



The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren

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It's a story that made Dutch painter Han van Meegeren famous worldwide when it broke at the end of World War II: a lifetime of disappointment drove him to forge Vermeers, one of which he sold to Hermann Goering, making a mockery of the Nazis. And it's a story that's been believed ever since. Too bad it just isn't true.

Jonathan Lopez has done what no other writer could--tracking down primary sources in four countries and five languages to tell for the first time the real story of the world's most famous forger. Neither unappreciated artist nor antifascist hero, Van Meegeren emerges in *The Man Who Made Vermeers* as an ingenious, dyed-in-the-wool crook--a talented Mr. Ripley armed with a paintbrush, who worked virtually his entire adult life making and selling fake Old Masters. Drawing upon extensive interviews with descendents of Van Meegeren's partners in crime, Lopez also explores the networks of illicit commerce that operated across Europe between the wars. Not only was Van Meegeren a key player in that high-stakes game during the 1920s, landing fakes with powerful dealers and famous collectors such as Andrew Mellon (including two pseudo-Vermeers that Mellon donated to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.), but the forger and his associates later offered a case study in wartime opportunism as they cashed in on the Nazi occupation.

The Man Who Made Vermeers is a long-overdue unvarnishing of Van Meegeren's legend and a deliciously detailed story of deceit in the art world.

The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren Details

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From Reader Review The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren for online ebook

Mary says

"A deliciously detailed story of deceit in the art world," brings us the story of a WWII era forger of Vermeers who was made a Dutch folk hero for hoodwinking Goering into buying one of his forgeries. However, this book reveals the truth of van Meegeren's true political colors.

Yes, we have an ARC at NP.

Reading it now:

Barb

Ed Smiley says

It appears that Han van Meergeren was in a sense his own greatest forgery.

In this work, the author deconstructs the legend, and reveals a character on the borderline of sociopathy, albeit socially charming, but far more of a collaborator, Nazi sympathizer and hardened crook than the art world Robin Hood legend represents.

Rather than a loss, this results in a story I found far more fascinating, and far more coherent. What is somewhat puzzling to the contemporary reader is the mystery of how the images that finally lead to van Meergeren's arrest could ever have been mistaken for those of Vermeer.

The author has done a very good analysis of how the expectations of an era or an art historian can determine what forgeries are invisible to it, or cater to its whims. And of course, as soon as one forgery is admitted as genuine, the oddities of its style start to be attributed to its purported maker.

(None of the above is really a spoiler, there is a wealth of detail that I have left out.)

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

3.5 stars.

Pang says

I made it to about page 148 before calling it quit.

The book is a story of a man named Han van Meegeren who made his living forging art works of dead masters, including Vermeers and Hals. The opportunities for fake arts arose as a side effect of the World War

I. As homes were raided and destroyed, art works were also confiscated and sold. So more arts from great artists were "discovered" during 1920s and 1930s where it was easy to paint something similar to what the great artists would have painted and sold as original. Van Meegeren managed to dupe many people in the art world to the degree that his story had become somewhat a legend.

The subject is rather interesting, but it (and the writing) is not enough to keep me going. It might very well get a whole lot more interesting if I keep going. After all, everyone raves about this book. But I find it hard to read more than 10 pages at a time. Too many other books on list to read; I must take a bow.

Mary Ronan Drew says

The story of a forger who made remarkably unconvincing "Van Gogh" paintings and sold them for megabucks (megamarks?) to Hitler and his friends.

Andie says

Intersting & extremely wel-researched story of Han van Meegeren who became famous for forging Vermeers and selling them to the Nazis during World War II This is one of those footnotes of history that is so very interesting.

david-baptiste says

this is the best book on the subject i've read so far--and there are many out ii have yet to get to--having read only six or seven of them--

Lopez provides a study not only of van meegeren's vermeers and other fakes, but also the painter's own works, as well as an indepth look at the high class journal of the arts ven Megeeren did in late 20's--which includes his first forays into "fascist art critique" of a comcealed kind--and barely concealed plagiarisms from Hitler's views on modern art from Mein Kampf--

Lopez makes a link between fasciosm and the forgers of the peiroad between the two world wars, however doesn't go into it much more than stating this--so wil have to "find outfor myself" more re this--it intrigued me in relation with the uses of forgery by the Bush administration and throughout history in producing "reasons for war"--(Gulf of Tonkin Incident or the Maine explosion for exmple, as well as those used by the Germans and Israelis)--as well as in relation with roberto bolano's book of fictionl writer's bios and works Nazi Literature of the Americas--

