



A Forger's Tale

Shaun Greenhalgh , Waldemar Januszczak (Contributor)

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In 2007, Bolton Crown Court sentenced Shaun Greenhalgh to four years and eight months in prison for the crime of producing artistic forgeries. Working out of a shed in his parents' garden, Greenhalgh had successfully fooled some of the world's greatest museums. During the court case, the breadth of his forgeries shocked the art world and tantalised the media. What no one realised was how much more of the story there was to tell.

Written in prison, *A Forger's Tale* details Shaun's notorious career and the extraordinary circumstances that led to it. From Leonardo drawings to L.S. Lowry paintings, from busts of American presidents to Anglo-Saxon brooches, from cutting-edge Modernism to the ancient art of the Stone Age, Greenhalgh could - and did - copy it all. Told with great wit and charm, this is the definitive account of Britain's most successful and infamous forger, a man whose love for art saturates every page of this extraordinary memoir.

A Forger's Tale Details

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From Reader Review A Forger's Tale for online ebook

June Louise says

Having read and loved Laura Cumming's art-based James Tait Black Prize biography winning book, I was excited to read this biography contender as it is also based in the art world. However, instead of an account of the life of a relatively unknown artist, this book is 357 pages of confessions from Shaun Greenhalgh, otherwise known as the Bolton Forger. His business was to forge famous paintings or sculptures either on behalf of other people or, latterly, for himself, often selling them to very high-profile galleries and museums in Britain and elsewhere. While there were many times when he got away with his crime, he was eventually arrested in 2006.

The narrative starts with his arrest and then looks backwards on his life, tracing his love of art from boyhood, his studio in his father's shed, the tragic death of his girlfriend, and his passion for falconry. He addresses the reader in a conversational style, which makes the narrative accessible; he drew you into his crimes, so that as a reader you felt you were witnessing, rather than reading, his shady undertakings. My main criticism of the book is that while in the first 150 pages, the artistic techniques that he describes (which he employed in order to carry out these copies) is interesting, by the time I got to page 300, I was getting a little bored with them. Indeed, it was a struggle of the will to finish the book. In my opinion the book was a little too long, and that reference to so many forgeries in minute detail were making my mind wander from the text more than it should have done.

Final verdict: The first half of the book was good. It wasn't amazing, but it was interesting learning about the man and the events which acted as catalysts for his life of forgery. The last 200 pages, though, were hard work to get through.

Adam says

Very talented self-taught artist that made realistic reproductions and copies of famous artifacts and pieces of art. Doesn't name names and is not a tell all, but certainly an eyeopener on dealing in art and the whole quaint cottage industry (for lack of a better term to describe the insular, wanky, posh art world of London etc. See the Wied-something Jewish family that somehow became the 'authority') 'Institute' where they're supposed to be world class but were fooled by one of Greenhalgh's pieces. And also a Monet that was discovered recently that was almost certainly legit, but for reasons of ego and pride they're denying it is real, it was part of a BBC 'Fake Or Fortune' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_or... documentary) in the UK of buying and selling massively overpriced artworks.

Author dislikes the 'infamous' tag by media, yet he didn't tell the publisher not to put it on the cover, or did but they ignored him. Why do publisher's treat authors like this?

Shaun Greenhalgh from a very young age had great artistic talent and a voracious appetite for history and mechanics led him to art and creating fakes. Initially it was the challenge to recreate pieces he admired, see how he measured up. If it wasn't for dodgy dealers commissioning pieces to resell for huge profits (initially without his knowledge or consent) and his girlfriend dying he probably could have been a sculptor in his own right or perhaps eventually an examiner/appraiser. And working under art restorer Carol and getting

access to expert analysis reports of material composition data and other inside secrets. He just couldn't seem to create his own original art because he felt he wasn't creative and original enough. Perhaps the dislike for 'modern' art influences that also.

Photoplates aren't really referred to. Illustrations of what he was explaining would have been helpful. Index would have been useful. Not a page-turner but interesting nevertheless. Nothing beats Frank W.

Abagnale Frank Abignale's 'Catch Me If You Can'. Catch Me If You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake

Good to see there are a few dozen titles in this art forgery & theft genre.

<https://www.goodreads.com/author/show...>

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Similar books I've read previously are Priceless (green cover by UK art dealer) and one about the history of Sotheby's auction house. Recommended, just can't find their actual authors & titles.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawn_G...

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NoveList data to come.

Donna Hines says

Forgeries in the art world is not something often discussed but in A Forger's Tale we have front row seats to examine it all under the microscope.

In 20017 Shaun Greenhalgh was sentenced for four years for producing these forgeries.

