

Tainted Archives: Art, Archives, and Authenticity*



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RÉSUMÉ Cet article examine un cas sans précédent de fraude artistique et de falsification de documents d'archives. Il raconte le cas de John Drewe, un escroc qui a inséré des faux documents dans des archives d'institutions d'art britanniques dans le but de créer des provenances pour des copies d'œuvres d'art. Le texte explique comment les archives ont été infiltrées et décrit le chaos engendré dans le monde de l'art britannique suite à ses actions. Le texte se termine en examinant la portée de ce cas tant pour le monde de l'art que pour le monde des archives.

ABSTRACT This article examines an unprecedented case of art fraud and archival tampering. It describes the case of John Drewe, a con man who inserted fraudulent documents in the archives of British art institutions in order to create provenances for forged art works. The article details how the archives were infiltrated and outlines the havoc wrought on the British art world as a result. The article finishes by examining the implications of the case for both the art and archival worlds.

In matters of crime, striking similarities exist in the art and archival worlds. Thefts from archives tend to have a lower profile than heists from art galleries, but it is not uncommon for valuable documents to be stolen from archives. In addition to their evidential and informational values, archival documents are also desired for their intrinsic worth. Stolen archival documents are typically commodities, that is, they are objects that individuals wish to acquire for their aesthetic or historical properties. Documents seen as particularly valuable in this sense are artifacts such as historic maps,¹ papers

* This paper is based on a presentation made to the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists on 30 June 2006 in St. John's. I would like to extend my thanks to Laura Pallister, Johanna Smith, Amy Tector, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on this paper.

1 See, for example, Miles Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime* (Toronto, 2000), which details the thefts of antique maps in the United States and Canada by Gilbert Bland.

of famous individuals,² and stamps or other philatelic objects.³

In addition to theft, both the world of fine art and that of archives suffer from the scourge of forgers. While artistic forgeries are more prevalent, or at least more widely publicized, extremely valuable documents have been forged and offered for sale to archival repositories.⁴ On rare occasions, forgers surface who have a very nuanced understanding of archival records. They realize that the real importance is not necessarily in the record's intrinsic or market value, but rather in their informational and evidentiary nature. They understand that archival records are evidence of actions and transactions of their creators. If archival records are falsified, documents that have little apparent market value can lead to illicit gains. In an extraordinary case of forgery that spanned a decade, the art and archival worlds were simultaneously shaken by a sophisticated scheme that saw the sale of up to two hundred forged paintings and drawings. These forged works were "authenticated" by fabricated documents that were secretly planted in major art archives throughout England.

The forgers in this case were so successful because they possessed a sophisticated understanding of the way the international art market works. Determinations about the authenticity and value of paintings and other art objects are largely made based on the provenance of the work. Provenance, a term derived from the Latin *provenire*, meaning "to come forth,"⁵ forms the

2 See "Jury Out in Trial Involving Glenn Gould Archive Items," *CBC.ca Arts* (23 October 2006), <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/story/2006/10/23/gould-theft.html> (accessed 23 October 2006), and "Texas Art Prof Sentenced in Gould Theft Case," *CBC.ca Arts* (13 December 2006), <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/story/2006/12/13/gould-theft-sale.html> (accessed 14 December 2006) on the theft of documents from the Glenn Gould collection of the Library and Archives Canada by Barbara Moore.

3 For just one example of the theft of stamps, folded letter sheets and other rare and collectible items see Bob Mitchell, "Police Find Historical Documents Stolen in 80s," *The Toronto Star* (9 February 1995), p. A2; and Ian S. Robertson, "Nabbed! Stolen Postal History from the Ontario Archives Surfaces After 15 years," *Canadian Stamp News*, vol. 19, no. 21 (March 7–20, 1995), p. 1, which describe the discovery of nearly one thousand documents stolen from the Archives of Ontario by a former employee.

4 See Anthony L. Rees's review of Linda Sillitoe and Allen D. Roberts, "*Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 155–59, and David Mattison, review of Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, "*The Mormon Murders: A True Story of Greed, Forgery, Deceit, and Death*," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 159–61 on the dramatic forgery and murders committed by Mark Hoffman.