Lopez has also written some fascinating articles for the journal Apollo on this and other strange subjects re primarily Dutch painting--

the research is terrific--and turns on their heads many of the urban legends associated with van meegeren in which he's portrayed as a kind of "good guy" trumping the Nazis when in fact he was an admirer of them and a collabo--

it's hard to beleive suh truly awful works cd have been taken for vermeers--but then the book shows how cpomepting cities, nationalism, competing experts and crooks all got involved, to fill the "vacuum" of vermeer's having made so few works, nd sezingon this to "supply a demand"--

making great fortunes for van meegeren and many of his associates in the art and criminal worlds--

(old review here:

I'm really looking fwd to reading this as have read a current and earlier article by jonatahn lopez which are parts of the book and they are excellent-

and open up whole new cans of worms regarding "the man who was vermeer"--

and his decades long interest in hitler and his connections with not only nazis but lot of crooks in the art manufacturing worlds--

i've read a couple other books on this fella already, in fact am currently reading a brand new one i just stumbled on at the bookstore-

forgeries of al kinds have been a fascination of mine as long as i can remember--

in a very strange way the doors of falsehoods open up vast hidden areas of the "true story" that wd not otherwise perhaps have come to light--

and also give an illumination on ares of the theatrical in ways that the theater itself often seems incapable of-

i think that investigating and understanding the operations of the fictional is one of the most fascinating ways to of finding methods to put to use in the awareness of how much of what is taken to be "true" and 'reality' is in fact a massive and massively funded and militarily imposed deception--

i think that the inability to take into consideration the reality of the fictional is an indictment of a severe lack of imagaintation, which turns often as not into the dogmatic rejection of things that exist in favor of those things which one believes as a dogama or adheres to in order to project one's fanatsies into the world as though they themselves are realities--

"hard headed realists" often turn out to be the most hopeless of romantics, clinging desprately and with a great show of toughness to the feeble pylons by which they orient their plodding march through the world, attemptng to stamp out any indications of of the exostences somewhere somehow of a humor they cannot grasp--

of course, these bludgeons in clothing are often taken to be "leaders" in the realms of thought and Doctrine and are followed in their wakes by a stream of timoursou souls seeking a "leader"--

there complete lack of humor and imagination is to their folowers the sign of their "immesne seriousness of purpose and commitment to their saving vsion"--

trees thesmelves are astounded at the approach of this blindoflded Visionary--

th gerater the esteem in which they are held, the the more ssad is the show--

perhaps it is the fuction of hoxes and forgeries at times simoply to expose al this rot in the sytem and the fraud of its reducing others to drones following the directives of its unquestioned Authrotiy--

so sayeth the ginat ghost haunting the spectral glades of long vanished pmanuscripts of unknown authors, tthose

forgers of the masterpieces of oblivion

Michelle Nevius says

A very enjoyable read, and informative about Europe prior to and during WWII (in addition to of course being a comprehensive look at this notorious forger).

Jammies says

An intriguing story, a compelling if not particularly likeable subject, crisp writing, elegant language and an author who explains details and concepts without talking down to his reader all made this a wonderful reading experience.

Mizuki says

It is a fine non-fictional book about a fraudster named Han van Meegeren who created fake Vermeer's paintings at the turn of the century. (More information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_van...)

This is a story about an up-and-coming artist (who had quite a charmed life, mind you) and his development into a fraudster who created fake Vermeer's paintings--plus he claimed he had discovered Vermeer's, non-existent, Biblical themed paintings!

(LINK: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Fi...>)

(Link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_van...)

Well, when viewing some of the forgeries, I really had a hard time trying to understand why would people thought Vermeer actually painted *this*!?

This fraudster's life story is shady and intriguing as hell (and he wasn't the only one, the author also introduced van Meegeren's circle of art forger, go-betweens and brokers as well), and the book is informative and easy-to-read. It gives you a better understanding of the circles of European artists, art market at that period of time, the vanity of the collectors (as you can imagine, Americans rich people were viewed mostly as easy marks. LOL), and the many methods to create fake 'ancient masterpieces'. If you were interested in such topics, you will be well entertained!

PS: strangely enough, I'd read about van Meegeren's and his fellow art forgers' methods of creating forgeries in a child book about detective work when I was a kid. LOL

Jose says

Successful art forgery stories have always been an interest of mine and for that reason this book, being about the best Vermeer forger to the date, was a sweet read.

