



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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Contact: Jim Hendricks
Director of Marketing & Public Relations
229.439.8400
jim.hendricks@albanymuseum.com

BOOK CLUB LAUNCHES SEASON WITH BOOK ABOUT ART FRAUD SCHEME

Provenance Is an Account of the Biggest Art Forgery Scheme of the 20th Century

[For Release July 7, 2022 – Albany, GA] — The AMA Art Lovers Book Club opens its 4th season at 6 pm on Tuesday, July 19 with a discussion of *Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art*, a book about the biggest art fraud scheme of the 20th century.

While *Provenance* reads like a thriller novel complete with an intricate plot and unusual characters, the book, written by the wife-and-husband investigative reporting team of Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo, details real-life events that rocked the art world.

The AMA Art Lovers Book Club meets in the Willson Auditorium at the Albany Museum of Art, 311 Meadowlark Drive. There is no formal membership and the event is free and open to the public. Every other month on the third Tuesday, participants enjoy a favorite beverage and snacks as they explore interesting books that have a connection to the art community.

“This isn’t a whodunit novel, but a riveting, true-life ‘howtheydunit’ story,” Albany Museum of Art Director of Education and Public Programming Annie Vanoteghem said. “This narrative gives an in-depth look at how two men—a clever con artist and a talented art forger—stunned the art world with their successful schemes.”

When John Drewe, a British native who faked a physics Ph.D. to gain a job teaching physics at an English private school, lost that position in 1985, he met a struggling artist named John Myatt, launching a decade of deceit. Myatt had placed an advertisement in a publication offering to create “genuine fakes” for 150 British pounds, and Drewe became one of his customers.

“At first, Drewe convinced Myatt to paint copies of artworks for his home, but then he talked Myatt into joining his forgery scheme,” Vanoteghem said. “He created false provenance and paper trails for Myatt’s paintings with made-up invoices and certificates of authenticity.

“He paid friends who were down on their luck to sign documents as ‘previous owners’ of some of the artworks, created people who never existed, tricked relatives of real artists into authenticating some

works, and utilized records of deceased people. He even conned his way into accessing the letter archives of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, allowing him to introduce false records into the archives. All of that created false histories so the artworks didn't seem to just appear out of nowhere."

Once Myatt was on board with the scheme, he used techniques to "age" his new paintings so that they appeared to be much older. He created paintings in the styles of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, Roger Bissière, Marc Chagall, Le Corbusier, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, Matisse, Ben Nicholson, Nicolas de Staël, and Graham Sutherland.

The illicit enterprise came to an end in 1995. While Drewe reportedly made 1.8 million British pounds (more than \$2 million) with his schemes, Myatt has said he received about \$165,000 of the total take. He agreed to testify against Drewe at his trial in 1998. Myatt ended up serving four months of a one-year sentence for his role in the scheme, while Drewe served two years of his six-year sentence. Drewe would be sentenced to eight years in prison in 2012 for conning an elderly widow out of 700,000 British pounds, about \$1.1 million.

"Many of the forgeries are still out there," Vanoteghem noted. "Myatt is supposed to have painted more than 200 artworks, but he has said only about 80 of them have been recovered."

Myatt has since turned his talents into a legitimate business similar to the one he was trying to start in 1985. He sells his "genuine fakes" to collectors who are looking for affordable alternatives to expensive artworks. A fictionalized book about his experiences with Drewe, titled *Genuine Fakes*, has been released and is reportedly being made into a movie.

Other dates and titles for season 4 of the AMA Art Lovers Book Club are:

Sept 20: *William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told*, written by Steve Turner;

Nov 15: *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin*, written by Ruth Butler;

Jan 17: *In the Full Light of the Sun*, written by Claire Clark;

March 21: *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie*. Written by Maya Angelou;

May 16: *Love in the Time of Cholera*, written by Gabriel García Márquez.

All book club meetings start at 6 pm at the Albany Museum of Art. Information about the AMA Art Lovers Book Club may be found at www.albanymuseum.com/book-club.

AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Homecoming*, which features works from the Albany Museum of Art Permanent Collection, is in all galleries May 12-Aug 13, 2022.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art is located at 311 Meadowlark Drive in Albany, Ga., adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road. The museum is accredited by the American Alliance

of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open to the public 10 am-5 pm Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com, or call 229.439.8400. Be sure to follow the @AlbanyArtMuseum on Twitter, AlbanyMuseum on Instagram, and AlbanyMuseumOfArt on Facebook.

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