5 Francis V. O'Connor, "Authenticating the Attribution of Art: Connoisseurship and the Law in the Judging of Forgeries, Copies, and False Attributions," in *The Expert versus the Object: Judging Fakes and Fake Attribution in the Visual Arts*, ed. Ronald D. Spencer (Toronto, 2004), p. 17.

basis of modern, Western archival theory,⁶ and also plays a vital role in art history research. The provenance of a work of art traces the history of the work from the artist's studio to the current owner. While a complete provenance is the ideal scenario, it is in many cases almost impossible to trace, as this history, even for modern works, can be riddled with gaps. For Old Master works, centuries of ownership can often remain unaccounted for.

Artistic provenance relies heavily, if not exclusively, on archival material to trace out the complex history of transactions and movements across time and geography. Documents used to establish the provenance of a work of art include inventories of artists' studios and of art collections, invoices, correspondence, certificates of authenticity, and auction and exhibition catalogues.⁷ Labels, marks, stamps, and inscriptions on the work of art itself also offer evidence about the movements of the piece.⁸ When examined in their entirety, these documentary traces offer a biography of the artwork, albeit one that, if it exists at all, is frequently incomplete, fragmentary, vague, and very rarely conclusive on its own.

In conjunction with establishing ownership of an art object over time, the provenance of the work plays a vital role in the determination of its authenticity. Archival records, according to Sir Hilary Jenkinson, are almost certainly authentic as long as the chain of custody remains unbroken, that is, as long as they remain under the control of the administrative body that created them, are transferred to a succeeding office, or are given into the care of a "responsible person" (i.e., an archivist).⁹ Similarly, for art, where there is a clear and complete provenance – an unbroken chain of custody – it is much easier to ascertain the authenticity of the work. As artistic biographer Alex Danchev states, "the provenance is a kind of pedigree. The pedigree attests that the work is genuine, that it *is* what it *seems* ... In a word – the key word – the provenance is a proof of authenticity."¹⁰ While a pristine provenance does not guarantee that a painting or other work of art is genuine,¹¹ a solid provenance is a powerful piece of testimony that goes a long way in determining artistic authenticity.

6 See Peter Horsman, "Taming the Elephant: An Orthodox Approach to the Principle of Provenance," in *The Principle of Provenance: Report from the First Stockholm Conference on the Archival Principle of Provenance, 2–3 September 1993* (Stockholm, 1994), pp. 51–62; and Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 21–22.

7 O'Connor, p. 17.

8 David Phillips, *Exhibiting Authenticity* (New York, 1997), p. 56.

9 Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making* (Oxford, 1922), pp. 12–15, 37–39.

10 Alex Danchev, "Provenance," *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 10, no. 1 (January 2006), p. 31. Emphasis in the original.

11 Ronald D. Spencer, "Authentication in Court: Factors Considered and Standards Proposed," *The Expert versus the Object* (see note 5), p. 210.

In the case of the British artistic and archival forgeries, the forgers understood that the authenticity of a work of art depends on an authentic archival record. If the archives could be tampered with, and fraudulent documents inserted into reputable, existing archival collections, these documents could be used to legitimate and authenticate forged paintings. Armed with this understanding, the English con man John Drewe perpetrated an unprecedented series of forgeries between 1986 and 1996. These forgeries have serious and continuing implications for both the art and archival worlds.

Initially, there was no criminal intent, at least on the part of the painter, John Myatt.¹² He was an art teacher from the English village of Sugnall in Staffordshire whose wife had recently left him. Desiring to work from home so he could look after his two young children, Myatt placed ads in the biweekly satirical magazine, *Private Eye*, beginning in 1983, advertising “Genuine fakes, 19th- and 20th-century paintings from £150.” Myatt had numerous responses and painted a variety of “pastiche” in the style of modern masters. In March of 1986, after the ad had run for its fourth time, Myatt was contacted by a man who introduced himself as Dr. John Drewe, a nuclear physicist. Drewe was, in fact, a con man who invented credentials, occupations, and personalities. He commissioned a Matisse from Myatt to decorate his house. Soon, Drewe commissioned other paintings, including several in the style of seventeenth-century Dutch masters, along with a Klee, a Chagall, and others. After the ninth painting, Drewe asked Myatt what he would like to paint. The artist always wanted to try his hand at a Cubist painting and he painted “Portrait of an Army Doctor” in the style of Albert Gleizes. It was with this painting that the pastiches became forgeries.¹³ Drewe