The author walks us through the process that drove Han Van Meegeren into becoming one of the most renowned and successful art forgers of the world, taking us from the shitty quality-less paintings to the pieces starring in millionaire art auctions.

The book unfolds in a really grasping mode, allowing the reader to get involved in the process of setting an art-piece up in the European mid 20th century art market; comparing as well the regular art market system for legit master pieces and how incredibly interesting it gets for fake art works.

Really enjoyable and informative book as it analyses how a man's criminal stigma was turned into a national hero label.

Teri Zipf says

I was listening to an interview with Marshall McLuhan's son, and he said that his father, when reading nonfiction, only read every other page, because nonfiction writers are so redundant (not to mention, generally boring) that it's all that's necessary. I smacked myself on the head because if I had heard that before I started this book, I may have finished it. As it was, I gave it a lot longer trial than it deserved, about 75% of the book.

You'd think that someone who has the elements of great art, forgery, and Nazi Germany, could inject some tension into their book, but this book plods along, citing fact after boring fact, and not even anything like, "Here's how you forge Vermeers, in case you were wondering," though he does mention some of the technical processes. I think this book was written for art historians and then wrongly marketed to the ordinary reader. You'd have to be getting paid by the hour to finish it.

Mike says

This is the second book that I have read in the past couple of months about the Dutch forger Han van Meegeren. The first ("I Was Vermeer: The Rise and Fall of the Twentieth Century's Greatest Forger") was a very sympathetic portrait of the man who made (in today's dollars) millions creating fake works of art. While his own above-board career as a portrait painter and artist stalled.

This book is a much more critical look at the man and his life, but goes into far less detail about how he (supposedly) discovered and applied the technology that allowed him to pass the basic fake-screening tests of his day. Since this book casts a colder eye at the stories and actions of van Meegeren we may also need to question the veracity of his own statements about how he developed the paints and aging process that he used in his fakes.

Within its pages, Mr. Lopez looks not only at the making of the fakes, but also at the way in which the man made himself appealing to whatever group was currently in power. Whether it was using mimicry (as was accepted) as an art student to win a prize, or to paint in a manner that the wealthy and powerful admired (and flattered them in the portraits he created), or to incorporate visual elements that "borrowed" from the occupation government and the Nazi regime during WWII he gives us examples and first-hand accounts.

Like a book of literary criticism, this book delves into the technical aspects of his art in all its forms. The quality of the fakes is examined (it is in both books, but more so here): but Mr. Lopez does not limit himself to the sloppy brushwork and incorrect pigments of the later paintings. He looks at the compositions of the paintings and how they relate back to true paintings by the artists that he copied. If you are more of an art lover and historian, this book will satisfy your critical faculties better.

The last 70+ pages of the book (before the index) is composed of an Author's Note, endnotes, bibliography, and picture references. In both tone and composition it is a more scholarly work. The author himself is an artist and although that may not give him any special insight into how to construct a critical book, I think he's done a pretty good job of it. Of course it helps that he writes articles for periodicals (some of which were incorporated into this book).

If you only wanted to read one book about Han van Meegeren, then this is probably the one. It covers his life in all phases (however briefly at points), his art, his fakes, and how he was perceived by the world of art lovers and by the Dutch (before and after his arrest). If you want a deeper look at his early life and his painting methods, then I recommend also reading "I Was Vermeer". It is a much more romantic look at the man and while it may be based on not-always-reliable facts, it has color reproductions of the paintings both real and faked. Together they offer a pretty complete look at the man.

But as for this book, it is well-written, very measured in how much space is devoted to the various aspects of van Meegeren's life, and gives more insight into how art experts operated and how specific individuals were regarded as they authenticated (or not) newly-found paintings. I think it is well worth reading and I am scoring it a full "4".

Molly says

OK. So - I knew nothing about Vermeer's art going into this. Other than I had heard of his painting - The Girl With The Pearl Earring. And I only knew about that because of the movie I had caught in passing on TV one day. And even then, I didn't remember that Vermeer was the one to paint it until I began reading this book. Why then would I read this book?

No - not for a homework assignment or a sudden budding interest in art history research. I read it because the author is a member of a Book Group here on GR that I belong to and his book was one of many selected to be read during the year. Thought I'd give it a go. It sounded intriguing after all - not a biography about a master Dutch painter, but the re-telling of the legend of a master Forger of the master painter, who collaborated with Nazis and lived (for a while) to tell about it.