He fooled just about everyone and tantalized the media in the process.

A true story told straight from behind the cells this story will make you question the realities of his career in this interesting memoir.

Bryant Whelan says

I delighted in this tell-all memoir about the life of a master forger who began making fakes as a child in the 1970s and continued until he got caught and imprisoned in his forties. He explains in detail his processes, tools, and mechanics used to create his fakes that fooled experts and now live in collections literally around the world believed to be the "real thing." Sculpture, paintings, carved relief panels—attributed to masters from Gauguin, Moran, to DaVinci, Egyptian carvers, Reliquary...there seems to nothing he could not create as a copy. But Shaun Greenhalgh admits he is not a creative artist with a vision to express himself with original art, and confessed that any attempt to do so was not well received. So he studied, practiced, learned the methodologies of masters, copied them, created fake provenances, fooled the auction giants and museums, and took their money. And after 40 years the law gathered up all of his stuff from his garden shed where he worked and sent him to jail. I enjoyed his humor, willingness to call himself out, and his detail on the processes he used. He was passionate about his work-and writes with humor. Fun stuff. It was a bit long and

detailed but I liked it. Just also makes me realize that a lot of the “authenticated” works just might actually be fakes, made by some dude down the street who was bored and liked to experiment.

Wei Li says

Irrefutable that Mr. Greenhalgh led an interesting life but this is one of the rare cases in which the story would have been more better served told by a third person. The knowledge the author has on reproducing works of art is fascinating, but is told in almost manual-like form, like a short how-to, which makes it a better art guidebook than it does a story.

Also the author is too self-effacing. A third person would tout his horn - “Shaun had a healthy curiosity about art, unmatched by peers, and was already pulling earnings equal to an adult’s wage before he completed his O-levels.” Unfortunately for much of the book Mr. Greenhalgh prefers to tout the horns of artists long dead. Bernini. Rembrandt. I almost laughed when he nearly put Rodin in the same category considering their polar opposite reactions to the Elgin Marbles.

I suspect this is all down to the fact that Mr. Greenhalgh wrote this all down during his time in prison. It’s pure confession. No editor to talk to him about structure and request rewrites.

An interesting story, but a boring read. Conundrum isn’t it?

Richard Howard says

An eye-opening read! Throughout the book 'The Forger' decries his lack of talent, though he managed to fool many 'experts' for many years. His understanding of historical techniques is astounding, even more so because it was self-taught. The pages of descriptions of these techniques do become wearying but I applaud his persistence. Two observations I found enlightening. The first is about artistic technique and artistic vision: the author believes he has the first but not the second and that with many modern artists it is the reverse. (Having been to the Tate Modern on a number of occasions, I see his point.) The second is that of the many 'experts' he encountered, few were artists themselves; a fact he believes made them easier to fool. Did he deserve 5 years in jail? From the TV show 'Hustle' comes a pertinent quote: 'You cannot con an honest man.'

Perhaps the forger's beloved ancients said it best 'Caveat emptor!' - Let the buyer beware.

Valerity (Val) says

A moody read about forgeries in art, written by a prolific forger while still in jail who was busted and served time for it. named Shaun Greenhalgh who relates his story. He was the paid live-in caretaker for some years of both of his elderly parents who had health problems, and were in their 80’s, for forty-some pounds a week, which he compares to about as much as a kid’s paper route. Apparently, he’d needed a way to boost his income and had a love for doing art and visiting museums for years. So he tried his hand at making copies of different things, using different techniques until he became quite good at many different forms.

The book starts with the day he’s arrested, the knock on the door, the search, things hauled out as evidence,

etc. Having to go down and give a statement to police. The wait while they go over the evidence and decide what to charge him with, and see if he will cooperate. The media bugging him. Then it goes into his art, how he got interested in it, learned to do it and branch out to so many kinds as he experimented.

He talks about how he offered his 'copies' at low prices, playing dumb and watching as the sellers instead of offering to have the pieces looked at by someone with experience, would offer a bit more, running off to sell them at huge markups, then asking for a letter of provenance stating that they'd had the piece in the family for a long time. Showing a lot of shady goings-on in the art business already by many. A sort of true crime in the art world story, perpetrated by an unusual character who wrote about it after. My thanks for the advance electronic copy that was provided by #netgalley, author Shaun Greenhalgh, and the publisher for my fair review.

Atlantic Books 384 pages

Oct 1st, 2018

RATED: 3.5/5 Stars

My BookZone blog:

<https://wordpress.com/post/bookblog20...>

Roberto Estaba says

I really wanted to like this book, due to its unusual topic and the "man vs. The system" feel. And while I found bits of it entertaining, it has a couple of failings that dilute the enjoyment too much.

