

# Fake priest tricks art world with masterful deception



The fake copy of a watercolour boating scene by Paul Signac that was offered to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

A man posing as a Jesuit priest has managed to trick a lot of museums into accepting masterful counterfeits. The only thing he seems to have gotten in return is the satisfaction of pulling it off.

The UK's Guardian reported Nov. 16 that the fakes are so perfect that most cannot be detected without high magnification. One theory holds that the man may have been "embittered by his struggles to find recognition under his own name," according to The Guardian.

A snip from the article:

*A picture is emerging of one of the most bizarre cases of deception in art history. Unlike other forgers, the "priest" does not ask for payment of any kind for his Picassos, Signacs and Daumiers which have been described as "masterful". It seems the alleged fraudster simply enjoys fooling museum experts who have not only accepted his fakes as cherished gifts but invited him to "special donor events" in the belief that he has more to give.*

*Research by senior museum figures suggests he has targeted more than 30 museums so far and institutions across the United States are now being warned to look out for him.*

WKRC in Cincinnati reported Nov. 23 that experts at the Cincinnati Art Museum figured out the scam. The forgeries were made when someone meticulously painted over digital reproductions of originals. The fake priest was identified as Mark Landis, who used many aliases.

A snip:

*Landis posed as a Jesuit priest at the Hilliard Museum in Louisiana. He really played the part. In the parking lot before he left, he blessed the museum. The F.B.I. says there is no crime, because Landis isn't selling the fakes.*