12 Details of the case have been taken primarily from media accounts, especially Amelia Gentleman, “Fakes Leave Art World in Chaos,” *The Guardian* (13 February 1999), http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,314899,00.html (accessed 22 February 2004); Amelia Gentleman, “The Liar: Meet the Con Artist of Many Parts,” *The Guardian* (13 February 1999), http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,314915,00.html (accessed 22 February 2004); Mark Honigsbaum, “The Master Forger,” *The Guardian* (8 December 2005), <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1661836,00.html> (accessed 17 June 2006); Peter Landesman, “A 20th-Century Master Scam,” *The New York Times Magazine* (18 June 1999), <http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/archive/19990718mag-art-forger.html> (accessed 14 September 2005); and Michael McCarthy, “A Fake’s Progress,” *The Independent* (15 July 2000), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20000715/ai_n14329844 (accessed 17 June 2006). These articles were used, however, while keeping in mind the warning of the head of the Tate Archive at the time that many of the reports in the media were misinformed, exaggerated, and even false. See Jennifer Booth, “Dr. Drewe – A Cautionary Tale,” *Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2003), p. 16.

13 See Monroe C. Beardsley, “Notes on Forgery,” in *The Forger’s Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Denis Dutton (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1983), esp. pp. 225–26. Beardsley argues that forgery only occurs when there is intentional deception. The artist may be innocent and someone else (a dealer or conman) may be “responsible morally, if not artistically, for the forgery” (p. 226).

approached Christie's auction house with the painting, and they, believing it to be original, offered to sell it for twenty-five thousand pounds. Drewe offered Myatt half of the profits and their career as art frauds began in earnest.

In the mid- to late-1980s, there was a huge market for modern art. Auctioned paintings, even those by relatively minor artists, were realizing record figures. The conditions were right for Myatt's paintings to be absorbed almost without question. Over the course of ten years, Myatt forged paintings in the style of such artists as Roger Bissière, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Jean Dubuffet, Raoul Dufy, Alberto Giacometti, Le Corbusier, Henri Matisse, Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, and Nicolas de Stael. Drewe earned somewhere between £1-£2.5 million selling the forgeries to Christie's, Sotheby's, and Phillip's auction houses; to major institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Art; numerous respectable galleries; and private dealers on both sides of the Atlantic. Of this sum, Myatt earned about one hundred thousand pounds from his involvement. Eminent figures in the art world, including Peter Nahum, the former head of Sotheby's British paintings department, a highly respected art dealer, and an *Antiques Roadshow* expert, and Tate Director Sir Alan Bowness, a premier Nicholson authority and the artist's son-in-law, were among those fooled by the forgeries.

The element which separated the Drewe-Myatt forgeries from the countless other art frauds was the use of archives to establish false provenances for the works. By Myatt's own admission, his works were far from undetectable. He states that he "took no trouble technically ... There was a negligence to everything I did."¹⁴ Myatt used emulsion paints that were first produced in the 1960s, long after the forgeries were supposed to have been created, an anachronism that would be immediately spotted upon scientific testing. Furthermore, the quality of many of the paintings was questionable. Unlike most art forgers, who direct their energies and talents in creating impeccable forgeries, Drewe realized that paintings of even poor quality could be passed off as authentic as long as a convincing paper trail was in place. Myatt in a recent interview explained that the faking of the provenance made for "cast-iron" authentications, despite the fact that "quite a lot of the paintings I was doing really weren't very good ..."¹⁵

According to Glen Lowry, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Myatt and Drewe perpetrated "one of the most extensive frauds in the visual arts ... What distinguishes this case is how methodical Drewe was, and how well he understood the process of validation."¹⁶ Drewe, who is not believed to have any background in art history, developed a thorough under-

14 John Myatt quoted in Landesman, "A 20th-Century Master Scam."

15 Myatt in Doug Lang and Kathleen Lang, "John Myatt: Art Con of the Century," *Art a GoGo Podcast* 26 (14 May 2006), <http://www.artagogo.com/blog/?p=47> (accessed 20 June 2006).