There are three broad threads in this book:

- a- the story of a working class, self taught man from Bolton conning the entire art world,
- b- a really brief tour through the history of art, and
- c- an explanation of how forgery works.

Had this book mostly focused on point a, with brief explanations of point C, while making just the necessary reference to point B, it would have been thoroughly enjoyable.

Instead, there are just too many technical details on faking techniques and too many art periods covered too extensively.

Take 100 pages of this book, and it would have been more enjoyable. As it is, it remains for the niche of readers who appreciate all three points mentioned above equally

Rhonda says

A fascinating tale no doubt. It really opened my eyes to how the art world operates, its unethical practices and the importance of a good story for a piece of art. Shaun's story is a good story too even if he seemed to leave out some significant details and obviously put his own spin on events. The development of his interests and skills in childhood and early career was particularly interesting, all the technical detail was fascinating

too, and enjoyed reading how seeing the art of Italy influenced him. An interesting character to have the range of artistic skills he did, and the practical and research skills. I was left wondering what he did with all the money he must have made. Did he have a gambling problem? Pity that just about all his references to women had a description of their ranking on the 'good sort' scale.

Caroline says

I found this book interesting for the first chapter or so, but after that it dissolved into a rather woolly recipe book of the techniques used by Shaun Greenhalgh in doing his forgeries in art and sculpture. After about the fifth artefact described, my eyelids begin to droop. I found it similar to reading any other instruction manual, and equally as boring.

In 2007, Shaun Greenhalgh was busted for forgery by The Art and Antiques Squad of Scotland Yard, He was given four years and eight months in prison. Initially the police thought that several forgers were responsible for the artefacts he produced, as they were so wide-ranging in character. Herewith some of genres he worked to emulate -

Victorian watercolours

Oil paintings

Cameos - from Roman hardstone gems and intaglio reliefs to large terracottas and marble reliefs.

Stone carving

Wood carving

Metalwork casting

Concrete casting

Ceramics - in terracotta and porcelain.

Ivory carving

Glass casting.

The only art training he had were two years of art classes at secondary school, but he was obviously incredibly able. Right from the beginning his passion was copying. He would look at a work of art or sculpture, and analyse how it was made - and how he could replicate what the artist had achieved. Even when young, all his interest was in copying the work of others.

Making forgeries, or copying, is often incredibly difficult. In many cases the hardest part of the process is ageing the artworks, so that they look genuinely old, be that a hundred or several thousand years old, and this book discusses in detail the great lengths he went to in order to produce these likenesses - many of which ended up being sold for eye-watering prices, as original artworks. The scope of Greenhalgh's work was pretty impressive...

Other issues I had with the book were that Greenhalgh is not a writer, and the book is plodding. I also found his attitude to art incredibly pedestrian and uninspired. I like art books that fill me with excitement and make

me want to rush off to the nearest museum or gallery, but I found Greenhalgh's approach lacklustre and mechanical. For me the book was all technique and no spirit.

Forgeries seem to be quite common. Here is a link to Victoria and Albert Museum's collection of forgeries/copies.

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/...>

Christina Dudley says

Having never heard of Shaun Greenhalgh or his decades of art forgeries, this was a fun and fascinating memoir to come to "cold," although I spent lots of time all along, phone in hand, googling artworks and artists he mentioned.

The main takeaway, which, in Greenhalghian fashion, he repeats at least four times, is that you should buy art because it pleases you, not because of whoever supposedly created it. Fakery is rampant in the art market and has been for centuries, so just buy it if you like it, and not for the name brand.

Greenhalgh turns out to be an impressive craftsman, working in paint and sculpture and ceramics across multiple eras and spanning the globe. Really he ought to hire his services to make fakes for people who love a certain work of art but could never afford it. I'd love one of his Peploes or L. S. Lowrys, for example.

And speaking of which, I really liked learning about and looking up all kinds of amazing artists and craftsmen that Greenhalgh imitated or admired.

If you like art, this memoir will interest, instruct, and even amuse. It's somewhat repetitive, and I confess to skimming some of the non-art-related bits, but altogether it was a worthwhile read. And take a look at the Smithsonian video where Greenhalgh argues that that famous bust of Nefertiti is a fake!!! It's quite convincing.

Thank you to the publisher for the opportunity to read this book!

