

“Ethical” Motives for Fakely

Tetsu UENO*¹

In this paper, using case studies, I present some unethical acts that were indeed perpetrated by artists, and discuss what motivated them to fake and plagiarize. Upon conclusion, it should be apparent that fakes and plagiarism are due to a lack of respect for artists and a biased evaluation of their work only in monetary terms, reflecting that art dealers and collectors treat artwork only as merchandise. Further, encouraging aesthetes, patrons and collectors to champion promising emerging artists is more effective than teaching professional ethics to artists regarding the deleterious impact of fakes and plagiarism.

KEYWORDS : fakery, plagiarism, ghostwriting, aestheticism

1. Introduction

In this paper, using case studies, I present some unethical acts that were indeed perpetrated by artists, and discuss what motivated them to fake and plagiarize. Upon conclusion, it should be apparent that fakes and plagiarism are due to a lack of respect for artists and a biased evaluation of their work only in monetary terms, reflecting that art dealers and collectors treat artwork only as merchandise. Further, encouraging aesthetes, patrons and collectors to champion promising emerging artists is more effective than teaching professional ethics to artists regarding the deleterious impact of fakes and plagiarism.

Actually, Japanese have been taught to appreciate craftwork on two levels; one is for its aesthetic beauty and the other is for its utility. Regarding appreciation of the images of Buddha, Tetsuro Watsuji, who was a famous Japanese moral philosopher, pointed out various aspects of religious art made by Japanese at the beginning of the 1900's; Unlike the West, many Japanese 'arts' are not created to be admired, but are considered as practical goods. For

instance, 'Ukiyoe' art was used on pamphlets or postcards, and pottery and lacquer crafts were made for the tea ceremony. 'Waka' (the Japanese poem) was the something that resembled the present-day letter, and the 'Yuzen' and 'Nishijin' textiles were valued as garments. From such circumstances in Japan, Japanese art education might be credited with being a pioneer in teaching children not to judge art solely on its street value, but to instead consider a wider and varied aestheticism.

2. Motives for fakery and plagiarism

The history of fakes and plagiarism dates back to about the sixth century B.C. The fake artworks that were traded by the Phoenicians who ruled over the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea at about that time, have been found at excavations¹⁾. A young Michelangelo once counterfeited a sculpture of 'Roman times', buried it in Medici's garden, and had someone find this art of 'Ancient times' on purpose. Moreover, Michelangelo did not return the original art he borrowed to duplicate, but instead delivered the duplicate²⁾.

*1 一般科(Dept. of General Education), E-mail: tueno@oyama-ct.ac.jp

Why have fakes and plagiarized works not been eliminated completely? Many people might think that an insatiable desire for wealth is the reason. For instance, Thomas Hoving, who is the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, insists that the impetus for fakes and plagiarism is based on human beings' avaricious desire for wealth. 'Money is the root motive for art forgery. Most forgers are money-grubbing confidence men, delighted to cobble up something that will get by in the rush for big profits at little expense'³⁾.

I cannot, however, completely agree with Hoving's contention. The desire for wealth may not always be the ultimate motive. In fact, Michelangelo's reason for counterfeiting the sculpture of Roman times was to gain the attention of Lorenzo De Medici who was his patron⁴⁾.

3. Fake

A fake is defined as 'any work that isn't a copy but is an imitation that the people believe to be the artist's new work'. According to Thomas Hoving, about 40 percent of all work he investigated while working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art were imitations or were overly restored or resembled fakes due to mistaken identification⁵⁾. He declared that the main reasons for the fakes were 'the get-rich-quick attitude of the times' and 'the general fudging between what's real and virtually real'⁶⁾.

In my opinion, however, this caution was not for artists, but for art dealers and connoisseurs. After all, people do not pay money for the painting process and workmanship per se; rather, they pay for the painter's name on the finished product⁷⁾. Actually, the common features of the artists whose reputations are damaged by fakes entering the market are that their work is at the 'height of the market value', 'popularity', and they are 'figures liked by people'⁸⁾.

Moreover, the purpose of the first class fake

painters is / was not necessarily one of simple financial gain. Often there is / was an ulterior motive. What follows are two typical cases of fakes.

3.1. Fake of Vermeer's paintings by Van Meegeren

Portrait of Painter in Atelier, Astronomer and Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery, which Hermann Wilhelm Goering, field marshal of the Nazis possessed, these and *Christ and Apostle in Emmaus* at the Boijmans Art Museum in Rotterdam and *Washing Christ's Foot* at the Amsterdam National Art Museum, are all fakes. The painter of these fakes was Van Meegeren. He lived in Amsterdam and confessed to faking up to six paintings by 'Vermeer' and two paintings by 'Pieter de Hooch' in his lifetime. He sought to make inept art critics of the art field to pay for their inability to recognize original work for the fake⁹⁾.

