



The Arts Society Oxford Study Day

**Can We Trust The Experts?
Conservation, Counterfeits and Confirmation
January 21st 10am to 3pm
Rewley House 1 Wellington Square OX1 2AJ**

Lecturer: David Phillips

David Phillips studied History at Oxford, he has worked for Nottingham Castle Museum and from 1982-98 lectured in Museum Studies and Art History at Manchester University. His publications include 'Exhibiting Authenticity'.

The Art World is full of great beauty and great deception. Masterpieces of immense value selling for vast fortunes will always tempt the less scrupulous to try to fool the market. Ingenuity and skill are employed to hoodwink the experts and us.



Applied decoration on genuine (left) and fake (right)
Wedgwood Jasperware

Session 1 Conservation

The Secret Surface: how time and conservation transform the appearance of paintings.

Art conservation has been dogged by controversy, for example, the cleaning of Leonardo's *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne* in the Louvre. To understand the issues better, we explore how paintings change for the worse with age, and also because of past conservation treatments. Changes are often laid bare by new conservation. Different conservators and museums have very different ideas about how to manage them and museums are wary of opening up the issues with the public.

Session 2 Counterfeits

Fine Art Forgery: craftsmanship or conjuring trick?

In 2016 a distinguished art historian published an unknown Van Gogh sketchbook, only to have it roundly condemned by the wider Van Gogh community. How can forgers fool even experts? We discover that forgeries can be laughably bad, and that they often work so well thanks to old-fashioned conmanship. We meet a cast of colourful characters, including the celebrity fakers, Han van Meegeren, "Professor" Drewe and his collaborator John Myatt, plus the Greenhalgh family of Bolton, who found themselves in court in 2008. But a few forgeries are masterful, and when they are, is the forger then as good as the artist he or she is imitating?

Session 3 Confirmation

Who Says? Can we trust the experts on good and bad in art?

Traditional art historical expertise has not always emerged with much credit from the investigations of the excellent *Fake or Fortune* series. To be fair, art historians cannot usually afford the depth of research the TV programme can bring to bear, even so, in numerous other media attribution controversies, traditional art history has emerged looking a bit of a mess. And that's when everyone is acting in good faith, which is by no means always the case. To better understand what's involved, we look at the different varieties of judgment that experts have to make, in evaluating art of different kinds.