Studvet says

Brilliant read and makes you chuckle with his baldly-stated non-PCness. There is a refreshing clarity and simplicity about the way he writes with no delusions of grandeur or arrogance. Despite what he says about himself, he is obviously a genius of sorts and fantastically gifted in his application and ingenuity. He skewers the elite art market brilliantly and gives fantastic details of how he created his "art". He obviously has an ingenious imagination and knowledge and, I think, would be fascinating to know. I totally believe he created the disputed "La Belle Princessipa" because what gain has he to lie and he comes across as very open about what he did and didn't do. He gives very cogent reasons to say he did it, both about construction of it and of its faults. I found it a page-turner and Greenhalgh to be a true-blue English eccentric. He is not a

sentimentalist but it was very affecting when his partner died tragically at a young age.

Olivia says

A truly personal account of a 'everyman' talent. An enjoyable and interesting read.

It would seem that in another age Shaun Greenhalgh would have been hailed as a talented 'copyist' and set to work for any number of wealthy sources.

Even today artists such as Susie Ray are acknowledged as 'copyists' and well paid to assist those with priceless collections wishing to display a work but not the original. Many of the copyists work only in a single medium.

Shaun appears to be truly gifted in multiple aspects of art work. THIS is a genuinely human picture by the author of his life, his 'doings' and his art adventures. The challenge he says was in the achievements themselves. Often sold as copies he was secretly amazed, then titillated by the apparent greed and credulity of the High End dealers and their customers.

he says his original efforts and intentions were so far from forgery it is hard to believe.

Sadly, he eventually received a prison sentence for his efforts. NOW...he says HIS telling is the accurate version. That many have benefited to the tune of perhaps millions, certainly thousands, of pounds from his UNSIGNED works. His deliberate 'forgeries' were minimal. I KNOW that doesn't absolve him from the few acts of deception undertaken deliberately. BUT...

Why, oh why was he not snapped up much earlier on in life and re-directed and why was his transgression seen as so much more despicable or sentence-worthy than others?? Indeed some of the European artists of fakes have received serious sentences and his must be seen in parallel. BUT...again, it seems so sad that such a talent was under-played for so long. There is a certain humour in his distance from some of the later fraudulent sales undertaken by those who were keen to receive his unsigned copies, re-package them, then sell on with dubious provenance.

IT seems clear that those investigating his 'work' and subsequent misdeeds in part didn't understand his talent and from another angle admired his industriousness.

It is to be hoped, in my opinion, that his talent is finally acknowledged and redirected to the benefit of all.

AN ENJOYABLE and interesting read.

Storyheart says

The author, forger and art-maker Shaun Greenhalgh has so much talent, drive and curiosity that this should have been a fascinating read. And indeed, parts of the book, especially those relating to the slimier side of the art world, were very interesting.

Alas, however talented a painter, sculptor and metal smith Greenhalgh may be, he is no author; his memoir was long and rambling, causing me to skim entire sections in order to get through it. I think this story would be best told as a documentary allowing interested parties to actually see the copies Greenhalgh so brilliantly made.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for this ARC.

Ana says

The "A Forger" in the title refers to the author. Greenhalgh wrote his autobiography whilst in prison, serving his 4+ years for art forgery. The sheer volume of his output is insane: he forged everything from Assyrian reliefs, to Egyptian statues, to 20th Century watercolours. His talent - as he specifies multiple times - lays in copying, not in producing original work. And by Odin, is he talented. Not only did he study the historical background of all of his pieces in order to situate them in their time, but he produced most of the forgeries using original methods, and then concocted strange ways of making them "look the part" - in some cases, 4000 years old.

Most fascinatingly, he claims he is the creator of the famous drawing that has sparked a lot of controversy - La Bella Principessa. The drawing has been attributed to Leonardo da Vinci by some top experts in the field, whilst others say it is definitely a fake. Whatever they believe, the piece is now privately owned and the last offer to the owner was 80 million dollars. In case you don't know what it looks like, you probably do - I myself have seen the piece multiple times online when the "discovery" was made that it was da Vinci's work. Greenhalgh, in his own words, drew it in 1978 - when he was 18 years old. Given that I'm not an expert, I couldn't tell. But after reading his book and understanding the ease with which he was able to create pieces that passed for originals, I do think he is capable of it.

His story is a truly fascinating one. He served more time in prison than some do for murder, so I think he did his time. I myself, while believing that punishment for forgeries is well deserved, also think it's not that much of a serious crime. As he says, stop looking at the labels and just look at the god damn piece of art - judge for yourself if it's beautiful or not. He does draw a limit, though, in his respect for the true giants of the arts. And, to be honest, he never signed any forgery with another artist's name - he simply created copies as close to reality as he could, then sold them for often minimal prices. In any case, it is worth the read.
