (mostly in the southern United States) for motives that are his own. This pseudo-philanthropic approach to fraud has allowed him to continue donating copies of valuable artworks for over thirty years for two reasons: (1) museums were unlikely to scrutinize the authenticity of artworks which they did not pay for, and (2) there seemed to be no legal consequences for fraud where the perpetrator is not unjustly enriched. Another reason the true extent of Landis’ fraud will likely never be known is that he clearly has a gift for duplicating art from diverse genres and eras ranging from the Old Masters to Picasso to Charles M. Schulz.

However, his ability to replicate art is perhaps exceeded by his compulsion to do so. Almost as soon as the viewer is introduced to Mark Landis, it becomes clear that he suffers from deep-rooted psychological problems. More than eccentric, the man is very underweight, is obsessed with his late mother, makes multiple visits to mental health professionals during the events of the film, is heavily medicated for unspecified disorders (although at one point he read off a laundry list of diagnoses he received as a young adult) and lives alone among piles of his art supplies, completed artworks and books and catalogs from which he plans to make copies. The compulsiveness with which he works and his nearly eidetic memory have allowed him to create a system for copying so efficient and effective that even journalists admitted to be impressed.

The documentary struck an interesting balance between showing, on the one hand, the effect of Landis’ fraudulent donations on the reputations of recipients and the faith of art connoisseurs and, on the other hand, Landis’ mental health struggles and the minor satisfaction which he is able to derive from his actions. Ultimately, the film left the viewers to decide for themselves whether or not to empathize with Mr. Landis and whether or not he was truly aware of the morally reprehensible nature of his actions.

The film was followed by a lecture by James Martin of Orion Analytical. As Mr. Martin explained, Orion Analytical is “a micro-niche materials analysis and consulting firm” which investigates art and other collectibles from ancient Egyptian artifacts to paintings, architectural finishes, wines, sports memorabilia and so on. Orion is hired worldwide by to examine the authenticity of artwork via top of the line technology. Mr. Martin discussed his work in the recent cases in which his lab ran tests determined paintings were in fact fakes. After his presentation, Mr. Martin fielded questions from the audience which were just as variegated as the audience’s makeup itself.

Join us for our next “You’ve Been Served” event on Monday April 13 when we screen the long-anticipated film “[Woman in Gold](#).” “Woman in Gold,” released today in American theaters, is a dramatization of the protracted legal battle waged by Holocaust survivor Maria Altmann to recover “[Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I](#)” (1907) from the Republic of Austria roughly 60 years after the Nazis seized the painting from her family during their takeover of the country. The film stars Helen Mirren as Altmann, Ryan Reynolds as her young lawyer and Daniel Brühl as Austrian journalist Hubertus Czernin. The time and location of the screening are still undetermined but once the details are finalized, it will be added to [our calendar of events](#). Also please be careful not to spoil the [current status of the painting](#) for would-be viewers.