Meegeren's painting teacher was a person who was well versed in the Dutch classic painting technique of the Vermeer age, and he inculcated all of his skills in Meegeren. At age 20, Meegeren had become an assistant at the art academy and became a popular painter when he joined the academy. However, later he was indicted with his friend for corruption by the art critics, who unjustly resented and harassed Meegeren and his friend. He deceived the art world by painting a Vermeer fake entitled *Christ and Apostle in Emmaus*. This was done in retaliation to Bredius who was the authority of authentication of Vermeer's paintings and had been harassing Meegeren's close friend. Meegeren affected cracked pigments and sullied the work with Indian ink to make it look old. Bredius was duped and believed the fake was a real painting by Vermeer.

Meegeren had intended to eventually confess that *Christ and Apostle in Emmaus* was his fake. 'He wanted to paint something which would cause the art world to reevaluate the canon itself.

He would have it authenticated by a leading expert in the field and sold, ideally at auction. When his work was proudly displayed in a prominent museum, admired and acclaimed by all, then and only then would he announce his charade, forcing the critics and the dealers to admit their humbug and the public to recognize his genius’¹⁰⁾.

Actually, when Meegeren drew *Christ and Apostle in Emmaus*, he cut out a part of the canvas that he used and kept it as evidence. ‘He had cut down the painting so that, when the time came and he revealed his deception, he would have tangible proof’¹¹⁾.

3.2. Fake of Palmer’s paintings by Tom Keating

Tom Keating, a British painter, is one of the famous fake painters, who was motivated by the same factor as Meegeren’s. According to his confession, he drew 2,000 fakes or more in his lifetime. The reason he had started making fakes was to exact ‘Revenge on picture dealers’.

After leaving the navy, Keating obtained a scholarship and started studying painting in earnest at the art school in London. Upon registering at the art school, to help pay his rent, he was given a ‘Part-time job drawing replica paintings on old canvases’. A false signature was put on the replica paintings, however, and the works were sold as real paintings in a high-class art gallery before Keating knew it. In addition, when he worked with a picture restorer, he changed a part of the picture to make it something that modern people would like. It was an instruction from his boss. However, he also knew that these pictures would be sold at high prices as genuine paintings. He protested intensely against this to his boss, and subsequently, lost his job¹²⁾.

Keating explained his motive to begin faking as follows: ‘Old masters and painters of the French impressionist school were exploited by shameless art dealers while they were alive. These art dealers kept preying on them after their death too. I made the decision to do

everything to revenge my brothers’¹³⁾.

Keating also devised ways to reveal to a third party that his picture was a fake. First of all, he always drew the picture on an old canvas, then completely cleaned it, applied the film, and began to draw his picture, even if it was an unskilled picture. Keating intended that the picture he had drawn on the special film would begin to peel off in about 50 years; thereby, shocking the owner. Secondly, he had written, ‘This is a fake’ on the film with white lead paint before drawing the picture. He seemed to know that an X-ray inspection would be used to determine the picture’s authenticity. Thirdly, Keating used paper from the 20th century for the fake of Samuel Palmer’s rough sketch, and used paper from the 18th century for the fake of Rembrandt’s rough sketch. He intentionally used paper from a century after the painter had been alive¹⁴⁾.

Given Keating’s attitude, we can understand why he behaved the way he did and felt no remorse about getting his ‘Revenge on the picture dealer’: ‘I did not realize I was making the fake at all’¹⁵⁾.

Incidentally, we can find an example where all artists’ works except that of the fake’s were criticized. Let us look at two cases involving retouching without permission and ghostwriting.

4. Retouching without permission

The photograph of *Women being pushed toward the gas chamber at the crematorium V of Auschwitz* taken by Mr. ‘Alex’, a Greek-Jew who was one of the Zondarcomands of Auschwitz, was reproduced many times after the war, and retouched while it was circulated. Risking his life, taking this photograph in August 1944, the photographer miraculously avoided all Nazi obstructions, and the photograph, concealed in the tube of pulvis dentrificus, made its way to the Polish resistance. The other three photographs that Alex took were also recovered and still exist¹⁶⁾.

As mentioned above, this photograph was retouched without permission in the process of its being circulated, after the war, as evidence to indict the Nazis for unprecedented, horrific cruelty. The most remarkable modification is a retouch to the face and body of a woman on the right side. A breast was added to her emaciated body whose protruding ribs were a telltale sign of starvation. In addition, the photograph was retouched so that the face of the woman could be discerned.

Georges Didi-Huberman criticized this retouching from an academic viewpoint commenting: 'I don't know who did it, or what the person's intentions were'¹⁷⁾. When features such as flesh and blood are emphasized, the brutality of the Nazis who mercilessly sent many people into the gas chambers is effectively burned into the public's memory. However, this can be interpreted as a 'Lack of the respect for the photographer' if we consider the sense of incompatibility created, despite the artist being motivated by good intentions. 'The act reduces "extra" parts and elicits only "information" from these images, and tramples down the photographers' attempts'¹⁸⁾.

