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**Mirror**

# Fake or fortune? Six of the world's greatest art forgeries

The £165,000 forgery that appeared on last night's Fake or Fortune isn't the first phoney artwork to fool the experts



Viewers were left speechless during last night's episode of *Fake or Fortune*, when a painting bought by an amateur antiques enthusiast for £165,000 was revealed to be a probable forgery.

Fiona Bruce and her team of experts were unable to validate the artwork, called 'Glass Jug with Plates and Pears', leaving its owner Lyn dumbfounded at the verdict. Still, she took the news in her stride, telling Fiona: "This too shall pass."

Forgeries are a major problem in the art world. Even with the advent of top-level anti-counterfeiting measures and high-tech authentication processes, experts believe that as much as [50 percent](#) of pieces in museums and collections are fakes.

And it's a lucrative business. As these stories of top art forgeries show, there's a lot of fame and fortune to be had in dishonest art dealings.

## Wolfgang Beltracchi



Dubbed the 'forger of the century', German-born Wolfgang Beltracchi made a name for himself faking hundreds of paintings in an international art scam that netted him millions of pounds.

Working with his wife, Beltracchi made and sold forgeries of work by famous artists including Max Ernst, Fernand Leger and Kees Van Dongen.

His criminal career came to an end in 2011, when he was found guilty of forging

14 works of art that sold for a total of £28.6 million. He was sentenced to six years in prison and was ordered to pay millions in restitutions.

## Michelangelo



Michelangelo might now be known as one of the greatest Renaissance artists of all time, but he actually cut his teeth as an artist in the world of fakery.

In 1496, he created a figurine of a sleeping cupid – a replica of the famed *Sleeping Eros* – and treated it with acidic earth to make it appear ancient. He then sold it to a dealer, claiming it was a genuine Roman artefact.

The buyer eventually realised he'd been duped, and demanded his money back. Somehow, Michelangelo got off scot-free, keeping the cash *and* establishing a reputation for himself as an artist.

It's not known what happened to the fake statue – some believe it was probably destroyed in a fire at the Palace of Whitehall in 1698.

## Han van Meegeren



Dutch artist Han van Meegeren got into forgery as a way of making a name for himself as an artist – but as they say, be careful what you wish for!

He started out selling detailed forgeries of paintings by Johannes Vermeer, sometimes for staggering prices – he sold a collection of six such paintings for the equivalent of \$60 million.

Things got complicated for him in 1945, however, when one of his forged artworks ended up in the collection of high-ranking Nazi officer Hermann Göring. Van Meegeren was put on trial for being a Nazi collaborator, and ended up having to convince a jury that he actually *was* a forger.

He was found innocent of Nazi-related activity, but was still given a short jail sentence for art fraud. He died of a heart attack before he could be moved to the prison.

## Tom Keating



British art forger Tom Keating didn't make fakes for fame or fortune, but instead to take revenge on the critics and art galleries that he believed were suppressing young emerging talent.

Throughout the 1970s Keating produced more than 2,000 imitation paintings, including a dozen watercolours supposedly created by well-known painter Samuel Palmer.

Dealers and collectors were fooled by his skills for years until he was exposed in 1976. He admitted to making forged artworks, but wouldn't reveal which were his, leaving experts to identify his collection of fakes.

The public branded him a 'loveable rogue', and his forgeries are now collectable in their own right.

## Tatiana Khan



Things can get pretty complicated in the world of art counterfeiting – in one well-known case, the forger didn't even realise they were part of a con.

LA-based art dealer Tatiana Khan told an artist friend that her beloved piece, 'La Femme Au Chapeau Bleu' by Pablo Picasso, had been stolen. She then

commissioned her pal to recreate the famous artwork, paying her the princely sum of \$1,000 to do so.

The resulting forgery was so realistic that Khan sold it for an eye-watering \$2 million, and used the bounty to purchase an authentic Willem de Koonig. The original artist had no idea she'd unwittingly been involved in a million dollar scam.

## **John Myatt**



Back in the 1980s, amateur artist John Myatt began creating imitations of famous paintings by request, selling them for a very reasonable £150 apiece, and signing them with his own name so it was clear they were not originals.

His skills soon caught the attention of a Mr John Drewe, who sold one of Myatt's pieces, 'Portrait of an Army Doctor', at Christie's auction house for £25,000 – he claimed it was an original by Cubist painter Albert Gleizes.

For the next few years the duo embarked on an elaborate art scam that saw Myatt creating fake pieces, and Drewe forging documents to support their authenticity. Some 200 paintings were sold at auction.

The pair were caught in 1995 and imprisoned for their crimes, although a strange turn of events saw the police officer who'd arrested Myatt commission him for a £5,000 family portrait.