I liked the writing, and the photos of all the paintings. I liked the beginning and the end - when the forger is captured and exposed. I liked the history lesson of WW2's impact on the art world - some of which I was actually familiar with. And I was left curious to seek out more information about the art world in general.

I didn't like the middle - where the forger came into his own leading up to the war. It seemed dry in sections and much needed to be assumed or supposed due to lack of complete evidence. However, a lesser writer would have used that as an excuse to get fictional with a factual book - so I do appreciate that restraint. I presume most of why the middle didn't hold my interest as well was that I was unfamiliar with all of the

players involved - and there were many - and I had no list to refer to with their names as they kept popping up throughout. So I kept missing the irony about their involvement, or the wicked connections brewing.

If you are a fan of Vermeer, or the art world, or would like some insight into the seedy underbelly of Nazi collaborators you will probably enjoy this read very much. It isn't too long and flows well. I wish that there had been some more personalization of the facts - a parallel with the individual responsible for arresting, and then befriending, the forger for example. It would have held my empty art brain's interest longer.

The author did well to educate me on this bit of history that got twisted and embellished over the years, much like the forger's work itself. And to accomplish that is deserving of a round of applause.

Richard says

This book is not one I might normally have read, had it not been brought to my attention by a series of strange coincidences that would make even Lemony Snicket's jaw drop. But this is a happy story, not a tragic one, so please bear with me.

I came across the names of Joop Piller and Han van Meegeren quite by chance, and later realized there was a book which discussed their case. It looked interesting enough, but as I have so many unread books on my shelves, I thought I'd never read it.

I joined GoodReads on a whim, and by chance saw a review of one of my favourite novels, *Madame Bovary*. I know something about this book, having studied it in excruciating detail. So I commented on the review, and generated a flattering flurry of positive responses. But fate had yet another surprise in store: the next day, I was quite astounded to find that I had attracted the notice of none other than Jonathan Lopez, esteemed art historian and author of the award-winning story of *The Man Who Made Vermeers*. A friendship was soon forged between us, which made me think ever more seriously of reading his book. And the rest is history. Art history, to be exact.

And now, for the review. (You were starting to wonder if I would ever get to it, weren't you? Come on now, be honest!)

There are a few things that I would have liked to have different in this volume. I would have loved some colour plates, as I do enjoy paintings of the Dutch Golden Age; moreover, it would have been interesting to see the difference in colour between a Vermeer original and a forgery. That being said, there is a veritable plethora of illustrations in black and white. Many of these are reproductions of old photos, the quality of which is not greatly affected by the lack of colour.

I would also have liked to see the mechanics of documentation handled slightly differently. I was not aware until I was quite deep into the body of the text that there were a large number of endnotes providing many technical details as to the sources of information. I wondered why there were no superscript numbers (or even asterisks) in the text to alert the astute reader to the existence of said endnotes. However, although one must hunt a bit to find it, the documentation provided is voluminous and painstakingly thorough. The research undertaken during the preparation of this book must have been phenomenal--and in fact, aside from the evidence of the endnotes themselves, Lopez gives us tantalizing glimpses of this in his acknowledgments.

There is much to praise in this book. First of all, it tells a very complex story with multiple tangled threads.

Van Meegeren, the man at the crux of it all, was the ultimate con-artist, who, even when he got caught, was able to cover up much of what he'd done, and manipulate even his captor into protecting him. For many he was a famous, likeable and even heroic cad, because he'd managed to hoodwink the great Goering himself into buying one of his spurious Vermeers. But despite his great charisma, Van Meegeren kept a lot of his true feelings to himself. Lopez does an admirable job of tracing how the master forger embarked on his career, how he operated, who he duped, how he covered his tracks, how ideological, political, and even religious feelings influenced his forgeries, and what his genuine motivations were.

The book contains many technical details about art and the art world that, in other hands, could have made for a deadly dull experience. The reader learns about canvases, age-crackle, pigments, chemicals, Bakelite, various testing techniques, authentication certificates and more. So--not being a professional artist or art critic myself--why did I not drop the book in disgust and look for a fantasy novel instead?

Well, Lopez has a way of demonstrating his mastery of the subject without clubbing the reader over the head with it. His style is elegant and polished, his story-telling is superb, his sense of humour flashes out often, and his psychological and historical insights are profound.
