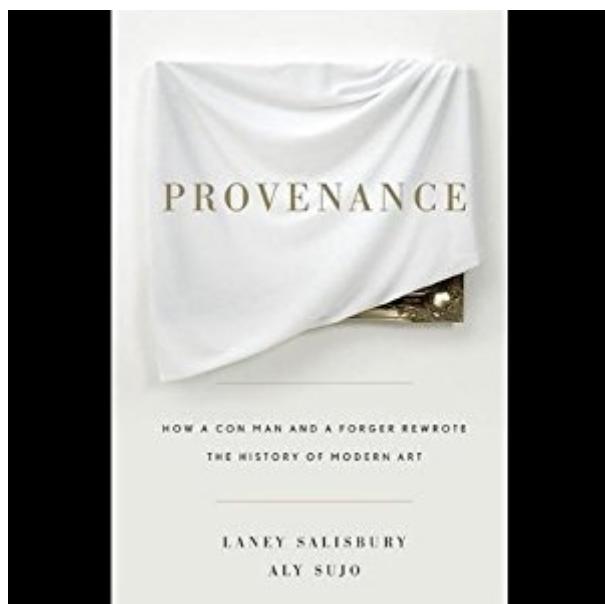


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# Provenance: How A Con Man And A Forger Rewrote The History Of Modern Art



## Synopsis

A tautly paced investigation of one the 20th century's most audacious art frauds, which generated hundreds of forgeries-many of them still hanging in prominent museums and private collections todayProvenance is the extraordinary narrative of one of the most far-reaching and elaborate deceptions in art history. Investigative reporters Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo brilliantly recount the tale of a great con man and unforgettable villain, John Drewe, and his sometimes unwitting accomplices. Chief among those was the struggling artist John Myatt, a vulnerable single father who was manipulated by Drewe into becoming a prolific art forger. Once Myatt had painted the pieces, the real fraud began. Drewe managed to infiltrate the archives of the upper echelons of the British art world in order to fake the provenance of Myatt's forged pieces, hoping to irrevocably legitimize the fakes while effectively rewriting art history. The story stretches from London to Paris to New York, from tony Manhattan art galleries to the esteemed Giacometti and Dubuffet associations, to the archives at the Tate Gallery. This enormous swindle resulted in the introduction of at least two hundred forged paintings, some of them breathtakingly good and most of them selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many of these fakes are still out in the world, considered genuine and hung prominently in private houses, large galleries, and prestigious museums. And the sacred archives, undermined by John Drewe, remain tainted to this day. Provenance reads like a well-plotted thriller, filled with unforgettable characters and told at a breakneck pace. But this is most certainly not fiction; Provenance is the meticulously researched and captivating account of one of the greatest cons in the history of art forgery. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A large number of books have been published in recent years on the subject of fraudulent art. A few are autobiographical accounts, some are biographies, and many are academic studies on what motivates fakers, their techniques, and how they inject their phony works into the market. John Drewe, the central figure around whom the story of this book is built, is a uniquely clever and industrious con-man. As the title suggests, his complex swindle involved creating a bogus provenance for the fraudulent works he had commissioned. He insinuated himself into museum archives where he secretly inserted the forged documentation. It was a scheme that fooled much of the art establishment for years. Worse, he so debased the archives that they could never be entirely relied upon again. Provenance is a real life thriller and detective yarn, a factual account of a singular and elaborate scam. It provides a knowledgeable glimpse into the shady machinations, the greed and dangers of a secretive art world in which huge amounts of money change hands daily. It also delves into the strange world of John Drewe, a highly intelligent, inventive, but totally corrupt figure, a sociopath and pathological liar whose life is driven by falsehoods and fantasy. Provenance is a smoothly written and well researched book, a true account of remarkable events, one that is both instructive and pleasurable to read.

Provenance is an unusual book that plainly makes the case that love of history is often heavily clouded by the status of association with greatness, casting doubt and concern about the legitimacy of our "artifacts." Can we trust what we see? Can we trust the experts? Does it matter? And if so, why? Recognizing the ease with which some have created substitute "artifacts," how much of our "history" can be relied upon, and how much may be a popular forgery? Indirectly, Provenance questions everything we think we've ever seen "proven" by "evidence." A fascinating read.

Published in 2009 after the death of one of the couple of authors this in depth presentation of an extraordinary series of art and documentation forgeries ever. Years of research were required to effectively present the deeds or misdeeds of John Drewe who seem to become the characters he pretended to be - a physicist, an heir to a remarkable art collection, a Mossad agent, a consultant to the British Atomic Energy Commission and the list goes on. All the while cleverly documenting and selling "modern masterpieces" to the leading dealers in London and elsewhere. John Myatt - failed painter is swept into this whirlwind of activity and doing a reasonably good job of creating masterpieces by Ben Nicholson, Roger Bissiere, Braques and Giacometti, Graham Sutherland et al. Drewe prepared an "authentic" provenance for each work and then used "runners" to present and

sell them to the likes of Leslie Waddington, Daniel Stern, Peter Nahum among many others. Upwards of 200 works were made and sold. Drewe parlayed each meeting and relationship into a probable sale. Eventually he was caught and convicted but it took hard work, chance and luck to bring him down. He was never repentant and was also not out to embarrass the art world. Rather his success was aided by the lax standards where greed is involved. Although it is a tale related to the modern art world it seems more a story of the disintegration of moral and ethical standards in our world. The authors simply and clearly describe the facts and the events but the take away for me seems much more tragic and universal.

I found this book to start a little slow, prodding, but I couldn't put the book down after the halfway point. I kept finding myself thinking, "this can't possibly be true," but you are assured by the extensive endnotes that indeed, it is. Once I finished the book, I appreciated the time the author took to setup the psychology and industry standards, which helps makes sense of the way things wrapped up. I recently read *The Art Forger: A Novel* by B. A. Shapiro, and it was interesting to see the intersection of truth and fiction (*The Art Forger* used many technical details actually practiced by the team explored in *Provenance*). I recommend this book, though it takes some time to become absorbed; it is well-written and carefully researched, and what a tale!

Absolutely fascinating book, perfect for anyone who has an interest in art or history or crime stories. I read it years ago - LOVED IT and have given it as a gift at least half a dozen times. Each recipient said they couldn't put it down. Great way to spend a weekend! Buy one for yourself and a friend... you'll need to have an extra copy on hand. It is so wild, you wouldn't believe it if it hadn't happened. Very well written and utterly captivating.

The authors describe John Drewe and John Myatt's elaborate fraud in the art world with great detail, making for an interesting story. It certainly appears that Drewe suffered from an unusual psychiatric malady and although the authors do not purport to diagnose him, after recounting the pattern of his grandiose behavior, much of his actions seem less fascinating and more the product of an illness. The strength of this book is the explanation of the key role a work's provenance plays in its value, and how Mr. Drewe manipulated this, perhaps like no other forger. Like many reviewers, I agree that including images would have been helpful, and that is the reason for four stars, and not five. I would refer readers to Laney Salisbury's web site for these images, [...] Sadly, co-author Aly Sujo, also Salisbury's husband, passed away prior to the publication of this book, and I would have wanted a

short note about that fact in the epilogue.

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