16 Glen Lowry quoted in Landesman, "A 20th-Century Master Scam."

standing of the way the art world operates and exploited it to his advantage. He went to rather extraordinary lengths to create provenances for Myatt's paintings. He used acquaintances, particularly those who were vulnerable and easily manipulated, to act as the owners of paintings, or he would create fictional owners. Drewe contacted members of the artists' families in order to get details about their lives to use as fodder in forged correspondence. He created invoices using stolen or copied letterhead, period typewriters, and forged official stamps and seals. It is not uncommon for forged paintings to have fake documentation accompanying them, often in the form of certificates of authenticity.¹⁷ The real feat of ingenuity on the part of Drewe was that he gained access to the appropriate archives and planted the fraudulent documents in order to "prove" the paintings' authenticity.

Drewe recognized that his forged provenances would not be scrutinized if they were "found" in the archives of preeminent English art galleries and museums. Supported by seemingly authentic documentation, Myatt's paintings, in turn, would be deemed authentic. Jenkinson notes that forgers "from all periods" have expended a great deal of effort attempting to plant their fraudulent documents in public archives "because they know that the authenticity of the enrolment would never be called into question ..."¹⁸ While Drewe is not the first person to insert forged documents in archives, the scope and sophistication of his archival infiltration is nevertheless remarkable.

It is known that he tampered with the archives of the Tate Gallery, the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the archives of the Institute of Contemporary Art (which were later acquired by the Tate), and the British Council's archives, and he may have also infiltrated other libraries and galleries throughout Britain. In order to gain access to the archives, Drewe varied his tactics depending on the institution. In 1989, he obtained a reader's ticket to the Victoria and Albert's National Art Library by filling out an application form, listing his occupation as nuclear physicist and a "Dr. John Cockett" as a reference. Cockett was Drewe's real name, which he had changed when he was a teenager, and the address provided was his own. Unsurprisingly, the reference was positive: "John Drewe is a man of integrity,"¹⁹ it read. That same year Drewe donated a Le Corbusier and a Giacometti (forged, of course) to the Institute of Contemporary Art for a fund-raising auction. Following that act of good will, Drewe claimed he was interested in researching the Institute's history, and was given unrestricted and unsupervised access to the archives.

17 Samuel Sachs II, "Museums and Authenticity Issues," interviewed by Ronald D. Spencer, *The Expert versus the Object* (see note 5), p. 106; John L. Tanock, "Issues of Authenticity in the Auction House," *The Expert versus the Object* (see note 5), p. 51.

18 Jenkinson, p. 10.

19 Landesman, "A 20th-Century Master Scam."

In 1990, Drewe approached the Director and several curators at the Tate. He offered to donate two paintings by Bissière, in which the Gallery was initially interested. The artist's son, however, questioned the materials used in the works and Drewe rescinded the offer. Instead, he invited the head of the department responsible for the Tate Archive out to lunch and offered to donate twenty thousand pounds to the Archive in order to support their cataloguing program. Beth Houghton of the Tate Library and Archive has stated that the donation "was presumably done with a double advantage in view: both to gain special status for himself in relation to the collection, and also to hasten the cataloguing of relevant collections of documents and therefore ensure they would be accessible to him for his nefarious uses."²⁰ On his application, which did not require a reference, Drewe stated the subject of his research as being the "collaboration between the Hanover Gallery London and the ICA, particularly 1951-7," and he regularly visited the Archive in the summer of 1991, in addition to supervising others who were researching on his behalf.²¹

Drewe took advantage of lapses in security and the occasions when he was left unsupervised to insert his forged invoices, correspondence, and photographs, all of which featured Myatt's paintings, into the relevant files. He removed auction catalogues from the archives, particularly those of the defunct Hanover and O'Hana galleries at the Tate Archive, and replaced them with replicas that included entries of the forgeries along with corroborating images. When the police raided Drewe's home in 1996, they discovered the tools and source materials he used in creating the provenances for the forgeries. Peter Landesman of the *New York Times* writes:

... they found hundreds of documents from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate Gallery and the Institute of Contemporary Art. Sitting on Drewe's kitchen table were two catalogues missing from the V. and A.'s National Art Library, still in the museum bag that Drewe had used to smuggle them out. There were rubber stamps bearing the authenticating seals of the Tate and of an order of monastic priests; receipts for the sale of paintings across continents going back decades; certificates of authenticity from the estates of Dubuffet and Giacometti; also the more mundane instruments of document forgery: scissors, razors, correction fluid, glue, tape.²²