5. Ghostwriting

When carver Camille Claudel began to work at Auguste Rodin's atelier in 1884, she was assigned the task of carving the parts of the hand and foot of the statue by Rodin. This was not work especially imposed on her; rather, this was merely the system of the division of labor of the subcontractor, mold-making craftsman and model designers in Rodin's atelier at that time, where a team created each project. Anyone who wanted to be a carver had to start at the bottom of the ladder. Actually, Rodin seems to have put his signature on Camille's carvings¹⁹⁾.

There are many carvings where we can not determine the actual sculptor. For instance, in *The Gates of Hell* and *Citizens of Calais*, it is apparent that the carvings are from molds made

by Camille. In addition, *Stinginess of Stinginess and Dissoluteness* by Rodin resembles the work of Camille. There are some carvings, such as *A Laughing Man*, which are signed by both Rodin and Camille²⁰⁾.

After their romantic relationship ended, Camille, who had endeavored to be different from Rodin's style, came to abhor him, and felt victimized. 'Have you guarded my works from that impostor? To steal my works, he torments me. He fears my return before he can rob me of my works... therefore, he always tries to delay my leaving hospital as much as possible'²¹⁾. Finally, she realized that it was Rodin who had her confined to the Mental Hospital originally.

Camille's warped anger was caused by Rodin's disrespect for her work and herself. Rodin never credited Camille with being the leading engraver she was nor did he praise her work. The stress caused by Rodin's lack of appreciation might have been what destroyed her.

6. Conclusion

I have referred to 'unethical' cases of fakery, plagiarism, and ghostwriting as perpetrated by the artists. As already pointed out, such 'unethical' acts were not caused by mere desire for wealth. 'Lack of the respect for another artist' and 'Valuing the work only in terms of a monetary standard' were motives in all cases that were presented. There are exceptions to this, where the good life of the craftsman-culture transcends any 'Lack of the respect for the artist' and 'Placing value on the work only in monetary standards'.

In Europe of the Middle Ages, as is generally known, the craftsman's work was not easily separated from the construction of churches, monasteries and hospitals. Therefore, craftsmen of the specialized industries thought that each technology was a gift to God. Essentially, they were proud and conceived that 'as craftsmen they were also assisting in the creation of the earth, just as God created the Universe'²²⁾.

‘Tobi (steeplejacks)’ that do the work of engineering design and construction on scaffolding was one of professions in Japan. Their work, which was a valued social contribution and evoked human feelings and confidence, was esteemed. They tried to contribute to the common welfare by comporting themselves as professionals with a high morality because they knew that the people would esteem their work and their profession(s)²³. Moreover, ‘Touyou (Master)’ carpenters who built shrines and temples were prohibited from building private houses for the following reasons: ‘The building of a private house is considered mercenary work. You must work to make use of your talent to contribute to society and honor God. You must not be ruled by time and only work for money’²⁴.

In my opinion, an effective way to discourage ‘unethical’ acts of fakery and plagiarism is to teach people how to duly evaluate the value of art work. Gustav Pauli, a former director of the Hamburg Art Gallery has advice on how to avoid buying imitation work: ‘The only reliable way is to buy the work of young, talented, yet unknown artists’²⁵. If people who appreciate the art have courage to pronounce an original judgment, and they learn how to evaluate an attractive work even if it is by an unnamed artist, then the fakes and imitations will inevitably be discouraged and eliminated. To prevent making fakes, it is more effective to improve the insight and taste of people who appreciate art at the compulsory education level than to emphasize professional ethics education for artists.

Actually, Japanese have been taught to appreciate craftwork on two levels; one is for its aesthetic beauty and the other is for its utility. Regarding appreciation of the images of Buddha, Tetsuro Watsuji, who was a famous Japanese moral philosopher, pointed out various aspects of religious art made by Japanese at the beginning of the 1900’s; and recommended that they not to be viewed as objects of religion but as ‘art that evokes the spirit of Buddhism’²⁶.

Unlike the West, many Japanese ‘arts’ are not created to be admired, but are considered as practical goods. For instance, ‘*Ukiyoe*’ art was used on pamphlets or postcards, and pottery and lacquer crafts were made for the tea ceremony. ‘*Waka* (the Japanese poem)’ was the something that resembled the present-day letter, and the ‘*Yuzen*’ and ‘*Nishijin*’ textiles were valued as garments²⁷.

From such circumstances in Japan, Japanese art education might be credited with being a pioneer in teaching children not to judge art solely on its street value, but to instead consider a wider and varied aestheticism.

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【受理年月日 2013年 9月11日】