Unlike Myatt's paintings, which were made with anachronistic materials that can be easily detected if scrutinized by an expert, Drewe took extreme care in creating the false provenances. He used period paper and inks to create

20 Beth Houghton, "Art Libraries as a Source of False Provenance," *World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council, 1-9 August 2003, Berlin* (5 August 2003), <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/047e-Houghton.pdf> (accessed 14 September 2005).

21 Booth, "Dr. Drewe – A Cautionary Tale," p. 14.

22 Landesman, "A 20th-Century Master Scam."

thousands of records spread throughout the archives of numerous institutions over a six to ten-year period. The full extent of the archival corruption, as the directors of both the Tate and the Victoria and Albert have admitted,²³ may never be known.

Despite the provenances that Drewe concocted for Myatt's paintings and the false documents that he methodically seeded throughout the major British art archives, people became increasingly suspicious and started asking questions. In 1993, the Giacometti Foundation as well as several dealers approached the Tate Gallery Archive with concerns about the authenticity of Giacometti works ostensibly sold in the 1950s from the Hanover and O'Hana galleries. The head of the Archive, Jennifer Booth, suspected that false provenances were being supplied and that Drewe was involved. However, with no hard evidence, her supervisor instructed her not to act.²⁴ Others were becoming suspicious of Drewe as well. In 1994, the British Council banned a researcher who was working for Drewe after they determined that information from their archives had been used to falsify the provenance of a "Nicholson" painting in Drewe's possession.²⁵ Leslie Waddington, a prominent art dealer and friend of Dubuffet, was approached by the artist's daughter after she had expressed doubts about a number of works purportedly painted by her father that came onto the market in the mid-1990s. Waddington questioned the date as well as small details in the documentation surrounding a group of Myatt forgeries of Dubuffet paintings, particularly several from the "Vache" series, and alerted the police. The dealer Peter Nahum also had reservations about the Nicholson paintings he purchased from Drewe but was swayed by the documentation. In 1995, he determined he had bought a fake and he, too, contacted the authorities.

In 1995, Drewe's relationship with his common-law wife ended. He left incriminating evidence in their house regarding the forgeries. She contacted the Tate Gallery and the police and, feeling they had enough information to act, the authorities arrested Myatt. The artist confessed to his involvement in the forgeries and offered to help bring in Drewe. The con man was arrested on 6 April 1996, charged with conspiracy to defraud, three counts of forgery, one of theft, one of false accounting, and one of using a false instrument with intent. The trial began in September of 1998 and was supposed to last three months. Drewe presented an elaborate defence that argued he was a part of an international "art for arms" conspiracy and the trial took almost six months to conclude. In the end, Myatt, who pleaded guilty and turned Queen's evidence, was sentenced to twelve months, but served four. Drewe was convicted on six of the seven counts and was sentenced to six years in prison; he was released

23 Ibid.

24 Booth, "Dr. Drewe – A Cautionary Tale," p. 15.

25 Ibid.

after only two.

The philosopher Sándor Radnóti states that stories about art forgery typically feature characteristics of the picaresque. When the forger is unmasked, whether “voluntary or involuntary,” he writes, it “always reveals something about art and the art world.”²⁶ This is certainly the case with the Drewe-Myatt forgeries, and we can add that they reveal some things about the archival world, as well.

One element that this case reveals is the fragility of the archival record and the ease with which it can be altered. This has certainly been the case where documents have been destroyed, whether by negligence, through accident or disaster, or through willful acts of destruction, as well as when documents have been stolen. When considering archival security, we are reminded by Drewe’s actions that documents in art archives, and in other types of institutions as well, have immense informational and evidential values beyond their intrinsic market value. They are valued for what they say and what they can prove. Archivists must be on guard for more than just theft and vandalism.

Alarming, even the awareness that individuals may insert fraudulent documents into archives in order to alter the historical record has not succeeded in eliminating the possibility of it reoccurring. In 2005, it came to light that false documents were inserted into the National Archives of the United Kingdom.²⁷ These documents “proved” that top-ranking Nazi official, Heinrich Himmler, was assassinated by agents of the British Government. This shocking revelation, upon the publication of the documents by a historian, initiated a forensic investigation of the records. They were ultimately proved to be fakes. The documents have been removed from the National Archives and a police investigation has been initiated, although to date no suspect has been apprehended.²⁸

While the archival profession may never be able to stop someone as determined as Drewe, it must examine its practices to ensure that the possibility of the archival record being tampered with through acts of inclusion or intrusion are minimized. The Tate Archive and the Victoria and Albert’s National Art Library, along with the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, thoroughly reviewed their security policies in the wake of Drewe’s activities, as has the United Kingdom’s National Archives since 2005. Maintaining archival security, regrettably, requires submitting users to a certain amount of

26 Sándor Radnóti, *The Fake: Forgery and Its Place in Art*, trans. Ervin Dunai (New York, 1999), p. 10.

27 Ben Fenton, “Files on Himmler ‘Murder’ Exposed as Fake,” *The Daily Telegraph* (3 July 2005), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/07/02/nhimmler02.xml> (accessed 5 February 2007).

28 “Update on Document Authenticity,” *News from The National Archives* (18 July 2006), <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/stories/121.htm> (accessed 5 February 2007).

surveillance and results in the enacting of restrictions and limitations.²⁹ Every effort needs to be made to ensure that a balance is struck where access is provided to the records held in archives, while maintaining the safety and integrity of the collections. To ensure that archives are doing their utmost to protect their holdings and heighten their accountability to their stakeholders, archives should undertake periodic security audits. Audits will serve both to identify potential risks and to demonstrate that the institution is working actively to reduce those risks.

A second element that the Drewe-Myatt case highlights is that the art world needs to take a much more critical stance when it comes to documentation. There is a need for the art establishment, as well as others who rely on archival documents as evidence, to be at least somewhat skeptical. Dealers admit that they thought the works presented by Drewe or his runners were of “poor quality” or even “terrible,” but they were nevertheless convinced by the documentation.³⁰ In the years since Drewe’s arrest, there are still some experts who make statements such as, “Provenance is probably the most critical element in authentication. There is no substitute for an iron-clad provenance ...,”³¹ which place more faith in documentary evidence than is perhaps wise. The best practice for the authentication and attribution of artworks takes advantage of three tools at the expert’s disposal:

1. Connoisseurship – the “expert” eye based on intimate familiarity with an artist’s oeuvre;
2. Scholarly documentation, including provenance and other archival or historical evidence; and
3. Physical and technical examination by scholars and material specialists.³²

The first step in any authentication is an examination by a connoisseur before the effort and expense of archival and scientific research is undertaken. While far from infallible, this examination will provide an initial feeling of “rightness” about the work and offer a starting point which can guide subsequent research.³³ It is very rare that any one method of investigation will

29 See Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection,” *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos. 2–4 (2002), pp. 234–37 on policing measures in the reading rooms in the name of security and their practical and theoretical implications.

30 Gentleman, “Fakes Leave Art World in Chaos.”

31 Duane R. Chartier and Fred G. Notehelfer, “Authentication: Science & Art at Odds?” in *Scientific Detection of Fakery in Art*, ed. Walter McCrone, Duane R. Chartier, and Richard J. Weiss, Proceedings of SPIE, vol. 3315 (Bellingham, WA, 1998), p. 76.

32 Sharon Flescher, “The International Foundation for Art Research,” *The Expert versus the Object*, p. 98.

33 Patrick Le Chanu, “The Contributions and Limitations of Scientific Examination and Analysis in the Detection of Forgeries of Old Master Paintings,” in *Scientific Detection of Fakery in Art* (see note 31), p. 62; O’Connor, p. 6.

provide a definitive answer. As museum studies professor David Phillips states, “Historical evidence, like scientific evidence, is often suggestive, but again only rarely conclusive.”³⁴ The data accumulated from all three approaches must be combined and weighed in order to make a fully informed judgment regarding the authenticity of any work.

These three techniques of interrogating objects can be effectively applied to archival documents. Broadly speaking, records being used as evidence must be interrogated and evaluated for their authenticity and reliability.³⁵ They cannot always be taken at face value. Both the informational content and the physical characteristics of documents should be examined carefully to ensure that their properties are in keeping with what is known about contemporary record-creating practices. Archivists have a key role to play in conveying the need to approach records critically and have the expertise to foster this sophistication in users. Given institutional realities, archivists alone cannot be expected to perform detailed inspections on every document that comes into their possession. By being open to dialogue concerning suspect documents and working with users, archivists can pool their knowledge, expertise, and technical resources with others to evaluate the authenticity of questionable documents when they surface.

Finally, an examination of the Drewe-Myatt case encourages reflection on the role that archives as institutions play in establishing authenticity. The key to Drewe’s success was the realization that archives are perceived to be places of power and that documents enshrined in the archives of venerable institutions, such as the Tate, have authority. He recognized that, in the art world at least, archives have the ability to bestow authenticity on objects. Archives are believed to be arbitrators of truth, even if the records themselves are not truthful. It cannot be assumed that documents automatically become “depositories of truth,” once they pass through the “archival threshold.”³⁶ While occurrences of tampering with records after their arrival at the archives and the insertion of fraudulent documents are, one hopes, relatively infrequent, fraudulent, or at least unreliable or inauthentic, documents can also come into the archives legitimately. Regardless of the impressive sheen records acquire upon entering archives, their maintenance in the archives does not automatically bestow upon them truth or legitimacy. This belief in archival power, while flattering to the archivist, must be tempered by the understanding that records are never completely impartial or objective. The discovery of unreli-

34 Phillips, p. 54.

35 On authenticity and reliability see Luciana Duranti, “Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications,” *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 5–10; and Heather MacNeil, “Trusting Records in a Postmodern World,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), esp. pp. 39–42.

36 Luciana Duranti, “Archives as Place,” *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 2 (November 1996), p. 245.

able or inauthentic documents, and the more serious cases of fraudulent documents, cannot be allowed to undermine the credibility of archives.

Ten years after the arrest of Drewe, only eighty or so of the approximately two hundred Myatt forgeries have been found. Myatt, since his release from prison, has been making a living painting “Genuine Fakes” offering works for sale through his website,³⁷ and has had a number of successful shows in London. It even appears that someone is forging “genuine Myatts.”³⁸ Drewe is keeping a rather lower profile, although he still appears to be working at exposing the British government for its part in the multinational arms deal in which he claims to have been involved.³⁹ Hollywood has become interested in the case and two films are in production about the forgeries: a Michael Douglas film with the working title of *Art Con* and a biopic on Myatt.

Both the art and the archival worlds have survived the tampering of Drewe, but neither has emerged unscathed. All of the records that Drewe and his confederates may have had access to are now suspect. The legacies of some of the most important twentieth-century artists have potentially been irrevocably stained. As the lead prosecutor in the trial stated, “Corrupting such material damages not only the individual items, but inevitably undermines and taints the whole system. It affects not only those who deal in works of art, but those who love them and buy them.”⁴⁰ While this is perhaps a slight overstatement, the forgeries should certainly make archivists reevaluate both how we operate and how the records in their care are viewed.

By examining the Drewe-Myatt case, archivists will hopefully be reminded of the lengths to which individuals will go in order to abuse the archival legacy for their own personal gain. Furthermore, this case of archival tampering should remind archivists and those using records as evidence, that documents are not always authentic and therefore that the need to critically examine records remains paramount. Archivists must continually work to ensure that the documents in their archives are what they claim to be. By engaging in dialogues with users and maintaining partnerships with subject specialists, archivists will be able to bring external perspectives to the discussion of the authenticity of archival documents, fostering an understanding of the potential and limits of evidence and authenticity in archives.

37 See “Genuine Fakes,” <http://www.johnmyatt.com/> (accessed 14 June 2006).

38 Sarah Lyall, “After Stint of Crime, Art Forger Sells Genuine Fakes,” *New York Times* (4 March 2006), Section A, Page 4.

39 See Johndrewe.com, http://www.evil_i.org/johndrewe/index.htm (accessed 14 June 2006).

40 John Bevan quoted in Martin Bailey, “Trial of Accused Paintings Fraudster,” *The Art Newspaper* 86 (November 1998), p. 66.